

# Leadership Structures and Practices in Enlightened Christian Gathering Churches in Kenya

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**Abstract-** *This study examines the leadership structures and practices within Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) churches in Kenya, focusing on inclusivity, diversity, and women's participation in leadership roles. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research surveyed 267 church members across six ECG branches and conducted interviews with clergy members. The study found significant variation in leadership practices across branches, with some demonstrating more inclusive structures than others. While most churches had established leadership roles, the extent to which these promoted diversity varied considerably. Women's representation in leadership positions differed across branches, with some showing progress and others facing challenges in achieving gender equality. The impact of inclusive leadership practices on church growth was generally perceived as positive, contributing to increased membership, enhanced spiritual maturity, improved community outreach, and greater financial stability. However, the study also identified challenges in implementing inclusive practices, including resistance from conservative members and the need for careful change management. The findings suggest that more intentional efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity in leadership could positively impact church growth and development in ECG churches. Recommendations include developing comprehensive leadership training programs, implementing mentoring initiatives, revising church policies, and fostering an inclusive decision-making culture. This research contributes to the broader understanding of church governance and growth dynamics in contemporary African Christian movements.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Brief background on ECG churches in Kenya

The Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) churches in Kenya are part of a relatively new religious movement founded by Prophet Shepherd Bushiri. Originating in Malawi, the ECG movement has experienced rapid growth and influence, attracting a significant following in several African countries including Kenya (Burgess, 2015). As an emerging Christian denomination in Kenya, ECG churches present a unique opportunity to examine contemporary leadership structures and practices within a dynamic religious context.

### Statement of the problem

While ECG churches have seen substantial growth, there is limited research on their specific leadership structures and practices, particularly in the Kenyan context. The extent to which these churches promote inclusivity, diversity, and equal opportunities in leadership remains unclear. Additionally, there is a need to understand how leadership practices within ECG churches impact their growth and development trajectories. As Kgatle (2018) notes, the role of women in church leadership is an ongoing area of debate and examination across Christian denominations in Africa.

### Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the leadership structures and practices within ECG churches in Kenya. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the existing leadership structures and hierarchies within ECG churches.
2. Assess the level of inclusivity and diversity in leadership positions.
3. Investigate the extent of women's participation in various leadership capacities.
4. Analyze the impact of current leadership practices on church growth and development.

### Research questions

To achieve these objectives, the study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the specific leadership structures and practices that exist within ECG churches in Kenya?
2. To what extent do these structures promote inclusivity and diversity in leadership?
3. What is the level of women's representation and participation in leadership roles within ECG churches?
4. How do the current leadership structures and practices influence the growth and development of ECG churches in Kenya?

By examining these aspects of leadership within ECG churches, this study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of church governance and growth dynamics in contemporary African Christian movements. As Barna and Jacobsen (2020) emphasize, leadership policies and structures play a pivotal role in shaping the growth and development trajectories of Christian denominations and organizations.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of church leadership structures and practices

Christian churches exhibit a wide range of leadership structures and practices, ranging from highly centralized hierarchies to more decentralized, congregational models (Thumma & Travis, 2007). Hierarchical denominations often have well-defined leadership structures with clearly delineated roles and authority vested in bishops, priests, or pastors. In contrast, congregational models emphasize local church autonomy and democratic decision-making processes (Barna & Jacobsen, 2020).

In the African context, church leadership structures are often influenced by a complex interplay of religious traditions, cultural norms, and societal attitudes. For instance, in Nigeria, while some churches maintain hierarchical structures headed by bishops and priests, others have adopted more decentralized approaches with a strong emphasis on lay participation and cell group ministry (Adedibu, 2018; Ojo, 2018).

Women's participation in church leadership

The participation of women in church leadership roles remains a topic of ongoing discourse and examination

across various Christian denominations. While some churches have embraced women's ordination and participation in senior leadership roles, others have maintained restrictive practices rooted in traditional gender norms (Aune, 2014; Chaves & Eagle, 2015). In the African context, women's representation in church leadership positions has been influenced by religious traditions, cultural norms, and societal attitudes. Phiri (2017) notes that while some African churches have embraced women's leadership, others continue to uphold restrictive interpretations of religious teachings and traditional gender roles. Factors that facilitate women's leadership opportunities include progressive theological interpretations, denominational policies that promote gender equality, and societal shifts toward embracing women's empowerment (Kgatle, 2018).

Influence of leadership structures on church growth

Research has identified several key factors that influence the growth and development of Christian churches, including the ability to adapt to changing cultural and social contexts, effective communication and outreach strategies, strong leadership and management practices, and the provision of relevant programs and services (Barna & Jacobsen, 2020; Thumma & Travis, 2007).

Churches with inclusive leadership policies that embrace diversity and empower individuals from various backgrounds, including women, may be better positioned to connect with diverse communities and facilitate growth (Kgatle, 2018). Conversely, rigid leadership structures that exclude or marginalize certain groups can hinder a church's ability to resonate with broader segments of society and limit its potential for expansion (Barna & Jacobsen, 2020).

Theoretical framework: Organizational Culture Theory

Organizational Culture Theory, as developed by Schein (2017), provides a useful framework for understanding leadership structures and practices within religious institutions. This theory explores the shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape behavior and decision-making processes within organizations, including churches.

According to Schein, organizational culture operates at three levels:

1. Artifacts: Visible organizational structures and processes
2. Espoused Values: Strategies, goals, and philosophies
3. Basic Underlying Assumptions: Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and perceptions

Applying this framework to church leadership structures allows for an examination of both the visible aspects of leadership (such as formal hierarchies and roles) and the underlying values and assumptions that shape leadership practices. This can provide insights into how leadership cultures within ECG churches are formed, maintained, and potentially transformed.

Moreover, Organizational Culture Theory can help explain the resistance to change that some churches may experience when attempting to implement more inclusive leadership practices. As Schein argues, changing organizational culture is a complex and often challenging process, requiring sustained effort and commitment from leaders at all levels.

By utilizing Organizational Culture Theory as a lens for examining leadership structures and practices in ECG churches, this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics that shape church governance and growth in the Kenyan context.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Research design (mixed methods approach)

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of leadership structures and practices within ECG churches, encompassing numerical trends and in-depth insights into contextual factors.

Study area and population

The study is conducted in Kenya, focusing on six branches of the Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) church: Nairobi, Bungoma, Kisumu, Eldoret, Mombasa, and Kisii. The target population consists of 900 members of these ECG church branches, as well

as six clergy members in charge of the respective branches.

Sampling techniques

The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970). With a population size of 900, a desired confidence level of 95%, and proportionate allocation across the six branches, a sample size of 267 was selected. Simple random sampling was used within each branch to ensure randomness and equal opportunity for selection.

Data collection instruments

The research instruments include:

1. Structured questionnaires for church members: These gather quantitative data on demographics, perceptions of leadership structures, women's participation in leadership, and the influence of leadership on church growth.
2. Interview schedule for clergy members: This provides qualitative insights into leadership practices, challenges, and strategies for promoting inclusivity and women's participation in leadership roles.

Data analysis methods

The data analysis employs both quantitative and qualitative techniques:

1. Quantitative analysis: Descriptive statistics are used to summarize key characteristics of the sample and responses to scaled items. This includes frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations where appropriate.
2. Qualitative analysis: Data from interviews and open-ended questions are analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to leadership structures, practices, and their impact on church growth.
3. Triangulation: The study uses methodological triangulation, comparing and integrating findings from both quantitative and qualitative data sources to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

This mixed-methods approach allows for a robust examination of leadership structures and practices in ECG churches, combining the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative insights. By

triangulating data from multiple sources and methods, the study aims to enhance the validity and reliability of its findings.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### Demographics of participants

The study included 267 participants from six ECG church branches in Kenya. Gender distribution showed 44.2% male and 55.8% female participants. Age distribution was as follows: 15.7% aged 18-25, 36.0% aged 26-35, 27.7% aged 36-45, 13.9% aged 46-55, and 6.7% aged 56 and above. The largest representation came from the Nairobi branch (23.2%), followed by Kisumu (19.9%) and Bungoma (18.0%). Nearly half of the participants (48.3%) had been church members for 1-5 years.

##### Leadership structures in ECG churches

###### Clearly defined roles and responsibilities

Most participants acknowledged that their church branches had clearly defined leadership roles and responsibilities. One participant from the Nairobi branch stated, "Our church has a well-structured leadership system, with specific roles for pastors, elders, deacons, and department heads." However, some participants noted that the boundaries between roles could sometimes be blurred, indicating potential areas for improvement in role clarity.

##### Inclusivity and diversity in leadership

Opinions regarding inclusivity and diversity in leadership structures varied across branches. Participants from Nairobi and Mombasa branches generally felt their church leadership promoted inclusivity. A participant from Mombasa noted, "Our church has made intentional efforts to include people from different backgrounds in leadership positions." However, participants from Bungoma and Eldoret branches expressed concerns about the lack of diversity, particularly in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic status.

##### Women's representation in leadership

The representation of women in leadership positions emerged as a contentious issue. Some branches, particularly Kisumu and Kisii, reported adequate representation of women in key leadership roles. A participant from Kisii shared, "Our church has several

women in key leadership positions, including pastors and department heads." However, participants from Bungoma and Eldoret branches expressed concerns about the lack of women in senior leadership positions, with women often relegated to supportive roles.

##### Equal opportunities for leadership

Perceptions of equal opportunities for leadership varied across branches. Participants from Nairobi and Kisumu branches generally felt that their churches provided equal opportunities for men and women. However, participants from Eldoret and Bungoma branches noted subtle biases and expectations that made it harder for women to be considered for certain positions.

##### Strategies for promoting inclusivity

Participants offered various suggestions for promoting inclusivity and diversity in church leadership structures:

1. Intentional mentoring and training programs for diverse leaders
2. Reviewing and reforming church policies and practices
3. Conducting education and awareness-raising initiatives
4. Implementing gender diversity targets for leadership boards and committees
5. Creating new leadership roles that leverage diverse perspectives

##### Impact on church growth and development

The study found a generally positive perception of the impact of inclusive leadership practices on church growth. Participants noted several benefits:

1. Increased membership and engagement, particularly among women and youth
2. Enhanced spiritual maturity through diverse teaching and mentoring approaches
3. Improved community outreach and impact through diverse leadership perspectives
4. Greater financial stability through transparent and accountable leadership practices

However, some participants also noted challenges, such as potential resistance from more conservative members and the need for careful change management to maintain unity.

In conclusion, while ECG churches in Kenya show some progress towards inclusive leadership structures, there is significant variation across branches and room for improvement. The findings suggest that more intentional efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity in leadership could positively impact church growth and development. These results align with previous research by Kgatle (2018) and Barna & Jacobsen (2020), which emphasize the importance of inclusive leadership practices for church growth and vitality.

## CONCLUSION

### Summary of key findings

This study explored leadership structures and practices within Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) churches in Kenya, revealing a complex and varied landscape. Key findings include:

1. Leadership structures vary across ECG church branches, with some demonstrating more inclusive practices than others.
2. While most churches have established leadership roles and responsibilities, the extent to which these structures promote inclusivity and diversity varies significantly.
3. Women's representation in leadership positions differs across branches, with some showing progress and others facing challenges in achieving gender equality in leadership.
4. Perceptions of equal opportunities for leadership vary, with some branches providing more equitable practices than others.
5. The impact of inclusive leadership practices on church growth is generally perceived as positive, contributing to increased membership, enhanced spiritual maturity, improved community outreach, and greater financial stability.

### Implications for ECG churches

These findings have several implications for ECG churches in Kenya:

1. There is a need for greater consistency in implementing inclusive leadership practices across all branches to ensure equitable opportunities for all members.
2. The varying levels of women's representation in leadership indicate a need for more intentional efforts to promote gender equality in church governance.

3. The positive impact of inclusive leadership on church growth suggests that adopting more diverse and equitable leadership practices could enhance the overall health and vitality of ECG churches.
4. The challenges identified in implementing inclusive leadership practices highlight the need for careful change management and ongoing dialogue within church communities.

Recommendations for enhancing leadership practices  
Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed for enhancing leadership practices in ECG churches:

1. Develop comprehensive leadership training programs that specifically address issues of inclusivity, diversity, and gender equality.
2. Implement mentoring and sponsorship programs to support the development of diverse leaders, particularly women and youth.
3. Review and revise church policies and practices to remove barriers to inclusive leadership and create more equitable opportunities for all members.
4. Increase the visibility and representation of diverse leaders, including women, in key roles such as preaching, decision-making, and community outreach.
5. Foster male allyship by encouraging and equipping male leaders to actively support and advocate for women's leadership.
6. Enhance theological education and teaching on biblical perspectives of inclusive leadership to address misconceptions and promote a more holistic understanding of church governance.
7. Create networking opportunities for women leaders across different ECG branches to share experiences, resources, and support.
8. Establish clear leadership pipelines that provide pathways for the advancement of diverse leaders, including women, into senior positions.
9. Address work-life balance issues by implementing family-friendly policies that support women leaders in balancing their ministry and personal responsibilities.
10. Foster an inclusive decision-making culture by actively seeking out and integrating diverse perspectives in all levels of church governance.

By implementing these recommendations, ECG churches in Kenya can work towards creating more

inclusive, diverse, and effective leadership structures. This approach aligns with the biblical vision of the body of Christ, where all members are valued and empowered to use their gifts for the building up of the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). As ECG churches continue to grow and evolve, embracing inclusive leadership practices will be crucial for their long-term health, vitality, and kingdom impact in Kenya and beyond.

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