



CHALLENGES FACED BY THE REDEEMED GOSPEL CHURCH IN CONDUCTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

To achieve community development, people have to be empowered both economically and socially. The church has been globally recognized in the fundamental role it plays in community development. However, some churches have faced various obstacles that hinder their potential contribution in achieving this objective. Community development requires a collective involvement to achieve common goals and without this, it becomes a challenge. There has been no documentation of challenges encountered by the Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) when conducting development projects. This paper is therefore an assessment of the challenges faced by the Church in its mandate to enhance community development. This paper utilized an empirical qualitative “ethnographic” research design. Participatory ethnographic interviews and questionnaires were employed as the main methods for data collection. Data was collected from 30 RGCs that were randomly selected in the 20 sub-regions making in Makueni County at the time of the study. The collected data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively and presented in themes. The study indicates that besides financial hindrances, the churches also lacked leadership training on its management and in the management of projects in the community.

Keywords: challenges, finance, economic development, community, management, projects, organization structure

1. Introduction

Theologians say, “*God has called individuals to Himself so that they may have fellowship with Him and with one another. As these individuals come together, they form the Church, which is the congregation of believers and which essentially forms the body of Christ.*” There is the universal

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church which is the whole/general body of Christians collectively. Redeemed Gospel church (RGC) is one part of this Christian body, succeeding in evangelism and church growth. However, the Church is far below expectations when it comes to facilitating education, health care, agriculture and other essential community developments (World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFD), 2017). According to Magezi (2017), Churches often have varying ideological positions, an aspect that hampers their unified contributory efforts towards community development. This is due to the lack of coordination between Church leadership and the community as a whole in working together. Nonetheless, these challenges, as depicted in this paper are attributed to the lack of Western development partners (like the mainstream churches) and lack of substantive capital in local churches.

Another major reason could be that the Church's national leadership has not developed a well-structured community development or impact program. It is assumed that RGC, at forty-five years in operation (1974-2019), should have developed programs and projects in the communities they minister to. Important to note is that the theological position of RGC is not part of the reason for lack of participation in development activities as in its constitution, Article 7, the objectives are very clearly stated. Thus:

"7.4 To establish and maintain humanitarian programs which include:

- a) Feeding and rehabilitation programs;*
- b) Health programs including hospitals, health centres and old people's homes;*
- c) Education including Bible Schools and colleges, Academic Schools, Universities and polytechnics and any other institutions, which are beneficial to the church and society at large and are not repugnant to the teachings of the Bible.*

7.8 To source and accept donations from members, non-members, the Government, other charitable organisations and any persons whether private or corporate, from Kenya or any other part of the World, for the furtherance of the activities and objectives of the church."

Makueni County suffers from perennial droughts and often depends on relief food to feed its people. A lot of Christians have not seen a difference in terms of their standard of living before and after conversion. Julia Mutua, a resident in Makueni - in a forum of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) held in Makueni County observed that poverty and the challenges of accessing essential services including healthcare are among others that the county grapple with. She noted that, *"Poverty is very high and has affected the access to essential service for many residents in Makueni"* (Wanzala, 2019). Notably, of late, this has seen a lot of young people being lured to join other religions, which seems to provide the much-needed financial support to its adherents. Other times, people have lost commitment to Godly things because of not having their social needs met. It is to this end that this paper seeks to address the challenges faced by RGC pastors and the church as a whole in conducting community development projects.

This paper is therefore premised on the following research questions:

- 1) What challenges do the pastors of the Redeemed Gospel Church in Makueni region face when carrying out developmental projects?
- 2) What are the obstacles that hinder Redeemed Gospel Church community development projects?

2. Literature Review

The society in recent years has been progressively undergoing complex and rapid social change that has resulted in substantial insecurity, uncertainty, stress, and overdependence. Macaulay (2013) observes that development by the church and faith-based organizations through community projects have been achieved by engaging other practitioners and partners with the financial strength to support the projects. However, for developing countries, Kenya in particular, this becomes worrisome as the community then becomes over dependent on these funded programs, limiting them from individual growth (Macaulay, 2013). In Magezi's observation, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) including churches, play a vital role in the development of the community. However, he argues that given the varied settings and environment in ideological and religious positions, the Churches' potential contribution to effective development is hampered by limited capacity and lack of coordination to organize themselves in working together (Magezi, 2017). While it is estimated that 30-70% of essential services like education and health care in the developing world is provided by Faith Based Organization (FBOs) (World Council of Churches, 2010), Mati (2013) expresses dissatisfaction pointing out that this aspect has been given very little attention in social scientific analysis.

Nonetheless, as much as our communities need help, Mulwa (2009) proposes a way forward to run-away from the dependence syndrome. According to Mulwa, *"People should be made to experience the joy of self-reliance, the dignity in the ability to attain community aspirations through self-help. This will be an impossible expectation where the change agents happen to perceive themselves as the 'saviours' of the people instead of facilitators and enablers of people process of self-development. Equally important is the need to develop effective methods for challenging attitudes of dependency and instead facilitating the kind of process that instils local responsibility through local decision-making and action"* (Mulwa, 2009, p. 70). Agreeably, the attitudes of the dependents should be challenged because many people have the poverty mentality hence, they should be shown how to work and create wealth on their own. The Bible says, *"as a man thinks in his own heart, so he is"* (Proverbs 23:7).

As much as Mulwa is not opposed to free services and handouts, he gives a very good caution towards the same: *"Beneficiaries of free services and handouts are often treated with disrespect by their benefactors simply because their situation of need is perceived to have rendered them helpless and hopeless. They are seen as people without rights, not even with the rights to be treated with fairness. Relief distribution in refugee centres is a classic example where the recipients have often had to resort to violence in order to fight against humiliation"* (Mulwa, 2009, p. 71). In general, the church in Makueni has successfully done her best to fill the vacuum in the hearts of men and women through preaching Good news. Virtually, in

every market centre in Makueni County there is at least one or two churches to meet the demand of the people of Makueni. RGC in regard to this must have reached so many people because being evangelist in nature, the Church is expected to have had more engagement in community development. In the survey by the World Council of Churches (2010), many scholars studying church and community development observed that, *“lack of financial resources to support the projects, is one of the major concerns for church development”* (p. 6). On the other hand, Kelly, Asta and Stern (2010) found out that in the church’s effort to undertake community development projects, they do not receive valuable commitment, from the funders, that is enough to support their projects. In addition, other than the problem of funding, there is poor integration, coordination among the leaders as well as capacity development and resource mobilization approaches that are suitable for local level support (Rodriguez-Garcia, Bonnel, Wilson, & N’Jie, 2013; Birdsall & Kelly (2005:8) and 1– 3).

Reading through Mulwa’s work, the church and the government both have a great challenge. Mulwa notes, *“Social evils such as alcoholism, drug abuse, rape, murder, suicide, crime and theft are but symptoms of unmet fundamental human needs. More police and cells are not really the solution. Experience has shown that a multiple of these needs are more easily met in working collectively through groups than through individuals in a community”* (Mulwa, 2009, p. 89).

These social evils are on the increase despite the presence of the church in Makueni County. The national government established a concept called, *“Nyumba Kumi Initiative”*, meaning that in every ten households, all the people should know each other and recognize any stranger joining the selected ten households. By so doing, the government’s expectation was to guard against all these social evils including terrorism. In 2018, Makueni County was rated number three (3) in cases of defilement after Kitui and Kisii Counties respectively. In this regard the church has an enormous obligation to assist the community in meeting their fundamental human needs. Based on this, the researcher seeks to find out if this is still a challenge in community development by the church. Mulwa (2009) argues that for any community project to survive there must be capacity building and empowerment to the people in the community and he goes ahead to give reasons why community projects collapse. He states:

“Keen observation tends to point out that numerous community projects collapse soon after the handing-over ceremony by the donor. Why has it been so? Empirical observations indicate that community projects often collapse due to various factors, the most critical of which has to be low or non-participation of the key stakeholders (and community in particular). In decision-making conversely, where the target community is fully involved, there will not be a high sense of local ownership, but equally important, high chances of projects sustainability. People are also likely to experience positive impact from their own project imitative. With people involved right from the planning stage, it is expected that the development project will address people’s top priority needs with significant impact towards their ultimate goals.” (p. 119)

In another study, *Beyond Charity: The call to Christian community development* by Perkins (1993), points out that many communities were poor because of vacuum of moral, spiritual, and economic leadership that is prevalent among these communities. Perkins suggested two ways to eliminate the problem of a vacuum in leadership thus, “*There are two ways to accomplish this task, both of which are crucial to an effective Christian community development strategy. The first thrust is indigenous leadership development, raising up Christian leaders from the community. The second thrust is for committed Christians and their families to live in communities of need, filling the leadership vacuum by modelling healthy lifestyles*” (p. 73). The author has highlighted that provision of health to the poor is of paramount importance. Such services include treatment of the sick, preventive care, such as diet and simple lifestyle measures that can lead to healthier body. However, the poor cannot afford to pay for these essential services, and they have no voice to speak for themselves hence the church is left to be their only mouthpiece. There is need therefore, for the church to obtain insights into community priorities for development as well as to identify potential beneficiaries for specific community development projects. In so doing, there will be an increased engagement by the community members and easy management of the community expectations by the church on the introduction of new community projects. However, without sufficient involvement of the residents of the chosen beneficiary community, it is difficult to identify the socio-economic priorities, and thus difficult to design appropriate structures to channel and deliver beneficial community projects (Wlokas, Boyd, & Andolfi, 2012).

As the church carries out community development projects, they need volunteers to assist. On volunteers, Perkins (1993) has advised that they should come and support the indigenous leadership in the community. They should also understand their role within the community and in the Ministry and finally, they must learn to ask, “How can I follow you,” because they have not lived in the community long enough to know what needs to be done. Premised on the aspect of leadership, church pastors should engage their congregation in community development activities. According to Vidal (2001), any effort to influence congregational behavior will likely hinge on reaching, educating and persuading church pastors and other congregational leaders. In another study, Mann’s (1992) opinion is that there is need to train ministers to be effective leaders, based on the experience of congregation-based community organizing. According to Mann, most church leaders have the faith and hearts, but not the method. Ministries committed to improving the lives of low-income and moderate-income families require strong leadership to guide transformation and this include accountability, relationship-building, leadership skills, mentoring and evaluation (Reese & Clamp, n.d.).

Perkins concludes by discussing the challenges or specific spiritual battles that Christian community developers who work among the poor must face. They include suffering, brokenness, failure, faith and hope, loneliness, and rejection. On suffering, Perkins says, “*Suffering is the way God’s power is known. The suffering of Christ on the cross of Calvary was the means by which God completed the cosmic battle against Satan. That moment was the climax of a heavenly struggle that handed the victory to the Almighty God. Jesus was*

whipped, mocked, beaten, nailed, pierced and buried. Yet he won. The road to victory is paved with sacrifice” (Perkins, 1993, p. 171). As Christians, when we undergo suffering for the sake of the gospel, Peter encourages us that: “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the suffering of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” (Peter 4:12-13)

On brokenness, Perkins observes that, *“community developers will discover after a time that they are not only depleted of spiritual and emotional resources, they will feel nearly crushed and in a state of despair. Their self-image will weaken, their sense of strength will diminish, and doubts will crowd their minds as they face limitations where before there were only wide-open horizons of opportunity. The light of Christ in us is able to shine through those cracks of the cracked vessels. We have to go through the wrenching experiences of brokenness to understand this principle, but once we experience it we will discover that Christ calls us to minister in his strength, by his spirit and not by our might or power” (p. 172). In such a state of brokenness, the scripture speaks to us loudly that, “God does not despise a broken and a contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17).*

On failure, as one of the challenges in doing development among the poor, Perkins gives the counsel that it is very much relevant in our salvation. He says, *“An effective servant is one who is able to bounce back, to keep pushing in spite of the odds. We will stumble and fail along the way. Our purest motive and sincere efforts will not protect us from failure. We need to mentally accept this ahead of time. We must go through the fiery trial of failure before we are able to fully accept the fact that failure “comes with the territory.” In this struggle we confront the cultural value of success” (p. 172).*

I believe that any Christian involved in community development and goes through such a painful refining can withstand all the challenges and thereafter excel in their work. Such people cannot quit when the storms of challenges blow but instead they become even stronger to face more storms in life. These lessons need to be learned by Christians as they involve in community developments (Kimunya, 2016). Perkins’ work addresses the problems the black Americans face in ghettos such as racism, exploitation, neglect by the whites who live dignified lives, drug abuse, unemployment, high rate of crime, low levels of education, poor sanitation, police brutality, congestions, immorality, and isolation by the whites the rich and the educated. The methods Perkins uses to improve the lives of those urban poor dwellers are very relevant and if applied they can still bear fruits to the RGC in Makueni county in their endeavour to impact the community in Education, agriculture, health, spiritually, and economically. From the foregoing discussion, despite the acknowledgement of the role of churches, Samuels, Geibel and Perry (2010) are in agreement with Mati (2013) that the challenges faced in community development by churches has not been seriously explored. This paper thus sought to fill this gap.

3. Methodology

This study utilized an empirical qualitative design. Being qualitative in nature, the study employed participatory ethnographic interviews and questionnaires for data collection. Creswell (2003) posits that, *“a qualitative study approach is one in which the researcher often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives and uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenology (a study that tries to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives and understanding of a particular situation), ethnographies (which tries to study people in their environment through participation and face to face interaction), grounded theory studies (where a theory is constructed through analysis of data), or case studies (where particular phenomenon is studied and assumed to represent the rest)”* (Creswell, 2003, p. 18).

Makueni County was the area of study, but the researcher focused on a sample of churches selected from different regions and settings in the County. Selection of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) or Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) working either with churches or directly with the communities were particularly selected hence 30 churches participated in the study. The collected data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data obtained from the structured questionnaires were edited, coded, and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. On the other hand, qualitative data was analysed by grouping into themes and summarized into narratives and statements to complement the quantitative information.

4. Results and Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess the challenges encountered by the Redeemed Gospel church (RGC) Pastors in Makueni County while conducting community projects. It was established that the churches lacked adequate funds for sponsoring the projects. This was because the Church does not have donors who support church projects. They only rely on members’ contributions which were not even adequate to meet the church needs. This seemed to be the major challenge facing churches in community development.

From the study findings, it was established in the field interviews that the educated pastors could easily enrol in Theological training on part time basis to sharpen their preaching and church administrative skills. On the other hand, some of the pastors, who were not educated beyond primary level, had several challenges in doing ministry due to lack of knowledge of the same. Among the main challenges reported by the respondents include; lack of administrative and management skills, communication failures, lack of structured church programs, lack of clear vision for the church, lack of strategic plans and limited finances that hampered the role of pastors in carrying out church development projects. The lack of finances also hindered evangelism work, like educating children from less privileged families. This information had however not been documented anywhere in the RGC papers.

Still on education, it was found out that one of the Redeemed Gospel churches (Kavete) was located in a very dry region depicting high levels of poverty in this region. Fortunately, it was established that the Compassion International, which is a faith-based NGO, sponsors 220 children from very poor families. The project sponsors children in the following areas: buying food for the children and their families, buying uniforms, paying school fee, offsetting medical bills and building classes for them which were usually used on Saturdays to teach the children. To some families, the project provided solar systems; water tanks and built simple permanent homes for members of the community. These children were also given educational sponsorship up to the university or college level.

The project offered employment to teachers who teach these children in all classes from Grade one to Grade eight. This education took place only on Saturdays. During this day, all children and parents ate together and concluded the day with a short sermon from their resident pastor, Reverend Kitema. The project had offered training to pastors and all church elders, on management of the project, who were the custodians of the funds donated. The children learned in different schools but only met on Saturdays, making the Kavete centre to be a unique academic institution which had transformed the lives of very many children and their families.

In addition, the study established that Compassion International had greatly impacted on the Kavete community through the RGC. It was noted that the first bunch of sponsored children would be through with their University education and start working. When these children start working, they were expected to then plough back their incomes into the same community which would spur up economic transformation. Based on this study finding, it could be imagined that this kind of sponsorship would be a replica of Starehe Boys Centre where the alumni of this great school sponsor other bright students from needy backgrounds. The study findings indicated that Compassion International in this Centre does a holistic transformation to the chosen deserving children. Whatever they do in the Centre is highly commendable and should be spread to other poverty-stricken areas of the entire County.

In an interview with one of the church leaders, the then Secretary General of the RGC at the headquarters in Nairobi and senior pastor of Syokimau RGC, the following information concerning the challenges in the RGC, was received.

The National governing council that is mandated to run the affairs of the entire church meets quarterly in a year and evaluation of the implementation of the church's stated objectives is done annually (Bishop Dr. Stephen Kanyila, Personal communication, May 20th, 2018).

In addition, he said that, "*the Headquarters of RGC did not have a strategic plan which few of local churches had*". As a Ministry, RGC was not considered to have a major community impact on projects but Huruma RGC, the head church under the leadership of Archbishop Arthur Kitonga, had started Redeemed Integrated Development Agencies (RIDA) which supports several projects in the Church. Under this, we have Bishop Kitonga Academy for offering primary formal education, Korogocho Dispensary for treating people in Mathare valley, Huruma and Korogocho areas and a Vocational

Training Centre which offers the following courses: Computer training, Beauty and Salon training, Secretarial and Tailoring courses. Initially, the project had been started with an aim of rehabilitating street children and children from slums presenting anti-social behaviours. The project recruited street children who underwent rehabilitation for one year and thereafter, were sponsored for education at various levels. The researcher reliably learned that RGC in Kenya is divided into 13 Regions each headed by a Bishop.

The Arch-Bishop Dr. Arthur Kitonga, several years back, started the Redeemed Theological College with a clear vision and mission statements. The purpose of this college was to prepare students for Ministry in the dynamic African context. It provided a special environment for ministerial education and spiritual development. The school had also developed effective curriculum to train and coach those individuals who had a clear objective in ministry, and it offers one curriculum division on the certificate level leading to a Diploma (DIP) in Biblical studies. At the time of the study, the college had produced 100 graduates with certificates and diplomas.

The study established that on 26th April 2018, Redeemed Theological College entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Pan Africa Christian University under the following scope of collaboration:

- Develop a partnership framework that will allow for offering of PAC university academic programs to RGC;
- PAC University to mentor RGC Theological College;
- Conduct trainings;
- Hold joint conferences, workshops and seminars;
- Conduct joint research;
- Partner in other mutually agreed areas of collaboration.

The MOU was aimed at boosting the college to a great deal in meeting Biblical and pastoral training for the many RGC ministers who were not yet trained.

Based on the interview reports from the respondents, living around Redeemed Gospel churches, the people regarded the Church highly, all saying that RGC had transformed very many souls who were hopeless, drunkards and other reckless people in the society. They noted that, after these members converted and joined the church, they were transformed and were then leading responsibly and are depended upon in the society. One of the interviewees who agreed to have his name mentioned is Mr. Mathina Munyoli, a graduate teacher, teaching at Kathonzweni Boys Secondary School. He said, *“though a staunch Catholic, he has a great admiration for RGC as he sees serious devoted Christians in their churches”*. He is so happy because he is an eyewitness to radical transformation of his very close neighbours. He says the church supports community development projects that are aimed at lifting the well-being of the society. He was very much pleased with the rapid growth of the churches. He confessed that though Redeemed Gospel churches do not have schools and health facilities, their presence was highly felt positively.

Finally, the voice of the pastors and other interviewees was that, for RGC to have a sound impact in community development, the church leadership should look for

development partners and well-wishers to channel their support to the community through them. The respondents were of the view that the church should start small organizations for free clinics with established hospitals and other charitable organizations in their church compounds. Whenever there is famine, which are common in Makueni County, the leaders should seek assistance from the Red Cross and Faith Based Organizations like Dorcas Aid, Compassion International, Kids Alive and World Vision, among others.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents coverage of the challenges faced by churches in implementing development programs. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher mentions lack of finances and lack of management training among the church leaders as the major obstacles in community development. With reference to literature, this paper concludes with some of the outstanding biblical quotations with reference to handling challenges in church. Jesus did health care when he was on earth by administering the wellness of humanity in relating to the hopeless and the despised, through showing them He cared, and by calling for a change of heart for those who were rebellious to God. Biblically, Jesus sent his disciples to preach the kingdom and heal the sick (Luke 9:2). This paper found out that the church, especially the RGC, is carrying out this mandate of preaching the Kingdom and healing the sick, though in a small way.

Further, the church is a change agent. When her members live exemplary lives, it is emulated by the community leading to transformation of the latter. Redeemed Gospel church members are living a life that can be emulated by the community. Churches that make a difference practice seven forms of Evangelism: network evangelism, contact evangelism, service evangelism, sanctuary evangelism, special event evangelism, media evangelism and prayer evangelism. Jesus did practice all the above and RGC is doing the same, though not to the maximum in some areas, especially the media evangelism, which is done by only a few well-endowed branches of Redeemed Gospel churches.

As depicted in this study, best church leaders are described as those with a growing relationship with God, have passion for sharing Christ's love with the lost and the broken hearted. They also minister with bold faith, have gracious humility and are connectors, catalysts, and agents of change in their church and community. They also encourage and equip people to share in their vision and recognize and cultivate the strengths of others on leadership teams and in the congregation. Great Biblical leaders had all the above qualities with Jesus being the best example.

6. Recommendations

The researcher makes the following recommendations:

- 1) Churches committed to community development should explore ways of working together rather than separately to increase their capacity for the society.

- 2) The top leadership should approach foundations like; Bill Gates, Jimmy Carter and even local ones like the Kalonzo foundation which can help in sponsoring children from needy families.

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