

The Catholic Church and development in the context of El Nino-induced drought in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This is a theoretical paper that investigates, through the praxis cycle, the role of the Catholic Church in responding to El Nino- induced drought. The first objective of this article emanates from the open call by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC) to the whole nation expressed in the Scripture text "You give them something to eat yourselves" (Mark 6: 37). Acknowledging the effects of El Nino in the current agricultural season, the Bishops are calling on everyone to unite in order to assist in feeding millions of hungry people in this country as a result of the devastating effects of El Nino. Scriptures assist the Church to inform and teach the people about their responsibility in helping the less fortunate members of our community. The second objective is how the Church pursues agricultural development and strategies to respond to future challenges. The Church takes the responsibility of initiating practical ways of implementing agricultural strategies through various agencies to respond to the El Nino as well as future challenges of food security. The two aspects were mentioned in the Statement on Drought by ZCBC on 4th April 2024. The guiding question in this research is: How can the Church respond to the devastating effects of El Nino- induced drought? Through analysis of the effects of El Nino, the Church strives to empower communities to take action.

Key words: Church, El Nino, hunger, unity, strategies, development

Introduction

Most scientists believe that the ecological crisis¹ is perhaps the most pressing challenge that the world is grappling with at present. The unregulated exploitation of nature in the name of scientific and technical advancement is the cause of this crisis. This crisis impacts the world in various ways as cyclones, hailstorms, winds, floods, droughts and other weather calamities cut across our world. It is in this category that El Nino- induced droughts are encountered in the sub-Saharan region in Africa. El Nino has impacted large parts of Angola, Botswana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa and has affected large areas and communities²; Zimbabwe too, like other sub-Saharan regions has been subsequently affected by El Nino. The president of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, said the country would need

¹ Olusakin, V. A., "African and Christian Theology of environment as a model for the control of global warming" in Ifiok: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies Vol. 4, July, 2018 (<https://philarchive.org/archive/OLU AAC>).

² OCHA, "The humanitarian impact of El Niño in Southern Africa: Key Messages (April 2024)" (<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/malawi/humanitarian-impact-el-nino-southern-africa-key-messages-april-2024#:~:text=It%20has%20impacted%20large%20parts,water%20and%20livelihood%2C%20is%20eroded>).

\$2 billion to feed the 2.7 million people who would go hungry this year in 2024. The focus of my paper is Zimbabwe and how the Church has started to respond to El Nino- induced drought.

The term El Nino comes from Spanish which means “Christ Child” referring to a warming of the ocean surface, or above-average sea surface temperatures, in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. The winds normally blow from east to west, but they can also reverse and blow from west to east. El Nino disrupts normal weather patterns, hence the experiences of drought whether through droughts or floods³

El Nino- induced drought has impacted large parts of Angola, Botswana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa and, indeed, elsewhere on other continents, particularly the southern hemisphere. Although there is a likelihood of more countries declaring a national emergency as the coping capacity of affected communities, particularly around access to food, water and livelihood, is further eroded, the focus of this paper is on the Zimbabwean situation.

Negative effects of El Nino in Zimbabwe

Like in other regions affected by El Nino, the impact in Zimbabwe is severe and long-lasting. Some of the negative results are more obvious than others. The most noticeable impact in Zimbabwe is widespread drought in most regions of the country. With this result is the accompanying painful experiences of food-shortages, malnutrition and worsening conditions of poverty amongst communities. The biggest negative impact of El Nino- induced drought is crop failure and hunger. In recent memory, February 2024 was recorded as the driest month in forty years. This is why President E.D. Mnangagwa declared a national disaster in regard to failure of crop harvest this year. “To that end, I do hereby declare a nationwide state of disaster due to the El Niño-induced drought.”⁴ This will adversely impact the food and nutrition security situation, leading to reduction of food and thereby affecting the overall quality of people's diet. The existence of severe drought implies shortage of water and, in some instances, even lack of water which threaten the lives of people. This threat is compounded by poor health which, in Zimbabwe, faces the challenge of proper health facilities and lack of appropriate medication for the various diseases that befall a large number of people in the country. “The collapse of the healthcare sector has left hospitals without life-saving equipment and vital medicines, rendering them incapable of meeting the needs of patients in need”⁵. Health care has become expensive and can only be afforded by the few who enjoy the wealth of the country. Thus, El

³ USAGS: Science for a changing world, “What is “El Niño” and what are its effects?”

([https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/what-el-nino-and-what-are-its-effects#:~:text=The%20term%20El%20Ni%C3%B1o%20\(Spanish,and%20eastern%20tropical%20Pacific%20Ocean\).](https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/what-el-nino-and-what-are-its-effects#:~:text=The%20term%20El%20Ni%C3%B1o%20(Spanish,and%20eastern%20tropical%20Pacific%20Ocean).)

⁴ Mnangagwa, E.,

([https://www.google.com/search?q=To+that+end%2C+I+do+hereby+declare+a+nationwide+state+of+disaster%2C+due+to+the+El+Ni%C3%B1o-induced+drought&og=To+that+end%2C+I+do+hereby+declare+a+nationwide+state+of+disaster%2C+due+to+the+El+Ni%C3%B1o-induced+drought&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCjExMTk2MGowajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8\).](https://www.google.com/search?q=To+that+end%2C+I+do+hereby+declare+a+nationwide+state+of+disaster%2C+due+to+the+El+Ni%C3%B1o-induced+drought&og=To+that+end%2C+I+do+hereby+declare+a+nationwide+state+of+disaster%2C+due+to+the+El+Ni%C3%B1o-induced+drought&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCjExMTk2MGowajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8).)

⁵ United Zimbabwe Alliance, World Health Day, 7 April 2024 (<https://unitedzimbabwe.org/blog/world-health-day/>).

Nino- induced drought cannot be divorced from the devastating conditions of the health of communities. This is not the first time Zimbabwe has experienced El Nino -induced drought. El Nino events also occurred in 1982, 1983 and 1992 and were then considered the worst droughts in memory⁶. During 1992 the World Food Programme assessed that 5.5 million people faced starvation as households needed food both in rural as well as urban areas. The El Nino effects continued in 1997, 1998, 2014 to 2016. Yet, the 2023 to 2024 rain season is also considered very severe as it has devastating consequences to most rural communities that have agriculture as their main source of livelihood.

Further, flora and fauna also become vulnerable because of lack of water. Vegetation suffers, with possible consequences of increasing desertification in drought-stricken areas. Over a period of time, desertification will render the soil unusable for agriculture; the mainstay for communities' food-sufficiency, thereby turning Zimbabwe from a "bread-basket" status, which it was at independence in 1980, to a "begging bowl" country. Without water and arable land, the result is continual crop failures and increased hunger. The lack of vegetation also destroys animal life. There is a negative chain reaction because of lack of flora and fauna.

Due to the extreme dryness of the atmosphere because of El Nino, wildfires are common and these destroy both homes as well as vegetation that sustain livelihoods. The same lack of adequate water results in severe energy crisis which leads to poor industrial production as well as poor earnings for people in the country. It is clear that closing of the few existing industries because of lack of electricity (water-generated) has further negative consequences of increasing unemployment, poverty of those unemployed families and reduction of production of goods for sale to sustain the country's economy.

The "menace of corruption" in Zimbabwe, which further destroys the country's economy, is not directly the result of El Nino, instead El Nino has worsened the desperate situation of the people in the context of an ailing economy. When the conditions of food production, health of the nation, economic stability deteriorate to alarming levels, the El Nino- induced drought also takes advantage to further destroy the capacities of the nation to maintain its means of livelihoods. All these negative effects are linked to climate change challenges which need to be resolved by communities, not just on a national but also global levels.

Other minor but serious consequences loosely related to El Nino- induced drought are the destabilization of community relationships. Due to hunger and food-shortages, communities tend to scramble for the limited food resources available and this results in increased incidences of theft of food and property for survival. These increased thefts create greater opportunities for suspicions and conflicts amongst villagers and communities. In some instances, there are gangsters that go around threatening single households or even beating them up in order to procure the little food they may have. Even in our towns and cities there are incidences of food theft because of hunger. Thus, El Nino has far-reaching negative effects on communities because of the hunger that prevails.

⁶ Jeffrey Moyo , 2019 "Zimbabweans struggle amid worst drought in memory: Faced with failed crops, dying cattle and starvation, families search for ways to survive" in AA- Africa World.
(<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/zimbabweans-struggle-amid-worst-drought-in-memory/1424311>).

Reflection and assessment upon drought impact

The approach of the church to development should not be the old paradigm of “business as usual” pulpit approach. As situations change, the church too should make a paradigm shift from the old perspective of merely preaching the Gospel to target the souls of multitudes; it should go beyond preaching and utilize new scientific discoveries in order to augment other players who are trying to respond to climate change challenges such as the emergence of El Nino-induced drought. In addition to the scientific explanation of the source of this global phenomenon of El Nino, the church perceives the ultimate source of all existing things to the Creator, God. Thus, all phenomena in the universe are contextualized within the aegis of the Creator who designed patterns to be followed by nature in order to attain the ultimate goals designed for them. With such an interpretation, creation becomes imbued with principles and forces that it has to follow to remain balanced and achieve its ultimate goals. Humanity, which is part of creation, has been given the intellect to control the rest of creation. Unfortunately, with ever advancing discoveries by the human intellect, humanity has exploited the rest of creation to such an extent that the balance intended to be maintained in nature has been destabilized. In the first two chapters of Genesis, we realize that creation is described as good and harmonious where all creation fits together in a symbiotic relationship with its Creator who acknowledges that it is good. Theologically, harmony is highlighted in the Scriptures through the way God creates the universe. God brings order (Gen. 1:1 – 2:4a) and rests on the seventh day (Sabbath, Gen. 2:4a). The climax of this rest; the calm that it brings about reflects the profound harmony between God and his creation. This is an economic-ecological transformation in contra distinction to an organic mechanical utilitarian world. The former is God-centred whereas the latter is exploitative relationship. God intends human beings whom he has given charge of creation to live in harmony⁷ with the rest of creation, yet humanity chose the second relationship of exploiting benefits of creation to the level of destabilizing the harmony thereof. Some of the early theologians, like St. Augustine of Hippo, taught that God created the universe out of nothing; that change and motion were materialized by Him. Similarly, St Athanasius, born in Alexandria in Egypt (ca. 296 AD), spoke of harmony in the music of creation with the word being its conductor. He says: “So too the wisdom of God holds the world like a lyre and joins things in the air to those on earth, and things in heaven to those in the air, and brings each part into harmony with the whole”⁸. If this harmony is maintained, then the goals of creation are achieved. On the contrary, if not maintained then disaster strikes and situations like climate change result from the imbalance of exploitation of creation by humanity. This sets the basis of the first reflection on climate change.

Another reflection on the El Nino- induced drought, which is a result of climate change, draws its foundation on many Scripture texts which highlight the importance of harmonious relationships both for humanity itself and humanity with the rest of the created nature. An

⁷ “harmony with creation”: Salaam – Shalom, Arabic salām “peace,” cognate with Hebrew shalom (def), from common Semitic šalām.

⁸ Crossroads Initiative:

(<https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/thedivinewordholdstheuniversetogether/>)

article written by several scholars⁹ highlighted the responsibility of humanity to the environment and creation in order to maintain a balanced relationship. They quoted Genesis 2:15 which says: “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it”. Therefore, humanity, especially Christians, are required to keep the ecology and this includes taking steps to prevent environmental disasters. Their theological reflections highlight not only the goodness of creation but also the role of mankind in working for and with God in the process of “repairing” creation. Christians are called upon to respect and maintain the totality of creation instituted by God. In this context, it is easy to see the connection between God and creation in the various texts of Scriptures. This, therefore, lays the foundation for an examination of humanity’s behaviour and choices which endanger the eco-systems of creation or prevent disasters such as climate change which produce cyclones with negative impacts such as El Nino.

In the Old Testament a number of psalms indicate the importance of harmonious co-existence of created items? Themselves as well as harmony between nature and God: for instance Psalm 96:11-12: “Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them”:

Psalm 104:1-6: O Lord my God, thou art very great; Thou art clothed with honour and majesty: Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain: Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: Who maketh the clouds his chariot.

Psalm 133:1 and Psalm 19 reflect the relationship between science and theology, connecting creation and wisdom and, with regards to climate change, how to live with natural order. There are other passages too in the Old Testament. Similarly, New Testament passages reflect harmony between Christians themselves, which is the intention of the Creator: Rom 12:16-18; Rom 14:19; Col. 3:12-13; 1Peter 3:8; John 3:16. While Jesus champions this harmony in the New Testament, his main thrust is to represent the Father who has created a world that is ordered and has specific goals to fulfil as it journeys towards its destination. Thus, Christians too are to observe harmony amongst themselves in order to maintain the desired balanced relationship. Disruption of this harmony and order brings chaos and calamities not only to human beings but also to the rest of the created world. Hence, disruption of this equilibrium has resulted in calamities of climate change from which the phenomenon of El Nino derives. The Church, therefore, makes an urgent appeal not only to focus on the strategies of working for food sufficiency, but also to make people aware of their responsibilities to make correct choices that prevent over exploitative tendencies in extracting advantages from the world; all parties should benefit. Only then can a balanced harmonious relationship be achieved. When humanity makes wrong choices, the Church teaches that the Holy Spirit guides and corrects it. Thus, Father, Son and Holy Spirit continue to work as one God in creation.

⁹ Benjamin C.D. Diara PhD, Omaka Kalu Ngele Ph.D, Chukwuedozie K Ajaero Ph.D, (Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria) and Nsukka (Department of Geography, University of Nigeria) “Theology of Climate Change Mitigation , Stewardship and Adaptation: The Place of the Church” in *Journal of Environment and Earth Science*, Vol.4, No.20, 2014, 44-49.

There is a lot of hope when Christians begin to realize that it is their obligation to be involved in issues of climate change in an active manner. Issues of climate change are not a detour from the mission of the church, but are part and parcel of serving humanity through respect for creation in order to ultimately attain salvation. *The Cape Town commitment* states that:

If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says ‘Jesus is Lord’ is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ’s Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.¹⁰

Creation care is the first missional task when God gave Adam and Eve responsibility to care for the earth (Gen 2:15) and, therefore, this is not an option humanity may choose to relegate to the periphery. It is a commandment to be obeyed in the development of the relationship between people and the whole of creation. Thus, the use of creation’s resources is to be guided by God and not according to the exploitative dictates of the secular world. In recent times, the Church has responded to climate change challenges by trying to propagate right choices for harmonious co-existence between humanity and nature. The development arm of the Church, “Caritas Internationalis,” represented by Caritas organisations in most countries where there is presence of the Catholic Church, have embarked on developmental goals in these countries. Caritas specializes in uplifting the under-privileged, in disaster-management, and tackling challenges of sustainable livelihoods. In Zimbabwe, Caritas is present in all the eight Catholic Dioceses and has taken the responsibility of responding to the challenges caused by the El Nino- induced drought. As we turn to the third part of the praxis cycle, the paper turns to some of the strategies adopted by Caritas in responding to challenges of El Nino and how the organization tries to implement action that reduces its impact.

Although independent from the Christian approach, most African traditional religions are imbued with religious ontologies, cosmologies and existence that are environmentally friendly. In fact, the relationships expected between Africans and nature are so important that they are reflected in their religious ceremonies. There is no separation between the spiritual and the material in traditional African life. From a traditional African belief system, the ultimate dominion over the whole world is in the hands of God. Most indigenous African religions, including the Shona traditional religion, have peculiar beliefs and practices that have a bearing on the environment¹¹. The Shona religion in particular is also called the *Mwari* cult, which reflects the close relationship between people and their Creator (*Mwari*). The perspectives and beliefs of the Shona towards created beings in nature consolidates a good relationship with nature.

For Shona societies, the natural environment has certain sacred places that are so indispensable in their religious beliefs, such as certain mountains, curves, rivers, grave sites, and forests that ought not to be defiled through undue cutting down of trees that

¹⁰ Lausanne Movement, (2023) “Global analysis”. (https://lausanne.org/global-analysis/climate-crisis-and-gods-creation-calling-global-christian-leaders-to-act?gad_source=1).

¹¹ Mabvurira Vincent, Muchinako George Alex and Smit Elizabeth Ivy, “Shona traditional religion and sustainable environmental management: An Afrocentric perspective” in *African Journal of Social Work* Volume 11 Number 3 2021, pp 111-118.

grace them and killing of other living creatures for the sake of it. Therefore, the Shona cherish a life of living in harmony with the natural environment and what it holds, as reflected by their penchant to use the environment in a sustainable way.¹²

The Shona cosmology is encouraging because it diminishes the selfish, exploitative approach that leads to destruction of the eco-systems that nature must have to maintain itself. Respect for nature that African cosmologies have cultivated over the years assists in giving the mindset that humanity can lessen the disasters of climate change.

This discussion has enabled us to discover the various negative impacts emanating from El Nino- induced drought over the years, and especially the El Nino of 2023 to 2024 that caused dire consequences within communities in Zimbabwe. The analysis of these effects deepened our understanding of what the relationship between humanity and creation should be like. We noted that some important aspects need to be maintained. These include a recognition that creation has an ‘author’ who designed how it should function. The ‘author’ of creation indeed is God. We also noted that humanity should live in harmony with nature in order to maintain the eco-systems of creation. Humanity has been given charge of God’s creation and so should make the right decisions in co-existing with nature in order to avoid disasters that result in the destruction of both humanity and the entire creation. African cosmologies are environmentally friendly to nature and should be taught to the young generation. Humanity ought to live in harmony with nature. Now, in our last segment, we turn to the Church strategies that are already being implemented as well as suggest further activities that the Church can pursue in its goal to combat the effects of El Nino -induced drought.

Strategies for development

In the third part of this paper are the specific actions implemented by the Church to lessen the impact of El Nino. These specific actions are used as strategies to combat the negative effects of drought as well as provide food sufficiency during the drought period of 2023 to 2024. Some actions offer immediate results while others are long term. The first developmental action of the Church is educational. In recent times, Pope Francis through his document *Laudato Si*¹³, has widened the arena for the social teachings of the Church by providing the world with relevant insights on how humanity ought to relate to the whole of creation. Each of the six chapters in his document discusses methods of the centrality of God’s creation and how humanity should relate to it both for its own salvation and for the sake of harmonious co-existence. This information, based on the belief that God is the ‘author’ of all creation, educates humanity to have the right attitudes and perspectives towards creation as intended by its ‘author.’ The encyclical *Laudato Si* covers a wide range of issues, including socio-economic life, social justice, and relationship with God, spirituality and, most importantly, the

¹² Munamoto Chemhuru & Dennis Masaka, “Taboos as sources of Shona people’s environmental ethics” in *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* (Volume 12, No.7, 2010), Clarion University of Pennsylvania.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

(https://www.google.com/search?q=what+are+the+6+chapters+of+laudato+si&og=The+six+chapters+of+Laudato+Si&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqCAGBEAAYFhgeMgYIABBFgDkyCAGBEAAYFhgeMg0IAhAAGIYDGIAGEIoFMg0IAxAAAGIYDGIAGEIoFMg0IBBAAGIYDGIAGEIoF0gEJMjY1ODdqMGo3qAIAAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8).

environmental crisis that the world is facing due to climate change. In summary, the six chapters are as follows:

Chapter One – What is happening to our common home?

Chapter Two – The Gospel of Creation

Chapter Three – The human roots of the ecological crisis

Chapter Four – Integral Ecology.

Chapter Five – Lines of approach and action

Chapter Six – Ecological education and spirituality

While all six chapters are inter-related and are a basis for education for humanity, the third chapter is considered to be at the fulcrum of education for humanity as it focuses on the participation of humanity in the responsibility for the environmental crisis. In the category of environmental crisis belongs the challenge of El Nino- induced drought. The education provided by this document and, especially the third chapter, ought to assist all human beings to be aware that we are all responsible for our environment and should care for it so that both creation and ourselves benefit. Thus, before implementing other strategies, humanity must be aware of its role through education and exposure to the problems of the current environmental challenges that have produced the crisis under discussion.

The second strategy highlights action that brings about immediate results in order to feed the multitudes of hungry people. The Church, through the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, appealed to the whole nation for people faced with this El Nino drought to be fed. It is the responsibility of everyone to offer a helping hand to the needy. This is why their pastoral letter on 4th April 2024 highlights the Scripture text that: “You give them something to eat yourselves” (Mark 6:37). When Jesus was approached by his disciples and was told that he should let the people to whom he was preaching go home and other surrounding areas to buy food, Jesus’ direct response was that the disciples themselves had the responsibility to feed the people. Therefore, the appeal of the Bishops is directed first to all those in Zimbabwe who have the capacity to help in drought situation. The Bishops emphasized the need for concerted efforts in tackling the hunger crisis in Zimbabwe by saying: “Together we are stronger and can feed the multitudes. When the little that we have is generously put at the hands of the Lord, he multiplies it, and all will have their fill.”¹⁴ The Bishops continued to warn against politicization of the food distribution and insisted that this was not the time to make profits and dehumanize the hungry; but to share in the spirit of love. As this is a Church appeal for food, the Bishops also call for Christians to pray for the success of this advocacy. Just as Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fish to feed the multitudes of hungry people, prayer is an indispensable means to call for God’s intervention. The success of this program of feeding the multitudes of hungry

¹⁴ AciAfrica, 04 April, 2024, Harare, (<https://www.aciafrica.org/news/10667/catholic-bishops-in-zimbabwe-appeal-for-food-aid-amid-prolonged-drought#:~:text=Catholic%20Bishops%20in%20the%20drought,the%20droughts%20a%20national%20disaster.>

Zimbabweans is only possible through the power of God which moves the hearts of well-wishers to support it.

It is not only the government that has the task of feeding the hungry people but also all those with the capacity to do so. It is a moment of self-introspection; of how each one of us relates to the needy when faced with this El Nino- induced drought. Thus, each one of us cannot run away from this God-given task to help. The appeal is also directed at well-wishers and donors. The Bishops, over the years, have always appealed to other Christian Churches overseas in moments of drought and other disasters in Zimbabwe. These appeals are meant to provide immediate relief to those in dire need of food. In this category falls non-governmental organizations who are run by the Catholic Church in their countries. These include organizations like Mesereor (Germany), Trocaire (Ireland), Catholic Relief Service (United State of America), CAFOD (England and Wales), Caritas (Australia) which either provide funds to purchase grain for the people of Zimbabwe or actually transport the grain from other countries to feed the hungry. There are also non-Church organizations who hear the plea of the Zimbabwe Bishops and respond positively to provide food for the desperate people facing drought. These include the World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and others who always complement the above-named Christian donors. This humanitarian act by the Church is not just for Christians or those affiliated to Churches, but for everyone affected by hunger. However, in the process of distribution, the government agents allocate districts and wards to these Church organizations so as to keep records of those who have received the much-needed food. Unfortunately, in some instances government itself politicizes food distribution and there are cases of people supposed to receive food but, in reality, could not because they belonged to the opposition, as the following indicates:

Local and international rights and relief agencies have been complaining for more than a year that food distribution is being manipulated for political ends, favouring those who support the government and the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), the ruling political party¹⁵.

Another level of the Church's involvement in the development of food security is in its involvement in agricultural projects in communities and villages. This is specifically the task of Caritas organizations of the Catholic Church in each country. In Zimbabwe, there are eight Caritas organizations which are, in effect, the development arms of the Church. While other departments like Catechetical, educational, health, justice and peace deal with their specific targets, Caritas deals with the developmental aspects pertaining to agriculture and food security. This is a long-term goal to deal with disaster management like El Nino- induced drought as well as developmental issues of food security. In this area are several programs and projects that empower communities to be self-reliant and attain food-sufficiency. Caritas has programs that empower communities to obtain water from drilling boreholes, managing nutrition gardens, doing chicken farming, goat rearing and planting fruit trees at individual

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch: Relief Web logo Relief Web, 24 Oct 2003, "Not eligible: The politicization of food in Zimbabwe", (<https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/not-eligible-politicization-food-zimbabwe>).

homes. There is already a program for 2026 by Caritas Masvingo to improve livelihoods, diversity, resilience, food and nutrition security in the Diocese. Communities will be trained based on set goals and each goal has detailed activities to be done by trainers. Caritas personnel normally conduct the training sessions in the villages with the help of government agricultural officers. An example of a training session in a community is as follows¹⁶:

Goal number 1: Needs Assessment

Activities followed

- Conducting feasibility studies
- Baseline survey
- Analysis and report writing for fund mobilization

Goal number 2: Sustainable Agriculture to 7000 farmers

Activities followed

- Baseline survey on income sources
- Identify and segment areas in terms of interests and skills, training needs
- Train people on income generation in the particular area identified

Goal number 3: Income Sources

Activities followed

- Sustainable farming techniques. -agro ecology -sustainable agriculture -climate smart
- Seed provision
- Training on nutrition and dietary diversity.
- Promotion of seed sovereignty.
- Establishment and strengthening of nutritional gardens.
- Field discussion days
- Look and learn visits.
- Innovation and appropriate technology.

Goal number 4: Economic Strengthening

Activities followed

- Trainings on Saving and Internal Lending communities (SILC) and methodologies
- Establish income generating projects
- Train participants in marketing skills

Such programs would be carried out in designated districts and wards identified by government officers, but implemented by the development arm of the Church, Caritas. These will consolidate food security against the El Nino- induced drought currently suffered.

Another long-term response to challenges of El Nino is the thrust taken by all dioceses in Zimbabwe to resuscitate their mission farms to produce commercial grain for the nation as was the custom when missionaries used to produce food for sale. In response to El Nino- induced

¹⁶ Caritas Zimbabwe, Masvingo: "Livelihoods, Food Security and Nutrition"
(<https://caritasmasvingozim.co.zw/causes/livelihoods/>).

drought, there currently is only one diocese that has responded by actually engaging in commercial agricultural ventures. Bishop Rudolf Nyandoro, on behalf of the eight Roman Catholic Bishops of Zimbabwe, said that all the Bishops have come up with a program that will enhance food security in dioceses as well as in the country. The Bishops agreed to utilize *Stella Mundi* organization, which has a Catholic Priest as one of the directors in the board, to spearhead this massive agricultural project. *Stellar Mundi (Pvt) Ltd* is an Agro-industrial entity of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference incorporated and operating nationally in Zimbabwe. Vice President Chiwenga praised the Catholic Church for taking this bold move to achieve sustainable food and nutrition security at household and national levels of the country. After touring the mission project in Driefontein in the Gweru diocese and seen for himself what *Stella Mundi* organization had achieved with its technocrats, Vice President Chiwenga said:

The involvement and participation of the church in state programmes of feeding the nation, gives me the pleasure to safely say, together we are the two wings that will fly the country to greater heights... I am pleased to stand before you to witness a massive wheat project under the ‘Catholic Economy Value Chain’ professionally modelled and monetised through a special purpose vehicle called *Stella Mundi (Pvt) Ltd*¹⁷.

The Vice President was indeed pleased that the Roman Catholic Church had established a huge agro-industrial corporation built upon the vast Catholic asset base, their farms, managed by top-notch technocrats.

Prior to starting this project, the Bishops had deliberated and subsequently issued a statement that they would embark on this agro-industrial program in their dioceses. The Archbishop of Harare, Robert Christopher Ndlovu, as president of the Conference signed that *Stella Mundi (Pvt) Ltd*, the Catholic Economy Value Chain document which explained that it “is both a commercial enterprise and a tool to develop, transform and build our communities. It is the Church’s torch to shine a light in dark places and shine a light in these dark times”¹⁸. This initiative is meant to propel the local church into financial self-sustenance, guarantee food security as well as create economic value in the agriculture value chain. Bishops hope that with the availability of sizeable farm land in most of their dioceses, this project will cascade from diocese to diocese until the economy value chain can be realized. As this program is takes off, the hope is that the challenges of climate change can be tackled and food security restored in the country.

One might ask; what is the connection between El Nino- induced drought and the creation of jobs in Zimbabwe? El Nino- induced drought causes food shortage, diminution of processed food commodities for sale, thereby impacting negatively on the growth of the economy in the country. With a struggling economy, more people become unemployed and poverty increases, causing other negative consequences like gangsters and robbers who attack people for the limited commodities available. The church, therefore, needs to be pro-active. The church

¹⁷ Chingwere, M., “Government praises Catholic Church” *Monday 15 July, The Herald* (<https://www.herald.co.zw/govt-praises-catholic-church/>).

¹⁸ “Kahiu, M., “Catholic Bishops in Zimbabwe Launch Agricultural Value Chain to Foster Self-Sustainability”, in *Aciafrica*, 2021. (<https://www.aciafrica.org/news/4620/catholic-bishops-in-zimbabwe-launch-agricultural-value-chain-to-foster-self-sustainability>).

should lobby government and non-governmental organizations to inject capital in other projects that can create employment and generate income for the country. Zimbabwe is endowed with many precious minerals, about forty¹⁹ different minerals most of which are highly in demand in the world. If the Church utilizes its positive influence both on government and traditional church-funders to engage in job-creating activities, the economy can be resuscitated while families are uplifted. The church's effort will bring a new trajectory in growing the economy of the country from other sources than remaining dependent on agriculture. Through enabling job-creation, the church is implementing the prescription of Jesus who said: "I was hungry and you gave me food and I was thirsty and you gave me to drink" (Mt. 25:35) and, through this good act, one deserves to enter into the kingdom of God. El Nino can be seen to have a direct relationship with the country's economy and the plight of the people. The church's development comes through its involvement with both government and non-governmental funders to uplift the economy of the country for the benefit of all.

In conclusion, the paper has argued that the church has a vital role to participate in the fight against El Nino induced drought in Zimbabwe. This direct involvement not only gives the church the opportunity to teach the nation that everyone should play their part in having the right attitude and choices to prevent climate change but leadership of the church engages strategies that respond positively to the El Nino challenges so that people have both immediate short-term results as well as long-term benefits for the nation.

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¹⁹ Zimbabwe is endowed with about 40 different minerals. Gold: Endowed with over 4,000 recorded gold deposits, Zimbabwe boasts the second largest gold reserves per square kilometer in the world. (https://www.google.com/search?q=how+many+minerals+are+found+in+zimbabwe&og=how+many+minerals+are+found+in+zimbabwe&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIJCAEQABgNGIAEMggIAhAAGBYHjIICAMQABgWGB4yDQgEEAAYhgMYgAQYigUyDQgFEAAYhgMYgAQYigUyDQgGEAAYhgMYgAQYigUyCggHEAAYgAQYogQyCgglEAAYgAQYogTSAQkyNTg3MWowajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8).

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