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The Role of Christian Churches in Entrepreneurial Stimulation

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Abstract:

Despite researchers' little interest on the role of church organizations on entrepreneurial stimulation this concept paper seeks to highlight the importance of religion in particular Christian church organizations in spreading not only the gospel of Jesus Christ but that of business formations or simply put entrepreneurship. Drawing inferences mainly from Christian denominations in Zimbabwe and the United States, the key roles they play in the arousal of the entrepreneurial appetite include education, creation of social and business networks, gospel on prosperity, contribution to the literature bank, business seminars and role modeling. While the effect of these deliberate efforts on entrepreneurial stimulation and orientation is commendable and evident it remains debatable whether the church members use these interventions at their disposal to create viable businesses. Undoubtedly though, the entrepreneurship development agenda will never be the same if the documented church efforts are understood and complemented by other partners. The question that needs further probe is whether fervent church goers are better entrepreneurs than those that do not go to church.

Keywords: Church organization, Entrepreneurial stimulation, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship development has been a topical issue having been initiated by past great thinkers like Adam Smith and Joseph Schumpeter. Concentration has been on finding and documenting strategies of influencing entrepreneurship activities. Entrepreneurship has been seen to be the new engine of economic growth. In this regard entrepreneurship authors and researchers have been falling over each other and even stepping on others toes in a desperate attempt to find the secret about this subject. Attempts have been made to understand the entrepreneur (one who undertakes to form a business) and why other people shy away from entrepreneurship. Authors have recommended divergent and convergent reasons that perhaps the risk taking propensity of individuals (Kihlstrom and Laffont, 1979), the cognitive process of opportunity evaluation (Keh et al, 2002), entrepreneurial intention of individuals (Krueger, 1993; Linan and Chen 2002, Malebana 2014, 2015) exposure to entrepreneurship education (Chimucheka, 2014) and unemployment (Evans and Leighton 1989a; Shumba, 2014) might perhaps increase the appetite to venture into entrepreneurial activity.

Some researchers and authors have delved into unfamiliar and less talked about territory-religion. For many people around the world, religious beliefs are central in their everyday life for religion provides the moral codes by which they live (Geertz, 1993). It is not surprising that researchers in entrepreneurship find it compelling to study the moderating effect of religion on the new venture creation process. Audretsch et al., (2007) using evidence from India concluded that some religions, such as Islam and Christianity, are found to be conducive to entrepreneurship. This observation was also buttressed by a different study in Greece using minority Muslims which concluded that religion influences the individual's entrepreneurial activity and that there is a strong relationship between religion and entrepreneurship (Papageorgiou 2012). A research by Emami and Nazari (2012) offers conflicting results.

Notwithstanding the fact that there is anecdotal evidence on the role of religion to entrepreneurship development this paper seeks to reveal some of the deliberate actions taken by Christian church groups to encourage entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

According to the Religious Population website, the world Christian population stood at 2.1 billion people in 2014 (almost at par with that of Muslim) constituting about 30% of the world total population. The Maps of the world website (www.mapsofworld.com/zimbabwe/facts) reports that Christianity is the dominant religion in Zimbabwe followed by over eighty-five percent of the population. The largest Christian denominations include the Anglican Church, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist and Methodist. It is important to note however that there is growing interest in Pentecostal worship. Pentecostal Christian groups are 'usually fundamentalist, that emphasize the activity of the Holy Spirit, stress holiness of living, and express their religious feelings uninhibitedly, as by speaking in tongues' (dictionary.reference.com). Examples of these organizations include Family of God Church (FOG), Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith Ministries (ZAOGA FIF), Word of Life Ministries, New Life Covenant and the Prophetic and Deliverance Church (PHD).

This paper seeks to posit the view that these church groups have a role to play in entrepreneurship development. The rest of this conceptual paper is arranged as follows, key words are defined as per their context followed by a brief analysis on the entrepreneurial intent. A number of church organization's direct and indirect initiatives that positively influence entrepreneurship activities are given and the recommendations thereof.

2. Contextualization of Terms

Church: As used in this paper, the church is a community of believers in the Lord, Jesus Christ (Okwueze, M. I., & Ononogbu, 2013). This church is also used in reference to formal organizations that are created to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ sustainably under the tutelage of a leader/ founder often called Senior Pastor, Bishop, and Apostle, Reverend or Prophet and advancing the Christian doctrine. Protestants, Evangelical, Orthodox communities are also included in the church dimension.

2.1. Zimbabwe

The Republic of Zimbabwe is a landlocked country located in Southern Africa and is bordered by South Africa to the south, Zambia to the north, Mozambique to the east and Botswana to the west. Its size is 390 757 square kilometers with approximately 1% of its surface area being water. According to ZIMSTAT in 2012 the population stood at 13 061 239. Formerly known as Rhodesia, Zimbabwe is a former colony of Great Britain and gained independence in 1980. English remains the official business language with Shona and Ndebele being the dominant other languages in use. Zimbabwe has an adult literacy rate of approximately 97%, one of the highest in Africa. Between 1980 and 2000 Zimbabwe enjoyed accelerated economic growth and this slowed and later culminated in serious economic crisis evidenced by unprecedented inflation levels. The local currency was later abandoned in 2009 with the adoption of multi currency system popularly known as dollarization (Shumba, 2014 pg 2).

2.2. Entrepreneurship

Notwithstanding the fact that 'entrepreneurship is in itself a complicated, ambiguous and changeable phenomenon, (Landstrom (2007:12), my working definition for entrepreneurship is 'any deliberate action by groups of people, communities or individuals in starting or engaging in business activities either formally or informally to make a profit'. Entrepreneurial stimulation refers to those deliberate attempts to steer or increase entrepreneurship activities.

3. Methodology

This is a concept paper though inferences are made using secondary data. Main sources of secondary are websites, newspaper articles and published papers. These are mainly used as a literature base and in some cases validating arguments raised. Primary data sources are mainly observation by the author in support of points of views under discussion.

4. Literature review

4.1. *The Intent to Start a Business: Entrepreneurial Intention*

Entrepreneurial intentions illustrate the 'extent of commitment directed towards the performance of the entrepreneurial endeavor of putting up a business for self employment (Roxas, Cayoca-Panizales, & De Jesus, 2007:65). It is the state of mind and self acknowledged convictions by individuals that they intend to establish businesses in future (Roxas et al, 2007; Thompson 2009; Malebana and Swanepoel, 2015). Consequently entrepreneurial intentions have thus been considered by many as a key element in understanding the firm or venture creation process. In this paper I conjecture that Christian church groups positively affect entrepreneurial intention.

The 2013 Global Entrepreneurship monitor report indicates that entrepreneurship intentions are higher in factor-driven economies where fewer good job alternatives are available and more necessity-based entrepreneurship can be expected. This view is also supported by Shumba (2014) and Sautet (2013)

Malebana and Swanepoel (2014, 2015) observed that there has been tremendous growth in entrepreneurial intention studies but scarce studies exist in South Africa and developing countries. Indeed there is meager research on this topic in Zimbabwe and glaringly so with respect to the role of the church in entrepreneurial orientation. Statistics on entrepreneurial intentions with respect to Zimbabwe have been missing in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor reports (see for example GEM reports for 2013 and 2014). This deprivation leaves Zimbabwean researchers anemic to crucial data and amputates efforts to contribute meaningfully to this exhilarating subject. Despite the lack of conclusive data on the entrepreneurial orientations of Zimbabweans, it is necessary to look at the factors that improve this orientation.

Apart from individual characteristics and structural conditions church organizations also favour entrepreneurship development. While few studies have been done in Zimbabwe on this topic this paper seeks to contribute to this subject by looking at the role of Christian church organizations.

5. Positive Contribution by Church Groups

5.1. *Social Networks an Essential Ingredient in Business*

Church gatherings undoubtedly create good networks for entrepreneurs, when congregates meet after service or other important social functions like funerals and weddings they not only pursue holiness but some discuss business deals as well. Many Pentecostal and non Pentecostal churches like Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith Ministries (ZAOGA FIF), Harvest House International, Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Roman Catholic Church and Reformed Church of Zimbabwe (RCZ) encourage social connections even outside church and have since introduced forums for Women, Men, Youth and Family to encourage these interactions. Interacting with others of the same religion cultivates shared values, which may include values conducive to entrepreneurship, Dougherty et al, (2013: 402). More precisely other denominations have taken deliberate steps to address the spiritual needs of entrepreneurs like

5.2. *The rise of Prosperity Gospel Preachers*

Prosperity gospel preachers shot into prominence in the 1980s with American televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart. Later on influential and inspirational speakers like TD Jakes, Joel Osteen and the late Myles Munroe emerged as proponents of this gospel. In Zimbabwe Emmanuel Makandiwa, Uebert Angel and Walter Magaya are some examples of influential and charismatic preachers. Despite the fact that there is meager research on the impact of these preachers on entrepreneurial orientation and self efficacy it is obvious that there have an influence on the development of an entrepreneurial mind set. It has been reported that these preachers also called 'man of God' or 'Prophets' hold sermons where hundreds of thousands of followers attend and sometimes fill church auditoriums with congregates. Mangena and Mhizha (2014:138) observed that 'the beguiling sermons hold the audience spellbound or captive as they emphasize physical and spiritual breakthroughs on issues of health and well-being, business development, employment opportunities, wealth creation and general prosperity'. Though the influence of these preachers on entrepreneurial stimulation might be anecdotal my view is that they have a positive influence in encouraging venture startups. Christians flock to church for many reasons and chief among them is to seek divine intervention for economic emancipation and be ushered into prosperity. It becomes scandalous though if churches promote wealth without suffering and working for it, Apostle Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3 vs 10: "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." Unfortunately the wealthy seeking congregates have been preyed upon by some unscrupulous and corrupt church leaders who take advantage of their vulnerability if not gullibility to enrich themselves by emphasizing on offerings as a key to unlocking the promised wealth. This kind of deception has been the prime reason why prosperity gospel preachers have received so much attention and criticism. Besides this backlash I still contend that today's churches deserve a sit among those individuals, groups and organizations who have contributed immensely towards entrepreneurial development.

5.3. *Evidence from some Bulawayo entrepreneurs*

Vakai Govore a Bulawayo entrepreneur who runs a transport (taxi and haulage trucks) business has attributed his success to God and the teachings of his spiritual father. Elton Vakira a 34 year old commodity broker who is a fervent member of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Zimbabwe church owes his wealth and entrepreneurial spirit to God and demands that his workers pray and sprinkle holy water before conducting business each morning. Julius Tapera (38) who runs a successful car sales and dealership business in Bulawayo is a Deacon with Word Of Life Church and said that he gains his inspiration from the word of God. The belief in the power of divine intervention is evident even as you drive and walk the streets of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe; testament to this is that many cars, office chairs, doors to office buildings bear stickers of church logos or that of the revered leaders. Phillip Phiri (40) a serial entrepreneur and an Elder at a Bulawayo church in Zimbabwe participates in church activities religiously and is ebullient about his faith. He is believes his entrepreneurial exploits have been aided by his church.

5.4. *Christian inspirational literature*

Education plays a pivotal role as an antecedent of entrepreneurial intention and a catalyst in arousing interest in venture creation (Malebana & Swanepoel, 2014 and 2015) Church organizations are providing this education formally and even informally in a variety of ways. Not only do church organizations preach about the Ten Commandments and righteousness but also business. This kind of education can be called unstructured and informal because sermons do not follow a known pedagogical sequence unlike college course outlines. However church leaders are contributing a lot through inspirational literature and are thus contributing immensely to the knowledge bank.

Joel Osteen a US televangelist has written so many books, in one of his books titled, *Your Best Life Now*, he emphasizes on 7 steps in realizing one's dream which are Enlarge Your Vision, Develop a Healthy Self-Image, Discover the Power of Your Thoughts and Words, Let go of the Past, Find Strength Through Adversity, Live to Give, and Choose to Be Happy. According to Larry Triveri Jr the book is encouraging and written in an optimistic manner which is relevant to personal growth.

A US author based in Arizona, Mathew Irons, an entrepreneur and believer wrote a book titled, *Upward Entrepreneur: How to Transform Your Start-up Business in 21 Days By Unlocking the Truth of God's Word (A Daily Entrepreneur Motivational Series)* which is dedicated to the Christian faithful. The book covers relevant aspects of entrepreneurship education that include customer care, overcoming fear, business planning, beating competitors and positive thinking.

The Good Reads Listopia websites lists more than 25 popular Christian books by various authors. This is indicative of the fact that there is unquestionable bias towards entrepreneurship in the Christian world. Some of these books include, See You at the Top by Zig Ziglar; The Richest Man in Babylon by George S. Clason; The Extremely Successful Salesman's Club by Chris Murray; The Go-Giver: A Little Story About a Powerful Business Idea by Bob Burg; The Greatest Salesman In The World by Og Mandino; The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership by John C. Maxwell; Entre Leadership: 20 Years of Practical Business Wisdom from the Trenches by Dave Ramsey; Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership by Laurie Beth Jones; Business Success Secrets, Principles, Formulas & Ethos: Your Primitive Business Guide To Giving Your Business The Greatest Chance Of Success (PrimitiveBusiness.com #2) by Daryl Urbanski; The Trust Edge: How Top Leaders Gain Faster Results, Deeper Relationships, and a Stronger Bottom Line by David Horsager; Ancient Secrets Of Lead Generation: Your Primitive Business Guide To Better Leads With Less Effort (PrimitiveBusiness.com #1) by Daryl Urbanski

A plethora of gospel inspired business literature is evidently present in many bookshops and even on the world's famous online bookstores like Amazon and EBay beside those listed above. This development goes on to buttress my assertion that churches play a significant role in entrepreneurship stimulation.

5.5. Business Fellowships and Seminars

As part of ensuring that churches encourage business formations and even growth, various church organizations have taken deliberate steps to encourage business growth. In this regard the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Forward In Faith Ministries (ZAOGA FIF) which is one of Zimbabwe's largest Pentecostal movement led by Apostle Ezekiel Guti established a ministry dedicated to business called Africa Christian Business Fellowship (ACBP). The ACBP allows members to share ideas, create partnerships where possible, seek divine intervention in their entities, participate in charity work and receive counsel from their patron who is the leader of the church.

According to a fervent member of Word of Life International a Bulawayo headquartered Pentecostal church believes that 'every member of the church must affect the sphere of the community that they live in, work in and interact with'. The implication of this vision with respect to business is very clear and encouraging because the church established a Business Fellowship Unit (BFU) to take care of the inevitable business needs of the congregants. The BFU offers a platform for business networking, idea generation, fund raising for the church or the needy, knowledge sharing and even targeted training sessions for entrepreneurs and potential ones. It is my resolve that these deliberate efforts by Churches to stimulate entrepreneurship must stimulate radical thinking and debate among scholars of the subject on the role of churches as antecedents for entrepreneurial development.

The Faith Ministries International church headed by Pastor Shingi Munyeza a known entrepreneur and business leader established a Business Forum led by Douglas Mamvura, a Marketer par excellence. According to the church website (www.faith-ministries.net), Business Forum is a: 'ministry dedicated to empower believers to start, build and consolidate businesses through the application of Biblical principles. We believe it is God who gives us power to create wealth, hence Christ is the foundation upon which our businesses our built. This ministry is all inclusive; your social standing does not matter as long as you have the desire and passion to get into business. It does not matter where you begin. The Bible says do not despise the days of humble beginnings. It is our belief that the Holy Spirit gives us the divine enablement to grow our businesses from humble beginnings to great empires'.

The objectives of the Business Forum's contributions to entrepreneurship are apparent and these are:

'to inspire and motivate believers to make use of their God given talents to develop successful businesses, to assist believers who want to get into business, to provide training on various business aspects such as marketing, book keeping, accounting, advertising etc and also to assist believers who are struggling with their businesses to get them out of survival mode into success and finally significance mode (Mamvura 2009 see also the church website on <http://www.faith-ministries.net/index>)

An article that featured on The Town Talk website reported that, the First Baptist Church in Pineville hosts "First@First" business leader luncheons on the first Monday of each month. These meetings have been reported to be a success with over 50 attendees since its launch in February 2015. Its leader Rev. Stewart Holloway has been quoted saying, "The vision was to have some impact on businesses, to offer encouragement for Christian businesses and offer some nuggets of truth they can apply," (Guidry 2015).

The evidence from ZAOGA FIF, Word Of Life, Faith Ministries and the First Baptist churches bears testimony to the fact that churches not only address the spiritual needs of individuals and communities but the business life as well. The quest by these and other churches to reduce poverty through firm creation cannot go unnoticed and unappreciated.

5.6. Business Inspired Sermons

It is not surprising to hear business testimonials given at church services in Zimbabwe. In one church service I attended a church elder spoke of how God intervenes in his thriving poultry business in Harare and how other members can emulate his success story. Business inspired sermons are not only found at seminars alluded to earlier but even at Sunday services. Testimonials are meant to encourage other congregates to venture into business with the convictions that God will bless and prosper them.

5.7. Giving as a Sign of Hard Work

Critics of the prosperity gospel crusade argue that God did not sign any spiritual contract with anyone and neither is he a celestial ATM (Beama and Chu, 2006). In this regard Christians must never anticipate getting quick riches by turning to God or giving at church. Despite this observation Christian are inspired and hold on to the promise presented in Malachi that says 'Bring all the tithes into the storehouse ... and try me now in this,' says the Lord of hosts. 'If I will not for you open the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.' It is not surprising to find people giving a lot of offerings as a

means of unlocking blessings from the Lord. Most of the congregants who give a lot are business people who would want to do well in their businesses.

In Zimbabwe the local media was awash with stories of a man who was suing a popular charismatic preacher domiciled in United Kingdom for fraud after he donated his Bentley car worth about USD300 000.00 with the hope of getting blessings trebling this offering which never happened. While it is evidently clear that the church plays an inspiring role to this generous giver (by instilling hope and assurance) little is known about the behaviour that followed with regard to entrepreneurial exploits.

The Herald (Zimbabwean) newspaper of 26 June 2015 reported that the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) would, 'soon tax churches and is working on a legislative framework for the purpose' (Machivenyika 2015). ZIMRA initiated this idea after it became clear that churches had surplus income a sign that congregates give generously and are blessed or determined to be. Other church organizations are operating for profit businesses for example ventures in dress making, poultry, pre-school education and real estate. This again supports my view that church members are efficacious people.

6. Conclusion

The deliberate efforts by different religious or church groups to stimulate entrepreneurial activities cannot go unnoticed by researchers and those interested in the field of entrepreneurship. Some of these interventions are education, creation of social and business networks, gospel on prosperity, contribution to the literature bank, business seminars and role modeling, advisory (by church mate) among a host of other contributions. Government departments, civic groups and development partners must seek ways to complement church or religious efforts to encourage venture creation and create the necessary infrastructural conditions that favour entrepreneurship. While this paper looked at the Christian community only, it will also be prudent and interesting to look at how other major religious groups like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Chinese Traditional influence entrepreneurship in different settings. Though I have suggested that church groups support and nurture entrepreneurs it will be explored in later researches whether the resultant entrepreneurship activity will be productive and systemic.

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