

## Analysis of Achievements, Findings and Recommendations for Church Independence: Case Study of The GPI Elieser Sentani Congregation

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received: 29 March 2025

Publish: 31 March 2025

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### Keywords:

Funding;

Independence;

Achievement;

Findings;

Recommendation;

GPI Elieser Sentani.

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### Abstract

*Church as a socio-religious institution has a great responsibility in its mission, including in terms of economic management and the welfare of its members. The independence of the church in field of funds is the key to ensuring the sustainability and strength of the church. This research focuses on the challenges in the financial aspect after the expansion of its previous organization. Despite showing growth in the number of congregations and several achievements, this church still faces obstacles in achieving financial independence and fund management. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with an Achievement, Findings, and Recommendations (AFR) analysis approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with congregation leaders and questionnaires with participants from congregations. The analysis is carried out by identifying the achievements that have been achieved, the findings or obstacles faced, and providing recommendations for the improvement and independence of the church. The results achieved revealed that the GPI Elieser Sentani congregation experienced a quantitative increase in congregation members and service quality. However, the church still faces obstacles such as dependence on people's offerings, limited resources, and cultural and social adaptation challenges that have an impact on physical development, congregational welfare and independence. From these findings, it is recommended that the GPI Elieser Sentani increase the diversification of sources of income by utilizing its assets and looking for external opportunities. In addition, there is a need to increase managerial and leadership capacity, like the development of innovative economic programs to support the welfare of the congregation.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The church as a religious social institution plays an important role in the life of the nation and state. On the one hand, the church has the duty and responsibility to preach the Gospel throughout the world, which includes aspects of repentance, renewal of life, as well as upholding justice, fighting poverty, backwardness and ignorance (Silaban, Lumbantoruan, Napitupulu, Siregar, & Pasaribu, 2023). In carrying out its service mission, the church is faced with various challenges, including economic matters, which is one of the main focuses in the Five Documents of Church Unity resulting from the Xth DGI/PGI General Assembly in Ambon in 1984. The church's independence in the economic sector, especially in terms of funds, is the main pillar that supports the holistic sustainability and strength of the church (Rawambakoe, 2024). However, current reality shows that world life continues to experience rapid changes, especially in advances in science and technology (IPTEK). These

changes have an impact on various areas of life, including the economy. Church people, as part of society, are faced with the challenge of adapting and struggling to face changing times, especially in the economic development of society.

The economic sector is an area that requires struggle and good management to maintain human dignity. Unhealthy competition, an attitude of taking advantage of each other, and an increasingly wide gap between the strong and the weak often become obstacles in the economic world. This creates the view that economics is a dirty and sinful field, so church people often avoid involvement in economic issues (Nugroho, 2019). In fact, the economy is an essential part of human life which functions to serve and realize the will and plans of God's creation.

The GPI Elieser Sentani congregation, as an independent congregation that has experienced expansion from the Elim Congregation since 2013, continues to strive to carry out its calling to fellowship, witness and serve in the midst of society. However, in its development, the congregation faced various obstacles, especially in the financial aspect, which affected their ability to finance service programs, both physical and non-physical. Several factors causing this obstacle include limited sources of income, low economic income of the people, and lack of utilization of available economic potential.

To overcome these obstacles, the church needs to continue to play an active role in developing economic development strategies for its people to achieve financial independence. This research aims to explore how the church can play its role in the economic development of the congregation and look for effective strategies for managing congregational finances. Thus, this research aims to investigate the economic development of the congregation towards church independence in the field of funds. "This research focuses on reviewing the practices and strategies for managing church finances in the GPI Elieser Sentani Jayapura congregation."

Community economic development is an effort to improve community welfare through managing and utilizing the economic potential that exists within the church community. The congregation's economy includes economic activities carried out by groups of church members by utilizing the norms and work ethic that apply in the church environment (Manunay, 2022). There are two main approaches to the people's economy: first, the small economic activity approach which focuses on empowering small business actors or the people's economy; and second, a democratic economic system approach that emphasizes the participation of all levels of society in development, often referred to as people's economics. This understanding highlights the importance of an economic system that is fair and oriented towards shared prosperity.

Community economic development involves joint efforts between the government, private sector and community groups to improve the quality of human resources and natural resources. The aim is to improve the welfare of the people by increasing income and productivity (Laukapitang, 2016). The community economic development strategy includes identifying economic potential, developing business actors, education and training programs, as well as coordination and evaluation. Important aspects of this strategy include developing human resources, increasing competitiveness, and creating effective partnerships to stimulate economic activity and create jobs.

Church independence in the field of funds means the church's ability to manage financial resources independently and responsibly. This includes the church's ability to explore, manage and utilize funds effectively for the implementation of the church's mission without depending on outside parties (Junaidi, 2021). Strategic steps to achieve church independence in the field of funds include identifying potential resources, developing and multiplying funds, as well as transparent and accountable management. With this approach, the church

can stand strong in carrying out its mission and achieve the financial independence necessary for the continuity of ministry and community development.

The economic improvement of the people in Tomohon, North Sulawesi is seen from the role of the church (Sumbung, 2012) in increasing the economic independence of the Christian Church in Minahasa (GMIM). The background to the problem is the high level of poverty and low access to education in the area, which contributes to environmental degradation and economic powerlessness of the community. GMIM, as a church organization with a social mission, established the Church Community Development Center (PPWG) and BLPT to empower the community through training and development of coconut-based small and medium enterprises (UKM). The research results show that this program has succeeded in increasing people's income, reducing unemployment, and encouraging people to open side businesses. In addition, the community feels more independent and no longer dependent on middlemen, which shows the positive impact of GMIM's involvement in empowering the local economy.

Para, Tari, & Ruku (2021) see the demands and challenges of the church in transforming diaconal services in the GMIT Ora Et Labora Oesapa congregation. They think that poverty is a problem faced by many countries, including Indonesia. Diakonia, as one of the church's tasks, often still focuses on charitable aspects and has not yet fully developed a transformative approach that can empower the congregation. Ineffective diakonia can widen the gap between rich and poor, so efforts are needed to understand and address congregational needs contextually. They concluded that diaconal services at the GMIT Ora Et Labora Oesapa congregation were still not optimal in overcoming poverty. Even though there is potential within the congregation, such as diverse work backgrounds, diakonia has not yet addressed needs effectively. The author recommends developing skills and empowering congregations to improve their standard of living through a more transformative and contextual diakonia approach.

The role of the church in efforts to eradicate poverty (Doma & Yohanes, 2023) through discipleship. Even though the church is often considered an institution that only focuses on spiritual aspects, in reality the church has great potential to empower congregations and communities through holistic discipleship. Discipleship not only includes spiritual aspects, but also includes education, training, and social advocacy that can help individuals and communities escape poverty. The research results show that churches can run effective education and training programs, as well as provide social assistance and economic empowerment. With collaboration between churches, congregations and other agencies, churches can become agents of significant social change. This research emphasizes the importance of social awareness and public policy advocacy to support poverty alleviation efforts, so that churches become not only places of worship, but also centers of community empowerment that have a positive impact. It is hoped that this research can provide a better understanding of the economic development of the congregation and contribute to church financial management strategies to achieve strong and sustainable independence.

This research offers a holistic approach that integrates spiritual, social and economic dimensions in the economic development of the people. The Church plays a strategic role as an agent of change, combining spiritual discipleship with economic empowerment to create sustainable financial independence, going beyond traditional charitable approaches to a transformative model that has long-term impact. The main objective of this research is to map the forms of achievements and findings or obstacles faced by the GPI Eliezer Sentani congregation towards a congregation that is independent and able to prosper its members.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method which aims to describe the situation systematically and accurately, with a focus on Community Economic Development towards Church Independence in the Field of Funds at the GPI Elieser Sentani Congregation. This approach was chosen to provide in-depth analysis based on field facts (Sugiyono, 2013). Data collection techniques involved in-depth interviews with key informants, namely congregation leaders and former pastors, and questionnaire surveys from congregations as participants in the research. The interview data was reduced to display the essence of the answers from each informant, then presented in table form. Meanwhile, questionnaire data is presented to see responses related to the importance of innovation and creativity in running an organization. To analyze the data, the Achievements, Findings and Recommendations (CTR) method was used. The analysis begins by collecting all the achievements that have been achieved within a certain period of time, continues by identifying findings in the form of failure to achieve the expected goals, and ends with providing recommendations as a follow-up for improvement. The findings of this research identify various problems faced by the GPI Elieser congregation, including the decline in physical development of the church every year which not only fails to improve the welfare of congregation members but actually increases the burden on the congregation. The recommendations resulting from this research will serve as concrete suggestions for changing and improving the existing situation, with the ultimate goal of achieving church independence in managing funds and improving the welfare of the congregation.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on interview and documentation data sources, it can be concluded that the church management at the Eliezer Sentani Congregation in order to become a management and financially independent congregation experienced significant obstacles which then had an impact on the financial burden on the congregation. However, apart from the findings or obstacles, there are also achievements or accomplishments after the expansion of the church from the parent church, namely GPI Elim Abepura. The following is a classification of achievements and findings in the GPI Eliezer Sentani-Jayapura congregation.

Category	base
Achievements (Achievements)	Increase in the number of congregations Implementation of Ecclesiastical Programs, Improving Service Quality Establishment of an Independent Church Building
Findings (Obstacles)	Dependence on the offerings of the people Limited resources for economic development cultural and social challenges, financial independence that is not yet optimal 100% of the 30 congregations agree with creative efforts, empowering the community's economy, not relying solely on offerings.

Table 1. Results and Findings

Indonesian Protestant Church (GPI) The Eliezer Sentani congregation has its own history as a church which is now large enough to become an independent church. Behind the congregation's quantitative success there are also challenges faced so that the church experiences obstacles in quality growth. These challenges take the form of resource utilization challenges which have an impact on the financial growth and welfare of its members. The growth of the GPI Eliezer Sentani Congregation will be aligned through the analysis of achievements, findings and recommendations below.

## Achievements

In organizations, it is always based on achievement targets over a certain period of time. The targets are usually prepared based on the organization's vision and mission and then followed up with operational plans. At the PGI Eliezer Sentani Congregation there is a vision and mission that includes targets for spiritual and financial capability and independence. Judging from the development of the congregation, the Eliezer Sentani congregation experienced a significant increase in the number of congregations, initially with 20 heads of families and growing to 70 heads of families. Sari & Amri (2018) revealed that organizational development and progress can be weighed in terms of quality and quantity. Quality refers to work achievements that provide the expected results, while quantity is nominal achievements both in terms of financial and membership growth. Apart from quantitative growth, there is also quality achievement, namely the growth of churches that branch out from the main church. Expanding oneself means standing independently without financial support and organizational management from the parent organization. There are several implicit factors in the success of establishing oneself in an organization, one of which is the availability of natural resources and human resources to cultivate governance in organizing or managing with "good governance".

However, even though the PGI Eliezer Sentani Congregation has shown significant growth both in quantity and quality, the main challenge faced in achieving full independence lies in implementing the principles of good governance. Success in expanding itself is not only determined by the number of congregations or financial support alone, but also by the church's ability to manage natural and human resources in a transparent, accountable and sustainable manner. This includes participatory decision making, equitable distribution of resources, and implementation of programs that are relevant and responsive to congregational needs. Thus, a focus on increasing effective leadership and management capacity, as well as empowering the congregation through training and coaching, is key in creating healthy church governance and ensuring sustainable growth, both spiritually and financially.

Management and utilization of resources are supporting factors for organizational success. Utilizing human resources and other resources such as technology is a determinant in the successful management of a business or organization (Khair, 2019). Human resources are human abilities to operate and carry out organizational operations effectively and efficiently, while other resources, such as technology, are tools that support work optimization and organizational development. Therefore, independent church management needs to pay attention to how human and technological resources can be managed and utilized optimally to achieve the church's goal of becoming an independent church.

The next achievement is spiritual and spiritual improvement. Spiritually refers to the implementation of church programs, while spiritually improving the quality of services. Running church programs well, especially in terms of service, is real work for church officials (Wijiati, 2020). Success in serving is certainly supported by an attitude of professionalism including skills in carrying out their duties. Good collaboration, as well as constructive communication (Wenda, Kabanga, & Labobar, 2022). The synergy of professionalism and good communication has a positive impact on services in terms of spiritual improvement.

## Findings

It cannot be denied that the physical growth of a congregation is a reflection of the welfare of its congregation members. It is not uncommon for churches to find various ways to improve the welfare of their members, one of which is theological concepts or reflections such as the salt theology reflection which provides training for congregations so that they

develop economically (Runturambi, Wailan, & Wanget, 2023). There are several findings that are considered challenges that make Eliezer's congregation slow in physical growth. These challenges are resource utilization that is not optimal. Indeed, one of the achievements of the Eliezer congregation at the beginning of the expansion of the parent organization was to have human resources. However, as time goes by, human resources are not maximized properly. The lack of creative programs that move the congregation to grow more mature, and the direction of thinking is too conventional so that it does not have good solutions to deal with the problems faced which then has an impact on the stagnation of development and physical development of the congregation.

However, congregational growth is not solely measured by physical development, but also by improving the spiritual, moral and social qualities of its members. Therefore, there is a need for more comprehensive and innovative efforts to utilize the potential of the congregation. The development of creative programs that are able to explore the talents and abilities of the congregation is very important, especially programs that are not only spiritual but also economic, social and cultural (Kurung, Nee, Hutabarat, & Siagian, 2024). A more dynamic and adaptive approach, which can adapt to the needs and challenges of the times, is needed to bring the Eliezer congregation towards more significant growth.

Limited economic development resources always collide with the idealistic attitudes of leaders and congregational councils. This triggers delays in thinking and moving. Zega (2019) revealed that it is important for a servant of God to understand and apply the meaning of Entrepreneurship so that he can apply it to the congregations he serves. He also emphasized that it is important for a church leader to understand and apply entrepreneurial principles, such as creativity, the courage to take risks, and the ability to see opportunities amidst challenges. In this way, leaders can direct congregations to be more proactive in developing their economic potential, either through joint ventures, skills training, or economic initiatives that support shared prosperity.

However, often the idealistic attitude of church leaders and congregation boards actually hinders the implementation of these entrepreneurial principles. Reluctance to adapt to new and innovative approaches to economic development causes congregations to lose opportunities to develop and be competitive. In this context, changing mindsets becomes very important (Mustakim, 2011). Church leaders should be able to integrate spiritual values and pragmatic entrepreneurial principles. In this way, they can guide the congregation to see the economy not only as a means of meeting material needs, but also as a form of social responsibility and community empowerment. This transformation requires full support from all parties, including training, monitoring and broader collaboration, so that congregations can move more quickly and be responsive to changing social and economic dynamics.

Another finding is the monotony of the church's income sources. A creative church is a church that considers opinions from various sources. This is done to support ministry within the congregation. The church's sole opinion, which only comes from the congregation's offerings, makes the church vulnerable to economic fluctuations and is highly dependent on the financial condition of congregation members. When the congregation's economic situation declines, the church's income will automatically be affected, which in turn can hinder various service and church development programs. Apart from that, burdening the congregation with various levies further adds to the congregation's economic pressure. On the other hand, the Church is obliged to open up employment opportunities for members of its congregation so that the physical, spiritual and spiritual growth of the congregation runs in balance. One creative idea is to develop congregations to utilize the potential of nature and the environment more effectively (Maggi, 2019). The church has a caring and adaptive attitude towards the needs of the congregation.

Apart from that, there is a lack of diversification of church income sources which are still dominated by congregational offerings or income sourced from internal congregations, without significant efforts to find alternative sources of external income. This results in the church having a high level of dependence on the economic conditions of the congregation, which is vulnerable to changes in the overall economic situation. When the congregation's economy weakens, the church's income is automatically affected, which can hamper various service and development programs. Apart from that, the church has not maximized opportunities to utilize the assets it owns, such as land, buildings or other facilities, which could actually be managed productively to generate additional income. Apart from that, churches tend to still focus on conventional approaches in seeking funding sources, without considering innovation or collaboration that could strengthen their economic position and ministry.

Cultural and social issues also have a significant influence in shaping the independence and maturity of a church organization in the Eliezer Sentani Congregation. This problem has great urgency for congregational growth because local cultural values often determine the perspective and practice of congregational life. Kbarek (2020) describes that the Wairon boat as a collective symbol influences the spiritual, cultural and social life of the congregation at KBS Saramom, Biak, showing how cultural symbols can strengthen social ties and shared identity within the congregation.

Ethnographically, the majority of the Eliezer Sentani congregation consists of members from the same tribe, namely the Maluku tribe. However, this cultural potential has not been maximized, even though there are traditional philosophies and values that can be used to strengthen unity and increase cooperation among congregation members. By utilizing Maluku cultural values which prioritize mutual cooperation, solidarity and togetherness, the church can create stronger synergy in the physical and spiritual development of the congregation. Lack of understanding and application of these cultural aspects results in obstacles to the holistic development of the congregation. If the cultural values that live in this community can be better integrated into church activities and services, then this will contribute to more significant and harmonious progress for the Eliezer Sentani Congregation. However, what happens is that there is selfishness and individualism among the congregation, this is because there are no values or philosophies that unite them to work together to build the congregation towards independence and prosperity.

### **Recommendation**

There are several recommendations related to contextual achievements and findings at the GPI Eliezer Sentani Congregation. These recommendations are prepared as constructive suggestions, without the intention of patronizing the congregation. First, there needs to be careful planning to design a congregational independence program by considering the maximum use of natural and human resources owned by the congregation. Second, creative economic programs that prioritize the principles of justice and congregational welfare, such as the formation of cooperatives or joint ventures, which can provide sustainable economic benefits for all congregation members. Third, understanding of theology and ethics needs to be strengthened so that economic independence is considered as part of the response to God's faith and calling, so that the congregation's economy is not only seen as a worldly thing, but also as a form of loyalty and service to God. Fourth, it is necessary to evaluate financial management with a more strategic, transparent and accountable approach, to ensure that any existing funds are truly used for the common good and mutually supportive services.

Apart from that, it is important for the GPI Eliezer Sentani congregation to strengthen communication and collaboration between congregation leaders and members so that each planned program can be implemented more effectively. Involving congregation members in

the planning and decision-making process will increase the sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the success of these programs. This will also reduce resistance to change and ensure that each step taken is appropriate to the needs and socio-cultural context of the congregation. By integrating spiritual, economic and cultural perspectives in a balanced way, it is hoped that the congregation can grow more independent and mature, both spiritually and socially.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The church plays an important role in national and state life with the main task of spreading the Gospel and advancing social justice. However, economic challenges often hinder the church's independence in carrying out this mission. The main focus of this research is the economic development of the people in the GPI Elieser Sentani Congregation to achieve financial independence. Behind achievements such as the expansion of the parent organization and quantitative growth of the congregation, the Church also faces significant problems that impact the development and independence of the congregation physically and spiritually. Major challenges include dependence on congregational offerings, limited resources, and premature congregational expansion decisions. Limited human resources and lack of diversification of church income are the main obstacles. Creative and innovative approaches in economic management, including asset utilization and diversification of income sources, are very necessary to increase financial independence. Community economic development through training and utilizing local potential can strengthen the church's capacity to achieve financial and service sustainability. To overcome these challenges, it is recommended that the GPI Elieser Sentani congregation focus on sustainable economic empowerment strategies. This includes developing training programs that can improve congregational entrepreneurial skills and encourage creative local initiatives. Apart from that, it is important to carry out regular evaluations of economic and service achievements to adapt strategies to existing developments. With this approach, it is hoped that the church can reduce dependence on external funding sources and achieve greater financial independence, so that it can carry out its social and religious missions more effectively.

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