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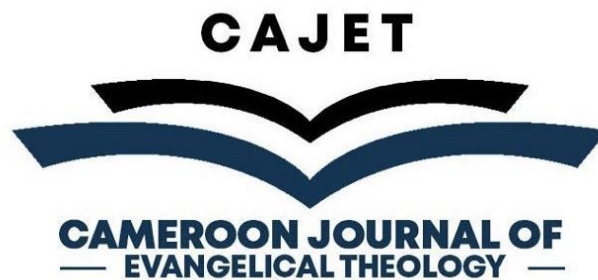
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Decolonizing Development Policies in Africa through Intercultural Communication

Décoloniser les politiques de développement en Afrique par la communication interculturelle

Chenyi Marcel Menjakwe[1] and Jiofack Kana C. Jésus, PhD.[2]

Abstract

In the present *globalized* world, there seems to be an overwhelming influence of Western nations that impose their views of development on other peoples. Unfortunately, in many places in Africa, the Church seems to have handed the responsibility of community development to the government and philanthropic organizations. This paper discusses the importance of mastering aspects of culture such as language, cultural values, social structure, gender issues, and interpersonal relationship, in enhancing community development. The data for the study were collected through observation in the field and analysis of published materials. From the findings, it appears that the values of global partnership and cooperation put forward by the *United Nations*, although important globally, has a special resonance in Africa, where many governments are striving towards the enhancement of the living conditions of their peoples. However, lack of intercultural communication skills or disregard for cultural differences has been a source of conflicts between promoters and the target communities. This study recommends intercultural skills as key in fostering the kind of development that will reflect God's will for humankind and the development goals and cultural values of African communities.

Keywords: Africa, community, development, intercultural communication

Résumé

Dans le contexte actuel de *mondialisation*, les pays Occidentaux semblent exercer une influence excessive par l'imposition de leurs propres idées de développement au reste du monde. Malheureusement, dans plusieurs régions d'Afrique, l'Église semble avoir abandonné la responsabilité du développement communautaire entre les mains des gouvernements et des groupes philanthropiques. Cet article traite de l'importance d'une prise en compte des dimensions de la culture telles que la langue, les coutumes, la structure sociale, les rapports au genre et les relations interpersonnelles dans le développement communautaire. Cette étude est fondée sur une observation de terrain et l'analyse des publications sur le sujet. Les résultats poussent au constat selon lequel les valeurs telles que le partenariat international et la coopération au développement promues par les *Nations Unies* sont importantes : y compris en Afrique où plusieurs gouvernements font des efforts pour améliorer les conditions de vie de leurs peuples. Cependant, le manque de compétence interculturelle ou le mépris affiché pour les différences culturelles sont à l'origine des conflits entre les promoteurs de projets et les communautés cibles. Cette étude met en avant la communication interculturelle comme élément essentiel pour un développement qui reflète la volonté de Dieu pour l'humanité, ainsi que les objectifs prioritaires et valeurs culturelles des communautés africaines.

Mots-clés : Afrique, communauté, développement, communication interculturelle

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[1]Chenyi Marcel Menjakwe is a PhD student in Intercultural Studies at the *Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary*, Ogbomosho, Nigeria. (Email: chenyimarcel@yahoo.com)

[2]Jiofack Kana C. Jésus is a lecturer in the Department of *World Missions and Intercultural Studies*, *Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary*, Ndu. (Email: charlesjesuskana@gmail.com)

Introduction

One of the outcomes of globalization is the desire expressed by the *United Nations* to unify all countries of the world around common goals of development. However, the framework of implementation of this global vision seems to reflect more of the Western understanding of development; with complete disregard for non-Western worldviews. The Church which is God's agent of holistic transformation has the responsibility to bring about development in communities where she operates alongside her missionary mandate. However, she rather seems to lay great emphasis on discipling members unto godliness while community development is overlooked as secondary to soul-winning and disciple-making. As a result, the task of community development is almost exclusively into the hands of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These misunderstandings and many others suggest the need of integrating good knowledge of intercultural studies into the policies and strategies of community development.

This paper aims at exploring the importance of good mastery of such aspects of culture as language, cultural values, social structure, gender issues, and interpersonal relationship on community development strategies. The paper argues that intercultural studies provide perspectives and skills for overcoming prejudice, discrimination and misunderstanding between people from different cultural backgrounds, and contextual strategies for holistic community development in Africa. The data for the study were collected through observation in the field and analysis of published materials.

The analysis begins with an overview of perspectives on intercultural studies. Then, it discusses the concept of community development. The last part of the analysis deals with the impact of intercultural studies on community development.

Perspective of Intercultural Studies

This section explores two perspectives of intercultural studies. The first is historical while the second is biblical.

Historical Perspective

The genesis of intercultural studies is generally traced back to World War II, when United States military forces had to secure the cooperation of island residents, but ascertained that they knew nothing of the language or culture of the people. According to Howell Brian and Jenell Williams, it occurred to these Americans that they could not just convince the islanders to assist in fighting the war, as if involvement into this war had the same importance to people of all cultures. [3] To that effect, anthropologists were invited to help study the island people. Edward Hall became the prominent leader in this move towards intercultural studies, by writing his book *The Silent Language* published in 1959, to show that people in all societies portray; but in a way that is not always obvious, their understanding of the world. Hall stated that, "It is time that Americans learned how to communicate effectively with foreign nationals. It is time that we stop alienating people with whom we are trying to work". [4] The term 'intercultural communication' was first used during this period. His second book the *Hidden Dimension* published in 1966 elaborates more on this topic stating that they are many layers in culture, one of which is the personal and social perception of space which is vital in non-verbal communication. [5]

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[3] Paris Williams Jenel and Howel Brian M., *Introducing Cultural Anthropology*: *A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011).

[4] Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Double Day and Company, 1959), 15.

[5] Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor Book Doubleday, 1966).

One development from Hall is the uncertainty reduction theory, which states that a stranger in a new culture is not sure how to behave and wants to reduce this uncertainty.[6] It is argued that this uncertainty is due to lack of accurate information concerning the people or group. Renáta Panocová explains that, "If uncertainty is high, people are confused because they cannot predict what their counterpart in communication will do and further communication may become useless."[7]

The concept of "uncertainty avoidance index"[8] has been coined to refer to the stranger's ability to tolerate ambiguity and intentionally learn the meanings behind the practices and behaviours of the new culture. In the past years, this has boosted the idea about intercultural studies to give greater understanding about how to behave in order to help people adapt. Intercultural studies have attracted attention due to challenges resulting from the encounter between different cultures or the culture shock that people encounter while ministering from one cultural setting to another. Barger Ken attested to this reality when conducting participatory observation among the indigenous people in Canada, in 1971.[9] One of the important principles that emerged from this study is that awareness of cultural differences helps cultural interactants not to see things in a foreign culture as strange or odd, but to develop diverse competencies to effectively interact in any culture different from theirs. Martyn Barrett and Michael Byram opine that intercultural studies do not mean abandoning one's own cultural identity; instead, it involves openness to, and interest in understanding other people who have other cultural values and behaviours.[10]

This openness to cultural differences enables gospel ministers and other agents of change to escape ethnocentrism and imperialistic mindsets as they strive towards positive development. As a result, people started studying approaches on how to penetrate other cultural environments. Foreign service training programs where introduced that included personal experience and descriptive linguistics. From this development in the study of cultures, anthropologists have studied complex social and cultural life for the purpose of mutual understanding between people from different cultural backgrounds. Building on the foundation laid by Hall, anthropologists observe and interact with people as they go about their daily lives. They also learn the languages and customs of people. In Cameroon and other countries of Africa, this has brought about significant growth in terms of management of conflicts which often result from cultural differences. As people lay claim of their cultural identities through fights for language rights, governments should develop intercultural conflict resolution strategies to reduce the divisive cultural gaps that are threatening national unity and stability.

From the onset, intercultural communication was developed as a curriculum that deals with "how people from different cultures interact *with one another* rather than on how members of a particular culture interact within their culture."[11] In contemporary literature, 'intercultural communication' is often defined simply as another term for cross-cultural interactions.[12] For this reason, Emmanuel Ayee asserts that despite laudable efforts to highlight conceptual

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[6] Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov, *Sofware of Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010), 188.

[7] Renáta Panocová, *Theories of Intercultural Communication* (Košice: Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika and Košiciach Filozofická fakulta, 2020), 72.

[8] Geert Hofstede, Gert jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov, 190.

[9] William and Flora Hewlett, *Sociology* (London: Open Stax College, 2012), 63.

[10] Barrett Martyn and Michael Byram, *Developing Intercultural Competence through Education* (Strasbourg: Cedex Council of Europe, 2014).

[11] James W. Neuliep, *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach*. 7th ed. (New York: Sage Publication, 2018), 59

[12] Brian J. Hurn and Barry Tomalin, *Cross-Cultural Communication: Theory and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 96-97.

differences in terminologies, "intercultural and cross-cultural communication can be used interchangeably."[13]

Biblical Perspective

According to Gabriel Idang, "Culture embraces a wide range of human phenomena, material achievements and norms, beliefs, feelings, manners and so on."[14] This definition puts in place the contribution of human instrumentality in the cultures that exist today. From the biblical perspective, God is the initiator of human culture: He started human cultures by giving the first human family the ability to communicate through language and name things in their environment. It is written in Genesis 2:19 that God allowed the animals that He had created to pass before man so that whatever name he called each animal, that was the name thereof. In like manner, when God created Eve, He brought her to Adam and Adam said she would be called a woman because she was taken from his own flesh (Gen. 2:22-23). God also gave the first human beings injunctions concerning their relationship with Him, within the family and with the environment. Therefore, culture began with God's creative and communicative acts that is, the creation of the universe, the first human family (or clan) on earth made in the image of God with a language, instructed to live a God-glorifying way a of life in obedience to the Creator.

In terms of communication, God communicated to these first human beings in a way that they could understand. The instruction given to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and develop the earth (Gen. 1:28) was not given in an angelic language. God limited His communication to the particular language that He had imparted on this first family. The command to eat of all the trees of the garden except the prohibited tree (Gen. 2:16-17) was not given in a heavenly language. Many other situations of communication between God and the first human family show God as an example of an intercultural communicator. Besides, the Garden of Eden was on earth and not in heaven: God came down and communicated in ways Adam was able to understand.

However, since the original sin in the Garden of Eden, human-beings have fallen short of God's glory (Gen. 3:1-9; Rom. 3:23). Under the pretence of seeking for God, they are actually running away from God the way Adam and Eve did immediately after the first disobedience (Gen. 3:9-10). Because of a distorted vision of God resulting from sin, God has become a product of human cultures (Rom. 1:20-23). The different perspectives on God come from different perceptions of God that result from sin. In many cultures, people seem to identify with the world as can be seen in 1 John 2:15-16 and 5:19. The normal tendency is to withdraw from any conversation about the truths recorded in God's word. However, the Bible is absolute (2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12); and God is supreme while culture is limited and relative (Acts 17:24-31).

Another consequence of the Fall is the misunderstanding between people from different cultures, due to differences in languages and in ways of perceiving the world. Again, the Bible presents God as the one who confused human languages as punishment for their idolatrous tendency (Gen. 11:1-9). Despite the Fall, God has shown the perfect example of bridging divisive cultural gaps. God relates to people through the cultural forms that are meaningful to them. He gave His Ten Commandments to Moses in Hebrew language (Ex. 20:1-17). The apex of God's cross-cultural communication is the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God who became man to bring eternal life to all those who believe in Him (Jn. 1:1-4). Hesselgrave and Rommen contend that a careful look at the synoptic gospels reveal the cultural

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[13]Emmanuel Ayee, "Christian Perspective on Intercultural Communication," *Pro Rege* Vol. 35, No. 4 (June 2007): 2. https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol35/iss4:1

[14]Gabriel E. Idang. "African Culture and Values." *Phronimon* 16*,* no. 2 (2015): 98.

inclination displayed by the different writers in their presentation of the gospel message.[15] In that light, Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers note that to be successful in communicating the gospel cross-culturally, one must keep the incarnation of Jesus Christ in focus.[16]

From these few examples, it seems obvious that culture exists as a result of God's providence. Also, the Bible recognizes that since the Fall of the first humans, different cultures have different standards, different values and shortcomings. These differences do not suggest a superiority of a particular culture over another, or a reason for maintaining ethnocentrism or building divisive gaps. The Christian position is that God's word should be preached in all cultural contexts for spiritual, economic, and societal transformation. To bring this holistic development in the world, there is need to study the receptor cultures.[17] This is because culture is the context in which every message is conveyed and every development is evaluated and given meaning.

Concept of Community Development

The understanding of community development varies greatly depending on whether one pays attention to the concepts put forward by proponents of the *Millennial Goals* or listens to the narratives of African leaders and communities. For this reason, it is important to make a difference between the *United Nations* (UN) perception of development and the Africans' views on development.

United Nations (UN) Perception of Development

Two prominent facts will be examined to illustrate the perception that policy makers have about world development. In the year 2000, world leaders gathered in a *United Nations Organisation* (UNO) meeting to define a fifteen-year vision for global development. This vision was presented in the form of eight *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs): eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development.[18]

For fifteen years, these stated goals influenced economic decisions, education strategies, political actions, and influenced social changes in many places of the world. The *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) were drafted during the *UN General Assembly Summit* in 2015, and they were aiming at achieving global food security and well-being on earth by 2030.[19] Marriam Abbas Soharwardi and Tusawar Iftikhar Almad observe that in the implementation of the SDGs, women empowerment has gained a higher priority in today's global development plan and is strongly linked with multiple development outcomes.[20] This means that, according to policy makers, women's empowerment should be given priority above other goals, because it brings about beneficial outcomes in other aspects of people's lives in terms of development.

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[15] David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 8.

[16] Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 19.

[17] Moreau A. Scott Garry R. Corwin and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

[18] United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015* (New York: United Nations, 2015), 4-7.

[19] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World* (New York: United Nations, 2015).

[20] Marriam Abbas Soharwardi and Tusawar Iftikhar Almad., *International journal: Sustainable Development and planning* (ResearchGate, 2020).

This perception of development seems more informed by the Western feminist campaign than the actual priorities goals put forward by African governments as far as development is concerned. These include: unemployment, industrialization, social security, food security and eradication of endemic diseases like malaria and hepatitis.

Another issue which seems imperative to UN policy makers as far as development is concerned is same sex marriage. Rita Schäfer and Eva Range who subscribe to this view of development give the following explanation: "With reference to the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG), the goals of gender equality (MDG 3) and combating HIV/AIDS (MDG 6) provide points of reference for supporting LGBTI projects."[21] This is an understanding of 'gender equality' as equality of all to choose whichever gender they prefer in terms of sexual orientation. The target here is the Western conception of gender which is not the 'male *vs* female' distinction like in Africa, but incorporates other categories constructed in the contemporary Western societies. Schäfer and Range go on to affirm that "Hate violence is an expression of heteronormative and patriarchal gender systems."[22] What these authors mean is that hate around gender issues in general is the consequence of maintaining a society where men are the heads of families and heterosexual relationships are the only norm. This explains why promoting LGBTI projects is considered a priority development goal according to the UN.

As a result, there has been violent opposition by nearly all forefront leaders of the UN world development project against the *Anti-Homosexual Act* drafted by the Ugandan parliament in February 2014. For instance, Stella Nyanzi has the following reproach against the Ugandan government, "Socially approved sexuality education programmes in Uganda are generally heterosexual and totally blind to the diversity of homosexualities enacted within the local LGBTIQ population"[23] Schäfer and Range regret that, "It is a controversial issue among activists from African countries and German activists whether pressure should be applied to governments that violate human rights by suspending funding within the framework of bilateral development."[24] However, Nyanzi observes that, "In December 2011, President Obama of the United States instructed diplomatic missions and agencies using foreign aid to promote and protect the rights of LGBT citizens abroad."[25] She goes on to recommend threats of withdrawal or actual withdrawal of foreign aid from donors as a strategy to compel governments to comply with the UN pro-homosexual and transgender agenda. The contributions of these authors indicate that foreign aid for development has been used repeatedly as a strategy to impose the legalization of LGBT agendas on African governments as part of development goals. Such an ethnocentric bias regarding development stems from the assumption that Western ideologies and priorities *for* Africa are qualitatively more significant than Africans' perceptions and definitions of development.

Development According to African Societies
A good understanding of the Africans' perception of development requires a flash-back on the African view of community. Fiji Suva notes that community commonly consists of individuals who, although separate human beings, are interconnected and interdependent in various ways and often have similar values and aims.[26] This definition of community suggests that an African

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[21]Rita Schäfer and Eva Range, *The Political Use of Homophobia: Human Rights and Persecution of LGBTI Activists in Africa* (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stifung, 2014), 22.

[22]Rita Schäfer and Eva Range, 3.

[23]Stella Nyanzi, *Homosexuality in Uganda: The Paradox of Foreign Influence* (Kampala: Makere Insttitute of Social Research, 2013), 23.

[24]Rita Schäfer and Eva Range, 21.

[25]Stella Nyanzi, 24.

[26]Fiji Suva, *Basic Concepts of Community Development* (South Pacific: The University of the South Pacific, 2014), 10.

community is characterized by religion, social networks of individuals, and political administration. It is first of all about people being together as members of the community, and then doing things together for the well-being of all within that community. This is typical of collectivism, which is a form of social relationships in which decision is made by consensus, bearing in mind the good of all.[27] John Kuada uses the term *familism* to refer to this type of social organisation where "members of the family are bound to one another by the collective moral rules and obligations of the family."[28] This is unlike the Western societies which are mostly individualistic. The people's expression of what they consider as priorities in terms of development is usually a reflection of the values that they attach to the community.

One of the outcomes of women's empowerment projects in Africa is the rise of highly educated women who have new perspectives relating to their lives. This causes them to develop self-esteem and to be more active in decision making. However, these projects are viewed in some cultures as attempts to build up women and develop them to the detriment of men. This usually happened when project leaders concentrate on girls and women, propagating messages which portray the idea that all men as bullies, and present women's fight for equality as an imperative. In the North-West Region of Cameroon where these researchers have lived for many years, there have been many of such projects run by leaders who recruit girls and women, and show little interest in explaining to customary authorities what should be the benefit of the empowerment that they are promoting in the communities. The messages that female children often bring home is that women have to be free so that they can make their own decisions, and not rely on men. As a result, the men of the community and many women see this kind of development as a way of building their girl children and women to fight men. This is considered a serious threat to the unity and harmony which should prevail within the community. In this light, Eyal Buvilski's opinion is cogent when he observes that, "Foreigners in Central Africa do not always manage to communicate well, and the differences in communication styles create obstacles."[29] The communication break-ups are due to inadequate understanding of social structures and interpersonal relationships.

To an extent, the approach used by these project managers may work in some African communities. But the fact is that this strategy has provoked a lot of resistance from the part of many members of the target community. This is a sign that many other challenges are likely to surface because the promoters ignore cultural values. Brian Hurn and Barry Tomalin concede that, "In Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as the Middle East, respect for hierarchy and seniority is important."[30] They go on to stress the implication for relevant non-verbal communication in this cultural context, "Maintaining eye contact with the group may be less important than maintaining eye contact with the senior persons present and addressing the main points to them."[31] African elders resist women's empowerment projects because its promoters lack these communication skills.

During his missionary trip in the island of Bakasi, in Cameroon, in 2014, one of the researchers was told that a company came to help electrify the locality. To the greatest surprise of the project manager, most of the populations vehemently refused. As it was reported, one of the

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[27]Richard D. Lewis, *When Cultures Collide: Leading across Cultures*, revised edition (Boston: Nicholas Brealey International, 2006), 374-376

[28]John Kuada, "Culture and Economic Development in Africa – Opportunities and Challenges," *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture* 1, no. 1 (August 2020): 88.

[29]Eyal Buvilski. "Intercultural Economic Diplomacy Model for Central Africa: The Importance of Intercultural Communication." *International Conference RCIC'20* (7-9 May 2020): 67.

[30]Brian J. Hurn and Barry Tomalin, *Cross-Cultural Communication: Theory and Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 82.

[31]Brian J. Hurn and Barry Tomalin, 82.

spokespersons asked: "Who told you we do not have light in the night?" This question was interpreted to mean that they believed they were spiritually developed by tapping 'light' from spirits at night, although they were physically poor.

This does not mean that all the perceptions that people have about any sort of change are valid. However, those perceptions are more or less a reflection of their worldviews; which are the main source of conflicts when not taken seriously. To this effect, Fiji Suva concurs that community development is a structured intervention which aims at giving communities greater control over the conditions that affect their lives.[32] In the case of Africans, the LGBT projects promoted by UN are viewed by many Africans as a violation against African traditions, where a successful life revolves around the family and the community. As a matter of fact, the imposition of policies on homosexuality and same-sex marriage to the detriment of what many communities consider as their priority goals for development like industrialization, employment, and many others looks paradoxical. This paradox has provoked hostility from countries whose citizens feel that their actual needs and cultural values are overlooked. The target communities of the SDGs do not understand how legalization of LGBT could be a more positive change than education and industrialization, for example. As a result, they suspect some selfish and aggressive ideology which is incompatible with their real desires.

On the other hand, the Church usually intervenes in the debate to condemn homosexual ideologies; which is part of her responsibility as a Kingdom community, called by God to proclaim the excellences of God in all circumstances (1 Pet. 2:9-10). However, apart from advocating for spiritual transformation and godliness, the Church in Africa often overlooks the importance of spearheading economic development and cultural transformation in the communities where she is established. As a result, stakeholders who feel indicted by the Church's advocacy for reproductive sexuality following God's laws revealed in nature – heterosexual relationships to perpetuate human species – often depict the Church as an anti-progressive group of people who know nothing about development. This does not mean that the Church should become a non-governmental organization (NGO), relegating her task of preaching Christ to the background. Since development is not only about accumulating wealth, spiritual transformation should also be prioritized. However, given that the Church has human resources in terms of competent and experienced members, spiritual resources from the authority bestowed upon her by Christ, and a strategic position in society, she is expected to use these resources to bring about holistic transformation in societies in which she operates. Paradoxically, the church seems not to have made the most of these multidimensional resources.

From all the issues highlighted above, there seems to be conflicting ideas between the Western stakeholders and Africans on the concept of development. These conflicting ideas seem related to conflicts in worldviews. This culture shock around perspectives of development indicates that change is not exclusively an economic phenomenon, but rather a multi-dimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social system.[33] The conflicts and misunderstanding show that every community needs sustainable development, but the necessary changes should not take place at the detriment of human dignity. This Christian position points to the importance of intercultural cultural communication skills for holistic community development.

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[32]Suva, Fiji, 2014.15,

[33]Nishan Sakalasooriya, "The concept of Development: Definitions, Theories and Contemporary Perspectives," (April 2020), https://www.reserachgate.net/publication/34037563)

How Intercultural Studies Can Impact Community Development

Neo-colonial perceptions of Africans appear as a serious hindrance to adequate policies for effective community development. It can therefore be difficult to discuss the impact of intercultural studies on development without stressing the need for decolonization.

Need for Decolonization

It is needful to remark that there is seeming unanimity among global partners that the model of development in Africa must follow the diktat of the West; and that economic development will only be achieved – if at all it should happen – at a high price: the disintegration of Africa's cultural values and social order. Mafa Kwanisai Mafa sounds the warning that, "recolonization has become the biggest threat not only in Africa, but also in the Middle East and other parts of the world."[34] There is need for decolonization of UN policies as an appropriate response to the ongoing threat of recolonization.

Emmanuel Oumarou and John Paul Nyuykongi underline that one important aspect of this decolonization is decoloniality, which involves a two-handed action. Africans engage in a deconstruction of the propensity to mono-narratives that glorify Western perspectives, way of life and structures, and move away from this epistemic matrix that the authors call "Westernocentric knowledge and forms of existence.[35] This action is followed simultaneously by a construction of new ways of thinking which are truly representative of, and liberating to the African people. Applied to the problem under consideration, it means thinking a form of development and implementing development policies that will not have Western 'strings' attached to them, to further alienate Africans.

Contribution of Intercultural Studies

It is worthy to note that in today's interconnected world, the ability to communicate across cultural boundaries is more important than ever. In community development, intercultural studies function as a connector between the community and its development. It is a catalyst and channel for a dynamic process of development, both for the community as well as the donors and promoters of development projects.

In a culture whereby respect for one's parent, social structure as family, interpersonal relationship are highly valued, donors and promoters of a project who have good knowledge of these cultural values will understand the importance of seeking the opinion of the parents before engaging the children in any empowerment project. Hurn and Tomalin have this to say: "The family and, indeed, the extended family are highly valued in many cultures (for example, in Africa and the Middle East), and therefore showing interest in the well-being of one's counterpart's family is important when developing successful relationships and mutual trust."[36] A project manager needs to study culture to understand this value, which will determine his or her strategies.

This ability comes through intentional efforts to cultivate openness, gather information about others without being judgmental, and harness a sense of curiosity, and tolerance of ambiguity. These intercultural communication skills are the primary focus of research in intercultural studies. Intercultural studies enable social actors to gain general knowledge on how to relate with people of another culture, investigate meanings behind their strange behaviors, spend time

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[34] Mafa Kwanisai Mafa. "Eurocentric Hegemony and African Recolonisation." *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9, no. 10 (December 2016): 389.

[35] Emmanuel Oumarou and John Paul Nyuykongi. "Liberating Knowledge to Liberate the Total Man: The Urgency of Understanding and Implementing Epistemic Decolonization in Africa." *Africanist Inter-Disciplinary Review*, no. 45 (September 2023): 47.

[36] Brian J. Hurn and Barry Tomalin, 165.

with individuals and groups in the host culture, interpret experiences, and develop skills to become successful intercultural communicators.

In addition, intercultural studies facilitate communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Misunderstandings are reduced when one understands the host community well. This is possible when one pays attention to what they say concerning their values, which are often presented in form of likes and the dislikes. These values are expressed both verbally and nonverbally. When this communication is well established, it creates a better platform for the social actor to foster the kind of development processes that will bring about qualitative changes in the life of the community. In Africa, it means collaborating with the members of the community, instead of imposing foreign ideologies on them, in total disregard for their perceptions of these ideologies. Effective development in Africa does not require neo-imperialism through Western lobbies and other pressure groups, but interculturalism. "This means that interculturalism highlights the relational process of an intercultural encounter, or the mechanics of reciprocal exchange at work in intercultural transactions."[37] Without this form of communication, there will be no collaboration. Without collaboration, the chances to see development projects succeed will be little or totally absent.

International studies help the missionary to know and understand diverse views and practices, even when he or she does not agree with all. This leads to more tolerance, acceptance, and ultimately stronger relationships which constitute the common ground from which dialogue towards positive changes can take place. The missionary can then serve as a catalyst that causes the people to review their values in the light of God's Word, and presents to them the benefits of paying allegiance to Christ. It goes without saying that the task of the missionary as an agent of change does not end with spiritual transformation. He or she should be able to use his or her intercultural communication skill to study the scale of preference the people's choices in terms of economic and social transformation. This will help him or her to orientate them toward development-centered choices. This expansion of their choices gives the people a holistic view of the gospel, and makes them to think 'big' toward development thereby enhancing it. For example, teaching the people about God's command on environmental care and the imperative of working to provide for the family imparts on the community a godly vision of development which includes hard work, generosity, and responsibility towards the earth.

Intercultural studies provide missionaries with concepts, theories and perspectives for developing the skills that will help them achieve this holistic development within the community. These include a good understanding of worldviews and human values. If modifications of these worldviews and values are needed, still a study of them will play a great role. Intercultural studies provide the missionary with the methodologies for achieving that goal and promoting community holistic development.

Intercultural studies also provide the missionary and the community with wisdom from the past to correct the present and inform the future. When the missionary helps the community to think into the future by referring to their past mistakes or that of their forefathers, it goes a long way to help them set goals that will enhance the development of the community. In this sense, intercultural studies foster innovation and creativity as both the missionary and the community become aware of the dynamic nature of culture and the need of changing traditions and beliefs for the well-being of all.

Some of these changes can include eradicating those practices which are harmful to girls and women, by showing the benefits of embracing the biblical worldview as a community, instead

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[37]Emmanuel Oumarou, "Christian Mission in an Intercultural World: A Dialogic-Prophetic Approach." *Africanist Inter-Disciplinary Review*, no. 24 (March 2022): 199.

of simply empowering girls and women in the community against boys and men the way some NGOs do. This indicates that intercultural communication skills contribute to building a sense of local identity.

One of the ministers' main objectives in intercultural studies should be to project the gospel by bringing the community closer to Christ and to the community of God's people that is the Church. However, one way of encouraging social cohesion in Africa is to develop interreligious projects which enhance peace building and harmony among people. By so doing, the missionary increases social security among community members thereby creating an atmosphere of mutual trust which is conducive for development.

Recommendations

As it has been demonstrated in this paper, the Church is supposed to be a major agent of holistic community development in Africa. For this purpose, there is need for Christian denominations to form Church-based organisations that will think and implement local solutions to community development challenges. It would be a misnomer to associate with Julian Green when she complains that Christian *Faith-Based Organisations* (FBOs) influence governments in sub-Saharan Africa to pass "bills that explicitly violate human rights for gay and queer people living in those countries,"[38] since such an assessment portrays a neo-colonial mindset decried above, and little or no knowledge of Christian ethos and African moral values. However, her definition of FBOs is quite helpful: "any non-profit organization with a central religious core that provides services aimed at bettering the lives of the community they are serving."[39] In Cameroon, FBOs that concentrate on family planning, cervical cancer screening, and vaccination are funded by American universities and a pharma company, often clash with local populations or church organisations who accuse them of promoting sex before marriage.[40] Some Christian denominations have put in place a crisis relief task force or department to address specific needs in areas affected by different sorts of crises. Although this second initiative is laudable, it may in a long run raise questions concerning the purpose of such programs in a crisis-free environment.

It is useful that FBOs operationalize their policies to cover a range of services and activities that can catalyze local development including skills empowerment and grant for projects. They need to integrate welfare and human rights approaches and skill empowerment approaches to development. This entails the necessity of developing funding strategies and engaging partners that show sensitivity to African moral values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the present context of globalization, achieving development goals is very important, since every country and every community is aspiring for positive changes which will enhance the living conditions of the populations. The values of global partnership and cooperation promoted by UN are equally important. However, this analysis has revealed that one cannot talk about achieving common development goals when this signifies disregarding cultural differences. Because of ignorance on these differences, there is nowadays an ethnocentric view of development in which Western values are emphasized at the detriment of

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[38]Julia Green, "Faith-Based Organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa: Negatives, Positives, and Recommendations for Effective Promotion of Human Rights," *International Human Rights Internship Program – Working Paper Series*, 8, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 13.

[39]Julia Green, "Faith-Based Organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa," 10.

[40]Sibylle Herzig van Wees, Emmanuel Betsi and Maturin Sop Sop, "A Description and Explanation of the Complex Landscape of Faith-Based Organisations in Cameroon's Health Sector," *Development in Practice*, https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2020.1841737.

African values. This study has indicated that to eliminate this source of conflicts, promoters of development projects should make use of intercultural skills to foster the kind of development that will reflect God's will for humankind and the intrinsic values of communities. This Christian view of intercultural studies emphasizes the need for the Church to renew with her responsibility of fostering spiritual transformation as well as social change and economic development in Africa.

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