The mandate of the Christian church in poverty alleviation: the case of the Anglican church of Kenya (ack) in Maseno and Winam divisions of Kisumu district, Kenya

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Abstract

Poverty and attempts to alleviate it is an issue that has continued to generate interest of national governments and international agencies and mostly in most developing countries. The Christian Church, in spite of its central mandate being spiritual evangelism has continued to participate in the fight against poverty to accomplish Jesus Christ's mission to whole-heartedly serve and minister to all; both rich and poor of the World. This paper evaluates the mandate of the Christian Church in poverty alleviation with reference to the role Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) plays in helping to alleviate poverty amongst its faithful. Specifically, the paper discusses the source of action by the church and the type and nature of development programmes carried out by the ACK in Maseno and Winam Divisions to establish the influence of the development programmes on the people. The Church, due to its proximity to the poor, remains one of the major stakeholders of poverty alleviation in rural areas. Hence, the paper makes the basic assumption that the majority of living poor, mostly in rural areas are not only poor but also profess the Christian faith as adherents of the ACK. The paper was guided by the Christian theory of human development which has two basic goals: to achieve life everlasting in the company of God and Christ in heaven; and to do God's will in one's daily life on earth by being responsive to the needs of the poor. Data was collected through literature review and a survey which comprised of responses of respondents to the questionnaires, focus group discussions and existing data records of the ACK. Qualitative data analysis Statistic Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The paper reveals that the Christian Church particularly the ACK has been and continues to be involved in improving the quality of life and economic status of the poor through the provision of essential social services and promotion of income-generation programmes, specifically in the areas of health, education, employment and small scale business entrepreneurship (SSBE). The paper, it is hoped, will provide relevant information for various stakeholders involved in poverty alleviation. Specifically the paper will contribute towards the achievement of Kenya vision 2030.

Keywords: Christian Church, Poverty Alleviation, Anglican Church-Kenya, Maseno and Winnam Divisions

INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the literature review and related works and source on poverty, its meaning and impact on the people. Guided by the study objectives, the paper evaluates the role of the church in poverty alleviation, the nature of ACK projects, and the capacity of the same institution to alleviate poverty, the impact of ACK within and around Maseno-Winam Divisions. Finally the chapter assessed some of the factors impeding the implementation of ACK projects within the area of study. The Primary Mission of the Christian Church

The primary mission of the Church is preaching the gospel because it is the God's agency to evangelize the

world. Jesus compared the Church to a house holder who went out into the market place to hire labourers into his vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). Jesus also compared the nature of the Kingdom of heaven to a sower who went forth to sow and the seed he sowed was the word of God (Matthew 13:3-23). It is the mission of the Church to provide the kind of place where spiritual life can flourish. Thus, it is the primary mission of the Church to: preach the gospel; teach the saved; provide a spiritual atmosphere; reproduce the character of Christ; and bring joy to mankind. This is the paramount objective of the Church in the world. Sometimes, people may ask: What about the poor and the unfortunate? Doesn't the Church have an obligation to them? Yes, it is necessary to do well and relieve the afflicted, the needy and the poor, but it is not the mission of the Church (Speckman, 2001). Perhaps one of the first problems the Church faced in the first century was the complaint that the widows were being neglected, and that they were not being fed. The apostles did not give up the preaching of the gospel but asked the disciples to choose men to be appointed over the business of caring for the poor (Acts 6:1-7) so as to continue with their primary mission. It was also the duty of preachers, teachers, and elders of the Church to teach the word, and feed the flock (Acts 20:28). The New Testament makes it clear that each Christian has a responsibility to other Christians (Hebrew 3:12, 13).

The Divine Mandate of the Church in Poverty Alleviation

The divine role of the Church in human history should be seen in God's act of creation. In the Genesis story of creation, a special place is assigned to the making of humanity, which is presented as the climax of God's creative undertaking. The first of these stories dignifies Adam (male and female) as the creature made after God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). The second shows God creating the first human out of earth, breathing life into him, and finally settling him and his companion in the garden to live off bounty.

Closely examined, creation stories carry a wealth of meaning at many levels in human life. At God's image, Adam is placed over other creatures and given a calling under God to promote and continue with the work of creation. Here, the human being is portrayed in a way that signifies all his creative duties such as being a teacher, farmer, doctor, artist, scientist, among others. In the second story, Adam's fellowship not only with the creatures of other species (animate and inanimate), he is given a companion, a woman, another of his own kind with whom to share life. Humanity is here again portrayed symbolically in its social character; bringing to birth families, nations and cultures. As the image of God and likeness, Adam is created to be with "others", and to be one who communicates, shares, and co-operates. As such, this human being is an "answerable" creature, one that exercises freedom in calling under God and to be accountable to others by reflecting and manifesting the creative power and love of God. The story of creation is, therefore, an affirmation of mankind's social, political, economic and spiritual activities: including giving service to community. Poverty alleviation is thus one of the services which men and women through the church haves the Divine mandate to perform.

The Church's View of Poverty

Poverty in the socio-economic circles is viewed as the inability of individuals to meet basic needs. It is associated with characteristics such as landlessness and unemployment; the inability to provide food for oneself and family; the lack of decent housing and the state of not being able to educate one's children; poor health and lack of access to medical care. It has also been noted elsewhere in this study that poverty is a multidimensional concept that includes inadequacy of income and deprivation of basic needs and rights, such as denied access to productive assets as well as to social infrastructure. While economists and social scientists write about poverty in this basic way, the Church insists that poverty is far more complex. It is 'many-faced', 'many-layered' and 'multi-dimensional' and cannot be reduced to quantities of goods that are, or rather are not, available (Oyugi, *et. al*., 2003).

Most theologians among them Gutierrez (1988), Boff (1990), Theuri (1994) argue that people who suffer poverty life it affected them psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, physically and at the same time it affects their family, community, and social relations. It is, therefore, not possible to consider any single dimension of poverty in isolation as this would drastically reduce our understanding of the phenomenon.

In the Bible, poverty has been referred to as a social phenomenon. Biblical Dictionary Index and Concordance define poverty as lack, need and want (Overbeck, 1976). It is a state of desperation which culminates in social suffering of one and family. This sentiment is well captured in the book of Genesis, which proclaims that: "there will still be five years of famine; and I do not want you, your family; and your livestock to starve" (Genesis 45:11).

Numerous cases of poverty cited in the Bible confirm the fact that poverty is a reality. According to Genesis story, involuntary poverty in all its forms and manifestations is a result of the fall of man and its consequences. Jesus Christ himself recognized the fact that the poor will always be there.

However, the recognition of Jesus of this fact does not imply that the poor should be ignored but be cared for (Acts 6, 7). The ACK affirms that poverty was not part of God's creation, nor will it be part of God's restored creation when Christ returns (Kodia, 2005). There are indications that God the Creator never willed any human

being to be poor or to be deprived of any basic needs (Genesis 1: 22, 28-30).

It is imperative to note that the plight of the poor has both direct and indirect impact on the rich, whether in developing countries or developed ones. More often than not, the poor are always treated with a lot of suspicion in the event of losses and other crimes-related cases. Due to this attitude towards these lowly placed members of society, the poor rank the lowest in status almost in every society and those in positions of leadership only view them as potential voters and people ready for hire by politicians to commit felony. Beyond this the participation of the poor in national issues is not guaranteed because their role is always seen as that aimed at serving the interest of the rich. However, the message of Christ to the poor is that good news will be preached to them for theirs is the Kingdom of God (Matthew 5: 3). This is all the reason why the ACK should be ready all the times to give service to humanity, particularly to the poor.

In the entire Old Testament tradition, poverty is regarded as a scandalous condition that should never exist in the land because it might force one to steal and bring disgrace to God (Proverbs 30:9). The New Testament, however, presents hope and encouragement to the poor despite their tribulations for they will receive blessings of a new heaven and a new earth when Jesus' victory is complete. This is what has informed the ACK's participation in matters of poverty alleviation in both Maseno and Winam Divisions of Kisumu District (Crouch, 1993).

Assistance to the poor is therefore not a new phenomenon to the church. It is as old as the Bible itself. Both the Old and the New Testaments affirm that the prophets' and Christ's intentions were to remind the rich of their natural responsibility towards the very needy of society. If the war against the oppression of the weak by the powerful was to be met; it had to target all those structures that promote this inhuman treatment.

The Law of Moses, for example, safeguarded the interest of the poor by appealing to other members of the community with means to give them a lending hand.

> If any of the towns in the land that the Lord your God is giving you there is a fellow Israelite in need, then do not be selfish and refuse to help him. Instead, be generous and land him as much as he needs. Do not refuse to lend him something, just because the year when debts are cancelled is near (Deuteronomy 15:7-9).

Furthermore, the considerable debts of the poor were waived in the years of Jubilee (Leviticus 25, 27:14).
Jubilee was one of the feasts of the Jews which were to be celebrated once after fifty years. All property would revert back to its original holder. It was to be a year of restoration where the poor who had been bought by the rich were to be released to reunite with their families. During this period, Israelites were to do three things: One to give the soil a rest and not farm; two to free Israelite slaves; and three to return the land and houses to the first owners or their children (Leviticus: 25). Also, in the Old Testament, if a poor person was hungry, he was permitted to eat in the field or vineyard of another (Deuteronomy 23:24-25). The prophets denounced the rich because they had neglected or mistreated the poor (Isaiah 1:23; 10:2; Ezekiel 22:29; Amos 5:11-14). In the New Testament there are similar orders concerning the poor. Jesus witnessed the state of poverty amongst the people and proclaimed the Gospel of liberation against socio-economic injustices and political oppression as implied here below;

> The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has Chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty of sight to the captives;to set free the oppressed and announce that thetime has come when the Lord will save his people(Luke 4:18-19. See also Isaiah 62).

This was a message of hope to those who were materially and spiritually depressed in life. The good News Jesus brought to mankind was not only meant for spiritual nourishment (saving the soul) but it was also to take care of the physical needs of the body by setting man free from all manner of suffering, including social, economic and political injustices. This declaration by Jesus of his true ministry (to the poor), elicited negative reactions towards him from the people which mysteriously led to his total rejection by his own people of means and who saw him as a rebel against the corrupt and unjust social system (Guiterrez, 1990). The poor of whom Jesus referred to were those who are materially poor, who die of hunger and disease, who are illiterate, unemployed, the exploited, persons denied the right to be persons. Thus, the poor do not only lack simply material goods but they also miss, on the level of human dignity, and full participation in socio-political life. Those found in this category are principally peasants, manual labourers, marginalized urban dwellers, and in particular the children and women of these social groups (Theuri, 1994). These are the people whose lives have been forgotten in Winam and Maseno Divisions of Kisumu District and whose need this study attempted to address by evaluating the ACK's involvement in the area.

Since the time of Jesus, the Christian Church has considered itself as the Church of the poor. Christ followers have been charged with the responsibility of taking Christ's gospel to the world today. To be a Christian today, the believer must live according to the command and example of Jesus Christ. He/she must manifest to all the purpose for which Christ came into the world and died, in word and in action: in worship and in service (Ibid.).The condition Christ imposed on Christianity when asked, "Why do you call me, Lord,

Lord, and yet you don't do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46) explains the Church's social responsibility today, which includes visiting prisoners, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, or the captives. Jesus' condition points out clearly the inseparability of Christian faith and concern for social, economic, and political justice.

Guiterrez avers that the gospel commitment of the Church should be like that of Christ who took on full solidarity with humanity, and therefore, should be a commitment to those most in need. When one draws nearer to the poor in order to accompany them and serve them, they are doing what Christ taught them to do when he became their brother, and clothed himself with poverty like them. The privilege of the poor thus has its theological basis in God. The poor are blessed not just because of the mere fact that they are poor, but because the kingdom of God is expressed in the manifestation of his justice and love in their favour. This central feature of evangelization is stressed in God's action of redemption to humanity; He sent His son specifically, who was born poor and lived among the poor to make us rich with His poverty (2 Corinthians 8:9). The separation of religion and life is thus a contradiction of the biblical teaching, since both the Old and New Testaments show God's care for the poor in this world.

Consequently and from the foregoing literature review, poverty can be defined as a state of being in shortage of basic elements required for a dignified living. This could be economic, material, moral, intellectual or spiritual, among others. This relative and subtle meaning of poverty raises one important question: who are the poor? The message of Christ to the poor is that the good news will be preached to them for theirs is the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:18). Kodia (2005) explains three categories of the poor as falling under the following: The first group is the indigent poor. This refers to those who are economically deprived. According to the Biblical references, their poverty could be attributed their own sin whether laziness, extravagance or gluttony; the second group is those who are socially or politically oppressed. In the Old Testament, it was clearly recognized that poverty would not normally just happen. It was usually due to the sins of others- a situation of social injustices, which easily deteriorated because the poor were not in a position to change it. The Law of Moses, for example, emphasized the need for impartial justice in the courts, in particular for the poor and the powerless; the third category is the humble poor. These are those who are spiritually meek and dependent on God for their survival. Oppressed by men, and helpless to liberate themselves, they turn to God for help. It is this third category that the poor came to be synonymous with the pious and this social condition became a symbol of their spiritual dependence.

Marger (1999) also looks at poverty in three different ways: absolute, relative and official. In this case everybody could be poor or rich depending on the scale that is officially in use. According to Marger, poverty is contextual and is subject to changing standards as situations keep on changing- that is different categories of people have different specific standards. For example, there are those who view a vehicle as a status symbol, and for them anybody who has a vehicle is regarded to be rich. To some a house can be a status symbol. Only the rich are assumed to live in permanent glass houses. This kind of standard can be deceptive because it is only based on material possessions but it does not consider intellectual, social or spiritual possessions.

Whatever is the meaning of poverty and the description of the poor, it is in the light of these theological insights and social recognition of our human solidarity that the ACK church responds and faces the issues concerning poverty in the country and more particularly in Kisumu District as a divine mandate. The Anglican Church affirms that poverty was not part of God's creation, nor will poverty be part of God's restored creation when Jesus returns

(Kodia, 2005).

The ACK Church leaders interviewed argued that poverty is a condition that should never happen because it is quite degrading to humanity. They noted that the love of God, which is the root of our dignity, necessarily becomes a loving communion with other human beings and fraternal participation. The Church today must become first and foremost a labour of justice on behalf of the oppressed. They expressed the sentiments in the gospel of John 4:20 which emphasize the fact that one who has no love for the brother he has seen cannot love God who he has not seen. There is no love for God without love for one's brothers and sisters, particularly those in need of help. The Church's involvement in alleviation of human suffering through its social services is therefore a right not a privilege. Christ's inaugural sermon (quoted from Isaiah chapters 9 – 61) clearly indicates that his gospel was a gospel to the poor and his ministry was the fulfilment of God's time which ought to be realized in the social teaching of the Church.

Guiterrez (1984) notes that the poor should not lose heart; instead they should have faith because God through the Church has an efficacious act of charity, of love for neighbours and the poor. This is in a way saying that one fundamental function of religion, and therefore, theology is reflection in the light of faith, on the basis of and about practice. Spirituality is located on the terrain of practice, the terrain of Christian experience of proclaiming the good news that they will cease to be poor and to suffer poverty anymore.

Boff (1988) amplifies Gutierrez's argument on the life of the poor and the duty of the Church when he proposes that the entire life of the Church should be impregnated and renewed by the vigor and the spirit of fighting for employment, health, housing and education of the poor in the society. This view is significant to the study because it emphasizes the divine role of the Church in poverty

alleviation. It is important to note that the two authors' works emphasize the responsibility of the church to the poor, which comprises acts of charity based on their spiritual life while living and working in this strident world. However, the plan of action by the Church to provide for the poor is missing in the two works. In this case, how the church should go about this divine role of providing for the poor is silent, a silence that has been addressed by the present study.

Carothers (1988) details how the poor have remained stark in poverty due to sins and wickedness of the rich who want to have cheap labour for their yards, kitchens and industries. He notes that some Christians are involved in this act yet they are supposed to be the keepers of the poor to show their love for Jesus Christ. The book belabours the meaning and spiritual roots of Christians care for the poor. Carothers further posits that the demand for solidarity with the poor is a demand made of every Christian because it is an apostolic duty. Any denial of the reality of poverty by Christians whether openly or indirectly is an affront to the Gospels and their teachings. Like the aforementioned, this one is also relevant to the present study but too general and fails to state what Christians should actually do to alleviate the problems of the poor. This study is thus different from the cited works in that the focus is on what the church is doing to assist in poverty alleviation than its causes. It also applies the gospel's spiritual solidarity with the poor to their real social and economic situations.

Dorr (1983) refers to the poor as those members of society who are economically deprived and have no status in their own land. He argues that the only option left for them is the moral intervention from such unjust political and economic systems. An option for the poor is part of a universal call for all Christians to be involved in matters of development that can improve the welfare of the weak members of society. It is a serious attempt to build a just society where the concentration of wealth is greatly reduced or eliminated from the hands of a few people. Although Dorr notes that the church ought to be involved in addressing the needs of the poor, he fails to state the nature of involvement, which the present study has addressed by examining development activities of the ACK in Kisumu County.

In Encyclical letter, Pope John Paul VI **(**1976) in *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples) acknowledges the gravity of poverty in the world and its effects on people. The Pope asserts that aid to the poor members of society is not just a matter of eliminating hunger nor reducing poverty, but rather, it should be a question of building a world where every man no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by others or by natural forces which he has no control. He further notes that the luxury of a few is an insult to the wretched poverty of the vast masses. This is contrary to the plan of God and to the honour that is due to him. The Pope concludes by noting that in this anxiety and sorrow the Church sees a situation of social sinfulness, which is all the more serious because it exists in countries that call themselves Christians and they are capable of changing the situation (see also Theuri 1994). Though the Pope was addressing the Catholic communities worldwide, his teaching is still applicable to other churches including ACK in Winam and Maseno Divisions.

Similarly, Pope John Paul II (1987) points out that there are millions of people living in poverty and underdevelopment in the world today; those human beings who lack the goods and services needed for better living are much more numerous than those who possess them. The two encyclicals conclude by noting that Christians have a moral obligation according to the degree of their responsibilities, to take into consideration the plight of the poor in society. A framework of how Christians should be involved is not amplified in the encyclicals, however, they are relevant to the study and the principles stated therein were used to examine the ACK's participation in poverty alleviation in Maseno and Winam Divisions.

Pixley and Boff (1989) in the same vein look at the Church as a divine institution with a moral obligation to address the issues of poverty since it affects every person, but above all Christians, who are the real treasure of the Church. This is very significant because it reveals that the church also belongs to the physical world and depends on material progress of its members. The work does not, however, suggest any plan of action. This study took up some of the challenges made by Pixley and Boff to the Church to find out whether the ACK has lived to its expectations as a Church in assisting the less fortunate members of society in the study areas.

Owazarek*, et al* (2002) aver that God is deeply involved with the life of the people, especially how God, throughout the history of salvation, has shown to be very attentive to the needs of people, particularly of the poor, the exploited and the less cared about in society. Owazarek and his co-authors quote several chapters and verses both in the Old and New Testaments to show how God empowers the people to rid themselves of the conditions of misery they are in, for example, 1 Kings 17:7-24; John 5:1-4; and Mark 6:30-44, they conclude by noting that the Church must be involved in the life of the people, most of all, of the ways through which they are empowered so as to free themselves from the fetters of any type of poverty. This is a classic example of Christian theology of human development manifesting itself in God's desire to liberate the down trodden of society, particularly the poor. The work has a lot of relevance to the present study and was used to evaluate the extent to which the ACK has applied this principle to alleviate poverty.

In a similar vein, Pierli and Maria Ratti (2002), posit that a people's development is not derived primarily from

money but from the formation of consciences and the gradual maturing of thinking and pattern of behaviour. The human person is the principle agent of development not money or technology. The Church forms the consciences by revealing to people the God whom they seek and do not know. It instils in a person the grandeur of the human person, created in God's image and loved by Him; the equality of all men and women as God's sons and daughters, the mastery of the human person over nature; created by God and placed at the human being's service and the obligation to work for the development of the whole person and of all human kind. The originality of the Christian approach to any particular social issue such as poverty alleviation is that, at the heart of any given question there stands the human person, and not profit, power or technology. This is what informs the Christian Churches social teaching which focuses on the primary role the human person must play in the improvement of their own life and future. The study used this emphasis by Pierli and Ratti on the Church as the conscience of society to assess the ACK's role in empowering people in the study areas to improve their standard of living. The Christians of Maseno and Winam Divisions have equal inputs like any other human beings to access world resources as spelt out in the Bible.

The Nature of ACK Projects in Maseno and Winam

NCCK (1983) observes that there is mass poverty in the country due to unreasonable accumulation of wealth by a few inconsiderate members who do not care about the unpalatable hunger on the remaining majority of society. Under the prevailing circumstances the NCCK further notes that the church has a moral obligation to assist the poor and the weak politically, economically, socially, spiritually and morally to feel being part of the system. The same sentiment is expressed in another handbook (n. d) where the NCCK argues that as a Church organization it has a divine mandate to promote issues affecting the spiritual, moral, economic and physical welfare of the people of Kenya to enable them to be in the forefront for their own development. It further claims that the scope of people's effective use of their voting rights for their own welfare would largely depend on their level of awareness of the social dynamic realities that contribute to their impoverishment and potential for transformation. On the other hand, it is only by proper safeguarding of the rights of the poor to vote and participating in societal organs that national policies are not only shaped to accommodate their interests but also support the organizations necessary for them.

The information contained in these two handbooks books is significant to the study because they highlight the fact that the Church has a divine mandate and moral obligation to promote and address issues affecting the poor. This study used the information in the two handbooks by focusing and considering in detail the development activities of the ACK in Kisumu District, which are aimed at improving standards of living of the local people.

Okullu (1974, 1984) notes that African governments use poverty as a political strategy for their own survival and abet corruption, which is a major impediment in the fight against poverty. The achievement of justice, which is a prerequisite of poverty reduction, depends on how much participation is available for the common person demand for justice and full participation in decision-making. Okullu further asserts that Christian's involvement in politics and matters of development aimed at enhancing people's standards of living is a divine command from God. He particularly notes that ACK has taken up the challenge by engaging in matters of development in the Diocese of Maseno South in consultation with the NCCK to improve the local people's standards of living. Although no detailed information on the nature of involvement is given, his dispositions are relevant to the study and provided a good basis for further investigations on ACK's development activities in Maseno and Winam Divisions of Kisumu District.

Olumbe (2003) avers that there is need to view poverty as a multiple deprivation which takes into account political, cultural and spiritual aspects but not in terms of income, which views poverty only in reference to economic deprivation. He notes that the ministry of Jesus as preached by the Church brings out a holistic gospel, which advocates both physical and spiritual freedom. It is a gospel, which has a general emphasis on ministry to the poor in society by addressing all their social, political, economic and spiritual needs.

Olumbe argues further that the early Church had poor people but through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they developed systems to effectively minister to them through the common sharing of resources and as evidenced by the first few chapters of the Acts of the Apostles; the rich Christians ensured that the poor among them were taken care of. More important, however, is a caution to the poor to work hard or else not to expect to live on handouts. The present study used this case to find out ACK's approach to helping the poor in the study area. Whether it is giving fish to the poor or teaching them how to fish for their own survival. The study, for example, tried to find out whether the ACK involves very poor members of Maseno and Winam Divisions in poverty alleviation by training them on how to run and manage small scale business enterprises for survival and on better methods of farming for better crop yields.

Ndung'u (2002) discusses religion in relation to the youth in society. He observes that Africa has not been able to adequately meet the fulfilments of her youth who are crying for social, economic, cultural and spiritual needs, the majority of whom continue to languish in abject poverty due to unemployment. Kenya, for example, is among the 30 per cent (30 %) poorest countries of the world with over forty six per cent (46%) of

the population of 30 million people living below the poverty line. The situation is compounded further by the escalating rate of unemployment in the country and the fact that Kenya's population pattern is broad based with about fifty four per cent (54%) of the people in under 15 year age bracket. The cries of the youth are a challenge to the society and the church, both of which should come up with an urgent agenda to map out ways and means of restoring hope among them. Ndung'u argues that the youth should be involved in decision making on matters that affect them either morally, economically, socially or spiritually. Although there is no direct reference to the ACK in this article, Ndung'u's appeals to the church to address the needs of the youth in all aspects of their lives was basic to the present study. The study, for example, tried to find out whether or not the ACK empowers the youth to the break-even the poverty line. The study recognizes the fact that the youth are the backbone of country's human resources and their empowerment would play a major role in poverty alleviation. The ACK and like any other established churches has a Divine mandate not only to the elder people but also to the youth.

Speckman (2001) argues that economic growth is not the end and measure of success of developmental efforts but the means itself. All attempts at poverty reduction in Africa based on economic growth sponsored by foreign governments have failed because the material conditions of the African Continent are never taken cognizance of, yet these determine what is possible to do in Africa and what is not. Speckman, however, notes that the church adopts the alternative theory of development; a theory that focuses on developing the human potential as a means to poverty management. Under this theory, the empowerment of individuals and groups is necessary because there can be no economic growth without motivated citizens, which the Christian Church through its agencies does. This work is significant to the present study because it was used as a basis to find out whether or not the ACK is using this alternative approach to development in the study area. Hence, it falls within the theoretical framework of this study.

Theuri (1994) presents an erudite study on the situation of poverty in Kenya, its causes and the necessity of the Church's involvement in its alleviation. He observes that the gulf between the rich and the poor in Kenya seems to be impossible to bridge because it increasingly becomes structural, and advances well beyond the reach of policy makers and at times ignored even where projects relating to it fail to take place. He further notes that the Church has a role to play because it preaches the good news that the Messiah proclaimed to the poor. Hence Theuri's work is applicable in the area of study as it attempts to propose clear involvement of the Church in poverty alleviation process.

Kodia (2005) analyses the causes of poverty from all angles including socio-cultural and socio-political factors. He presents ways forward which he terms as partnership between the Church, state and NGOs. He suggests that this partnership should involve multinational agencies as well as ecumenical organizations for such organizations have the capacity to empower the weak economies and stimulate them for growth. Kodia contends further that poverty in a country endowed with enormous natural resources like Kenya is an indication that citizens have failed to exercise responsible stewardship. The blame for this however, does not solely rest on the governing authority, but also on the Ministers of religion who could insist and convince the people of the true ownership of the earthly wealth. Furthermore, Kodia claims that despite having Christian leadership in many African nations, and despite having many rich Christians, there is still poverty, which creates the impression that the Church is inept and solely responsible for the socio-economic decay in society that has created inequality. He urges the church to reassess her role in the globalized economy and rediscover her mission and objective to the world. Though this work does not refer to ACK in particular, it guided the present study in evaluating ACK role in poverty alleviation.

The ACK Capacity to Alleviate Poverty

Mugambi (1990) notes that Africa is portrayed in all the mass communication media in the whole world as a Continent which is in deep crises, crises from which it cannot recover. Yet Africa is also portrayed as the most religious Continent in the world. Mugambi avers further that it appears as if Africa is overburdened with religion and as if God does not listen to the prayers of Africa. How can the most religious Continent in the world be abandoned to perish in poverty? Yet in the Bible, God is deeply involved with the life of his people; especially how God, throughout the history of salvation, has shown to be very attentive to the needs of the people, particularly the poor, the exploited and the less cared about in society (1 Kings 17:7 – 24; John 5:14, Mark 6:30 – 44). Issues raised by Mugambi are pertinent to the present study. For instance, the study would set out to find out; to what extent is the ACK fulfilling God's desire for His people that they 'may have life and life to the full' (John 10:10) in both Maseno and Winam Divisions? How can a religious Continent continues to suffer in the pangs of poverty? This and very many other related questions form the basis for this study.

Taylor (2003) presents poverty as a dominant feature of the world today. More than a billion people have to survive on less than a dollar a day. It is an overwhelming reality. While impressive reduction of poverty has been achieved in some parts of the world between 1970s and 1980s, the majority of the people in developing world still languish in abject poverty. He avers that the teaching of the Churches about poverty and wealth and how they relate to the gospel and the Church Mission is extremely

varied, even contradictory. Poverty itself, for example, can be God driven and which the same God approves, or it can be something which God is absolutely opposed to (Matthew 26:11).

Church leaders and preachers, proposes Taylor, are one source of confusion because they are accused of saying different things or not saying very much at all; their teachings on poverty and wealth vary from one church leader to another. Taylor argues further that the varied voices of the Churches can be organized into four reasonably coherent groups or types; spiritualizing; prosperity; liberation and holistic; though neither these groups nor their opinions are entirely exclusive or discrete. Taylor's claim on teaching of the Churches about poverty and wealth creates a paradox on the Church's role in poverty alleviation, though it provides a useful basis for the study in evaluating the ACK's position.

NCCK (2002) enlists the normal programme work of the Council along its four major areas of focus, namely theology, advocacy, development and general secretariat. In the area of development, which is the focus of this study, the Council notes that the ultimate goal of development programmes is to empower member Churches (ACK being one of the mainstream members) and communities with skills and knowledge necessary for economic development and social sustainability. The programmes endeavour to respond appropriately to issues of poverty reduction and factors that impoverish and marginalize people. The overall objective of the programmes is to facilitate Churches and communities identify their needs, acquire necessary resources and promote service that is holistic, relevant and sustaining.

The report is an overview of NCCK development programmes in conjunction with member churches. The information provided in this report about development activities of the NCCK member Churches are scanty and do not provide detailed information on poverty alleviation. However, the study used information provided herein to analyze ACK's development activities in Kisumu County.

Obeng (1999) notes that there is a clear example of vicious circle involving poverty and deteriorating ecosystem in Africa. The groaning situation can be deduced from these problems which contribute to poverty in Africa and which in turn create environmental problems; some of which have arisen as a result of natural factors while others are caused by human activities. He argues that cultural practices, corruption, poor methods of settlements, ethnic factionalism, greed for power and wealth are some of the human actions which have accentuated extreme poverty in Africa. He further notes that Christians and the Church in its entirety have a contribution to make to lessen or reverse the situation for the restoration of the integrity of creation on the African continent. Although this work does not directly refer to the ACK, it has touched on issues that the present study set out to evaluate and is therefore quite relevant to the work.

Getui (1999) claims that it is obvious there is food shortage in Africa which has led to hunger, malnutrition and starvation. This scenario has been caused by growing population and misuse of the environment. She notes further that the food crisis issue is within reach and can be controlled if only all interested parties, including the Church and the poor, participate in decision making on the use of productive resources in a move to lessen the gap between the rich and the poor. She notes that the Church and more so theologians have a responsibility to make the gospel relevant and meaningful to the peoples of various situations. The present study sought to highlight how this could be made possible by looking at the activities of the ACK, which are aimed at increasing food security to the poor within the study areas.

Kunhiyep (2008) paints a gloomy picture of the African Continent by claiming that as the rest of the world is progressing, getting richer and enjoying a better standard of living, Africa is deteriorating rapidly; the population is growing poorer, hungrier and sicker. Countries are consumed by war and ravaged by diseases like HIV and AIDS and the number of widows and orphans increasing daily. He further notes that the root cause of Africa's poverty include compact corruption, overpopulation, inadequate health care, illiteracy, war and civil unrest. He claims that Christians are implicated in some of the factors that contribute to keeping Africa in poverty. In the Rwandan genocide, for example, Christian Churches and other religious institutions faced extensive criticism not only for their failure to act in the face of atrocities or the individual transgressions of the Church members, but also for their role in teaching obedience to state authority and in constructing ethnic identities in their role as centres of social, political, and economic power allied with the state in preserving the status quo (Longman, 1997). Churches in Rwanda were tainted, not by passive indifference, but by errors of commission as well. Christians, however, ought to know that they are the salt and light in Africa and need to understand what the scriptures have to say about poverty and what it means and how they should approach it. This work is quite relevant to the present study as it sought to find out what the ACK is doing in response to the poverty situation in the study areas.

While all the works cited above are somehow related to the field of the Christian Church and Poverty alleviation, none of them have delved specifically into the issue of the impact of the ACK on poverty alleviation in Maseno and Winam Divisions of Kisumu County. This study, however, acknowledges and used the information from these works in as far as they assisted in the researcher shaping, and articulating views on the impact of the ACK on poverty alleviation in Maseno and Winam Divisions of Kisumu District and the entire country.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers in religious studies find it imperative to refer to the Bible as their source of reference on matters of human development. A study of the Christian Church in poverty alleviation therefore falls into this category. The idea is explicated further by the fact that present day Christians are more concerned about how the Bible functions today and how it addresses their present concerns, than about its origins and the historical importance of its stories.

It is imperative to note that the issue of poverty is a world-economic concern. It is, however, the authors' view that the Church can only have a legitimate and significant role to play when focused in a local and particular context and when guided by a sound theological rationale, which is quite explicit in the Bible.

The bible is so central in the lives of the majority of Christians to the extent that in times of vulnerability such as hunger, disease, poverty, among others, there is increased tendency among Christians to turn to the Bible for solutions. The Church from which the Bible claims its foundation is an institution that has much credibility among Christians. Additionally, the Churches and because of their close contact with the poor can have an immense influence on development on the people of God. It is this strong influence of the Church and the Bible on the people that informed the theoretical framework for the study, which was guided by the Christian theory of human development as advanced by R.M. Thomas (1990). Thomas noted that there are two basic goals to this endeavour: One, to achieve life everlasting in the company of God and Christ in heaven, and, secondly, to do God's will in one's daily life on earth by being responsive to the needs of the poor.

These two basic goals are the immediate goal of human development and are in turn based on the Christian principles of charity and justice explicit in the Christian Church's social service to community as amplified in the literature review. This theoretical model, assumes an emancipator purpose specifically aiming at liberation of the poor from such conditions as famine, disease and ignorance. As a theory, it embraces the integral human development manifested in the higher virtue of love: the end result which finds ultimate fulfillment in communion with God himself. The study identified Christian action based on the principles of charity and justice as a catalyst in the ACK's involvement in poverty alleviation programmes, which fits well in Christian theory of human development. The virtues of charity and justice as the basic and most important means of human development aimed at liberating the poor from their unnecessary sufferings is found in the entire prophetic and sapential traditions, which tie in the love of God to love of the poor and downtrodden in society. The whole prophetic movement in the Old Testament is about calling back the people of Israel to embrace God's justice in the covenant. In this process, prophets Amos, Jeremiah and Isaiah are the champions. Amos is commonly referred to as a prophet of justice. One of his strongest pronouncements is: They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes; they trample the head of the poor in the dust of the earth (Amos 2:7). Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless and the widows (Jeremiah 22:3-4. In these verses, God is not only portrayed as the vindicator of the oppressed; he is at the same time the judge of the oppressor.

This idea is quite explicit in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ who reckoned charity and justice as the basic pillars of the spiritual life of the human person. Christ showed his commitment to integral human development by commissioning his disciples to heal the sick and help the poor (Matthew 6:1-4, Luke 4:18-19). This is the same mission that ought to embrace the ACK's responsibility in Winam and Maseno Divisions in addition to its spiritual commitment. Christ' mission was inclusive and included every person who was in need regardless of cultural, religious and ethnic background (Kodia, 2005).

This theoretical model has been advanced further by liberation theologians who have underscored the involvement of the Church as the basis for the liberation of the poor in society. Influenced by the same concept of human development, African theologians like Mugambi, Theuri, Getui and Bojo are reconstructed ionists. They marry the West with the African way of life to make their case for the poor. This study falls into this category (Theology of Reconstruction). They have emphasized the need for the Church and the Christian community as a whole to be concerned with the plight of the poor, the oppressed and the outcast. This will give hope for mankind to develop into a new and perfect society where people live in harmony; without greed, envy, nor being selfish anymore but community-minded. Proponents of this theory believe that a religious perspective has to be prominent in any dealings with human beings, especially in attempts to improve the quality of human life. This view is not only based on the belief that human beings are created in God's 'image and likeliness' (Genesis 1:26), but also on the sociological view that religion creates a symbolic universe that legitimates earthly structures.

The theory of human development is quite in line with the ACK's theology and philosophy of development (Bouwsma, 1988), which can be summarized as follows:-

i) God is the creator and judge of the universe; he expects his creation to radiate his glory.

ii) God created man in His Image, then, man shares in God's creativity.

iii) Man, created in God's Image, is commanded to subdue the earth, and then man is called to manage world resources to the glory of God.

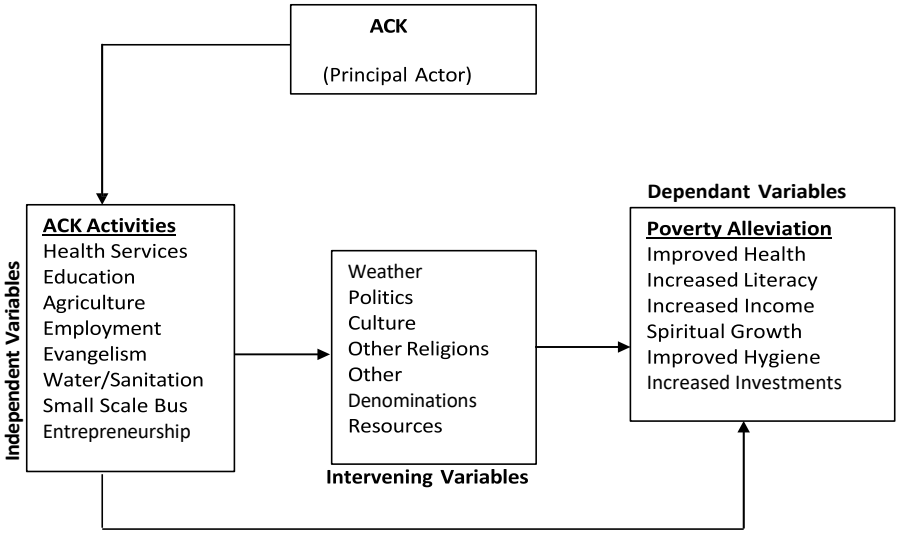

Figure 1: Relationship between ACk Activities and Poverty Alleviation
Source: Authors

iv) In view of man's nature and his relationship with the creator, the Church of Christ should cater for the whole man.

The above author points towards the theology of stewardship and active participation or making the world a better place for all including the poor is a divine mandate of the Christian Church.

An important element in the ACK's theology and philosophy of development is the emphasis on "holistic" development. The ACK acknowledges the fact that humankind does not consist of separate entities of body and soul; rather these are inseparable complementary parts of one person. The Church has a ministry towards all mankind's needs whether spiritual, physical or social. This stand by the ACK on human development corroborates John Calvin's view on church stewardship. Calvin argued that the task of the Church should not be confined within the narrow limits of spiritual conversion but should extend to the physical and social needs of those whose blood will be required of the Church ministers, since, if it is lost, it will be their negligence. The study thus recommends that the church has a particularly significant contribution to make towards human development and poverty alleviation. The Church involvement in human development and poverty alleviation is a bona fide function of the Church of Christ, the one whose spirit was to bring good news to the poor and claim the year of jubilee or liberty to all (Luke 4 : 18-19; Isaiah 62).

The theology of development should be based on a vision of the comprehensive well-being of human kind. Human beings are makers of their own destiny, but only on condition that they are conscious of their destiny and their strength and are free from all forms of oppression and exploitation. Furthermore, development work done by the Church should be compatible with the Christian faith based on the premises of love.

The study used this Christian model of human development to assess the extent to which the ACK has used its divine mandate to give social service to the people of Maseno and Winam divisions of Kisumu District. It also tried to investigate whether by using this approach the ACK would make the local people become dependent or independent in their survival strategies.

Conceptual Framework

The mitigation of poverty by the ACK was dependant on its activities (which are the independent variables) in Maseno and Winam Divisions of Kisumu District. The influence of the ACK's activities on the local people's lives is the dependant variables. Whereas, the factors found to influence the implementation of the ACK activities for effective poverty reduction became the intervening variables. These included weather conditions, the political environment of the region, other religions and denominations and, the availability of resources. The availability of resources, both human and financial, for example, may lead to speedy implementation of the church's activities whether in the provision of health services, education, water and sanitation, or the dispatching of qualified agricultural extension officers in the field to train local farmers on better methods of farming and advising them on high quality seeds to plant for maximum yields. This would ensure that the church attained its goal of improving people's health status, increasing their literacy rate and ensuring that farmers get maximum output from their small farms

Culture of wife inheritance, on the other hand, has had a negative impact and impeded the church's efforts to

control the spread of HIV and AIDS. This has led to poor health of those infected or affected as they end up spending so much of their resources in managing the disease at the expense of other commitments such as paying school fees for school going children and/or buying basic necessities for the family's survival.

Though the ACK has tried to seal some of the loopholes and applied checks to counter the negative effects of each of the intervening factors, it appears that the church has not attained its goal of alleviating poverty in the study areas as envisaged due to these factors. However, some remarkable improvements in the local people's standards of living were noted as a result of its intervention strategies.

This conceptual framework suggests a flow of action from the principal actor (the ACK) to its activities, which are the independent variables. The study assumed that the smooth flow of the ACK's activities are influenced, either positively or negatively, by the intervening variables that may lead to a change in the people's standards of living depending on the magnitude of the interventions.

CONCLUSION

The paper explored the existing literature related to the present study and expounded on the theoretical framework that informed it. It depicts the various authors and scholars understanding of the relationship between the Church and socio-economic roles in society based on the premise that the Church is the steward of the earth; it plays the role of co-operation with God the Creator hence has the responsibility towards the poor masses.

The comparable economic and social situation of the poor in the Bible and that of the contemporary society suggests that the Church's mission to the poor is unmerited privilege. It further shows that the Church's involvement in human development is a sacred responsibility under God's direction and is rooted in justice. Injustice springs from the helplessness of people living under squalid conditions and lack the ability to control their life situations. The various works covered have shown that the Church must show justice by empowering the poor and granting them the means which they can use to gain control over their destiny and improve their own standards of living. The chapter further noted that the Church is prepared to deliver the message of hope to all those in need of spiritual, social, political and economic liberation irrespective of one's religious or political affiliation. The church is especially prepared to realize this noble goal by engaging in activities geared towards poverty alleviation by enhancing peoples' participation in solving their own challenges in life. The literature covered has further shown that God of humanity is a God of excellence, and whose plan for humanity is based on his standards of excellence hence the ACK's active participation in development activities aimed at improving the living standards of the poor masses in Maseno and Winam Divisions of Kisumu District.

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