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The Contribution of PCEA-Initiated Projects on Socio-Economic Development in Laikipia West Sub-County, Laikipia County

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Historically, the church is known to give socio-economic services voluntarily in addition to the key mission of spiritual enhancement. This is founded upon certain Biblical teachings that focus on promoting the livelihood and social well-being of humanity. The Presbyterian Church of East Africa has implemented various programs whose agenda is to improve the socio-economic well-being of the society all over the world. The objective of the study was to establish how the Presbyterian Church of East Africa's church-initiated projects contribute to socio-economic development in Laikipia West. The study employed a descriptive research design. The study was guided by liberation theology and a comprehensive development framework, which are relevant to the Presbyterian Church of East Africa's contribution to socio-economic development in Laikipia. The target population was church ministers, ordained elders, and members of communities where the Presbyterian Church of East Africa has specific projects in Laikipia Sub-County. The study utilised both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Secondary data was collected by the use of documentary analysis. The data collected was analysed by use of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis for interviews, where percentages and proportions were computed. The study findings revealed that the church-initiated projects contributed immensely to socio-economic development through: provision of better health care; financial development through the SACCO; street children have found a home; access to clean drinking water; environmental conservation through tree planting and access to education opportunities. The study recommends that the Presbyterian Church of East Africa should work with a strategic plan, enhance resource mobilisation, and foster unity both within the church and among community members to create a more conducive environment for development efforts.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, church-initiated projects have made notable contributions to socio-economic development in various regions, especially in areas like Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe. For instance, Catholic and Protestant organisations in Latin America have been instrumental in promoting education, healthcare, and social justice through initiatives such as the Latin American Church's "Base Communities," which combine social activism with religious faith to address poverty and inequality (Sobrino, 2017). In Asia, church groups have worked on providing humanitarian aid and supporting marginalised communities, particularly in countries like the Philippines and India, by creating educational programs and supporting small-scale economic enterprises (Echeverria, 2018). However, despite these efforts, challenges such as limited funding, political instability, and the need for greater collaboration with local governments hinder the potential for church-based development to achieve large-scale impact (Hirsch, 2020). Moreover, while church initiatives have made strides in promoting economic and social welfare, they often face difficulties in addressing systemic issues such as inequality and corruption that require broader institutional reforms (Ochoa, 2019).

In Africa, church-initiated projects have been instrumental in advancing socio-economic development. Catholic, Protestant, and African indigenous churches have established schools, hospitals, and microfinance programs that target the needs of marginalised communities, contributing significantly to improved access to education and healthcare (Berg, 2020). The Catholic Church's health programs, for example, provide vital services in regions with limited government resources, addressing both infectious diseases and maternal health (Moyo, 2019). Similarly, Protestant organisations like the Salvation Army and World Vision have been involved in projects that focus on agricultural development, food security, and infrastructure in rural areas (Jenkins, 2018). However, the continent continues to face socio-economic disparities, political instability, and infrastructure deficits, which limit the sustainability and scope of church-based initiatives (Kremer, 2021). Moreover, while churches provide significant grassroots support, their efforts often lack coordination with national policies and broader development strategies, which impedes their potential for long-term impact (Hirsch, 2020). Thus, while church initiatives have achieved notable successes, there is still substantial work to be done to create a more coordinated, sustainable approach that integrates local, national, and international development efforts.

In Kenya, church-initiated projects have played a significant role in socio-economic development, particularly in rural areas, through initiatives in healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation. The Catholic Church, for example, operates numerous health facilities and schools, while Protestant organisations, such as the Anglican Church, run programs addressing food security and microfinance (Ng'ang'a, 2020). These efforts have contributed to improved access to education and healthcare for underserved populations. However, despite these achievements, many church-based projects continue to struggle with limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of coordination with government programs, which limits their effectiveness (Kamau, 2021). Additionally, systemic issues like corruption, unemployment, and inequality persist, and church-led initiatives alone cannot address these broader socio-economic challenges (Mwangi, 2019). Therefore, while churches have made important strides, more integrated efforts are needed to ensure sustainable and long-term socio-economic development in Kenya.

Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) is among the fastest-growing Churches in Kenya (Kagama, 2012). PCEA was established to minister the gospel in East Africa. A mission that has been in existence since 1891. Though the initial focus of the PCEA church was promotion of the spiritual well-being of its members, the social and economic life of its members is also important. PCEA has a history of practising Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that spans over a century in the areas of health and education (PCEA, 2008). PCEA church has been playing a significant role in socio-economic development, contributing to poverty alleviation in Kenya.

The work of Benedetto and McKim (2009), Gichumbi (2008) and Wamagatta (2007) gives an account of the Presbyterian Church in Kenya. They point out that PCEA in Kenya was established in

1891 by missionaries from Scotland. Scottish missions were planted in other parts of Kenya by Alexander Bruce and Sir William Mackinnon with the Imperial British East Africa Company directors in 1889 (Mwangi, 2019). Therefore, the PCEA church gained a base among the Agikuyu in the central region when Christian missionaries advanced their work to the interior parts of Kenya. The Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) brought PCEA to the Eastern Region in 1915 (Gunde, 2013). Through the provision of holistic development programs that improve the socio-economic conditions of people, Muriungi (2013) informs that as much as protestant churches are silent, the PCEA church has initiated a number of programs. Such programs include provision of education on entrepreneurial skills, training and encouraging engagement in income-generating activities and educational empowerment among the locals. PCEA General Assembly (2008) informs that PCEA has mission schools, clinics and hospitals that it uses to make contact with local people and establish initiatives that improve their socio-economic conditions.

In Laikipia County, several mission hospitals exist that are sponsored by the church. They include Charity Medical Hospital, Pope Benedict Hospital, Nyahururu, Consolata Mission Hospital and Rumuruti Catholic Mission Hospital. PCEA Church has also been involved in sponsoring institutions like PCEA Nyahururu Bethsaida health centre in Nyahururu, Laikipia County. It is against this background that the study sought to assess the contribution of PCEA church-initiated projects in influencing socio-economic development in Laikipia West Sub-County. The study examined the involvement of the PCEA church through community-based initiatives aimed at enhancing members' social and economic well-being.

METHODOLOGY

The research was based on a descriptive research design that allowed a detailed analysis regarding how projects initiated by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) have been used in the socio-economic development of Laikipia West Sub-County. Such a design was suitable for the collection of the perceptions and experiences of different stakeholders associated with or impacted by the PCEA projects. The target population was 1000 households, Ngarua ward in Laikipia West Sub-County. This social group is an indication of the combination of church and community stakeholders, either directly participating in the implementation of the projects or beneficiaries from the projects. The sampling formula used to calculate sample size was that provided by Neumann (2000), which recommends 10% of the population as the most appropriate sample size. Using the formula, 10% of 1000 households translates to 100 households. Primary data was collected using Structured household questionnaires. The instruments had been previously validated and reliability tests had been conducted. The frequency, percentages and proportions were descriptive statistics used to analyse the data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Contributions of PCEA Church-Initiated Projects to Socioeconomic Development in Laikipia West.

The study sought to assess the contributions of infrastructure projects initiated by the PCEA church in Laikipia. This was done to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives within the community. Results in Table 1 show that 73% of respondents indicated that PCEA's infrastructure projects have led to better healthcare. This suggests that the church's initiatives, such as establishing health facilities, have improved access to medical services, which is crucial for enhancing community health outcomes (Nkamleu, 2007). This finding is in

line with that of Barasa (2020), who asserted that the PCEA Church's integrated education-health strategy cemented the growth of a vibrant healthcare sector, leading to a well-coordinated Church-Government partnership in implementing health programs. This expansion allowed healthcare to reach many parts of the country.

The acknowledgement by 28% of respondents regarding financial development through the establishment of a Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) highlights the church's role in promoting economic empowerment. This finding aligns with that of Chigozie et al. (2017), who emphasised that financial sustainability is critical for the stability and growth of church-funded projects. The finding that 46% believe street children have found a home through church initiatives indicates a significant impact on vulnerable youth. The finding is in line with Ejok et al. (2022) in a literature review, which suggested that faith-based organisations enhance the welfare of street children through preventive, rehabilitation, outreach, and collaborative strategies. With 63% of respondents noting improved access to clean drinking water, this finding underscores the importance of water projects initiated by PCEA (Moser & Kalton, 1989). Access to clean water is essential for health and sanitation, contributing to overall community well-being (Kioko, 2020). The recognition by 31% of respondents regarding environmental conservation initiatives through tree planting indicates a commitment to sustainability. This concurs with a study by Mbaria (2017) that states that the PCEA church had created awareness on environmental factors and participated in environmental awareness through seminars, sermons and activities like control of soil erosion, planting of trees, harvesting rain water and protection of water catchment areas.

A significant (69%) of the respondents noted that PCEA initiatives have increased access to educational opportunities. This reflects the church's focus on education as a fundamental driver of

socioeconomic development, enabling children and youth to gain the knowledge and skills necessary for future success. This aligns with Ndegwa et al. (2018), who revealed that the majority of respondents recognised the church's role in initiating socio-economic projects that positively impacted education and health within the community. The finding that 34% of the respondents believe PCEA promotes the welfare of vulnerable people indicates an awareness of the church's social justice efforts. By addressing the needs of marginalised groups, such as orphans, widows, and the elderly, PCEA plays a vital role in fostering inclusivity and support within the community (Lagat, 2019). These findings are in line with those of Barasa and Karanja (2009), who

observed that the church provided access to education opportunities and healthcare. These findings concur with the Comprehensive Development Framework that emphasises long-term, holistic development in that PCEA initiatives often include activities that promote economic, psychosocial, and spiritual development, thus addressing the multiple dimensions of people's lives (Hezekiah et al., 2017). Liberation theology emphasises the need to address unjust economic and social structures that perpetuate poverty and inequality (Ojok et al., 2022). By engaging in socio-economic activities, the PCEA challenges these injustices and works towards creating a more equitable society

Table 1: Presbyterian Church of East Africa Initiatives in Laikipia West Sub-County

	Number of Respondents (%)
Better health care	73
Financial development through the SACCO	28
Street children have found a home	46
Access to clean drinking water	63
Environmental conservation through tree planting	31
Access to education opportunities	69
Promote the welfare of the vulnerable people	34

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

PCEA infrastructure projects in Laikipia have notably contributed to socio-economic development in the region. These projects have led to better healthcare access and have improved access to clean drinking water, which is essential for health and sanitation. The church's initiatives also play a role in promoting economic empowerment through the establishment of a Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO). PCEA initiatives have provided a home for vulnerable youth and have shown commitment to environmental sustainability through tree planting. Additionally, PCEA initiatives have increased access to educational opportunities and promoted the welfare of vulnerable people, fostering inclusivity and support within the

community. These findings align with previous research that recognises the church's role in providing access to education and healthcare.

Recommendations

The church should conduct strategic planning, enhanced resource mobilisation, and foster unity both within the church and among community members to create a more conducive environment for development efforts. The church should implement participatory monitoring and evaluation strategies that involve community members in all stages of project development (Nkamleu, 2007). This ensures that projects are aligned with local needs and fosters a sense of ownership among beneficiaries. Robust feedback channels that allow community members to voice their concerns and

suggestions regarding ongoing projects, thus enhancing accountability and responsiveness should be established.

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