

Influence of Sustainability of Spiritual-Economic Projects on Growth of Methodist Church in Kaaga Synod, Kenya

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Abstract

The mission of the church is to contribute to the transformation of the dehumanizing economic structures. Nevertheless, churches in Kenya have experienced a lack in financial leadership and spiritual support for projects; occasioned by absence of spiritual guidance in the implementation of economic projects. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of sustainability of spiritual-economic projects on growth of the Methodist church in Kenya, Kaaga Synod. The study was guided by stewardship theory, and adopted descriptive research design. The target population was 25 Circuits of Methodist Church, Kaaga Synod, Meru, Kenya. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 53 project managers, while simple random sampling technique was used to select 196 project members, constituting 30 percent of the project membership population across the sampled circuits. Questionnaires were used to collect data. A pre-test study was conducted in Methodist church in Nairobi synod, where 5 projects heads and 20 community project members were included. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequencies and percentage. SPSS version 29 was used to analyze the data, and results were presented in tables. The study found out that church projects, such as schools and financial institutions, were negatively impacted by Covid-19, resulting in low income. Consequently, the church has taken longer time than anticipated to deliver its mandate. The study recommends that the church council to develop strategies that would enable the church projects recover more quickly from the adverse effects of Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *Sustainability, Spiritual-Economic Projects, Growth, Methodist Church, Kaaga Synod, Kenya*

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1.0 Introduction

A church is mandated to ensure economic empowerment of its members through spiritual and social nourishment (European Methodist Council [EMC], 2020). Being empowered economically entails having a justified and legal means of attaining livelihood through which an individual or institution can sustain its various needs (United Methodist Church in Nigeria [UNMCN], 2018). Once a church member is empowered economically, they are able to lead comfortable lives and support various church activities through their offerings and tithes.

Churches have embarked on a mission to ensure that its members benefit collectively as members, and not as specific individuals (Kwemboi, 2019). As a result, they invest in communal projects which benefit every member directly through employment, financial support in form of loans, or through business in form of sales of their products. In addition, church members also benefit indirectly when they enjoy the services of various assets procured by the church using revenue raised from the projects such as advanced musical instruments, church structures, church sponsored tours, free seminars, monthly camps among other benefits. Church growth is defined as the ability of a church to increase in terms of its congregation and assets (EMC, 2020). Studies conducted in various nations highlight various factors that affect church growth due to sustainability of its projects.

In California, there have been costly empowerment projects in which church

members are charged to enjoy the services (Chowdhury et al., 2019). In United Kingdom, there has been inequalities and racism among church members (Rogers, 2017). In Asian, countries like China, have tough government regulations on freedom of worship; poor financial management; and few empowerment projects (UNMCN, 2018).

In African nations, countries like South Africa have been had weak church policies that are vague on the repercussions for a church leader who misappropriates church resources (Kgatle, 2020). In central African, there have been cases of gender inequality, and unavailability of resources for churches to initiate more diverse and viable empowerment projects in DRC Congo (Purwaningrat et al., 2019). In Namibia, the disabled and vulnerable groups such as people living with HIV/AIDS are the most forgotten group in empowerment projects, hence the high rates of poverty (Wyk, 2017). In North African countries like Morocco, there have been negative traditions that restrict women from spearheading and leading church project initiatives (Amanze, 2019). In Nigeria, corruption and poor governance of church projects lead to insecurity, while inconsiderate cultures that confine women at homes to do house duties have led to management squabbles (Arasio et al., 2018; Mabwe et al., 2018; Mbuagbo & Akoko, 2019).

In Kenya, the empowerment of church members has been engulfed with ethnicity and gender imbalance. Further, there have been church politics that limit development projects as a result of diverse doctrinal

beliefs; as well as conservative traditions in church institutions (Karanu et al., 2020). Notably, there have been low financial sustainability due to lack of consistence flow of resources to venture into diverse projects (Kioko, 2020). There has also been low literacy levels of project members, and a lack of trained personnel to guard the church projects from collapsing (Kwemboi, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Religion and economy are intertwined. The church cannot execute God’s mandate of liberating the poor and the dying in the world if it is not alive to economic, political, and cultural dynamics in the society (EMC, 2020). The mission of the church is to contribute to economic transformation of its members. Therefore, for the church to make impact on the economy, it should prioritize economic transformation of its members and participate in the empowerment of its members (English, 2019).

Nevertheless, churches in Kenya have experienced lack of financial and spiritual leadership and support for its projects (Methodist Church in Kenya, 2020). As a result, there has been limited resources to expand the projects so as to ensure sustainability. In turn, this has resulted in inequalities based on gender, ethnicity and age (Ndegwa et al., 2018).

There is extensive literature on the integration of faith into agriculture, and the subsequent societal reforms and project mainstreaming (Basedau et al. (2018); Chowdhury et al. (2019); Mbuagbo and Akoko (2019); Spaling and Vander (2019); Wyk (2017). However, there is dearth of

literature on how sustainability of church projects can impact on the growth of churches, hence the gap that this study seeks to fill.

“The study revealed that spiritual-economic church projects were negatively impacted by Covid-19, leading to lower project income that ultimately delayed the delivery of church mandate”

Purpose of the Study

To investigate the influence of sustainability of spiritual-economic projects on growth of Methodist Church in Kaaga Synod, Kenya

Research Question

What is the influence sustainability of spiritual-economic programs on church growth in MCK, Kaaga Synod?

Theoretical Review

This study will be guided by stewardship theory developed by Donaldson and Davis (1991). Stewardship theory argues that the stewardship behavior of managers led to great corporate governance norms when the adopted organizational principles are in line with endorsed principles. That means that when managers of an organization blend various thoughtful ideals with competencies, an advanced governance of the institutional resources is enhanced.

Stewardship theory was adopted in this study because the church is mandated by Christ to become stewards of His resources in expanding the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it is the sole purpose of the church management to train and equip its members with financial management skills. This is because, a well-managed institution enjoys maximum participation of all members in all areas. The church management is deemed successful when it provides economic empowerment projects to its members, and also trains them on how to manage church projects at both the personal and the communal level. Financial literacy is the most basic strategy that a church uses as they commence on the journey to economic empowerment.

Empirical Review

The subject of spiritual-economic projects has excited many scholars. A closer examination of church projects indicate that they complement sources of revenue for the church. In Europe, European Methodist Council [EMC] (2020) documented a project list for funding missions around Europe. These projects included television ministry in Poland, kindergarten in Pivnice, weekend soup kitchen in Virbas, music ministry in Dolny Kubin, church planting in Rome among others. As such, EMC ensured there was sustainability of the projects through leadership training and providing a platform for members to learn and contribute new ideas. This inspired the current study to examine the spiritual-economic projects currently in operation in Methodist Church in Kenya, Kaaga synod.

United Methodist Church in Nigeria [UNCN] (2018) examined how Nigerian women are

empowered through church microloans to begin small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The study investigated a program called ‘Empower Her’, in which women are able to access funds that to open business. The program had over 1,500 registered women who had access to microloans. However, for one to qualify for a loan, they needed to have a viable business idea. The loans obtained were paid back with a 2.5% interest for a period of 10 months. Women in Nigeria invested in grocery, fish-selling, clothes and farming. However, UNCN (2018) was vague on what other qualifications were considered when lending to avoid loan default cases. Apart from that, a church was not registered as a financial institution; hence, UNCN (2018) did not indicate which affiliate of the church lend on its behalf.

Further, Arasio et al. (2018) explained how pastoral community groups had emerged and evolved towards helping communities in northern Kenya. The study found out that in as much as information on various institutions that had initiated income generating projects in northern region in Kenya were plenty, little information on churches that had participated in the projects was very low. The study used 10 chiefs and 24 sub-chiefs, 6 government staff, 4 private sector members, 5 non-governmental organization officers and 2 church organizations in Marsabit South District to identify various groups that participated in income generating projects. The registered groups were 130 out of 153. 86 of them were women’s groups.

Additionally, Arasio et al. (2018) revealed that the two church organizations; namely, the Catholic church and the African Inland church had supported sale of traditional artefacts (25 beadwork groups) and micro-credit schemes (32 merry-go-round groups), sale of household item (89 groups), and cattle, sheep and goat trade (100 groups). Further, there had been engagement of various investment projects such as camel trading by groups such as Salama, Saidia and Salato women's groups supported by the church. However, Arasio et al. (2018) complained that there were few markets across the vast area in Marsabit South leading to high transportation costs, high capital, low financial education and increased insecurity while trading.

A study by Kwemboi (2019) found out the input of Salvation Army's Worth banking program on economic empowerment of women in Bungoma County. The study was conducted in Cheptais Ward due to low number of formal women financial institutions. The study enlisted 136 respondents who were leaders of economic empowerment programs. The study found out that Worth banking program significantly reduced dependency of women. However poor technical know-how on investment and low loans issuance had significantly deteriorated the program. Since the program was informal, accessing a boost from various formal financial institutions, had turned out to be futile. However, Kwemboi's (2019) study did not explain the causes of the program remaining informal regardless of the ease of registration of financial groups in Kenya. The current study sought to assess some of the registered projects in Methodist

church Kaaga synod, and how they influenced the vulnerable groups such as women and children.

A report by the Anglican Church of Kenya [ACK] (2016) outlined the strategic plan of the church from 2016-2020. The report acknowledged the six pillars of the church as spiritual, social, economic, governance, infrastructure, and capacity building pillars. In relation to economic pillar, ACK (2016) gave a platform for members to be empowered through initiatives such as membership in the church savings and credit cooperatives (Saccos), where they could save and access low interest loans. These Saccos included ACK Sacco, ACK Imani Talent Sacco and Ukristo Na Ufanisi Wa Anglicana Sacco. There were other projects such as Business College, in which students trained on basic business courses and also computer packages; academies, bookshops and church farms (ACK, 2016). The report emphasized the need for prudent management where the church hired third party members to run and administrate projects on behalf of the church. This information inspired the current study to assess the frequency of job position rotations in the Methodist church programs to ensure prudence in the management of the resources.

2.0 Materials and Methods

Descriptive research design was used in this study on a target population of 25 circuits in MCK Kaaga Synod, Meru County. The respondents were 53 managers of church projects, and 652 registered community project members. The study used purposive sampling technique to select all the 53 project heads. 30 percent of the project members' population resulting to 196 project members

were selected through simple random sampling method across the sampled circuits. Questionnaires were used to collect data. The study conducted a pre-test study in Methodist Church in Kenya, Nairobi Synod. A pre-test study was conducted on 5 projects heads and 20 community project members. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequencies and percentage. SPSS version 29 was used to analyse the data, and results were presented using tables and explanations. Ethical considerations ensured

respondents consent before being issued with the questionnaires. Further, respondents were not required to provide their names, addresses or contacts.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Reliability Statistics

The study conducted a pre-test study to examine whether the instruments-maintained consistency of measure. The results are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Reliability Results

Instrument	Sampled	Cronbach's Alpha
Questionnaires	25	0.82

According to Table 1, the questionnaires had a Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of 0.82. According to Trizano and Alvarado (2016), Cronbach Alpha of score of 0.7 to 1, is considered reliable for the study.

Response Rate

The study had sampled fifty-three (53) head of church projects; and 196 community project members who answered one questionnaire. The response rate is indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Response Rate

Respondent	Sample Size	Response Rate	Percentage
Heads of church project	53	45	84%
Community project members	196	161	82%
Totals for questionnaires	249	206	83%

The results in Table 2 reveal that the heads of church project who answered the questionnaire were 45(84%) and the community project members who answered the questionnaires were 161(82%). In total, the questionnaires were answered by

206(83%) respondents. Therefore, it indicated that the response rate was excellent (Mailu et al., 2021). This meant that the study was able to include a good number of respondents since the topic was relatable to them in their day to day lives.

Sustainability of Spiritual-economic Projects and Church Growth

Sustainability of spiritual-economic projects had indicators such as risk management, financial management, investments expansion, visionary leadership and involvement of the community members. It

was measured using questionnaires which had closed-ended questions. The closed ended-questions were measured using Ordinal Likert scale where 1-strongly disagreed, 2-disagreed, 3-neutral, 4-agreed, and 5-strongly agreed. Table 3 includes the results on questionnaire.

Table 3

Results on Sustainability of Spiritual-economic Projects

Statement N=206	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
All genders are well represented in various income generating projects.	37(18%)	16(8%)	12(6%)	37(18%)	104(51%)	3.75
Qualified staffs have been assigned task to manage within a specific duration of time	0(0%)	48(23%)	0(0%)	104(51%)	54(26%)	3.80
The Methodist church have greatly partnered with other denominations such as Catholic church in delivering various community-based projects	103(50%)	72(35%)	0(0%)	31(15%)	0(0%)	2.05
There is a great team effort played by Methodist church and the government of Kenya towards improving various income generating projects.	8(4%)	17(8%)	0(0%)	74(36%)	107(52%)	4.25

Table 3 shows that 107(52%) respondents strongly agreed that there was a great team

effort played by Methodist church and the government of Kenya towards improving

various income generating projects, on a mean of 4.25. This revealed that the church was actually contributing towards the government agenda of provision of employment, and subsequent eradication of poverty in Kenya. The good working relations between the Methodist church and the government provided a platform for the church to also air its opinion, advising the government on innovative ways of ensuring there is economic prosperity of the citizens. Findings by Thiongo (2019) also established that African Inland Church in Kenya had ensured that it heeded to the call to eradicate poverty as a way of supporting the government in place.

Further, 104(51%) agreed that there was good management in the income generating projects, on a mean of 3.80. Qualified staff were assigned tasks to manage within a specific duration of time. The presence of qualified staff indicated that the church was keen in delivering the projects in the correct way through the means available. Qualified personnel ensured that the church was able deliver its mandate with minimal legal errors. In the long-run, projects became successful and improve the lives of the community members. Tower (2016) corroborates this finding by stating that employing the right workers ensures consistency in delivering the mandate of the church towards poverty eradication.

Nevertheless, 103(50%) respondents strongly disagreed and 72(35%) disagreed on a mean of 2.05 that the Methodist Church in Kenya, Kaaga Synod had greatly partnered with other denominations, such as the Catholic Church in delivering various community-based projects. This meant that MCK had taken more time than it was required to deliver its mandate. According to United Methodist Insight (2020), the main reason why Methodist churches are struggling to partner with other congregations is because of the negative impacts of COVID-19 on church projects. Projects such as schools and financial institutions which are the main sources of income for the church were greatly affected due to low income generated. Therefore, the church is still recovering, hence there is need to give it more time to set its operations in order before embarking on partnerships with other denominations while delivering the projects.

Research Question on the Influence Sustainability of Spiritual-Economic Programs on Church Growth

The study was guided by the question on the influence of sustainability of spiritual-economic programs on church growth in MCK, Kaaga Synod. The study conducted a Pearson Correlational Analysis. Table 4 indicates the results of Pearson Correlational Analysis.

Table 4

Pearson Correlational Analysis on Sustainability of Spiritual-Economic Programs and Church Growth

		Sustainability	Church Growth
Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	1	.424**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	224	224
Church Growth	Pearson Correlation	.424**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	224	224

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.9 shows that the Pearson correlation coefficient for the sustainability was $r=0.424^{**}$ at $\alpha < 0.000$ and 99% significance level. Therefore, since the Pearson correlation coefficient was less 1 and its significance level less than 0.05, the sustainability of church projects had a moderately positive and significant influence on church growth. Therefore, the church needed to sensitize its members on importance of working hard so as to attract wealth using honest ways which promoted sustainability of the church projects. This sensitization initiative would encourage members to be industrious and to shun laziness through attending group welfare activities, merry-go-rounds and being active participants in income generating projects that involved their time and resources. These findings support Tenai (2016) who noted that church projects helped the poor through getting basic needs, visited the sick and prayed with them, as a measure to ensure no one is left during the spiritual-economic journey.

Summary of the Findings

Results from the closed questions revealed that 107(52%) respondents strongly agreed on a mean of 4.25, that there was a great team effort played by Methodist church and the government of Kenya towards improving various income generating projects. Further, 104(51%) agreed on a mean of 3.80, that there was good management in income generating projects whereby qualified staff were assigned tasks to manage within a specific duration of time. Nevertheless, 103(50%) respondents strongly disagreed and 72(35%) disagreed on a mean of 2.05, that the Methodist church had greatly partnered with other denominations, such as Catholic Church, in delivering various community-based projects.

The Pearson correlation coefficient for the sustainability was $r=0.424^{**}$ at $\alpha < 0.000$ and 99% significance level. Therefore, since the Pearson correlation coefficient was less 1 and its significance level less than 0.05, the findings indicated that sustainability had a

positive and significant influence on church growth.

4.0 Conclusions

Sustainability of spiritual-economic church projects, such as schools and financial institutions, which are the main sources of income for the church, were negatively impacted by Covid-19, and consequently lowered the project incomes. This resulted in the church taking more time than anticipated in delivering its mandate.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends the church council to develop strategies which would enable the

church projects to recover more quickly from the adverse effects of Covid-19 pandemic. This should involve project members creating goals that are in line with the strategies, hence fast tracking recovery. The clergy should also brainstorm with the project leaders and members on ways of improving their projects so that they were not adversely affected by future calamities. This could include coming up with solutions like insuring the church projects against various natural and manmade calamities. This would assure the church leadership the continuity of the project income even in the event of any unforeseen calamities.

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