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**The Church's Integral Mission as an Enabler to Community Development: A Case Study
of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan**

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Episcopal Church of South Sudan**



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Abstract

Purpose: This study seeks to examine the role of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan (ECSS) in the process of community development within the Wau Diocese with a particular regard to the ways in which the church fills the void left by the government in the provision of education, health and social services.

Methodology: This study was a mixed-method research study, conducted amongst 435 participants of churches and church leaders using questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, while qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings: The research shows that ECSS positively impacts community development by enhancing education and healthcare and advocating for human rights and non-violence. Its main challenges include financial limitations, political interferences, and cultural factors that hamper its work. It also finds that faith-based organisations should involve themselves with government and non-governmental organizations, undertake more outreach, and address structural challenges to service delivery through training and development efforts.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The implications of the study suggest that faith-based organizations like the ECSS can serve as pivotal actors in supplementing state functions in fragile settings, especially when empowered through partnerships, policy support, and community engagement. Therefore, the study concludes that sustainable development requires enhanced resource mobilization, stronger collaborations, and systemic reforms.

Keywords: *Episcopal Church, Community Development, Education, Healthcare, Social Justice*

JEL Codes: *I25, I18, Z12, O55*

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INTRODUCTION

Churches have served key functions in the development of societies especially in areas that are socially and economically troubled, or coming out of crises in their political systems. Research has established that faith-based organizations play a critical role in the delivery of education, health, and social services where state provision is often lacking or inadequate especially in conflict and post-conflict countries (Agensky, 2019; Kindersley & Rolandsen, 2019). Hearing how religious bodies have offered social services like schools, hospitals and counselling services show how they are involved in empowering and transforming societies (Kiri, Riak, & Aniny, 2020). Although South Sudan became an independent nation in 2011, it faces numerous challenges that include political instability, poor governance, and weak institutions, which has led to widespread poverty among communities of the country (Wilson, 2019).

The Episcopal Church of South Sudan or ECSS has also endeavor to overcome these challenges through educating people, offering health services, and fighting for social justice (Patricia & Etukei, 2019). Education remains a significant issue because the government had not adequately funded the creation of learning institutions, thus resulting in high illiteracy levels as well as low levels of vocational training (Seri-Hersch, 2017). Schools and training centres affiliated to ECSS have to some extent addressed this problem by ensuring that the affected communities receive both formal and informal education (Sherman-Wilkins & Thierry, 2019).

The health care segment has clinics and mobile health projects for the management of maternal health, child death, and disease outbreaks (Williams & Njoroge, 2017). Even today, health care is still limited in South Sudan, and many of the communities living in rural areas rely solely on faith-based health facilities. ECSS has not only enhanced access to healthcare needs but also fostered linkages with other international organizations to develop more health service provision and medical education (Mugambi, 2021).

Social Justice another crucial area of development where ECSS has posted significant achievements. The church has been involved in efforts aimed at negotiation of peace and reconciliation and in advocating for human rights (Rhoads & Sutton, 2020). This has involved engaging in the settlement of conflicts by providing conflict resolution services such as mediating between feuding parties and advocating for women rights (Santschi, 2014). However, this has not been an easy journey for the Church since it has its hurdles such as financial barriers, political intervention, and cultural suppositions that hinder the impact of social interventions (Kioko, 2020).

Problem Statement

Despite the prominent role of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan (ECSS) in addressing community needs within the Diocese of Wau, there is limited scholarly research that systematically explores its contributions to development. While the Church has stepped in to fill critical service gaps in education, healthcare, and social justice due to weak state institutions, its efforts remain largely unexplored and anecdotal. Existing studies fail to provide empirical insights into how the ECSS executes its integral mission amid challenges such as political instability, financial constraints, and cultural barriers. This study seeks to bridge this gap through evidence-based analysis.

Study Objectives

The following specific objectives will be achieved in this study:

- i. Examine the role played by the Episcopal Church of South Sudan in the participation in community development efforts particularly through education.
- ii. The following research questions were developed to guide the study with regard to the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and its role in promoting and healthcare:
- iii. : revealing the roles it has played in supporting, advocating for and advancing social justice in the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The contribution of faith-based organizations in the process of community development draws on various theories. The Ladder of Participation Model by Arnstein (1969) highlights the different levels of community participation in development projects. This model distinguishes between non-participation, formal tokenism, and citizen control. In the case of South Sudan, the example of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan (ECSS) is indicative of partnership and delegated authority within which religious organizations, including schools and hospitals, work with communities as partners to support education and healthcare (Agheny, 2019). Similarly, the Social capital theory postulates that social capital consists of the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate collective activities for the welfare of all in the society (Putnam 1993). ECSS utilizes the enhanced social capital in that the development programs are implemented through engaging relevant target populations or communities in building trust and relations.

Conceptual Framework

This research study therefore fits within the conceptual framework of ECSS centred on three key aspects of community development, namely education, health, and social justice. According to the framework, interventions in these areas by ECSS results in: enhanced literacy levels; improved health status; and increased social integration. The authors Kiri, Riak, and Aniny suggest that the affected religious organizations exercise considerable influence over these development outcomes. According to Patricia & Etokei (2019), the framework assumes that such aspects contribute to community resilience and promote sustainable development.

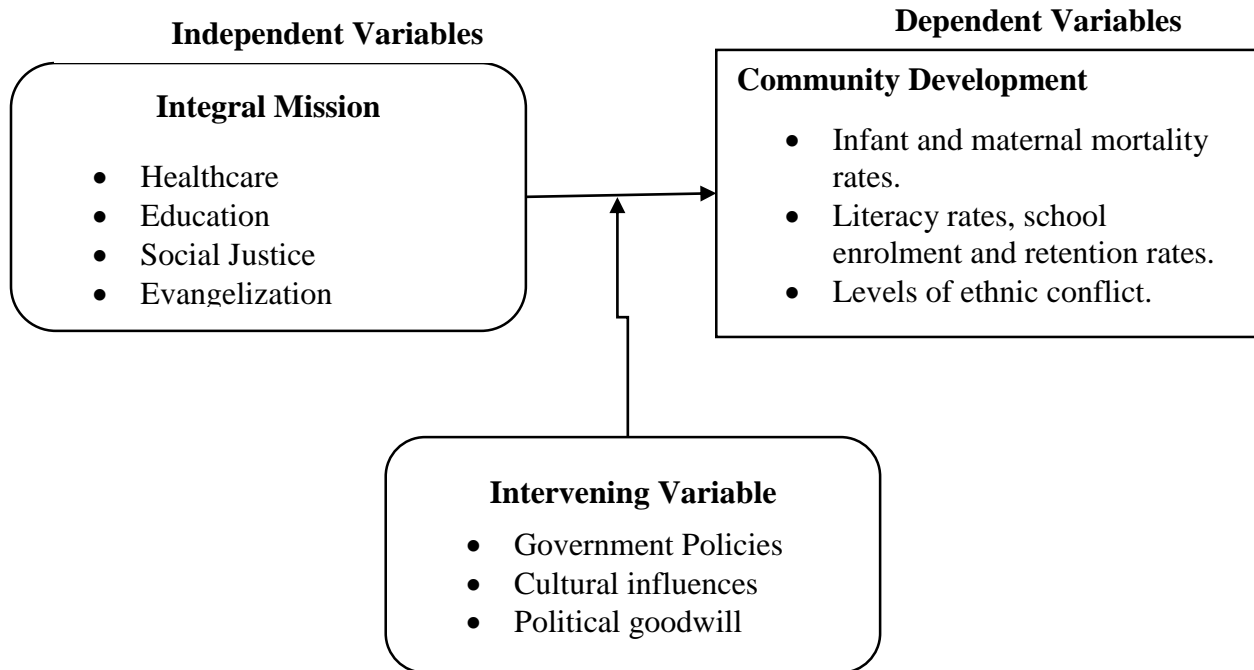


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Empirical Review

Prior studies have emphasized the importance of faith-based organizations in a community development process. Agensky (2019) in his work on religion, government, and humanitarianism in South Sudan also examined the importance of religious actors in peacebuilding and service provision. In a related vein, Rhoads and Sutton (2020) discuss community justice in South Sudan, which reveals that churches are frequently involved in handling community disputes and delivering services where the state fails to do so.

Seri-Hersch (2017) elaborated on the historical need for religious schools arguing that faith-based schools have played a historical role in delivering education to rural areas. Sherman-Wilkins and Thierry (2019) also pointed out that such institutions help to ensure that educational inequalities are bridged as it avails affordable and accessible educational services. In many parts of Africa, independent churches have historically stepped in to provide healthcare services in underserved and remote areas, especially where government systems have failed to ensure equitable distribution of health resources. In this regard, Mugambi (2021) has also argued that religious organizations can improve the delivery of health care by developing partnerships and training.

The social justice impact of ECSS has been established and documented. In the context of conflict resolution and reconciliation, Santschi (2014) looked at traditional authorities and local justice systems with a focus on the Church in South Sudan. Kioko (2020), on human rights, noted the position of the church in promoting human rights and combating gender-based violence. However, there has been some progress in this regard: political influence and cultural opposition remain major challenges for the Church's social justice programs (Kindersley & Rolandsen, 2019).

Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature regarding the contributions of faith based organisations in community development, there are still some issues that scholars find centralised. Also, there is a lack of empirical research on the longevity of the faith-based development programs in post-war contexts such as Sudan (Wilson, 2019). This study seeks to fill such gaps through an evaluation of the impact and sustainability of ECSS in education, healthcare, and social justice for community development.

METHODOLOGY

This study is an empirical case study that investigates the role of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan (ECSS) in community development within the Diocese of Wau. Primary data was collected using a mixed-methods approach, involving semi-structured questionnaires administered to 300 church members and key informant interviews conducted with 135 church leaders. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select participants. A pilot study validated the instruments, and reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.8$). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for quantitative responses and thematic analysis for qualitative insights.

Semi-structured interviews and self-administered questionnaires were used to gather data. The quantitative part involved a survey, which aimed at evaluating the respondents' views regarding the organization's involvement in education, healthcare, and social justice. The qualitative approach included focus group discussions with the leaders of churches and other residents to understand ESCC's challenges and the efficacy of the approaches it uses. To ensure that the data collected was reliable, pilot test was conducted on 30 respondents while face validity was ascertained through external tutor review.

As for the quantitative data, descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages were used to determine levels of community satisfaction with the contributions of ECSS. The open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis where the responses were coded with the intention of identifying the recurrent themes and patterns. Thus, the use of both quantitative and qualitative data assured comprehensiveness in identifying the Church's contributions to development and the challenges that need to be addressed.

RESULTS

Contribution of ECSS in Education

The respondents also indicated that they benefited from education by 75% and vocational training by 65% while acknowledging the role played by ECSS. Scholarship provision has been limited but has assisted financially challenged students enabling learning institutions to reach out to marginalized groups.

Table 1: Contribution of ECSS in Education

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Increased literacy rates	75%
Vocational training opportunities	65%
Scholarship provisions	50%

Contribution of ECSS in Healthcare

This research has revealed that ECSS has developed fixed health centers and traveling clinics for health care services. Only 30% of respondents have not benefited from maternal and child health services, while only 40% have not accessed vaccination programs.

Table 2: Contribution of ECSS in Healthcare

Healthcare Initiative	Beneficiaries (%)
Maternal & Child Health Services	70%
Vaccination Programs	60%
General Medical Care	55%

Contribution of ECSS in Social Justice

Looking at survey results, 68% of participants are of the opinion that ECSS has enhanced community relations and conflict resolution. However, political interferences and cultural resistances remain as key hurdles in the implementation of Church social justice initiatives.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research carried out in this paper provides substantial evidence that ECSS has positively impacted the development of community in South Sudan focusing on education, health, and human rights. Circumstances such as improvements in literacy, vocational education/training, and school enrolment all point to the Church in closing the education gaps (Seri-Hersch, 2017; Sherman-Wilkins & Thierry, 2019). According to a study, church operated schools record higher levels of student retention compared to the government owned due to the emphasis on moral values and discipline (Patricia & Etukei, 2019). But still, financial constraints and a lack of adequate teaching tools remain the main challenges that affect the sustainability of these efforts (Kiri, et al., 2020).

One of the focused areas that have benefited from ECSS outcomes is the healthcare sector. Mission-based healthcare facilities also offer comprehensive antenatal and postnatal care, lower mortality ratios, and immunization services among a vulnerable population (Williams & Njoroge, 2017). Research findings show that religion also contributes to disease prevention and control by leading sensitization campaigns on hygiene and sanitation (Mugambi, 2021). Still, inadequate funding and shortage of medically-trained human capital have remained major issues that negatively impact the sustenance and growth of health care programmes.

Such interventions have also contributed to its role in peacebuilding and social justice. This has seen the church intervene, by mediating between the feuding factions then supporting executable reconciliation (Rhoads & Sutton, 2020; Santschi, 2014). Also, ECSS has offered psychosocial support and trauma care, including delivering counselling services to victims of conflicts and gender-based violence, which enhance social bonding and community recovery (Kioko, 2020). However, social justice interventions face challenges such as resistance from culture, politics, and security (Kindersley & Rolandsen, 2019).

Nevertheless, the impact of ECSS toward community development cannot be underemphasized. The sustainability of these interventions should be improved through collaboration with the

government organizations, the international organizations and other stakeholders. Through proper capacity building, better financial management policies, policies, and the promotion of better policies ECSS can further contribute towards the development of the nation.

Overall, ECSS has contributed remarkably in education, health, and social sectors across the country. However, for these efforts to be sustainable, funding challenges need to be addressed, collaboration with the key stakeholders improved, and long-term community development policies and strategies outlined. Future research can identify the further ways to enhance the involvement of faith-based organizations in effective post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable development.

Recommendations

Based on the implications of the findings presented in this study, the following recommendations are offered to improve the effectiveness of ECSS's community development activities.

First, ECSS should raise partnerships with international organizations and development agencies to support funding for education, health and social causes. Long-term cooperation with the international donors and NGOs will create sustainable funding for the projects that continue even after the initial grants are given. Moreover, it should expand production and have income-generating activities specifically for funding its development programs. Perhaps, more sustainable activities like farming or skills development training could be established to provide for these basic needs.

Second, we need to enhance community involvement in development projects wherever we are implementing the projects. Another key finding was the recommendation for ECSS to engage locals in decision-making concerning education, health, and social justice initiatives. Consultative councils with community representatives, teachers, and healthcare workers will help to coordinate interventions in response to the needs of the targeted population. This will ensure more sustainability because people will keep on emulating and supporting the programs for a more long-term results because they will own them.

Third, to enhance its efficiency in development work, ECSS should champion for policy changes that favouring faith based organizations. Therefore, efforts should be made to facilitate dialogues with policymakers so that they foster a favorable environment for faith-based institutions thus minimising political interjections and enhancing symbiotic relations between faith-based institutions and government departments. Advocacy should aim to lobby for legal support, to fight for tax incentives for development projects and the integration of faith based organizations in the development agenda of the country.

The following guidelines can help ECSS improve its mission of promoting community development and overcome the barriers to change: Intensifying partnerships, engaging the public, lobbying for policy support, developing institution, and incorporating technology are the next steps towards the sustainability of ECSS initiatives in the South Sudan.

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