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## An analysis of environment stewardship projects implemented by the Catholic Church in Makindu Sub-county, Makueni County, Kenya

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#### Abstract

The evidence of environmental degradation is all around us especially in the marginalized arid and semi-arid lands. There is a growing concern over environmental destruction due to human activities in the arid and semi-arid lands which has attracted a number of stakeholders and has specifically challenged the church to respond. The role of the church in environmental conservation is not yet much recognized in scholarship and secular agencies. A case study was conducted to investigate the role of the Catholic Church in environmental in Makindu sub-county. A qualitative design was used in the study using questionnaires, interviews, observations and secondary data as research instruments. To analyse the collected data phenomenological approach based on Edmund Hursels principles of analysis was employed. The study revealed that the catholic churches' participation in environmental conservation is tremendous. The church is involved in environmental campaigns, environmental teachings, tree planting, at the pastoral level. This paper therefore has provided an insight into the critical role of the Catholic Church in playing in environmental conservation in Makindu sub-county.

**Keywords:** church, environmental degradation, environment, stewardship, marginalized areas, conservation

### **Public Statement**

The Catholic Church has been at the forefront in the fight against environmental degradation across the country. The church engages in environmental conservation efforts, particularly in the semi-arid areas of Makueni County, Kenya, in order to support the livelihoods of a people. This study sought to assess the role of the church in environmental stewardship in Makindu sub-county, Makueni County as way of showing that beyond spiritual nourishment, the church has a greater role to play to ensure that the people live in safe spaces and the environment is well protected.

### **Introduction**

Land degradation is a vexing and spiral global phenomenon with negative social, economic and political consequences in both developed and third world countries. The native American cree people have a saying about the importance of the environment to human beings, “only when the last tree has been cut, the last river has been poisoned, and the last fish has been caught only when will you realize one cannot eat money.” As a result, this has attracted a number of stakeholders in addressing environmental degradation. Among other actors, churches have been in the frontline in dealing with the problem of environmental conservation. All over the world, people have been engaging plundering the environmental resources in search of food and satisfaction of human needs. And in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, human beings are set on a path of unrepresented environmental degradation. In Genesis 2:15 the Lord took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work and care of it. God gave man the stewardship role with the world to take care of it. For Christians who account for 80% of Kenyans not to be involved in this God given mandate is a violation of the divine mandate. The Catholic Church has to teach her members to ‘obey’ its teachings including environmental stewardship.

Development and environmental conservation are not a new thing in human history. And throughout history human beings have been both, the object and agent of development while pondering on environmental conservation. It means nothing more than human beings acting on the environment to improve conditions (Ingold, 2020: 133-153). Therefore, environmental conservation defined as human beings’ efforts in order to improve his conditions and use the world’s resources prudently. The pre occupation of the churches has been since time immemorial associated with issues of justice but currently there has been a shelf towards championing environmental conservation. Moreover, literature available suggests that development has been measured in economic terms yet the term is a complex one with many facts which deliberately ignored conservation, a spiritual dimension (Ives et al, 2020: 208-217). The spiritual dimension could not be overlooked as it is instrumental in shaping and reshaping human behavior. The incorporation of the church seems to offer potential advantages which as a road map to the attainment of sustainable environmental conservation in many ways. The coming together of the church leaders offers possible opportunities for countries to share experiences on the implantation of sustainable environmental conservation programmes (Ostheimer & Blanc, 2021:377).

The church is possibly a driver of social change as it instills societal values which can encounter poor governance which in many cases has been associated with environmental degradation. In the past the role of the church in environmental conservation was undermined. A number of scholars also influenced this conception or misconception.

### **Description of the area study, scope and data collection procedures**

The study was a case study. Specifically focusing on the role of the catholic church in environmental conservation in Makindu sub-county, Makueni county. The study was conducted in three sub-locations of Makindu sub-county of Kaunguni, Kasuubi and Kalii. The sub-county is a home of many Christian denominations but the study formed on the catholic church targeting 100 participants.

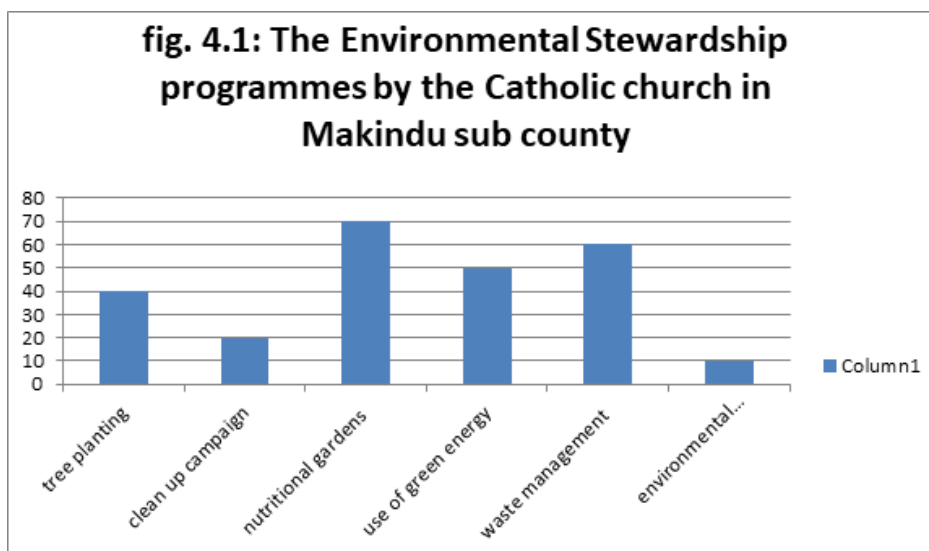
The used both primary and secondary methods in data collection. Questionnaires were administered to the respondents who were able to read and write. Both closed and open-ended questions were answered by the respondents to elicit a good qualitative data from the respondents. Oral Interviews were conducted especially among the illiterate respondents, semi-illiterates and even literates who had problems with the

questionnaires. The data was collected in order to explain the role of the Catholic Church in environmental conservation in Makindu sub-county.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation of the findings**

The researcher undertook a series of steps to detect quality errors. The process involved in detection of outliers, running values, logical inconsistencies and coding errors within the data set. To analyze data collected content analysis, methodology based on phenomenological approach was used. The collected data was analyzed based on identified different members of the Catholic Church who had crucial information on the role of the church in environmental conservation in Makindu sub-county.

The Catholic Church has been engaged in a number of programs which are key to sustainable environmental conservation. The Fig 4.1 below shows initiatives by the Catholic Church in Makindu sub-county to promote environmental conservation. The Catholic Church plays a significant role in environmental conservation based on questionnaire responses, oral interviews, observations. The Catholic Church is engaged in environmental programs such as the establishment of nutritional gardens and clean up campaigns all inside the church compounds. This can be used as a bench work by the members of the church.



The study results will be useful to the Catholic Church in arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya whose members are often greatest hit and struggling to counter the effects of climate change due to environmental degradation. The church is one of the most resilient and ubiquitous institutions in the arid and semi-arid areas. As such, the Catholic Church is in a better place to play a bigger role in the climate change adaptation by initiating stewardship programmes which are research oriented and with high chances of sustainability both in the short, medium and long term.

For instance, Karl Max argued that religion as the opinion of the oppressed masses. In other words, the church was considered as a drug to cure those who were languishing in poverty. In addition, the church was considered as a rehabilitation centre for those who failed to make it in life, and now living in the future promise of heaven. Thus, many church members who by imitation are poor and left out of national economic development (Dickson, Waiko & Nicholas:2018:9). The study by Karl max provided a biased view of the meaning of religion only in economic terms but fading to acknowledge that development without conservation will have none repressions to the so called the poor languishing in poverty.

Environmental degradation is a common existential challenge in the semi-arid counties such as Makindu sub-county, Makueni county. The agro-pastoral communities living these semi-arid regions of Makindu sub-county are oftenly characterized by poverty, food insecurity, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity due to acute land degradation. This has triggered extreme environmental condition like cyclic droughts, perennial water society thus accelerating the rate of environmental destructive activities and threatening the economic livelihoods of the church members who are also residents of Makindu sub-county (Kithuku,2017:

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18-19). In order to reduce and reverse the phenomena, the role of the Catholic Church in environmental conservation has been identified as a strategy. The paper specifically established the environmental stewardship programmes undertaken by the Catholic Church in Makindu sub-county.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that the Catholic Church is actively contributing to the environmental conservation in Makindu sub county. The study recommends that Catholic Church in Makindu sub-county should come up with a frame work for inclusion of the government as a policy formulation then the public as actors and the church itself as a funding agent.

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