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Critical Reflection of Determinants of Conflict in Selected African in Land Churches in Kangundo Region, Kenya

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Abstract:

The African Inland Church has undergone leadership wrangles at the national offices. These conflicts have however percolated to the local level which has resulted into schism which have caused some churches to separate completely and some factions went to courts to seek regress. The aim of this study is to determine the root causes of church conflicts among selected churches in Kangundo Regional Churches (KRC). The objectives of the study were to access the root causes of the church conflicts in KRC and to analyze the systemic issues in the churches that might have triggered the conflicts. The study adopted a qualitative research design. The target population was 11 KRCC churches where members of the congregation of all categories of men, women, pastors, adult youth and leaders were purposively selected. The researcher sampled 100 respondents from the 11 churches, approximately 25% of the total churches selected. The data was collected using questionnaires, focus group and narrative interviews which were administered by the researcher. The researcher used NVIVO 11 to analyse the data. The data was thematically analysed where responses were organized according to themes with the aid of the analytical tool. The study established that the main causes of conflict in the AIC churches in Kangundo regions was the fact that the local churches felt overburdened by the financial needs of the DCC which caused rebellion and others started to seek autonomy. There were also leadership wrangles at the national office but trickled down to the local churches as there were faction for the warring groups one led by Rev. Yego and the other by Re. Mbuvi. The conflict was also as a result of the bureaucracies and autocratic leadership of the church which resulted in some churches seeking break away. The church resisted change as any person particularly the pastors perceived to be going against the church doctrine like welcoming Pentecostalism, was excommunicated from the church. The study established that there were feelings by the dissenting groups who felt that the DCC/RCC strong hand interfered with the day to day running of the local churches. These included the transfer of pastors against the wishes of the congregation. There was also the issue of control of the church property such as church land among others. The study recommends that the DCC should be flexible to allow the local churches space and not to overburden them its financial needs but rather seek alternative sources of finance to raise money for its financial needs, there is need to conduct a free and fair elections and also to diversify the church's leadership structure so as to avoid contested elections of the national church leaders particularly the bishop, the church needs to embrace change so as to accommodate the modern ways of worship so as to avoid walkouts or loss of members to other surrounding churches or worse still a split in the church and lastly, there is need for the DCC/RCC to involve the local church leaders in certain decisions like the decision to transfer a pastors so as not to be seen as interfering with the day to day running of the churches.

Keywords: Church conflict, root causes of conflict, systemic issues

1. Background to the Study

It is a common knowledge and everyone's expectation that the church should be characterized by cohesion and peace among Christians with the aim of guiding them to live a holistic life (Rubin, 2006). As such peaceful coexistence of all Christians regardless of origin and background is a core value of the church. There is therefore need for total peace, only achievable in the absence of all types of conflicts (Rubin, 2006). Major changes and continued turbulence in the religious, social, political, technological and economic environments from local to global level, are continuously creating an uncertain and complex environment in which organizations have to operate (Tonder, 2008). Increasing uncertainty and complexity in the operating environment of organizations provide fertile ground for the onset of conflicts in the work place and places. These have not spared the churches as conflicts have arisen causing splits (Tara & Edling, 2012). Hollenweger (1997) notes that conflict among the believers dates back to 1906 with Charles Price Jones and Charles Harrison Mason who were both pastors in the 'Church of God in Christ' in California. Though Jones was the leader of the church, Mason was more dominant and popular. Their harmonious working relationship ended in a split in 1907 due to a leadership struggle. When Mason left this church after excommunication, about half of the ministers and the members of the church followed him.

The African Inland Church (AIC) has undergone leadership wrangles at the national offices. There has been a leadership dispute in the tenure of former Bishop Dr. Silas Yego. During November 2006, the AIC church held its elections which begun from the local churches up to the level of the presiding bishop. A court application by Rev. David Mbuvi, a

former leader at the CCC was that the elections were mismanaged by outgoing Bishop (Rev. Dr Silas Yego) which resulted to emergence of two factions one led by Rev. Mbuvi and another by the outgoing bishop. The Registrar of Societies on 23rd February 2007 decided to register the faction led by the outgoing bishop, a decision which was contested. Therefore a long and protracted battle for leadership and control of the church between the two factions followed leading to the filing of several suits in the High Court.

As already mentioned fraction of pastors has had issues with the bishop both claiming to be the head of the Church. On September 2012, Justice Odunga granted ex-parte orders in favor of the petitioners (bishop Silas Yego) restraining the Rev. Mbuvi faction and his supporters from interfering with the petitioners' rights to administer the AIC which orders were later confirmed by this Court on 13th January 2013 after the hearing inter-parties of the Application dated 2nd September 2012

The faction filed under the Societies ACT of Kenya filed a request that 'any efforts to resolve the wrangles and confusion herein should thus involve the joint participation of both sides. This followed a situation where the incumbent bishop Silas Yego held a meeting with AIC pastoral leadership.

The conflict which started as a leadership wrangle, then a church split then morphed into armed conflicts and violence at the grass root local church levels resulting into eviction, destruction of church properties and barring of worshipers from accessing the churches mostly situated in Machakos and Trans-Nzoia Counties. According to affidavits sworn in courts, the gangs used physical force to assault loyalists. The matters were table before the Attorney General still following 'ownership' issues of the AIC church.

Kangundo RCC is located in Machakos, where many churches had issues. There are actual churches that had schisms and moved out of KRCC due to major internal conflicts. The wave prevailed from 2007 onwards. For instance, in one church which I will call Church A and which was one of the mother churches in KRCC, developed internal conflicts due to holding to the AIC tradition, which was an influence by Pentecostal churches around it. A mass number of congregants was swept away by the movement. In Church B, due to the strict disciplinary rules and its conservative culture, two pastors were excommunicated from the church for having charismatic elements. In 2004, there was a mass number of youths migrated from the church to Pentecostal churches.

There were equally church splits experienced in Kangundo RCC. For instance, in a church I will call Church 1, The church had a project funded by one of its members. The member works at the USA where he got some partners to sponsor his home church. The church was requested to have three signatories, one being the pastor in charge. With time, a new DCC chair was elected. When the DCC transfers were issued, the 'older' pastor refused to move on for his transfer. There was a private meeting between the pastor and his elders which in turn led to sabotage of his transfer. The LCC elders had requested he stays to finish the funded project. When the DCC came for the resolution, one official said they will follow the pastor to a latter end. This statement sparked chaos and the church wanted to 'defend' their pastor. Some two outside pastors joined this group. The DCC fired him. The pastor was jailed and later the deviant group received eviction notices. They sought a different place to do their services.

In Church 2, the RCC had sent a new pastor to this church. The conflicts began early when there was a report purporting the sale of a church property by the RCC. This led to pressure from the RCC on increased monthly requirements. The church had originally requested to be independent but still be under the RCC. The church had another internal split comprising of the LCC and a self-elected group that would make decisions and give directives. The DCC had issues with this group for they rejected even the offertories being channeled to the DCC. The pastor received a compulsory leave and after the leave, he was given a directive to proceed on transfer to another local church. The church refused to let him go. He chose to be 'hired' by the church. They did two Sunday services facing different directions in the church. The LCC had very vocal persons from the said group who influenced and lobbied every decision. Internal factions have continued to exist with the afore-mentioned groups differing ideologically on management issues. The children home was the center of controversy. The climax was 2016, when the self-elected group reported one of the church assets had been sold by the RCC. The asset was for nurturing young orphaned children. Due to the intense pressure, the two pastor ladies were laid off and terminated from the church ministry. There were court orders from RCC and also counter pressure from the LCC ending in a stalemate. Of late as at December 2019, the church has split again on mismanagement grounds. The pastor in charge of the church that rejected the KRCC was the director of the church's children home. The home is funded by a son of the church. A sum of 1.2M released for 2019 brought issues of transparency. The pastor, after being questioned over receipts has resolved to open a different church. His sympathy group of members has split with him.

In Church 3, the split was complicated by misunderstandings and witch hunting amongst its members. There was power play between the residential pastor and the chairperson of the church's private school. The latter felt that he had powers to bring other pastors to minister to the school children. The former felt it was the duty to minister to the church. The pastor lady in the very church was more preferred to minister since his husband, a pastor, had been in charge of the school before the new pastor came. On one intricate Sunday, the issue was discussed after church. Two groups emerged immediately. The chairperson's group demanded a re-transfer of the original pastor. That is, his return to the church. The other group felt they had a capable pastor. From here, manipulations occurred and while the new pastor attended a spiritual retreat, fights ensued. The police officers had to guard every Sunday service due to the militant group. A senior politician got involved and the matter was taken to Milimani law courts. Meanwhile the original residential pastor gained ground with his wife and chairperson. The deviant group was served with a court order. The two groups were barred from the church ground for 6 months. After that, the new pastor side got back to their church. The deviant group got a piece of land and erected their church. It is operational up to date.

In Church 4, the church was in harmony and a great revival followed. The pastor had associated with the charismatic preachers and translated the same to his church. Soon some conservative members started questioning his standing and his frequent preachers invited to this church. The grievances reached the DCC which in turn gave him a compulsory leave. The pastor then joined another Pentecostal umbrella and started his church. The church is just opposite the original AIC one. There has been a lot of hate speech even on the pulpits here.

Church 5, the church's land was donated by the RCC office. There was no good documentation of this matter. Later, there were conflicts on the issuance of the title deed. The RCC wanted to move to the church premise and erect their offices. A politician triggered the chaos by going to court to challenge the RCC. Issue two concerned the church being elevated to perform as a DCC. The chair elected, a reverend, was eventually influenced by an external team to split several churches (four in number). The plan did not work; he was expelled by the RCC and all the four churches had dissenter who broke up. They took away church members with them.

In Church 6, the church had a tradition of selecting pastors and rejecting some. One pastor who was sent had become radicalized and wanted to hand it over to the defecting groups of AIC. He found no mercy with the RCC. The church followed the wave of rebellion in church 5 for it is nearby. The RCC had to send its own pastor from another DCC to oversee the church. It stayed for several years without being unstable. The defectors joined other churches nearby.

Church 7, the LCC had operated in harmony. Some outside pastors who were already affiliated to Rev. David Mbuvi influenced the residential pastor. He did all political strategies to join the defecting camp. The said pastor has been promoted by his bishop to become the assistant bishop in Machakos as of 2019. There was outward political influence in the confusion and the wave of schism from the other nearby churches. Eventually, the church split up. The larger majority of the church followed the pastor leaving only a minority.

In Church 8, the church was in harmony until they received a young talented assistant pastor. The pastor brought revival to the church. But in a year's time, a couple brought allegations that the pastor had impregnated their daughter. When the LCC council discussed the matter, they resolved to give the pastor one month leave to do more investigations. It was during that time when the pastor took poison. The sympathizers in the congregation took his side. These very members in a politicized wave stood with the pastor against the LCC. The young pastor was given land to build a church. Majority of the members followed him to the new church.

In Church 9, the conflict began 2018. It was ignited by the congregants who felt the minister violated the AIC liturgical order by introducing Pentecostal pastors and deliverance services. There was an external force of interrogation on members from the DCC. The DCC felt that the AIC constitution was being refuted. The task force of the DCC summoned the minister. One church elder was the main informant to the DCC; he had collided with the pastor on some internal affairs of the church. After long dialogue, he was served with a termination letter. On July 14th 2019, he started a new church under a different denominational cover.

The DCC was not spared in the conflict, for instance the DCC attached to KRCC in leadership and administration, wanted to join another RCC which is adjacent to them. This triggered a lot of friction with the RCC. After the elections of 2015, the DCC started break away mentality. They stopped participating in regional activities and also not sending finances slotted to them to run the regional offices. The RCC came in and re-initiated the former DCC leader while they sacked the one about to split it. In the second instance, the DCC had leadership wrangles in its history. In successive attempt, it split up causing now two DCCs apart. We have now two separate DCCs. The split was occasioned by those leaders that felt they did not want the leadership of the DCC chairperson. It can be termed as ideological in nature. Moreover, within this DCC, there are churches that have split and become independent for instance, in one church, the schism was individual and pastoral in nature. One pastor was expelled from the ministry due to lack of ethical integrity. He left the church and has joined the breakaway movement. He has his own church now. A second pastor voluntarily resigned citing lack of adequate pay from the DCC. He stayed for some time at home without ministering. Gaining advice from the pastor mentioned above, he first began to attend the other pastor's church. He has in turn joined the breakaway and formed his church too.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Internal church problems have been existent in churches. Of late, there are real church oriented schisms that have forced some churches to separate completely. The top leadership litigation phenomenon in AIC context saw AIC into the law courts for resolution. This adversarial version of mediation in KRCC worsened the conflicts. This also caused a similar move on the KRCC churches who sought court orders to block and bar either faction already mentioned since they all have followers. This was coupled by avoidance mechanisms- better espoused by Ken Sande- to the real conflict issues. The conflicting churches took hardline positions. On the other hand, both KRCC and the District Church Council (hereafter DCC) both faced an inability to constructively deal with the several conflicts has posed an administrative danger to our AIC churches in their jurisdiction. The negative side was litigations where the courts of law, including Milimani law court, tried to administer reconciliation. Mediations have been one sided and seasonal; they only come when conflicts are triggered or there are signs of church conflict. This study sought to determine the root causes of conflict in churches in Kenya.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study is to determine the root causes of church conflict among selected churches in Kangundo Regional Churches.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- To access the root causes of the church conflicts in KRC
- To analyze the systemic issues in the churches that might have triggered the conflicts

1.4. Significance of the Study

The major significance is the formulation of a localized theological mediation model that will deepen biblical/textual understanding of Jesus' mediation and promote conflict transformation. The researcher formulated a contextual mediation to be used in KRCC. Firstly, the research filled the theological gap in African pre-existing literature on *functional* and *ancestral* Christology of mediation. Secondly, it will be pastoral/ecclesial material to teach Kenyan Christians on biblically rooted ways of becoming Christ-centred mediators. It is hoped that the AIC church leadership and churches will learn about destructive conflicts and how to creatively make constructive transformations of the same. It is true that effective leaders always try to minimize conflicts while pushing their followers forward. Hence, the research will teach leaders how to creatively manage conflict. Congregations in KRCC will learn positively on the perspectives of conflict. The research thus will seek for the positive lens of viewing the conflicts and also precisely the larger picture as per Paul Lederach. Thirdly, it will be scholarly material for thinkers in contextual Christological mediation; in particular afro-centric hermeneutics on Jesus' mediation. On this wavelength, the research will contribute to the correlational learning of KRCC ecclesial structures versus other denominations in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of Church Conflict

Conflict has become a polarized word in conflict and peace studies (Augsburger, 1992). The researcher takes the view that conflict is a process, not a climax of events. The researcher took both a transdisciplinary approach to conflict and multidisciplinary approach to conflict. I concur with Ken Sande on his multidimensional approach on inevitability of conflicts:

To some, conflict is a hazard that threatens to sweep them off their feet and leave them bruised and hurting. To others, it is an obstacle that they should conquer quickly and firmly. But a few people have learned that conflict is an opportunity to solve common problems in a way that honors God and offers benefits to those involved. As you will see, the latter view can transform the way you respond to conflict (Sande, 2004).

Broadly conflict has been depicted as either destructive or constructive. Conflict has been viewed generally as a struggle or strive for some particular thing. But it has the inherent ability to bring forth destruction or transformation. The destructive camp is when some of the actors feel they lost and are dissatisfied with the outcomes. Culturally speaking, discord was viewed as disturbing the spirit world and there was resultant punishment. That is why Niirenberger would argue that, 'Most cultures consider conflict to be an evil' (Niirenberger, 1989). In the conflicting AIC churches in the researcher's context, conflict was generally viewed as evil and thus it must be avoided.

On the same came, the underlying attitudes of an actor can also be destructive. Several scholars have noted that the means to achieve a particular goal in any organization has often been negative not constructive. Hogan stresses that, 'Defeat of the opponent is seen *as essential* for achieving the goal.' Akpuru-Aja, in his perspective argues that 'in conflict, parties perceive or treat each other as a stumbling block that will result in frustrating the other in attaining a set of goals, or even furthering one's interests' (Akpuru-Aje, 2016). This element of opponent versus oppressor was common in the church splits.

The constructive camp digs into the post-conflict lens to cross check if it is productive; if actors or parties are satisfied. Morton Deutsch quotes Coser in his argument that:

Conflict can have stabilizing and integrative functions for the relationship. It enables social structures to readjust by eliminating sources of dissatisfaction and eliminating the causes for disassociation. Conflict frequently helps to revitalize norms; or it contributes to the emergence of new norms. Thus it is a mechanism for adjusting norms to new conditions. Internal conflict can also help maintain and continually readjust the balance of power between groups (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000).

Constructively, conflict has also been seen to have personal and social value (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). The constructive camp has seen the birth of 'creative conflict.' The paradigm shift now is on how destructive conflicts can be turned to constructive ones, commonly known as conflict transformation.

2.2. Conflict as Intrinsic

What happens when an individual is in conflict? The researcher engaged John Brown Okwii and John Dwyer. To begin, Okwii opines that 'Conflicts arise from unmet desires in our hearts...when desires grow into demands and we judge and punish those *who get in our way*' (Okwii, 2008). Okwii describes the downward progression of desire; what he calls progression of an idol which is commended by the researcher.

- I desire: He explains that 'to desire is not bad' since there are good desires. There are bad desires too. If the desire is channeled to its proper course, it is met. But the crossroad comes when the desire is unmet. What was a positive desire may turn to be a downward spiral to demanding.
- I demand: Okwii argues precisely that 'unmet desires have the potential of working themselves deeper and deeper into our hearts' (Okwii, 2008). At this stage, the person involved begins to justify and legitimize what was unmet in the stage above. Okwii observes the danger inherent here in that '

The trouble is that if our desire is not met, these attitudes can lead to a vicious cycle. The more we want something, the more we think of it as something we need and deserve. Even if the initial desire was not inherently wrong, it has grown so strong that it begins to control our thoughts and behavior. In biblical terms, it has become an 'idol' (Okwii, 2008).

Whenever one's desires are unmet and the person begins demanding, it spirals into more and more negative attitudes and behaviors. The vicious cycle progresses to judging others.

- I Judge: Okwii is of the opinion that whenever people fail to satisfy our demands above, we criticize and condemn them in our hearts and words. He quotes Dave Powlison who argues that by judging,

We act exactly like the adversary who seeks to usurp God's throne and who acts as the accuser of the brethren. When you and I fight, our minds become filled with accusations: your wrongs and my rights preoccupy me. We play the self-righteous judge in the mini-kingdoms we establish (Powlison, 1997).

He explores the thought that even expectations we set on people become conditions and standards for judging others.

- I Punish: This stage of idolatry is problematic. Okwii outlines it thus:

When others fail to satisfy our demands and expectations, our idols demand that they should suffer. Whether deliberately or unconsciously, we will find ways to hurt or punish people so they will give in to our desires (Okwii, 2008). The punishment takes different forms: reactions, threats and real actions of inflicting pain on others. This spiral depicts how conflicts become rooted in the hearts of believers.

From Okwii's work, it is evident that conflict arises from intrinsic factors of a *sinful heart*. The factors include unfulfilled desires as he observes. Okwii's theological premise is succinct; conflict affects the spirituality of the person. Conflict in KRC affected the mission of the church as a whole and hence the call for spiritual discernment in mediation to be discussed later in the theology chapter. Sin is deep seated and hence the call for iceberg-oriented conflict analysis in KRC conflicts. Dwyer's theology of non-violence will positively aid in the process of discipleship for the future generations of KRCC.

Louis Kriesberg also opens up another arena of factors (Kriesberg, 2003). Her internal ones include: self-conceptions, identity and structural issues. Conflict can also arise from extrinsic factors like power imbalance. Further, Kriesberg argues it can also be triggered by relational factors like coercive power, differences in economic status, and cultural issues. Kriesberg notes that these factors can make the conflict to be intractable; to reach a degree of high severity and depth.

Secondly, is John Dwyer Dear in his book *The God of Peace: Toward Theology of Nonviolence*. The author identifies six levels of conflict. He brings in the gospel of peace of Jesus as the option for healing. He argues that 'Jesus reveals his divinity by fulfilling the deepest expression of non-violence thus revealing that God is a God of non-violence' (Dwyer, 1994).

God is portrayed by Dear as the chief model of love with his son Jesus. He projects what the Christian community might be if it imitates God- a community of love. Dear then uses that premise to castigate violence as sin. The church fails miserably as per Dear when it does not condemn violence and fails its Lord with its 'sexism, patriarchy, racism, elitism, oppression and sanctioning of war' (Dwyer, 1994). He also uses liberation theology to unite the causes of justice and peace. To him power is not powerful coercion as he depicts that God is not powerless.

Dear is plausible first to use God as model. The researcher resonates with his element of violence. The only issue is that liberation theology tended to be violent in some quarters. His work is relevant for building cultures of peace communities in our churches.

2.3. Conflict Analysis

Church conflicts must be studied to get the root causes. If conflict analysis is done on the upper surface, the resulting strategies of resolution will be partial, short-term, and shallow on impact. The basic question to interrogate on conflict is the issue causing the conflict. Morton Deutsch denotes the underlying issues (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). Similarly, Christopher Moore in his book *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict* argues critically for data collection at the conflict analysis stage. He opines, 'The mediator's central task during this stage is to integrate and understand the elements of the dispute: people, dynamics, issues, and interests' (Moore, 2004). This data is highly instrumental to help decide on what mediation strategy to use. Effective data collection as per Moore engages all the historical details of the conflict(s), all the parties, and is disseminated through observations, consultations, and interviews (Moore, 2004). It helps in an analytical interpretation of the dispute.

Conflict analysis should be holistic. For conflict analysis to be comprehensive, firstly, all domains (social, historical, spiritual, political, psychological etc.) must be brought on the table. The social domain ranges from individual to group actors' attitudes, behaviors manifest in the conflict. The group dynamics are two-fold: in group and out-group. The spiritual domain ranges from the fallenness of man to the internal attitudes that actors have towards each other mostly in a church setting. The historical dimension gives us a clearer picture of the genesis of conflict and what has happened to the conflict in a span of time. The political domain ranges from power brokerage to who is suppressed in the conflict. Finally, conflicts have lasting impacts on the psychological dimension of the actors.

The cause and effect patterns of conflicts ought to be studied by conflict analysts within the church. The CMOC Model is helpful on that. Pawson and Tilley have developed the CMOC model. It explains how a particular context (C) when coupled with mechanisms (M) that are internal and external produces outcome configurations (OC) or patterns. Context is the particular conditions -including historical and institutional ones- that trigger the underlying mechanisms till we get the

outcomes that could be positive or negative. This model helps to delineate and understand cause-effect patterns in conflict situations. This, as per the authors gives explanatory continuum of the narrative which social inquiry aims at (Tilley, 1995). The end result is a realistic evaluation of the issues at hand.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This was a qualitative research. Mason Jenifa brings a fresh element of combining intellectual, philosophical and technical skills into qualitative research (Mason, 2002). In qualitative research design, human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting as per Crotty (Creswell, 2003). In other terms, descriptive research does not begin with hypothesis. P.M. Shields argues that 'the descriptive survey provides a clear explanation of the traits of a population or a situation being investigated' (Shields & Rangarajan, 2013). Creswell opines that, 'Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. This means the researcher makes an interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2003).

3.2. Target Population

The research covered the eleven KRCC churches. The members of the congregations that were included in the research were inter-generational in that all groups (men, women, pastors, adult youth and leaders) for comprehensive feedback. The researcher targeted 100 respondents from the 11 churches, approximately 25% of the total churches selected.

3.3. Sampling

The researcher purposely selected small samples from the churches named. The quality and resourcefulness of the informants was a key ingredient to avoid waste of time (Dolores & Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling aims at a smaller size of the overall sample (Welman & Kruger, 1999).

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

The data was collected using primary data collection tools as questionnaires, focus group and narrative interviews. The researcher also used telephone interviews where the interviewees got busy as scheduled. Questionnaires were used in all categories of the participants. The researcher further used five focus group for mature Christians who analyzed the conflict issues at a deeper depth. The focus group targeted specific group discussions which brought better light to the research questions. The focus groups will give fair comparative analysis of the experiences in the KRCC conflicts.

3.5. Methods of Data Collection

The researcher using the insider approach vetted assistant researchers in the eleven churches. As it came to be, the insiders were better placed in matters of information on the ground. Though the COVID 19 pandemic affected the research process, the prior trainings led to comprehensive data gathering. Data was gathered in all the churches by midway changing to phone contacts when the pandemic hit hard.

3.6. Method of Data Analysis

The researcher used NVIVO 11 as prime analytical research tool. All data was transcribed and coded using this tool. The thematic analysis was done using the tool. NVIVO 11 has a major strength in coding of themes from research especially the narrative form. The NVIVO 11 has added advantage when it comes to semi-structured interviews. The narrative analysis was therefore done using NVIVO.

4. Findings

4.1. Root Causes of the Church Conflicts in KRCC

According to the interview responses, many respondents noted that the main reason for the conflict was greed for money by some of the leaders. According to other interviewees, the main cause of conflict was that some churches felt overburdened by DCCs financial needs, thus they started rebellion against the DCC. Five respondents provided reason that some churches had complained of many remittances given to the DCC as financially burdensome. Some of the interviewees noted that among the reasons was that the churches started seeking autonomy from the yoke of the DCC and thus wanted to do their things independently without the control of the DCC/RCC. Three respondents thus noted that: the congregations wanted to be independent from the financial burdens placed on them by the DCC as they wanted to be like some of the breakaway churches who had no financial burdens.

The study learnt from the responses that discontent was brewing in the church as a result of the leadership struggles. For instance, many of the interviewees noted that conflict resulted from the insubordination and sabotage by some of the pastors who had either been expelled or were under discipline by the DCC/RCC who later moved on to start their own churches. The reason for expulsion and discipline according to respondents was because these pastors demanded autonomy. Further, many other respondents noted that the breakaway pastors had unmet expectations as some desired higher offices while others coveted the finances in the higher offices. The results revealed that some

respondents reported that there were pastors who wanted elective positions and when they missed, they resolved to revolt against the RCC/DCC.

The study further established that the other reason for the conflict was as a result of the bureaucracy, autocratic leadership and poor management of the DRR/RCC. According to the respondents, this was the genesis of rebellion and schism. Some pastors who had previously been oppressed or hurt by the DCC orchestrated the separatist, combatant and militant movement. The church seems to have had enough of the dominance of the DCC/RCC and as such desired freedom. For instance, the respondents noted that the congregation was against the DCC/RCC and as a result wanted full autonomy. Further, many more respondents noted that a group of pastors wanted freedom from the DCC and RCC. The respondents noted that the conflict was as a result of lack of RCC's periodic and managerial checks and balances of its churches which caused the church to be infiltrated by Nairobi's defected pastors.

The conflicts in the church also seem to have been as a result of the external influence. For instance, according to some respondents, there was insubordination and sabotage by a group of pastors who had joined forces with a Nairobi team. Further, other respondents reported that there was an external influence from the defecting pastors from Nairobi who secretly crept in and suddenly there was a wave of opposition and break away. Respondents also reported that the conflict in the church was ignited by the separatist wave of 'AIC B' from Nairobi which held secret meetings with pastors of KRCC and their Nairobi counterparts, which was the beginning of sabotage.

4.2. Systematic Issues in the Church Which Triggered Conflicts

The second objective of the study was to analyze the systematic issues in the churches that might have triggered the conflicts. The respondents were asked to explain the events that led to conflict in the churches. The study findings revealed that most of the respondents indicated that one major issue that has led to the conflict is the dissenting groups who feel that the DCC/RCC strong hand which they argued interfere with the functioning and the day to day running of the local churches and as such there has been motive to break away. The interviewees explained that among the issues was the transfers of the pastors by the DCC at will without consultation with the minister of the council. This led to disobedience with some of the pastors and the affected churches became emotional and violent during the enforcement of the directive by the DCC. Respondents went further to explain that the conflict was a reaction to the RCC choice of expelling the perceived wayward pastors. Another cause of the conflict according to the respondents was as a result of control of property. For instance, according to some respondents, the conflict was as a result of rumors, propaganda and misinformation about the church land. The study also established that the conflict was as a result the lack of dialogue between the elders and the RCC. Four of the respondents noted that in one of the respondent churches, the elders rushed to the courts despite the pleas from the RCC to give dialogue a chance. There was also the disgruntlement by those who failed to be picked for the leadership positions and committees, and therefore went on a revenge mission. The other reason according to the respondents was the indecisiveness of the DCC who took long to act on a request by the LCC. For example, some respondents mentioned an instance where the LCC wrote to the DCC for an exchange of the pastor and the DCC delayed. This resulted into a conflict as there arose two camps in the church which were ready for confrontation. This church got to a no turning back but to split.

The interviewees were asked to state who the main actors/groups were in the conflict. The intention was to determine whether these groups and or actors helped resolve the conflict or their increased the intensity of the conflict. According to the DCC respondents, there were two groups in the conflict, the first group wanted to defect from RCC while the second group which was from Nairobi caused incitement thus fueling conflict. Other respondents stated that there were two groups, the pro-conservatives and the pro-breakaway groups. According to other respondents, the conflicts were fueled by a senior local politician who took the warring churches to court and the court served the defiant groups with court orders. The study further established that respondents indicated that the conflicts were caused by the local church council while yet others felt that the reverend who chaired the DCC was to blame for the conflicts in the church. Other respondents blamed the conflict on the pastors and the elders. Other respondents stated that nearly three quarters of the church congregation were involved in the conflict. The respondents also stated that the pastors and their congregation were involved in the conflict.

The respondents were asked to describe the groups/actors causing the conflict. According to the responses, most DCC respondents stated that the groups had ideological fights, the classical idea was to finance the pastors to tempt them to quit the RCC. The DCC respondents further noted that these groups were strategic as they would meet secretly. They also communicated secretly with the Nairobi based team. The DCC respondents noted:

These groups had stratified arrangements in all their targeted LCC. For instance, there were those that were charged with leading propaganda, while the other group was charged with the responsibility of defending the LCC in the DCC talks and yet another group's responsibility was to cause chaos (DCC-B2).

The respondents further noted that the actors always had a biased pre-disposition to breakaway and were not interested in dialogue to solve issues. These were supported by four DCC respondents who noted that these groups were politically inclined on the left, that is on the side of defecting and no amount of persuasion could deter them. They were able to use inside group mentality to mobilize resistance following the instructions from the Nairobi team.

The respondents described these groups as having greed for money and money minded. They noted that the pastors were promised by the bishop that they will receive more money if they heeded the call to defection. Further as noted by some LCC respondents, these rebellious pastors collected offerings and the offerings for themselves and refused to give DCC. Two of the LCC respondents noted that the Nairobi based team promised them better salaries. The results revealed that three LCC respondents said that the groups had radicalized views as these dissenting churches together with

their leaders wanted reforms by all means. Other respondents described these groups as malicious as they noted that some of these actors wanted to see the fall of the DCC and RCC. The respondents also noted that there was rebellion between the DCC and RCC, they noted:

The DCC chair had elements of wanting to chart the DCC away from the RCC. He had secretive meetings and open rebellion towards the RCC (DCC01-R2)

The respondents were asked to state the views of each of the groups/actors. The LLC respondents noted that in one of the conflicting churches in which the pastors was given a transfer and objected, while the elders argued that they needed the pastor to stay for about two months, the DCC argued for him to go immediately. In yet another conflicting church, the LCC respondents noted that while the local church demanded for an explanation as to why their pastors were expelled, the RCC seemed to be not moved and went ahead to stamp its authority on its mandate of hiring and firing. Some LCC respondents stated that some of the groups argued that they wanted autonomy while the DCC's opinion was that the church was answerable and accountable to its members and as such the call for autonomy was uncalled for. The respondents noted that while to LCC wanted the pastor to remain in the church to oversee the finishing of building project he had started, the DCC wanted him to oversee another church. Some LCC respondents stated:

Some of the learned group in the church who were fed up with the DCC/RCC went to Nairobi court and obtained court orders barring the DCC/RCC from taking over their church (LCC1-B1).

In yet another church it was the opposite as the stated by the respondent:

The LCC wanted another pastor to work with them; they brought him while the one in charge was on spiritual retreat. The DCC on the other hand wanted the one in charge to remain (LCC3-R3).

The respondents noted that some of the conflict was a result of revenge as some pastors felt they were dismissed without a cause. Here are what some respondent said: The pastor who joined another denomination reported that his services were terminated by the DCC while on normal annual leave noting that the alleged accusations were written on the termination letter noting that he was not given a hearing (LCC 9-B3).

One expelled pastor asked, what do they achieve by expelling me from church? I was always loyal to the DCC all these years I have served (LCCQ – R4)

The results show that the churches felt that while they worked hard to bring some development in their churches, the DCC/RCC worked hard to wrestle it out from them. For instance, one respondent reported that:

The spokesman in our LCC argued that the children's home had been snatched by the RCC and the DCC while the RCC argued that they wanted to partner with the sponsor abroad (LCC1 – R2).

5. Discussion

The contextual analysis revealed that the root causes of the church splits were (a) pastorally oriented issues (b) the hierarchical leadership positions. (c) Congregational triangulations and (d) external actors' influences. The study established that selfish interests of the breakaway pastors and their followers in terms of financial plans. The DCC/RCC maintained hard line positions which received negative reactions from the churches. The other main issue was lack of tolerance from the DCC and RCC and lack of conflict transformation skills by the leadership. The DCCs and RCC tightened rules; expelled some pastors from the churches and sent three of them on compulsory leave. The LCCs were aggressive and showed disrespect to their DCCs and RCC. There were politically rooted issues in the dissenting churches that acted as catalysts for the splits. They wanted to be affiliated to the left- defection. Lastly, external actors influenced and triggered the church conflicts. Some of the congregations in KRCC split from outward forces and actors as explained. Looking at the data results, it is evident that religious commercialization and consumerism in AIC is real. The breakaway movement employed what Tolofari (2008) terms as 'entrepreneurial management of a religious body which in essence translates to a user-pays system.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes based on the findings that the main causes of conflict in the AIC churches in Kangundo regions was the fact that the local churches felt overburdened by the financial needs of the DCC which caused rebellion and others started to seek autonomy. There were also leadership wrangles at the national office but trickled down to the local churches as there were faction for the warring groups one led by Rev. Yego and the other by Re. Mbuvi. The manifestation of the wrangles was where I form of subordination and sabotage and outright rebellion by some pastors who were influenced from Nairobi. The conflict was also as a result of the bureaucracies and autocratic leadership of the church which resulted in some churches seeking break away. The church resisted change as any person particularly the pastors perceived to be going against the church doctrine like welcoming Pentecostalism, was excommunicated from the church. This caused church split as they moved with their loyalist and sympathizers to wherever they went either to join Pentecostal churches or to start their own. The study established that there were feelings by the dissenting groups who felt that the DCC/RCC strong hand interfered with the day to day running of the local churches. These included the transfer of pastors against the wishes of the congregation. There was also the issue of control of the church property such as church land among others.

7. Recommendations

The study recommends that the DCC should be flexible to allow the local churches space and not to overburden them its financial needs but rather seek alternative sources of finance to raise money for its financial needs.

The study further recommends that there is need to conduct a free and fair elections and also to diversify the church's leadership structure so as to avoid contested elections of the national church leaders particularly the bishop. The church needs to embrace change so as to accommodate the modern ways of worship so as to avoid walkouts or loss of members to other surrounding churches or worse still a split in the church.

There is need for the DCC/RCC to involve the local church leaders in certain decisions like the decision to transfer a pastor so as not to be seen as interfering with the day to day running of the churches.

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