

The Triple Bottom Line and Church Sustainability in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The religion of Christianity was firmly established in Kenya by European missionaries in AD 1844 and since then, it has grown to be the religion for 85.5% of the population. After Kenya gained political independence in AD 1964, numerous Christian denominations have established church congregations in all parts of the country and the competition for congregation members is high. The Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) and other mainline churches are experiencing declining congregations due to the entry of the Pentecostal churches but the earlier Pentecostal churches are also experiencing the same phenomenon due to the new denominations which are being established in all parts of the country. This paper examines how the church can retain its relevance and sustainability in the country by operationalizing the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model to gain and retain its congregations. The model approaches sustainability by considering an organization's social, economic, and environmental strategies. These are what made the early missionaries to penetrate the African market as they established schools, technical and agriculture training institutions and health centers. At their schools and churches, they taught about the need to live in a clean environment and set an example with their church compounds. This paper discusses how the TBL is operationalized in the ACK to resolve the declining phenomenon.

Keywords: Congregation, Environment, Strategies, Sustainability, Triple Bottom Line.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st Century has been called "The era of Technology" due to the rapid development of technology in all spheres of human activity (Cochrane, 2014). The technology has led to faster and cheaper production processes which have in turn made products cheaper and more easily available. Technology has also led to globalization such that a product can be produced in any part of the world as long as the appropriate technology is available which has led to the entry of more suppliers for the same or similar products and this has made the 21st Century markets very turbulent (Petricevic & Teece, 2019). 21st Century organizations have had to transform to market orientation for their survival in line with the marketing concept that the customer is the most important element in all organization strategies. Since the customers are part of the society in which the organization operates, the customers cannot be isolated from the social context and to influence the customers, there is need to consider their perception of the organization on its impacts on the society (Adam *et al.*, 2019; Akattu *et al.*, 2020; Owino *et al.*, 2017). The organization also needs finances for its operations and growth and since the funds are derived from the customers, the strategies have to consider how the customer will perceive the finance strategies in relation to other organizations offering similar products (Mabwe *et al.* 2018; Ochanda, 2013). The customers are also located in environments which at times can be stressful or unhealthy and the organization needs to show its concerns for a conducive environment (Kiarie, 2020; Warui & Kairu, 2018). Church organizations have not been left out of the turbulent markets for with technology, churches have also become global and market oriented for it is possible to get church services from any part of the world and the competition is as turbulent as in any other organization and many former well established churches in the 20th Century have declined in the 21st Century (Petricevic & Teece, 2019).

A. Sustainability

According to Batista and Francisco (2018), a sustainable organization is one which has the structures and resources to enable it to achieve its current and future strategies while maintaining its market position. Up to the last decade of the 20th Century, organizations, especially business ones, had based their sustainability on their levels of profits and a leader's performance was evaluated on how much profits the

organization achieved with the stakeholders having no concerns on how the profits were achieved. As a result, many leaders went to great extremes to achieve the expected results (Boddy, 2016). The supporting argument for this attitude was that business organizations were different from charitable organizations and the sole purpose of establishing a business was to obtain maximum returns on the investments. Issues such as social welfare or the environment were the responsibility of government agencies, welfare organizations and religions (Barnett, 2016). However, when some high profile leaders in many countries were prosecuted for unethical practices, there were public outcries from the highly publicized scandals which had negative impacts on the organizations' reputations and consequently, decline in market performance (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018).

B. Christianity in Kenya

Christianity first came to Kenya at the end of the 15th Century through the Portuguese explorers who were searching for a sea route to India but they discontinued their missionary activities after a short time (Ghazanfar, 2018). In the 19th Century, there was a new wave of European missionaries who were successful in establishing Christianity, led by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) who established their first mission station at the Kenya coast in 1844. The CMS was to later become the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) and is the largest Protestant denomination in the country. The CMS was soon followed by other mission groups who established the Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church of Kenya (MCK), the African Inland Church (AIC) and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) and all have their church congregations in all parts of the country (Nthamburi, 2019). Since then, Christianity has grown to be the religion of choice for 85.5% of the Kenyan population (Bariu, 2017). These mainline churches grew tremendously during the colonial period with the ACK receiving a lot of support from the colonial government and the settlers for it was viewed as the official church of Britain which was the colonial power (Owino *et al.*, 2017). With the establishment of new dominations and the entry of the Pentecostal churches after religions were liberalized when Kenya gained its political independence in 1964, there has been stiff competition for members and the ACK and other mainline churches are experiencing declining congregations as members migrate especially to the newly established Pentecostal churches (Nyabwari & Kagama, 2014). The Archbishop of the ACK, who is the head of the church, admitted this in a widely publicized media interview but the church has continued in the declining trend (McKinnon, 2020; Sunday Nation Team, 2018).

C. Triple Bottom Line

In 1994, John Elkington introduced the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model and stated that while profits were essential for growth and sustainability of any organization, they should not be the sole motivational factor and there was need to consider also the impacts of an organization's operations on the society and the environment. These would indicate that the organization had the interests of the customers and their environment which would in turn influence the customer loyalty and commitment to the organization and would enhance market performance and hence sustainability (Elkington, 1997). The introduction of TBL was controversial with the assertions that there were no discernible financial benefits in the social and environment elements of TBL (Boddy, 2016).

The further rapid development of technology in the 21st Century has turned the world into a global village with a very turbulent market in all sectors and the customer is being given a wide choice for products and services from global sources (Arora *et al.*, 2021). The customers are also more conscious of the organizations' roles in their social welfare and concerns for the environment and they tend to migrate to those organizations with such concerns (Mohammend & Al-Swidi, 2019). Sustainability strategies based on profits only do not contribute positively to sustainable performance for they are not effective for long term customer commitment and this has demanded that organizations need to formulate strategies based on the TBL model for growth or to counter any penetration by the competitors (Hammer & Pivo, 2016).

New laws on institutional ethics have also been introduced in many countries leading to the need to observe the TBL elements and ensure that not only do the organizations make profits for the stakeholders but that the operations were within the new laws. In 2003, Bill George also introduced the Authentic Leadership style which stated that while there was need for high profits, there was also the need for the leaders to consider how their organizations influenced the society in general (Bishop, 2013). In Kenya, the Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission (EACC) was established by an Act of Parliament to ensure that all organizations complied with the new ethics regulations (Kumba, 2013).

The 21st Century has been called the "era of technology" for with the appropriate technology, any product can be manufactured and made available anywhere in the world (Petricevic & Teece, 2019). The proliferation of goods opened new markets for the products from the developed countries but had negative impacts on the less developed countries whose markets were flooded with cheaper goods and services and led to the closing down of many industries and massive staff retrenchments. With the loss of their livelihoods, the citizens from the poorer nations sought employment in the developed countries where they experienced labor exploitation (Coffie, 2016). Due to the rise in manufacturing, there were more demands

for the natural resources in the poor countries which were heavily exploited by the developed countries with few benefits to the country of source until in the year 2000, the United Nations had to intervene with the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) whose recommendations included environmental sustainability and human rights (Hanson, 2017; Sethi & Schepers, 2013).

II. THE SOCIAL FACTOR IN CHURCH SUSTAINABILITY

A sustainable society has high per capita, low poverty levels, high standards of living and low levels of unemployment (Adam *et al.*, 2019). As a social organism, its growth and sustainability are dependent on the social factor (Mathew 18:20; Sengers, 2012). In the two thousand years of its existence, the church has played important roles in politics, education, and cultures, and has even been the cause of wars (Pillay, 2017). According to Junianto (2018), the customers for the church are its members. For its sustainability, the church needs to retain the loyalty of the current members and also attract new members from the external market including from other denominations and religions (Nzeng'e, 2019).

The European missionaries of the 19th Century, led by Ludwig Krapf first established a school at the Kenya coast for the Africans and although the original intention was for the Africans to be able to read the Bible for themselves, this ability gave prestige to the new converts. The missionaries also established a technical college where the converts could learn such crafts as masonry and carpentry to enable them gain employment with the new European settlers. With the Africans being now literate and able to earn decent wages, the missionaries next established a Bible school for the teaching of African evangelists and catechists so that Africans could be directly involved in the evangelization of the local communities (Nthamburi, 2019). The new elite class of converts became an attraction to the young people who now desired to go to school which enabled them to be employed as carpenters, masons, household servants and government clerks while the brighter ones were trained as teachers. The missionaries however laid down the condition that for one to be accepted as a student, the person had to first convert to Christianity which led to a rapid growth of the church which became even faster when the newly trained African evangelists joined the European missionaries. The converts were admired for their newly acquired European mannerism including clothes, food and the ability to speak the English language (Owino *et al.*, 2017). After the success at the Coast, the missionaries moved inland where they were even more successful, being now aided by the Africans who could communicate in the tribal languages and did not need interpreters. Apart from evangelism, the missionaries also established health facilities and medical training centers which served the communities immaterial of their tribes or religious and such activities attracted the non-Christians to the church. Through these social activities, the missionaries became involved in social development before the colonial government and in the modern Kenya, the institutions established by the missionaries such as schools, technical training colleges and medical centers have retained their attraction and prestige and are still regarded highly (Kallaway, 2009).

Since attaining independence in 1964, Kenya has had four presidents who received their initial education in Christian schools. The church in Kenya has played significant roles in ensuring the adherence to the rule of law and promotion of democratic governance such that when the rule of law and democracy were undermined through such government-sponsored laws as the grossly misused Preservation of Public Security Act (1966) which allowed for detentions without trial, and the one-party rule in 1982, the church came out strongly against such practices. When the one-party rule ended in 1992 and multi-party elections were allowed, the church was involved in the supervisory role of ensuring that the law was strictly followed until finally the multi-party system was enshrined in the Kenya constitution of 2010 (Conboy, 1978; Joshua & Kapinde, 2016). The church agitated for the establishment of the Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission (EACC) which has had an impact on the country by ensuring that all who are involved in unethical practices such as corruption are prosecuted and would not be allowed to participate in national leadership. The impacts of these church activities is that it is now prudent for any national leader to be involved in church activities and the church has become an influential factor in politics (Lichty, 2009). Due to these social activities, the church has gained popularity in the country for its social empowerment activities which have encouraged the Kenyan communities to live in peace without ethnic conflicts, that they are not involved in corruption and other crimes and that there is social justice without discrimination (Modise, 2018).

III. FINANCE FACTOR IN SUSTAINABILITY

The church needs funds for effective participation in social development and church growth. The Bible exhorts church members to give generously for God's work (Deuteronomy 12:6; Deuteronomy 16:10; Leviticus 27:30). Over the years, the church has formulated other finance strategies and in Kenya, the most popular fund-raiser is called "*harambee*", a term introduced in 1963 by the first president of Kenya and which denotes synergy, pulling together or self-help (Ochanda, 2013), *Harambee* is when the members of

a society agree to raise funds for a common purpose by each giving a voluntary donation and it is normal practice to invite a guest of honor to boost their efforts. Through the *harambee* spirit, the churches have built schools, health centers, and have sponsored students for university education. Due to the intrusion of politics in *harambees*, churches have turned to business ventures for financial sustainability such as bookshops, insurance brokerage, savings and credit cooperative societies, and some have established radio and television stations for the marketing function and as sources of finances through advertising (Kuyucu, 2020). After political independence in 1964, the old mission schools were taken over by the government but the churches have established new private schools which are popular due to their strict discipline and morality. Some churches have built health centers and hospitals with low charges but efficient services while others have built commercial buildings and the rents have eased the financial burden for the administrative function. There are also popular Church holiday centers with conference facilities in peaceful surroundings and efficient services. These investments have reduced the call to the members for donations which can discourage new membership (Mabwe *et al.*, 2018).

The impact of the social factor in TBL is evidenced through the financial factor. Most of the leaders in Kenya gained their education through the missionary schools and they now hold senior positions in the government and the private sector. When these officials are invited to chair church committees, they invite their senior colleagues in fund-raising activities and they always achieve their targets. There are also some Christian corporate leaders who consider church support as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and involve their organizations in church related social activities such as sponsoring health centers, school bursary funds, equipment for the technical colleges and even school transport (Aaken, 2020). It is through such activities that the church in Kenya has played such significant roles in national development and has become the major religion in the country (Akattu *et al.*, 2020).

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR IN CHURCH SUSTAINABILITY

The Bible states that the first human beings were instructed to look after the rest of God's creation and Christians consider environmental conservation as a Biblical command (Genesis 1:26-30; Warui & Kairu, 2018). Many Kenyans have studied and even worked in the more advanced countries and they have seen the impacts of the environment on issues of health, availability of food, and how members of the public favor organizations which are concerned with environmental issues (Kulkani, 2010). The church has direct influence on society and can offer guidance on environmental conservation apart from setting a good example as an organization and as individuals. Kenya's economy is based on agriculture and tourism and both depend on suitable environments. The church has set an example by having well-maintained compounds and encouraging Christians to beautify their homes with trees and flowers (Agayi & Gunduz, 2020). Kenya has a 5% population growth rate which is causing land problems with forest land being illegally allocated to individuals for farming purposes. With the illegal logging of trees, rivers are drying up, there is reduced rainfall which at times has led to drought, poor farm produces due to crop failure, and ultimately, famine. (Thuku, 2013). The rapidly growing population has invaded the wildlife conservation zones since arable land is becoming scarce and that is affecting wildlife and the pastoral tribes (Kariuki *et al.*, 2021).

The church in Kenya has prioritized environment conservation and relevant government departments like the Ministry of Agriculture, the Kenya Wildlife Service, and the Forest Department work closely with church organizations in their promotion of environment protection through the church-sponsored educational institutions and church congregations (Agyare, 2018; Gichira, 2009). There has also been collaborating with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) which is based in Nairobi (Soyapi, 2019; Wallbott & Rosendal, 2018). Churches have enhanced the beauty of the environment with well-landscaped compounds with tree nurseries from where they give free seedlings to the surrounding communities immaterial of denomination or religion. The church has also led the public in tree planting exercises and encouraged soil conservation by teaching proper agricultural practices and has also sensitized society on the effects of soil degradation due to the misuse of both agricultural and industrial chemicals (Kulkani, 2010). Church leaders are normally invited to demonstrations on environmental conservation so that the same can be communicated to the church members (Kiarie, 2020).

V. CONCLUSION

The necessity for operationalizing the Triple Bottom Line in the church is being recognized in the 21st Century (Fry & Slocum, 2008). The church has been concentrating on the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the growth of congregations, and the development of a firm financial base as its core functions. This has resulted in the establishment of some mega-churches even in Kenya with some denominations having sophisticated communication networks using radio and television stations. While Christianity is the

leading religion, there are issues that the church has not successfully handled (Faria, 2021). On the social factor, there is an increase in corruption in the country and unethical practices in both government and private sectors (Wambui, 2018). Kenya has experienced a widening gap between the rich and the poor with a rise in criminal activities including robberies, rapes and murders but the church has not made any stand on such negative factors on society. The ethnic conflicts of the early 1990s caused the deaths of many people and this spread to politics as the country experienced post-election violence after the elections of 2007 and 2017 which led to many deaths (Odote & Kanyinga, 2020). Financially, the country has borrowed heavily despite its inability to service its debts and some important national assets have been taken over by foreign lenders (Okiro, 2018). In the environment, the weather has become unreliable due to the allocation of water sources and forest lands to individuals, causing soil erosion and low rains which have made food expensive for the common citizens (Kariuki & Ng'etich, 2016). On a few occasions like during the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s, the church did play a role in sensitizing the population on the evils of such occurrences but the protests were short-lived. The church itself has been ineffective because the leaders are involved in unethical practices and they are no longer influential in society (Juma & Simiyu, 2019). As Henson (2018) recommends, the church must return to its core values as commissioned by the founder, Jesus Christ for it to play significant roles in line with the TBL.

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