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HINDRANCES TO CHURCH GROWTH IN RURAL
BAPTIST CHURCHES: A CASE STUDY OF UPATA
BAPTIST ASSOCIATION CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

A church is expected to grow and its growth should reflect in the dimensions of: quantitative (numerical) growth; qualitative (spiritual maturity) growth; expansion (Ministries) growth; and extension growth (Planting other churches). However, this has not been the experience of most rural churches. This invariably implies that certain factors must have been hampering or hindering their growth. It is against this backdrop that this research work sought to find out these hindrances, and had provided to readers and ministers an understanding of these factors, how to prevent them, and how to overcome them. Upata Baptist Association churches which are mainly rural are used as a case study. To achieve reliable findings chapter one was used for introduction, background to the study, reasons for, and usefulness of the research. An overview of church growth issues ranging from basis for, typologies of and hindrances to growth to the strategies for achieving growth especially in rural churches was presented in chapter two. Empirical research methodology was the main approach used in the investigation. The researcher also made use of library materials as a secondary source of information to aid his understanding of the recorded experiences of other churches, and also helped him design his questionnaires and *interview to get responses from correspondents which formed the primary source of information*. The findings reveal that socio-economic, organizational, ministerial, foundational, and attitudinal factors among others constitute the main hindrance to the growth of these rural churches. This research raised certain positions which could call for further investigation or research thereby contributing to studies of congregations particularly in rural setting.

5.2 CONCLUSION

It has been indicated that this research was motivated by the failure of *Upata* Baptist Churches to “make disciples of all nations” and to meet denominational obligations with nothing being done to salvage the situation over the years. The investigation having been done of the causative factors, and the findings having been noted in the summary section above, this research has to put forward certain positions by way of conclusion. From the outcome of the research, it should be noted that these

growth inhibiting factors found in the case study could be true of other Baptist churches in the rural areas.

Also, the researcher strongly believes from the responses of the pastors interviewed and from their responses to the questions on the history of their churches, that the root of the problem, is their foundations. The foreign missionaries' strategy of tolerating certain traditional/customary actions and behaviour of their early converts was not checked by trained indigenous pastor contrary to the missionaries expectations. This account for the entrancement of carnal living and unrepentant attitude among church members. It should also be noted that members poor attitude to giving and Christian stewardship resulted from the foreign missionaries' attitude of funding church projects at the initial stage.

Again, it is obvious that poor lay-leadership is as a result of rural-urban drift which left rural churches bereft of young and dynamic men and women who would have formed the base for good lay-leadership in rural churches. In the same vein, the more literate and middle/high income earners are attracted to the urban areas thereby leaving the rural churches with low income earners, and this affects their financial standing. Consequently, they are unable to afford the services of better trained pastors, for better ministry.

However, one can assertively posit on a positive note that these churches can overcome these obstacles to growth. The fact that these churches' members attest to their own weaknesses and failures (such as not being born-again, poor attitude to weakly programmes etc), shows that they understand their predicament and could yield

themselves to any conscious effort by their pastors and denominational leaders to salvage the ugly situation.