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BOOK REVIEWS

Chitando, Ezra, and Ishanesu Sextus Gusha (editors). 2022. *Interfaith Networks and Development: Case Studies from Africa*

Reviewed by Kimion Tagwirei

This book unravels the needful integration of faith-based networks and sustainable development in Africa. The editors are seasoned academics and practical theologians. Ezra Chitando is a well-grounded and respected Professor of History and Phenomenology of Religion at the University of Zimbabwe and Theology Consultant on HIV for the World Council of Churches, who has researched and published extensively about religion and development, security, gender, sexuality, climate change and related matters. Dr Ishanesu Sextus Gusha is a highly progressive priest in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, in the Anglican Diocese in Europe and is a former New Testament lecturer with the University of Zimbabwe who has researched and published a great deal on interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding and biblical theology. They present an enriching book with enlightening and empowering contributions by experts and theologians from different African countries.

The book connects religious networks with sustainable development. The Church carries a holistic mission of proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel in all areas of life, for example through *kerygma* (preaching total salvation), *diakonia* (attending to the needy, advocating for peace and justice) and *koinonia* (ecumenical, congregational and social fellowship). Thus, the call for the interconnection of faith-based organizations (FBOs) to sustainable development deserves the attention of practical theologians, missiologists, ecclesial practitioners and stakeholders.

In the introduction, Ezra Chitando remarks on how "Despite the importance of the interfaith movement globally, it continues to be neglected in scholarly discourses. While there is a growing realization that religion is strategically placed to contribute

towards development, there is still some hesitation among scholars to invest in researching and publishing in this area" (3).

Chitando notes that religion and development as a discipline in universities continues to be an encouraging testament to the consideration and endorsement of faith as integral in developmental discourses. Observing that, generally, secular and religious worlds appear distant from each other and were for decades kept like separate compartments of life, he laments that "most developmental discourse and programming has assumed a secular orientation, falsely believing the secular to be superior to the religious … yet, interfaith networks are critical players in the quest to meet the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda 2030" (4).

Consequently, this book addresses the theme of interfaith networks and development in Africa, with particular attention to SDG 10 (Addressing Inequalities) and others.

Engaging with practical reflections on interfaith initiatives and networks, this volume delivers new data and case studies from varied African contexts. It pays heed to the rising significance of interfaith networks in quest for the betterment of lives across the world.

Commendably, the book calls researchers, policy makers, activists and other stakeholders to invest in researching and enhancing interfaith networks and development in and beyond Africa. Bearing in mind that there are some voices that doubt the contribution of religion to sustainable development, each chapter presents different types and roles of interfaith networks towards meeting the UN's SDGs from diverse African settings.

The initial chapters provide theoretical reflections and examples of international interfaith networks that are active in developmental work. After the introduction, Sokfa John in the second unit explores key considerations for Interfaith Networks and development in West Africa. He scrutinizes the United Religions Initiative in West Africa, and proffers pivotal factors that determine one's understanding of the structure, role and contributions of interfaith networks and their potential for sustainable development. His chapter suggests that spiritual and value foundation, size of network, brokerage, connections and other factors influence the effectiveness of interfaith networks and development. This is highly commendable because it upholds flexibility, empathy, inclusivity, courtesy and collaboration in networking and engaging faith towards sustainable development.

Thereafter, Ahmed Ragab, Emma Rachmawati, Grace Kaiso and Matthias Brucker revisit the contribution of the Faith to Action Network to development with a special focus on Africa. Appreciating that religious praxis is deeply rooted in communities, they say that "faith organizations reach large numbers of people with messages on health, gender equality and peace that resonate with local beliefs and culture and provide social services through sustained networks of support" (47). FBOs profess and propel the reconciliation of SDGs, human rights as well as faith teachings and values. The authors capture the growing influence of FBOs on humanity through establishing life-bearing entities such as schools and hospitals. This concurs with my researches (Tagwirei 2022: 3), which add that, besides education and health, some FBOs, especially churches, have also invested in real estate and agriculture. Resultantly, they have deepened and widened their influence on humanity. Therefore, this book is greatly creditable for demonstrating that ignoring religious organizations in developmental deliberations is retrogressive and regrettable.

Befittingly, the authors lament that "there is a lot of disagreement between faith actors and non-faith actors. Faith to Action Network believes that too much attention is given to those voices that propagate disagreement, and insufficient space is given to voices that seek agreement and constructive engagement" (62). They recommend a shift of attention from differences to common interests towards enhancing constructive voices for inclusive sustainable development.

Complementarily, Ishanesu Sextus Gusha in chapter 4 applauds the monumental work of King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz's International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). Gusha heralds that KAICIID facilitates interfaith and intercultural dialogue for peace and sustainable development under an interreligious governance of state and religious representatives from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in Austria, Saudi Arabia and Spain. Subsequently, Florence Iminza and Esther Mombo end the section with the work of the Programme for Christian–Muslim relations in Africa (PROCMURA) towards peacebuilding. They historicize PROCMURA as a capacity building and relational organization that affirms the principle of partnership, collaboration and networking in communities. Aptly, their review confirms the promising potential of FBOs in advancing the accomplishment of SDGs in and outside Africa.

In chapters 6–9 the book promotes the integration of interfaith networks and gender. Based on researches in Tanzania, Ghana, Botswana, Uganda and Mozambique, separate contributions tackle femininity, masculinities, inequalities and tragic violence with religious tolerance, dialogue and social transformation.

Chapters 10–13 discuss African and global interfaith networks and development. Armed with case studies from selected African countries and international of Interfaith Networks, authors share various potentials, challenges and possible contributions of FBOs in development. They give examples such as the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) in Uganda, Zambia Interfaith Networking Group (ZINGO) in Zambia and evaluation of interfaith networking in Ghana which mirror the need for correspondence and reciprocal collaboration between FBOs and secular institutions for sustainable development. Together, the contributions indicate that FBOs possess more than spiritual influence. They display that FBOs are blessed with human, financial and material resources that can be harnessed towards the attainment of SDGs.

Chapters 14–16 present diverse themes of interfaith networks and development. Chapter 14, by Ezekiel Abdullahi Babagario, delivers the theme of education and interfaith development in Northern Nigeria. The author remarks that "Education is power, it is an avenue where enlightenment is passed from one generation to the other" (266) and reveals that it inspires and enlightens people towards tolerance, harmony, co-existence and development. Following that, Tapiwa Gusha and Ishanesu Sextus Gusha interface environmentalism with interfaith dialogue through a case study of the Southern African Faith Communities' Environmental Institute (SAFCEI). The work of SAFCEI upholds environmental stewardship.

In conclusion, Nomatter Sande brings the volume to its end with an incisive discussion of interfaith communities from the African Diaspora. Taking migration and globalization into account, his chapter corresponds sustainable development with engagement, integration and dialogue. While focusing on interfaith trajectories in the United Kingdom, the author engages with the United States of America and Southern African contexts. Largely, he reconciles diversities of interfaith networks with their promotion of tolerance, dialogue, integration and cooperation. For ecclesiology and missiology, this book inspires intersecting *diaconia* and *koinonia* with global interreligious discourses towards inclusive sustainable development. Overall, it teaches all of us to appreciate and maximize tolerance and co-existence as well as collaboration.

Taken together, all chapters observe and bless the marriage of interfaith networks to sustainable development and bemoan attempts to divorce them. I strongly believe that this is a transformational resource for religious, secular, academic and governmental, non-governmental, collective and individual considerations for sustainable development. Its submissions are greatly insightful about the potential, problems and strategies of accommodating and utilizing FBOs to realize African and global sustainable development. Recommendations from its different chapters can be contextual-

ized and applied in and outside Africa. All in all, this book motivates multiple further researches and publications in correspondence with changing contexts.

About the author

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