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The Significance of the Church, Culture and Government Partnership in Socio-economic Development in the Sub Saharan Region

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Abstract:

Majority of the people in the Sub-Saharan region are religious. They attend weekly meetings to show their belief in God and allegiance to their old and new cultures. However, the region is still ranked as the poorest in the world. Could their belief systems and cultures have a major contribution to the rate and degree of social and economic development? This paper critically examines the correlation between the Church, cultures, government and development partners in their agenda of empowering the common man. We examined literature and made inquiry via observations in our methodology. Literature studies show that most governments wish to eradicate poverty, ignorance and sicknesses. We found that some of the drivers of poverty in Africa have been corruption, superstition, witchcraft, laziness, some cultural practices and ignorance. These have bred lives of sicknesses, wars and even unnecessary deaths. However, collaboration between the Church, governments, tribal cultural custodians and developmental partners can address the above maladies and inculcate honesty, godliness, value of hard work and practices which can enhance brotherhood, wealth creation and sustainable development. If these virtues are infused with modern scientific and technological advances, the sub Saharan region can come out of poverty in one generation.

Keywords: Religion, sustainable, Kenya, empowerment, development partner, Bible

1. Introduction

Africa cultural systems were destabilized by colonization and Christianity. Modernization has also come in as stronger force to create another lifestyle. However, the past negative belief systems have not fully been replaced by the better one but have to a greater degree been added other unproven ideas. This has made development in sub-Saharan region to be very slow and confusing. Culture and religious beliefs have great influence in social-economic development as they form the filter through which ideas, innovations and technologies are accepted or rejected by the society. Recently, in 2019, an idea of a social card (locally called, *Huduma namba*) in Kenya was in turbulent waters amongst Kenyans due to the religious interpretation that it is related to the mark of the beast referred to in the Book of Revelation chapter 13 of the Bible. This was an eye opener to the government and development partners that organized religions and culture hold a dominant key in the economic, political and social economic development of any region. Studies show that if religion and cultural functions are correctly understood they can walk hand in hand and can be used as instruments for community development and mobilization (Murphy, 2012). Kenya had to inaugurate a new constitution in order to develop new developmental cohesive national culture with national values, but its implementation is facing hindrances of cultural stereotypes, culture of corruption, spiritual beliefs and traditional ideas. For example, there are some tribes which belief that if a person steals for their tribe is a hero. This has made a culture of cattle rustling to be hard to eliminate. This culture has been translated into government offices where officers are stealing for their 'people'. Some of them appear in court smiling because their tribes recognize them as heroes! The culture of patriotism is only known outside the country but not within the country.

Religion constitutes the bedrock of all we identify as culture; our perception, interpretation, understanding of reality and, therefore, that on which we organize our lives (Hiagbe, 2015). It is the bottom line of everything and indeed from it everything including life itself flows. (Kierkegaard, 1836). Therefore, our social and economic development strategies are directly influenced by the dictates of the religions and cultural practices we prescribe to. This according to many observations were due to the belief of powerful spiritual beings who are linked to the eternal destinies of human beings. Even in modernization, there is a consonance between science and religion which form the strongest forces

responsible for the construction of our world view (Griffin, 2011). Similar claims can be made in politics, economics, and any other field of human endeavor (Hiagbe, 2015; Barro et al., 2003).

This paper examines these scenarios and examines Kenya as a case study. Kenya has 47 County governments and one Central government. 80% of Kenya is known to be Christianity and with about 43 tribes which have different cultures. However; it is interesting to note that the Church and tribal cultures are not regarded as major factors in strategic development strategies although studies show that they greatly influence human attitudes, actions and behavior. Majority of development partners also disregard the place and value of the belief system of the people in sub Saharan region and this could be contributing to the unsustainable development in the region.

2. Limitation of the Research

This research focuses on issues that have long lasting impact on economic and social growth and are influenced by religion and culture like corruption, superstition, value of hard work, communalism and poverty mentalism. It does not deal with other religiously influenced issues like fertility, choice of marital partners, marriage, divorce, working of women, dress code, days of work, place of work, people of association although they also have also significant roles in sustainable socio-economic developments. The world has many religions, like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, Bahaism, Syncretic cults, animist religions, ancestral worship, Babylonian, we focused on the Church in this study in the sub-Saharan region.

3. Epistemological Definition of the Church

The word 'Church' is only mentioned in the New Testament in the Bible. It was first mentioned by The Lord Jesus Christ Himself in Matthew chapter 16:13-20. It was mentioned in the content of people giving opinions about what they thought The Lord Jesus was. This portion of scripture states, *'13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, whom do men say that I the Son of man am? 14 And they said, some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15 He saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 18 And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. (Bible, KJV, 1611).*

It shows three significant issues raised by the Lord Jesus Himself, namely, 1. He is the one building the Church. 2. The Church is fighting with powers of hell. 3. The Church has authority on earth and in heaven. The Word 'church' come from the Greek word, 'Ecclesia' which means call out one. It implies a group of people called out of the world system to represent the Kingdom of God. The Lord then goes ahead and illustrates the principles of operating in the Kingdom of God. The Church is defined as group of believers in a particular area where they form a local Church. The Local Church is supposed to operate in a region to do the work of Christ. Local Churches are supposed to cooperate in the work of the Kingdom but be independent in the administration at the local level.

Therefore, based on the above, the scope of the Church it also includes the governments sphere of operations in a country. Hence, for any sustainable development, the local Church and government must cooperate and have common core values. The Church is guided by the Bible as its final authority and it covers all aspects of human development, authority, social aspects of all ages from birth to burial and eternity. The people in the Church are also influenced by past cultural practices and beliefs which can interfere with their operation as the Church and also in the government agenda. Colonialism also brought about the individualistic kind of life style in the sub-Saharan region and replaced to a greater degree the community life which Africans were used to. This created the ground for corruption and materialism in the pursuit of copying colonial masters. The cultural authority based on age and wisdom was replaced by one of money and colonial education. Governments have been created based on the later and still derive their authority on the former so as to create a ground for developmental partners who despise the latter and disregard the former. The Church came into Africa and disregarded to a greater degree the African culture, it brought about 'modernism'. Africans wished to practice their cultures in the context of Christianity due to their religious fears of supernatural consequences of disobeying the responsible tribal spirits. The Africa youth forms the bulk of labour in the region and is trying to establish its own culture but, it has to overcome the tenets of the Church, requirements of culture, developmental partners, digitization and western culture and also governmental agenda. This is the puzzle which has made self-driven sustainable development in sub-Saharan region a hard nut to crack.

4. Recovering the Part of Religion That Plays Critical Roles in Development

A greater part of the people living in the sub Saharan region is intensely poor but seriously religious (Belshaw et al., 2000). African people are known to be deeply religious (Fonlon, 2010). Kenya is an economic giant in East Africa and has more than 65% of Kenyans confessing to be Christians (Sakwa, 2007). Literature studies show that Christianity has played major roles in socio-economic development of many countries. However, this has been done through repeated processes on unlearning, learning and relearning in order to change perceptions and attitudes and development of a working culture (Coleson, 1971). This should be the one great stride which even government in sub-Saharan region can focus to achieve as a major development agenda. Even believers who come into the Church should renew their thinking so

as to make them to function in the Kingdom of God as shown in the Bible in the Books of Romans 12: 2 which says, 'And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God'. In order words it requires mental information to bring about developmental transformation.

This idea can be emphasized by the following arguments; by the end of the 20th Century, the global incidence of poverty in the developing world was to fall from 33 to 18%, but that of sub-Saharan Africa was predicted to rise from 16 to 32%. There are factors which were used to make this prediction. These factors were majorly to do with the cultural perceptions and practices. The German economic miracle of growth after the World War II can be lessons for Africa and other parts of India which are chronically living in extreme poverty of less than US\$2 per day, and still hungry, sick, lacking safe drinking water, lacking quality education, shelter and clothing in the midst of adverse environmental changes. Five reasons have been cited as the cause of this poverty, namely; the people negative attitude towards work, cultural acceptance of poverty, negative supernatural beliefs, communalism and corruption. However, corruption is not necessarily the major contributor of poverty. This is because we have had well governed countries like Ghana, Malawi which failed to develop while more corrupt nations like Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Pakistan, made rapid economic growth (Sachs, 2005).

Just to mention, the West and East are now playing a major role in the development and under development of Africa which is still recovering from the deep wounds of slave trade (which took the best men away), colonialism politics (which took away the best land and military capacities) and colonial education which sowed seeds of discord amongst the systems of socialism and morality in Africa. These wounds were however been salted by the cold war division (1960-1970), structural adjustment programmes by the IMF and the World Bank (1980s), trade liberalization policies of the World Trade Organization (1990s), diseases like HIV and AIDS and political demands and environmental and climate variations.

5. Redefining Development in the Eyes of Religion

Development can be defined as the ultimate status which brings sustainable personal satisfaction, social acceptance and eternal security. The aspect of eternal security encompasses the scope of religion. Other ideas of what is development include the achieving of modernization, and being counted as a developed world. It might also mean a shifting of people from subsistence, traditional, rural mode of life to the urban, modern, and industrial life. Development is also regarded as a people-centered process in post-modern terms, as it now emphasizes the development of individuals and 'communities' rather than 'nations' (Speckman, 2001). Therefore, Christian theology and governments must seek to interpret and integrate African cultural beliefs and practices in the context of the Bible so as to bring about sustainable development according to universal principles so as to reduce poverty in the region. These include, the roles of environmental sites like sacred groves, sacred forests, sacred water bodies and the role and function of tribal rituals, passage rites and traditional governments in self and communal lives of people living in sub-Saharan region.

6. The Call of the Christian Church and Social Economic Growth

The five causes of poverty namely people negative attitude towards work, cultural acceptance of poverty, negative supernatural beliefs, communalism and corruption can be addressed in the Church mission. The Bible is the single most important guide to the Christian faith and it is from it that African Christians are expected to obtain answers to the five causes of poverty. Christianity can play a major role in development, as shown in the case of the South Korea and Ghana (Table 1). After fifty years of independence, South Korea is ten times better than Ghana. The main cause being cultural. South Koreans valued prudence, savings, and investment, hard work, discipline, and education. However, South Korea also had direct investment into its economy since 1945 by USA due to the Cold war. Hence coupled with Christian belief and discipline of the flesh other external help can produce tangible results. Some of the expensive practices in Ghana include lavish funerals in which some do not work for two weeks to mourn; culture influenced agricultural practices (Huntington, Samuel & Harrison., 2000). But, before, 1957, Christians in South Korea had already turned their faith into a culture called *Minjung* theology. They articulated their faith through actions while Ghana after independence was springing back into traditional systems which had made them to be colonized before (Seong-Won).

	Ghana	South Korea
Per Capital Income (1957)	US\$490	US\$491
GDP (2014)	US\$40.7 Billion	US\$ 1129.6 Billion
Per Capital Income (2015)	US\$ 2940	US\$33970

Table 1: The Economic Status Cases of Ghana and Korea

Culture influences the language, habits, beliefs, economic and social organization, and values. This was illustrated by the case of Italy, although the Italian Renaissance in full bloom tried to distance itself from the Church principles, which were the foundation of their success, by trying to revive the pagan past of Europe. But Christians are called to demonstrate integrity in the world (Nkansah-Obrempong, 2018). True Christianity has inbuilt mechanisms which guarantee sustainable development.

7. Reformers and Religion

Today we can look back and study the impact of the contributions of the Protestant Reformation, particularly the Calvinist brand, to the development of the Western world. It is clear that countries which have historically Protestant roots

seem to be doing economically better than the historically Catholic and Eastern Orthodox ones. This was because the northern countries carried within them the lasting effects of their past religious beliefs that continued to exert pervasive influence, for instance, on their attitudes to work, authority, savings, and other spheres that have direct impact on development (See Komi Hiagbe, *Reconciled to Reconcile*, (Frankfurt: Peter, 2008).

According to Calvin theological reflections on creation, God's endowment of special talents for social and economic life as part of His created gifts to all humanity (including the heathen), stewardship, calling or vocation was fundamental in transforming the workforce attitude. From his quotation, Calvin said, "*there was no doubt that the Word of God was directed at human beings as wholes, in their present and future lives, in their souls and also in their bodies, in their material and personal selves and likewise in their lives in society. When God speaks, He meets the individual in his or her total existence, present and future...the entire secular world becomes sacred, nothing escapes the plan, the judgment or the love of God*" (Bieler, 2006).

8. The Emerging Cultures and Its Drivers

Culture is dynamic. It is usually changing. The national culture and Church culture are also changing. It is impacted by forces which are constantly bombarding the minds of people so as to introduce new ideas and norms of living. These forces are mainly targeting the young minds for they are energetic and easy to mold. The drivers of this new cultures are the television, newspapers, mobile phones, internet and computers connections. The television invades the homes of almost all families and influences their way of eating, entertainment, relating, dressing, belief, value of life, status in life and future expectations.

Governments which have made progress have had a tight control of what is broadcasted to their masses. For example, China has been very strict with what the media is allowed to broadcast to influence of the minds of her citizens. This careful analysis of broadcast content has made a national Chinese culture of working to be introduced to the more than 56 tribes in China. This has been a key of why China is now becoming a strong economic power. On the contrary, the sub-Saharan region is being fed with all ideas from all over the world. It is like an experimental ground for every new innovation and technology ranging from teaching and learning methods, vaccinations, foods, political ideas, forms of governments etc. African governments have also been copying and pasting foreign ideas which cannot be operationalized in the cultural contexts in Africa unless through dictatorial systems. Surprisingly, this lack of involvement of citizens is happening in several countries in Africa and has created developmental stagnation and rebellion.

9. Discussions and Conclusions

The above studies clearly show that Science and Technology are developed within particular cultural contexts and form 'the media through which cultural values are preserved, maintained, modified and propagated. When the Chinese tried to copy the western technology within the teachings of Chang Chih-tung it proved to be impossible because of the natural resilience of culture (Mugambi, 2002). However, although Africa's response to the Christian faith had membership of the Christian community raising from about 60 million in 1960 to 300 million in 2001 (Paris Peter J., 2009), it has not been translated fully into development. One of the reasons why this is so was given by the statement, that "The church in Africa has been encouraged for too long to think that its role is to save souls and not bodies, thus, creating a sharp dichotomy between the secular and sacred life of the individual, which hitherto had not been the case in traditional Africa culture. Unfortunately, again, the prosperity gospel has also invaded the minds of the African Christian. It encourages the believers to participate in the world economy mainly as consumers and not producers of wealth. It is not according to the gospel of Apostle Paul who emphasized that, "He who does not work should not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Christian faith is based on giving food to the hungry, visiting those in prison (Matthew 25:35), working with own hands (2 Thessalonians 3:8), providing to the poor (Proverbs 19:17) and giving rather than receiving. This is part of the gospel and not an addendum to be attached to it.

Another, reason for Africa underdevelopment is on the issues of attitude to work and resource management. Studies show that these two aspects need to be dealt with in Africa through the Word of God. The unbalanced teaching that the world is ending anytime and we shall carry nothing out of this world might have negative impact in the development of Africa. The Church attitude work towards work is clearly sanctioned in Colossians 3:23-25 where it states, 'And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.' Showing that there is no division between secular and sacred jobs. This attitude can make development to be enhanced in all sectors.

It is also worthy, noting that cultural customs even Church customs, develop slowly with time and form a compounding relationship both with religion and the people involved in it (Marshall and Van 2007). Studies by Barro and McCleary, 2003, found that economic growth responds positively to the extent of religious beliefs. National development agenda should include the development of a national culture based on proven tenets. (Huntington, 1996; Landes, 1999, Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

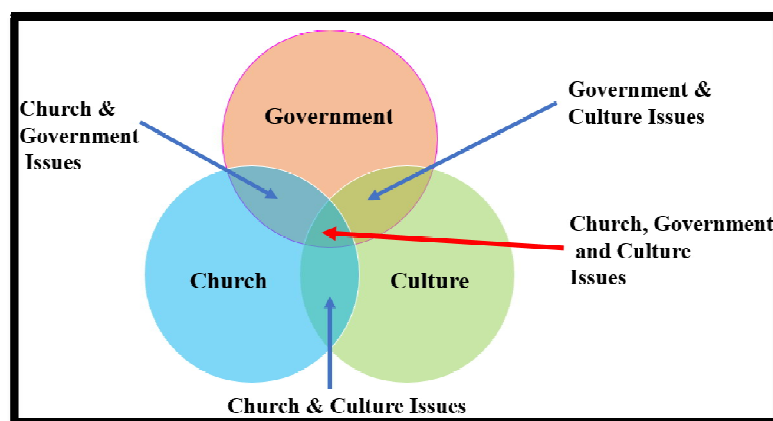


Figure 1: The Relationship between Church, Culture and Government, Showing Areas to Identify Scenarios for Developmental Collaboration and to Solve Conflicting Ideas.

10. Cultural Reconstruction

The Church is in almost any corner in the sub-Saharan region and is well able to tackle the hindrance of wealth creation and can eliminate poverty in one generation. This can be done through proper application of the God given mandate of administering the Word of God faithfully to tackle corruption, laziness, superstitions and cultures of poverty. Education was formerly tied to Christianity and this made the educated to have a Christian culture, detaching the two might be causing issues of not being able to tackle corruption, superstition, negative culture and laziness. Education is generally referred to as trained intelligence and can contribute up to 60% of socio-economic development (Dunn, 1960).

11. Value Driven Education

The core of the cultural reconstruction should focus on value-driven education. This type of education can transform health, conflicts, wealth creation and governance. The Church has an educational unfactured which is politically favoured and hence it can execute this mandate. Just as the Head of the Church says, 'go and make disciples of nations, teaching them to observe all that I have taught?' Therefore, if religion is the basis of culture, it should never be detached from people when engaging them into development strategies. The future development of the sub Saharan region might need both a backward reconstruction of past attitudes and a forward construction of a Biblically sound value system as our sustainable culture in a multiethnic nation.

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