

Ecumenical and Diaconal Work in Africa: Sustainability Lessons from the African Orthodox Church of Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

The African Orthodox Church of Kenya (AOCK), part of the global Orthodox Christian tradition, has actively engaged in ecumenical movements such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All-Africa Council of Churches (AACC) while carrying out vital diaconal work since the colonial era. Despite these efforts, the church faces significant sustainability challenges, including reliance on external donations and limited participation from local congregations in supporting its operations. This study examined the AOCK's ecumenical and diaconal engagements, evaluating their historical and theological foundations, effectiveness, and barriers to sustainability. Using a qualitative desktop library methodology, the research analysed secondary data sources to provide a comprehensive overview of the church's activities and challenges.

The findings revealed notable contributions through ecumenical dialogue and diaconal outreach; however, these initiatives often lack long-term sustainability due to financial dependency and insufficient local involvement. Structural and cultural barriers, including weak congregational stewardship and inadequate institutional frameworks for resource mobilisation, were identified as key obstacles. To address these issues, the study recommended empowering local congregations, diversifying resource mobilisation strategies, and aligning ecumenical efforts with long-term development goals. Additionally, further research was suggested to explore the dynamics of local congregational engagement, the use of digital tools to enhance outreach, and comparative sustainability strategies in other Orthodox jurisdictions across Africa. This study underscores the need for strategic interventions to ensure the resilience and impact of the AOCK's mission in addressing social and environmental challenges.

Keywords: ecumenical, diakonia, strategies, sustainability, faith-based organisation, Orthodox.

INTRODUCTION

The African Orthodox Church of Kenya (AOCK) exemplifies the role of faith-based organisations in promoting unity and serving marginalised communities. Through its ecumenical collaborations and diaconal initiatives, the church addresses societal challenges while advancing theological principles. This article examines the sustainability of these efforts, highlighting the challenges and strategies that can enhance their resilience and impact.

The background of the research

The Orthodox Church of Kenya, as part of the African Orthodox Church (AOC), offers a compelling framework for examining sustainability within faith-based organisations. Rooted in ancient liturgical traditions and theological foundations, the church embodies a unique blend of ecumenical principles and diaconal service, addressing systemic challenges such as resource inequity and corruption. Its growth amidst challenges like limited access to theological education, leadership inclusivity, and diverse spiritual engagement highlights its potential as a model for sustainable development in Africa. The church's ecumenical efforts promote unity among Christian

traditions, while its diaconal work focuses on serving marginalised communities, aligning with broader global initiatives for justice and social transformation.

Faith-based organisations globally have been recognised for their transformative role in sustainable development, particularly in contexts where state-led efforts face limitations (Marshall, 2021). Churches often act as catalysts for community resilience and advocacy, addressing societal challenges through theological frameworks (Harris & Moberg, 2020). Kenya's diverse religious landscape makes it a significant case study for exploring the intersection of faith and sustainability. The Orthodox Church of Kenya exemplifies how theological insights can be synthesised with actionable strategies to foster community empowerment and effective ecumenical and diaconal engagement. However, challenges such as reliance on external aid, inadequate leadership structures, and insufficient catechetical education underscore the need for localised, inclusive approaches (Waweru, 2020). The church's engagement in diaconal work reinforces the imperative for faith-based organisations to address social justice and promote unity among Christian denominations (Phiri, 2018).

This research aims to investigate sustainability strategies rooted in the practices of the African Orthodox Church of Kenya, emphasising leadership development, theological education, and interfaith collaboration. By drawing lessons from the church's ecumenical and diaconal efforts, the study seeks to provide actionable insights for other faith-based organisations striving to balance tradition with modern sustainability imperatives. Furthermore, it explores the broader implications of integrating eco-theology into operational frameworks, contributing to the global discourse on faith and sustainable development.

Statement of the problem

The sustainability of ecumenical and diaconal work within Africa, particularly in the African Orthodox Church of Kenya, presents a complex challenge that demands a critical examination. Despite their vital contributions to fostering unity among Christian traditions and addressing societal inequalities, these initiatives often lack the durability needed to create a long-term impact. The core issue lies in the question: Why do ecumenical and diaconal efforts struggle with sustainability? Therefore, ways of addressing these challenges to ensure there is dependability and resilience of ecumenical and diakonia work!

These challenges arise from several interconnected factors. Inadequate leadership structures and over-reliance on external aid weaken the operational foundation of such initiatives. Similarly, limited access to theological education and insufficient engagement with local communities hinder the ability to adapt to evolving social and environmental demands. Without strategic and contextually appropriate frameworks, these efforts risk becoming inconsistent, undermining their potential to address pressing issues such as climate change, corruption, and resource inequity in Kenya and beyond.

This research is significant because it seeks to bridge these gaps by developing strategies that enhance dependability and ensure the longevity of ecumenical and diaconal efforts. By focusing on key areas such as leadership development, robust local partnerships, and comprehensive theological education, the study aims to propose actionable solutions that align with the traditions and mission of the African Orthodox Church of Kenya. Furthermore, the research highlights the church's potential to serve as a model for leveraging faith-based initiatives to promote justice, environmental stewardship, and community resilience.

The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for faith-based organisations, church leaders, and policymakers. By addressing the root causes of unsustainability and proposing context-specific strategies, the research offers a roadmap for ensuring that ecumenical and diaconal efforts remain impactful over time. Strengthening these initiatives will not only empower the African Orthodox Church of Kenya to navigate contemporary challenges but also contribute to broader efforts in advancing sustainable development across Africa.

Objective

The study aims to analyse the underlying factors affecting the sustainability of ecumenical and diaconal efforts within the African Orthodox Church of Kenya. It seeks to identify challenges limiting the dependability of these initiatives and develop strategic frameworks to enhance their resilience and long-term impact.

Research Questions

1. What systemic challenges impede the sustainability of ecumenical and diaconal work in the African Orthodox Church of Kenya?
2. In what ways do leadership structures, theological education, and local community engagement influence the dependability and effectiveness of these initiatives?
3. What context-specific strategies can be implemented to strengthen the reliability and continuity of ecumenical and diaconal efforts in the church?
4. How can insights from the African Orthodox Church of Kenya be leveraged to guide faith-based organisations across Africa in promoting sustainable and impactful initiatives?

African Orthodox Church of Kenya and its ecumenical and diaconal work.

The African Orthodox Church of Kenya (AOCK), established in 1929, emerged as part of the broader African Orthodox Church movement, which sought to address the socio-political and religious challenges of the early 20th century. This movement was driven by African Christians striving for ecclesiastical independence from colonial missionary churches, which often imposed foreign leadership and practices. Inspired by the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the AOCK adopted its liturgical, theological, and ecclesiastical frameworks, contextualising them to meet the unique spiritual and social needs of African communities. Over the decades, the AOCK has grown into a significant religious institution in Kenya, blending its theological heritage with a strong commitment to social transformation (Thiani, 2024).

The AOCK's ecumenical efforts have been instrumental in fostering unity among diverse Christian denominations in Kenya. These initiatives aim to promote collaboration and inclusivity, addressing shared challenges within the religious and societal landscape. The church's diaconal mission, a cornerstone of its identity, focuses on serving marginalised communities through various social programs. These include initiatives in education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and social justice, reflecting the Orthodox tradition of philanthropy and social responsibility. For instance, the AOCK has been involved in feeding programs, microfinance projects, and advocacy against corruption, demonstrating its dedication to holistic community development (Dietrich & Thiani, 2021).

Despite its significant contributions, the AOCK faces challenges that threaten the sustainability of its ecumenical and diaconal work. Limited resources, reliance on external aid, and the need for more structured leadership and theological education are among the key obstacles. These challenges underscore the importance of developing sustainable strategies to ensure the church's long-term impact. The AOCK's history and mission exemplify the transformative potential of faith-based organisations in addressing systemic issues and fostering resilience within communities. By integrating theological principles with practical strategies, the church continues to play a vital role in Kenya's social and spiritual development (Ampony et al., 2021).

The AOCK's contributions to Kenya's development have also been recognised in the broader context of global Orthodox Christianity. Its ability to adapt Orthodox theological principles to local contexts has made it a model for other faith-based organisations in Africa. The church's emphasis on creation care and environmental stewardship aligns with the growing global focus on eco-theology, which explores the relationship between faith and environmental responsibility. This aspect of the AOCK's mission highlights its relevance in addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change and resource inequity (Conradie, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Orthodox Church believes that its mission began immediately after the day of Pentecost, as described in Acts 2:1-13. This event marks the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the birth of the early Christian Church. The Pentecost narrative holds profound significance in an ecumenical context, emphasising themes of unity and inclusivity in the establishment of the early Church. The Holy Spirit descends upon individuals from diverse backgrounds and languages, uniting them into one community of believers. This spiritual unity transcends

cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences. In the ecumenical movement, Pentecost serves as a model for fostering Christian unity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, encouraging deeper cooperation among various traditions (Kinnamon, 2016). This emphasises shared faith in Christ and the sacraments as the basis for unity, overshadowing denominational divides.

In the ecumenical context, Pentecost illustrates unity in diversity. Just as the early Church embraced people of varying cultures and languages, the ecumenical movement promotes dialogue and cooperation across diverse Christian traditions. The goal is not uniformity but an acknowledgement that different expressions of faith can coexist and enrich the universal Church. According to Robra (1994), W.A. Visser't Hooft, the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), emphasized that diakonia should not be viewed as a means to an end but as an essential dimension of the Church's identity as the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 8–9). Visser't Hooft asserted that *kerygma* (preaching), *koinonia* (community/unity), and *diakonia* (sharing and healing) are the three interconnected manifestations of the Church's mission (John 17:21; Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:3 5). These elements transcend societal and national boundaries, affirming an eschatological perspective that envisions a new creation under God's kingdom. The goal is not uniformity but recognition that diverse expressions of faith can coexist and enrich the universal Church. According to Robra (1994:278), the first WCC secretary, W.A. Visser't Hooft, says,

I urge the churches to serve in the world, not seeing diakonia as a means towards another end but as itself an essential dimension at the very heart of the church being as the body of Christ (2 Cor. 8-9). For Visser't Hooft, *kerygma* (preaching), *koinonia* (sharing community/unity), and *diakonia* (sharing and healing) were the three interrelated manifestations of the mission (apostolate) of the church. The unity of the church in Jesus Christ (John 17:21) and history were used as central categories transcending the given and ever-changing structure of modern societies and national or confessional ties in an eschatological perspective (Isaiah 65:17-25; Rev. 21:3-5; 2 Pet. 3:13).

The day of Pentecost certainly represents the breaking down of historical and theological barriers, such as language, culture, and social status, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This spirit of inclusivity underscores the ecumenical movement's goal to overcome divisions among Christian denominations. By focusing on shared beliefs, such as the sacraments and faith in Christ, ecumenism seeks to bridge these divides and restore the unity that characterised the early Church (Murray, 2014). Before the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles and other believers were gathered in prayer and fellowship, demonstrating the central role of prayer in fostering unity. Similarly, prayer remains a cornerstone of modern ecumenical efforts, as authentic unity is achievable only through divine grace (Kinnamon, 2016). The communal experience of Pentecost serves as a theological and moral foundation for these efforts, affirming the Church's role as a Spirit-bound community.

Orthodox missions, deeply rooted in the day of Pentecost, have endured for over twenty-one centuries. This mission is profoundly depicted in the Icon of the Descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. The icon portrays the Apostles seated in a semicircle in the upper room, awaiting the fulfilment of Christ's promise: "Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49, NIV). This scene symbolises the Orthodox understanding of mission and theology, emphasising the descent of divine power upon the Apostles. The liturgical and sacramental traditions embedded in Orthodox spirituality offer a uniquely Eastern approach to ecumenical dialogue and unity, distinct from Western theological frameworks (Ware, 1997). The icon also depicts Cosmos, an old man representing the world, illustrating the Church's universal mission to transform the world through love and service (Ouspensky, 1987).

Interfaith dialogue, as an extension of ecumenical engagement, fosters mutual understanding and respect for diverse religious traditions. Machado (2001) outlines the multifaceted nature of interfaith dialogue, including the dialogue of life (social interaction), action (collaborative justice), religious experience (shared worship), and theological exchange. These forms of dialogue align with the ecumenical and diaconal goals of the Orthodox Church, emphasising unity and collaboration in addressing societal challenges. According to Schaff (1995), Orthodox theology remains rooted in Apostolic tradition, exemplifying continuity in faith and practice. However, Schaff cautions that rigid adherence to traditional dogma may sometimes hinder ecumenical relationships, creating tensions with other Christian denominations. Ecumenical dialogue seeks to balance the preservation of Orthodox distinctiveness with a spirit of openness and mutual enrichment.

The Church's self-knowledge is rooted in its understanding of Christ, as revealed through the Scriptures, which form the apostolic doctrine of the Church. This doctrine primarily refers to the teachings of the Apostles as recorded in the New Testament and secondarily to their interpretation and commentary, provided these remain consistent with apostolic truth. Within this framework, the Church attributes apostolic status to its great saints, ecumenical councils, and even faithful believers whose lives manifest authentic apostolic charisma and truth (Ware, 1985). This emphasis on apostolic tradition underscores the dynamic nature of Orthodox ecclesiology, which is central to the mission of the African Orthodox Church of Kenya (AOCK) as it seeks to sustain its ecumenical and diaconal efforts.

The ecclesiology of AOCK, like that of the entire Orthodox Church, is firmly grounded in this apostolic foundation, claiming to represent an accurate exegesis of the New Testament *Ecclesia*. Unlike static representations, apostolic ecclesiology perceives the Church as a dynamic and living entity, where the *energeia* or charisma or gifts of the Holy Spirit demonstrate the ongoing power of the Resurrection (*Anastasis*) in contemporary society. Within Orthodoxy, the Church is seen as the manifestation of the renewing power of the Resurrection, guided by the Holy Spirit. This theological perspective informs the mission of the Church, emphasising its responsibility to address not only spiritual but also social challenges in a manner consistent with the apostolic tradition. This foundational understanding has direct implications for the AOCK as it aligns its theological identity with the practical demands of ecumenical dialogue and diaconal service (Bria, 1994).

In Orthodox ecclesiology, the Church of Christ is identified exclusively as the Orthodox Church, which considers itself the custodian of apostolic continuity. This belief highlights the Orthodox view that it uniquely embodies the apostolic experience and charisma. In Orthodox ecclesiology, there is only one Church of Christ, and that is the Orthodox Church. According to the Toronto Statement, 2,

The Orthodox member Churches of the WCC accept its Constitutional Basis, as well as its aims and goals. They firmly believe that the ecclesiological presuppositions of the Toronto Statement (1950) on "The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches" are of paramount importance for the Orthodox participation in the Council. It is therefore self-understood that the WCC is not and must never become a "super-Church". "The purpose of the WCC is not to negotiate unions between Churches, which can only be done by the Churches themselves, acting on their initiatives, but to bring the Churches into living contact with each other and to promote the study and discussion of the issues of Church unity.

As Ware (1985:250) explains, the Orthodox Church sees itself as preserving the transformative presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church's life. However, this exclusivity often creates tension in ecumenical efforts, particularly as Orthodox Churches, including the AOCK, participate in organisations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC). The Toronto Statement (1950) outlines the WCC's role, emphasising that it is not a "super-Church" but rather a forum for fostering dialogue among Christian denominations. Orthodox member churches affirm the importance of this principle, viewing the WCC as a platform for promoting unity while maintaining theological integrity (Toronto Statement, 1950).

Nonetheless, Orthodox participation in the WCC and similar ecumenical bodies is not without challenges. Gregory the Theologian warned against engaging in theological discourse without spiritual purification, cautioning that worldly notions could distort the Gospel and alienate the Church from its mission (Gregory, cited in Ware, 1985). These warnings resonate with the struggles faced by the AOCK in articulating its position within a pluralistic ecumenical framework. For the AOCK, balancing its commitment to Orthodox ecclesiology with its engagement in ecumenical dialogue necessitates careful theological and practical reflection. These dynamic highlights the ongoing need for the Church to adapt its diaconal and ecumenical efforts to the unique challenges of the African context.

Bria (1994) further emphasises the Eucharistic understanding of the Church within Orthodox ecclesiology, identifying the Eucharistic liturgy as the apex of Church life. During the Eucharist, the congregation celebrates the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ by partaking in His glorified body and blood, symbolising a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. Beyond this sacred act, the concept of "the liturgy after the liturgy," as articulated by the Church Fathers, calls for the extension of this sacrament into the broader community. This idea entails engaging with individuals across diverse social, racial, and religious boundaries, reflecting ecumenism

and diakonia as expressions of the Church's service to humanity. For the AOCK, this concept serves as a theological basis for strengthening its diaconal mission, particularly in addressing the socio-economic and cultural challenges of its context.

The complexities of Orthodox ecclesiology about ecumenical work are particularly pronounced within the African Orthodox Church of Kenya. The researcher observes that this tension often positions the AOCK either at the centre or on the margins of ecumenical discussions, depending on its theological articulation and practical engagement. To enhance its impact, the AOCK must re-evaluate its approach to diakonia, ensuring that it reflects both the equality of denominations in ecumenical settings and the unique theological contributions of Orthodoxy. Ultimately, the Church's participation in ecumenical and diaconal work should transcend theological constructs, shape meaningful human interaction and fostering a shared language of service and unity.

Research Gaps

Existing research on ecumenical and diaconal work in Africa has highlighted the vital role of faith-based organisations in promoting community development and social justice. However, critical gaps remain in ensuring the long-term sustainability of these efforts, particularly in the African Orthodox Church of Kenya (AOCK). Previous studies often lack comprehensive frameworks to support resilience, focusing instead on external aid without developing localised sustainability models (Dietrich & Thiani, 2021). This reliance undermines the dependability of ecumenical and diaconal initiatives, leaving their long-term viability uncertain.

There is a gap in the hierarchical nature of leadership structures within faith-based organisations, which limits inclusivity and adaptability. While many studies acknowledge this issue, few propose dynamic and inclusive leadership models that prioritise local engagement and shared responsibility (Ampony et al., 2021). Additionally, the role of youth and women in sustaining ecumenical and diaconal work has been overlooked, despite their potential as vital contributors to community resilience and the advancement of church missions (Thiani, 2024). Furthermore, the impact of technology and media on amplifying these efforts remains underexplored. Digital tools offer significant opportunities to modernise strategies and reach broader audiences, yet their integration into faith-based initiatives requires deeper analysis (Dietrich & Thiani, 2021). This study seeks to address these gaps by providing practical strategies and insights to enhance the sustainability and impact of ecumenical and diaconal work within the AOCK, offering a model for other faith-based organisations in Africa.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Building on the previous chapter's exploration of the African Orthodox Church of Kenya's (AOCK) ecumenical and diaconal activities, this chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to evaluate the church's efforts and their role in fostering sustainability. It describes the research design, data collection methods, data analysis processes, and ethical considerations, all aimed at ensuring rigour and transparency. The study employs a qualitative research design, grounded in the desktop library methodology, to systematically analyse existing literature and scholarly works related to the AOCK's mission and its contributions to community development and social justice.

Research Design

This article employs a qualitative research design, widely recognised in theological and ecclesiastical studies for examining the interrelation between theological principles, historical contexts, and practical applications. As Pieterse (2001) and Van der Ven (1998) have shown, qualitative approaches provide valuable insights into the dynamic interplay of tradition, culture, and lived experiences within faith communities. This method has been particularly effective in ecclesiastical research, such as Thiani's (2020) examination of the AOCK's theological framework and cultural adaptations.

The desktop library methodology, a subset of qualitative research, facilitates the review of secondary data sources, including historical records, theological texts, peer-reviewed journal articles, and case studies. This approach has proven successful in documenting the historical and missiological contributions of African Independent Churches, as demonstrated by Nandi and Kima (2015). By leveraging this methodology, the study

establishes a robust framework for assessing the AOCK's ecumenical engagements, diaconal initiatives, and sustainability approaches.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis serves as the primary method for identifying and organising key patterns within the data. This technique, endorsed by Braun and Clarke (2006), is commonly used in ecclesiastical studies to interpret complex theological and historical data. Previous research, such as Thiani's (2020) study on the AOCK's theological framework, demonstrates the efficacy of this approach in uncovering recurring themes. Narrative summaries further enhance accessibility by linking historical records, theological texts, and case studies into a cohesive presentation (Gitau, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity underpins this study. By relying on secondary data sources, the research minimises ethical risks associated with primary data collection. All sources are properly cited to maintain transparency and academic honesty, following best practices in theological scholarship (Nandi & Kima, 2015). Additionally, sensitive data from church records and online databases is anonymised to safeguard privacy, ensuring the study adheres to strict ethical standards.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis and interpretation of the findings related to the African Orthodox Church of Kenya's (AOCK) engagement in ecumenism and diakonia, and to evaluate their contributions towards sustainability. Using secondary data collected through the desktop methodology, recurring themes, patterns, and relationships between the research variables, ecumenical activities, diakonia, Orthodox culture and mission, and sustainability challenges are analysed to address the research objectives.

AOCK's Historical and Theological Bases of Ecumenical and Diaconal Work

This section interprets the data related to the first objective: To examine the historical and theological foundation of the African Orthodox Church of Kenya's participation in ecumenical and diaconal activities.

1. Historical Context - Analysis of AOCK's historical involvement in ecumenical movements such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All-Africa Council of Churches (AACC). The interpretation emphasises the Church's motivations for aligning with global and regional ecumenical bodies and traces its diaconal initiatives from the colonial period to the present.
2. Theological Foundations - Discussion of the theological principles underpinning the Church's commitment to diakonia and ecumenism, such as the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ and the Trinitarian mission. This section explores how these foundations influence AOCK's practices and aligns with broader Orthodox ecclesiology.

Impact and Effectiveness of Ecumenical and Diaconal Engagements

This section analysed findings related to the second objective: To assess the impact and effectiveness of the Church's ecumenical and diaconal engagements. Ecumenical Impact - Interpretation of the Church's role in ecumenical activities, evaluating its contribution to fostering unity and dialogue among Christian denominations. The analysis includes examples of collaborative projects, such as education programs and interfaith initiatives.

1. Diaconal Effectiveness - Assessment of AOCK's social service activities, such as healthcare provision and community development. Interpretation focuses on their reach, sustainability, and alignment with the Church's mission to serve as a beacon of compassion and outreach.

Key Sustainability Challenges

This section addresses the third objective: To identify the church's key sustainability challenges in maintaining its ecumenical and diaconal work. Dependence on External Aid - Detailed analysis of the Church's reliance on foreign donations and its implications for sustainability.

1. Local Congregational Engagement - Interpretation of data highlighting the limited involvement of local congregations in supporting Church operations, including financial contributions and active participation.
2. Cultural and Structural Barriers - Examination of sociocultural factors and organisational challenges that hinder the Church's ability to mobilise resources and expand its diaconal activities.

Strategies for Enhancing Sustainability

This section focuses on findings related to the fourth objective: To explore possible strategies for enhancing the sustainability of the Church's ecumenical and diaconal efforts. Empowering Local Congregations - Analysis of approaches for increasing local engagement, such as stewardship programs and education on the importance of diakonia.

1. Resource Mobilisation - Interpretation of strategies for reducing dependency on foreign aid, including partnerships with local organisations and businesses.
2. Integration of Ecumenical Activities with Development Goals - Discussion of how the Church can leverage ecumenical platforms to address broader development challenges, ensuring alignment with sustainability objectives.

Research Findings

This section synthesises the insights gained from the analysis of the African Orthodox Church of Kenya's (AOCK) participation in ecumenical and diaconal work, framed within the broader context of its sustainability challenges. By examining the historical, theological, and operational dimensions of the Church's activities, key themes and patterns emerge that address the research objectives.

Historical and Theological Foundations

The AOCK's participation in ecumenical and diaconal initiatives is deeply rooted in its historical legacy and theological ethos. The Church's active engagement in ecumenical movements, such as its membership in the World Council of Churches (WCC) and All-Africa Council of Churches (AACC), reflects its commitment to fostering Christian unity and addressing social needs. Theologically, these efforts are anchored in Orthodox ecclesiology, which views the Church as the Body of Christ, called to manifest divine love through service (diakonia) and promote reconciliation among Christian denominations. However, the study highlights that while the Church's historical and theological foundations provide a strong framework for its work, the practical translation of these principles into impactful and sustainable actions remains uneven.

Impact and Effectiveness of Ecumenical and Diaconal Engagements

The analysis reveals that while the AOCK has made commendable contributions to ecumenical dialogue and diaconal service, the tangible impact of these activities within the local context is limited. Ecumenical engagements have fostered collaborative relationships with other churches and organisations, enabling participation in projects such as education and community development. However, these initiatives often lack continuity and visibility among the local congregation. Similarly, diaconal efforts, particularly those addressing healthcare and poverty alleviation, demonstrate the Church's commitment to social transformation but are frequently constrained by insufficient resources and over-reliance on external donations.

Key Sustainability Challenges

The AOCK faces significant challenges in achieving sustainability, particularly in its financial and operational capacities. The reliance on foreign donations, which dates back to its colonial origins, undermines the Church's

ability to independently sustain its mission. This dependency is exacerbated by limited local involvement, as many congregants are not actively engaged in supporting Church operations, either through financial contributions or participation in diaconal activities. Cultural and structural barriers, including a lack of awareness regarding the importance of stewardship and organisational limitations, further hinder the Church's ability to mobilise resources and foster a sense of ownership among its members.

Strategies for Enhancing Sustainability

The findings suggest that achieving sustainability requires a multifaceted approach. Empowering local congregations through education on stewardship and the theological significance of diakonia is essential for fostering greater involvement. Resource mobilisation strategies, such as partnerships with local businesses and community-based fundraising initiatives, can reduce dependency on foreign aid. Furthermore, integrating ecumenical activities with long-term development goals, such as vocational training and capacity-building programs, offers a pathway for aligning the Church's social mission with sustainability objectives. These strategies emphasise the need for a localised, context-sensitive approach that leverages the Church's existing strengths while addressing its challenges.

CONCLUSION

Historical and Theological Foundations

The AOCC's historical and theological foundations provide a robust framework for its participation in ecumenical and diaconal work. The Church's alignment with global ecumenical movements has enabled it to contribute to Christian unity and collective service. However, the study concludes that there is a need to deepen the integration of these foundations into operational strategies that address sustainability.

Impact and Effectiveness of Ecumenical and Diaconal Engagements

While the Church has made impactful contributions through its ecumenical dialogue and diaconal outreach, the study found that these initiatives often lack continuity and tangible outcomes within the local community. The effectiveness of these engagements hinges on the ability to align them with localised developmental priorities and foster greater visibility among congregations.

Sustainability Challenges

The study highlights critical sustainability challenges, including financial dependency on external aid, limited engagement from local congregations, and structural barriers that impede resource mobilisation. These challenges underline the necessity for capacity-building and localised strategies to reduce reliance on foreign support and empower congregations.

Strategies for Sustainability

The synthesis points to actionable strategies, such as enhancing stewardship education, fostering local partnerships, and aligning Church initiatives with community development goals. By embracing these strategies, the AOCC can effectively bridge the gap between its theological and operational realities, ensuring the long-term viability of its mission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the Study

1. Develop stewardship education programs focused on diakonia and the theological importance of community involvement, encouraging local congregations to actively support Church operations financially and logistically.

2. Establish partnerships with local businesses, civic organisations, and government agencies to create sustainable funding models while reducing reliance on foreign donations.
3. Implement training programs in leadership, resource management, and community engagement to enhance the Church's ability to mobilise resources and address structural challenges effectively.
4. Align ecumenical projects with long-term objectives such as vocational training, education, and healthcare initiatives to amplify both spiritual and social impact while ensuring sustainability.

Recommendations for Further Studies

1. Comprehensive Study on Ecumenical Activities and Sustainability Strategies: Expand this research to other Orthodox jurisdictions in Africa, comparing their approaches to sustainability and ecumenical work to develop adaptable strategies that can further inform the AOCK's context.
2. Evaluating the Role of Local Congregations in Enhancing Orthodox Church Sustainability: Conduct an in-depth analysis of how local congregation dynamics influence the sustainability of Orthodox Church operations, with particular focus on financial contributions and community involvement.
3. Exploring Digital Tools for Orthodox Missions: Investigate the potential of digital technology and online platforms to advance ecumenical and diaconal efforts, particularly in engaging youth and expanding the reach of the AOCK's initiatives.

In conclusion, the article provides a critical evaluation of the AOCK's historical and theological contributions to ecumenical and diaconal initiatives, linking these efforts to its mission of unity and service. It highlights achievements while addressing sustainability challenges, including financial dependency and limited local engagement. Proposed strategies, such as stewardship education, partnerships, and capacity building, offer actionable solutions to align the Church's vision with sustainable practices. Ultimately, the chapter outlines a transformative path for the AOCK to overcome obstacles and advance its mission with renewed focus and resilience.

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