The Impact of Collaborative Leadership on Urban Church influence in Africa.

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ABSTRACT
Over the past few decades, urban cities of Africa have experienced a rise in social, economic, political challenges. Poverty, hunger, ill-health, terrorism, political unrest, and violence are some of the issues still rampant in many African cities even today. Collaborative leadership entails bringing urban churches and other pertinent stakeholders together in collectively addressing the issues facing urban cities of Africa. In this article, we conduct a qualitative systematic review of the existing literature on collaborative leadership and church influence in Africa to elaborate on a theological model on urban church influence. After reviewing several journals articles, books, and pertinent non-journaled cases of collaborative leadership in the context of the urban church in Africa, we identify critical collaborative leadership practices necessary for urban churches in Africa to have successful influence and be a pertinent player in defining and resolving Africa's urban challenges. These practices include shared control and power, leadership development, and the discipleship experience. We also identify a series of collaborative leadership benefits that are crucial in urban churches in Africa. These benefits include a greater sense of diversity, solidarity, inspiration, and collective strengths. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of adopting collaborative leadership principles for church leaders and practitioners in the context of urban church influence in Africa.
KEYWORDS: collaborative leadership, urban church influence, theological model

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Collaborative leadership according to Archer and Cameron (2013); Goleman and Boyatzis (2013) entails bringing various stakeholders, leadership, and all organizational teams out of personal and team bureaucracies and silos to working together towards the delivery of shared goals. From the definition above we can deduce two key elements of collaborative leadership as first everyone is involved and takes responsibility. Second, information is shared openly and everyone has a specific say in the table. According to Goleman and Boyatzis (2013) collaborative leaders, often are open to feedback and positive criticism, and diversity of opinions. They see this as an opportunity to amass great ideas from their teams and colleagues and build collective strategies aimed at addressing common goals. Badaracco (2002); Dagelijks (2012) share that this then enables the teams to develop trust, and be more engaged, and become responsible and accountable.

Collaborative leadership is one of the most critical leadership models required for the growth of church influence in contemporary society (Donohue, 2011; Daniel & Jared, 2016). As the church in Africa is battling to develop relevance and influence in this era especially with the growing number of youths in Africa, it will be critical to review and evaluate both its leadership and the context of its impact on society. In the current era, urban churches in Africa are facing many struggles that make it nearly impossible for them to flourishing and influence their society as per their mission. Some of these struggles include a lack of resources, people, and even space for the expansion of church plants (Boesak, 2005). These struggles have even been more prevalent in the current period of the COVID-19 pandemic with many urban churches closed as a result of a lack of resources to sustain their premises among other restrictive covenants in its tenancies (Pillay, 2002). Sadly, these difficult realities are the reasons why church influence in Africa is deteriorating as church plants in major urban towns disintegrate. Many churches in the urban context of Africa seem as though they are not equipped or resourced enough for urban church growth, impact, and influence (Boesak, 2005). Historically, urban cities are where most societal cultures are born and shaped. This is also true in our contemporary urban setting where new cultures for the African nations are driven from the urban cities (Perkins, 2005; Donohue, 2011; Daniel & Jared, 2016). The urban context offers greater opportunities for the church in Africa to influence and transform some of the oppressive cultures, provide platforms for fair justice among people, shape the political culture of the cities and nations among other areas of influence.

Despite collaborative leadership and church influence being well-reviewed in the academic and religious world, not much has been directly written concerning the relationship between urban church influence and collaborative leadership specifically from an African Context (Fullan, 2001; Kessler, 2001; Pillay, 2002; Garriott, 2006; Spears, 2010; Donohue, 2011; Ang'ana&Chiroma, 2021). If the urban church in Africa continues with its status quo, it will continue to miss the unrivaled opportunities in influencing its society in all sectors. It will miss out on the opportunity to reposition its mandate especially in impacting the growing youth in Africa and most importantly to transform the areas that have become the centers for oppression within the Africa context (Donohue, 2011).

These arguments form the framework of this qualitative systematic review article and aim to not only build on the findings of the already rich literature but also to derive theoretical claims on the practices and benefits of collaborative leadership that are critical in driving urban church influence in Africa. The specific question that guides and informs this article includes: what is the impact of collaborative leadership on urban church influence in Africa? The key objectives that this article aims to address are; a) to understand the collaborative leadership practices essential for urban church influence in Africa; b) to explore the benefits of collaborative leadership in the context of the urban church in Africa. The first part of the article provides the background of the study and contextual definitions. The second section considers the theological model of church influence. The third section articulates collaborative leadership practices and benefits. The fourth section provides the implications, recommendations, and conclusion of the article.

I. DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

To bring out the understanding of this article, there is a need to define key concepts used, with a critical understanding of their application in this article. This will enable us to have clarity, understanding, and appreciation of the subject matter as shared in this article.

Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative leadership is a leadership trait that involves breaking the bureaucratic structure and accommodate all stakeholders in the decision-making and consensus-building process (Daniel & Jared, 2016). Collaboration in any setting enhances organizational effectiveness. It encompasses more than just democratic principles and entails the aspects of building relationships within the organization, resolving conflicts, and more shared control (Ang'ana&Chiroma, 2021). In the context of this article, collaborative leadership is defined as the enhanced cross-functional relationship between the urban church, stakeholders, and the society where it operates (in this case, it is the urban cities in Africa) in a way that exerts influence on all societal sectors. If collaborative leadership principles are employed by urban church leaders, there will be increased internal and external engagement and relationship building between the church and society. There would be continuous mechanisms of resolving conflicts or differing opinions between the church and society. Finally, alignment of the purpose and mission of the church will be achieved.

Church Influence

From a historical perspective, the Church in Africa has played a role in the development of social services in advancing education especially in marginalized areas, medical care, shaping society culture and philosophy, and also an influential player in religion and politics (Boesak, 2005). However, in the recent two decades that influence seems to be fading with many African countries recording political unrests and skirmishes (such as in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, South Africa, Nigeria among others), increased droughts and famine, the democratization of corruption, deteriorating medical care and increased mental illness and suicidal cases, increased drug abuse among youth in Africa among other such increasing issues affecting Africa (Perkins, 2007).

Influence from the church perspective is understood as the transformation it impacts on the society which is an essential part of its mission. The Church in this case plays a critical role in inspiring, molding, and motivating the social-political and economic life of the communities and society around them. In the context of this article, influence refers to the capacity of the church to affect the character, development, or behavior of society and its people.

Urban Church

The Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Winners Chapel are among the churches with pan-African reach; United Family International Church in Zimbabwe, CITAM churches, Mavuno Church, Assemblies of God, PEFA church in Kenya and East Africa; CRC Christian Church and Church DoxaDeo in South Africa are among the most influential churches with a huge following in Africa (Wiki South Africa, 2020; ECOCNN, 2021). However, it's worth noting that most of these churches start peasant-style urban church plants and,

therefore, are unable to influence the intended urban folk and therefore fail to have the intended impact on society.

According to *The Holy Bible: New International Version [NIV]* (1983/2013) the early church started as an urban movement from Jerusalem and spread to the cities of Judea and Samaria (*The Holy Bible: New International Version [NIV]*, 1983/2013, Acts 8:5), Damascus (*NIV,* 1983/2013, Acts 9:2), Caesarea (*NIV,* 1983/2013, Acts 10:1), and Antioch (*NIV,* 1983/2013, Acts 11:19). This was the foundational growth of Christianity with an origin of urban cities and spreading through urban cities of the world to Africa cities (Garriott, 2006).

The urban church in the context of this article are churches located in a relatively densely populated settlement of socially cosmopolitan individuals with the greatest diversity in ethnicity, cultural, and socio-economical aspects (Gornick, 2002). This definition is not based on any biases but for the sake of understanding how collaborative leadership affects the growth of urban churches.

II.   A THEOLOGICAL MODEL ON THE URBAN CHURCH INFLUENCE

This theological framework highlights the historical to a contemporary journey of the influence of the church especially in urban cities of the world. It brings to perspective the essence of this article on the influence of the urban churches in Africa and especially in the context of making disciples in all corners of the world and in this case Africa which is the foundation of collaborative leadership (Pillay, 2002). The urban cities are indeed the places where sin abounds; from Sodom and Gomorrah to Jerusalem are among the cities mentioned in the (Miller, 2000). Urban cities are the areas where much human activity takes place and therefore prevalent for all types of vices, from substance abuses, fornications, homosexuality, terrorism, corruption, political unrest among other such vices and sins (Garriott, 2006). Urban cities are the hubs where evil grows freely due to the contemporary understanding of human rights, equality, and freedom of choice. These are areas where there are no moral checks and people are free to sin openly (Keller, 2002). In today's context, it is an avenue expressed through diversity and inclusion an as agenda. Furthermore, Conn and Manuel (2001); Garriott (2006) argue that the urban city's cultural setting, along with the realities of freedom of expression and human rights actions, allows for the opportunity of oppression of people.

From a theological perspective, Keller (2002) the urban cities are the spaces that churches need to prioritize their establishment and influence and establishing God's rule over societies. According to Wright (2006), Jerusalem, Babylon, Sodom, and Gomorrah are some of the cities where we have read of the mighty move of God being established. Similarly, Jesus Christ association with the urban setting is not a surprise (Keller, 2002). Born in the city (*NIV,* 1983/2013, Luke 2:11), crucified and rose near a city (*NIV,* 1983/2013, John 19:20), mostly preached in the cities (*NIV,* 1983/2013, Mathews 9:35), and also wept over the city (*NIV,* 1983/2013, Luke 19:41). Paul was also a city person born in Taurus and has been taunted as the greatest church planter, his efforts resulting in the growth and influence of modern-day Christianity (*NIV,* 1983/2013, Acts 22:3). He planted churches in the main cities (*NIV,* 1983/2013, Acts 16:11-40; 18:1-11; 28:16-31) which resulted in the spread and influence of the church in Europe, India, China, and even Africa (Wright, 2006).

This explains the argument of this article that the urban cities are the places where the church must proclaim its influence and achieve its mission. But for the urban church to have such massive influence in society, it must be able to overcome its internal divisions, overcome its limited impact belief, and most importantly learn to collaborate, understand, and partner with its society and its people.

Keller (2002) argues that God's Kingdom has a clear urban focus and the church needs to reciprocate the same and share His heart for the prosperity of the urban cities. The church needs to focus its mission and commitment on the influence of urban cities. The urban cities as already seen are a representation of oppression in our world. The presence of idolatry is no less pronounced in today's urban cities than in the first-century world (Keller, 2002). The push for personal gains through corruption, strive for political power in the interest of killings resulting from political unrests, clearly demonstrates the worship of sex, money, and power which are such examples of modern-day idolatry (Pillay, 2002).

It may be seen as if the urban church today has also been given to idolatry due to its safe approach to vices affecting society and its comfort in engaging in popular activities and preaching. This has prevented the urban church from advancing its intended influence as per church mission. Fear for safety, comfort, and tribal superiority is fueling the church's influence in urban centers of Africa today (Perkins, 2005). For the church to exact its intended influence as per the theological perspective, it has to be ready to expose and wrestle with the idolatry that keeps it from engaging the urban cities and this can only be done through collaborations with all stakeholders and partners in the society (Keller, 2002).

In as much as this theological model is appreciated by many, there are also several critics of this model. However, in the context of understanding the influence of urban churches in a collaborative leadership perspective, this model provides a sound framework for understanding the theological journey.

III. COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Collaborative leadership is God's style of leadership and He has modeled this in many ways. In many instances in the bible and even in contemporary times, God chose to partner with people yet He could have accomplished his entire redemptive plan by Himself. He collaborates with people to accomplish His mission (Ian & Michael, 2016). The church from a theological perspective is one body made up of many people most of them associates serving as volunteers. How the church influence links to collaborative leadership especially in the context of Africa urban church is what this section tries to bridge and explain. The urban church in Africa today exists in a more competitive space where each of the different doctrines and ministries is looking at expanding their urban reach in congregational numbers and influence at all costs (William, 2017). This makes the church devise strategies and tactics to enable them to maximize their influence and impact especially when the church perceives what they want is limited. Collaborative church leaders, however, need to try as much to foster more cross-denominational engagements, partnerships, and less competitiveness. Collaboration by church leaders will create win/win engagements in urban churches to enlarge their impact and influence. By working in partnership urban churches can utilize their collective efforts and resources. This would enable them to come up with joint societal solutions that will have greater reach in influence (Ian & Michael, 2016).

Collaborative leadership means church leaders seeking to include, inspire, motivate and influence teams, associates, and other stakeholders including cross-ministry teams to harmoniously work together to accomplish the shared goals as per the greater mission of the church of God. According to Conn and Manuel (2001), collaboration is the willingness to work together, and not against each other; a willingness to align, share views even differing views openly and precisely without fear of victimization (p. 173).

Collaborative leadership means urban church leaders not giving away their power and control but instead, integrate them with their teams, associates, and other stakeholders' interests to take a shared control for purposes of synergy and impact. Michael (2020) suggests that collaboration brings greater achievement and impact than when urban churches compete or rather focus on their ministry within the same urban setting. This however will call for church leaders to allow themselves to be more vulnerable and not defensive. The vulnerability of individual urban church leaders is what will enable them to build synergy and true collaboration for influence in the urban context (Daniel & Jared, 2016).

Collaborative leadership entails church leaders' accommodating what other people think and say, which requires courage, humility, openness, and vulnerability (Michael, 2020). Trust in each inter-denominational urban leader is critical and vulnerability plays a vital role in forming a solid level of trust. According to Trenholm (2001) when church leaders share openly with each other their strategies, pains, challenges, and align on how to tap into the influence of the urban centers, they make themselves vulnerable. However, the level of openness is driven by the perceived influence or power that the church leaders have, and therefore, the degree of trust present in their collaboration is directly impacted (p. 147).

While there is no one specific model for collaborative leadership today, this study suggests that greater urban church influence can be achieved if church leaders employ the below three essential practices:

Shared control and power: The current state of church leadership in many urban African cities is more hierarchical and dictatorial. Senior church leaders have personalized their leadership resulting in oppressiveness in many churches resulting in followers losing their own identity and voice as they're swept up into the personality and vision of the church leader (Ian & Michael, 2016). Church leaders in Africa must manage the tension of being both organizational leaders and Spiritual leaders. This will enable them to minimize the greater positional authority and a power distance between them, their teams, and their followers. An urban church leader must understand that each person and church ministries are uniquely gifted and are parts of one body, each doing what they do best but all working together for God's kingdom (Timmermans, 2020). This means that there is a need for the people and urban churches in Africa to connect. This will enable them to discover the services, resources, and opportunities each one needs for the bigger influence around the Africa urban cities. Leaders of urban churches must have the discernment to give responsibilities to their teams and associates according to each person's particular gifting and in keeping with the overall mission of the church (Ian & Michael, 2016).

Urban church leaders must understand that by jointly deploying resources available in their churches and forging joint missional ventures they are better equipped to solve the complex realities of urban life today (William, 2017). This does not in any way means that they should abandon their church ministries and missions but forge alliances to tackle critical or prevalent urban complexities that are affecting both parties in spreading their impact and influence. Collaborative leadership entails church leaders focus on building relationships through shared learnings, power, and accountability (Timmermans, 2020). By practicing such shared control and power, urban church leaders take pride in their strong ministry foundations, staff, and associates and align them together towards much greater influence in the urban context they operate in.

Leadership development: For urban churches to exact the influence they should, the aspect of people development should not be taken for granted. According to Daniel and Jared (2016), church leaders should

develop associates who are filled with the Spirit and are skilled at bringing creativity to the Africa problems, seeing conflict and change as opportunities, and empowering others (the communities) to use their gifts and skills and help resolve the challenges affecting the communities around. Church leaders must understand that the church's influence and impact are driven by their teams and their spiritual and personal growth and development must be an ongoing dynamic that needs to be continually re-evaluated and updated (Fullan, 2001). Inspired, motivated, and well-groomed teams of associates and staff will drive greater church influence as they will confidently engage the cities and influence individuals with authority, and knowledge. They will also be able to understand, discern and engage with some of the societal issues, challenges and propose better solutions that will be impactful.

Today, many of the roles that used to be performed exclusively by senior church leaders (such as Bishops and Pastors) are the work of highly-trained associates and volunteers in many urban churches including preaching (William, 2017). This is the key reason why their growth and development must be prioritized. It's also worth noting that no church leader is good at everything, and in an impactful and healthy church the strengths of the leadership, associates, and other stakeholders complement each other. Church leaders should therefore strive to employ less hierarchical leadership styles, and encourage associates to take up more leadership roles as part of their growth and development both from spiritual and personal context.

The discipleship experience: Urban churches in Africa should be a welcoming home where people of all ages, ethnicities, genders, and abilities learn to love and to help each other grow into the likeness of Christ (Timmermans, 2020). For the urban church to exact influence, it should be clear how discipleship experience is driven in their churches. Church leaders must understand that for them to lead their churches to influence the non-believers and society they operate in to gain more followers in the church, their discipleship experience is the key driver of church engagement. This calls for urban churches to carefully plan how they would engage within the context of the urban centers they operate that would lead them to excel in this area of discipleship with a focus of turning ordinary people from the society to be fearless influencers who will then go back to the society and influence every sector they operate in. This eventually is the multiplication influence factor that urban churches require and it has a theological foundation (Conn, & Manuel, 2001).

Discipleship entails enabling people to discover and use their strengths to impact their society (Plantinga& Sue, 2003). Especially in this season when the church in Africa is having unprecedented challenges in its influence on the urban community as well as resonating with the young people who are not religious; proper discipleship experience can be the solution to bridge this gap. The urban church must be open to tackling perceived tough topics in such conversations to offer solid understanding in the wake of many urban church scandals experienced in Africa. The church should discern, through their urban presence and partnerships, how their associates and church leaders can influence the urban communities in ways that connect to the needs and prevailing challenges in urban communities. This is the sure way for urban churches in Africa to influence the various sectors of society through discipline communities.

The above practices may appear deceptively simple. But, if the church in Africa is to thrive, and influence the urban centers during these contemporary times when many people and more so the majority of the youth who no longer find value in organized religion they must: a) rise above and employ these practices and work together through shared power and control and pull in resources for the good of greater church mission, b) be able to spend time developing their associates and staff in both spiritual and personal areas to enable them to have a solid foundation to influence and solve societal problems, and c) employ discipleship as a critical aspect of their mission. It's through discipleship that multiplication of impact and influence of the urban church will be achieved. There will be a lot to celebrate as a church seek to address and influence the needs of today's Africa urban centers through these collaborative practices.

IV.   BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

The central thesis of this article is to look at how collaborative leadership has impacted the urban church influence especially as it relates to the mission of the church in Africa.

Collaboration within the church, between churches and stakeholders in Africa, is critical because it reflects the very nature of the mission of the greater church of God. Whether it is a bilateral partnership between different church ministries or an informal alliance among like-minded ministries, collaboration is demonstrated through practical partnering. Collaboration in the urban church in Africa is not only critical because it's part of God's design for the church but also because collaboration has demonstrated increased church influence and impact (Daniel & Jared, 2016). Many church leaders fear that collaborative leadership will tremendously reduce their power and influence on their teams and stakeholders. However, it is important to mention that the impact of collaborative leadership on the influence of the urban church in Africa carries with it some greater benefits and impact beyond individual church leaders' power and influence.

Diversity: Collaborative leadership creates a greater sense of the diversity of the church in Africa. The church is made up of all kinds of people. When urban churches in Africa collaborate, they are plugging in the

concept of the church as the body of Christ with each playing a part in positively influencing the society (Foster, 2002). Church leaders must understand that each person is made in the image of God, each person is of inherent value, and each person is essential for the church and that is the essence of collaborative leadership. Church leaders must embrace diversity and ambiguity. They need to give the people and associates they lead permission for things to fail. This is how the church learns on the way on how best to address urban societal challenges.

Solidarity: Collaborative leadership creates solidarity in the church in Africa. The urban church in Africa needs to realize that they have a common goal to reach out to the society, positively influence it and make disciples who will multiply the influence (Korngold, 2006; William, 2016). Not only can the church benefit from each other to drive greater influence and impact, but they can also support, encourage and pray for each other.

Inspiration: Collaborative leadership ensures the church, its associate, stakeholders, and the people within the urban societies in Africa are creative and inspired for a collectively shared mission. When leaders, associates, and other stakeholders from different churches and sectors of society get together, they are often energized for the combined mission of the church (Adler, Proctor & Towne, 2005; Korngold, 2006). Multiplication of influence takes effect when the church and other stakeholders get together and focus on the collective church mission which is to make disciples. Church leaders need to understand that the urban reality in Africa is always changing. This means that they must adapt to solve the problems that change brings in the context of urban cities in Africa.

Capitalize on strength: Collaborative leadership enables church leaders in Africa and their ministries to capitalize on their strengths. Effective collaborations allow urban churches and their leaders to maximize their collective contribution rather than spreading themselves too thinly as most are doing today (Foster, 2002). The influence on society then ends up being negligible. When urban churches in Africa join hands with one another, they will discover different, often complementary, strengths. Effective collaboration will enable them to see what is needed to accomplish the bigger urban church vision, identify the missing pieces, and connect with resources to accomplish the vision (Miller, 2000). Getting all the pieces together, focused on a common objective, is a sure recipe for better outcomes and influence of the urban church in Africa.

The benefits of collaborative leadership on the influence of the urban church in Africa are real. Attention needs to be paid to these benefits to help the urban church have impactful contributions in every sector of society in the urban cities of Africa.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE URBAN CHURCH

Collaborative leadership provides a huge opportunity for the influence of urban churches if well understood and applied. There are practical implications for both church leaders and their associates if they are to tap into the potentialities of collaborative leadership as it affects the influence of urban churches in Africa. Collaborative leadership provides powerful principles, and practices that open opportunities. Hence, we must consider the following implications for church ministry especially as it relates to the influence of urban churches in Africa. Church leaders (who are majorly senior pastors and pastors) should make conscious efforts to understand collaborative leadership principles to position their churches to tap into the benefits of collaborations that will enhance their influence in the urban cities.

Urban church leaders should have an open mind to welcome new creative ideas and relevant ways on how to engage with its society in an urban setting (DeVito, 2002). Church associates and stakeholders must have the humility and hunger to engage in developmental avenues and opportunities that their churches have provided to foster both their spiritual growth and personal development (Daniel & Jared, 2016). The church and its associates should also make intentional efforts to reach out to individuals in the urban cities, disciple them and equip them on how to respond and positively influence the sectors of society they operate in. Lastly, the reality of collaborative leadership is here to stay with us, especially for church leaders. They must be ready to shelve their power ambitions and share control, find quick ways of resolving conflicts as they arise, and provide leadership in building synergy and relationships within the urban context.

V.   CONCLUSION

This article has discussed the impact of collaborative leadership on the influence of urban churches in Africa. The article argued that collaborative leadership is not only useful in the business world, or politics but, also plays a role in the influence of the urban church in Africa. The article further outlined that urban church leaders have a vital role in driving the collaborative leadership experience and highlights fundamental collaborative leadership practices to be employed if the church is to have a positive influence in its urban cities of Africa. The article has provided some practical implications of the role of the church leaders and their associates in fostering collaborative leadership that will re-position the church as a critical influencer of all sectors of society in Africa.

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