



# A Framework for Overcoming Poverty and Economic Injustice in Africa



THE LUTHERAN  
WORLD FEDERATION  
LUTHERAN COMMUNION  
IN AFRICA



# A Framework for Overcoming Poverty and Economic Injustice in Africa

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# Preface

God has never blessed poverty. God has blessed the poor as an act of empowerment to heal them, reclaim their dignity, and make them come out of poverty (cf. Mt 5:3-11; Luke 6:20-26). This biblical-theological understanding of poverty calls to an end of the mystification of the reality of poverty in Africa. With such a strong theological foundation, Lutheran Churches in Africa have ever since been struggling to come out with a document that will help them come out of poverty and become self-sustaining.

*A framework for Overcoming Poverty and Economic Injustice in Africa* is a result of the concerted efforts of churches of the communion of the Lutheran World Federation, Africa Region to respond to the theological misconception of the interpretation of poverty. Furthermore, this framework reveals the inevitability of human beings as responsible creatures to reclaim their role of participating in the preservation of the vitality of God's creation.

The framework has outlined important principles that guide action against poverty and economic injustice. The recognition of the poor themselves as the sole participants in the agenda against poverty makes this document peculiar and revolutionary. Poor people have always been neglected and become subject of one way traffic diaconal initiatives from outside their context. The church becomes prophetic if she listens to the needs of her members and cares about them. This means that the church should be a safe space for the hopeless people to have hope and the poor to participate in fighting against systematic injustice and poverty.

In order to realize these principles, the document has underlined important activities that will help the church act strategically against such a complex challenge of poverty. The analysis of political, social, economic and cultural challenges and opportunities related to these aspects is important for the prioritization and proper stewardship of the limited resources set apart for fighting poverty.

The framework has mainstreamed various aspects that are tools for a comprehensive fight against poverty and economic injustice. Diaconal initiatives cannot be separated from advocacy based on theological and prophetic responsibility of churches. This also includes empowering and standing for marginalized and continuously degraded creation of God by human beings. It means that churches using this framework should be ready to fight against corruption, child abuse, gender inequality, economic exploitation at all levels, undemocratic institutions and environmental

degradation. Such a confrontation requires visionary leadership and good governance as provided by this framework.

It is my wish that this document that has timely come during the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation will remain a symbol of unity and guidance to action in confronting poverty in Africa. Lutheran communion in Africa is rejuvenated by this document, and it is the responsibility of these churches not to shelf such a valuable document, but they should utilize it as a catalyst for their initiatives upon realizing the fight against poverty and economic injustice.

Bishop Dr Alex Malasusa,  
LWF Vice President for Africa



# Introduction

The Framework is the outcome of a long process having drawn its impetus from a global Lutheran community call to address issues of poverty and economic injustice since 2005. It derives its theological and spiritual momentum from different consultative meetings in Arusha (2006) and Lund (2007). These consultations led into emphasizing overcoming poverty and economic injustice as part of the holistic mission of the church. The key biblical justification of this framework as a result of this process affirms, «*So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth*” (Job 5:16). This framework therefore, appeals to the theology of life engraved in the saving act of Jesus on the Cross and in Christ’s glorious resurrection. Both Jesus’ suffering against injustice and his victory against sin and death challenge African Lutheran churches as Christ’s commissioned institutions to confront poverty and economic injustice in their respective contexts.

## Title

This framework shall be known as The Framework for Overcoming Poverty and Economic Injustice in Africa, herein after referred to as framework.

## Scope

The framework shall apply to the all LWF member churches in Africa and related institutions at all levels in their diversified contexts. It may also be used ecumenically.

## The Framework

This framework is developed to help churches engage on impact based processes of overcoming poverty and economic injustice in Africa. The levels of achievements shall be measured based on the set expected outcomes of strategic issues underlined by this framework to be realized by churches in their respective contexts.

## Principles

This framework is based on the principles of people and churches' capacity to act against poverty and economic injustice as follows:

### I. Participation of people living under poverty and economic injustice

- The capacity of households, groups and individuals to meet their basic human needs such as access to education, information, health, shelter, water and sanitation, food sovereignty, credits and sustainable income.
- The ability of communities to demand their democratic and human rights as well as participation in decision making for their own development.
- The ability to link their economic production with care and sustenance of their environment

### II. Churches as actors of Social and Economic Transformation

- The capacity of churches and their related institutions to manage the processes of overcoming poverty and economic injustice.
- The increase of capacity of churches in integrating the principles of overcoming poverty and economic injustice in the life of the church in particular theological and diaconal institutions.
- Promote the capacity of the churches to address the issues of church governance and accountability.
- The increase of capacity of churches in intensifying their advocacy efforts related to overcoming poverty and economic injustice.

## Why the Framework

The Lutheran churches in Africa share a lot in common in terms of their establishment as missionary churches. Many of them trace their originality from Euro-American missionary activities in Africa. Post Euro-American missionary churches have shared Lutheran common values through

their attachment to the bodies of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) a communion of churches and in particular in the Lutheran communion in Africa. These churches serve in contexts where many of their people live in abject poverty and experience political, social and economic injustice. The Lutheran communion in Africa through their commitment in holistic mission is obliged as actors of change in the society to engage in the war against poverty and economic injustice (LWF, *Mission in Context*, 2004).

This framework is a result of a long process of the Lutheran churches in Africa in their initiatives to join the local and international communities to fight against poverty and economic injustice. Since 2005 Africa church leadership together with other organizations jointly worked together in the fight against poverty and economic injustice in the region. There has been notable progress in these efforts through Africa Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation (ALCLC), the Lutheran Council in Africa (LUCA), and the Task Force on Poverty (TFP). The process has enhanced ownership of the initiatives to fighting poverty and economic injustice by the sub-regions and member churches.

Based on previous consultations, research, outcomes from pilot projects and evaluation conducted in 2014 it was strongly recommended that the process of confronting poverty was still relevant to the member churches in their respective contexts. Poverty and economic injustice are still overarching problems in Africa. Only few African countries have a medium human development while many countries register a very low development (UNDP, 2015). The United Nations has realized the problem of poverty and economic injustice by making fighting poverty and its forms the top priority agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG, 2015).

The magnitude of the problem of poverty and social and economic exploitation requires churches in Africa to have a comprehensive framework to guide their concerted efforts in confronting poverty and economic injustice. The Lutheran churches in Africa draw their mandate from biblical and theological call to act against the exploitative and unjust economic systems created by individuals, groups, or nations that deny majority citizens of this world from fairly participating in social and economic production and their related benefits. The Old Testament statement, "*So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth* (2007)," is reinterpreted in Jesus' own promise, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10b). Lutheran churches in Africa participate in God's mission to bring fullness of life by addressing root causes of poverty and at the same healing and taking care of the wounded and oppressed souls. Therefore, the framework aims at providing guidance to the member churches in Africa in their efforts to confront poverty and economic injustice.

## Vision

A transformed society free from poverty and all forms of injustice.

## Rationale

Majority of people in African countries still live abject poverty and have no access to basic needs such as shelter, education, health and sanitary services. Lutheran churches in Africa serve people in these contexts where life is so hard and insecure.

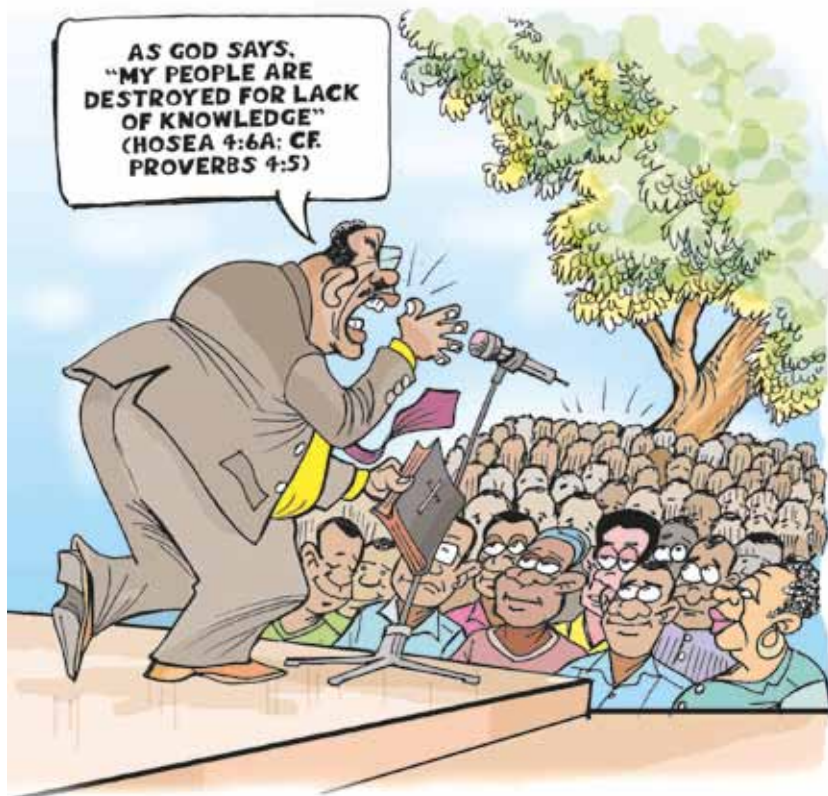
Lutheran churches in Africa believe in God through Jesus Christ who promise providence of life in abundance (John 10:10). Lutheran churches confess that we are justified by faith. Through faith we are called to be responsible stewards of God's creation (LWF, *Diakonia in Context*, 2009). As Lutheran churches in Africa we have been commissioned to intervene against all forms of injustices affecting humankind and creation. Despite the work done by the churches and international community through Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), the problem of poverty and economic injustice has persisted. This framework is calling churches in Africa to increase their efforts and aggressively confront this perennial problem.

## Objectives

- Member churches are guided and enabled to produce theological reflections and training material on confronting poverty and economic injustice.
- Member churches are engaged to plan and implement programs on confronting poverty and economic injustice in five years.
- Churches are equipped to mobilize local and international resources for the fight against poverty and economic injustice.

This framework on confronting poverty and economic injustice in Africa has outlined 12 issues under the stated objectives to be considered by churches. These key topics are starting points for churches and related institutions, which are encouraged to reflect on them with a view of working out their action plans and produce their own training materials in context.

# 1. Situational Analysis



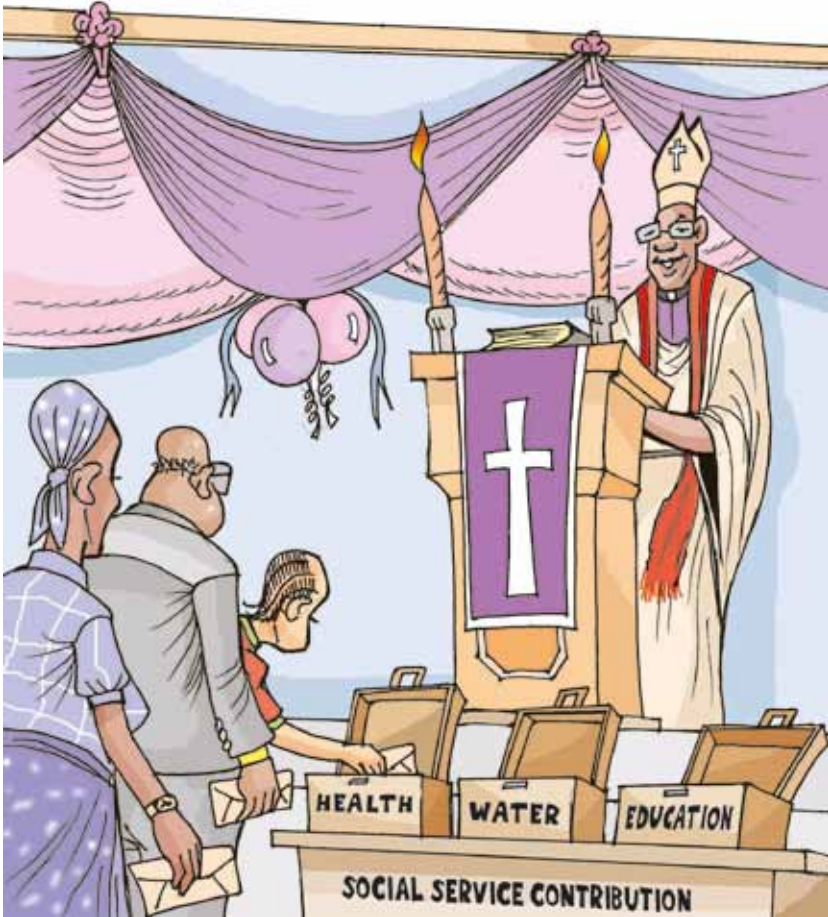
In order for the churches to have solid programs on overcoming poverty and economic injustice, situational analysis of each context is essential. This analysis will enhance the capacity of churches to deal with the reality in a comprehensive.

Churches in Africa should engage communities in various levels in gaining deep understanding of poverty and injustice in their contexts. It is this understanding that enable the churches to strategically plan interventions for confronting poverty and economic injustice As God says, “my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6a; cf. Proverbs 4:5).”

## **Churches should:**

- Among other resources use the Guidelines and tools for participatory poverty studies by Churches in Africa (2010), developed by LWF
- Support church leaders and communities reflecting on their life situations and possible practical solutions
- Support communities in developing relevant advocacy agenda

## 2. Advocacy



Advocacy entails empowering vulnerable groups who are victims of poverty and economic injustice to act boldly themselves.

In the context of the mission of the church, advocacy should be viewed as part of public witness. Churches and related institutions are encouraged to open up advocacy desks with an objective of influencing

governance, policies and societal norms and mobilizing communities to engage in overcoming poverty and economic injustice.

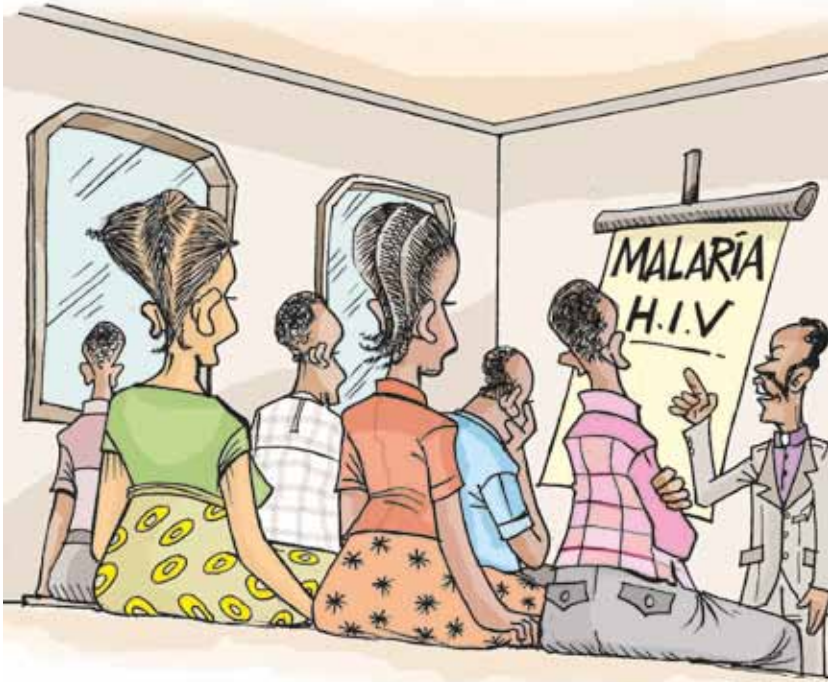
As human beings we are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28) and as Christians we believe in God who is just (Micah 6:8). The churches in Africa are sent by God to bring hope to the hopeless, freedom to the oppressed, and life in abundance to the poor (Luke 4:18).

### **Churches should:**

- Increase their participation and act in concert with civil society activities in advocacy matters.
- Challenge unjust systems and policies by speaking truth to power and actively participating in policy making fora
- Lobby local and global policy makers to create policies favorable for poverty eradication
- Networking for the creation of a just society, integrating advocacy into every diaconal action



### 3. Diaconal Initiatives



Traditionally, diakonia has been limited to providing support and care to the needy. However, a more comprehensive understanding of diakonia as lived out by some churches in Africa in their holistic mission goes beyond charity initiatives by responding to and addressing the root causes of poverty and injustice. Learning from a few experiences churches should maximize the good practices in diakonia. The Church is called to act and respond to “challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation” (Diakonia in Context, 2009).

## **Churches should:**

- Deepen their understanding of diakonia through training, seminars, workshops, etc.
- Mobilize resources for local actions against poverty and injustice
- Increase and improve existing social services
- Empower people to participate fully in income generating activities
- Increase their prophetic voices and empower communities to demand s basic rights
- Engage in pressuring governments to have participatory and inclusive budgeting and in demanding accountability to citizens
- Continue addressing HIV and AIDS, Malaria and other emerging infectious diseases
- Link diakonia with theological education and training on overcoming poverty and economic injustice

## 4. Theological Education and Training

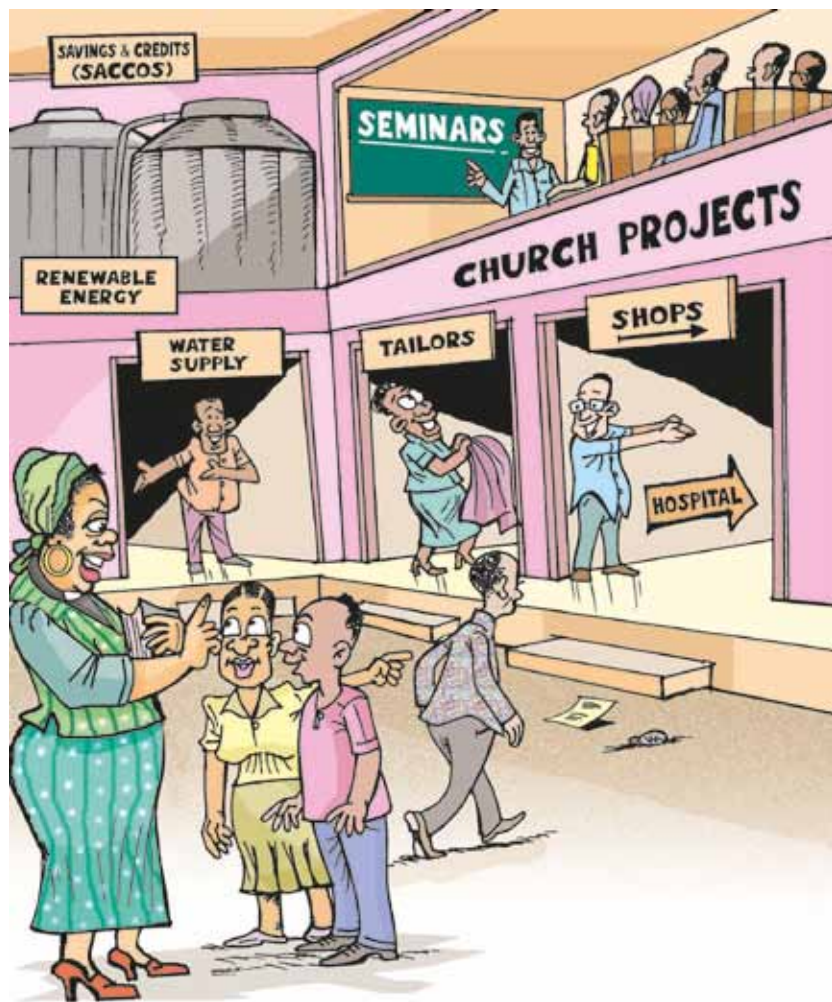


Churches are called to fulfill the great commission of making disciples and holistic service to humanity and creation (Mt 28:18-20).

## **Churches should:**

- Strengthen the capacity of theological education and formation – through improving Christian education curricula, lectionaries, etc.; thus bring awareness to different groups on matters of poverty eradication and fight against all forms of injustice
- Theological institutions should develop curricula which address contemporary socio-political, socio-economic, management and leadership (Theology and development)
- Engage in action research that shall address problems of overcoming poverty and economic injustice
- Disseminate the research findings to enable churches to take up issues of governance, sustainability and accountability which have been perennial problems among the churches and their related institutions
- Continually develop capacity of pastors to address contemporary theological and spiritual issues

## 5. Church Sustainability



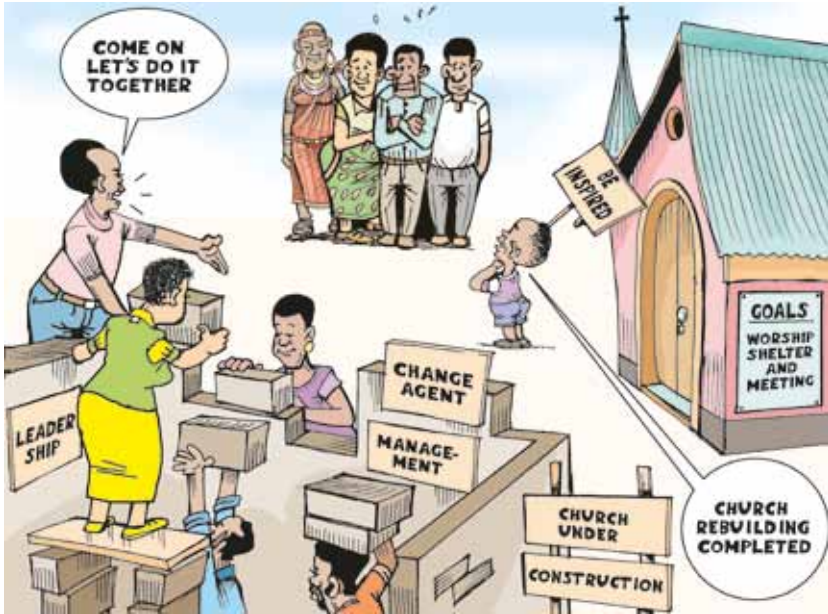
Churches in Africa, as part of the body of Christ, are endowed with gifts and resources to serve and sustain themselves (1 Cor 12:4ff 2 Thes 3:68). Sustainability of churches is more economic ability to sustain its activities. It entails a well-grounded a theological understanding of being church that

teaches and nurtures its members. LWF member churches in Africa are challenged to adequately utilize these gifts and resources for the spiritual and material growth of the church as well as improving people's living conditions and the environment they live in.

### **Churches should:**

- Create awareness on issues of poverty and injustices and develop programs for utilization of the available local resources for confronting poverty and injustice
- Develop strategies for economic empowerment and self-support to circumvent the perennial disease of dependency syndrome that has plagued many churches in Africa
- Support people's livelihood, agricultural schemes, small enterprises, cooperatives and access to markets
- Put in place and strengthen effective policies and systems of accountability at different levels
- Develop and implement effective policies for human resource management and development that also entails succession planning and talent management

# 6. Leadership and Management



Good leadership, management and accountability are crucial to confronting poverty and injustice in Africa. In most African churches and communities, there has been lack of good leadership and management leading to poor results of programs and projects. Yet Christ has indicated the traits of good leadership and management (Mark 10:45, Luke 14:28.)

## Churches should:

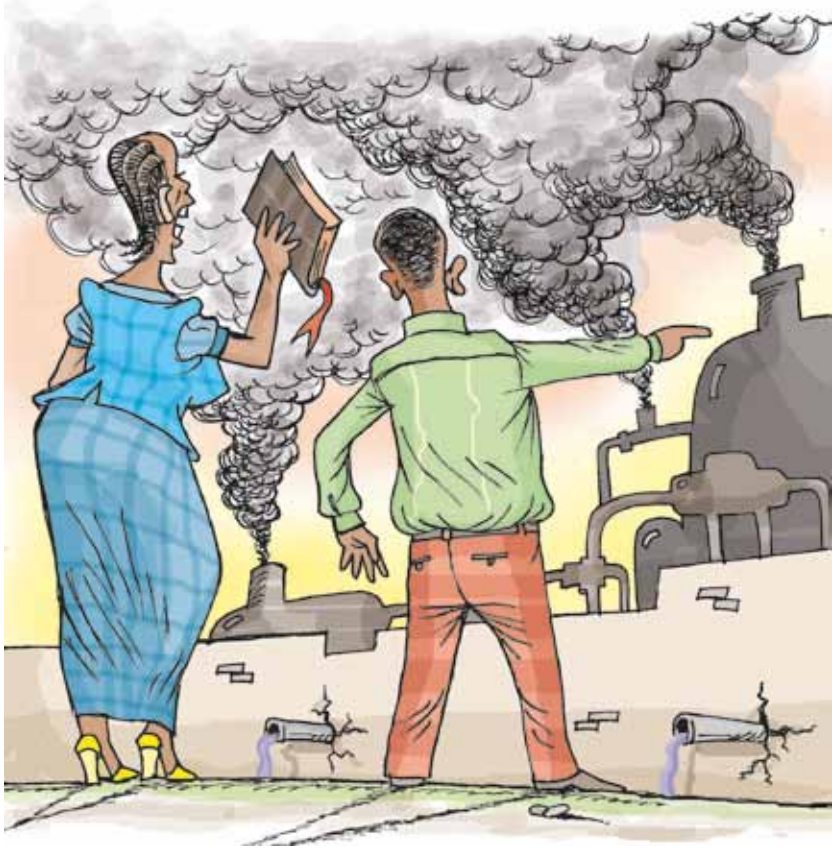
- Conduct training on servant leadership and management
- Create clear checks and balances for accountability (Mt 25:18ff)

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- Promote building of trust and transparency
- Promote inclusiveness in decision making processes
- Conduct training on democratic constitution-making and implementation



# 7. Care for God's Creation



Human beings being created in the image of God and being part of creation are given the responsibility to care for creation (Gen 1:26ff). Contrary, human beings have been the source of destruction of God's creation. The world has already witnessed the impact of destruction such as desertification, pollution, drought, perennial floods, and global warming. Given this scenario various attempts locally and globally continue to be made as solution to this crisis. Many churches in the ecumenical circles have become aware and acting, participating, contributing in creation

conservation. Regrettably some churches have not taken enough initiatives to address human activities that have contributed to destruction of God's creation. Furthermore, this has aggravated poor conditions of living among communities leading to economic and ecological refugees in Africa.

### **Churches should:**

- Develop biblical ethical basis for creation conservation
- Initiate and intensify awareness building programs on the care for creation
- Integrate care for creation into the curricula of their educational institutions
- Collaborate with partners worldwide to address issues of climate change
- Mobilize resources to mitigate effect of climate change in Africa
- Educate and sensitize her members and the general public to engage in environmental conservation efforts as an appreciation of the beauty of God's creation and as a factor in the climate change
- Engage in activities such as afforestation, renewable energies, recycling and waste management
- Act against conflicts and civil wars in Africa which cause environmental destruction, human displacement, hunger, and insecurity
- Act responsively in promoting ecological justice which is essential for poverty eradication

## 8. Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation



The continent of Africa has for a long time been affected by unresolved, conflicts civil strife, violence and wars. These have not allowed time and space for articulating policies aimed at confronting poverty and economic injustice. Consequently, the continent has suffered many social and economic setbacks, with women and children being the most affected. The

Churches in Africa have been involved in promoting peace, justice and reconciliation. Churches, therefore, are called upon to intensify their efforts to promote peace, justice, and reconciliation (Mt 5:9).

### **Churches should:**

- Train church leaders in peace reconciliation, conflict resolution, management and transformation
- Organize fora for conflict management, resolution, transformation, and reconciliation
- Engage other faith based communities, civil societies, conflicting parties, and other stakeholders in peace, justice, and reconciliation efforts
- Establish and strengthen peace, justices, and reconciliation commission
- Proactively seek participation in peace and reconciliation commission
- Act against gender based violence in to promote gender justice as a strategy for poverty eradication
- Strengthen interfaith dialogue

# 9. Gender Justice



Gender justice is informed by the biblical fact that God created both male and female equally and blessed them for their task of reproduction, stewardship and production (Gen 1:26ff; 5:1; 2:15). However, social constructs in society have created gender disparity with women being marginalized, denied political, social and economic rights. Struggle against poverty cannot without addressing issues of gender injustice, gender violence and non-recognition [unequal participation of men and women in the economic development in Africa] of the economic contribution of women in Africa. Therefore, churches and other faith based organizations are called upon to be in the forefront in the struggle against gender discrimination and disparity both inside the church and in the larger society.

## **Churches should:**

- Formulate and review gender policies and put strategies for implementation
- Empower women to know their rights and responsibilities in economic development and property ownership
- Educate their members on gender justice, including positive masculinity
- Advocate for gender justice in governmental policies
- Address systems of injustice in resource access in particular credits, land and property ownership etc.
- Empower men and women to access health, education, and be involved in decision making in matters of development
- Empower young adults, especially women to fully participate in decision making bodies of the churches and communities

# 10. Youth Participation



Youth are important group in church and society as they potentially constitute the largest productive population. However, they have been left out in decision making processes in church and community hence they are rendered vulnerable to violence, crimes, social and economic injustice. The churches in Africa should support youth ministries, knowing that God cares for them (1 Tim 4:12; 1 John 2:14).

## **Churches should:**

- Enact and review policies that will place youths in decision making bodies at all levels and put strategies for implementation
- Support youth initiatives that develop their capacities to confront poverty and economic injustice
- Avail to the youth financial resources and vocational training and entrepreneurship

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- Support youth self-employment schemes such as cooperatives and small enterprises
- Mainstream issues of peace building in all youth activities
- Promote ecumenical cooperation with other denominations and faiths in order to come up with joint programs on tackling the issue of poverty and economic injustice



# 11. Child Rights



As stipulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), all children have the right to protection from all forms of violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 19, 34.

However, children throughout the world living in any socio-economic context are at risk of child abuse and exploitation. While most child abuse occurs within families and communities, children also experience abuse and exploitation within organizations intended to provide them with support and services. It is therefore important to promote children's rights and ensure that their welfare and physical security are recognized, safeguarded and protected. Child's protection should therefore be a deliberate part of the life of the church. In so doing, churches should:

- Formulate and review child protection policies and put strategies for implementation
- Include child rights in teaching for both children and adults
- Support only child safe and child friendly programs
- Ensure that protection and support to children are not discriminatory
- Ensure that professional parameters are maintained whenever care for children is provided
- Ensure that children are appropriately and respectfully portrayed in all communications
- Ensure that child protection training is organized for those caring for children in its schools, Sunday schools and children's programs

## 12. Ecumenism and Interfaith Cooperation



Ecumenism is the spirit and act of interdenominational and interfaith cooperation at different levels and for different purposes. The church of Christ is called upon to show love to a neighbor (Luke 10:25ff). Since poverty cuts across religions and affects people of all faiths, there is a need to work in solidarity with people outside the church for the betterment of human living condition. Besides, the church cannot achieve much

in her war against poverty without the contribution of other members of the community.

### **Churches should:**

- Build working relationships with other faith based communities and civil societies in her fight against poverty and economic injustices through networking, fora, seminars and workshops
- Join hands with other faith based organizations and other stakeholders to advocate for good policies to confront poverty and economic injustice

# Conclusion

Moved by Jesus' passion and compassion to save and to serve humanity, this framework is about inspiring and calling upon churches to implement and monitor the areas of action outlined above in order to effectively confront poverty and economic injustice in Africa and to improve the living standard of the people of Africa. Churches are hereby called upon to introduce this framework to their institutions and structures at all levels. The churches are also encouraged to collaborate with other churches, faith based organizations, civil societies, governments, and other stakeholders in tackling issues pertaining to poverty and economic injustice.

In this regard, the Lutheran World Federation is called upon to accompany member churches in Africa in implementing the areas of action spelt out in this framework.

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