

## **African Instituted Churches in Southern Africa: Paragons of Regional Integration?**

**Ezra Chitando (Dr)  
University of Zimbabwe**

While the role of Christian churches in the struggles for liberation in Southern Africa have been acknowledged, most writers have glossed over their contribution to regional co-operation and integration.

Most studies on the churches tend to be limited to specific countries, and to the Western-derived mission churches. This study explores the activities of African Initiated Churches (AICs) in the context of Southern Africa. It examines their emphasis on black economic empowerment and outlines their dominance in the informal sector. AIC members are actively involved in cross-border trading and have formed transnational support systems. Zimbabwean AIC traders in Botswana, South Africa and Mozambique, for example, are hosted by fellow believers in these countries. This study maintains that whilst politicians and technocrats on the continent are still debating issues relating to indigenisation, the NEPAD initiative and other strategies for co-operation and integration, AICs are already implementing these ideals. The study recognises the importance of religion to Southern Africa and analyses the spiritual under-currents within the quest for total liberation in the region.