

# The Impact of Intra-Church Conflicts on Social Development with Particular Focus on the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** *This study was concerned with determining the impact of intra-church conflicts on social development projects, but focusing only on the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ). It examined the causes, types, effects of intra-church conflicts in MCZ and feasible resolution mechanisms were identified and adopted. Mixed- methods approach and the survey research design were used. Data was collected and generated through the use of questionnaires and interviews. The main cause of such conflicts, was found to be ineffective policy implementation which made it difficult to manage projects in the MCZ; namely, learning institutions (schools and training colleges), mission farms, funeral services, clinics and orphanage centres. Identified failed projects were Teacher's and Nursing's training colleges, Southern African Methodist University, Epworth District Hospital, Methodist Hospital in Southern Central African, Matthew Rusike Children in Mzinyati and Epworth Housing Scheme. The study recommends that the MCZ needs to be a role model, have strategic measures and revisit its projects policy implementation for the benefit of church and entire community.*

**Keywords:** development, intra-church conflict, Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and policy.

## 1. Introduction

The Methodist Church was founded in 1738 in England by John Wesley. The Church moved into Zimbabwe via South Africa led by Reverends (Rev) Isaac Shimmin and Owen Walkins, who travelled to Mashonaland in 1891. The mandate of the church is to ensure that it meets the spiritual and social development of the people of God in Zimbabwe.

MCZ promotes social development through the Sub-Committee of Development and Relief; Christian Social Responsibility Committee (CSRC). The CSRC's sole responsibility is to be sure that the Church fulfils the role of meeting the needs of all people in their local communities. Such needs are food, education, shelter, health services, clothing, employment and realisation of all human rights in fullness. The mandate is under the vision and mission statement of the MCZ [1]

The vision of MCZ is to become "An oasis of life, peace, justice and hope", while the mission statement states "we exist to transform lives, through biblical teachings and witnessing; nurturing believers into true worshippers of God, in a dynamic worship environment, genuine Christian fellowship and commitment to meet the felt needs of individuals and communities without discrimination" [2].

These are the tools for the Church to transform lives of people from a spiritual perspective and social development perspective through setting up of learning institutions, health centres, settlement areas and other social and profit making projects to meet all humanitarian needs. However, the MCZ does not seem to be fulfilling these expectations, partly owing to intra-church conflict. This seems to be a challenge to its social development business activities and the conflict appears to be on an upward trend. The researcher has observed that the most prominent cause of intra-church

conflict in the MCZ is ineffective policy implementation. There are more than 18 social projects in the MCZ, some of them having been established as early as the time of the birth of the MCZ in Zimbabwe in 1891 up to 2005, but 5 major ones were abandoned and 3 were shelved.

The projects that were abandoned were Methodist Hospital in Southern Central Africa (MHSCA), Teachers' Training Institute (TTC) in Chemhanza, Waddlove, Kwenda and Thekwane, Nursing Training College (NTC) in Waddlove, Matthew Rusike Children's Home in Mzinyati (MRCH-M), Mission Farms (MS) and Epworth Housing Scheme (EHP). Those projects which were shelved were Southern African Methodist University (SAMU), Epworth District Hospital (EDH) and Chitungwiza Vocational Training Centre (CVTC).

It is assumed that the existence of sour relationships in the Church undermines all efforts to serve Christ and win souls for the lord [3], church becomes weak and divided resulting in chaos and confusion setting in. The MCZ strives to address disagreements which negatively impacts on the spiritual growth, the numerical growth, financial viability which results in poor funding of the social development projects within the church.

Membership in the MCZ appears to be decreasing as members move to other churches and some are moving out to start their own churches. There are also other challenges like decrease in spiritual and financial growth for the Church. Decrease in spiritual growth happens if there is no stability in the church. If there is conflict, members of the church avoid attending religious fellowships which subsequently affects their relationship with their God. Decrease in spiritual growth is when the relationship of the church members with God is not in good standing. If members of the church are affected in their spiritual life they

do not give offerings, which cause the economic base of the church to shrink. As a result, this affects infrastructural development, which goes hand in hand with social development. Development is affected in such a way that whatever needs to be developed cannot succeed because of shortage of money; people from within the church will not support because of frustrations. It is against this background that the study sought to assess the impact of intra-church conflict on social development in MCZ.

## 2. Literature Survey

The review critically examined existing literature to enhance or contradict this article's assumption based on the subject of the impact of intra-church conflict on social development. Sources are books, journals, magazines, newspapers, internet, formal and non-formal publications, dissertations and other related literature like minutes or reports from formal meetings.

Conflict is "disagreement in opinions between people or groups, due to differences in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. In the business world, differences in such characteristics as work experience, personality, peer group, environment and situation, all lead to difference in personal attitudes, beliefs, values or needs"[4]. Hence intra-organisational/church conflict is that which is within the organisation.

In view of one of the scholars, there are certain points of tension in the Church, neither good nor bad in them carrying degrees of intensity and levels of importance needing study, reflection, discussion, and appropriate response, since any one of them can create a new future for the Church [5]. Causes of conflict are unqualified roles, unfair distribution of resources, misuse of power, discrimination, poverty and negative attitudes such as greed, selfishness, anger or superiority [6]. However, in other instances intra-church conflict can manifest due to how mal-administration in policy implementation, relationships, power struggle, theological and financial matters are handled.

It is stated that total membership for Methodists in 2009 was 112687 and in 2010 were 111734, showing a decrease by 953 which then predict less input in terms of ideas and financial support towards social projects. The economic development which is linked to finances of 2011 portrays a negative picture, for example, the trend of remittances to head office is as follows; Bulawayo East and West district 0%, Chinhoyi district 0%, Gokwe district 30%, Gweru district 21%, Harare Central 9%, Harare East district 0%, Harare West district 0%, Hwange district 0%, Kwenda 0%, Marondera district 0% and Masvingo district 0% [7]. The above trend of financial remittance shows the challenge of non-spiritual growth. If giving is as low as shown in the above this affects funding for accommodation for workers, training of ministers, learning institutions, medical institutions, transport, farming in mission farms and Church Buildings. In view of MCZ discourse "as a Church we are also in business; the business of winning souls for Christ" [8]. From another angle this does not sideline the issue of the developmental perspective since it is the vehicle to soul

winning. Quite a number of people who attended Methodist Mission Schools ended up being members of the MCZ.

Emphasis is put forth that ineffective policy implementation in the Methodist movement was and is of great concern [9] For instance, leadership appointment as per MCZ policy on the appointment of the bishop or presiding bishop (PB) is by ballot vote and by a clear majority cast [10]. With that regard, as an insider researcher this approach promotes campaigning which may leave the church divided in support of one against the other despite the fact that church is a faith based organisation which always communicates everything in prayer to God. It has been argued that serious crises with wide repercussions in the Fambidzano (Ecumenical movement of Zimbabwe Independent Churches) including Zion Christian Church, African Methodist Church, Zion Apostolic Church to name a few, arose over elections. Rev. Marinda versus Rev. Peter Makanda over the principals of Theological Education by Extension (TEE). Churches became divided because bishops needed a person who might be more assertive or responsive to their financial needs than the man already groomed by others who wanted to safeguard the future of the TEE programme [11]. Also, "the current tension in the United Methodist Church results from a gradual shift in the leadership role of bishops" [12]. This is the case with MCZ, had reflected that great controversy transpired during leadership appointment [13]. At Mutare Teachers's Training College conference, "recommend that the district bishops (DB) be assigned to circuits and cease to be full time officers" ([14], but was not attended to though it was on the agenda. That seemingly portrayed a silent intra-church conflict because that recommendation from the district was supposed to be dealt with forthwith by the Conference; the final decision making body in MCZ.

Internal fight can be exhibited when dealing with church projects due to lack of transparency consistency or any cause of misunderstanding as a result of ineffective policy implementation. It is evidenced by the absence of consistency in running social developmental projects when there is new leadership in the office. This implies that new administration introduce new project (s). In 1994 construction of Southern African Methodist University was proposed, but when PB, Rev. C. Mukandi came into office he introduced Epworth District Hospital, Chitungwiza Vocational Training Centre (CVTC) projects yet could not take off. When PB, Rev. S. Sithole assumed office he introduced Cluster Housing Project in Epworth and the commercialization of nine Church farms of the church as a result the former projects could not be completed and nothing was achieved [15].

Transferring of MCZ ministers is another reflector of poor handling of policy with of much controversy, "stationing committee shall not station a minister to a circuit for a period exceeding eight years" [16], but almost 75% of ministers are transferred before or after 3 years which is too short a period of time and cannot promote development as per policy's expectations. During transfer, if a minister feels that it was done to fix him or her that poses sour relationship between the minister and the management. This may translate to the philosophy that such victims cannot even perform well in the community being send to work in.

Organisation can suffer from mal-administration and objectives will never be achieved if not betrayed. MCZ assessed that leaders should direct and use money accordingly. Allegations “were raised against one of the ministers of religion who purchased a vehicle without the circuit’s knowledge and permission [17]. As a result the minister was transferred and was demoted to work under someone” [18]. Contrary, transfer of a problematic personal is to spread the inherited problem to another area. There is a similarity between M.C.Z and in Fambidzano in terms of mal-administration. Fambidzano faced internal misunderstanding over prioritising funds for their core business of training ministers, but diverted it to charity activities. Later on the other faction influenced the donors to stop funding and that affected the work of the organization [19].

“Relationships are key to developing trust and respect across cultural and racial lines” [20]. Indeed, relationships of mutual respect between pastor and people forms the basis for conferring pastoral authority on the pastor. In a reported case in the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe, when the same community fight each other there is likelihood of suffocating social development programmes as this can be witnessed in various organisations and churches have no exception [21]. In 2004-2005 relationships in MCZ were strained by power struggle as witnessed during pre and post-election period, a case of Rev. Dr. C. Mugaviri who was forced to withdraw from the post being appointed as PB in 2004 [22]. In those days the church travelled along rough path, leading to camps and clicks within the church, just in the Anglican Church had squabbles between Dr. Rev. N. Kunonga and Bishop Sabastain Bakare over leadership saga. This was exacerbated when Kunonga declined to leave the office and handing over church property to his successor (Bakare) leading to split of Anglican Church in 2007 [23]. From Marx’s perspective, competition leads to power struggle as evidenced in these two faith based organisations

Theological conflict within the church can prevail. In MCZ experienced issues of „mass prayer“, and the question of who to receive sacrament of Holy Communion subtly divided the church unlike of the intra-church conflict that pervaded the Anglican Church over theological debates on homosexuality [25]. Accountability and evaluation issues are generating considerable tension in the denomination [26]. In another report, costs for conferencing, transferring of ministers, committee meetings and stationery were seen as unnecessary expenditure [27], but the question is what is that which is necessary to be funded. However if the matter is not handled properly giving within the church can be affected.

Effects of intra-church conflict are outcomes after the organisation gone through the process of internal conflict. In this regard, focus is on spiritual, numerical, economic and social development. For development to take place, church members need to grow spiritually and numerically and later, issues of financing the project needs will not be a problem.

Some scholars submit in the understanding of spiritual growth coming as a result of fellowshiping together with others, but when that religious fellowship is characterised by internal conflict, the weak in faith become weary and back

slide. That can affect members’ performance in every activity in terms of development [28]. Also numerical growth can be affected by intra-church conflict, such as condemnation of one another’s spirituality or character due to differences over beliefs or commitment, absence of managing feuds in the church, unaccountable use of power, money, property or members. Naturally every human being loves to be loved despite the fact that he or she is doing the wrong thing, if condemned, might leave the church [29]. Statistically, it is projected that 2009 total membership was 112682 and in 2010 it was 111927 [20]. On the same note it had been observed that in Gokwe District, especially Kwe-Kwe, there is a breakaway group of people who started a new church known as Apostolic Pentecostal Methodist (APM). Negative spiritual and numerical growth affects giving as well as social development work [31]. The church ministries are developed through the stewardship of God’s people. That stewardship is a stewardship of service as well as stewardship of finances [32]. The clergy and laity have responsibility over it through properly managing finances that they accumulate through tithing and giving (Malachi 3:10). Without the tithes of God’s people, the church will not be able to carry out the Great Commission. In MCZ disappointment was raised due to failure to be liberated from the bondage of financial poverty, notwithstanding the existence of valid reasons and excuses. From 2005 up to 2012 the church had not received enough resources to meet its needs at all levels and our tithes and offering have always not been enough to cover operational expenses [33].

On social development projects, this is observed as infrastructure with activities that provide society with the services necessary to conduct daily life and to engage in productive activities [34]. In the MCZ expected projects to be viable were such as TTC, NTC, MHSCA, EDH, EHS, SAMU, CVTC and 10 MF; Kwenda, Chemhanza, Mdengezi, Waddllove, Pakame, Thekwani, Sandringham, and Moleli need financial support. But could not be as per the vision of the church. Social developmental projects are the corner stone of positive progress in education, health, living standard and the development of human resources of the societal people that indicates better position of the society than before [35]. Like in any other communities churches see it worthy to provide human needs in various forms.

When conflict happens there is need for an effective conflict resolution mechanisms to be implored. It has been observed that essential steps to conflict resolution are that; conflicts must be dealt with in the context of the overall relationship, improve relationship and produce mutual benefits [36]. An approach of peacemaking responses to conflict by overlooking an offence just as insignificant to warrant attention (Proverbs 19:11) thus act of forgiveness (Colossians 3:13), reconciliation as an approach to resolve the personal issue through confession, loving, correction and forgiveness (Matt 5:23-24; Gal 2:8-13; Matt 8:15) and accountability for promoting repentance, peace and justice (Matthew 18:17) [36]. Others advocated measures to reduce conflict through praying for God’s intervention (2 Chronicles 7:12-14), training for all leaders at different levels, establish strategic planning to guide new office bearers to continue with implementation phase of projects,

rather than identifying a project with an individual, upholding of the policy with justice to nip mal-administration, poor management of finances, corruption and campaigning during election period and considering love, forgiveness, tithing and giving, commitment and obedience (2Tim 3:16-17) [38], [39] and [40].

### 3. Methodology

The study used the mixed- methods approach and adopted the survey research design. A sample of fifty research participants were randomly selected from men and women members of the MCZ in Harare. Data was collected and generated through the use of questionnaires and interviews.

### 4. Findings

#### Majority of respondents stated that:

- There exists intra-Church conflicts in the MCZ;
- Ineffective policy implementation was the cause of intra-Church conflict in the MCZ;
- Internal church conflicts in the MCZ were said to be exhibited in meetings; Church, institutions, and fellowships;
- Intra-Church Conflicts in the MCZ occurred occasionally;
- Intra-Church Conflicts were unavoidable;
- Intra-Church Conflicts was beneficial to the MCZ;
- Out of a total of eighteen MCZ projects, Five ceased altogether;
- Intra-Church Conflicts needed high levels of intervention;

### 5. Discussion

As has been established by the study results, it is beyond reasonable doubt that conflict is ever prevailing having many rated causative factors such as ineffective policy implementation being the highest with 31%, maladministration 16 %, financial mismanagement 14 %, theological controversy 9%, leadership appointment 21% while others sources came to 3%. The noted facts are raised as well from the following sources; [6, 9, 15, 17, 19, 21 and 23], ineffective policy implementation being the main cause. All of these were simplified as relational, administrative, theological, power struggle and economic crises which cannot be run away from the organizations, but need intervention techniques.

The study submits that traits of conflicts were exhibited and rated accordingly; at meetings being on the highest with 31 %, followed by within the church 26 %, at institutions 21%, at fellowships 20 % while others is on a minor rating of 3 %. However, this presupposes that where ever people conflict erupts as identified in [14, 23 and 29]. As people display their knowledge and skills it's not universal to others hence that becomes the source of misunderstandings. The prevalence of the schism in the MCZ was identified to be as occasional and above 85 % and it has been acknowledged that 78% of the respondents admit its inevitability despite 22% of those were not clear on their position. However, this substantiate the notion that prevalence of instability has some negative effects towards development as reported in [15, 19, 22, 23, 26, 28 and 33]. In this case the misunderstanding in the MCZ has left unpalatable legacy as

noted in [35] that major projects abandoned were 5 (MHSCA, TTC, NTC, MS and EHP) while 3 (SAMU, EDH and CVTC) were shelved. Generally this might affect the smooth running of MCZ if generating projects are not functional and this increases the level of intra-conflict.

Though the study has shown the challenges faced by the MCZ it is time for it to appreciate that it is under siege hence it's time to address the all obstacles towards development for the benefit of itself and the community at large since it exists for others. Respondents hailed that intervention is needed as early as yesterday by 75% against the neutral of 25%. As in [35] intervention methods and strategies must be employed to manage the internal crises. As a faith based organization with two major tools of enhancing its operations that are Bible and constitution, they must be used to the best of satisfying God's pleasure. The church should do justice to its vision by promoting accountability, sound capacity building skill, good church governance after revisiting its constitution for sound amendments, constituting a council composed of the clergy and lay filled with the wisdom from the above and fostering good relationships through loving and forgiving as a way of inviting harmony. Where there is peace there is development.

### 6. Conclusion

It is clear from the findings of this study that intra-church conflicts exist in the MCZ; that such conflicts are exhibited in meetings, Church, institutions, and fellowships. The study found that the causes of such conflicts appear to be factors such as ineffective policy implementation and power struggle. While such conflicts may appear to be detrimental to the functioning of the MCZ, in reality, they are not only unavoidable, but necessary, for such conflicts encourage the Church and its membership to actively re-examine their way of doing things.

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