

Men's Perceptions of the Role of Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma, Kenya

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Abstract- *Small Christian Communities (SCCs) play a vital role in the Catholic Church, particularly in Africa. However, in the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma, Kenya, there has been a notable low participation of men in these communities. This study aims to examine men's perceptions of the role of SCCs in the diocese and how these perceptions influence their participation. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing a cross-sectional survey and semi-structured interviews to gather data from men, priests, and religious leaders. The findings reveal that men primarily perceive SCCs as spaces for animating liturgical celebrations, spreading the gospel, and promoting justice and peace. These perceptions align with the spiritual, evangelistic, and social dimensions of SCCs highlighted in the literature. However, the study also identifies a lack of awareness among men regarding the financial contributions of SCCs to the Church. Analyzing the findings through the lens of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the study suggests that men's perceptions of the relative advantage and compatibility of SCCs with their spiritual and social needs play a significant role in shaping their participation. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of understanding men's perceptions in addressing the challenge of their low participation in SCCs. Recommendations are provided to enhance men's understanding and appreciation of the role of SCCs and to foster their active engagement in these communities. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on SCCs and lays the foundation for further research into the factors influencing men's participation in these vital components of the Catholic Church's pastoral and evangelistic mission.*

Indexed Terms- *Small Christian Communities, men's participation, perceptions, Catholic Diocese of Bungoma, Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory*

I. INTRODUCTION

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) have become an integral part of the Catholic Church, particularly in Africa. These communities are small, localized groups of Christians who gather regularly to pray, study the Bible, and support one another in their faith journey (Healey, 2012). In the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma, Kenya, SCCs play a vital role in fostering spiritual growth, community building, and lay participation in the mission of the Church (Wambua & Mueni, 2022). Despite the importance of SCCs, there has been an observed low participation of men in these communities within the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma. This phenomenon has raised concerns among Church leaders and lay members alike, as the active involvement of both men and women is crucial for the success and sustainability of SCCs (Kato, 2005).

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The poor participation of men in Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma is a significant issue that warrants attention. This lack of engagement can have detrimental effects on the mission of the local Church, as SCCs are meant to be inclusive and representative of all members of the faith community (Majawa, 2005). Moreover, the low involvement of men in SCCs may hinder the spiritual growth and development of these communities, as well as limit their potential to contribute to the wider mission of the Church.

Despite the importance of this issue, there is a lack of adequate research specifically addressing the factors leading to the poor participation of men in SCCs in the context of Bungoma Diocese. While some studies have examined the participation of laity in SCCs in other African contexts (Maatha, 1996; Nyoni, 2006), there remains a need for a focused investigation into

the perceptions and experiences of men regarding SCCs in this particular diocese.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine the perception of men regarding the role of Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws upon Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1962) to understand the adoption and participation of men in Small Christian Communities. The theory describes the process by which an innovation, such as the concept of SCCs, is communicated and adopted over time among members of a social system (Rogers, 1983).

According to Rogers, the adoption of an innovation is influenced by five main factors: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. In the context of this study, these factors can help explain how men's perceptions of the benefits, relevance, and ease of participation in SCCs may affect their willingness to engage in these communities.

Moreover, the theory highlights the importance of communication channels and social networks in the diffusion of innovations. This aspect is particularly relevant to understanding how men's perceptions of SCCs are shaped by their interactions with others, both within and outside the Church community (Rogers, 1983).

By applying Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence men's adoption and participation in Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma.

V. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Numerous studies have explored the phenomenon of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa and globally, shedding light on their roles, importance, and the participation of members. Healey (2012) provides

a comprehensive overview of SCCs in Eastern Africa, highlighting their contributions to spiritual growth, community building, and the mission of the Church. He emphasizes the role of SCCs in fostering lay participation and promoting inculturation of the faith. Several studies have specifically addressed the participation of men in SCCs. Kato (2005) investigates the factors influencing men's involvement in SCCs in Uganda, noting the importance of leadership roles and the perceived relevance of SCC activities to men's spiritual and social needs. Similarly, Nyoni (2006) examines the participation of laity in SCCs in the Catholic Archdiocese of Bulawayo, Zambia, and identifies the need for greater awareness of the roles and benefits of SCCs among both men and women. The literature also highlights the various roles and importance of SCCs in the life of the Church. Majawa (2005) describes SCCs as a "new way of being Church," emphasizing their potential to promote spiritual growth, social transformation, and the active participation of all members. O'Halloran (2002) further elaborates on the pastoral and evangelistic functions of SCCs, noting their role in fostering community, facilitating faith sharing, and promoting the social mission of the Church.

VI. GAPS IN LITERATURE

Despite the growing body of research on Small Christian Communities, there remains a lack of specific studies focusing on men's perceptions of SCCs in the context of the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma, Kenya. While existing literature provides valuable insights into the participation of laity in SCCs in other African contexts (Maatha, 1996; Nyoni, 2006), there is a need for a targeted investigation into the factors influencing men's involvement in this particular diocese.

Moreover, the available studies do not adequately address the specific perceptions and attitudes of men towards the roles and importance of SCCs. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for identifying the barriers to men's participation and developing strategies to promote their active engagement in these communities.

This study aims to address these gaps by specifically examining men's perceptions of the role of SCCs in the

Catholic Diocese of Bungoma. By focusing on this particular context and demographic, the research seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide valuable insights for enhancing men's participation in SCCs.

VII. METHODOLOGY

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of men's perceptions of SCCs in the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A cross-sectional survey design is used to gather quantitative data from a sample of men in the diocese. The survey questionnaire includes items assessing men's perceptions of the roles and importance of SCCs, as well as their level of participation in these communities. Stratified random sampling is employed to ensure representation from both rural and urban parishes (Singh & Masuku, 2014).

Qualitative data is collected through semi-structured interviews with a subset of men, as well as key informants such as priests and religious leaders. The interviews provide an opportunity for in-depth exploration of men's experiences, attitudes, and perceptions regarding SCCs (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Data analysis involves both descriptive and inferential statistics for the quantitative component, using SPSS software. Thematic analysis is employed for the qualitative data, allowing for the identification of key themes and patterns in men's perceptions of SCCs (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The study adheres to ethical principles, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participants' rights and well-being (Israel, 2014). Ethical approval is obtained from the relevant institutional review board before commencing data collection.

VIII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the study reveal diverse perceptions among men regarding the role of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma. The survey results indicate that a significant proportion of men (35.8%) view the primary role of SCCs as animating liturgical celebrations on Sundays. This perception highlights the importance men attach to the liturgical life of the Church and the potential for SCCs to enhance their participation in worship.

Another prominent role identified by men is the spreading of the gospel, with 27.5% of respondents emphasizing this function of SCCs. This finding suggests that men recognize the evangelistic potential of SCCs and their capacity to facilitate the sharing of faith within the community.

The promotion of justice and peace emerged as another significant role, with 19.1% of men highlighting this aspect. This perception aligns with the Catholic Church's social teachings and the call for Christians to actively work towards building a just and peaceful society (Majawa, 2005).

Interestingly, only 8.3% of men identified assisting the Church financially as a primary role of SCCs. This finding may indicate a need for greater awareness among men regarding the potential of SCCs to contribute to the financial sustainability of the Church. Analyzing these findings through the lens of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1983), it becomes evident that men's perceptions of the relative advantage and compatibility of SCCs with their spiritual and social needs play a significant role in shaping their participation. The emphasis on liturgical celebration and gospel sharing suggests that men are more likely to adopt and engage in SCCs when they perceive these communities as enhancing their spiritual life and facilitating their role in evangelization.

The findings also resonate with existing literature on the roles and importance of SCCs. Healey (2012) and O'Halloran (2002) have highlighted the multifaceted nature of SCCs, encompassing liturgical, evangelistic, and social dimensions. The perceptions of men in

Bungoma Diocese reflect this diverse range of roles, indicating a growing awareness of the potential contributions of SCCs to the life of the Church and society.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable insights into men's perceptions of the role of Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma. The findings reveal that men primarily perceive SCCs as spaces for animating liturgical celebrations, spreading the gospel, and promoting justice and peace. These perceptions underscore the spiritual, evangelistic, and social dimensions of SCCs and their potential to engage men in the life and mission of the Church.

Understanding men's perceptions of the role of SCCs is crucial for addressing the challenge of their low participation in these communities. By recognizing the aspects that men value and prioritize, the Church can develop targeted strategies to enhance their engagement and create a more inclusive and vibrant experience of faith within SCCs.

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on SCCs and lays the foundation for further research into the factors influencing men's participation in these communities. It highlights the importance of considering men's perspectives and experiences in the ongoing efforts to strengthen and sustain SCCs as a vital component of the Catholic Church's pastoral and evangelistic mission.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to improve men's understanding and appreciation of the role of SCCs and to enhance their participation in these communities within the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma:

1. Develop targeted formation programs and workshops that highlight the spiritual, evangelistic, and social dimensions of SCCs, emphasizing the aspects that resonate with men's interests and priorities.

2. Encourage the leadership of the diocese and parishes to actively promote the importance of SCCs and the vital role of men's participation in these communities.
3. Foster collaboration between SCCs and existing men's groups, such as the Catholic Men Association, to create synergies and encourage cross-participation.
4. Identify and showcase successful examples of men's engagement in SCCs, both within the diocese and beyond, to provide role models and inspiration for other men.
5. Conduct further research to explore the specific barriers and enablers to men's participation in SCCs, using the findings to inform the development of targeted interventions and support mechanisms.

By implementing these recommendations, the Catholic Diocese of Bungoma can work towards creating a more inclusive and empowering environment within SCCs, one that values and nurtures the participation of men in the life and mission of the Church.

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