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Social Relief To Social Development: South African Church Leader's Perceptions on Church-based social service provision to fight poverty

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Introduction

- The involvement of the Church in the delivery of social services related to poverty alleviation is not new.
- The Christian Church has historically been a prominent context for social service provision from its inception in the first century, through the Middle Ages and the Reformation into the 21st century.
- It is re-emerging in the 21st century as an essential and critical component in both the academic and religious discourse.
- There is a growing interest globally, continentally, nationally and locally in the provision of social services by the Church through its congregations and Church/faith-based organisations.

Introduction

- Despite this growing interest in the provision of social services by church congregations, their role has been overlooked in social work scholarship.
- Yet, a historical link exists between social work and religion. Authors often trace the origins of social work back to charitable works of religious groupings (Cnaan, Wineburg and Boddie, 1999; Zastrow, 1999: 317; Pittman and Drumm, 2008).
- According to Johnson, the Christian Church was the “mother of social work” (Johnson, 1941: 404 in Pittman and Drumm, 2008: 6).
- In re-thinking Social work in Africa, this is another area for consideration.

Introduction

- Church congregations are essential to the functioning of the larger social service delivery system especially in addressing poverty in communities.
- Churches are seen as values-based organizations, and their involvement in the provision of a range of services is generally justified on the basis of their commitment to compassionate service.
- They are the key to understanding how services may devolve locally, especially in the wake of vast social problems such as HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, poverty, drugs and alcohol abuse among others.

Context

- Poverty is a global, continental, national and local challenge.
- Sustainable Development Goal 1 of “No Poverty” proposes ending poverty in all forms by 2030 (World Bank, 2016).
- In South Africa, a large number of communities are characterised by high levels of poverty and joblessness (ECSECC, 2014; Statistics South Africa, 2014, 2016).
- In line with the SDGs, the South African government has set targets to eradicate poverty by 2030 in line with its commitment to the National Development Plan (NDP, 2011).
- This implies an urgent need exists to accelerate progress towards the realisation of the NDP and the SDGs.

Context

- Various institutions, such as international and national governments, international development agencies, financial institutions, donor agencies, private sector, civil society have their respective roles to play in reducing poverty.
- The focus of this research was on the distinctive role of the Christian Church in delivering social services aimed at fighting poverty.
- The involvement of the Church in the delivery of services is grounded on biblical imperatives on which the Christian Church is founded, which is essential to the Christian social conscience (Smith, 1976; Hinson, 1988; Hendricks, 2007, Pittman & Drumm, 2008).

Contribution of the study

- This study contributes to scholarship around church-based/ congregational social service delivery by proposing a strategy for enhancing church-based social service delivery from social relief and welfare to social development, consistent with the current social welfare policy context and contextually relevant to the socio-economic challenges of poverty and its consequences in post-apartheid South African society.
- The social development approach stipulates empowerment, participation, partnership and a ‘people-centred approach’ as key elements. These are considered to be key principles for a South African developmental approach according the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997).

Rationale

- The possible role and involvement of the Church in social development has re-emerged as an important focus of contemporary academic and religious discourse in South Africa.
- Various authors, who are mostly academics and theologians argue that churches and other Faith Based Organisations should be regarded as the most strategic in contributing to the challenge of moral regeneration as well as being agents of social development, reaching the South African population at large (Koegelenberg, 2001; Louw & Koegelenberg, 2003; Hendriks, Erasmus & Mans, 2004; Erasmus & Mans, 2005; Swart, 2006).
- There is consensus amongst researchers that the Church could potentially play a very significant role in combating poverty and its consequences (Swart, Gouws, Petterson, Erasmus & Bosman, 2012).

Key Research Problem

- Previous research findings show that the Church in South Africa and its congregations appear to be locked in works of charity and social relief and do not have the ability to move beyond the relief and welfare mode (Massey, 1990; Venter, 2001; Bowers-Du Toit, 2012; Bowers-Du Toit, 2012; Schoeman, 2012).
- Researchers also assert that the Church in South Africa has reached an impasse in its endeavours to make an impact on broader society and promote development, and that such an impasse has now existed for quite some time (Koegelenberg, 2001; Louw & Koegelenberg, 2003; Hendriks, Erasmus & Mans, 2004; Erasmus & Mans, 2005; Swart, 2006; Swart, Gouws, Petterson, Erasmus & Bosman, 2012).

Research Problem

- Previous research shows that congregations are among the strongest and trusted institutions in disadvantaged communities (Louw & Koegelenberg, 2003; Hendricks, Erasmus & Mans, 2004; Krige 2008), yet as congregations multiply throughout South Africa, the Church appears to be less responsive to the challenge of poverty facing the South African society, as a social service delivery agent, and this appears to erode the historical impact that the Church has made in the past.
- Some churches appear to be clearer than others regarding their social service delivery role, especially in terms of policy around social development in a transforming South African society but their congregations seem less clear on how to practically enhance their social service provision from social welfare to social development.

Research Question

- How can the Church's involvement in the delivery of social services be enhanced from a social relief or welfare ethos into a developmental ethos in addressing poverty in South Africa?

Sub-questions

- What is the historical involvement of churches in delivering social services to alleviate poverty?
- What is the current involvement of the Church in the delivery of social services to alleviate poverty?
- What are the factors that influence the social service delivery role of churches in alleviating poverty?
- How can the churches improve their social service delivery role in alleviating poverty?

Theoretical Framework

- Korten's (1990) four generations framework provides a theoretical framework that helps to distinguish churches as development agents, according to four distinct strategies for action:
- First generation agencies - attempt to meet immediate relief and welfare needs.
- Second generation agencies - engage in local community development projects.
- Third generation agencies - promote sustainable systems development within a wider network of actors and institutions, while
- Fourth generation agencies mobilize large networks of people into people movements (Korten 1990: 115-123).
- According to Korten (1990), what differentiates second generation from first generation strategies is the emphasis on local self-reliance which relates to empowerment.

Theoretical Framework

- Empowerment theory by Zimmerman (2000) was also used in the study to enhance Korten's framework.
- It examines the processes by which people of faith, their congregations and their communities gain mastery over their lives and the outcomes of empowering processes.
- According to Zimmerman (2000), churches are potentially key empowering settings in which people have opportunities to share leadership, develop group identity, learn skills and participate in key organizational tasks.
- Examples include the involvement of congregation members in community problem solving through collaborative partnerships and participatory processes that promote empowerment. A crucial element of empowerment theory is the participatory process through which people work to improve the quality of life of individuals (Zimmerman, 2000).

Purpose of the study

- The purpose of the study was to investigate
 - (i) the Church's historical and current social service delivery role in alleviating poverty,
 - (ii) the Church's conceptualization of its social service delivery role,
 - (iii) the factors that contribute to the successes and failures of churches in social service provision, and
 - (iv) suggestions on how the social service delivery role of churches can be improved. This was done with a view to inductively develop a strategy to help enhance church-based social service delivery from first generation strategies of social relief to second generation strategies of community development in the Eastern Cape.

Methodology

- The qualitative descriptive method of enquiry was conducted with 5 mainline Christian denominations: Dutch Reformed Church, Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, KwaSizabantu Mission and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA).
- In particular, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) denomination was selected and studied in-depth using a case study method because the developed strategy is intended to be piloted within MCSA.
- Thirty face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in total with church leadership from the 5 church denominations in South Africa - Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, Grahamstown, Mthatha, Ngcobo, Mt Frere, Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and Kranskop.

Methodology

An interview guide had the following guiding questions:

- *Describe your church's historical involvement in social service delivery.*
- *What successes and/or challenges did your church experience in delivering social services?*
- *What in your opinion contributed to the successes and/or challenges?*
- *What are your conceptions of the church's role in social service delivery?*
- *Describe your church's current involvement in social service delivery?*
- *What successes and/or challenges is your church currently experiencing in social service delivery?*
- *What can your church do to improve its social service delivery role in addressing poverty?*

Data Analysis

- Data was analysed using 2 methods, namely; the 8 steps recommended by Tesch (1990), as cited by Creswell (2014: 198) and Atlas.ti computer software package.

The data analysis process yielded the following themes:

- Theme 1 - Historical church-based social service delivery;
- Theme 2 - Current church-based social service delivery;
- Theme 3 - Factors limiting current church-based social service delivery;
- Theme 4 - Proposals for improving church-based social service delivery.

Findings

Table 1: THEMES AND SUB-THEMES FROM DATA SOURCES

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. Historical church-based social service delivery in addressing poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">1.1 Missionaries had an awakened consciousness to influence communities1.2 Missionaries provided a holistic intervention1.3 Missionaries empowered communities towards self-reliance and community development1.4 Missionaries were involved in collaborative partnerships1.5 Missionaries ensured sustainability
2. Current church-based social service delivery in addressing poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">2.1 Involvement in social relief2.2 Involvement in structured social welfare services2.3 Involvement in education and health projects2.4 Involvement in skills training and economic projects

Findings contd.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
3. Factors limiting Church-based social service provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">3.1 Ministers are not empowered to facilitate church-based social service delivery3.2 Congregation members are not empowered to drive CBSSD3.3 Church currently drifting from its history of social service delivery3.4 Lack of sustainability of interventions
4. Recommendations towards a strategy to enhance Church-based social service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">4.1 Awaken consciousness for social service delivery4.2 Follow characteristics of the historical church for a Holistic mission4.3 Empower ministers to provide a significant leadership role in facilitating and supporting church-based social service provision4.4 Develop faith and compassion motivated champions to embark on social service delivery4.5 Establish collaborative relationships4.6 Ensure sustainability

Some selected findings

- Findings from theme 3 identified factors which limit current church-based social service provision as focused around the fact that church-leaders are not empowered to facilitate church-based social service delivery, they lack the skills in community or social development facilitation, in financial management, ethics of good governance and accountability.
- Findings also reflect that they lack time to facilitate church-based social service programmes or to empower congregants in social service provision.
- Findings under theme 4 propose that ministers should be empowered so that they can be more capable to provide a significant leadership role in supporting and facilitating church-based social service provision. This suggests that if ministers had these skills, they would feel more equipped and empowered to facilitate and manage church-based social service programmes that would benefit communities.

Findings contd

- Participants identified that churches are rich with people who are professionals and experts in various fields and who can share their professional expertise with congregations and communities.
- They proposed that church leaders can collaborate with professionals in the field of social development to seek and share expertise with social workers who can share their knowledge as members of the church.
- Existing literature also suggest this collaboration could benefit congregations in developing faith-based community ministries and in social action (Placido & Cecil, 2012).
- This is also supported by the work of proponents of congregational, collaborative, social work (Tirrito, 2012: 17; Adams, 2014; Garland and Yancey, 2014) all of whom suggest that the social development agenda for the coming decade must include efforts to link social work with the Church.

Continued

- Chamiec-Case (2002) suggests that social workers can work with clergy to establish a pastoral care ministry for congregational members, which can offer supportive services through programmes where laypersons are trained on various topics.
- Garland (1992 in Abertini and Grenz, 2011: 7) notes that unlike professional social work in the broader community agency setting, the church social worker has a primary task, the responsibility of equipping people in ministry to serve.

Summary

- Findings reveal that the Church identifies social service delivery as its major role and is currently dealing with social issues normally handled by social workers as their core function.
- Yet, in terms of personnel and expertise, the church is ill equipped to deal with these issues because leaders lack the skills, professional assistance and guidance.
- This suggests a dire need, and a niche for social workers who are congregation members, who can help enhance services and effectiveness.
- The skills of social workers in areas such as planning, assessing needs, management, evaluation and community development facilitation can assist congregations in focusing on and mapping a meaningful direction to effective social ministry.

Recommendations

- Establishing a collaborative relationship between church leaders and social workers in developing congregations as settings for social development, as part of the strategy to enhance the social service delivery role of the Church.
- Establishing a formal network of compassionate driven professional volunteers who will work as a voluntary empowerment support to congregations, sharing their professional knowledge in congregational settings. They will be involved in planning of empowerment processes.
- Social workers can work with clergy to establish a congregational social development ministries for working with communities.
- Social workers can serve in their role of service broker, facilitator, consultant, teacher, trainer and advocacy

Recomendations

- Exposing church leaders, congregation members and other community members to capacity-building and empowerment opportunities will increase their capacity, knowledge and skills and will enable them to successfully facilitate church-based social service delivery programmes to address poverty in local communities.
- Further empowerment processes for congregation members can include resource mobilization, community planning, community organizing, which could lead to the establishment of cooperative enterprises.
- Congregation members can mobilize other community members to participate in cooperative enterprises as a way of creating economic cooperation. Cooperative enterprises are a means of creating economic opportunities for sustainable income.
- This will restore the indigenous values of “UBUNTU” and “ILIMA” (working together supporting one another)

Recommendations

- The development of an effective collaboration between social workers and the Church may require some additional enhancement of professional competencies, *inter alia*:
 - (i) including community development training for ministers in theological seminaries or religious graduate schools;
 - (ii) Training as social workers or auxiliary workers those who have already developed the passion to work voluntarily in congregational settings, initiating congregational social services. This would serve to combine ministry and professional practice.
 - (iii) Opening up opportunities for placements for social work students for their practical in congregations to assist in the establishment of social services within congregations.
 - (iv) Engage more in the area of congregational social work research

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THANK YOU



I look forward to your comments and questions!