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Theology of Sustainable Development in Tanzania.¹ The Role of the Church in a Paradoxical Fast-changing society

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For more than two decades, *ujamaa* (familyhood) in Tanzania enjoyed the national and international limelight. It produced both critics as well its disciples at national and international levels. National unity and international relations were gauged according to their ability to articulate *ujamaa* vision and aspirations. In view of the way the church in Tanzania more or less agreed to the basic ideas of the *ujamaa* policy, the conclusion can be drawn that only one theology of liberation and development was created in Tanzania which had a wide following which were disciples of Julius Kambarage Nyerere from both secular and religious circles.² At this juncture, two unavoidable technical mistakes were committed.

First, Nyerere became unambiguously a sole articulator and definer of *ujamaa* nationally and internationally. He possessed both the definition and the ability to determine the role of the church and other agencies in Tanzania within *ujamaa* framework. With his great power of persuasion and state machinery around him, he overwhelmed the masses that wished to put their ideas in *ujamaa* policy. Over time, it became subversive to oppose *ujamaa*.

Secondly, the views of Tanzanian theologians conformed to the aims of the state to such an extent that there was little room left for criticism. Some went on to propose and view Nyerere as a prophet whose ideas had to be embraced with total sincerity.³ This technical oversight denied *ujamaa* a very important input and led it to dogmatism, which eventually promoted it to its impracticality. With Nyerere retiring in 1985, the vacuum was created for both politicians and theologians who had used Nyerere as their main source of creativity and acumen. That vacuum for the church and its theology of mission, liberation, and development in Tanzania was a critical dilemma calling for critical thinking and resolve.

The demise of *ujamaa* by the exit of Nyerere ushered in a pragmatic approach in development. The government sweepingly adopted policies imposed by the World Bank and monetary agencies, while the masses clung to ill-fated *ujamaa* utopia. With new policies in place under the umbrella of free trade and liberalization, poor masses took the impact in the social service

¹ Based on my PhD work at LSTC, 2003 which was a continuation of STM work at Wartburg Seminary, 1998

² Frieder Ludwig, *Church and State in Tanzania: Aspects of a Changing Relations 1961-1994* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 123.

³ In one of his many articles on Nyerere, Laurent Magesa wrote: "Why has Nyerere's thought been chosen for analysis, despite the fact that by profession he is not a theologian, reflecting directly on the church? How can we elicit a useful ecclesiology from his thought?" Then Magesa cites the reasons, "But not only is he devout, he is also constructively and honestly critical of the shortcomings of the church he admires and loves. As such, he may justifiably be considered as a prophet, whose voice the church should listen to." Laurent Magesa, "Nyerere's Ecclesiological Challenge", in Magesa, ed., *The Prophetic Role of the Church in Tanzania Today* (Eldoret: Gaba Publications, Spearhead 115, 1991), p. 76.

sector. The national debt was swelling and its impact took toll on the grassroots. For the church, this was challenging because she had to make a critical choice, being with the poor or stay with the pragmatic state. To stay with the state, the church needed to formulate a theology in support of state reforms and pragmatic practices. To stay with the masses the church needed to formulate a practical theology, which would sustain them in the absence of "impractical" *ujamaa*. The middle ground was shaky coupled with possible compromise to mission integrity, and risking an opportunity to minister through the changes.

Theologically there were three alternatives for the church at the turn of critical economic events in Tanzania. First, "Structural Adjustment Programs" (SAP) in Tanzania had denied the poor people in Tanzania, the free or subsidized access to the social services. Thus, for the church it was important to move beyond charity in facing the reality of poverty. Welfare was no more practical in liberal economic environment but churches had to go for structural changes in order to cope with the new world order. Perhaps this was difficult due to the complications of global economy. Secondly, it was a ripe time for the church to move out of its crippling partnership with the state and start to question, propose, or confront the roots of political and economic causes of poverty and underdevelopment. This could aim at democratic reforms, access to land and credit for the poor, and labor intensive investment. But this could as well ultimately be seen as idealistic demands that could not be implemented by those who benefited from the structures of economic imbalance.

Thirdly, the church in Tanzania and its social teaching had been appropriately attentive to the broader issues of capitalism and communism, and has clearly outlined conditions by which the forms of ideologies could be judged to conform to the demands of justice. Specifically, the church advocated that those forms of capitalism and communism that must be rejected were those in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework, which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality. To sum up this, the church had to watch carefully not to engage in ideological debate but rather focus its theological attention to the question of justice

From the preceding discussion and analysis on *ujamaa* in Tanzania and the position of the church, one is led to summarize by reflecting on the role of the church, which is grappling with fast economic changes. With global economic forces wrecking economic, social, political, and cultural life in Tanzania, complex paradoxes are emerging. The Lutheran World Federation study on globalization characterizes these paradoxes in a way that befits Tanzania when it says:

Globalization has been said to be everything and at the same time its opposite. It democratizes both opportunities and risks. Its tools can break down communities, environments, and traditions but also can be used to build them up. Through market economy, it promises new opportunities but it results in ever-greater gaps in wealth. It operates in decentralized ways but results in growing monopolies of power and greater patterns of exclusion. It values unrestricted freedom, yet intensifies patterns of domination. It promises global connections but accentuates the pain and suffering caused by global greed. It has helped raise the income of the poor in some parts of the world, yet it also can be brutal and cruel to the most disadvantaged.⁴

⁴ *Engaging Economic Globalization as a Communion*, A Working Paper of the Lutheran World Federation; Department for Theology and Studies, May 2001

Globalization defies all simplistic solutions and calls for critical mediation and self-evaluation.

From a Lutheran theological point of view, this should perhaps not surprise us. What is good and evil, righteous and sinful, constructive and deconstructive in human history usually is intertwined in complicated ways. Practices and institutions of our common life are an ambiguous mixture of good and bad, sometimes in ways that are difficult to separate or even see. Because much of economic globalization is so paradoxical, simply denouncing it all or disassociating ourselves from it may be illusory. Many people's livelihoods, as well as the financial support of the church itself, depend on it.

This complex situation is the background of theology of sustainable development in Tanzania. It is a response towards the paradox nature of globalization, and it seeks to compliment the public role of the church and its vocation. This theology leads what the church does in public life. This is contrary to what has been the rule in the past where, churches acted out of passion and later on sat and formulated a theology to justify their involvement.

The mainline churches in Tanzania have functioned as important forces for development in the country since long before independence in 1961. This goes especially for the classical fields of church aid: schools and health care, where churches delivered more than half of these services in the country. Through the earliest missionaries in the country, some important cash crops were introduced. In addition to this, the missions spread technical knowledge through their vocational training schools, small factories and workshops. These social economic steps even though were taken to link proclamation and development, but first, they lacked local theological basis and secondly, they facilitated in a long run, integration of local cultures into foreign ones.⁵

Even today the church hospitals and dispensaries stand for two thirds of the health care of the whole country, and objective analysis has shown that they often function better than their government counterparts. An outstanding reason for this is more than general dependency syndrome that is so pervasive in the country.⁶ This tendency applies to almost all social economic programs, which are over driven by the thinking from abroad. The classical debate on the theology of development gets the valid impulse in Tanzania by looking at the present state of involvement of the church on development issues.

African Theology of Sustainable Development: *What is it?*

The emergence of African theology had to do partly with the quest for African identity. On the other hand, theology has to accompany Tanzanians in search for sustainable livelihood out of

⁵ Cf. Robert Chambers' argument on emerging "third culture" as a result of encounter between two cultures. Deheragora would call this process a "homogenization of culture". See Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (London: Longman, 1983), p. 46; and Kishan Deheragora, "Impact of Globalization on the Third World Cultures: Sri Lankan Experience", in *Dialogue* (NS) Vol. XXIV (1997), p. 12.

⁶ Bengt Holmberg cites the reason behind the church's quality services to be the contacts with the rich world. He says, "All the time the church receives new inputs of personnel, medicine, and equipment, as well as scholarships to give Tanzanian health workers the opportunity to study abroad." See "A Look at E.L.C.T. in the 90s: A Missionary Perspective," in *African Theological Journal*, Vol. 20 No. 3 (1992), p. 286.

their own knowledge. Therefore, by definition African theology in Tanzanian context is a "theological reflection on the relationship of Christian theology to African cultures," and then, this mutual bond leads to the engagement with social, economic and political realities on each other.⁷ Even though there are multitudes of definitions to African theology, a special inclination to local African realities by African themselves is a pillar of this theology.

The existence of African theology is far beyond controversy.⁸ It is now a plain fact that African people needed their own theological reflection on how God has been communicating with them before and after the arrival of colonialism. The time for petition and clarification of validity for African theology is long overdue. African theology has a place not only among the world's theological establishment, but also it is an indispensable discipline for every Christian in the continent. What is needed now is the engagement between African theology and daily happenings on the continent.

This commitment involves re-defining the role of the church and certainly, how the church becomes the "church of the people." A theology of sustainable development that arises out of the "church of the people" should bear the marks of their community. Accordingly, acquiring that theology will amount to a dynamic interaction of three community pillars to come out with the theology that bears local knowledge, namely, the gospel, the church, and culture.⁹ The sustainability of both theology and development can be achieved through dialectical dynamics.

Theological and Ethical Dimensions of Development in Tanzania

The lack of knowledge and a sound basis regarding development may render the church vulnerable to manipulation by other societal and ideological players dealing with development. The absence of a sound developmental basis may inhibit the church's creative response to the immensely complex problems of our society. Until recently the problems of development in Tanzania have been approached very objectively and scientifically in an attempt to create more efficient and cost effective structures.¹⁰ These efforts not only need theological scrutiny, but they also call for the church to systematize her theology of development.

As development gradually became identified with the status quo, ecumenical thinking in Tanzania began to reject development but without offering an alternative. It instead started to speak

⁷ Cf. Luke Lungile Plato, "African Theologies," in John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Doing Theology in Context* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 156.

⁸ Stephen Munga, *Beyond Controversy: A Study of African Theologies of Inculturation and Liberation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1998), p. 15.

⁹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 21.

¹⁰ See C.K. Omari, "The Social and Ethical Implications of Structural Adjustment Programs for African Societies: Examples from the Tanzanian Experience" in Viggo Mortensen, ed., *A Just Africa: Ethics and the Economy*, pp. 95-107. Kjell Havnevik views this process as a second phase of development from above, the first phase being that of ill-fated *ujamaa*. See Kjell Havnevik, *Tanzania: The Limits of Development from Above* (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1993), pp. 287-320.

of liberation without necessarily reflecting this theme from a contextualization process.¹¹ Noting that defect in the use of liberation theme, Magesa ventured to insist on blending African socialism and African culture in forging the liberation theology motif that is different from both Latin American and indigenous African theological brands.¹²

To theologize around the concept of development is prone to misconceptions due to the elusive nature of the concept itself. African theology of sustainable development in Tanzania denounces universalism. Thus, its emphasis in realizing sustainability are contextual and at length, existential and derived from Tanzanians. In respect to this technical reality, this section will deal with four emphases, namely, **identity, freedom, participation, and self-reliance**. These are dealt with theologically and ethically. On each, the presentation will clarify why it is important that development in Tanzania should be understood from that particular emphasis, and why theology is indispensable in focusing on it. This choice does not however claim to exhaust all possibilities, for that would violate the central claim of this presentation namely anti- universalism.

Identity

“Identity”¹³ as a concept and as a value system became a target of the systematic globalization process in Africa. One of the most catastrophic impacts of globalization to Africa is the systematic undermining of people’s trust in their own self-governing abilities, their uniqueness as Africans and accordingly the weaning of the vast variety of habits through which people have governed themselves through all times and cultures, within a very wide variety of political regimes.¹⁴ Consequently, in order for Africans to be recognized in the world wide human interactions they had to relinquish their true identities and acquire the new ones. Over time, Africans could not deliver according to the new

¹¹The liberation theme started to appear in Tanzanian ecumenical circles after the EATWOT historic conference held in Tanzania back in 1976. Therefore, it is fair to say Tanzanian churches were overly preoccupied by theological inculturation before the conference. Even after the conference, the gist of talking about liberation was more from the political and economic stand point than from a theological standpoint. See David Westlund, *Ujamaa na Dini: A Study of Some Aspects of Society and Religion in Tanzania, 1961-1977* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1980), p. 128.

¹² See Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, p. 215; and Laurent Magesa, “Towards a Theology of Liberation for Tanzania,” in Edward Fashole-Luke et al, eds., *Christianity in Independent Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1978).

¹³ The underlying definition of “identity” in this section is “oneness, the undivided self of a person, the unity of oneself.” Peter Mwakylile analyzes this definition to be like A=A, or I am I. The analysis goes like: I become itself in its action. The being of I is determined by one’s actions, which makes this self be what it is. But, this I has in its actions limitations, it is thus not absolute because there are other selves with which this I is socially interacting. The I has thus freedom of action which is bound or limited by the presence of other selves – the Not –I. To be I or to be oneself, one needs the recognition by others, the Not –I. A person will be a real person only with others. The **oneself or I** can never recognize itself. It can never be conscious of itself. It necessitates the presence of others. Through the others one is oneself and one knows oneself well. The Not –I is the **basis of experience** or the **object of knowledge**. Israel-Peter Mwakylile, “African Identity Within the Christian Church: A Quest for Reconstructing Our Theology,” in *African Theological Journal* Vol. 23, No. 2 (2000), pp. 54-55. This is a derivative analysis from Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “Einige Vorlesungen Über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten,” in Rudiger Bubner, ed., *Geschichte der Philosophie in Text und Darstellung: Deutscher Idealismus*, Bd. 6 (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun. Stuttgart, 1978), and pp. 172ff.

¹⁴ Gustavo Esteve, “Towards the Age of Re-development?” p. 179.

acquired identities and could not as well go back easily to their old identities. Apparently, they are caught up in a tormenting identity crisis that is responsible for hampering any meaningful development efforts.

The identity crisis facing the concept of development in Africa is in the form of a cogent imperative to universalize it rather than Africanizing it. This imperative is wrapped in the claim that disclaims Africans to have their own type of development with their own parameters to measure it. As a result African people are learning to live in two types of developments while not feeling at home in either of them. So the African identity crisis has not been so general or so profound as it is often asserted. If we are going to employ in any useful way the concept of identity crisis we have to be much more particular. There is not much use in talking about such a crisis affecting all Africans over a hundred years. We have to ask ourselves to what extent does this crisis cause powerlessness, lack of self-motivation, and lack of confidence. And then after this step, solutions to this crisis should be sought. Just as the identity crisis has many phases, shapes, and forms, so the solutions will be. Maluleke states that, “the identity problem of Africans is not only a matter of consciousness and spiritual schizophrenia. It has a material basis... Therefore, rhetoric, pedagogy, spirituality and theology alone will neither explain nor resolve the African identity crisis.”¹⁵ Something more in a form of interdisciplinary approach is called for.

With the inevitable global social economic changes that killed *ujamaa*, Tanzanians were left with an identity void, which paralyses the country through endless patriotic discords. Apparently, most policy makers and theologians tend to question the identities of those who do not subscribe to the fateful *ujamaa*. In return, those who subscribe to capitalist liberalism downplay the relentless *wajamaa* whom they see as clinging to an irretrievable model of development. Liberals under adjustment programs think that *wajamaa* cannot use their past because it has been frozen into a cluster of single identities, of closed communities. And indeed, the *wajamaa* are holding themselves hostage by denying the possibilities of pluralism in ideals, flexibility in approaches, and solidarity with those whom do not subscribe to their ideas. Hence, one of the greatest problems of identity in Tanzania today is that in too many parts of the country, it is being so narrowly defined that the inflexibility of identity that existed in the past has been circumscribed. At the core is the identity crisis that threatens every move to search for sustainability in development.

Another stormy area in the identity crisis of Tanzania is in culture(s). There are those who still hold the vague idea of a national culture, denying the existence of diverse cultures in one nation. To some extent this is ascribed to the euphoria of a national pride that was attained during the *ujamaa* policy. At that time, villages were museums of national culture and cities were temporary settlements where people came for temporary convenience. But today, changes are both in villages and cities and people have to come to terms with the toll that changes inflict on their culture and identities. Certainly the industrialization of the economy in cities has come to mean industrialization of the mentality in villages. Most Tanzanians want to break definitively with the past but remain

¹⁵ Tinyiko Maluleke, “Recent Development in the Christian Theologies of Africa: Towards the Twenty-First Century,” p. 47.

faithful to it.¹⁶ That means, while securing survival, they want to maintain their identity, which is imbedded in the national sovereignty. Nyerere holds that balance tactfully when he says:

We are making a mistake to think that we shall get the money from other countries; first, because, in fact, we shall not be able to get sufficient money for our economic development; and secondly, because even if we could get all that we need, such dependence upon others would endanger our independence and our ability to choose our own political policies.¹⁷

Of course Nyerere is making one big mistake to think all Tanzanians have their stakes attached to the single national cultural identity. He can only manage to delay national economic strategic plans in thinking that one day all Tanzanians will unanimously become one on their way to defining their identities.

In resolving the identity crisis, Andrea Ng'weshemi advocates what he calls, "reclaiming the African story" and hence returning to the past and drawing lessons from thereof. He particularly thinks *ujamaa* as a socio-economic policy can provide a stable hold to those seeking identity as a way of discovering who they are.¹⁸ His analysis elucidates the concomitant feelings among the disenchanting Tanzanians who detest liberalism, but it suffers from unrealistic optimism. With all due respect, *ujamaa* as a philosophy in practice under Nyerere, represents today a fate that a good person can do to society in the service of bad ideas. Therefore, this study maintains that a "selective return to the past" is needed in order to avoid surrendering theology in the hands of another ideology masqueraded as a way to true identity.¹⁹

African theology of sustainable development draws from both inculturation and liberation. First, in the area of inculturation, the communal mode of life found in most parts of Africa is the best resource for transformation. Within it we encounter both the concept of human (*Umunu*) and a "pro-life" life style, which is enshrined in African culture. Nkurunziza emphasizes that, *Muntu* was created in the image of God, with divine qualities, through receiving the breath of God. The incarnation in Christ is a re-enactment of our creation and thus of our own recreation: Life means kinship to God.²⁰ The significant point here is that the gospel enables people to rediscover their essential human integrity and be reintegrated into communal fellowship of believers; it restores human values and creates a positive self-image, restored by the grace of God (and in his image) through faith. The essence of Christian *koinonia* brings a new sense of belonging and of value.

¹⁶ The blue-print of Tanzania identity (The Arusha Declaration) stipulated this by saying, "creation of a "new Tanzanian man, "fully conscious and confident." See J.K. Nyerere, "Arusha Declaration: Socialism and Self-reliance," in J.K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism*, p. 249.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁸ Andrea Ng'weshemi, "Rediscovering the Human", pp. 72-75.

¹⁹ In advocating return to *ujamaa* Philosophy and its economic practice, Ng'weshemi equates the importance of Nyerere to Ujamaa. While people may agree to the importance of *ujamaa*, they may disagree on the importance of Nyerere to *ujamaa*. Consequently, this may intensify identity crisis. See "Rediscovering the Human", pp. 71-75 (Peter Lang).

²⁰ Deusdedit Nkurunziza, *Bantu Philosophy of Life in the Light of Christian Message*, p. 36.

Another way, perhaps a unique one, of looking at identity crisis theologically, is to let people decide on that issue by themselves. This is important in order to avoid the mistakes done by "some" previous missionaries who risked imposing scheme of identities from above.²¹ And since we acknowledge the fact that development is a matter of values and perceptions, people should be left alone to decide what type of development they want to achieve no matter how subtle is the adaptation theology theologians may have for them.²² Theology should create facilities and an atmosphere of freedom for people not to feel guilty and heretic by being on their own. Theology has to cease to be the tool to coerce people to submit to the wishes of the hierarchy and the state. It should try to find structures and ideas, which enable the pouring of richness into local communities without what Terence calls "assistance without interference."²³

Doing theology of sustainable development dictates that the church should devote resources to theological training at all levels. But in order to do that, linking identity crisis and development is inescapable. The church hierarchy in Tanzania has been forced to resort to "ministerium" rather than its traditional "magisterium" approach in affirming multiple identities in communities. The church has been preaching for multiple divine callings and charisma, (i.e. priesthood for all believers) so she should accept the fact that multiple identities in crisis form exist and need to be utilized. The elites will have to sit and respect what the common people in the village know and say rather imposing on them "modern" ideas about development in the midst of an identity crisis. And all theological formulations would have to start with the village poor, women, youth, or any other vulnerable group. In doing sustainable development, the church is called upon to relinquish power from above in order to enhance power from below. And in practical terms, every church program is viewed critical to see how far it is resolving the identity crisis.

Freedom

Freedom as a concept is derived from two principal strands of human tradition, namely, a Jewish strand that emphasizes socio-political structures and a Greco-Roman strand that stresses personal attitudes.²⁴ According to Achermann, freedom in Africa unlike in the western hemisphere should be seen externally so as to effectively address critical issues facing the African people.²⁵ This

²¹ By using the term "some" the study specifically means to state clearly two important things; namely, that not all missionaries fit into categories of missionaries bent to destroy local cultures during the missionary era. Secondly, even those who happened to commit that error, it is not clear that they imposed everything as it is always generally stipulated. For detailed analysis on this issue, see Klaus Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900-1940* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996).

²² Chambers holds the similar view when he says, "For that to happen, [letting people to decide] power must shift. Knowledgeable rural people... For them to be better able to participate, control and benefit requires reversals. Among these, one first step is for outsider professionals, the bearers of modern scientific knowledge, to step down off their pedestals, and sit down, listen and learn." See Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, p. 101.

²³ Terence, "Concluding Remarks: Religion, Development and Identity", p. 159.

²⁴ Frederick Herzog, "Freedom" in Donald Musser and Joseph Price, eds., *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, p. 192.

²⁵ This concept is not dealing with inner freedom or individual freedom as might be stressed by stoic philosophy. But it may, however, deal with where inner freedom interferes with external freedom. Since freedom is often seen in relation to other constituents of human life cycle, the subjection of inner freedom may surface as an implication

does not, however, justify the situation where internal and external freedoms are paradoxically opposed to each other. The presence of such paradox may debilitate apprehension, comprehension, and visualization of possibilities of change within an individual. The free person is not one who has all his material needs filled, or who has no one forcing him to do certain things.²⁶ Those are elements in freedom. But freedom consists, more basically, “in being” able to act responsibly towards one’s objectives and values. Such freedom requires reciprocal interaction between reflection and action.

“Being” and “freedom” are thus, either inseparable or synonymous to the human person. According to Philip Hefner, “the fact that humanity has emerged as a creature characterized by freedom is the ground for asserting both the essential and the unavoidable nature of freedom.”²⁷ Biblically, freedom is more than quality or attribute of the human being: it is humankind’s very reason for *being*, the depth, and the core, of all human existence. God made human beings—man and woman— to be free and in order that they might act with freedom.²⁸ God willed to be in the presence of a free being like God self.²⁹ This means, in the absence of freedom human beings will search, fight for, or create freedom. Certainly, this also underscores the importance of freedom or “unavoidableness” of freedom in the process of a person “becoming” more human.³⁰

A critical look at the forms of underdevelopment in Africa reveals a sinister image: that of lacking freedom. Deprivation, destitution and oppression are new problems associated with poverty. But they are mere additions to pre-existing ones such as unfulfilled elementary needs, occurrence of famines, widespread hunger, civil wars, violation of elementary political freedoms and basic liberties, neglect of women rights, environmental pollution, and decimating diseases like AIDS, cholera and Ebola.³¹ Overcoming these problems is a central part of the exercise of development.

to external freedom. For African convenience, this section is not seeking to compare the concept of freedom between the African past and the post-colonial experiences. Cf. Fredrick Herzog, “Freedom,” p. 194 and Achermann, *Cry Beloved Africa*, p. 176.

²⁶ Michael Lerner analyzes this paradox which is prevalent in the so-called free societies when he says: “Even when external oppression is gone and human beings appear free to act in accord with their highest selves, they still face the debilitating psychological effects of oppression and the internalization of cruelty. There is more real powerlessness standing in their way of human improvement. There is also what I call surplus powerlessness, the degree to which individuals have internalized their powerlessness and become convinced that the way things are now is the only way they can be... In every historical period there is a thickly embroidered set of ideas that are described as ‘common sense,’ which are in fact the summary set of expressions by which people reassure one another that what is, is all that could be, and that one is foolish to try anything else. In most historical periods, this common sense is also dressed up in more formal garb in the form of religious, metaphysical (or in the latest incarnation) scientific beliefs that serve to reinforce this deep conviction that nothing much can be changed.” See his *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1994), pp. 111-112.

²⁷ Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 97.

²⁸ Jose Comblin, *Called for Freedom: The Changing Context of Liberation Theology*, trans. Phillip Berryman, (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), p. 28.

²⁹ Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s statement that, “The man who surrenders freedom surrenders his very nature as a Christian.” In *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936* (London: Collins, 1965), p. 112.

³⁰ Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture and Religion*, p. 97.

³¹ Achermann, *Cry Beloved Africa: A Continent Needs Help*, pp. 17-19

We have to recognize the role of “freedoms” of different kinds in encountering these afflictions. Indeed, individual “agency” is ultimately central to addressing these deprivations.³² On the other hand, the freedom of agency that we individually have is inseparably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. It is important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual freedom and to the force of social influences on the extent and reach of individual freedom. To counter the problems that we face, we have to see individual freedom as a social commitment. This section seeks to explore that direction.

The analysis of theology of sustainable development presented in this study treats the freedoms of the individual as the basic building block.³³ Attention is thus paid particularly to the expansion of the “capabilities” of persons to lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value. These capabilities can be enhanced by public policy, but also on the other hand, the direction of public policy can be influenced by the effective use of participatory capabilities by the public. The two-way relationship is central to the analysis of understanding the role of freedom in realizing sustainable development.

Expansion of freedom is viewed in this approach, both as a primary end and as the principal means of development. Development consists of the “removal of various types of unfreedoms” that leaves people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency. The removal of substantial unfreedoms is constitutive of development.

Poverty in Tanzania as it is everywhere, causes people to suffer from varieties of unfreedoms. Famine continues to occur in particular areas denying people the basic freedom to survive. Also a great many people have little access to health care, to sanitary arrangements, or clean water. As a result, many people succumb to premature mortality after spending their lives fighting unnecessary morbidity.

Freedom facilitates envisioning, and there cannot be sustainable development without visioning and articulation of that development. On the eve of Tanzania’s independence (then Tanganyika), the then president envisioned that:

We have great purposes for our independent country. We aim at building a non-racial democratic country, part of united Africa, where every individual can stand in human dignity, free from ignorance, disease and misery of poverty. We do not have any specific against the dangers, which beset our path, nor do we claim to know every detail of the way. But we believe that if we can

³² Like Amartya Sen, this study employs the term “agency” as derived from a noun “agent” but not in economic terms. This study is particularly concerned with the agency role of the individual as a member of community and participant in social-economic transformation. Theologically speaking, this study sees agency of sustainable development in terms of producers, consumers and actors of that development. Cf. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, p. 19.

³³ By this “individual” it does not mean a selfish orientation, but rather an aspect, motivation and environment for a person to engage with others in realizing one’s full potentialities. It further means that the step from an abstract to a real freedom is not taken without individual struggles against all the forces that oppress man, a struggle full of pitfalls, detours and temptations to run away. The battle at community level constitutes many individual victories prior to this stage.

maintain the courage and the faith, which has sustained us so far, we shall continue to overcome- or bypass – the obstacles awaiting us on the next stage of our journey.³⁴

This is a vision for a newly independent country, claiming victory over some of the unfreedoms, but setting a stage for the next encounter with remaining unfreedoms, which deprives people of their capabilities. Under Julius Nyerere's leadership, Tanzania pursued the goals of national identity and self-reliance without depending on either the communist or capitalist blocks. Tanzania wanted development on its own initiatives. Nyerere perceived that only by withdrawing from the world capitalist system was it possible to act autonomously and develop on its own terms. To Nyerere, dependence was a breeding ground of all forms of unfreedoms.³⁵

Theologically, freedom is the backbone of realizing God's call extended to human beings. Of course freedom is never complete. As human beings, freedom evolves and becomes – inertia of positive unfolding. For a human being to become more human, freedom has to become freer. On this, freedom is no longer grasped in abstraction from the real world around humanity. It surfaces through forms such as liberation, empowerment, and emancipation. Authentic freedom expresses itself not in private wealth, but in commonwealth. It is manifest not as "freedom as theory," but as "freedom as praxis" in solidarity with others. In order to avoid oppressing others through excessive use of self-determination in pursuit of freedom, a link is required between salvation and God's plan for humankind.

In Christ, God has set free humanity just as human beings in their co-creation role make freedom to be "integral" to their natural character.³⁶ This freedom, is then, set to unfree human struggle for more freedoms. Freedom is more than a personal word; it is not merely internal, individualistic, "spiritual" or an otherworldly thing. It is a freedom that people are called to experience in a material, this- worldly and communal sense. Theologically speaking, it is a process of breaking down the barriers that make people unfree to participate in realizing their humanity in its full-fledged perspective. Man is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for his own destiny. This is born out of an understanding of the vision of history and a distinctive anthropology. The gradual conquest of true freedom leads to the creation of a new man and qualitatively a different society. So to say, the vocation of the church in Tanzania through different socio-economic programs is not entirely based on material provision but rather on providing a free space for thinking and acting freely to reduce unfreedoms. This leads us into another crucial component of theology of sustainable development in Tanzania, namely participation.

³⁴ J. K. Nyerere, "Foreword" in Sophia Mustafa, *The Tanganyika Way* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. vii.

³⁵ In one of his writings, Nyerere is quoted to have said, "It is stupid to rely on money as a major instrument of development when we know only too well that our country is poor. It is equally stupid, indeed more stupid, for us to imagine that we shall rid ourselves of our poverty through foreign assistance rather than our own financial resources. It is stupid for two reasons: first, money would not be forthcoming from these sources; and second, even if it were available in adequate amounts, it would compromise Tanzania's independence." See his *Freedom and Socialism*, pp. 238-239.

³⁶ Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor*, p. 97. This affirms Pauline exhortations about freedom where he repeatedly insists: "For Christ has set us free (Galatians 5:1), "For you are called to freedom, brothers and sisters (Ephesians 3:12).

Participation

If doing theology and development is done from the perspective of the poor in the community, then their participation is required as an acknowledgement of this basic fact. If deprivation in any form is in part a reflection of the flawed identity of the people, then participation is essential to any effort to restore their identity. If an agreement exists that there are already resources within the community, then participation is the logical means by which this knowledge can be discovered and can become part of the development process. If the courage subsists to admit that development is not a material thing to be delivered to another community, and that only a small part of enabling is needed in facilitation of development, then local participation is the indispensable tool towards sustainable development. By any measure, local participation is a critical component to be given the utmost emphasis in transformational theology. There are three issues to be considered when discussing development in Africa. Those are quality of participation, cultural-philosophical participation, and of course, for the church's sake, theological participation.

The quality of participation has a bearing in the development processes. However, participation depends upon what kind it is, under what circumstances it is taking place and for whom.³⁷ This quality should be judged in three ways: Who is participating? What kind of participation? How is the participation occurring?³⁸ People should own the process from researching, analyzing, planning, implementing, and evaluation.³⁹

The theological part of participation is more than branding a concept to justify the presence of God in this particular human concept. It is to unveil the fact that where there is human undertaking, God is there either to judge or to affirm the involvement. And this is not a blatant dualistic detour to welcome God in an otherwise unwelcome situation, but it is to capitalize that God and human are inseparable without causing a serious collateral injury to one.⁴⁰ In African perspective, it is to affirm that this "life is therefore neither purely bodily nor purely spiritual, but a life of the "whole man." It is the whole life, the entire being, being in totality. Participation is the element of connection, the element that unites different beings as beings, as substances, without confusing them. It is the pivot of the relationships between members of the same community, the link which binds together individuals and groups, the ultimate meaning, not only of the unity which

³⁷ Norman Uphoff, J. M. Cohen, and A Goldsmith, *Feasibility and Application of Rural Development Participation: A State of the Art*

Paper (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1979), p. 281.

³⁸ Suggested by Bryant Meyers, *Walking With the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), p. 148.

³⁹ Though the form of participation is integral and central, but it should not be occasional and formalistic lest it be hijacked by elites again. This will help to keep it focused on empowerment criteria, which is its thrust area. See Meyers, *Walking With the Poor*, p. 148.

⁴⁰ Cf. C.S. Song whose theological-anthropological syllogisms goes like, "the word 'God' contains the word 'people', and the word 'people' implies the word 'God'. God is in the definition of people and people are in the definition of God. To deny God to people is to denude people, and to deny people to God is to denude God." This syllogism is central to Song's Christology. See Choan Seng Song, *Jesus, the Crucified People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 185-186.

is personal to each man, but of that unity in multiplicity, the totality, that concentric and harmonic unity of the visible and invisible worlds.⁴¹ Every development approach in Africa has to consider this theological and philosophical mindset that is prevalent in rural Africa.

At present there are two major avenues in which participation is subdued in Tanzania. First, is in the local avenue where development practitioners are dealing with development issues with minimal consultation to people. The second is the international avenue where the national leadership is contracting on behalf of the country without a “post-election” consultation. These two avenues are dialectically related and can be dialectically solved by initiating a critical participation approach, which will otherwise undermine the current trend if it does not heed to the new one.

Critical participation advocated by this study is far from other “participations” proposed and tried before in Tanzania.⁴² It is slightly different in a sense that it is dynamic and can cautiously warrant and enable the local people to force their way into the decision-making processes. It therefore implies donor-recipient resource balance as well as researcher-local community balance. This model allows local people to challenge the power structures, if need be to test them and openly set the agenda. Like freedom, critical participation is attained, not given, and this requires that previous participation models be re-evaluated. Critical participation involves taking part in an activity physically (being present, using one’s mechanical efforts), mentally (conceptualization of the activity, making joint decisions, using mental skills), and emotionally (assuming power, responsibility, and authority over the exercise).

Conventionally, theology is done and owned by the church in Tanzania. However, critical participation abhors this monopoly because participation as a concept is open-ended, and to human undertaking is God-given.⁴³ It is either the church identifies with every human person and thus acknowledges the right to participate in realizing the humanness or the church acts in a way that every individual can identify her that she is fully participating in holistic transformation. Klaus Nurnberger outlines nine “dares” as a way of highlighting the church’s critical participation in the economic sphere. Those are, dare to reconstruct her own paradigm, dare to be unpopular, dare to analyze profoundly, dare to involve everybody [participation], dare to do what she can do best, dare to be practical, dare to take the prophetic ministry seriously, dare to be self-confident in her convictions, and dare to be secular.⁴⁴

⁴¹ “Life” and “being” are thus thought of among the Bantu as a participation in the life, in the being of the ancestors; this explains their sense of solidarity. This life may be handed on; it can exert or be subject to vital influences; it can be increased and diminished; it is the subject matter of Bantu science and philosophy. See Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1969), p. 149.

⁴² I once sided with Mshana to propose, “critical popular participation” as a way of resisting developmentalism. That proposal may surely prevail, but only in resisting rather than providing knowledge to the contemporary model of development. See, Bagonza, “Doing Theology and Development in Tanzania,” pp. 137-139; and Mshana, *Insisting Upon People’s Knowledge*, p. 289.

⁴³ Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, p. 53.

⁴⁴ Klaus Nurnberger, “The Task of the Church Concerning the Economy,” pp. 137-143: Even though he speaks from a post-apartheid setting in South Africa, the gist of his proposal coincide well with a core of critical participation approach.

Self-reliance

Self-reliance emphasis in African theology of sustainable development intersects and thus prevails in freedom, identity, and participation emphases. It is central to them because the ultimate of each component depends on how reliant each component and people’s communities tap into their potentialities, opportunities and deal with threats. It is, however, treated separately in this section because, as a concept, self-reliance carries its own weight regardless of whether other emphases are linked to it or not. For Africa, self-reliance is so significant and so difficult to practice at the same time. It is so significant in the sense that development in its very nature has to do with rejection and rebellion against any conditions that dehumanizes an individual or a community. Africa needs self-reliance more than anything else; a determination to control her own destiny by her own resources and knowledge. It is difficult to practice it because the previous and present global trends do not give such room.⁴⁵ Globalization operates on the wisdom that every member of the globe depends entirely on specific rules of the game economically and thus it is expected of Africa to comply by relinquishing her claim of self-reliance. By and large, self-reliance is something that Africa has to choose and to accept its to accept its temporary consequences.

Self-reliance is not autarchy or isolationism, however, “self-reliance applies at different levels: local, national, and international.” At the national level, it gives the economic contest to political independence. Borrowing from this premise, in 1967 the TANU party ruling in Tanzania at that time met in Arusha to develop strategies for that recently independent country. The Arusha Declaration spelled out the national course towards self-reliance:

In order to maintain our independence and our people’s freedom we ought to be self-reliant in every possible way and avoid depending on other countries for assistance. If every individual is self-reliant, the ten-house will be self-reliant; if all the cells are self-reliant, the whole ward will be self-reliant; and if the wards are self-reliant, the district will be self-reliant. If the districts are self-reliant, the region is self-reliant, and if the regions are self-reliant, then the whole nation is self-reliant, and this is our aim.⁴⁶

Even though the emphasis was on economic production, the intention was also to inculcate in people’s minds a strong national pride and values through self-creativity that ranged from the individual to a national level. It was assumed that the spirit could as well be utilized beyond the economic sphere. On the other hand, it was a national admission that foreign aid could not be relied upon if genuine development was a goal.

Thus, self-reliance approach to development is a strategy for more appropriate development, based not on external constraints and potential dependency but rather on internal needs and criteria. Structurally, self-reliant development would equalize and redistribute power among nations and

⁴⁵ Africa lost her strategic status due to the demise of the Cold war. Today, she is so frightened and weak to be herself due to globalization. The leading conventional wisdom dictates that there is no safety outside the globalization even when being in it or outside means the same. What is happening right now is Africa needing to stay in touch with globalization in order to sustain her basic needs. This creates endless dependency through debts accrued through supplies of those needs. See Mary Kerber, “Globalization: The Challenge for Africa,” in Patrick Ryan, ed. *Structures of Sin, Seeds of Liberation* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1998), pp. 51-59.

⁴⁶ Julius Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism*, p. 248.

among people within nations. Power is an important factor in development at both macro and micro levels. It is the ability to control the environment or people physically, economically or culturally. Without structures that allow for a democratization of power there is no authentic development.⁴⁷ The concept of self-reliance within a nation thus involves a decentralization of power, which would allow all those concerned at every level of society to exercise all power of which they are capable. This redistribution of power is necessary for the exercise of fundamental human rights: the right to express oneself without repression, the right of equal opportunity, and the right to control one's own destiny. This, self-reliance is sought in order to promote the participation of all members of society, from the lowest levels up. At the international level, self-reliance cannot be achieved under the present power structure whereby Africa is burdened by the stigma of debt. It takes away her esteem and courage and forces her into servility of dependence.

The church represents the biggest social movement in Tanzania. It is rural oriented and politically positioned to affect changes. Economically the church's social programs depends heavily on outside funding with crippling restrictions that gradually erodes selfhood. Politically, her political power and legitimacy is derived from leaning heavily on her alliance and partnership with the state, which in return galvanizes the colonial memories where some missionaries endorsed colonialism. Theologically, with the demise of *ujamaa*, a pendulum swung from a state theology back to either Western fundamental theology or to traditional religions with little connection to reconstruction. The church thus lost grip with self-reliance in her teaching, preaching, and practice. This is the serious ethical blind spot to be dealt with.

This being the case, self-reliance emphasis in African theology of sustainable development has a double duty: to resurrect a selfhood motif in the church and to apply that motif in her prophetic duty to the state in order to stir up the selfhood in the entire society. These duties are both noble and imperative. Just as self-reliance is necessary for genuine development, selfhood is meaningful to theologizing. Without selfhood theology becomes useless and it can manage to escape that by uplifting self-reliance in thinking and acting.

Concluding remarks

African theology of sustainable development raises questions posed by people, rather than projecting professional theologians' or church leader's agenda. This does not mean that the people will agree on each and every issue. But given the commonality of their contexts, they are likely to pose more basic and pressing questions (questions that go to the core of their suffering), than the elites who usually benefit, sometimes through no fault of their own, from structural oppression.

By starting with questions raised by the people, African theology of sustainable development initiates a dialogue with the Christian tradition, whereby that tradition can address questions genuinely raised by the real context, rather than only those questions, which the Christian tradition has treated in the past. When this is achieved, it is simply acknowledged that the context has

⁴⁷ Kidane Mengisteab contrasts authentic development with developmentalists' development by analyzing its characteristics when he says, "development has been an attempt at social control. It has meant the sacrifice of culture, the loss of solidarity and self-reliance. The debt crisis, which continues to exact enormous sacrifices, has been one of its worst manifestations." See Mengisteab, *Globalization and Authenticity in Africa's Development in the 21st Century* (Asmara: Africa World Press, 1996), p. 34.

changed and thus theology is moving beyond answering the old questions. The emancipation of the Gospel and the people can also be accomplished with the people and their liberating cultural symbols and virtues in order to reinterpret the Christian message within their context.

African theology of sustainable development heeds the voices of ordinary people within Africa and outside Africa when they yearn for the solution of this ongoing dilemma. The triple theological quests in African theology have to be a unitary concern namely, to indigenize, liberate, and reconstruct. All three tasks taken together are anchored in the African desire to preserve, promote, and enhance a just society where poverty and discrimination are being overcome. In other words, theology and sustainable development wrap together triple theological tasks for African theology.

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