

The Impacts of the Catholic Church Strategies and Initiatives In Social Change in Nairobi County 1963–2023

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ABSTRACT: The Catholic Church has played a significant impact that has shaped social change in Kenya, particularly in Nairobi County, through its involvement in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and social justice initiatives. Despite extensive historical accounts of the Church's contributions to national development, limited research has analyzed its long-term impact on the people who went through these initiatives in Nairobi county from 1963 to 2023. This study sought to fill this gap by examining The Impacts of the Catholic Church Strategies and Initiatives In Social Change in Nairobi County 1963–2023. The study was guided by Social Movement Theory, Critical theory, Faith-Based Organizational Theory and Liberation Theology, which provide analytical frameworks for understanding the impact of the strategies and initiatives for social change. Social Movement Theory helps contextualize the Church's ability influence on societal norms, while Liberation Theology emphasizes its moral obligation to advocate for the poor and oppressed. Critical theory, prompts a critical examination of the Church's impacts, taking into account both the intended and unintended consequences of its involvement in social change. A case study research design was employed, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the Church's initiatives in Nairobi. The study utilized qualitative methods, including interviews, observation, focus group discussions, and document analysis, to gather rich insights from Church leaders, beneficiaries of Church-led programs, and historical records. Sampling was purposive, targeting individuals who had direct experience of the Church's institution or interventions. Data was analyzed thematically to identify patterns and trends in the Church's contributions to education, healthcare, and social justice. The findings of this study will contribute to the broader discourse on religion and social change by highlighting how faith-based organizations particularly the Catholic Church has played a pivotal role in addressing socio-economic inequalities that has yielded to social change. The study has provided practical recommendations for policymakers, religious institutions, and development organizations on enhancing collaboration with the Catholic Church to promote sustainable social change. By documenting the Church's historical and contemporary (1963-2023) contributions, this research will serve as a valuable reference for future studies on the intersection of religion and social development in Kenya.

I. Introduction

This study presents and critically discusses the findings of the study on the Catholic Church's involvement in social change in Nairobi County between 1963 and 2023. Drawing on interviews with respondents and document analysis, it explores how the Church has influenced slum empowerment, social development, reconciliation during times of conflict, youth and women empowerment, promotion of social justice, and adaptation to emerging modern challenges. The discussion integrates respondent voices with existing literature to highlight both the transformative contributions and the contradictions of Church-led interventions. In doing so, the study

demonstrates how the Catholic Church has functioned not only as a spiritual institution but also as a catalyst for socio-economic and political change, addressing gaps often left by the state while shaping narratives of dignity, justice, and inclusion in Kenya's capital city leading to an impactful social change between the years 1963-2023.

II. Theoretical Framework

The relevant theories related to the Catholic Church's involvement in social change are Social Movement theory, Liberation Theology, Faith-Based Organizational Theory and Critical Theory.

Social Movement Theory: provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how collective action can lead to social change. Developed by scholars such as Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam, and Sidney Tarrow, this theory posits that social movements emerge when groups of people organize to address perceived injustices or promote specific social or political goals (McAdam et al., 2001). Several key components contribute to the success of social movements, including resource mobilization, political opportunity structures, framing processes, and repertoires of contention. Resource mobilization focuses on how movements acquire and deploy various resources, such as human, financial, and organizational assets, to achieve their goals (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Political opportunity structures examine how the broader political context either facilitates or constrains the activities of social movements, depending on factors such as government openness, alliances with influential groups, and institutional stability (Tarrow, 1998). Framing processes explore how movements construct and disseminate meaning to mobilize supporters and demobilize opponents by shaping public perceptions and defining issues in ways that resonate with their audiences (Snow & Benford, 1988). Repertoires of contention refer to the set of protest tactics and strategies available to movements in a given context, including demonstrations, public statements, advocacy campaigns, and grassroots mobilization (Tilly, 1978).

In the context of this study, the Catholic Church's involvement in social change in Nairobi has analyzed through these theoretical lenses. The Church has demonstrated strong resource mobilization through its ability to leverage its congregation, financial resources, and institutional networks to implement social programs. Its engagement with Kenya's evolving political environment illustrates how it navigates political opportunity structures, adapting its strategies based on the prevailing governance climate. The Church's framing processes are evident in the way it presents social change as a moral and religious imperative, advocating for education, healthcare, and social welfare as fundamental human rights. Additionally, its use of diverse repertoires of contention, such as public advocacy, social services, and faith-based community outreach, reflects its strategic approach to addressing societal challenges. One of the strengths of Social Movement Theory is its versatility in explaining different forms of collective action across various contexts. It offers a robust framework for understanding how organizations like the Catholic Church can drive social change through structured and organized efforts. Moreover, the theory acknowledges both structural factors, such as political opportunities, and the agency of movement leaders in shaping strategies and actions. However, a notable limitation of Social Movement Theory in the context of religious institutions is its emphasis on secular movements and contentious politics. The unique characteristics and motivations of religious organizations, which often operate based on spiritual convictions and moral imperatives, may not fully align with the more political orientation of traditional social movement theory. Additionally, the theory's focus on protests and direct action may overlook the Church's use of non-confrontational strategies, such as social services, education, and pastoral care, as mechanisms for social change. Despite these limitations, Social Movement Theory remains relevant for analyzing the Catholic Church's role in shaping social change in Nairobi county. By applying this framework, the study provided insights into how the Church mobilized resources, navigated political dynamics, frames her messages, and employs various strategies to foster social change.

Liberation Theology: which emerged in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s and subsequently spread to other parts of the world, offers a unique perspective on how religious institutions can engage with social and economic justice. This theological approach, pioneered by theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino, emphasizes the Church's role in addressing social injustices and promoting the liberation of

oppressed groups (Gutiérrez, 1973). It is grounded in the belief that Christian faith must be actively lived out in solidarity with the poor and marginalized, advocating for their empowerment and social change. Liberation Theology emphasized on the church's role in addressing social injustice, poverty, and oppression. It advocates for a preferential option for the poor and marginalized, viewing Christianity as a force for social and political change (Evans, 1992). One of the fundamental principles of Liberation Theology is the preferential option for the poor, which asserts that Christians should prioritize the needs and concerns of the poor and marginalized in society (Boff & Boff, 1987). This principle is rooted in biblical teachings that emphasize justice, compassion, and the dignity of every human being. Another central tenet is the praxis-oriented approach, which highlights the importance of not just understanding the world but actively working to change it (Gutiérrez, 1973). Liberation theologians argue that faith must be expressed through concrete actions aimed at dismantling systemic injustices.

A third key aspect of Liberation Theology is the concept of structural sin, which extends the notion of sin beyond individual transgressions to include societal structures that perpetuate injustice and oppression. Sobrino (1994) contends that social and economic systems that institutionalize poverty, exclusion, and inequality are manifestations of structural sin that must be challenged through collective action. Additionally, Liberation Theology reinterprets the Kingdom of God as not only a future heavenly reality but as something to be partially realized in the present through social justice efforts (Boff, 1978). This perspective calls for a transformative engagement with the world, where faith and justice are inseparable. (Bigsten et al., 2016), Liberation Theology provides a theoretical framework for understanding the Catholic Church's engagement in promoting social change. However, the approach has also been subject to critique. Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) expressed concerns that some interpretations of Liberation Theology emphasized political and social concerns at the expense of spiritual matters, leading to tensions within the Church (Ratzinger, 1984). Ratzinger argued that elements of Liberation Theology, particularly its Marxist-influenced critiques of capitalism, could risk reducing Christianity to a form of political activism rather than a spiritual movement. Similarly, historian Michael Löwy (1996) noted that while Liberation Theology played a significant role in advocating for the rights of the poor, it faced opposition from conservative elements within the Catholic hierarchy who viewed it as too radical.

Despite these critiques, Liberation Theology remains an important framework for understanding how religious like the case of the catholic church institutions in Nairobi county engage in social change. It complements Social Movement Theory by providing a more specific, religiously grounded rationale for the Church's involvement in social changes. While Social Movement Theory offers a broader framework for understanding collective action, Liberation Theology provides insight into the theological motivations that drive faith-based institutions to advocate for social justice and community empowerment. This perspective will be critical in analyzing the Catholic Church's role in promoting education, healthcare, and social welfare initiatives in Nairobi County between 1963-2023. Catholic Social Teaching (CST): Emphasizing human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good, CST provides a moral framework for the Church's social interventions. In the context of Kenya, where issues of poverty, inequality, and social injustice are prevalent. It guides the Church's efforts in advocating for the rights and dignity of the poor, empowering marginalized communities, and challenging oppressive structures through education, activism, and community organizing. Analysis through the lens of Liberation Theology has illuminated how the Catholic Church's actions align with its commitment to social justice and liberation. Liberation Theology has been widely recognized for its direct engagement with social realities, providing a bridge between religious teachings and concrete action for social justice. It offers a compelling rationale for religious institutions to be actively involved in addressing societal issues, aligning with the study's objective of assessing the Catholic Church's contributions to social change. Liberation Theology adapted to Kenya's post-colonial context, prioritizes the poor and oppressed, guiding initiatives like slum empowerment and advocacy against injustice. In the context of this study, Liberation Theology, provided a theological framework for understanding the Catholic Church's motivations and justifications for her involvement in social change in Nairobi County. By applying this theological approach, the study examined how the Catholic Church in Nairobi County has historically mobilized her resources, institutions, and moral authority to impact the lives of

communities through education, healthcare, and social support programs.

Faith-Based Organizational Theory: This theory focuses on understanding the unique characteristics, motivations, and strategies of religious organizations in addressing social issues and promoting community development (Harden, 2006). It recognizes the distinctiveness of faith-based institutions, including their values, networks, and religious mandates, which influence their approach to social change. In the context of the Catholic Church in Kenya, Faith-Based Organizational Theory helped in understanding how the Church leverages its religious identity, resources, and networks to initiate and sustain social development initiatives. It guides the analysis by examining factors such as leadership dynamics, organizational culture, and partnerships with other stakeholders in driving for social change efforts. This framework also shed light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in the Catholic Church's engagement in development work, including issues of legitimacy, accountability, and sustainability. This theory analyzed the Church as a non-state actor, examining how its organizational structure, values, and networks shaped its social change efforts.

Critical Theory: Critical Theory, which emerged from the Frankfurt School in the 1930s, focuses on critiquing and changing society as a whole. Developed by theorists: Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas, emphasizes the need to examine power structures, ideologies, and social inequalities (Horkheimer, 1972). Critical Theory is anchored in several key principles aimed at understanding and challenging societal structures. It begins with a critique of domination, which seeks to uncover and confront various forms of social oppression—political, economic, or cultural—as emphasized by Horkheimer (1972). Driven by an emancipatory interest, the theory aspires to promote human liberation and the creation of a more just society, as noted by Habermas (1971). Its interdisciplinary approach integrates insights from philosophy, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, enriching the analysis of complex social phenomena (Kellner, 1989). Additionally, Critical Theory employs dialectical thinking, recognizing social realities as intricate and shaped by historical and material conditions (Adorno, 1973). Central to its ethos is the principle of praxis, which underscores the unity of theory and practice, advocating not only for the interpretation of the world but for transformative action to effect change. Collectively, these principles provide a robust framework for addressing the complexities of social life and fostering meaningful engagement with issues of domination and inequality. (Marx, 1845/1978).

It urges researchers to look beyond superficial explanations and consider the deeper social forces at play. Moreover, the complexity of its theoretical framework can pose challenges for empirical research. It prompts a critical examination of the Church's strategies and impact, taking into account her involvement in social change (Habermas, 1984). In the context of this study, Critical Theory offered a valuable framework for analyzing the Catholic Church's role in either challenging or reinforcing existing power structures in Nairobi County, for instance, Critical Theory encourages an exploration of how the Church implements initiatives for social change. A significant strength of Critical Theory lies in its emphasis on power dynamics and social critique, offering insights into the complexities surrounding the Church's influence on social change. Critical Theory complemented the other theoretical frameworks in this study by providing a critical lens to examine the Church's actions and their broader societal implication. While Social Movement Theory and Liberation Theology emphasize the Church's mobilization for change, Critical Theory fosters a more nuanced and reflective analysis of the power dynamics and the consequences involved in these processes. By incorporating Critical Theory, this study achieved a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the Catholic Church's role in social change in Nairobi, considering both its potential for promoting positive social change.

III. Methodology

This section outlines the research methodology that guided the structure and procedures of the study on the role of the Catholic Church in social change in Nairobi from 1963 to 2023. Drawing inspiration from Kothari (2004), the

qualitative methodology employed in this research aimed to elucidate the impact of the Catholic Church's activities on social change in Nairobi during the specified period (1963-2023). The methodology detailed the categories or groups of research participants, the methods used for participant selection, and the data collection process essential for validating the research outcomes.

Research Design

The study employed a case study design, delving deeply into multiple data sources to explore the role of the Catholic Church in social change in Kenya from 1963 to 2023. Case study allowed for a comprehensive examination of the various initiatives and activities undertaken by the Catholic Church during this period. This study provided rich insights into the social changes brought about by the Church. Only post-colonial and upto 2023 church initiatives were scrutinized/examined and their impacts. Case study was clear, practical, and assed qualitative data relevant to the research questions and objectives, facilitating an analysis of the Catholic Church's impact in 1963-2023.

Area of Study

This study encompassed the Nairobi County, focusing on the role of the Catholic Church in social change from 1963 to 2023. Nairobi county presents a dynamic urban landscape, marked by rapid growth and cultural diversity. It offers rich insights into urbanization and migration patterns, reflecting a blend of various ethnicities and cultures. The historical context of Nairobi, from its post-independence challenges, shapes its current social dynamics. Nairobi's affluent neighborhoods and informal settlements highlight significant socioeconomic disparities, making it a vital location for examining the role of the Catholic church in social change. The roles of Catholic Church in advocating for social change was critical to understanding local dynamics. Nairobi provides an interplay between social issues, the catholic Church's need to address them, that made it a unique focal point for this study.

Target Population

The study targeted the Catholic faithful, leadership, agents such as teacher, social workers & nurses in catholic institutions, benefactors and beneficiaries (individuals) who have been direct beneficiaries of the social changes initiated by the Catholic Church in Nairobi County from 1963 to 2023, who are still alive. This includes members and non-members of the Catholic community who have experienced or participated in various social programs, education initiatives, healthcare services, and other activities facilitated by the Catholic Church during this period. Additionally, leaders within the Catholic Church who have been instrumental in implementing these changes were targeted for their insights.

Sampling Procedure

For this study, the researcher utilized purposive and snowball sampling methods. This was because the study targeted specific period and specific information i.e from the period of Kenya's independence in 1963 up to 2023 and the role of the Catholic church in social change within that period. The researcher gathered insights from a specific group of respondents who have been directly involved or impacted by the social changes initiated by the Catholic Church during this period. These respondents may include Catholic faithful, church leaders, and individuals who have benefited from Catholic Church programs and initiatives directly and indirectly. Additionally, the researcher sought referrals from these initial respondents to identify others who provided credible information on the Catholic Church's role in social change. Respondents were assessed for their credibility, and those who possess relevant documents such as notes, diaries, letters, and photographs from the period under study were prioritized.

Instruments of Data Collection

This study used qualitative data collection methods which include interviews guide, observations, document analysis guide and focused group discussions guide. The study used interview guide; interview guide lists the questions on issues to be explored during the course of the interview. This means that each respondent received exactly the same interview stimulus as any other. The interviews were recorded after obtaining permission from

the respondents.

The researcher used document analysis guide. Document analysis is a method of data collection which involves analysis of content from written documents in order to make certain deductions based on the study parameters (Kothari, 2004). This guide included Document analysis forms which are graphic organizers that guide researchers through a process of identifying important background information about a document. This data was used to determine the documents biases or perspectives. Document analysis guide enabled the researcher to select specific publications of journals, books and archived documents. The researcher reviewed the books and journals, determine their weaknesses, their strengths and relevance to the study and the use of primary documents to compliment the written sources. The data was examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, give understanding, and develop empirical knowledge.

The study utilized focus group discussions (FGDs), which are discussions with a small number of individuals possessing specialized knowledge or interest in the topic. FGDs will involve groups of up to 10 participants, consisting of individuals with similar roles or experiences related to the Catholic Church's social change activities in Nairobi county from 1963 to 2023. Participants included individuals such as church leaders, members of Catholic organizations, beneficiaries of Catholic Church programs, and others involved in social change initiatives. The selection of participants was not be based on age, location, or education level, but rather on their direct involvement or experience with Catholic Church activities during the specified period. FGDs were be guided by detailed discussions and insights into participants' experiences related to the Catholic Church's role in social change. The researcher acted as the moderator, created a supportive atmosphere, established ground rules, and guided the discussion to explore participants' views and experiences regarding the impact of Catholic Church initiatives on social change in Kenya

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures depended on the instruments used, which include interview guides, observations, focus group discussion guides, and document analysis guides. The interview guide was a one-on-one to gather direct primary data. For focus groups, respondents were grouped based on their roles during the specified period, while the researcher acted as the moderator. Additionally, the researcher visited libraries, archives, and historical websites for document analysis. Data collected was organized according to respondent answers, then qualitatively analyzed. Digital recordings of interviews were transcribed and coded into sub-themes for analysis, Critical analysis was conducted by comparing multiple sources, including written documents and oral interviews, observations and focused group discussions. A narrative description of each theme was constructed, and a descriptive report on this objective was compiled.

Data Analysis and Presentation

This study applied a qualitative data analysis which according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), the analyze the information in a systematic way in order to come up with some useful conclusions and recommendations by establishing patterns, trends and relationships from the gathered data. For this study data analysis begun during data collection. There was identification of emerging themes in relation to the study objectives, data collected through interviews analyzed and written descriptively. Data collected from the archives and documentary sources was analyzed to provide a detailed description. In cases where interviews are recorded digitally, they were transcribed and well coded to various sub-themes for the purpose of analysis. The data was subjected to critical analysis by comparing several sources together, looking at the information from the written documents and those of oral interview, and back with evidence with digital photography.

IMPACT FINDINGS

Slum Empowerment – Uplifting the Lives of Vulnerable Communities

The Catholic Church has played a significant role in slum empowerment across Nairobi County, particularly in informal settlements such as Kibera, Mathare, Mukuru, and Korogocho. These settlements are home to some of the most marginalized populations, where residents face challenges such as inadequate housing, poor sanitation, unemployment, insecurity, and limited access to health care and education (UN-Habitat, 2020). The Church, through its parishes, charitable organizations, such as Caritas Nairobi, Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Little Sisters of St. Francis Joy women group which is a charitable welfare for the poor women, has sought to provide holistic interventions. These have ranged from basic services (education, water, sanitation, and health) to community empowerment through training, advocacy, and spiritual support.

Housing and Infrastructure

Improved housing and sanitation were also highlighted as areas where the Catholic Church has made visible contributions.

“Through Caritas, my family benefited from a housing project in Mukuru. They built low-cost houses, and we pay in installments. At least now, I live in a place where my children are safe.”

“We worked with the parish to construct community toilets and drainage. It was a partnership – the Catholic Church gave materials, and we contributed labor.”

“When floods destroyed our houses, the Catholic Church provided emergency shelters and blankets. Government officials came only to take photos, but the sisters stayed with us until we recovered.”

These initiatives align with global findings on the role of faith-based organizations in community-based housing programs (Clarke, 2016). Yet, some respondents pointed out that housing projects remain limited in scale compared to the vast needs in Nairobi County’s growing informal settlements, where an estimated 60% of residents live in substandard housing (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2022).

The findings reveal that the Catholic Church’s interventions in slum empowerment mirror broader global trends of faith-based engagement in urban poverty alleviation. Literature consistently affirms that religious organizations occupy a unique niche due to their proximity to communities, moral authority, and ability to mobilize resources (Tomalin, 2020).

Housing and Infrastructure: Similar to studies in Brazil’s favelas (Alves & Evanson, 2017), Catholic-led housing initiatives in Nairobi County provide essential relief but are limited by funding constraints and government regulatory hurdles.

Access to Education and Child Support

One of the most frequently cited contributions of the Catholic Church was in the area of education. Respondents noted that Catholic-sponsored schools in slums had created opportunities for children from poor families to access learning.

“If it were not for the Church, my children would not be in school. The parish here gives bursaries, and the sisters run a nursery and primary school where even orphans are accepted without fees. It has changed our lives.”

“I grew up in Mathare, and the only reason I completed secondary school was the scholarship I got from Caritas. Today I am a teacher, and I give back by volunteering at the same center.”

“The Catholic Church does more than education; they feed the children in schools. For many families here, school feeding programs are the only guarantee of a meal for their kids.”

Document analysis confirmed that Catholic schools in informal settlements are among the most affordable yet high-performing institutions. A report by Caritas Nairobi (2021) indicated that over 10,000 children in Nairobi County slums benefit annually from Church-supported bursaries and school feeding programs.

These findings resonate with earlier research by Sweeney and Monaghan (2018), who highlighted the role of faith-based organizations in bridging gaps left by state education systems in marginalized urban spaces. However, they

also raise the concern of sustainability, as some schools rely heavily on donor funding, which has been inconsistent since the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2021).

Health Services and Sanitation

Health and Sanitation: Respondent accounts affirm previous studies (Green et al., 2018) highlighting the trust communities place in Church-run health facilities. Yet, consistent with Pfeiffer et al. (2019), limitations exist in terms of staffing, operating hours, and emergency readiness.

Respondents also described the Catholic Church as a critical provider of health services in areas where public facilities are overstretched.

"We have a clinic run by Catholic sisters. They treat mothers and children at very low cost, and sometimes for free. During COVID, they were the only ones who continued offering services in the slum."

"I was diagnosed with TB at the Catholic Church clinic. If I had gone to the government hospital, the lines are long and sometimes you don't even get medicine. Here, the sisters give you both treatment and counseling."

"The Church has invested in clean water points and toilets in our community. Before that, cholera outbreaks were common. Things have improved a lot."

These accounts align with studies showing that faith-based organizations contribute significantly to primary health care provision in Sub-Saharan Africa, often filling gaps where public health systems fail (Olivier & Paterson, 2019). In Kenya, Catholic institutions manage an estimated 25% of all health facilities (Kenya Catholic Health Commission, 2020).

However, while most respondents expressed gratitude, a few raised concerns about the accessibility of such services. Some clinics were reported to operate only during weekdays and could not cater to emergencies at night. This critique echoes findings by Pfeiffer et al. (2019), who observed that although faith-based clinics improve local access, they often lack full-time staff and emergency facilities, leaving critical gaps in slum health care.

Contradictions and Gaps

While most respondents viewed the Church as a lifeline, a minority argued that Church interventions risk fostering dependency.

"Sometimes people wait for the Church to bring food or pay school fees instead of working harder. It is good help, but it can also make people lazy."

This critique resonates with Ferguson (2015), who critiqued aid programs in Africa as sometimes perpetuating a "culture of dependency."

Others in a focused group discussion also expressed frustration that

"Church aid was sometimes distributed selectively, benefiting only those aligned with particular parish groups."

Furthermore, gaps remain in addressing structural issues such as land tenure and government policy failures. Scholars like Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2016) argue that without systemic policy reforms, slum upgrading remains fragmented and unsustainable.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the Catholic Church has played a transformative role in slum empowerment in Nairobi County through education, health, sanitation, housing, and social support. Respondents' voices illustrate both the depth of impact and the persistent limitations. While the Church's contributions are undeniable, they cannot substitute for long-term government-led structural reforms.

Faith-based interventions are most effective when complemented by state policies and community-driven initiatives. The findings highlight the need for stronger partnerships between Church actors, the state, and international development agencies to ensure sustainability and scalability of slum empowerment programs.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation has remained one of the most significant roles of the Catholic Church in Nairobi County since independence in 1963. The country's history has been punctuated by cycles of ethnic division, political violence, land disputes, and marginalization. Nowhere have these conflicts been more visible than in Nairobi, where the city's multi-ethnic composition, economic inequality, and political competition frequently erupt into violence, particularly during election years. The Catholic Church, due to its broad presence across parishes in every community and its respected moral authority, has been at the forefront of efforts to foster peace, heal divisions, and promote forgiveness.

The Church's involvement became particularly evident during the 1992, 1997, and most dramatically the 2007–2008 post-election violence (PEV), when over 1,100 lives were lost and nearly 600,000 people displaced (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Nairobi, as the political and economic heart of Kenya, experienced some of the worst skirmishes, with slums such as Kibera and Mathare turning into epicenters of violent confrontation. Within this context, Catholic parishes, priests, and lay organizations assumed an intermediary role, providing safe havens, dialogue platforms, and trauma counseling services.

The Catholic Church's emphasis on forgiveness, justice, and peace is grounded in its theology of reconciliation. Drawing from biblical teachings such as Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers," priests and bishops framed reconciliation not only as a social necessity but also as a Christian duty. Respondents noted that this religious framing often motivated individuals to let go of vengeance.

Scholars such as Schreiter (1998) highlight that Christian reconciliation emphasizes restoring broken relationships, not just ending hostilities. This theological perspective strengthens secular approaches by introducing moral imperatives that transcend political calculations. However, as Murunga and Nasong'o (2007) caution, overreliance on religious appeals can sometimes overshadow the need for legal accountability for perpetrators of violence.

The Catholic Church has been instrumental in reconciliation efforts in Nairobi County, particularly during and after episodes of ethnic and political violence. Through mediation, trauma healing, and humanitarian support, it has provided both immediate relief and long-term community rebuilding. Respondents' voices vividly illustrate the lived reality of these interventions—spaces of dialogue where enemies spoke again, counseling that turned grief into healing, and sanctuaries that saved lives.

For reconciliation to be sustainable, Church initiatives must be complemented by structural reforms led by the state, greater inclusivity in peace forums, and collaboration with civil society. Only through such multi-pronged strategies can Nairobi's history of cyclical violence be transformed into a future of enduring peace.

Peace Mediation and Dialogue Forums

Respondents repeatedly emphasized the Church's role as a convener of peace dialogues. Parish halls often became neutral meeting grounds for conflicting ethnic groups.

"After the 2007 violence, our parish priest called people from both sides. We sat in the church hall, Kikuyus on one side, Luos on the other. Slowly, through prayer and discussion, people started talking again. It was not easy, but it worked."

"The Church organized forums where youth from rival gangs in Mathare met. At first, they refused to even greet each other, but through consistent meetings, football tournaments, and counseling, some of them now work together in business."

"What impressed me was that the Church never took sides. Politicians would blame each other, but priests insisted on peace and condemned violence regardless of who caused it."

Document analysis confirmed that Caritas Nairobi and the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) organized numerous inter-ethnic forums between 2008 and 2012, emphasizing grassroots peacebuilding. Similar to Lederach's (1997) framework of reconciliation, these initiatives prioritized relationships and trust-building as foundational to lasting peace.

Trauma Healing and Counseling

Many respondents highlighted the Church's involvement in psychosocial support for victims of violence.

"I lost my brother in 2007, and for months I could not sleep. It was the parish counseling program that helped me cope. They combined prayers, therapy, and group sharing sessions."

"The sisters/nuns trained as trauma counselors came to our settlement. They taught us breathing exercises, guided us in forgiving those who hurt us, and even provided small support groups. It made us feel human again."

"I was a perpetrator during the violence. I attacked neighbors from another tribe. Later, I was consumed by guilt. A priest encouraged me to confess, repent, and even reconcile with those families. It was the hardest thing I ever did, but I feel peace now."

Studies affirm that trauma healing is indispensable in post-conflict societies. Gopin (2012) argues that faith traditions provide unique resources for reconciliation because they integrate psychological healing with spiritual meaning-making. The Church's incorporation of both counseling and sacramental practices (confession, Eucharist, communal prayers) reflects this integration.

Provision of Safe Havens and Humanitarian Support

During violent outbreaks, Church compounds and institutions often became safe spaces for displaced people.

"In 2008, thousands of us fled to the Catholic parish compound. The nuns gave us food, blankets, and medicine. It became like a refugee camp, but at least we were safe."

"When the police were chasing youths during demonstrations, many of us hid in the church compound. The priests negotiated with officers to spare those inside. Without them, many would have been killed."

"Our house was burned, but the parish gave us shelter for three months. Even after we left, they continued supporting us with rent for a while until we could stand again."

This role aligns with global findings where churches often serve as sanctuaries during political instability (Appleby, 2000). The humanitarian work of the Catholic Church in Kenya reflects its broader mission of *diakonia* —service to those in need—though questions of capacity and sustainability arise given the scale of displacement during major conflicts.

The respondents' accounts align with a wide body of literature that emphasizes the importance of faith-based organizations in peacebuilding.

Neutral Conveners of Dialogue: Like Lederach (1997), who stressed relational peacebuilding, the Church's neutrality created safe spaces for dialogue. This is consistent with Kiplagat (2013), who documented the Catholic Church's involvement in Kenya's National Accord negotiations in 2008.

Psychosocial Healing: The integration of trauma counseling and spirituality parallels studies in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, where churches facilitated communal healing through prayer and counseling (Phiri & Werner, 2016). However, in contrast to Rwanda, where churches were also accused of complicity in violence (Longman, 2010), most respondents emphasized the Kenyan Church's impartiality.

Humanitarian Assistance: Similar to South Sudan, where churches sheltered displaced persons during civil war (Rolandsen, 2015), the Catholic Church in Nairobi provided essential humanitarian aid. Yet, as Owuor (2018) notes, faith-based relief tends to be immediate and short-term, often struggling to address long-term displacement challenges.

Youth and Women Empowerment

Youth and women empowerment remain central to the Catholic Church's mission in Nairobi County. Since independence in 1963, Kenya's socio-economic landscape has been shaped by structural inequalities that disproportionately affect women and young people. Women have long faced barriers to education, political participation, and economic opportunities, while young people who make up nearly 70% of the Kenyan population grapple with unemployment, political manipulation, and social exclusion (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2022).

In Nairobi, these issues are particularly acute. Slums such as Kibera, Mathare, Mukuru, and Korogocho are filled with underemployed youth, many of whom are vulnerable to crime, substance abuse, and political violence.

Similarly, women in these settlements face challenges such as limited access to reproductive health services, gender-based violence, and exclusion from decision-making structures.

The Catholic Church, through her parishes, Caritas Nairobi, Catholic Women's Associations (CWA), youth movements like the Young Christian Workers (YCW), and financial initiatives such as Caritas Microfinance Bank, has sought to provide holistic empowerment interventions. These include scholarships, vocational training, micro-credit loans, mentorship programs, leadership formation, and advocacy for gender equality.

The Catholic Church's initiatives in youth and women empowerment in Nairobi County have yielded significant benefits: expanded educational opportunities, vocational training, access to microfinance, and leadership formation. These programs have enabled women to gain economic independence, reduced youth idleness, and fostered civic engagement. Respondent testimonies highlight transformations at both individual and community levels. Nonetheless, challenges persist, including dependency risks, selective access, and limited scale relative to Nairobi's vast population. Moreover, structural economic and political constraints hinder the sustainability of empowerment efforts.

This section presents findings from interviews with 15 respondents, analyzed alongside documentary evidence and existing literature, to evaluate the impact of Catholic-led initiatives on youth and women empowerment in Nairobi County.

While respondents appreciated the Church's interventions, several critiques emerged:

Dependency Risk: *"Some youth wait for scholarships or loans instead of finding their own way. The Church helps, but people also need to be proactive."*

Selective Beneficiaries: *"Sometimes the bursaries go to those close to parish leaders. Transparency can be a problem."*

Inadequate Scale: *"The empowerment projects are good, but they reach too few people compared to the need. Thousands of young people are still idle."*

These critiques mirror Ferguson's (2015) concern that aid and empowerment programs can foster dependency and exclusion when not transparently managed.

Education and Scholarships

Education: The findings confirm the Church's vital role in educational access, echoing studies from Uganda and Tanzania where Catholic schools in slums outperform government institutions (Buchmann & Hannum, 2019). However, critics like Watkins and Ashraf (2021) caution that dependence on religious schools can entrench inequality if not integrated into national policy frameworks.

Education was consistently identified as a key tool for empowerment. Respondents emphasized how scholarships and bursaries offered by the Church opened doors to opportunities otherwise inaccessible.

"I was raised by a single mother in Mathare. Through a parish scholarship, I managed to complete my high school. Later, I got another bursary from Caritas to pursue a diploma in catering. Today, I run a small restaurant and employ three other women."

"The Church supported me through school. Without the bursary, I would have ended up in casual labor or perhaps on the streets like some of my peers. Now, I am a university student, and I mentor other youth."

"My two daughters are both in secondary school through CWA bursaries. This gives me hope that they will not go through the same struggles I went through."

Document analysis confirmed that Caritas Nairobi annually supports over 5,000 students in Nairobi slums with scholarships, prioritizing girls and vulnerable youth (Caritas Nairobi, 2021).

This aligns with studies by Buchmann and Hannum (2019), who emphasize education as a critical equalizer for women and youth. However, reliance on external donor funding raises sustainability concerns, as noted by Watkins and Ashraf (2021), who argue that church-based scholarships may struggle during economic downturns.

Education: Respondent experiences mirror global studies on faith-based scholarships increasing educational access (Sweeney & Monaghan, 2018). Yet, as Watkins and Ashraf (2021) caution, scholarships do not automatically translate into equity without systemic policy reforms.

Vocational Training: The positive impacts align with Mwaura (2017), but structural economic challenges (Omolo, 2010) show that training must be coupled with job creation policies.

Vocational Training and Employment

Several respondents noted that vocational training initiatives, particularly in tailoring, carpentry, ICT, and hairdressing, created alternative pathways for self-reliance.

"I was trained in tailoring at a Catholic vocational center. They even gave us sewing machines on credit. Now, I design school uniforms and wedding dresses. I don't depend on my husband anymore."

"I joined a youth ICT training program at the parish. We learned digital literacy and freelancing. Some of us now earn through online work, something we never imagined possible in Kibera."

"Through Caritas, I received training in carpentry. They also linked us to contractors. Even if I don't get employed formally, I always find small gigs that help me support my family."

These accounts are supported by Mwaura (2017), who documented the role of faith-based vocational training in enhancing employability among Kenyan youth. Yet, gaps persist, as not all trainees secure sustainable employment. As Omolo (2010) notes, structural economic constraints such as limited job creation in the formal sector mean that vocational training alone cannot solve the unemployment crisis.

Women's Economic Empowerment and Microfinance

The Church's financial empowerment initiatives, particularly through Caritas Microfinance Bank and parish-based self-help groups, were widely acknowledged.

"I belong to a women's savings group supported by the Church. We contribute every week, and through loans, I started a small grocery kiosk. Now, I can pay school fees without begging my husband."

"The Church taught us how to save and invest. I received a micro-loan to buy a water tank. Selling water has become my family's main source of income."

"Microfinance through the parish gave me capital for boda-boda business. Now I earn a steady income. Before that, I was idle, vulnerable to drugs and crime."

Studies affirm the effectiveness of microfinance in empowering women and youth. For example, Kabeer (2016) notes that access to credit enhances women's bargaining power in households and contributes to poverty reduction. However, other scholars like Bateman (2010) critique microfinance for sometimes leading to debt cycles and failing to address systemic poverty. However, the Church faces internal tensions: while it promotes women's economic and civic empowerment, it simultaneously upholds doctrines restricting women from ordination. Respondents were aware of this contradiction but often distinguished between empowerment in society and Church hierarchy. Microfinance : Findings echo Kabeer (2016) on enhanced agency but also reflect Bateman's (2010) concerns about indebtedness, which some respondents hinted at when loans became overwhelming.

Leadership and Gender Equality

A recurring theme among respondents was the Church's promotion of leadership training for both women and youth.

"Through CWA, I was trained in leadership and public speaking. I am now a community representative in the local ward. I never imagined myself in politics."

"The parish youth group trained us in civic education. They encouraged us to register as voters and to reject manipulation by politicians. This helped many of us think differently during the last election."

"For the first time, women in our parish are chairing committees. The Church is teaching us that women can lead just as well as men."

These findings correspond with research by Cornwall (2016), who argues that empowering women in leadership transforms not only households but also broader governance structures. Nonetheless, contradictions remain, as the Catholic Church itself has been criticized globally for excluding women from priestly leadership (McAleese,

2014). The findings strongly align with existing literature emphasizing the Church's role in socio-economic empowerment:

Leadership: Church-driven leadership training supports Cornwall's (2016) advocacy for women's political inclusion but reveals internal contradictions within Catholicism regarding clerical gender exclusion.

Promotion of Social Justice

Social justice has been one of the most enduring commitments of the Catholic Church in Nairobi County from the dawn of independence in 1963 to the present day. Nairobi, as both Kenya's capital and its most unequal city, has long reflected the deep fractures of society—where affluence and destitution co-exist side by side, and where corruption, exclusion, and abuses of power frequently define governance. In this environment, the Catholic Church has consistently sought to act as a defender of the oppressed, positioning itself as the “voice of the voiceless.”

Drawing from Catholic Social Teaching (CST), which emphasizes the dignity of every person, the preferential option for the poor, solidarity, and the common good, the Church has attempted to challenge structures of injustice. Through sermons, pastoral letters, press conferences, protest marches, and grassroots activism, the Church has denounced land grabbing, condemned police brutality, resisted corruption, and sought to include marginalized communities in the life of the nation.

The Catholic Church has played a pivotal role in promoting social justice in Nairobi County, confronting land grabbing, police brutality, corruption, and marginalization. Respondent voices reveal the Church as a beacon of courage, offering solidarity to the oppressed and amplifying their concerns. The literature corroborates this role while also highlighting contradictions and limitations. Despite its impact, the Church faces challenges of credibility, selective advocacy, and limited systemic influence. To remain effective, it must continue refining its own internal accountability while building stronger coalitions with civil society and policy institutions. Social justice, as respondents reminded us, is not a one-time battle but an ongoing struggle—and the Church's prophetic witness remains indispensable in this journey.

Speaking Against Land Grabbing

“Our parish land in Nairobi was once targeted by grabbers. The priests refused to keep silent and went to court. They mobilized us as parishioners to protest, and eventually, the land was returned.”

“The Church has been a strong voice on land justice. Bishops openly condemn land cartels, even when it is risky. Without them, many schools and hospitals run by the Church would have been lost.”

“I remember sermons where priests called out corrupt leaders who grabbed land meant for the poor. It gave us courage because we felt someone powerful was on our side.”

These testimonies highlight the Church's dual role as both victim and defender in the struggle over land. In many cases, Church institutions themselves became targets of grabbers who attempted to appropriate land belonging to schools, hospitals, or parishes. Rather than retreat, Church leaders publicly resisted, mobilizing parishioners and using both legal and prophetic means to secure justice.

This aligns with historical records showing that in the 1990s, several Catholic institutions in Nairobi went to court to reclaim grabbed land, often winning after long battles (Ghai & Cottrell, 2007). Parishioners interpreted such resistance not just as a defense of property, but as symbolic of a wider struggle against powerful elites who enriched themselves at the expense of ordinary citizens.

The literature confirms that land injustice lies at the heart of Kenya's inequality. Klopp (2000) argues that land grabbing is not just an economic crime but a political weapon, used by elites to consolidate power. In this context, the Church's denunciations were interpreted by respondents as empowering—showing that even powerful cartels could be confronted. The courage of priests and bishops to “name and shame” corrupt leaders resonated with parishioners who felt voiceless.

Yet, contradictions remain. Some respondents quietly acknowledged that not all Church leaders were blameless; in a few cases, diocesan institutions themselves were accused of benefiting from irregular land allocations. This reflects the complexity noted by Branch (2011), who argues that while churches often resist corruption, they are not immune to complicity in it.

Denouncing Police Brutality

"In Mathare, police used to kill young men and leave their bodies on the road. Priests came to the funerals, condemned the killings, and called for justice."

"During protests, the Church would sometimes open its doors to protect youth from police harassment. Priests would stand at the gates, telling police to stop shooting at us."

"When my cousin was killed by the police, it was the parish priest who helped us connect with human rights groups to demand justice."

For residents of Nairobi's informal settlements, police brutality is a daily reality. Respondents' accounts describe the terror of extrajudicial killings, particularly of young men branded as criminals, and the deep mistrust that exists between communities and law enforcement. In these situations, the Church's intervention was experienced as both protective and restorative.

The image of priests physically blocking police officers from entering church compounds, or officiating at funerals of young men killed in so-called "police operations," underscores the Church's moral courage. For grieving families, these symbolic acts carried weight, affirming that the lives of their loved ones mattered. As Respondent 10 described, priests also connected families to human rights networks, demonstrating the Church's ability to bridge grassroots struggles with broader advocacy efforts.

This resonates with global literature where churches, particularly in Latin America under authoritarian regimes, served as sanctuaries against state violence (Berryman, 1987). In Nairobi, as Amnesty International (2019) reports, police brutality in slums remains systemic. By positioning itself as both a sanctuary and a protest voice, the Catholic Church provided residents with hope in the face of structural impunity.

However, while respondents valued these interventions, many admitted that extrajudicial killings have continued. This points to the limitations of moral appeals in the face of entrenched state impunity. Cheeseman (2018) suggests that without institutional reforms within the police and judiciary, such advocacy may have symbolic but not systemic effects.

Condemning Corruption

"Corruption is everywhere in Kenya, but the bishops keep preaching against it. I remember a pastoral letter that said corruption is stealing from the poor. It made me think differently."

"The Church refuses bribes even when officials try to silence them. This shows integrity."

"During elections, priests warn us not to sell our votes. They remind us that corruption begins with small actions and destroys the whole nation."

Corruption is arguably Kenya's most persistent governance challenge, and Nairobi sits at its core. Respondents recalled not only public sermons but also pastoral letters where bishops boldly declared corruption a sin against the poor. This moral framing distinguished the Church's critique from secular anti-corruption campaigns: it presented corruption not just as a legal crime but as a moral evil that offends God and undermines human dignity. This theological perspective resonates with Catholic Social Teaching, particularly Pope Francis' frequent condemnations of corruption as "a cancer that steals the hopes of the people" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013). Respondents noted that the Church's refusal to accept bribes reinforced its credibility, contrasting sharply with a political system where bribery is normalized.

Yet, the literature underscores the resilience of corruption. Mutua (2008) shows how corruption became entrenched in Kenya's political economy, shaping everything from public tenders to employment. Respondents' frustration that little has changed despite decades of Church denunciations reflects Cheeseman's (2018) argument that moral critique alone cannot dismantle entrenched patronage networks.

Some respondents also acknowledged contradictions—cases where Church officials themselves mismanaged funds or where transparency in bursary allocations was lacking. Such inconsistencies risk undermining the Church’s prophetic credibility, a challenge that Branch (2011) also notes.

Fighting Marginalization and Promoting Inclusion

“The Church stands with the poor. Priests come to the slums, celebrate Mass with us, and remind us that we are just as important as the rich.”

“When refugees came to our area, it was the Church that defended their right to live among us. They said no one is illegal before God.”

“The Church promotes unity. In our parish council, we have people from all tribes. That way, we learn to work together.”

These testimonies highlight the Church’s inclusive ethos. By affirming the equal dignity of slum dwellers, refugees, and ethnic minorities, the Church provided a counter-narrative to the marginalization entrenched in Kenyan politics. Priests celebrating Mass in slums were experienced as symbolic gestures of solidarity, bridging the gap between the marginalized and mainstream society.

The Church’s defense of refugees, particularly Somali and South Sudanese migrants in Eastleigh and surrounding areas, reflects its global role in migrant advocacy. Casanova (2018) argues that religious institutions worldwide are uniquely placed to frame migration not as a threat but as a moral obligation to hospitality. Respondent 4’s statement illustrates how such theology translates into tangible solidarity.

Similarly, parish councils composed of multiple ethnic groups provided spaces for inter-ethnic collaboration, directly countering the ethnic divisions that have historically fueled violence in Nairobi. Tomalin (2020) highlights that religious communities can serve as “microcosms of inclusion,” where individuals learn to transcend ethnic and class boundaries.

While respondents acknowledged the Church as a defender of justice, contradictions were evident:

Internal Complicity: Some respondents criticized cases of financial mismanagement within Church institutions, echoing Branch’s (2011) observation that no institution is immune from corruption.

Selective Advocacy: Respondents noted that the Church is more vocal on issues like corruption and land but less consistent on matters such as domestic gender-based violence. This reflects Chitando and Togarasei’s (2018) critique that churches sometimes prioritize selective social issues.

Limited Systemic Impact: Respondents recognized the Church’s voice but lamented that injustices persist. As Murunga & Nasong’o (2007) note, advocacy without structural reform risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

Theological and Moral Dimensions

The Catholic Church grounds its advocacy in Catholic Social Teaching, particularly in encyclicals such as *Rerum Novarum* (1891), *Populorum Progressio* (1967), and *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013). These documents emphasize the moral duty of Christians to oppose injustice and stand with the poor. For respondents, this theological grounding meant that justice was not simply a political matter but a sacred mandate. The prophetic role of priests speaking truth to power mirrored biblical prophets who condemned unjust rulers. Yet, the challenge remains: how to balance prophetic denunciation with constructive engagement in policy reform.

Theological and Moral Dimensions: From a theological perspective, the Church grounds empowerment initiatives in the principles of **Catholic Social Teaching (CST)**—particularly the dignity of the human person, the preferential option for the poor, and the call to participation (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). By promoting women and youth empowerment, the Church operationalizes its belief that every person is created in the image of God and has the right to flourish.

Adaptation to Modern Challenges

Over the past six decades, Nairobi County has undergone profound social, political, economic, and technological transformations. These changes have brought both opportunities and new challenges for the Catholic Church as it seeks to remain relevant in an ever-evolving society. Unlike the early post-independence years, when the Church primarily addressed issues of poverty, illiteracy, and political injustice, today's context requires responses to complex phenomena such as climate change, HIV/AIDS, globalization, digital technology, and emerging social issues like cyberbullying and digital addiction among the youth.

The Catholic Church in Nairobi has sought to adapt by expanding its ministries, modernizing its communication strategies, collaborating with scientific and development institutions, and revising its pastoral approaches to respond to new realities. However, this adaptation has been neither easy nor uncontested. Some critics argue that the Church lags behind in addressing pressing contemporary issues, while others commend it for creatively balancing tradition with innovation.

Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

"Our parish has embraced tree-planting programs. The youth are mobilized every rainy season, and even schools run by the Catholic Church participate. It shows that the Catholic Church is serious about the environment."

"During sermons, priests now talk about global warming, floods, and droughts. They tell us that caring for creation is part of our faith. This was not the case 20 years ago."

"The Church is helping slum residents cope with flooding. Caritas gave us water tanks and trained us on waste management. This helps us adapt to changing weather patterns."

Respondents consistently recognized that the Church has become more vocal on environmental issues, framing them as moral and spiritual responsibilities. This reflects Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), which calls for ecological conversion and a renewed commitment to sustainability. In Nairobi, parishes have organized clean-up exercises, waste management training, and water conservation projects, while Catholic schools increasingly incorporate environmental education.

These initiatives align with global findings that faith communities can play critical roles in advancing environmental justice by mobilizing local populations (Jenkins et al., 2018). However, respondents also admitted that challenges persist: urban pollution, poor drainage systems, and deforestation in peri-urban areas remain rampant, with Church interventions limited in scale compared to the magnitude of the crisis.

The findings resonate with broader literature:

Climate Change: The Church's tree-planting and environmental programs mirror Pope Francis' global call in *Laudato Si'*. Jenkins et al. (2018) emphasize that faith communities can mobilize grassroots environmentalism, though they face scale limitations in urban contexts.

Addressing HIV/AIDS and Public Health Challenges

"When HIV/AIDS first came, many people in our community were stigmatized. The Church started programs to care for patients, give them food, and provide counseling. That changed our view."

"Catholic hospitals and clinics provide ARVs at low cost. The sisters not only treat us but also give spiritual encouragement. They make us feel human."

"Some of my friends avoid Church programs because of its stance against condoms. They feel the Church is not practical enough, even though it helps in many other ways."

The Catholic Church has been deeply involved in HIV/AIDS response since the 1980s, when the epidemic hit Kenya. Respondents acknowledged the Church's pioneering role in home-based care, orphan support, and stigma reduction. Caritas Nairobi and Catholic hospitals remain among the largest providers of HIV services in the county (Kenya Catholic Health Commission, 2020).

However, contradictions emerged. While the Church provides care and treatment, its opposition to condom use remains controversial. Respondents, particularly the youth, critiqued this stance as unrealistic given high rates of premarital sex and urban risk behavior. This tension reflects broader debates documented by Agot et al. (2010), who found that faith-based organizations' moral teachings sometimes clash with biomedical prevention strategies.

HIV/AIDS: Respondents' experiences confirm Olivier & Paterson's (2019) observation that Catholic institutions provide critical HIV care. However, tensions around condom use echo Agot et al. (2010), who noted conflict between religious teachings and biomedical prevention.

Nonetheless, respondents agreed that the Church's compassion in providing care to patients especially during the height of the epidemic when stigma was severe saved countless lives. Partial Engagement: Some respondents argued the Church engages with issues like HIV/AIDS compassionately but avoids debates on sexual rights and reproductive health, leaving gaps in its relevance for young people.

Reactive vs. Proactive: Respondents noted the Church often reacts to crises (e.g., HIV/AIDS, COVID-19) rather than proactively anticipating emerging issues.

Embracing Technology and Digital Evangelization

Technological Divide: Digital evangelization risks excluding the poor, reinforcing inequality.

"Nowadays, Mass is streamed online. During COVID-19, this was the only way we could participate. It made me realize the Church can be modern."

"We have parish WhatsApp groups where priests share Bible readings, announcements, and even videos on family values. It makes faith accessible on our phones."

"The Church is trying, but sometimes its messages online are too traditional. Youth want interactive content, not just lectures. This is an area where improvement is needed."

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the Church's digital transformation. Respondents described how livestreamed Masses, online catechism classes, and digital pastoral counseling became new norms. WhatsApp and Facebook groups enabled parishioners to stay connected, while some priests experimented with YouTube and podcasts.

This shift resonates with Campbell & Tsuria's (2021) notion of "digital religion," where faith communities adapt to online platforms. Yet, challenges remain: some respondents felt digital evangelization still mirrors traditional preaching styles and fails to engage younger audiences. Moreover, unequal internet access in Nairobi's slums limits inclusivity, echoing concerns raised by Manda & Wamukoya (2020) about Kenya's digital divide. Digital Evangelization: The digital turn aligns with Campbell & Tsuria (2021), but digital inequality (Manda & Wamukoya, 2020) hampers inclusivity.

Confronting Cyberbullying and Digital Addiction

"My teenage son spends all his time on social media. The parish organized a seminar on digital addiction, which opened my eyes to how dangerous it can be."

"As youth leaders, we were trained to mentor others on safe internet use. We talk about cyberbullying, pornography, and how to balance online life with real life."

"The Catholic Church is trying to catch up with youth issues. For example, they preach against cyberbullying, but sometimes they don't understand the reality of online culture. We need them to listen more."

Digital challenges were a recurring theme. Respondents identified online harassment, pornography, and digital addiction as growing threats among Nairobi's youth. Some praised the Church for organizing seminars, workshops, and mentorship programs that address these issues. Others, however, felt the Church's understanding of online culture remains shallow, leading to messages that sometimes feel moralistic rather than practical.

Scholars such as Livingstone & Helsper (2007) argue that digital literacy is essential in protecting young people from online harm. By entering this space, the Church demonstrates adaptation, but as respondents suggested, it must integrate youth voices in shaping programs to ensure relevance.

Cyberbullying & Addiction: The Church's initiatives reflect global recognition of online risks (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007), but critiques about outdated approaches suggest a need for co-created solutions with youth.

Despite adaptation, contradictions persist:

Generational Disconnect: Youth respondents highlighted a gap between Church leaders' perceptions of digital culture and the lived experiences of young people.

Continuity With Tradition - Theological and Moral Dimensions

Theologically, the Church frames its adaptation through continuity with tradition. Caring for creation is rooted in Genesis, where humanity is called to be stewards of the earth. Caring for the sick reflects the ministry of Christ, while digital evangelization is seen as a new frontier for the Great Commission ("Go and make disciples of all nations" – Matthew 28:19).

By interpreting modern challenges through biblical and theological lenses, the Church maintains its identity while engaging contemporary realities. However, theological rigidity particularly on sexual ethics creates tension with biomedical approaches, revealing the struggle between fidelity to doctrine and pastoral responsiveness.

The Catholic Church in Nairobi County has demonstrated remarkable adaptability to modern challenges, from climate change and HIV/AIDS to digital evangelization and cyberbullying. Respondents' testimonies highlight the Church's creativity and compassion, while also pointing out its limitations and contradictions. The Church's strength lies in its ability to mobilize communities, provide care, and frame global challenges within a moral and spiritual narrative. Yet, its weaknesses include partial engagement with controversial issues, digital inequality, and a sometimes-limited grasp of youth culture. Ultimately, adaptation is an ongoing process. For the Church to remain relevant in Nairobi's fast-changing society, it must deepen partnerships with scientific, technological, and civic actors while listening more attentively to the voices of youth and marginalized groups. Its prophetic witness will remain credible only if it combines doctrinal fidelity with pastoral innovation in addressing today's and tomorrow's complex challenges.

IV. Conclusion

The Catholic Church's involvement in Nairobi County from 1963 to 2023 has profoundly shaped social change through multifaceted interventions that uplift slum communities, promote reconciliation, empower women and youth, advance social justice, and respond to modern challenges. Respondent testimonies consistently affirmed the Church as both a sanctuary and a prophetic voice, offering education, health care, economic opportunities, peacebuilding, and moral guidance in contexts where state institutions often faltered. While its initiatives have not been without contradictions ranging from sustainability concerns, selective advocacy, and occasional internal complicity the Church's moral authority and grassroots presence remain indispensable. By adapting its mission to contemporary realities such as climate change, HIV/AIDS, and digital transformation, the Church demonstrates resilience and relevance, even as it continues to wrestle with structural inequalities and generational shifts. Ultimately, the Church's contribution lies not only in addressing immediate needs but also in shaping a vision of justice, dignity, and solidarity that challenges Nairobi to pursue inclusive and transformative development.

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