

ANNUAL REPORT

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2020

**Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological
Community Development and Research**



“30 years of prophetic work and witness”

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Executive Summary

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have already taken the side, the side of the oppressor, If the elephant has its foot on the tail of the mouse, and you say you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality” – **Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu**

In the midst of the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic that has already claimed the lives of more than 2.5 million around the globe, neutrality is inconceivable and not an option. The Ujamaa Centre 30 years of prophetic work and witness is based on the assertion that we are not neutral in situations of injustice. We are overtly bias towards the poor and the marginalized communities that are oppressed by economic and political systems and structures of our time. Our five programmatic areas are an attempt to address the challenges of the poor and marginalized communities using biblical and theological resources to achieve this. It is our ideo-theological praxis that provides the ‘theological shape’ to our intervention in the community.

Our Body Theology Programme is the flagship programme and provides much needed intellectual and pragmatic response to issues affecting ‘vulnerable’ communities especially women, LGBTOQA+ community, People living with HIV, People with Disability, survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV), and Sex workers. The programme engages with the lived realities and the embodied theologies of survival. The highlight for the programme is the Eudy Simelane Public Lecture that continues to raise awareness about the struggles of LGBTIQQA+ and those affected by GBV. The programme is not neutral, but bias towards those vulnerable in the community.

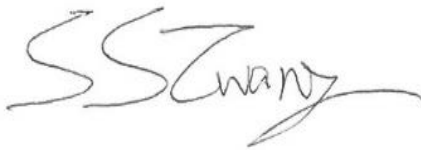
Our Bread Theology Programme is premised on the biblical concept of ‘Daily Bread’ in the Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6: 9-13). It is concerned with access to economic resources by the majority of the unemployed. It is primarily concerned with the triple challenge of chronic unemployment, abject poverty and huge income inequalities in society. It engages with economic theory and how it affects macro-economic policies that impact negatively on job creation. In exploring and critiquing the capitalist paradigm, the programme seeks to challenge the narrative that the unemployed are lazy. It makes it clear that the structural neo-liberal capitalist ideology creates this perception. The highlight for the programme is the Mzwandile R Nunes lecture that continue to highlight major socio-economic structural problems in the community.

Our Public Theology Programme remind us of the importance public prophetic theology that engages with the status quo. This progressive theology provides a counter-narrative to what the Kairos Document (1985) calls ‘Church Theology’. Elements of church theology have emerged in the public realm undermining gains already made during the apartheid era. The highlight of the programme has been the re-awakening of the public prophetic theology by the South African Council of Churches (SACC) especially during the Covid-19 lockdown, speaking truth to power on issues of access to basic needs by the communities affected and infected by the pandemic.

Our Earth Theology Programme engages with the most challenging contemporary challenge of climate change. It seeks to expose the inequalities with regard to how environment intersect with the economy. The issues of access to water by the majority of the poor and marginalized communities is one example of such inequalities. The highlight of the programme is the partnerships with key stakeholders in the water and climate change sector and the collaboration with KZN government.

Our People's Theology Programme is a grassroots mobilization programme that seek to provide solidarity support to religious and social movements. It builds biblical and theological capacity among the 'movements' contributing to their resilience and resistance against their oppressors. The highlight of the programme is the continued struggle for social and economic justice by the African Initiated Churches (AICs), the Abahlali Basemjondolo – Shackdwellers Movements and the Rural Network especially on the question of access to land in rural and urban areas in South Africa.

Aluta Continua.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SS Zwane', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Revd Sithembiso S Zwane

Director: Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics (SRPC), College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg:

Date: 5 March 2020

Body Theology Programme

Introduction

The fundamental objective of the programme is to engage with exclusion, marginalization and different forms of institutionalized discrimination and injustice. These forms of institutionalized discrimination manifest through Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBG), Gender injustice, HIV and AIDS stigmatization, Disability, Sex work, and homophobia and hate crimes.

Activities

The 2020 activities took place under very difficult circumstances of the lockdown due to the pandemic. It was evident from the 26 March 2020 when the President of the Republic of South Africa announced that the country was going to be under lockdown level 5 that it was business 'unusual' for everyone. Despite this challenge, work had to happen in our communities through both physical interaction and the use of the online platform.

First, Eudy Simelane lecture Eudy Simelane lecture was organized and presented by Ms Putuma Koleka on the 7 December 2020 using the virtual platform. The lecture was presented in a documentary style and received an overwhelming social media response and coverage. The lecture engaged critically with the realities of LGBTIQ+ realities especially black lesbians in South Africa. The stigmatization and discrimination of LGBTIQ+ are getting the backlash perpetuated by the dominant heterosexual-heteronormativity narrative that seek to legitimize heterosexual relationships and demonize homosexual relationships in the process. The lecture exposed these inconsistencies and hypocrisy of the society in dealing with the issues of human sexuality from a biblical and theological perspective but also from a socio-cultural perspective. The lecture was also covered by the BBC, it can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuteht-DahA&ab_channel=CharleneVanderWalt

Second, Christian Aid Contextual Bible Study (CBS) training focusing on developing biblical and theological resources for reflection on issues of environment, gender and economic justice. The series of three CBS workshop was organized and facilitated virtual on the 7th, 14th and 21th October 2020. The first workshop engaged critically with issues relating to gender injustice. The second workshop addressed issues relating to economic justice and how this impact on gender justice. The third workshop engaged with the contemporary reality of environment and how this intersect with both gender and economic justice. These workshops created the opportunity to develop new CBS resources for training for transformation aimed at building biblical and theological capacity.

Third, the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) training focusing on Disability was organized and facilitated on the 3-4 December 2020. The workshop was a partnership between the University of Exeter (UK) and the University of Namibia, the focus was on 'Religious and Cultural Perspectives'. The Ujamaa Centre was invited to facilitate the virtual workshop which attracted interests from different stakeholders around the world. The disability project is critical for the Ujamaa Centre because it engages with issues of exclusion and inclusion of people with disability from accessing socio-economic opportunities because of their physical challenges that they have no control over.

Fourth, the Gender and Religion activities included the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence 2020. A number of gender based activities were organized and facilitated in the communities of Mt Elias, Illovo, Mpolweni and greater Pietermaritzburg. These workshops were conducted during the lockdown when the problem of GBV escalated in the communities. This was not unique to South Africa, other countries also experience challenges with gender based violence. The CBS work was done on GBV in South Africa and beyond during the lockdown. The new resources on GBV will be developed to ensure that there is adequate biblical and theological resources to provide a counter-narrative to GBV in the communities. The importance of theology and prayer was important during the difficult time of Covid-19.

Gerald West, together with colleagues from Brazil and Kenya who have worked with the Ujamaa Centre over the years, presented a webinar on: Theology and Prayer: How Our Theology Engages Us and Motivates Us to Act. The webinar was attended virtually by over 80 people from around the world on 2 December, and is available on YouTube, where it is still being viewed as a resource: [16Days Webinar: Theology and Prayer: How our theology engages us and motivates us to act - YouTube](#). The Ujamaa Centre's contribution to this webinar was specifically on how we have used the Tamar Contextual Bible Study to engage both violence against women and alternative masculinities.

Fifth, the academic publications related to Ujamaa Centre's work especially the pedagogical orientation that empowers Ujamaa Centre to engage with issues of human sexuality, gender and economic justice from a liberation theology perspective includes Per Frostin's 1988 book, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* has been increasingly difficult to find in second-hand bookshops and almost inaccessible to African and other Third World students. Yet this book is a deep and thorough engagement with emerging (in 1988) Third World theologies. It was this book that inspired what was then the Institute for the Study of the Bible and Worker Ministry Project to change its name to the Ujamaa Centre. So it is fitting that the republishing project was imagined by the Ujamaa Centre as part of its own commitment to working within an African liberation theology trajectory. We are committed to accompanying this republication of Per Frostin's *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* with a regular cycle of symposia in which we gather together with colleagues from around the African continent, the Third World, the margins of the First World, and others whose work is shaped by liberation theology trajectories. This republishing project and the envisaged symposia could not have been fulfilled without the support of the Per Frostin Foundation in Sweden, the Church of Sweden Mission Fund for Mission Research. The book will be published in early 2021 and will be available in electronic and print format. We plan to have the electronic version widely distributed to the 'Third World'.

Results

First, some of the key results includes the strengthening of the Eudy Simelane project to ensure that it reaches more LGBTQA+ community in 2021 through the use of online/virtual platform and social media. The message of justice for the queer community will be communicated much quicker and easily through this initiative. Second, the partnership with Christian Aid continues in 2021 with the new workshop training planned in an 8 week format to engage with issues of social justice and public prophetic theology. Third, the gender justice

work will continue in partnership with We Will Speak Out and ACT Ubumbano activist organizations doing work on Gender Based Violence (GBV). Fourth, the academic work continues in 2021 with the reprinting of Per Frostin's book on liberation theology with a focus on gender and economic liberation. More academic papers will be published on LGBTIQ+ especially the relationship between hospitality and homosexuality using Genesis 18 and 19.

The Ujamaa Centre was approached last year by the United Methodist Church (UMC) in the United States of America (USA) to develop a manual on Gender Based Violence (GBV) as a result of the challenges that emerged around the world. This GBV resource will be completed by the end of April 2021 and can be used by a wider constituency engaging with GBV realities in different contexts around the globe.

Analysis

The critical component of Body Theology Programme is its focus on the vulnerable 'body' of the women. The HIV and AIDS, Gender Based Violence (GBV), Sex Workers and Disability have all have this susceptible 'body' as a common denominator. In addition to this is the 'vulnerability' of queer community that suffer from stigmatization, homophobia and hate crime perpetuated by ignorant communities using biblical and theological narratives that the Kairos Document (1985) calls 'Church Theology' to oppress and marginalized the 'other' in the community. The dominant heterosexual-heteronormativity uses the 'Church theology' narrative to undermine progressive actions against the stigmatization and discrimination of LGBTIQ+ community in the public realm. Both religion and culture are partners in the oppression of LGBTIQ+ community. It is therefore crucial that redemptive biblical, theological and cultural narrative is developed through the Contextual Bible Reading (CBR) process to deconstruct this dominant reading of sacred texts.

Conclusion

The Body Theology Programme is a strategic focus for Ujamaa Centre because it engages with 'vulnerable' constituency' in our communities. This work will continue this year. The organization is committed to Gender Justice and the protection of the vulnerable in our communities.

Bread Theology Programme

Introduction

The report provides the critical response provided to our constituency during the most difficult year in the history of the organization and the programme. The unprecedented Covid-19 caused heartache for many families and communities. The report focuses on (1) the Mzwandile R Nunes Lecture; the (2) Contextual Bible Study (CBS) training in the Western Cape with both the Warehouse and Uniting Dutch Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), the (3) academic work on Economic Justice using the methodology of See-Judge-Act and (4) the challenges of unemployment (5) and the pragmatic response to the challenges of food insecurity and debt under lockdown in KwaZulu-Natal.

Activities

The Bread Theology Programme activities focused on the use of Contextual Bible Study (CBS) to engage with issues related to economic justice challenges such as health, social grants, and unemployment and food security.

First, the Mzwandile R Nunes Lecture was organized and presented virtually on the 10 December 2020 focusing on the impact of Covid-19 on families and community at large. It was evident that Covid-19 did not only affect people's lives (health) but also livelihood (wealth) as the majority of those employed on casual or contract basis lost their jobs during the lockdown. The speaker, Ms Bongzi Zengele argued vehemently that Covid-19 differed from HIV and AIDS

Second, Contextual Bible Study (CBS) training with the Warehouse and URCSA was organized and facilitated on the 10-12 February and -4-6 November 2020 respectively engaging with the realities of poverty and indebtedness affecting the majority of the poor in the Western Cape. The two workshops on CBS focused primarily on the issue of social development and the impact of social grants for the poor.

Third, the presentations on economic justice as an academic project were made to different E-conferences. The coordinator gave presentations on two important conferences on Economic Justice using the See-Judge-Act methodology. The first conference was organized by the European Churches focusing on Diaconal and Missional work to eradicate poverty and malnutrition. This conference took place on the 21-23 September using the virtual platform. The theme of the paper was, "*Reality, Faith and Action: the impact of Covid-19 on Diaconal Work and Mission*". The second conference was organized by the Council for World Mission (CWM) on the 30th October to 1 November 2020. This conference paper was entitled "*Solidarity Assurance: Faith, Reality and Action*" engaging with the role of churches during the lockdown in addressing the challenges of food security and unemployment especially in the communities of the poor and marginalized.

Fourth, the challenges of unemployment and retrenchments under lockdown were severe for the communities of the poor and marginalized. The Statistics South Africa reported that under the lockdown level 5 2.2 million people lost their jobs because their companies could not survive the lockdown and had to retrench workers. The 2.2 million workers were bread winners which means more people were indirectly affected by these retrenchments. This

contributed to increase in demand for food as families struggled to meet their daily needs for food within their households. The latest statistics from STATS SA suggest that the unemployment rate is at 30.8% using the narrow definition of unemployment which excludes the discouraged work seekers, it means more than 10 million people are unemployed. However, in terms of a broad definition of unemployment, the numbers are estimated at more than 20 million. This therefore requires a collective response to address the problems of unemployment, poverty and inequality in South Africa.

Fifth, the pragmatic response from the Ujamaa Centre and ICCO to challenges of food insecurity and debt meant deviation from the original budget to accommodate buying of food parcels to respond to the immediate need of food insecurity in the communities of the poor and marginalized.

Results

The results from these activities relates to the following. First the Mzwandile R Nunes lecture generated interest from a wide range of constituency who suggested that a legacy project be developed to continue to honour his contribution to social and economic justice. This proposal was accepted, the plan is to provide a series of lectures on different themes annually and to work on a book project on economic justice. Second, the training on CBS for ecumenical organizations in the Western Cape has extended to other provinces who have shown interest in the train the trainer project. The URCSA in the Eastern Cape will be the next province to receive training in 2021. Third, the academic work on economic justice will continue this year with two more papers being published in this area. These papers will focus on economic justice and migration while the other will be on economic justice and human sexuality. Fourth, the workshops on unemployment and retrenchment resulted in the need for additional resources being set aside to support the poor and marginalized communities affected by the lockdown. The solidarity support will continue under different levels of the lockdown in 2021. Finally, the food security as part of the solidarity fund will be looked at as a continuation project in partnership with the Solidarity Fund.

Analysis

The dominant narrative in the public domain is that Covid-19 does not discriminate against people in terms of infections. This is relatively true especially if one considers the rich and poor countries, male and female, black and white etc. However, in terms of class inequality, it exacerbate the already existing socio-economic inequalities between rich and poor. The poor do not have the economic muscle to survive the challenges of lockdown, especially the loss of employment. This is not the case with rich people, they have the economic power and can navigate the tough economic realities presented by the pandemic. Those who manage companies can either sell their shares or retrench their workforce to reduce cost to their companies. The retrench workers are not able to find jobs immediately and this puts their families at risk of not accessing basic amenities like water, food, electricity etc.

Conclusion

The Bread Theology Programme working with the poor and marginalized communities remain committed to social and economic justice. The programme will continue to prioritize the Mzwandile R Nunes lecture, Contextual Bible Study (CBS) using the See-Judge-Act methodology. In addition, the academic resources on economic justice will be developed to

engage with the reality of poverty, unemployment and income inequality. The reality of this triple challenge contributes to food insecurity and indebtedness of already poor communities.

Public Theology Programme

Introduction

The primary objective of the programme is to build prophetic theological capacity among the church leaders across all faith traditions. The biblical and theological empowerment of churches and community is fundamental in the programme. The focus in this report is on the work done in 2020 in collaboration with KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council (KZNCC). During this lockdown period, many places of worship were closed as part the bid to reduce the spread of the pandemic as it is known that places of worship have a huge volume of people meeting.

Activities

A series of dialogues were held with church leaders to look at the impact of Covid-19 on them. Looking at how it impacted on them from a faith perspective, a health perspective and a theological perspective. KZNCC also assisted in the distribution of food parcels for foreign nationals residing within the region as they were affected by the pandemic.

First, the primary focus was providing accurate information was disseminated to the communities about the Covid-19. There was a concern about inaccurate information circulating and causing panic. As part of the programmes public prophetic mandate, a dialogue on Covid-19 and the churches was organized by the Ujamaa Centre in partnership with KZNCC on the 11 November 2020. The dialogue used the See-Judge-Act to analyse the reality (See) of the community under lockdown, to identify biblical and theological (Judge) resources to address the realities and to offer a pragmatic response (Act) to change the realities.

Second, the partnership with KZNCC focused primarily on the Act part of the method after the analysis of the realities and the identification of biblical and theological resources. The rationale for this was the reality of hunger and lack of water for the communities necessitating the urgent response to address these challenges. The church leaders provided support in addressing the challenges of food insecurity and water. The month of November and December 2020 was used to distribute basic amenities like food, water and sanitizers to the needy communities in KwaZulu-Natal. The church was visible engaging with the reality of Covid-19. The church took a prophetic posture at the time when the community was struggling to make sense of the situation.

Results

The partnership with KZNCC was strengthened during the lockdown showing solidarity with those affected by the pandemic. The dialogue gave great insight of what church leaders are facing. The prophetic voice that they are supposed to be is lost, it isn't the same as the church is also hurt and is affected by this pandemic. The closure of the house of worship meant loss of income for some, a disconnect from congregants which impacted on pastoral care and not able to make any input on the happenings of the country. Church leaders were vulnerable during this pandemic as they also felt the injustices from their own leaders.

Functioning was expected to continue as per normal even though life as we know it was far from normal. Foreign nationals from the community we work in were assisted with food

parcels as many of them had lost their jobs and some their businesses had closed down. Unfortunately they do not qualify for any governmental assistance, these parcels provided much needed relief to their community. There were some noted exploitation from other church leaders during this period, still requesting offerings and promising to pray for people out of this pandemic.

Analysis

During the dialogues the church was concerned about its ability to speak theologically and prophetically in the time of crisis. The church leaders were concerned about their own struggles and challenges under the lockdown affecting their own ability to provide solidarity support to the communities in the form of prophetic theology. It was this concern that led to the need to reflect on this from an academic perspective in a paper presented to the CWM e-conference. The paper attempted to explore the role of the church during the Covid-19 lockdown. Some of the key questions were, who is the church in the midst of Covid-19? This is a pertinent question that seeks to identify those who should be speaking theologically and prophetically during the crisis. If the church leadership is affected, does it have the capacity to do this important task without bias or prejudice? An analysis of this dichotomy is critical in the mission of the church.

Conclusion

The Public Theology Programme is important for the poor and marginalized communities struggling to deal with contextual challenges. This year the programme will focus on strengthening partnerships and networks with other faith based organizations.

Earth Theology Programme

Introduction

The primary objective of the programme is to speak theologically and prophetically on issues on environment and social justice. It engages with issues of access to clean water and climate change. The programme also seek to produce African theological resources for the protection of the environment.

Activities

First, the partnership with Green Anglicans and the development of Contextual Bible Studies on the environment. The Ujamaa Centre through its associate Rev Sabelo Mthimkhulu organized and facilitated a CBS on environment and migration on the 10 October 2020 using the book of Ruth. This workshop took place virtually and attended by environmental activists, churches and community.

Second, the partnership with University of Cape Town on issues of water shortage and desalination project. The plan to host a global water conference was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was planned for 12 May 2020 and was to be attended by governor from the United States Mr. Arnold Schwarzenegger who is a global water ambassador. The President of the republic of South Africa was also meant to open the Global water conference in Cape Town. Plans are still in place to continue with this conference in the future.

Third, our partnership with KwaZulu-Natal Government on Climate Change affecting poor communities. The challenge of flooding in most parts of KwaZulu-Natal is a major cause for concern.

Results

The partnership with the Anglican Alliance and the Green Anglicans on issues of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Green Anglicans specifically on environment and climate change. These partnerships are critical for the development of new biblical and theological resources for development and environmental justice in the communities.

The new global water conference is planned for 2022 in Cape Town to address the challenges of water shortage and desalination project. The challenge of water is major crisis not only in South Africa but around the globe. A number of cities around the world are struggling to access clean running water. Hence the need for the conference to deliberate on strategies to mitigate against this global challenge.

The KZN Provincial Government has set up a Provincial Task Team to deal with the issues of flooding, water shortage and climate change. Ujamaa Centre was invited to be part of this important structure. The director has been recommended to represent the organization in the task team.

Analysis

Climate change has created major challenges in the communities of the poor and marginalized contributing to challenges of water shortage and food insecurity as the results of land degradation. It is inconceivable to imagine climate justice without access to clean running water for communities. In the midst of Covid-19, access to water becomes paramount. This became evident when the need for water was raised as an important element in disrupting the transmission of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

The Earth Theology Programme will continue to explore creative ways to ensure access to water and to raise alarm on climate change and its impact on poor and marginalized communities.

People's Theology Programme

Introduction

The primary objective of the programme is to ensure that religious and social movements are given a 'voice' to articulate their struggles for recognition in their respective contexts. The programme works with the African Initiated Churches (AICs) and Social Movements like Abahlali Basemjondolo (Shackdwellers Movement) and Rural Network.

Activities

Ujamaa Centre in partnership with Institute for Religion, Governance and Environment in Southern Africa (IRGESA) organized a joint workshop to engage with the AICs on developing African theological resources to protect the environment. The AICs uses indigenous knowledge system to address community challenges of health, economy and politics. On the 30 February 2020 a dialogue was organized and facilitated by both organizations to identify key biblical and theological resources to engage with environment, land and gender.

On the 20 September 2020 a meeting with Abahlali Basemjondolo and Rural Network provided Ujamaa Centre with the opportunity to facilitate CBS work on issues relating to rural and urban land affecting the two social movements in KwaZulu-Natal. Ujamaa is committed to journey with these movements especially on building their biblical and theological capacity to speak prophetically and theological on the land issue in South Africa.

Results

A resource manual will be developed in partnership with IRGESA to engage with the AICs on identified themes. This resource will focus on biblical and theological components. This is a 3 year project that will begin this year drawing on the work of the Ujamaa Centre in terms of building theological capacity to effect social transformation in the community. The social movements (Abahlali Basemjondolo and Rural Network) have been part of the Ujamaa important events showing their support of our work on developing biblical and theological resources for social, economic and political justice.

Analysis

The AICs are a conduit for an important contextual decolonization project that seeks to change how Christianity is understood and practiced in Africa. The AICs are a typical African church that has been able to articulate African Christianity without the influence of Western Christianity. They have exposed the hypocrisy of Western culture masquerading as Christianity. The demonization of African culture being labelled as 'a bridge back to heathenism' is a concern for contemporary African scholarship.

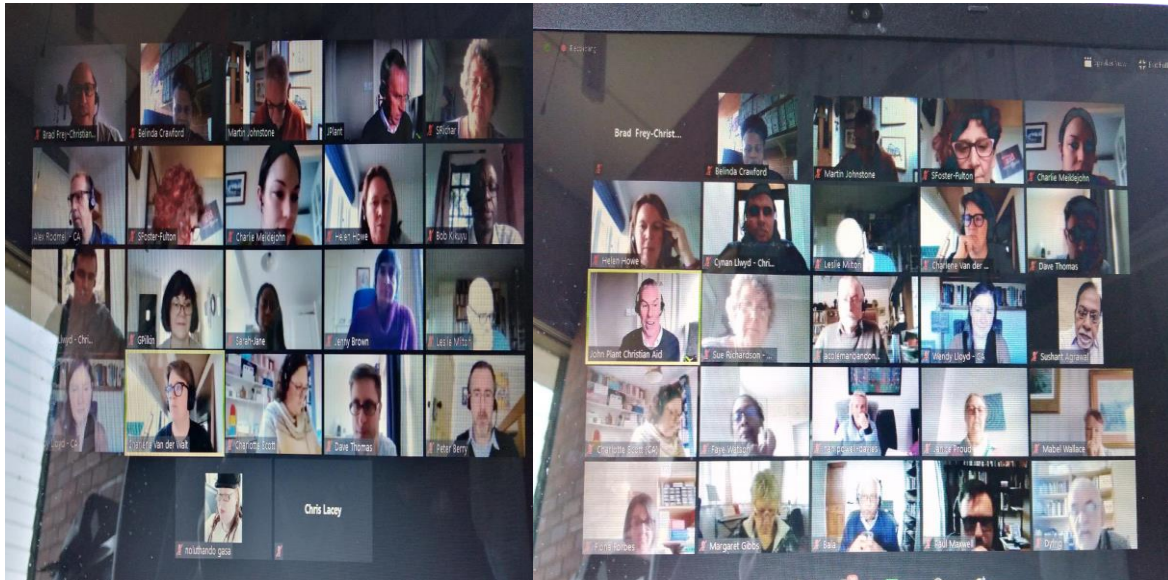
The Social Movements remain a strategic partner in the realization of social justice in our life time. What is particularly important about these movements is that they are non-partisan in nature which broaden the scope of mobilization and campaign. These movements are key in

the attempt to build a 'movement' of progressive forces challenging the policy formulations on issues of land and economic justice.

Conclusion

The People's Theology Programme will continue to prioritize religious and social movements in its quest to bring about change in the community. The important of building African theological resources for issues of land is the priority for the programme in the next 3 years.

Appendix



Zoom Workshops in 2020



Plesslaer and Dambuza Disability Group



Mpolweni Group



Mt Elias unemployed and HIV Groups



Unemployed Group



Illovo Gender Based Violence Group



Illovo Team