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Sustainable development goals through the lens of local churches: An interdisciplinary study

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This article reports on the findings of the local churches' involvement in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Tembisa in Gauteng province of South Africa. The article employed Richard Osmer's model of the four tasks of practical theological interpretation, focussing on narrating and examining the situation in the Tembisa community. The article relied on documentary analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The study findings revealed that local churches could significantly promote the SDGs within their local communities. The study identified essential factors such as human rights, gender equality, peace and justice, and biodiversity conservation as crucial for achieving developmental outcomes. The challenges that local churches face in implementing the SDGs were also discussed.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The study outlined principles for ensuring improved quality of life for all through effective implementation of the SDGs. Additionally, the study recommended further empirical research on the role of local churches in promoting SDGs, as well as similar studies in different regions or sectors.

Keywords: local churches; SDGs; human rights; gender equality; peace and justice; conservation of biodiversity.

Introduction

Local communities in South Africa face numerous socio-economic problems and challenges, such as gender inequality, crime and unemployment (Msebi 2022:36; Van der Westhuizen & Swart 2015:732; Van Wyk 2017:1). In recognising the familiar presence of these challenges, Mangayi (2018:2) refers to them as modern aspects of townships and marginalised communities. These difficulties exist alongside the ongoing formation of local churches within these communities. Despite this, local churches are not just anticipated but are already playing a crucial role in improving the lives of the local communities (Mutemwa, Hattingh-Rust & Hatting 2018:3). For instance, during the apartheid era in South Africa, local churches took a stand and played a crucial role in promoting social justice. Their past actions inspire hope that they will continue to address the social issues facing communities and society today (Van Wyk 2017:5).

In supporting the above-stated assertion, Magezi (2017:11, 2019:1) postulates that churches may have to play their transforming role because they are key community institutions. In bringing the Christian perspective into the debate, scholars such as Rakotoarison, Dietrich and Hiilamo (2021:4) allude that church members ought to grapple with the biblical idea of using God-given talents for the sake of local community development. Additionally, the Book of Genesis 5:2 stresses that all people are created in the image of God. Therefore, the local churches have to demonstrate God's unconditional love for humankind (Van Niekerk 2015:4; Van Wyk 2017:5). The demonstration of God's love ensures that the transformational process is physical and spiritual.

Given the above-mentioned circumstances, the authors became keenly interested in investigating the contribution of local churches to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within local communities in Tembisa. Tembisa is a township located inside the City of Ekurhuleni in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

The context of the research site

Tembisa was founded in 1957 within the apartheid regime, serving as a symbol of optimism for black households who were forcibly displaced from their residences (Rakabe 2016:12). The word 'Tembisa' is a Nguni term that loosely translates to 'to promise' or 'to give hope'. This background signifies that the residents of Tembisa Township have been living in the hope of a better life. A

significant portion of this township's population continues to experience poverty and live in substandard housing, receiving assistance under the government initiative known as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (Charman 2017:3). Thus far, the Tembisa Township presents challenges that do not offer a promise or hope to the entire community. Instead, it brings disadvantages, vulnerabilities and loss of hope towards positive and sustainable development. Tembisa has a population of approximately 463 109. The population consists of 22.7% youth (ages 0–14 years), 75.4% working-age individuals (ages 15–64 years), and 2.0% elderly (age 65+ years). The Statistics South Africa Report of 2011 shows that 3.7% of the youth aged 20+ have no schooling, 7.5% have higher education and 39.9% have completed matric.

The population in Tembisa continuously establishes local churches whereby some of them operate from formal buildings, while others hold services in houses, public schools, tents and more (Ribbens & De Beer 2017:5; Van Dyk 2018:64). It would be beneficial for the local communities, if most of these churches could be involved in welfare-related projects, but this requires them to build trusting partnerships within their communities, mainly if they aim to promote sustainable community development (Schoeman 2012:1). Klaasen (2019:7) emphasises that if all development stakeholders, such as individuals, communities and churches, take personal responsibility for interacting and contributing to community development, the process could lead to effective and sustainable development.

Methodology

The study utilised a qualitative research approach to detail the data collection process, sample selection, interviews, data analysis and interpretation. Both document analysis and field data were used to assess the role of local churches in sustainable community development. Additionally, the study applied Richard Osmer's model of theological interpretation. The fundamental objective of this model is to empower church leaders to be systematically involved in practical theological interpretation of challenges facing them in ministry. Therefore, the model has been used to comprehend what happens in local churches and sustainable community development contexts (Msebi & Beukes 2024). Research participants were selected purposefully, whereas document analysis was done on sources that were searched online using relevant keywords.

The contribution of local churches to sustainable development goals

Empirical evidence reveals the essence of the local churches' contribution to raising awareness and implementing the SDGs. Firstly, they should raise awareness about the SDGs among church and local communities (Iyayi & Obani 2021:189). To achieve this, local churches should organise programmes and projects that raise awareness about the SDGs in the communities and society. Secondly, church leadership should

ensure that congregants actively participate in development programmes and projects in their communities linked to promoting the SDGs. Pillay (2017:9) supports these viewpoints by arguing that churches should work to develop people's lives sustainably and ensure the attainment of the SDGs. This may not be a challenge for local churches, considering Pillay's assertion that local churches are not new to the transformation space, having played a significant role in fighting for the oppressed and poor in South Africa during the apartheid era. In supporting the preceding arguments, Iyayi and Obani (2021:189) suggest that churches should support the SDGs in their development role. During fieldwork, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, decent work and economic growth, peace, justice and strong institutions were the main goals that emerged. Hence, they are being discussed in this section.

Zero hunger

Ebenezer (2023:8) defines hunger as the weakness resulting from a lack of food. He argues that hunger can lead people to engage in unusual behaviours. According to him, socio-economic problems such as unemployment can cause hunger, leading to behavioural deficiencies. Additionally, Otekunrin et al. (2020:13) state that developing countries, including South Africa, face severe hunger issues because of problems such as bad governance, climate change, politics, crime, and unemployment. The Zero Hunger initiative aims to address this issue by promoting food security and nutrition. Rakotoarison et al. (2021:2) suggest achieving this goal involves promoting sustainable food production initiatives led by local community members based on local traditions and agricultural practices.

The literature and field data align, showing that local people overlooked agricultural activities, leading to hunger in Tembisa. Local churches should encourage the establishment of vegetable gardens in homesteads and church yards to combat hunger. Onah, Okwuosa and Uroko (2019:3) support these efforts, advocating for churches to help free individuals from hunger and poverty. Local churches should address material needs in addition to spiritual ones. Ebenezer (2023:11) argues that the Old Testament (OT) supports caring for the hungry in local communities. Some churches operate soup kitchens and collaborate with retailers to provide food. Although these charity acts are appreciated, they do not sustainably address social problems. They focus more on the symptoms than the causes of poverty and other social issues (Beukes & Van Huffel 2016:230).

Good health and well-being

Musekiwa and Musekiwa (2023:4) highlight the increasing complexity of achieving good health and well-being within local communities because of reduced health system standards. Guégan et al. (2018:1) argue that sustainable community development is essential for achieving this goal and is interconnected with other goals. Dharmshaktu (2018:2) emphasises the importance of adopting health and wellness approaches, including mental, physical, environmental, and

social aspects, to prevent diseases. Manala (2016:4) emphasises the need for community development stakeholders, including local churches, to promote good health and well-being by addressing challenges such as diseases. Access to quality healthcare is crucial for all community members, particularly older individuals, to participate meaningfully. Conversely, poor health hinders sustainable development. Baloyi (2015:6) suggests that church leaders collaborate with healthcare chaplains and government officials to ensure that everybody, including senior citizens, has access to healthcare services offered by the government. Manala (2016:6) and Magezi (2012:1) both support the idea that local churches are crucial in providing community healthcare services. According to these scholars, churches should offer valuable healthcare services, especially in communities with poorly developed healthcare structures and systems. In conclusion, literature and field data agree that despite their significant contribution, the critical role of local churches in healthcare is often poorly understood and overlooked within local communities and the country. The lack of understanding of the role of churches in healthcare was further highlighted during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, where the churches were one of the institutions that were closed while their beneficial role should have been acknowledged.

Quality education

Raborar (2016:32) defines quality education as the fourth SDG. Similarly, Van der Merwe (2022:1) describes quality education as one of the SDGs that promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all, particularly children and young people. Unlike the Millennium Development Goal 2, which only addressed Basic Education within children, this goal promotes equitable primary and secondary education. The knowledge and skills gained from quality education help individuals and community members make informed decisions that promote sustainable development in their communities. Quality education should address pressing issues in the community and society, such as climate change, poverty alleviation, health, human rights and environmental protection. This goal also aims at improving school infrastructure and promoting equitable primary and secondary education, as well as promoting the supply of qualified teachers.

Ofei-Manu and Didham (2014:2) emphasise the importance of quality education for sustainable development and note that achieving measurable results remains a challenge because of limited access for many children and young people. In Tembisa, high levels of illiteracy and socio-economic challenges such as poverty, young parenting and abuse make it difficult for many young people to complete their education. Local churches in Tembisa make an impact by providing educational programmes from early childhood development to high school with the help of their members. These churches utilise qualified educators from their congregations to help children gain knowledge and skills (Thesnaar 2014:6). The respondents alluded that they cannot

fold their arms while children's future is destroyed. In light of the foregoing, Van der Merwe (2022:2) alludes that education is dire on the African continent but worst in South Africa. The above-mentioned realities are manifested by the previous Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshega's utterances when she only asks for a 30% minimum pass rate for Grade 12 subjects (Msweli 2022:2447).

Decent work and economic growth

Cohen and Moodley (2012:320) argue that decent work should provide income and promote personal dignity, family stability and community peace. They emphasise the importance of promoting decent work activities to address the existing decent work deficit in South Africa. Skvarciany and Vidžiūnaitė (2022:74) emphasise the significance of this goal in promoting employment and the economy, which are essential for achieving various other goals. Additionally, these academics stress the importance of equal employment and financial opportunities regardless of age, race and gender, as advocated by this goal. Rai, Brown and Ruwanpura (2019:369) support promoting decent work and economic growth by emphasising the need for all workers to have equal rights to decent work.

The concept of decent work and economic growth should include all sectors of the workforce, promoting freedom, equality, security and human dignity for both men and women. Khosa-Nkatini, Buqa and Machimana (2023:1) highlight that this goal remains a challenge in local communities and South Africa, as women face barriers in employment. The literature is consistent with field data regarding the above-stated viewpoints. During interviews, the participants illustrated that issues regarding gender inequality impact development adversely among Tembisa communities and hamper human development and economic growth. According to Matshobane (2024:2), to achieve this goal, development actors, including churches, should establish strong cooperation and collaboration.

Peace, justice, and strong institutions

Some scholars argue that promoting peace, justice and strong institutions leads to peaceful and inclusive communities and societies for sustainable development (Mohanty & Singh 2021:15; Suganya 2022:4665). Nyakwaka and Chelang'a (2021:3) emphasise the importance of promoting peace in local communities for sustainable development. Kowkas, Shayeb and Bransi (2024:7) also highlight the importance of collaborative efforts. The literature and field data support that attaining community peace and justice is connected to addressing socio-economic issues, such as segregation and criminal acts. After considering the points mentioned earlier, Kowkas et al. (2024:8) stress the importance of including teachings of peace, tolerance and respect for human rights in the education curriculum. They believe that by equipping young individuals with these skills early on, they can be better prepared to promote peace in their communities and society. Fabris and Longobardi (2023:01) agree with the

importance of fostering this goal through education, emphasising the protection and inclusion of children. In the Tembisa community, peace and justice are crucial issues. McDermott et al. (2019:514) suggest that SDG 16 should address various social ills within local communities, including gender-based violence, child abuse and environmental concerns.

Elements of sustainable development goals emerging from the study

Job creation

The respondents mentioned that job creation is essential for the Tembisa community. Currently, there are very few job opportunities within the Tembisa community, forcing most residents to travel long distances to reach their workplaces. The participants emphasised that there is a growing scarcity of job opportunities within local communities. They mentioned that many community members have to seek work outside of Tembisa because of the limited job prospects within the township. As a result, the respondents urged the government to create more employment opportunities within local communities. Based on these discussions, the field data revealed that addressing crime should be prioritised before development stakeholders focus on creating more job opportunities. For the respondents, decreasing crime can also influence positive change within local communities, including creating jobs.

The context emphasises the crucial role that churches must play in helping people secure jobs to improve their lives. Churches should focus on creating new jobs that promote sustainability within local communities. Job creation projects contribute to stability and are the foundation for local community development. Field data underscored that local job creation is essential for the sustainability of local communities and leads to an increase in the employment rate. All local stakeholders, including churches, should collaborate to identify and create employment opportunities within local communities. The data indicate that while local governments should lead job creation initiatives, other entities, such as churches, should also recognise their responsibility in creating jobs within local communities.

Human rights

Salagare (2017:58) defines human rights as the rights people have simply by being humans. According to him, human beings have essential rights, such as the right to food and clothing to maintain their dignity. Salagare categorises human rights into natural rights and civil rights. Natural rights are those that people have inherently as humans, such as the right to life, food and shelter. On the other hand, civil rights include social rights such as access to essential services, education, freedom of speech, political freedom and the right to vote, among others. Similarly, Lusha (2023:118) recognises human rights as fundamental rights that belong to all human

beings, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religion or any other status. These rights encompass the right to life, liberty and security of person, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as the right to work and education, among others. They are founded on human dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence.

O'Leary and Tsui (2020:131) coincide with the above-stated deliberations. These authors expand the debate by including the environmental aspect. Their view is that when considering human rights, people should not take life experiences such as access to clean air and clean water, safe and adequate food, healthcare, and more for granted. They believe that the environment sustains life and should be considered when discussing human rights. These opinions are supported by field data. Interviews exposed that human rights should encompass the environment. Respondents emphasised that individuals in local communities, particularly in Tembisa, may have misconceptions about their human rights and responsibilities in relation to the environment. For them, local churches should play a transformative and theological role in fostering a culture of human rights within local communities and beyond.

Gender equality

Mhembwe (2019:66) defines gender equality as a crucial factor for development, allowing everyone to contribute equally to community development activities. The author highlights that in Africa, women continue to face various forms of mistreatment, socio-economic injustices, exploitation, as well as physical and mental abuse. Mhembwe further argues that promoting gender equality is a crucial component of development strategies, enabling both men and women to equally participate in efforts to improve their standard of living in their local communities. Promoting gender equality is an integral part of the development strategy that aims at transforming the lives of all people, including women and men, to escape poverty and improve their standard of living. Scholars such as Casimir, Chukwuelobe and Ugwu (2014:170) concur with the preceding deliberations regarding gender equity. However, they bring the biblical perspective on the matter, arguing that gender equality is engrained from the fact that God made men and women according to his image. Therefore, men and women are equal as they are equal before God. To support these realities, the Book of Genesis 1 (v. 26) states that men and women are created equally in God's image. The literature aligns with field data regarding gender equality. During interviews, it was discovered that gender equality remains a challenge within local communities. This fact was cemented by the fact that not a single woman participated in the field work out of 12 different churches. This confirms that gender equality is not only a challenge in the secular world, but also a challenge even inside church walls and needs to get serious attention.

Peace and justice

The field data underlined peace and justice as crucial sustainable community development principles. These two

principles ensure that sustainable development is effectively carried out within local communities. According to Tushima (2019:7), the importance of peace and justice in sustainable community development is recognised. However, he brings a biblical perspective to the argument, stating that peace helps people reconcile with their Creator and live well in a good environment. He also argues that justice helps local people, groups and communities to nurture and maintain relationships. In supporting the above-mentioned realities, Franklin (2020:2) attests that living God's life leads people to practise peace and justice in their communities. For him, this creates a good environment where people enjoy living good lives with others and nature. Khairil et al. (2017:4937) concur with the preceding deliberations. The literature is consistent with the field data. The fieldwork discovered that peace and justice remain the significant challenges facing the Tembisa community and might be similar to other local communities. The participants reported that the level of violence is high in their communities. Criminals show no respect, even targeting churches for attacks, robberies and killings. These are some reasons why issues related to peace and justice require urgent attention within local communities. Without addressing these social problems, local communities cannot progress and prosper, as they hinder development initiatives (Opoku, Addai-Mensah & Manu 2017:7).

Conservation of biodiversity

The field data introduced biodiversity as the variety of life that can be found on the earth, including plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms. The respondents argued that biodiversity is crucial for the survival of human beings. In other words, it is the natural resource base upon which humankind depends. Moreover, biodiversity offers opportunities for economic development and provides ecological services such as crop pollination, climate regulation and pollution control, which are essential for all forms of life. The preceding definitions highlight the importance of biodiversity for all living creatures. It is crucial for people to ensure the preservation of biodiversity at both local and national levels. Respondents believe that sustainable community development is a key aspect of biodiversity conservation, and the two cannot be separated. Understanding the importance of biodiversity conservation within local communities, the respondents emphasised the need for people to take responsibility for caring for biodiversity. They also stressed the importance of balancing community, development and the environment to ensure sustainable community development, including extensive biodiversity conservation.

Challenges faced by local churches' involvement in sustainable development goals

Limited resources

Ziolo, Bak and Cheba (2021:46) argue that while there is a strong interest in achieving SDGs, the resources, particularly financial resources, need to be more appropriate and adequate to attain them successfully. Basically, they assert that it is challenging to meet SDGs within local communities because of limited resources and financial constraints. Ordinarily, the SDG programmes require a substantial capital injection, which is a challenge within local communities. Participants emphasised their transformative roles within communities, but expressed the need for more resources to make a significant impact. In short, limited resources, including funds, have thwarted local churches from contributing effectively to the implementation of SDGs within local communities. Jaiyesimi (2016:15) accentuates that a lack of resources, including funds, limits local churches' contribution to community development. The author further articulates that limited resources have a negative impact on development. For instance, churches can only help a small number of people compared to the larger population in need within the community because of financial constraints. Many individuals live below the poverty line, and the lack of funding hinders progress in achieving SDGs (Asaithambi 2023:68). Scholars such as Akanle, Kayode and Abolade (2022:2) also agree with the views on the scarcity of resources and funding.

Lack of partnership

Singh (2016:249) points out that the need for more partnerships is a challenge in implementing the SDGs. According to Cruz (2023:03), partnerships among development actors are crucial for achieving all the SDGs. Hence, partnership among different development stakeholders, including social partners, government, business sector, academia, among others, is essential for the success of SDGs. However, these partnerships should also be extended to local communities. In other words, for the effective and successful implementation of SDGs, local people need to be the key stakeholders, not just passive beneficiaries.

The above-stated literature viewpoints are congruent with field data. The participants acknowledged the lack of partnerships in implementing SDGs. According to them, there should be solid partnerships between churches, development actors, government and community members. Likewise, the essence of partnerships is also highlighted by Cruz (2023:03), who implores all development stakeholders, including local churches, to help achieve SDGs. This is vital as implementing SDGs includes challenges such as poverty reduction, which are too big to be fought individually and uncoordinatedly (Lombard & Du Preez 2004:242).

Deficient training

Kioupi and Voulvoulis (2019:13) accentuate that deficient training and negative information about sustainable development projects are the challenges that hinder the progress of sustainable development within communities. They argue that educational institutions need to play a role in overcoming these barriers to allow development actors to achieve SDGs. Bilderback (2023:2) posits that training provides people with the knowledge and the skills needed to align with

the principles of SDGs. Based on Bilderback's assertion, training appears to promote a culture that delivers anticipated results and builds people's trust. Considering delivering on the implementation of SDGs, religious leaders, including church leaders, should incorporate basic sustainable principles in their church training and academic curriculums when they train their leaders (Akinloye 2018:51). Despite its importance, research participants indicated that they have not been exposed to training programmes that could enhance their contribution to SDGs from the perspective of the church.

The theological principles of the sustainable development goals
Unity

Unity is one of the essential principles derived from scriptures that contributes to sustainable community development. Examining both New Testament (NT) and OT texts unveils that Scripture emphasises the importance of unity in the name of God. When people are united, it breaks down barriers such as racism, tribalism and discrimination. These social ills are considered sins before God; therefore, his people must repent. Unity also brings valuable qualities to people, such as trust, honesty and respect. The Book of Nehemiah 4 (v. 6) illustrates that when people are united, they can achieve their goals. This is because when they are united, they function as one team with one common goal. In 1 Corinthians 12 (vv. 12–27), Paul explains that just as a body has many parts, each with a different function, the church comprises many members, each contributing to the whole. Despite their diversity, believers are united in Christ, the head of the body.

Caring

Most NT texts emphasise the importance of caring within the Christian community. Galatians 6 (v. 2) states that people should bear each other's burdens. In this way, they fulfil Christ's law, teaching that people should care for each other. This means that God's ministry should be centred around caregiving. For example, preaching, teaching, guiding and worship all reflect the call to express love and care. Christians should demonstrate care towards all individuals, regardless of their background, traditions or gender. There is a significant challenge within local communities regarding demonstrating care. Many communities are encountering various social and economic challenges, such as murder, gender-based violence and rape, indicating a lack of care, love and compassion among the people. Because God is love, he encourages his people to love and care for one another. Philippians 2 (v. 4) emphasises the importance of considering the interests of others and not just our own. It also extends this care to include the environment and natural resources. This highlights the urgent need to promote love and care within local communities and society. When involved in community development projects, local churches should also emphasise the importance of showing care for natural resources.

Education

The Bible emphasises the value of education, wisdom and the transmission of knowledge. From a theological perspective, education, specifically quality education, should include the study of God's laws and commandments. Deuteronomy 6 (vv. 6–9) instructs parents to teach their children constantly, at home and while travelling. The scriptures emphasise the importance of parents and caregivers in training their young children. This training should encompass intellectual development and cognitive, social, emotional and ethical aspects. The values and principles instilled during early childhood have a long-lasting impact on a child's beliefs and actions, ultimately influencing community development. Education given to children benefits families, communities and society. For example, instilling good ethics and principles in children can create safer and more harmonious communities. Cultivating education, more specifically, quality education among children is essential for nurturing future societal leaders. The Book of Ephesians 6 (v. 4) echoes the above-stated deliberations as it encourages parents to educate their children in the Lord's ways, including moral, spiritual and possibly intellectual education. Therefore, as trusted community agents, local churches should collaborate with parents and caregivers to ensure children receive the necessary training during their formative years.

Stewardship

Stewardship is one of the crucial principles in the Bible as it emphasises the responsible management and care of God's creation, resources and blessings. 1 Peter 4 (v. 10) supports the preceding description, stating that everyone should use whatever gift they received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in various forms. This Scripture shows that God desires his people to responsibly manage and care for his creation, resources and blessings, and to be faithful in their responsibilities. Considering the above-stated views, the Book of Genesis 2 (v. 15) also stresses the concept of stewardship as humanity's responsibility to care for the environment and manage it wisely. In this light, Christians are responsible for managing and caring for God's creation. Therefore, the context of stewardship to the Christians is much broader as they should show love and care for the people, and the same love and care should also be extended to natural resources. Likewise, development stakeholders and local churches should promote and encourage the love and care for natural resources when they embark on development programmes within local communities.

Selflessness

According to the Bible, selflessness is an essential principle in community development. It means placing the needs of others above your own. In 1 Samuel 18 (vv. 1–4), Jonathan selflessly helps David escape from Saul's attempts to kill him, prioritising David's safety and well-being over his interests, despite the fact that David poses a threat to Jonathan's

inheritance of the throne. The scriptures reveal that Christians are called to be selfless to carry out the work of the Lord. They are commanded to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18), known as the Great Commission. This means being prepared to be selfless and actively meeting physical and spiritual practical needs when reaching out to people. From a community development perspective, local churches should be ready to assist those in need, especially fellow Christians facing socio-economic challenges such as hunger and poverty. Churches must support the Christian community and reach out to all less fortunate individuals in their vicinity. This inclusive approach ensures the effectiveness and impact of caring for and supporting one another, particularly the poor and marginalised. Considering the foregoing discussions, selflessness involves demonstrating care. Therefore, it is crucial for Christians, including local churches, to practise love and care within local communities.

Compassion

Compassion has emerged as a critical principle guiding Christians in their role in community development. Christians are called to act kindly towards the less fortunate, the poor and the marginalised, extending compassion to fellow believers and non-believers. In this light, Ephesians 4 (v. 32) narrates that people should be kind and compassionate to one another. Also, they should forgive each other, just as in Christ, God forgave them. Many people in local communities face hunger, poverty and other hardships. Therefore, the well-off should dedicate their time, money, services and resources to helping the needy and less fortunate within their local communities. 1 Peter 3 (v. 8) agrees with the above-stated truths, stating that people should be like-minded, sympathetic, loving, compassionate and humble. Considering the foregoing, local churches are expected to address these challenges as trusted development agents by responding with genuine compassion and practical assistance.

Recommendations

The findings of this study lead to the following recommendations:

- Development practitioners and agencies should involve local churches as partners and resources in implementing sustainable development initiatives.
- Churches, particularly local churches, should educate people about their responsibility regarding environmental conservation.
- The researchers assert that this study is inconclusive and recommend further investigations in different fields or provinces.

Conclusion

The study presented a critical analysis of the local churches' involvement in SDGs in Tembisa Township in Gauteng province, South Africa. Based on the findings from interviews and document analysis, the study elucidated the local churches' contribution to SDGs and outlined the elements of SDGs emerging from the study. The article also acknowledged local churches' constraints in their involvement in SDGs. It then proposed theological principles of the SDGs that emanate from the Bible. While the authors anticipate that the study will enrich the current knowledge in areas such as Sustainable Development, Community Development, Theology and Development, they also propose areas of further research.

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