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# BEYOND SPIRITUALITY TO BROADER SOCIAL CHANGE

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN  
CHURCH IN A RURAL COMMUNITY IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my work. Except where otherwise indicated and due acknowledgement is given.

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## **Abstract**

In the contemporary era, non-state actors continue to play a crucial role in the development of and bringing change to society and people's lives as they are major stakeholders in the social development process. While the Christian Church has a religious role, as part of a civil society, it is expected to collaborate in efforts to make a significant contribution to political and socio-economic development, and bring about positive change. The Christian Church has a long pedigree in development, playing major roles in the health and education sectors during the colonial era as well as after independence in Africa.

This dissertation analyzes the role of the Christian Church in our society, and in particular, whether it has played any socio-economic role in its immediate community, such as uplifting and changing lives in ways that lead to sustainable development. By problematising the development role of the Christian Church in society, the study adopts a case study approach, and views the church as a major stakeholder in the society where it operates.

The approach adopted for the analysis of the church and its role is, therefore, grounded on stakeholders' accounts, including those of the community and church members, who are major role players; and on the need to understand the perspectives of these stakeholders. It uses the case of the Charismatic Christian Church operating in Ga-Maphalle in the Limpopo Province, to understand how it has engaged with the development challenges of the society, particularly the programs that it has implemented and to look at what guides these programs and also its encounters with the Covid-19 pandemic together with the challenges associated with restrictions to church activities. The analysis revealed that through various activities, the church was heavily involved in the affairs of the community. Its activities went beyond religious duty to offer charity, and more importantly, to empower particular groups through social and economic outreach. Church members embarked on an outreach program to address social issues, while the church assisted community members to start livelihood projects through the provision of a non-restrictive micro-finance system.

The study revealed that the church played a prominent role in ensuring food security during the Covid-19 crisis, when livelihoods were under threat. Despite its active role, the church did not have the capacity to solve key developmental issues, which needed collaborative efforts. However, the church and other stakeholders operated in silos, and thus, failed to make a

significant impact. The study concludes that, the church could have achieved more in the society of Ga-Maphalle, through collaboration with other stakeholders, and by using its position and proximity to society, to mobilize these stakeholders towards bringing the needed development. Unfortunately, this window of opportunity was not utilized, and the society missed the opportunity to see development, which was essential. The thesis, therefore, emphasizes the significance of cooperation between different stakeholders, and argues that the church can easily achieve this because of its position in the society.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

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### 1.1 Introduction and Background

The study situates the modern church in Ga-Maphalle Village and its activities within the broader discourse on non-state actors and their role in the development process in the modern era. According to Kamaara (2000), non-state actors are increasingly being called to complement state efforts and play prominent roles in tackling development challenges affecting contemporary society. The key focus in this approach is for the church to give back to society and make a difference. Therefore, the study provided an analysis of the extent to which the modern church, in the form of the Charismatic Christian Church, has moved beyond spiritual deliverance to meet the development needs of its immediate communities in a context of increased social and economic challenges in modern South African society.

While the study recognizes the complexity of the concept of development and the multiple meanings it has adopted over the years, it takes the view that development implies improvement or positive change, and thus views the modern church as a major stakeholder in our society, with an extended mandate to bring about change. While this may seem rather simplistic, it encompasses what we want to see in our communities: improvement in socio-economic and political aspects of life and other related aspects affecting societies today. Dudley Seers, thus captured the meaning of development as:

The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all of these three have become less severe, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned [...] But if one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result 'development', even if per capita income has soared (Seers 1969: 24).

The persistence of these social challenges signifies the insurmountable task faced by the modern state and calls for the modern church to offer tangible assistance to achieve moral, social, and economic stability, as has happened elsewhere in the developed world. Eng et al. (1985: 81) noted how:

The Church, more than any other institution, has been in a position to assist black people in America to cope with and on occasion to overcome the social and political barriers of unequal access to resources...Church has provided a social support function to its membership and the surrounding community in the most important sense of the term.

They also recognize the power of the church in many communities that can be used to ‘strengthen and encourage behavioral change on the part of its membership and the community at large’ (ibid: 82). Drawing from their observation, this study will particularly focus on the social programs of the Charismatic Christian Church and its development effects and look at what has informed these programs.

The church has a spiritual role as well as a social-economic role. Oladipo (2000) suggests that the role of the church in influencing social change is even more relevant in the modern era where multiple actors play a role in development. The church is seen as having an advantage in delivering sustainable development, mainly due to its location even in remote areas, and its stability as an institution (ibid). In a very specific way, McNabb (2017) sees the church as having a role in championing and defending human rights. It has in numerous times proven to be a reliable and effective source in delivering basic human needs, although these have often focused on the individual, it can redirect energies towards addressing common challenges of society by developing a structured ‘way of doing things’ (Pillay 2017).

As Carr notes, it is increasingly becoming difficult to separate religion and politics as both seek attention from the community by offering a service, which is hope and change (Carr 2011). The church can play a major role in bringing societal change by ploughing back into the society where its congregants live. According to Maxwell (1998), the church should play a proactive role in transforming the lives of church members and improving them economically and socially. On a similar note, Buffel (2007) argues that churches should intentionally work towards sustainable transformation beyond preaching and praying. This is dictated by the ever-changing society dynamics, which put pressure on the church to align its mandate to societal needs, if it is to remain relevant to its target population.

Stransberry and Hilcom (2007) point to the long history of the church in bringing social and economic change to communities. They noted that although the church has its foundations on spiritual grounds, the early Christian church had played a major role in improving the

communities' social services like schools and hospitals. We are also reminded of how the Christian Church in Africa played not only its spiritual role, but also its social role through education and provision of health care (Manji and O'Coill 2000).

The development of mission schools and hospitals resulted in enlightenment and stopped death by curable diseases, and ultimately improved living standards of people. Furthermore, in areas where mission schools were established, literacy improved while mission hospitals improved the general health care of the most vulnerable populations. As in many other parts of southern Africa, missionaries from the Roman Catholic, Anglican, London Missionary Society, and others, established schools and hospitals at their missionary stations while developing a new class of educated African elites (Myers 2015). Thus, the traditional church introduced and managed the education and health systems during early colonialism (Bruneau 1980).

Despite these developments, the Christian religion and the institution of the church have often been viewed negatively from some parts. Part of the problem lay in its association with colonialism and the unfortunate historical process of imperialism (Okoth 2004). From this perspective, the arrival and spread of missionaries in Africa are seen as having worked in favor of the colonial western states, which used Christianity to impose its 'colonial mentality' as an ideological tool to 'brain wash' the natives (Nkomazama and Setume 2016). The schools for education and the clinics for western health care were built by the European missionaries for the same purpose (Viera, et al. 2007). Linus (1988) has expressed doubts on whether Christian missionaries benefitted Africans by introducing western education and healthcare to the detriment of traditional norms.

However, modern challenges faced in developing countries – increasing poverty, minimum health care, access to water and basic education - call on the Christian Church in the post-colonial era to intervene (Hiagbe 2015). The church is increasingly expected to assume a lead role in the lives of people, offering better life in response to the undesirable social, economic, and environmental conditions that many are living under (Maxwell 1998). This is particularly so in the times of the novel Corona virus and the subsequent containment measures, which plunged large population into a deeper state of poverty.

Given that the Christian Church has continuously played a crucial and visible role in the social lives of its constituency, it is understandable that the question of its broader engagement in bringing

developmental change has not been thoroughly explored in South Africa. However, this is a central issue in contemporary society where societal needs require more than just charity. The charity work of the Christian Church has been well recognized, and its role on changing the lives of its members cannot be underestimated.

This study focuses on the broader development question in the church's immediate communities, although it also analyses its encounters with the COVID 19 pandemic, and the challenges associated with restrictions to church activities. Using a case study of a Charismatic Christian Church operating in Ga-Maphalle, Limpopo Province, it seeks to understand common community developmental needs, the church's community development programs, and how its programs were affected by the COVID 19 pandemic.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This study seeks to explore these issues by answering the following central question: In a context of heightened poverty and deprivation, how has the Dynamite Word Ministry Church in Mopani District, Limpopo Province, responded to development challenges in its immediate community?

This central question can be further broken down into a four research questions, which this study will address:

1. What are the social, economic, and infrastructural problems confronted by communities in the Maphalle Village in rural Mopani District in Limpopo?
2. What are the specific social programs introduced and implemented by the Dynamite Word Ministry Church in these communities?
3. What guides the church's programs in the surrounding communities? Has the church aligned its social programs to the specific needs of communities?
4. What are the community's expectations from the church? Has the church programs satisfied those expectations?

## **1.3 Significance of the study**

The modern church is expected to move beyond spiritual deliverance, temporary acts of charity, and contribute to the long-term development of the communities it serves (Myers 2015). This

study is significant to the church community in a rapidly changing environment as it seeks to reposition itself as a role player in providing solutions to socio-economic disparities. Also, the study is significant to the state where social changes deepen and call for a collaborative approach that bring together all development stakeholders including grassroots organizations like the church.

#### **1.4 Summary of the Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative approach, which is geared at gaining an in-depth understanding of societal development challenges and the activities of the church, which are directed at bringing positive change in society. It was conducted in a rural community of Ga-Maphalle, located in the Greater Letaba Municipality in Mopani District, Limpopo Province. Within the Ga-Maphalle society, the study focused on the activities of a Charismatic Christian Church, which operates in the area.

Due to the challenges imposed by the novel corona virus and government's containment measure, the study utilized the interview technique to collect data. It utilized mainly two types of interviews: 1) open-ended interviews; and 2) telephone interviews, although the majority of the interviews were conducted through face-to-face open-ended interviews. These interviews were designed to draw information on a range of issues including the development challenge faced by the community, the development programs implemented by the church and what guides these programs, and the community's views on the church's role as a development agent in the community.

Data collected through these interviews was analyzed manually through thematic analysis. This was done in order to give control to the researcher to generate themes that were pertinent in developing her dissertation. For a study that was conducted at the time of a pandemic, there were a number of challenges faced by the researchers, which delayed fieldwork. These challenges, together with the ethical issues involved are discussed in greater depth in section 3.5 of Chapter Three.

## **1.5 Organization of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is chronologically structured. Each chapter explores a stage in the research process. Chapter one is the introduction to the study. It begins by providing a motivation for the study; then presents the research aims and questions, significance of the study, before providing a brief summary of the methodology adopted. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature and attempts to provide a framework of analysis.

Chapter Three describes the methodological approach, and the challenges associated with carrying out a field study during a pandemic. Chapter Four presents the results. It begins by providing a context, which is done through the description of the study area and the church. It then discusses the developmental challenges in the community and the different activities of the Charismatic Christian Church, and what guides the church's developmental programs. The chapter attempts to answer the question of whether the church has indeed moved beyond spirituality and charity to provide sustainable development. Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the main themes and the policy implications.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

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### 2.1 Introduction

South Africa has, in the last twenty years, seen an increase in churches, with a total number of 14 201 registered with the Department of Social Development as Non-profit Organizations. The figure can be higher than the recorded as some churches operate without formal registrations while others are registered with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC). Since churches are classified as non-profit organizations, according to the Department of Social Development's Code of Good Practice for South African Non-Profit Organizations of 2001, they are mainly set-up for the purpose of social services, charity, or welfare and but not limited to a group of people to achieve a common purpose. Churches are not excluded from the classification, hence the need to re-look at the role they play in society.

Though churches are classified as Non-Profit Organizations, the South African legal framework does not require or make it compulsory for Churches to be registered under the Non-Profit Organization Act (No 71 of 1997) in order for the church to qualify as a legal organization and operation. However, we cannot ignore the reality that the church has dramatically grown to a level of influence and control. The church, therefore, is a major development actor as part of the non-state sector.

The study attempts to investigate the role of a non-state actor in the development process and is guided by the emphasis on development partnership and the rise of non-state actors in the development landscape. As Lundsgaarde (2010: 2) has argued, 'the challenge is for these new actors in development to increase their willingness to invest their resources in 'unfamiliar operating environments and to increase their chances of success and their willingness to sustain existing commitments in the long term'.

In order to analyse how churches contribute to social changes in society, it is necessary to examine how their activities conform to the dictating factors of development. In trying to capture the development impact of the Christian Church, it is important to use concepts that focus mainly on the concept and discourses of development in light of the changing demand for non-state actors to

be part of the development process. The development discourses, particularly social development, economic development, state-centred development and rolling back the hands of the state, are used to facilitate an analysis of what development is about.

These concepts, which are discussed using sub-headings under development, reveal the complexity and the problematic nature of development. By using these concepts to analyse the role of the church, the study reveals the challenges of arriving at a simplistic definition of what is meant by the concept development. The church and its role fit into this complexity, and the chapter discusses the church and development in later sections.

## **2.2 Development as a discourse**

There is surely no consensus on the meaning of development, and over the years there have been various definitions advanced by people from different perspectives (Turner and Hulme 1999). The concept of development is highly contested and means different things to different people. The term is used in different ways, depending on the context (Okwueze, 2004). However, the difference in meaning is also related to the different perspectives that have dominated the development landscape over the years. Thus, the definition of development has changed from the time of the 1960s when the modernization perspective held sway, to the later years when development underwent a major rethink ((Schoorman 1993).

Some view it as change, while others see it as advancement, improvement, and progress, while to others development signifies change in light with growth. Ovbiebo (2013) defines development as an advancement, progression, or improvement of growth from one level to a higher level. For Bassey et al. (1985: 3), ‘development is the maximization of the potentialities of the total environment of a specific country - economically, physically, politically and human development - for the betterment of the majority.’ According to the Obong of Calabar, development must aim at creating an appropriate environment for the individual to live a happy, contented, spiritually satisfying and culturally meaningful life.

According to the definition provided by the United Nations Organization as cited in Anyanwo (1981:165), development should be seen as a process through which the efforts of the people are directed at collaboration with those of governmental authorities, in a common purpose to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions and circumstances of communities, integrate those



communities into the life of the nation, and enable them to contribute fully to national development. This study recognizes the complexity and the contested nature of the concept but adopts a simple definition that views development as the process of bringing about change to so-called poor regions of the world.

Following this definition, improving the lives of community dwellers within a specific integrated village of Maphalle through the activities of Christian church as the non-state actor, will be viewed as development. Fabian (2004) brings into this discussion the subject of the church by arguing that in Nigeria, it is difficult to discuss community development without mentioning efforts and contributions of Christian churches, particularly in the areas of health care. This can be said of other parts of Africa, where churches have a long history of involvement in the health and education sectors.

Who is responsible for development? This question has been deliberated for decades post the World War II as the western countries were facing the cold war. President Truman, in his famous speech during his inauguration in 1949 can be quoted as saying, ‘We will continue to give unfaltering support to the United Nations and related agencies, and we will continue to search for ways to strengthen their authority and increase effectiveness in programs for world economic recovery, strengthen freedom loving nations against the dangers of aggression and embark on new bold programs for making our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of under-developed areas’.

The statement suggests that development is the sole role of the government, especially to countries or people who are still primitive or lacking technological advancement. We should be reminded, however, that the concept and practice of development has undergone massive changes since that day President Truman delivered his speech. However, Herbert-Cheshire (2000) is convinced that for sustainable development, individuals who form part of communities should be trained, skilled, thoroughly resourced and empowered to be independent. The purpose is not to make ungovernable communities, but to create a culture of long-term development (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000). While the government has a major role to play in development, it is almost impossible to let the burden be on the shoulders of the government alone.

James (2013) suggests that all Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) serve and contribute drastically to development. He outlines that from those that influence policy making like People opposing women abuse (POWA), including those that are focused on implementing developmental projects and programs such as African aid organization (AFAID) and those who pursue humanitarian programs like the Red cross foundation, faith-based organizations are also not excluded from the role of development. For so many years, NGO's have been developers, funders, and operators of development especially in Africa mainly to decrease poverty, increase equality and strive for the improvement and betterment of livelihood (Manji and O'Coill, 2000).

It is evident that NGO's had and continue to transform the world's social structures. They are key players in the field of development (James, 2013). Furthermore, NGO's offers new advanced and people-oriented approaches to service delivery, advocacy, and empowerment in providing skills, study and distribute aid geared towards development. Donors have turn away from governments and their agencies as a result of bureaucracy and corruption that leads funding not used for the purpose it was meant for, they now rely mostly on NGO's as a bridge to socio economic change (Goldsmith, 1985).

The private sector's role goes beyond providing dividends to their shareholders in profits, but is beneficial to economic growth and development (Naude, 2014). Furthermore, the most critical role is for the private sector to create employment, to the overall community such that it creates homebuilders from construction sector, bankers from the financial sector, and marketers from the media industry. The government also benefit from taxes collected as revenue. Schulpen and Gibbon (2002), suggest that the private sector has become more efficient, productive and conducive to economic growth. They continue with the notion that the fast growth pace has created healthy competition that strengthens the market force.

### **2.2.1 State-centered development**

As highlighted earlier, the discourse of development is often associated with the Truman Doctrine of 1946. In his speech, President Truman promised to 'make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life'. As Escobar (1995: 4) argues, this was America's dream for a new world, but later the 'dream was universally embraced by those in power'. As the process was an extension of

America's vision, development was seen as essentially means of transformation, where the rest of the world had to be transformed drastically in 'pursuit of the goal of material prosperity and economic progress' (Escobar 1995: 4).

To achieve this vision, institutions like the World Bank, IMF and other donor agencies were created to provide aid to '3<sup>rd</sup> World' countries for them to developed (Lavelle 2011; Rapley 2007; Stiglitz 1999). This development aid was channeled through the state, which was mandated with achieving development. As Rapley (2007: 2) reminds us:

However, by the early postwar period, development thought, like conventional economic wisdom, was really neither left nor right, for the simple reason that a broad consensus had come to coalesce around certain core assumptions. Its thrust was that economies needed more state intervention than they had been given in the past (in fact, in Latin America it was right-wing authoritarian regimes that began employing statist development strategies).

Thus, development models of the time which were – modernization and dependence theories, while hardly ideological bed fellows – were mostly prostate. Newly independent states in Africa, Asia and Latin America embraced these models and employed statist development strategies (Scott, 1998). Rapley (2007: 2) explains the reasoning:

The state, if it was helped, could both develop economies and alter societies in such a way as to make them suit human needs. Underlying this was a belief that the state could embody collective will more effectively than the market, which favored privileged interests.

This position was not only favored by socialists and communists, but modern liberals also saw value in the state as the agent of development. It is not surprising, therefore, that newly independent African states embraced the task of developing their countries, and development strategies mirrored the thinking of the time.

### **2.2.2 'Rolling back the hand of the state' and non-state actors**

By the late 1970s, the state had lost its role as the conventional agent of development as decades of development had failed to measure up to expectations (Pieterse 2000). Globalization market forces and international organizations had overtaken the state as the conventional agent of development. In the meantime, the state was under attack from neoclassical theorist advocating for a return to neoclassical economics (Rapley 2007). It was accused of hindering the working of the market, while catching up as the main aim of development was in question (Pieterse 2000).

In the late 1980s, bilateral and multilateral donors adopted a new policy agenda, which favored the non-state actors in mediating development (Bebbington 1997; Edwards and Hulme 1996). The state slowly lost its previous role in championing development to non-governmental organizations, grassroots organizations and the private sector. These ultimately arrogated roles previously performed by the state, and became prominent actors in poverty reduction, social welfare goals and development of civil society (Robinson 1993). Given the record of the state in the development process in Asia, Africa and Latin America, these emerged as ideal in a new era of ‘sustainable, participatory, and efficient development’ (Bebbington 1997: 1755). NGOs, in particular were presented as an:

....integral component of a thriving civil society and an essential counterweight to state power, opening up channels of communication and participation, providing training grounds for activists, and promoting pluralism (Edwards and Hulme 1996: 962).

This approach also recognized the historical role of society-based organizations, particularly the church, in providing services like education and health to society (Edwards and Hulme 1996). The church has been seen as a transformative and change agent, which is expected to play an important role in transforming society (Pillay 2017). This study is guided by these changes in development emphasis and the belief that the church can help improve communities both socially and economically (Hiagbe 2015).

### **2.3 Churches and Development**

Development is a topic that arises and is widely discussed by government institutions and even ordinary people (Alawode 2016). Development is about people's lives and communities, and it is not something that can be categorized through measurements (Belshaw et al. 2000). Community development hold foot in many spheres of our history including education, economic, sociology, political, urban as well as regional planning, and it is one of the most diversified practices in history (Phillips and Pittman 2014).

In many circles of development, faith-based organizations have good backgrounds and operate extensively in communities in the provision of social services, health, education, and act as community organizers (Marshall and Keough 2004). Faith-based organizations frequently play as sole providers of social services, they scheme out ideas and deliver services inform of developments in sectors that governments have failed to develop (Adkins et al. 2010).

Belshaw et al., (2000) argue that most African Christians were molded by missionary theologies through development activities such as education, farming, and health institutions. Omenya and Anum (2014) notes that the central objective of the missionary societies was to change African religion with Christian religion; but they also point that the early missionaries did not pay attention to African culture and the African way of life became a major hurdle in the evangelical ground.

Untold organizations engage in community development in various countries with diversified political systems to address astounding problems (Bhattacharyya 2004). Community development is in fact a shifting system that operates professionally, and it is supported by different organizations as well as the public (Henderson and Verseg 2010). One of these organizations is the church, which holds its foot in many countries and their cultures, particularly in Africa. Belshaw et al. (2000), imply that the church takes the spiritual topic sincerely and sees development as more than a secular process. The Church seeks to hold forth humane and spiritual values to underpin social, political, and economic development. There are three objectives of sustainable development in society: economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability (Sachs 2015).

According to De Temple (2012), development indeed has a background based on church principles and these principles promote and shape our present-day world. According to Alowode (2016), as a church, the following serious questions have been asked:

Are we actively engaged in the difficult task of transformation that embraces the social, the economic and the spiritual? Are we making a lasting influence on society? What is the score of the church in this whole issue of spiritual and social transformation?

Most responses to these inquiries can be addressed solely on individual aspects related to the way one interacts with the community (Green and Goetting, 2010). Bhattacharyya, (2004) argues that community development should be based on different types of politics, politics that are just, fair, non-authoritative, and based on people's wishes. Community development includes resources provided to the marginalized and it's about providing sustainable assistance. Providers of such resources can range from government institutions, non-governmental organizations, charity organizations, philanthropic individuals, faith-based organizations, and even businesses (West et al. 2014).

Just like religion, which operates ultimately, development is all about enacting quality actions by mobilizing the community to be self-reliant (De Temple 2012). The church's capacity to impact effectively to poor people is based on its followers and its stand in many countries through equitable evangelism (Belshaw, 2000). According to De Temple (2012), development can be anything that constructively defies institutions' powers through actions, practices, and ideas that are just and righteous. However, from a theology studies perspective, it is captivating to highlight that there are many arguments about the concept of religion, and whether or not it contributes to development (Wijsen, 2011).

### **2.3.1 Churches in collaboration with other organizations**

International banks and international organizations have in recent years been seeking collaboration with other development organizations like religious institutions to broaden their role in the fight against poverty. In fact, the church works extensively with other organizations like the World Bank in bringing forth development opportunities to marginalized communities.

The World Bank and the churches have respectively acknowledged their position and responsibilities in the fight against poverty (Belshaw et al. 2000). Apart from the World Bank, other organizations are stepping up to gain an understanding of poverty and while doing so, they are also seeking collaboration with religious organizations (Marshall and Keough 2004).

Religious and development organizations in different localities have constantly been engaged in activities and discussions regarding poverty and social equity (Marshall and Keough 2004). The church is called to engage, assist, and support people who are excluded and socially disadvantaged (Berchie et al. 2016).

Charities and other non-profit organizations play unique social goals in getting in touch with marginalized communities and usually assist them with education and skills needed in employment (Johanson and Adams 2004). The partnership between institutions and organizations engaged in community development is proving to be productive and symbolic in many dimensions (Phillips & Pitt, 2012). As a result, religion has long played an important character in supporting the well-being of socially disadvantaged communities (Clarke, 2013).

### **2.3.2 The church in local communities**

The church forms an integral part of the community as it is deeply rooted in the daily social lives of the people it serves (Oladipo, 2000). We therefore cannot sideline the church and box it only as a spiritual body. Individuals and families who form part of the community have social problems that cannot be solved by extended families or the state, those problems end up at the pastors' table and thus become the responsibility of the church. Oladipo continues to suggest that certain social challenges where Ngo's and the state have failed to implement sustainable solutions like poverty can be effectively alleviated by the church as it gives hope and faith to those who are in need.

There is an expectation of the church to offer employment, education, health care, take care for the orphans and widows, and provide housing (Maxwell, 1998). Furthermore, Maxwell suggests that the environment within communities should improve from scarcity to plenty when a church is present, this will be evident by the decrease in single headed families as more people will be encouraged to start families, crime will subside as many will find employment and increase in better health care facilities that seeks to promote long life.

Maxwell (1998) does not overlook the fact that in as much as the church will benefit from the church members, it should also increase the livelihood of the same church members through accumulation of assets, shift their mind set from being "receivers of handouts" to becoming active contributors to the economy. The research concurs with Carey (1792), when he stressed an important role of the church in his enquiry into the obligations of Christians that the church leaders should endeavor to instill a culture where there is no visible difference between poor and rich during church gatherings.

Community development goes beyond visible change like education or poverty alleviation, we have seen people evolve in values, beliefs and practices as a result of the influence the church has on families and individuals (Stansberry, 2007). Stansberry also notes that the church brought the importance of acquiring skills by teaching children basic education in promoting grammar to make them better communicators.

### 2.3.3 Church and poverty alleviation

The UNDP (1996) defines poverty as the privation of fruitful resources, money and capabilities that provides for people whether as an individual or group. While Buffel (2007) adds that poverty is the absence of basic human necessities including food and drink, clothing, shelter, home, and proper health care facilities.

The worldview on poverty is alarming. In most countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America the incomes of the very poor have been dramatically dropping below the average poverty line (World Bank, 2015). It was perceived that poverty is declining, however it continues to increase and without intervention, many poor people will end up dying. According to Oladipo, poverty is a systematical problem rather than hereditary; to address the roots it will require a holistic system transformation (Oladipo, 2000). Furthermore, that the poor cannot be blamed for their conditions, the system was designed in such a way that both the poor and the rich should exist without equality but a growing disparity difficult to close overnight.

It is almost impossible to mention poverty without attaching it to race, it is believed that blacks are the poorest with the distribution of wealth and income is unequal (May 2000). Africa with its vast and fertile land still stands with the high poverty rate, the unavailability of agricultural resources, access to markets and lack of education are some of the factors that continually keep the poor poorer (Oladipo, 2000). Buffel (2007) suggests that poverty is accounted for by inequality, segregation of access to markets by race, illiteracy within blacks and high rate of unemployment.

In relation to the church and its role, the definition outlines clearly that the church is not limited to only spiritual counsel since you cannot preach to an empty stomach. An estimated quarter of the world's population in developing countries is subjected to poverty (Ravonburg and Sano 1994). With the alarming rate of poverty, intervention is sought from the church, a clear distinction between transient and structural poverty should be attained prior to any intervention in poverty alleviation (Jalan and Ravallion, 2007). Jalan and Ravallion, distinguish transient poverty as the periodical experience of less feasting at household level, while Oladipo (2000) defines structural poverty as a generational experience as a result of socio-economic and political imbalances (Oladipo 2000).

While poverty alleviation is left to the government and other NGO's, according to Carey (1792), the church cannot ignore the precarious predicament that involves the same creatures created in



the image of God. The Christian church even though not prescribed remains with the responsibility and duty to uplift others who are less fortunate to feed themselves. Maxwel (1998) brings attention to African Christian churches not to follow the examples of western culture that focus on making money for self and forget to improve the socio-economic issues that affect blacks in Africa.

#### **2.3.4 Church and education**

To even begin considering that prayer and reading the Bible alone will bring solutions to modern issues will be an error. The Christian church cannot continually pump information that will subsequently not change their status of living. Welch and Norton (1996) suggests that the primary role is to keep the youth thoroughly involved by allowing them the space to think and explore than to capture them in ideologies that are prescribed as law. Moreover, the ignorance of the ideology that Christian churches has no role to play in education. Furthermore, the youth is hungry for the undiluted truth that will teach them fundamentals of freedom, which is freedom to be independent.

Wade (1940) suggests that focus should be given mostly to young boys and girls by offering them opportunities to attain a level of education; this has the potential to change their livelihood for good. Most Christian churches should be a vanguard in driving successful leadership and training (Cavendish, 2002), in the most sustainable way possible.

#### **2.3.5 Church and health care**

Healing is deemed as a supernatural force that occurs by divine intervention, however, Ransford et al. (2010) pose a rather fundamental question of then what is the solution to proper health care in the absence of faith. Should healing by religious people be dependent on faith, will the faithless simply be left to suffer and therefore die? They continue suggesting that while some of the most apparent obstacles to health care include financial affordability, long waiting periods, fear of discrimination in the case of the poor and access to the hospitals or clinics.

The church has a role to play in creating solutions to the availability and accessibility to health care especially in the communities they serve. They need to be involved in policy making, engage medical professionals and partner with relevant aid providers (Aaron and Burstin, 2003). Ovbiebo (2013) suggests that the church and its involvement in health care in the community addresses

mental health that leads to reduced hypertension, reduced suicide attempts, less depression and less promiscuity

### **2.3.6 The church and social and economic development**

Social development is the pattern or process of change exhibited by individuals because of their interaction with other individuals, social institutions, social customs, etc. (Morris, 2010:9). Christian churches offer consolation to oppressed people by giving them hope and eternal happiness in an afterlife (Nwanunobi 1992:194). Christian churches have been known to provide support and consolation and to help in the search for rational oppression, violence, and strife within communities and groups. They have helped to ensure that the social life of people in a community is balanced. Obiora (2007:112) indicates that Christian churches have had an impact on social development, as well as other religious groups.

Economic development is the development of the economic wealth of countries or regions for the well-being of their inhabitants. Economic development is a far-reaching strategy that combines different types of activities that facilitate, sustain, and expand an economic area and discipline, in fact, economic development is a vital element of community development projects for any society or government (Phil-lips and Pitt 2012). This age of neoliberal governance has, however, unfolded opportunities for the revivification of faith-based activities within the public circle – activities that fill the gap left by the receding governments (Cloke et al. 2013).

However, viewed from another perspective, Christian churches contribute to the local economy in a variety of ways. Most churches employ at least one person, and many have more than 20 employees, especially if they operate a childcare facility or even a school, and they consume office supplies, furniture, curriculum materials, and specialty church items (Hamilton-Pennell 2009). The Black church in the US has played a significant role in the abolition of slavery and also gave impetus and platform to the Civil Rights Struggle.

In 1977, Lloyd wrote an article, entitled —The Black Church and Economic Development, in which he demonstrated that, historically, the Black church has played an important role in the social and economic lives of the Black community. He argued that the Black church, often in partnership with the federal government, has provided both moral and economic impetus for the economic redevelopment of urban areas.

Most churches have an important role to play in community development. Church organizations provide jobs for the community, and churches support a variety of local businesses. Churches bring individuals from surrounding areas to the community in which the church is located, and these individuals provide economic support to local establishments. Thus, churches aid in bringing additional revenue to communities.

## **2.4 Can the Church Move Beyond Spirituality?**

To demonstrate God's greatness and kingdom, Christians and the church are called upon to do so through the application of integrity and fairness in the world, and this calling has broader implications in relation to how the church should be operated and how its character must be steered. People interacting in congregations can relate to each other's problems, whether economic or spiritual, and developmental activities can materialize from the interactions of local religious organizations (Marshall and Van 2007). The Church offers an impressive and passionate image that recognizes and ties people together even when there is a lot of resistance, and this is because religion is at the center of specific values and belief systems that steer society (Njogu 2013).

When it comes to development, the Christian religion needs to be broadly considered because most Africans confide in it, and throughout the world, the religion is considered helpful in uplifting the standard of living for the poor (Belshaw et al. 2000). Literature on rural community development emphasizes the importance of citizen participation as a means of strengthening communities (Flora et al., 2004). Advocates and practitioners of rural community development also believe that citizens should be meaningfully involved in community decision-making (Coe 1990).

For development to occur there is a need for greater participation of locals and the church in the development processes that will change the nature and direction of developmental interventions as well as result in a type of development that will have local people's support and recognition (CASSAD, 1992). With many developing countries facing increasing fiscal constraints, many of the rural communities are gaining less attention from governments, hence the need for community members to mobilize themselves for the greater good of community development.

Various studies have examined the problems and henceforth the role of churches in community development and provided the framework in which churches can help improve their host community (Ekong 2010; Dreyer 2004; Flint et al. 2002; McRoberts 2001 and Ekong 1983).

Another study by Dreyer (2004) was motivated by the premise that the church, with its powerful resources and infrastructure, could be an important partner and role player in existing development strategies and initiatives, especially in villages.

The study aimed not only to illuminate the unique role that the church can play in sustainable development but, more importantly, to inspire it to rise to the challenge of practical involvement. It was, therefore, concluded in the study that participation by the church could contribute to the effective development of especially the rural people, thereby allowing for a more integrated, community-centered approach. The foregoing exposes the characteristics of the church especially concerning community development, which is the focus of this investigation.

Churches are often well placed to play a part in the huge task of community development. Unlike other voluntary agencies, they are in many cases stronger in the rural areas than in the cities. The rural-based church, especially the one established by missionaries, often locates its headquarters in that local area. This ensures close contact with the people, and can therefore help in overcoming the many problems in promoting community development that arises from communication shortcomings. Churches are primary meeting places for communities, providing sites of ‘sociability’ and ‘redemption’ for local people (Ladd, 1998; Ammerman 2000; Spain 2001) and civic associations that encourage large numbers of citizens to participate in an array of social activities (Ammerman 1996).

The analytical framework of the study is based on the changes in the developmental emphasis since 1950. The study attempts to investigate the role of a non-state actor in the development process and is guided by the emphasis on development partnership and the rise of non-state actors in the development setting. As Lundsgaarde (2010: 2) has argued, ‘the challenge is for these new actors in development to increase their willingness to invest their resources in ‘unfamiliar operating environments and to increase their chances of success and their willingness to sustain existing commitments in the long term’.

## **2.5 Bringing in the Exchange Theory**

This research is anchored on the exchange theory as the theoretical framework for analyzing data on the contributions of urban and rural-based churches to community development. The major proponents of exchange theory are George Homans and Peter Blau. According to Charles (2010),

exchange theory is often seen as deductive in orientation because it involves propositions that guide reasoning and research. The propositions comprise of statements of a relationship that assume that if condition “B” must take place, then situation “A” must prevail. A fundamental question that exchange theory seeks to ask is the ‘Quid pro quo’ - something given as compensation.

That is, in a situation of exchange, one must ask, “what will I gain from this interaction or transaction?” The implied gain or loss is quickly calculated albeit, mentally before an actor engages in any interaction. Gratification is the keyword in exchange theory because nobody wants to go into a relationship he expects to suffer materially or emotionally. Everybody, as an individual actor, is driven by a profit motive to go into a relationship that involves an exchange (Charles, 2010). Churches as well as their host community (which most often comprise of members of these churches) are actively engaged in finding the answer to the question ‘what will I gain from this interaction or transaction?’

An important purpose for most Christian religious organizations in planning and carrying out community development projects or programs is to fulfill their evangelistic function. The development projects also serve as welfare programs to their members who are also members of the community where it is based.

For an exchange to take place, it is assumed that every actor is a free being and is not under any obligation to go into the transaction. This means that the actor has the choice to enter into or to refuse to enter any exchange. There is therefore a strong element of voluntary action and freedom in taking a decision. No one is under the pressure of entering into a relationship of any sort. This shows the various approaches the church engages in to attract its members. This was the method used by the early missionaries who were able to convert community members through the provision of schools, hospitals, and other amenities.

In exchange theory, it is assumed that each person is unique and is motivated by a selfish interest to go into an interaction in order to get what he wants. A finding in a study by Ekong (1988) on Rural Based Religious Organization and Rural Community Development revealed that the sick constituted the second largest category of membership. This is clear evidence of the extent to which self-interest motivates people to go into interaction and transactions. Reciprocity, therefore, enhances exchange in society and sustains the relationship (Charles, 2010). If the church gains

more and more members through the corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs it gives to its host community, then the relationship will be sustained and could likely increase in dimension, intensity, and regularity.

## **2.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter first presented the introduction which showed how the structure of the chapter is laid out. The chapter then discussed concepts that enhanced understanding of the research topic. The first concept discussed was the development discourse, which provided different meanings of the concept of development and who should be involved in the development process. Following this, the role of the church in development was discussed, and the various areas where the church has played a prominent role were identified and analyzed. The discussion also revealed the long history of the church in areas like education, health and poverty reduction. The discussion of the church is continued in the next section, with a focus on whether the church can move from mere spirituality and charity to providing sustainable development. Lastly, the chapter discusses the exchange theory and attempt to bring it into a discussion of the theoretical framework.

## Chapter Three: Methodological Approach

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### 3.1 Introduction

The study is meant to explore the role of the Christian Church in bring social change in rural societies. It is particularly focused on whether the church has taken a developmental role in communities where it operates. It used a case study of a charismatic church operating in Ga-Maphalle, a poor rural community in the Limpopo Province. The study was guided by the assumption that the church as a non-state actor in modern society should be expected to respond to societal challenges in its midst.

This chapter follows a review of selected literature and the description of the framework of analysis that was adopted by this study, which was presented in Chapter Two. This briefly describes the research area, the research design adopted in studying the role and activities of the church and the views of the community on the role of the church, the methods used for collecting data, the data analysis approach, and ethical considerations. The chapter particularly highlights the challenges and problems of conducting fieldwork during a time of crisis and the innovative strategies adopted by the research. It also illustrates the ethical challenges of conducting research on human aspects and collecting views of individuals on a subject they view as sensitive.

The research study was conducted between August and October 2021. The timing was designed to cover research in the community and the church. Fieldwork was conducted in Ga-Maphalle in the Great Letaba Municipality in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The community and the church formed part of the case study and this dissertation draws insights from these three months of fieldwork. The chapter begins by briefly discussing the study area and the reasons for the choice of the case study. It then provides a description of the research design adopted by the study before discussing the data collection methods. It then discusses the data analysis approach, ethical considerations and fieldwork challenges.

### 3.2. Choice of Study Area

GA-Maphalle is located within the Mopani District in the eastern parts of the Limpopo Province in South Africa (see Fig. 1). The village is home to the Balobedu tribe, found in these parts of the

Limpopo Province. In Ga-Maphalle, both middle income and low-income households are found, but the majority of households can be categorized as poor. Ga-Maphalle was purposely selected as case study because of the following reasons: First, it is a rural community located in a province that is regarded as poor by South African standards. Second, the village houses a number of Christian churches that include conventional churches like the Roman Catholic Church, other churches like the Zion Christian Church (ZCC, which is popular in the Limpopo Province, and charismatic churches, which have mushroomed in the recent past.

Thirdly, the region is faced with numerous developmental challenges such as lack of infrastructure including proper water supply and proper sanitation. Lastly, there are numerous social problems including high population of women and youth, unemployment, poverty, HIV and AIDS, lack of social amenities, livelihood collapse, and a high proportion of women-headed households and orphans.

As a whole, the village offered an ideal environment for investigating the development role of the Christian church in rural society. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on the charismatic Christian church, and not the other local churches, which have smaller branches and do not command a large membership. Also, the charismatic church is considered very rich, drawing large sums from tithes and other donations, and with the location of the main church in an urban area (Ga-Kgapane), where the congregation is mainly middle-income groups. The choice of the church was also guided by the assumption that the church must give back to society that supports it.

### **3.3 Research Design**

Strydom et al. (2002: 137) define a research design as a specification of the most adequate operations to be performed in order to test a specific hypothesis under a given condition. For Babbie and Mouton (2002: 72), a research design can be seen as a plan that a researcher has to follow during any study in order to provide answers to the research question. Key to a research design is for the researcher to decide on the research strategy that he should adopt, and this may involve two steps: first, the researcher must determine exactly what he or she wants to investigate, and secondly, he or she must determine how best this could be achieved.

In the case of this study, a qualitative approach that is geared at gaining an in-depth understanding of societal development challenges and the activities of the church was adopted. The strategy was



geared in digging deep in an attempt to understand whether the activities of the church in society brought positive changes and whether these changes were what the community wanted. It also sought to understand the perspective of community members on the church and its role, and what they expect from the church that operate in their midst. Such a study related to the meanings, definitions of ideas, features, metaphors, symbols, and summary of things (Sethole, 2018).

Kumar (2018) argues that any study method chosen should be based on resources availability and expertise of the researcher. While time was limited and there were constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, a qualitative approach was the only appropriate method. The study could not utilize a qualitative design that would provide statistical insights without providing the necessary details, and missing the pertinent questions of the why and how.

According to Marshall and Rossman, the approach is increasingly becoming a vital mode of exploration in social sciences because it provides for an in-depth study of a phenomenon or phenomena under study (Marshall and Rossman, 2014). Within the qualitative tradition, the study adopted a qualitative case study of the Dynamite Word Ministry and the rural community of Ga-Mphalle, Mopani District in Limpopo Province.

### **3.4. Population and Sampling Procedure**

The study was conducted in Ga-Maphalle Village and the charismatic church that has a branch in the community. The population focused on in the study were the members of Ga-Maphalle community, including community leader, elders, men, women and youth, and people in the church including the church leadership and congregation. A population is a group of people who share common traits or attributes which are of interest to the researcher and the population to whom the findings can be generalized (Nancy & Grove, 2001).

When deciding on the population of a study, it is important to bear in mind that it is impossible to conduct the study on the entire population, which in this case, we focus on the members of the rural community of Maphalle in Limpopo Province. As such, the entire community of Ga-Maphalle and those involved in the charismatic church were of interest to this study. Those involved in the church would shed light on the church and its activities, while the community was a rich source of data on aspects concerning the community, the church and their expectations from it.

While the whole population was of interest to the study, it is often impossible to cover the entire population and also, the assumption is that answers obtained from a selected population would represent those of the entire population. The research had to sample the population in order to manage the process of data gathering. Pilot and Beck (2004: 219) define sampling as the process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population. While there is a range of sampling techniques available to the researcher, some techniques may not be appropriate for a certain study design.

For this study, the researcher had to employ a variety of techniques. First, she adopted a purposive sampling approach to identify certain categories of groups that would participate in the study. In the community, the identified categories were: 1) community leaders, 2) elderly residents, 3) women, and 4) youth. At the church level, two groups were identified. These included the church leadership and members of the congregation. Within the congregation, the sample was random, but biased towards youth and women who were active in church and community activities rather than ordinary church members.

At the community level, the researcher also employed a random sample to select women, youth and community elders who were willing to participate. The community leaders were purposely selected to represent the traditional and local government leadership. In fact, the researcher had interacted with these leaders before commencing the research since they were the gate keepers. In the community, the chief, community councilor, the two school principals and five business people were selected to participate in the study.

From the ordinary community members, I selected five elders, six women and ten youth. At the church, besides the Pastor and his wife, I selected five women and five youth. In total, the study included a sample of 42 people drawn from different categories of individuals at the church and community. None of the participants was a minor and the study made sure that all selected individuals fall under the adult category and avoided including primary and high school learners.

### **3.5 Data Collection Techniques**

Within the case study, the study employed the interview technique. While the plan was to utilize a range of qualitative research methods ranging from key informant interviews, participant observations, non-participant observation and interviews, this could not be achieved because of the complications with the Covid-19 situation, particularly restrictions on social interactions. The

study, therefore, relied on face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews. The interviews were unstructured and sought to understand certain aspects of the research at a time rather than being a once-off interview process.

Marshall and Rossman (2014) refer to this kind of technique as an unstructured conversation with a purpose. Such an approach was appropriate in situations where the researcher wanted the interviewee to engage with issues in great depth. According to Creswell (2017), this guarantees the quality of data, and the response rate increases.

Interview with key individuals including the church and community leadership, business people and the two school principals were mostly face-to-face and extended. These were individuals that the researcher had contact with when she was in the community, and some like the community councilor, the chief and pastor, were also significant in introducing the researcher to the community and congregation. In total, 20 interviews were held with these key individuals. The interviews were mainly open ended and designed to allow the key individuals to share information, opinions and knowledge. The researcher adopted the role of a facilitator.

At the community level, the interviews focused on community problems and needs, the community relationship with religious organizations including the charismatic church, and what these leaders expected from the church and other similar organizations. For the church leadership, the focus was on the church and its history, its doctrine, its role in the community and what guides its programs.

Since the interviews were extended, every visit focused on specific issues, which were often discussed in greater details. The open nature of the interviews allowed these key individuals to discuss issues in great depth. All of them were enthusiastic and had a lot to share, had opinions and solutions to the problems. As such, the interviews were very long and each interview section took hours, which made the process worthwhile.

For church and community members, the researcher adopted two types of interviews. The main technique used was the face-to-face interview. This was the most preferred technique. However, sometimes the researcher would not be able to interview everyone on her visits and would interview other participants through the phone. The researcher mainly used WhatsApp calls, which were cost effective. This was used as a last resort and in total; only 10 people were interviewed through the telephone.

This had its own challenges because the interviews could not be elongated due to issues of costs, and sometimes the network would be bad and some important facts would be lost. However, the researcher made sure that she would phone again to clarify issues. In this case, some telephone interviews were also extended, with four participants interviewed three times during the study. The researcher also made sure that all interviews conducted with the elderly members of society and those who were vulnerable were conducted face-to-face.

The interviews with community members focused on challenges they face in their community, what the church has done and what changes the church's intervention has brought, and whether they thought the church's interventions were appropriate. For church members, the interviews focused on their role in the church, what programs they have implemented on behalf of the church in the community, and whether these programs have been successful. Most of the church members were also part of the community and understood community challenges. Some were key players in initiating programs which were implemented.

### **3.6 Data Analysis, Ethical Considerations and Fieldwork Challenges**

This section discusses the data analysis approach adopted by the study, the ethical issues that arose and how they were handled, before presenting the fieldwork challenges which were encountered at an unprecedented period in the country's history.

#### **3.6.1 Data analysis**

The study gathered mainly qualitative data. After the data was gathered and recorded it was analyzed to make sense of the vast amount of material collected over a period of three months of field research. The empirical data from face-to-face and telephone interviews, was analyzed through a thematic analysis process. Thematic analysis involves identifying themes and meaning in the data. This is a manual process which is dependent on a process of reduction rather than any technological tool.

This approach was preferred because it gave the researcher control over the data that she collected. The data analysis process involved a number of steps. The first step involved writing down all data. The second involved developing codes and grouping similar data. The third involved coding various groups and comparing them for similarities and organizing these groups into broader

groups. This process was repeated until major themes were identified. At the end of the process, four broad themes emerged. These themes included:

1. The rural community is poor and has numerous development needs.
2. The charismatic church intervened in the community to bring social change.
3. Some community challenges were beyond the capacity of the church.
4. Church implemented mainly social development programs.

These themes were used to develop the argument in this dissertation, although some data was used in its raw state as quotations and case scenarios.

### **3.6.2 Ethical considerations**

For a study that involves human subjects, it raised certain research ethics. The study was conducted at both the church and the community and had to conform to the University of Pretoria research ethics standard. An application for clearance was made and obtained from the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Humanities' Ethics Committee. Once cleared to conduct the study by the university ethics committee, permission was sought and granted from the church and community leadership. Once granted permission to conduct the study, the study conformed to the following principles:

- **Informed consent**

A fundamental ethical principle of social research, according to Polit and Beck (2004) and Russel (2000), is to never force anyone to participate. Participation must be voluntary, without any intimidation or victimization. Based on this principle, the purpose of the study, data collection method, and participation criteria were made clear to the participants (Burns & Grove, 2005:193). To conform to this principle, the researcher was open about her study to the community members and church.

She informed all participants about the study, its purpose, the risks involved, and their expected roles in the research process. Participants who agreed to participate were asked to sign a consent form, which was either read to them in a language they understood, or they were given to read on their own. The study also conformed to the principle of voluntarism. The researcher informed participants of their rights to participate, or not participate, and to opt-out without any prejudice.

- **Confidentiality**

For a study that draw information from individuals and sought their opinions, the study had to adhere to the principle of anonymity. Burns and Grove (2003) stated that anonymity is assured when even researchers cannot link a participant with the data pertaining to that person. Beanland et al. (1999) added that confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed by ensuring that the data obtained is used in such a way that no other researcher is aware of the source. In any study, every participating individual has a right to anonymity.

However, some participants may decide to be identified, so it is the role of the researcher to give them choices. In line with this principle, participating individuals were assigned pseudonyms, which were used to identify them. Related to the principle of anonymity is that of confidentiality. According to Burns and Grove (2003:201), confidentiality refers to the researcher's management of personal information shared by an informant, which must not be shared with others without the permission of the informant.

Polit and Beck (2004) view confidentiality as secret, which means that no information that the participants divulge is made available to others, but is only made known to certain people, such as Christian churches or a research team (Griffiths, 2009:191). To conform to this principle the researcher ensured that data was not easily accessible to third parties. Responses from interviews were transcribed and password protected during the fieldwork. The data was only shared with the researcher's dissertation supervisor. After the research data and all field material was archived according to the university's storage procedures.

- **Beneficence**

The right to protection from discomfort is based on the ethical principle of beneficence. This principle stresses that the researcher does not harm the participants. It also imposes a duty on researchers to ensure that the individual participant and society in general benefit from the research and that harm is minimized. Polit and Beck (2004) support this view by stating that research related to humans should be intended to produce benefits for research subjects themselves, other individuals, or society as a whole.

For this study, the risk was categorized as minimum. Except for the risks associated with Covid-19, the study carried no physical, emotional or psychological harm. Great measures were taken in

terms of Covid-19, and all protocols were followed including testing before going for fieldwork, maintaining social distancing and oral hygiene.

- **Reliability**

According to Polit and Hungler (2004:205), reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which the research instruments measure a specific attribute. Stommel and Wills (2004:209) define reliability as the relative absence of unsystematic, random measurement errors. This implies that if the researcher is using the same method of data collection and analysis, and should the test be repeated with the same respondents, the results of the study will be the same.

The study will also conform to the principles of anonymity and confidentiality. The study will adopt pseudonyms to identify participants or their households, and the information they provide will not be easily linked to them. With regards to confidentiality, the researcher will ensure that the information is not easily accessible to third parties, except the supervisor. Data will be securely kept in a password-protected computer during fieldwork, and in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology afterward, where it will be kept for a period of up to 35 years. The study involves social and development aspects, and there are no foreseen safety risks.

### **3.6.3 Challenges encountered in undertaking the study**

This study took long to complete. While the researcher had planned to complete the study in 2020, this could not be done. A number of challenges were encountered. First, the initial church that the study intended to study pulled out at the last minute, forcing the researcher to reconsider her case study. Second, while the researcher found a church which was heavily involved in the community and was willing to participate, the country went into lockdown, which made travel and social interaction impossible. This forced the researcher to interrupt her studies for the year 2020. When she eventually resumed her studies in 2021, she could not undertake fieldwork before receiving ethical clearance. To be cleared, the researcher needed letters of permission from the church and community.

However, with restrictions on social interaction and the ban on social gatherings, it was difficult for the researcher to attain letters. When the letters were finally issued, ethical clearance took a long time as the Faculty Ethics Committee needed some clarifications and revisions on the field plan. Third, when the study finally started at the community and church levels, there were still

restrictions on social interaction and social gatherings. The church was not fully operational. It was difficult to get hold of church members. More importantly, the researcher could not employ the field techniques as she had planned. She was forced to adjust. Instead of a full-fledged ethnography, the researcher had to rely on interviews. However, not all participants could be reached through face-to-face interviews, forcing the researcher to resort to telephonic interviews. However, these alternatives did not compromise the research and the research was able to gather the information she needed.

### **3.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the methodological approach adopted by this study of the charismatic church and its development role in a poor rural community in the Limpopo Province. It started by describing the study area and justifying its choice, before discussing the research design that was informed by the purpose of the study. It highlights the importance of a qualitative approach that digs deeper and provides deeper insights of phenomena.

Following this, the chapter presented the population of the study and issues around sampling, demonstrating the appropriateness of purposive and random sampling techniques, which had a particular bias towards particular population groups. The chapter also presented the data collection techniques used, and emphasized the limits imposed by circumstances. These circumstances limited the study to the use of two methods and robbed it of the option of richer and more engaging techniques like participant observation. Lastly, the chapter presented the data analysis approach, the ethical issues that arose and how they were handled, and more importantly, the challenges of conducting fieldwork during a pandemic.



## Chapter Four: Data Presentation

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### 4.1 Introduction

The religious role of the Christian Church often obscures the significance of the church as a driver of change in society. The spread of the gospel is often the strategy for the Christian Church to influence behavioural change, but the gospel has often been accompanied by broader activities, which have gone beyond mere conversion to society-wide impacts. As such, the Christian Church has a profound impact on society and many people across the globe.

Throughout history, the church has proven to be the primary source of social progress, motivating people to develop spiritual qualities to be able to sacrifice for their fellow men and helping to improve their community. Saayman (1991) identifies the following universal values - patience, compassion, love, justice, humility, sacrifice, loyalty, devotion to goodness, belonging to others and solidarity— as being at the heart of the Christian Church, and the foundation of continuous civilization. He argues:

On the contrary, mission politics has everything related to the eternal truth that Christians calls salvation; in addition, the desire for justice, is connected above all else by man. The purpose of the message was to preach the good news and to release the captives.

Carnigie (2006) has argued that the church's Christian identity, loyalty, history, and people are a source of strength and initiative. Several more recent studies confirm this aspect of the Christian Church, noting that the church is able to mobilize far more people than any other social movement and reach all sectors of society, as it is better positioned than the state to address issues of moral decay, has the greatest level of trust than any other institution in society and contributes more than the state to social welfare (Krige 2008: 132).

In fact, the church continues to be recognized, particularly in marginalized and poor communities, as an institution to be trusted which indeed points to the fact that churches 'could be viewed by policy makers and other strategists as an important channel of opportunity to enter the respective communities and establish contact with the local people' (Swart 2010: 343). Furthermore, Churches provide a 'buffer' against the powerlessness and despair engendered by poverty as spirituality is often a key resource for the poor in weathering the many challenges they face.

This chapter explores the development role of a charismatic Christian church in a rural society in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The chapter draws on data from a qualitative study conducted on the rural society and the charismatic Christian church. The objective of the chapter is to demonstrate that the Christian church has become a major actor in societal affairs, filling the gap left by the state. It also seeks to show that the church is a central part of society, understands societal problems, and is better placed to address them since its members are closely associated with the society and are major stakeholders. While some of the interventions may not be central to societal needs, they bring change that is necessary.

The chapter proceeds in the following. First, it provides a context and background. It does this by introducing the setting for the study, beginning with the study areas (encompassing the municipality area and the study village), and the charismatic Christian Church operating in the area. Second, it discusses development challenges faced in Ga-Maphalle, which is a rural society that is poor and crying for intervention.

These are discussed from the perspective of community members. Lastly, the chapter focuses on the role of the church in the community. It focuses on interventions implemented by the church and what guides these interventions. Then, the discussion turns to the question of the expectations of the community from the church and whether society sees the church as playing an appropriate role. The section ends by providing an assessment on whether the interventions of the church are seen as charity or contribute to development.

## **4.2 Providing the Setting**

Research was conducted in Ga-Maphalle, or Maphalle, as the place is popularly referred to in everyday reference. Maphalle is a rural community that lies about 150 km east direction of Polokwane in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The village is under the leadership of a traditional leader and a councilor. The main language spoken there is Khilobedu, a unique language that has been incubated as a dialect of the Sepedi language as the efforts to have it recognized as an independent official South African language in 1994 failed dismally. There are also Tsonga and Venda speaking people in the area, although they are not many.

#### **4.2.1 The Greater Letaba Municipality**

The location of study is under the Greater Letaba Municipality, which is mainly a rural municipality. The Greater Letaba Municipality (GLM) lies in the north-eastern part of the Limpopo Province under the jurisdiction of Mopani District Municipality. The municipality has an estimated area of 1 891km<sup>2</sup>.

The Greater Letaba Municipality incorporates rural areas such as Ga-Kgapane, situated to the extreme south of the municipal area, and Senwamokgope towards the north-west of the area of jurisdiction and Maphalle towards the southwest, and commercial farming areas and urbanized areas such as Modjadjiskloof. There are about 132 rural villages within the municipal area, while Modjadjiskloof is the major town in the Municipality. Polokwane City is the provincial capital, housing the provincial administration and therefore the centre of business and commerce. It thus, is the centre of livelihoods for people in the province.

The Municipality shares borders with Greater Tzaneen Municipality in the south, Greater Giyani Municipality in the east, Molemole Municipality in the west and Collins Chabane Municipality in the north. The Greater Letaba Municipality was established as a category B municipality in terms of Section 12 of the Municipal Structure's Act No. 117 of 1998. It was established as a municipality with a collective executive system combined with a ward participatory system as per provision of Section 9 (b) of the Municipal Structures Act. During the 2019/20 financial year, Councilor, Matlou MP served as the Mayor of Greater Letaba Municipality; Cllr MD Makhananisa the Speaker of Council while Cllr Mampeule P.J as the Chief Whip.

The African National Congress had 30 ward Councilors and 16 PR Councilors, Economic Freedom Fighters had 9 Proportional Representative (PR) Councilors, Congress of the People had 2 PR Councilors, Democratic Alliance had 2 PR councilors and LIRA party had 1 each PR Councilor. The total number of councilors for Greater Letaba was 60. The municipal council has established 30 functional Ward committees in line with Section 73 of the Municipal Structures Act. The term of office corresponds with the term stipulated in section 24 of the Local Government Laws Amendment Act No. 19 of 2008.

The committees are chaired by ward councilors and have powers and functions to make recommendations on any matter affecting their wards to all structures of council through the ward

councilors as specified in Section 74 of the Act. Ward committees give effect to public participation as outlined in chapter 4 of the Municipal Systems Act by assisting Ward councilors in mobilizing, organizing consultative meetings and activities, disseminating information and encouraging participation from residents in the ward.

Compared to other municipalities in the region, the Greater Letaba Municipal land area is one of the smallest and characterized by contrasts such as varied topography, population densities (low in the south, relatively dense in the north-east), prolific vegetates in the south (timber) and sparse in the north (bushveld). Although aquatic resources within the boundaries of the Municipality are scarce, the proximity of natural resources (tourist's attractions, intensive economic activities, nature reserves and vast arable land) to the borders of the municipality creates an opportunity for capitalization, although the developmental objectives by state actors have not been met in the past 5 financial years. The entry to the municipal area is Sekgopo in the west and Modjadjiskloof in the south.

Table 4.1 is a representation of the population of people and households as captured from the 2011 and 2016 population censuses. As can be seen from the table, both the human and households population has increased between censuses. It is expected that these have increased even more after 2016.

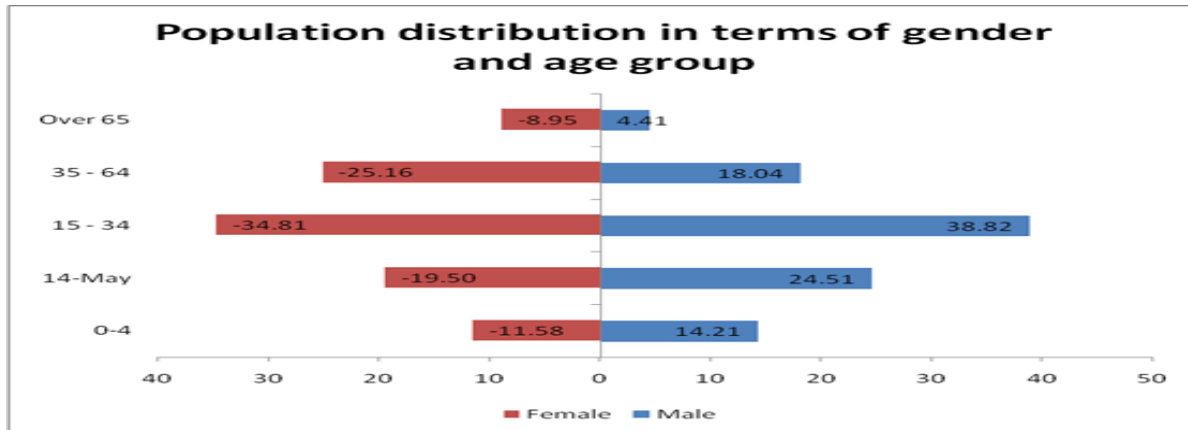
*Table 4.1: Human and household population*

Population		Households	
<i>Census 2011</i>	<i>Census 2016</i>	<i>Census 2011</i>	<i>Census 2016</i>
212 701	218 030	58 262	67 067

*Source: What is the source of your table?*

In terms of the age and gender profile, the Greater Letaba Municipality consists of categories which are of growing policy concern globally and nationally. The population is generally young, with about 39.3% of the population younger than 35 years of age (GLM 2020). As represented in Fig. 4.1, of the youth population (15 – 34), the majority of them are male, with only 34.81 % of women. However, there are more women than men in the population category 35 to 64, which is active population age group.

Fig. 4.1: Population distribution in terms of gender and age group



Source: Census 2011

Besides these special categories of population, which are of policy concern the world over including South Africa, the Greater Letaba Municipality also has another vulnerable population group which requires policy attention. According to statistics, the municipality has a total of 3 993 people living with disabilities. Table 4.2 is a presentation of the various types of disabilities together with the total numbers of people in each category.

Table 4.2 Disability by type

Types of disability			Total
Sight	345	134	479
Hearing	392	102	494
Communication	421	143	564
Physical	729	567	1296
Intellectual	1	32	33
Emotional	493	432	925
Multiple	145	57	202

Source: GLM (2020)

Another area of concern in developmental terms is the level of literacy. Rural communities all over the world have the lowest level of literacy mainly because of poverty and lack of infrastructure. In poverty reduction terms, there is a drive to improve literacy, particularly among vulnerable populations. The issue of literacy in the municipality is important because of the high proportion of women in the category 35 to 65 years. Women are a policy priority group.

In terms of education profile, about 28% of the population has no formal education. This population may include the women in the adult category (35 to 64), which means that they are vulnerable to poverty. Table 4.3 provides statistics of education levels in Greater Letaba Municipality and the broader Mopani District.

Table 4.3: Levels of education in The Greater Letaba and Mopani District

<i>LEVEL OF EDUCATION</i>	<i>GREATER LETABA</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>MOPA NI</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Grade 1/sub A (completed or in process)</i>	7627	5.6	31711	5.4
<i>Grade 7/standard 5</i>	15877	11.7	64097	10.9
<i>Grade 11/standard 9/form 4/NTC II</i>	15919	11.8	68420	11.7
<i>Attained grade 12; out of class but not completed grade 12</i>	6419	4.7	30580	5.2
<i>Grade 12/Std 10/NTC III (without university exemption)</i>	10159	7.5	52920	9.0
<i>Grade 12/Std 10 (with university exemption)</i>	754	0.6	10195	1.7
<i>Certificate with less than grade 12</i>	1430	1.1	10497	1.8
<i>Diploma with less than grade 12</i>	1562	1.2	7780	1.3
<i>Certificate with grade 12</i>	952	0.7	6448	1.1
<i>Diploma with grade 12</i>	2777	2.1	13095	2.2

<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	1479	1.1	6879	1.1
<i>BTech</i>	78	0.1	999	0.2
<i>Post graduate diploma</i>	317	0.2	2431	0.4
<i>Honours degrees</i>	459	0.3	2043	0.3
<i>Higher degree (masters/PhD)</i>	72	0.1	1127	0.2
<i>No schooling</i>	38459	28.5	14686 3	25.1
<i>Out of scope (children under 5 years of age)</i>	28068	20.8	11331 6	19.4
<i>Unspecified</i>	2334	1.7	8115	1.4
<i>Institutions</i>	494	0.4	8476	1.5
<i>Total</i>	135165	100	58599 1	100

Source: 2011, STATSSA.

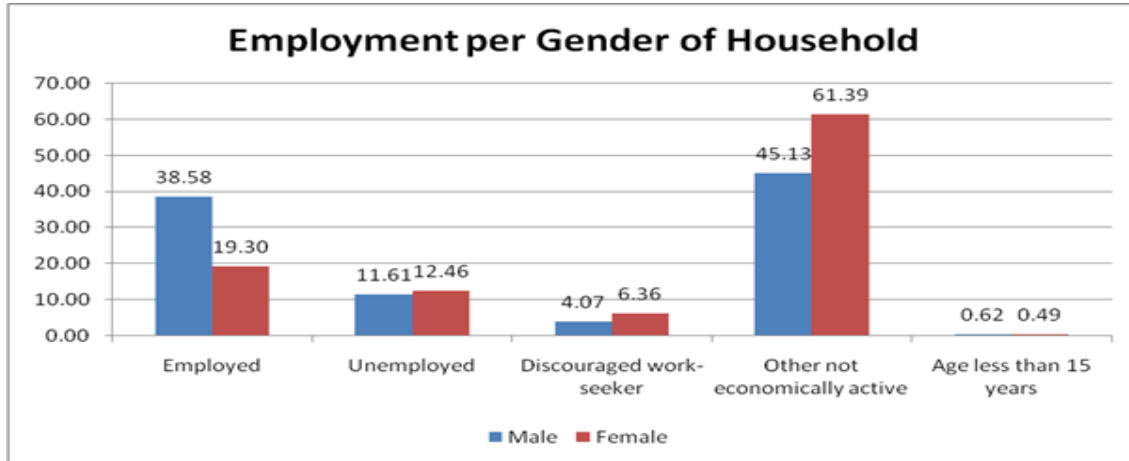
The percentage of illiterate people within the municipality is estimated to be around 28.5%. The number of functional schools in the municipality is inadequate and some have the worst conditions due to lack of educational infrastructural development.

Moving from education and literacy, another marker of poverty, particularly in migrant labour societies is the level of employment. In migrant labour societies, livelihoods lean more on formal employment than agriculture. If employment opportunities are available and more people can be employed, households' welfare can improve significantly since these households can achieve food security. The proportion of people that are employed in the municipality according to their gender profile in each household is presented in Fig. 4.2.

According to Fig. 4.2, 9 719 males are employed as compared to the small number of 6 383 female persons. And STATSSA also shares distinguishing features on the number of youth employed, the number of disabled people employed, the number of females unemployed, etc. There is also an

alarming amount of discouraged work-seekers and economically inactive members of the municipality who are mostly affected by economic barricades as indicated on the chart below.

Fig. 4.2: Employment per gender in households



Source: Census 2011

However, more importantly is the fact that they have a high proportion of people who are employed in the formal sector (63.78%) than those employed in the informal sector (23.78%). The figure also shows that there are households that offer employment, with about 9.26% people employed by local households. This reflects the level of inequality, where some poor households work for others.

From a community development point of view, the municipality boasts of eight (8) libraries within its area of jurisdiction. These libraries contribute significantly to the education of the Greater Letaba population. The Modjadjiskloof library, Soetfontein library, Maphalle and Ga-Kgapane libraries are currently operational. The libraries in Mokwakwaila, Sekgopo, Senwamokgope, and Shotong are completed and are currently in the process of resourcing. Rotterdam Library designs are completed.

There are also ten (10) sports facilities around Greater Letaba Municipality's area of jurisdiction targeting to benefit the community thus promoting social cohesion. The areas where these social amenities are located are Sekgopo, Kgapane, Lebaka, Rotterdam, Thakgalane, Senwamokgope, Shaamiriri, Mamanyoha, Mokwakwaila and Madumeleng.

STATSSA indicates that, within the Greater Letaba Municipal area, 42% of communities reside within 20km away from a hospital, meanwhile, 4% of communities reside within 10km away from



a Health Centre and 91% of communities live within 5km away from a clinic. Apart from the very low Health Centre statistic, Greater Letaba compares favorably with other local municipalities in the Mopani District. The distance norm to rate accessibility does not take into consideration other restrictive factors, such as the bad state of roads, and therefore health facilities are in all probability less accessible to communities than reflected by the Department of Health criteria.

The maximum allowable consumption for Free Basic Electrification in the municipality for each household is 60kw per month. The municipality receives applications for its licensed areas. All qualifying beneficiaries are currently receiving a free allocation of 60kw per month. ESKOM administers applications and collection of FBE in areas under their licensed distribution area. The municipality allocates a collection of free basic waste of at least once a week to qualifying indigent households located in proclaimed areas.

The municipality has a strategic intention of locating streetlights or high mast lights in areas which are at entry to the municipal area or / and affected adversely by crime. Areas which are provincial, district and local growth points, areas which have economic activities especially even after sunset are also targeted for lighting. A total of one hundred and fifty-nine (159) high mast lights were erected from 2009/2010 until 2019/20 financial years benefiting all the wards. A vast increase in street lighting assets requires the municipality to adjust the budget for related operations and maintenance accordingly.

Transportation infrastructure makes a major contribution to the facilitation of economic activities. Major progress has been made in improving the condition of the roads in the municipality. The municipality has a total of 1228.8 km road network. The Greater Letaba municipality public transport is accessible to communities; some villages take less than 10 minutes' walk to access public transport, whereas some take more than 10 minutes to access public transport which is above service norms and standards.

The Greater Letaba Municipality has a number of heritage sites: Modjadji Cycad Forest; the Rain Queen White House; and the Lebjene Ruins. There is a need for Greater Letaba Municipality to promote Khelobedu language and popularize heritage sites such as Manokwe cave which is still under construction and other attractions which are found within the Greater Letaba Municipality.

#### **4.2.2 The community of Ga-Maphalle**

The description of the municipality was meant to provide a context for our understanding of Ga-Maphalle. From this description, it is safe to say that Ga-Maphalle cannot be categorized as a remote area, although it is still rural. Ga-Maphalle is highly connected to major towns and other urban areas. It is linked to the provincial capital, Polokwane, by the R71, which also leads to Modjadjiskloof and Tzaneen and to Giyani by the R81. These are all urbanised areas that differ in terms of setting and economic development from Ga-Maphalle and surrounding rural areas in the province, but also provide opportunities.

However, the village itself is surrounded by other rural villages such as Dichosini, Jamela and Mohlabaaneng, although Ga-Kgapane nearby is relatively urbanised and rapidly modernizing, like the town of Modjadjiskloof in Tzaneen. Compared to surrounding areas that have been urbanizing, Ga-Maphalle is an underdeveloped village, with rural characteristics. This description shows that the research area is well below the development aspirations of the country. Its rural nature is characterised by poor infrastructure such as schools, health facilities, water taps, and sanitation provision and recreation facilities.

The general state of water supply in Ga-Maphalle and other rural villages need improvement since it is not up to the required standard. The government threshold for provision of Free Basic Water is a maximum of six (6) kilolitres per household per month. Indigent households that reside in the proclaimed towns do not pay for the first 6kl of water as reflected in their service accounts. A total of 132 villages in the municipality receives unmetered free water supply which is presumed to be above the FBW threshold. In areas where there are deficiencies in water availability, the water supply is supplemented by water tankers at no cost to the recipients. However, in areas such as Ga-Maphalle, households have not enjoyed this basic constitutional provision. These areas experience severe water disruptions, which has forced people to utilize contaminated water collected from natural sources like rivers and springs for domestic use. For example, in Ga-Maphalle the school does not have a reliable water supply. Cases of Bilharzias disease have been reported in Maphalle as a result of contaminated water being used by desperate community members.

As highlighted earlier, there are sports facilities in other parts of the municipality, which are key places for youth development and leisure. There are, however, no sports facilities in Ga-Maphalle,

despite the high youth population. These youth rely on makeshift facilities that are self-developed, but do not provide adequate value to youth people.

There are two public schools - Pipa Primary School and Modisha High School serving the community with their own abandoned sporting grounds. A vast amount of day care centres can also be found, with a community Library recently built which is used by the six other small villages that surround Maphalle as the bigger village.

The village is serviced by one fuel station, one hardware store and various *spaza* shops, taverns and bottle stores that are mainly owned by foreign nationals such as Ethiopians. These have increased in the recent past and now form the main entrepreneurial group in the area. But, they only provide for small scale services such as immediate food purchases. Because they operate in small operations like spaza shops, they are expensive, although they offer convenience to the residents.

Otherwise, residents have to travel 34km to Modjadjiskloof for shopping or 55km to Tzaneen, the bigger town, for services. Local opportunities for informal trading are available. The main bus station provides a market for local vendors, who sell fruits and vegetables. The place is known as a unique place where tomatoes are produced, as the heartbeat of the ZZ2, which is the largest tomato farming business in sub-Saharan Africa. The commercial farms provide employment mainly for the poor, who work in the tomato farms as either permanent or seasonal workers.

Some people are accommodated in compounds within these farms. Besides the commercial farms, the government also act as a major employer, providing employment for civil servants including teachers and health workers. These may be considered the middle class in a society where the majority of people are poor. Because of the cosmopolitan character of the population, you find a range of housing including shacks (mkhukhu in local language), RDP housing provided by government, and modern housing structures that are self-developed by individuals.

For a community with a large population of youth and women, there are no social clubs and no proper sports facilities for young people. However, there are several churches operating in the area. In the area, despite the charismatic church featured in this study, there are other churches operating equally on a greater scale. The dominant churches are the Apostolic Church, the Zion Christian Church, Lutheran Church, Seventh Adventist Church and Roman Catholic Church. These churches have large memberships and have church buildings where they operate from. There are also other

charismatic churches in the area with little support as compared to the dominant Dynamite Word Ministries which is the focus of this study.

Besides these Christian denominations, traditional religion is still practiced. However, the majority of people are Christians. The Zion Christian Church is the most popular church in the area, with about a quarter of community members claiming to be active members. The church has provided a structure where people can worship from and serves as a structural catalyst in terms of continuous operation. However, the main branch is located in Ga-Kgapane, which is an urbanized area.

#### **4.2.3 The Dynamite Word Ministries Charismatic Church**

The Dynamite Word Ministries, the church in question, is one of the charismatic religious Christian Churches that are found and sustained through the charismatic leadership of the founder. The church was established in the area in 2008 by Pastor Mopai, a qualified optometrist by profession and a seasoned businessman, who says he responded to the call from God in the early 2000. The church was founded in Ga-Kgapane Township, a small urban settlement in Lebaba Municipality outside Modjadjiskooof. Starting as a small church where church services were conducted under a tent, the church grew in popularity and attracted people from surrounding villages, who would travel there to attend church services.

Initially, the church would provide transport for people from outside Ga-Kgapane to attend church services. However, the church continued to grow and the church leadership saw the need to expand. The church later established a branch in the rural community of GaMaphalle in 2012 to cater for congregates in the village and other surrounding villages, and to save them from commuting to Ga-Kgapane.

The church has continued to grow, and currently boasts of a congregation of over 500 members and has opened branches in other villages and towns outside Ga-Kgapane and Ga-Maphalle. Besides church members, it also receives non-church members for special Sunday services. People come to the church for prayer and healing. The majority of the church members are women and youth, but there are also men and elders who have joined the church.

The pastor, who is the head of the church, is aided by his wife who is a lawyer by profession. The church also has other pastors that officiate in different branches. The primary role of the church is to preach the gospel. It does this through regular church services, held mainly on Sundays, although

there are special church services during the week. There are also services for different groups outside the main Sunday service. Besides preaching the scriptures, the church also conducts marriage counselling services and motivational sessions. These sessions provide spiritual healing and address specific life challenges.

Along with these services that are common to most churches, the church is also involved in community uplifting initiatives. It is heavily involved in communities, where it has played a major role in changing lives through social welfare and other development projects. The charismatic Church has played a pre-emptive role in promoting rural community development in local contexts, and the church and its leadership recognized the challenges of poverty and the need to eradicate poverty by transforming communities through developmental programs. There was a realization that the church is an institution for everyone and should benefit the broader community, rather than its membership only.

Members of the community also saw the church's role as expanding beyond mere evangelism. One of the community members commented:

It will be wrong for the church to only engage in evangelization while community members are suffering. The church is a community, and when the community is poor, there is no church. Growth is the key to spreading the true Gospel (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

To achieve its developmental goals, the charismatic church has made a concerted effort towards working with other churches and non-governmental organizations in the area to lift the people of Limpopo out of poverty. This is according to community and church members.

The local church members play key roles in the affairs of the church. The elders are mostly people from the community, while the youth maintain an enthusiastic presence. Thus, the church allows locals to play prominent roles in the church. Because of this, they associate with the church and its pastor, and express a sense of belonging. Although the church was founded by an individual, church members saw it as their church and felt as a big part of the family. Community church members work for the church, perform a variety of chores including cleaning, which they do through a roaster system.

The sense of belonging is understandable in a rural area, where poverty is prominent, and the church play a major counselling role. By introducing people to Christianity, the church changed and improved people's lives, while others are healed. The church has a clear vision on young

people, which is to develop them into better individuals, who are responsible and fearful of God. It sought to involve most of the youth and reach out to those who were not church members through crusades. Youth members are often involved in spreading the gospel and in church outreach programs. They are the ambassadors of the church, who are visible in the communities.

For the youth, attending church and being church members saved them from the vices of the world. Some had belonged to other churches and lived as Christians, while others were non-Christians and became church members for the first time when the church established its branch there. Through their involvement with the church, they played key roles in charity activities, helping orphans, promoting health and supporting the poor against various deadly diseases.

The church has a community program where youth play a leading role. The church has established collaborative relationships with the community and non-governmental organizations to improve the health of communities, mostly those at the high risk of being exposed to HIV/AIDS infections. These organizations have worked extensively with rural communities to improve livelihoods and alleviate poverty and unemployment. The organizations support housing, business education, health education, training and spiritual development.

The church operates rather different, mainly because it serves mostly poor communities. While it collects tithes and offerings, it also has come up with a business model, where it has built rental properties that sustain the church, and some income is ploughed into the community.

### **4.3. Community Development Needs**

As alluded to earlier, Ga-Maphalle is far from being remote, but like most rural villages, it lacks some infrastructure which can serve to improve the welfare and wellbeing of individuals. Some of this infrastructure is crucial for socializing and leisure pursuit for the local population. In this section, the focus is on the community's development needs and its expectations from the churches that operate in its midst.

The discussion draws from data obtained during interviews with the community members and observations during the period of research. The assumption guiding this discussion is that the church has a major role in society, not only in spiritual deliverance, but also in bringing about both social and physical changes. As they say, 'thou shalt not deliver the word alone' (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

The first area of need revolves around education. It was shown earlier that the community consists of two public schools - a primary and a secondary school. These schools are accessible to children from G-Maphalle and nearby villages. Though the availability of the schools means that children will not travel long distances to attend school, these are still typical rural area schools.

The community complained that the schools were poorly equipped and could not cater for the needs of a modern student. The poor equipment, it was believed, compromised learning. The situation was captured in an interview:

In this community, there is very little in terms of educational infrastructure. Schools here are very poor and lack basics, which neighboring schools in Ga-Kgapane have. The schools available also cannot cater for the growing population. In my section, for example, we only have one primary and one high school, and the community has a large number of children. This forces some children to attend schools outside the community, which is a great inconvenience. Also, because of the number of schools, there is overcrowding (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

For example, the two schools have no running water, and children rely on tanks for water. Some of these water sources are not safe and as highlighted earlier, the community had experienced water related diseases. According to a community elder:

The schools here have no running water. This means that children do not have access to safe drinking water. This is a major challenge since children spend most of their days at school. This is also a hot region and water is essential for children to learn. The situation has been like this ever since I remember. We need water to be connected to the schools, or at least a borehole to be sunk to provide safe water (interview, Maphalle, August 2021).

Lack of water also means that the sanitation situation is still traditional, with no flush toilets. Children and teachers rely on pit toilets, which are a safety and health hazard. Access to water and sanitation is a basic requirement, and for a public institution that host young children to lack these basics is a matter of grave concern. Provision of sustainable water and sanitation solutions to the schools, therefore, emerged as a priority for the community.

The schools also did not have other facilities such as libraries and computer laboratories, which the community felt this would improve learning. As one of the community members observed:

In modern society, computers are essential learning equipment. Children need technology to be up to date. Yet, even our high school does not have a computer laboratory. How are our children expected to learn? They

obviously are lagging behind. There is also no library at the school, and without a library, children cannot learn.

We need a library, especially for the high school (interview, Maphalle, October 2021).

For access to the library, children from this community have to use a community library. While this is available to all children, the library is in poor condition and lacks necessary books they need. While the Greater Letaba Municipality has built the library, it has failed to adequately provide the necessary books. This, however, is not a problem peculiar to Ga-Maphalle local community, but spread across South Africa, especially with regards to village infrastructural development.

The students that participated in the study also acknowledged the hardships they experience because of lack of library and computers. The effect of not having computer laboratory was particularly felt in 2021 when children were expected to learn remotely. To many children this was a new experience and because they didn't have necessary equipment, they were left behind. Some had access to mobile phones, but they all agreed that these were not the same as computers.

Students also cited the lack of a science laboratory, yet they were expected to master science. The absence of a science laboratory meant that children had inadequate equipment to conduct science experiments. Science lessons are taught in normal classrooms, which is a major concern. Students felt that they could not adequately gain knowledge without proper facilities: they felt that they could not pass science because they only read books, and do not have the privilege of practical experience in a proper learning environment.

Despite the availability of the two schools in the community, there are limited opportunities for post-high school training, which could provide skills. There are no tertiary institutions nearby and no vocational training opportunities locally for youth. Despite the government's emphasis on youth development, youth in this community are virtually stuck after completing high school. This lack of vocational training centers means that young people cannot be capacitated to improve their lives. However, the absence of post-high school opportunities locally has not stopped young people from seeking opportunities elsewhere.

Despite these challenges, young people have demonstrated commitment and travel outside the community for further education, particularly after high school. The study found that some young individuals were active students or had been students outside the community. For example, from the sample there was 29% of participants who had matriculated, 29% who had college education,



and 28% with university degrees. This amounted to about 86% of individuals who could be categorized as literate. This leaves about 14% of those who are uneducated. While this may seem to be a negligible number, it tells a story of poverty and need in the community, where some households cannot afford to send children to school, let alone to post-high school institutions.

Some individuals may have the desire to improve themselves and enhance their chances for better lives but may lack social networks outside the community. For example, Elijah was 24 years at the time of the research and had matriculated from the local high school. He had passed his matric examination although he did not qualify for university. However, he wanted to train as a builder. Since there was no vocational training institution in the community, he was stuck. He could not attend vocational training outside the community because he would need to stay there for the duration of his course. He had no one outside the community. ‘If only there was an institution nearby, it would make things easy for me’, he explained.

In other words, people recognize the need for capacity building to move out of poverty, but there are no opportunities available as there are no facilities and no resources. The majority of people in this rural community are poor and lack financial means to send their children to school, yet there are limited opportunities for bursaries or sponsorships. Elijah’s situation is evidence of the general need for financial assistance for youth. As one of the community members explained:

Young people here are motivated. Despite the challenges associated with poor state of education, we get children who pass with good grades. Some of these students fail to proceed and remain stuck here because they lack means to proceed with their education. The number of young people leaving the community to seek education opportunities reflects to the fact that the young generation is highly motivated. We would be having more young people who are educated if there were resources. The majority of children come from households that cannot afford to send them to school. These households focus on getting by – survive day by day. We need a Good Samaritan, someone who would emancipate our youth. Organizations that can sponsor children to go to school are not there. This is a rural community. Opportunities pass us by (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

Another community elder concurred and alluded to the poverty situation in the community, by observing that some households only focus on acquiring their next meal, and that there are no resources to educate children locally, compelling them to go outside the community where they have to commute or stay there (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

The lack of post-high school education opportunities has in turn discouraged young people, who some members of the community think now lack motivation for school. In one of the interviews with one young person who is not in school, the issue of discouraged young people emerged:

Education in our area is not good, but we have students who are trying their best to overcome the obstacles, but these are only a few. Others only attend school because they are forced to attend school. They do not see any reason for attending school, which they see as a waste of time. After attending school, what happens next? The state of the schools also is a major contributor to discouraged children. In one of the schools, the classes have no windows and no doors, also without proper tables, but the teachers still complain and say the children are not learning. There are only two schools in the area and that leads to highly packed classrooms which makes it very hard to teach and help the students who need help (interview, Maphalle, October 2021).

As such, while some young people are fighting their way up against all the odds, there's a section in the community that drops out of school. These are mostly teenage girls, who often get pregnant before completing school. Teenage pregnancy, therefore, emerged as one of major challenges facing the community, but also linked to the schooling and lack of opportunities. This is of course not an isolated problem. Teenage pregnancy is also one of the problems confronting South Africa and the global community at large.

Mchunu [2012] argues that adolescent pregnancy, occurring in girls aged 10-19 years, remains a serious health and social problem worldwide, and has been associated with numerous risk factors evident in young people's family, peer, school, and neighborhood contexts. In Sub-Saharan Africa, one such risk factor in early childbearing is increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Teenage pregnancy in Ga-Maphalle, has always been associated with high incidents of HIV and AIDS among youth. A community member explained the reasons:

Most families rely on social grants for survival, especially old people's grant led by matriarchal family set-ups. As a result, the youth in the community resort to escapism; in the form of gambling, alcohol abuse, and underage unprotected sexual intercourse resulting in teenage pregnancies and exposure to the HIV/AIDS phenomena which is very rampant in the area (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

From this excerpt, poverty has therefore contributed to high rates of pregnancy among girls, some of them of young age. The excerpt also alludes to the challenge of HIV and AIDs and the growing problem among youth.

What contributes to this situation is the fact that the majority of community members are unemployed, and those who are employed are usually engaged in menial jobs in farms, retail, and

an array of less paying jobs or self-employed. More importantly, like most areas in South Africa, a large majority of people who were employed have lost their income during the lockdown because most farms have closed down and those who were self-employed have equally been affected due to the pandemic's enforced lockdowns.

There is a need for intervention in the community. The social problems among the youth have also been linked to other social ills such as drunkenness, peer pressure and wasted young lives. As one community member observed:

Young girls drink and waste their lives, get pregnant and become young mothers. Pregnancy and young motherhood become a pathway out of poverty since they can then qualify for child support grant. The majority of these children have no fathers, or their fathers are not responsible since they may not be working. However, some of the fathers are old married men, who take advantage of the vulnerability of these young girls. It is an issue of morality (interview, Maphalle, August 2021).

The issue of morality was also raised by one church elder, who blamed old men for their role in child pregnancies and HIV and AIDS. According to the elder:

The problem lies with the older men who buy these girls beer. They take them to taverns and see wives in them. When a girl child is poor, she easily becomes a victim of such men. What need to be addressed here, are morals. We have a responsibility as a church, and we should be seen to be playing our part. These are our children, and the men who do these things, we know them (interview, Maphalle, October 2021).

Poverty is, therefore, a major issue in Ga-Maphalle and surrounding villages, which is contributing to other social problems. Earlier, the discussion focused on poor sanitation and lack of water in the two schools. However, these issues also extend to the society. Services such as water and access to basic amenities remain a society-wide problem, while access to the internet and electricity are foreign in this community, and people only access these from nearby villages and towns. However, poverty can also be attributed to infrastructural issues including the poor state of schools and therefore lack of opportunities.

Most families live in squalid conditions in what is popularly known as 'Umkhukhu', locally. These are shacks constructed of salvaged iron sheets. Some of these families could not afford their own food and are heavily reliant on charity. This situation was further made complicated by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures. These are broader issues that require partnership among all stakeholders. The church has a role to play as a religious institution, the government has

a role to play, but also, the community has a role to play. It is not helpful to complain about lack of infrastructure, poor education, lack of morality and wasted lives, without taking action.

Of course, the church recognizes these challenges, which should provide it with opportunities for intervention. The church cannot only preach the gospel without playing major roles in societal transformation. However, recognition of the problem is a major starting point: In an interview, these issues emerged:

Poverty is high because this place is rural. It is still underdeveloped and lacking basic infrastructure - roads are still gravel. People have to travel to towns for basic amenities, while services such as the internet and others are bad. So, accessing those amenities will always have cost implications (interview, Maphalle, August 2021).

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Lack of basic services such as water supply and electricity have a direct negative impact on our health. People still use pit toilets even in schools. Hygiene becomes a challenge under those circumstances. Primary health care is a big challenge that has also been proven to be the source of water-borne diseases. Family planning and health education is also a challenge, and as a result teenage pregnancy and HIV are a common sight (interview, Maphalle, July 2021).

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To begin with, the educational infrastructure is very poor in this community, forcing many people to travel to Venda or Polokwane to study. There are, however, enough basic educational structures, even though they need improvement to be on par with other schools in the cities. The educational standard is high despite the poor infrastructure. Many youths have tertiary qualifications, with only a few high school dropouts. As a church we want to assist the youth, and we have assisted those that are active church members. (Interview, Ga-Kgapane, July 2021).

However, besides the general education and education infrastructure situation in the community, there is a general lack of opportunities to improve the lives of the community members. It was highlighted earlier that in Ga-Maphalle, there are no sports facilities. Sports facilities are essential for leisure and to keep the children off the streets. However, in true rural circumstances the youth are excluded from these basic which others in urban areas take for granted.

Not only are there no facilities for youth, but it is also very difficult for women to identify any social clubs or women projects that can occupy them and build their capacity. The absence of these limits women's chances to move out of poverty. Women expressed the need for clubs that could

teach them life skills such as sawing. Sawing can change the lives of these women since there are opportunities to supply uniforms to the local schools and crèches. Not that the women do not need these projects, they agreed and recognized their potential in changing their welfare. However, they indicated that they do not have the resources to start such projects. They need help, but no such help has been forthcoming.

#### **4.4 The Church in the Community**

The previous section has described situation that calls for intervention. Like all rural societies in the country, development still lags behind. The people do not enjoy the benefits that are enjoyed by their counterparts in urban areas. While the country has adopted and introduced developmental local government system, the government cannot achieve development alone. The government has a development agenda that is general and focuses on specific areas, but sometimes development needs are specific to a particular society and should be area specific.

Such development, which accommodates local realities, requires attention to the local context. Local stakeholders are better placed to understand local developmental needs and come up with appropriate interventions. The church is a local stakeholder, with vested interest in local communities, and with better understanding of the dynamics in society. The church, therefore, has a potential to address local developmental needs.

Churches have a duty to serve their congregations in all areas of life, including their work life. According to Stackhouse (2002), ‘those who receive the vision of the promised reign of God [believe in the redemption of humanity and a New Jerusalem], are to employ every means to make it actual...’

The charismatic church in Ga-Maphalle recognizes its spiritual and social role in the community where it operates. Since its existence, it has introduced an array of developmental and community empowerment programs in Ga-Maphalle and surrounding villages. The study sought to understand what drives the church’s programs in the communities where it operates. The assumption was that the church was only driven by the need to give back to the society and not that of playing a developmental role. However, the study learnt that the church’s programs were in every aspect developmental. Accordingly, the church sought to promote education, help alleviate poverty and empower members in the community through education and entrepreneurship.

There was a lot of emphasis on education to give community members knowledge and skills needed for them to transform their lives. There was an understanding that the church cannot only contribute to society through preaching, although there was an understanding that preaching is the core activity of the church. The church saw its role as broader than just spiritual deliverance.

In the Ga-Maphalle, a number of developmental needs were identified, and the church acknowledged the need for intervention. The rural community was identified as poor, with poor infrastructure. But more importantly, because of poverty, most children have been denied early childhood development.

One area that the church identified as an area for intervention is related to children and child development. According to one church elder:

The majority of parents could not afford to send their children to childcare institutions due to lack of financial resources. Even those who could afford to send their children to pre-schools were reluctant because of the poor state of these institutions in the community. Realizing the challenge, the church offered a building to the community to use as a crèche/daycare during the week – from Monday to Friday (interview, Maphalle, August 2021).

While the administration of the Crèche is in the hands of community members and other social groups, the offer of church facilities contributed to the alleviation of poverty and unemployment. It also was a solution to the challenge of childhood development. The availability of the church facilities also opened opportunities for society to address other social problems as highlighted in the interview excerpt below:

Our church is used as a daycare facility during the day on weekdays. That adds to an income generation program. There are home-based health care and support for the elderly people and those that are infected and affected by HIV and Aids. We have a lot of churches from different areas, over 25 of them doing the same thing. The church is open for the learners to study as there's free electricity. The church also allows the community to use the premises for meetings and other gatherings at a low fee. There are outreach programs where we invite youth for career guidance. We also do concerts to fund some of our programs. We do these in order to not burden the church, financially (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

This may appear as a social responsibility, but it goes further than that. According to church sources this is another church's way of bringing change rather than just giving back to the community' (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

The church has always given back to the community through social programs. This has been more prominent during times of crisis. The church has always given food parcels to the poor, offered feeding schemes for children, but more importantly provided charity to widows. However, during the times of Covid-19, the church's community involvement has been prevalent. The pastor and members of the congregation have offered spiritual counselling.

The church has offered prayers and opened online praying sessions. More importantly, it also extended its hand to issue food parcels for those who had lost their livelihoods and needed food parcels during the pandemic. During the hard lockdown, the church further extended its support to those in need, with transport to and from the clinic and to the shops for ease of accessibility. Church building was also offered for Covid-19 testing, and consequently offered for vaccination which is ongoing as of November 2021.

The role of the church in relation to Covid-19 pandemic was a continuation of the church's focus on health and well-being of the society. The church has always played a major role in promoting health, well-being, relationships and family life, and by creating opportunities and by encouraging fair behavioral practices. For example, the church has focused on people in the community who have experienced discrimination because of their health and financial capacity. It has also made a considerable difference in helping people get the medicine they need. The Church distributes food and clothes to poor members of the local community. According to members of the church, these are central responsibilities of being a Christian:

The church is not just a building where we should worship God and sing and rejoice. The church is you and me. It is the community. Can we be called Christians if one of our neighbors goes to bed in an empty stomach or has nothing to cover her or him? Do we only want these people in our church services? For me that would be embarrassing and disgraceful. The church should be a family that looks for each other. The community is part of the church, and we should look after it. The current situation with these young girls who are now mothers brings a major question to the church. What should we do? These are our children. This has been our approach as a church, trying to answer this question. We are heavily involved in the community, which is our community (Telephone interview, Maphalle, July 2021).

Each year, church members and well-wishers come together to donate clothes and household items to be given to the poorest members. Community members such as the elderly, orphans and the disabled are the church's top priorities. The church targets these population groups because they are vulnerable. The church is in a better position to mobilize resources and stakeholders to play a

role in changing the situation of these vulnerable groups, who have no other source of support. Some of these people have become dependent on the church for sustenance.

There are different people involved in these activities including women groups, men, youth and the elders. These various groups put together resources and distribute them under the banner of the church, and with no expectations. In other words, the church does not discriminate and provides for both church members and non-members. As such, this is not done for patronage, but to change the situation of people. The sole purpose is to help members of the society in times of distress such as hard times, death, sickness and/or old age. A church member had the following to say on this:

We help each other and members of the society through difficult times. We live in a place where no one is left alone. We visit sick members, elderly people who cannot attend church, and society members that are in need. We collect a lot of money and help them financially and emotionally. I mentioned one of the participants here, like my brother. He was sick and we were all there for him. We prayed for him, helped him pay his medical bills, and now we're happy to see him smile (Telephone interview, Maphalle, August 2021).

The most important group is that of women. This group plays a major role in advocacy and has been a key player in fighting domestic violence, advocating against divorce and teaching girls. The group organizes meetings for women and girls to discuss social issues. They also deliberate on their role as women and how to stand against women and children abuse. As one of the women explained that; ‘we also talk about women rights and the inequality issues which need to be addressed in our everyday lives’ (interview, Maphalle, August 2021).

Table 4.4: *Programs introduced by the church in the province, in %*

	<i>Interview Themes</i>	<i>Ga-Kgapane Village</i>	<i>Maphalle Village</i>	<i>Tafelkop Village</i>	<i>Nkowankowa Village</i>
<i>Social programs introduced and implemented by the Church in Limpopo province</i>	<i>Social Programs</i>	77%	82%	61%	72%
	<i>Sustainability Issues</i>	80%	51%	74%	41%
	<i>Responses to Covid-19</i>	73%	90%	89%	82%



The organization also aims to break the vicious circle in which women rights and community participation are perceived as of less importance. The church is also involved in a housing project. According to some community members, the church is developing partnerships with other organizations to help build better homes for the poor in the community, it has also provided significant support to provide better housing and better living conditions.

In an interview with one of the group members, it was revealed that, while the housing project was not large, some vulnerable individuals such as widows have benefited from it. She added that, “through these programs we offer as women from the church, families have been joined together through the housing project and feeding schemes, and those who are psychologically broken have found true love in the church” (interview, Maphalle, August 2021).

TABLE 4.5 *SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURAL PROBLEMS CONFRONTED BY COMMUNITIES IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE IN PERCENTAGES.*

	Interview Themes	Ga-Kgapane Village	Maphalle Village	Tafel Kop Village	Nkowankowa Village
<b>Social, economic and infrastructural problems confronted by communities in Limpopo province</b>	Poverty	88%	82%	91%	79%
	Education	30%	45%	55%	49%
	Health Issues	65%	71%	58%	51%
	Vulnerable Population	36%	29%	40%	43%
	Infrastructure	20%	26%	19%	31%
	Youth and Women	53%	49%	62%	60%

To improve the welfare of community members, the church has introduced a micro-financial plan, which is a finance lending project. The objective of this micro-finance project is to create a community of small businesses that promotes employment by supporting entrepreneurship activities. This project encourages members of rural communities who cannot obtain loans from traditional banks to borrow money at minimum premiums.

Anyone in the community qualifies to borrow money from the scheme. While the scheme was introduced with the objective to assist members in starting entrepreneurial activities, there are no restrictions, and people can access funding for a range of activities such as starting a business, paying school fees, paying medical bills, farming, etc. According to community members, the project prioritizes people that fail to meet minimum standards and credit requirements for acquiring loans from the bank. Community members are encouraged to start small businesses and agricultural projects such as poultry, egg farms and piggery. This project has been very helpful as one community member observed:

The people here are very poor. A lot of people here have nothing; no land, and nothing to use as collateral if they're to go to the big banks. But fortunately, we have microloans and people can live on microloans. We get such loans and no one come to your house if you don't pay your monthly installments in time. Aside from microloans, interest rates are so low that anyone can afford them (interview, Maphalle, October 2021).

Community members held that the microfinance project has also opened a new horizon for immigrants such as Ethiopians, Ghanaians and Pakistanis to learn more about how microfinance works. Fundraisers work with other organizations to help rural communities make a difference, they also said that one of the church's partners taught members of the rural community about economic governance, microfinance, culture, and business practices in the community. To protect food security, the church, along with its partners, is organizing meetings to promote small-scale farming. One of the participants asserted that the church distributes the trees seedling, planted in the community.

#### **4.4.1 What guides the church's programs?**

One objective guiding this study was to understand what guides the church's development programs in the community. This was in turn guided by the assumption that the church should address issues that are viewed by society as important, rather than those that the church believe need to be attended to. The study showed that the Charismatic Church has a community program that is meant to give back to the community. The program mostly focuses on the vulnerable members of the society. This is aligned with the doctrine of the church, to uplift the vulnerable. As one church member observed:

It is our role as Christians to assist those that are less fortunate than us. As a church, we have to ensure that those that are deprived also have a smile. These are the foundations of Christianity, and we as a church have

not diverted from them. Our targets are the most vulnerable such as children, the elderly and the poor. (interview, Maphalle, 2021).

The church, therefore, focused on the poor, particularly the women headed households, orphans and children. Quoting the bible, one of the congregation members referred to the common verse of allowing children to come to Jesus.

Besides these programs, church interventions were determined by church members as they are also members of the community. These community members would identify areas for intervention and through their groups, would then provide the necessary intervention under the banner of the church. Interventions on gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, are mostly taken care of by female church members who are also members of the society.

These different groups would also identify areas where they could intervene as a church and consult with the church leadership. These were mostly problems, which church members saw as challenges requiring the intervention of the church. These church members do not go and enquire from the community as to what needed to be changed, but they act on their own as church groups according to the findings of their observations.

What this tells us is that the church through various church groups developed interventions in line with the doctrines of the church. These interventions focused on moral issues, bringing dignity and acceptable moral behavior. There were also interventions which were introduced because the church believed they would bring changes to the welfare of the people. These were interventions decided by the church leadership in an attempt to bring about change.

Again, there were no consultations with the communities, and these interventions are common interventions available in other communities as well. The micro-finance program is one of these programs, which the church introduced with the hope of bringing about positive change. These interventions can also be found in other non-governmental organizations. The church appears to have taken a leaf out of these broad programs of empowerment.

#### **4.4.2 The church and Covid 19 situation**

The advent of the novel corona virus pandemic certainly disrupted social activities in the country and the whole globe. The corona virus pandemic was accompanied by a rush of containment measure by government that restricted movements and interactions, and brought many social and

political activities to a halt. The study sought to understand how the church was affected by these restrictions, and the impact of the pandemic on the activities of the church in the community. Members of the church agreed that the pandemic called for an active role of the church in the communities, which needed comfort and counselling. The church had the responsibility to restore hope to individuals and households. According to one congregant:

We have never needed church's intervention in our lives like we did that time. The pandemic brought desperation, uncertainty confusion and pain, and people needed prayer. People needed the church to play an active role. People looked to God for answers, and the church was the only thing that could ease our pain and suffering (interview, Maphalle, 2021)

Unfortunately, the church was absent and could not play an active role and provide the hope when people needed it the most. Initially, church gatherings were prohibited and churches could not access the public. As restrictions continued, church services commenced on the virtual spaces and people could only access the gospel online. However, these were platforms for the elite and not for the poor such as the community of Ga-Maphalle. Of course, some members of the community who could afford data attended these services, but this left out the majority, who needed divine intervention.

The restrictions also disrupted church programs in the community as church members could not freely interact with members of their community. They could not gather to continue with programs such the GBV awareness, women forums and the fight against abuse of teenage girls and teenage pregnancies. The restrictions also meant that the church could not console those who had lost their loved ones due to Covid 19 since funeral wakes were banned, though the priest could still provide prayers to send off the dead.

However, the corona virus provided space for the church to expand its charity programs, which expanded from the previous target group – widows, orphans, etc – to most members of the society, the majority of whom had lost jobs and their key means of living. The church provided food parcels and ensured that the community did not starve. Of course, this was not enough since the need was greater than the available resources, but the church, through the priest and his family, mobilized businesses to contribute food.

When tougher restrictions were lifted, limited church services resumed. The church opened its doors again and provided services to a limited number of people. This brought back the space which was missing in the lives of the community members. According to one community member:

You could go to church, worship and pray. But, more importantly, you would meet other people and share your sorrow. You could also see the priest. The church also offered a platform where we could pray and ask God for mercy. These limited services brought healing, especially to those who were broken and were in pain. People had lost their loved ones, people needed each other and these services provided that platform (interview, Maphalle, 2022)

While the pandemic constrained the church to operate normally and provide normal services to the community, what the pandemic actually did was to constrain the financial resources of the church which were critical for its intervention in poor communities. While the community of Ga-Maphalle is poor and was not contributing a lot in terms of money to the church, the church raised most of its money, which was then used to care for Ga-Maphalle community, from its urban congregants in the main branch. However, this constituent was not spared from the challenges of the corona virus, which had a bearing on how the church operated and executed its mandate to the poor. According to one church elder:

For the church to continue playing a role in a society during the time of crisis, we had to bring in other stakeholders and ensure that their resources were used for the good of the poor. We brought in retail stores, we mobilized money from big businesses, and we ensured that we brought food to the needy (interview, Maphalle, 2022).

With the easing of restrictions and the return to normal services, the church continued with its programs in the community. In return, members of the community pledged to work for the church. The role of the church during the time of crisis was recognized and appreciated in the community, and those who benefited from the church's charity speak highly of the church and its leadership.

#### **4.5 Community Expectations from the Church**

It is often one thing to intervene in communities and try to change lives, and another for interventions to address societal needs. Societal needs are determined by society. However, those that introduce interventions make the mistake of assuming that they know what the people need. The church should implement programs which are beneficial to all rural residents, rather than those

that promote its existence. This section addresses the issue of society, their needs and expectations from the church.

The local community of Ga-Maphalle was grateful to the church for its role in the community. The community cherished the church's values and its commitment to promote the health, well-being, social and family life in the rural communities. Participants spoke ardently about how the church can play an important role in the community in promoting health and well-being. From the above, it is believed that the church creates an environment that promotes health, justice and equality. The church also plays a part in addressing contemporary health issues, particularly relating to women and the youth.

#### **4.5.1 What was missed?**

However, the community of Ga-Maphalle understood their needs and had certain expectations from the church. As Green and Goetting (2010) noted, marginalized communities need help to achieve their developmental goals. As such, some people expected a lot from the church and felt that not enough was done to really develop the society. The church did not have the resources to achieve what the society considered important to their development.

First, they wished that the church could have used its power of mobilization to mobilize resources to improve the schools in order to improve learning outcomes. According to one of the community members:

The church can help to improve water situation in the schools. It has partners who are capable of changing the lives of our children. However, since this has not been its priority, schools were not in its agenda (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

Besides improving the situation at the local schools, people felt that the church should have played a major role in capacity building to change the situation of the community. As Njogu (2014) noted, in most societies the current concern is the lack of employment, especially among young people, which he considers a waste of human capabilities. In line with his observation, education featured prominently in their list. Those that participated emphasized the need to improve education and skills levels of young people. In interviews, the need for vocational training to assist young people to develop skills was one of the development needs which were not satisfied. To many, the social

scourge in the society can only be solved through education, and vocational training on top of that. In the words of one elder:

The province is full of lazy young people who have nothing to do all day. We need to come up with the means to help young people. As it stands, they are just like a ticking time bomb waiting to explode; they are in need of structural development and empowerment. We cannot afford to have young people who are doing nothing with their time (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

It was also indicated that these ideas have been presented to the church, but the church did not follow up on them due to the costs associated with such a projects. Thus, while the church has assisted the youth, it had not come up with programs that could up-skill the youth and make them better individuals.

These programs are bigger developments and people agreed that the church did not have the capacity to implement such large-scale programs. This was also recognized by community members:

Our church is small and can only implement small-scale programs. However, these programs can only assist few individuals, yet the population in need in the community is bigger. To achieve this, the church will need partners. The private sector should also play a bigger part because the sector has resources. However, I feel that the church has the power to mobilize other stakeholders (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

As Bessette (2004) noted, making collaborations often requires a change of perspective. Thus, it was noted that the church needed to work collaboratively with other faith-based organizations in the community to implement broader development projects. It was also noted that the church was less involved with other churches and other stakeholders and that this needed to change if the church is to achieve developmental success.

It was noted that different churches were doing different things, and there was a lack of a common agenda. However, people understood the churches as having a common cause and saw possibilities for collaborations. One community member noted:

Churches should stop competing against one another. They should stop criticizing one another and work together. They are here to serve the people, and the word of God does not discriminate. It does not matter who is preaching it. However, some churches see themselves as different from others, which prevent them from working together (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

People also expected the government to work with churches to carry out their developmental programs in the communities. Njogu (2014) argues that ‘public-private partnerships have the

potential to improve public housing or public services while allowing governments to use less of their own resources' and to maintain or improve quality standards. Governments can help poor people to benefit from economic development through civil rights (Sakwa, 2008).

One participant noted that the biggest problem faced by these communities was the zero involvement of government agencies and non-state actors such as churches in community development. However, people saw the church as having the capacity to bring government and other stakeholders together and work towards achieving change in the society. People's expectations from the church mostly stems from their understanding of its mobilizing power and moral duty to the society.

In the interest of the community and their expectations of the institution, the church must protect and also empower young people, because they are tomorrow's leaders. However, the community also believed that the church could do better in mobilizing resources for further study. While implementing vocational training programs was seen as being beyond its capacity, there was a general belief that the church can mobilize resources such as bursaries to assist in training children in need. This according to community members was within its capacity since charismatic churches receive a lot in offerings and tithes. According to a community member:

Charismatic churches are the richest. They collect large sums of money. The church would have contributed massively if it introduced bursary programs for poor children and assist poor families to move out of the poverty trap. Currently, I have not heard of any such programs. Maybe it has programs for its church members, particularly those that are active participants in church affairs. I have head of situations where the church has paid fees for poor children at primary schools. It has also provided uniforms, but this does not improve the situation of these children since it does not build their capacity (interview, Maphalle, October 2021).

The need for vocational training is guided by the desire to move from poverty and the understanding that education can offer that avenue. Vocational training also provides practical skills needed in the community.

#### **4.5.2 The recognized role of the church**

While the society of Ga-Maphalle had unsatisfied needs and would have preferred the church and other religious institutions to assist with transforming their livelihoods, people recognized the moral role of the church. This was particularly significant in a society where people needed guidance, and certain population groups needed direction. The church instilled moral principles



and taught individuals responsibility. Church members got involved in their communities and embarked on a process of bringing about change. One elder commented that, ‘through the activities of the church, the principle of “Ubuntu” was restored’ (interview, Maphalle, September 2022).

Church members became ambassadors of change and engaged social evil decisively as well as fighting poverty and inappropriate moral behaviors. Women from the church became advocates for behavioral change, addressed the issue of gender-based violence, which was becoming a social scourge in the society. They also intervened to address the issue of anti-social behaviors such as drunkenness among the youth. Society also applauded them for tackling the problem of teenage pregnancy, which led to a decline in incidents among young girls.

As such, the church, as an independent organization, was perceived by many as a pillar for the vulnerable population groups in the society. People also recognized how the church had instilled social responsibility and work ethics for people to self-sustain. By introducing self-sustenance project, the church taught individuals to fend for themselves. The introduction of the micro-finance project was seen as evidence of the development role of the church. Through this project, it was realized that many families were saved from poverty.

More importantly, young people who were not employed found something to do, and were generating income, which in turn changed their lives for the better. This was by far one of the most important contributions of the church in a context of high unemployment and poverty rate. Financial assistance created opportunities for livelihoods and empowerment. To others, the church was within its mandate since it has historically been involved in empowerment. As Ter and Busuttill (2005) observed, ‘churches and religious beliefs can sometimes involve people in activities aimed at helping those in need through financial aid or other outreach activities.’

The church also has a major role in the moral aspects of the society. The community expected the church to play that role. In the words of one elder, who was a member of another church, ‘churches have a moral duty to society, since issues of morality requires religious intervention’ (interview, Maphalle, September 2022).

It is not surprising that the community saw the church as an appropriate institution to deal with a wide range of social ills affecting their community. This was guided by the belief that some social issues required divine intervention. According to a community elder:

The world has changed. What we see now, we never saw before. Some behavior cannot be explained and are beyond any comprehension of a normal man. Some of these issues require divine intervention. These are the acts of the devil. How do you explain the evil committed by men on our children and their own wives? The government has the law, but law cannot change morals. We need the priests, we need the church. Some of these issues only need prayer (interview, Maphalle, October 2022).

Besides the moral issues, there are also other issues that people historically associated with the church. Elders reckoned that the church has been the main institution closely linked to household welfare, providing for human needs. As Green and Goetting (2010) argue, 'human needs often include issues such as unemployment, poverty, insecurity, and housing problems. The church would provide shelter to the poor, provide food and provide skills.' In Ga-Maphalle, the church had certainly supported members of the community.

Many people agreed that different groups (youth, women and the church leadership) have been united in providing solutions which were within their abilities. They also agreed that others were beyond their capacity as a small local-based institution, with limited capacity. Of course, community members believed that the church would continue to grow because it has become a community institution and were willing to support it.

The church also offered an avenue for the vulnerable. 'Sometimes people turn to God for help because they cannot control their lives and cannot understand and think about what is going on around them' (Murray, 2012). Other participants noted that most community members go to church as a way of escaping from life's challenges and to gain self-esteem and self-respect. In other word, the presence of the church in the community was seen as a positive aspect in a context of challenges.

The church provided a place for comfort, for social interaction and more importantly, for companionship. To some, it served as a home, and not only a spiritual home, but a family and provided a sense of belonging for those who have nowhere else to go for help and association. One businessperson observed:

The church is there for everyone, whether you are a church member or not. We often call on the church in times of need. Many of us expect the church to help with funerals and weddings, to pray for the sick, and solve our problems through prophecy (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

This was particularly the case during the Covid-19 pandemic, when people could not find answers for what was happening. While church services were banned, church members offered prayers to those affected by Covid-19, which lessened the pain.

According to Henderson and Vercseg (2010), the objective of community development is to promote community participation by integrating the community with an objective of inclusion.’ One important aspect that emerged from most the study was that the church managed to achieve this in the community. This was achieved through identification of societal problems and intervention through outreach programs that sought to provide awareness and teach affected groups. It also used spiritual healing to appeal to the vulnerable and the needy.

Those who had benefited from church programs wished the church should continue on its trail towards spiritual growth and the serenity of its community. To many members of the community, the church continued to provide them with strength and encouragement to persevere even in challenging times, offering comfort and helping those who lost their loved ones to heal. In the words of one elderly woman, who had lost family members to Covid-19, ‘it became a partner and helped to overcome sorrow and loneliness’ (interview, Maphalle, September 2021). Similarly, another community member observed:

When you are facing difficulties, the church is available. When you have problems, it is often easier to talk about them at church or with your pastor than it is to share with anyone in any other organization or the government representatives (social workers). Church members and community members are not responsible for the church but are responsible for improving their support for it. Most people have gotten stronger mentally, spiritually, and financially whilst at church than they were before going to church. They see the church as an organization that they created, and the church cannot function at all without conforming to it. People here are appreciative of the fact that the church has had such a significant impact in their lives (interview, Maphalle, October 2021).

From testimonies of the community members, the church has not only promoted spirituality and social cohesion. It has also championed development in the community. However, people still believed that a lot still need to be done.

They believe that the church has been successful not only in championing development, but also in promoting spirituality and social life. Participants also quickly pointed out that there was still a lot of work to be done. The success of the Church must become the model of development that leads to the prosperity of the local community.

I find it ostensibly crucial to note that the membership of the church alongside community members recognizes the developmental role played by the church. No participant has shared a deleterious outlook on the role of the church in the community although some felt that the church wasn't doing enough to help them deal with social problems. Through the charismatic church's programs, the village of Ga-Maphalle is heading towards an upright path in both social and economic footings although a lot still needs to be done. However, this should not be reserved as a sole postulation that other rural people would feel or have experienced the same, as the recommendations received from 30 sampled participants were accepted. The Church proved to fathom the social landscape and milieu in rural communities better than any other organization, including the government.

#### **4.5.2 Social responsibility or development?**

The study sought to understand whether the community viewed the activities of the church as charity or development oriented. From the interviews conducted with community members, it emerged that people did not see these interventions as contributing to development. Rather, they saw them as part of the institution's social responsibility.

By social responsibility, they meant that these were activities that are expected from a church. According to community members, a church has a social responsibility to the society. It is its role to ensure that people are socially developed. This, however, was not the development they wanted. According to one community member:

Development should be long-term and sustainable. That is why we focus on sustainable development. Is the church capable of bringing sustainable development? We will be expecting a lot from the church. The church has a different role. Its role is to change behavior, ensure social welfare and ameliorate (interview, Maphalle, September 2021).

Majority of people saw the church as having played a bigger role in assisting young people in becoming more sociable and spiritually grounded, bringing out their talents and in making them better individuals who exhibit socially acceptable behaviors. Some believed that the church cannot be expected to contribute to economic development because this is not its primary function. It can only assist through collaborations and partnerships, but this area is above its capacity.

The church cannot be our government and should remain a church and with responsibilities for social well-being and change. While the charismatic church implemented and embarked on ambitious programs including the micro-finance project that sought to improve lives of the vulnerable, and playing a role in achieving better health, these activities had limited impact and were within the confines of the church's responsibilities to influence behavioral and social change.

This study draws on Snidle and Yeoman (1997: 7)'s findings that the doctrine of the activities of Christian churches are important in preparing members of a community with basic knowledge and skills that can help reduce illiteracy in the community. This is one of the basic roles of the church. However, people realized that the church could not provide skills that could capacitate the community. The church in question and others in the area had not provided skills or education useful for changing people's livelihoods.

This was a major area of need, and the church could not provide for such development. While the church's role cannot be ignored, people felt that more needed to be done for the church to assume developmental roles. This was generally the situation in the whole municipality, where the role of Christian churches (even bigger ones) remained confined to small-scale intervention to alleviate crisis. Whilst other religions like the Islamic faith owns economic franchises and contributes to community development for their members and their communities. The Christian church still have a void that must be filled by overseers and Church leaders.

#### **4.6 Chapter Summary**

If we only focus on the Christian Church's primary role as an institution that preaches the gospel, it is easy to forget that it plays major roles in bringing broader social changes. This chapter has looked at the role of the Christian church in a poor rural society in Limpopo Province and explored the development impacts of its interventions in the community. Rather than focusing on its primary role of converting people to Christianity, bringing change to society became a preoccupation of the church in a context of poverty and social upheavals. It intervened in society to bring about social change and change the situations of people through empowerment strategies often identified with development agencies.

The introduction of financial strategies to empower community members, who could not qualify for formal finance lending, was one of these strategies. Its community advocacy to tackle social

problems such as teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence and women abuse, demonstrate how the church has entered the terrain associated with development actors such as social movements. The church was able to successfully intervene through these strategies because it is a central part of the society, its members come from these societies, live and work in these societies, and understand the realities in these societies and the appropriate solutions that could work.

Although the church remained active in society, including providing humanitarian solutions particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, the real issues that the society valued and needed solutions to remained unresolved. Education emerged as a key area of concern and society wished the church could have provided solutions. The discussion showed that capacity building of youth through vocational training was on top of the list for the community. However, the church did not have the capacity to provide such solutions, which were mostly the mandate of the state.

The church's continued focus on social issues in the community, while the youth questions remained ignored, created the impression that it was focused more on charity than development. Questions were asked whether the church could have played a different role, like mobilizing other stakeholders and lobbying government. This prompted major disagreements on the real role of the church, with some community members believing that the church should collaborate more with other religious groups and actors for their intervention to be impactful. This was not done, and the church had not used its power to mobilize other stakeholders to generate sustainable solutions.

Fundamental developmental problems remained unsolved because they were bigger than the church. There was surprisingly little engagement with the local government, which has the mandate to develop local areas. Both institutions continued independent endeavours, with the church doing it alone, and using its membership. Distinctions should be made between charity and development, and the chapter tried to shed light on that. The perception by community members was that the church intervention is often reactive and geared towards charity. As much as the church had moved beyond preaching the gospel and seeking to change society, its focus was on social development rather than broader aspects of development.

The church is often viewed as an organization itself, and this attitude is often attributed to the social organizations it creates and maintains. In many countries, the church occupies a unique place among national associations as an important provider of various services. However, with the rise in health, the continuity of modern life, and the deep separation of Church and State, the

responsibility of the congregation has been reduced. Religious organizations are able to provide some social services in good faith, but all other things being equal, they are able to challenge state or public support with secular providers who only provide similar services in certain areas. These limits are a clear indication of the unification of the Church's approach to social problems. Therefore, the Church may be interested in the State and NGOs as a separate community rather than an organization.

De Temple (2012) argues that economic prosperity and religious and behavioral factors must be combined in order to participate in community activities to create justice that promotes morality. I have realized or rather observed that most churches in Limpopo are active in social justice participation by empowering communities through activities aimed at sharing common church and community values and also responding to community expectations with their limited resources.

The role played by the charismatic church have proved more helpful than any non-state actor or government in the community of Ga-Maphalle, although, in order to become more effective, in this sense it's crucial for the church to collaborate with the government and other non-state actors to bring about radical change. Whilst the feeling is that the church is headed towards an upright footing, the church can only do so much.

Murray (2012) argues that the church has been a permanent home for centuries and that safety has been mentioned and documented by the ancient Greeks and Romans. So, when I say 'empowerment' I don't think of the church as an independent institution, but as an organization that leads to community growth. But at the same time, we must recognize that this is good community practice. 'Community development activities pursue to manage the responsibility and involvement of those at risk.' (Henderson & Vercseg, 2010). The Church as an organization has been attendant to the needs of rural communities and mobilized activities to meet those needs. From most participants' outlooks and the findings therefore, it is clear that the charismatic Church in this study is dedicated and committed to community development, although the government should also play its role. It does appear that a unitary response to community development between these parties will reach productive ends.

## Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

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### 5.1 Introduction

The study situates the modern and Charismatic Church in Ga-Maphalle Village and its activities within the broader discourse on non-state actors and their role in the development process in contemporary times. The church has a spiritual as well as a socio-economic role to play to its host community. Despite these developments, the Christian religion and the church as an institution have often been negatively professed.

Part of the problem is in its association with colonialism and the unfortunate historical process that has taken place in South Africa and the African continent at large. When colonizers came, most of them presented themselves as Christian Missionaries who preached the Gospel of Jesus whilst capitalizing in the enslavement and colonization of Africans, henceforth precipitating a belief that Christianity is a colonial enclave.

The central question has been further broken down into four research questions, which this study addressed:

1. What are the social, economic and infrastructural problems confronted by communities in the Maphalle Village in the rural Mopani District in Limpopo?
2. What are the specific social programs introduced and implemented by the Charismatic Church in these communities?
3. What guides the church's programs in the surrounding communities? Has the church aligned its social program to the specific needs of these communities?
4. What are the community's expectations from the church? Has the church programs satisfied those expectations?

The study set out to explore the developmental programs implemented by the charismatic church in Ga-Maphalle Village and its immediate communities as a non-state actor. Ga-Maphalle is a poor rural village about 90km outside the Province's Capital City of Polokwane. Like every rural village in South Africa, Ga-Maphalle is faced with numerous social challenges including unemployment, poverty, HIV and AIDS, lack of social amenities, livelihood collapse and a high proportion of women headed households and orphans.



The study was guided by the assumption that the church as an actor in modern society should be expected to respond to societal challenges in its midst. The methodology adopted by this study was therefore guided by the purpose of the study and the question it sought to respond to. This section presents the conclusion of the methodology adopted by the study including the design, the research techniques, data analysis approach and ethical considerations.

## **5.2 Reflections**

This study adopted a qualitative approach, which is geared at gaining an in-depth understanding of societal development challenges and the activities of the church, which are directed at bringing positive changes in the society. Such a study relates to the meanings, definitions of ideas, features, metaphors, symbols, and the summary of things.

According to Marshall and Rossman, this approach is increasingly becoming a vital mode of exploration in social sciences because it provides for an in-depth study of a phenomenon or phenomena under study. Within the qualitative tradition, the study used a qualitative case study of the charismatic church in rural Ga-Maphalle, in Mopani District, Limpopo Province.

The church is often viewed as an organization itself, and this attitude is often attributed to the social organizations it creates and maintains. In many countries, the church occupies a unique place among national associations as an important provider of various services. However, with the rise in health, the continuity of modern life and the deep separation between the Church and State, the responsibility of the congregation has been reduced.

Religious organizations are able to provide some social services in good faith, but all other things being equal, they are able to challenge state or public support with secular providers who only provide similar services in certain areas. These limits are a clear indication of the unification of the Church's approach to social problems. Therefore, the Church may be interested in the State and NGOs as a separate community rather than an organization.

The data obtained in the study have demonstrated that most rural churches are in need of developmental frame of strategic planning because it's either they have limited coherent developmental programs, or they have none whatsoever. The implications of the above findings suggest that those churches that have economic activities and investments are mostly relevant to their host communities in terms of the social responsibility programs.

### **5.2.1 Development needs in society**

What exactly are the developmental problems faced by Ga-Maphalle? This analysis has shown that Ga-Maphalle is a typical rural community and faces numerous developmental challenges associated with rural societies. The study portrayed the community as poor, with a lack of infrastructure including access to potable water and sanitation. The community also lacks other facilities such including sporting fields, while the two schools are poorly resourced with no running water, poor sanitation and no library and science laboratory. Also, the lack of schools in the area has led to overcrowding which has contributed to poor education outcomes.

Associated to these issues is the high dropout rate among young people, which has contributed to teenage pregnancy and other social ills among the youth. However, this can also be attributed to poverty at the household level and social degeneration as old men have taken advantage of the situation and are mostly responsible for moral decay. Another associated issue is that of gender-based violence, which has become a pandemic in the society. Ga-Maphalle emerged as a mirror image of other rural societies in South Africa as elsewhere, with a high proportion of women headed households.

Since women headed homes are associated with poverty in these communities, this serves to reflect the state of poverty. (Chant, 2004; Horrell and Krishnan, 2007; O'laughlin, 1998). The youth question emerged as a major problem in the study, with most of the youth unemployed and unskilled. Thus, obtaining skills through vocational training emerged as a critical need in Ga-Maphalle. These challenges called for intervention from somewhere, and the church as an institution working in the community has a role.

### **5.2.2 The church and its activities in society**

The church has certainly played a role in bringing social change in this rural society, engaging in both programs geared at bringing moral and social change. Farming systems varied in sizes, land use, management styles and ownership structures. The nature and significance of these programs differed among different church groups, but all church groups were involved in society empowerment. The women tackled the social scourge of gender-based violence and teenage pregnancies, reaching out to victims and embarking on outreaches.

The church as an institution addressed issues of poverty assisting vulnerable population groups to achieve food security through food parcels, while also playing an empowerment role by assisting people to become entrepreneurs through the micro-finance program that assisted a large number of people including youth.

Even foreign entrepreneurs from Ethiopia and Ghana adopted the model to lend money to people who otherwise would not qualify for loans from the banks to access small amounts to set projects. While this is one of the major developmental achievements by the church in the community, we cannot forget its continued religious role and how it remains an institution that offers hope and companionship.

### **5.2.3 The community perspective on the role of the church**

The Church values and its commitment to promoting good health, well-being, social and family life of rural communities were profoundly prized by all participants, yet there's a section of the respondents that believes that a lot still ought to be done. So, although the participants recognize the limited role played by the church, they were not completely satisfied. Participants spoke ardently about how the church can play an important role in the community in promoting good health and well-being. From the above, it is believed that the church produces an environment that promotes good health, justice and equality.

The community of Ga-Maphalle had some unsatisfied expectations and needs. The community emphasized the need for vocational training for young people for them to improve employment opportunities and move out of poverty. However, the church could not provide this. Of course, the community understood that the church did not have the capacity and resources to achieve such a huge project. It needed collaboration partners.

However, it was realized that the church was operating independently and was not collaborating with other religious institutions, which were also instituting independent projects. The church and other churches were also not working in partnership with other stakeholders, which could have assisted them to achieve sustainable development. It was recognized that the church had the capacity and power to mobilize other stakeholders, but it had not done this.

This was seen as a major disadvantage, which has cheated the community of major development. The community blamed the churches in general for competition and failing to work together

because of different religious doctrines. This had to change, if the church is to achieve meaningful development and complement the docile state. It was noted that instead of the church to be in competition with the state, it should be a partner and lobby the government to attend to community developmental problems because it is closer to the community.

### **5.3 Recommendations and Conclusion**

The study here has provided a space for a radical shift in terms of the character of the church's role in development as a non-state actor. The most prominent churches in the world historically in terms of community involvement, development and social change have been mostly Black American churches. During the time of Jim Crow laws in America and the Civil Rights Movement, churches like Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama (USA), have produced many Civil rights leaders and their message and activities revolved around the liberation of Black Americans from the plague of anti-black racism that darkened the American social milieu in the 1960s.

Because of such a racist system of governance, African Americans then were constant victims of Police brutality and discrimination, and as a result, some of these churches emerged with social programs to assist the situation. One leader who was a product of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church was the most prolific Rev, Dr Martin Luther King Junior who led the church as its pastor between 1954 and 1960.

One of the programs that Dr Martin Luther King Jr, initiated as the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist church was to help organize the most famous Montgomery bus boycott from the Church's basement. The boycott lasted for 381 days and when it was over, the US Supreme Court declared segregated bus seating unconstitutional. That was one prominent example of how the church can affect development and social change as a non-state actor.

Although there are a few developmental programs championed by the charismatic church featured in this study, there is however a void in terms of the church's involvement in moral commiseration and the problem around complete involvement in development still ought to be resolved. Most Christian churches in South Africa are rather more involved in only the spiritual/religious aspect of operation, notwithstanding that as an institution the church cannot be permeated from the deeply rooted social and community issues to bring about radical development.

South Africa is a country that sits at about 34.9% of unemployment as of January 2022 with 64% of those being the youth, so given the fact that the Greater Letaba Municipality where Ga-Maphalle is located consists of a very youthful population, it is henceforth in the best interest of any church to understand its role in development.

With the Christian Church having earned its negative cap through the church's involvement in the colonization of Africa, it is henceforth necessary for the Church as a whole to repel that legacy by helping to facilitate developmental reparations and social emancipation by developing programs that will benefit the community at large, far beyond their host communities.

Some other faith-based organizations like the Islamic religion have done a remarkable job in empowering their membership and host communities. In South Africa, the Muslims own franchises like Kentucky Fried Chicken, Nandos and Chicken Licken and in most cases, these are mostly located in their host communities, and they employ their members and as well as community members.

Most banks like the First National Bank have a division that deals with Muslim clients only, so not only do they align their members to the spiritual base of the religion, but their religion is intertwined to their way of life. So, these instances provide a place for Christians to reflect on and be able to develop the Christian faith far beyond fasting, prayer and speaking in tongues since that's the reputation the Christian religion has earned overtime.

Jews as well have played a bigger role in organizing themselves economically and have answered the question of social development and change far so deeply. After their genocide by Adolph Hitler, Jews were henceforth able to pick themselves up. They strived for the self-determination of their faith, their people and their wellbeing by fighting for reparations.

Every Sunday, most Christians go to church, yet their involvement in the social commiseration in South Africa is minimal. This qualitative study aimed at rooting out the broader role of the Christian Church in development as a non-state actor and henceforth an institution with a coherent developmental plan as one of the overlooked social institutions yet very powerful and can be instrumental in effecting change in South Africa when working with other non-state actors, NGOs and the government.

One particular observation from the study was how the Christian church continues to operate in silos. There is completion and a lack of united effort that would allow the Christian family to play a much broader role in the communities within which they operate. These differences meant that the church has been prevented from exploiting its strength, which is the power of mobilization and use it to the general good of the community. Alone, the church can only achieve that much, and that much is not often the community's priority problems.

As shown in the discussion, the community saw capacity building of youth to improve skills through vocational training as a critical developmental need, but such a program was a bit too much for a small community church. It did not have the capacity to implement such a broad program independent of other stakeholders. However, there was a general belief that such a program was possible if the church could use its power of mobilization and lobby to get the government and other stakeholders on their side. The church is better placed to understand society's problems because society's problems play right before it.

What does this analysis tell us? What emerges from this analysis is the importance of collaboration. Every actor has a role to play in rural development and in achieving developmental change that really matters. The church can play a key role in bringing stakeholders together to tackle real problems of the society because of its proximity to the society, its concern with the welfare of the people, and its moral duty to the society.

It is interesting that in South Africa, the significance of the church is recognized. This was often acknowledged by the state President in his speeches during the lockdown period. More importantly, the church has influence and its influence goes beyond the confines of the church membership. The charismatic Christian church in Ga-Maphalle, therefore, did not exploit this and the opportunity for broad-based community development was lost.

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## ***Appendix***

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### **Participants' Socio Demographic Details**

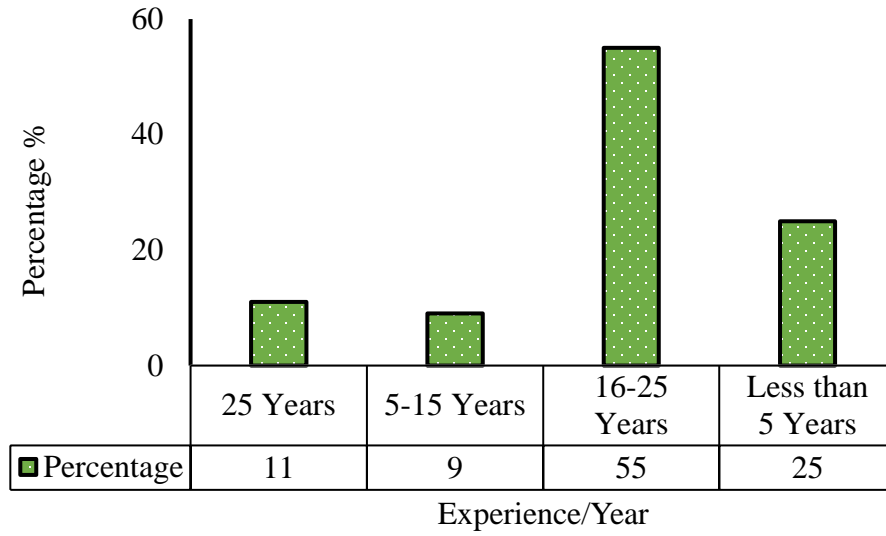
**TABLE 1 AGE DISTRIBUTION AMONG THE PARTICIPANTS**

<b>Age</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
18-25	5	17
26-40	6	20
41-50	6	20
51-60	13	43



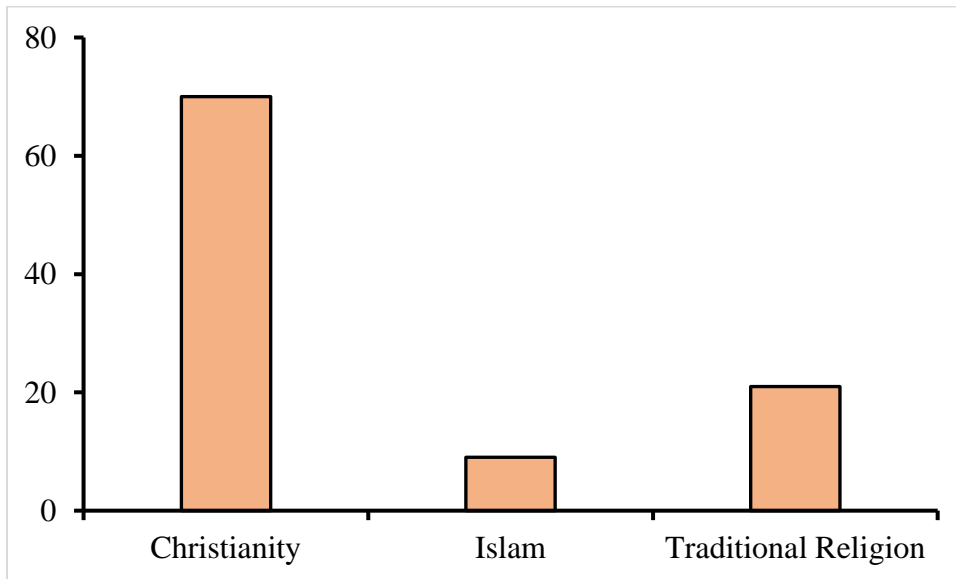
**TABLE 2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS**

	<b>Variables</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	19	62
	Male	11	38
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	7	23.3
	Married	12	40
	Divorced	6	20
	Single parent	5	16.7
<b>Education</b>	Less than high school	4	14
	High school graduate	9	29
	College graduate	9	29
	Degree	8	28
<b>Employment Status</b>	Full time	6	20
	Part-time	7	23.3
	Unemployed	17	56.7



*Figure 1: Graph displaying the years of experience of rural community members.*

### Religious Affiliation



*Figure 2: Graph displaying the religious affiliation.*

**TABLE 3: TYPE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS IN MAPHALLE, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

<b>Types of Membership</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Those that need spiritual assistance	11	36.7
Traders	4	13.3
Farmers	7	23.3
Students	3	10
Civil Servants	3	10
Politicians	2	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

**TABLE 4: SOURCES OF INCOME FOR THE CHARISMATIC CHURCH IN MAPHALLE, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

<b>Source of Income</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Church collection	80	40
Voluntary donations	27	13.3
External support from church head	53	26.7
Engagement in economic enterprises	27	13.3
Others	13	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

**TABLE 5: TYPE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS CARRIED OUT BY RURAL CHURCHES IN MAPHALLE, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

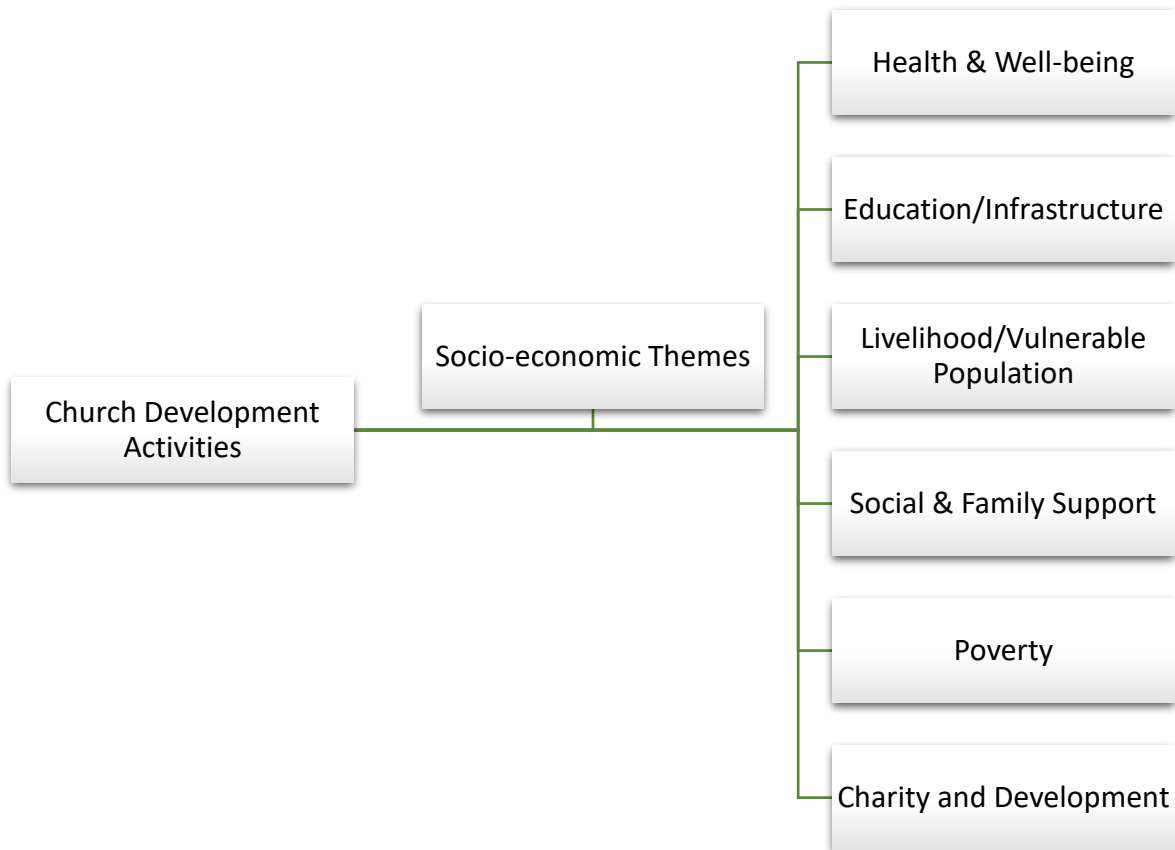
Project Type	Completed/Ongoing	
	No.	%
Water Supply	14	18.7
Electricity	0	0
New Church Building	69	92
School Construction	47	62.7
Clinic	2	2.7
Farm	8	10.6
Orphanage Home	0	0
Literacy	5	6.7
Skill Acquisition Center	43	57.3

**TABLE 6: RESPONSES ON PROBLEMS FACED BY RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION IN MAPHALLE, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

Challenges	Yes		No	
	No.	%	No.	%
Competition for membership	14	46.7	18	60
Lack of money	9	30	20	66.7
Lack of governmental support	11	36.7	12	40
Lack of trained pastors	17	56.7	16	53.3
Land issues	22	73.3	15	50
Poor attendance	8	26.7	10	33.3
Church equipment theft	18	60	9	30
Migration of youths	5	16.7	6	20
Membership discrimination	27	90	11	36.7

## Thematic Analysis

The factors are thematically illustrated in figure3 below:



*Figure 3 Thematic areas employed for participants' observations.*

**TABLE 7: COMMUNITY'S EXPECTATIONS FROM THE CHURCH IN %**

	Interview Themes	Ga-Kgapane Village	Maphalle Village	Tafel Kop Village	Nkowankowa Village
Community's expectations from the churches in Limpopo province	Community Social needs	85%	76%	55%	63%
	Charity and Development	67%	72%	80%	78%
	Community's understanding of the role of the Church	53%	68%	83%	69%
	Community's positive views on the programmes offered by the Church	73%	55%	63%	71%

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**Beyond spirituality to broader social change: A qualitative analysis of the development role of the Christian church in a rural community in Limpopo Province**

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**Interview Schedule**

**This is a qualitative study where no specific questions, but specific thematic areas will guide fieldwork. This interview schedule outlines these thematic areas, which will guide either observations or interviews/discussions.**

**What are the social, economic and infrastructural problems confronted by communities in the Maphalle Village in rural Mopani District in Limpopo?**

- **State of poverty**
- **Health Issues affecting the community**
- **Education and Educational Infrastructure**
- **Vulnerable Population (Elderly and Children)**
- **Youth and Women**

**What are the specific social programs introduced and implemented by the Church in these communities?**

- **Social Programs**
- **Target Population in terms of Programs**
- **Sustainability Issues**
- **Achievements**
- **Responses to Covid 19**

**What guides the church's programs in the surrounding communities? Has the church aligned its social programs to the specific needs of communities?**

- **Understanding the Community Social needs**
- **Difference between Charity and Development**
- **Program Focus**

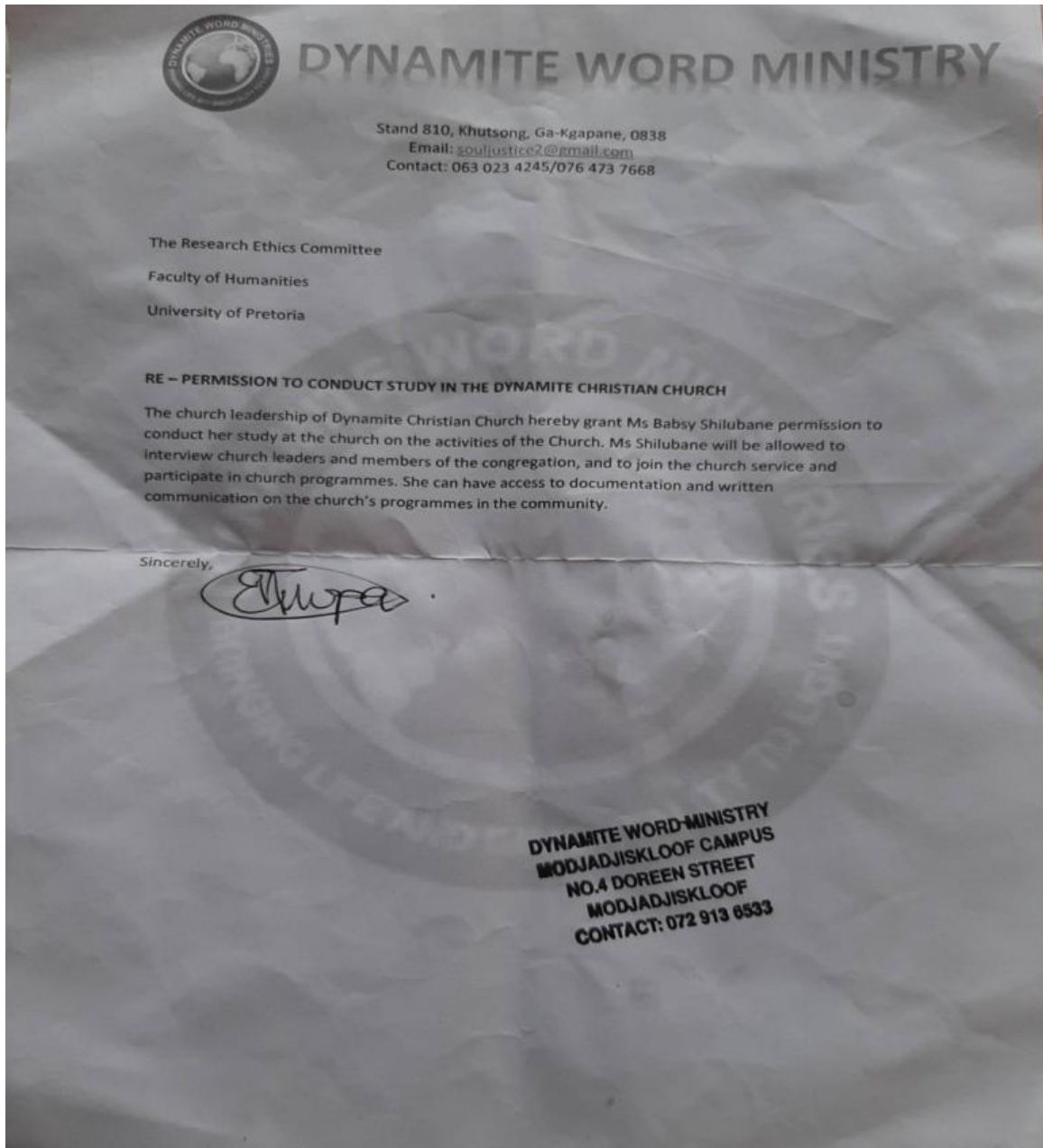


- 
- **Going beyond the Congregation**

**What are the community's expectations from the church? Has the church programs satisfied expectation?**

- **Community's understanding of the role of the Church**
- **Community's expectations from the Church**
- **Community's views on the programs offered by the Church**

### **Interview guide**



Church consent



**Faculty of Humanities**

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Bomotho



12 July 2021

Dear Ms BS Shilubane

**Project Title:** Beyond spirituality to broader social change: A qualitative analysis of the development role of the Christian church in a rural community in Limpopo Province  
**Researcher:** Ms BS Shilubane  
**Supervisor(s):** Prof V Thebe  
**Department:** Anthropology and Archaeology  
**Reference number:** 21213250 (HUM013/0321)  
**Degree:** Masters

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 12 July 2021. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,

**Prof Karen Harris**  
**Acting Chair: Research Ethics Committee**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**  
**e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za**

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Bomotho

**Research Ethics Committee Members:** Prof I Pikirayi (Deputy Dean); Prof KL Harris, Mr A Bizos, Dr A-M de Beer, Dr A dos Santos, Ms KT Govinder, Andrew, Dr P Gubura, Dr E Johnson, Prof D Maree, Mr A Mohamed, Dr I Noomé, Dr C Puttergill, Prof D Reyburn, Prof M Soer, Prof E Tshard, Prof V Thebe, Ms B Tsebe, Ms D Mokalapa

**Research ethics committee approval**

**Enq cllr manyama**

**Cell 0788867973**

**Email [mothipamanyama311@gmail.com](mailto:mothipamanyama311@gmail.com)**

**Ward 04**

**Greater Letaba Municipality**

**2021 /04 /07**


**To whom it may concern**

**RE - PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY IN Ga-KGAPANE**

This letter serves as permission for Ms Babsy Shilubane to conduct a study in the community of Ga-Kgapane. The permission grants Ms Shilubane access to the community, and to conduct interviews with community leaders and members. Ms Shilubane can tour the community and is allowed to take pictures of physical and infrastructure.

Sincere,

Cllr Manyama



**Community Permission**



UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

## Memorandum of Agreement for Academic Supervision of Postgraduate Students

*This document should be read in conjunction with the following University of Pretoria policy documents:*

*This document should be read in conjunction with the following University of Pretoria (UP) policy documents:*

- the **University of Pretoria General Regulations** applicable to postgraduate study (G.16 to G.61),
- the **University Code of Ethics for Research**,
- the **University Plagiarism Policy**,
- the **Policy for the Preservation and Retention of Research Data**,
- the **Intellectual Property Policy**,
- the **Guidelines for Postgraduate Supervision and**
- the **UP Declaration of Originality form**.

### **IMPORTANT:**

- These documents are all available on the university of Pretoria web site (<http://www.up.ac.za>) and on request from the Registrar's Division.
- Students are expected to read them and to ensure that they understand the content.
- Clear mediation mechanisms are available to deal with any grievances, personal problems or disagreements that may arise between a postgraduate candidate and the supervisor.
- (Refer to the General Regulations and Information of the University of Pretoria pertaining to the **Student Communication Channel**, Section B.15).

### **Memorandum of Agreement between Postgraduate Student and Supervisor**

Name of student:	Babsy Shilubane
Student number:	21213250
Email address:	babsyshilubane@gmail.com
Degree:	MSocSci in Development Studies

Department: Anthropology and Archaeology  
Faculty: Humanities

**Name of supervisor:** Prof Vusilizwe Thebe  
Email address: vusi.thebe@up.ac.za  
Department: Anthropology and Archaeology  
Faculty: Humanities

**THE STUDENT Babsy Shilubane accepts and undertakes the following roles and responsibilities:**

1. Reading, understanding and abiding by the relevant rules and regulations of the University (in particular, those in the policies listed above).
2. Working independently under the guidance of the supervisor and ensuring that she or he stays abreast of the latest developments in the field of study.
3. Developing, with the advice of the supervisor, and abiding by, a time schedule which outlines the expected completion dates of various stages of the research work and dissertation or thesis (See Supervisor section, #4 below).
4. Attending pre-scheduled meetings with the supervisor and being adequately prepared for these consultation sessions (See Supervisor section, #5 below).
5. Submitting proposals, reports and written work at times agreed upon with the supervisor.
6. Taking account of the feedback provided by the supervisor before subsequent submission of written work.
7. Undertaking to submit the dissertation or thesis within the prescribed time for the completion of the degree unless exceptional circumstances arise, and to plan accordingly.
8. Accepting responsibility for the overall coherent structure of the final dissertation or thesis and, as far as possible, submitting written work that is free of spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, and incorrect punctuation.
9. Undertaking to submit draft papers for publication, taking into account advice provided by the supervisor.
10. Informing the supervisor of any absence or circumstances that may affect the student's progress and schedule for completion.

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**THE SUPERVISOR Prof Vusi Thebe accepts and undertakes the following roles and responsibilities:**

1. Abiding by the relevant rules and regulations of the University.
2. Assisting the student in building knowledge and research skills in the specific area of postgraduate study and relevant to the level of the degree.
3. Ensuring that the proposed research project is feasible, of an appropriate level for the degree under consideration, and that the necessary resources and facilities will be available to enable the student to complete the research timeously.
4. Providing information on the conditions to be met in order to achieve satisfactory progress/performance and assisting with the construction of a written time schedule which outlines the expected completion dates of various stages of the research work.
5. Being accessible to the student by attending meetings in line with a schedule agreed upon in advance by the supervisor and the student, and being prepared for the meetings.
6. Implementing an arrangement for student supervision in cases where the supervisor is away from the University e.g. sick leave, sabbatical leave, or leaves the employ of the University, and communicating these arrangements to the student timeously.
7. Accepting submission of written work at intervals agreed on by the student and supervisor, providing constructive comment and criticism within a time frame jointly agreed on at the start of the research, and informing the student, in writing, of any inadequacy relating to progress or work, in relation to the expectations previously agreed on by the student and supervisor. (In general, feedback should be provided within one month).
8. Assisting the student with the production of the dissertation or thesis, including providing guidance on technical aspects of writing and discipline-specific requirements.
9. Assisting with the publication of research articles as appropriate and ensuring understanding regarding the ownership of research results in accordance with the University's policy on intellectual property.
10. Contributing to the student's academic development by introducing her or him to relevant academic and professional networks through conferences, seminars and other events where possible.

#### **THE STUDENT and THE SUPERVISOR:**

1. Confirm that we have read and understood this Memorandum of Agreement;
2. Confirm that we have discussed and agreed on authorship of publications emanating from the project and understand that this must be agreed before any articles are submitted for publication;
3. Confirm that we have discussed and agreed on matters related to intellectual property and how it will be dealt with in future;
4. Understand that in the event that the student fails to maintain satisfactory progress, consultation between supervisor and student will take place and a warning letter from the Dean, and/or probation may result;
5. Understand that if satisfactory performance is not achieved after a probation period of three months, the supervisor may recommend to the Dean that the registration is terminated;

6. Understand that the student may appeal (in writing) the termination via a process of appeal to the Vice-Principal responsible for Research and Postgraduate Education;
  7. Agree to accept the content of the Memorandum of Agreement for the duration of the period of study, in respect of the degree as specified below.
-



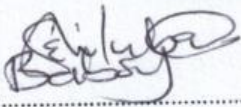
**RECORD OF AGREEMENT ON PLACES AND DATES OF MEETINGS,  
MILESTONES AND DEADLINES**

*(to be completed at the time when the Agreement is signed)*

AGREED MILESTONES (AND RELEVANT NOTES)	PLANNED DATE FOR COMPLETION	DEADLINE FOR COMPLETION
Complete draft	15 December 2021	03 January 2022
Attend to comments	28 February 2022	28 February 2022
Submit final draft	30 March 2022	30 March 2022
Submit for editing	15 April 2022	15 April 2022
Submit for examination	30 April 2022	30 June 2022

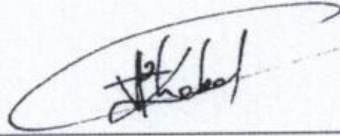
Name of student: Babsy Shilubane  
 Student number: 21213250  
 Degree: MSocSci. in Development Studies  
 Department: Anthropology and Archaeology  
 Faculty: Humanities

Signed at Pretoria..... on 30 November 2021..... (date)

Student's signature:  .....

Name of supervisor: Vusi Thebe.....

Supervisor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Name of co-supervisor:.....N/A.....

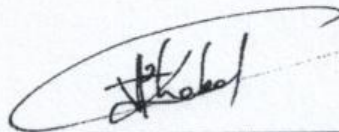
Co-supervisor's signature:.....

Provisional date for thesis / dissertation submission: 30 March 2022.....

Date Forwarded to the Head of Department:

.....

Signature of receipt by Head of Department: \_\_\_\_\_



.....

Signature of receipt in Dean's Office\* .....

**ATTACHMENTS REQUIRED:**

1. Plagiarism Policy Agreement
2. Declaration of Originality

# UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

## PLAGIARISM POLICY AGREEMENT

The University of Pretoria places great emphasis upon integrity and ethical conduct in the preparation of all written work submitted for academic evaluation.

While academic staff teaches you about referencing techniques and how to avoid plagiarism, you too have a responsibility in this regard. If you are at any stage uncertain as to what is required, you should speak to your lecturer before any written work is submitted.

You are guilty of plagiarism if you copy something from another author's work (e.g., a book, an article, or a website) without acknowledging the source and pass it off as your own. In effect you are stealing something that belongs to someone else. This is not only the case when you copy work word-for-word (verbatim), but also when you submit someone else's work in a slightly altered form (paraphrase) or use a line of argument without acknowledging it. You are not allowed to use work previously produced by another student. You are also not allowed to let anybody copy your work with the intention of passing it off as his/her work.

Students who commit plagiarism will not be given any credit for plagiarised work. The matter may also be referred to the Disciplinary Committee (Students) for a ruling. Plagiarism is regarded as a serious contravention of the University's rules and can lead to expulsion from the University.

The declaration which follows must accompany all written work submitted while you are a student at the University of Pretoria. No written work will be accepted unless the declaration has been completed and attached.

Full names of candidate: Babsy Shilubane

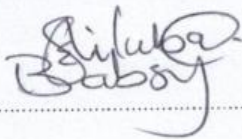
Student number: 21213250

Date: ...30 November 2021.....

### Declaration

1. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.

SIGNATURE



OF

CANDIDATE:

SIGNATURE

OF

SUPERVISOR:

This document must be signed and submitted to the Head: Student Administration within two months of registering for the research component of the programme.

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**  
**DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

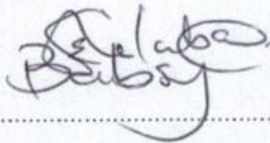
This document must be signed and submitted with every  
essay, report, project, assignment, dissertation and/or thesis.

Full names of student: Babsy Shiubane

Student number: 21213250


**Declaration**

1. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.
2. I declare that this Dissertation..... (eg essay, report, project, assignment, dissertation, thesis, etc) is my own original work. Where other people's work has been used (either from a printed source, Internet or any other source), this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements.
3. I have not used work previously produced by another student or any other person to hand in as my own.
4. I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.



SIGNATURE OF STUDENT:.....

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR:.....

Initial – Student	
Initial – Supervisor	