Faith-based and Asset-based Congregational Diakonia in a Malagasy Lutheran Context
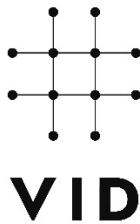
A Qualitative Study of the Use Your Talents Project

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Faith-based and Asset-based Congregational Diakonia in a Malagasy Lutheran Context:
A Qualitative Study of the Use Your Talents Project

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor (Ph.D.)

VID

VID Specialized University

List of abbreviations

ABCD: Asset–Based Community Development project

FBO: Faith–Based Organizations

FANILO: *Fampandrosoana Anivon'ny Loterana* or the FLM development department

FLM: *Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy* / MLC Malagasy Lutheran Church

INSTAT: *Institut National de la Statistique*

KMSL: *Komity Mpandrindra ny Synoda Lehibe* (Coordinating Committee of the General Synod)

LWF: Lutheran World Federation

NEHS: The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities

NGO: Non–Governmental Organization

NMS: Norwegian Mission Society

NORAD: Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

NSD: Norwegian Centre for Research Data

UYT: Use Your Talents

WCC: World Council of Churches

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Abstract

After decades of ignorance, scholars and international development actors have come to embrace faith–based organizations (FBOs) as important actors in poverty alleviation. FBOs have the potential to be important contributors to community development – especially in the context of the Global South, which suffers from a lack of external resources – through the participation and involvement of their members. Community development projects may compensate for the inability of many states and governments to serve people and meet the basic needs of those living below the poverty line. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to broadening public knowledge and literacy about a specific asset–based community development project (ABCD) called Use Your Talents (UYT), which has been implemented in the Lutheran Church of Madagascar (FLM). The study addressed through local–level analysis how the UYT project is supporting FLM congregations' engagement for community development. The data was collected with an ethnographic–inspired approach through participant observations and semi–structured interviews from four congregations within three FLM synods between July and October 2018. The data was analysed with thematic content analysis with ABCD, lived religion and gender perspectives. The findings demonstrate that religion might be one of the constitutive forces behind individuals' and congregational community development's engagement. The research also shows that the UYT approach includes some elements of ABCD methodology that appears to inspire collective action. Additionally, the results indicate that the UYT project promoted women as important actors in community development. The significance of this study is that it informs the empirical understanding of congregational community development dynamics with a focus on Christian religion/faith as an intangible asset, assets–based methodology and women's contributions. The study also shows that congregations as local civil society organizations have the potential to

contribute substantially to community development through their members, who are the Church's greatest asset.

Etter tiår med uvitenhet, omfavnes trosbaserte organisasjoner som viktige aktører i fattigdomsbekjempelse. Trosbaserte organisasjoner kan potensielt være viktige bidragsytere i lokalsamfunnsutvikling, særlig i det globale sør som lider under en mangel på eksterne ressurser, gjennom deltakelse og involvering av medlemmene sine. Lokalsamfunnsutviklingsprosjekter kan kompensere for mange staters og myndigheters manglende evne til å bistå sine borgere og møte de basale behovene til de som lever under fattigdomsgrensen. Målet med denne avhandlingen er å bidra til bredere kunnskap om et spesifikt ressurs–basert samfunnsutviklingsprosjekt kalt Use Your Talents som har vært implementert i den lutherske kirken på Madagaskar (FLM). Gjennom analyse på lokalt nivå adresserer studiet spørsmålet om hvordan Use Your Talents støtter menighetenes engasjement i lokalsamfunnsutvikling. Datamaterialet ble samlet ved hjelp av en etnografisk inspirert tilnærming, gjennom deltakende observasjon og semi–strukturerte intervjuer i fire menigheter i tre synoder i FLM, i perioden fra juli til oktober 2018. Materialet ble analysert ved hjelp av tematisk innholdsanalyse av ressurs–basert lokalsamfunnsutvikling, levd religion og kjønnsperspektiver. Funnene viser at religion kan være en av de konstruktive kreftene bak individers og lokalsamfunns utviklingsengasjement. Forskningen viser også at Use Your Talents tilnærming inkluderer elementer fra ressurs–basert lokalsamfunnsutvikling som ser ut til å inspirere kollektiv handling. I tillegg, tyder resultatene på at Use Your Talents løfter kvinner som viktige aktører i lokalsamfunnsutvikling. Betydningen av studiet er at det informerer den empiri– baserte forståelsen av dynamikken i menighetsbasert lokalsamfunnsutvikling med et fokus på religion/tro som en immateriell ressurs, ressurs–basert metode og kvinners bidrag. Studiet viser også at menigheter som lokale sivilsamfunnsorganisasjoner gjennom sine medlemmer, som er kirkens største ressurs, har potensiale til å bidra substansielt til lokalsamfunnsutvikling.

The Articles of the thesis

Article 1

Rakotoarison, Z. R.; Dietrich, S.; Hiilamo, H. T. (2021)

Faith as an asset in a community development project: The case of Madagascar. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 77 (4), a6470.

Article 2

Rakotoarison, Z. R.; Dietrich, S.; Hiilamo, H. T. (2019)

Tackling poverty with local assets: A case study on congregational asset–based community development in a Lutheran church in Madagascar. *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice*, 10 (2), 119–140.

Article 3

Rakotoarison, Z. R. (2024)

Gender and power relations in a Malagasy congregational asset–based community development project. *Religion & Development*.
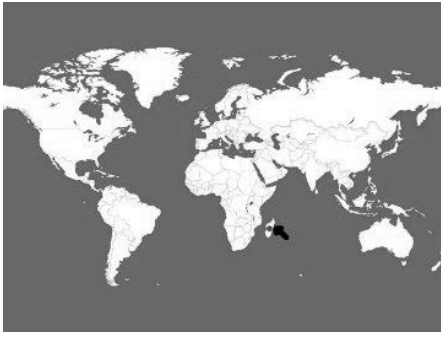
Legend: Madagascar is pointed out with a black arrow in the world map, and the centre of the three synods are marked with red points.

Map 1:   Maps of Madagascar and of the world

Sources: Central Intelligence Agency (2016) and Sketch App Sources (n.d.)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Motivations and rationale for the study

Many states and governments in sub–Saharan Africa are unable to serve their people to meet their basic needs, even with billion–dollar support in the form of loans and donations from the international community. As many as 42% of the population of sub–Saharan Africa lived below the poverty line[1], even before the pandemic (Schoch and Lakner 2020). Faith–based actors have played and continue to play an increasing role in local development in the Global South. This is also the case in Madagascar (Skjortnes 2014a, 47–56). The Use Your Talents–capacity building project (UYT) represents the development from purely needs–based and rights–based development work supported by external donors towards asset–based development, owned and driven by people in local congregations. UYT means congregations work to contribute to improve the life of local communities in which they are situated by initiating development activities through the use of talents or assets of its members and other people in the communities (Haus 2017, 18). Talents encompasses skills, knowledge, relationships and resources (Haus 2017, 18). The focus of this research is the UYT project, which started within the Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM[2]) in 2008, a project based on voluntary work and a focus on local human resources and networking (Haus 2017, 18). The UYT project was initiated by the FLM, but funded by NORAD, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation through Digni[3] a Norwegian umbrella organization for several Norwegian mission societies, churches

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[1] Measured by those living on less than $1.90 per day.
[2] FLM stands for Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy.
[3] https://digni.no/en/digni–what–is–this/

and organizations, among them the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS). The question this study seeks to answer is **how the UYT project is supporting congregations' engagement in community development within four congregations in three FLM Synods**. The overall aim is to contribute to broadening public knowledge and literacy about UYT and the church's local engagement in congregational community development or congregational diakonia. This study's motivation is to further the academic interest and research on ordinary Christians' experience in asset–based community development initiatives in the Global South and produce systematic knowledge and understanding of the UYT project.

The actual development work of the FLM is a continuation of the work of its mission's founders. These missions, in addition to evangelization and church planting, set up institutional development work encompassing education, health and rural development (Skjortnes 2014a, 50–51). From 2004, FLM wanted to include and engage its local churches and members in the diaconal work of the church. The shift from institutional and foreign development aid to local actors and local resources is based on FLM's development policy from 2004 (Rakoto 2017, 9) and vision. FLM's development policy is based on a holistic understanding of humankind, corresponding well with a traditional Malagasy understanding. A person is formed of both a physical body, an abstract nature of spirit and soul, and is part of a community. FLM grounded its commitment to work for the well–being of the Malagasy people, and its approach on development on this understanding. Most importantly, FLM emphasized a biblical mandate to love one's neighbour. This mandate and rule imply the critical involvement of individual members and local participation as the policy says:

> In FLM, we will underline the responsibility for every member of our church and every citizen in our country, through cooperation with others, to use their capacity and resources to make a better

life for himself, his family and the community. This is the most important source for economic

and social development. (FLM 2004, 1).

This policy put the responsibility of individual, group, and national well–being on church

members and Malagasy citizens, their cooperation, action, and their own resources. Nevertheless,

the policy emphasizes that the work of FLM should aim to complement that of the government in

its duty (FLM 2004, 9–11).

FLM underlined that local well–being and development do not necessarily depend on

external resources and expertise. It emphasized local wisdom, assets and actions as being of

prime importance, and felt responsible to volunteer to facilitate development initiatives at the

grassroots level. FLM furthered its policy with the formulation of its vision in relation to its

holistic view and the church's responsibility as: 'The Malagasy Lutheran Church, preaches the

Gospel, stands for Christ's witness, progresses in doing good works, develops all the people and

the whole being' (FLM 2007, 1). FLM envisioned itself as being supporters and leaders of local

community development work that improves local people's standard of living. The work is based

on its members' talents and skills, in collaboration with various development actors. In short,

FLM considered itself to be a diaconal church with a holistic approach to communities and a

church in which the word is taught rightfully, and the sacrament administered faithfully. It

emphasized that participation in improving the living condition of the Malagasy people is its

mission and a godly mandate, and church development work is the result of the cooperation

between church members and all Malagasy people, based on their assets. This ideology of local

participation and collaboration based on local assets is the foundation of UYT.

For decades, international agencies and NGOs promoted community participation or a

bottom–up approach to development work (Craig 1998, 1–5). This bottom–up approach changed

the perception of the role of states and government. International and local NGOs became an

alternative to state/government intervention/cooperation in development work, with community–based activities aiming at improving people's lives (Banks 2021, 673–675; Kang 2010, 227). International organizations have the potential to influence international and local development practice and agenda (Clark 1995, 597), as they cooperate with national governments and local NGOs in the Global South and contribute to community development through funding and providing technical assistance to various projects and programs. But these projects and programs focused on responding to the needs of communities by a reliance on external expertise and funds, an approach the asset–based model challenged (Mathie and Cunningham 2003, 474–477). Asset–based community development emerged as an alternative approach that empowers communities to control and manage their life situations, based on and valuing what communities possess and can access and benefit from.

According to Öhlmann (2023, 2), the fields of diaconal studies and religion and development 'have the same object of inquiry: the social impact of religion' and development, are both related to practice and the debates on FBOs in the Global South. This study is situated within these two fields as it focuses on the ways local actors from congregations in the Global South, namely Madagascar, are contributing to local community development. Diaconal studies for more than a century concentrated its research primarily on theology and education, health and social work in the Global North (Nordstokke 2014, 47; Öhlmann 2023, 2), while recently with the ecumenical movement and international diakonia in the Global South, limited numbers of scholars started to research international cooperations on diaconal activities focused on humanitarian aid and development (Leer–Helgesen 2017, 18). Development research on local faith actors also is needed within the field of religion and development (Tomalin 2018, 11). This study aims at contributing within a research gap and extend research within international

diakonia on local actors' diaconal practice, local efforts of sustainability with less dependence on external support in the Global South. It looks at what is and is not happening in relation to community development in congregations in the Global South, specifically within FLM in Madagascar. It is based on data material of practices in community and on a local congregational level. It also contributes to key debates in diaconal studies of Christian–based development work, such as the relation between motivation and goals.

Diakonia is defined in this study as the 'responsible service of the Gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people' (White 2002). It is then understood as the doing and being of the church, its holistic ministry and its solidarity with the vulnerable and marginalized (Nordstokke 2021, 37–38; WCC and ACT Alliance 2022, 70). Congregational diakonia, in opposition to institutional and professional specialized diakonia (Nordstokke 2014, 47), then refers to the practice, as means by which the congregation can facilitate and assist individuals and communities to achieve development from their own ideas, decision–making and use of their own human resources and strengths in combination with external resources. The study of diakonia in this research project then intends to contribute to the reflection and knowledge about the work of local church in the society (Dietrich 2014, 13), in this case, FLM's community development through UYT.

The outcome of the UYT–project so far seems to be related to its starting point in local congregations: an approach facilitating and/or influencing church members' engagements in voluntary community development activities (Boberg et al. 2020, 19). The project used biblical terminology, storytelling, and training to help individuals to recognize their assets, validate themselves and to develop interests in engaging in community development. Participants in the UYT–project from Madagascar, for instance, shared their experiences and successes through

personal stories (Haus 2017, 30–41, 53–61, 102–105, 110–121, 128–131). This study sets out to analyse the key characteristics of this particular congregational asset–based community development approach, the Use Your Talents at the Malagasy Lutheran Church in Madagascar. It will look closely at the role of Christian religion, aspects of asset–based community development and gender and power in this approach, and in practice, which I observed locally through interviews. This research wants to contribute to improve the informants' lives, as the knowledge and understanding of UYT from this study is based on their experiences. This knowledge and understanding might improve the lives of the informants and participants in the UYT project. It might also build up the well–being of their community, and the ways their congregations engage in the lives of local communities. The study uses qualitative data from participant observations and interviews conducted in four congregations across Madagascar in 2018.

1.2 Research design

This study was designed to answer: **how the UYT project is supporting congregations' engagement in local community development within four congregations in three FLM Synods**. Three additional sub–questions helped to narrow the focus of this overarching question, addressing three different areas in UYT and congregational community development. The sub–questions are presented here as they were used in the three supporting articles:

1) What is the role of faith as an intangible asset in a congregational asset–based community development project?

2) How can a congregational diakonia contribute to community development in the absence of external resources?

3) How gender and power relations both affect and are affected by UYT projects?

This research project is a descriptive and analytical investigation. The aim is to describe and analyse UYT from lay Christians' perspectives, from volunteers and some Church leaders' points of view. As the FLM is a large church in terms of spatial occupation and numbers of adherents, the participants will be selected from a few parishes across Madagascar. This means that this study is limited in geographical coverage and in the representativity of parishes and participants. Additionally, this study will limit its analysis to lived religion, ABCD and power and gender perspectives. As this is one of the pioneer research projects on the UYT capacity–building project, the aim is to provide a thick description and detailed investigation of the role of Christian faith/religion in an individual's use of talents and in their experience and understanding of their actions in congregational community development. This study also aims at informing the practice of UYT and suggesting implications for future quality improvements for those working in congregational community development in Madagascar and other countries. This research also wishes to contribute to the discussion of gender and power in religion and of development and diakonia scholarships with careful attention to power dynamics in local community development initiatives. This study is also done in response to a personal desire for deeper knowledge of UYT, particularly the way it is implemented at the local level, and how individuals experience and view the approach. It seeks to give a voice to individual narratives. It not only increased my personal knowledge of what is happening in local congregations in Madagascar in terms of community development, but also helped me to develop my capacity to do academic research.

This extended abstract is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the research project. The second chapter presents the contexts in Madagascar, the regional and local contexts of the field sites, and the academic research on congregational community development in the fields of religion and development and diakonia in the Global South. The third chapter

outlines the conceptual framework for the study including the concepts of asset–based

community development, lived religion and power and gender. The fourth chapter accounts for

research methodology. Before concluding with the last chapter, the fifth chapter presents the

summary of the articles and the discussion.

Chapter 2: Context

2.1 Context in Madagascar

This subchapter describes the context of UYT in Madagascar. The use of talents and the congregational community development are interrelated with the national and local social, economic and religious contexts of FLM and the congregants. These contexts provide a background for this study and for the analysis of the data, and they help in understanding UYT. Their importance in UYT projects was discussed in the articles and in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

2.1.1 General context

One of the largest islands in the world, Madagascar has a surface area of 591,896 km^2, lying in the Indian Ocean about 400 km east of the continent of Africa. In 2018, the population of Madagascar was 25,674,196, with 43.4 inhabitants per km^2 and 4.3 persons per household (INSTAT 2020, 12, 39). 19.5% of people lived in cities. The Malagasy population is young, as 41.2% were below 15 years of age in 2018. The estimated total fertility rate is 4.3 with variation between urban and rural areas (INSTAT 2020, 65). Concerning living conditions, 24% of Malagasy households are managed by women. Around 80% of Malagasy homes were considered to be precarious housing, many of these in rural areas. 27.7% of the population has access to drinking water, 36.5% to electricity, and 33.9% use modern toilets and latrines, the majority of these living in urban areas. Regarding health conditions, even if Madagascar currently counts 136 public hospitals and 2,776 public basic health centres (*Ministère de la Santé Publique*

2024)[4], in 2012 37.7% of the population had consulted a healthcare professional (INSTAT 2013, 4). Many Malagasy do not go to the hospital because of lack of money, remoteness of location from health centres[5], insecurity, absence of health personnel, poor care services (Action Contre la Faim et al. 2014, 8), the use traditional plant–based medicine and consultation of the traditional healers.

Regarding education, in 2018 21.5% of Malagasy above the age of five have never been schooled, the majority of these from the south of Madagascar, while 48.4% in primary school, 19.8% in secondary school and only 3.1% at the university level, many from the Analamanga region[6] (INSTAT 2020, 51–52). Many people prefer to send their children to private schools, as they are dissatisfied with the quality of education in the public schools (Skjortnes and Zachariassen 2010, 195), while rich families among the country's leaders send their children to study abroad.

The Malagasy government elaborated a national development plan that envisions Madagascar as a modern and prosperous country and emphasizes the centrality of a strong and active government (*Ministère de l'Economie et de la Planification*. Madagascar, 2015, 63–64)[7]. This plan mentioned a partnership of the state and civil society with the private sector to reach its goal, without specifically defining the form of partnership. It also emphasized the development of primary sector, though the country imports rice – its main staple food – from abroad. Apart

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[4] Almost half of the public primary health centres lack medical doctors. Most doctors prefer to work in cities, a choice that allocates rural areas with only nurses and paramedics.
[5] In 2014, 60% of the population live 5 km from the nearest public basic health centre. 20% of Madagascar is totally isolated. Madagascar's actual roads are now fewer than what existed at the end of the independence in 1960. Roads are old and suffer from lack of maintenance.
[6] This region comprises the capital of Antananarivo and its surroundings.
[7] With five priorities, the first is consolidation of the state's authority. Human's occupation is in fourth position.

from that, the document seemed to be favourable towards local and foreign investors without mentioning ways to support local initiatives and investments. Bearing in mind that most rural areas are isolated, and some major cities are connected to the capital by very bad roads, the politics of development of the government appears to be a selective development in favour of cities and select other areas, a strategy partly inherited from the era of colonization. (Wietzke 2015, 294).

2.1.2 Economic context

As many as 83.2% of Malagasy households live from the primary sector of the economy, among them 46.3% of urban households (INSTAT 2020, 98–99). To meet their needs, these households diversify their activities combining agriculture, (and/or) fishing, salaried work, petty trade and forest exploitation/foraging (Nawrotzki et al. 2012, 664, 66–667; Tucker et al. 2011, 293). Other livelihood strategies include trades and employment in cities (Skjortnes 2014a, 9), even from a young age[8]. But even with these strategies, researchers argued that two–thirds of the Malagasy population are chronically undernourished, primarily rural households, as they produce less than they consume annually (Harvey et al. 2014, 2), which affects their work and health. In addition, they sell their produce cheaply at the time of harvest, and buy their food expensively during lean seasons. Often, they sell their produce to pay debts from the lean seasons. Thus, their income does not match the price of the food they need during the lean seasons, and they have low opportunity to borrow, ensure, save (Thomas and Gaspart 2014, 490) and to earn money

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[8] In 2007, the International Labour Organization's survey on child labour in Madagascar indicates that 55% of teenagers age fifteen to seventeen are 'economically active' (2008:xv). The minimum legal working age is 15 (INSTAT 2020).

(Marcus 2008). The crop shortage is mainly related to small–scale farming[9], infertile soil and unproductive agricultural techniques (Harvey et al. 2014, 7–8) besides high climatic variations (Penot et al. 2018, 2; Tadros et al. 2008, 1). Unfortunately, Madagascar is one of the countries in the world with the highest risk of cyclones, drought and floods (Kreft et al. 2016, 7), all climatic conditions that increase the vulnerability of rural households, particularly small–scale farmers (Harvey et al. 2014, 8). These natural disasters bring about soil impoverishment, crop failures that trigger malnutrition, food insecurity and migration (Nawrotzki et al. 2012, 665). These agricultural issues particularly and chronically affect the south of Madagascar (Hänke and Barkmann 2017, 273). They not only negatively affect agricultural work and production, but also education, resulting in student absenteeism and poor scores (Marchetta et al. 2019, 1223). The precariousness of the situation in the rural areas is worsened by cattle rustlers, ransacking and land issues[10]. Individual property becomes exiguous as families increase in number, stay in the same place and family property is shared out. Recently, however, rural communities saw their ancestral land taken away from them – legally, or by force – for the benefit of foreign investors (Medernach and Burnod 2013, v, vii–x; Tucker et al. 2011, 294; United States Department of States, n.d.b). International trade, in some cases, prolongs insecurity and destruction of the environment that profit the elites (Gardini 2019, 178–184; Anonymous 2018). The population, which often lacks confidence in the justice system, find themselves helpless as the authorities

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[9] In 2010, 70% of rural households were small scale farmers with less than 1.5 ha of land. One rural household numbers 4.9 individuals, on average (INSTAT 2011). 'The high population pressure on arable land and by the extreme poverty and declining income of the majority of the population' are used to explain the declining fertility of the Malagasy people (Garenne 2017).

[10] Property registry from colonial times promoted the division of land, individualization and sale. But acquiring land is a bureaucratically time–consuming, expensive and demanding process, besides being rife with corruption and injustice.

reinforced by pervasive corruption selectively enforce laws (United States Department of States, n.d.b).

Madagascar is, according to the United Nations (2021), one of the Least Developed Countries of the world. In 2019, 75% of the Malagasy were estimated to be living on less than $1.90 per day[11], while the island's soil is rich in various minerals and gems and has a unique biodiversity (The World Bank 2020, 2). This high percentage is explained with a 'long–term decline in incomes', related to a prevalent informality and underemployment, with a majority of subsistence–based activities (The World Bank 2020, ix). Yet Madagascar's general economy has been growing since its independence but superseded by the population growth characterized by a decline in fertility (The World Bank 2020, 103). Malagasy couples – the women in particular – seem interested in family planning in the traditional or modern way, the challenge being either that the service did not reach them (Harris et al. 2012, 185) or meet their specific requirements (Nyangara et al. 2007, 29) or underestimated the involvement of men and their network (Comfort et al. 2021, 12). In 2018, 74.2 % of the population were categorized as 'multidimensionally poor', meaning below the internationally accepted standard of education, health and quality of life (INSTAT 2020, 95). Madagascar as a nation is externally dependent, as its economy is based, among others things, on agricultural exports, the mining industry, the tourism industry (Dayo 2018, 3) and on financial aid from International Monetary Fund and Madagascar's international partners. From 1960, the United Nations and its entities were working in Madagascar in cooperation with governmental entities, international and national NGOs (*Nations Unies Madagascar,* n.d.).

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[11] 'Extreme poverty', according to The World Bank.

France, the colonial power in Madagascar from 1896 to 1960, has influenced the economy and the mode of governance, even after independence (Randriamihaingo 2011, 306). French and international partners supported Madagascar with financial, technical and structural support. With the first and second republic, the Malagasy state maintained the image of the sole provider of welfare assistance, which created a culture of dependence (Randriamihaingo 2011, 312–313). But from the beginning of 1990, the state, in cooperation with its international partners, adopted principles of community development. Several NGOs and FBOs started to work throughout the country, focusing on social and environmental issues.

Despite the presence of many international organizations, observers remarked that improvement in the living conditions of the Malagasy people is almost invisible, and of limited success (Hänke et al. 2017; Randriamihaingo 2011, 309–313). Scholars have tried to understand why Madagascar continues to be considered one of the poorest countries in the world, though not plagued by war, as are many countries in the same category. It has been argued that, even if the government, development agencies and NGOs used the discourse of community development, all funds, technologies, decisions and expertise came from abroad, and the work lacked local ownership, such as, for instance, in work on reproductive health (Baker-Médard and Sasser 2019, 19), and that international aid aims at advancing foreign interests (Horning 2008). Research also showed that funds for development work have been misappropriated (Ramiandrisoa and Rakotomanana 2016, 26–27, 30), and relief aid misdirected (Francken et al. 2012, 497–498), funds being embezzled and used for political interests, burdening the country's economy. In addition, recurrent political unrest/crises stopped financial support from international donors, which reduced the government's capacity to ensure its work.

The social work of churches and their partners, without state support, constituted significant relief for the population during these times of crisis (Randriamihaingo 2011, 311), and in the case of harvest failures natural resources (Nawrotzki et al. 2012, 667). The extended family (Skjortnes and Zachariassen 2010, 200, 204) constitutes the farmers' safety net. When foreign assistance resumed, the government used them and the renewed cooperation as a sign of the legitimization of its power (Horning 2008). But even this assistance is not enough, as the Malagasy people have a history of deep poverty that persistently traps households, and the state's development policies do not take into consideration the socio–cultural dynamics of local Malagasy communities (Thomas and Gaspart 2014, 499).

2.1.3 Gender context

Malagasy households' livelihoods depend upon the complementarity of gender contributions (Dahl 1999, 97). This attitude not only reflects the Malagasy traditional egalitarian culture that exists particularly in the highlands (Skjortnes 2000), but also persists because of chronic deep poverty in the country that occurred before the colonial period (Thomas and Gaspart 2014, 490). Women are responsible for various agricultural tasks in complementarity with their husbands, in addition to care of children, the elderly and the sick, household chores, management of money and of food/agricultural products/crops (Skjortnes 2014c, 165; Rich 2004, 213; Raharinjanahary et al. 2000). Malagasy women manage the family money with the exception of Tandroy[12] women, but in the use of important income, the couple decide together, particularly stable couples (Raharinjanahary et al. 2000). Single mothers manage their livelihood

[12] Tandroy is one of the 18 official groups of people in Madagascar. The Malagasy people is made up of one ethnic group divided into several subgroups.

with the help of fathers or brothers, who act as counsellors. Women control small farm animals

such as poultry, pig breeding, market gardening/vegetable crops and can have their own money

and live independently (Skjortnes 2014c, 165; Raharinjanahary et al. 2000). Cattle and the work

related to their use, as well as land, are perceived as belonging to men. Still, women have the

right to land and to possess cattle, even symbolically (Raharinjanahary et al. 2000). Nowadays in

the highland, boys and girls inherit land equally (Razafindralambo 2005, 889), while in the other

areas, only women inherit land as a safety net in case of divorce and, in some areas, childless

widows have no priority to inherit from the husband compared to his family (United States

Department of State, n.d.c).

Malagasy people traditionally differentiate people socially based mainly on seniority or

leadership capacity (Dahl 1999, 80–103) and, to some extent, in relation to their connection to

the land as *tompontany/zana–tany* (owner/children of the land) and *vahiny* (migrants or guests)

(Sharp 2001, 217), not on gender. Thus, before colonization, women had political roles and

authority (Altius and Raveloharimisy 2016, 136; Rich 2008; Dina 2001, 21–22) depending on

their social status. According to scholars, changes in gender status, public roles and relations,

particularly in the highlands, have their roots in missionary and colonial practices (Altius and

Raveloharimisy 2016, 136–137; Rich 2004, 213). Illiteracy, among other factors, impedes

women's participation in political and community processes (Rich 2004, 212). The French

colony, for instance, refused girls access to education (Altius and Raveloharimisy 2016, 137) or

prepared a minority to be housekeepers or, at best, to be midwives[13] (Decker and McMahon

2021, 215, 242). Missionaries, on the other hand, educated both women and men, but assigned a

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[13] Because of the pronatalist politics of the colonizer, health related education was promoted.

submissive role to women or, as with the colonial government, trained them to be housekeepers or, at best, to be teachers (Predelli 1998, 104–105), giving prominent positions to men. Still, some women from the time of independence were political activists and had access to national leadership roles (Altius and Raveloharimisy 2016, 138). They also occupy academic roles and are highly educated, even with family demands (Skjortnes and Zachariassen 2010. 197, 203–205). Women, particularly older ones, have influence in their households and extended family (Gezon 2000; Skjortnes 2000), and in some areas of Madagascar they are the critical voice in the village/community (Hanson 2000, 276; Dahl 1999, 152–153). In Christian churches, particularly in FLM, women could use their voices through preaching, teaching and leading the revival movement, even without being ordained as pastors. Issues of gender and power were studied in Article 3 of this thesis, and in the discussion chapter.

2.1.4 Religious context

Knowledge of the Malagasy religious context is important for this study, as the role of Christian religion as an asset was studied in Article 1 and in the discussion chapter of this thesis. The Malagasy people are profoundly religious. Religion is part of Malagasy consciousness as a whole (Skjortnes 2014a, 39–43; Austnaberg 2008, 147–152). The physical world is instilled with spiritual and moral significance and power. The Malagasy differentiate between good and bad people referring to how individual acts towards other people and other beings. The person is then called a person of good or of bad spirit. According to Austnaberg (2008, 87, 333–336, 368–370), the idea of evil spirit in Christianity, particularly with the revival movement is that apart from God's Spirit, all other traditionally believed forms of spiritual beings are evil. The percentage of followers of different religious varies, according to different sources but, overall, both Christians

and the traditional religion form the majority (Sawe 2017; United States Department of State, n.d.a). There are several historical churches, but more recently Pentecostals and evangelicals with American and African influences have gained popularity (Cole 2011). Most of the population in the highland[14] and in the cities are Christians (Skjortnes 2014a, 51; Cole 2011), while in rural areas, particularly in the coastal areas, Christians constitute a minority group.

Christianity seems to be part of Malagasy culture and identity (Skjortnes 2014a, 36; Razafindralambo 2005, 887), arriving in Madagascar via missionaries from the United Kingdom, France, Norway, United States of America and Denmark (Skjortnes 2014a, 50). The Muslim community constitutes around 7% of the population. Arabs and Pakistani migrants introduced Islam to Madagascar along the north and the east coasts (von Sicard 2011, 102–105). Since 2010, they have built many mosques and schools all around Madagascar with the full support of the government. Their visibility increased as shops and restaurants are marked with the halal sign.

Traditionally, ancestors – the living dead – are the source of both blessings, the fertility of land and people (Razafindralambo 2005, 896). The Malagasy believe that their ancestors can blame and cause misfortune to the living if they do not satisfy their demands (Skjortnes 2014a, 40–41), and that ancestors' spirit can possess the living as a way to transmit their message and will. Spirits play an important role in people's lives (Rich 2011, 9–10; Austnaberg 2008, 148–164). The Malagasy believe in *Zanahary*, the Creator, but believe that God only plays the occasional role in important family and community events, in which cases they are called upon before the ancestors. The *famadihana*, or the re–burial or changing of shroud, organized once every two to seven years, is one way to honour the ancestors in the highlands. Protestant

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[14] The highland comprises the area occupied by the Merina and Betsileo groups. They were the first to convert en masse to Christianity.

churches condemn this practice as idolatry (Dahl 1999, 36–37), yet leave the practice of circumcision unquestioned, though one of the conditions for the qualification of being an ancestor once dead. All Christian churches are critical about the expensive family expenditures related to *famadihana* ceremonies (Dahl 1999, 37), yet this practice was used as a way to retain identity in a changing society (Ellis 1985, 165). One of the principles of the *fifohazana*, the revival movement from its inception was against re–burial. Christians constructed their own family tombs or buried in the *toby*, the revival movement centres for shepherds, to avoid the obligation of participating in the *famadihana* and in opposition to the ancestors' important place in the lives of people. Traditionally, a tomb is a sign of belonging, insurance of access to land and part of a person's identity, even existence. The cult of ancestors ensures social harmony, strengthens ties within the community and secures the life and continuity of community (Bediako 2004, 30; Dahl 1999, 37). Land traditionally belongs to and is inherited from the ancestors, and selling it is forbidden. Thus, all activities related to land use need the *Zanahary* and the ancestors' approval and blessing for fruitfulness. All actions that may offend the ancestors require purification rites. For fear of and respect towards the ancestors, some Malagasy prefer traditional agricultural techniques to modern ones, yet they may imitate new techniques if they see a benefit, and if they can afford to buy the agricultural implements.

Health is traditionally understood as being both a social and a cosmological/spiritual issue (Austnaberg 2008, 164–171). A person's identity and life exist through and are in equilibrium with the community and the cosmos (Rabarihoela Razafimandimby 2014a, iii). The Malagasy translate illness or misfortune as possibly coming from an evil person, an evil spirit or in repayment of one's action (Rabarihoela Razafimandimby 2014b, 67). Specialists can heal (Austnaberg 2008, 164–170), and various ailments can be prevented (Rabarihoela

Razafimandimby 2014b, 68–69). The traditional healer, *mpanao ody*, for instance, heals through natural medication (Rabarihoela Razafimandimby 2014b, 68), the *mpanandro*, or astrologer/diviner intuits for the right time and place for all activities its cosmological part. Both men and women can be designated as witches, who perceived as people who abuse the power of nature to destroy and harm. Taboos are used to protect individuals, the community and even nature (protection of forest), but also to harm (killing of twins and babies). They are linked to social, religious, and political ideas (Raison–Jourde 1991, 81, 182, 296).

For the Malagasy, religion encompasses a person's life from birth to death, as well as after death (Skjortnes 2014a, 39–43). All important steps in life are celebrated with religious rituals. Religion is a governing power (Nielssen and Skeie 2014, 195), and traditional rulers acquire their legitimacy through religion (Raison–Jourde1991, 26). The *fifohazana*, for instance, played an important role during the overthrow of power in 2009 (Nielssen and Skeie 2014, 190), and President Rajoelina used the sanctity of the land of the ancestors as a propaganda against former President Ravalomanana (Evers et al. 2013, 1–2, 15–16). As a hybrid nation, Madagascar's political life is very much influenced by its history. Colonizers introduced and imposed the notion of ethnicity (Astuti 1995, 6, 8), and associated it with religion in order to create division. Some politicians continue to use this politics of difference to maintain antagonism.

Traditionally, women had religious leadership roles (Rich 2011, 18–20), and still play, in some areas of Madagascar, the role of mediator between the dead and the living, monarchs, in particular. (Lambek 2014, 494–495; Sharp 1993). But within Christian denominations,

particularly historical churches[15], only one of the four main churches ordains women (Rich 2011, 24), while the charismatic churches have female pastors. With the reformed church, ordaining and recruiting women pastors has some limitations (Rich 2004, 214). In nearly all churches, women constitute most of the members. They are well–organized in groups and are very active. In FLM, women can preach and participate in church services, but they are not allowed to do the work of the ordained pastors, for instance distributing the sacraments or baptizing. They might nevertheless occupy religious leadership within the revival movement (Rich 2011, 8) and, on some rare occasions, work as a pastor in some congregations. Still, other positions of leadership within church ministries are open to and occupied by women (Rich 2004, 218–221). These opportunities for women to hold positions and have influence do not mean though that gender equality is a plain reality in Madagascar. The situation is much more complex, as most men profiting from the influences of colonial western ideology furthered their interests, and some women believing their oppression, claimed it as normal/traditional (Rabenoro 2012, 92).

2.2 The Malagasy Lutheran Church and its development work

2.2.1 Historical and present–day characteristics

To understand UYT, knowledge of FLM and its development work history and actual characteristics seems necessary. One of Madagascar's four historical churches is FLM and is the result of the 1867's unification of 1,800 Lutheran congregations between the Norwegian Mission Society and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. FLM's founders and funding have a significant impact on the liturgy, activities and structure of the organization. FLM has more than

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[15] The historical churches are the churches the first missions established that include the Catholic, the Reformed, the Lutheran and the Anglican churches.

4 million baptized members and, with around 5,000 congregations, is one of the largest Lutheran churches in the world. It is structured into synods, which are further split into districts, parishes, congregations and houses of prayer. FLM became an independent church in 1950 and elected its first Malagasy leader in 1967. Yet the missions were still present and supported a large part of its national administrative running costs, its evangelization, and diaconal activities. In 2018 it had 1,457 pastors, 6,414 catechists (FLM Empowerment Program 2018, 12), and hundreds of women theologians. The church also had 430 schools, 44 health centres (including hospitals), 28 theological schools (including Bible schools), 4 professional training centres and 144 revival movement centres (Razafimamonjy and Bakke 2017).

The structure of FLM is very complex. The highest ecclesial authority, the General Synod or assembly, mandates the executive committee or KMSL to decide on church matters between its meetings[16]. FLM has, according to its constitution, a synodal structure with committees as its decision–making bodies, composed of half laypeople and half clerics, elected and mandated at all level of the church structure. In addition to the committees, the church has a bureau or board which is the administrative and executive body led by a president. The church is also organized into departments, projects/programs and associations/groups/movements, which carry out its social and religious work. While church decision making is top–down, financial support goes upward, from the congregations. The life and work of the church and its associations depend on the members' support in terms of financial, material, skills and time while the departments and projects are financed by external donors, and/or with paid services.

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[16] The General Synod meet once every four years, elect the members of the executive committee/KMSL and decide on general matters. The KMSL or *Komity Mpandrindra ny Synoda Lehibe* (literally the Coordinating Committee of the General Synod) meet twice a year.

Large congregations are often organized into several sections called *quartier,* which are organized in the same way as the church.

The size and wealth of congregations increase from rural areas to cities. Most congregations in cities, as well as some in towns, have concrete buildings, while a great number of church buildings in rural areas are made of wood. There is lately a trend in rural and coastal congregations in striving to construct concrete buildings, as this became the image of the ideal developed church. The majority of the church members are women and the women's group is the most active and financially supportive of the church, particularly at congregational level (Skjortnes 2014c, 166). For a decade, the church started to discuss the issue of the ordination of women, but for now FLM does not ordain women. While the church structure tends to reinforce segregation and hierarchies, the *fifohazana* is the space that offers leadership position to so–called poor and minimally educated people (Nielssen and Skeie 2014, 206).

Like in many churches in Africa, growth in FLM's membership goes in parallel with the burdens of carrying a sustainable witness and ministry (Bediako 2004, 105; Deressa et al. 2017). In 2010, the FLM carried out an organizational assessment of its weaknesses and strengths to make it more efficient. Following the assessment, FLM organized workshops at regional and national level, where FLM's leaders looked for suitable methods and structures that would enable the church to reach its goal (MLC 2011). The assessment team reported that one of the main weaknesses within the church is the focus of some of its leaders and members on things that do not work, instead of the church's strengths, something that hinders them in focusing on their responsibility to develop the church (Lemvik et al. 2010, 8). The team reported that the main source of division and dissension within the church are its 50–year–old structure and the inefficiency of many committees. They mentioned, in addition, that corruption was an issue in

church development work and relief services. It is worth mentioning that the development work of FLM evolved from the missions' work in education, communication, health and agriculture, partly indigenized through the revival movement. The Protestant missionaries were the first to build a university and medical school in Madagascar (Rabarihoela Razafimandimby 2014b, 69). Until now, the church has constituted both powerful networks and engaged development actors (Nielssen and Skeie 2014, 192).

2.2.2 Use Your Talents–project historical roots and evolution

The object of this research is the Use Your Talents approach to development. In order to understand this approach, we need to look into past behaviour, attitudes and circumstances – internal (ecclesial) and external settings – that could have influenced the establishment of UYT and how it evolved from its inception.

The UYT approach was conceptualized beginning in 2002 in relation to a realization of existing development activities that congregations were running (Haus 2017, 19). Among the types of activities cited were care centres. These centres are related closely to one of the FLM's strength and identity, which is the *fifohazana,* or the revival movement. The UYT approach can be traced back to that movement. This movement is one of the contributors to the indigenization of Christianity from nineteen century, and provides a model for individual Christian's diaconal work in the community through caring for 'the sick and the poor', improving their social, physical and mental health (Austnaberg 2008, 57). These works contain some elements of *ubuntu*'s social values, such as compassion and solidarity and the principle of love (Breed and Semenya 2015, 2). The Malagasy and, particularly, the shepherd's understanding of healing within a healthy social context (Austnaberg 2008, 307–317) also have some similarities with the

ubuntu's principle of interconnectedness. But most importantly, in the *fifohazana*'s perspective, interconnectedness goes beyond humanity, as they gave the most important role to the Christian God and his love. Rainisoalambo, the first leader of the *fifohazana*, and his collaborators created the *toby*, or care centres, as a 'holistic community of healing and wellness' (Rich 2008a, 89). In these centres, human and economic development were as important as spiritual development. This equality of importance is witnessed in the guidelines for community life these leaders elaborated. The guidelines encouraged development–related activities like education, healthy habits and autonomy, and emphasized the religious aspects of these activities, such as trust in God for all activities and one–time burial in opposition to the custom of *famadihana*, which has both religious and economic aspects (Rafanomezantsoa 2008, 18–19). Traditional communal work was adapted as way of working of the *fifohazana* to reduce money spent on salaries and to improve the unity and love in the community (Rafanomezantsoa 2008, 20). Communal work was a traditional way to ensure collective survival and to meet, at the time, the royal administration's requirements. It is important to mention here that shepherds believe that some of the conditions for the healing of sick people in the *toby* is the presence of their family, their support/care and their faith in Jesus (Austnaberg 2008, 308–311). The work of the movement is self–funding (Skjortnes 2014a, 57; Austnaberg 2008, 58; Rafanomezantsoa 2008, 21), depends on volunteers and their commitment to the well–being of others; characteristics that resemble those of the UYT approach.

Since the 1960s, in addition to educational and health activities, the church initiated various rural development projects and, in 1982, established its development department[17]

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[17] That department was suppressed in 1995, as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) stopped its financial support.

(Randriamanantsoa et al. 2006, 4). At that time, the church's development projects ranged from the building of latrines to agricultural–farming training based on modern/western techniques, to drinkable water projects to agricultural water management. All these initiatives, from the beginning, depended heavily on financial support from and through the missions and other foreign faith–based institutions, like the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Nevertheless, some regional church institutions were striving to be self–sustaining, as in the example of the farm school in Tombontsoa Antsirabe (Kristensen et al. 2009, 16). From the 1960's, when development aid became popular and progress was understood as the transfer of knowledge and material resources from the West, Lutherans and all Malagasy people alike associated development work with a lot of money from abroad (Rakoto Endor 2017, 9) and four–wheel drive cars (Andriambonimihanta 2017, 27).

In 2001, FLM in collaboration with NMS started a process of organizational development that aimed at renewing FLM's approach to its diaconal ministry to the community (Randriamanantsoa et al. 2006, 4), coordinating and integrating its development activities in the congregation (FLM and NMS 2007, 1). They organized various meetings at different levels in the church structure where church representatives received training in development, discussed and elaborated various documents on FLM's development policy and role in the nation's development work (approved by the FLM executive committee in 2005) and its vision of 'doing good works, develops all people and the whole being', (approved in 2007) (FLM 2007, 1). One of the main ideas conveyed in these documents was that development work starts from the congregation through church members and committees in collaboration with other people and organizations, making the most of local resources (FLM 2007, 6; FLM 2004). The development work described in these documents has both charitable and empowering aspects. Ideally, the

whole church, at all levels, elaborate their development plans/projects and collaborate with other actors in the community. This idea suggested that the church in general and congregations, have the capacity and disposition to collaborate with other development actors. All these ideas followed the international trend on the participative development which started in the 1970's. At the same time, the state was favourably inclined to collaborating with civil society, including churches in the national program of poverty alleviation. Yet to some extent, FLM was compelled to go through this process of organizational development following some financial mismanagement (Rich 2008b, 70), accompanied with the imminent withdrawal of the missions, ever–changing technology and the aim for a sustainable church (FLM 2007, 1). The idea of congregational development was also a response to the continued economic deterioration of Madagascar, which affected both the local communities and the church itself.

From 2004 to 2007, FLM replaced its prior development department with a structure called FANILO (*Fampandrosoana Anivon'ny Loterana*) with support from NMS. FANILO is made up of committees that have been set up at every level of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Its duty was to assist Lutheran congregations in participating in development initiatives that were regarded as part of the Church mission. The FANILO ensured ownership and sustainability of the development work through the congregations' members, who became the main actors, initiators and beneficiaries of all activities (Randriamanantsoa et al. 2006, 9–10). It informed and encouraged pastors and catechists to support the creation of development work committees. FANILO structure is quite special as its status and committee's compositions differ from the other church's committees and even from synod to synod and from congregation to congregation.

UYT became FLM's official local development strategy and approach in 2008. It was put into action with NORAD's financial assistance. Since then, the principles and the project of UYT

had been widely evolved. UYT, like FANILO is at first a project with external financial support, but also an approach to development that promotes the idea that 'everybody' has 'talents to build a better Madagascar' (FLM and NMS 2007, 2). In this approach, and following the Lutheran tradition and one of FLM's maxims – *sola scriptura* – FLM taught and based the UYT approach on biblical passages. These passages included 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:11–12 and Matthew 25:14–30 among others. They served to spread the notion that God gives people and communities gifts that are beneficial to both themselves and others. UYT taught Christians that development is theirs: the conception, decision, resources action, which are grounded in the church, reach out to the community and society (Rakoto Endor 2017, 9), that UYT is a way to look positively on needs/problems, a step to grow and to develop. All believers have a social and sacred responsibility to share their God–given talents, which is Jesus and all his blessings for the world's well–being. Congregants were to be inspired by FLM to participate in local community development. To accomplish that, FLM taught its congregation members about a form of development involvement that was talents–focused. The guiding assumptions of this approach were that God gave people a mission and provided them with the means to carry it out. The purpose of the approach is to exploit local potentials, capabilities and abilities for the benefit of general welfare. Local initiatives and resources received much of the attention. Therefore, congregations' development projects rely on local skills, knowledge and coping mechanisms.

Through the UYT approach, FLM aimed to alter its members' attitudes. First, instead of viewing oneself as deficient and in need, each person/people should be valued on their own and for their gifts/resources. The second is about how everyone's contribution to the community must be weighed against the need for outside assistance. The third is about the Church's ability to affect community development change through its members and development committee, as

opposed to acting only as a spiritual force. Some western concepts, like human dignity have been enhanced by these perspectives (Skjortnes 2014a, 56). These perspectives were anticipated to boost the power, agency and creativity demonstrated via volunteerism and collaboration in local community development projects. UYT also included the formation of talent groups and congregation's collaboration with local authorities. Therefore, it emerged that congregational community development initiatives primarily relied on local will, resources, vision/goal, skills and organization.

From 2008 to 2020, the project had one national full–time worker assisted by volunteers from the synods, selected districts and congregations in promoting and spreading the approach. The project sensitized and trained pastors and catechists who were the congregations' gatekeepers. To nurture and promote its ideas, the UYT project produced materials such as booklets about congregational assets mapping, various guidelines, leaflets, posters and inspirational stories. In 2014, the project UYT combined with a leadership–capacity building project were put under a programme called Empower FLM. The aim of that programme was to support the church in reaching its holistic vision of both spiritual and physical well–being, without depending on external financial support. From 2016, LWF funded a UYT project for Malagasy deacons.

At the international level, since 2013, NMS spread the UYT approach through international exchange–learning networks, involving three continents and several denominations: Africa, Asia and Europe (Boberg et al. 2020, 2). The UYT approach was developed from 2004 without explicit links to theories and methodologies as taught within the framework of social work or international development work (Randriamanantsoa et al. 2006, 17–18; FLM 2004), but later described within the framework of ABCD (Haus and Sameien 2016, 7–13). In order to

further reflections and secure a sustainable implementation of the approach, NSM also involved several academic institutions. As a result, this multicultural, multidenominational, and multi–institutional programme produced books and a website that provides information about the UYT approach for a larger public. The aim is to encourage more congregations to engage 'in asset–based community development work' (Boberg et al. 2020, 7).

2.3 Congregational community development in the Global South

Even with the growing interest of scholars in religion and development (Swart and Nell 2016), there has been little research on asset–based congregational community development in Africa in the fields of religion and development and also diakonia. This review of literature's focus is on the three main themes of this research project related to this study's research question and its constitutive articles: the role of intangible assets, particularly Christian religion in congregational community development; the various approaches and methods used in local religious development work with a particular attention to ABCD methodology; the actors, particularly women, and their roles in religious community development. The literature was selected because their focus was at least on two of the three main themes of this study: mostly on community development and Christian religion, and ways congregations and Christians were engaging in community development. Most of the authors were scholars from the fields of religion and development and diakonia. Two researchers with extensive inquiry are worth noting here: Magezi (2019; 2018; 2017), who studied churches community development in several countries in mainland Africa; and Skjortnes (2016; 2014abc), for her research on the diaconal work of FLM in Madagascar, and also the only research with a special focus on gender (Skjortnes 2016; 2014c). Researchers have interviewed religious leaders (among others Mangayi

2018, 2–3; Bowers du Toit 2017, 2; Rakotoniaina et al. 2014, 2), while others have interviewed community leaders (Magezi 2019, 6–7; 2018, 7; 2017, 5), religious organizations staff (Sundqvist 2017, 58; Bornstein 2002, 5) and individual beneficiaries interviewed individually (Skjortnes 2014a, 8–13; 2014b, 66) or through a focus group (Magezi 2017, 5). Three articles' data resource was church's documents and reports (Umuraza 2021, 382; Pali 2019, 211, Magezi 2018, 7). Female informants are mostly underrepresented in most of the studies, thus there is no apparent focus on issues of gender and power. Most of these studies are empirical using qualitative methodology, apart from a few that involved quantitative research (Celesi and Bowers du Toit 2019, 3; Schoeman 2012, 2) or mixed method.

Those involved in the studied community development initiatives were composed of leaders: both ministers and lay, religious members and leaders and individuals from the local communities. The role of women in these community developments were, however, not much discussed. Women in all these studies were presented more as being beneficiaries than contributors to community development. According to the previous research, leaders often decided, created and were even the main actors in implementing community projects (Mangayi 2018, 10; Rakotoniaina et al. 2014, 4), while lays members were the implementers (Mangayi 2018, 10; Magezi 2018, 10). But not all leaders ensured effective community development work (Pali 2019, 206). Religious leaders did not prioritize community development work over spiritual work. They appeared to be too busy and/or not to be on good terms with the lay leaders and members. Sometimes, members were more involved than the congregations (Schoeman 2012, 3). In some cases, a team or committee was responsible for community development work (Schoeman 2012, 3). In other cases, volunteers or facilitators were at work (Umuraza 2021, 383; Magezi 2017, 5, 7, 9) and, in others, community development was the result of a collaboration

between religious and community leaders (Magezi 2017, 7, 10). Individual members might be involved economically in community development but, in most cases, work is financially supported by international (Magezi 2018, 6; Magezi 2017, 4; Bornstein 2002, 5), local religious organizations (Beukes 2019, 7–8) or from various resources, including members contribution and donations (Umuraza 2021, 384; Balogun and Iduemre 2020, 16; Celesi and Bowers du Toit 2019, 4–5).

For churches or congregations that are engaged in community development, social services are integrated into church activities (Umuraza 2021, 383–384; Mangayi 2018, 6; Magezi 2017, 5–8; Öhlmann et al. 2016, 10; Skjortnes 2016, 220–225; 2014c, 166; Clarke 2013, 343–348), and leaders understand them as part of church ministries. Even church buildings are used as facilities for these activities. For some religious organizations that include churches, faith informs their work and influences their staff and beneficiaries (Sundqvist 2017, 219–241; Skjortnes 2016, 220–225; 2014a, 155–158; 2014b, 76–79; Bornstein 2003). Religion or faith provides the coping strategies for life challenges (Umuraza 2021, 383–385; Skjortnes 2016, 220–223; 2014a, 152–157; 2014b, 77–78; 2014c, 171), enhancing the dignity of the beneficiaries (Skjortnes 2016, 220–225; 2014ab; 2014c, 171), and also the object of development (Bornstein 2003). In engaging in community work, church/congregations cooperate with local civic organizations and with other denominations (Mangayi 2018, 6–7). They likewise cooperate with FBO (Celesi and Bowers du Toit 2019, 5–6; Bowers du Toit 2017, 5) national and international, and the local government (Clarke 2013, 347–348). Some of these activities are focused on community/women's needs (Magezi 2017, 6–7; Skjortnes 2014c, 167) with top–down training (Umuraza 2021, 384–385; Magezi 2018, 6, 10; Skjortnes 2016, 222–223), others use a bottom–

up approach with a community development, based on local resources available but elaborated by external organizations (Magezi 2019, 7–9).

Some scholars have noted difficulties that churches and congregations may have when participating in community development. For instance, Schoeman's research (2012, 7–8) demonstrates that congregations faced challenges in forming trustworthy relationships inside their communities, leading the Church to be less involve there. Bowers du Toit's study (2017, 2, 4–5) shows however that the lack of capacity and professionalism are the most frequent problems faced by churches. Besides instances when religious institutions and congregations operate together, she indicated that ownership difficulties arise for the congregations. She also mentioned race, class and theology as barriers to church participation, issues Skjortnes (2014c, 166–168) took further in arguing that religion has the power to cement gender inequality and injustice. She stated that churches did not support women to challenge the social expectations of women and men's roles in the society and in the church, and that it even influenced gender roles (Skjortnes 2014c, 166–168). She mentioned, however, that the women's group provided an arena for women to be agents of change in the church and society, and to improve their living conditions (Skortnes 2014c, 166).

In sum, previous literature demonstrates that congregations/churches as institutions or individual members and religious movement/organizations may play important role in community development within the domains of, among others, health, education, agriculture, job creation, housing, saving club and even road rehabilitation. Studies also shows that faith that includes all invisible religious assets such as belief and prayer, among others, play an important role in the creation, implementation and even reception of these congregational community development initiatives. This literature comprises studies of churches or religious

movement/organizations, community development work in one congregation, one area, in cities, rural areas or both, in one country or several countries. Yet they did not address asset–based congregational community development as one complex phenomenon. Very few addressed the issue of gender, and none addressed power. Recent research on UYT, published after the submission of this thesis, addresses issues of power, but it was not included in this literature overview as its interest primarily was on the international aspect of UYT (Syltebø Endalew 2023), rather than on its implementation at local level, which is my main focus.

2.4 Local context of the study

2.4.1 The congregation in the synod of Manakara

Manakara synod is situated in the South–East coast of Madagascar within the regions of Vatovavy and Fitovinany. The area is among those that registered a highest internal migrating population. The congregation I visited had sensitization on development committee and work (UYT 2017), a person elected as FANILO coordinator none of this study's participants knew. The church has no planned community development activity, but the church's old building is made of wood, and a concrete building was under construction. That building work is considered to be development work, and is in the centre of the district. The church has around 800 members. Its staff comprised a pastor and a catechist. The pastor has a pastoral record book that contains all the names of the newly baptized, confirmed and married couples, but no list of members. The number of members was not updated. It has women's and youth groups, revival movement, Sunday school and deacons. The choir met once a week and the revival movement held an evening devotion every Wednesday. The site where the church is situated is a rural commune with 14,905 inhabitants in 2015 according to the Commune. It is connected to the city of

Manakara with a tarred national road and daily public transportation. The population lives mostly from agriculture, with very few people working as retailers and civil servants. Most houses are most often made with materials from local plants. They are often a one room house with the floor covered with a mat as the main furniture, and the fireplace kitchen is located on the south side of the house, in the traditional way. Some better–off families have furniture such as wooden bedstead with mattresses, wooden chairs and tables. People fetch water from the river or at other natural sources. Few uses latrines. Many families rent solar lamps every night thanks to the work of an NGO. The commune has one public and a private primary school, a secondary school, and a basic health centre. Although the area produces rice twice a year, production is still not enough for consumption needs. A small marketplace is very active in the afternoon. The town has three churches: one Catholic, one Lutheran and an Adventist. I heard about a small community of Muslims, but it did not have a local place of meeting. The village has *ampanjaka*, traditional leaders who ensure the respect of the custom and the social harmony; each large family has a family leader, *mpitondra tranobe*, who is responsible for the respect of custom in the family and keeping the extended family property. All activities concerning the population of the village as a whole require the consent of the traditional leaders. During my visit, I attended various traditional celebrations and rites, with one of my informants, such as circumcision, benediction of the first labour in the paddy field of the family tutor, marriage and first haircut of a couple's first child. The annual meeting of the Ankaramalaza toby, situated within the synod of Manakara started within my 4th week in the field site. Several of the study participants attended the event, which shortened my stay.

2.4.2 The congregations in the synod of Antsirabe

The synod of Antsirabe is in the highlands of Madagascar, 170k m from Antananarivo, which is the capital in the region of Vakinankaratra. The region is also among those that registered a highest internal migrating population. The area has volcanic fertile soil and produces vegetables and fruits for Antananarivo and other cities of Madagascar. I stayed in two congregations. The first congregation was situated in a remote rural village. The road that leads to the village was not tarred, impracticable during rainy seasons and without public transportation. The FANILO district coordinator is the catechist of the congregation. In 2014, 157 families were listed as members of the congregation. The church, which is a parish, had no pastor but student pastors came for internship and the district's vicar came once a month. The catechist had a notebook where all Sundays' activities were registered: decisions, number of persons present and the offering. He also had a list of the members with all of their names, ages and marital statuses. The congregation has a large property with a parsonage, an apple grove, and a football field under construction. I was told that the congregation was selected to be a pilot church by the FANILO synod as an upland rice production project site. The FANILO synod promised to provide agricultural materials and training. Apart from the regular Sunday school, the choir met after the church service. The fokontany, the smallest administrative unit, had 3,880 inhabitants in 2017, according to its chief, composed of many farmers with few retailers. The village had a public basic health centre, a primary and secondary school. It had two churches: one Roman Catholic and one Lutheran. The village had a lively weekly market. The area is one of the main providers of timber, firewood and charcoal for Antsirabe city. Exceptionally, the village had four public tap water points, but no electricity. A medical doctor and a nurse worked once a week on market day. I was in the village at the time of famadihana, the returning of

ancestors' bones, a local traditional custom in the highlands of Madagascar, drawing the whole family and the neighbours. As in most Merina and Betsileo villages, the houses are traditionally made of bricks with at least two floors and several rooms. The latrine forms a separate small building in the yard of the house. People use petrol or candles at night for light. People usually use wooden bed and table. The ground floor is usually used to keep domestic animals, and the upper floors are devoted to the bedrooms and kitchen, which is a defence strategy against burglars. Some of the informants told me stories of housebreakers and robberies. Having reported the stories of insecurity to my main supervisor, she suggested I moved to a safer place which prompted me to move to the second congregation in that synod.

The second congregation is in the suburb of Antsirabe. It was a parish with 1,371 baptized members. The pastor had an electronic list of its members grouped by family, with names of its members and some details about non–membership and confirmation. The pastor collected the information during his annual household visits. The parish was organized into four quarters. The women's and youth groups and the Sunday school had regular meetings. The church had deacons and shepherds. The FANILO committee gathered only occasionally to discuss and decide about a development project. The parish also facilitated various development activities such as improvement of local poultry breeding, and the identification of persons with special needs that the FANILO synod assisted with material and technical support. The congregation is situated in the fokontany with a population of around 7,000, being mostly farmers who combined their livelihood with various income–generating activities and/or various jobs. Houses are made of brick, but with more modern features. Several houses have only one floor with two or more rooms. The area with access to tap water and electricity is the location of businesses such as retailers, private midsize farmers, hotels, wood shops, veterinarian shops and

collecting milk points. There are also two football fields in the area. There are three primary schools: two public and one private, two private agricultural colleges, one private health centre, and three churches: one Catholic, one Lutheran and a Jehovah's Witness are within the fokontany's boundaries and its surroundings. The fokontany was served by several city lines of public transportation every day. When I was visiting the congregation, several events occurred: the FANILO committee was deciding about its collaboration with the milk collector from Antananarivo, the annual meeting in the toby Farihimena – one of the revival movement's main centre situated in the synod of Antsirabe – was held and some members of the congregation along with the pastor attended the gathering.

2.4.3 The congregations in the synod of Toliara

The synod of Toliara is in the South–West region of Madagascar. I stayed in two congregations but visited three. The first congregation is a parish, and the centre of the district. It has a new parsonage built through the use of talents of the congregants. The parish has a FANILO coordinator and trained volunteers. The women's group seems well–organized, and meets once a week. The congregation is situated in the city of Toliara with a population of 168,756 in 2018 (INSTAT 2020, 15). The houses were a mix of modern and traditional buildings made with mud or corrugated metal roof sheets, furnished with at least beds, chairs and tables. Several households have access to electricity. Most people get clean water from public fountains. The church's staff comprises three pastors and a catechist. It had 2,250 active partakers of holy Communion. The church displayed detailed semester offerings on a blackboard inside the church. The church was very active. The revival movement had a regular morning devotion,

while the other groups' meetings were spread out during the week. The church had at least two services each Sunday.

As I was searching for a congregation that had initiated a successful community development project, a second congregation a few minutes away by public transportation from Toliara was referred to me. The church is in a rural commune with a population of about 6,000. Housing was composed of both modern and traditional buildings. I met with the pastor and the FANILO coordinator, a medical doctor. The congregation is the centre of the district. The small town has a tourist attraction site, schools, a hospital, and a market. Church–run development activities included the construction of latrines and a training centre, and production of nursery plants, activities that were initiated and supported by the FLM development program, Malagasy Integrated Rural Development – MIRD which was funded by Digni through NMS. I was dissatisfied with that fact, as I expected to find locally–initiated activities, which I did not find. The district FANILO coordinator told me that in the one of the district's parishes, one association established a very successful UYT project. That parish is the third congregation I visited in the synod of Toliara.

The third congregation is in village, within a rural municipality with a population of around 10,000. The road that leads to the village was not tarred, and no public transportation served the village. The village is often isolated in times of heavy rain. Women fetch water from the river or wells. Houses are made of mud, comprising one floor with two rooms. Most families have beds, some have locally made or imported living room furniture. The village had a Catholic kindergarten that offered lunch for the pupils. The closest primary schools were at a nearby village, and at the centre of the rural commune. The Lutheran church is the only church in the village and in the surrounding area, with around 100 members. The church had a parsonage, but

the pastor lives in another town. The revival movement held an irregular morning devotion, and the church had several active choirs. The FANILO coordinator seems very active. The livelihood of the local population is mainly farming, growing sweet potatoes, cassava and maize and breeding goats. I was informed that people herd cattle in the forest far from the village, however I saw in a neighbouring village a traditional cattle pen with several zebus. Some men produced charcoal, and girls and women sell agricultural products in Toliara.

Chapter 3: Theoretical perspectives

This chapter presents the theoretical perspectives which helped me to understand and interpret UYT through the experiences of this study's informants. This study is situated mainly within the two emerging and interdisciplinary fields of diaconal studies (Öhlmann 2023, 7; Nordstokke 2014, 59–60; Nordstokke 2011, 35) and religion and development (Swartz and Nell 2016, 3) bringing into dialogue theoretical perspectives from those fields to analyse, understand and challenge the church's practice (Nordstokke 2012, 87). The understanding of the concept of development is related to how one understands poverty, who are the actors of development and how is it shaped. The classical understanding and conceptualization of development is often related to a Western notion of modernization, secularization and capitalism. Both post–colonialism and post–development scholars tend to be critical of this conceptualization. Post–colonial thinkers often interpret development concepts and practices as loaded with colonial power, dualism and ethnographically centered norms (Ziai 2016, 38–52). They want to give voice to those oppressed by colonial and post–colonial powers and suggest a concept of development emphasising human dignity and sustainable development with a focus on environment and care for the whole cosmos. Strategies of community development emerged as aiming at assisting local communities to gain capacities to address their own needs and aspirations. Post–development critique, among them religion and development scholars, provided space for religion to be integrated in development studies (Bompani 2019, 180–181). Some of the critics of traditional understandings of development are even more severe and suggest abandoning the term altogether, using other concepts (Öhlmann 2023, 7; Ziai 2016, 54–67).

Within the very limited framework of this thesis, it is not possible to give a full account of the critical discourse on development theories and practice. My main point is thus to give a voice to local people in the Malagasy context, in congregations belonging to FLM. Although the critical discourse on development theories, and on community development, indeed is relevant for my field of work, the emphasis here is laid on giving a voice to the people who are involved on locally led development in congregations, and within the framework of the UYT project. Development in this study is thus primarily understood from a Malagasy perspective, where development is interpreted through the word *fampandrosoana,* which means moving from one situation toward a different one, with an idea of change, movement, and direction (Decker and McMahon 2021, 6). This notion of development, fampandrosoana values the process, method and outcome of development including a holistic perspective on nature. My discussion of the findings in the congregations relates to a number of key concepts, which I will present in the following sections of the chapter: religion and faith, asset–based community development, power and gender and how these concepts relate to UYT. The theoretical concepts were used to interpret the overall findings in the discussion chapter.

3.1 Religion and faith

The theoretical perspectives on religion and faith are drawn mostly from authors within the fields of religion and development and lived religion as this study wants to contribute to the reflection and debate on religion and development, investigating on religion 'in terms of its social consequences and impact' (Öhlmann 2023, 17). Lived religion as a perspective is particularly helpful in understanding religion and faith in individuals' and communities' commitment to social project and as inspiring change, and it offers the potential to address the

whole lifeworld of informants. Overcoming the dualism of religious/secular divide through the concept of lived religion is 'essential for scholars who aim to understand religiosity in the Global South' (Rubin, Smilde, and Jung 2014, 14). Lived religion in the Global South is, compared to a Western individualistic interpretation and invention, embedded into a set of shared religious family or community beliefs (Magezi 2023, 173). This study reflects particularly on the role of Christian religion and faith as assets in both contributing to community's well–being and/or upholding or transforming gender roles in community development projects. Thus, congregational community development through UYT can be recognised as a diaconal practice within FLM representing an alternative approach to development, because activities are organized, initiated and owned by church members (LWF 2009, 61–63) for and with local community members bringing about changes. Traditional development projects in the context of FLM parishes were usually not owned by the parishioners themselves, but often sponsored and owned by external partners. People´s own tangible and intangible assets, including their personal commitment and faith, were not at the centre of the projects, as in UYT.

3.1.1 Concept of religion and faith in development studies

    In numerous religions and development publications, religion and faith are used interchangeably and are often associated with traditions, institutions/organizations, sacred texts and belief in a supreme being (Tomalin 2018; Swart and Nell 2016; Deneulin and Rakodi 2011; Jones and Petersen 2011). For scholars like McGuire (2008, 21–22), placed within the tradition of religious sociologists focusing on lived religion, religion is a social construction that changes over time and its definition is based on four key issues: the location of the sacred, the nature of divine power, the focus of individual religious expression and the purity and authenticity of

tradition and group identity. Most scholars would agree that the concept of religion is complex, and constructing a definition risks being exclusionary and biased. Nevertheless, within the Christian tradition, as with the subject of this study, faith is a meaningful concept. In Borstein's (2003) religion and development research, Christian faith was understood in terms of religious ideas and practices, a productive force and an object of ethical attention used as a frame to evaluate Christians' attitudes and behaviours. In Ammerman's (2013, 272–273) lived religion research, informants understood faith as a way of life. Thus, in development work, faith might have the potential to become the motivation for action in terms of religious ideas, and an integral part of development work in terms of religious practice and way of life, as it empowers women and unites individuals in development projects (Oluwafunmilayo 2006, 415–419; Haddad 2001, 16–18).

Religion and faith are recognized by many scholars, but also by many development stake holders, as social and political forces that might represent both liabilities and/or assets to development (Rakodi 2012, 643). They, for instance, became assets when religious institutions offered spiritual and psychological support, physical, mental and material resources, ethical framework, common experiences and a sense of belonging (Skjortnes 2020). But religion and faith became liabilities when these institutions, through the reading of sacred texts and their interpretations, justify certain practices and translated them into reality in the case of patriarchal structure (Wood 2019, 2–4). Yet these interpretations also constitute the basis of ideologies that might perpetuate and promote various forms of social practices, such as community development initiatives. In that case, participation in development activities might be constructed to be a moral duty. Religious leaders often play a decisive role in the interpretations of texts and shaping practices. Religious teachings and rituals contribute to the production of religious belief and

values, which in turn might encourage social engagement (Rakodi 2012, 644). In order to understand religion, particularly individual's religious lives, several scholars suggest the use of the concept lived religion. The next section focuses on this concept.

3.1.2 Lived religion and the consideration of the invisible

Lived religion, according to McGuire (2008, 98), is the creation and enactment of religious resources. It is also a practice in which the sacred is an integral part of every social relationship, space and time. In other words, it is an experience: a practice that involves the body, the mind and the spirit, a practice that can accomplish transformation (McGuire 2008, 98, 171–183). The concept of lived religion directs the researchers' attention to all religious elements that individuals and groups use to create and deconstruct their world, a religious world that, in turn, shapes them (Orsi 2003, 172). A lived religion approach helps to distinguish which religious elements matter most to individuals in engaging with the world (Orsi 2003, 173). It is about studying the religious lives of the laity, their everyday acts and thoughts and paying attention to the meaning of their practice (Hall 1997, vii–xi), in our case, their involvement in community development work.

Lived religion is a concept that helps to analyse the everyday practice, experience and expression of religion of individuals as they make the invisible visible and present. In everyday practice, things and space convey religious messages, identity and the embodiment of religion (McGuire 2008, 13–15). For instance, some religious practices express power relations, either to assert dominance and status, such as with exclusive rituals or to demonstrate submission, as in kneeling (McGuire 2008, 171–178). Often, these practices inspire changes, as Henriksen (2016, 39) argues that 'The transformative element [of religion] is a component that enhances religious

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engagement and contributes important motivation for attempts to change the present situation by means of different practices'. This component, Henriksen (2016, 39) added, is relevant on a social and individual level. As it positioned outside of institutional religious settings, lived religion challenges institutionalized religion. It is for this reason that lay people's interpretations of sacred texts are valued, and practices and experience are at the heart of the adherent's life (Ammerman 1997, 197, 201–206, 211–212).

The idea of lived religion was developed in the United States. It is sometimes criticized as being simplistic in overemphasizing the agency of laypeople, while overlooking the institutional embeddedness of religious practices (Kupari 2020, 215). According to Knibbe (2020, 265), lived religion requires critical perspectives as 'some forms of lived religion may produce and perpetuate suffering and oppressions', but according to Ammerman (2016, 92) lived religion is helpful in paying attention to various issues among other issues of gender and power. Several researchers in the Global South applied this concept in their study of religions, particularly of lived Christianity (Magezi 2023; Ogidi and Chiroma 2021; Lado 2020), of what people do and experience. Lived religion's conceptualization, according to Magezi (2023, 173) is contextual. In the Global North's understanding, lived religion, through the body, is interpreted as the bridge that connects and blurs the boundaries between the sacred and profane (McGuire 2008, 50–52, 55, Ammerman 2014, 299). In the Global South, particularly in Africa, lived religion is lived and generated in a faith community, in its members' public practice in a context of tension and contradiction from the encounter between religions (Magezi 2023, 167, 174–175; Vähäkangas and Lauterbach 2020, 1). Focusing on lived religion is also a way of studying religion empirically (Orsi 2003, 174). It examines the ways people are religious: how do they bring the reality of their religious world in their bodily experience, and how this reality is

expressed. It is a combination of religious ideas, imaginations and actions individuals use to engage the world (Orsi 2003, 172). As lived religion is based on individual experience, it seems complex, incoherent, and heterogenous, but it is grounded on shared meaning, experiences, and practices (McGuire 2008, 16) related to a association with an official religious institution where this shared meaning, experiences and practices are produced (Ammerman 2014, 299–304). This also applies in the Global South (Magezi 2023, 174) and thus makes the concept and theory of lived religion meaningful, also in a Malagasy context. The concept of lived religion as a public expression of religious commitment is also used to analyse the hybridity/openness of religion in the lives of religious people. Religion is not bound to established norms and boundaries, particularly of the educated or the clergy (McGuire 2008, 16; Ammerman 1997, 210–212), but is something which is expressed and experienced by everyone.

Lived religion perspective acknowledges the relevance of everyday activities as part of the faith life (McGuire 2008, 12–16), which makes it relevant to this study, as in Madagascar spirits are pervasive in human life. It has a holistic/inclusive way of perceiving the world with its social, psychological and spiritual dimensions (McGuire 2008, 137–145). The living dead – the ancestors – as well as spirits are believed to influence the life of human beings and the world (Dahl 1999, 25–42). The concept of lived religion is particularly helpful when considering the worldview of the informants and their community. Malagasy people believe in supernatural powers that intervene and are involved in human life and the world (Skjortnes 2014a, 39–51). Traditionally, the role of a supreme God is believed to both give and take back life (Dahl 1999, 34). The ancestors, however, play a role in the everyday life of people as they have the power to intervene in the fertility of soil, animals and humans (Dahl 1999, 28–29), and to protect and heal (Austnaberg 2008, 150, 166, 170, 333). Spirits, in the traditional Malagasy understanding, are

not entirely good or bad, but for Christians, particularly from the point of view of most shepherds in the revival movement, all spirits that are not of God are evil (Austnaberg 2008, 334–336). Belief in spirits provides a comprehensive explanation of the universe, a total integration of religion in people's lives (Skjortnes 2014a, 39; Austnaberg 2008, 149), so that the dichotomy of sacred and secular becomes irrelevant. Thus, people are living in a religious universe and have a holistic view of life. Individuals invest in their relations with spiritual entities to enhance the quality of their lives: material welfare and interests. The non–normative approach which is included in a lived religion perspective is thus helpful to describe and understand Christian faith and its role in daily life in local contexts in Madagascar, since it also opens for the acknowledgement of faith elements that traditionally might not have been accounted for within systematic and practical theology in a Malagasy Lutheran context.

The questions that could support the understanding of UYT from a lived religion perspective are, how did UYT assist congregations in bringing the reality of their religious world in their bodily experience of community development initiatives? How did UYT assist congregations in using religious elements to create and shape the religious life of those engaged in congregational community development initiatives?

3.2 Asset–based community development (ABCD)

The ABCD theoretical framework was taken from authors within the fields of social work and development studies. ABCD approaches are similar to some Diakonia approaches in terms of working with, and not on behalf of communities. Like the lived religion perspective, ABCD methodology started in the Global North, with its western liberal approach to development but was later adopted in the Global South. The ABCD theoretical perspectives and

methodology were chosen as they help understand and interpret the UYT through the experiences and stories of the informants. The phrase 'community development', like the two terms that constitute it 'community' and 'development', has different meanings for different people depending on their contexts and values. Community development can be considered as a process and an outcome (Phillips and Pittman 2009, 6) in which peoples' capacity are built to contribute to a positive change in their communities. Asset–based community development is one type of approach to it (Addy 2022a). In international diakonia, community development is referred to as an important activity (LWF 2009, 62). Community is in this study referring to people that are related by place (Addy 2022b, 80; Phillips and Pittman 2009, 5), the local villages and its neighbourhood. Community members could have fluid and different identities and interests. In this study, FLM's congregations and local churches members constitute communities of identity as faith communities, yet they are also residents of local villages and its neighbourhood. Additionally, UYT projects might be initiated by FLM members, but activities and benefits include non–members.

3.2.1 Conceptual basis for the asset–based community development approach

Asset–based community development is considered to be both an approach and a set of methods to community development (Mathie and Cunningham 2003, 477), more than simply a theory. As an approach to development, it rests on several principles: that development is community driven, that development initiatives are built upon the recognition of local assets as motivating positive change, that it is collaborative and inclusive (Mathie and Cunningham 2003, 477, 483) and that local community is both the main actor and main decision–making body (Nel 2020, 270). As a set of methods, ABCD includes asset mapping, resource mobilization

(McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1236–1237), forming a core group of mobilizers, appreciative inquiry (Mathie and Cunningham 2003, 477–478), initiation of community activity without outside assistance, and scaling up of activities through linkage with external institutions (Mathie and Cunningham 2005, 3). ABCD also relates to theories and methods, such as social capital, economic development and dependency (Green and Haines 2016, 14).

The asset–based approach was based upon and inspired by local experiences in some cities in the US (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993, 7) and was meant to affirm and complement the work that is ongoing in communities. The asset–based approach was also applied and researched in some countries in Africa. Researchers found that even with some challenges the approach can be promising for community development work in many contexts in Africa (Yeneabat and Butterfield 2012, 137, 151–152), as it contains some elements emphasized in alternative approaches to development, such as local ownership and empowerment, where classical approaches to development might not have fully succeeded (Nel 2006, 240–241). It is also considered to be a way to counteract (Mathie and Cunningham 2003, 475) and to question needs–approach's sustainability (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 439). Such a needs–approach is understood to potentially create clients and consumers and sustain the idea of deficient and incapable individuals and community.

The asset–based approach focuses on local resources. Through community gatherings and conversations, assets are systematically assessed and identified. This is the process called asset–mapping in which individuals and community learn about the resources available (Green and Haines 2016, 15). Assets include, among other things: culture, humans/the work force, physical assets, financial environment and politics of the individuals, associations and institutions. An asset–based approach values all assets, as they are the foundation for individuals'

participation, community mobilization and the mobilization of local and regional assets. Assets are multiplied through sharing, investment and connections. They can also be drawn to meet local needs and used to solve problems. They may also be used as leverage to mobilize other assets.

Asset–based approach is a method that both empowers people and supports them to empower themselves (Roy 2017, 461). It increases personal and interpersonal power that encourages and enables individuals and local communities to act (Ssewamala et al. 2010, 434). By acquiring and using resources, individuals and communities can achieve their goals. In asset–based approach, participants are considered to have the capacity to think through the costs and benefits of their involvement (Green and Haines 2016, 14).

Asset–based approach also applies the concept of community building, as the goal of the approach is the building of a stronger community. The aim is the shifting of power, in which individuals and groups are listened to, valued and can engage on a more equal basis between themselves and with external actors (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 435–445). It might have the potential to encompass a change in relationships that creates social cohesion, extension of relationships beyond relatives, and even the local community. Asset–based approach encourages mutual support and problem solving, sharing common interests and activities and enhances collectivism and solidarity. Thus, the approach is considered to be a socially sustainable model (Harrison et al. 2019, 5–9).

The aim of the asset–approach is to develop community agency, which contributes to local development based on collective strength and action, resulting in a community that is able to overcome present and future obstacles, influence structural policies and decisions and ensure

effectiveness of outside intervention, policies and plans (Ennis and West 2010, 412), in short, a community that holds the government accountable for certain responsibility (Nel 2020, 269).

As such, an asset–based approach is considered to be an integrated development approach, and thus part of a multidimensional approach to development (Ssewamala et al. 2010, 440–441), a complementary approach with a strategy that links micro assets to macro environment (Mathie and Cunningham 2003, 477). The asset–based approach seeks to build local community leadership capacity, foster a community as a nurturing environment (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 436), a vehicle for active citizenship, which encourages a spirit of egalitarianism (Mathie and Cunningham 2003, 482).

3.2.2 Critique of an asset–based approach to community development

The asset–approach has been criticized by both scholars and practitioners. It has been criticized for lacking evidence–based efficacy and conceptual clarity (Ennis and West 2010, 407). It was also criticized for ignoring the power dynamics within countries, groups and families (Green and Haines 2016, 18; Ennis and West 2010, 407), such as racial segregation, and lack of resources that perpetuate unequal conditions. These critics say that asset–approach exaggerates community capacity (Fisher and Defilippis 2015, 368), leaving the structural drivers of inequality, power and privilege unchallenged (Nel 2020, 273–274; Roy 2017, 456–457; Ennis and West 2010, 407), as well as the macro level cause of disempowerment (Ennis and West 2010, 406). In other words, 'ABCD prioritizes "power with" over "power within"', does not develop 'power to' and disregards 'power over' (Maclure 2022, 3), different aspects of power that will be discussed in Article 3 and in the discussion chapter. There is a concern that the asset–based approach serves the interest of the powerful, suppresses voices, accommodates the

dominant ideological position, stigmatizing people with needs and problems (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 445–446). Others fear that its application might take time and resources and might be against building on existing association with perceived constrained cultural norms (Mathie and Cunningham 2003), or give advantage to the already influential and cohesive community (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 446).

Scholars also charge the asset–approach of encouraging individualization by privatizing public issues (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 436–438, 447), to value free market and the reduction of the government's spending and intervention (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 437). In political discourses in the Global North, the asset–based approach could be used to justify the withdrawal of the state as the primary actor in social welfare, which is considered to be hostile to and distrustful of the state as stakeholders and duty bearers for community development (Nel 2018, 37, 46), and to function for the benefit of society (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 437). In addition, welfare state spending is portrayed as ineffective, reinforcing social problems and creating a culture of 'entitlement' (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 439). Based on the critique towards ABCD approaches, one could also ask whether UYT potentially can imply a withdrawal of international partners and donors, requesting that local partners and people in congregations have all the capacities and resources, assets, 'talents', to improve their living conditions without further support from partners. The questions that could support the understanding of UYT from an ABCD methodology are: how did UYT inspire collective action, and how did UYT position congregational community development initiatives vis–à–vis the role of other stakeholders, particularly the state?

3.3 Power and gender

The concepts of power and gender in this dissertation were drawn from authors within the fields of social work, development studies and diakonia. These concepts were chosen as analytical lens in this study to explore and understand the kind of power that participants and UYT could make use of and to have insight into the gender distribution of roles in development projects. Power and gender are part of social relations and power differences are realities in community life (Hustedde 2020, 25) as well as in diaconal activities (Addy 2022b). What matters in both cases is awareness of power differences (Dietrich 2014, 19), and critical reflections on those differences with the aim of bringing transformation (Addy 2022b; Deifelt and Hofmann 2021, 57–58; Leer–Helgesen 2018, 159–162).

3.3.1 Concepts of power and gender in development studies

This study adapts Gaventa's (2006, 24) conceptualization of power to its understanding. It pertains to the ability/capacity to affect change in the community, institutions and/or individuals. The concept of gender is understood in Haddad's (2003, 429) terms as 'the socially constructed and culturally defined differences between men and women, which are usually identified through a set of role expectations of men, and women'. The distribution of power and its dynamics is complex and varies for women and men in many areas of life. According to statistics from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social affairs (2020), in many contexts, particularly in the Global South, men exercise more power than women, and have more opportunities in social, economic and politic arenas. Women, for instance, represent fewer than 30% of people participating in the labour market in the Global South (United Nations

Department of Economic and Social affairs 2020), and are disproportionately represented among those who live in poverty (Jackson 1996, 491).

In development studies literature, power is understood as a productive means that helps individuals and communities to make change. It is necessary in order to build and mobilize resources (Meade et al. 2016, 8; Kabeer 1994, 229). Power relates individuals and their communities to competence and rationality. Power is at the root of the processes of empowerment and disempowerment. This transformative conceptualization of power is helpful in understanding the UYT projects/approach.

In the process of empowerment, individuals and communities acquire the ability to achieve change in their communities, and to transform themselves and others. According to feminist scholars (Kabeer 1994, 262; Moser 1993, 198–203), empowerment is achieved only through community action, organization and mobilization. The process of empowerment could be understood through four aspects of power: 'power within', 'power with', 'power to' and 'power over'.

The first aspect of power is about an individual change of attitude, personal growth and the increase in confidence (Masterson and Owen 2006, 23, 26). Power is generated from within. It is about the increase of self–esteem and autonomy, seeing the self as able to act and influence the world, to take responsibility for own decisions and lives. It is the ability to understanding situations of domination and injustice and act upon that understanding. This form of power operates when individuals develop skills and capacity and have access to resources.

The other three aspects of power overlap. 'Power with' is the ability to relate and work with others. Collective actions are meant to help individuals to becoming aware of their interests and relate them to the groups/communities' interests. This is the space in which each person as

an individual and groups learn to negotiate and influence, to work together to achieve an extensive impact. It is about collective responsibility and sharing of power. 'Power to' is the ability to gain access to decision arena, the ability to make socio–political action. It is about agency and achievement. 'Power over' operates in a relationship of domination and influence, which can be open or covert. Open and visible exercise of power are recognized in decision making setting. Power is exercised covertly through controlling agendas, limiting what issues are to be discussed and decided and through manipulation of roles and identities in which both the powerful and less powerful accept the situation of power imbalance as natural (Kabeer 1994, 225).

Women's empowerment means a change in attitudes and behaviours, a redefinition of role and relationship that challenges stereotypes and normativity. It means doing justice to women and acknowledging their importance in society. It is about claiming power and building self–confidence (Turner et al. 2015, 155). The aim is to redress unequal access to resources and power and engage in mutual relationships (Turner et al. 2015, 160). Without power, women and their knowledge become invisible and given less value (Pyle 1999, 98–102).

3.3.2 Power and gender in faith communities

There is a need for those engaged in diaconal activities to be aware and have critical reflections about power asymmetries in their performance and handle power ethically (Dietrich 2014, 19–21). The imbalance of power in the church and its ministries might be the result of its organizational structure and gendered practices and traditions. These might be sustained and reinforced by the church's theology, grounded in biblical interpretations that promote and justify the imbalance of power, particularly gender inequality (Wood 2019, 2–4). The appropriate roles

of women and men in the family, society and in the church, in most cases, are often defined by and constructed from the church's biblical interpretation. The church tended to view women's role as confined to private domestic life, while men were given public office and leadership. Within the history of diakonia, particularly with the European Protestant tradition, work was feminized, as women were the workers, and men often occupied the position of leaders (Nordstokke 2016, 43).

In the church's community development work, power asymmetries are expected to be found in the context of different knowledge and economy. Each person who wants to bring social change has power and also the opportunity to misuse power. Misuse of power might occur subtly, as congregations and their members appear to come with good intentions, but instead disempower and create dependence in the people or community they want to help. The idea of power from God might also lead to individuals' misuse of power. Their understanding might prompt them to enforce their ideas and methods on other individuals without the latter having a voice and being able to decide for themselves. The aim of diakonia is to facilitate and assist individuals and communities to achieve development based on their ideas, decisions and by using their strengths and resources in combination with external resources. As with the ABCD approach, the church's development work is supposed to be performed with, not to or on behalf of communities (Dietrich 2014, 20). Thus, diakonia use methods/strategies aimed at empowering individuals and communities to participate in and own development activities.

In diaconal theory and practice, empowerment is one important dimension. Empowerment relates to the biblical understanding of humans as being created in the image of God, with dignity, 'with capacities and abilities, independent of their apparent social situation' (LWF 2009, 45). Individuals, in this understanding, were created with a sense of self–worth,

self–confidence, agency and control, and see other individuals in the same way with dignity and autonomy regardless of differences. Individuals were created to live in community with others, in which they contribute to the well–being of the community in collaboration and mutuality. Still, in societies and churches with patriarchal traditions, gender inequality might affect and challenge diaconal activities that are aiming at empowering women (Bue Kessel 2016, 169–171). To help avoid or minimize the preservation and reproduction of gender inequalities, there is a need to analyse and evaluate power relations in diaconal work and institutions (Breen 2016, 185). The questions that could support the understanding of UYT from gender and power perspectives are: how did UYT assist congregations to challenge and/or support social expectation of women and men's contributions to community development, and how did UYT assist congregations to have critical reflection on different forms of power and power asymmetries?

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology underpinning this thesis. The study

approaches the phenomenon both in terms of religious and socio–organizational aspects of UYT.

This chapter starts with a brief reflection on the qualitative methodology that has guided this

research. The next section presents the data collection process, sampling strategies and methods

employed in the study. After a discussion on the interpretation and analysis of the data, this

chapter concludes with the study's ethical considerations.

4.1 A qualitative approach

This study employs a qualitative study design to understand and describe **how is UYT**

project supporting congregations' engagement in community development within four

congregations in three FLM Synods. This study aims to answer the following questions: which

roles do Christian religion and faith play as intangible assets in the implementation of UYT

projects, how Lutherans congregations get involved in UYT without external support, and how

gender and power relations both affect and are affected by UYT projects.

Social constructivism is a philosophical paradigm that assumes human beings construct

and co–construct realities, that they make sense of their world based on their history and contexts

and scientific knowledge is created through experience and conversations (Creswell and

Creswell 2018, 8). The individuals' meanings constantly developed and negotiated socially and

historically are the basis of realities (Flick 2018, 10). I view UYT as a personal and communal

approach to life and experience and a complex social practice, which also can be described along

the lines of the ABCD community development methodology. Thus, social constructivism helps

to understand and interpret how people on the ground adopt it and potentially bring it into life, in all its complexity. To make sense of UYT 'in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 10) and understand the context of the research informants, I decided to implement a qualitative methodology in which I go for field study and gather information personally. The knowledge produced from this study is the reconstructions and interpretation of both the participants and my interpretation of the participants' understanding and/or experience of the 'use of talents' for community development within the framework of their Christian faith.

Qualitative methodology with an ethnographic–inspired approach is used as the method of inquiry. A qualitative procedure implies that I, as a researcher, collect data in the 'natural setting' of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell and Creswell 2018, 181) using open–ended questions. An ethnographic–inspired approach is a method of collecting data by means of spending some time in the field for participants' observation (Creswell 2007, 68), and visiting or accompanying them in their daily activities several times. It also implies studying the meaning of the behaviour of the participants. One of the characteristics of the qualitative methodology is that it uses emerging design, which allows flexibility in the research process (Flick 2018, 13).

4.2 Sampling

To find research sites and participants, I used both procedures of maximal variation and purposeful sampling strategies. Maximal variation sampling is a way to build the complexity of our world into the research (Creswell 2012, 207).

4.2.1 Sampling sites

The initial plan was to select three synods, visit one congregation in each synod and stay in each congregation for four weeks. The basis for selecting the three synods was a Use Your

Talents–project report (FLM Empowerment program 2018) and recommendations from the national coordination of the same project. The sample sites were designed to encompass both urban and rural areas, as well as Madagascar's inland and coast. In terms of their involvement in community development activity, the research sites included synods/congregations that were active, inactive and lukewarm. Prior to fieldwork, the President and the FANILO Coordinator in each synod gave field access via phone calls and emails. Additionally, they gave three names and descriptions of their activities from which to choose the field sites. Although representativeness is impossible because the chosen sites only included four congregations, they did allow for the collection of most data possible regarding the congregations' level of engagement in their members' use of talents and the experiences of the laity with the congregations' development practice. I informed both FLM's President and the national responsible of the project UYT about the field research by email, and asked for their approval, as gatekeepers, in conducting the study.

4.2.2 Sampling participants

The sampling units were at the same time an individual unit and a group unit, as both the individuals in the Lutheran families and congregations' members were the sources of data and the focus of the conclusions of this study. The participants were from families with young people above fifteen years old of age, church leaders and volunteers. I conducted the study with the church leaders and volunteers with my supervisors in two parishes in the South–West FLM synod of Toliara. Young people are defined as those who are above the age of 15 and living with their parents at the time of the interview. The families were chosen from both those participating in and abstaining from community development initiatives. In each congregation, I purposefully selected the families from various social backgrounds and different level of participation in

church activities: members of committees, groups and church attendance. For the leaders and volunteers, the aim was a gender balance of participation.

The choice of informants was based on: 1) for families, the parents' position in the church, and 2) for the leaders and volunteers, their familiarity with and/or direct involvement in the UYT–initiatives. These families, the leaders and the volunteers were 'those most likely to know the information required to verify or to move understanding forward' (Morse 2015, 1214). Parents' position denoted their involvement in church service through serving as committee members or deacons. The family selection's purpose was to explore and compare the dynamics and the difference in the individual family members' involvement and their construction of their experiences. The sample represents the different characteristics of families in the congregations: a) both parents have positions, b) one parent has a position or c) neither has a position at church. The difficulty was to find the families with no position even if they were often the majority in churches. The family criteria also constituted a challenge to recruit families, as most parents find my request suspicious, particularly in areas where rumours of abduction were abounding. The selected families reflect and represent, to some extent, the distributions of people's level of involvement in the congregation. Basing the selection of families on the representations and having a position or not opens for various aspects of use of talents and is a way to have a distinct perspective on the Use Your Talents project. I intended to interview at least fourteen Lutheran families: the parents and their child/children, and young people above 15 years of age who are 'old enough to express their opinion' (NEHS 2006, 17). In 2012, youth (between fifteen to twenty–four years of age) literacy was above 76% in Madagascar (INSTAT 2013, 27). The study might contribute to a smaller extent to the understanding of the role of young people in the Malagasy family and society.

To identify the families, I asked pastors or catechists to provide the congregation's census or list of members, but few congregations only had that document. In congregations with a FANILO Coordinator, these coordinators helped identify the first families who then helped choose more informants using a snowball sampling technique. The families were chosen based on two factors: the collectivist nature of the Malagasy society, and the role of the family in socialization or in influencing the views and practices of its members (Hunt 2007, 614). Additionally, research shows that the development of local communities depends on and is interrelated to the characteristics of families in these communities (Delpeche et al. 2003, 12). In addition, when a person is using his or her talents, it affects the whole family, a perspective the international Use Your Talents network used in its practice (Haus 2017, 133). The family sample served as a means for gathering data and assisted in the process of finding informants. It was beneficial to observe the family's complexity and the contrasts in the informants' lives. However, family interviews were difficult from a cultural point of view as, traditionally, words are only given to the eldest. Thus, young people have difficulty expressing themselves, particularly in front of their parents.

4.3 Methods of data collection

The methods used to collect the data came from multiple sources: semi–structured individual and group interviews, field observations and documents. The purpose was to capture the complexity of the phenomenon and to secure rich and thick data. Interviews allow me as a researcher to gather useful information to answer research questions (Creswell and Creswell 2018, 185–187), for a 'rich understanding of human experience' (Roulston 2014, 332), focused and controlled questions, face to face interaction (Creswell and Creswell 2018, 181, 187) without

influence by others, if in a group, and to gather talks. I intended to compare the individual interviews with group interview data to see the difference in views, as well as complementarity. Sites and gender would be other characteristics for comparison. Participants' observation serves both to observe religious practice and life in relation to engagement in church activities, the possibility of community development engagement of participants and provide a thick description of the site and participants' lived reality.

I used interview guides both for the individual and group interviews. The aim of the interview guides was to explore the participants experience and understanding. The guides structured the interviews around the participants' knowledge about and/or engagement/participation in the 'Use Your Talents' project in relation to the church's development organization and teachings about community development and, for the group interviews, their understanding of biblical parable of the talents in Matthew 25 in relation to the church's community development work. In December 2017, accompanied by my main supervisor, I went to Madagascar and conducted seven pilot interviews to test the interview guide for family members. Regarding the study I conducted with my supervisors, we used several main questions, but the interview followed the flow of the informants' stories. After receiving the NSD's approval, I went in Madagascar for my field study.

4.3.1 Field sites

I visited three different synods and six congregations within the FLM and collected data during a four–month period (July–October 2018), but I only collected data in four congregations (the last two parishes with my supervisors). For security reasons and for the sake of studying a successful UYT project, in the two last synods, I moved from one congregation to another, and

chose congregations other than those the synod leaders suggested. My choice was the result of discussing with both local leaders in the site where I was located and with the national responsible of UYT project. Insecurity in one of the field sites was related to robberies and housebreaking. The choice of moving was the result of a consultation with my supervisors. Because I was from Norway, some of my host families in the field and informants thought that I was rich and might be robbed or injured while traveling alone as a woman stranger in some rural areas. In addition, during the time for my research, the annual traditional rituals of the "turning of the bones" (*famadihana*) was going on, which caused some extra insecurity in the region, and forced me to change the research site.

The selected sites of the study comprise four congregations: two rural, one suburban and one urban. The three synods were in Manakara in the South–East of Madagascar, in Antsirabe in the centre and in Toliara in the South–West. To preserve the anonymity of participants, only the names of the synods are mentioned, not the location of the congregations.

4.3.5 Participants

I recruited the first families with the help of the local church leaders. The criteria for selecting families made the recruitment narrow and difficult. Unfortunately, families who did not fit the criteria were willing to participate in the study and several families who did fit initially agreed to be part of the project, but disappointingly refused at the time of the interview. At last, I was able to recruit a minimum of three families from each congregation: eight families with two parents, and three single–headed–families, a few of them composed of a multigenerational family. The average number of members per family was 5.6. The fathers' occupations ranged from farmers, employees, small business entrepreneur to retired. The mothers were also engaged

in farming, and most of them were engaged in some form of trade as a permanent or occasional source of income. The majority of the adult informants were educated, with the exception of a few women. Concerning young people, the majority were students, a few dropped out of school and one had recently graduated. I interviewed twenty–nine individuals, among whom ten were young people. All participants came from eleven Lutheran families. With my supervisors, we interviewed twelve individuals with as many female participants as possible. All the interviews were tape recorded.

4.3.6 Data collection

Before the data collection started, I contacted and informed the local authorities who approved the implementation of the study. I (and my supervisors) informed those who agreed to participate in the study about their rights, the aim of the study and the data collection procedure. The participants agreed to be observed as a family on two occasions, to participate in one individual interview on the third meeting and one group interview on an agreed–upon schedule. The individual semi–structured interviews lasted between 15 minutes to one and a half hours. Group interviews were only held in two synods with one fathers' interview, two each for both mothers and young people. The group interviews lasted for about one hour each. Family observations took one hour to a full day, depending on their occupation at the moment of observation. I for example followed a father and his son to a cassava field where the man showed me his talents and where people can learn from his ameliorated agricultural technique. The interviews as well as the field observation followed the pre–established guides and objectives. The interviews I conducted were in Malagasy, transcribed literally and only quotes used in the thesis I translated. The individual interviews of families took place mostly in the participants'

house, with a few held in the church's yard, and the group interviews in the parish's building. With my supervisors, the interviews took place in various public places. Participants were interviewed both in English and Malagasy with a translator, and transcribed into English. Before the arrival of my supervisors in Madagascar, I regularly informed them about each field research.

4.4 Analysis

All recorded information was transcribed literally. Data sources were from 41 individual and five group interviews making 38 hours 27 minutes and 38 second of voice data, with 318 pages of transcript and around 50 hours of observation with 80 pages of written notes. Study of four FLM congregations in Madagascar. With Article 1 – Faith as an asset in a community development project: The case of Madagascar – the data material used from the observations and interviews of 33 lay Christians: adults and young people, a volunteer and a leader from the four congregations. With Article 2 – Tackling Poverty with local assets: a case study on congregational asset–based community development in a Lutheran Church in Madagascar – the data sources were from qualitative observations and interviews of ten persons, composed of volunteers and church/project leaders from two FLM congregations in the South–West of Madagascar. With Article 3 – Gender and power relations in a Malagasy congregational asset–based community development project – the data material was from qualitative observations and interviews of 41 informants including family members, volunteers and church/project leaders from all the sites. For all articles, the process of analysis followed several steps implemented in iteration: organizing of data, coding, forming themes, reporting and interpreting the findings (Creswell 2012, 236). The process helped to combine codes in new ways and formed new codes and themes.

4.4.1 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data in order to answer the research question (Creswell 2012, 236; Crabtree and Miller 1999, 129). It is also answering the question: what does I want to see in the data and to tell my audience? The approach used was thematic content analysis, because it is suitable for research with a relatively low level of interpretation. The goal of content analysis as a method of handling data is to apply inductive coding techniques based on the content of the communicated data and to create categories of themes that exist in the empirical data. The categories were grouped together in this study's scenarios in relation to different aspects of UYT.

4.4.2 Organizing the data

The transcripts were printed, and in the beginning, I put together the materials in units: notes from the observations, individual and group interviews group by gender and age. Before organizing the data, I reflected on potential bias I had during the process of data collection that might first have influenced the contents of participants' answers and affected the interpretation of the data. Being explicit about researcher's bias is one strategy to validate the inquiry (Morse 2015, 1214–1217). To become familiar with the data, I read the transcript several times and looked for patterns, ideas, concepts, behaviours, phrases or most common responses, having in mind and written in front of my desk the research objective. I worked on the Malagasy transcript for analysis and translated only the quotes and key words of the participants I used in the report.

4.4.3 Coding

Analysing is sorting out the data, finding connections and grouping those with similar ideas (Creswell 2012, 239) or identifying units of interest or segmenting (Crabtree and Miller 1999, 134–135). Coding helped to structure and label the data. The data was grouped both manually and with the help of NVivo computer program. Once I defined the units, I then coded them and tried to narrow the data into a few themes (Creswell 2012, 243). The techniques used to discover codes also included counting of words that occur regularly throughout all narrative and coding each text accordingly. All coded texts were compared to identify similarities and differences. The coded texts were also compared to the individual narratives, to check the accuracy of interpretation, and whether a point of view should be added. Nvivo 12 helped in organizing the coded words and breaking down the data into analytical pieces (reduced). At this point, I made decisions as to which part of the data to use and which to 'disregard' if they do not 'provide evidence' for their themes (Creswell 2012, 243). This means the data was reduced in order to search for the phenomenon of interest: the way congregations engage in community development (Roulston 2014, 339). The coding of the data for the purpose of this study went through various changes meaning the analysis was not a linear work but a back and forth between reporting, reading the data and coding. The coded groups of texts were printed, interpreted and summarized into concepts or themes. Themes were developed further or added and reformulated. The themes helped to describe, compare and explain (Ryan and Bernard 2003, 86) how participants understand UYT and construct their experienced of UYT in relation to Christian faith and religion.

4.4.4 Reporting and discussing the findings

After coding, the next step was reporting and discussing the findings. Reporting is the process of summarizing in detail the findings from the data analysis and discussing the themes (Creswell 2012, 254–256). The findings were then interpreted or discussed, giving meaning to the phenomenon based on the participants' experiences and understanding and compared with findings from other studies. This section is the space for the researcher to share her/his new understandings, interpretations and what s/he learned (Crabtree and Miller 1999, 137). Theoretical perspectives were used in the interpretation 'as a broad explanation for behaviour and attitudes' (Creswell and Creswell 2018, 61). I presented the draft of my texts to my supervisors and peers several times during various academic meetings and re–worked them in relation to new applicable comments and input.

Most of the quotes used in this study are my personal translation of the excerpts from the data collection. I translated the selected quotes determined to preserve meaning with as much accuracy as possible, keeping in mind the importance of the cultural and contextual meaning of the quotes. I discussed this question of translation with my Malagasy peers. Recently, scholars started a discussion about methodological issues relating to cross–languages qualitative studies, questioning the validity of the study (van Nes et al. 2010, 313). There is a fear that the participants' voice would be changed through translation, and the meaning of the informants' original quote be reduced or lost, which may affect the readers' understanding and interpretation of the finding. I realized the challenge of translation when I started to translate the questionnaire guides from English to Malagasy. This also prompted me to choose to translate only the selected quotes that would be used in the report. Once the quote was selected, I consulted the original transcript to check the interpretation of the quotations. Concerning the study conducted with my

supervisors, we used, in addition to myself, an academician working in the field of community development in the south of Madagascar as a translator. When all data were transcribed, my task was to check the accuracy of the translation against the participants' tape–recorded responses.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Scientific research is expected to be ethically sound in three aspects: scientific quality, consideration of the welfare of the participants and respecting the dignity and rights of participants (Flick 2018, 39). The aim of this study is to produce some knowledge about a congregational approach to community development in Madagascar within the scientifically required standards and norms, as it is my obligation and responsibility as a researcher (Bird and Scholes 2014, 83). From the outset, I had to prepare strategies to handle all possible ethical issues in conducting research with human subjects in compliance with all related governing ethical protocol to ensure integrity and quality, and submit the ethical considerations and plans for assessment and approval to the relevant institution/body. I adapted my attitudes and behaviours during the field work with the expected moral norms of acting relevant to local customs, I handled them with the help of cultural awareness. I ate, for example, the food my informants offered me when I came to their home, mostly upon the second meeting. Offering food for guests culturally means a friendly welcoming symbol, and refusing to eat would be considered to be an affront, displaying mistrust and hostility. With individual interviews, the adult male informants took the initiative of having one child with them or having the interview conducting in public space. Concerning the question of power dissymmetry, open–ended questions allowed the informants to tell their stories and be in charge. While analysing the data and reporting the findings, I strove for accuracy of the report (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 140),

reporting even the negative results (Creswell 2014, 99), in order to be honest about the ups and downs of whole process (NEHS 2006, 8), as I am accountable to my informants, VID, FLM and NSD (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 151). When using other sources, I cite or refer to them at the end of quotations or paraphrased ideas (NEHS 2006, 26).

The informants are one of my sources of information and, ethically, I was required to ensure their welfare during the research process in anticipation of how the research results might be received, interpreted and used against the informants (Singleton and Straits 2010, 31). During the field study, repeated family visits and conducting the interview in the informants' homes helped to both relaxed the informants and to some extent the atmosphere of the interview. The briefing at the beginning of the observations and interviews about the research process and what participating in the study entails worked as a guarantee that the study's aim is understanding and knowledge, not demanding perfection or coming to assess what is wrong. Some participants found questions about their experience of use of talents to be distressing and confrontational, and I am grateful that they were honest when they did not have experience or knowledge of UYT. The study report did not include personal judgment of the participants. To preserve the anonymity of this study's participants, their names and the locations of their congregation were not mentioned (Creswell and Creswell 2018, 95). For the sake of reciprocity, transparency and balance of power, I thought of giving back the research results to the informants and their community. But that idea prompted several questions: when would I give back and to whom? In practice, giving back is challenging, as the products of this research are – for now –English– language academic articles and a thesis. Would the study participants understand the findings as the research did? On the other hand, the results might affect the quality of life of the study participants, and help religious leaders and workers to make informed decision with regards to

the congregations' community development initiative. Thus, my plan is to share the products of this research with the religious leaders at national and regional levels, and at least with the Malagasy Lutheran theological faculty. When finalizing the thesis, I also plan to write a summary of my research results in Malagasy, particularly for my informants, as the research ethic guidelines requires it (NEHS 2006, 35).

Concerning respect for the dignity and rights of participants, they were informed about the purpose, methods, intended use of research and what participation entailed. I explained that participation was voluntary and depended on their decision. They were free to withdraw at any time. I asked both young people and adults for their consent. During field work, I stored the recorded interviews in my laptop, which is locked with a password. Upon arrival in Norway, I made copies of the data on a USB, which was also key protected with a password. As this study explored issues related to religion, and some participants were 15 to 17 years old, the NSD's permission compelled this study to observe the ethical consideration of protecting the identity of the participants. Participants and their locations have been anonymized in accordance with the regulations in research. Everyone is identified with a code. S stands for site, W for woman, M for man, YW for young woman and YM for young man. The numbers after the code S indicate the synod of origin of the participant. The numbers after W/M/YW/YM indicate which the family the person belongs to. The numbers do not follow the chronological field visit but, the chronological answer in the findings report.

4.6 Researcher's positionality

I entered the field research as an educated person and a former church employee with structural and historical knowledge of UYT and had the privilege to access the field through

gatekeepers such as the synod's presidents. My reliance on local gatekeepers might have influenced the attitude of my informants as they took me seriously even when some of them saw me as a 'young'[18] woman. I chose and selected both the sites and informants based on my research criteria and sampling strategies. The context in the field research however to some extent influenced my choice of informants as most members in some congregations, for instance, were from single headed families. I also realized in the field that having families as a sampling unit helped me to approach men as a single woman[19], while it facilitated my relations with women and young people. I stayed in the sites (villages and city) and sought to respect what informants did or did not in their community and who they were.

I had a pre–understanding of UYT, but as a researcher I had to take the informants' point of view seriously and tried to understand them in their own terms. My experience as a former church employee, in addition to my identity as Malagasy, and participant observation facilitated my rapport with and trust of informants. My informants trusted me with their stories, lives and I had the privilege of seeing some of their 'use of talents' work as a contribution to community development even if they considered me mostly as an outsider. Some of them thought that I was related to NMS. They reported about certain 'abuse' of some leaders and thought that once I informed NMS about that situation, it might influence and change how donations and activities in the local congregations will be managed. Some of my informants expected that I would explain 'the what and how' of UYT and would correct what they did or did not. Throughout the field work, I tried to remain neutral, in the sense of not saying positive or negative things about their stories, and repeatedly reminded my informants that I was a person who came to investigate

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[18] An adult male informant told his daughter that I was a 'child', *zaza* in Malagasy.
[19] The culture sometimes views a single woman with a man alone as a couple.

'the what and how' of my informants' UYT. Others thought I was there to evaluate their work and would eventually report to the '*Foibe*' (FLM head office) or the synod. Then they became apologetic in relation to what they knew or did not know and what they did and did not in relation to UYT. Some were also critical of the UYT activities, of the direct and indirect participants of these activities and the ways these activities were done or not done. The fact that I was a researcher from Norway also made me rich in the eyes of some informants. I had to make clear that I was not coming to them with material resources or project funding, but that I was there to listen to their stories as a researcher. Their stories comprised struggles with poverty they were facing, a reality that I have observed during my visit and stay. In addition to personal stories and church activities, the interviews also shed light on interpersonal, religious, social and economic challenges/issues in the congregations, in families and in the community. I reported in the findings' section different perspectives and accounts of informants as well as negative aspects and flaws of UYT projects.

During the analysis and writing of the dissertation, I used academic theoretical perspectives while I had to analyse and describe UYT based on informants' experiences and personal point of view, using their own words. For instance, in the encounter with the empirical data and the qualitative material I gathered, the concept of lived religion offers the potential to address the whole lifeworld of religion and the different aspects of the role Christian faith and religion plays in the life of the informants and the local communities I entered. My analysis and writings also were influenced by inputs from colleagues and existing literature related to my research focus and themes. I included gender and power as a theoretical perspective for example after my midterm evaluation and the recommendations from the external evaluators.

As mentioned above, I co–worked with my supervisors in some part of this study. I was the main responsible for the identification of the field site, the congregations and the participants composed of leaders and volunteers. I collected and coded most of the data on my own and translated most of the selected quotes in the articles, or crosschecked whether the translation on site was adequate. With the two first articles, I was the main responsible in drafting and finalizing the main parts. Yet, I worked with my supervisors during parts of the field visits, interviews that the article builds on, and we discussed our observations, analysed the data, and conceptualized the articles, including their structures, together.

4.7 Reliability, validity, and generalization

In order to ensure the quality of the research, I had to reflect on the concepts of reliability, validity and generalization. While reliability depends on rigor in conducting the interviews, transcriptions and analysis, validity questions the relevance of the methods used in relation to the aim of the study and the moral integrity of the researcher (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 283). Generalization is the transfer of the research findings to other relevant situations. Some qualitative researchers tried to find alternatives to these terms, as they connote positivistic views. Flick said there is no single way to assess the quality of qualitative research (2018, 540–565). Some qualitative researchers recommended the use of several validation strategies to ensure the accuracy of research (Creswell and Poth 2018, 259; Creswell and Creswell 2018, 199–202). The use of leading and follow up questions, corroboration of the informants' answers through interviews of different members of the same family and/or leaders of the same congregation helped to ensure the reliability of the interviewees' answers. Leading questions also helped to clarify the answers of the interviewees and help the interviewer to understand the

meaning of the interviewees' answers. For the transcription, my supervisors and I transcribed all the interviews particularly those we interviewed personally. The interview materials were analysed based both on the informants' point of view and on theoretical concepts. This means the themes were data generated and conceptually driven as they were related to the research questions.

This study also applied validation strategies that represented the researcher, participants in the study and the reader's point of view (Creswell and Poth 2018, 259–264). I was assisted with the following strategies to check the accuracy of the findings: the evidence was corroborated with multiple and different theories, and in some part of the study, my supervisors and I collected and analysed the data. I also reflected about the biases, values and experiences I brought to this study (mentioned above). Through the participants' lens, I spent extensive time in the field and had close encounters with the informants. This time allowed for building 'rapport with participants and gatekeepers', increasing knowledge about the local culture and contexts (Creswell and Poth 2018, 262) and becoming familiar with the sites and participants. This time also assisted me in making field–based decisions that were relevant to the purpose of the study, such as looking for a successful UYT projects. For the reader, I made effort to describe in detail in earlier section of this thesis the setting of and the participants to this study to allow readers to transfer the findings with similar settings with the same characteristics.

The findings could, for instance, be transferred in a 'naturalistic' way (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 296) for Lutherans and other Christians in Madagascar, as these findings are based on the personal experience of the informants. An 'analytical generalization' (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 297) also could be applied, as this study's findings might serve as a guide to what might occur in other congregations in other countries that apply the UYT approach.

Chapter 5: Summary of the articles and discussion

Three articles constitute the basis of this study that use to a large extent the same data. All articles discuss how people in the local congregations I visited understand and try to perform local activities in the framework of UYT. Although the context and the data are the same for all three articles, the articles seek to answer different research questions, which all contribute to answer my main question: how is the UYT project supporting congregations' engagement in local community development within four congregations in three FLM Synods?

The findings in the separate articles contribute to shedding light on mechanisms that support a congregation's engagement in local community development through 1) mobilizing Lutherans and strengthening their faith, 2) using the ABCD methods to mobilize assets and 3) empowering the local community, particularly women. The practice of the Christian faith forces some Lutherans to various congregational diakonia initiatives. Combined with specific methods and strategies, UYT strengthens and promotes this 'good will' for the work for a better living condition at the individual and social level. UYT then empowers both women and men to contribute to congregational diakonia. All articles discuss different aspects of UYT as an approach and methodology for diaconal, locally led initiatives for community development. This chapter has four sections that starts with a summary of the articles followed by the discussion of the findings, the strengths and limitations of this study and concludes with a presentation of practical implications.

5.1 Summary of the articles

This thesis is based on three articles that investigated three different aspects of UYT. Each of them contributes to answer this study's main research question: **how the UYT project is supporting congregations' engagement in local community development within four congregations in three FLM Synods?** Article 1 contributes to this study by analysing the role of Christian faith/religion in UYT projects and placing initiatives in their religious/congregational context in Madagascar. Article 2 provides an analysis of the project implementation process as it relates to ABCD methodology. Article 3 demonstrates the communal components of UYT by examining the gendered aspects of and the power dynamics within congregational community development initiatives. With some overlapping elements, each article complements the others and represents, in its entirety, the complexity of UYT. A summary of each article will be presented successively.

Table: overview of the articles.

	Research question	Data sources	Main findings
Article 1 Faith as an asset in a community development project: The case of Madagascar.	What is the role of faith as an intangible asset in a congregational asset–based community development project?	33 lay Christians: adults and young people, a volunteer and a leader from the four congregations.	Reveals that Christian religion and faith play complex roles in congregational community development. Church structure and competition with traditional religion and practice influence congregational community development.

Article 2 Tackling poverty with local assets: a case study on congregational asset–based community development in a Lutheran Church in Madagascar	How can a congregational diakonia contribute to community development in the absence of external resources?	Ten persons composed of volunteers and church/project leaders from two FLM congregations in the South–West of Madagascar	Identifies elements of ABCD methodology in UYT projects based on the understanding of assets in the biblical term talents. The mapping and mobilization by congregations of assets seem unorganized, unsupported. Lacking clear communication and clear goals and lack structural and societal dimension.
Article 3 Gender and power relations in a Malagasy congregational asset–based community development project	How do gender and power relations both affect and are affected by UYT projects?	41 informants including family members, volunteers and church/project leaders from all the sites	Women play an active role in UYT projects, men were often leaders and external actors supported and influenced UYT. Gender and power determine participation in community development without necessarily changing gender and power in the community/society.

5.1.1 Article 1: Faith as an asset in a community development project: The case of Madagascar.

This article investigated the role of Christian religion and faith as intangible assets in the implementation of UYT projects. Article 1 argues that Christian faith and religion might be mobilized as assets for religion–led development work. It provides evidence that faith plays a complex role in congregational community development, as is the case in FLM. The research supported that faith can constitute the essence of lay Lutherans' involvement in community development when informants interpreted and understood it as a religious calling. Informants

who have a strong knowledge of biblical stories, particularly the shepherds, point to this vocation for community development. According to these informants, this vocation refers to and points out God as the primary agent and power behind human actions. These informants emphasized the prominence of an invisible spiritual work more than human agency and capability. The call to this vocation, nevertheless, indicates human responsibility, as informants also mentioned future accountability. Each person must give an account to God of the way they used her/his gifts, often referred to as talents. The vocation, informants mentioned, involves the use and multiplication of talents. This means talents, which includes, among other things, knowledge and skills, benefit both the self and groups, including the congregation and the community. Benefits include fulfilment of financial duty to the church and associations, improved agricultural techniques resulting in increased crops, reduced use of charcoal that also protects the environment, access to small saving credit, employment and improved health. The notions of vocation, gifts and accountability are drawn from religious teachings and biblical stories which serve as normative sources for desirable behaviour. These notions provide religious values, such as love, hope and respect for authority, which will be discussed below, that can drive lay Lutherans' actions and participation in community development. Yet Article 1 demonstrates that, for certain informants with less biblical knowledge and involvement in the church, economic motivations may be significantly stronger than religious ones.

Article 1 also concluded that engagement in congregational community development activities can be the result of structural power and external influence. The study found that church activities go through the work and decision of a committee: preparation and planification of activities including community development initiatives. Members and associations, according to informants, were encouraged to participates in these activities. Volunteering and engaging in

UYT projects in this context demonstrated what most informants understood to be respect of authority: leaders and committees. Informants valued this respect as part and parcel of the process of growing in faith and a form of humility, another religious value. Activities that the authorities did not approve could be considered, according to informants, as divisive and as having an adverse effect on membership, creating inappropriate circumstances for Lutheran discipleship, communities and witness. Still some congregational development initiatives in the words of informants were damaged by power abuse, disagreements, disappointment and mistrust, some of which are considered to be the work of the evil.

The understanding of authority for the informants combined two different but similar views. Authority represented Jesus/God and the *raiamandreny*, a Malagasy concept meaning literally father–and–mother or a parent, which is also a link to the ancestors. In contrast to the idea of authority coming from the ancestors, informants believed that God appointed church leaders for the benefit of the community. Church members depended on and trusted these church leaders to ensure the well–being of the church and Christians. Some informants in leadership positions experienced their use of talents in a way that established and validated their credibility as a leader/elder in opposition to a dependent/incompetent child. Yet structure, as some informants experienced, can create communication problems such as limited expression of ideas and concerns. In addition to congregational/institutional internal power, external influence affected local initiatives. These influences include religious competition and thematic top–down projects from the national UYT project itself. Christianity and traditional religion compete for influence and importance in the local community's practices and beliefs. Some informants considered UYT projects to be ways to evangelize to non–Christians. Yet the data shows that informants explain UYT in both Christian and traditional ways. For instance, the data shows both

dependence on the Christian God and the qualities of good people who, in the traditional understanding, assist and support their neighbour. UYT was also used as a critic of traditionalist's wealth expenditure to get the blessing of the ancestors, considered to be an affront to both God and development. Thus, the aim of UYT performance was both to spread and strengthen Christian faith and improve the livelihood of its participants and people in the community. To sum up, the findings revealed that UYT initiatives depended on biblical stories, religious teaching, values, and structural power, with some elements of Malagasy worldview for community well–being. The question the next section will deal with is the strategies and systematic way UYT use to encourage engagement in UYT initiatives.

5.1.2 Article 2: Tackling Poverty with local assets: a case study on congregational asset–based community development in a Lutheran Church in Madagascar.

This article describes and analyses UYT projects' implementation in comparison to ABCD methodology, as both emphasize local assets. The aim is to study the way UYT contributes to local community development. The findings describe eight cases in which aspects of ABCD methodology of asset–mapping and mobilization were applied. The first is the *noni* project (*Morinda citrifolia*) organized by the regional women's association, which trained members and donated seedlings. The second is the training of hairdressers. One woman volunteer trained several young persons in the skills of hairdressing. The two next cases include the collection and distribution of school kits and clothes. A group of volunteers in an urban church under the leadership and training of a pastor encouraged the church to both support the education of children coming from underprivileged families and provide clothes for prisoners and sick persons. The sixth and seventh cases were the latrine project and goat farming. The

FANILO coordinator in a rural congregation, with the support of an FLM regional program, initiated these projects. The fisheries development was initiated by the national coordinator of UYT, and the saving clubs belongs to the rural youth group.

Understanding assets in the biblical term talents facilitates the mapping and mobilization of assets, both intangible and tangible. This understanding shows that the church uses religious language to engage its members to do development work. Informants understood talents in terms of their activities, occupation and skills, such as developing new and various products from the extraction of a plant, hairdressing, agricultural capacity, skills in account keeping and dependability. Talents also include each person identified as God's talents, as well as activities, such as the successful model of a local saving club. Yet according to the data, asset–mapping and mobilization in most of the cases appeared unstructured and random. In one case, local knowledge and skills in fisheries were identified more in a top–down fashion, as the related project started from a national plan and initiatives.

Article 2 is also consistent with Article 1 in demonstrating that, in all cases, community development initiatives were the result of the mobilization work of a leader, volunteers or committees/leaders. In one congregation, the FANILO Coordinator was the instigator of most of the congregations' development initiatives, apart from the implementation of the saving group, which was the decision of the group's leaders. With the *noni* project, goat farming, collection of school kits and clothes cases, informants cited the work of groups of volunteer mobilizers trained to assist the community to improve its well–being or to assist individuals in the community to acquire skills. Congregation members contribution in two initiatives were the result of the work of these volunteers. One informant talked about both the pastor's training and teaching and her concern about young people's future, which contributed to her personal initiative of training

young people in hairdressing. Each case provided evidence as to how local strength and volunteers establish the basis of congregational community development activities. Congregation members participate and, in some instances, collaborate with non–members in the activities. Some of the activities also started with external assistance from church's organization at national or regional levels providing, among other things, assistance materials and training. In the latrine project, the local municipality recognized the value of the congregation's development initiatives and awarded them with a certificate.

These initiatives show the potential of the church as a stable structure, which could encourage participation and ownership of activities. Yet these activities as informants experienced faced some challenges such as volunteers' lack of official support and recognition, activities' lack of professional competence and structural dimensions and unclear goals and beneficiaries. In the instance of the saving club, members used their savings to assist them during bad times, rather than investing them to grow their capital. Besides, most leaders interviewed, on the one hand, viewed the development activities as one way, among others, to support the church. Lay Lutherans informants, on the other hand, are mostly concerned about their livelihood, their dedication to the church and the well–being of their communities. This demonstrates first that church leaders need training related to congregational community development, and second that UYT is not a capitulation to neoliberalism's ideology of individualization and privatization. Article 2 shows that UYT lacks structural dimensions, Article 3 helps to understand this lack as it describes and analyses gender and power in UYT.

5.1.3 Article 3: Gender and power relations in a Malagasy congregational asset–based community development project.

This article focused on the relevance of gender and power in the mapping and mobilizing of assets in UYT projects. It pointed to the active role women play in UYT projects and adult men's positions, as well as the presence of some external supports, as described in Article 2. The findings showed that women contributed to local development and participated actively in the development initiatives in the congregation, or in activities its groups implemented. Informants described that women, as individual volunteers or as a group in their congregation, learned, for instance, agricultural techniques, such as poultry breeding, various households–care skills and implemented the techniques. Yet exceptions existed, as the case of one female informant who had the privilege of her family support, took the hairdressing course, used it successfully to support herself then subsequent used these new skills to teach young persons. In addition to training from the church, some informants received material assistance such as seeds/seedlings. Some informants had the opportunity to expand their knowledge on how to turn raw materials into various commercial products, as was the case with the *noni* project.

In almost all the congregations that were visited, women's groups were organizing various development initiatives in addition to their associational religious activities. Most female informants knew and valued themselves as individuals and their assets, which disclose their awareness of their 'power within'. These female informants also talked about the opportunities they have within their groups to exchange information and to learn from one another and form networks, particularly at local, and – to some extent – regional levels. Some informants shared their experiences of their group looking for possibilities, organizing around issues, with individuals taking responsibility and participating in the activities. These activities showed their

'power to'. Yet several informants revealed that these initiatives were hampered by various challenges such as insecurity, distrust and disagreement between members in addition to uncertain goals and benefits, a lack of church support and recognition, a lack of structural elements and professional competence in the activities mentioned in Article 2.

Gender and power determine participation in community development without necessarily changing gender and power relations in the community/society. The findings of Article 3 found that congregations organized collective activities with the participation of women, men and youth. One example was the construction of a well in a rural village for easy and safe access to potable water. In these activities, men held some specific positions and carried out specific tasks that differed those of women and youth. Men were often leaders at high or low level of the church structure, trainers and members of committees which had the power to decide the details of processes of development initiatives. Some men validated their 'power within' by pointing that some local development initiatives can be carried out by local people without external interventions.

In contrast, women in congregational initiatives often included supportive and executive roles. Additionally, informants experienced that the tasks in collective initiatives were gendered. Yet women could also be leaders in their groups and could affect those in their surroundings when they used their skills. Thus, men mostly hold 'power over', while women and youth hold 'power with'. With these collective initiatives, some female informants complained about relational issues such as unreliable leaders, and unheard voices, as stated in Article 1. Some informants explained this difference on the gendered knowledge, skills and even physical and emotional dispositions of each person. Men seemed absent in community development as, in some cases, they were employees, a status that did not allow them time for community

initiatives. Some men, however, waited for convincing results before participating. Women, for their part, seemed mostly available as the implementers of UYT initiatives. Some female informants perceived these initiatives as an opportunity to complement the family livelihood, to improve their living conditions and to contribute to the church. Yet in some areas, their participation was restrained, as they had limited access to resources compared to men. Young people's participation was also limited as they thought that they do not have skills or are still studying. Their contribution is mostly related to an order from adults or church leaders.

To sum up, this chapter described the methods UYT projects have been supporting congregations' engagement for community development. These engagements were first the results of the individuals' heeding their vocation, their recognition of God's action, the encouragement of the congregations' leaders and encounter of Lutheran and Malagasy traditional values. Congregations were also engaged in community development, because individuals and groups were able to identify their assets, and initiated activities with or without the assistance of committees, volunteers and outside support. Women contributed actively to these congregational engagements mostly as implementers like the youth, while men more often made decisions and led. These findings were discussed through the presentation of three different, but complementary articles.

5.2 Discussion of the findings

This sub–chapter provides a summary of the findings on UYT within the context of academic research on congregational community development in the fields of diakonia and religion and development. It discusses the mechanisms that support a congregation's engagement in local community development and reflects upon the view of the overarching research question

of the thesis: **how the UYT project is supporting congregations' engagement in local community development within four congregations in three FLM Synods?** This study analysed the data using lived religion, ABCD and power and gender perspectives. Based on analyses, findings point to three different, yet combined, ways UYT project in Madagascar have supported congregations to initiate community development. The first method appears to be through mobilizing Lutherans and strengthening their faith. The data suggests that Christian faith/religion is an intangible asset that could be mobilized for community development initiatives. The second method that could help religious communities to mobilize assets is by using ABCD methodology. The data demonstrates that congregational UYT projects present some elements of ABCD. The third method to support congregations' engagement is when religious communities are empowering the local community, particularly women. The findings show that gender and different forms of power are at work within congregational community development initiatives. The subchapters are structured to follow the order in which the different methods are presented above.

5.2.1 Mobilizing Lutherans and strengthening faith

Religion and development scholar Tomalin (2018, 9–10) argues that religious stories and values facilitate and drive adherents' involvement and engagement in development. In former studies, churches, aiming for community development, used religious resources such as prayer, Bible teaching (Skjortnes 2016, 223–225; 2014a, 155–158; 2014b, 65, 74), traditions and liturgy (Bowers du Toit 2017, 5) to mobilize both its adherents and people in the community to improve their lives. Other studies (Magezi 2018, 10; 2017) mentioned the training of church members for community well–being without indicating the role of faith or religious resources in both the members and the church development activities. This study shows that informants use religious

resources such as the biblical story about talents in Matthew 25 and its interpretation as foundation of their action and mode of action. Such stories provide informants with an image of past, present and future life in which God is always present. The emphasis of the UYT was designed to include practical, applied day–to–day manifestations of one's spiritual beliefs. Building on Henriksen's (2016, 47) understanding of practicable ideas from religious stories, the idea of talents was meaningful as the informants were able to relate the biblical stories to their own capacities and strengths, talents, and see the unfolding of biblical stories in their lives and those of others. The stories provide an understanding that each person is endowed with gifts of talents, which in turn enhance the dignity of both Christians and people in their community (WCC and ACT Alliance 2022, 47). This understanding might be the result of what Henriksen (2016, 41) calls 'the orientational dimension of religion', where biblical stories and terminology helped the informants interpret their experiences and give significance to their engagement. It is conceivable to consider that this orientational aspect of religion is connected to the fact that religious communities develop plans of action for dealing with difficult circumstances (Skjortnes 2016, 223–225). This dimension of religion also provides the basis for the integration of community development work in church activities.

Extending previous research on the complex role of religion in faith–based community development (Sundqvist 2017; Skjortnes 2016; 2014ab; Bornstein 2002), this study provides evidence that lay people are active in community development work and faith informs and influences these works. This dynamism might be related to the work of the *fifohazana* with their commitment to the well–being of other people (Skjortnes 2014a, 57–60). Compared to, say for instance, Bornstein's (2002, 26–27) findings that development for the staff of the two FBOs working in Zimbabwe was closely related to and an expression of faith, this study offers the

same perspective but with different experiences from lay Lutherans in Madagascar. While both informants in Bornstein's and this study consider their community development involvement to be an act of personal faith, the understanding of evangelization in development differ. In Bornstein's study, evangelization is combined with development activities, a combination which some informants questioned. Informants in this study considered their development activity as a tool for evangelizing. This view could be related to what religious scholars using the concept of lived religion understand as public expressions of religious commitment (McGuire 2008, 11–12, 203–213). The concept of lived religion was used in order to appropriately analyse and understand Christian religion in UYT, and to view religion not as an instrument to development but its essence, an indicator of religion and religiosity (McGuire 2008, 46). The findings show that some Lutherans in Madagascar participate in community development projects through UYT projects to express both their identity and their commitment. UYT constitutes an instrument to transmit religious message and identity, carried through actions, attitudes and behaviours. How one lives in society matters (Ammerman 2014, 38) as much as it indicates who or what one believes or doesn't believe in. The point is, one's life points toward what one belongs to, to whom one is loyal and dedicated. This seems to be an extension of views in lived religion in which things, space and rituals primarily convey religious message and identity (McGuire 2008, 208–210).

In addition to the public expression of faith, the mobilization of Lutherans in Madagascar for community development could also build on religious embodiment, a perspective drawn from lived religion (McGuire 2008, 118). Religious embodiment points to a practice that relates the material and physical to the physical lives of individuals (McGuire 2008, 13–15, 98, 118). This perspective was also mentioned by employees in the World Vision in Zimbabwe (Bornstein

2002, 13–14. 19). In this study, religious embodiment could be related to the informants'
understanding and construction of their participation in community development as being action
out of vocation. UYT as a religious embodied practice makes sense to informants, as the practice
seeks to create change. The use of talents is useful, according to the data, as it aims both at self–
development and conversion. This finding is related to the principles of the *fifohazana*, which
also emphasize both human and economic development (Rich 2008b, 60), and faith (Austnaberg
2008, 308–311). The weakness with the individual call or vocation is that UYT became
personalized and privatized, less focused on a collective and community responsibility/mission.
This privatization is one of the critiques of asset–based approach (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014,
436–438), limiting both the sustainability of the work and the collective ownership of both the
work and its impact.

The findings of this study are also challenged with Celesi and Bowers du Toit's view
(2019, 2), showing that theology deters churches from becoming involved in community
development. In other research (Magezi 2017, 5–6), theology might be a divisive element and
could hinder collaboration in community development in different denominations. This study is
different from that of Magezi in the way that UYT began within Lutheran congregations. It also
differs from Bowers du Toit's study, as she combined theology, race and class dimensions as
elements of analysis. This study shows that the main driver of UYT is its religious dimensions,
as informants witnessed. Race and class might be used politically by those in power, and also by
participants in community development as an instrument used to oppress others and reach selfish
goals. The race dimension in Madagascar is a divisive colonial idea that some scholars are
challenging (Astuti 1995, 6, 8). Besides, the importance of the racial aspect has a less prominent
role in social life in Madagascar compared to South Africa, where du Toit did her research.

Concerning class dimension, the majority of the Malagasy live in poverty, particularly in rural areas, thus the inequities are smaller than is some countries, thus class dimension was not applied to this study. The gender aspect, on the other hand, was considered to be more relevant.

This study also shows the holistic nature of UYT projects, as informants acknowledge God carrying his mission to the community through individuals' community development initiatives. Church activities are holistic when they are seen to correspond to the material and spiritual concerns of its members and people in the community. Numerous studies also point to the holistic nature of church activities, that is when they support both spiritual and social transformation (Mangayi 2018, 5–7; Magezi 2017, 6–8; Öhlmann et al. 2016, 9–10; Skjortnes 2016, 220–225; Clarke 2013, 344–347). Such a holistic approach according to WCC and ACT Alliance (2022, 32) could be related to the aim of the Church for a just society. In this study, the data showed that church members are concerned about their own and their neighbours' economic, physical and spiritual lives. Other researchers observed the same concern in their studies of the church's work in Madagascar and in other countries (Magezi 2018, 7–8; Skjortnes 2014c, 167; Clarke 2013, 346).

Through the perspective of lived religion, UYT projects appear as a social dimension of Christian religion, as supported in other studies, the believers' response to what other people are concerned about (McGuire 2008, 211–213) or a coping strategy for life challenges (Skjortnes 2016, 223–225). The hairdressing training is an example of response to economic concerns. Christian religion/faith in that case is one of the resources that supports people in their struggle (McGuire 2008, 140, Haddad 2003, 441). Religion as practiced could also be intentional with a direct involvement in society and accomplished with a desired end (Ammerman 2014, 248–249). Faith became an asset for religious communities to promote change (Nordstokke 2014, 218) as

was the case with the *fifohazana* (Skjortnes 2014a, 147; Austnaberg 2008, 308–311). This use of religion as encouraging change at personal and social levels is supported by Henriksen's (2016, 39) idea of transformative religion. This study shows that informants' use of talents both aimed at improving their livelihoods and of others at the same time it improved their faith. Lived religion allows understanding the informants' experiences as a religious life in which they are in relation with other people and God, 'simultaneously working for the well–being of others and promoting own spiritual development' (McGuire 2008, 154).

As a religious public expression in a country with different beliefs and religions, the faith and religion of contributors in UYT encounter other religious public expressions. The encounter is both a cause of tension and a motivation according to the data, as it is a way to affirm one's faith and evangelize. Tensions originate from the differences in ways the different religions are expressed and lived in a society. Malagasy people believe in spirits, but their explanation of the universe in relation to these spirits (Austnaberg 2008, 148–164) is based on who they believe in, the ancestors or the Christian God. Traditional understanding of spirits attributes blessings and goodwill to the ancestors and the *Zanahary* (Austnaberg 2008, 149–151; Dahl 1999, 28–29, 34), while in UYT, as Article 1 illustrates, the Christian God acts through Lutherans to bless people in the community. For Malagasy Lutherans, their body is the dwelling place and the instrument of God's spirit to get involved in the well–being of local communities. McGuire (2008, 97–118), from the West herself, argues that the body connects the sacred and profane, the material and the spiritual. This difference in perspective might be explained by the fact that Malagasy people do not see the material world in opposition to the spiritual world, whereas for Lutherans, the difference is between God's spirit and other spirits, which are considered to be evil (Austnaberg

2008, 334–336). The gap between God, spirits and earth is more prominent for Westerners than for people from the Global South.

The findings of this study are consistent with other studies indicating that religion within community development activities might be used to gain members (Magezi 2019, 8). In the Malagasy community, in which many believe that the ancestors ensure the fertility of people and land, Lutherans want to show that, through their work, their God would be visible and identified as the one who blesses their work. God's blessing for them will be an instrument to call both Lutherans and non–Christians to faith and commitment. Several informants in Article 1 mentioned that development is a way to not only improve family livelihood and the community's well–being, but also to support the church. Faith also has the potential to play a negative role in community development, when religious leaders, for instance, do not support Christians´ involvement in community development activities but emphasize the church's benefits in terms of finance and membership, as described in this study. Faith could then become an oppressive tool used to exploit and/or control or force congregants to become involved in projects they do not wish to join, but which religious leaders think they should, using God's will and the Bible to justify and support their argument. Faith could then have a paralyzing effect on involvement in community development activities. The issue of power in UYT projects will be discussed further in the last part of this discussion chapter. This study shows that congregational community development might not promote privatization and market–oriented principles, but rather support development for both the individual/family, the faith community and the local wider community. Yet Christian religion could play a negative role in participation in community development when the emphasis is more on church benefit than on the community.

5.2.2 Using elements of ABCD methodology to identify and mobilize local assets

Article 2 reveals that FLM congregations used elements of ABCD methodology to identify and mobilize local assets in their communities. Other studies, for instance, Bowers du Toit (2017, 3), refer to the congregations' mode of engagement as being asset–based without giving details of the methods or principles used. The findings of this study highlight that individual Christians are actors and can identify themselves and value their talents as assets. They are involved in various community development projects and possess the capacity to both contribute to and take ownership in UYT. These projects are built upon identified and valued local assets. In some cases, similar to findings of other research, the congregations (Magezi 2018, 6, 10) or churches' organization (Skjortnes 2014a, 118–120, 123, 126, 130, 133) might offer training. These mobilizations might not be systematically organized, but they contribute to some new opportunities. Like previous research, for instance, Schoeman (2012, 3–4), this study shows that individual members often see themselves as more involved as individuals than as the part of congregation. Besides, they face various challenges without official support and recognition. This finding demonstrates that UYT does not necessarily operate on the local level and FLM's broad emphasis on UYT as a guiding principle for all congregations are not contingent.

Comparing these findings with the report from the UYT international project assessment (Boberg et al. 2020), one might ask whether there nevertheless is a gap between UYT's ambitions to facilitate bottom–up activities while they are decided on and brought to the congregations through the church leadership, top–down. The effectiveness of UYT at the local level seems questionable because, in terms of being a national project, it is a top–down concept that seeks to strengthen bottom–up activities. UYT designates existing ways of working and

development activities at the local level. Additionally, UYT in FLM is vehiculated through a specific separate structure, the FANILO (Randriamanantsoa et al. 2006, 9–10). One of the challenges with a separate structure of diaconal activities in the church is that this tends to strengthen the separation between the social–material and spiritual concerns. Even if the concept was put into a biblical context (Haus 2017, 16–18), and congregations offered various training, these were not translated automatically into involvement or commitment of the principal leaders and agents in the congregations or the congregants to the concept. Besides, there seems to be no relation between the development of other associations, such as the women's group and the FANILO. This shows that UYT is not always integrated in church activities; the responsibility seems to reside on one structure or group.

As some former studies indicate, volunteers (Magezi 2018, 8–10) or a committee might be responsible for congregational community development work (Magezi 2017, 6–7; Schoeman 2012, 3). The findings of this study show that congregational community development was led by volunteers or committees. That is the case, for instance, in the construction of a well. A FANILO Coordinator led the construction work and encouraged people, including women, men and youth in the community to collaborate in common issues. This method could be related to the way of working of the *fifohazana*, as it includes both women and men in its activities, encourages shepherds to volunteer in working for the well–being of others and to take responsibility in their congregations (Skjortnes 2014a, 59). Compared to other studies, the committees' role in UYT appears to be limited. In Magezi's (2017, 6–7) study for instance, the committee play the role of internal unifier and external spokesperson. The findings of this study show that, in the women's group project, neither a development volunteer nor a committee were involved in the project. Yet the church offers spaces and structures for people to connect and

initiate community development activities. Each person can participate in the activities and contribute through different forms. Through various church groups, people made connections with their resources and one another. However, some findings have shown that no connections existed between the groups' initiatives, and that UYT/FANILO were not involved in any of the other groups' projects. For instance, an asset that was obtained from the regional conference of women's group is the Noni project. The female informants lamented about difficulties, but it seemed they had no choice but to apply the project individually without their group's participation.

Compared to other congregational community development initiatives, UYT has some similarities with the findings of other research regarding local contributions (Balogun and Iduemre 2020, 16; Celesi and Bowers du Toit 2019, 4–6) and external support (Magezi 2018, 6; 2017, 4). This study found that most community development projects depended on local resources and knowledge, including members' financial contribution and donations. Other projects that involved church members, like the fishing project, had a higher level of international financial support. In most cases, there is little or no external support for UYT projects. Thus, the findings portray UYT projects to be detached from direct engagement with global development institutions and organizations. FLM, through the national UYT project and its congregations, uses a bottom–up approach of community development based on local resources available. This shows that UYT is similar to the work of the *fifohazana*, which also is self–funding and depends on communal work (Skjortnes 2014a, 57; Austnaberg 2008, 58).

This bottom–up model is criticized by ABCD scholars as it runs the risk of putting sole responsibility for development on religious leaders and members (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 437–438). This model appears to leave other stakeholders, like the state, for example, free of

responsibility toward well–being at the local level. Such a scenario is related to critics of the ABCD methodology as encouraging the privatization of public issues (MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 436–438). Local resources are likely to be insufficient for development in a setting where the majority of the population live in a precarious condition with recurring consequences of climate disaster and the indebted state. This is similarly the case for the savings club, which was used more for emergency situations than for investments.

The findings also show that the activities encountered several challenges that demonstrated UYT's weakness. Ownership was questioned when activities received external support. Participants also raised the issue of lack of professional competence, confirming previous studies findings that some of the most common challenges to churches are the result of a lack of professionalism (Bowers du Toit 2017, 2, 4–5). One possibility is that some of the projects failed in relation to this lack of capacity to address certain difficulties – structural or technical – that hindered congregations in engaging fully and effectively in community development. These deficiencies also limited congregations' activities in short–term responses to needs. In other words, congregations seemed to lack the capacity to empower local people to engage in strategic needs. The constraint might also be related to conflicting expectations of potential beneficiaries and limited focus. Some informants viewed the projects as aiming primarily at church contributions. Others had mixed concerns about their livelihood, community well–being and church contribution. Activities might focus on some specific needs (Magezi 2017, 7) with a specific division of roles, as illustrated by the construction of a well.

According to the findings, UYT has been seen to be more of an approach than a set of methods, in comparison to ABCD methodology. ABCD principles of asset–based, transformative, participatory and collaborative development (Mathie and Cunningham 2003,

477, 483) could be related to UYT. As with the ABCD, UYT starts with existing assets in the local community, which means development and change come from within the community and are built upon existing resources. This finding is different from Beukes' (2019, 7–8) study that emphasizes the importance of congregation members as co–owners of community development projects, yet all initiatives and resources in his research came from outside of the congregation. In Beukes' study, congregation members are both participants and beneficiaries of community development projects.

To some extent, the participatory principle is also applicable to UYT, as suggested by research findings. Other studies (Bowers du Toit 2017, 3–5; Magezi 2017, 6–7) show that, through their leaders, congregations participated in some part of the development process. Often a leader or a committee made the ultimate choice about community development efforts, even with external influence and support. A weakness with the church committee when empowered to make a choice is that they might not accurately represent the local community. In another study (Magezi 2017, 9), the question was not on the representativity but on the issue of beneficiaries that often target only church members. This study questions both the representativity of the committees and identifying beneficiaries of the projects. The findings show that the church committees at least did not represent the church as most of its members were powerful men. The beneficiaries were also disputed as, according to some informants, it is first the church, while for others it is themselves, the church members and people in the community. In addition, the community may not have fully participated in the whole process of community development, apart from being the implementers, a finding that is similar to the results of other studies (Mangayi 2018, 10; Magezi 2018, 10).

Yet the transformative principle is relevant to UYT because it alters the social role of some persons, such as when a producer becomes a mobilizer, or a hairdresser becomes a trainer. This finding about altered role is similar to those of other studies (Magezi 2017, 10). Additionally, UYT takes advantage of the collaborative principle. For the example, the rural FANILO coordinator collaborated with external organizations in implementing community projects in his community. These examples of cooperation included providing training, materials and agricultural inputs, according to the data. In other studies, collaborations were both extended to other denominations (Bowers du Toit 2017, 4; Magezi 2017, 6), and with the interventions of international FBOs (Bornstein 2002, 5). The findings of these studies differ from the results of this study, as the collaborations in UYT projects appear to be limited mostly within FLM as an internal relationship between congregations with national or/and regional FLM's programs/projects and associations.

As a set of methods, UYT is related to ABCD in terms of the identification of assets, the existence of a core group of mobilizers and the initiation of community activities with and without outside assistance (Mathie and Cunningham 2003, 477–478). Yet the findings shows that UYT is different from ABCD, since these methods are used more arbitrarily. Additionally, while ABCD identifies assets through collecting stories from local communities, the findings of this study show that informants identify and validate their assets with the use of the biblical term talents. Asset mapping in the whole church or community was not mentioned. In addition, the core group of mobilizers were composed of congregational or its association's committees and/or volunteers, as UYT starts within the congregation. Apart from that, UYT projects include individual personal initiatives based on personal convictions, as well as local church groups and community activities. Building on the findings of this study, future research on UYT could

include the introduction and practice of methods of asset mapping and networking, which would improve the practice of congregational community development. In that case, action research could be conducted within a congregation or a community, or the work of several volunteers who implement the methods of asset–mapping and networking could be compared and analysed.

5.2.3 Empowering women

Article 3 shows that asset mobilization in a religious community might require an adequate examination of gender and power. Former studies (Skjortnes 2014c, 170–172; Haddad 2003, 430, 447–448) posit that taking into account the gender issue in the process of development work is a guarantee to its efficacy. This study demonstrates that most participants in congregational community development initiatives were women. The findings are consistent with evidence from similar past work that – alone or in groups – women can build self–confidence and gain skills (Skjortnes 2016, 223–225; Haddad 2003, 446; 2001, 16–18). They might share experiences and skills. They have ideas, take initiative and have vision. Both as individuals and with other members of the church and their community, women solve problems and develop self–reliance. They participate in collective activities, have access to some resources and, as a group, women control decisions in planning and implementing community development work. In another study, women's access to resources was also limited (Haddad 2003, 439). Further study could look into the narrative of individuals' use of talents, particularly the very poor, such as single mothers, who lack land or stable incomes. This future research could then contribute to overcome the lack of class and race dimensions in this study.

But women's participation in collective community development work, according to this study, suffers from weak organizational structures. Women have little influence within power– and decision–making structures and seldom manage to hold institutions, organizations, companies/industries and government accountable for the actions and policies that affect the community's life. The range of women's influence was limited to being within their family, their neighbours and other women in their groups. The influence mentioned here refers to the application of what women learned, especially experiences in relation to skills. Their influence was more horizontal than vertical. Concerning internal family influence in the use of talents, the findings seem to show that church structure and personal conviction were more in play in encouraging involvement in community development than family socialization. This finding supports a former study (Haddad 2003, 442–443) that shows that women's decisions on important matters were based more on knowledge acquired from their religious network than on their husbands' influence. This finding corroborates former studies that show that women in groups may have opportunities for development (Skjortnes 2014c, 166). This suggests that the involvement of religious communities in development work should imply women's empowerment.

This study also reveals that, while women were volunteers and active in implementing various community projects, men mostly played the role of leaders. Most of the men had access to decision–making bodies. Consistent with the findings of other studies, leaders composed of a majority of men decided, created and might constitute the main actor in community projects (Mangayi 2018, 10; Rakotoniaina et al. 2014, 4), while lay members might be mainly executors (Mangayi 2018, 10; Magezi 2018, 10). This structural aspect of the work might reflect the dependence of congregants on their leaders, and might be disempowering and sustain power

asymmetry. This structural aspect of congregational community development might put more responsibility on those suffering than on duty bearers. This asymmetry of power and responsibility is also the cause of dissatisfaction and critique from some participants, particularly in the case of alleged power abuse. In some cases, activities seem to follow a set of constructed gendered roles, which confirm other studies' findings that Christian religion has the power to cement gender inequality and injustice (Skjortnes 2014c, 166–168). Given that fewer males participated in UYT activities as implementers, it is plausible to think that this low number is due to the misconception that caring for and love to one's neighbours is more typically associated with women than with men. This finding seems to be in opposition to the practice of the *fifohazana*, which offers leadership positions to people with less education and includes both women and men in caring for people (Skjortnes 2014a, 58).

Looking at the UYT approach from gender and power perspectives also helped in understanding how UYT deals with gender roles. This study shows that, in UYT, women were more than beneficiaries of development projects, they were included in the activities. These findings support the idea that UYT provided women the opportunity to contribute to community development. Through the different types of initiatives, women were perceived as having both productive roles and co–managing community resources. As independent producers, women were trained in various skills such as poultry projects and the noni project. They had access to resources, managed their own money and were supported in having petty commodity productions, such as the saving club and poultry projects. In most of the women's projects, women contributed to the initiatives in terms of money, time, confidence and education.

The findings also demonstrate that women were co–managers of community resources, such as in the cases of the fabrication of environment friendly stoves, the construction of a well

and the assistance of children's education. UYT, according to these findings, seems designed to ensure increased production, but not to support women to acquire remunerated employment. The initiatives were geared toward women and focused more on low–paying and informal activities, whereas they may have helped men become more marketable. Through UYT, women and men were given the opportunity to improve their living conditions and be agents of change. UYT, however, did not support women and men to challenge traditional gender division of labour, findings which are consistent with evidence from past work (Skjortnes 2014c, 167). UYT supported individuals to act, but not with a political voice critical of structural oppression. UYT provided social networking skills inside of church settings, but seems to lack the same skills with other stakeholders. UYT did not assist in resolving conflicts, such as the case of women's projects failure. UYT continued to socialize women and men into dominant top–down approaches and left some marginalized women's concerns unheard. UYT seems to reinforce and use traditional and religious power structures to implement its initiatives.

The findings of this study also show that the UYT approach seem to emphasize both 'power within' and 'power with'. In relation to the critics of ABCD methodology, 'power within' is not an end in itself, but serves the 'power with', or the collective action (MacLure 2022, 3). Yet as the findings show, collective actions seem to be marked with either structural power and technical and relational challenges, which seems to be left unaddressed. Recent studies exposed that careful attention to power dynamics in community development initiatives serves to guarantee their efficacy (MacLure 2022) whether it will be impartial, sustainable and lasting. Besides, compared to how the church is encouraged to carry out its social activities (Deifelt and Hofmann 2021, 57–58; Dietrich 2014, 19–21), UYT seemed to be lacking in critical reflections on power. It appears to be simultaneously empowering and disempowering. It

empowers individuals and the community in terms of supporting them to validate themselves and their assets and encouraging collective action, but it seems to disempower them when it comes to its inactivity in relation to the status quo. The findings of this study imply that development practitioners and researchers are encouraged to conduct comprehensive gender and power analysis of FBO's activities/initiatives, and possibly encourage the involvement of women's group in research in grassroots community development.

5.3 Strengths and limitations

This study is the first academic dissertation on the local implementation of UYT approach which is gaining ground as a new approach to FBO's development efforts in the Global South. It advances our understanding of the ways religious communities initiate development activities, particularly for UYT practitioners. Furthermore, this study, which was carried out in accordance with scientific ethical standards, gives voice to various individuals, including those who were previously unheard, women, or young people, who hardly had the opportunity to express their experiences. Throughout the research process, most of the texts produced had peer reviewers, colleagues from the fields of theology and religious studies and diakonia. The strength of this study also relies on my long experience in following up UYT in the FLM context and my good knowledge of the FLM context. In relation to data collection, I had very good access to informants. Besides all that, this research is the first theoretical conceptualization of the local implementation of the UYT approach, and its added value is specifically in its focus on local actors: the congregations and its lay members. This research project contributes to a discourse on congregational community development as a complex phenomenon in which Christian religion and faith are assets, and gender and power play important roles. Thus, it contributes to the

increasing body of literature on religion and development and diakonia. The special contribution lies in the emphasis on the local understanding and practice of UYT, giving a voice to regular church members. Further research is required on the methods of asset–mapping applied, how assets are identified and used, and particularly on the issue of gender and power.

Three limitations are identified with this study in relation to challenges found in other studies and ways to analyse the findings. The first limitation was its focus on Christian religion compared, for example, to that of Bowers du Toit (2017, 2), work which included a combination of theology, class and race as elements of analysis. These elements of analysis could be used for future research, looking more at subgroups/identity/place origin and class. This study, however, has the advantage of analysing UYT through gender and power perspectives, which would assist congregations ensure the sustainability of their community development initiatives. A second limitation is its scope, as this study was only conducted in four congregations in FLM, which limits a generalization of the UYT mechanism to a broader population. Yet, this study has a relatively balanced participation of women and men with some young people. In addition, this study is interested in how UYT works or supports local, congregational engagement for community development, rather than on its quantitative outcome or effects. Thus, the interviews were confined within the context and the process of engagement in UYT through the voices of the local members of the congregations I visited. A third limitation is its geographical coverage, as the study sites are not reflective of the whole of Madagascar. Yet the data indicate important aspects as to the ways that religious communities may mobilize assets for local development in several regions of Madagascar, with some geographic and cultural variations. These might be useful for UYT practitioners in comparing, analysing and improving their work both in Madagascar and in other countries.

5.4 Practical implications

By bringing forth the topic of local community development, the use of local human resources and the ways Christian churches can contribute to this engagement, the findings and conclusions of this study may have wider implications for the future development of local diaconal practices both in Madagascar and beyond. This is reflected in the holistic profile of the UYT projects, which combine spiritual and material concerns with informants' belief in God's mission being carried out through engagement in community work.

For FLM, this study has its significance in the way UYT will be implemented in the future. For local congregations, the findings about the complex role of faith as asset means that congregations would benefit from investing in increasing the understanding and knowledge of its members' religious identity and what this identity involves, practically speaking, in different spheres of social life. In other words, church teachings should orient its members towards active participation in improving local communities' well–being, as well as transforming these communities in a holistic way: spiritually, mentally, physically and socially. At national level, educating leaders, particularly pastors, in UYT is then necessary so that religious stories and values became resources that encourage and sustain church members' contribution to the well–being of local communities. There is however a need to relate to and situate this training within the study of ecumenical diakonia, to address the lack of structural implementation of UYT. My research revealed that there is a lack of systematic and well–structured implementation of UYT in the local contexts I visited. UYT could gain from theological training, placing it within the context of the church participation in God' mission to become an instrument of transformation

and move beyond service and charity. In addition to strengthening UYT's effective methodological elements, FLM could gain from addressing its methodological weaknesses.

At international level, this study also provides avenues for Christian religious communities and FBOs, and not at least congregations on a local level, to take lessons on how to mobilize faith and religion, Christians and available local resources to tackle poverty and work towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals. The necessity of training all applies particularly for churches. This will contribute to the sustainability of UYT, since it is related to both the church's identity and practice. This study also suggested several topics of research which could broaden the public knowledge and literacy about UYT.

Chapter 6: Concluding remarks

This study sets out to understand and analyse the UYT project in the local context of four congregations within FLM. How does UYT support congregations' engagement in local community development? Based on the qualitative analysis of the experiences and understanding of both lay Lutherans, volunteers and leaders from four congregations in FLM in Madagascar, this study, based on three articles, gives evidence of the complexity of such a project. First of all, this study shows that congregational community development relies on the participation and engagement of church members. These members are the source of ideas and competence for the work as well as the providers of material and physical resources needed for the work. The participation of church members also ensures both ownership of the work and its sustainability. The mobilization of church members, according to this study, has spiritual/religious and relational bases. Religious stories and values are assets that orient church members towards certain goals and actions, which results in community development. These stories and values could also transform members' view of themselves, their place and role in society and the world around them. Religious stories and values appeared supporting congregations/Lutherans bringing the reality of their religious world in their bodily experiences of community development initiatives.

This study contributes to providing some evidence on the way congregations could initiate local, asset–based community development. The findings show that the UYT approach contains some elements of ABCD methodology, particularly its focus on assets and local initiatives in supporting congregations' community development. My study also showed that there is no planned and systematic application of asset–based methods in the congregations, nor a clear structure for the work, but that there are huge variations in the application. UYT in FLM

has nevertheless the advantage of having committees and volunteers that support the congregations' engagement. It seems that UYT in its outline seeks to inspire collective action, yet the emphasis on asset identification moves individuals toward personal action, which does not necessarily result in collective action. My data showed that there is a local lack of capacity, skills and knowledge when it comes to methods, particularly in asset–mapping and networking with non–Lutheran stakeholders. ABCD methodology supports the mobilization of assets, both religious and material. Yet the church must have clear and applicable methods of asset mapping and of congregations' collaboration with other stakeholders.

Another important finding is the realization that the UYT project promoted women as important actors in local diaconal community development. UYT supports women and men's participation in congregational diakonia with its emphasis on 'power within' and 'power with'. Still, its quiescency supports the social expectations of women and men's role in local development with men holding 'power over'. For the congregations' diaconal community development intervention to succeed, they need to encourage and support women to take part in the process of local development. In addition, the UYT project must support congregations to reflect critically on power dimensions and asymmetries. This support includes supporting women to comprehend and exercise more 'power to' and 'power over', bringing positive change to local communities. Women as well as men need support to acquire competencies in community development, particularly in addressing structural issues.

To sum up and conclude, this study demonstrates that UYT could be an instrument that congregations and FBOs use to encourage religious communities to initiate local diaconal community development. It helps to mobilize congregants, strengthen their faith, encourage local initiatives that focus on local asset and validate women's contribution to local well–being.

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Article 1

Abstract:

Contributing to the emerging religion and development literature, this study sets out to analyse the role of faith in the context of a particular development approach, 'Use Your Talents' (UYT) at the Malagasy Lutheran Church in Madagascar. By analysing the views of lay Christian informants with regard to their involvement in the UYT project, the study asked what is the role of faith as an intangible asset in an asset-based community development project? The qualitative data were collected through participant observations and interviews conducted in four congregations across Madagascar in 2018. The results showed that church teachings and biblical stories created a normativity of good and desirable behaviour in the context of the asset-based community development project. Faith may constitute an asset when it promoted the individual's capacity to achieve positive economic and social change.

Article 2

Tackling Poverty with Local Assets: A Case Study on Congregational Asset-Based Community Development in a Lutheran Church in Madagascar. Zo Ramiandra Rakotoarison, Stephanie Dietrich, and Heikki Hiilamo. Diaconia 2019 10:2, 119-140.

Abstract:
How can congregational diakonia contribute to community development in the absence of external resources? Community-driven development rests on the principle of development through community participation. Faithbased communities have the potential to be important stakeholders in civil societies and local communities through the participation and involvement of their members and thereby contribute to community development. However, the resources may not always benefit the local communities, as institutional structures in the Church may claim their share. This article studies two Lutheran Church of Malagasy congregations in South-West Madagascar, where an asset-based congregational community development approach called "Use Your Talent" (UYT) is applied. Through qualitative interviews with volunteers and project leaders we analyze the implementation of UYT approach and methodology of asset-mapping and mobilization. Overall, our results point to a contraction in strengthening the local communities and collecting resources for Church structures.

Article 3:

Rakotoarison, Z. R. (2024). Gender and Power Relations in a Malagasy Congregational Asset-Based Community Development Project. Religion and Development (published online ahead of print 2024).

Abstract:

Managing power relations is a development concern, and this study adds to research addressing questions of power and gender balance in local community development projects. It analyses power relations and gender roles within a Malagasy congregational asset-based community development project called "Use Your Talents". In local communities as well as in larger society, power relations and gender injustice are interlinked. This paper is part of a qualitative study with data collected in 2018 at four Lutheran congregations in Madagascar with forty-one female and male informants. In analysing the interview, the following themes emerged: "power over" in favour of adult men, 'power to' that differentiates between women's and men's possibilities and limitations, 'power with' as collaboration between women, men and young people and activities based on gender and age, and "power within" from God and from skills based on gender. The study revealed that Use Your Talents mostly emphasises the 'power within/with', and where power is exercised 'to and over', it is mainly adult men exercising power. The study also found that women contributed significantly to congregational community development projects. The study concludes that the church provides both women and men opportunities for development through the Use Your Talents approach, but they exercise different aspects of power. This is reinforced by Use Your Talents and affected their roles, relations and activities in congregational community development. The difference in power favours adult men, while limiting economic and social possibilities for women.

Appendices

Request for participation in research project

This information will be presented verbally to all participants in the research project in order to avoid frustration and discomfort in case some participants are illiterate.

"Faith–oriented and asset–based community development in a Malagasy context: a qualitative study of 'Use Your Talents' capacity building project"

Background and Purpose

This is a PhD project at VID Specialized University in Stavanger, Norway. Its purpose is to find out the contribution of the church–based development initiatives in the development of civil society. It also aims at contributing into the discussion on development approaches and the role of religion in development.

The participants in this study were selected as they represent persons who may best help the researcher to better understand and learn the church's contribution as well as the role of religion in development. The researcher selected the participants members of the church based on the congregation's census or through observations. Respondents who are not members of the church were selected through information from the local authority or pastor or other respondents.

What does participation in the project imply?

The participants in this study will be observed for in their everyday life in family, with people in their community, and at church during various meetings and church services. Each observation may last one hour per session/activities. The researcher will take written field notes.

The participants will also be individually interviewed for approximately one hour. The questions will concern the respondents' experiences and knowledge/ideas about their church's involvement in development work such as cleaning the market place or planting trees and so on, the respondents' contribution, and the religious implication of their involvement. All discussions will be audio–recorded.

As adolescent from 16 years old will participate in this study, parents are asked to give their consent on behalf of their children. The interview guide for the adolescent participants has similar content/questions as the adults but adapted to their level of understanding. The adolescent version of the guide is available for their parents in case they would like to know the details.

What will happen to the information about you?

All personal data will be treated confidentially. Only the researcher will have access to the personal data of the respondents. Personal data will be stored separately from other data in a locker at VID University and the data will be anonymized.

In the thesis/book, to protect the privacy of the participants, each participant will be identified with two numbers: the first number indicating the site and the second the range in which the person was interviewed. No personal information will be mentioned in the PhD publications.

The project is scheduled for completion by 30th September 2020. Personal data and voice recordings will be destroyed.

Voluntary participation
It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all your personal data will be made anonymous.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, you may contact me with my telephone number and email Zo Ramiandra Rakotoarison, 034 63 019 37, zo.ramiandra.rakotoarison@vid.no. You may also contact my supervisors: Stephanie Dietrich, +47 22 963 782 or Stephanie.Dietrich@vid.no and Heikki Hiilamo, heikki.hiilamo@vid.no.

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Consent for participation in the study
Participants will be asked to give their consent to participate in the study verbally in order to avoid frustration and discomfort in case some participants are illiterate.

Fangatahana fandraisana anjara amin'ny fanadihadihana

"Fivavahana/finoana sy asa fampandrosoana ifotony mianga avy amin ny talenta eto Madagasikara: fikarohana momba ny tetikasa 'Ampiasao ny Talentanao'"

Zava–misy sy ny tanjona
Ity fanadihadiana ity dia ao anatin'ny tetikasa fikarohana iray mirafitra amin'ny Sekoly Ambony VID any Stavanger, Norvezy. Ny tanjon'ny fikarohana dia ny hamantatra ny anjara–biriky entin'ny asa fampandrosoana ataon'ny fiangonana amin'ny fampandrosoana ny fiaraha–monim–pirenena. Isan'ny tanjona ihany koa ny handray anjara amin'ny adihevitra momba ny fomba fiasa ho fampandrosoana sy ny andraikitry ny fivavahana ao anatin'izany fampandrosoana izany.

Ny fifidianana ireo mpandray anjara amin'ity fikarohana ity dia miankina tamin'ny fiheverana fa izy ireo no hanampy ny mpikaroka hamantatra sy hianatra ny anjara–biriky sy toeran'ny fiangonana eo amin'ny asa fampandrosoana. Ireo hadihadihana dia olona izay notsongain'ny mpanao fikarohana manokana amin'ireo kristiana mambran'ny fiangonana niainga avy amin'ny lisitry ny kristiana ao amin'ny fiangonana na azo tamin'ny fotoam–panomanana ny fanadihadihana. Ireo mpandray anjara tsy mambran'ny fiangonana dia nosafidiana niainga avy amin'ny resaka tamin'ny solotenam–panjakana eo antoerana na ny pastora na olona hafa.

Inona no ho fihatraikan'ny fandraisana anjara amin'ny fanadihadihana?
Ireo mpandray anjara anatin'ity fanadihadihana ity dia ho jeren'ny mpikaroka manokana ny fiainany andavanandro, ao antokatrano, eo amin'ny fiaraha–monina, ao ampiangonana mandritry ny fotoam–pivoriana samihafa izay andraisany anjara. Ny faharetan'ny fijerena manokana dia miankina amin'izay ataon'ilay adihadihana. Mandritr'izany fijerena manokana izany dia handray antsoratra ny mpanao fanadihadihana.

Ireo mpandray anjara ireo koa dia mbola hatonina akaiky tsirairay avy hiresahana manokana. Ny faharetan'ny fanadihadiana dia mety ho ora iray farafahakeliny. Ny fanontaniana dia mikasika ny traikefa sy ny fahalalana/hevitry ny adihadihana momba ny fanatanterahan'ny fiangonana asa fampandrosoana tahaka ny fanadiovana tsena na fambolen–kezo na ny hafa, ny anjara–birikin'ny adihadihana amin'izany, sy ny fihatraikan'ny fivavahana amin'ny fandraisany anjara. Ny dinidinika rehetra dia ho raisim–peo avokoa.

Ny zatovo 16 taona no ho mihoatra koa dia isan'ny hadihadihana ary angatahina aminy sy amin'ireo ray amandreniny ny fankatoavana hanao ny fanadihadihana. Ny vontoatin'ny taridalana momba ny dinidinika dia mitovy amin'ny an'ireo olondehibe amin'ny ankapobeny nefa ampitoviana tadindokanga amin'izay takatry ny sainy. Ny taridalana ho an'ireo zatovo dia omena ireo ray amandreniny raha toa misy ny ilainy izany.

Inona no hampiasana ireo resaky ny adihadihana?

Izay famantarana manokana mikasika ny olona adihadihana dia arovana mafy mba tsy hisy hahalala (confidentiel) ankoatry ny mpikaroka irery ihany. Ireo famantarana manokana ireo dia ho tahirizina amin'ny toerana mihidy, ary ny mpandray anjara rehetra dia tsy ho fantatra amin'ny anarany na amin'ny fomba hafa ao anatin'ny boky na antontantaratasy samihafa izay hosoratan'ny mpanao fanadihadihana indrindra indrindra aorian'ny fifaranan'ny tetikasa fikarohana ny 30 Septambra 2020. Ho potehina avokoa izay famantarana manokana rehetra mikasika ireo nohadihadihana.

Fanolorantena handray anjara
Misokatra ny fandraisana anjara amin'ny fanadihadihana ary afaka manda na miala amin'ny fotoana rehetra tsy ho isan'ny mpandray anjara izay hadihadiana na dia tsy milaza ny antony aza. Raha mieritreritra ny tsy handray anjara ianao, ny famantarana manokana rehetra mahakasika anao dia tsy hisy mpahalala.

Raha te handray anjara ianao na misy fanontaniana manitikitika anao momba ny fanadihadihana dia afaka mifandray amin'ny mpanao ny fanadihadihana amin'ireto laharana finday na adiresy mailaka manaraka ireto: Zo Ramiandra Rakotoarison, 034 63 019 37, zo.ramiandra.rakotoarison@vid.no. Afaka mifandray amin'ireo mpampianany: Stephanie Dietrich, +47 22 963 782 na Stephanie.Dietrich@vid.no na Heikki Hiilamo, heikki.hiilamo@vid.no.

Ity fikarohana ity dia nahazo alalana tamin'ny fanjakana Norveziana na ny sehatra fiarovana ny vaovao amin'ny tetikasa fikarohana samihafa (NSD).

Fanekena handray anjara amin'ny fanadihadihana
Voaraiko ny resaka rehetra momba ity tetikasa fikarohana ity ary mazoto aho handray anjara

_____

_____

(Sonian'ny nohadihadihana, datin'andro).

Appendix 3 Interview guide

GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction:

Self–introduction of the researcher

Presentation of the research project: aim and methods, selection of participants, use of information

Request of participants' consent

For the Christians members of the congregation

General information about FLM (Malagasy Lutheran Church) and development work.

FLM has a booklet about FLM's vision. Have you heard about this booklet? Have you read it? Was it discussed in your congregation? What do you think about FLM's vision?

FLM also has a policy about development work. Have you heard about this document? Have you read it? Was it discussed in your congregation? What do you think about it? What relevance does it have for you and your congregation?

Have you heard about the approach 'Use Your Talents'? Was it discussed at church? What do you think of this approach? What relevance 'Use Your Talents' approach has for you as a person of faith/Christian and for people in your village and Madagascar?

The church's teachings about development work.

What did you learn at church about Christians' faith / expression of faith in the community/society? What relevance does these teaching have for you and your family?

What are the church's teachings for actions in the society like, let say, cleaning the market place, plant trees, and so on? What do you think of these teachings?

The congregation's development work.

Apart from the regular church services and associations' meetings, what did your congregation do for the well–being of your local community and the society? What happened in these activities? Who initiated and decided about these activities? Who participated in the implementation of the activities? Where did the congregation get the source and resources to implement its activities?

What do you think of these activities? Do you like them? Should the church do them? What is the relevance of these activities for you, your village and Madagascar? What do you think of the way the church do these activities?

The respondents' personal experience and understanding of the church development work.

What does having faith implies in your daily life with your family and other people in your village? What happens? What should you do out of faith? Do you discuss about that in your family?

How does women/men express their faith in their community? What causes / not the difference?

What talents would you use, let say in the cleaning of the market place? What is the implication of you using talents in your family? What reason encourage/hinder you to use your talents/ participate in that activity? Why do the church use 'Use Your Talents' approach? Why the congregation is doing what it is doing, like planting trees?

For the respondents not members of the congregation

Apart from the church service every Sunday, the FLM congregation was, let say planting trees in the neighbourhood. What do you think of the FLM congregation and its members involving in planting trees? Do you like that? Do you think the church should do that? Why do you think FLM and its members do what they do? What is relevance of the FLM congregation/Christians action like planting trees for you, your village and Madagascar?

VID