



THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIAL-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNITY: FOCUS ON REDEEMED GOSPEL CHURCH IN MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

Across the globe, questions have emerged on the role the church should play in enhancing community development. A majority of scholars have agreed that the Church has an integral responsibility in creating an environment fit for socio-economic development in any country. For instance, churches have been seen creating awareness through seminars. Nonetheless, some countries have recorded the participation of the church in quite a number of educational and healthcare facilities that are rooted to the Church. The Roman Catholic and the Lutheran churches are some examples that have enormously influenced the lives of many in socio-economic development. This paper seeks to explore the role played by the Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) in socio-economic transformation of the community in Makueni County besides its evident spiritual transformation. In achieving this objective, the paper uses empirical qualitative "ethnographic" design. With a sample of 30 churches across the County, participatory ethnographic interviews and questionnaires were used as the main methods of data collection. Analysis of the collected data was then done qualitatively, and the results presented in themes. The study finds that education, healthcare and agriculture are among other sectors in which the Redeemed Gospel Church has played a role in development.

Keywords: healthcare, agriculture, education, Redeemed Gospel Church, socio-economic, spiritual transformation

1. Introduction

Solomons (2012) defines development as a process that involves economic and social transformation, change as well as evolution in bestowing the human race to a more

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progressive state. It is agreed that development ought to result in capacity building especially as an investment in the people through commitment to life changing processes that can better shape the forces that affect peoples' lives. Economic development today is directly linked to education (Solomons, 2012; Masilela, 2012; Terreblanche, 2012). Both Church and State have a role to play in the development of the society. However, the two are observed as occupying two varying positions in society, each of which is typically attributed to its functions. While the church is considered a moral and spiritual authority, the state is regarded as comprising political power (Schoeman, 2011; Masilela, 2012). This paper focuses on the Church in order to bring out the religious perspective of the role it plays in economic and social development of the community. Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) which is the area of focus in this paper, is a Pentecostal church whose statement of faith are stated in Article 6 of the RGC's constitution as follows:

- 6.1 We believe in the Holy Trinity, the only one true God and the Godhead consists of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; Three in One and One in Three.*
- 6.2 We believe the Bible to be the inspired authoritative Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16 – 17, 2 Peter 1:21).*
- 6.3 We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, His incarnation, crucifixion, death, Divine bodily resurrection, His accession to glory and His promised second coming.*
- 6.4 We believe in salvation through the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ, which is by grace through faith and not by works.*
- 6.5 We believe in Jesus' power to save, to heal and sustain Christians to live holy and pure lives by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.*
- 6.6 We believe in the observance of:*
 - a) Water baptism by immersion after salvation; in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19 – 20)*
 - b) The Lord's Supper as commanded in the Holy Bible.*
- 6.8 We believe in the baptism of the Holy spirit with the manifestation of speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4, 10:46, 19:6) and the present ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through the believers as manifested in the ministry gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 4:11, I Cor. 12:9 – 11, Gal. 5:22 – 23).*

On community development, the RGC has outlined it in detail in Article 7 of the church's constitution as follows:

- 7.4 To establish and maintain humanitarian programs which include: -*
 - a) Feeding and rehabilitation programs;*
 - b) Health programs including hospitals, health centres and old peoples' homes;*
 - c) Education programs including Bible Schools and Colleges, Academic Schools, Universities and Polytechnics and any other institutions, which are beneficial to the church and society at large and are not repugnant to the teachings of the Bible.*

- 7.8 *To source and accept donations from members, non – members, the Government, other charitable organisations and any persons whether private or corporate, from Kenya or any other part of the World, for the furtherance of the activities and objectives of the church.*
- 7.14 *To invest in income generating businesses for the furtherance of the objectives of the church.*
- 7.15 *To set up a fund for disaster, poverty alleviation and other catastrophic occurrences through collections from well – wishers, members, non – member’s government bodies or any other institution.*
- 7.16 *To provide counselling and care services to disaster victims.*
- 7.17 *To establish re – rehabilitation centres for drug – abuse victims, HIV/AIDS and recreation centres that shall be managed by the Church to help the communities deal with spiritual, social and economic issues facing them.*
- 7.18 *To sponsor and establish public institutions including primary, secondary schools and colleges, health institutions, charitable organisations among other institutions.*
- 7.19 *Provide civic education on issues affecting the community.*
- 7.20 *To do all such other things as deemed essential or conclusive to the attainment of the above objects, if such activities shall not be repugnant to the teaching of the Bible.*

The functions outlined in Article 7 of the RGC constitution as stated above therefore provide a blueprint for the church’s engagement in development. Schoeman (2011) acknowledges that for the church and community’s active involvement in socio-economic development, there is need to have a clearly stated policy and an understanding of the objective. If these two concepts are missing, then it is likely to derail the church’s efforts on economic development. At the time of the study, there were 300 Redeemed Gospel Church branches in Makueni County. It is envisaged that with such a large number of churches in the area, its impact on the community would be very visible. Being one of the ministerial team at the Kathonzweni RGC, the researcher ascertains that the Church has had quite an impact in education with over sixty university graduates (some of whom are a product of this church); being very instrumental in the Church’s development, financially funding church projects. This group also helps the less fortunate members of the church with food, clothing, medication and education of children. It is therefore hoped that through this example, such an initiative can be spread and be structured among all the churches in the whole county to positively impact the community.

1.1 Objective of the Study

This study sought to explore the role played by the Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) in the socio-economic transformation of the community in Makueni County.

2. Literature Review

The church has globally had a clear record in the provision of social services to the community through building organizations that focus on this (Cole, 2011). According to Mpumlwana (2016), churches play a significant role towards community development through direct or indirect involvement economically and socially. Churches do this by providing social services, volunteering in community work, conducting civic education to the people, facilitating education for the less privileged in society, as well as providing moral guidance to reduce levels of deviance in society. In agreement, Sider as cited in Solomons (2012) opines that the involvement of the church in community development is derived from God's command to the church thus; 'to love our neighbour' and in so doing, we link the church with God's own work to humanity. The role of the church is to make God known to the whole world by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notably, the gospel is the good news that God has extended redemption to humanity from the scary plan of the devil, which is to bring suffering to the world. As the enemy of God's people, the devil comes to steal, destroy and kill but Jesus came to give life and life in abundance (John 10:10). The church thus becomes God's 'hand' in making this a reality, reaching out to the poor and the neglected offering them both spiritual guidance and practical support for their struggles. Jesus sums up this mandate in Matthew 5:13-16.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16.)

The church should therefore understand and take up her mandate as the salt and light of the earth. Christ was talking about the believer (and by extension the church), to bring taste and show the way to those around us. Every individual Christian is called by God to be an influence on the world around them by living an exemplary life, showing the way in terms of doing charitable work (living what they preach and not drinking wine while preaching water to those around them). Jesus taught this concept early in his ministry when he told his disciples that he would make them fishers of men.

According to Modise (2018), the church should actively participate in the transformation of the community's socio-economic status through instructional empowerment of the community as a whole. The church can play the empowerment role through organizing; workshops, conferences and seminars through which the socio-economic challenges can be addressed and measures to avert them taken. In addition, Strauss (2013) quoting Sakwa posits, *"to empower is to offer the appropriate resources for the poor in society to champion their well-being"* - for instance availability of micro-credits opens

up opportunities for socio-economic independence. This helps individuals to start-up entrepreneurship entities for self-development (Strauss, 2013).

In order for the church to tap and embrace this new understanding of its mission to the community, there is need for practicing transformational leadership. This will motivate subordinates to be committed to performance that exceeds expectations. The researcher's vision is for churches to bring economic development in the community, hence calling for a "paradigm shift" for churches to re-think ministry. This can only be done effectively through transformational leadership. When people talk of "transformational" leaders, they speak of leaders who stimulate people to think in totally new ways. They also seek to accomplish goals that were not previously imagined, thus putting transformational leader's concept in contrast to the "transactional" type of leaders, who promises rewards to followers in exchange for performance. Bass (1990) explains the difference between the two in the following ways:

- *“Transactional leaders work within the situation; transformational leaders change the situation.*
- *Transactional leaders accept what can be talked about; transformational leaders change what can be talked about.*
- *Transactional leaders accept the rules and values; transformational leaders change them.*
- *Transactional leaders talk about payoffs; transformational leaders talk about goals.*
- *Transactional leaders bargain; transformational leaders symbolize.”*

In short, a transformational leader would motivate the church to change the present situation of doing ministry; change rules and values of doing ministry rather than maintaining the status quo. Further, he/she would also set goals and motivate the followers to work towards achieving them. In other words, he/she would be willing to re-evaluate the way the church is reaching to the lost and be willing to expand the intended mission beyond mere evangelism. In explicating the concept of development on the basis of the church, the researcher makes reference to various authors expounding on their propositions.

This paper for instance makes reference to Allen, Luscombe, Myers and Ram (1991) in their book titled: *Health, Healing and Transformation: Biblical Reflections on the Church in Ministries of Healing and Wholeness*. The authors argue that healthcare and healing is and should be a very significant core business of the church. The church should bring healing to the community it serves. Allan puts it clearly, "As a church, we are apostles of healing, as healing is demonstrating the kingdom of God and the totality of the gospel of salvation." They posit that, "By no means should churches leave healing to medical establishment because this is her core mandate" (Allen, Luscombe, Myers & Ram, 1991. p. 7). Reference is made to Luke 9:1-4, where Allen et al. (1991) summarize what Jesus did in health care as follows, "In ministering to the physical illness of humanity, Christ addressed the psychological dimension as he related to hopelessness, the social dimensions as he met alienations with his presence and caring, and the spiritual dimensions by calling for a change of heart from the rebellion

against God. The healing of the whole body, mind and soul, social relationships, and spirit should not be neglected" (p. 20). With 67% poverty level in rural areas, and 60% poverty level in towns in Makueni County, it is a true indication that there are many poor people who cannot afford healthcare; hence the church has a big task to perform. Myers (2011) in his book, *Walking with Poor: Principles and Practices Transformational Development*, outlines practices and principles of transformational development as opposed to traditional development. In traditional practices of development, donors went to a given community and started some developments without consulting and involving them. But in transformational development, the community is fully involved for the purpose of ownership. The author is impressed by what he calls the Trinitarian faith which means, *"Living as Christ lived, preaching the gospel, relying on God, offering healing and reconciliation, rejecting laws and customs that place people beneath rules, resisting temptations, praying constantly, eating with modern lepers and other outcasts, embracing the enemy and the sinner, and dying for the sake of the gospel if it is God's will"* (p. 44).

For sure, the church of Christ exists to practice the Trinitarian practices because acts of mercy define a church and her mission on earth. This acts as an eye opener for the researcher to examine what RGC has and has not achieved. Myers on the Bible story states, *"A story in which the poor are forgotten, God will be forgotten too; loving God and loving friends are twin injections of a single command"* (Myers, 2011, p. 55). *A church cannot claim to serve God if she does not serve the poor. As the notion goes, "God sees us through the eyes of the poor."* In any given community where a church is found, the main target is the poor people who Myers sadly avers:

"The poor are subjected to a life of suffering, deception, and exclusion which is internalized by them in a way that results in the poor no longer knowing who they are and what they always meant to be without value and without gifts. They believe they are truly god - forsaken, feel non-existence, valueless and humiliated. This is the deepest and most profound expressions of poverty." (p. 76)

Poverty is an unnecessary evil which dehumanizes the victims, limits their growth, and limits them in four areas of life: physical, mental, social and spiritual. The church, being the messenger for Christ, has an enormous task of liberating the poor. Armed with this knowledge, the researcher explores ways and means in which the RGC will help the poor in Makueni.

To help the poor, a model of development approved by the evangelicals (RGC is a member of evangelical) during the Lausanne Consultation Wheaton '83 was advanced. They highlighted the following as characteristics of transformation: life sustenance, equity, justice, dignity and self-worth, freedom, participation, reciprocity, cultural fit and ecological soundness (Myers, 2011). Appropriate development for the poor is people centred, sustainable and consistent with their own aspirations and the people themselves should decide for themselves the improvement they want and how they would be achieved. To alleviate poverty, the poor need to be empowered as households and

individual members through their involvement in socially and politically relevant actions. To this end, it is thought of that social responsibility is a continuous process. Many times, churches organize a one-time charity event and assume people have been helped. This is a misguided approach.

Myers (2011) has given us a godly advice to those who carry out development as they may feel they are more important and more valuable than the poor. He states:

"The transformational truth is that the poor and those not poor, are made in the image of God and are valuable enough to God to warrant the death of his son in order to restore that relationship (dignity) and to give gifts that contribute to the well-being of themselves and their community (vocation) because the poor suffer from a marred identity and a degraded vocation. Those not poor, on the other hand, suffer from god-complexes and an inflated vocation. The poor should recover their identity as children of God, and to recover their vocation as productive stewards, discovering that they have been given gifts to contribute to their social well-being. Those not poor and the development agencies must relinquish their God-complexes and employ their gifts as a source of power or control." (p. 16)

It will be fulfilling to the founder and the entire family of RGC and all the likeminded members of the community to see RGC focusing on restoring individual persons; with the triune God, with the community, with those who are "others," and with the environment. This is because the church is the hermeneutical community that needs the bible story and applies this story to the concrete circumstances of its time, place and culture.

According to Stearns (2009), *"The goodness that Christ brought about was that the poor, the sick, the grieving, crippled, slaves, women, widows, orphans, lepers, and aliens were to be lifted and embraced by God. The followers of Christ were to be "the salt", "the light" and "the yeast of the world" (p. 6).* From the foregoing, this paper therefore examines whether RGC has really lifted the above people who are created in the image and likeness of God to Him. What Stearns calls, *The Hole in the Gospel*, is the inability of the church to address issues like poverty, oppression, wealth, and justice which are addressed in over two thousand verses in the Bible. This paper acts as a wakeup call in addressing these issues. As Christians serve God, there should be no hypocrisy which made the people of Israel to be brutally taken into captivity to Assyria. Consequently, *"To seal the hole in the gospel, the church is required to obey God, feed the angry, take care of the poor, establish justice, show love, mercy and compassion" (Stearns, 2009, p. 60).* At times Christians fail to serve God due to the desire for security, comfort and happiness even when it's known that real happiness is found in serving God. God does not need our wealth, but our obedience, availability and *"what we have in our hands,"* as in the case of Moses.

In agreement, Stearns views that, *"The rich nations and people have the awareness, and the ability to help the most desperate around the world, but there is a hole in our that is getting deeper society which needs to be repaired " (p. 5).* This paper hypothesizes that the local

church must work out mechanisms of helping the poor among them. This hole in people's hearts can be filled by receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, hence extending the hand of mercy, love and compassion for the less fortunate members of our community. *"Despite those who are able, having awareness, access and ability, 10 million children die of preventable and treatable sickness globally annually"* (Stearns, 2009, p. 7). RGC can help a few of those who are suffering with the limited resources they have for the glory of God. If the church is able to mobilize herself to take up the challenge of helping the poor, the God of increase is able to bless them do even more.

Education is fundamental to the development of a child, his or her community and the entire nation. No long-term escape from poverty is possible without the education of children. Therefore, it is viewed as a pass to socio-economic development. In a study conducted by Samson et al. (2002), they opined that there is need for the church to tap the education potential for students at the university level in the community by harnessing volunteer programs. It is true that no community can develop without this great tool of education. Stearns (2011) gives the following shocking statistics on illiteracy, that, "close to a sixth ($\frac{1}{6}$) of adults in the world are illiterate, two thirds of who are women". Additionally, 115 million children do not attend primary school in the world. Africa in particular reported that 59% of the children attend school and only one out of three will complete primary education while 29% of children aged five to fourteen are engaged in child labour. In Makueni, education is highly valued by all people as they jokingly say, *"education is our cash crop,"* since the county is classified as an Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) area. As a result, Makueni County was ranked position one in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) in 2012 before the government stopped the ranking of schools.

Sterns (2011) outlines the importance of educating girls by saying: *"Education of girls increases income and reduces infant mortality. When educated, their children are immunized, birth rates are reduced, and the percentage of HIV/AIDS infection is lowered. This does not however mean the education of the boy child is ignored, because they are equally important as they will complement the girls in achieving the stated roles of educated women"*. First world countries have achieved this due to high levels of education of both men and women. The church can therefore impact the community by destroying all barriers and instead build bridges with communities. Such churches should get involved in community affairs, like when they have any celebrations or when faced with calamities. This is a wakeup call for RGC to see the wide-open doors in the communities they serve.

Wubeneh and Sanders (2006) state, *"for agricultural development to occur, farmers knowledge and skill must keep on increasing and changing"*. As farmers adopt more and more new methods of farming, their ideas change; they develop a new and different attitude towards agriculture and the natural world that surrounds them. Their increasing contacts and transactions with merchants and government agencies draw them into a closer acquaintance with the world beyond their villages. Agricultural development thus is an integral part of general social and economic development. It contributes to and assures that development shall be truly general, including within its scope the large proportion

of people who live by and will continue to live for many years in farming in many countries.

The early church seemed to have clearly understood their mandate and so impacted their communities. In Acts 2, 4 and 5, believers sold their properties to make sure that the needy among them were catered for. Acts 2:44-45, NIV, "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need". In addition, Acts 4: 32-35, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need." Today the practice of selling lands and houses cannot work because our community set up is different from that of the past. What can work today is that church members should have the same spirit of helping the needy in their communities by trying to supplement them with basic needs.

In contrast, Ovbiedo (2013) in a study conducted to establish the role of Christian churches in community development showed that Christian churches in the community have failed in the quality of lives of its people in education, economically as well as in healthcare. Consequently, this has increased the rate of unemployment and poverty a case that would be attributable to Makueni County. The findings of this study indicate that the Christian churches are not living up to the expectations of the societies they are established in (Ovbiedo, 2013).

3. Methodology

The RGC Makueni region, which is the focus of this study, was started by Archbishop Arthur Kitonga and Bishop Paul Mutua. After successful evangelistic campaigns in markets and schools across Makueni County, the first two churches, namely Thavu RGC and Mwanyani RGC, were planted in 1978 (Mutua, 2011). Redeemed Gospel Church like any other church was founded to transform the society spiritually, economically and socially. According to Article 7, RGC has clearly spelt out objectives. Objective 4 states very clearly this mandate:

"To establish and maintain humanitarian programs which include: Feeding and rehabilitation programs; Health programs including hospitals, health centres and old peoples' homes; Education programs including Bible Schools and Colleges, Academic Schools, Universities and Village Polytechnics and any other institutions, which are beneficial to the church and the society at large and are not repugnant to the teachings of the Bible."

Although the RGC is the largest Pentecostal church in Kenya and particularly in Makueni, it was observed that there had not been a notable impact by the church to the

development of the communities in which the churches are located. This is in spite of the well-articulated church objectives which spell out the churches' commitment to offer practical support to her communities.

This study was qualitative in nature and employed participatory ethnographic interviews and questionnaires as the main method of data collection. As Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) point out, "qualitative research methods enable the researcher to collect data and explain a particular phenomenon deeply and exhaustively". On the other hand, Creswell (2003) argues that, "*A qualitative approach is one in which the researcher often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives and uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenology (a study that tries to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understanding of a particular situation), ethnographies (which tries to study people in their environment through participation and face to face interacting), grounded theory studies (where a theory is constructed through analysis of data), or case studies (where particular phenomenon is studied and assumed to represent the rest)*" (p. 18). Thus, phenomenological and grounded theory tools were used for this study.

The target population comprised RGC congregants and pastors in Makueni County. The County consists of 20 sub-regions from which a sample of 30 churches were selected to participate in the study. Questionnaires, observation, library research and interview guide formed the main data collection instruments. The collected data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively and presented thematically on emerging objectives.

4. Results and Discussion

The focus of this study was to assess the role played by RGC in Makueni County in influencing community development in terms of education, healthcare, Agriculture and other community projects. The respondents for the study were pastors and church leaders drawn from 30 churches. It was hoped that churches pooled in this study fairly represented the current trends as far as the developmental functions of churches in the region were concerned. Questionnaires were administered to 30 RGC pastors and interview schedule to key informants who were the community members living around the churches as well as those in the leadership of the Church.

4.1 Demographic Representation

Table 1 presents a summary of the findings on demographic data for the pastors. From the information gathered, the findings presented in Table 1 indicate that in all the 30 churches investigated, majority of the pastors were male while the female only occupied a few seats as pastors. All the pastors 30(100%) involved in the study were married. They hence were in a position to give reliable information about the impact of the church on development and the how churches engage in socio-economic development.

Table 1: Pastors' demographic data

Dominant Gender	Male
Dominant Marital status	Married
Dominant Education level	Undergraduate, Diploma
Dominant working experience	More than 10 years
Presence of associate pastor	Yes
Presence of church board of elders	Yes

Using education as a variable, it was noted that in the case of all the churches, the highest education level attained by majority of pastors was undergraduate certificate and diploma. However, there were 3 pastors with a PhD and 3 with a master's degree in theology. It was also observed that one pastor had a Certificate in Theology. Notably, there were few pastors who had attained only the primary level education but lacked any other professional training.

It was reported that majority of the pastors had worked in their positions for over 10 years, thus gaining experience necessary to give reliable information for this study. Only one pastor had worked for less than 10 years as a pastor. In addition, out of the 30 pastors involved in the study, 13 churches had associate pastors, representing 56% of the total churches while 10(33%) churches did not have associate pastors. This shows that most churches were in a position to share work with their associates, hence could have a higher impact on the community development than those led by just one pastor.

As reported in this study, all churches had a board of elders for managing the church affairs. This enhanced the church's impact in the society through exchanging of ideas among the board representatives. With reference to the main objective of the study, Education, Healthcare and Agriculture were found to be among others key areas where the Church's impact was seen.

4.2 Socio-economic Development

4.2.1 Education

Out of the 30 churches under study, three churches had functional primary schools and the fourth church had already built four classes ready to start a primary school. The three churches included; Nunguni, Makindu and Mtito-Andei Redeemed Gospel Churches. The fourth one, Kathonzweni Redeemed gospel church had already built four permanent classrooms. The presence of schools in the community had also enabled some community members to acquire jobs in the schools especially as teachers and non-teaching staff. This improved their social and economic status. Other respondents especially those who lived around the church environment were able to supply items to the schools hence earning income which would not have been otherwise earned. The building materials for the schools were sourced from the community and the local market thus improving the economic status in these areas. These primary schools had been performing very well compared to the public primary schools in the region. This enabled many pupils to be admitted into good secondary schools. Consequently, they performed very well at form four level after which majority were admitted to the universities. Consequently, the

graduates had higher chances of getting good jobs given their level of education. This brought development to the community as described below:

a. Schools

Based on the findings presented from the interviews, it was found out that RGC had only three Primary Schools established by individual churches. The church had however not sponsored any Secondary or Higher learning institution even though that is one of the community development objectives of the church. The schools provided baby care services especially to parents who had children aged between 3-5 years and could not afford the services of the house-helpers. In these schools, there was maximum protection especially for a few children from broken families. These schools helped rehabilitate abused children and provided balanced diet to malnutrition children through supply of fortified porridge.

The schools assisted children from around the community in health matters such that the sick children were often scheduled for taking their medicine at right time. Medics were also allowed to do medical check-ups on children and treat those who were sick. Schools also allowed hospital personnel to de-worm and immunize children.

It was found out that these schools sponsored children from very needy families which increased access to education for many children. The schools as well grew their churches as some children influenced their parents to join the sponsored churches for their schooling. There were cases where Islamic parents had converted to Christianity through their children. All churches were involved in offering support to educate the children of church members and those of the larger community. Those who had benefited from the support also assisted others in their churches and the community as a way of giving back to the church and the community.

On the pastors' level of education, about one third had acquired a degree and above. The churches that had achieved tremendous growth and development were the ones led by the educated and professionals. This was because the pastors used their resources to fund the schools and churches especially when the churches were still at their early stages of growth. All pastors were highly grateful to the Archbishop Kitonga who is the founder and head of RGC. From the field, it was established that in the entire Country RGC had not started any health facility although it is one of her objectives. From the study findings it was established that although RGC had not established any medical facility, there were several members who were part of RGC and worked in government Hospitals, Health centres and dispensaries across the country for entrusting pastors who were teachers and other professionals to lead in these churches. The professionals use their expertise to further the gospel for the glory of God. A case in point is that the researcher was one of the five high schools Principals and the Kathonzweni church had over 100 graduates who worshiped at RGC. More than half (80%) had attained their education while still attending the Kathonzweni RGC.

b. Healthcare

The constitution of Kenya, under the Bill of rights, gives the citizens the rights to the highest attainable standards of health care in line with the World Health Organization

(WHO) constitution which declares health as a fundamental human right and commits to ensuring the highest attainable level of health for all. According to the Ministry of health, Universal health coverage (UHC) has been adopted and targets 3.8 of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). It has a clear goal of ensuring that individuals and communities get health services they need without suffering financial hardship. This includes provision of essential quality health services from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care.

This study also established that Makueni County had almost attained universal Health care because most family heads paid five hundred shillings only to be issued with a card that covers all family members in all treatment services including x-rays, theatre, dialysis and even mortuary expenses in case of death. With this card one also enjoys dental services and ambulance services. The card is renewable annually. In the first years of devolution, the Governor H.E. Hon. Prof. Kivutha Kibwana had built at least a dispensary in every sub-location which made it possible for every Makueni residence to access health care within a distance of less than 5kms attaining WHO standards. This is one of the parameters that were used in January 2018, for Makueni County to be ranked the first county in terms of performance Kenya. Many counties have visited Makueni County to do benchmarking. In Health, the church is supposed to supplement what the government is doing. However, when it was established, the Redeemed Gospel Church had not yet been initiated in the region thus could not cooperate with medical facilities in providing health care.

The Catholic Church and the African Inland Church (A.I.C) had a few health facilities in the region that provide health care to the community. The Redeemed Gospel churches however participated in health care by assisting in raising funds for the sick as well as paying for medical bills. The church generously supported the sick in accessing medical care in health facilities that were outside Makueni County. In schools owned by the few Redeemed Gospel Churches, pupils were de-wormed, assisted in taking drugs whenever they fell sick and were also taught on balance diet.

Concerning the sick, there is a good practice throughout all Redeemed Gospel Churches whereby the sick are visited either in hospital or at home by members of their Home bible churches, who nurse, feed and stay with them till they recover. Members of the RGC do this in turns. In the event where one passes away, the same church members console the bereaved family and also assist in funeral expenses. The pastor presides over the burial ceremonies as part of comforting and mourning with the bereaved family. The study also established that although RGC had not established any hospital, health centre or dispensary, there was a good number of the church members working in the health sector in Makueni County.

c. Agriculture

It was established that the RGC were not involved in agricultural activities except for a few who were reported as having provided planting seeds to some community members. It was reported that Kathonzweni Redeemed Gospel Church supported the poor with food throughout the year.

As a senior pastor the researcher began a “Dorcas Aid Ministry” in 1996, where every month all able members could donate cash, food, seeds, and clothing which was then shared out to the poor, the sick, and orphans to make sure that like the early church, no one lacked anything (Acts 2:44-45). The needy are given enough food to last them for a week. When beneficiaries are given seeds to plant, a good follow up is done through their Home Bible churches to ensure the seeds were planted and that proper weeding was done to actualize good yields. The sick and other vulnerable members of the community were helped in taking care of their farms by the healthy members from the fellowships. It was evident that the number of dependents had gone down over the years. In the church, 90% of foodstuff brought to the church was channelled to support the needy in the church and the surplus was sold to do other church projects. This is possible because the four pastors serving in the church were working professionals and may not need such food. It is in the strategic plan to start projects in rearing traditional chicken and goats to support the needy in the church in order to alleviate poverty and reduce the dependency syndrome in Makueni county.

Of the 30 pastors interviewed, 27 of them had permanent church buildings and all the churches had bought plots even those who were in rented premises. The church had impacted the community in various ways. Those in rented buildings paid rent to their landlords, hence improving their economic well-being. The churches had bought plots from the same community. Churches that had put up structures had also bought building materials from the same community, engaged masons from the surrounding community, employed carpenters and other casual workers to do the construction work. It was reported that churches benefited the community economically in other ways like in the purchase of furniture, public address systems and food items. After Sunday services, the churches located in towns and in marketplaces provide customers to the shop and hotel owners within, hence were boosting their economy. During times of bumper harvest when churches received a lot of food as tithe, they sold the excess food to the local community business people. The Redeemed Gospel churches contributed a lot of money to the communities during Christmas, Easter festivals, pre-weddings and weddings. In a nutshell, the presence of the Redeemed Gospel churches is highly felt economically throughout the entire Makueni County which had 300 churches. RGC does not own any business in Makueni County but the church had a good number of members who were businessmen. The sound teaching done by the RGCs discouraged behaviours that would promote poverty such as alcoholism.

5. Conclusion

As already highlighted in the principles learnt, the church has a widely open door to make great impact to the community. The RGC can do exploits even with the limited resources as they engage development partners like the government, foundations like the Jimmy Carter, Bill Gates, Dorcas AID, World Vision, Compassion International, the Kalonzo foundation among others. The Makueni County government is trying very

much to alleviate poverty in the region. For example, they had built a Mango processing plant at Kalamba and a milk processing company at Kikima in Mbooni sub County. The government has built another milk processing factory at Kathonzweni sub-county though not yet officially opened. NGO called OMO- which is in full operation MWOLYO out. Mwolyo is a Kamba name for relief food given to residents by the government or other agencies. The two NGOs have done great work in Katangi which is the driest part of Machakos County. OMO project is a brainchild of Bishop Titus Masika of Yatta area. If the church in Makueni County can borrow what the two NGOs are doing at Katangi, the problem of perennial famine could be stamped out. Success in food production is the only sure way of reducing poverty levels in Makueni County. If two churches have brought a solution to Katangi Sub County, how about 300 Redeemed Gospel churches in Makueni County? The church has a big role to play in poverty eradication. RGC has several church members who work as health workers, teachers, agricultural extension officers and even elected members of county assemblies and the national assemblies. However, the church has done a lot of evangelism because having a population of three hundred churches in Makueni County alone is not a mean achievement.

6. Recommendations

The church of today needs to manifest love and justice which are great motivators in the provision of healthcare to the lost as well as to those who are sick. (Matt 25:33-40). This paper highly recommends that the leadership of RGC should come out with an elaborate strategic plan to guide the church on what the entire church is supposed to achieve at a given period.

Out of the main strategic plan, individual churches should prepare a customized strategic plan which is tailored to meet their local objectives. The strategic plan will give a direction, both short term and long-term objectives to achieve and by so doing the church will have impacted the community greatly.

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FOCUS ON REDEEMED GOSPEL CHURCH IN MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

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