



How you can help
build a better
community and
a better world

USE YOUR TALENTS

– the congregation as primary development agent



William Kayo



This is an exemplary book which uses the concept that the congregation is the primary actor in developing the local community. The lessons taught in this book are life transforming and points to the fact that God given talents when properly identified and utilised can bring out immense resources that will raise the living standards of the people in the society. This book therefore will not only be an inspirational book based on use your talent stories gathered from different communities far and wide but also an instructional book that guides the people to tap locally available resources for their own welfare. I therefore recommend this book to be an excellent handbook for the Church leaders and congregations around the world.

*Rev. Walter O. Andhoga
General Secretary
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USE YOUR TALENTS

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Title: Use Your Talents – the Congregation as Primary Development Agent
Editor: Sigurd Haus
Publisher: Digni, Arbins gate 11, 0253, Oslo, Norway • www.digni.no
Design: tilfellet.torgersen as • Ivar Oftedal
Photo: Endre Hilleren (front cover and pages 6, 22, 25, 62, 89, 112, 114, 147, 165, 170), diverse photos from NMS' photo archive
Artist: William Kayo (Cameroon)
Completion date: April 2017
ISBN: 978-82-93052-08-1

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In PART I, *What is 'Use Your Talents'*, the main focus is how 'Use Your Talents' gradually developed within MLC in Madagascar based on longstanding efforts by many people. PART II, *'Use Your Talents'*, shows how people from different places really use their talents. And PART III, *'Use Your Talents' – Diakonia and Development*, contains articles that discuss 'Use Your Talents' as a way to fulfil the holistic ministry of the Church.

FOREWORD

Written by Rakoto Endor Modeste

This foreword is to provide context to 'Use Your Talents' within Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM) history.

The church will accomplish its mission from Jesus, both through faith and by concrete actions. So the church fully lives what it preaches, giving a concrete picture of its proclamation in its multiple aspects and not only being satisfied with symbolic actions. The spiritual and material go hand in hand.

The institution of 'Use Your Talents' germinated with the official articulation FLM's development philosophy in 2004. Development is often defined in terms of projects and outside funding, however another stem of ideas which became stronger and stronger puts forward that people are not starting with empty hands and a void history in development. Even before foreign development aid, local people had already been actors of development. Such action has to be recognised, seen for its dynamic value, and continued.

When development projects were implemented, input from the beneficiaries was considered participation by development partners. 'Use Your Talents' sprouted from a participatory method, as people looked to the Bible in the difficult situations the parishes and communities faced, while at the same time local participation required by donors became more and more out of reach. 'Use Your Talents' educated people in practice that they are not only participants, but they own their development. They conceive and execute. Each individual has to contribute of their own, whether skills or belongings or time or love or hope. For the believer, it starts in the holy community of the church and goes on to the community at large.

In developing 'Use Your Talents', biblical texts were re-examined in our Theological Seminaries for a theology of development.

More biblical formulation of development has been put out and embodied in the life of the church. Using the word diakonia for development is part of this reformulation. Among other Bible passages, a study of Genesis 1-2 with Luke 4:18-20 together with Romans 12, Ephesians 4:11-16, Matthew 22:39, Matthew 25, 1 Corinthians 12 leads the way to an application of the parable of the talents in the life of the community. The parable affirms that all believers have the responsibility to share whatever they received from God the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sanctifier – for the good of all. Everyone who receives has to give for the advancement of the gospel and for the well being of all humans and of all the earth.

The FLM upheld the proclamation that Jesus Christ is present among us, taking our suffering upon Himself and raising us, the believers, and the whole world out of our misery. The communion of the saints receives from Jesus this loving presence. His presence becomes the believer's whole life and they impart it to the surrounding community. Our proclamation of the gospel is in words and deeds; it is done by each one of the believers, as well as from all the communion of the saints together. The believers share what they received from God, whether they were born with the gifts or acquired the skills from learning or it were spiritually granted by the Holy Spirit, or otherwise. All limitations of resources are no handicap but constitute an affirmation of the challenge to be overcome in the present in order to reach the aimed advancement in life. All believers are to recognise that they are responsible before God in their stewardship of those gifts.

'Use Your Talents' in Revival movement

In the Malagasy Lutheran Church, the Revival Movement lived in the 'Use Your Talents' way since its beginning in late nineteenth century.

In the Revival Movement, Communion of the Saints is understood in everyday practical life. The people unite their skills to reach their common goals in the healing ministry of the church. In the TOBY (revival movement care centres), the healing ministry has multiple aspects which involve each believer fully. The shepherds lead the way in this particular life of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. The shepherds use whatever they have. One would give his time and energy, the other some of his or her money, others clothing, food, care, and many spiritually committed involve their whole life in the Toby to preach the gospel, cast out demons, lay hand and take care of the mentally, spiritually and bodily sick. Skills and spiritual gifts from God, the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sanctifier, are all here combined in action to liberate, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the demoniacs and sick people. The shepherds also use their gifts to affirm the people, sick and healthy alike, in the salvation of the Lord Jesus of Nazareth.

The Malagasy Lutheran Church has three Tobilehibe. They are the three national revival villages to which other revival villages or Toby are affiliated. The Tobilehibe Soatanana started in 1894 and is led by apostles and shepherds. They have been tilling the land because they wanted to feed the sick they have been taking care of. The sick people were not their relatives, but are people in need of spiritual healing and have no strength to provide food and clothing for themselves. The shepherds are giving sacrificially from all that is their own. They use whatever is there with them to help themselves and the sick and needy they are in charge of in the Toby.

The Tobilehibe Ankaramalaza, which started in 1941, has been doing the same and asked the believers and the family of the sick to help also, as the number of the sick ones increased. The same for the Tobilehibe Farihimena, which started in 1946.

The Toby urged the institutions, schools and clinics in the village to help ensure the full spiritual, mental and bodily health of the people in the Toby. Remunerations are scarce, even in those institutions. The sharing in the Toby is not only of wealth, but also of suffering. The main thing is to share as much as one can for the advancement of the faith in everyone and for the propagation of the gospel to all nations. Jesus is the centre of all sharing of one's gift with someone else. So the sharing of the material, mental and the spiritual binds the whole community together in Jesus of Nazareth.

'Use Your Talents' in Parish Work

Using talent has always been done by individuals and groups within the church worship and ministry. Starting with the pastor who emphasises his vocation from Jesus in his commitment to the ministry. So whether he receives his remuneration in full or not, he keeps on following his vocation. The same for the evangelist and the catechists, the organ players, Sunday school teachers and the like, in the service of the church. Competence or skills are identified by each individual or by the groups within the church which call for the accomplishment of a specific task. Talents from the believers complete each other in the ministry of the church.

Remuneration of the Pastor and the Catechist and the Evangelists are usually handed in cash but in the rural area, because of the lack of money, the congregants find different ways of providing it in kind. Many will give the first fruit of the land and some will ask the departments within the church to till the land for pastor. So the departments will take turns, half a day a week or more, to work on the land of the church or a land which one of the congregants has lent in view of helping the church provide for the remuneration of the Pastors and the catechists. Some would

bring to the church crops from their own land to be sold in the church. Everybody would give as they are able and from what they have. This production looks more like a survival than a development. Yet the practice leads the whole community to be more confident that together and with Jesus they can achieve more than they are able individually. Skills complement one another and belongings add up to reach the goal. Unity in Jesus of Nazareth led people to even build church buildings by calling upon each believer to contribute through their talents. Some will donate of their belonging, whether it is money, materials, skills, time and prayers. This spirit has to be cultivated and given orientations. In this spirit, many parishes have established education departments which unite teachers in the parish to help the young among the congregants prepare for their exams. Similarly the department of health uniting the medical doctors in the parish to strengthen the sick with advice and even treatment of their illnesses. Other departments come to life such as that of law, business and agriculture.

'Use Your Talents' in the Department of Women in the Church

Women with skills teach other women in the church to acquire that skill so that those

who are in economic difficulty have a way to get out of their financial problems. Most vulnerable women and young adult women with children come to learn and have a better vision of their future. In this department of women, many teaching teams for special skills can be found: sewing team, agricultural team, literacy team, choir team.

'Use Your Talents' from inside the Church to the Community

This giving of self extended from the church to the community. The believers were urged to share with the community around them whatever they have to improve the socio-economic situation people are living in. As working together resulted in admirable achievement in the church, the society has confidence as Christians work together with them. – So roads and bridges are built by Christians and non-Christians together. The common good for all, little by little, becomes everybody's responsibility. Everybody is involved in the advancement of the society.

It is a privilege for me to share these experiences seen in the Malagasy Lutheran Church in this book written by clouds of witnesses as 'Use Your Talent' is revived at a universal level.

In Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord and Saviour.

*Pastor Rakoto Endor Modeste,
President of Malagasy Lutheran Church
2004 – 2016.
Ankaramalaza, March 7th, 2017*

Foreword from the editor

What can we do with what we have here and now? How can the congregation be a primary actor in developing the local community? These are the two main questions in 'Use Your Talents'. It started in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM) – a way of working based on experiences from congregations and their development committees laid the foundation for what gradually became a movement and an approach to development work within a church setting. Through the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS), I had the privilege to work as a consultant for FLM during those years and until now.

In 2011, we asked ourselves if this approach could be used in other contexts, in other churches. That was the start of the 'Use Your Talents' Knowledge Development Project (2013-2016). Four churches and their partner organisations in Norway have worked together, learned from each other and explored if we could further develop and spread 'Use Your Talents'. Most of the texts in this book are written by participants from this knowledge development project.

As a project leader, I would say that we have had an amazing and rewarding journey together. I want to thank all the participants and the participating churches and organisations for your contributions: professional, social, spiritual and administrative! It has been a pleasure to work with and be together with you.

I would like to extend special thanks to FLM and its leaders, and especially to my closest colleagues and friends: Mr. Noël Andriandrasana, Mr. Antoine Andriambonimihanta and Mrs. Zo Rakotoarison. You included me in your work, and as I see it, we found a way to work together where we could really Use Our Talents. I was very sorry when Noël became sick in November 2014 and had to retire. I also want to extend a special thanks to Mrs. Hanta Rasoarimalala, who shares her experiences in this book. Her voluntary work in her own community has been an inspiration for the development of 'Use Your Talents'.

I also want to thank the Norwegian Mission Society and especially Mrs. Anne Karin Kristensen. She has been responsible for 'Use Your Talents' within NMS and her support and dedication has been crucial for the project.

My thanks go also to Digni and especially Mrs. Lilliann E. Razafimandimby Våje and Mr. Jørn Lemvik (Director). Digni has financed the project and we have had their support and encouragement all the time.

My thanks also go to Mr. Dag Rune Sameien, who has been involved in the project in different ways, including in the group that is working to edit this book. I would like to extend a very special thanks to Mrs. Kerenina Kezaride Dansholm who edited both language and content in all the texts with a very sensitive touch. Your contribution has been very important.



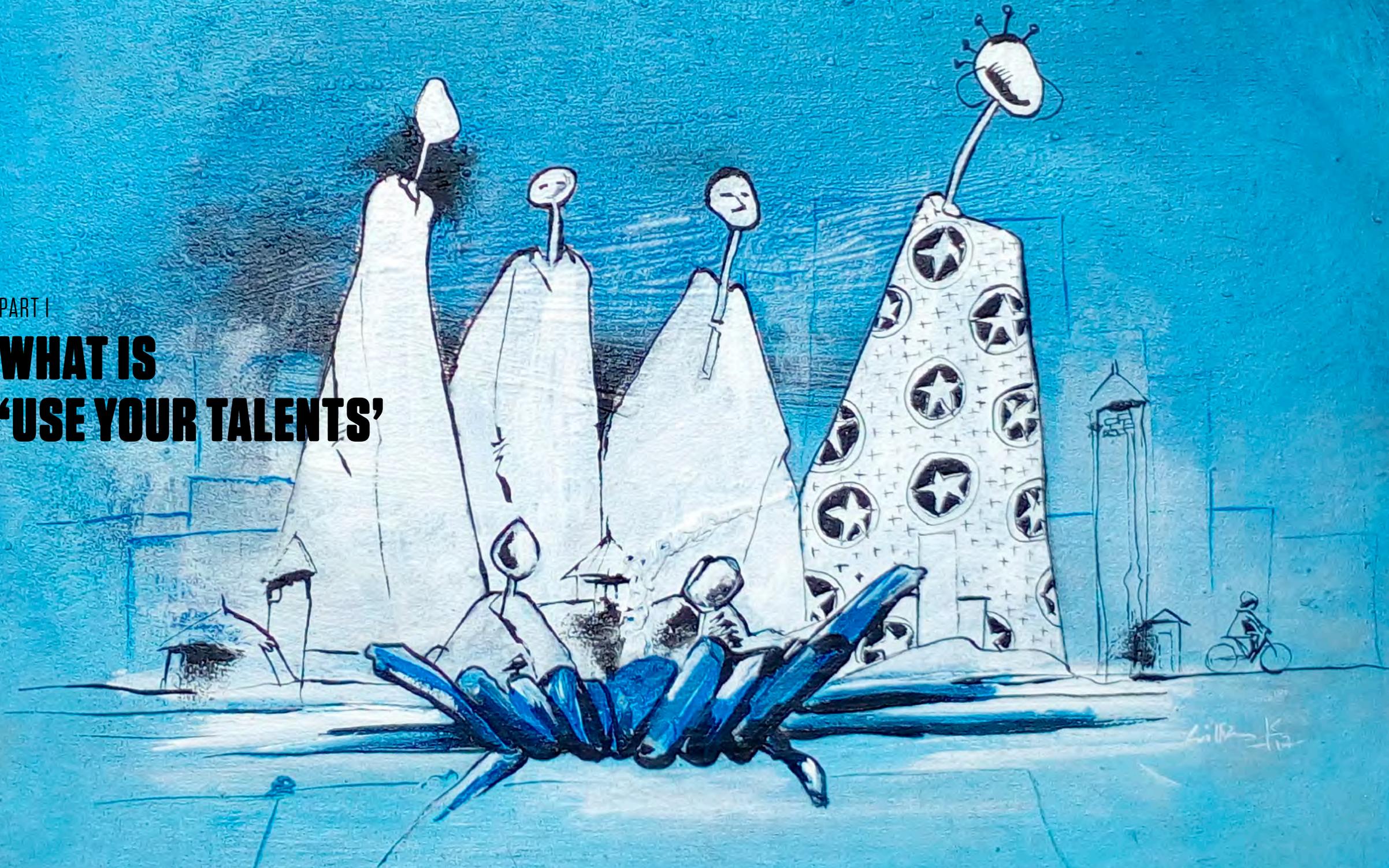
The cooperation with our lay-out firm has been close and very good. I would like to thank Mr. Kjell Inge Torgersen, Mr. Ivar Oftedal and Mrs. Janne Eide for excellent work. Mrs. Janne Eide also introduced Mr. William Kayo to this project. Your art, William, has lifted the book to a higher level. Thank you very much!

Finally, I would like to thank all the contributors. You have used your talents and you have shared your talents. Thank you!

May God Continue to Bless You All!

Stavanger, April 2017
Sigurd Haus

PART I
**WHAT IS
'USE YOUR TALENTS'**



"Femme et défis" by William Kayo

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

25 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

7"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

9" 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

10"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11"Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

12"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

13"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

The Parable of the Talents

14"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15To one he gave five talents^a of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts

^a15 A talent was worth several hundred pounds.

with them. 20The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

21"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

22"Then the man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

23"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

24"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

26"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

28"Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The Sheep and the Goats

31"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34"Then the right, 'Come, Father; take y dom prepared the world. 35I gave me some and you gave t a stranger an needed clothe sick and you prison and yo 37"Then the 'Lord, when feed you, or thing to drink stranger and clothes and el you sick or in 40"Then the truth, whatever of these brot 41"Then he 'Depart from into the etern and his angel gave me not you gave me stranger and needed cloth I was sick a look after m 44"Then a did we see stranger or prison, and 45"Then he whatever yo least of the 46"Then punishment life."

The Plot Against

26 Wh the ciples, 26" A two days a be handed 3Then th the people high pries 4and they



Sigurd Haus

On the left: The Parable of the Talents.

'USE YOUR TALENTS' KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

- introduction article

Written by Sigurd Haus, Project leader Use Your Talents Knowledge Development Project

Introduction

What can we do with what we have here and now? How can the congregation be a primary actor in developing the local community? These are the two main questions in 'Use Your Talents'.

experiences from congregations and their development committees laid the foundation for what gradually became a movement and an approach to development work within a church setting.

'Use Your Talents' started in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC or FLM). From 2002 to 2007, a manner of working based on

In 2007, we realised that the best way to describe this movement was with the parable of the talents from the Bible:

For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. (Matthew 25: 14-16)

That is why we called it 'Use Your Talents'. From 2008, the work gradually evolved, and we saw that it brought results. In 2011, we therefore asked ourselves: Could this approach be used in other contexts, in other churches, or were these methods only applicable to Madagascar? That was the start of the 'Use Your Talents' Knowledge Development Project (2013-2015). Four churches worked together, learned from each other and explored further developing and spreading the 'Use Your Talents' approach. This book is a result of the 'Use Your Talents' Knowledge Development Project. All the texts contribute to the understanding of 'Use Your Talents'.

In this introduction article, we will first present the essence of 'Use Your Talents' and the beginnings in MLC. After that, the 'Use Your Talents' Knowledge Development Project and the characteristics of this strategy will be described. Lastly, we will present the texts.

Use Your Talents

The essence of 'Use Your Talents' is to start at the congregation and go into the community – using what we have here and now. The goal is, first and foremost, to fulfil God's commandment to "Love your neighbour". 'Use Your Talents' is about how congregations can work to fulfil this commandment. It is about how congregations can fulfil their holistic ministries, how they can work to make living conditions better for their own members, for the congregation and for the rest of the community.

The main question in the 'Use Your Talents' approach is: What can we do with what we

have here and now? Matthew 25 shows the importance of recognising and using our talents.

'Talents', in our context, are our skills and our knowledge, our relationships to others, and our belongings, like land, houses and money. We are all entrusted with talents, and we are all expected to use our talents. We should not be afraid.

Moreover, when we put our talents together, when we work together, we can accomplish great results. The construction of a bridge close to a village in Madagascar is one example:

A village needed a bridge. The path that passes over the bridge goes between a village and the main road that also leads to the centre of the municipality. The purpose of the bridge was:

- to provide easy access to the dispensary, especially for women who are going to give birth;
- for children to gain access to school, including during times of flooding;
- to make it easier to bring products to the market place.

The construction was done on a voluntary basis. The development committee within the local church organised the work, the municipality provided the stones and the army provided the wood.

'Use Your Talents' in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC)

The Malagasy Lutheran Church has about 3.5 million members and 5,500 congregations all over Madagascar. One of the main ideas of the 2005 policy document was that development should start from the grass-roots, where people get together and seek to solve their own problems. Based on the parable in Matthew 25, the vision of 'Use Your Talents' is: *To stimulate and support everyone in the church to use his or her talents to build a better Madagascar.*

What we learned in Madagascar while we worked with the policy document was that the church and its members are involved in a lot of development work within the church and in the local community:

- Building schools
- Building bridges or maintaining roads
- Tree planting
- Courses in cultivation of different plants
- Advisers in agriculture
- Building storage facilities for rice
- Building healthcare units
- Protecting the environment
- Running care centres for the sick and needy people
- Etc.

We also learned that there are some key people that readily share knowledge with their neighbours. Some of them also share their experiences in this book.

The question we asked ourselves was: How is it possible to further stimulate and facilitate this kind of voluntary work? The main strategy in Madagascar was to establish separate functioning development committees within the church at all levels, and create a network of relationships inside and outside the church that could support local development initiatives – not by offering financial support, but by offering training and exchanges of experience. The role of committees is to promote development in the villages or the areas where they are located. In addition, volunteer field agents work to train and help congregations.

Cooperation

This way of working leads many people to begin initiatives and do things without external resources; but we also saw that many of the most active people cooperated with local authorities and local NGOs on a very broad basis. In that way, this type of work could be seen as a kind of foundation that

gives knowledge, develops self-confidence, connects people and creates networks – all factors that we see as crucial for development.

In this context, 'projects' are initiated locally, and the local actors also own and conduct the activities. 'Use Your Talents' contributes to the ideal where the local actors are the prime actors and NGOs support them, based on decisions within the community.

This can also be seen as an advantage for NGOs. They can concentrate on their professional knowledge and cooperate with partners that are reliable and competent; partners that also have a long-term perspective and want to continue the work after the cooperation period is finished.

'Use Your Talents' Knowledge Development Project - Could 'Use Your Talents' benefit other Churches?

Through the Knowledge Development Project (2013-2015), our goal was to find other churches and mission organisations that had experience with or were interested in the same kind of approach. The questions we asked ourselves were:

- Could this approach be used in other contexts, in other churches, or is this approach only applicable in Madagascar?
- Is it possible to find general factors that are also useful in other settings?
- Is it possible to improve the work in MLC by implementing ideas from other churches?

The objective was to share experiences and learn from each other and, through this process, develop this approach and make it available to others.

Exchange of Experiences

During 2012, three churches (in addition to MLC) and their Norwegian partners showed interest in the project, and a workshop to

discuss the project was held in Nairobi in December of that year. The churches were The Malagasy Lutheran Church, Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya, The United Methodist Church – Zimbabwe Episcopal Area and Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Their partners are NMS (Norwegian Mission Society), PYM (Norwegian Pentecostal Mission), the Methodist Church and NLM (Norwegian Lutheran Mission). The Knowledge Development Project was financed by Digni and run by NMS.

Study Tours

During 2013-2014, we had study tours to all four churches with 3-4 participants from each church and their cooperating partners. In the beginning of each study tour, each of the participants stayed with a family for two days to learn what the family does for a living and in what way they are engaged in development work in the church and in society. The reports from the visits were then used as the basis for the discussions about if and how this approach could be applicable in the different churches.

National Workshops

The main purpose of these workshops was to gather the experiences and reflections about 'Use Your Talents' in each church and discuss if and how this approach could be further developed within the church.

Cooperation with Universities and University Colleges

The project also started to cooperate with interested universities and university colleges to develop training programs and research related to 'Use Your Talents'.

What characterises this approach?

During our work in the Knowledge Development Project, we tried to summarise 'Use Your Talents' into some main points:

Start with the resources

The main idea in 'Use Your Talents' is to start with the resources and talents that are already present in the community and ask how they can be recognised, used and developed. This represents an alternative to approaches based on needs or rights – which focuses on what is lacking in the community.

Actors

The members of the community and congregation are the actors. They take the initiative, they invite people to participate, they cooperate with others and they organise the work. In this way, they are not "participants" or "a target group" or people that "need to be involved" – all concepts taken from a traditional project approach. They are the actors.

Integrated in Congregational Life

Normal church development work is often linked to a special development department. Often they operate quite separately from the rest of the church. The result is that local congregations do not have the positive impact on the community that they could. In 'Use Your Talents', development work is an integrated part of congregational work.

Voluntary Work

'Use Your Talents' approach is made possible by volunteers. – Similar to other voluntary church work, like singing in the choir.

Networking

'Use Your Talents' starts with people's experiences, and then asks how it is possible to learn from each other. How is it possible to create networks so that people with different resources can meet and share experiences? With development committees at all levels in the church structure, active in meetings and forums throughout the year, experiences can be spread and people can cooperate across geographical borders.

Sustainability

Since the work is voluntary, it means that it is possible to avoid dependence on an external partner or donor.

Ownership

A very central point is: Development starts when men and women get together and organise, and through that break out of the helplessness that is very often the crucial part of poverty. They create for themselves the possibility to have an impact. In this way, this approach is an answer to one of the main challenges within development, namely, ownership.

The Contributions in this Book

The main idea in 'Use Your Talents' is that it starts in the congregation with what you have here and now and goes into society – "Love Your Neighbour". The initiatives can be very different, as you will see in the contributions that follow.

Almost all of the contributors have participated in the 'Use Your Talents' Knowledge Development Project. The texts are very different. Some are personal testimonies, some are examples, some are discussions, some are short reports, some are discussions on a special topic and some are devotionals. There are, for example, articles on the concept of talents in the Bible, agricultural production, cooperation with local authorities, saving groups and becoming self-reliant. The texts are also a mix of genres. To make it simple, we call all the texts articles. We believe that together the articles will explain 'Use Your Talents' in a clear way and hopefully inspire you, as a reader, both to see and use your own talents.



Antoine
Andriambonimihanta

Antananarivo,
Madagascar



THE DEVELOPMENT OF 'USE YOUR TALENTS' IN MADAGASCAR

Written by Antoine Andriambonimihanta,
Country Coordinator for 'Use your talents' Madagascar

The Malagasy Lutheran Church uses this approach in order to develop the church itself, the Christians, and especially the society surrounding the church. We wish that this approach will be used all around Madagascar, and even in the whole world, for the spiritual, physical and intellectual development of each person.

‘USE YOUR TALENTS’ is an approach to development work in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC). The aim is to improve people’s intellectual, physical and spiritual life. The program targets the whole person, according to its vision in the fourth challenge in the MLC vision: “Promote holistically the entire person”. The realisation of this approach brought many outputs and outcomes to the church itself and to the local society.

Here ‘Use Your Talents’ in MLC will be presented through the following four points:

- The history of MLC and its development activities
- The reason why MLC chose this approach
- The approach ‘Use Your Talents’
- The impacts of this approach.

The history of MLC and its development activities

MLC is among the biggest protestant churches in Madagascar. The Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) brought Lutheran Christianity to Madagascar for the first time in 1867. In the beginning, missionaries used to lead the church hierarchy: clergy, parish, district, synod and headquarters. They ensured the management and ran all the activities. The church used to be called “missionary church” at that time. From 1901 to 1903, the wish for church independence prospered in the hearts of Malagasy Christians. During the 1903 big synod meeting in Masombahoaka area in Fianarantsoa town, a Malagasy pastor shared this idea in public. We can say that it was not immediately approved, because we needed to go step by step, but the longing to gain independence was brewing slowly. In 1950, the denomination MLC (Malagasy Lutheran Church) was born. Since then, little by little the Malagasy took over the administration and activities within the church at different levels.

The history of MLC cannot be separated

from the whole history of Madagascar. Since the colonisation period until now, Malagasy people have thought that the leaders are supposed to “give” everything people need, and thus the people would “receive” whatever the leaders give them – whether it is good or bad for them. This principle or attitude of non-participation of the governed people led to poverty. We could notice this principle even at church: the Christians thought that the missionaries are there to give; they call them “parents” while the Christians consider themselves as “children”. So the relationship of parents and children reigned between the

missionaries and MLC. Now, in this third millennium, this relationship has evolved to “partnership”. Presently in the church, the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed still exists: pastors are the parents and the Christians the children. I believe that, in some respects, this principle is good, as the pastor is the representative of God. The pastor continues the work that God gave to Adam and Eve: He gave them the breath of life, the garden of Eden, and finally some talents for work and stewardship. Likewise, the pastor shares the Scripture and the sacraments, and helps Christians to improve their material

development through using the talents they got from God. But sometimes it is difficult to put that theory into practise.

Since the beginning, the missionaries started activities to improve people’s living. To illustrate, we can name some of the development activities from the time of the missionaries: building hospitals, building mainstream schools for general education, specialised schools for people with disabilities (schools for the blind and for the deaf), building vocational agriculture schools, popularisation of farming and livestock,



other diaconal missions, a wide range of work planning, the seminary school of theology, etc. All of these were made to improve people's lives – not only in a material and financial sense, because most of the participants converted and started to pray later. It is worth specifying that most of the funds used in these development activities came from abroad, and at the beginning of each project, the missionaries led the work. Later, the Malagasy people also got involved little by little in the management of the work which the missionaries had started. Nowadays, no more missionaries are on the management, even though they still invest a lot of money in the work.

Similarly, the management of the church went through these steps. Now MLC is entirely responsible for the management and development of the church. Malagasy Christians are called to contribute in different sectors according to their skills and resources. Currently, all of the 6700 churches, 1500 parishes, 300 districts and 23 synods have autonomy and do not receive any funds from abroad to run their activities. Even MLC headquarters receives less than 10% of their budget from abroad.

With this historical background in mind, we will look at why and how 'Use Your Talents' developed within MLC.

Why is the approach chosen by MLC

Three main reasons pushed MLC to choose this approach. First, the historical reasons, as said earlier; then the motivation to continue God's work for a sustainable development of the church; and last, the feeling that if the work belongs to every Christian, then they will do it with love.

a) Historical reasons

As told earlier, MLC and the Christians in the church were cultivated to be "givers" and

"receivers". Later, as the number of Christians increased and the poverty situation became obvious, the leaders made an effort to motivate each enthusiastic Christian to help for the autonomy of the church, either in the operations or services of the church. That could be done with personal resources and the skills of local people. The availability of resources pushed pastors to use Christians' motivation more for their own advantage, for the good of the society surrounding, as well as for the development of their church.

In the Lutheran community, "all believers can be priests". The leaders say that priesthood work should not be limited within the four walls of the church; it should go outside the church for others because that is what we call "development". This teaching was given to motivate the Christians to use their talents to develop not only themselves, but also others. The Malagasy Lutheran Church now has four TOBY LEHIBE, and 97 smaller ones. These Tobys are social centres that take care of sick and disabled persons. They are also powerful spiritual centres where people meet in thousands for worship and prayer. Here Christians are taught to go and preach and work outside the church. So commitment within church must be followed by other works in the community's daily life, according to the tasks and responsibilities of each person. One of our spiritual parents told us that "we cannot say that the lessons are known if they are not lived". – That it is, at the same time, a service to God and development work, according to the sector and the situation. Most of the time, the "shepherds", who are the leaders within the Tobys, are the ones who are doing this kind of work; and they are really fervent. There are also other people that are not shepherds, but are convinced of their vocation to do God's work and serve in their daily life using their talents. In 2002, a book was written about development principle and strategy for MLC. This book has the

following motto: "MLC works for a living and sustainable development." The participation of each person and each citizen to his/her own development, his/her family and his/her society is especially highlighted. It can start with a little thing and then get bigger.

Most of the earlier missionary work was done in the Synod of Antsirabe, including the creation of the agricultural vocational school (Tombontsoa). Up to now, 3000 students have graduated from this school. After their studies, these students go back to their home village and use what they have learned about farming and livestock. The first director of the school, called Razafimandimby, was also leader of the development work within the synod. Many small projects were carried out with the Christians, to improve their situation. He was also teaching at the theological school at that time. The objective was to educate the students to become pastors and learn technical skills in agriculture at the same time. So, the pastor trainees of that time had two desks, at church and in the field, where they work as technicians.

The department for the rural animation of agriculture and farming was also implemented in this synod. This 'animation' department trained a lot of people in development work, and those who followed the teaching became technicians and thus models for other farmers in the community.

In 2007, MLC developed a vision to be applied in the church and society. The fourth challenge in the goal is to "Promote the full and entire person". The strategy to realise the goal is to find out the talents of each Christian and use them for development.

To sum up, we understand that both the legacy from missionaries and from The Revival Movement, the training and counselling in agriculture and the recent work to define a



"MLC works for a living and sustainable development."

clear policy for development work, have been important for the development of the 'Use Your Talents' approach in MLC.

b) Lead the Church to a sustainable development

The church is one institution that should be sustainable, so if leaders are smart and have good organisation, the activities will last for a long time. All the work should start with preaching the Scriptures. The development activities of the church will be sustainable because the Christian people also live in the community. So all the suggestions, the decisions and the realisations are from the local people. It means that sustainable work starts from available local resources and skills of the persons willing to do the work, and is not dependent on external funds. Everything should start with simple and small work, not with big financial support from abroad. And finally, development should respect the local culture and ecology.

c) Convince the Christians that the development is theirs

More than half of the Malagasy population belongs to a church. To be member in a church is important for people. For MLC Christians, they are supposed to preach and practise the gospel. The teaching of 'Use Your Talents' says that God gives talents to each person. The development committee coordinates and organises the use of Christians' talents for development work. So, they realise that the work belongs to them and they feel motivated if there is any barrier to the development.

When they realise that the work is theirs, they do everything themselves: make project plans, do the realisation, enjoy the advantages, and follow up at the end. So, the achievement of the work relies on each person, and many bring their talents and time to development action led by the church.

To sum up the last two points: The church tries to encourage and train people to do development work by using local resources. That creates ownership and sustainability. But how does it work in the community and in the church?

'Use Your Talents' in practise

A big guarantee for the success of this approach within the church is the pastor, including the Scripture teachings related to the development action in the place. The pastor organises the development committee in his church. This committee uses the approach for the development of the church.

The committee needs to be aware of the local context (know the history of the place) and the local culture that should be respected, before starting any work. The members of the committee have to find each talented person. They lead everyone to be committed to development actions. When people volunteer and their talents are defined, they are gathered into groups with a technical committee so that they develop the work together. It can start in small groups, for example, with five

persons to make the organisation easier. A small number makes it easier to prioritise and to ask a woman to lead the group. We have experienced in MLC that if a woman leads an association, it thrives more. Finally, once the rules and plans are all settled, the work begins and each one takes responsibility. They work together and all the advantages are shared equally between them. A follow up is done to improve and develop the skills.

The impacts of the approach

In general, the impacts of this approach are classified in three categories, according to experience.

a) In the society

Once the neighbourhood knows that the church is the source of the development work, people trust and do the work, as they believe that it is a blessing for them.

The neighbourhood wants Christians to lead them in development work, because they think that they are reliable and righteous. It becomes a big subject of discussion for the people in the society if the church brings innovations for development.

In this approach, women have a special place in society because they are the most diligent in using their talents, and they are really eager to lead the others. As we have experienced, development work led by women goes further than those led by men.

This approach also builds a strong relationship among community members, as the unity of all is one of the objectives. If the people in the neighbourhood are on good terms, the number of thieves and beggars decreases; consequently each member of the community knows the importance of development work. Thus, a common network of communication is born in the community that uses this approach.

b) For the individual and the family

Personal skills increase from the experience, and everyone feels responsible for running and managing the family. Consequently, there is gender equality in families using this approach.

If each member takes responsibility, the whole family's standard of living improves and they can fulfil their duties. Overall, they have a better life.

Love and fraternity reign in the family and they become a model for society, and many other families will follow their example.

c) In the Church

There are many impacts of this approach in the church, as it demonstrates a goal of every Christian, which is a commitment to serve:

- We can see the number of Christians increasing. Additionally, more people volunteer in the service and development work. So it is much easier for the church to ensure different kinds of involvement and regular financial contributions. If there is any deficit in the church management, the Christians do not tolerate it because they feel they are owners.
- The work of the development committee is not limited to the organisation, because they are also the engine of church development in general.
- The development work requires that the leader (the pastor) knows what the Christians do in their daily lives and how to use that. He is challenged to improve his knowledge and enlarge his capacity, not only on theology but also in other fields.
- Some persons who volunteer in the church become professionals later, especially those who volunteer in development work. Actually when they use the approach, the persons who benefit from the development action sometimes

offer money to them. For example, a technician volunteer specialised in poultry taught the farmers in the community, and he received some money back for his motivation and the time he spent, although it is not defined as a salary. He does benevolent work.

- In the churches that use this approach, Sunday service announcements teach us that the development works and gives benefits to the community's daily life as well as church life.

- In 2012, an association of three churches from Africa helped MLC using this approach. This association is called KDP (Knowledge Development Program). For three years (2013-2015), there was an exchange of capacity between the churches. Nowadays, this approach is no longer limited to Africa but is spread to Asia, Thailand, China and Japan. MLC cooperates with other missionaries in spreading this approach to other places.

In conclusion, the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) uses this approach in order to develop the church itself, the Christians, and especially the society surrounding the church. We wish that this approach will be used all around Madagascar, and even in the whole world, for the spiritual, physical and intellectual development of each person.



We have experienced in MLC that if a woman leads an association, it thrives more.



*“Withhold not good from
them to whom it is due, when
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hand to do it.”
(Proverbs 3:27)*



Hanta
Rasoarimalala

Tsarazaza,
Madagascar



‘Animateur/animator’
is a French word used to describe a person in the community who acts as an informal leader in initiating projects, motivating and activating others.

MY EXPERIENCES AS AN ‘ANIMATEUR’

in the Malagasy Lutheran Church

Written by Hanta Rasoarimalala

I began on a very little: From selling consoude balm, I got a sewing machine. The income from sewing and hat selling gave me the opportunity to buy pigs. I have never ceased to increase my skills, because they are beneficial for everybody. To those who read this testimonial I would like to say, the more you use your talents, the more they develop. So don't hide your skills.

I wish you all the best. May the peace of the Lord be with you.



“Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.” (Proverbs 3:27) This proverb has inspired me in doing development work; it's better to share good things with others and not keep them to yourself. Everyone has duties to the nation, to the church, and even to the whole world – because that is Jesus' message. I would like you to pay attention to my story, through this testimonial of using talents.

I grew up in a needy family

I am a farmer's child, who grew up on a farm. My family could be classified as a needy family.

I started school when I was about 10 years old. Facing difficulties I thought: I'll try not to be in the same poor situation as my parents. When I was in school, I used to help my classmates and my friends with their homework. I continued helping in Sunday schools and youth associations. I couldn't be selfish when I could give a hand.

How we worked in Tatamalaza

When I was young, I got married; God gave my husband the job of a pastor. We have worked in three districts until today: at the parish of Andriakely, district Tsarazaza, district Tatamalaza, and the district Antanimboanjo where we live now. Before the creation of the

program, I have been doing work related to 'Use Your Talents' in the parish of Andriakely, district Tsarazaza, where we first worked, but it was not so prominent. The synod committee appointed us to work in the district of Tatamalaza in March 1998, so we moved to this place in July 1998.

The first thing we did when we arrived at Tatamalaza was to visit Christians' homes, preach the gospel, and we also did a survey. From those visits and investigations, people's problems were found out. That inspired me to intervene, use my skills, and encourage people to use their God-given talents because everyone has their own talent: men, women, children, young people, the elderly and the disabled. In mid-1998, we completed the survey, and through this investigation each person's problem was found. During our visit, we have found similar associations having the same aim. Among them was an organisation in a village called Antavikely, 3km west of the church and 2km north-west of Tatamalaza. Many people, in various cities and churches, have worked with me in 'Use Your Talents', but I will witness especially about this organisation, the work we have done and the opportunities we enjoyed together.

Fertilisers

During the house visits, discussions centred on asking about problems, why people do not come to church, and children's studies, which are only limited to primary schools; they do not go further. The problem was that they lacked resources and they even have no money for the offerings; they can't buy soap to wash their clothes.

When we asked about the reason, they said farming is the basic survival support, but the land is poor and not very productive. Livestock died from diseases, they cannot be successful farmers. They were looking for donors to buy fertiliser; they could not find any and had financial difficulties.

Almost all the problems among the members were similar, according to following discussion. We found that the fertiliser problem is our priority so we focused on that first. In our organisation, the members included 10 families, with 28 persons total. The people had similar standard of living, and were ready to improve their lives. As we found that fertiliser was the main problem, we focused on making compost. Actually, farming relies completely on fertiliser, as the Malagasy proverb says: "Wood can be transformed into a canoe if it is planted in good soil". So if we want to get good results, first we should take care of the land and enrich it with fertiliser. We first dealt with producing compost, as we have mentioned. Then we moved on to various farming techniques, such as vegetable planting, off season cultures on the rice fields which gives other products, and we also improved the rice production – which is the staple food for the Malagasy people.

I started to use new techniques

I taught that it is possible to make efforts with what you have in hand – not always waiting for help from others; that is to say, starting with the little you have and increasing. I made my first example of manure compost, because I didn't have cattle. It is better to turn cow manure to compost than to use it directly (from the farm to the field). I planted vegetables and off season cultures in the rice fields. I made an effort to have them on the road sides so that many people would see my examples. That made them interested and they would ask questions. Then it was easier to start sharing information. I continued to sensitise at church and in home visits. I also showed these interventions at different fairs. The approach was successful, with many people asking for training. We extended our activities in different fields: various farming techniques, rain-fed cultures such as soy-beans, beans, sweet potatoes, etc. We also made cassava grafting, and fruit tree grafting.

The grafting attracted many visitors. Rice culture was not less important, as it is a staple food. At the beginning, it was very difficult to integrate the new farming techniques like Intensive Rice Production System. I had to demonstrate during the fair to convince people to adopt the new farming techniques.

Soon, many applied the techniques I taught in Antavikely; everyone shared and taught each other – no one kept the skills for oneself. Similarly, we did training about livestock, because we saw the animals died of diseases. Members were also trained to do vaccinations for poultry, rabbits, pigs and cattle. Besides traditional farming, new techniques were introduced to improve their livelihood, for example, bee-keeping and fish farming in the rice field.

Everybody benefited

It was noted that people who worked with me got a better livelihood, and were motivated to go to church to fulfil their financial support. Children could get better education, while previously it was limited.

We did not stop with different farming techniques. I also taught food processing to have healthy food, like making cakes with sweet potatoes, transforming soy-beans into milk, soy, etc. We also had training on life skills, gender equality and the fight against HIV/AIDS, etc.

From these small achievements, difficulties decreased. People noticed they got advantages due to the effort we made together. Besides our own effort in using what we had in hand, we looked for help and cooperation. Therefore, some governmental and non-governmental organisations have worked with them. They felt joy, and they harvest crops; they never forget me. For example, they offer sweet potatoes or other crops produced from the work we did together, according to the season. Similarly, on the New Year, they



"I got a sewing machine."

bring a gift from their livestock, they offer fish on national Independence Day, and on top of that, they appoint two days a year to work for free on my land. We both get benefits, either me as a trainer or themselves as trainees, because we all use our God-given talents.

Cooperation with Local Authorities

Prosperous cooperation continued and was expanded to the community. In 2005, robbery was frequent due to people's poverty caused by the cyclones. The mayor of Tatamalaza called for cooperation to eradicate robbery. I was especially called to attend the forum. It was then decided that each family had to have two acres of off season cultures. I was appointed to sensitise, give training, and supervise the project. The campaign was in each village; I gave training and we had practise in the field. After that, we followed up development of the culture and the production. People got good crops. Consequently, robbery reduced and since then people committed to farming works.

Sewing centre

We went on with the cooperation. I looked for a way to improve my skills and knowledge. I learned to make consoude balm (a local herbal remedy) with a church development



Consoude leaves.

project. We use essential oil from consoude, pure coconut oil, and pure honey wax. The balm cures diseases such as rheumatic knee pain, coughs, colds, and many others. The balm was sold at a low price – affordable and efficient for many people. The proceeds from the balm were especially beneficial for me; I collected money to buy a sewing machine which works with electricity and can also be used manually. I got a sewing machine, but I did not know how to sew. I applied at one church development project to get a scholarship for a sewing course. I got it, and I went to the Lutheran Women's League centre. We received training on many things: management, preaching, gender equality, civics and others, apart from sewing. My studies lasted seven months, and I finished my studies in 2007.

Back in my workplace at Tatamalaza, I set up a teaching centre for young people in the church – for both boys and girls. My first students were seven boys and girls. I thank God, all of them were hard working. A lot of people heard about my work experience and skills. Consequently, the mayor called me to teach in the community every Monday, which was a market day. I lovingly accomplished the work. Many women came to learn. I didn't sign any salaried contract; I did it for free, as I got the talent from God, but



The consoude balm is ready.

the trainee women collected some offerings for the training they received. I got happiness and fulfilment from using my talents. Equally, those who worked with me were also happy because they could pass it on to others. So many people got advantages.

Out of my District

My work did not only stay in the district of Tatamalaza. We shared experiences with the districts of Miarinaratra, Ankafobalo, and Vatomitsangana, which are not too far. We then

worked in the scope of church development. A competition was organised for potato crops. They brought their crop to the church to see the best production. After the selection, the crops were sold and money was offered for church development. We noticed better agricultural techniques and results.

Beside the activities held at church, we also gave training to students in schools, including the Miarinaratra High School. I taught them basketball, compost, worm fertiliser, sewing,

and about caring for the environment. The students were interested. It stimulated them to raise awareness on fighting against slash and burn, on reforestation, and on flower gardening in the school to make it green. The work continued and spread to the entire synod.

As the president of church workers' wives, I gave training on civics, gender equality, leadership, and various techniques involving small farms: poultry, fruit and vegetable cultures, rain-fed cultures, rice cultures,

handicraft, and consoude balm. Progress was seen and felt among the members. Approximately 85 members in the synod received training once a year, and it had good and far-reaching effects on their daily lives and the life of the church.

I started by Using My Talents

I continue using my skills and I have never ceased to increase them, because they are beneficial for everybody. To those who read this testimonial, I would like to say that I started with what I had in my hands, planting consoude to be processed into balm and sold. Then I got money to buy a sewing machine; I became a dressmaker after my training. I used the income to sell hats. I began with twenty thousand Ariary (approx. 6 USD) and that helped us in our living. So, use your talents to help yourself and others.

From 2010 - District of Antanimboanjo

The synod committee met in March 2010 and appointed us to work in another district. So we moved to the district of Antanimboanjo. We arrived at Antanimboanjo in August 2010. As usual, we paid a visit to and surveyed practising Christians. According to the survey, a lot of technicians had already come with training, and there were already projects relating to development in the area. It was visible, but there are always new ways coming up, so I continued my work.

Women

Many women do not know their rights, and that led me to hold a meeting to inform them about their rights, and encourage them to work for development – first for themselves and after for others.

We organised a festive meeting on March 8th, 2011: cleaning hospitals and schools, planting flowers and young trees, followed by a discussion and training related to

environment and equal rights. We continued that every year and we used the earnings to help the families of patients and women who are going to give birth. The hospital only had the basics, so we bought cooking pots, buckets, bowls, jugs, mattresses, and many other materials to reduce rural people's difficulties. We wanted to encourage them to come to hospital for childbirth or for diseases, and not depend on traditional practise without any doctors. It was successful and the rural people were happy. The new equipment at the hospital encouraged many people to join the members to use their talents, because they feel their burden lightened since they do not have to bring those materials, like cooking pots, and buckets.

Water

The work continued. We visited another village named Antsaharoaloha, with a population of approximately 84 (15 houses). We led a survey, and found that during the rainy season there are several days of diarrhoea. We looked at their well; it was very dirty during the rainy season and that caused diarrhoea in the village. There was a church development project working on improving water springs. We applied to get the infrastructure for the village. The village people provided all the work, while the project provided the materials: cement, iron, stone, and sand. The work was done because they all used their talents, whether young boys, young girls, children, adults, and even old people, according to their capacity. The work was completed in a short time (five days) and everyone enjoys the benefits. Diarrhoea is less frequent, people are healthier; every day people can go to the field or to school.

Sensitisation

Sensitisation campaigns went on to encourage people to improve their standard of living, starting with available resources, and using local solutions in their farming, livestock and



The congregation in Ambaniriana organised the building of this bridge i 2015.

handicraft techniques. Our district has five churches. I raise awareness in each of them, but each church has a different plan of action. Even in rice-growing, there are different solutions, like the technical rice field, culture crops, tree planting, etc.

The purpose is to make Christians use their talents in their respective churches. The churches have made efforts to expand the buildings because Christians are increasing in number. Some improve the inside, and some set up an inside balcony, etc. This illustrates the growth of Christians' standard of living. If not, how can they do this? In addition, they also perform their duties in the district and the synod. We can say that most people have used their talents positively. That includes the rehabilitation of some infrastructures inherited from former development projects.

Some bridges were old and needed maintenance. The church, helped by the community, actively participated in the reconstruction because of the importance of communication and transport. People helped each other. Some provided the

wood. Others provided the oxen and carts for transportation. Some 40 men lifted wood for repairing the bridge. The work was successfully completed. Experts supervised the work to ensure the infrastructure was strong.

The work will not end until Jesus comes. We continue in encouraging widows and divorced women to work together and unite in order to improve their standard of living, for example, one woman had seven girls to raise by herself. We are now starting to produce manure and planting vegetables. We hope to gather money every month and to progress. We are also looking for a way to teach handicraft to women, and particularly young single mothers with social problems. We want to help them to thrive. We want them to behave decently to be the pride of the family. The cooperation with native Malagasies who are expatriates in other places also helps the development, so we do not forget to invite them to give a hand with the talents they have in order to advance a holistic development. We organise sport competitions of different kinds to prevent

alcohol or drug addiction, and many young people get involved.

We sometimes have a praise song competition. All the youth show their talents. The band is not necessarily a choir, so groups from different denominations, either Lutheran or Catholic or any other can praise God together, parents and children together. A reward is given to the winner to encourage each other and motivate others. I, myself, am also skilled in writing poems, and for me this is an occasion to read poems and, in that way, encourage people to use their talents.

International Exchange

Above all, it was a great advantage for me to attend the international exchange of experiences which took place in and around Fianarantsoa in August 2013, which involved several talented groups and volunteer counsellors in grass-roots development work who shared their skills.

During a workshop in Kenya in April 2014, we could see women's impressive solidarity working together in organisations that do fund-raising, and give loans to those who want to use money; for example, to build a house, or buy land, etc. It was a great experience for me to show my ability to milk in Kenya.

In Ethiopia, in November 2014, we saw the social work of the churches to help the poor build their homes. They were also involve in infrastructure and school construction. In addition, they participate in social work, such as repairing roads. That impressed non-believers, leading them to go and pray at church. On top of all that, they do not neglect to use good techniques in their everyday living activities, such as in farming and livestock.

These are all real privileges for me to use my talents, to promote myself and others, and the target is to develop the whole and all

needy people. Thanks to awareness raising campaigns, some infrastructure is set up to fight against environmental degradation; two families in the district of Antanimboanjo have "BIO-GAS" systems. Thank God my work in using my talents is recognised by some non-governmental and governmental development projects. Therefore, they helped in providing some materials for the work, namely bicycles and hoeing machines. The people do not forget to offer gifts for the New Year (money), or a memorial present in recognition of the work that has been done. This reminds me of the proverb: "The good you accomplish is happiness, but the bad you have done is misfortune".

When you use your talents for the benefit of your friends, that will be remembered wherever you are, and that is a precious treasure that God gives, as it says in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

So, use your talent according to Jesus' words, and you'll get more benefits. I, myself, confirm that I have gotten many advantages and having the opportunity to tell this testimonial is a great encouragement to me to continue using my talents until Jesus comes, for the good of the whole people.

Conclusion

There is no problem in leading the association, even if I am a woman. Anyway, self-determination is very important as well as the good use of talents given by God for yourself and others. I have chosen my motto from Proverbs: "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due when it is in the power of thine hand to do it." (Proverbs 3-27)

I reiterate here that I began on a very little: from selling consoude balm, I got a sewing machine. The income from sewing and hat selling gave me the opportunity to buy pigs bred by someone else; both of us received

benefits. The important thing I want to pass on is the idea of righteousness and trust. If you have a trustworthy reputation, your work will go smoothly. I sold hats just through phone calls. People I had never met ordered hats and sent electronic money, because there was mutual trust. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to continue the work until our retirement. Now that it is no longer far, we plan to buy milking cows.

In closing this testimonial on using your talents, I would like to say I have no problem in fulfilling my additional duties at home. I do not neglect taking care of my home; the most important is sharing the tasks and responsibilities, especially concerning the children's education.

We have five children; all of them go to school normally. The eldest son has his bachelor's degree in computer management and is now studying to be a pastor. The second son is finishing his studies at Polytechnical School, Ivontovorona. The third studies about the rural world at the Technical High School in Ambositra. The fourth is finishing his high school this year, and the fifth is in grade 11. It is a real joy for me to share my experiences in the use of talents. Use your talents: it helps you and it helps others. That's why I encourage you to use the talents that God has given us all according to Matthew 25:14-30.

As a pastor's wife, I also contribute a lot in different church groups. I would like to stress that Lutheran Christians are not the only people with whom I worked. I also worked with Catholic, FJKM (Malagasy Reformed Church), Adventist churches and many others.

It is helpful to use the talents. The more you use it, the more it develops. Use your talent, don't keep it. It will help you and others. Remember that you help yourself and all people if you use your talent. I wish you all the



It is helpful to use the talents. The more you use it, the more it develops. Use your talent, don't keep it. It will help you and others.

best. May the peace of the Lord be with you who are reading this testimonial about 'Use Your Talents'. Glory is only for the Lord.



Emmanuel
Kisemei

THE FOUR LAWS OF GOD'S BLESSING

in relation to using our talents

Written by Pastor Emmanuel Kisemei,
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1. Our blessings (talents) should flow to others

The Bible teaches us that we are blessed, not just so that we can feel good, not just so we can be happy and comfortable, but so that we will bless others. God told Abraham in Genesis 12, "I will bless you and you will be a blessing to others." This is the first law of blessing; it must flow outwardly.

2. When we bless others through our talents, God takes care of our needs

God promises that if we will concentrate on blessing others, He'll take care of our needs. There's almost nothing that God won't do for the person who really wants to help other people. In fact, God guarantees this blessing. In Luke 18, Jesus says, "I guarantee this. Anyone who gives up anything for the kingdom of God will certainly receive many times more in this life and will receive eternal life in the next world to come."

When you care about helping other people, God assumes responsibility for your problems. And that's a real blessing, for He's much better at handling your difficulties than you are.

3. Our blessings to others, through our talents, will come back to us

The more you bless other people, the more you help others, the more God blesses your life. Luke 6:38 tells us, "Give your life away

and you'll find your life given back. But not merely given back. Given back with bonus and blessing." You cannot out give God. The more you try to bless other people in the world around you, the more God says, "I'm going to pour blessings out on you. We'll play a little game here. Let's see who will win. Let's see who can give the most. The more you bless others, the more I'm going to bless you in return."

4. The more we're blessed (talented) by God, the more He expects us to help others

Jesus said it this way, in Luke 12, "Much is required from those to whom much is given. For their responsibility is greater." Based on the blessings of your life, what would you say God expects from you?

"I will bless you ... and you will be a blessing."
Genesis 12:2 (NIV)

'Use Your Talents' concept is a powerful tool to empower the congregation and the community to identify their talents and help them to improve their lives as they identify the available resources.



Lotera
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'TALENTS' IN FIRST CENTURY MEDITERRANEAN COMMUNITY

Written by

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Matthew 25:14-31 is a parable of the kingdom of God. The patron is God or Jesus and His disciples are the clients who should use their talents until He comes back. As Christians, we should use our gifts with faithfulness and dedication, and this will help us fully accomplish our work.

1.1. General introduction.

One of the main ideas that the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) is working on now is the "use of talents" that would develop the activities of the church. By definition, a talent is an inborn ability or tendency to respond in a given way. The synonym of talents is skills, but in contrast, skills are things that one has learned. Although skills will often complement your talents, they are not things that you were born knowing how to do. You had to learn them, and you could probably figure out how to teach them to others. In other words, talent is considered innate and natural while skill is developed with practise. Talents are also

typically more individual and hard to describe, while skills are specific and occur more broadly. Another word for talent is ability: the power or the capacity to do or to act physically, morally, mentally. Ability is the competence in an activity or occupation because of one's skill, training or other qualification. Abilities can be called talents or special skills or aptitudes, the mental or physical power or skill needed to do something.

In fact, in church history, the use of talents is not a new thing; Jesus had taught it through the definition of the kingdom of God and the people that will live there. The writers of the

New Testament had also stressed on it when they wrote about the church, its development and its mission. The word "talents" has two main meanings in the New Testament, which are *τάλαντον* (talents) and *χάρισμα* (charisma).

1.2. General definition

1.2.1 Talents

This word is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament (for example: Exodus 38:24; 2 Samuel 12:30; 2 Kings 5:5; 1 Chronicles 19:6; Ezra 7:22). It also appears in the New Testament but only in the gospel of Matthew (Matthew 18:24; 25:15,16,20,22,24,28). The Malagasy version of the Bible translates the Hebrew word: *קִיקָר* (*kikkar*, LXX: *τάλαντον*, *talanton*) to be as "talents".¹ It has two meanings in the New Testament.

1) The "talent" is a money value at around 5000 or 6000 denarius. It means, if one was paid a denarius a day (Mat. 20:2ff.) then in the New Testament context, it would have been worth a daily salary for five or six thousand people. Hence, talents are here defined as money or wealth.

2) The "talent" can also be defined as an *aptitude*, natural ability or the skill of doing something. Another definition is *general intelligence and mental power => ability*. Finally, a talent is also a special, often creative or artistic, aptitude.²

This second meaning is quite similar to the general introduction of talent that has been mentioned above. It is also close to the definition of talent as a gift, *χάρισμα* (charisma). Paul used this definition very often in his letters about talents (for example Romans 12:6ff; 1 Corinthians 12:1ff.).

1.2.2. Χάρισμα (charisma)

Paul shows that *χάρισμα* (charisma), *διακονία* (diakonia, service) and *ἐνέργημα*

(*energema*, work) are inseparable, according to 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. In other words, the *χάρισμα* is a gift from the Holy Spirit to all believers in order for them to serve God and develop the church, which is the body of Christ, through diaconal mission. The text emphasises the different types of charisma: some people received the word of wisdom; some got the word of knowledge, meaning, these people received the unique talents to spread and to teach the word of wisdom and knowledge; some people had talents in healing, miracles and prophecy, etc. (1 Corinthians 12:8-10).

These texts also show that *χάρισμα* is from God (Holy Spirit), so the use of *χάρισμα* should be in accordance with God's will. The collection of these different talents or charisma will allow the church, as the body of Christ, to execute the work of God. According to 1 Peter 4:10, the believers that are part of the church should help one another by using those talents as the responsibility of the *χάρισμα* that God has given.

1.3. Talents/ charisma in Οἶκος/Οἰκία

During the first century, within the Mediterranean community, the word talent is very important in the household (*οἶκος/οἰκία*, eng. *household, family*). During that time, a household, which was composed of the father and his wife, children, slaves and clients, etc., were partners and co-manager of their business. In general, a household or *οἶκος/οἰκία* is run as a company. However, *πατήρ* (lat. *Paterfamilia*, eng. *father, patron*) is the main owner of all wealth. The clients and the slaves are skilled members that ensure the running of the business. Therefore, the members have their own class and talents (Matthew 25:14-31). One of the criteria that a patron looks for in a client before choosing him is his talents or skills³. The name of a slave or a client is very

Client:

In ancient Rome, the patron-client relationship was a mutually beneficial dependency / partnership between a freedman, or occasionally a fellow citizen, and a Roman citizen. The patron was responsible to look out for the welfare of their client, represent them in legal matters, and in various ways, confer favours on them. The client's responsibility was to provide services for his patron, follow him into battle, and if financially independent, offer financial assistance, if needed.

A freed slave would automatically become the client of his former master.

often associated to his or her skills. Let us take some examples:

Some clients or slaves were called *θεράπων*. This name is from the Greek word *θεραπεύω* (in English: to serve), however it could also mean to heal⁴. Healing is the service that they give to their patron (Luke 7:21ff). Those kinds of clients or slaves were in charge of the health of the *οἶκος/οἰκία* or *familia/domus*⁵.

The clients or slaves were also called *ἐπιτρόπος*, which means manager, foreman or steward (Matthew 20:8; Luke 8:3)⁶. According to Matthew 20:8, the *ἐπιτρόπος* were called the steward, so part of their work was to manage the finances of their master in paying the wages of the labourers. They could be called, in general, a cashier but they could also be in charge of some administrative work.

Another name of the *ἐπιτρόπος* is guardian or protector⁷. In Galatians 4:2, the clients were in charge of taking care of the children of the patron until their father will look after the education of their children. It shows that the clients must have a special talent in order to accomplish their work. In this second meaning, the word *παιδαγωγός* and *ἐπιτρόπος* are quite similar. The words *παιδεία*, (eng. *education, training*), *παιδευτής* (eng. *teacher*), and *παιδαγωγός* (*attendant, guide*⁸) were used in the education of the children. The boys receive more care in education. The father is the responsible for the education when his sons reach twelve years old, however before that age, the clients are still taking care of the education. In case the children need higher education that the father could not offer, then the talented clients are still in charge of giving that kind of education⁹.

The *οικονόμος* (eng. *steward, manager*¹⁰) is very often used to call the clients and slaves. The *οικονόμος* are the people in charge of wealth, houses and the business of the patron.

They supervise everything and manage everything, depending on their talents and the authority that they had been given (“*he is an administrator of finances and property on behalf of the owner of the property*”). They have to make a report on how they have used the money of their master (Luke. 16:1ff).

Some of them were also called *ἀκολούθος* (eng. *follower, attendant, helper*)¹¹ or *ὑπηρέτης* (eng. *underling, servant, attendant*)¹². These types of clients or slaves do not have a special talent like the others, so they were just helping their friend or their patron¹³. However there are some of them that have a special talent in farming and agricultural (Matthew 20:2ff) and handicraft. The patron wants the clients or the slaves to be *πίστις* (eng. *faithful*) when they were doing their work. Their faithfulness is measured by their using their talents appropriately. Those who master the use of their talents received *χάρις* (eng. *favour, gratitude, reward*) because it had really helped in developing the *οικονομία* (eng. *economy*).

2. The “talents” according to Matthew 25:14-31

As it is said above, this is the second pericope (passage) that contains the word “talent” in the gospel of Matthew. Let us talk more about it.

2.1. The patron and his wealth.

A parable about the kingdom of God is in Matthew 25:14-31. In this parable, it is said that a man went to a very far destination. The sentence “...called his own servants (*δούλος*) and delivered his goods to them,” shows that this man is a patron. His trip is a very long trip to an unknown destination. In the first century context, in the Mediterranean sea¹⁴, many patrons travelled far for many reasons. One of these reasons is to trade in different places, in fact, trade was a very important part of life for the people around the Mediterranean sea. When the patron is on a mission, he lets the eldest of his sons be

in charge of the management of the town and his wealth. However, in Matthew 25:14ff, the patron gave the management to one of his servants (*δούλοι*). The two words here show the close relationship between the patron and the clients.

First, calling someone by his or her name in the first century shows the close relationship between the client and his patron. That close relationship also shows a trust between them so that the patron can rely on the client in developing his wealth. It could be define as changing management for a short period¹⁵. The time indicator *aoristin-* in the two Greek words (*ἐκάλεσεν* and *παρέδωκεν*, v. 14) indicate that he had given his wealth to the clients with his complete trust. It shows that he had no doubt about his clients managing his wealth.

2.2. The clients and their talents

According to Matthew 25:15, the patron called three different clients to manage his wealth. It is said that he did not give the same amount of wealth to the three clients: the first had five, the second got three and the third received one. Why? The sentence *κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν* (eng. *each according to his own ability*) answers this question: the amount of wealth that the clients received depended on their strength and skills. As it is said above, in the first century, the patron required skills and talents from his clients and slaves because they will manage and develop his wealth. This pericope shows that there are not only different type of talents and skills but also different amount of skills and talents. In fact, the patron gave five talents (money) to the first client because he thought that it matched his amount of talents (strength, skills). The same thing happened to the second and third clients. ‘Faithful’ is one of the criteria that the patron expects from the clients. Therefore, if a client is faithful, he will be able to do his

work perfectly according to his level of skills. A client cannot fully do his work if he does not have the necessary skills for the job and a patron will never trust a client who is very skilled but does not fully use it.

In this pericope, the first chapter has two meanings of talents: talents as wealth and skills. In other words, the patron did not only give the talents as wealth to the clients to be developed but also the talents as skills. The patron did not only expect the clients to develop his wealth, he also wanted them to develop their skills. More wealth requires better skills.

2.3. The clients and the use of their talents

We can learn from verses 16-17 how the clients managed the wealth of their patron depending on their strength and skills. Verse 16 is introduced by an adverb *εὐθέως* (eng. *immediately*¹⁶). It means that they execute their work immediately without waiting. It shows that the clients are *πίστος* (eng. *faithful*) in managing their time in developing the wealth of their patron. The two time indicators in verse 16 are very important: *λαβὼν* (eng. *received*)¹⁷, and *εἰργάσατο* (eng. *worked*¹⁸). In other words, the patron gives them his trust and they show a complete dedication to their work. The clients were just doing an errand for their patron but they did it with dedication. They used their talents with dedication and got 100 percent of the result expected. It is shown in verse 16 “...earned another five thousand.” The same result for the second client.

In this pericope, we can see that not only the wealth had grown but also the skills. That is why the patron said in verses 21 and 23 “...so I will put you in charge of large amounts”. The wealth of the patron has increased to 100 percent so he needed more skilled clients to manage the new wealth. The same for the second client.

The third client had a different way of doing things. The word for contrast *ὁ δὲ* in verse 18 shows the difference between the third client and the others. It also shows the *ἀπιστία* (eng. *unfaithfulness*¹⁹) of the third client. He received the wealth of his patron but he buried it. The meaning of burying the wealth here is to keep the wealth. However, the patron expects him to invest his wealth. The client has not only buried the wealth but he has also buried the skills. It shows his unfaithfulness. Therefore, he did not respect his contract with his patron (verse 26-30).

When the patron was back, he asked for a report about his wealth from the clients. It was normal for a patron to ask for a report from his clients. That is what we are going to develop next.

2.4. The reports

In verse 19, the patron came back suddenly without informing the clients. It was a routine process for a patron at that time to ask for a report about his wealth. It shows his power over his wealth and his clients. Matthew 25:14-30 also talked about it. It also emphasises if they are faithful or not. However, it is also an opportunity for the patron to express *χάρις* (eng. *gift, gratitude*) to his clients or not. The pericope in Matthew 25:19-31 describes everything about it.

First, it has to be done right at the moment. That means that the clients must always be prepared to do a report. Second, the first client did it without hesitation, with dedication and a complete readiness. The client showed to his patron that he was faithful and trustworthy. Third, he brought all the talents, including the proceeds that he got, to his patron. Fourth, once he gave back the talents, he started to do his report to his patron: the patron had given him five talents to be managed and invested; he has made 100 percent profit out of them. All of these things show that he has done a complete report to his patron.

The second client has done the same thing (verse 22-23). However, the third client did something different when he made his report. The word *δὲ* (eng. *but*) in verse 24 shows the client's difference in approach to the patron compared to the other clients. The pericope has also highlighted the *ἀπιστία* (eng. *unfaithful*) character of this third client in managing his patron's wealth. The client gave a kind of respect to his patron by calling him *κύριος* (eng. *lord*) however, he also called him *σκληρὸς εἰ ἄνθρωπος* (eng. *you are hard, difficult rough man*, Matthew 25:24) which was very disrespectful to his patron. It expressed a kind of revolt toward his patron. In other words, he was breaching his contract to his patron. He emphasized it by saying, "you reap harvest where you did not sow, and you gather crops where you did not scatter seed" (verse 24), which is a reproach or an insult to his patron. He also tried to justify himself to his patron. Then, he made a report to his patron about how he had managed his patron's wealth: he buried it instead of investing (verse 25). As we have said above, he not only buried the talents, he buried the skills as well.

2.5. The Patron, Clients and χάρις

We have already said that the place of the *χάρις* (eng. *gratitude*) between the patron and the clients is very important. It shows the emotion that he expressed for the faithfulness of his clients in managing his wealth. It was not only about emotion though, but he also expressed gratitude to his clients and give them *χάρις* (eng. *gift, reward*) – the gift and reward are also called *χάρις*. The clients responded to their patron with *χάρις* (gratitude).

In this pericope, the verse 21 and 23 shows it. The word *χάρις* is not mentioned, however the action that the patron did to the first two clients explained the relation that the patron had to his clients. The adverb *εὖ* (eng. *well done*, Matthew 25:21,23) underlines

the satisfaction of the patron in the clients' management of his wealth. It also indicates that they were *δοῦλος ἀγαθός* (good servants). It is important to point out that the word *ἀγαθός*²⁰ here shows an inner beauty, not a physical beauty (compare to *καλός*, eng. *beautiful*)²¹. The inner beauty of the clients had helped them to do their job well. The patron's repetitive use of the different forms of the word *πίστις* (eng. *faithful*) reinforce it. As it is said above, the patron called the clients GOOD and faithful (*ἀγαθός και πιστός*) because they used 100 percent of their talents to develop the patron's wealth. The word *και* makes a relation between synonyms *ἀγαθός* and *πιστός*: those who are good, are faithful and those who are faithful, are good.

Here, the parable refers to the kingdom of God – that is why it is perfect and complete. The *χαρά* (joy) shows the happiness in eating at the same table. In the Greco-Roman context, the patron does not eat at the same table as his clients, however here, the patron invited his clients to share his happiness in its fullness, because they are "good and faithful".

The *χάρις* (eng. *gift, reward*) that the patron had given to his clients is indicated in the verse "Come on in and share my happiness" (Matthew 25:21,23): *χάρις* the patron had given it in his fullness. In this context, we have to be aware that *χάρις* is a small remuneration.

The third client did not receive the same treatment. He was called "*you bad and lazy servant*" (Mat. 25:26). The word *πονηρός* (eng. *pertaining to being morally or socially worthless, wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, degenerate*)²² shows the character of the client which is contrary to the *ἀγαθός και πιστός* that has been explained earlier. The word *ὀκνηρός* (eng. *idle, lazy, indolent*)²³ means laziness. It also highlights the burying of the talents and skills of the client. In verse 30, the patron called him *ἀχρηστος* (eng. *useless,*

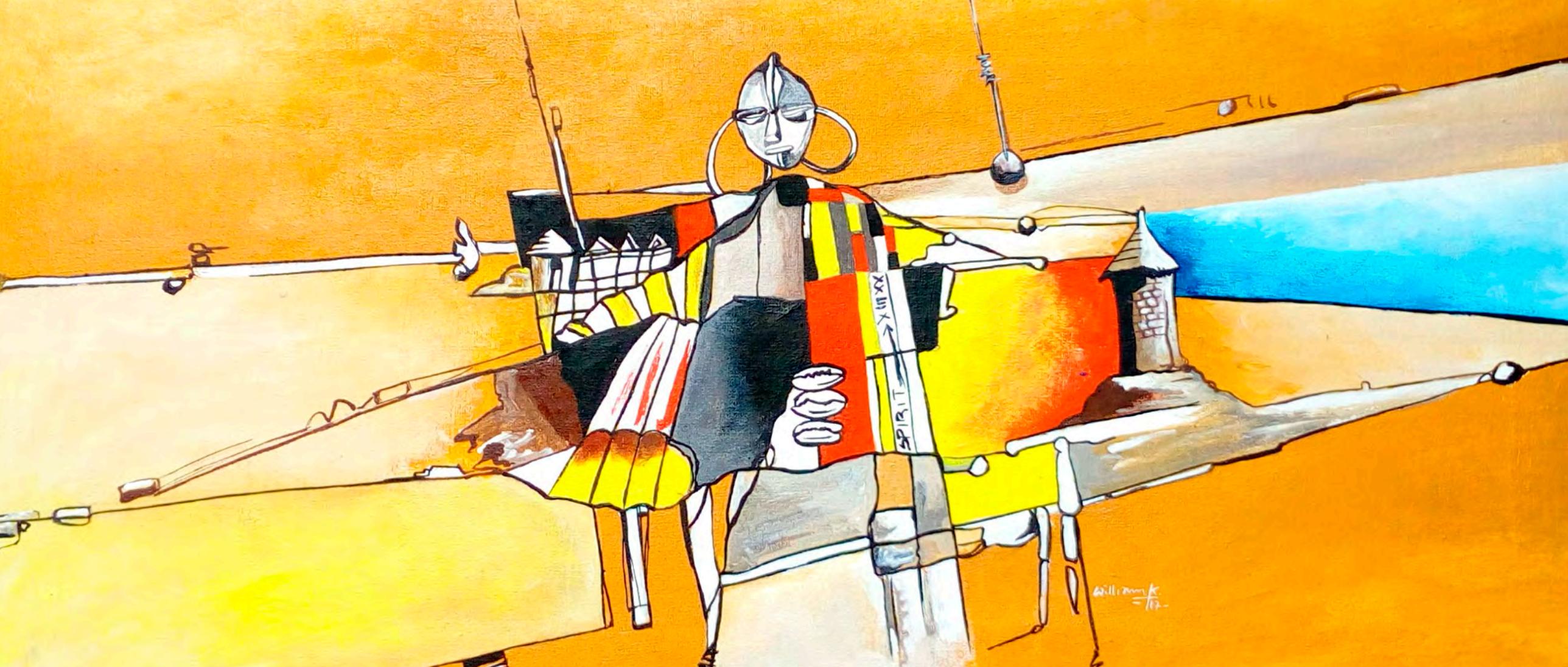
*worthless*²⁴) to emphasize his unfaithfulness. His refusal to use 100 percent of his talents (skills) to get 100 percent of benefit underlines his laziness so that he is called bad servant. It has been said earlier that the patron was off for a very long time but the client did not use his time in developing his talent (wealth and skills).

Therefore, instead of receiving the *χάρις* (favour), he was fired from the patron's client group (verse 29-30): the patron removed him from his talents and gave his talents to one of the other clients. Afterwards, he was thrown away in a dark place where he would cry and grind his teeth. This place is a prison in the context: it is a cold and dark place. The meaning of weeping and gnashing teeth shows the hardship in this dark and cold place which is opposite to the happiness and joy that the patron had given to those who were faithful. There is also his dismissal from being part of the *οἶκος* (household) of the patron.

2.6. Talents, the kingdom of God and the life of the church.

Matthew 25:14-31 is a parable of the kingdom of God. The patron is God or Jesus that gives the gospel about that kingdom and all the work that it requires from His disciples and the Christians until He comes back (Matthew 28:18-20). In other word, His disciples or the church through its members, compose the clients that have His trust. He gives different types of gifts to all Christians in order to accomplish the work. The Christians' use of that gift with faithfulness, dedication and readiness to give daily report to God, will help them to fully accomplish their work so that they can develop the church and its life.

The Malagasy Lutheran Church, through its revival movement led by Rainisoalambo in Soatanana, for example, has practised the use of talents and skills in order to develop the



John 13:34-35
"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

church, its life and the life of the Christian members. It is a rural area, so most of the people that live there are farmers. They use the talents that they have in farming and, until now, they are still using it to develop the life of the people there (body, mind and spirit). The dedication of the people to use their talents is the consequence of the revival movement that they have received. In other words, they feel the desire to serve God in everything that they accomplish, even if it is for the community. John 13:34-35 is their motto in everything they do.

In addition, nowadays, many Malagasy Lutheran churches (MLC) try to map the

Christians' talents and skills in each church. The MLC in Ivory Avaratra, SPAF synod, for example, had divided the Christians in different groups of talents and skills. There is the group of education and Christian education led by the teachers, the group of lawyers, group of health led by the doctors, group of sports, music, social work, diaconal and missionaries, group of money and wealth, etc. All of these groups try to use their talents and skills to develop the church and accomplish the work that God has given to them. The goal is also to keep all members of the church active so that they can testify about the living God.

Endnotes

- ¹ Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures, 1949 ed. s.v. "רַבִּי".
- ² Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. "τάλαντον".
- ³ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. "τάλαντον".
- ⁴ BDAG, s.v. "θεραπεύω".
- ⁵ TDNT, s.v. "θεραπεύω".
- ⁶ TDNT, s.v. "ἐπιτρόπος".
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ TDNT, s.v. "παιδεύω".
- ⁹ TDNT, s.v. "παιδεύω".
- ¹⁰ TDNT, s.v. "παιδεύω".
- ¹¹ BDAG, s.v. "ἀκολούθος".

- ¹² BDAG, s.v. "ὕπηρετης".
- ¹³ BDAG, s.v. "ἀκολούθος".
- ¹⁴ W.S. Baron, Histoire d'Israël (New York: Colombia University Press, 1952), 23-25.
- ¹⁵ Dictionnaire Grec-Anglais, 1988 ed., s.v. "παραδίδωμι".
- ¹⁶ BDAG, s.v. "εὐθέως".
- ¹⁷ BDAG, s.v. "λαμβάνω".
- ¹⁸ BDAG, s.v. "ἐργάζομαι".
- ¹⁹ BDAG, s.v. "ἀπιστία".
- ²⁰ BDAG, s.v. "ἀγαθός".
- ²¹ BDAG, s.v. "καλός".
- ²² BDAG, s.v. "πονηρός".
- ²³ BDAG, s.v. "ὀκνηρός".
- ²⁴ BDAG, s.v. "ἀχρεῖος".



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LEARN-PRACTICE-SHARE!

The MAFI-volunteers within the Malagasy Lutheran Church

Written by Rev. DieuDonné Randrianarivonirina,
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MAFI is a system within the FLM church where volunteers for local development are trained, then they practice what they have learned and after that they share it with their neighbors. Within 3 years (2010-2013), the number of MAFIs in the district of Andohamatsiatraha has increased. More than eighty (80) people volunteered in different sectors. Both the local community and the government can feel the change in the lives of the local people and in the life of the church. Most churches in the district expanded the church building as there are now more Christians. For me, the roots of MAFI can be traced back to my childhood experiences.



**«And surely I am with you always,
to the very end of the age.»
(Matthew 28:20b)**

We thank God every day since we can still do His work, and we also express our thanks to all the people who continue to work with us. We also give sincere thanks to those responsible for the project 'Use Your Talents', who never forget us and keep encouraging us in God's mission.

This is an article about MAFI "mpantana antsitrano amin'ny fampandrosoana ifotony", meaning volunteer trainers for local development. MAFI is a system within the church where volunteers are trained, then they practice what they have learned and after that they share it with their neighbours. The title that is used may change according to the responsibility of the person; it may become teacher, doctor, or trainer, but they are all volunteers.

For me, the pastor, the roots of MAFI can be traced back to my childhood experiences, so allow me to tell you a few things of what happened in my life (John 8:14).

My family life

I grew up in the countryside with a traditional culture in the municipality of Manandriana, rural municipality within the district of Ambovombe central. We went to the Lutheran church Ambondronaina, in the district of

Fihasinana. We received different kinds of education from the elders. They encouraged us to get united and love one another. They told and taught us many proverbs, talking about kinship and love.

- *Ny hazo tokana tsy mba ala (one tree never makes a forest);*
- *Izay mitambatra no basy (to get united is the ideal);*
- *Mitabe tsy lanin'ny mamba (crocodiles don't eat those who are in a big group).*

And they encouraged us to do good things for our friends:

- *Ny soa atao levenam-bola fa ny ratsy atao loza mihantona (when we do good things to others, we are saving wealth; but if we do bad things, we are hanging disasters on ourselves);*
- *Aza ny lohasaha mangina no jerena fa Andriamanitra mahita ao ambonin'ny loha (do not think that nobody sees what you do in a secret place because our God above does);*
- *Ny adala no tsy ambakaina, Andriamanitra no atahorana (We do not cheat the fool, for the fear of God);*
- *Arahabao na dia olon-tsy fantatra, fa tsy fantatra izay hiseho ampitso (always greet, even unknown people, because you never know what will happen tomorrow)...etc.*

In short, in our family we have been educated to like each other and to help our friends. But we got education, not only from the family, but also from other settings, like the boy scouts club.

Education from the boy scouts

Most of the education we received from the boy scouts club since a young age became life habits, once we grew up. Here are some examples:

Encouraging us to do diaconal work to the people around us everyday: It was considered a real shame if we had nothing to say about the diaconal work we did in the previous week when we report to the leaders and all the members of the boy scouts during the meeting. So, we really did our best to achieve the goal and do some diaconal work; and it was a real joy for us to share the experiences with our friends. We were not embarrassed in front of them when we had something good to say, even if it was just small things. For example:

- *removing a banana skin from the road, because people may slip on it and fall; but also it is trash that should be thrown away to keep the environment clean*
- *carrying elder people's bag or luggage during the camping time*
- *taking part in giving first aid to someone in a traffic accident or any accident that may happen in the society.*

We felt a strong attachment to people to whom we did diaconal work and we can never forget each other. We had peace in our minds when we think of what we did, and what we will do; the bad persons are not like that, as the Psalms say.

Before you leave one place, make it better than how it was before you came – either the camping site or the house in which we stay as guests. The improvement of the place will bring a good reputation for the person who stayed there and especially the club.

The valourisation of the talent of each member is among the most important principles in the boy scouts. We even put a label on the sleeve of the members who had a special talent. For example:

- *good at swimming*
- *good at bike riding*
- *good at cooking*
- *good at first aid assistance.*

Some of them had two or many talents, but others did not have any; in actual fact, they did, but we just didn't notice it. The one who has the talent should make it grow further. The leaders helped them to develop their talent in order to bring advantage to themselves and their neighbours. The different types of education we received in the boy scouts club are really good. Among these are self-devotion and the use of our talents. Our society's culture also had lessons for our life.

Some of the values from the society

In our society, we learned and got the Malagasy culture and values which are loving each other, helping each other, and doing good things to our friends. Some proverbs, expressions and tales from the elders and parents tell about these values. For example:

- *Ny manao soa tsy mba matiantoka (there is no loss for those who do something good)*
- *Ny akanga maro tsy vakin'ambova (foxes don't attack many guinea fowl).*

Schools also gave us a lot, regarding the use of our talent. We will just resume it shortly, because they are so many that we cannot tell all here.

At school we learned to use our talents

We went to school during the time when schooling changed from the French system to the Malagasy system. Patriotism was part of

our subjects, and this love of the country also included love of all citizens, as we say

'ny tanimbary fotaka, ny vola taratasy ny omby hena fa ny olo ro olo (harena)' literally 'ricefield is mud, money is paper, cow is meat, but people are people (or wealth).'

The national hymn even insists on this principle of devotion (body, heart and soul) to the country and the Malagasy citizens. The sacrifice of the Malagasy people who were martyred for the love of the country was also part of the subject at school, which reminded us about the history of patriotism.

We also learned to use our talents: the protection and conservation of the environment through reforestation and fighting against bush fires, the use of manure to increase the production, the creation of farmer associations with the common advantages, the use of veterinary products for farming and livestock. Those who apply them do not lose anything but earn a lot. We can say that both the soil and the persons always give good results if we take good care of them (like the soil with manure).

Unfortunately, this may not be the case if someone else comes to destroy the improvement and the effort we have started. The person who will do that will be the loser, as we say, "Do not do something bad in this earth because then one day it will turn back on you."

These different sectors have all been important for our education, but the most important one is the church.

The different steps of using the talents of the faithful in our church

Like every Christian person, we attended Sunday school at church; and like every pastor, I also went to the seminary school

to learn theology. But we work in different districts and in different congregations, and in many places there are big challenges.

I am not the only one who faced these challenges, but I feel that the life of the clergy where I worked was really hard. The pastoral work was also very hard because the people already had some ideas in their mind and it was not easy to convince them to follow the teaching of the Bible. Besides, I was still young at the time we started to preach there (25 years old). The pastor before us also had his way of teaching, which was different from our method. So it was difficult to take over the work he started, although we both dealt with evangelisation.

Another thing is that the people in the country side where I worked are very poor. It is said: Ny kibo tsy mba lamosina ary ny tsinay tsy mba vatsy fa izay voky no maharaka ny namany, which means 'The belly is not the back and the intestine is not a provision; only those who eat enough can go further than the others.' The church could not pay, neither our salary nor the duty to the church district. Our living became hard and when we got sick, we did not get adequate healthcare. That cost us the life of one of our children. Even if the Christians wanted to do something for us, they didn't have the means, as these Malagasy expressions go:

- *Ny tsy fahampiana mahakely fitia (poverty makes people less friendly)*
- *Ny voronatsy an-tanana tsy atolo-jaza (We cannot give to children a bird which is not in our hand)*
- *Ny eritreritra mahataka-davitra fa ny tanana nitsipona madinika (the mind can go very far and think big but the hands can only get the small things close)*
- *Ny eritreritra te hividy omby fa ny vola havidy azy no tsy ampy (the thoughts want to buy a cow but the money to get it is not enough).*

This was really hard, and we still undergo the consequences until now. To be honest, poverty has been very serious in our lives; it impacts a lot people living in difficulties, as even their state of mind changes due to poverty as the scripture says: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mark14:38)

Insecurity reigns due to poverty. That is really hard. People say:

- *The satisfied people are wise*
- *Ideas don't come out of hunger, etc.*

We think that if poverty persists, the body will suffer and the devil will overcome the soul due to hard temptation to steal. We needed to find ways to change that and think of a good strategy to fight against it.

The source of ideas

So we started to collect ideas. Apart from the different education structures above (society, scout association, family), which have been models of life for the MAFI volunteers, there are also other sources of ideas like:

- Discussions with the catechist and board members of the church in order to find development strategies to fight against poverty. We could only set up a project after different sessions of meeting. No one could decide by himself or herself.
- We read the articles about development and autonomy written by Pastor Rasolondraibe Peri in the church magazines, such as "Sakaizan'ny tanora" and "Mpamangy".
- There is also the Catholic newspaper "Isika Mianakavy", which taught us different means of development.
- Some books about the Lutheran church autonomy, written by the Pastor Jonah Gabriel, also contributed to the idea.
- The discussion with Mr. Rasamimanana Alfred, General Secretary of Development in the Synod, was very important and

fruitful. We learned new agricultural techniques and shared them with people within and outside the church. We started in the parish of Anjanomanana. A very few people started to apply the innovative techniques we taught, but the results were obvious and visitors from abroad and from our country can see the change.

The goal is not yet completely reached and we should continue our efforts; meetings and experimentations are also ongoing for people interested in development. We have also discussed how to keep the work going when foreign funding ends, and FAFIFI (agricultural advisers) can no longer ensure the rural coaching for agriculture. We prepared to undertake this activity ourselves. After many years of work, the MAFI system was created:

Structure of the mafi

Members

The District committee is the highest authority to decide the creation or the dismissal of MAFI (as stated earlier).

The person should write an application letter to the church district so that we can know his motivation and his attitude through what he writes.

These are the conditions and criteria to be members of MAFI:

- *Ready to work - likes development*
- *Available for regular training, to improve his talent and make it fruitful*
- *Commits himself to apply the training, and share the skills for free to those who are interested when he has time*
- *Promises to keep improving and developing his skills.*

Results and impacts in the society

From 2010 to 2013, the number of MAFIs in the district of Andohamatsiatraha has

*Ny hazo tokana tsy mba ala
(one tree never makes a forest).*



increased. More than eighty (80) people volunteered in different sectors. Both the local community and the government can feel the change in the life of the local people and in the life of the church. Most churches in the district expanded the church building as there are now more Christians.

Among all the districts in the countryside, I was the first pastor who got a motorbike from the church. That means that the life of the people is improving, especially among the Christians, due to the work of MAFI. Previously, there was a vain effort to fight against insecurity. MAFI has helped to settle the security; through the diaconal work and the training MAFI gave for free, a stronger fraternity link was born in the community. The scripture says that love covers a multitude of sins (1Peter 4:8).

To illustrate, these are some of the results in different places:

- In education, more students succeeded their exams and more illiterate adults learned to read, after the free courses given by the teachers in the Lutheran school of Antsomaina in their free time.
- In Ambondrona, where we worked before, there were no greens sold at the market. When we left, all the rice fields were full of off-season cultures (vegetables and others).
- In Anjanomanana, Isomotra and North Anjanamahaso, chickens and poultry are protected from disease because MAFI had a free vaccination campaign and taught the people about it during their free time.
- The health field agent received special training from the doctors. Mothers and children in Fondreo Isomotra and Soatanana Anjanomanana received training about health and some basic medicines to use at home so that they do not need to walk so far any more to find a doctor.

- Many young girls and women learned sewing and handicraft with MAFI in Soatanana Anjanomanana and in the Toby Ambodiriana.

Pastor's responsibilities in the implementation and development of maft

The pastor has a great deal of responsibility to implement the project and carry out the work. The Malagasy Lutheran Church has dealt with development for long time. In previous experience, the sensitisation gets better results when the Christians listen to the pastors and participate in the development.

For our case, we have proved the principles by Bible teaching. God gave to each person different talents that He wanted them to use. Those talents should give results because God is greatly displeased with people who are not doing anything to use their talents.

Usually, the board members of the church deal with development while the pastor takes care of the sacraments only. But here, the involvement of the pastor has especially helped to achieve development. Besides, some pastors may have good ideas so we should let them work since each person has skills.

I used to be invited to share some teachings on development in churches. In those meetings, development according to the scriptures and modern development techniques are taught separately by different experts of each field. Those responsible and board members in each branch in the church assist to make the work easier, especially those in the development committee, because the pastor cannot do all the jobs by himself.

Sometimes we appeal to the Christians at church to write down their talents and share with those who have the same talents, in order to build each others' capacity.

In addition, we do some collective work for the community, like road repairing or cleaning day, according to the organisation of the church committee. That is an occasion for the Christians to use their skills together and to do the diaconal work of the church.

Conclusion

What is said here is only our experiences; many people might have done more. Until now, we have not completely reached our goals. So any suggestions or advice are welcome.

I personally wish for a Bible education program for all ages (children, young people and adults) to help MAFI to stay for a long time. Because it happens that some people are activist only for a while and then lose motivation, but we need patience to help them continue. The work will succeed if there is a specific program of MLC to coach MAFI members. It is worth noting that gospel life and development are two things that go together.

In conclusion, we can say that development is not yet reached and we are not yet developed: we are developing. Anyway, we are on the way and we will go further with MAFI. We believe that Jesus, who devoted Himself and helped us to use our talents, will still help us to do MAFI work. He will be with the MAFI as He promised.

Jesus is MAFI, I am MAFI and I hope you are MAFI; all of us should be MAFI so that we will reach the goal of a nice MAFI environment and overcome the evil's work. The place where there are MAFI will be peaceful because the Lord said: "And surely I am with you always".

Glory be to God only.



Development is not yet reached and we are not yet developed: we are developing.



IT-training centre in Ambalavao congregation.

WOMEN, USE YOUR TALENTS

Written by Zo Ramiandra Rakotoarison

This article is a shortened version of an article in a book titled “Diakonia in a gender perspective”. It is based on a 2013 master thesis on Diakonia and Christian Social practises discussing the result of research on the church work of empowering women through the development project called ‘Use Your Talents’.



Zo
Ramiandra
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Antananarivo,
Madagascar



Use Your Talents: a diaconal work of the church

‘USE YOUR TALENTS’ is a project run by the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) in partnership with the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS). At grass-roots level, ‘Use Your Talents’ is a church activity implemented with and in the community. For three years (2008-2010), it was combined with a program called “Women Empowerment and Gender Equality” (WEGE) to increase the ‘Use Your Talents’ focus on gender. Digni, an umbrella organisation in Norway, developed WEGE as a capacity building program, which combined with projects like ‘Use Your Talents’ to increase awareness on gender issues. During 2008-2012, ‘Use Your Talents’ worked through the church development department structure called FANILO, working as a facilitator (through field agents), counselling and training peasants in the local community. It also provided training at the national level on how the church may capitalise on and use the talents of local Christians to develop the church and the community. The term ‘talent’ is not confined to one area. It encompasses all areas of human life and activities: health, communication, education, rural activities and other activities.

In Madagascar, the concept of “projects” is strongly linked to funding from abroad, therefore ‘Use Your Talents’ should be understood rather as an approach to development because ‘Use Your Talents’ grass-roots development initiatives depend mostly on faith, local talents, volunteers and group support. Volunteering is the basis of ‘Use Your Talents’, and its development work

rests on local human resources and the network of people and organisations that are exploited at the grass-roots for the purpose of development.

WEGE empowerment in the context of 'Use Your Talents'

As 'Use Your Talents' was not designed specifically with women's empowerment in mind, two persons from MLC were responsible for incorporating WEGE activities into 'Use Your Talents'. The activities were mainly geared towards the leaders and those involved in the development work initiated by the church, to raise awareness on gender issues. 'Gender' includes women and men's collaboration in development work. The overall aims of WEGE are poverty reduction, sustainable development and the improvement of women and children's lives.

Malagasy women in society and in the church

Of Madagascar's 20 million population, almost half are women. In the Malagasy Constitution, women and men are given the same status, such as access to education, work and land. Yet discrimination against women exists. Conditions for Malagasy women cannot be generalise as inequalities are determined by the culture of the ethnic group and of the region.

In MLC, women form the majority of church members. Women's associations are very active associations and make the most important local financial contributions, voluntary labour and investment in time to the church. Until today, MLC does not ordain women, however the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America states that "theologically trained women serve in a variety of ministries at all levels of the church".

Research methods

The research was conducted in Madagascar in January 2013 in two regional synods

in the south of Madagascar: Ambovombe Androy and South Betioky. The south has ethnic groups that are considered "extremely patriarchal", with a very strong male-dominated system. The research intended to find out if the church, through its work, is making a difference in that region. The informants for the research were leaders, church members and inhabitants from two rural villages. About 200 people participated in the research.

The focal questions of the research were: participants' understanding of the terms 'talents' and 'gender', the contribution of 'Use Your Talents' to the lives of women in the church and in the community, and challenges women face in using their talents in the church and community. Two additional questions related to church teaching on the role of women and the leader's role in implementing gender equality were posed to leaders and direct program participants.

Empowerment

Empowerment is understood as processes that increase the capacity, income and participation of an individual, a group or an organisation which are the constituents of development. Participation of women in public discussion, decision-making meetings and political debate are signs of empowerment. Women have access to development when they are part of those who decide. Accepting women in leadership means that society, the community or an organisation address issues such as male-dominated structures and cultures, and promotes working relationships between men and women that are mutually supportive and respectful.

Summary of research findings and feedback from participants

This section looks at the feedback by subject:

- *Participants' understanding of terms 'talents' and 'gender':*

Most of the Christians interviewed relate the word 'talents' to God's gifts, their apparent skills and professions. In the villages, people more specifically define 'talents' as their occupation and means of subsistence. 'Gender equality' for the church leaders corresponds to women in leadership, while some respondents who are indirect actors in 'Use Your Talents', associate it with human rights, superiority of men, and the percentage of women in a project. In villages, the term 'gender equality' is not known or understood.

- *Use Your Talents's contribution to the lives of women:*

As you know, 'Use Your Talents' is not a special project for women; it is intended for talented men and women alike. The 'Use Your Talents' project manager said that women use their talents more than men, even if they have the same talents. Within the church in general, women are given consideration and Christians accept that they occupy a position of responsibility and leadership, particularly as treasurers. This attribution is not related to the 'Use Your Talents' intervention, but to a common Malagasy knowledge that women are trustworthy with money. Women in Ambovombe and Ejeda community have benefited from activities the church initiated, such as income generating activities, adult literacy, training in leadership and other things. These activities have improved women's family income, and even their status in the community, helped them to increase their contribution to the church, supported the studies of their children and improved their family nutrition. In addition, some women have now started to express their opinions in public meetings and some are elected or appointed to positions of leadership. Using their talents has helped women to take responsibility and increase their capacity for action and knowledge.

- *Challenges women face in using their talents in the church and community:*

Women may face three types of challenges. First personal, such as the level of education, self-esteem, and poverty. Second challenges come from the community: the attitudes of women and men to change, tradition, jealous husbands, men's protection of position and power, not recognising women's talents as assets, and female ordination. Additional challenges are external, such as unstable weather, market rules, lack of resources, the question of ownership and decision-making, lack of follow-up and accompaniment of activities, and opportunity.

- *Teaching of the church on the role of women:*

The teaching about women's role is not clearly stated in written documents, but women have an important place within the church as they are the majority and the most active.

- *Church leaders' role in implementing gender equality:*

Some leaders appeared to be engaged in working for gender equality, and are supportive of giving women positions of leadership in the church.

Overview of Use Your Talents / WEGE's impact in south Madagascar (Data analysis)

This section looks at positive outcomes, as well as some of the ongoing challenges. Some of the main benefits of the 'Use Your Talents' program were as follows:

- lifts up people's dignity,
- is an instrument of inclusion and participation,
- serves the community in a flexible and open way,
- increases the capacity of women,
- increases the income of women,
- increases the participation of women.

In the program, leaders and 'Use Your Talents' workers have contributed to improving individuals' dignity by valuing actions and characteristics of women, such as honesty and ability to manage money, and recognising women's contributions and importance within the church. Two different female informants stated that the local authority and population showed them respect because of what they were doing in the villages. These two people were supported by the FANILO synod coordinator in their work.

In 'Use Your Talents', participation in development work is open to all talented Christians, however the 'Use Your Talents' manager stated that women are the most diligent in using their talents, and many leaders and participants recognise that successful development work depends on the inclusion of women in all phases of the project. One of the informants felt that women are freer to use their talents in church and in opposition of the role and responsibility assigned to women in the local villages; they are also eligible to be members of the church committee.

An example showed empowerment is mutually beneficial, as in one village a woman is leading and encouraging both women and men in her village to create and expand income-generating activities for the village's benefit. The activities of 'Use Your Talents' depend on locals' talents and the work of volunteers, thus projects are not governed by external sponsors' ideas, working method or funding limitations. 'Use Your Talents' volunteers are also working in cooperation with professional workers of the church and have the opportunity to work with people outside the church, like NGOs or professional development organisations, depending on the project's requirements. It shows flexibility and the independence of 'Use Your Talents' regarding the choice of partnership.

Empowerment is also about increased capacity to lead, take responsibility and gain self-confidence. The 'Use Your Talents' project has techniques which increase the leadership capacity of women, for example, through gathering small groups of women with the same talents and through personal coaching. In 'Use Your Talents', occupying the position of leadership is a possible choice and can be acquired by women.

Women recognise that the various income-generating activities like basketry, embroidery, breeding laying hens or growing green leaf vegetables help them with family expenses and with their regular contribution to the church. In addition, the nutrition of their families also has been improved.

Women have a sense of being able to act, to cause things to happen in development projects and activities.

Challenges

However, not all women share the privilege of men's respect, especially outside the church when the majority is not Christian. Some active participants in 'Use Your Talents' spoke about challenges they are facing such as their powerlessness to apply what they have learned and lack of materials. In addition, two male informants made statements which show that unjust structures and unjust ideas are not questioned by the church, as the development work the church has initiated is not aimed at changing traditions which gives men all authority and power. These two men expressed their compliance with local traditions of patriarchal control.

However, women's work in church is also still limited because the first position of leadership in the church can only be held by a man, the pastor. In addition, the development work created through 'Use Your Talents', particularly in the south of Madagascar, follows the kind

of work attributed only to women, such as basketry, weaving, and poultry breeding and green leaf vegetable farming. These activities contribute to the increase of women's income, but the women do not acquire new skills which may enable them to take part in decision-making.

Some women also feel that simply being provided the opportunity and training for leadership is not enough. For them, leadership actions should not just be encouraging words in meetings; they should be accompanied with concrete tools that improve women's lives. Some of the respondents complained about insufficient funds to sustain the income-generating activities which they felt in turn limited 'Use Your Talents' actions. In addition, while respondents said that women have knowledge, it seems that they were not transforming their community as far as the male-dominated culture is concerned.

In addition, in some cases the women say that husbands do not allow their wives to manage the income, and therefore these activities have no impact within the family or on women's lives. Thus increased income does not necessarily lead to change in control of resources.

Two women leaders local associations pointed out that, although through 'Use Your Talents' women have more ability to act, this is the case so long as activities are not aimed at "breaking the tradition".

General reflections and impressions

'Use Your Talents' has an advantage when there is a lack of gender equality in both church and society. It seems that it is useful to focus on the development of talents in general (not gender specific) in order to get the support of the majority of people, even if people have different views on women's empowerment.

Working at the grass-roots' level is one of 'Use Your Talents' strengths, as 'talents' involve personal knowledge and material possessions, and local activities are based on and expanded from these. 'Use Your Talents' is not a donor-driven project, but dependent on mutual cooperation where people are asked if they would like to participate in a certain project, independent of the donors' ideology and planned results. Unfortunately, women's presence in the project's planning does not imply that their role and power change, or that they are necessarily empowered.

Conclusion

After the field research, it was possible to state that 'Use Your Talents' as a diaconal work contributed to human dignity and allowed both Christians and community villagers to participate in its activities and support one another. The research shows that the work of the church and 'Use Your Talents' in the community changed lives. Some women acquired new knowledge and new status. Others were given the opportunity to improve their own lives and others. Their family, church and community benefited from their involvement in 'Use Your Talents' and changed conditions. We also observed that some women became more courageous to step out of their traditional position and role despite challenges. On the other hand, though women may improve their capacity, have access to resources and be involved in various development activities, power relations in the community may remain unchallenged. This leads to thinking that not all changes in women's life necessarily mean that they are empowered. However, a number of church leaders tend to promote women's leadership. Thus, hopefully, the slow transformation of attitudes of women, church leaders and people in the community will be a way to more possibilities for women in the future.

Endnotes

- ¹ FANILO is an organizational structure composed of committees with coordinators whose role is to ensure that development work is on the agenda of the church and part of its activities.
- ² Use Your Talents's main activity is facilitation: linking or relating the local population with organisations or structures which provide development services or materials that would help the population improve their activity and their living.
- ³ Use Your Talents – The Congregation as Primary Development Agent (Senter for Interkulturell Kommunikasjon, URL: <http://www.sik.no/project?96&lang=en>, read 20 February 2013).
- ⁴ BN/Digni, Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE), BN's overall project plan 2007-2009 (2007).

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⁹ Sully, Green, *The leading question?* 6.

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PART II
**USE YOUR
TALENTS!**

"Le riche et ses serviteurs" by William Kayo



Tesfaye Noko

INNOVATION

and Indigenous knowledge

Written by Tesfaye Noko,
Operations Manager of the EECMY

The EECMY congregation in SheleMella is very creative in using and establishing cooperatives and small scale associations in the area. This work paved the way for more financial freedom for the village ladies in the area, in comparison to their previous lives.



Congregation leaders visit their cotton farm in SheleMella, Mekane Yesus, Arba Minch. (Photo by Tesfaye Simon.)

Arba Minch, Ethiopia



The World Bank defines innovation as a strong idea, with an emphasis on 'use' of an idea or method, with informal collaboration as a key component of problem-solving and accelerating positive change in communities. In simple words, innovation is putting new ideas to use. Indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. Local innovation based on indigenous knowledge can offer promising new ideas and practises for sustainable development.

How does innovation work in local congregations

The EECMY SheleMella congregation is using its natural talents to generate its income, both for evangelistic and diakonia work. The congregation is operating under the administration of the South West Synod in Arba Minch, 20km south of Arba Minch town. It owns both cotton and banana farms, in addition to its input in dairy production, shared with the community.

Cotton in SheleMella is grown either by smallholder farmers or by private investors, in addition to the local congregations. SheleMella, and the surrounding vicinities of Arba Minch area, are known as the second largest cotton growing region in the country after the Amhara Region. Smallholder and state cotton farms are located on the western side of the two important lakes in Arba Minch, Lake Abaya and Chamo. As traditional hand spinning is one of the common ways to make traditional clothes in Ethiopia, the SheleMella congregation women's group is spinning and winding cotton weft into thread. Hand spun yarn products, such as the local textiles Gabi, Netela, Kuta and other gender or culture based textile fibres made by the congregation's women, are easily transformed into opportunities for income generating schemes benefiting both community development work and congregational diaconal work. The

congregation is also a member of the cotton spinning association in the area.

These associations are now linked to local traditional cloth weaving micro-enterprises which makes it easy to accommodate and sell their hand yarn products through the established institution. This is an essential step forward for talented women to generate home grown income, both for themselves and the community. The women's spinning associations in SheleMella are important value chain outlets which provide a sustainable income for themselves and the community as well.

The talent of congregations at the community level

The EECMY congregation in SheleMella is very talented in using and establishing cooperatives and small scale associations in the area. The congregation members (mostly women) are playing an active role in the dairy production association within their small village. The project was started some six years back. Young ladies and housewives took up the challenge of bringing their products from home to the junction of the roadside where passengers are moving, and their fluid milk and butter answered the demand and gained customers.

The project grew when it became known that milk fluid and its products were available, and milk collectors from 20km rushed to SheleMella to collect. The local authorities appreciated the innovation of church ladies and cooperated to institutionalise a market linked network. Currently, the association has more than 1000 members of milk collectors. The growth of the association witnessed the formation of a credit fund and is looking for more opportunities in the near future. The fiscal report reveals that the association earned more than 200,000 Ethiopian birr last year, aside from milk equipment. This work



100 ETB = 4,4 USD



Traditional hand spinning by Women Spinners Association in SheleMella. (Photo by Marit Breen)

SheleMella Milk association: filtering process.



Dirshaye (number four from left) with fellow leaders in SheleMella Congregation during the UYT Team visit on Oct. 4, 2016.

She is now inspiring fellow members in the congregation to reveal their talents to benefit themselves, the congregation and the community as well.

paved the way to greater financial freedom for the village ladies in the area, in comparison to their previous lives.

The association also contributed to creating a social norm of everyone working hard and thinking of possibilities for self-employment, which benefits the individual member and the congregation. The key actors in this system are congregation members, smallholder farmers, housewives, and local firms that provide inputs and services. The demand for milk and products appears to be rising from universities, restaurants, private segments, tea and coffee cafés and many other sectors found in Arba Minch town and the neighbourhoods. Dairy production is part of a bigger dynamic system of livestock innovation, which contributes to food security.

The talents of individual members within congregations

SheleMella congregation is blessed with individual members who are talented and

have creative ideas for themselves and the congregation. Mrs. Dirshaye Anjulo is serving as chairperson of the women’s ministry in the congregation. She has strong initiative to use opportunities around the community. Despite social and cultural challenges facing new ideas, she has courage to go further than the cultural range. “How can I use my skill and who could assist me to go beyond the limitations of the culture?” This was her conflict before being able to utilise her talents. She is a housewife, and housewives are not usually allowed to go far away for business and sleep outside their homes. Mrs. Dirshaye didn’t realise her talent, even though she wanted to make something new in her life. Her husband had also not realised her talent – that she is a business woman. This talent was not revealed to herself and the family for many years. But she had an amazing talent parked inside. It was her brother that identified her talent five years back, and saw that she had business skill. After she was encouraged by her brother to try out some businesses, she

went ahead and did so. She succeeded and now identifies herself as a businesswoman; something which is not culturally accepted as the natural role of a woman. Dirshaye now has 80,000 Ethiopian birr in her account and assists her congregation and family through her skill.

Final remarks

“Everyone is handicapped in some way, but no one is disabled in everything” (Prof. Stephanie Dietrich). Today, many indigenous knowledge systems are underdeveloped because of the dependency syndrome, where diaconal work is reliant on foreign funding calls. Traditional development practises withdraw as they become inappropriate or unable to adapt to new challenges. This was proved as many short term development practises disappeared because foreign technologies and development concepts interrupted them with promises of solutions, but were not capable of sustaining them.

Increasing attention to building and mobilising knowledge capital is essential for sustainable development. Local congregations and grass-roots communities are primary agents to practise home-grown knowledge, which provides new insights and skills for a sustainable approach. The insights and skills develop and adapt continuously to gradually changing environments, and are then passed down from generation to generation. It is my belief that indigenous knowledge is home born innovation that inspires local novelty in sustainable solutions through utilising the natural talents of congregations and communities for development. This knowledge is relevant for development on three levels:

- Obviously, indigenous knowledge / local innovation is most important for the community in which the bearers of such knowledge live and produce.

- Development agents (NGOs, government authorities, donors, local leaders and the private sector) need to recognise, value and appreciate the indigenous knowledge in their interactions with local communities.
- Lastly, indigenous knowledge forms part of the global knowledge. Its relevance is therefore in need of being preserved, transferred, adapted and adopted elsewhere, as needed.

This is the main reason why I, myself, and the Norwegian Mission Society are inspired to work with and develop the practical experiences of local congregations and communities for sustainable approaches.

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“La connaissance” by William Kayo



Grace
Auma

HOW WOMEN CAN USE THEIR TALENTS

– experience from Tuinuane savings groups

Written by Grace Auma, Former leader of Tuinuane Saving Group Program

Tuinuane savings groups for women promote the use of talents as one very important way to alleviate poverty. The groups save their own money and give loans from their own savings. There is no external funding to the groups. Tuinuane helps women to discover their hidden talents. This promotes use of talents, skills and local knowledge in development.

Nairobi,
Kenya



Women are talented, but most of the time these talents are not utilised due to lack of opportunity or motivation to put them to use. Men and women are economically, socially, and politically equal. All over Africa, the customs and traditions take away these powers from women, i.e. inability to inherit property from parents/husbands, lack of equal opportunity to go to school, and early marriages. Women lose much of their economic and social power and find it hard to regain it.

Tuinuane, a project run by Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) and supported by PYM (Norwegian Pentecostal Mission), has been working towards creating opportunities for women to actively participate in economic development. The project's main objective is to improve poor women's ability to sustain themselves economically and contribute towards their household income. The main strategy is the establishment of self managed accumulating savings and credit associations (ASCAs) where use of talents, local knowledge, skills and business training is promoted and members get easy access to savings and credit services. The strategy is an effective tool to poverty reduction which ensures achievement of socio-economic strength and improved living standards. Exposure of members to entrepreneurial development and availability of credit facilities, enables them to venture into pursuing Income Generating Activities. Poor households use savings and credit to move from everyday survival to planning for the future: they invest in better nutrition, housing, health, and education. The establishment of Tuinuane groups as a method for alleviating poverty has been inspired by a belief that the poor need financial services and, more importantly, they have the potential to improve their livelihoods.

Tuinuane promotes the use of talents as one very important way to alleviate poverty. This

is done by encouraging mobilisation of locally available resources, and there is no external funding to groups. The groups save their own money and give loans from their own savings. Assisting members through a self-actualisation process to identify their hidden talents is part of the training for groups, leaders and volunteer trainers. This promotes use of talents, skills and local knowledge in development.

The project sees itself as a tool which contributes to achieving the twin objectives of poverty alleviation and women's empowerment. Tuinuane groups have brought certain changes to the lives of women. It has enabled women to move from their earlier position of silence to one of gaining voice, reduced their fatalism and has increased their collective bargaining powers.

Part of the great success of Tuinuane is hinged on the much acclaimed slogan "helping people to help themselves", which has materialised in Tuinuane principles and methodology. This is through mobilising and training people in groups to cooperate towards a common goal, which is "improved quality of life for all".

Members have recognised talents as readily available resources that need little or no capital to use to earn income. Through talents, it's easy to transfer knowledge and skills to other people. Talents are mostly embedded within the culture and people's traditions, making it easy to practise, especially in groups of people from the same community. Members therefore use their talents in various ways such as: income generating activities, i.e. outside catering, singing, weaving, poultry keeping, livestock rearing, etc.; involvement in community activities, i.e. repairing roads, working on farms, participating in community leadership roles, improving their businesses, supporting church development and motivating/inspiring others to get started.

Tuinuane has inched toward a collaborative society in which the merits of both men and women are understood, valued, respected and employed. Getting access to savings and credit facility provides access to financial services tailored to greater livelihood security and enhances ability to utilise un-utilised/underutilised talents.

Being in groups enables women to bring together different ways of thinking, cooperative spirit, gift of learning from each other, patience, empathy, networking abilities, negotiating skills, drive to nurture and educate their children, business connections and the win-win attitude, where each woman wants to witness success in their families and ability to embrace complex social, environmental, and political challenges.

On a personal level, I worked in FPFK Tuinuane Project as a project leader for 15 years, until the end of 2014. My main role, apart from administration, included empow-

ering communities through trainings on economic empowerment and carrying out follow-up visits and monitoring of the established groups. I also offered training to community based trainers (field agents), who were important in reaching out to new groups, training and doing close monitoring of groups. Field agents were important assets for the project sustainability.

I am currently involved in building a new organisation. The organisation offers economic empowerment to rural communities targeting youth, men, women and physically challenged persons. The aim of the organisation is to enable communities to realise their potential and to maximise the use of locally available resources, talents, knowledge and skills to improve their livelihoods. The organisation observes every human activity within communities as interrelated – population change, the state of environment and socio-economic development – to support the realisation of sustainable development.



Basics model of the Tuinuane savings group

- 10-25 members
- Group must elect their leaders (chairlady, treasurer, secretary and controller).
- Leaders are given training on record keeping, group management, savings and credit.
- Groups are provided with accounting materials, including cash box and record books.
- Weekly meetings with self-determined savings.
- No access to savings till end of business cycle (one year).
- Record keeping and money management is done in weekly meetings.
- Groups have rules and regulations.
- Group must fix and enforce fines for situations such as: lateness, absence, etc.
- Groups have an emergency account (welfare kitty).
- Members set their development goals at the beginning of each business cycle.





Jonah
Kitur

Tuinuane Savings Groups:

IMPACT ON FPFK CONGREGATIONS

Written by Rev. Jonah Kitur

Due to the financial sustainability, families are now living at peace. They can look at each other eye to eye, which was not possible before Tuinuane came to the congregations.

Kenya



“TUINUANE” is a Kiswahili word meaning ‘uplifting one another’. This has been tried and proven true, because the Tuinuane group members come together and put their resources together. “There is power in unity”.

There is a force of attraction in unity. There is victory in unity. Tuinuane is built on the values of love, trust, integrity and honesty.

Tuinuane is a project within the Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) that has empowered low income women within congregations. For the last ten years since inception, women’s story within communities has changed.

Following are outcomes of Tuinuane from various groups and congregations in Kenya that have implemented the program.

Tuinuane has taken root amongst the women in the church and even those who are not in the church. It is becoming the culture and life of the congregation. Currently, those who have been moving with this movement cannot live without Tuinuane. It has become part and parcel of their lives.



Living testimonies

A landless family, who had been kicked out of a number of houses, was able to purchase a piece of land and they are now happily enjoying living on their own farm. At one time, after they were kicked out of one house, they could not find anywhere to keep their belongings. Sitting on the roadside, hopeless and without any hope of staying together, they almost divorced. They see Tuinuane as their rescue, hope and their future.

What made Tuinuane accepted among the congregations? It is its accessibility to economic strength. Tuinuane became a solution to many challenges of life for those who became part of it. Those who were not able to take their children to school got a chance to educate their children. Tuinuane is the answer.

Weekly input

This is one of the best ways to make people work hard, and thus to decrease loitering and laziness. Women and men within Tuinuane use time wisely and also their resources. They use their minds to think of the best ways they can invest. This has given them the opportunity to discover what is within; they have been able to discover their talents and abilities. It is in this respect that they have grown their economic stamina. Before, many women only depended on their spouse

Farming, which is a key component in the daily lives of common citizens, was boosted since those congregations were able to buy farm inputs. Before, they were not able to produce enough for their families and take some to the market to sell, in order to boost their economic strength.

about shares, interest, management of the welfare kitty, penalties and other forms of financial contributions.

Gender issues

Tuinuane was mainly for women, but men have not been left out. At the beginning, it was only 20% men. The main reason was because the target group was women, as they were the most affected group financially. The holders of family economy were largely men, but since men have seen the success of women in Tuinuane, they are joining in good numbers. At the moment, as an organisation, we are seeing Tuinuane reaching everybody, i.e. women, men and even youths. As we climb this ladder, we do have challenges.

Business

The groups have seen opportunities within the community. There is more strength in unity than an individual. Many groups within Tuinuane have tents and chairs for hire, and what is paid for the same will be shared among the group members. They have also added utensils, sufurias (cooking pots) and spoons. These are used whenever there is a function in the community, adding to their income. This

Sufurias



is what is known as outside catering service. These services are needed especially during weddings, funerals or any function that needs the attention of caterers.

Other groups started pre-school for the church and community. This was developed because they saw the need for that in the community. For their own members, they have a special rate. This gives the congregation an opportunity to explore their talents. Those with the skills for teaching are given the opportunity to exercise their God-given talents.

In other congregations, the group has bought large tracks of land for future use. This is especially to develop real estate. They can dream and have the capacity to translate their dreams into reality.

The government has felt the the move of Tuinuane. Many government officials are members of Tuinuane. The model for Tuinuane is the best.

To develop talents and abilities within Tuinuane can be achieved. This is because members are close to one another and you can easily note what every member is good at and what every member can do best. Already some talents have been explored as some members go to group with something to sell. That's a business talent. When people discover their talents, the work becomes easier. It is the same everywhere. There is no struggle but people will enjoy using their talents.

In conclusion, Tuinuane is a community development programme. The model can fit any set up. The benefits are many. Discipline is key. If the regulations are followed, every congregation can achieve a number of developments. There is nothing you cannot do with Tuinuane. There is hope in Tuinuane and Tuinuane is the hope of many. What you cannot do alone, you can do through Tuinuane.



"La révélation" by William Kayo



Mwingirwa
Benson Linguli

Voluntary Primary School **LUNCH PROVISION**

Written by Rev. Mwingirwa Benson Linguli,
Master of Diakonia - VID, Minister with the Methodist Church in Kenya

Most of the children that attend primary public schools in Kenya hail from poor family backgrounds that can barely afford proper meals. These children are forced to go back to school on empty stomachs, and even when they go home in the evening, their families can probably only afford some simple and little dinner. This has contributed to a large number of primary school drop-outs.

Meru,
Kenya



Many primary schools in Kenya are public day schools where school children have to travel every morning to school, go home in the afternoon for lunch, go back to school for the afternoon session and return home again in the evening. Most of these children have to walk many miles to reach their schools, not to mention the fact that they have to make at least three trips every day between school and home.

Most of the children that attend public primary schools in Kenya hail from poor family backgrounds that can barely afford proper meals. Most of them actually go

to school without breakfast and with no guarantee of getting lunch when they go home, because either there is no food at home to be cooked or maybe their parents are out in the field looking for means to survive or even tending to their farms or livestock. These children are forced to go back to school on empty stomachs, and even when they go home in the evening their families can probably only afford some simple and little dinner. This has contributed to a large number of primary school drop-outs.

On realising the distances most of these children have to cover every day, bare-foot and braving the scorching sun, only to go

home and find no food, myself and some other former pupils of the school decided to try initialising a programme to provide lunch for all the pupils at one school in rural Meru county, Eastern Kenya. We began by coming together, bought a few sacks of maize and beans, oil, pots and other ingredients. We also talked to the school committee to help us in getting some volunteer cooks to help in the preparation of the common meal for all the children. We tried it for one term and it worked. It is then that we decided to call a meeting for all the parents, explaining

the idea of having the programme continue. We gave a suggestion that every parent must, at the beginning of every term, contribute a few kilograms of maize and beans, then we, as the stakeholders, and the school committee are to provide other ingredients and ensure that every school-going child gets a standard simple lunch at school. The parents consented to the idea – which is running up to today.

The project has had several far reaching impacts, some of which are:



1. Ensuring equality among all the school-going children, despite their family backgrounds.
2. Promoting integration among children of different family backgrounds.
3. Alleviating suffering of the children who had to make numerous trips between school and home every day in the scorching sun, bare-foot.
4. Giving parents time to work and earn some income, rather than being home to prepare lunch and wait for their children every afternoon.
5. Reducing cases of primary school drop-outs.
6. Improving performance at the school, both academically and in extra-curricular activities.
7. Providing a platform for the former students to give back to society.
8. Motivating pupils to work hard in order to be able to help those in need as they themselves have been helped.
9. Encouraging parents to work together in unity and speak in one voice.
10. Creating more time for teachers to concentrate on their teaching activities rather than having to worry about school absenteeism.



Margaret Mbugua

Loruko, Kenya



LORUKO COMMUNITY AND THEIR EXPERIENCES

IN USING THEIR TALENTS

Written by Margaret Mbugua, Leader of Tuinuane Saving Group Program

Read how the Loruko community improved their situation through using their talents. It has caused the congregation in this community be glued together, live in harmony and attract development in the area, as well as receive government services which were previously hard to get.

Loruko is about 150km from Isiolo town, just next to Samburu Serena Lodge (safari tourist destination). Isiolo is one of the northern frontier regions in Kenya. It is also a semi-arid area with its residents depending on cattle for their livelihood. Given that this place is constantly dry, the residents most of the time live nomadic lives as they move to other places in search of pastures for their cattle. The place is predominantly occupied by the Samburus and Turkanas who, after many years of tribal clashes, are currently co-existing together, even in their respective manyattas (group of traditional thatched houses). The communities live adjacent to the famous Samburu National Park, the home of Owaso Ng'iro river, known as the habitation of crocodiles and the former Samburu Serena lodge.

It is important to note that though these two tribes have different cultures and traditions, the community members have uniquely mastered both languages very well. This has led to good communication amongst the community members, both young and old, ultimately strengthening co-existence. Again, with rich traditions and culture, it is important to note that the responsibilities between genders are well defined. While men look after the cattle, the women are left to take care of the children as well as make manyattas,

in case of the community changing location. This leaves women underprivileged and with no bargaining power.

Since male gender is highly respected in these communities, the women have little to say when it comes to decision-making. Here, polygamy is the order of the day with or without consultation of the first wife. More often than not, the young wives are younger than some of the first wives' children. Women have no right to say no to Female Genital Mutilation. As soon as the girl has gone through the cut, then the next thing is that she is married off, often to men older than her father.

The culture also dictates that men are not to live in the same house with young men. Therefore, as the young men go through the rite of passage, they are secluded from the community and sent to live in the bush until the elders decide to call them back in preparation for marriage. During the time of seclusion, the young men should not be near women, and it is a great taboo for them to get young girls and impregnate them before marriage. Any child born out of wedlock is cursed and often the child is killed at birth or later in life.

The culture here dictates that any body excretions should not be stored in a house, such as a pit latrine. Again, as men in these communities are highly valued, it is a taboo for them to share common amenities, like toilets, with women.

Tuinuane* had their first encounter with the group in 2012. The encounter with these communities was an eye opener for them; they were able to appreciate many of the resources that were dormant. Before the encounter with Tuinuane, these communities were recovering from the aftermath of floods that had occurred in December 2009. The

* See article on page 78



The community members have uniquely mastered both languages very well. This has led to good communication amongst the community members, both young and old, ultimately strengthening co-existence.

100 KES = 1 USD

flash floods devastated the Samburu Serena Lodge, leaving the entire hotel swept by the waters, and it has remain closed to date. The disaster caused heavy damage, worth millions of shillings and adversely affected the livelihood of these communities. Before the floods, women from the manyatta communities relied heavily on the sale of their handmade beauty accessories, such as bangles, necklaces and other artefacts. The target market was the tourists visiting the lodge. With the closure of the lodge and no other market and finally the climate change, these households live on meagre earnings. Occasionally the government would give them food rations or even buy cattle from them, though very rarely.

Through the invitation of the local church, we were able to introduce Tuinuane in these communities as alternative ways of livelihood and creating opportunities for growth. Most of the members would save from the little they earned for bead work or from selling their goats to put food on the table. Initially, the mortality rate for both adults and children was very high due to communicable and water born diseases. This trend is further aggravated by frequent floods experienced from Owaso Ngi'ro River during rainy season.

Our approach was first to help the community be aware of their concerns and to help them identify their strengths. As the community members continued to discuss the concerns that they had in common, they were able to identify the root cause of the high death rate, and they expressed the desire to learn and embrace change. This means that with the awareness of the need to have toilets, the community was ready to take action.

In the 'Use Your Talents' approach, the men took their leadership roles by mobilising the

women to go to the bush to collect rafters and rope from tree bark to serve as joiners instead of nails, while the men took as their role to dig the pit latrines. Each manyatta, or community, took initiative to build their own toilets. To do so, the community members depended purely on the available materials to bring the change that was long overdue. However, if money was required, each member contributed towards the activity as per the decision of the elders. As the toilets started coming up, the government, through the Ministry of Health, came knocking to the community to support their efforts. Through the Kenyan Ministry of Public Health, each household received a 20 litres water dispenser for the use of storing boiled drinking water.

Also, as this was taking place, the community members were made aware and enlightened regarding their rights. This was after we (Tuinuane) introduced human rights awareness forums. As a result, the members were able to know they have these rights: Right to government services, schools, good infrastructure, hospitals as well as security, among others. In a region of 100km², no full primary school was notable and those that existed were less than five schools which operated only up to class four. Those children privileged enough to go to school have to forego the warmth of their family and opt to live with relatives in the towns where school is either up to class eight or secondary level. This left so many children of school going age at home, taking care of their siblings.

A well-wisher visiting the national park saw the community effort and was moved by their resilience. This prompted her to give them materials to construct a nursery. The community, on the other hand, provided the manpower required and volunteered to ensure that the one room nursery was completed and operational. Only one girl in the community had finished secondary school. Therefore

she was called back to the community by the request of the elders to come and run the nursery. In the spirit of 'Use Your Talents', the community elders and members agreed to contribute some money on a monthly basis to ensure that the teacher is paid. All this was managed by the community members as their resource.

Again, due to the nomadic lifestyle and with no hospitals, many children are born at home, thus lacking the necessary documents to indicate their place of birth. According to the community members, disease prevalence in these areas is very high, resulting in high maternal mortality rate. This is due to lack of health facilities, since the nearest one would be many kilometres away. In the spirit of rights awareness and 'Use Your Talents', one of the ladies in the community was motivated to get birth certificates for her children. The community members joined her in the administration office where they had an audience with the officer in charge. As a result, the officer in charge mobilised his office to visit the area and take the services there. In the span of one day, all the people aged 18 years and above, including women, received their national identity cards and all community members were issued with voter's cards. In addition, all the children without birth certificates were issued with one in a span of less than a month.

The community members felt so empowered in having the necessary documents for voting. As the next election approached in 2013, the community voted for their own candidate to represent them at the county assembly. He was also elected the deputy speaker of Isiolo county assembly. The MCA (Member of County Assembly) was one among the few young men who had finished secondary school through a sponsorship program. The following year, the community endorsed another young man, who was also a form four



As a result of taking charge of their resources, the community attracted other actors who have highlighted the community's role in the area's conservation work.

graduate, to be the area chief. Previously, the community had no power to say what they wanted or was good for them. In endorsing the two young men, it demonstrated that they have resources and thus the community attracted other agencies in development. All this was made possible in the spirit of the 'Use Your Talents' knowledge development.

The community has also been keen to map and manage other natural resources that have been dormant and underutilised in the past. For instance, this community is surrounded by a vast area of sand. Previously, vendors would come and collect the sand without paying anything to the community. As a result of taking charge of their resources, the community attracted other actors who have highlighted the community's role in the area's conservation work.

So Loruko community improved their situation through using their talents. It has caused the congregation in this community be glued together, live in harmony and attract development in the area, as well as receive government services which were previously hard to get. They are inspired by the 'Use Your Talents' knowledge development tool to keep making their lives better.



Esayas
Emene

BECOMING SELF-RELIANT

Experience of the South-West Synod,
Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Written by Rev. Esayas Emene,
EECMY SWS President

It was a big shock when church grants came to an end, since the grants came from abroad and supported head office, synod, parishes and congregations. For example, over 30 evangelists in South West Synod stopped outreach work at once. As a result, many congregations and outreach places collapsed. Synod employees started to look for jobs elsewhere. In general, frustration, discouragement and difficulties prevailed.

Arba Minch,
Ethiopia



Background and introduction

South West Synod (SWS) is one of the 26 Synods of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). The Synod was established in March, 1990, with its office in Arba Minch, which is 500km from Addis Ababa, capital city of Ethiopia. The working area of the synod covers about 38,000 km², with population estimated at 3.5 million. There are 26 ethnic groups and over 20 languages in the synod's operational area. The administrative hierarchy of the synod is structured as congregation (local church), parish and synod. The synod currently has 17 parishes, 700 congregations, 350 preaching centres and over 400,000 members.

Self-reliance

According to the Oxford Advanced Learners dictionary, 'self-reliant' means able to do or decide things by yourself rather than depending on other people for help. In the Ethiopian Evangelical church, Mekane Yesus, the meaning of self-reliant goes beyond what the dictionary says. Yes, it means being independent economically, but not only for ourselves – but to be a blessing to others. To accomplish Jesus' great commandment, which says, "And the second is like it, Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39), we realise if we are not able to be self-reliant, we could not be a blessing for others.

Use Your Talents

'Use Your Talents', as an alternative development approach, focuses on resource opportunities which are inward looking rather than outward, through talent mapping and exploring the potential and talents of members of the community/congregations. The approach gives emphasis to grass-roots initiatives.

It also brings about qualities such as independence, ownership, personal development, mobilisation, networking and self-confidence. Moreover, at community level, it enables the local congregation to play a proactive role in the development agenda through ensuring real and maximum community participation. Therefore, EECMY's understanding of self-reliance and the 'Use Your Talents' approach communicates the same thing in different ways.

Challenges that led the church to the self-reliant vision

Initially, EECMY was founded by the joint effort of missionaries and indigenous people. Until 1959, church leadership was under the head missionaries. Evangelistic and development works were fully expensed by donors. However, financial and human support from outside started to decline, and specifically block grants and earmarked grants stopped fully 15 years back. It was a shocking incident when the grants came to an end for the church, since the grants emanated from outside to head office, to synod, to parish, and to congregations.

Over 30 evangelists stopped at once from outreach work. As a result, many outreach places, as well as congregations, collapsed. Some structures of the synod were locked, employees deducted (outreach, Christian education & communication sections were closed); benefits for the workers were very low and sometimes the synod was not able to pay workers' monthly salary. Employees of the synod were looking for jobs outside. In general, frustration, discouragement and difficulties happened, especially at the synod level.

Unable to pay allowances, synod leaders were not able to visit congregations and to train the members. Synod leaders stopped driving cars long distances, like to Addis Ababa, and instead started to use public transportation. The synod office workers service car stopped transporting workers in the morning and evening; only serving the mid-day (lunch), etc. Nine years back, we were asked to sell the synod compound to our Muslim neighbours to make it a school for their children, because by that time the compound was full of bush.

Following the challenges, EECMY articulated the vision which aimed for self-reliance, which says: "To see a spiritually vibrant, resource-wise sustainable, missionary and passionate Church."

Strategies of South West Synod (SWS) to implement the vision

SWS has many years of experience in working with the local people and mobilising resources at the community level. Congregations of the synod are always striving to excel their own economic support initiatives by mobilising their resources. To change the existing crisis and to become self-reliant, the synod had three important strategies to implement the vision.

Tithe policy implementation

EECMY formulated the policy that urges each congregation to pay 10 percent of its income (tithe) to the synod and the synod also pays 10 percent to the head office, based on the biblical messages (Nehemiah 10:36-39; Malachi 3:10). In order to manage and administrate the tithes, SWS opened the Economy Development office in 2008, and integrated the policy into its constitution. The synod engaged in strong biblical teaching regarding self-support and formed implementation strategies.

Synod leaders, development workers and parish leaders started to go directly to nearby congregations to teach and collect the tithe. In addition, by 2011 we selected 52 congregations from all the parishes to make them models in implementing the vision. By 2015, the number of model congregations increased to 120. These congregation leaders get training twice a year. By 2015, 450 congregation leaders got direct training on implementing the church vision.

Income generating activities

In order to improve the synod's economic situation, we took the following important actions to gain resources – which required much effort and time from the Economic Development and Stewardship office. We sold old cars which had stood in the synod compound for more than 20 years. Grass, wood and any material which needed

Below, in the table, see the 10 percent collection from 2009-2014 in Ethiopian Birr.

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
60,000 ETB	81,000 ETB	132,200 ETB	280,000 ETB	350,000 ETB	500,000 ETB	650,000 ETB (USD 30,000)

disposal was sold for income generation. Existing houses were rented out, car mileage was reduced and we saved on telephone and electricity expenses. As result, we were also able to build new buildings in town to rent out for income generation (see pictures 1 & 2). In the following photos, you can also see disposed materials for sale (pictures 3 & 4).



Unity and Vision sharing spiritual conferences

Training for congregation leaders is one way to implement the church vision, but frequent changes in congregation leaders hindered implementation of the training. Therefore, we decided to begin a new tradition of performing a spiritual conference in each congregation; the synod planned to have a big gathering for the entire congregation together (minimum of 40 congregations). The preaching and teachings focus on the church vision. Congregations covered the expenses of the conference and brought presents from each congregation. For instance, from Feb. 9 to 12, 2016, we had a great conference in Arba Minch town in which over 15,000 people participated. In that gathering, 50 people came to believe in Jesus as their personal saviour and about 400,000 ETB (USD 19,000) was collected for a new Bible school dormitory building and outreach work.

Conclusion

We started such conferences in 2010. So far, we performed 20 big conferences in which over 100,000 people got teaching, 900,000 ETB (USD42,000) was collected and the synod got 400,000 ETB (USD 19,000) for its outreach work, and the remaining was for parishes' evangelism work. This is one way in which we are trying to be self-reliant.

In all our struggles, we trusted God for His guidance. Now we are in a better situation, but we need to work hard. Our final goal is, since we are dependent upon others for both spiritual and development work, we want to be independent and serve the community, not only by evangelism but also by development, using our own resource, skills and talents to be self-reliant – in other word, to 'use our talents'.

I conclude then by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We, his servants, will start rebuilding" (Nehemiah 2:20).





Antoine Ralison

Report on ROAD RENOVATION in Ambodiharan'i Vondrozo, Madagascar

Written by Mr. Ralison, The Fanilo Coordinator of the Synod



Vondrozo, Madagascar



During the first Republic of Madagascar (1960-1972), 500km of road were accessible by car in the district of Vondrozo. In 2015, only 108 were still usable by car, meaning 22 percent of the initial road, while the remaining 478km is currently only accessed by pedestrians.

In February 2016, the Synod (SPAV) met and decided to tackle the issue because it was hard

for people (Christians, catechists and pastors) to connect with each other. Everyone in the meeting agreed that it will be hard to develop the synod without good roads. Therefore, they decided to sensitise the Christians about the issue. Then they also talked to the other big churches in the area (Catholic Church, Reformed church). These churches agreed to solve the problem. Later, the project was proposed and accepted by the local authorities.



This is how they organised the tasks

- *There were two meetings led by the district chief and the three church leaders; there are 11 towns on the south side and seven on the north side.*
- *An announcement was made on the radio to call the mayor and the city council, the head of the surrounding villages, church leaders, 4 representatives from each village, and the president of each association.*
- *The reason for the call was to gather everyone in order to explain the strategy to adopt in constructing the road.*
- *The leaders of that meeting were: the church leaders and the adviser of the region chief, which is also the Fanilo Coordinator – Mr. Ralison.*
- *These were the decisions taken:*
 - *The construction started in April 2016.*
 - *Men from 18 to 50 years old will work on the construction.*
 - *Each village will build 4km of road.*
 - *The chief of the village and catechist will lead the work in each village.*
 - *The mayor and pastor will lead the work in each city.*
 - *The three church leaders will lead the work in the district.*
- *These are the result, as of September 2016:*
 - *Only 70km could not be accessible by car.*
 - *430km is accessible by car if the 10 bridges are build.*
- *These are the direct impacts:*
 - *The people are happy and thank the church for their initiative.*
 - *The local committee for development decided to build the 10 bridges.*



Amos
Ounsoubo

“WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR HOUSE?”

– The Widow’s Olive Oil

Written by Amos Ounsoubo, Director of School for children with impaired hearing in
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon in Ngaoundere

Ngaoundere,
Cameroon



2 Kings 4: The Widow’s Olive Oil

1 The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

2 Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

“Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.”

3 Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few.

4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”

5 She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring.

6 When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.” But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

7 She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”

She was a widow – without any protection or security. The family was responsible for debt left by the late father. They had no means to pay the debt. The situation was leading to the sale of the two boys as slaves. She would then lose even the last and poorest support she was expecting. All this could be summarised in these words: “Extreme poverty with no hope”.

The woman cried to the prophet of God, Elisha.

God replied to her through the prophet with these questions:

- 1) How can I help you?
- 2) Tell me, what do you have in your house?

How can I help you?

This question is critical when it comes to the fight for development or when talking about development issues. The breakthrough of that family depends on the answer to these questions.

Firstly, we need to be clear about what we are expecting from Him. Jesus asked a blind man the same question Elisha asked the woman: “What do you want Me to do for you?” That is crucial!

What do you have in your house?

Secondly, we need to clearly identify what we already have, the thing the Lord could use to perform the miracle. The manna was in the desert, where there is not any resource at all. But here, the Lord is telling us that before coming to Him for help, we must acknowledge that He has already done something, He has already deposited some resources. He has already displayed some talents that we just need to develop and multiply.

The answer of the woman had two parts: First, FATALISM: She set her eyes on what was lacking. That led her to assess that she had nothing at all.

Second, HOPE: Then suddenly, she realised that there was at least a minor thing and she said: "... except a 'small' jar of olive oil".

That hope was very thin, and she wasn't expecting anything big from it. But at least it was enough for God to do the miracle; it was as small but also as big as the mustard seed to make the faith work and achieve great things (READ Matthew 13:31-32). THAT IS THE DNA OF 'USE YOUR TALENTS' APPROACH.

Our guideline

From verses 2-4, we can draw this guideline:

- 1 Find a motivation and an expectation ("What do you want me to do?")
- 2 Identify the resources "you already have" ("What do you have?")
- 3 Look for partners, lay on others resources ("Go around and ask for empty jars...") and "dream big" ("... Don't ask for just a few.")
- 4 Don't let your dream be shaken by other's thoughts, don't let discouragement affect you, and don't even give a chance for it to come to your mind ("... Go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons").

You need to share the ideas just with those who can believe in you, those who can trust in you and will work with you.

- 5 Work hard ("Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side").

Hard work is the single most important way to make real the ideas we work on. Pastor Sam Adeyemi said:
"There is no substitute for the hard work in the school of success ... The world only moves for the man who moves himself. It

*is your action that counts. It is good to dream of financial breakthrough, but you must know when to snap out of those dreams and turn them into reality."*¹

- 6 Don't limit your activities, look for other opportunities to enlarge them.

The outcome of the work of the woman was limited to the number of jars she borrowed (verse 6). The oil was still flowing until they declared there are no more jars.

We should never put any limitation to our activities. We need to scan, examine and scrutinise for other ways for making them bigger. We must not stop at the local level; let's step for a regional level, then after, we need to go for the national and then after, the international. Never limit our work to one area or just one domain. Pray and pray hard for new revelations, for new ideas and for new opportunities.

- 7 Over all, build a strong inner character. That leads to:
 - a) Thankfulness through the fact of going back to God and acknowledging that HE is the author of everything we have (verse 7: "She went and told the man of God ..."). We need to contribute to church activities and social work – give a hand to the helpless.
 - b) Integrity. We need to build a high integrity character. Never deceive those we are partners with or our workers at any level (verse 7: "... Go, sell the oil and PAY YOUR DEBTS ...").
 - c) Stewardship. That leads to sustainability. We need to learn how to efficiently use the money or resources we earned as benefit in order to invest wisely and create sustainability in our welfare. (verse 7: "... You and your sons can live on what is left").

This passage doesn't mean that the widow should just spend what she got as benefit, but she should organise herself and think of how she could use it in order to never return to the stage of extreme poverty again, avoid dependency and remain in the state of permanent well-being.

Those are biblical principles that companies, industries and businessmen use to prosper. Why should we restrain the Bible and suffer poverty and lack while our God is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8)?

Can we just try and see how God is faithful?

¹ Sam Adeyemi, Start With What You Have, P63



Ratsimbalantson
Clemence

Being an example:

ANIMATOR COUPLE IMPROVE FARMING

Written by Ratsimbalantson Clemence (Lanto), Rural development animateur

The most important responsibility for MLC development committee members is being an example in everything they do. Mr. Rainivony and Aunt Pierrette are engaged in a development committee. Through their own tree planting and cultivating, they are very active in implementing and promoting new farming techniques.

Miarinarivo,
Madagascar



This story is about one family living in Ambohimandroso in Miarinarivo, Region Itasy. Rakotoarivony, known as Rainivony, is head of the family. He is 69. In 1973, he got married to Ravaonirina Pierrette, known as Aunt Pierrette. She is now 57, and is from Ambatomitsangana. They have 9 children. They are very active members of the local MLC development committee.



The Development Committee

The couple is working with the local community, the Fokontany. All community members who were determined and willing to work together were invited without any distinction. The daily routines and responsibilities of the committee consist of receiving requests and needs, looking for solutions to the problems among the farmers, raising awareness and passing on the advice after training sessions. They also follow up the farmers' work and the decisions taken together, and they also write activity reports.

The most important is being an example in everything they do. They are 10 members in the committee and they work benevolently, and neither the church nor the Fokontany pay them.

When technicians come to give training, and when they look for a demonstration plot, the members of the committee offer or look for someone who has what is needed so that everyone can gain experience. It is not necessarily the best plot, but it is just used to give training and advice. It is an example or model.

Mr. Rainivony and Aunt Pierrette

Both Mr. Rainivony and Aunt Pierrette are determined to work for development. At 15, he already planted 200 pine trees. They planted 40 Japonica trees, and 30 mango trees, but the trees have never given any fruit. However, the couple don't want to cut these trees for environmental reasons. They



To farm means to protect and to improve

also think they can give firewood later. In addition, they have had 9 red pepper bushes for 10 years. Collectors come to their place to buy the crops.

Once, they joined an association of egg-laying chicken farmers and worked with the government, but there was a problem of management in the association. They could only gain the poultry and some experience, and therefore wanted to restart a poultry project. They feel that is what they are able to do at their age, because it is not very difficult and they can get money every day. It will also be complementary to the farming they do, because they can get very good manure from the poultry.

To farm means to protect and to improve

Itasy has a slope relief and the couple is ready

to set up contour lines on the slope lands. They finished 3 hectares and Rainivony himself dug the canals, because he was not content with what the employees did. They now have many plots of lands. They offer some land to people who want to farm and to protect the soil. They say: TO FARM means to PROTECT and to IMPROVE.

The first training was about making compost. They produced 6 carts; they used it to plant vegetables and off season cultures. They got money from that activity for a winter. Now they are preparing to make 30 carts: that is their present need.

They also learned about fruit trees: fertilising and pruning. Rainivony offered his orange trees for the practise during the training. Unfortunately, the trees still couldn't produce fruit. So during our discussion, he ordered 50kg of bone powder to solve the problem. He hasn't lost heart yet, and they have extended and planted 400 more orange trees in November and December 2014.

But he had problems in watering his orange trees, although the river Imazy passes next to his field. First, the river is too deep, and second he's getting old. So he invented a drip

irrigation system: he made 20 very small holes at the bottom of 5 litre plastic cans. He fills those cans with water every morning, puts them at the foot of each tree, and collects them every evening. He says that system is better than watering directly with a can because the water comes out little by little and the young trees get the water efficiently.

The couple really likes planting fruit trees because they can also plant food crops between the trees. That helps in fertilising the soil. In addition, the fruit trees are a part of their retirement plan as farmers. They have already mastered the pruning techniques; now they want to learn about grafting.

Which Taro tastes best?

In October 2013, a project introduced 23 varieties of "taro" to be grown in the village. The objective was to know which variety tastes best and get a good share of the market. Rainivony and his wife agreed to work with the project. They took 5 seedlings of each



Taro

variety and planted them on half an acre of their field. Now they are on the next season covering 1.5 acres. They are very enthusiastic, because now they are in May and the burrows are ready for the sowing in June: 50cm x 50cm with an interval of 50cm. Before Aunt Pierrette offers seedlings to other people, she first goes to see the place where they will be planted. She also checks if any preparation of the soil has been made beforehand. If the criteria are not met, she prefers not to give. She wants to invest wisely.





Training centre

Last, there is a training centre in Antan-timboahangy, on the way to Analavory. It is a cooperation with the Region of Itasy. The centre gives training to the farmers according to their needs. Aunt Pierrette likes to go and get training at that centre. Trainees themselves pay the cost of the training. The centre offers light lunch and leaflets with technical information. She likes to practise the training she gets. So she was chosen by the centre to go on a study tour to Morondava in May 2015.

Conclusion

The story given here is just one example of what the Development Committee does. It is similar in the eight villages. However, each has some particularities and special talents of their own.



Lovasoa
Anjaralalaina

FATTENING DUCKS

in MIRINDRA Association in Antanetibe

Written by Lovasoa Anjaralalaina, Farmer

The association elected its steering committee, deciding that we will make association rules, have our meeting every week on Sunday and start the project; unfortunately we didn't have a budget. But we started with what we had in hand. We bought five ducks, and the 14 members shared the tasks.

Miarinarivo,
Madagascar



Mr. Irakotomandimby, known as Ndimby, is a trainer in the Fokontany (community unit) Ampasamanatongotra. His approach is to act as an example by doing things, and then people see what he does and ask questions. He trains and teaches those who come to him. He is talented in water techniques (local technician in the village water supply). He also makes improved charcoal stoves.

Ndimby lost his job in 2012. Now he is maintaining spring waters and supply fountains. He even expanded his talents to house construction. Therefore, he doesn't stay much in the village, although people used to learn from him. When he is away, I, Mrs. Anjaralalaina Lovasoa, and our four children carry on in making improved stoves, off season farming, and manage the tree nursery. These are important money making activities which ensure our daily subsistence, as well as the schooling of our children who all go to the public high school of Miarinarivo; the eldest son graduated from high school in 2013. Our stoves are selling and well appreciated. As a couple, we were also regular in going for



training every month. When only Mr. Ndimby could go, he brought back some handouts and explained the training to me, so we could both realise the work together.

We usually talk with and give advice to the farmers, so now when Mr. Ndimby is away, I can continue for him. I usually say that we are complementary: I am talkative and like

1000 Ariary is around one half USD.



visiting people; Mr. Ndimby also welcomes everyone who comes to take advice and he answers everyone's questions.

The Mirindra Association

In October 2014, the church sensitised about having common savings. I went there to sensitise and convince the congregation. Consequently, eight people met for the first time on January 24, 2015 and decided to set up an association called "MIRINDRA". They agreed to a project of fattening ducks and selling liver.

Ms. Razananoro, known as Mamanoro, is a member of the association and has the talent of fattening ducks. She already had some people to receive the products in Antananarivo. She agreed on the choice because, by herself, she can't satisfy the demand. It is also a quick cycle, because through the project, we can get products after only 21 days. In addition, she already has a ready infrastructure which is large enough for the poultry.

I was not content with the few people who responded to the first call, so we had a second meeting and got 14 people. Everybody agreed to the project of fattening ducks.

The association elected its steering committee: I, Mrs. Lovasoa, was elected president. We also decided during our meeting that we will make association rules to run the association.

We have our meeting every week on Sunday afternoon. Each member would also pay 1000 Ariary of annual membership, 10kg of rice and 2kg of corn. We decided to start the project; unfortunately we didn't have a budget.

As we wanted to start as soon as possible, we borrowed some money from some members and also used the membership fee paid in advance. We started fattening ducks with the budget we had in hand. We bought five ducks, and the 14 members shared the tasks. Two people feed the ducks at 6:30 am and 5:30 pm. Ms. Mamanoro changes the water because she stays at home; she doesn't go to the field like the others.

Ms. Claire, a school headmaster, said it has changed her life as a civil servant. She has to fulfil her share of responsibility in feeding the ducks. She said it has improved her social skills and her knowledge.

We started with 5 ducks, then 8, 13, and 14. We wanted to have more than 14, but we couldn't find more ducks to buy. After five cycles, we didn't yet share out the benefits because we wanted to help the members face the financial difficulties at the beginning of the school year.

The objective of the association is to raise funds and savings; later we will share so that everyone can improve his/her living. A remaining problem is that the members still wait for donations, although I, as the trainer, explain at every meeting that development starts with one's own strength and possibilities, and not waiting for external assistance and help. The positive outcome is that the members have improved their skills in selecting good ducks and selling meat with high quality and a good price.





Report on **BEAUTIFUL HANDBAGS** made of re-used plastic bags

Written by Razanamampionona Charline Norohanta

Majunga,
Madagascar



Mrs. Charline volunteered to sensitise people to protect the environment by teaching handicrafts made from used plastic bags. They produce shopping bags, hats, pockets, carpets, etc.

The Development Committee in Tsaramandroso Mahajanga sensitises the Christians to use their talents to develop themselves and the community. I, Mrs. Razanamampionona Charline Norohanta, am the development volunteer for MAFI* and volunteered to sensitise people to protect the environment by teaching handicrafts made from used plastic bags, like shopping bags, hats, pockets, carpets, etc.

The Christians and community members collect the used plastic bags everywhere in town, then they give them to me and the handicrafters group. Eight women followed the training every Tuesday. It was a mixed group of young students, mothers and old women. A Catholic university student in environmental issues follows the training and her handicraft project helped her to get a good grade at school when she presented her project.

Apart from the handicraft training, we also have workshops on family management and environmental protection. The Development Committee gives a certificate to each parti-

cipant that finishes the training fully. Some of the students that receive the training use their talents as a living. One of them gets funded by the Deacons and Women Association. The families of the students are thankful for the training offered by our committee, because it gives them a new way to earn money by selling their products to their friends, Christian members and abroad.

The next class of students is now learning waste reclamation, using clothes waste, empty plastic bottles and plastic bags. Their desire to learn will ensure them sustainable earnings. There are two local committees from different districts that are now requesting the same trainings from Tsaramandroso.

The students take part in the various exhibitions that take place in Mahajanga. For example, world handicraft day, Boeny Region economic fair, summer break, mother's day, and the Christmas fair.

As for myself, I was able to buy land to build my house, and because of my volunteer work, some people want to help me in building the house.

Note
The publication of this article has received the agreement of Fanilo in Tsaramandroso and the district pastor.

* See article on page 53



Margaret Macheka

Report on the **BREEDING OF BUSHVELD ROAD RUNNERS**

in Chikwizo Community

Written by Rev. Margaret Macheka
The United Methodist Church: Chikwizo Mission Centre

In fulfilment of the United Methodist Church's fourfold pathways, especially that of Poverty Alleviation and the Episcopal vision BEB (Bring, Educate, Build), The United Methodist Church (UMC) Chikwizo Mission Centre in Chikwizo Communal Area (Chikwizo) engaged in a Bushveld Road Runner breeding project, under the supervision and leadership of their Pastor, Rev. Margaret Macheka.

Chikwizo, Zimbabwe



I go round to the families to help with the best chickens. The church also participates in sensitising people of the community.

Chikwizo is 256km (159 miles) away from Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, and 53km (33 miles) from Nyamapanda Border Post, Mozambique. Chikwizo is a very hot area! Average temperatures are 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 degrees Fahrenheit) during hot season and 28 degrees Celsius (82 degrees Fahrenheit) during cold season. Chikwizo receives very low rainfall. The people in Chikwizo are mostly peasant farmers who rely on support from their children and relatives who work in the cities. Because of the low rainfall, the peasant farmers rarely have bumper harvests. The congregation finds it difficult to meet their church financial commitments, pay fees for school children and put food on the table. The average family size is eight and average income per household is \$25 monthly, which is mainly earned from agricultural activities.

The congregation found the chicken project to be very attractive as it would help them meet

their immediate financial needs. Breeding of chickens is one of the projects that can be done successfully, if the breeder is committed. The Chikwizo community chose to breed Bushveld Road Runners because these are most suitable to the climatic conditions of Chikwizo.

The chicken breeding project started in 2014 with a group of five families, who are trying their best to sensitise other people in the community. The families come together at least once in two weeks to share ideas and to inspect each other's breeding areas and the cleanliness of the chicken run.

Since the area is very hot, breeding needs to be done during the cold season, that is, from May to August.

The chicks are fed on growers mash while grown chickens take sunflower seeds and any type of grain, such as crushed maize (corn /



zea mays), mhunga (pearl millet / pennisetum glaucum), rapoko (finger millet / eleusine coracana) and sorghum. A mixture of these grains is good for them.

The proper name of the chickens we breed is 'boschveld' and following is their profile:

Profile of the Boschveld chicken

The boschveld indigenous chicken was bred by Mike Bosch in South Africa. Hence the breed is specifically for African conditions. It is a cross breed with 25% Ovambo, 25% Matebele and 50% Venda chicken.

The Ovambo chicken is the local bird found in the northern region of Namibia and Ovamboland. It has brightly coloured feathers and is strong and aggressive with great survival traits, small in size but tough for African conditions – a true chicken of the wild.

The Matebele chicken is a typical chicken of the Matebele people found in the rural land south of Bulawayo. It is light brown in colour with a great egg laying ability. It feeds off what nature provides. It is large in size, for an indigenous chicken, with a well-rounded

body and strong legs. It has a very strong maternal instinct and high fertility.

The Venda chicken is a breed which was first noticed for its distinctive black and white colouring by a veterinarian in Gwanda, a Venda speaking area, which is 129km (80 miles) from Bulawayo. The Venda chicken is a great egg layer with a docile nature, very fertile and also has greatly enhanced survival to produce on what Africa can provide around the rural household.

Why Boschveld for Chikwizo

The boschveld birds are suitable for Chikwizo because:

1. They survive and produce on what nature can provide with a small amount of maintenance feed to boost production. At Chikwizo we are breeding these chickens without any other maintenance feed for the fully grown up, and are doing well.
2. Generally, the fully grown bird withstands the different climatic conditions of Africa.
3. Hens are very fertile with strong healthy

chicks that grow well, especially in cool areas of Africa, but they need a lot of ventilation and a tender loving care in hot areas like Chikwizo.

4. Excellent egg production for small commercial poultry operation.
5. They are very alert birds with an instinctive sense which helps protect them against predators.
6. Egg production starts from 20 weeks of age and continues to 36 months. The eggs are of standard size with a yellow yolk. In our project we do not give mash to any chickens which are layers, hence our egg production may start from 28 weeks.
7. Cocks are strong and fertile and can also be used for food. They should be ready for slaughter at 12 weeks of age, depending on the quality of feed given. Their meat has a good flavour and makes a tasty meal.
8. No expensive modern housing is required to make success of the poultry operations. All that is needed is warm, dry and safe houses to spend their nights and a safe nest where they can lay their eggs for brooding or for collection.
9. They provide an ideal source of protein for a household or community and can also provide a sustainable income.

Breeding the birds

Boschveld hens should be given freedom to behave naturally, to flap their wings, dust bathe and to socialise. They need access to clean, fresh water and nutritious food.

Although these birds can survive on their own foraging for food, they will only maintain a good level of production if kept on a solid

nutritional plan by providing the right amount of quality food.

For this project, we sell the birds at 4 weeks of age, which allows them to become juveniles and able to fend for themselves. The job of acting as mother, keeping them cool or warm and safe, should now be done by us and includes all the medications which are necessary to ensure a healthy productive life later.

A group of 10 birds should have one cock for the breeding of and expansion of the flock. It must also be remembered that if a hen is allowed to become broody and allowed to sit on her eggs and hatch them, she will be out of egg production for up to 12 weeks or more whilst making and managing her new family. So to have a constant flow of egg production, the breeder should have another flock of common road runners that will hatch the eggs. This is quite simple. We take the road runners' eggs from their breeding nest and replace them with boschveld eggs. The road runners' eggs can be sold or eaten.

When the eggs are hatched, there will be a group of mixed sex chickens. The hens can be grown to mature into egg production and the cockerels can be used for meat at 12 weeks onwards. So if there is one hen hatching chicks, there should also always be cockerels to eat and sell. We sell our chicks for \$7 each at 12-16 weeks in the capital city, Harare, to restaurants that prepare traditional food.

In our group, my family has 70 newly hatched chicks, 45 twelve week old mixed sex chicks, two fully grown cocks and 21 laying hens. Among the hens, there are eight road runners, which hatch the eggs. The hens sit on 12-15 eggs at a time.

The other two group members are also doing well and we have almost the same amount of newly hatched chicks.

Our aim is to achieve the following production as individual households, then sell together in the city.

1. For example, a model of 50 hens producing 80% egg production = 40 eggs per day
2. 40 eggs per day x 7 days = 280 eggs per week x 4 = 1120 per month
3. 1120 eggs / 12 = 93.3 dozen
4. 93.3 dozen x selling price of \$2.00 = \$186.60

Inputs using standard stock feed:

Each bird should be eating 120g / day.
Therefore the amount of feed for 50 birds would be 120g x 50 x 30 days = 180kgs x 0.50 / kg = \$90

This gives a profit of \$96 – minus any medication, transport and packaging for the eggs to be sold in the capital city.

However, we allow our birds to range free in the surrounding area so that their reliance on stock is reduced. The standard stock feed is supplemented with crushed or small grains and vegetables. A reduction in expenses will also increase our profit margin as most of the grains are home grown.

It should be noted that there should be an allowance made for home consumption of eggs. As long as the birds get sufficient protein, they will lay eggs. Therefore, if you are not getting eggs, check how much protein you are giving your birds.

Protein can be found in many of the grains and in green leafed vegetables and insects. The birds need to be given Newcastle disease vaccine twice or more before they come into

laying and then every 3-4 months when in lay. The vaccine is simpler to administer in the drinking water than direct injection. They also require a developing medication, which is also a water based application.

My role as a Pastor

I go round to the families to help with the best ways we can successfully breed these chickens. The church also participates in sensitising people of the community. In our group, we have members of other denominations. We encourage each other in supporting the church by paying tithes faithfully. We get the money from sales of eggs and chicks in the community, but this is done as individual households. In fact, most households are using the same ideas when breeding common road runners and are doing very well. Their different denominations are also benefiting because they are now able to support their churches from sales of the grown up roadrunners, as most people favour these free range chickens to broilers.

By being involved in these projects as a Pastor, my role has been:

1. To help eradicate poverty among church members. I have demonstrated that we do not accept poverty but we fight against it, with God's help.

(Deliverance from poverty must come from benevolent offerings given by those among God's people who have been blessed with material possessions. Acts 2:45)

2. To instil the spirit of sharing among church members.

(The early church established a caring community that shared their possessions to help meet each other's needs. Acts 4:34)

3. To lead by example: I was involved in the project and I also gave a cock and hen each to three families who are members of the congregation, to help them get a starting point to use their talents.

4. To inspire church members to help each other. The spirit to help others get started has been adopted by the whole church. Our members are donating chickens to fellow Christians who do not have any chickens. All that they need to do is build the chicken run and the church provides the chickens (Chabadza* concept shown by Elisha and the poor widow in 2Kings 4:1-7).

And in the Bible we see this demonstrated in Acts 9:36:

God worked through Dorcas with her deeds of kindness and love. Acts of love that help those in need are a demonstration of Christ's compassion and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

5. To reach out to the community and instil the same concept. As a result, members of other denominations, whom we have inspired, are promising to help their brothers and sisters in Christ in the same way.

(Our first priority in the care of the poor and needy were those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. Matthew 25:40)

Outcomes

Although the project is still in its infant stage, positive and encouraging signs are showing that the objectives of alleviating poverty, educating our children, providing nutritional sources of food and source of income will soon be fulfilled.

Signs of spiritual growth are being noticed in the church as the number of tithers has increased by 50% since inception of the project.

New members are joining our church nearly every Sunday and those who had left the church are coming back, thereby fulfilling the UMC (United Methodist Church) goal of making disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).

* See article on page 160



Rakotoarisoa
Philémon

Ankafobalo,
Madagascar



MALAGASY LUTHERAN CHURCH

SYNOD: FISAKANA

PROJECT: USE YOUR TALENT

DISTRICT: ANKAFOBALO

REPORT FROM DEVELOPMENT ANIMATEURS TO THE RESPONSIBLE OF THE PROJECT 'USE YOUR TALENTS'

Written by Rakotoarisoa Philémon (Mao), Development Animateur,
District of Ankafobalo, Regional Synod of Fisakana

Dear all! May the blessings and peace from God, Our Father, and Jesus Christ, Our Lord, be with you forever.

We can also mention the empowerment of the small farmers, through training given. They were trained to improve their production; they were also trained in skills of selling veterinary and farming products.

Find here the report from development animateur working in the region behind the mountain Manangana, synod Fisakana. The report is mainly about the situation from before the project and up to the date of this report. The report includes:

- The previous situation
- The appointment of the animateurs
- The result of awareness raising activities
- Outstanding points.

The Youth Association also planted coffee trees and took care of a nursery for other trees. That idea was very interesting in the development of both individuals and the church. It is worth noting that the church owns a big field for this nursery, that could be used and benefit both the church and the community.

We will start with the previous situation. A close and serious cooperation already existed between the church leaders and the Christians. Thus Christians were able to do some development work within the community. To illustrate, we can name the building of dams, which irrigate the farming fields, and the maintenance of the water spring. These two are examples of cooperation which provided the service of rural development.

That covers the previous situation. Now we come to the appointment of the development animateurs. The synod committee had a meeting in March 2014 and they elected the development animateurs to raise awareness about Christians using their talents. They received training in July 2014. There they gained some experience and knowledge about how to sensitise and persuade the community and the church. They also were provided with some materials, such as bicycles, to facilitate their work. They did their best, so

the Christians and the community welcomed the information and the sensitisation. They visited many churches, and some associations. They received a good response and people agreed to use their talents.

Now we will see the sensitisation work since the appointment of the development animateurs:

- Within the church, the church leaders and Christians realised the importance of the sensitisation. Although they had already started some works, the idea of using their talents has impressed them to develop more.

Therefore, some of them volunteered to help in realising some development works, such as being committee members.

They also welcomed the idea of officialising the development committee. The members of four churches were trained.

- Within the community, the idea of using their talents was remarkable – with good results in farming, livestock, trade and handicraft, and especially in working together for community development.

For example, when the Youth Association planted coffee trees, many members participated. The project raises funds for the church and preserves the environment.

The quality of the handicraft is improving. To illustrate, a hat used to cost 500 Ariary, but now it is 600 Ariary. That is due to a better quality and not to price increase on the market.

Now, let's see the results gained since the appointment of the animateurs.

1. Everyone is convinced that it would be okay if they use their products instead of money for the offerings at church, so the Christians offer things like hats, breads, chicken, and peanuts.
2. People with the same kinds of talents gather and share experiences. Recently one of them shared her experience in making buns. Now they can produce their own buns and don't need to buy from outside.
3. According to the MLC vision, each Christian should plant one tree each year. So the Christians have decided to plant coffee trees they bought from one Youth Association member.
4. The Christians have also decided to have common production on the big land the church owns. The crops will help them to pay their church contribution. Therefore, they planted sweet potatoes and different kinds of vegetables which correspond to the everyday needs of the people.
5. The motto 'Use your talents' is now in the mind of every Christian. It motivates them in working willingly and happily. The Christians also encourage each other.
6. Personal information about the development animateur: Although he spends much time in giving information, doing sensitisation, and talking to people who need advice, his own life has also improved by using his talents, both in the professional and social life.

The development animateur is convinced that he gained new talents in socialising with people. Others also share their talents and that is a great advantage for him. Glory be only to God.



MLC animateur Mao with his bicycle.

'Use Your Talents' – GUIDELINES

The EECMY congregation in SheleMella is very creative in using and establishing cooperatives and small scale associations in the area. This work paved the way for more financial freedom for the village ladies in the area, in comparison to their previous lives.

In the Family

One way to start is with your own family. Asking some simple questions with your family / household can help you recognise the talents you have at hand:

- What kind of knowledge and skills do we have within the family?
- Who does what in our family: Husband, wife, boys, girls, other members of the household?
- Is there something that our family, or one of our household members, cares about in a special way?
- Whom do you relate to outside the family? Individuals, families, congregations, associations, institutions, society. List them as well as interesting activities within each.
- What are our physical assets: What kind of land do we have; what could it be used for? Do we have any houses; what could they be used for? What other kinds of property do we have; what could it be used for?
- What do we spend our money on? How much money is it possible to save each week? How could we use this money?

Answering these questions will give you a good starting place for looking forward and seeing possibilities. As you spend more time exploring the questions and answers, you may see new ideas emerge. (For example: We know that our land is suitable for production of coffee, and we know that the congregation has a demonstration site where we could participate and at the same time receive training on how to cultivate coffee). At this stage, it is important to be creative – don't be afraid of 'wild' ideas. Sometimes they lead to important actions.

When you have some ideas – some of them may be 'wild' ideas – they should be evaluated and reduced to a few (2-4) to be more thoroughly evaluation with the following questions:

- Who will benefit from this plan and how will they benefit?
- What are the risks?
- What kind of knowledge or skills do we need?
- Whom do we need to consult?
- Who can give advice?
- Who do we need to cooperate with?
- What will be the concrete steps in our plan?

After that, make a plan of action with a simple time schedule (write it down) where you agree on the steps to follow.

In the Congregation

In the congregation, the principles are the same. Whatever position you have in the congregation – whether pastor, catechist or evangelist, women's group leader, or Sunday school teacher – most important is to have an eye for possibilities and creativity and appreciate and cherish the resources and talents of your congregation. A good starting place is engaging those who are already 'using their talents,' those who are creative, active, looking for possibilities and better ways to do things, big or small. You can start discussion with a few individuals or families about the local situation and what possibilities there are if talents are combined and put to use.

It is helpful for the congregation to promote 'Use Your Talents' in a systematic way. In the services, the pastor or the catechist can emphasise that every Christian has talents and is called to use them. In addition, practical examples and ideas could be shared in announcements. Sunday school is also a good place to teach the children to use their talents, for example, by growing vegetables outside the church, teaching them hygiene, or engaging the parents in tree-planting.

The church committee or elders' council could help by organising training to help members

recognise their talents and resources, and facilitate meetings where people can discuss possibilities for united projects. The church committee could also initiate voluntary community work, for example, tree planting, maintaining roads, building schools, etc. They could also facilitate training in new techniques, such as for agriculture or fishing, entrepreneurship and Christian business ethics.

The church committee can be an agent for development by facilitating contact between church members and local authorities, and people or institutions that have specialised knowledge and competence.

Establishing a development committee in the congregation could be a good solution. This committee should have the same status as other committees in the congregation. The tasks for the development committee could be:

- Connect community members who are initiating or developing an idea with other persons or associations who can help or have expertise;
- Involve people to participate in voluntary communal work;
- Initiate cooperation with local authorities on, for example, local infrastructure, like roads and bridges;
- Make an inventory of human resources in the church/parish;
- Give people tasks according to their talents and skills and financial resources;
- Establish routines for follow-up, monitoring and evaluation;
- Establish local income systems to fund the work done by the development committees (for example, offerings, selling products, common activities, etc.);
- Use church land as a source for income and as a way to test new agricultural methods.

District, Regional and National Level

It is possible to have a system of development committees at all levels, where members from the congregational level are represented at district level and members from district level are represented at regional level. That way they create a network that can facilitate contact and help each other, facilitate contact with local authorities, other churches or others who have the knowledge and skills that are needed. At district or regional level, it is also possible to organise training sessions and appoint voluntary members that can follow up and be advisers on, for example, farmers or entrepreneurs.

Special training can be offered to volunteers who want to spearhead certain fields, for example, rice cultivation, chicken raising, hygiene, etc. Once they receive training, they practice what they have learned in their own fields or in their own home and then they share it with others.

Another possibility is saving groups, especially for women. For example, a group of women (up to 25) gather every week and each adds the amount she wants to save. Each woman has a specific goal to improve her family's living condition, for example, by investing in a sewing machine, or a goat, or something else that she could use to increase the family income. This is a good way to help women manage their goals and finances more systematically. (See article on Tuinuane Savings Groups by Grace Auma for more details).

Cooperation

'Use Your Talents' helps many people to initiative and do things without external resources. That does not mean that we should not cooperate with others, for example, local authorities. Cooperating with local authorities is very important because often you need

their permission for initiatives and by cooperating, you can achieve greater results. Sometimes they also have programs you can follow, specialists you can invite, or they can provide material or equipment. Cooperation with local authorities can also help remind them of their duties in the community (see

article on Loruko community by Margaret Mbugua). Local NGOs might also have needed competence and could be invited to share their experiences.

These are just a few ideas to help you get started in using your talents in your community.

Experience in training for asset mapping within the Malagasy Lutheran Church

– by Zo Ramiana Rakotoarison

MLC had the privilege to get to know and be authorised to translate into Malagasy part of the book "The Power of Asset Mapping – How your congregation can act on its gifts" by Luther K. Snow (2004). The training we implemented followed the steps described in this book:

- Identify the congregation's assets (physical assets, individual assets, associations, institutions, economic assets) through an individual exercise and sharing of answers within a group.
- Brainstorm actions that can be done by connecting the available assets. (Development is creating a new link between two or more existing assets, for example: "If we put my broken car together with Brian's mechanical skills and the youth group, we'd have a repair clinic.")
- What do you want to do? Stand individually for an action you want implemented together with others.

In general, during the whole process we observed that the participants were laughing, enjoying the time together. The session was very lively as the participants discussed the group's answers. At the end of the training, there was a small evaluation of the experience of the group in mapping the congregation's assets. Most of the participants expressed their surprise and joy when they realised their congregation has assets they did not think of. We also asked those who already implemented the process to comment and give feedback on their experience. The participants said that as an immediate result, those groups who learned the process of asset mapping made various plans for the future and they are happy with the lists of actions they made. In other words, the process of mapping assets was appreciated by the participants and gave them hope for the future.



PART III

'USE YOUR TALENTS' – DIAKONIA AND DEVELOPMENT

William Kayo
2017



Daniel
Mutidzawanda

TRANSFORMING THE COMMUNITY:

WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR HAND?

Written by Rev. Daniel Mutidzawanda (Zimbabwe)

“And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand?
And he said, A rod.” (Exodus 4:2)

Mutare City,
Zimbabwe



The Israelites went to Egypt in search of food and settled there, in a foreign land, for 460 years. It was hunger and poverty that had forced them to leave their beloved country. After a long period of suffering in a foreign country, God sent Moses to rescue and liberate the children of Israel from the oppression of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. He gave Moses the assignment and task to deliver these people who were facing socio-economic hardship and lived miserable lives at the mercy of the Egyptian king. Moses was called to rescue them out of this situation.

Similarly, the ‘Use your talents’ knowledge development program has come as our “Moses” to alleviate the suffering of people in third world countries. Third world countries are suffering from socio-economic challenges. They do not have sound financial background to support their families and the church.

People in third world countries often spent much of their time weeping and crying like babies instead of finding ways and means to eradicate such challenges in life. Hence, the program came to address community and socio-economic challenges and help communities to live a meaningful life through the ‘Use your talents’ knowledge development program.

God sent Moses to convince them that he is holding something in his hand that is of paramount importance to improving their lives and helping them to come out of poverty. The rod in the hands of Moses was to be used to transform the lives of the Israelites to a better situation, and to help them be better people in their own right. The concept of ‘Use your talents’ is the key to unlock the potential talents stored in the hands of communities around. God asked Moses what was in his



"Together" by William Kayo

hand – which was a rod. The rod had the potential to become a snake, but Moses was not aware of the significance of the rod until he threw it on the ground at God's command. Then he realised the potential that was in the rod to change from a rod to a snake, and its significance.

The 'Use your talents' knowledge program seeks to remind people of what is in their hands which can be used to change the lives of their own people, and help them to become aware of, discover and release the talents in their lives. God reminded Moses that

there was something important that he was holding in his hand which could be of help to transform his people from suffering. In the same way, communities need help to learn to discover potential talents that are in their lives and utilize such talents for the betterment of the community.

In your hand you have much potential: potential to do animal husbandry, potential to do crop husbandry, bee keeping, carpentry, to be a builder.

God helped Moses to release the potential talent that was in his hand and it was used to liberate the children of Israel from bondage. Likewise, you can use the talent in you to transform people's lives in your community. The people back home are eagerly waiting for the "Moses" of their time to help them to tap the potential talents in their lives. When we go back home, we need to try our level best to assist people around us to release their potential talents and utilise them for the betterment of their families and communities at large.



Stephanie
Dietrich

Oslo,
Norway



Use Your Talents –

DIAKONIA IN PRACTISE

Written by Rev. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich,
Liasons for 'Use Your Talents' within VID Specialised University

We should relate the breaking of bread in the Holy Communion with the breaking of bread with the world, in the same way as it was related intrinsically from the beginning – the first breaking of the bread of Jesus with the community of His followers.



“Now I can send all my children to school. ‘Use Your Talents’ project made it possible for me”.

What is diakonia?

The theories of diakonia focus on linking the life and faith of the church and the life in congregations with life in society at large. Diaconal theory emphasises that the faith of the church and our life in the world are intrinsically interwoven and should stimulate each other.

“Now I can send all my children to school. ‘Use Your Talents’ project made it possible for me”.

This was said by a leader in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, pastor Daniel Mutidzawanda from Mutare, about what ‘Use Your Talents’ meant for him (see his devotional in this book). Together we stood in his field, with maize, watermelons, pigs and ‘roadrunner’ chickens flapping around us.

“Use Your Talents’ has changed my life and that of many others in the community”.

Understandings of diakonia have fundamentally changed. Diakonia is not just ‘care for people in need’. The Norwegian Church, in its 2007 Diakonia Plan, defined diakonia as “the gospel in action which is expressed through loving your neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice” (Church of Norway National Council 2007). Many churches in the worldwide church have a similar understanding of diakonia. The church is

called to stand together in service to each other and humanity as a whole. This call is not simply about charity work, but about standing together side by side in the fight for a better life for our global society. Everyone is equal in this fight – everyone has a role to play and the ability to contribute. The current understanding of diakonia is characterised by a fundamental belief that all people have value and dignity. A decisive part of a Christian understanding of humankind is that everyone is created in God’s image and likeness, for fellowship with one another. Everyone is given to one another and is dependent on one another and on the whole living cosmos.

In recent years, in both development work and in diakonia and mission, there is more emphasis on the need for people in the ‘global south’ and ‘global north’ to stand together. Cooperation is not about charity, but about partnership, reciprocity and equality. Nevertheless, we know that it is often the donor, the one with the money, who ultimately is the project owner and has the power – not the users or the beneficiaries of aid. ‘Use Your Talents’, through its characteristic bottom-up perspective, attempts to combat the top-down mentality.

In the diaconal theoretical framework, there is strong emphasis on the need for reciprocal cooperation and contributing towards empowering each other. It is important to under-

stand that as fellow members of the human race, we are mutually dependant. Sometimes we need help, sometimes we need to give help to others. No one owns the solution to someone else’s problem – but together we can make progress in finding solutions.

‘Use Your Talents’ is built on the same understanding and belief that all humans have inherent resources and the ability to take part in developing their own life and that of their community. The New Testament story of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 is a good place to start. The parable is understood as an encouragement to the faithful to use their ‘talents’ – which in the New Testament context was an amount of money that was increased through wise management. Jesus judgement of the one who buried his talents was severe. Talents are understood today as individually inherent gifts and abilities.

In the Christian worldview, the emphasis in ‘Use Your Talents’ is that all people are created in God’s image and have diverse gifts and talents which can and should be utilised in their unique setting. Instead of focusing on everything one cannot do or accomplish, we are encouraged to reflect on what we can do with the possibilities and resources available to us.

Now I can send my children to school

I was first introduced to ‘Use Your Talents’ through supervising a masters student in diakonia from Madagascar, Zo Rakotoarison (article also included in this book). It took a little while before I understood what it was about – ‘Use Your Talents’ is, in fact, not a traditional development or charitable project. It is not about making a project plan and providing money and competence to improve people’s living conditions. The starting point is that the ability, willingness and competence to do something about individual circumstances



“‘Use Your Talents’ has changed my life and that of many others in the community”.

lies within each person who utilises their God-given talents. The parable from Matthew 25 is the basis and encouragement to use our talents instead of burying them.

Later on, I became a part of the ‘Use Your Talents’ Knowledge Development Project and I have seen how it can change people’s lives. The Methodist pastor that I referred to was able to earn money to send all his children to school because he started looking for possibilities to make a better life for himself and his family. He had a plot with uncultivated soil that was available – fertile soil in Zimbabwe – and he had the desire and ability to begin to cultivate in his own garden. Now he has planted both maize and corn which he has sold; he has chickens and pigs and other animals which provides food for his family and money to send his children to school. And the most important of all: He is inspired and is providing guidance to others in the church and congregation to do the same – think ‘possibility’ and ‘ability’, rather than ‘need’ and ‘obstacles’. It can begin small and spread to others who also don’t have enough food or money for school fees. – And it can be done through the work in local congregations, in local communities, based on resources which are available for everyone.

Use Your Talents!

In diaconal theology, we emphasise that the church is only a true church if it is diaconal in

nature: Diakonia is part of the church's DNA. This includes both the individual diaconal responsibility, congregational diakonia, 'diaconal institutions' and the international diaconal responsibility.

Christianity has, right from the beginning, focused on the church's responsibility towards our fellow human beings, both inside and outside the congregation. The Christian church has not only played an important role for its own members, but also for the local society.

'Use Your Talents' starts with the congregation as actors. Congregations have many possibilities and resources, both material (buildings, land, employees) and non-material (abilities, talents and participation). When local congregations and churches notice and make use of their own potential, big changes might happen. Congregations have local knowledge, a sense of ownership, many members, continuity and, not least of all, credibility in the community.

The challenge and aim for the future should be for those who work in congregations, or will work with congregations, to be educated in becoming catalysts for such thinking in their respective local context. Maybe this type of training and diaconal awareness should be provided for those in traditional mission and development projects. Church workers, and especially priests and pastors, often play an important and powerful role in creating meaning in local settings and therefore there is huge potential for raising awareness amongst them about the importance of their responsibility to inspire and lead congregations' members to use their talents.

When congregations are not only focused on the spiritual, but are concerned about the 'whole human being,' both body and soul, in accordance with Jesus' own example and preaching, then big changes might happen which can benefit the whole community and the society as a whole.





Galunde
Waketa

'Use your talents' concept:
**AN EVOLVING
COMPLEMENTARY OR
ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO
DEVELOPMENT WORK**

Written by Galunde Waketa
The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, South West Synod
Arba Minch, Ethiopia

The voice of the poor, the marginalised and excluded is so loud and needs to be heard and responded to as urgently as possible. The church and the congregation located among the grass-roots community is here to say, "I am here to share your burden".

Arba Minch,
Ethiopia



Fisherman in Chamo
Lake close to Arba
Minch.

When we use the word development, it is essential to understand the context, because it is a contested idea floated without standard consensus. Different interest groups and intellectual groups define it differently. Among theorists and practitioners of development, there have been sharp divisions. Development is a very mixed bag in that its work is widespread over the world but motivated by a variety of aims which may contradict each other (Kotze 1997:2&3). However, normally we may have two things in mind: the goal/aim on one hand; and the process, the movement towards that goal on the other hand. Obviously, we can easily understand that development as a process leads towards development as a goal. Development could be thought of as something good for all, despite the fact that getting things which benefits all in the same manner is so difficult.

Different approaches have been introduced and implemented over a century within the development sector. Some worth mentioning are empowerment, participatory, gender equitable, people centred, inclusionary, rights-based, result based, etc. In fact, each approach has behind it a set of values, beliefs and attitudes that give it flavour, set its tone, as pointed out by Rowlands (2003:2). It is not the purpose of this thesis to analyse the content, advantages and disadvantages of each approach, rather I believe that the analysis of the views of some scholars concerning development approaches may very likely help the readers to see things in a different way and easily link these views to the main issue 'USE YOUR TALENTS', discussed in the second part of the paper.

Why 'Use your talents' concept?

The term 'talent' has two definitions: The first one is measurement/scale, whereas the second

is ability/aptitude – both natural and spiritual. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, describes talent as a group of aptitudes useful for some activities. An aptitude is a component of competency to do certain kinds of work at a certain level. It includes both physical and mental competencies: developed knowledge, understanding, learned or acquired abilities/skills or attitude. Therefore, talent could be understood both as ability/potential already there in human beings and in nature, and also built up through interaction and practise. From these prepositions, we may come to the understanding that talents could be material resources around us, material resources within our access, mental resources, time, etc. However, biblical texts describe it somewhat differently. In the parable narrated by Jesus in Matthew 25:14-29, talent is described as a kind of gift given by the master to his servants, according to their abilities. Two of the servants who received gifts used the gifts properly with reproduction, where as the third servant buried it in the ground and kept it as it was (unproductive) until the master came. From the exposition, it could be understood that the talent is a gift given by the master with a purpose. A gift is not given for ordinary people, but for his servants. The receivers of the gift were accountable at the end of the day for what they had done with the gift they received. Jesus was teaching, through this parable, about what His second coming will be like.

In my understanding, both propositions are not far apart. Because the source and owner of all resources, be it material or mental, be it around us or be it in our disposal, including ourselves, is God. We are endowed with different resources, not without a purpose and responsibility. At the end of the day, we will be held accountable for misuse of, wastage of and ignoring the resources without any regeneration.

Project (needs) based approach versus ‘Use Your Talents’ (asset-based)

Needs based approach

Basically, projects emanating from broader country, regional or sector development programs have definite goals and execution periods. However, I focus only on aid projects which are financed by organisations and/or individuals from resource rich countries and have their counter national or local partner for implementation. There are more or less universal principles and procedures for projects to function. First of all, we need to have five key actors in the project business: the target community/beneficiary – these days designated as ‘rights holders’ whose need is addressed mainly by others, implementing local non-governmental organisation (LNGO), international non-governmental organisation (INGO), government and donor. Projects usually require well organised structure and large capacity staff with high remuneration and benefit packages to implement the intended activities. It is almost always mandatory to be involved in all standard procedures during project identification, formulation, budgeting, implementation, monitoring/evaluation and reporting. Use of main tools, like the logical framework (LOG), and employing participatory needs assessment methods constitute integral parts.

The project has some basic characteristics such as concreteness, time bound (time frame), orientation towards certain objectives, assignment of clear responsibilities, accountability for resources used and capability to be evaluated. Setting clear objectives, strategies and definite result packages like outputs, outcomes and impact have been practises in project operation for many years. In spite of developing ‘SMART’ objectives, it is equally important to note that projects failing to meet their objectives are not



few. In fact, many factors contribute to such failure, and describing them may be beyond the scope of this thesis. Project cycle management is another very important aspect of a project which constitutes problem/need identification, formulation/appraisal, financing, implementation and evaluation. Each cycle has its own tools and approaches of doing. In project based approach, needs is a key issue. Therefore, non-governmental organisations usually take care that needs assessment is conducted in a proper way. To this end, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is one widely used for community needs assessment (Block 2001:146).

In spite of exerting tremendous efforts in the needs assessment, it is realised that the formulation of projects with SMART objectives, dedicated to address the identified needs of the community, is not a simple task. Different reasons might contribute to such weakness, but we can raise questions like: Who conducted the assessment? Who were the information

sources? At what level did the target community participate? From experience, we have learned that people engaged in needs assessment are externals having little or no knowledge of the target community’s socio-economic, cultural and political background. Again, sometimes the door for community participation gets narrow which leads to nominal, reactive rather than proactive participation.

In spite of all the challenges faced in project operation, NGOs have been significantly addressing the community development gaps in many developing countries. Particularly in countries where there are conducive policies and practise of good governance, the results are impressive; whereas in those countries with eroded good governance and bad policy environments, NGO projects have ended with little result.

Generally, the major challenges/bottlenecks facing project based development approaches in the current context are the following:

Multi-dimensionality of poverty

These days, poverty is multi-dimensional and is persistently linked to a web of recurring factors, as described by Narayan (2000:201). Poverty is rarely about the lack of only one thing; rather it stretches from lack of food, which results in hunger for the poor, to lack of access to basic infrastructures, such as roads, transportation and clean water. It also encompasses lack of access to education and health services. Psychological dimensions such as powerlessness, voicelessness and dependency also form its integral parts. The question posed now is, “Would it be possible to escape from multi-dimensional poverty by exercising the already existing traditions and deploying the conventional development approaches that we have at our disposal now?”

Mushrooming terrorism and multiple forms of conflicts

Terrorism has become a global problem and is knocking on the doors of every country. Ethnic, religious and resource based conflicts have been mushrooming in every corner of the world. All these issues are sensitive, crucial and demand huge resources to intervene. The attention of developed countries’ leaders and big financial institutions have been drawn to these matters. Being trapped by the jungle of these issues, who can hear the voice of the poor now? The answer to this question may very likely be: very few. Therefore, I would tend to argue that ‘business as usual’, walking on the same road at the same speed, may not take us a long distance.

Ever growing demand for best quality project proposals

A couple of decades ago, winning finances for development projects was so simple. Developing project proposals did not require well qualified and skilled personnel and the content of the project proposal document was not as complex as it is now. The requirements from the donor side for project planning as

well as reporting has become more complex, demanding time, expertise and even substantial finances.

Logical framework, also known as LOG frame or project matrix, originated in USAID and is a very widely used tool in project planning. However, there are significant differences in framing vertical and horizontal logics by many donors. For example, USAID uses 4x4 matrix where as the Norad version consists of only three columns and four rows (3x4 matrix). There are also many other differences (Gasper 1997:6). If the implementing NGO has two or more projects financed by different donors, it must adhere to each donors’ interests and requirements, which is very difficult.

Instability in policy environment

From experience, we have learned that the aid policy of donors has been changing frequently. On the other hand, in countries like Ethiopia, the government has developed special policies and directives for NGOs’ operations and management in the country. Accordingly, a federal government institution known as Charities and Societies Agency was established in 2009 with three objectives: to enable and encourage charities and societies to develop and achieve their purposes in accordance with the law; to create a situation in which the operation of charities and societies is transparent; and to ensure that charities and societies operate legally (Federal Negarit Gazeta, 2009:4,525). Moreover, a directive emanated from the 2009 proclamation in which budget items were determined to be fit into the ratio 30% administration (maximum) to 70% program (Charities and Societies Agency, 2011:5-7), which disappointed almost the whole NGO community. Since then, a series of discussions have been conducted by concerned bodies, but a consensus is not yet reached.

Community participation

Many projects are known for involving different stakeholders in one form or other. In spite of being widely used, the definition of ‘participation’ is under considerable disagreement among development scholars and practitioners. It varies depending on the context and background. For example, politicians and economists look at it from different angles. The prevailing diverse perspectives reflect the differences in the objective for which participation stands for.

According to Paul, Community Participation is defined as follows:

An active process by which beneficiary/client groups influence the direction of an execution of a development project with a view of enhancing their wellbeing in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish (1987:2).

Some important themes that can possibly be drawn from this definition are: that beneficiaries are the key actors who direct the execution of the project; collaborative involvement of beneficiaries is an essential feature of community participation. Group involvement enables commitment creation, learning/building up capacity, confidence building, and cost sharing. As argued by Awortwi (1999:8), community participation goes beyond being seen only as a management tool for the efficient execution of specific projects. Initiative taking, action and key decision-making are among the most important issues that the community should be involve in. Such involvement steps up the community from passively waiting for technicians/experts and politicians to solve problem towards proactive participation to address their problems mainly by themselves. Generally, community participation serves the following objectives (Paul 1987:3&4).

- *Instrument of empowerment:* community involvement in development projects empowers them to initiate actions on their own – to influence the process and outcomes of development.
- *Capacity building:* may generate two advantages. First, beneficiaries engage and take operational responsibility of parts of projects, through which they learn more. Secondly, it contributes to the sustainability of the project outputs and outcomes beyond the project period.
- *Effectiveness:* beneficiary involvement in different project cycles activities may lead to results that match better with beneficiary needs and constraints.
- *Cost sharing:* beneficiaries contribute labour, money and materials that strengthens collective effort and thereby develops sense of ownership.
- *Efficiency:* community participation, beginning from the initial phase, results in effective coordination and interaction among beneficiaries, and between them and implementing agencies. The ultimate effects will be: reduction in delays, smoother flow of project services and overall costs reduction.

Despite the fact that community participation has such tremendous advantages in the process of development projects, there are various barriers towards full participation. As pinpointed by Plummer (2000, cited in Dorsner 2008:414), skills and knowledge, cultural beliefs and practice, gender, social and political marginalisation are factors affecting the level of participation.

Paul (1987:4-5) has identified four levels of community participation in development projects – what he termed ‘intensity’ of participation. These are information sharing, consultation, decision-making and initiating action – in such a way that the intensity grows, reaching the peak at the level of initiating

action. In this regard, the problem often faced is that during planning projects, donors and government bodies tend to pre-empt the role of beneficiaries in decision-making and initiating action which reduces the beneficiaries to playing a reactive rather than proactive role.

Growing Donor driven tendency

Most development projects are financed by foreign aid. In the so called partnership hierarchy/ladder, which constitutes beneficiary community (at the bottom), implementing local partner or local non-governmental organisation (LNGO), international non-governmental organisation (INGO) and donor (at the top), upward accountability is highly emphasised. INGOs and LNGOs are usually set up to serve the marginalised communities that generally have little or no voice. As stated by Rowlands (2003:88), most often INGOs give higher attention to donor base partnerships rather than the grass-roots community. As a matter of fact, the donor community neither receives primary services from organisations, nor is capable of monitoring and ensuring that the INGO is adequately responding to the needs of the poor. Nonetheless, the donor community is the most influential in determining the direction of the project. This is the symptom of the alien-hand syndrome.

The fundamental questions such as: Whose needs do we have to privilege? How can those at the bottom of the ladder gain a decisive voice? What should come first: downward or upward accountability? – These questions have been raised for many years, but still remained unsolved.

Generally, it would not be difficult to understand that the resources mobilised in the name of the projects are very huge compared to the impact it brought to the livelihood of the poor. On one hand, the importance of local resources and the role of the grass-roots

community is overlooked, resulting in less guarantee of ownership and ultimately failure in having long lasting results. On the other hand, these days the resources seem to be very limited but the need to scramble for these resources is growing with unprecedented speed. Therefore, it is time to think of either alternative or complementary development approaches which practically favour the poor at grass-roots level and improve their livelihood. Hence, 'Use Your Talents' asset-based development approach has been thought of, initiated and is evolving. It was initiated in 2004/5 in the Malagasy Lutheran Church in close cooperation with Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) and the idea further expanded to three African churches – The United Methodist Church (UMC) Zimbabwe, Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK), and The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) (Haus 2014:4).

Use Your Talents (Asset-Based Approach)

Asset based approach enables the communities to use their resources, build from actions already started and thereby transform themselves rather than waiting for externals to address their own priorities. It creates an opportunity for people to work together, learn from one another and get engaged in new dynamics. This concept is marginalised by development practitioners and being used mainly in the global north (see, for example, Kretzmann & McKnight 1996, Mathie & Cunningham 2005).

Development literature says very little on 'Use Your Talents' concept, rather the Bible tells and reminds us many things about it.

As discussed earlier, talent includes spiritual, natural/acquired abilities and learned skills. Actually, some people try to associate gifts only to spiritual elements given by God, and put apart talents/abilities as natural/acquired and having been learned through interaction with other people and environment. However, the reality is that all we have is from God, including talents/abilities, be it acquired or learned. It is equally important to note that the talent is the asset we are endowed with by God. My differing argument could be that spiritual gifts are given only for believers of God who are born again. Otherwise, both believers and unbelievers have got acquired and learned abilities. For this preposition, I have sufficient evidence from the Bible. Gifts of knowledge and wisdom were given to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Daniel 1:17-19). Moses told the children of Israel how God called by name Bezaleel and filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship. Moreover, "in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work" (Exodus 35:30-35) – which implies God given skills/abilities.

In my understanding, the fundamental issue is not lack of understanding on talent, rather, using that talent has been left behind and less focused on. As people of God, we are here with a purpose and all things deposited in us have got a function, like to make a difference, to leave a positive mark on the area / among the community we live in, and to influence those around us so they too can flourish. We have a dual responsibility: a responsibility to others and a responsibility to ourselves. In reality, each one of us is blessed with different talents and some are even blessed with extraordinary abilities. The problem is that some of us are not able to see and recognise what we possess, and some others may not want to share it and use themselves or their talent.

The Bible encourages us to use our talents (Romans 12:1-21). God wants us to have a spirit of humility, so we can serve one another with our talents instead of using those talents for our own glory. In verse 6, we are told that each one of us has different gifts, according to the grace we've been given. It goes on to name many different talents, from the more noticeable to the easily overlooked ones. There is one common factor for each gift – it tells us "let him do it".

*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve. If it is teaching, let him teach. If it is encouraging, let him encourage. If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; If it is leadership, let him govern diligently; If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.
Romans 12:6-8*

Basic characteristics and principles of Asset-based approach

- To start with the resources and talents that already exist in the community and ask how they could be recognised, nurtured, used and developed further (Haus 2016:9). Be it in us or around us, there are different resources which we have not yet well recognised or have overlooked.
- Volunteerism is a key driving force of the asset-based approach. The source of the gifts in us is not we, ourselves. It is God who deposited in us, free of any charge. Therefore, each one of us should contribute on a voluntary basis towards the grass-roots support initiatives of the congregation.

- On a personal level, independence, ownership, personal development and mobilisation, networking and self-confidence are the results coming from the 'Use Your Talents' development approach.
- At community/congregation level, inward rather than outward looking; Assess and identify the potentials/talents each member in the community/congregation has, and then map the identified talents for further planning and action; At individual level, you need to ask yourself what you are good at. For example: If you are good at helping people, organising people, hosting people, giving advice, giving encouragement, creativeness, singing songs, teaching, etc.
- Takes grass-roots initiatives as the basis and any outside support to be thought of should be geared to stimulate these initiatives; Care should be taken with any kind of external support not to erode and displace grass-roots roles.
- Enables the local congregations to play a proactive role in the development agenda, which locates congregations as the primary development agents.
- Ensures real and maximum community participation: Each member of the congregation has his/her own gift or talent, which is very important; In this regard, asset-based approach brings the community from mere listening (entirely passive) and receiving information to the next influential participation ladder, which ensures decision-making, acting and self-mobilisation (entirely active participation).
- Sharing and networking to stimulate the release of the potential already there in each member for the betterment of the people/community whose livelihood is badly deteriorated.

The way forward

Asset-based intervention in some African Christian congregations

From the compiled reports on study tours, it could be understood that the asset-based approach works well (Haus 2016:66-67). In Mahasoabe district, Madagascar, it was noticed that MAFI (Malagasy acronym for volunteer development animators at grass-roots level) has developed a highly organised system of training and follow-up which enabled them to become specialists in their fields. The basis for MAFI work is the biblical teaching which promotes volunteer work in the church and community. The key stepwise processes in place are training, practising and sharing it with their neighbours. The MAFI system is used in many parts of Madagascar where the Malagasy Lutheran Church is operational. It was clearly seen that the local community increased their production and thereby generated income for other uses of the household. The MAFI work is proven to be efficient and its sustainability unquestioned, as the reports indicated.

In Mafo congregation, south Ethiopia, a well organised voluntary work system has been developed to address the multifaceted problems of the local community. There is a development committee in the congregation responsible for planning and coordination of the execution of planned activities. The way the congregation generates income, prioritises community problems, organises volunteer teams, mobilises its members and addresses community problems is so creative and impressive. Using the volunteer teams and own income, it constructed many houses for sick and elderly persons, built bridges and schools and also maintained schools and roads. It was realised that the congregation had organised successive training programs and invited specialists in the field for community

empowerment to give training towards increasing production and productivity. Not only did the people become open-minded and eager to learn new techniques, but also the development committee and congregation leaders become so open-minded and eager to learn and search for new ways of doing things.

The 'Tuinuane' groups (women's saving groups) in Kimane Congregation in Kabiria, Nairobi, is another exemplary result/outcome of the asset-based approach. Here also there is a well organised system in which 22 women's groups were established, with 25 members each. Each member in the group saves a certain amount each week, and can take loans to make petty scale investments so as to improve their income. The group members meet once a week and worship together and discuss various issues. During the study tour to 'Tuinuane', we learned that these groups have not only changed their lives but also the lives of the whole neighbourhood.

Generally, even though the cases narrated above are few, there are many cases of such kind, and even more impressive, being practised in other congregations. Therefore, from the three practical cases, we can understand that the grass-roots community has got huge potential to impact itself and its surrounding. The MAFIs and Tuinuane groups had received some external support for training and networking. But Mafo congregation has come a long way in practising 'Use Your Talents' without any external input. This shows that it is also possible for the congregations to initiate and design their own new ways of supporting the disadvantaged community members, specifically, and the community at large, in general. However, we realise that a lot of work is awaiting us. And hence, we can conclude that 'Use Your Talents' can be a complementary development model which church leaders should give high attention to its implementation.

How can we 'scale up' and 'scale out'?

Christian churches are established and exist on different parts of the earth to represent Jesus and engage in responsibilities which Jesus was engaged in. Some among these responsibilities are to feed the hungry (Mark 6:41), to heal the sick (Luke 13:12-13; 8:48), to be manifested in a good work (2Thessalonians 3:13; Ephesians 4:28; Luke 10:34-35), to love each other (Romans 13:8), to stand for justice (Luke 18:8).

The phrases 'scale up' and 'scale out' do not have basic differences in meaning. In this paper, I use 'scale up' to mean that a good practise should be expanded in the catchment of the congregation responsible for initiating it. 'Scale out', in this context, is to expand a good practise under consideration beyond the catchment of the initial congregation. In fact, we need to take care of the contexts of each congregation, parish/district and synod in a country when replicating an exemplary practise. Moreover, when it comes to cross country exchange, it needs more care than that of internal context. There are fundamental remarks drawn from the discussions made above.

- The voice of the poor, marginalised and excluded is so loud and needs to be heard and responded to as urgently as possible. The church structure, in general, and the congregation located among the grass-roots community is here to say, "I am here to share your burden".
- God has given different gifts or talents to each member of the congregation. Moreover, the congregation, as grass-roots church structure, is endowed with different kinds of man-made and natural material resources. The fundamental questions to be raised are: Does each member in the congregation recognise that God has equipped him/her with

one or other kind of talent to be released for the benefit of the community around irrespective of race, religion, sex, age, etc.? Does the congregation recognise the huge potential existing in it? And for what purpose does the congregation mainly invest its resources? Therefore, we need to properly and adequately address these questions while dealing with 'Use Your Talents'.

- 'Use Your Talents' concept should be adequately internalised by the leaders of church structures, from congregation to national level. To this end, awareness raising and basic training programs should be designed and implemented so as to promote and expand volunteer work.
- Assessment and identification of different talents in the congregation has to be worked out. Mapping the identified talents is another important step in moving the concept forward.
- Many times, committee work is not as effective and efficient as it could be due to personal and external reasons. Nevertheless, we learned that the FANILO (development committee) in Malagasy Lutheran Church has managed well the MAFI system. Again, the development committee in Mafo congregation, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), has been effectively mobilising the volunteer teams organised under it. Therefore, it is quite important to place the volunteer coordinating and mobilising structure within the context of each church unit.
- Deeply planting the 'Use Your Talents' concept in church work demands more than awareness raising and a couple of days training. Therefore, it should be designed to have education programs in 'Use Your Talents' in the national and regional seminaries and theology schools and universities.

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The Relationship between 'Use Your Talents' and CHABADZA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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'Use Your Talents' and Chabadza are both approaches to community development based on the principal of assets rather than focusing on problems and needs - community driven development rather than development driven by external agencies.

Chabadza

(Shona, Zimbabwean language)

The Shona word 'badza' means hoe, a manually operated mechanical tool using in farming, gardening, agriculture.

The Shona word 'Chabadza' can carry the meaning owner/master of the hoe, or when used figuratively, it can mean a good user of the hoe - a good farmer.

Metaphorically, Chabadza implies people working alongside each other for mutual benefit.

The United Methodist Church Zimbabwe Episcopal Area has participated in the 'Use Your Talents' Knowledge Development Project. In this text, we want to explore the relationship between one of our own approaches to development work (Chabadza) with 'Use Your Talents', and also how our way of working has been inspired by 'Use Your Talents'.

Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' have the same philosophy that intentionally centres on people's existing gifts. A philosophy that seeks to assist individuals as well as whole communities to believe in themselves - their knowledge, their abilities, their value, their worth - to break through the traditional hierarchical perceptions of power and cycles of dependency reinforced by an overemphasis on outside solutions and outside funding.

The Chabadza Community development program is premised on the local ownership of development initiatives, agenda and process. *The program is anchored in the age old communal practice of lending a hand to other families or communities engaged in some work. The idea is that an external person, either a stranger or a visitor, when passing by people cultivating their fields, would be invited and obliged to make a detour in their own journey and lend a hand in the ongoing work. The owner of the field remains mindful and conscious of the fact that the stranger is only assisting them with their work. The field worked on remains theirs, but also they wouldn't put down their hoe and leave the helper to work alone.*

The concept of Chabadza operates in such a way that the community exists first and the development scheme is an intervention in it. This helps the community to feel ownership of what is achieved by the development scheme, and therefore preserve and enhance it. As a result, the projects done under this concept are

undoubtedly sustainable. The communities develop their own development agenda and set out their priorities. After that, they mobilise themselves to begin working and bring together all locally available materials, such as river sand, pit sand and moulding of bricks, in the case of construction projects.

Having done their part, they then call for assistance from Chabadza through the local United Methodist Church. In this sense, the Chabadza Community Development Program gives a hand to communities who are already on their way working to develop and transform their communities [CHABADZA].

Through community meetings and efforts, the Chabadza Community Development Program helps to point out some of the areas that people in the community would like to see improved. The areas to be focused upon are not looked at from some outside group or some demographic study that is laid upon the community. Instead, it is the community members themselves that decide what they would like to improve. There are some community meetings and discussions that are held by the Chabadza staff together with community leaders and members to find out what the communities have done already in an effort to develop their community.

After a community has decided where they want to focus some of their attention, it is then directed to the means with which they themselves can bring this about. What qualities, talents and abilities does the community have that can help solve these problems? The focus is on the community members seeing themselves as the solution to the problem; not some government program or outside group or aid that is going to be their salvation.

The Relationship between Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents'

Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' have the same philosophy that intentionally centres on people's existing gifts. Both models contribute to the transformation and healing of the hurting world by encouraging its staff and partners to act as facilitators that engage and energise people through an appreciation and affirmation of their gifts, ideas, decisions and existing resources versus simply their needs. Both the Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' concepts contribute to healing, empowerment, sustainability and wholeness. Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' only use different methods, but the philosophy is the same. They are both community economic development models that place priority on collaborative efforts for economic development that make best use of its own resource base. They focus on putting effort to engage people as citizens rather than clients in development, and how to make local communities more effective and responsive. 'Use Your Talents' and Chabadza are approaches to community-based development based on the principal of assets rather than focusing on problems and needs; community driven development rather than development driven by external agencies.

Self-initiated activities

The two models are based on principles of empowerment and ownership of the development process.

Chabadza is a community development concept that always looks at what the community can do for themselves. The concept looks at the talents available in the community, because before the community invites Chabadza they have to be working on their own on self-initiated development projects. The communities look at what they have and take stock of their material and human resources. They then begin to work

on their projects using the locally available materials before they call for assistance from Chabadza.

Similarly, 'Use Your Talents' is a concept that looks at the talents which individuals have and how they can use these talents to develop their lives and then their communities. In 'Use Your Talents', people are also gathered in church by the church leaders to find out what skills and talents they have so that they can be further trained in order to train others to engage in different projects and get money for their families and church. They also gather together and work together to build their community institutions, like schools, bridges, etc. By so doing, both concepts help to build confidence in the communities. The meetings and discussions that draw out people's experiences, successful activities and projects help to uncover the gifts, skills and talents that people have not recognised before and also help people feel pride in their achievements. This celebration of achievements and realisation of what they have to contribute builds confidence in their abilities to be producers, rather than recipients of development.

Develop Christian Leaders

Community transformation is very critical in the two programs. The community initiatives which change their situation, status and condition are also a common aspect in Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents'. For Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' ministries, development leaders from the community are a huge priority; they undertake with absolute commitment. The pay-off is that our communities are now filled with strong Christian leaders who love their neighbours and have the skills and abilities to lead our churches, organisations and other institutions.

In both models, particular people emerge as leaders in the community. People who

have shown commitment and leadership in the past are usually selected to be leaders of particular projects. In Chabadza, a committee with the following people is selected: the coordinator, the secretaries, the treasurer and committee members. All are democratically selected to help implement, monitor and keep records of the projects. In 'Use Your Talents', people with different skills are also selected in the church to lead and train other people in church and out in the communities to do different projects. Each of these leaders will have personal interest – something that motivates him or her to act.

Sustainability

Many local institutions today, however, are actually controlled by national and international organisations. This situation may influence the relationship of the institution on the local level. One of the central goals of Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' approaches is to provide stronger ties between institutions and the residents in a locality. The two concepts both believe and suggest that community is a contingent phenomenon, dependent on a number of conditions to achieve social interactions in pursuit of mutual interests. Both Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' concepts make efforts to make sure that community sustainability is promoted and focused on local practices and policies, and evaluate whether they contribute to the long-term survival of the social, economic and environmental bases of the locality. The approaches focus on examining the interconnections between local economic, social, and environmental issues. They provide practices that promote economic development, for example, the need to ensure the sustainability of the environment and provide opportunities for marginalised residents in the community. Chabadza community development programs are now training the communities which they work with on environmental issues. In 'Use Your

Talents', the communities are also trained in projects like tree growing and how to care for the environment.

This focus on community assets, rather than the needs, represents a significant shift in how community development practitioners have approached their work in recent years. In the past, community development practitioners began their efforts by conducting a needs assessment that examined the problems and weaknesses of the communities to address local issues. The tendency, however, is for residents to look to others outside the community, especially to professionals, for help. By relying on professionals and others, communities become more dependent on outside resources and often lost control over the development process. In response to these tendencies, the concept of Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' emphasises the importance of looking to individual, family and community assets as a way to identify strengths and resources that can contribute to a strategic planning process.

Both concepts, Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents', reject the view of communities as isolated social structures. Instead, through interaction in a locality, awareness of common interests emerges. In this process, people learn to identify, manage and leverage local resources for the benefit of their communities. Much of this is dependent on developing social ties and relationships that enhance the ability of communities to act collectively to address local concerns. This is what Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' are working to achieve.

Both concepts emphasise that communities may have natural resources that could potentially be of value as an amenity. They have the same goal of trying to help mobilise communities: that they have to do projects themselves and meet the needs of their families and communities. The two approaches also

imply that the community development efforts are directed toward the locality of place. Rather than providing training for jobs that workers must take elsewhere, there is an attempt to match training efforts to jobs that can be created locally. Both Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' share the same ideas, that all individuals have the capacity to contribute to their community. When selecting committees, both men, women and young adults are selected and they participate in all activities that help develop their families and communities.

Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents'

'Use Your Talents' and Chabadza are developing to be great partners in community development initiatives for the churches in Zimbabwe and other partner countries. The program, Chabadza, is now using the experiences learned from 'Use Your Talents' to help people grow their own food and raise money for their families and community development. Chabadza has done community boreholes, and at these boreholes, the headmen of the areas in question have allocated areas where communities will have nutrition gardens to do horticulture for both family consumption and for sale. More community members will be having small plots in those gardens. This will also help in community cohesion and sustainable development.

We had training in 'Use Your Talents' in 2013 and 2014. This was held in Zimbabwe, and we invited our committee members from all communities to attend. Many individuals and communities are now involved in self-help projects like horticulture, poultry rearing, piggery, tree growing, cattle rearing, etc. Chabadza and 'Use Your Talents' have different names but have the same principles.





Anne Karin
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DEVELOPMENT ACTORS EXPERIENCES

– then and now

Written by Anne Karin Kristensen, Program Director Norwegian Mission Society

Due to my personal experiences as a missionary and a mission leader, I really believe in 'Use Your Talents' as a model for development. I believe in incremental changes – step by step is better than huge development processes that make people feel they are small and ignorant, without any knowledge about their own situation. I believe that people love to participate and to take initiative, if they are given the chance.

As a former missionary, I worked together with co-workers in Cameroon to make a better life for everyone. We initiated activities that helped people to get income on a small scale basis. We also encouraged people to participate with the knowledge and skills they had. When the development business made it possible to have more funding, it seemed as if the development people took over the whole responsibility for development. It was as if what the local people could do was not anything to be considered. I felt the same. We were not professional enough and the work was too small. We were told we had to scale up. In later years, as a mission leader, I have worked with the 'Use Your Talents' approach, which is focusing on the congregation as the primary development agent. This reminds me of earlier times, but is also adding some new aspects that are important for development work today. I really believe in the 'Use Your Talents' approach, especially when I see it from the perspective of being a mission leader responsible for international development work.

A young and growing church

In the eighties, I worked as a missionary to Cameroon. From NMS alone, we were 79 missionaries in 1979, co-operating with the Lutheran Church. It was a great time and the aim was to expand church work all over the country. Mission work started in 1925 and the church had been established as an independent church just a few years before my arrival. The church was young. It was growing and highly recognised for its social work and especially for care of the vulnerable people in society.

Social responsibility

The church had taken responsibility for many sectors in society and became a supplement to the state in many ways. The running

of schools, health institutions and the agricultural work in rural areas became a sign of a healthy church – not only in Cameroon, but all over Africa. Most of this work was funded by money available from mission agencies, such as NMS. The mission agencies had the opportunity to cooperate with their governments to get funding. With the establishment of Norad in Norway, this became a normal method of collaboration, from the late seventies to the present. The missionaries were engaged in a lot of development activities and had big responsibilities for the planning, implementation, follow up and reporting according to standards set by the governments. The goal was to hand over the work to local co-workers some time in the near future. One of the qualities a missionary needed to have was good knowledge of the local language and interest for learning about local traditions and behaviour. This made them fit to have good contact with the people on the grass-roots level.

Establishment of institutions

The church had a very clear diaconal profile – at the congregational level as well as in the institutions. The experience was that it was very easy to start new things, but it was more difficult to keep things going. Also, when it came to the funding, it was very difficult to find people who were willing to give money for the running of long term projects or institutions. It was easier to engage in investments like buildings and equipment. In this period, there was a growth of institutions run by churches. It was also easier to report back to donors by documenting that the building was there. It also helped to get a feeling of quick results with money that was clearly used for its purpose.

A heavy burden

At a certain time, the institutions (such as schools and hospitals) became a heavy burden for the churches because of lack of funds. In

some cases, this became a dilemma because the state had made itself dependent on the institutions run by the churches. The fact that the churches took responsibility for needs in society led to a very passive role by the state and became a 'sleeping pillow' in some areas. In the long run, it was difficult to run the institutions with the income that was available from the customers. In the eighties, everybody was thinking that the economic situation would change and grow. There was a belief in a changed future with equal possibilities for most people. This was also my belief. It has not been the case. The need for external funding is still a fact.

Women for Christ – the women's movement of the church

Most of the time as a missionary I was working as an advisor in the women's movement "Femmes pour Christ" (Women for Christ), with a special responsibility for training – some of it related to a training centre. I also travelled a lot and arranged training in small villages in rural areas. We initiated small scale activities to help the women produce something for sale. It could be food, bakery or handicraft.

Small scale production

It became popular to produce cloths for babies, knitted or sewn by hand. Some produced table cloths and sleeping pillows. Production of soap for sale was one of the activities. We had to think low cost and to find local materials coming from the area – not to create dependency from the "outside". The most interesting, perhaps, was the baking business. It was difficult to find somebody selling good bread in those days. How to produce bread? Almost every household had a big cast-iron pan. This could be used for baking. First, we had to produce baking tins from iron plates, usually used for roofs. The pan was filled with a layer of sand from the bottom and the baking tin was placed on the sand. The baking

tin could be filled with dough to make cakes, especially banana cakes, or we could make small loaves of bread in it. The pan was put on the open fire and charcoal was put on the cover on top. This was a good functioning stove for bakery. Later on, the women learned how to build small clay stoves which helped them to economise with the wood and by that also led to save the environment. A lot of women got a better life and became more independent economically. The most eager women had a good income.

Trainings and organising

Still trainings were required. Trainings were funded from abroad. New areas were included in the teaching and there was a need to think of new products for sale all the time. In some places, the women managed to organise themselves in such a way that they started to sell their products at the market place, but most of the time it was individual women trying to make a better life for themselves and their families limited to their own villages.

From illiterate to educated

The women in most places were illiterate. They did not have the possibility to go to a school. Even if there was a school in the village, the girls did not have the privilege to attend; the families prioritised boys for such new knowledge. In the eighties, as much as 80% of the women engaged in the women's movement of the church were illiterate, but most of them spoke several local languages that they had learned naturally by themselves. They were also very motivated to learn. There was a huge interest in literacy courses offered by the "Femmes pour Christ" movement. Quite a number of these women learned to read and write in their own original language. Until now, this geographical area has one of the highest levels of school attendance in the country – more than 92% of both boys and girls attending school. The parents saw, at a very early stage, the necessity of education for



their children and gave school a high priority. This, as we see today, is the most significant result of mission work in the area. Most of the young women in this area today are educated.

Pressure on scaling up

When funding became available from Norad, it was not a problem to get funding for trainings or investments. The bigger problem was to keep the funding at a reasonable level and try to keep the ownership with the women in the rural areas. There was big pressure to scale up. The goal was to reach the masses and there was, of course, a big need to reach a lot of people to try to improve the living conditions for the biggest possible number of people. But most of the initiatives came from the outside, from people who did not have contact with people from the grass-roots, people who did not have enough knowledge on culture, local language, traditions or religious beliefs.

A growing feeling of inferiority

The intention was good, but it led to a feeling of inferiority by being assisted from the outside, from the strangers. There was a feeling of demand from the outside to change very rapidly without considering good local traditions and eagerness for social development. The question was whether to 'be developed' or to take action in their own development. The feeling of inferiority was increasing. For instance, in the "Femmes pour Christ" movement there was a feeling that the work was not good enough, not big enough and not professional enough to be labelled as development work.

The specialists take over

In development work, there has always been room for trying out new things. Some of it works, some of it doesn't work. It is understandable that this leads to a set of values and criteria for what is understood as good development work. But when it leads to a kind of international thinking of development

work, as if the same mindset and framework is useful all over the world, there is a danger of ignoring the local differences in ways of doing things. Respect for the local context might be jeopardised. In some cases, the specialists were overruling the local people. They had a lot of knowledge about development in general, but less knowledge on local culture, thinking and language.

Local ownership

It has therefore become a goal that the work should be owned by the local people. But how does this function in practise? Development funding applications require a certain template with a number of criteria to be outlined. If the goal still is to reach the most marginalised, that is the people with less education and also less experience in adopting a system of international guidelines with different levels of goals and indicators. It scares them off instead of involving them.



"We don't want to fulfil others' goals for us. We want to fulfil our own goals. We don't want to be somebody's target group; we want to be actors in our own development action."

Is it possible to plan everything?

There is a huge distance between the local people and the specialists in the donor organisations. The most significant distance is perhaps about planning. In the specialists' minds, there is a thinking that you can plan everything. The better the plan is, the better you achieve expected results. Therefore,

you need indicators at all levels. I am also a representative for this way of thinking, but I have seen very clearly that it has its limits.

Creating distance

In one example, and it is not the only one, the local partner organisation had produced a project document, written by their specialists, for a marginalised target group. They had visited them several times to try to understand their wishes and dreams for the future. The local people in the village were ready to participate. They were church people, ready to do something for their society by inviting everyone in the village to join in. When this project document came to NMS, as a member organisation of Digni, we saw that this document did not meet the demands of Norad. So we tried to revise it to meet the expectations of Norad. In dialogue with the partner, we tried to find a good way to meet Norad's expectations, but in the process, the local people became more and more distanced. They had no possibility to follow the discussion due to language problems and lack of education. They did not feel involved and did not understand what the discussion was about. They felt even more marginalised while processing their application. We, as specialists from a donor, were creating a distance.

Actors in their own development

The first thing the local people did not understand was the word 'target group'. They expressed the following to us: "We don't want to fulfil others' goals for us. We want to fulfil our own goals. We don't want to be somebody's target group; we want to be actors in our own development action. We just need some help to get started. We want to start with something and then see what happens and take it further on from there. We cannot work as if everything in the future is planned; we need to take one step at a time. We need training, but at a level that we can understand."

Pride

This is how I have seen that the 'Use your talents' approach is much more workable for local participation. The local development committee decides what activities to undertake and makes a plan for each action. People are invited to participate and they discover that people love to do something together by using all their available skills. A training team makes regular visits. The local people get inspired and they practise what they learn. They see results from their efforts. The self-confidence is growing and everybody thinks that they can make a difference. People are also willing to share their knowledge.

Then and now

Something hit me very hard when witnessing this. There are a lot of similarities with the way I used to work as a missionary in the past. I saw the pride of people when being able to do something to improve life for themselves and their community. Is it possible to move back to this by the 'Use Your Talents' approach? Yes, I think so. We already see how it is working. It is owned by the local people, involving all kinds of people, and there is a better probability for sustainability. It is spreading because people see that it works.

There is also something new in 'Use Your Talents'. People need trainings about how they can find and best use their talents for everybody in the community. They need to have knowledge about how to organise people and to know with whom they can cooperate. For instance, there are a lot of possibilities to cooperate with local NGOs, which was not fully exploited before. In the trainings, we need the specialists too. We need the knowledge and experience from international research about development work. A lot of people are searching for a good way of doing it. The best recipe has not yet been found. We need to work together on this. Still, I think that the 'Use Your Talents'

approach can be a very important model. In some cases, it can be a substitute for traditional development work; in other cases, it can be an important supplement.

I believe in 'Use Your Talents' as a model for development

Due to my personal experiences as a missionary and a mission leader, I really believe in this as a model for development. I believe in incremental changes – step by step is better than huge development processes that make people feel they are small and ignorant, without any knowledge about their own situation. I believe that people love to participate and to take initiative, if they are allowed to. I like the fact that this approach has its beginning in the church, that is in the local congregations you can find in most villages around the world. Their inspiration is from Jesus, the Man who came with and was Himself the good news for everyone. Jesus inspired people to use their talents, and by doing so, the whole nation becomes a better place. I believe that Christian values are added values in this kind of development work, but it does not hinder anyone to participate. This model is for all.



I believe that people love to participate and to take initiative, if they are allowed to.

List of abbreviations

ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
AU	Africa University
Digni	Umbrella Organization, supported by Norad, for 20 Norwegian Mission Societies and Churches Engaged in Long-term Development
DS	District Superintendent (UMC)
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
FANILO	Development Work in Malagasy Lutheran Church
FJKM	Malagasy Reformed Church
FLM	Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy - Malagasy Lutheran Church
FPFK	Free Pentecostal Fellowship Kenya
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KDP	Knowledge Development Project
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
MAFI	Mpanentana Antsitrapo Amin'ny Fampandrosoana Ifotony - Development Volunteers in Malagasy Lutheran Church
MLC	Malagasy Lutheran Church
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NLM	Norwegian Lutheran Mission
NMS	Norwegian Mission Society
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PYM	Norwegian Pentecostal Mission
SWS	South West Synod in Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
UMC Zimbabwe	United Methodist Church Zimbabwe Episcopal Area
UYT	Use Your Talents
UYT-KDP	Use Your Talents Knowledge Development Project
VID	VID Specialized University (Before 1 January 2016: Diakonhjemmet University College)
WEGE	Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Project

Definitions

Animateur / animator / animation

'Animateur/animator' is a French word used to describe a person in the community who acts as an informal leader in initiating projects, motivating and activating others. Within the Malagasy church project, MAFI, 'animator' is also an official title for those who act as trainers within the program.

Diakonia or Diaconal Work

Responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people; ministry or development work carried out by church members to improve the community as part of their service.

Sensitise / sensitisation

'Sensitise' and 'sensitisation' in our setting means raising awareness on issues that are important for the improvement of the local community.

TOBY

Care centre for sick and needy people within the Malagasy Lutheran Church.

Currencies

Ariary: Malagasy currency. 10000 Ariary is approximately \$3 U.S.

Birr: Ethiopian currency. 100 Birr is approximately \$4.4 U.S.

KES Shilling: Kenyan currency. 100 KES is \$1 U.S.

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"Challenge" by William Kayo

***“Use your talent,
don’t keep it.
It will help you
and others.”***

Hanta Rasoarimalala, contributor



There are moments in life when I have been utterly surprised. Issues that were considered very difficult, suddenly have found a genial, simple solution. Learning to know this “method” was such a moment! ***Use Your Talents*** uses the story of the talents told by Jesus, - and challenges us as individuals, congregations

and churches to put our talents to work in order to change our local community and society at large. This book is a **MUST READ!** It tells us how we can contribute, focusing on what we already have, - communicating hope, inviting our fellow men to “put our talents together” - and change the world.

*Jørn Lemvik
Director Digni*

USE YOUR TALENTS