

## **Usurping Governance effectiveness in Faith-Based Organizations: Evaluation Opportunities and Challenges**

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**Abstract:** Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) have become common vehicles for integral human development among religious groups in Africa. The major conundrum is on measuring programs' effectiveness in the light of FBO governance. For a long time, religious institutions have not allowed their governance structures to be exposed to external assessments and evaluations based on the assumption that acts of charity or works of mercy by religious leaders do not need to be subjected to secular scrutiny. This assumption is now challenged by the advent of modern governance practices whose focus is on the primacy of accountability and alignment with organizational vision and mission. This study takes a critical look at the relevance of Private and Voluntary Organization's registration requirements in relation to the core business of Faith-Based Organizations of promoting integral human development. The article advocates for an evaluation approach that seeks to align the measurement of FBO governance effectiveness with the overall spirituality of the religious institution.

**Keywords:** Faith-Based Organizations, NGO governance, Divine Right of Kings, Integral human development

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### **Introduction**

Africa is becoming the epicenter of religious growth in the third millennium as the Western world move into the post-Christian era. The rise of African independent Churches as a reaction to the marriage of convenience between Western civilization and the Christian religion has sparked the need for a return to the African forms of liturgical celebrations. Classical Christian theology and the African traditional religious beliefs agree on the sacredness of any action geared towards the promotion of integral human development prompting the need for good governance. Ultimately, board evaluations are an indispensable part of development programming.

Evaluation systems have become key global enablers for good governance in both the private and public sectors. Evaluations are a recent phenomenon in the continent of Africa and are associated with the rise in donor-funded projects (Mapitsa, Tirivanhu & Popiwa, 2019). This justifies the dearth of empirical evaluation research on the performance of most programs implemented by different organizations. Faith-Based Organizations are still finding it hard to subject their governance structures to evaluations as a means to validate and improve organizational effectiveness. Demand-driven evaluations by donors focus on program performance to the detriment of the spiritual vision of the religious organization. Strategic plans are now used to attract funding and not to fulfill the religious aspiration of the institutions. Historically, this lack of appetite for governance evaluations among FBOs can be traced back to two important religious epochs of the Divine Right of Kings and the Charity Imperatives of the middle ages.

Prior to contemporary requirements for charity organizations to seek national registration before implementing projects and programs, FBOs used to assist vulnerable people using unstructured methods devoid of the need for accountability. Today, most countries and international donors prefer to assist registered FBOs. In this study, a Faith-Based Organization (FBO) is defined as "a community service agency which explicitly identifies with a religious tradition or religious organization or community" (Noor & Nawi 2016, p. 15). This implies a community service or development agency that engages skilled workers and has its identity and mission emerging from the religious teachings of a religious group. This definition as applied in this study does not make a distinction between registered or non-registered faith-based organizations. However, formality is of the essence as it helps relate intervention outcomes to governance evaluation studies of FBOs as agents of integral human development. The thesis of this article is that the services offered by FBOs do not necessarily reflect the religious content that defines their spirituality. This creates some governance challenges among FBOs.

This article addresses the question: To what extent do FBO (as intentional religions) programs incorporate the spirituality of the founding institutions of faith (organic religion) in their programming? To address this challenge, the paper will be structured as follows; the first part will discuss the influence of two religious frameworks of the Divine Right of Kings and the Charity Imperatives. In the second part, the paper will discuss the governance challenges faced by faith-based institutions. The third part will proffer some recommendations for effective governance of FBOs.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Evaluations in Africa are best pronounced in the context of the continent's drive to fight poverty, discrimination, bad governance, and underdevelopment. In the light of this background, religions have often been targets of criticism for "legitimizing inequalities and injustices such as poverty, as well as a driver for potential change and empowerment" (Schweiger, 2019, p. 54). Religion legitimizes inequality and injustices when projects, programs, and policies no longer address the integral development of the whole human person. Program designs often made by development technocrats focus on crafting winning proposals to the detriment of the spirit of the organization. The Board of Directors (mostly faith leaders) who are the legal holders of the organization, often with little or no experience in resource mobilization, subvert their oversight role to agents (employed program staff).

Due to the lack of an effective board monitoring system, beneficiaries are deprived of a voice in evaluating the spiritual contributions of FBO programs. The danger arising from such sins of omission is that FBO programs end up meeting donor expectations sometimes divorced from the development objective of the religious institution. This mismatch between the spirit of the institution and the governance ineffectiveness of FBO boards has origins in two important ancient epochs of the Divine Right of Kings and the Charity Imperative of the middle ages.

#### **The Divine Right of Kings**

During the Medieval period, a political and religious ideology of the supremacy of the leader as a representative of God emerged. It was anchored on the belief that states are willed by God and come into existence through God's ordinances (Maduekwe, 2019). Consequently, Kings and ecclesiastical leaders had absolute authority over their subjects and were not accountable to any human being. As earthly representatives of God, Kings and bishops/popes were thought to possess divine knowledge making them infallible in matters of governance (Burgess, 1992). The Pope as vicar of Christ, head of the Church, and spiritual leader claimed higher authority than the king who had temporal powers. Hence, an ideology developed that justified the supremacy of religious leaders as infallible and beyond reproach. This became known as the Divine Right of Kings.

Vestiges of the ancient theory of the Divine Right of Kings are still dominant among religious institutions. Religious leaders still harbor the belief that accountability is only rendered to God and not to human beings. Bishops, Pastors, Apostles, and other faith leaders demand accountability from their subjects but do not feel they should in turn account to them (Tumiwa, 2017). Transparency and accountability in most religious institutions emerge out of how power is exercised (O'loan, 2010). Consequently, the lack of transparency and accountability by leaders of religious institutions has resulted in financial scandals (Masimba, 2013), sexual exploitation, and child marriages (Dzimiri et al., 2017).

If program evaluation can be defined as a "systematic investigation of the value, importance, or significance of something or someone along defined dimensions" (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011, p. 287), then religious leaders should incorporate it in the leadership of FBOs. Governance evaluations do not pose a threat to divine leadership but rather enhance the stewardship mandate. The Divine Right of Kings impressed negatively on religious leaders along with monarchical leadership styles. The absence of governance evaluations is often blamed on lack of resources, lack of requisite skills to undertake effective evaluation, fear of negative results that undermine the public image of the church, extra burden for workers, and the belief that it has no material contribution to the spirit of FBOs (Metz, 2007).

#### **The Clarity Imperative**

Most not-for-profit organizations like charity organizations or Private, Voluntary Organizations (PVO) emerged out of the practice of charity common among religious Institutions. All religions of the world practice some form of charity towards the poor and vulnerable groups in their society. In traditional Zimbabwe, this is attested by the concept of the *Zunde RaMambo / Isiphala SeNkosi* (King's Granary) among the traditional Shona and Ndebele people of Zimbabwe respectively (Ringson, 2017). In line with African belief systems, the *Zunde Ramambo/ Isiphala SeMkosi* was a cultural strategy for storing grain at the Chief's court to feed orphans and vulnerable groups during times of need and in the spirit of *Ubuntu*. In the Judeo-Christian faith, feeding the poor and hungry was considered a central religious tenet of faith (Crimm 2008, Gardner 2015). Over time, charity work became organized into what became known as social work (Walton, 2007).

At the heart of social work is the desire to improve the conditions of life of vulnerable communities and individuals. For centuries, religious groups have improved people's lives through donations to the poor. In Africa, the practice was popularized by Christian missionaries during and after the colonial period through donations like food, clothes, and school fees among others. There is a belief that aid that does not capacitate the beneficiary in alleviating poverty or improving development in Africa is ineffective (Gukurume, 2012).

Recipients of charity or donations are excluded in the decisions about the form and substance of donations given. Religious leaders who for centuries have understood themselves as champions of charity towards the impoverished people of Africa have become immune to the development potential of the people they serve.

### **Background to FBO Governance**

Research into how religion positively impacts people's lives is vast. Contrary to the European Union's exclusion of religion in the development agenda, the 9/11 experience in the USA has demonstrated the relationship between religion and modernization (Ellis & Haar, 2006). Religious conflicts have demonstrated their ugly impacts on the socio-economic development of Sudan and Nigeria during the past decades (Amanze et al., 2019). Aid agencies are now realizing that religious attitudes impact secular development and are now shifting focus from estrangement to engagement. The World Health Organization reported that 40% of development in Sub-Sahara Africa is led by faith-based organizations (WHO, 2007). However, there is a dearth of literature on the effectiveness of FBOs as measured through scientific methods of evaluation.

In a study carried out by the Centre for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society on the effectiveness of Faith-Based Organizations, a distinction was found between organic religiosity and intentional religiosity (Dululio, 2002). 'Organic religion' was used to mean the affiliation of individuals or groups based on the faith component. This group was found to possess an objectively positive emotional intelligence towards development outcomes. The 'intentional religion' which in this study is referred to as the faith-based organization is the initiatives by organic religious leaders for which faith may not be a key component of programming (Noor & Nawi, 2016). It is the religion one goes through at a particular time, and for a particular purpose (Johnson, 2002). However, intentional religion always exists as an affiliate of the organic religion. This distinction serves to highlight the governance challenges posed by theseparation ofthe religious institutionsfrom their development arms, the FBO, in terms of their spirit, functions, and approaches to integral human development.

Existing literature attests to the reality that faith-based organizations (intentional religion as the subject of this study) have from time immemorial implemented charity programs on behalf of the poor and underprivileged members of society (Tadros, 2010). However, the traditional religious spirit of charity that guidedFBO programminghas been compromised in countries like Zimbabwe where government policy on PVO registration has been standardized thereby undermining the uniqueness of each religious institution. PVO constitutions are prohibited from articulating their respective religious values and aspirations. This has implications for FBO governance as programs are no longer guided by the spirit of the religious institution. PVOconstitutions are differentiated by their objectives, which in most cases are required by law to exclude religious values.

The focus of FBO charity is to promote integral human development. The concept of integral human development has both religious and social implications as a state of personal well-being in a just and peaceful environment. It is a "long-term dynamic process based on human dignity and right relations: i.e., each person's relations with God, self, others, and all of creation"(Heinrich, 2008, p. 5). Integral human development is a rights-based development strategy that lifts up intellectual and spiritual well-being among people as fundamental to human dignity. Since integralhuman development is rights-based, and, that human rights are derived from natural rights, it follows that human rights are moral entitlements that every individual possesses by virtue of being a human person (Melden, 1959). Consequently, for FBOs, interventions that do not promote integral human development are deemed lacking in substance. In essence, FBO development programs cannot be divorced from the spiritual foundations of their religious institutions.

### **Method**

This paper used a qualitative research method comprising secondary data obtained through a review of related literature from published articles, books, online news, and reflections. Primary data was obtained through interviews with leaders of faith-based organizations as well as through participant observation gained in the past 20 years as a development practitioner within a faith-based organization.

### **FBO self-understanding and Mission**

Most FBOs in Zimbabwe see their vision and mission as tied to their religious affiliation while their activities are often seen as purely philanthropic. The distinction between 'organic religion' and 'intentional religion' continues to pose a serious challenge to the governanceofFBOs in Zimbabwe. Traditionally, charity, as practiced under organic religion, followed the spirit of the religious institution. ReligiousInstitutions were akin to fact that the logic of board effectiveness and program evaluation is based on the need to strengthen the quality of the intervention and improve program outcomes (Plottu & Plottu 2011). Traditional charity programs' effectiveness was measured by inputs and outputs indicators. The common assumption was that program benefits accrue to the beneficiary acting in accordance with his/her religious imperatives. However, the

formalization of intentional religion in the form of Private and Voluntary Organizations has presented a new dimension to charity. The Zimbabwean FBOs have not been spared from these challenges.

The 21st century has seen a multiplicity of FBOs in Zimbabwe. Traditionally, the major religious players were the development arms of mainline churches like Caritas (Catholic Church), Lutheran Development Services (Lutheran Church), and Mendra (Methodist Church) among others. To date, several Christian denominations and other faiths like the Muslim religion have instituted similar development arms within their institutions. Two major reasons accounting for this rapid increase in FBOs include the need to address the humanitarian crisis in the country caused by the deteriorating socio-economic situation, and the rise in Pentecostal and African Independent Christian Churches who are competing for space in the community development arena. Several community programs are being implemented by religious institutions, including the establishment of centers of learning and health facilities as part of the promotion of integral human development.

Findings from key informant interviews carried out for this study showed that FBO boards are less interested in the strategic alignment of their mandates in the development agenda and the spiritual foundation of their religious institution. This was demonstrated by the fact that all FBOs assessed confessed that no board evaluations were ever carried out on their organizations despite the several board meetings carried out to assess the operational effectiveness of the organization. FBOs are under obligation to carry out financial audits and program evaluations as part of the funding requirements. However, funders often restrict their assessment to the existence of the board and their participation in ensuring program success. Funders and donors seldom demand the alignment of the objectives of the intentional religion with the parent organic religion.

It also emerged that there are three major motivations for organic religions to found an intentional organization in the form of an FBO. The first motivation is spiritual. Religions understand their mission as tied to the promotion of religious values, both eschatological and contemporary. The latter feeding into the former. In this instance, integral human development is synonymous with the spiritual, social, economic, and psychological development of the person (Vlach, 2017). This supports the Christin concept of the kingdom values that formed the central mission of the person of Christ. Improved well-being and the ability to live life to the full are demonstrative of divine blessings as a reward for one's obedience to the deity. The major challenge associated with the spiritual motivation for founding an intentional organization is the absence of relevant objectives and indicators in organizational documents, specifically in their PVO constitutions. As such, many organizations measure board effectiveness based on secondary indicators divorced from the core business of the organic religion.

The second motivation for religious institutions to found FBOs in Zimbabwe was the need to address the vulnerabilities of the society in post-independence Zimbabwe. Most FBOs were founded after the year 2000 due to the country's deteriorating socio-economic situation that began in the aftermath of the Fast-Track Land Reform program. Several scholars would like to trace Zimbabwe's economic decline to the early 90s when the country was forced by the Brettonwood institutions to embark on the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (Mupedziswa & Gumbo 1991, Nelson 1990, Kawewe & Dibia 2000). However, the 1999 national Referendum pushed the government into legislating the Land Reform Program. The Western world responded with sanctions that left the country with no access to international debt financing. NGOs began to fill in the gaps left by the government by assisting communities with food, agricultural inputs, water and sanitation, and many other development initiatives. Religious leaders responded by forming FBOs to complement government and NGO efforts.

Politically, the land reform program ignited the rise in opposition politics and civil society activism. The government, led by the ruling party ZANU PF, accused the civil society of interfering in the politics of the country by supporting opposition political parties (Madhuku 2004). To curb the potential of NGOs and FBOs from participating in politics, the government standardized the registration of NGOs and FBOs through the enactment of the Private Voluntary Organizations Act. The Act does not provide room for FBOs to include objectives that seek to promote religious values (PVO Act, Chapter 37:05). Consequently, PVO registration adopted a general approach to development devoid of the spiritual dimension in line with the religious foundation of the organization.

The third motivation for founding FBOs is the need to access international funding for both institutional growth as well as driving the spiritual goal of the organic religion. Through donor funding for several programs, religious institutions have managed to construct churches, educational institutions, health facilities, training centers, and several social enterprises most of which have long-term financial benefits to the parent religious institution. FBOs have been used as instruments of resource mobilization. Most religious institutions have developed through funding for programs. Historically, missionaries used to access funding for evangelization under the program of expanding missions. However, this has since dropped drastically and donors have turned their focus toward vulnerable individuals and communities.

According to the findings of this study, traditional program effectiveness has been limited to the effectiveness of activities implemented by the FBOs. The assumption taken by organic religions is that any program output and outcomes that save the charity imperative suggest a contribution to integral human development. On the part of funders and donors, the untested assumption is that FBO programming by virtue of them originating from an organic religion is effective at board levels (Van Wees & Jennings, 2021). This follows the example set by missionaries during the colonial period of the effective education and health institutions led by religious entities in Zimbabwe. Most leaders of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe owe their education and revolutionary ideas to mission schools and their missionary endeavors (Tshili, 2020). The effectiveness of mission schools is confirmed in a study carried out by Nyagura (1991) which discovered that students in mission schools performed much better than in other schools.

### **FBO Legislative Challenges**

The historical success of education and health institutions owned by religious organizations in Zimbabwe cannot be correlated with FBO effectiveness as these are guided by different legislations. FBOs are guided by the PVO Act (Chapter 37:05) while the education and health programs are guided by the respective legislations of their parent Ministries. Mission schools have a leeway to exercise and enforce their spirituality among the learners within the education sector without undermining government educational policy. The same privilege is available at health institutions. On the contrary, the PVO Act does not permit the use of unique institutional religious language within the constitution to express ownership or operational methodologies of FBOs. FBO constitutions are limited to expressing their vision and mission through objectives that use a neutral language. There is no room for structuring the organization in ways that incorporate the influence of their respective religious spiritualities.

According to the FBO constitutions reviewed, intentional religions are led by an Executive Committee comprising of the Chairperson, the deputy chairperson, the secretary, the deputy secretary, the treasurer, and at least two committee members. Since this is the highest responsible authority under the PVO Act, it presupposes that the same committee represents the governance board of the institution. This presents both governance and agency theory challenges. Where the Executive committee doubles up as a board of governance, it creates a conflict of interest where an employee cum director has a private interest that could improperly influence decisions or actions in the performance of public duties (Davies 2000). Conflict of interest, in this case, can come in the form of financial or non-financial interests. Evaluations can pick governance discrepancies on conflict of interest, but organic religions often find themselves unable to officially address the challenge.

It also emerged from the study that the PVO registration requirement of having the Executive Committee as the highest authority presents an agency problem. In all the FBOs assessed, the executive management is divorced from the board of directors. Agency theory denotes the conflict of interest between the employed executive management (as agents) and the shareholders (religious Leaders). Management's primary motive in running the FBO on behalf of the organic religious organization is to earn a living through salaries and benefits. Religious leaders on the other hand value the growth of the organization in the promotion of integral human development. This conflict in primary goals between the religious leaders and their management team is what has been termed an agency problem. The PVO constitution does not make a distinction between the Executive Committee, the management, and the board of directors. Consequently, most FBOs, and for practical purposes, have the executive management (employees) and the boards of governors (religious leaders). This arrangement, which is not supported by FBO constitutions often presents challenges for governance evaluations.

Today, most faith-based organizations are recipients of funds from multilateral institutions and international donors most of whom receive their funds from federal governments (Johnson, 2002). FBOs are now obligated to account for the assistance given to their organizations and to evaluate the impact of their interventions. FBOs have not inculcated a culture of governance evaluations for their intentional religions outside 'demand-driven' evaluations by donors. This supports the view that leaders of organic religions who are the responsible authorities of faith-based organizations display an affinity to Medieval Divine Right of King's theory and the Charity imperative both of which do not promote beneficiary feedback and leadership accountability in program management (Singh, 2020). Other reasons cited as causes of governance ineffectiveness include, resource constraints, the absence of adequate M&E systems, and the lack of M&E budgets. Existing evaluation reports reviewed showed a lack of valid, reliable, and scientific data on governance, and this explains the mistrust that some donors hold against FBOs (Van Wees & Jennings, 2021).

Another governance challenge observed by the study was that in most faith-based organizations, program or project selection is often dictated by available funding opportunities rather than local needs (Mapitsa et al., 2019). To facilitate this option, most FBO strategic plans have broad objectives that can accommodate several funding opportunities. In this regard, organizational growth is measured by the number of programs attained and the sizes of budgets. The implications of this aid trap are that FBOs have ceded their control over need

identification to donors who in turn are now dictating the type of interventions that must be implemented. For example, Caritas, a Catholic development agent has programs on artificial family planning supported by international donors through the government of Zimbabwe at Catholic health facilities contrary to the Church's focus on natural family planning. Catholic spirituality does not promote the use of artificial family planning, yet they are required as part of the Ministry of health policy direction to implement such programs.

### **Challenges and Opportunities for Evaluation**

The most significant governance challenge for effective evaluation among faith-based organizations is the question of self-identity. Zimbabwe's FBOs find it difficult to justify themselves as integral human development agents against other non-governmental organizations. Some define themselves as purely development agents like any other NGOs while others see their interventions as a contribution to the mission of their faith affiliation. Those who consider themselves no different from other NGOs showed an affinity to the need for evaluations. On the contrary, those whose identity is linked to their religious affinity believed that evaluations cannot measure the faith component which is their rallying point. This challenge confirms Harden's (2007) assertion that there is generally no approach to measure the religious and spiritual components of faith-based interventions. It raises critical questions about whether the evaluation of interventions by faith-based organizations should assess the spiritual and religious components of the intervention or use a conventional approach used by the social sciences.

The distinction between organic religion and intentional religion is very apparent. Faith-based organizations are initiatives founded by and affiliated with organic religion. In other words, FBOs derive their purpose and identity from an organic religious or a religious group (Noor & Nawi, 2015). There is a mismatch between values expressed under organic religion with those of intentional religion due to the lack of the faith component in the latter. This lack has been exacerbated by the legal requirements for registration as a Private and Voluntary Organization where constitutions guiding all non-governmental organizations follow a similar format. The format does not allow for direct faith-related objectives. However, it takes away the authority over the registered faith-based PVO from its organic source and gives it to the Ministry of Labour and Social Services. The PVO speaks of annual reports to be submitted to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare but is silent on evaluations that are key to understanding community benefits deriving from faith-based organizations' interventions.

The second challenge is related to the formalization of faith-based organizations. The legal requirement for registration as a PVO gives the governance authority to Executive Committee. Very often, leaders of religious groups who are the 'responsible authorities' of faith-based organizations are excluded from the PVO governance structure. Agency conflicts between the executives and the religious leaders militate against the need for evaluations. Evaluations through essentially useful for the organization, have the potential to expose the executives as agents of the organization. Only faith-based organizations with an active board of directors outside the executives can command an evaluation. However, very few faith-based organization has strong boards capable of providing development leadership.

The third challenge is the lack of resources for initiating governance evaluation in the organization. The absence of good FBO governance has been blamed on the lack of funding for administrations purposes. Often, international donors restrict their funds to specific programs with insignificant budgetary allocations for organizational development and capacity development. M&E systems are then reduced to program levels while absent organization-wide. Most faith-based organizations in Zimbabwe bemoan the lack of funds for organizational assessment. They allocate blame for poor evaluation of programs to the absence of skilled and permanent evaluators within the organization.

However, there is funding potential for governance evaluation among faith-based organizations as most international funding agencies are shifting away from concentrating on funding governments only in favor of private sector investments including funding for civil society (Noor & Nawi, 2016). Good governance in Africa has been hampered by corruption and many donors are becoming skeptical of African governments when it comes to development funding (Momoh, 2015). Funding for civil society, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations has increased in the past decades signifying a positive relationship between donors and non-governmental organizations.

While existing literature supports the view that the capacities of FBOs do not match those of secular organizations (Johnson, 2002), the presence of international donors in the country who are funding local FBOs has brought essential skills transfers. Donors are assisting FBO in adopting international standards and the demands for governance training have raised the quality of FBO programming. Most FBOs have benefited from partnerships with international donors and implementing agencies. These partnerships offer a great opportunity for organization development.

### **Recommendations**

FBOs' program evaluations should specify their goals and objectives highlighting the target focus between the faith component and community benefits. The faith component should not be relegated to the periphery as it constitutes an important identity creation variable for faith-based organizations.

There is a great need for FBOs to lobby for legal revisions to the PVO Act to include constitutional provisions that reflect the core values of each particular FBO as agents of religious institutions. Care should be taken to avoid discrimination based on religion. The current provisions serve the political interest of some sections of the society but create agency problems for FBO governance.

FBO recruitments and beneficiary selection should be based on merit as against faith affiliation. While it is important to maintain the values of the religious institutions, it is necessary that officers leading the organization should be equipped with the right skills. The skill of M&E has become an important institutional strength that should be assessed during the recruitment

FBOs should appoint an effective and efficient Board of Directors to ensure corporate governance. The board members must be trained properly on how to execute their responsibilities. The founding leaders should ensure the executives account to the board for their work

### **Conclusion**

Faith-Based organizations have a contribution to make to Africa's development. The world is waking up to appreciate the historical role that religion has played in assisting communities. However, the FBOs should in turn improve their governance through regular evaluations and organizational capacity assessments. A culture of board evaluation should be inculcated into the operations of FBOs irrespective of the limitations provided under the PVO act. The international donors should take advantage of the opportunities created by FBOs in reaction to the marginalized communities. However, they should assist them to develop strong governance systems. Further research is needed to measure the effectiveness of FBOs in Zimbabwe under the current socio-political environment of the country.

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