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Doing business as mission: A bittersweet challenge for the church in Africa

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The Church in Africa is amazingly well endowed and can accomplish integral mission both at home and away on reverse mission to former motherlands that launched missionary initiatives. As the world struggles with religious syncretism, political polarisation, wars, natural disasters, pandemics and economic recession, the Church in Africa is expected to engage in both local and reverse mission and facilitate transformation; however, its activities are limited mainly by socio-economic constraints. Though much has been published about integral mission, reverse mission and faith-based sustainable development, practical and lived models of sustainability are lacking. This study fills that gap by reviewing the feasibility of the business as mission (BAM) concept. It undertakes a qualitative literature review and draws lessons from the Assemblies of God churches. This study finds BAM a bittersweet concept that has actionable, resourceful and transformative benefits and faces hard challenges regarding church ownership, theological differences, volunteerism, negative impressions and divided attention. It concludes that BAM has benefits and drawbacks; hence, it is a necessary challenge that the Church in and beyond Africa should consider adopting.

Interdisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article interfaces Ecclesiology with Missiology and Business for holistic Sustainability.

Keywords: church; business; mission; challenge; necessity; sustainability.

Introduction

Africa is endowed with diverse human and natural resources, such as fertile land, forests and minerals and abundant water sources (Chen et al. 2023; Negusse 2026; Oluwole & Onyejiuwa 2023; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2025). The Church is God's agent for holistic transformation (Pillay 2017; Tagwirei 2024a), and the Church in Africa is already engaged in a reverse mission of evangelising the European and other Western nations that initially evangelised Africa and eventually succumbed to secularisation (Musoni 2025; Olofinjana 2023). Integral mission involves the Church reviving recipients' spiritual lives and mitigating the most pressing political, ecological and socio-economic crises (Arrasmith et al. 2026; Colomina 2026; Dygas 2025; Emergency Watchlist 2026; García-Santana & Moral-Benito 2025; International Monetary Fund 2026). Sadly, regarding reverse mission, Africa is struggling with spiritual syncretism and political and socio-economic issues (Amare 2026; Dersso 2026; African Development Bank Group 2026; Lawal 2025; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2025). How can a Church that is facing socio-economic crises sustain local integral mission, reverse mission and transformational development? Starting by overviewing the theory of theonomic reciprocity, which is the bedrock of this article, the next sections conceptualise business as mission (BAM) as a strategy that has considerable potential to meet the increasing demands of contemporary African *missio ecclesiae*, and review the concept, benefits and challenges of BAM in relation to Assemblies of God churches.

Theoretical framework: Theonomic reciprocity

Theonomic reciprocity was initially proposed in 1980 by the German theologian Bohren in his work on preaching, titled *Predigtlehre* (Bohren 1980). Theonomic reciprocity is derived from two terms – theonomy and reciprocity. The term theonomy means the sovereign biblical law, rule or government of God, which must inform and determine personal and civil legislation, conduct and engagement with everything in life (Perdue 2023). Reciprocity means collaboration (Beltran et al. 2023). Falk and Fischbacher (2006) theorise reciprocity sociologically as a behavioural response, or correspondence to perceived kindness or unkindness. Theologically, Chismar and Rausch (1984) explain that theonomy is a theocratic system that affects God's authority, direction and blessing on anthropological affairs. Chismar and Rausch (1984) argue that submitting to, observing the law and

applying the word of God beget his blessings and enablement. Overall, the theory of theonomic reciprocity proposes the comprehension, utilisation, investment and management of God-given resources for individual and collective economic sustainability.

Bohren (1980) developed the theory of theonomic reciprocity in view of the relationship between the Spirit and method. Van Ruler (1969) describes this relationship as divine action that enhances human actions and effectiveness. Bohren (1980) theorises that God inspires, guides and resources human beings to be productive and sustainable when they submit to His inspiration and leadership and multiply what He provides. Biblically, theonomic reciprocity relates to the parable of talents (Mt 25:14–30), which suggests that investing God-given talents can lead to multiplication and, eventually, sustainability. Although Van Helden (2016) applies theonomic reciprocity to a different subject of Church growth, she theorises theonomic reciprocity as conformity to God and harnessing his provisions for holistic sustainability. The conceptualisation of Van Helden (2016) infers that the theory of reciprocity is multidimensional and feasible in any context.

Just as every other theory has weaknesses, theonomic reciprocity is reactive, faith-based and determined by the openness, sensitiveness, timing, willingness and practical cooperation of human beings, which could cause challenges (Van Helden 2016). Furthermore, ecclesiastic economic sustainability requires proactive and innovative management (Banda 2026; Jackson 2018). Nevertheless, this study employs theonomic reciprocity because it interlinks faith and spirituality with economic sustainability; hence, it is considered the best framework for research on faith-based organisations. Consequently, this researcher complements theonomic reciprocity with the BAM concept, which incorporates strategic management.

Understanding the business as mission concept

The concept of BAM originated in the Lausanne Movement, which is a global Christian movement that emerged in the 1970s. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization developed BAM at its 2004 conference in Thailand, where it emphasised the potential of business to sustain the Great Commission. According to one of the major proponents of BAM, Tunehag (2006:33), Business as Mission is about real, viable, sustainable and profitable businesses with a Kingdom of God purpose, perspective and impact, leading to transformation of people and societies spiritually, economically and socially – to the greater glory of God.

Tunehag (n.d:1.) explains that BAM rests on three distinct biblical mandates – missionary work, stewardship of God-given resources and employment creation. Because Jesus Christ taught His followers to pray, 'May your Kingdom come!' (Mt 6:10), Tunehag (2006:34) explains that 'BAM is about being an answer to Christ's prayer – in and through business' to address all spiritual and socio-economic needs of humanity. 'This means being good stewards of our talents, resources and callings, but also caring for creation and people' (Tunehag n.d.:1). Additionally, Tunehag explains that BAM has a global mission to achieve inclusive transformation.

BAM takes 'business' and 'mission' seriously: real business and intentional mission, especially to areas with dire spiritual, economical and social needs. Business as mission businesses want to see Christ revealed and God glorified, in and through business, among all peoples and nations (Tunehag n.d.:2).

According to Rundle and Paul (2022), BAM is a recognition of and response to God's call for the whole Church to take the gospel holistically to the total person (spirit, soul and body) across the world. Plummer (2019) stresses that BAM is 'an enormous opportunity to leverage God-given potential of business to address some of the world's most pressing spiritual, social, environmental, and economic issues'. Plummer (2019) explains BAM as being 'a movement of business professionals using the gifts of entrepreneurship and good management to bring creative and long-term, sustainable solutions to global challenges'. Plummer (2019) explains, furthermore, that BAM serves God in the marketplace and intentionally employs businesses to advance the gospel and the common good. Through BAM, enterprising professionals use their skills to serve people, make a profit and develop financial and material resources to sustain *missio ecclesiae*. Basically, the concept of BAM refers to a holistic approach to integrating business with mission, mainly to harness business to enhance spiritual, social and economic transformation. Business as mission challenges the separation of business from theology, ecclesiology and missiology. Business as mission interlinks entrepreneurship with missionary engagements by arguing that business can generate income to sustain individual, family, community and marketplace evangelism. Scripturally, BAM draws inspiration from the virtuous (enterprising) woman of Proverbs 31 and the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14–30), which, in line with theonomic reciprocity, advocate for the responsible, innovative and sustainable use of God-given talents and resources. Business as mission suggests that Christians should engage in commerce not just for profit but to enhance *missio Dei* – God's mission – as his stewards. Since its development by the Lausanne Movement, BAM has been applied in various ways by different nations across the globe.

In Africa, many BAM initiatives have focused on agricultural development, leveraging business to improve food security and economic stability. Organizations like 'Farming God's Way' combine biblical principles with sustainable farming techniques, demonstrating how BAM can address practical needs and spiritual growth simultaneously, for example 'East African Power' is an integrated renewable energy development and engineering company delivering affordable and reliable clean energy solutions (Mordomo 2024:6).

Churches such as Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ), Assemblies of God (AOG) in Zimbabwe, Assemblies of God Hwange and Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa (ZAOGA) have invested in education, agriculture, health and related areas by building schools, buying farms and establishing clinics and hospitals. Studies by Tagwirei (2022a) and Tagwirei and Masango (2023) confirm that these investments have remarkable ripple effects, such as raising resources for the Church to fill knowledge, food security and health gaps, while meeting the rising costs of missionary work in Africa. Because we cannot study all the churches in the world in one submission, this study reviews BAM in the AOG Church in Zimbabwe to identify challenges, benefits and lessons that can be considered and applied in local and reverse missionary engagements.

Overviewing business as mission in African ecclesiologies, missiologies and development

The current continental political, ecological and socio-economic crises are critical reasons why the church must show up as an able agent of God's transformative integral mission. There have been promising talk and action in response to the Lausanne call for the church to take the whole gospel to the whole world (integral mission) in African ecclesiologies and missiologies.

Tongoi (2009) states, 'there is need to acknowledge the work of the church as touching every sector and therefore a need for the church to be visible in all areas of life including the economy'. For the attentive and concerned observer, life across the Global South is crisis-ridden, and the people are in dire need of holistic help. The cause of the crisis is mainly the problematisation of the spiritualties, politics, economics, environment and sociologies of Africa by a multiplicity of factors, ranging from self-serving political leadership to religious syncretism, selfishness and corruption. Sadly, 'Christianity has been seen by the general populace as preparing one for the hereafter, but silent on the here and now' (Tongoi 2009).

It is commendable that some parachurch organisations, such as the Church Mission Society, have facilitated the development of community-based initiatives such as Herbal Gardens, which empower marginalised farmers to pursue sustainable farming in Kenya. In South Africa, a parachurch organisation called Paradigm Shift has been equipping churches 'with a volunteer-driven, economic development model to serve the poor in their community. The model incorporates four key things: business training, one-on-one mentoring, microloans, and discipleship' (Arnold 2017). With the help of Paradigm Shift, churches in 11 African countries have impacted the lives of 6500 micro-entrepreneurs; 50% of mentors meet with their paired entrepreneur weekly, and each entrepreneur is supporting on average five dependents [such as orphans, widows, the sick and other needy people] (Arnold 2017).

In Rwanda, Marlow (2023) reports that Tearfund partnered with African Evangelistic Enterprise and is teaching communities 'new farming techniques to adapt to climate change and increase the amount of food they are producing'. Across the African continent, some churches and faith-based organisations have been involved in tangible efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change and political and economic challenges facing Africa. Zenda (2024) quotes the examples of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, which facilitated projects and initiatives to enhance the resilience of communities to ecological and economic challenges and promote sustainable development; the Green Anglican Movement, which was launched in 2010 by the Environmental Network of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa to foster environmental stewardship and sustainable practices in the church and the wider community across the continent; and the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, which facilitates public enlightenment and empowerment programmes to achieve sustainable environmental stewardship across the Global South. News Africa (2025) reports that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints facilitates self-sustaining projects on education, food security and health in 38 countries in Africa. Other churches, such as the RCZ, ZAOGA, Church of Christ and Methodist, Anglican and Catholic churches, have built schools, clinics, hospitals, training centres, farming and other developmental businesses that contribute to sustainable education, health, human resource and economic development in Zimbabwe (Chirongoma 2020; Maposa 2020; Tagwirei 2022a).

According to Tagwirei (2025), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) has mobilised, empowered, networked with and connected evangelicals to advance integral mission and transform Zimbabwe. In 2012, the EFZ partnered with Tearfund and (Tagwirei 2025):

> [*D*]eveloped a tool to advance integral mission, which it calls the Church and Community Mobilization Process (CCMP) … The CCMP advocates for and mobilises communities to achieve sustainable development and reduce poverty. (p. 3896)

Through the CCMP, the EFZ encourages denominations to engage their communities and identify, examine and collectively work out contextually relevant ways to solve their problems. Tagwirei (2025) also reports that the EFZ facilitated citizenship awareness programmes and self-sustaining projects that enlighten citizens about their rights and responsibilities and encourage them to be a voice for peace and engage in local and national development. Religion in Africa is now far more than a matter of belief (Desiderio 2025):

> It is a cornerstone of daily life, a source of moral guidance, and increasingly, a formidable economic force … Across the continent, places of worship are not just spiritual sanctuaries; they are real estate empires, media conglomerates, educational powerhouses, and healthcare providers. (n.p.)

For Desiderio (2025), the intersection of faith and finance has created a sacred economy with a vast network that can influence lives, livelihoods and development:

> From Lagos to Nairobi, sprawling megachurches and mosques stand on prime urban land, often surrounded by commercial complexes, schools, and clinics – all owned and managed by religious bodies. The Catholic Church alone operates over 7,000 schools across sub-Saharan Africa, educating millions and employing tens of thousands. (n.p.)

In underdeveloped countries, where ordinary citizens struggle and bear the brunt of underfunded public services, faith-based organisations have stepped up as *de facto* providers of education, healthcare and social welfare. If churches or Christians engage in business, not just for selfish enrichment, but to solve identified public problems and advance sustainable development, business can be understood beyond commerce, as a mission. Unfortunately, BAM in Africa has been vulnerable to cultural contradictions, commercialisation and commodification of the gospel, costly organisational registration and operation processes and political and economic instability (Sangwa & Mutabazi 2025; Tongoi 2009). Therefore, the following section explores the merits and downsides of BAM in the particular denominational context of the AOG Church in Zimbabwe. Delimiting research of a complex phenomenon such as BAM from its macro- to a particular micro-setting is strategic for recounting lived experiences and contextualised viewpoints, in-depth analysis and applicable comprehension.

Reviewing business as mission in the Assemblies of God Church in Zimbabwe

Despite prevailing global geopolitical and economic volatility (Beirne & Renzhi 2026), European and Western nations are developed and economically better placed to sustain integral mission globally, and they have succumbed to secularisation (Burgess 2020; Soares 2026). Consequently, BAM is a feasible idea (Mordomo 2024), a strategic consideration for churches in the developing Global South, to sustain reverse mission – evangelisation of the Global North, which had initially evangelised Africa (Dena 2020). Business as mission can sustain home – African mission in Africa – and reverse mission to European and Western nations by developing, managing, multiplying and preserving ideological, human, financial and material resources.

While various churches have, directly and indirectly, undertaken BAM in different ways and places in Africa, this review is contextually and geographically delimited to the AOG Church in Zimbabwe, which was considered because this researcher is a long-serving member and pastor of the church; hence, strategically informed and well positioned to engage with informative leaders, congregants and partners. Additionally, the AOG Church is one of the oldest churches in Zimbabwe; it has raised many apostles and denominations that are exploring BAM. Examples of churches whose leaders were raised by the AOG include ZAOGA (of the late Ezekiel Handinawangu Guti), which now has hundreds of branches and which owns and operates agricultural, health and education investments all over the world, and AOG Hwange, which was pioneered by the late Winston Mukolo in Hwange, and which facilitates agricultural projects in Matebeleland North, around the rural areas of Binga, Lupane, Kariba, Siabuwa, Gokwe and the surrounding countryside communities. Other examples include Glad Tidings (of Richmond Chiundiza in Harare), Wealthy Word International Ministries (Judge Dube) in Bulawayo, Destiny church in Australia (Josh Moyo), Impact Ministries (Silas Dube), Kingdom Ministries (John Chiweda), Oasis of Love Ministries (Margaret Mhlanga), Christian Light International Ministries (Peter Zhangazha) and AOG Spiritual Movement in Mashonaland East (of the late Francis Nyika).

The AOG Church was established in Zimbabwe in 1959 by the late Apostle Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu. It has its origins in and was supported by white missionaries who had planted the church in South Africa (Mpoko 2019). Today, the AOG Church exemplifies BAM mainly through agricultural and educational projects. In attempts to build up economic capacity, sustain its missionary mandate and embody the love and care of God to humanity in and beyond Africa, the AOG Church in Zimbabwe has undertaken a variety of business projects. It built a high school in Norton, Zimbabwe, in 2012, to serve local communities, enhance missionary work and raise funds to sustain the furtherance of the gospel. Tagwirei (2022b) reports that the AOG named the school after its founder, Nicholas Bhengu (as Nicholas Bhengu High School [NHBS]). Nicholas Bhengu is described by Lephoko (2018) as a global transformational crusader with lasting impact. In addition to the prospect of raising funds that could help the church to meet its operating expenses, the school is expected to serve a missionary purpose through evangelistic engagements by teaching and complementary staff and incorporation of pastors and Christian students to spread the gospel to their fellow learners and residents of the surrounding community. In addition, the school is expected to grow and raise funds that can contribute to sustaining local and global missionary engagements of the church.

In addition to the school, the church owns a farm in Mashava, under Shurugwi district. The church bought the farm in 1992, and after it lay idle for three decades, work on building a conference centre started in 2024. Once the conference centre is completed, incumbent leaders of the church envision building a boarding school at the farm. Besides the conference centre being available to host conferences of the AOG, it is expected to generate rental income by charging fees for gatherings of other denominations, weddings and other events. Another school like NHBS is planned as an additional income-generating project and a platform through which the church can evangelise to students, staff and residents of surrounding communities. The proceeds from the conference centre and boarding school are expected to eventually contribute towards funding international evangelisation.

The church owns another farm in Bulawayo, which the Matabeleland region branch of the church bought after the church underwent a national split in 1987 (Tagwirei 2022b:140). The farm lay idle for almost three decades, and

then the church started renting it out to generate income which contributes to operating and missionary costs.

Because of various reasons, reportedly ranging from realising the need to sustain borderless integral mission, help the needy and embody the gospel through empowerment, AOG Church in Zimbabwe partnered with Swedish International Relief and Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) to facilitate agricultural projects for the needy in Ward 16, Chipinge District, Manicaland Province. According to a baseline study by Matiza, Tagwirei and Ruzengwe (2026), AOG and PMU Sweden facilitated a Rural Livelihoods Strengthening and Resilience Building Programme to address poverty, climate vulnerability and food insecurity through an integrated approach that combines climate-smart agriculture, sustainable environmental management and disaster early warning systems, while leveraging the unique reach of faith networks to catalyse entrepreneurship, strengthen women- and youth-led enterprises, and build inclusive local economies. The programme will not only secure food and income for vulnerable households, but also embed resilience, dignity and opportunity at the heart of rural transformation (Matiza et al. 2026:25).

The study by Matiza et al. (2026) indicates that there are more Christians, who are expected to live as the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13–16) and as hearers and doers of the word (Ja 1:22), than members of other religions and non-believers in Zimbabwe's rural areas of Chipinge. Thus, by doing BAM, the AOG Church appreciates the potential of the concept of enlightening and empowering the needy and enabling evangelism locally and internationally. A leader of the EFZ and pastor of the AOG church in Chipinge said that, 'by facilitating agricultural business projects, the church demonstrates love and care, thereby instilling the same emotions in its beneficiaries' (Sithole, Interview 20 April 2026). Several beneficiaries of AOG projects in Chipinge requested that the church plant branches in their communities because the community appreciated, received and expected the church to minister beyond business, through evangelism. The AOG Church established a project team that identifies areas in need, mobilises funds with partners such as PMU Sweden and runs entrepreneurial projects to boost the economic sustainability of the needy. In the case of Ward 16 of Chipinge district, the AOG project team took into consideration that it is a drought-prone, lowveld area that is highly vulnerable to recurring socio-economic crises, and frequently has to be rescued by donors, to the extent that villagers have succumbed to dependency syndrome. Consequently, AOG facilitated training on self-sustainability, stewardship, resilience, strategic management and practising drought-resistant agriculture, not only for subsistence, but as a sustainable business that can grow, sustain families and generate produce that can be exported to neighbouring communities and nations. In this way, the AOG Church taught people that doing BAM can reform, transform and sustain lives and livelihoods. In responding to the researcher's question about the impact of AOG-facilitated projects, beneficiaries highlighted that they had gained hope that they could realise economic sustainability through the integration of faith-based teaching and business and technical project management. One of the villagers said, 'The projects that AOG has facilitated in our community raised hope in us, that we may become sustainable in the future' (Villager 1, Interview 20 April 2026).

Another villager commented:

> 'Our area is well known for famine, poverty and distress. AOG has tried to educate and resource us to build our sustainability through training and mobilising resources for us to do sustainable farming. Even if we do not reap much to sell, whatever we get will make a difference in our pursuit of sustainability.' (Villager 2, Interview 20 April 2026)

In appreciating what the church had achieved through BAM, one of the village heads in Chipinge where the AOG facilitates BAM said that 'we request the church to assist us with Bible materials alongside project capacity-building manuals to enlighten and empower us to grow our faith and economic sustainability'. Key Chipinge rural government stakeholders and traditional leadership agree that faith is a potential driver of business and sustainability, and can bring people together regardless of their backgrounds. They trust that the Church can maximise community relationships to enhance inclusive economic sustainability. However, the case of the AOG Church in Zimbabwe has also exposed the challenges involved in BAM, which will be discussed next.

Challenges of business as mission from the case of the Assemblies of God Church in Zimbabwe

While appreciating that BAM can enhance the local and global integral mission of the Church, it is crucial to review the challenges involved. The AOG has initiated a great number of promising and enterprising initiatives that should have yielded greater profits to sustain pastoral work and welfare and created more opportunities for missionary engagements than before. However, the church struggles to manage ownership issues, theological differences, ecclesial human resources, fears of commercialisation and commodification of the gospel, negative impressions, division of attention and cultural conflicts.

The challenge of ownership

The church and all its activities are owned by and, in line with theonomic reciprocity, subscribed and submitted to God, above all leadership structures. Unlike neo-Pentecostal ministries that tend to be owned, led and run as personal and family possessions by their founders (Tagwirei 2024b), classical Pentecostal churches such as the AOG use a mixed Episcopalian and congregational governance system. When the AOG founder Apostle Bhengu was still alive, he led the church as the international overseer. He provided supreme oversight of the church in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Bhengu died in 1985, and since then the church has been run by national and regional leaders who are elected every two years. Unlike founding leadership voices, which are usually highly respected and obeyed, incumbent elected voices who only serve 2 years struggle to sustain BAM in the church. Evidence of this claim is the farms the church bought in Bulawayo just after 1987 and in Mashava in 1992, which lay idle for three decades because elected leaders could not agree on the theology, timing, engagement and management of business (Tagwirei 2022b:143–144). The NHBS, which the church started building in 2012 and which officially opened in 2018, has seen very little congregational support and infrastructural development, not just as a result of economic instability, but because of an ownership challenge. One of the AOG pastors in Norton, who is also a member of the school's development committee, recently lamented in the church's national WhatsApp fellowship group for men that our school is lacking our moral and financial support. Other churches send their children to their church schools, but we don't. Our school has very low enrolment, yet we are a big church. Our voices, as leaders, are not heard. Most of us do not send our children to NHBS. Yet if supported, it could grow and sustain our church.

A number of leaders who responded to his lamentation concurred that ownership is the main challenge. They argue that developments of established schools are leveraged on the ideas and voices of owners who are respected. Adversely, the ideas and voices of those who are elected to lead AOG nationally and regionally are sometimes changed by those who replace them after elections every 2 years. While new ideas can be appreciated and taken up by new leaders, changing strategies and approaches can affect outcomes. Though some leaders are re-elected into their same offices, new people who are elected can bring either constructive or destructive change.

Nevertheless, the fact that AOG built a school and started constructing a conference centre is commendable in BAM. Changing ideas and voices, as well as the obstruction caused by two-year terms of regional and national leadership, can be mitigated by constitutional and policy reviews and amendments. However, constitutional and policy reviews and amendments are also problematic in the AOG – also because of the challenge of ownership. The AOG Church has undertaken reviews and has documented proposed amendments, which were supposed to be debated and considered to be either approved or rejected in 2014. The document was shelved, up to today, because some members of the national executive are not in agreement about certain ideas that were proposed. Today, 2026, 12 years later, some national executive members have left office, and current members have still not agreed to consider the reviews. It is undeniable that the challenge of church ownership is real and that it hinders economic development and missionary activities of the church. Thus, regardless of how problematic constitutional and policy issues can be, it is recommended that incumbent leaders revisit the reviews, as stewards of the church, to identify and fill in gaps that affect the continuity, management and sustenance of not only BAM, but all integral aspects that affect the church. In that way, the church can build its capacity to sustain its contributions to local, reverse mission and inclusive sustainable development.

The challenge of theological differences

Should the church own any business that is operated for profit? Should the church run a business? What is the theology of business? Is there a danger that doing business will divert ecclesial leadership attention from the work of ministry to profit? These and related questions have been delaying and challenging BAM in the AOG Church since the start. When pastors who theologised business as God's way of sustaining the holistic mission of the Church were elected to national leadership, they facilitated the buying of the farms at Mashava and Bulawayo. When like-minded leaders were elected into regional leadership, they introduced small business ventures such as poultry production. When different leaders, who theologised business as being secular and a hindrance to *missio ecclesiae*, were elected, they neglected the farms for three decades, and did the same for other entrepreneurial projects that had been introduced. Then, when a new crop of leaders, who viewed business as complementary to mission, were elected to national leadership, they bought an institutional stand and facilitated the building, registration and launch of the high school in Norton, which is currently operational. The same kind of leaders who assimilate business with mission have been letting the church farm in Bulawayo generate income towards operating expenses. They raised the possibility of building another school at AOG Mashava farm, where the church is currently building a conference centre. These voices, who support BAM, have been suggesting that the church should consider commercialising the conference centre once it is completed by letting it out for events such as weddings and conferences of other denominations.

According to Tagwirei (2022b:143), a former AOG national executive member and a senior pastor who had been involved with the farm project before and after its procurement disclosed that 'the church has not utilised the farm due to divergent theological perceptions about engaging much into business as a church'. This leader explained that, after the church had procured the farm in 1992 (Tagwirei 2022b):

> [*L*]eaders eventually disagreed on doing any business with it. Some of the leaders then perceived engaging in business as disruptive to missionary work, while others thought that doing business was ideal to complement revenues of the church. (p. 143)

Sadly (Tagwirei 2022b):

> While the debates raged on for years in separate meetings, Zimbabwe fell into series of economic crisis and the church got further incapacitated to engage in any serious investment. Since then up to now, there has been no progressive plans and actions towards commercialising and monetizing the land. (p. 143)

Senior AOG youth organisers visited the farm in 2012 to assess what could be invested and wrote a report to the national executive. The national executive at the time did not respond to the youth leaders' report and recommendations. Later, in 2023, the national executive visited the farm and considered building a conference centre. Meanwhile, the AOG Church had built a national conference centre in Gweru, a city in the centre of Zimbabwe, which is strategically and cost-effectively accessible to congregants from all areas of the country. Somlandela TV (2024) broadcast the address of the incumbent AOG Church national executive chairman, Reverend Nathan Sethlako, to leaders at the Mashava farm. He explained that the national leadership had realised that the church's convention centre in Gweru could no longer accommodate increasing numbers of congregants, hence the need for a new conference centre on the spacious land of Mashava farm. In agreeing that the idea of building a conference centre was good for the church, as the chairman argued, the national leadership mobilised all AOG branches to raise funds for its construction. Since 2024, the leadership has issued monthly financial contribution targets for all assemblies of the church in Zimbabwe. From participant observations and purposively sampled in-depth conversations with pastors, the researcher, as one of the pastoral leaders of the church, has found that the majority of assemblies have been struggling to meet their monthly targets because their sources of income – congregational freewill contributions – are constrained. Zimbabwe's economic meltdown, which is caused by various factors including weak governance, political instability, systematic corruption, inconsistent policies, heavy taxation, deindustrialisation and high unemployment, is impoverishing ordinary citizens (Ansari 2024; Maseko 2026). With their constrained incomes, some assemblies sacrifice large chunks of their incomes to meet the conference building targets while shelving missionary activities and developments of their local assemblies, which also require funds. If leaders do not theologise business as complementary to *missio ecclesiae*, local assemblies may delay or fail to resume developments of their local assemblies, and may not be able to meet the rising costs of pastoral ministry and welfare, especially with the Zimbabwean economy continuing to plummet. Yet, if church leaders could be in agreement about optimising BAM, and even if proceeds from business are low because of national economic challenges in Zimbabwe, even limited returns from business could support ecclesial developments without overburdening congregants.

It is recommended that church leadership resolves the unending dilemma of whether, and how best, to integrate faith and economics. Theological differences on doing BAM can be resolved through enlightenment on the theology of work. Reed-Thomson (ed. 2023:11) explains that, 'as God worked to create the universe, so then humanity is to imitate him and work at stewarding and filling the earth – to the glory of God'. From a biblical perspective, 'business is designed to multiply wealth, provoke innovation, create dignified work, steward resources, and produce goods and services that contribute positively to human flourishing' (ed. Reed-Thomson 2023:14).

The challenge is exacerbated by the fact that some members of the AOG national and regional leadership do not have any theological training. Less than half of them hold diplomas or degrees in theological education. Theologically uneducated leaders are unable to theologise anything as soundly as their colleagues who are trained. Thus, theological differences on BAM in the church could continue indefinitely. The author agrees with Hadebe (2017:3) and Brunsdon and Knoetze (2021) that theological education and training can prepare and enhance gospel ministers and church leaders so that they are more competent. As stated in 2 Timothy 2:15, theology training enlightens those who undertake it to interpret, contextualise and apply scripture properly. Although theology education does not guarantee hermeneutical and theological soundness, because other factors such as school resourcefulness, educators' competence and individual learners' comprehension can vary, it can improve hermeneutical skills and theological conceptualisation.

The challenge of volunteerism

Volunteerism is another critical challenge that has problematised BAM in the AOG Church since time immemorial. From 1987, when the church bought a farm in Bulawayo, to 1992, when it bought a second farm in Mashava, AOG leaders have not considered employing expert project managers or other qualified personnel to work on profitable projects at the farms. Assemblies of God only recently employed a projects team, on a contract basis, with donated funding to facilitate agricultural initiatives that have started in Chipinge. Otherwise, the majority of the church's workforce is predominantly volunteers. It is possible that the aforementioned challenges relating to ownership and theological differences, which resulted in the shelving of activities on the farms, also obstructed leaders from employing a full-time projects team.

Some of the initiatives that survived differences of opinion among the leaders, and which could now be generating sustainable revenue, are affected by the challenge of volunteerism. The lamentation of the board members about the school the church operates in Norton reveals that AOG leaders and members do not enrol their own children in the school or contribute to the sustainability of the school. Assemblies of God leadership does not talk much about the school, and when they do, their voices do not seem to bear the desired fruits, because enrolment demographics indicate no entries from AOG members. Yet, the AOG Church has an education board that could brainstorm how AOG can support the school further by identifying and addressing problems that may be behind the failure to achieve congregational support. Some responses of AOG members to the lamentation suggested that the AOG education board take up the issue and resolve it. It is a challenge that members of the AOG education board serve voluntarily and do not receive allowances. Therefore, some of them serve only for a

short time and leave when they get involved in commitments that provide income. The same applies to other projects that the church has attempted. The AOG Church owns a Bible school, the Theological College of Southern Africa (TCSA), which was initially owned by AOG South Africa. According to Bond (1994), the TCSA was founded in 1966 by AOG South Africa in South Africa and set up as a correspondence school to train prospective pastors, elders and other leaders of the church. Assemblies of God South Africa also engaged volunteers. Bosch (2014) narrates that TCSA had only one full-time employee, Pastor Lawrence Wilson, who was the principal and lecturer, while he continued pastoring. The church incorporated other pastors to volunteer as lecturers. Wilson eventually resigned and was replaced by Dr Thomas Resane, who served in the same role of principal and lecturer, with the assistance of volunteer lecturers. After three years, the church closed down the Bible school, and one of the AOG Church in Zimbabwe leaders at the time, Pastor Mathamsanqa Dube, negotiated with AOG South Africa to move TCSA to Zimbabwe. Assemblies of God South Africa agreed, and the school was established in Bulawayo in 2004. Bosch (2014:21) reports that Dube volunteered to manage the school as its principal, with the help of a volunteer administrator and volunteering lecturers – who were mostly pastors, just as in the South African case. Later, in 2011, the church engaged a missionary and Bible scholar, Dr Anton Bosch, to assist TCSA with its curriculum and related academic developments in Zimbabwe. Bosch, a South African, had relocated to the United States of America, where he had founded a church. He agreed to work online as a volunteer while pastoring his own church. Upon realising that the school was not developing much as a result of its reliance on volunteer administration and faculty, Bosch facilitated his church to fund the employment of one full-time academic dean and a lecturer, as well as an administrative secretary. Since then, TCSA has operated with a volunteering principal, administrator and lecturers and has employed two full-time staff (a dean and a secretary). Volunteering workers serve erratically, as and when they are not occupied with commitments for which they are paid. The two full-time employees cannot fill all the gaps that volunteers leave when they are occupied elsewhere. In attempts to mitigate the challenge, Bosch facilitated extra funding to employ a lecturer to assist the dean online. Thus, TCSA now operates with three paid employees: academic dean, secretary and one lecturer. The principal, administrator and other lecturers remain on voluntary engagements.

Volunteers may be passionate about serving, especially because most of TCSA volunteers are AOG pastors and members whose love for the church can maintain their volunteering passion and motivate them to develop leadership and ministerial human resources. However, the economic crisis in Zimbabwe demands that citizens sweat for survival by, for example, diversifying sources of income. Given the widespread human insecurity in Africa (Amare 2026), and the high rate of unemployment in the poverty-stricken Zimbabwe (Dzviti 2026), volunteering can be a path to eventual employability, survival and livelihood. In the case of the TCSA, administrative and lecturing volunteers are absent even when they are expected, reportedly because some of them are frustrated about having volunteered for a long time and expected to be employed, in vain. Other volunteers simply cannot be available at all times because they have personal and family obligations that demand their attention elsewhere. Therefore, the attention of volunteers is divided, and such division affects their service delivery. When administrative and lecturing service deliveries are erratic, enrolled students drop out and report negatively about the college to prospective students, which causes enrolment to continue dwindling; consequently, the revenue provided by student fees declines and the institutional economy crumbles.

Similar church-owned theological institutions, such as ZAOGA's Africa Multination for Christ College, have grown despite the national economic situation, and has invested in infrastructure developments, diversified courses beyond theology to related courses such as leadership development and chaplaincy, attract high enrolments and have built economic sustainability. Churches such as ZAOGA levy their institutions and receive extra income to support missionary and other needs. In contrast, the TCSA continues declining. While various factors affect enrolment, payment of student fees and overall economic instability, volunteerism could be one of the reasons for the failure to grow. The erratic attendance of a volunteering principal, administrator and lecturers affects administrative and lectureship service delivery, which affects students, enrolment and institutional economics correspondingly. The same applies to other projects of the church, such as poultry production and letting farm space. In the absence of full-time workers to attend to particular projects on a full-time, paid basis, requisite service delivery will be affected, and prospective business and proceeds are likely to fail.

Assemblies of God Church farms, schools, poultry production and other projects are great initiatives that could be exemplary businesses done as mission, but volunteerism stands in the way of success. If the church realises that volunteers are not free but, instead, costly for the development of the church, leaders can review their stance on ownership and the theologies of church-owned resources as stewards; they could strategise to commercialise the farms and schools they have by developing them to the extent that they yield desired viability and economic and missionary sustainability.

The challenge of negative impressions

In addition to the aforementioned challenges, some AOG leaders fear that doing business could cause negative impressions, for example, that church leaders are commercialising and commodifying the church, similar to what neo-Pentecostal leaders have done with their prosperity gospel. Such fears are real, as confirmed in the RCZ. The RCZ owns farms, bookshops, butcheries, hospitals, primary and high schools and a university, Reformed Church

University, in Zimbabwe. Munikwa (2011:109) reports that entrepreneurship unintentionally created the impression that the church is greedy and materialistic.

Kantanka (2012) asserts that churches traditionally possess a popular image as selfless organisations unconcerned with financial gains, and distinctively focused on spiritual matters. While the church is essentially missionary, Tagwirei (2022a:6) argues that 'the need for resources to meet her operating costs; inconsistency, unreliability and unsustainability of tithes, freewill offerings, other local collections and donations in Zimbabwe necessitate business engagements'. Therefore, churches such as the AOG Church in Zimbabwe can and should consider reconciling mission and business as both essentially missionary. This is the case because business can generate income that can complement traditional freewill ecclesial income and create opportunities for churches to evangelise and build partnerships in the marketplace for holistic ministry. Holistic ministry, in this case, includes human, financial and material partnerships for diaconal mission to care for the needy, such as orphans, the poor, survivors or the bereaved of natural, road or other disasters. If business is done properly as a selfless mission to save lives, spiritually and socio-economically, communities will eventually appreciate it, and negative impressions will be minimised.

Division of attention

In addition to challenges mentioned previously, some members of AOG leadership have succumbed to fears that doing business as a church could divert attention from the work of ministry to profit-making engagements. Therefore, they are unable to agree about making progressive engagements to add the mission of business to the business of mission. This is one of the major challenges that led the church to neglect its farms for three decades. However, as Tagwirei (2022a) argues:

> [*D*]ivision of attention is arguably a result of management failure. It is contended that churches can establish separate business units, and boards that look after their businesses while reserving pastors and elders for the work of ministry. When separation and delegation of duties are adopted, churches can do business effectively without diverting their attention from ministry. (p. 6)

As exemplified by other churches such as ZAOGA and RCZ, doing BAM cannot divert the attention of church leaders and gospel ministers when corporate governance is executed properly, for example, by establishing separate non-pastoral boards and appointing managers and teams of technocrats that run respective ventures for the selfless purposes of sustaining integral mission, which saves ecclesial and communal life. As Plummer (2016) argues, BAM could be a strategic opportunity for the Church to create a conducive space and facilitate sustainable prayer services, evangelism, discipleship, mentorship, inclusive economic empowerment, self-sustenance and diaconal development in Africa. For Plummer (2016), when the church or individuals engage in business for the purposes of supporting or doing missionary work in the marketplace, they can collectively or singularly break the scourge of dependency syndrome that is crippling missionary advancement in Africa.

The majority of churches in Africa that depend on tithes, freewill offerings, collections and donations face incapacitation, mainly because freewill sources are inconsistent, unpredictable, unsustainable and, thus, unreliable, especially in light of limited resources in the hard times of economic instability. Byonge (2026) reports that there are various examples of churches, individual pastors and Christians in Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa and other African countries who are doing tent-making through professional jobs or businesses to sustain their families and ministries.

This arrangement allows them to support their families without placing financial pressure on small congregations. At the same time, their professional roles bring them into daily contact with members of the community, creating natural opportunities for evangelism and pastoral care (Byonge 2026).

With strategic management, 'some Christian professionals working in fields such as education, healthcare, and business correctly view the workplace as a mission field' (Byonge 2026). Byonge (2026) explains that those who take their employment or business as an opportunity to advance the gospel are integrating their services with evangelism and discipleship, thereby making their workplaces or marketplaces platforms for demonstrating Christian values to and sharing faith with people from different political, religious and socio-economic backgrounds, which are sometimes beyond the reach of churches. Thus, if managed strategically and with ethical leadership, integrity and missional orientation, withstanding potential challenges such as division of attention can effectively serve both economic and missionary purposes.

Conclusion

The Church in Africa is facing the challenging dilemma of either continuing with the predominant traditional, dependent or modern, contextually interdependent economics of integrating a mission of business with the business of mission. This article concludes that BAM is bittersweet because it begets both sustaining benefits and disturbing challenges. Although this conclusion is drawn from one case study from Zimbabwe, it is applicable beyond Africa, to all churches, faith-based organisations, missionaries and people in poverty-stricken contexts because theological and strategic views of leaders differ even when they serve the same church. The old model of doing mission with funding from freewill offerings, tithes, collections and donations is not sustainable in any politically and socio-economically unstable context. The modern model of BAM is interdependent and can be sustainable, but is problematised by challenges, such as church ownership, theological differences, volunteerism, negative impressions and division of attention. If the Church in Africa is serious about accomplishing local and reverse mission and

sustainable development, denominational and ecumenical leaders should consider BAM models that are feasible and sustainable in view of their missionary and economic milieu. Dependence on freewill offerings and donations is not sustainable and viable anywhere, because it is unpredictable, unreliable and cannot be budgeted for. Congregants, well-wishers and donors usually give as and when they have enough, and are happy and willing to give, but mostly only after satisfying their personal and organisational interests. Thus, dependency stifles ownership, involvement, strategic planning, creativity, governance, self-determination, dignity and development. We must bear in mind that some of us may mistakenly marry BAM to independence because BAM promises independent sustainability. Independence is not commendable in ecclesiology because it implies an inclination towards selfish human gratification, while overshadowing selfless interdependence. Interdependence is Godly, as submitted under the theoretical framework of this study – theonomic reciprocity – because it urges humanity to utilise, invest, multiply and manage what God provides to yield sustainability and advance *missio Dei*. If BAM is engaged in according to its meaning, it can enhance sustainable interdependence by integrating profit-making business with public-spirited, transformative mission. Such an integration is tenable because business engagement will be purposed to promote integral mission, reverse mission and inclusive congregational, denominational, ecumenical and global transformation. Business as mission is not meant for those who wish to generate income, survive and thrive merely to meet present and future personal, congregational or denominational needs. Business as mission is meant for the promotion of resilient, sustainable, other-centred, inclusive, national and global ecclesial missionary exploits, and for succeeding against all socio-economic odds.

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Kimion Tagwirei: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Disclaimer

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