

# The church and poverty alleviation

## The challenges for Congo Evangelistic Mission

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### Abstract

This study<sup>2</sup> utilised the qualitative methodology in which individual data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews to investigate the challenges facing the Congo Evangelistic Mission (CEM) in its attempts to alleviate poverty in the city of Lubumbashi. The findings of this study revealed that the CEM's ability to respond to poverty problems in Lubumbashi holistically is hampered for the most part by individualistic, structural and fatalistic perspectives that underly perceptions of the causes of poverty that shaped the mind of the people. Consequently, the CEM's intervention in alleviating poverty was found to be insignificant as it was limited to sporadic instances of assistance for the needy. For the CEM to play an active and vital role in tackling poverty, it needs to re-evaluate the theology of missions by expressing the concern for the poor and working towards life transformation.

**Key words:** Congo Evangelistic Mission; poverty; life transformation

### 1. Introduction

The fight against poverty in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is one of the significant challenges of the twenty-first century. This situation is exacerbated by a wide gap between supply and demand for social security (GPRSP 2, 2013:81). The same source indicates that, given the vast needs and fragmented response of many stakeholders, the percentage of people who receive some social assistance is insignificant (state, NGOs, international agencies, churches, grassroots communities, associations of vulnerable groups).

Poverty is an overly, multivalent phenomenon. It can affect a person, family or community for a variety of parameters (Wright, 2004:169), and these vary by region. In Europe, for example, the causes of poverty are the loss of jobs and economic stability, also the falling adjustment of living standards shared by a growing number of Europeans, including the middle class (Council of Europe, 2013:13). Whereas in Africa, the listed causes of poverty include low and stagnant economic development, weak African political structures, corruption, maladministration, eth-

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nic conflicts, inadequate health care and sanitation, and low educational standards (Kakwata, 2018:22).

Poverty is generally defined as a situation in which human needs are not sufficiently satisfied (Jones, 2006:120). It is understood as the lack of economic resources that prevent people from living a decent life (Lötter, 2008:19). The CEM's pastors interviewed for this study shared this real understanding of poverty. The reason is that local people have dynamic ways to define poverty informed by their past, present and future lives (IPRSP<sup>3</sup>, 2002:9).

The CEM is a Pentecostal denomination founded by English missionaries William F. Burton and James Salter in 1915. It traces its roots in the Pentecostal movement that started in 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles California on 9 April 1906 and which spread across North America and Europe during the early years of the twentieth century (Garrard, 2008:1). In 1915, as Garrard indicates, Burton and Salter arrived in Elizabethville (now Lubumbashi since 1967) during the colonial era (1885 to 1960) after they regularly attended Bible studies under Thomas Myrscough, the founder of the Preston Pentecostal Church. They settled in Mwanza in the centre of Katanga province where they established the first station.

Over the subsequent decades, the CEM has grown substantially, and churches have sprung up across the region, new stations have been established, and a senior pastor oversees each station. The church Burton planted 103 years ago continues to grow, and it has become one of the leading Pentecostal denominations in the region. It has thrived to plant 65 stations and over 5,000 local congregations (Womersley & Garrard, 2005). Following the country independence from the Belgian colony in June 1960, the public administration was ceded to the indigenous people – Christian organisations also followed the example (Garrard, 2008:70). It was with this in mind that the administration of the church was handed over to the local people.

The CEM is a Pentecostal denomination, and it came into being owing to the English missionaries eager to bring the Gospel of Christ, which was not yet known to the people of the Congo. Although the invasion of Africa is subject to much criticism as a result of the abuses committed by colonisers, it should be acknowledged that colonialism is an essential factor that facilitated the implementation of missions in Africa.

The city of Lubumbashi, the second largest in the DRC, is located in the South-eastern part of the DRC. It is the capital of the upper Katanga Province. It served as the centre of a crucial metallurgical industry in the region owing to the presence of *Gécamines* (the prominent state-owned mining company) before its decline in the 1990s (Kisangani & Bobb, 2010:318). Presently, the city grapples with the escalat-

<sup>3</sup> Interim poverty reduction strategy paper.

ing and deleterious problems of poverty and human suffering. As Tambwe (2010:8) aptly observes, Lubumbashi is characterised by an extreme economic crisis at a time of rapid population, growth and urban poverty. The city's persistence of poverty raises relevant questions, not only about the government's role, but regarding the part of churches and theology.

The fight against poverty is the collective responsibility of all humankind, particularly religious organisations in developing countries such as the DRC where it is most pervasive. The principal commandment of Jesus Christ hinges on the love of God and the love of neighbour. This same principle formulates the mandate transferred to the church to devote itself to the mission of poverty eradication.

Against this background, this study investigates the challenges the CEM encountered in its attempt to respond to the crippling problems of poverty facing the city of Lubumbashi. To achieve this goal, the study tries to identify the CEM's perceptions of the unfortunate situation in Lubumbashi city. On the basis of these perceptions, the study examines the actions taken by the CEM to tackle the problem of poverty and establishes the extent to which the church is involved in such programmes. Finally, the study suggests some practical guidelines that can assist the CEM to overcome the difficulties it is facing in its mission to alleviate poverty in Lubumbashi. Although the survey is firmly contextual (limited to Lubumbashi), the principles that emerge would prove indispensable to other urban environments around the DRC and the sub-Saharan region.

## **2. The theology of mission-related to poverty**

There is a relationship between mission and poverty, and it is an exciting subject. It allows researchers and practitioners to understand the purpose of the church around the world, and particularly in Africa, in the face of the persistent cycle of poverty. The mission is God's heart for the world. As the Scriptures testify, God is on the mission. He has been on the mission of fulfilling His purpose throughout history, glorifying His name, establishing His realm, and reconciling the world to Himself. In the words of Wright (2013:22), God of purpose engaged to achieve that objective universally, embracing Israel, the nations, past, present and future. The mission is now the church's dynamic function of bringing the good news of salvation to the world's end. The socio-humanitarian mandate of the church is linked to this mission. In the context of teaching the good news of God's Kingdom, the relationship between the socio-humanitarian and the evangelistic mandate of the church can be perceived.

A solid theological foundation of mission-related to poverty can be found in the Old Testament, particularly in the Pentateuch. The Bible teaches that God is good (Exodus 34:6). As such, He expressed His deep concern concerning people who are poor,

helpless, abandoned, marginalised, widowed, orphaned, and the aliens throughout the Scripture. Therefore, those who are in fellowship with Him must also manifest goodness and love. Therefore, a believer who loves God must be loving and merciful in his relationship with others. The Apostle James puts it clearly when he says, "This is the religion that God our Father accepts as pure and without fault: to look after orphans and widows in their distress ..." (James 1:27). This verse suggests that there is no religion without caring for the poor. That is why the mission is not limited to saving souls, but to healing all kinds of wounds and anguish that overwhelm people.

A holistic conceptualisation of the church's mission, therefore, requires concern for the spiritual and physical needs of people and the salvation of all creation, which weeps for redemption (Kalu, 2008:135). Similarly, August (2010:43) reiterates that the quest for salvation should not be understood solely in spiritual terms, rather it should encompass all aspects of human life, such that, it changes relationships, living conditions of people, structures and the world.

Thus, the mission of the church and mainly the CEM is to address the country, social, cultural and economic devastation that brought so much suffering on the population. To promote spirituality, to protect the poor and to defend the oppressed. As Bosch (2011:320) stipulates, the missional dimension of the church, however, evokes intentional, that is, direct involvement in society; it moves beyond the walls of the church and engages in missional concentration points such as evangelism and work for justice and peace.

From that perspective, the CEM should be at the forefront of missional commitment and action in the field of evangelism and social promotion. The CEM does not exist on its own but for the Congolese society in which it is established since 1915. For that reason, the good news she preaches cannot be relevant as long as it does not address the real problems people are facing daily and liberate them from spiritual and physical impediments. As part of its evangelistic mission, the CEM must devise new strategies to make its mark in the fight against poverty in the city of Lubumbashi, the entire DRC, and beyond.

### **3. Research methods and design**

The exploratory nature of this study necessitates the use of the qualitative methodology. This approach is best suited to the study because it enables an in-depth evaluation of subject materials. During this study, a non-probability sampling design, correctly the quota sampling, was utilised. In this type of sampling, the researcher selects the most viable respondents to obtain necessary information and to answer the research questions.

According to June 2016 statistics, the CEM in the city of Lubumbashi currently comprises approximately 300 local congregations, which means that the church

boasts of 300 ordained pastors and about 50,000 members under its auspices (Bondo, 2017:109). As a representative sample for the study, approximately three or four pastors were selected from each of the city's seven locations. Thus, a small sample of 26 pastors (both full and part-time service) were selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the conversation, each participant was asked to sign the informed consent form, and during the interview, the researcher posed a series of questions and themes even though the exact wording of the questions were not strictly used because of language differences. The research focused on three variables: the CEM's perceptions of poverty (its understanding of the rampant poverty in the city of Lubumbashi), the CEM's involvement in poverty alleviation [what the church is doing (or has done) to tackle the issue], and its challenges (the difficulties the CEM encountered while addressing the problem). The interviews were conducted between April and May 2013 and lasted for over a period of two months. Approximately four meetings were scheduled weekly; each meeting lasting between 30 to 40 minutes and was tape-recorded with the permission of the participants.

The analysis of qualitative data collected during the field research was based on Creswell's method (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014:160, 61), which comprises of the following four steps:

- Data were organised using a computer database. Large bodies of text were broken down into smaller units, in the form of individual words;
- The entire text was reviewed several times to get an overall sense of data, and the primary interpretation was written;
- Data were grouped into themes and sub-themes, and their meanings were uncovered;
- Data were integrated and summarised for the reader.

The research followed an inductive course of reasoning, which moves from specific facts to a general conclusion (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014:160). It means that the conclusions drawn would be valid for other local congregations in the region.

#### **4. Perceptions of the causes of poverty**

Perceptions of what constitute the causes of poverty vary from one society to another (Asian Development Bank, 2011:16). It is an essential element that influences the attitude and level of involvement of people in the respective poverty reduction measures (Namukwaya & Kibirige, 2014:1). Therefore, respondents were asked the following question in an attempt to explore the understanding of the origins of poverty: What do you think is at the root of Lubumbashi city's poverty persis-

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<sup>4</sup> This article has taken into consideration exclusively relevant questions used in the interviews and questionnaires. The full range of questionnaires and notes on interviews are available from the author.

tence? The respondents' responses may be classified into three categories, namely individualistic, structural and fatalistic poverty perceptions of poverty (Campbell & MacLachlan, 2001:410).

#### 4.1 Individualistic perception

The individualistic explanations (sometimes called the fundamental attribution error) place the responsibility for poverty on the behaviour of poor people (Campbell *et al.*, 2001:410). For Calnitsky (2018:1, 2), such theories blind our poverty account explanatory capacity because it lacks a macro-level evaluation on the subject.

Yet the individualistic explanations are attractive because they are more straightforward than structural theories and are often strengthened by our everyday experiences. For example, some respondents (Revs. B,<sup>5</sup> G, W, and Y) postulated that the reasons for the impoverishment could be attributed to an individual's laziness (or laxity). These participants deplored the attitude of the Congolese people who refuse to work but prefer to obtain resources quickly like manna in the desert. They remarked that even though the country is extremely rich in natural resources, the minerals will not emerge from the ground automatically; its retrieval requires arduous efforts. Therefore, they opined that people must work to harness the resources available to them for their betterment.

Regarding the role of laziness in perpetuating poverty, Wright explains (2004:169) that poverty is a complex phenomenon that is attributable to a variety of factors. He contends that from the Old Testament perspective, destitution can be explicitly a direct result of sheer laziness. For example, Proverbs 20:13 admonishes, "Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake, and you will have food to spare" (NIV). This verse implies that laziness breeds poverty, while hard work is the key to economic well-being. Laziness is; therefore, a state of mind Congolese people should be liberated from to fight against poverty. For example, the DRC is a vast Central African country with plenty of rain and good soil to cultivate. Food security cannot be achieved despite its high potential for agriculture. The basic food commodity, maize flour, is mainly imported from neighbouring Zambia. Whenever Zambia closes its borders, the city of Lubumbashi in particular, plunges in a severe shortage of maize flour and the price escalates out of control.

Another argument respondents postulated associated with the individualistic perception is that poverty is a consequence of personal sin and unfaithfulness in tithing. Rev. B argued that sin and Godlessness are the precursors of lack in people's lives. To support his view, Rev. B referred to Genesis 3:16, which discusses the downfall of humankind due to sin, and the consequent punishment of toiling to eat.

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonyms to prevent the disclosure of the interviewees' true identities.

Other respondents (Revs. S and O) suggested that many Christians have reneged in honouring God with their tithes and offerings. In their opinion, the situation has affected the church's finances severely and led to poverty amongst believers. Referring to Malachi chapter 3 where the Lord warned His people about neglecting to give their tithes and offerings, the participants (pastors) argued that tithing and offerings are biblical conjunctions that should be adhered to by Christians. To buttress this stance, Rev. O insisted that some people in the congregation are abundantly blessed (faithful tithers) amid the widespread poverty in the city.

This section is not intended to scrutinise the theology of sin either logically or in terms of its significant consequences. Nonetheless, it is critical to point out that this perception clearly reflects the influence of the prosperity gospel that regards poverty as the direct consequence of sin and this depicts a lack of a critical socio-economic analysis of the situation. Gifford (1993:149, 185) maintains that the problem with the prosperity gospel, however, is that it disregards the socio-economic reality of the poverty situation and falsely assures believers that wealth is their entitlement and has nothing to do with unjust structures. He rightly observes that the older generation of gospel preachers did not place much emphasis on tithing, but for modern preachers, it is almost the foci of their teachings. This attitude leads to what Kalu (2008:141) describes as aggressive and innovative fundraising strategies that contravene the traditions inherited from missionaries. The argument here is that the payment of tithes or the absence thereof is not a valid explanation for the socio-economic issue of poverty ravaging the city of Lubumbashi.

#### 4.2 Structural perception

The structural perception views society or its functioning as the cause of poverty (Alcock, 2006:39). In other words, the causation of poverty is attributed to structural reasons or socio-economic forces. Interestingly, Rev. A identified low remuneration as the primary cause of poverty in the city. He revealed that 80% of his church members were unemployed. In addition, for the working minority, the average wage-earning is \$60, and none of his church members earned up to \$500 (monthly) because they mostly engaged in small businesses such as selling charcoal, or palm oil as their means of subsistence. He argued that the deplorable state of the roads makes it difficult for small businesses to operate efficiently – this threatened these meagre sources of income. Thus, he queried how people could exist on such low-income levels. Rev. A's stance resonates with reports of *The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*<sup>7</sup> (GPRSP 2, 2013:34) household

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<sup>6</sup> \$ USA

<sup>7</sup> The benchmark document for any study of poverty in the DRC.

survey, which attributes the persistence of poverty to low remuneration, lack of jobs and infrastructure. Although there is a dearth of reliable and recent national statistical data on income poverty and unemployment in the DRC, and no current indicators of the actual extent of poverty in the country, it is estimated that 70% of the population lives in poverty (GPRSP 2, 2013:34).

Accordingly, the broader systemic economic failure precipitated by many decades of oppression and mismanagement in the DRC led to the downfall of *Gécamines*. Tambwe (2010:6) explains that the collapse of *Gécamines* significantly contributed to the escalation of poverty in the city of Lubumbashi. It is because for 85 years (1906-1991) the mining company was the primary employer of wage earners in the Katanga province and the leading producer of foreign currency in the DRC. Its decline in the early 1990s caused the dismissal of thousands of workers and the loss of livelihood for numerous households. Poverty such as experienced in the DRC is therefore structural and historical, and the oppressive governing system has exacerbated it.

Taking another viewpoint, Rev. A attributes the prevalence of poverty in the city to a paucity of love among believers. In other words, lovelessness is responsible for the escalation of impoverishment across the city of Lubumbashi and the entire country. Furthermore, Pastors (Revs. N and T) agreed that the lack of love was the root cause of the persistence of poverty in the DRC. These pastors maintained that the Congolese people do not love one another because selfishness is rife among the Congolese, people seek their interests, and the culture of sharing is non-existent. Myers (2011:145) reiterates this perception, and he describes the nature of poverty as being fundamentally relational. He explains that poorness arises when people's relationships with their fellow humans are dysfunctional, unjust, loveless, or oppressive. Arguably, sinful behaviour directed against other people through an oppressive social system breeds mass poverty. In a similar vein, Wright (2004:170) argues that impoverishment is created and its primary causal factor is the brutal exploitation of humans by other humans. For that reason, Wyngaard (2013:271) insists that to effectively eradicate poverty which continues to dehumanise millions of people around the globe, sinfulness in all its forms and at all levels must be eschewed.

### 4.3 Fatalistic perception

The fatalistic perception attributes the responsibility for poverty on bad luck or fate (Campbell *et al.*, 2001:410). In other words, privation is considered the result of forces or circumstances beyond anyone's control.

For example, two pastors, specifically Rev. H and Rev. Q, shared their views of poverty from three different points of view: mental, material, and spiritual. From the subjective point of view, they recognise poverty as a problem of low intelli-



gence, mentality and unprogressive perception. Rev. Q argued that poverty stems from ignorance – numerous people are poor without realising it. Similarly, Myers (2011:84) acknowledges that deprivation has to do with the mental condition of the poor or the poor self-image held by the poor themselves. Kalu (2008:212) alludes to this line of argument when he posits that religious values are necessary for creating a new state of mind that encourages discipline, hard work, and self-sustainability. From a material viewpoint, Rev. H and Rev. Q perceive poverty as life below the required minimum provision. Finally, from the spiritual angle, they described poverty as a situation of failure due to demonic bondage, a dark source or curse.

For Rev. G, poverty is best understood from two perspectives, namely the material condition of poverty and what he terms the spirit of poverty. He argued that poverty entails a lack of material resources, for example, lack of money, food, a job, clothes, or a house that could be temporary. From the spiritual perspective, Rev. G believes that the spirit of poverty operates within the spiritual realm as a spirit. According to him, demons are responsible for retaining people in a situation of lack, whereby affected individuals may acquire material resources such as money, but they would never utilise it constructively, or they could get a job but would lose it due to their actions or inactions. Rev. G concluded that a person possessed by the spirit of poverty is continuously in a situation of lack, in other words, demons (destructive supernatural beings) ensure that such a person is economically destitute and prevents them from progressing in life. Rev. G attributed this to the power of witchcraft. He insists that specific individuals or families fall into poverty because of the oppressive forces of witchcraft.

Kalu (2008:195) expresses concern about the doctrine of poverty and deplors the fact that modern Christianity blames demons for problems such as poverty. He believes that this approach to the issue of poverty reduces human responsibility. For Gifford (1993:299), the misguided modern preaching about poverty dismisses any contextual social analysis of the problem. Because of this, Freeman (2012:80) postulates that rising witchcraft discourses in Pentecostal churches relate to structural adjustment and to the impact of neoliberal economies, which in many African countries have resulted in increasing inequality, poverty, unemployment, and the collapse of the health care system.

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that the interviewed pastors portrayed diverse perceptions of the causes of poverty that are influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic beliefs, rational and irrational mechanisms, the world-view, the cultural context and the environment. These perceptions can be classified as individualistic, structural and fatalistic explanations that form the theoretical framework underlying opinions of the causes of poverty. In general, the Congolese people viewed poverty as constitutional and historical, worsened by the oppressive governance system.

The conclusion that is deducible from participants' perceptions of poverty is that: individualistic explanations blame the poor themselves, that they are lazy, or they do not pay their tithes and offerings – this explains their situation of lack. The structural reasons attribute poverty to external socio-economic factors such as mismanagement, dysfunctional political systems, and corruption. The fatalistic explanations relate poverty to causes such as bad luck or fate. The poor are in that situation because of unseen evil forces such as witchcraft. In addition, the study results analysed, revealed that these theories correlate with socio-economic variables, the standard of living, and education.

Further examination showed that participants who live in deprived areas are less probable to perceive poverty as a structural problem compared to those who live in the suburbs. The author discovered that educated participants perceived poverty as a problem linked to structure, whereas respondents who are engaged in spiritual warfare prayer perceived poverty as a fatalistic issue.

It is clear that the mindset problem is the common denominator for the different explanations of the perceptions of the causes of poverty. A mindset can be defined as “a mental attitude or inclination”, it is the amount of knowledge that someone might have, including ideals and beliefs about the world and oneself (Bosman & Fernhabe, 2018:7). It can also be understood as an infectious force permeating individuals and local communities, an assumption that life is filled with shortages, a mentality that it is hard to get things, painful to make money and there is no way to do better (Langille-Hoppe, Gonzalez & Maxey, 2011:179). In this context, it can be argued that poverty, as a mindset, results from the experience of deprivation; in other words, the situation that people find themselves in shapes their minds. Slagter (2009:260) reached a similar conclusion and argues that poverty perception is always mutable, influenced by present events and circumstances.

## **5. Church's involvement in poverty alleviation**

Regarding the church's involvement in poverty alleviation, Swart (2010:205) expresses a concern that theologians have not reflected enough on the church's mode of engagement required to deal effectively with issues of poverty and underdevelopment. Letegan (1995:218) describes this gap in development literature as a widespread structural deficiency — an apparent incapacity of theology for meaningful and active public participation. Thus, there is a need for a theological reflection on poverty issues to enable churches to embrace a useful role in the fight against these problems in society.

In the exploration of the involvement of churches in the fight against the pervasiveness of poverty in the city of Lubumbashi, two observations were deduced from

the participants' responses, namely the church's approach to poverty alleviation and partnership-building approach to development.

### **5.1 Church's approach to poverty alleviation**

The church is understood as a gathering of people who have been called from the secular world, which is the broader society to become God's followers (August, 2010:43-44). The latter insists that the church should be an instrument for poverty alleviation in society, this is due to the nature of the church itself as a building community, and its calling to care for the vulnerable.

In the same line of argument, August explains that the community finds its basis in the work of Jesus, which consists of setting man free from all kind of bondage. He further specifies that salvation should not be understood as being solely spiritual or only changing people's lives, but it includes all aspects of human life, it changes relationships and living conditions of people and communities, it affects the world. This suggestive fact demonstrates that the church has a significant role to play in the development of the community. The church can express concern for the poor because of its identity as a community of faith, and promote holistic development, based on justice, love and compassion, which underpin the divine call (Swart, 2008:120).

In comparison with the Roman Catholic Church and other Protestant denominations in the region, the early CEM missionaries did not anticipate social works and poverty alleviation as part of the evangelistic plan. Nevertheless, necessity forced them to participate in education and other social activities such as dispensaries, maternity nursing and printing (Garrard, 2008:77). However, pastors interviewed described the current involvement of churches in poverty alleviation as rudimentary. Due to the fact that congregations are limited to performing irregular, ad-hoc works of charity, for instance, most pastors affirmed that they organised unique offerings once, twice, or thrice a year to assist the poor, while others do so monthly. Sometimes the pastors hold special collections of material donations such as clothing or food items that are distributed to the poor. The level of assistance that the congregations provide seems minuscule in comparison to the magnitude of the problem of poverty, and pastors were aware of this situation. One respondent revealed that the CEM has a department of community development that has never been operational since its inception. He explained that although several congregations provide occasional assistance to orphans, widows, and the needy, there is no specific arrangement or programme within these congregations to consistently tackle poverty in the community.

Winter, Steve and Hawthorne (1999:588-589) explain four specific poverty alleviation strategies, namely economic growth, political advocacy, relief and trans-

formation development. Economic growth is based on the national economy and is outside the control of the Christian missions and churches. Political advocacy challenges government policy at all levels of civic life. Throughout the history of humanity, Christian missionaries and churches have been engaged in the relief strategy, although it is not development, it is appropriate for situations of emergency. It becomes harmful for development when used over a more extended period it generates dependency rather than sustainability. This state of affairs does not address the causes that create a cycle of poverty. The sustainable involvement in poverty alleviation, called transformation development, tackles long-term deprivation and fosters transformation within a community. It represents God's desire for the betterment of His people all over the world as seen in the Scriptures (Deut. 15:7, 1 John 3:17).

The Catholic role in this respect becomes relevant. It has a long tradition of social teachings, acts, and it has thrived in development activities. For example, apart from spiritually nourishing the needy, the Roman Catholic Church always supports the poor sustainably. The Catholic Church has built many schools and, hospitals, orphanages, older people and motherless children's homes, youth skills development centres, to name but a few. There is much the CEM can learn from the Catholic Church in the context of the DRC, but it has to comprehend the importance of partnership in development. It is at this point that the importance of collaboration in developmental activities should be emphasised.

## **5.2 Partnership building approach to development**

The partnership is not a new concept in the development field. It has been used worldwide for many years as one of the strategies to address issues of under development in various countries. In recent years, the practice of partnership has expanded dramatically and has been considered the critical element that bridges the gap between the developed and the underdeveloped and between the rich and the poor (de Gruchy & Koopman, 2008:123), and has thus become a global aspiration in different sectors. The concept of partnership refers to the co-operation or association of two or more people from various parties to address common societal aims. It involves a combination of their resources and competencies (Idowu, 2013:1819) to achieve common goals. The importance of partnership in development is also emphasised in the Millennium Development Goals, which has been superseded by the Sustainable Development Goals (Williams, 2014:6). It should be mentioned that poverty is a complex and a multi-dimensional phenomenon, and for that reason, joint action is needed for an effective fight against this rampart.

However, findings arising from interviews with 26 pastors of the CEM indicated that for several reasons, their congregations were not in partnership with other development agencies such as NGOs. Some interviewees identified the urgent need

of collaborating with NGOs that could fund their development projects, but they expressed uncertainty about where to start. Other pastors have tried to reach out to the NGOs but were unsuccessful. Another obstacle to their affiliation with NGOs, as noted by the interviewee, is the problem of selfishness. Favouritism was also described as an obstacle for the congregations' co-operation with NGOs, in the sense that those who lead the NGOs are more likely to support their relatives than others.

Furthermore, participants mentioned the issue of mistrust, particularly concerning the members or originators of NGOs as a factor deterring congregations from connecting with NGOs. Some leaders of NGOs have been proven to be crooked (they are dishonest and fraudulent); this has discouraged several pastors from co-operating with these organisations. Interviewees agreed to be cautious about collaborating with NGOs because of the unfounded fear that certain NGOs are sponsored or run by Satanists, homosexuals, criminal personalities, etc. For instance, one interviewee argued that churches could not collaborate with NGOs without having full knowledge of their foundations. He maintained that they would readily associate with NGOs that are founded on Christian principles. Other pastors interviewed stressed that soliciting assistance from NGOs led by Satanists is tantamount to directly requesting help from Satan or it would amount to depending on other people or institutions, rather than God. It makes sense, given that most churches expect more from these NGOs, and this could lead to dependency, which perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Yet, a study done by De Gruchy and Koopman (2008:123) meaningfully confirms that mutual trust and faith between partners are crucial elements to build a partnership to address the challenges of poverty and promote social development.

After having examined the challenges of partnership in development, the next section focuses on the church's problems in the fight against poverty.

## **6. Church's challenges in the fight against poverty**

The church's involvement in poverty alleviation is not a new phenomenon. As Bowers (2010:261) specifies, "Social action has always accompanied Christian mission as either an explicit part thereof or an intended by-product of mission." August (2010:47) also argues that involving the church in the situation of the poor is not a Christian doctrine option, but a biblical command. In other words, the church is also called in addition to preaching, teaching and healing, to express compassion, to serve and defend the poor.

The DRC is facing one of its biggest challenges, extreme poverty which remains pervasive and persistent (GPRSP 2, 2013:81). This situation, the same source specifies, is exacerbated by the significant difference between supply and demand for social security. In the sense that due to insufficient resources in the face of huge

needs, there is a small proportion of people covered by any form of assistance, and also sporadic interventions by government, international agencies, NGOs and churches. For example, the GPRSP 2 (2013:81) indicates that:

Only 9% of Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) benefit from foreign aid, 15% of children who have broken away from their families are catered for in an institution, and 86,000 are subsidised by particular types of social security and 42,000 people of independent means and pensioners receive provisions.

Thus, in its attempt to fight against poverty, the CEM faces various difficulties. The interviews conducted with pastors confirm the thesis that churches are faced with challenges of insufficient resources in their attempts to combat poverty in their communities. They acknowledged that many of their church members in the city of Lubumbashi were living in poverty, and some had even become beggars (Revs. D and F). These difficulties are precipitated by factors such as unemployment, low remuneration and lack of sponsorship. Most church members are unemployed, those who are employed earn low wages or are remunerated irregularly, and only a handful are involved in small businesses. This situation has left numerous families poor and destitute, and the church's finances have been affected as well. As a result, congregations comprise of multiple needy people who need regular assistance.

Presently, each CEM's congregation functions autonomously; therefore, each congregation takes its own initiatives to address poverty. However, the situation has left several leaders of local churches directionless because they are mostly uninformed about the crucial role and responsibility of the church towards tackling the challenges of poverty facing the city. Thus, each congregation is liable for raising its fund through member contributions, and the constitution of the church recognises tithes, offerings, and collections as resources and obligations that contribute to the proper functioning and operation of the church community.

Nonetheless, several participants (pastors) complained that the contribution of members is insufficient to cover the needs of the church since they do not receive financial support from the CEM's legal representative office. However, pastors are swamped with financial contributions which they must present to the CEM legal representative office. Rev. A lamented that the CEM's problem is that when it appoints a pastor, it doesn't provide him with a building or plot to build the church. Therefore, the pastor is burdened with the responsibility of retaining the congregants and sustaining the church financially. It is because "Pentecostals affirm that when the Holy Spirit calls and sends, He will supply the material need to fulfil the mission" (Kalu, 2008:141). In other words, when God gives the vision, he also induces the provision.

Participants reported that they work individually to meet their financial needs even though the constitution of the CEM mandates prosperous congregations to assist newer and less prosperous ones. They explained that the CEM raises funds through member contributions to finance different projects such as the construction of the church building. However, they complained that these contributions were insufficient for solving the problems of the church and initiating development projects. They proposed the creation of alternative sources of revenue, such as agriculture and building schools, which equally require financing.

Furthermore, it was noted during the research that among all the pastors interviewed, only Revs. I and V mentioned prayer as a strategy for combating poverty. The importance of prayer in eradicating poverty is underlined by Job 29:16 in the following terms, "I delivered the poor who cried for help and the orphan who had no helper" (NASB). De Klerk (2005:347) observes that during worship services, the needs of people in situations of extreme poverty are rarely prayed for or mentioned. Hence, he advocates "intense supplicatory and intercessory prayers to God in favour of the poor." He urges believers to ask God to open the hearts of those who are financially incapacitated in the church to assist the poor.

From the above preceding, it is evident that the CEM is facing various challenges in its endeavour to alleviate poverty, amongst a lack of funding, poor leadership, planning and coordination, poor social analysis. As a result, its involvement in the fight against deprivation is described as rudimentary.

As mentioned earlier, there is a gap in the development literature regarding the mode of involvement of the church in poverty alleviation. Hence, the necessity to provide a formal theological framework as a mechanism for development initiatives. Such a paradigm, however, offers a distinctive incentive for development derived from an ontological explanation of salvation and an evolutionary goal of the kingdom theology.

The ability of the CEM to respond holistically to the challenges of poverty in the city of Lubumbashi is, for the most part, hindered by individualistic, structural and fatalistic perspectives on poverty. Consequently, the role of the CEM in poverty alleviation was found to be negligible, restricted to intermittent instances of aid for the poor. There seems to be a discrepancy between the socio-humanitarian and the evangelistic mandate of the church. However, the two commissions are interconnected; they are an integral part of the church's missional calling, to do one is to do the other. It is based on Jesus Christ's great commandment to love God and one's neighbour. This same principle formulates the mandate entrusted to the church to dedicate itself to the mission of alleviating poverty. For the CEM to play an active and vital role in reducing poverty, it needs to reassess, the theology of missions by voicing the concern for the poor and working toward the transformation of lives.

## 7. Practical proposals

Based on the preceding discussion, the pertinence of the church's involvement in combating poverty cannot be overemphasised. For example, *The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Poverty reduction strategy paper*<sup>8</sup> (GPRSP 2, 2013:81) recognises the role of churches in fighting poverty as part of their mission. However, the CEM is faced with many challenges when it comes to tackling the problem of poverty, amongst financial difficulties, lack of co-operation or partnership, and mindset problems. The conclusion drawn from CEM pastor interviews is that poverty, as faced in Lubumbashi City, is mostly a mental problem.

Just as the old general opinion of the Congolese people suggests that for a meaningful transformation to take place in the country, the people's mindset needs to change. A mindset can be influenced and fixed, but it is not a once-off initiative, it is a process. It must be strengthened and exercised through specific sermons, preaching, religious literature and films made by Christians. First, people need to be taught to acknowledge their negative attitude. This approach will encourage them to change their way of thinking, which will also transform their entire life.

Regarding financial issues, it was noted that many congregations are destitute; they face financial difficulties. The money raised is not sufficient to cover the church's needs and to instigate development projects. The church needs to establish self-financing strategies such as inter-parish tontines (called stokvel in South Africa). A tontine is a form of saving that allows you to receive a portion of the saving after a given period. Many people resort to tontines in the city of Lubumbashi to overcome financial constraints, and it produces excellent results.

Administratively, a station in the CEM is typically sub-divided into sections of at least five to twelve parishes, and each section can practice tontine to solve the financial difficulties that paralyse the church's development activities. Tontine practice can extend to a station. For example, Lubumbashi station alone has 300 parishes. The author assumes that if the inter-parish tontine is implemented efficiently, congregations that are trapped in the vicious circle of poverty will be released, and each congregation will have enough money to finance development projects. Similarly, interparish tontine practiced can help fund school building and productive activities. It is also necessary to organise people in entrepreneurship at the individual level so that they can escape the cycle of poverty and suffering.

It should be mentioned that in the CEM, there is a lack of collective action to deal consistently with the problem of the poor. Poverty is a dynamic, multi-dimensional

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<sup>8</sup> The benchmark document for any study of poverty in the DRC.



phenomenon, and it cannot be addressed in isolation, the partnership is an excellent poverty alleviation strategy. Therefore, a collaboration between congregations and other denominations that thrive in development activities should be encouraged.

Finally, the CEM needs to hold unceasing prayers for the poor as a strategy to alleviate poverty alleviation. The CEM should continually ask God to touch the hearts of those who have the means to support the needy—also praying for the awakening of national consciousness that will change structures, living conditions and the socio-economic transformation for the well-being of the Congolese people.

## **8. Conclusion**

This article set out to investigate the challenges facing the CEM in its attempt to alleviate poverty in Lubumbashi. The findings of the study revealed that poverty is widespread in the city of Lubumbashi, and the pastors interviewed were aware of the situation and its adverse effects on the population. However, the pastors had divergent perceptions regarding the root causes of poverty in the city of Lubumbashi, and some demonstrated a myopic view of the concept of poverty and a lack of contextual understanding of the social problems facing their communities daily. Their perceptions of the causes of poverty correlate with individualistic, structural and fatalism views of poverty. Based on these opinions, it can be deduced that the poverty interviewees portrayed is mainly a problem linked to mentality. However, the study shows that CEM is neither practical nor theologically equipped to address the mentioned challenges. As a result, the CEM's involvement in poverty alleviation was found to be rudimentary, limited to sporadic incidents of assistance to the poor. Evidently, the involvement of churches in poverty alleviation merely entails a form of relief work that provides only a temporary solution to the problem of poverty. Whereas what is needed is a more sustainable involvement with poverty alleviation.

This situation holds a clear missional implication. It prevents the CEM from effectively fulfilling its holistic mission as a Pentecostal denomination, which is bringing hope to the church in times of uncertainties, transforming lives and communities. Therefore, for the CEM to be an active and significant role player in poverty alleviation, it must – as a matter of urgency – re-evaluate the theology of mission by re-emphasising its concern for the plight of the poor and work more proactively towards transforming lives. The theology of mission should guide the CEM to understand its role and responsibility in society. By doing so, the CEM will be able to devise new strategies to accomplish its missional function in complex situations. Although such an approach holds further challenges for the CEM, they would ultimately provide the fulfilment of serving the Lord holistically through the initiation and management of real transformation.

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