



ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF COMMUNITIES. A CASE OF THE HOLY CHRISTIAN ISRAEL CHURCH IN GITHUNGURI SUB-COUNTY, KIAMBU, KENYA

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Ndegwa, J. W.,¹ Otuya, P.,² Kariuki, E.³

^{*1} Master of Development Studies Student, St. Paul's University [SPU], Kenya

² Ph.D, Department of Social Sciences, St. Paul's University [SPU], Kenya

³ Ph.D, Department of Social Sciences, St. Paul's University [SPU], Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of the church in socio-economic empowerment of communities using a case of the Holy Christian Israel Church in Githunguri sub-County, Kiambu County. Specific objectives of the study were to establish socio-economic empowerment projects initiated by the Holy Christian Israel Church; to find out the effect of the projects on socio-economic empowerment of their members; to establish the effect of church leadership on economic empowerment of communities and lastly, and to investigate the perception of local communities towards the Holy Christian Israel Church. The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive design and was carried out among 112 members of the Holy Christian Israel Church. Simple random and stratified sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 72 members of the church. Data from respondents was collected using a questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. According to the study results, most (70%) of respondents reported that the Holy Christian Israel Church had not initiated socio-economic and empowerment projects for their members. 90% reported that the church had not invested in health and was not sponsoring any school. Majority (80%) encouraged their children to go to school and sought healthcare from health facilities. Nearly 90% reported that no training was given to church leaders while 77.8% of collected offering and church contributions was used to pay church leaders. 56% reported the church members were discriminated in the community and the church was perceived to be a cult. The study concluded that the church had done little to empower their members and the community socio-economically hence it had little impact on development. Even though considered to be against modern medication and education, most members reported to seek medication from health facilities and to take their children to school.

Key words: Empowerment, Socio-Economic, Development, Church, Community

INTRODUCTION

Participation of the church in economic development can be traced to the African-American church in the United States of America (USA). Gipson (2001) asserts that out of the experience of slavery and after the liberation declaration of both slaves and freedmen, African-American Church was born. Much as the church was built primarily as an institution for communal worship, it was also viewed as an institution for the economic development of the communities. It became a center for economic cooperation, pooling resources to buy churches, building mutual aid societies which provided social services for free blacks, purchasing and helping resettle enslaved Africans, and setting up businesses for economic development.

Since then, the role of the church has been more elaborate on not only preaching the gospel but also empowerment of communities. For instance, Ruth (2008) asserts that one of the major roles of pastors and their churches is to support and grow a community of believers that is not only spiritually healthy, but also economically viable. A pastor and his church typically provide support for parishioners in the form of prayer, guidance, and financial resources in times of need.

Ruth (2008) writes that being a pastor in Haiti is different from being a pastor anywhere in the world. She asserts that while most pastors spend their time in their offices, Haitian pastors have a varying role. They have to know their members and spend a great deal of time visiting their parishioner's houses. The pastor has to go to their people, visit them when they are sick, observe how they live. The elders also visit the sick but the parishioners are not content until the pastor has come.

In Africa, the church has also been involved in initiating development projects in different countries. For instance, in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Council of

Churches (ZCC) formed Christian Care. The initial aim of forming this Christian Non-governmental Organization (NGO) was to provide welfare assistance to those who were being persecuted during the liberation struggle, especially to care for political activists who were put in jail during the liberation struggle. In addition to ministering to the detainees, it was also concerned with the welfare of their families. However, after the period of the liberation struggle was over, Christian Care started working with communities in programmes of rural development. It currently works very closely and collaboratively with local churches, merging with the activities of local rural churches that seek development projects for their congregational communities Bomstein (2003).

The other notable Christian initiative in Africa is the Catholic Relief Services (CRS). It is a humanitarian agency of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that aims at the reduction of poverty, alleviation of human suffering and provision of hope to the coming generation. Its work in Africa includes food security, responding to the HIV and AIDs pandemic, and microfinance. The CRS has often supported projects in 42 African countries through which it has given attention to health and education and conflict resolution within some countries. It has also paid attention to the problems of underemployment and unemployment in growing cities, especially among less poorly educated youth. Equally, it has effectively combined the short term goal of meeting immediate needs through food aid and the long term goal of establishing complementary livelihood support activities through cash support (Christian, 2013).

In Kenya, the increasing number of primary schools and the growing rate of primary school leavers had become a problem to parents and government institutions because these school leavers had very few job opportunities and lacked the necessary skills to take such jobs. The situation led a joint Working Party of the Youth Department of the National Christian Council of Kenya and the Christian Churches'

Educational Association to begin to innovate on the further education, training and employment of Primary School Leavers. In their effort to discover what to do to help some of these unfortunate young people, the Village Polytechnic Movement was launched in 1966 with the acceptance of the member churches to become the main sponsoring bodies (Christian 2013). The village polytechnics have gone a big way to offer skills to school leavers for their survival.

The Holy Christian Israel Church has its roots in Central Kenya. It is an African indigenous church that grew strictly out of indigenous leadership without splitting from any western mission. Although the members perceive the church as a peace movement, the church has faced sharp criticism on most of their doctrines. Most of their members have no value for education and that they perform mysterious rituals. The church is also known for not taking modern medication but rather opt for prayer and traditional healing methods. Some congregants have even lost their lives at their homes as they hoped to be healed miraculously by God. Some splinter groups of the church in Kenya have also in the past misled members on an alleged 'end of the world' forcing their members to sell all their property in anticipation. In the region, there is growing discontent among the community members on the church not doing much to pursue their Christ given mandate in terms of socio-economic transformation and empowerment. Most of the leaders remain mere preachers of the gospel while others are even negatively impacting on their members by exploiting them financially.

A few years ago, the community evicted the church from the community citing spiritual discomfort and disturbance. The increasing discontentment among members of the community concerning the church and the fact that little research has been conducted on the same inspired this study. The study delved into the practices of the Holy Christian Israel Church in a bid to establish their role in socio-economic

empowerment of its members as well as members of the community.

The study was limited to the Holy Christian Israel Church in Githunguri Sub-County, Kiambu County with a focus on their immediate community. The study focused on the church management including the pastor, leaders of men, women and youth organizations in the church to ascertain the initiatives put in place to empower the community. The study also focused on congregants and community members to establish their perception of the church in the area as far as socio-economic empowerment is concerned.

Material and Methods

Study Area

This study was a descriptive cross-sectional study. The design is useful in gathering information by interviewing or administering questionnaires to a sample of individuals to obtain data useful in evaluating present particulars which have not controlled or manipulated the situation. The design was therefore found useful in establishing the dealings of the church and clarifying perceptions.

The study was carried out within Kiambu County, Kenya. Kiambu County which is located in the Central Region of the Kenya and it borders Nairobi County and Kajiado County to the South, Nakuru County to the West, and Nyandarua County to the North West, Murang'a County to the North and North East and Machakos County to the East. The county lies between latitudes 0° 25' and 1° 20' south of the Equator and Longitude 36° 31' and 37° 15' east. The county extends between 1200 M to 2550 M above sea level. It covers an area of 2,543.5 Km² with 476.3 Km² under forest cover according to the 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census. Currently, the County is divided into twelve (12) sub-counties namely: Gatundu North, Gatundu South, Githunguri, Juja, Kabete, Kiambaa, Kiambu, Kikuyu, Lari, Limuru,

Ruiru and Thika Town (Kiambu County Government website). Notable among Christian faiths are Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostals and Baptists. Only a small number of residents subscribe to different faiths including Islam and Hinduism. The area of study was inspired by the fact that the area was at a convenient distance from the researcher. The area also has a large population of the Holy Christian Israel Church adherents.

The study targeted 112 members of the Holy Christian Israel Church in Githunguri Sub-county. As per their records, Holy Christian Israel Church constitutes 27 men, 64 women and about 27 minors (Personal Communication, 22nd August 2017).

Sampling Plan

The study relied on purposive sampling technique to sample the Holy Christian Israel Church in Githunguri Sub-county. The sampling technique was adopted since the researcher had prior information about the dealings of the church. The study also employed stratified and simple random sampling techniques to

select a sample of 72 congregants from the church. Stratified sampling technique was used to divide the congregants into men, women and youth before selecting 24 respondents from each of the strata. The sample size for the congregants was arrived at through a mathematical formula by Nassiuma (2000):

$$n = \frac{NC^2}{C^2 + (N - 1)e^2}$$

Where:

N- The population size

n- Desired sample size

C- The coefficient of variation – 0.67. In most social science research coefficient of variation is usually between 30% -70%. This study used 67.10% used by most science researchers (Nassiuma, 2000).

e- The margin of error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{112 \times 0.67^2}{0.67^2 + (112 - 1)0.05^2} = 69.21$$

A summary of the sample size and sampling techniques was presented in table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Sample Size and Techniques

Category	Sampling Technique	N	n	%
Church	Purposive	-	1	-
Congregants	Stratified/simple random	112	72	64.29

Key: N- Population, n- Sample Size

Source: Field Data

Data Collection and Procedures

Data was collected using questionnaire for church members, secondary data from journals and previous research data. The researcher obtained research authorization from the Postgraduate Department of The Saint Paul’s University. The researcher then applied for a research permit from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and from the District Education Officer (DEO) to carry out the research within the sub-county. The researcher then arranged specific days with sampled respondents to collect data from them. The researcher personally issued questionnaires to

randomly sampled congregants of the sampled church and collected them after they were dully filled for analysis. After collection of data, research instruments were closely examined to ensure no errors were present. Quantitative data was then carefully extracted and coded numerically. The responses were stored in a computer’s spread sheet program. Data analysis was mainly descriptive statistics. Descriptive analysis was used for categorical data which was described in terms of frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages. Analysed data was presented in tables of frequencies and percentages, graphs and charts.

Results

Majority of the respondents were female comprising 65.1% (41) with the rest being male. Majority of the sampled respondents were aged above 41 years of age. Of the respondents, 31.75% (20) were between 41-50 years of age with the same number being above 50 years. Those who were aged between 31 and 40 years formed the minority of the respondents at only 9.52% (6). On education, 70.7% (29) of male respondents only possessed primary level education while 54.6% (12) of the female respondents had the same level of education. The study also established that more male respondents had higher levels of education as compared to their female counterparts. For instance, 9.1% (2) of male respondents had a diploma qualification while only 7.3% (3) of the females had the same. Majority of the respondents had been members of the sampled church for between 6-10 years comprising 59.1% (13) and 39.0% (16) male and female respectively.

Socio-Economic Empowerment Projects by the Sampled Church

When asked whether the church supported needy people in its society, 70% (44) were of the opinion that the church did not do so while 30% (19) asserted that the church supported needy members of the

society. An overwhelming 90% (57) of the respondents said the church did not sponsor any schools with only 10% (6) stating that the church sponsored some schools.

When members were asked whether they encouraged their children to attend school, 80% (50) were very positive in their response. However, an overwhelming 80% (50) of the respondents also confirmed to discouraging their children from attending formal learning.

On healthcare and related issues, the study obtained varied responses from respondents. On whether they sought medical attention from hospitals, 80% (50) said yes with only 20% (13) giving a 'no' response. Even though, 90% (57) of the respondents also confessed to believing in healing by faith, 80% (50) of sampled respondents claimed to believe in modern healing technologies. Most, 90% (57) admitted that their church had not invested at all in health facilities.

The study also sought to establish from respondents whether the sampled church offered any humanitarian assistance as well as legal aid. The study established that 80% (50) of the respondents admitted that the church did not offer any humanitarian assistance while 90% (57) also affirmed that the church did not offer legal aid to their members as well as the community. See table 2.

Table 2: Empowerment Projects by the Sampled Church

STATEMENT	Yes	%	No	%
Does your church support needy people in the society?	19	30	44	70
Does your church own/sponsor any school?	6	10	57	90
Does your church encourage students to attend school?	13	20	50	80
Do you deny children the right to attend school?	50	80	13	20
Do you seek medical attention from hospitals?	13	20	50	80
Do you believe in healing by faith?	57	90	6	10
Do you believe in modern healing procedures?	50	80	13	20
Has your church invested in health facilities?	6	10	57	90
Do you offer humanitarian aid to the afflicted?	13	20	50	80
Do you offer legal aid to those in need of it?	6	10	57	90

Source: Field Data

Impact of Projects on Socio-Economic Empowerment of Communities

The study sought to establish whether the sampled Holy Christian Israel Church had initiated any projects in a bid to empower the community. Of the respondents, 70% affirmed that the church had not initiated any project to empower their members. The few respondents that claimed that the church had invested said that they had done so in the education sector though they were not able to point out the effect that had on members of the community.

More than half (66.7%) of the respondents asserted that the church held seminars and trainings. Most of the sampled church's meetings were mainly to discuss spiritual matters and not concerned at all with development of its members. This was evidenced by 57% of the respondents who affirmed that most of the seminars mainly delved in spiritual matters with 5% and 6% asserting that such seminars discussed development projects and education respectively.

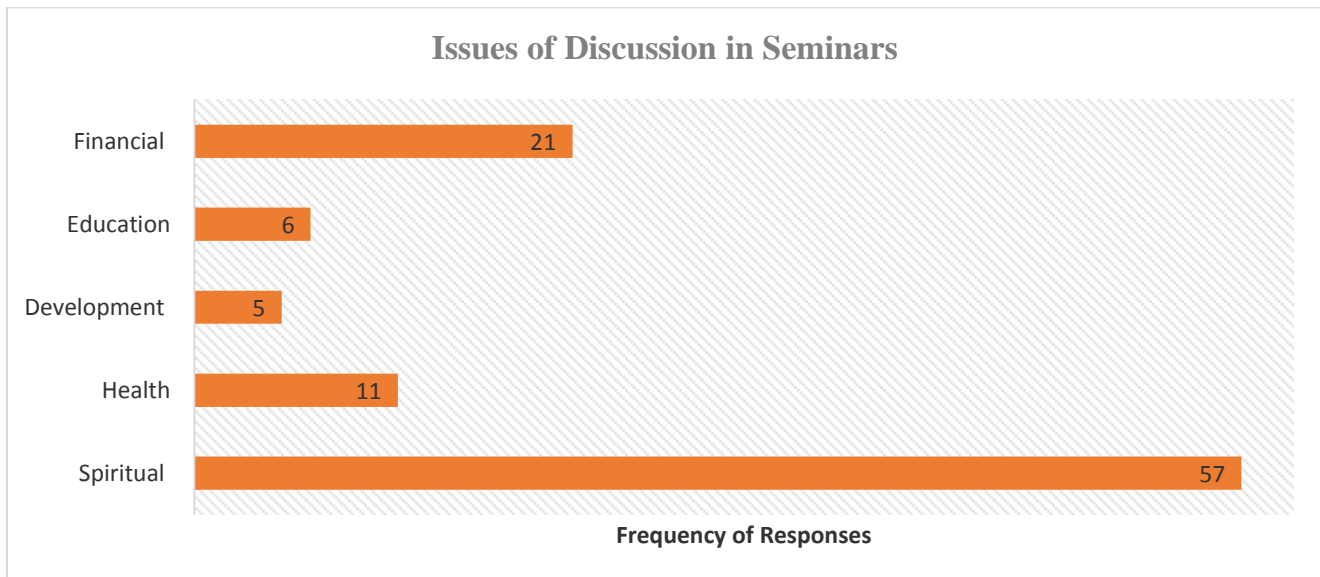


Figure 1: Areas of Discussion in Church Seminars

Source: Field Data

Sampled members were asked if the church collected offering, how often, in what form and how they utilised the offerings. All respondents agreed that their church collected offerings every Sunday and in both cash and farm produces. When asked how the church utilised the collections, most, 77.8% (49) articulated that offering collected in form of cash was used to pay church leaders while 20.6% (13) affirmed that it was used to fund development projects for the church. Only one respondent (1.6%, 1) claimed that the cash was used for other purposes such as providing fare for attending seminars.

Influence of Church Leadership in the Success of the Church

On whether the church leaders underwent training, the study established that, 88.9% (56) of the respondents affirmed that church leaders in their church did not undertake any training before assuming leadership positions. The same number felt that their leaders were not adequately trained. All the respondents also affirmed that training for church leaders was necessary asserting that they would do better if trained. They also claimed that there is a positive correlation between church leadership and its success in socio-economic empowerment of communities.

Table 3: Responses of Leadership and Success

STATEMENT	YES	%	NO	%
Leaders in your church undergo training	7	11.1	56	88.9
Your church leaders are adequately trained	7	11.1	56	88.9
Do you think training is necessary?	63	100	0	0.0
Has training for your leaders assisted in the success of church's role in socio-economic development?	42	66.7	21	33.3
Your leaders do better if trained?	63	100	0	0.0
Is the success of a church dependant on leadership?	63	100	0	0.0

Source: Field Data

The study also sought to establish way in which church leadership would ensure socio-economic empowerment of communities. Some of the responses obtained from the respondents included: to involve the youth more in the running of the church so as to bring in new ideas. Others felt that for the church to develop its members as well as their community, the church must embrace modernity especially in education and medicine. It was also the feeling of members that leaders should work to avoid dependence on church offering which should have otherwise been invested elsewhere. Other suggestions offered were that the church should start businesses for youths, create a SACCO and invest in projects such as schools and hospitals.

Holy Christian Israel Church Members' Feeling on how the Community Perceives Them

Majority (56%) of the sampled members agreed that members of their church are often discriminated with 44% strongly agreed to the same statement. Majority of the respondents (66.7%) agreed while 22.2% strongly agreed that their church was viewed as a sect by members of the community. Only 11.1% of the respondent disagreed with this sentiment. The other perception of the church identified and sought out in this study was whether the church was anti-development. Most of the respondents (45%) remained un-decided on the issue. However, 22% strongly agree and agreed while 11% disagreed with this sentiment. Data was also sought to establish if

individual members had undergone discrimination in their community. It was found that 56% of the respondents strongly agreed to have had personal discrimination in their community while 44% agreed to the same. On misconceptions about the church being a sect, 44.4% of the respondents remained undecided on whether perceptions existed about the church were true or simply misconceptions. However, 22.2% disagreed with the same number agreeing on the statement. Only 11.1% strongly disagreed.

Discussion

According to Okullu (2003a) the church has a role to play in helping the needy which includes intervening to help hungry children crying for food, provide water and sanitation to villages that are in need, help beggars in the streets, help refugees running from oppression and help those in the brink of hunger and death. This study therefore reported that the sampled church had failed its followers as well as members of the society as far as playing the expected role of helping the needy. Effort is needed in the church to ensure that its members are empowered to break their chains of oppression by poverty. The study finding was consistent with that of Chandra (2012) who affirmed that religious organizations in Kenya have in the past played a great role in establishing educational institutions and continues to do so. The sampled church can then be reported as having failed as far as engaging in the education sector is concerned. If other churches and religious

organisations have been able to run some of the best performing and disciplined schools, then the Holy Christian Israel Church should not be an exception. Most (80%) of the church members interviewed reported to seek medical services from health facilities. The study can therefore authoritatively report that the said misconception that members of the sampled church did not seek medication in hospitals remains just 'a misconception'. Most respondents claimed to believe in modern healing technologies but admitted that their church had not invested at all in health facilities. Earlier media reports in Kenya showed some churches that remained reluctant to seek medication in hospitals; however, findings from this study established that the same was not true for the Holy Christian Israel Church. The study was however alarmed by the failure of the church to invest in the health sector.

The church was expected to be in the forefront in helping the distressed in times of calamities. This study however, established that the sampled church did not engage in such activities as reported by the church members themselves.

The study can authoritatively report that the Holy Christian Israel Church had done little to invest in socio-economic empowerment project for the sake of their members as well as members of their community. The church members admitted having not invested neither in education nor healthcare but majority argued that believed in modern medication and also encouraged their children to attend school. The question that begs answers therefore is, if they value education and believe in modern healing methods, why would the church not invest in such projects? The study also found the church as not engaging in humanitarian assistance nor legal aid to its members or members of the community. The church can then be said to be mere preachers of the word of God without concern whether they are preaching to the hungry, the poor, and the aggrieved among others.

The study established that health education and development were given little attention in the sampled church with much emphasis being given to spiritual matters during church meetings and seminars. Although the church's main role is to spread the gospel, a balance is needed since the church has a role to play in socio-economic development of its members

Although the church is expected to play a critical role in empowering its members as well as members of the society, the sampled church was found to neglect the said role. Findings established that although the sampled church collected offerings from church members, such offerings were only utilized to benefit a few who formed the church leadership. The findings also established little emphasis had been put by the church especially in areas of education and health.

Most (88.9%) of the respondents reported that the church leaders were not trained before assuming leadership and there was the view that they were not well equipped for their leadership roles. Nkonge (2004) argues that any organisation needs leadership to succeed and the church being an organization of Christian believers needs reliable leadership to achieve its goals.

All respondents affirmed the necessity of church leaders training and its role in socio-economic empowerment. Although it has been argued that leadership requires no training, Githiga (2009) stated categorically that leadership may be an inborn gift but one has to learn it. Historically and even in the bible, as stated earlier, leaders were nurtured by mentors to be great people. This affirms that there is need for some training before people assume leadership positions. This could explain why the sampled church is failing in its roles. It could be probably due to poor leadership.

Conclusions

The study established that the Holy Christian Israel Church in Githunguri had done little in its role of empowering members and the community. The

respondents affirmed that the church had neither invested in education nor in the health sector. Although respondents did not confirm to discouraging learners from attending school, the study established that they remained reluctant on encouraging the same. The study also established that the church was not involved in any humanitarian or legal aid to their members or the society. Demographic information also revealed that majority of the sampled respondents (54.6% of the males and 70.7% of the females) had primary level education with very few pursuing further education. The study concluded that there is no tangible impact of the church on the community. This can be attributed to the fact that no such projects initiated by the sampled church were found on the ground. The study established that the church was merely involved in spreading the gospel. The study also established that cash collected from congregants of the sampled church was mainly used to pay their leaders and therefore the church did not initiate any

economic projects for its members or members of the community.

In establishing the relationship between church leadership and the success of the church, the study first noted that church leaders in the sampled church did not undergo any training. The members however noted that training of church leaders was necessary. The study concluded that the failure of the church in socio-economic development might be associated with lack of training of the church leaders.

On the communities' perception on the church, it was found that most members of the community have negative perception of the church. Most of the respondents affirmed that members of the church were often discriminated against and even regarded as a cult. The church was also viewed by many as being ant-development.

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