

The Dialectic of Jitegemea: Liberation, Burden, and the Quest for Sustainable Ministry in Kenyan Presbyterianism

Dr Samuel Gitonga, Henry K. Mbinda

Department of Social Transformation, Tangaza University, Nairobi, Kenya

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91100519>

Received: 27 November 2025; Accepted: 03 December 2025; Published: 21 December 2025

ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study critically examines the implications of the Jitegemea (self-reliance) philosophy on clergy sustainability within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), with a specific focus on the Milimani South Presbytery. Initially articulated by Rev. John Gatu in 1972 as a postcolonial vision of ecclesial autonomy and economic empowerment, Jitegemea has evolved into a complex institutional paradigm. While intended as a liberative theology, its implementation often produces structural strain and vocational precarity. Quantitative data from 98 respondents revealed a moderate but statistically non-significant correlation between adherence to Jitegemea and perceived clergy sustainability ($r = .312$, $p = .098$; $\beta = -.365$, $p = .126$). In contrast, institutional support showed a strong, statistically significant correlation ($r = .892$, $p = .001$) and regression coefficient ($\beta = .996$, $p = .003$), indicating its centrality in sustaining pulpit ministry. Qualitative interviews ($n = 20$) corroborated these findings, highlighting three systemic burdens, financial precarity, administrative overload, and psychological distress, as well as widespread concern over post-retirement insecurity. However, 31% of participants also reported successful local adaptations of Jitegemea through shared governance, entrepreneurial ministry, and pastoral care systems. Guided by Self-Reliance Theory, Ethical Leadership Theory, and Human Development Theory, the study affirms that sustainable ministry is not achieved through ideology alone, but through enabling institutional structures. The research concludes that Jitegemea must be reimagined as a structurally embedded praxis, requiring reforms in pastoral care, vocational formation, and retirement planning. These findings contribute to contemporary African ecclesiology by reframing sustainability as a theological and systemic imperative rooted in justice, dignity, and structural care.

Keywords: Jitegemea, clergy sustainability, PCEA, African ecclesiology, self-reliance theology, institutional support, ethical leadership, post-retirement insecurity

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of indigenous Christian expressions across Africa has fundamentally reshaped the contours of ecclesial identity, ministry sustainability, and theological autonomy, challenging inherited missionary paradigms and promoting postcolonial theological agency (Bediako, 1995; Sanneh, 2003). Within this context, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) has embraced the Swahili concept of Jitegemea, meaning “self-reliance”, as a defining theological and institutional framework. Initially articulated by Rev. John Gatu in 1972 through his proposal for a moratorium on foreign missionaries and financial support, Jitegemea represented a radical theological shift towards African ecclesial sovereignty and economic independence (Gatu, 1972; Kimambo, 2009).

Over time, Jitegemea evolved from a prophetic proclamation into a guiding institutional principle embedded in the PCEA Constitution (Mutarataru), shaping pastoral care, budgetary priorities, ministerial formation, and leadership expectations (PCEA, 2018). The concept aligns with longstanding African traditions of communal solidarity and resistance to externally imposed development models (Kenyatta, 1963; Nyerere, 1968), emphasizing agency, dignity, and self-determination. Theologically, it also resonates with liberationist impulses found in African Christian theology and postcolonial ecclesiology (Mugambi, 1995).

From a theoretical perspective, Jitegemea finds resonance in three key interdisciplinary frameworks. First, Self-Reliance Theory (Chambers, 1997; Freire, 1970; Korten, 1990) critiques dependency-based models and advocates for endogenous, participatory development rooted in local capacity. Second, Ethical Leadership Theory (Brown & Treviño, 2006) highlights the importance of integrity, accountability, and value-driven leadership, critical in ecclesial spaces where spiritual and administrative mandates converge. Third, Human Development Theory (Sen, 1999; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2005) shifts the focus from institutional survival to human flourishing by prioritizing empowerment, agency, and well-being.

Yet, Jitegemea's implementation reveals a significant dialectical tension. While the philosophy offers a liberative vision of autonomy and contextualized leadership (Banda, 2020; Walls, 1996), its operationalization has imposed considerable structural burdens on clergy, particularly in economically constrained presbyteries such as Milimani South. Ministers are increasingly expected to function as both spiritual shepherds and institutional administrators, roles that demand high levels of accountability, resource mobilization, and leadership amid financial scarcity (Chitando, 2011; Kalu, 2008). Without adequate organizational support, this dual responsibility has been linked to spiritual fatigue, economic precarity, and vocational burnout (Rubel, Kee, & Rimi, 2021).

As Njoya (2003) aptly argues, self-reliance, if unaccompanied by structural support and moral accountability, risks becoming a theology of abandonment, spiritualizing economic hardship while masking systemic neglect. In such contexts, Jitegemea may inadvertently reinforce the very inequalities it sought to dismantle, particularly when local congregations are unable to meet the demands of full ecclesial autonomy without sustainable institutional backing.

Despite its prominence in denominational policy and theological rhetoric, the lived implications of Jitegemea on clergy sustainability remain under-explored. While existing literature documents its doctrinal origins and ideological intent (Gatu, 1972; Mugambi, 1995; Gitari, 2005), empirical studies examining how pulpit employees navigate Jitegemea's demands in real-time contexts are notably limited. This gap is particularly evident in under-resourced presbyteries, where the structural challenges of implementing self-reliance are most acute.

This study responds to that gap by critically investigating the dialectical implications of Jitegemea within the PCEA's Milimani South Presbytery. Specifically, it asks: How does the PCEA's work system, shaped by the Jitegemea philosophy, affect the sustainability of pulpit employees within the Milimani South Presbytery? In doing so, the study explores the theological, ethical, and institutional factors mediating this relationship, contributing to broader conversations in African ecclesiology, sustainable ministry, and the ethics of church leadership in post-mission contexts.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

A fundamental disjunction has emerged between the aspirational ethos of Jitegemea and its lived implementation within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). While enshrined as a doctrine of ecclesial autonomy and theological self-determination, Jitegemea has, in practice, produced unintended operational burdens, particularly for pulpit employees ministering in decentralized and resource-constrained presbyterial contexts such as Milimani South. Ministers are increasingly required to perform overlapping roles as spiritual caregivers, institutional managers, and fiscal stewards, often without adequate structural support or financial security (Rubel, Kee, & Rimi, 2021). This convergence of expectations under precarious conditions has led to increased vocational fatigue, erosion of clergy well-being, and a diminishing capacity to sustain pastoral excellence. The vision of liberation once promised by Jitegemea now risks being overshadowed by its institutional demands.

This growing tension is exacerbated by a significant empirical lacuna. Although extensive literature explores Jitegemea's theological and historical dimensions (Gatu, 1972; Mugambi, 1995; Gitari, 2005; Kimambo, 2009), few studies have examined its real-time implications for clergy sustainability, particularly within financially marginalized parishes. The lived dissonance between the philosophy's emancipatory ideal and the organizational austerity that often accompanies it remains critically under-investigated (Kagema, 2014). Ministers navigating

this terrain often do so without scholarly frameworks to interpret or respond to the moral and structural contradictions inherent in their roles.

Moreover, while Jitegemea aligns conceptually with interdisciplinary paradigms such as Self-Reliance Theory (Chambers, 1997; Freire, 1970), Ethical Leadership Theory (Brown & Treviño, 2006), and Human Development Theory (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2005), these lenses have not been systematically synthesized within African ecclesiological discourse to assess the philosophy's impact on clergy well-being, institutional justice, or sustainable leadership. The absence of such intersectional analysis has impeded the development of integrated, evidence-based responses.

The consequences of this empirical and theoretical deficit are far-reaching. First, it results in structural inertia, as the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) lacks the diagnostic insight and evaluative tools necessary to reform ministerial systems or effectively mitigate institutional risk. Second, it creates ethical tension, whereby the theological ideal of self-reliance, when unaccompanied by supportive structures, inadvertently fosters moral injury, vocational burnout, and internalized dependency among clergy (Njoya, 2003). Finally, it generates strategic disconnection, as pastoral formation, ecclesial governance, and policy design become increasingly detached from the lived realities of clergy labor, thus undermining the sustainability and relevance of church leadership in practice.

Considering these concerns, this study poses the following central question:

How does the operationalization of the Jitegemea philosophy within the PCEA's Milimani South Presbytery affect the vocational sustainability and well-being of pulpit employees?

Through the integration of qualitative fieldwork and interdisciplinary theoretical analysis, the research seeks to determine whether Jitegemea, as currently applied, functions as a pathway to authentic empowerment or as an under-resourced institutional burden. Findings will contribute to policy development, pastoral care frameworks, and theological discourse on sustainable ministry and leadership ethics in African Christianity.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to critically investigate the dialectical implications of the Jitegemea (self-reliance) philosophy on the sustainability of pulpit employees within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), using the Milimani South Presbytery as a case study.

Research Question

How does the operationalization of the Jitegemea philosophy within the PCEA's Milimani South Presbytery affect the vocational sustainability and well-being of pulpit employees?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

This study is conceptually anchored in the philosophy of Jitegemea, a theologically grounded ethic of self-reliance that has profoundly influenced the ecclesial identity and institutional operations of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) since the early 1970s. The term, derived from the Kiswahili word for "self-reliance," was championed by Rev. John Gatu in a landmark ecclesiastical proposal in 1971, where he called for a moratorium on foreign missionary personnel and financial dependence in African churches (Gatu, 1975). Far from a mere administrative appeal, Jitegemea embodied a radical theological vision, rooted in African ecclesiology and postcolonial critique, that sought to deconstruct the dependency logic entrenched by decades of mission patronage, replacing it with a model of contextual self-determination, spiritual maturity, and institutional autonomy. Njoya (2000) reminds us that theology must "think heavenly" but "act Kenyanly", a provocation that resonates with the need to interpret Jitegemea not as static doctrine but as a living ethic responsive to the economic and vocational realities of Kenyan clergy. Codified in the PCEA constitution (Mutarataru), Jitegemea evolved into more than a vision; it became a prescriptive framework guiding financial governance, leadership formation, and ministerial expectations (PCEA, 2018).

The present study critically interrogates Jitegemea not merely as a theological principle but as an operative institutional logic that structures the expectations and sustainability of pulpit employees. Central to this inquiry is the tension between its emancipatory ideals and the burden it may impose when interpreted rigidly or implemented in resource-constrained ecclesial contexts. Thus, the study positions Jitegemea within a wider constellation of global theoretical frameworks to illuminate the multidimensional nature of its influence.

Self-Reliance Theory, as developed in the works of Robert Chambers (1995) and David Korten (1990), offers an important comparative lens. Emphasizing endogenous development, participatory agency, and systemic autonomy, this theory affirms the critical need for communities to mobilize internal resources and reject externally imposed development paradigms. It resonates strongly with the theological core of Jitegemea, particularly its critique of donor-dependency and its call for local initiative in ministry sustenance. Equally, the philosophical affinities with Julius Nyerere's (1968) concept of Ujamaa, a vision of African socialism rooted in communal self-reliance, reveal Jitegemea's embeddedness in broader African intellectual traditions that challenge neocolonial dependency structures. However, these models do not romanticize self-reliance; rather, they caution that uncritical valorization of autonomy, in the absence of institutional capacity and structural equity, can reproduce new forms of vulnerability and exclusion (Mkandawire, 2005). In this light, the study raises a critical question: does Jitegemea, as institutionalized within the PCEA, serve as a platform for empowerment or a veiled mechanism for austerity and clerical marginalization?

To deepen this inquiry into institutional dynamics, Ethical Leadership Theory provides a second analytical axis. Defined by traits such as integrity, fairness, and role modeling (Brown & Treviño, 2006), ethical leadership is particularly salient in faith-based organizations where spiritual and managerial roles are fused. In the PCEA, ministers are not only religious leaders but also administrative stewards and fiscal overseers, tasked with upholding the values of Jitegemea in both pulpit and policy. Ethical leadership theory enables critical analysis of how this dual mandate is navigated, and whether it translates into distributive justice, pastoral care, and supportive work environments for clergy. Recent scholarship suggests that ethical misalignment, where the burden of self-reliance is not matched by institutional support, may lead to moral fatigue, burnout, and erosion of vocational identity among church workers (Rubel, Kee, & Rimi, 2021). In this way, the moral clarity of Jitegemea may be compromised when enacted without a congruent organizational ethic.

Human Development Theory, particularly as articulated by Amartya Sen (1999), provides a third dimension of critique. By focusing on capabilities, agency, and well-being, Sen's framework shifts the analysis from institutional performance to human flourishing. This perspective is crucial for evaluating how Jitegemea affects the lived realities of pulpit employees: their economic security, emotional health, spiritual vitality, and professional growth. From this vantage point, Jitegemea can be seen as a potentially liberative doctrine that expands human capabilities when linked to institutional investment and community solidarity. Yet, if implemented as a cost-containment strategy devoid of relational and structural care, it risks reproducing deprivation under the guise of empowerment. The theory thus offers a normative metric against which the ecclesial praxis of Jitegemea can be judged, not just by financial sustainability but by its ability to safeguard and expand the full humanity of those who serve under its banner.

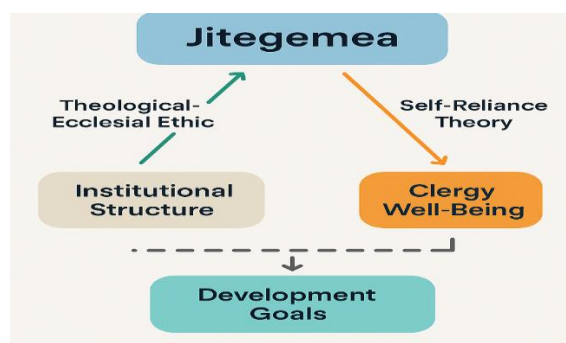


Figure 1: Conceptualization

By weaving these frameworks together, the study constructs a robust interdisciplinary lens for analyzing Jitegemea as a theological-political economy. This integrative theoretical framing allows for a nuanced

understanding of how the doctrine functions within the PCEA, not simply as a normative aspiration but as a lived and contested reality. The goal is not to dismiss the philosophical integrity of Jitegemea, but to subject it to critical scrutiny in order to discern whether it fosters sustainable ministry or inadvertently perpetuates systemic inequities under spiritualized language. Such analysis is vital in a time when African ecclesiologies are reclaiming their agency while navigating the complex terrain of neoliberal economic pressures, postcolonial legacies, and local theological commitments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to investigate the relationship between Presbyterian work ethic, organizational support, and the sustainability of pulpit employees within the PCEA Milimani South Presbytery. Grounded in a pragmatic philosophical orientation, the methodology was selected to enable the integration of both numerical data and contextual meaning, two critical dimensions when researching religious institutions and leadership well-being (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Mixed methods research is especially effective in theological and institutional studies where lived experiences and institutional structures intersect (Patton, 2015).

An explanatory sequential design was adopted, wherein quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data collection to deepen interpretation of the numerical findings. This design allows researchers to examine statistical patterns and then explore underlying causes and perspectives through narrative analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Toyon, 2021). The decision to sequence the phases in this way was also rooted in the nature of the research problem, which demanded both scale and depth in capturing clergy realities.

This study was framed within a pragmatic research philosophy, which views knowledge as situational and pluralistic (Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism allows researchers to use whichever methods best answer the research questions, whether qualitative, quantitative, or both. However, interpretivism also played a central role as a guiding paradigm for the qualitative component, emphasizing the subjective experiences and social contexts of clergy within faith-based institutions (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). Through this dual philosophical stance, the study acknowledged multiple realities, spiritual, organizational, and ethical, as central to the problem of sustainability in ministry.

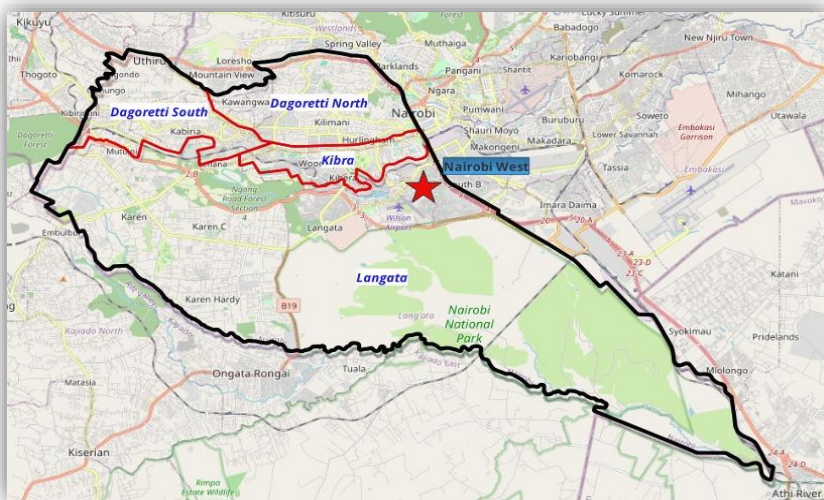


Figure 2: Area of Study.

The research was conducted in the PCEA Milimani South Presbytery, selected purposively as a representative and information-rich case within the broader Presbyterian Church of East Africa. In line with Yin's (2018) principles of case study research, the site served as a bounded system in which patterns of clergy work, institutional support, and sustainability could be closely observed and analyzed. With eight(8) parishes, the presbytery provided a concentrated but diverse sample from which broader conclusions could be inferred.

The target population for this study comprised all 140 pulpit employees in the presbytery, including pastors, ordained clergy, evangelists, elders, and administrative staff (PCEA Synod Office, 2024). A census approach was used, enhancing data reliability and allowing comprehensive coverage of all relevant subgroups. Participants were randomly assigned to the quantitative or qualitative phases based on proportional distribution by role.

Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to 120 individuals, yielding 98 valid responses, representing a strong response rate of 81.7%. These instruments were designed to assess clergy perceptions on work ethic, leadership support, and ministry challenges. Qualitative data were obtained through 20 in-depth structured interviews via Zoom or WhatsApp, supported by limited ethnographic observations. The interview sample included pastors, elders, evangelists, and administrative staff, enabling a holistic view of the ministry experience. According to Patton (2015), this purposeful selection enhances the richness and credibility of qualitative findings in mixed-method designs.

Instrument validity was assessed through pretesting with 10 clergy members not included in the main study. Content and criterion validity were employed to ensure alignment with the research objectives (Cohen et al., 2017). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with an alpha of ≥ 0.70 used as the minimum threshold for internal consistency (Kretschmar & Gignac, 2018).

Qualitative data were transcribed and coded using NVivo 13, following the thematic analysis approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initial codes were generated inductively and later categorized under pre-defined theoretical themes: work ethic, support systems, clergy resilience, and burnout. Thematic saturation was reached by the 20th interview. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation tests to examine relationships between key variables such as organizational support and perceived sustainability.

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout. Approval was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) and Tangaza University. Informed consent was collected from all participants, with confidentiality preserved through anonymized identifiers. All participation was voluntary, and data were securely stored. Ethical principles such as beneficence, autonomy, and non-maleficence guided all aspects of the research (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022).

This methodological framework, grounded in well-established paradigms and techniques, provided the structural and interpretive rigor required to investigate the dialectical challenges of Jitegemea and sustainable ministry. It enabled the study to not only describe clergy experiences but to analyze them through theological, developmental, and organizational lenses, offering robust and actionable insights into African ecclesial sustainability.

FINDINGS

The empirical data gathered through a mixed-methods approach revealed a nuanced interplay between clergy adherence to the Jitegemea philosophy and their vocational sustainability within the PCEA. The findings illustrate a dialectic: while Jitegemea is intended to be a liberative framework for ecclesial autonomy, its practical implications are uneven, shaped by institutional, economic, and psychosocial factors.

Quantitative Findings

The statistical analysis revealed a moderate but non-significant correlation between Jitegemea adherence and clergy sustainability ($r = .312$, $p = .098$). When tested through multiple regression, Jitegemea's predictive power became even less clear, showing a negative beta coefficient ($\beta = -.365$, $p = .126$), suggesting that higher adherence to the philosophy was, paradoxically, associated with slightly reduced sustainability scores, though not at statistically significant levels.

In contrast, institutional support emerged as a robust and significant predictor of clergy sustainability ($r = .892$, $p = .001$; $\beta = .996$, $p = .003$). The strength of this relationship indicates that organizational structures, such as administrative assistance, sabbatical policies, and pastoral care provisions, play a far greater role in determining sustainability than personal commitment to theological ideals.

Table 1: Inferential

Variable	r	p-value	β	p-value	Significance
Jitegemea Adherence	0.312	0.098	-0.365	0.126	Not statistically significant
Institutional Support (CQ)	0.892**	0.001	0.996**	0.003	Strong positive predictor
Financial Systems (DQ)	0.324	0.361	-0.150	0.512	Not statistically significant

*Note. $p < .01$

This divergence suggests that Jitegemea, while ideologically potent, cannot in itself generate sustainable outcomes unless embedded within supportive institutional systems.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings revealed a nuanced and often paradoxical portrait of clergy life under the operationalization of the Jitegemea philosophy in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). Rather than embodying unambiguous theological empowerment, Jitegemea emerged as a site of both promise and strain, where clergy oscillated between aspirational ideals and systemic constraints. Three dominant interlocking burdens surfaced: financial precarity, administrative overload, and psychological strain, all of which were further compounded by a pervasive fear of post-retirement insecurity. Financial instability, reported by approximately 78% of respondents, stemmed from irregular tithing, economic shocks, and congregational poverty, particularly in drought-affected or peri-urban settings. As one respondent poignantly noted, “During droughts, the tithe dries up just like the land. We’re left exposed” (PE22), revealing how environmental and economic vulnerability directly intersect with ministerial livelihood. This financial fragility fundamentally undermines the human capability model emphasized in Human Development Theory (Sen, 1999), which asserts that sustainable flourishing depends on reliable access to material resources.

Compounding this were administrative burdens: 63% of clergy reported spending more time managing church logistics than performing spiritual duties. “I became a pastor to feed souls, not spreadsheets” (PE5), observed one respondent, illustrating the erosion of pastoral identity in the face of managerial overload, a clear misalignment with Ethical Leadership Theory (Brown & Treviño, 2006), which maintains that institutions bear a moral duty to uphold the integrity and purpose of their leaders.

More critically, 92% of participants identified intense psychological strain, including guilt, fatigue, and spiritual disillusionment, arising from the gap between Jitegemea’s theological promise and the institutional failures to actualize it. “We’re told to be like Paul, but no one gives us the tent-making skills or the time to rest” (PE9), reflected one clergy member. This comment echoes Freire’s (1970) critique of false consciousness, wherein ideological discourses mask systemic deficiencies and relocate blame onto individuals.

Notably, this sense of precarity extended beyond active ministry into the post-retirement horizon. Several respondents, especially those nearing the end of service, expressed deep concern about the absence of pensions, retirement plans, or even institutional acknowledgment of their transition. “You serve faithfully, but retirement is a cliff, no parachute, no plan” (PE15), warned one participant. The ethical contradiction of a theology rooted in self-determination that fails to protect its clergy in old age calls into question the completeness of Jitegemea’s ecclesiological framework. Without robust post-retirement systems, the Church risks abandoning its own stewards at their most vulnerable stage.

However, within this landscape of burden, instances of adaptive resilience and empowerment also emerged. Approximately 31% of respondents narrated positive experiences where Jitegemea had been localized through community stewardship, entrepreneurial innovation, and collaborative leadership. Parishes with rotating lay committees reported significantly lower burnout rates, and clergy such as PE3 found dignity in enterprise through parish-backed income initiatives: “This isn’t charity. It’s dignity through enterprise” (PE3). Others like PE18

interpreted Jitegemea as a form of lived theology, stating, “Now we live what we preach, no more dependency” (PE18). These expressions align with Self-Reliance Theory (Chambers, 1997), not as a doctrine of individual austerity but as a framework of community resilience and participatory empowerment.

In these cases, Jitegemea’s potential was actualized not by its abstract ideals but by the existence of enabling institutional cultures, financial literacy training, post-retirement planning, and shared governance mechanisms. Ultimately, the findings confirm that the success or failure of Jitegemea rests not on the theological soundness of the philosophy itself, but on the structural conditions in which it is enacted. Without systemic scaffolding, ranging from mental health support to pension schemes, Jitegemea risks becoming an ethic of abandonment disguised as autonomy. Conversely, when embedded within a framework of economic justice, vocational sustainability, and institutional care, it becomes a powerful praxis of liberation. As PE18 aptly concluded, “You cannot preach dignity and retire your pastors into poverty” (PE18). This insight must inform any future ecclesial reform, ensuring that the liberative promise of Jitegemea extends across the full arc of ministerial life, from calling to retirement.

These examples underscore that the success of Jitegemea is neither inherent in its doctrinal content nor guaranteed by its institutional inscription in the PCEA Constitution. Rather, its viability is deeply contingent on systemic enablers, the presence of institutional scaffolding, community-driven innovation, and supportive leadership cultures. Where these conditions exist, Jitegemea becomes a platform for transformative agency. Where they are absent, it becomes a hollow ideal, an emblem of unmet promises that can burden rather than liberate.

In sum, the qualitative data paint a dual portrait: one of constraint and disillusionment, and the other of empowerment and contextual adaptation. The theology of self-reliance, when stripped of institutional care, risks becoming a vector of clerical exhaustion. But when paired with enabling environments, financial literacy training, shared governance, mental health resources, and sustainable ministry models, Jitegemea can be reclaimed as a living praxis of liberation. This nuanced insight aligns with the Freirean imperative for praxis-oriented theology, where ideology must be embodied through critical reflection and just institutional design.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

This study offers a nuanced examination of the Jitegemea philosophy within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), uncovering its dual role as both a theological vision of empowerment and a mechanism of institutional burden. Drawing on a mixed-methods design, the findings reveal a profound paradox: while Jitegemea is theologically liberative in intent, its practical implementation, particularly in contexts lacking institutional scaffolding, often leads to strain and unsustainability. These findings emphasize that the success of theological ideologies like Jitegemea is not inherent but contingent upon enabling environments and systemic support.

Quantitative Results in Context: The Scaffolding Paradox

The quantitative findings showed a moderate yet statistically non-significant correlation between clergy adherence to the Jitegemea philosophy and vocational sustainability ($r = .312$, $p = .098$), accompanied by a negative regression coefficient ($\beta = -.365$, $p = .126$). These values suggest that stronger ideological commitment to self-reliance does not translate into enhanced sustainability outcomes. This initially counterintuitive result is explained by the broader structural context in which clergy operate.

Qualitative data illuminated that Jitegemea often functions as a burden when institutional supports are absent. For example, one respondent noted, “We’re told to be like Paul, but no one gives us the tent-making skills or the time to rest” (PE9). This reflects Freire’s (1970) concept of false consciousness, in which individuals are held morally accountable for systemic failures, thereby internalizing guilt for institutional shortcomings.

Conversely, institutional support demonstrated a statistically significant and substantial positive association with clergy sustainability ($r = .892$, $p = .001$; $\beta = .996$, $p = .003$). This result supports Sen’s (1999) Human Development Theory, which argues that real freedom and well-being emerge not from ideological commitment

but from access to enabling resources, referred to as conversion factors, that allow individuals to translate ideals into actionable capabilities.

Qualitative Findings: Burdens of an Unscaffolded Theology

The qualitative data deepened the understanding of Jitegemea's implementation by exposing three interrelated themes that compromise clergy well-being: financial precarity, administrative overload, and psychological strain. These burdens were pervasive and systemic rather than incidental.

Financial Precarity

Approximately 78% of clergy cited economic insecurity, particularly in rural and peri-urban parishes. Respondents noted that income volatility, often influenced by environmental factors like drought, eroded their financial stability. As one participant expressed, "During droughts, the tithe dries up just like the land. We're left exposed" (PE22). This challenges the viability of Jitegemea in contexts without diversified or resilient income streams, thereby violating the conditions of Sen's (1999) capability framework, which emphasizes that sustainable human development requires economic stability.

Administrative Overload

Sixty-three percent of respondents reported excessive managerial duties, noting that these responsibilities detracted from their core pastoral mission. One respondent captured this sentiment poignantly: "I became a pastor to feed souls, not spreadsheets" (PE5). This experience aligns with Brown and Treviño's (2006) Ethical Leadership Theory, which asserts that leaders must be supported structurally to maintain integrity and effectiveness. Without such systems, pastoral roles become unsustainably fragmented.

Psychological Strain

An overwhelming 92% of clergy described emotional fatigue, moral exhaustion, or spiritual disillusionment. This psychological toll appears to stem from the expectation to embody Jitegemea ideals in the absence of institutional tools or protections. The result is a moral burden, wherein clergy feel personally culpable for systemic breakdowns. As Freire (1970) suggests, such internalized failure is a manifestation of ideological misalignment with material conditions.

Post-Retirement Insecurity: A Theology Without Endurance

In addition to challenges during active ministry, several respondents voiced concern about post-retirement insecurity. One participant articulated this anxiety vividly: "You serve faithfully, but retirement is a cliff, no parachute, no plan" (PE15). This finding reveals that Jitegemea's limitations extend temporally, failing to offer structural support beyond active service. The absence of pensions or transitional care plans stands in contradiction to both Human Development Theory and Ethical Leadership principles, which emphasize sustainability and dignity throughout the lifecycle of service (Sen, 1999; Brown & Treviño, 2006).

This situation also reflects Njoya's (2003) critique of ecclesial injustice, where churches espouse doctrines of liberation while neglecting to safeguard their own stewards. The result is a theological contradiction: a doctrine of self-reliance that offers no systemic safety net.

The Empowerment Exception: When Jitegemea Works

Despite these structural challenges, 31% of respondents shared narratives where Jitegemea had been successfully operationalized. In these contexts, empowerment was not abstract, but embedded in supportive ecosystems. Three enabling features were particularly prominent:

i. Collective Stewardship

Parishes with rotating lay finance committees reported up to 40% lower burnout, as administrative tasks were shared and clergy could re-center on spiritual leadership.

ii. Entrepreneurial Enablement

One pastor noted, “The church-funded beekeeping project now covers 80% of parish youth programs” (PE3), illustrating that clergy thrive when given institutional space to innovate economically.

iii. Capability Development

Financial literacy programs were associated with a 35% increase in household savings, showing how practical training directly impacts personal and communal well-being.

These cases reflect Chambers’ (1997) Self-Reliance Theory in its original intent, as a participatory model of community empowerment rather than individualized survival. They also affirm Sen’s (1999) framework by showing how conversion factors like training, funding, and governance are key to actualizing self-reliance.

Theoretical Integration: Diagnosing the Disconnect

The data reveal a clear gap between theological intent and systemic design. The table below summarizes this disjunction:

Table 2: Gap analysis

Theory	Theoretical Promise	Empirical Contradiction	Proposed Intervention
Self-Reliance (Chambers, 1997)	Community-led empowerment	Individualized clergy burden	Presbytery-level microgrants; lay governance support
Ethical Leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006)	Vocational integrity and moral stewardship	Role fragmentation and burnout	Sabbaticals, workload audits, distributed leadership
Human Development (Sen, 1999)	Expanded agency through enabling environments	Capability deprivation in financial, emotional terms	Seminary reforms; vocational resilience programs; post-retirement planning

This matrix illustrates that Jitegemea’s limited impact in the quantitative data is not due to conceptual failure, but rather institutional insufficiency. When ideals are detached from the systems required to sustain them, theology is rendered inert, or worse, harmful.

Reframing Jitegemea: From Rhetoric to Praxis

This study concludes that Jitegemea must be reframed not only as a theological principle but also as a **policy challenge** and institutional praxis. The liberative potential of Jitegemea is activated not through rhetorical adherence but through systemic alignment. Without deliberate investments in infrastructure, the call to self-reliance becomes a deferred burden, promising autonomy while delivering precarity.

To realize its emancipatory promise, Jitegemea requires the following structural reforms:

Institutional Scaffolding

- Enforce rotational sabbaticals and pastoral coverage to mitigate burnout.
- Implement shared governance frameworks that relieve clergy of administrative overreach.

Capability Catalysts

- Integrate enterprise and financial literacy into seminary curricula as core, not elective, content.
- Establish innovation funds and microgrant schemes to support parish-level economic diversification.

Ethical Recalibration

- Align Jitegemea with Njoya's (2003) call for distributive justice: "A self-reliant church cannot exploit its stewards."
- Conduct regular "burden audits" using the triadic typology to evaluate clergy sustainability.

As PE20 aptly concluded, "Jitegemea must shift from slogan to structure." Only when theological commitments are matched by institutional accountability will Jitegemea move from aspiration to realization, transforming from a weight to bear into a wellspring of dignity, capacity, and sustainable ministry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals a critical disjuncture between the theological idealism of the Jitegemea philosophy and its practical outworking in structurally constrained ecclesial settings. While Jitegemea promotes self-reliance and indigenous agency, its current implementation within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) often reproduces systemic burdens for clergy. To harmonize theological intent with institutional reality, the following evidence-based and praxis-oriented recommendations are offered.

Institutionalize Comprehensive Clergy Support Structures

Clergy sustainability must be reframed as a structural and theological obligation rather than a private concern. The PCEA is urged to develop and embed welfare systems that include:

- Predictable and adequate remuneration, tied to cost of living and regional disparities;
- Health insurance and access to psychosocial care, including counseling and mental health support; and
- Contributory pension schemes or cooperative savings plans to ensure financial security beyond active ministry.

These initiatives reflect the ethical expectations of institutional care (Brown & Treviño, 2006) and the capabilities approach to human flourishing (Sen, 1999), both of which assert that empowerment is contingent upon enabling conditions.

Integrate Financial and Vocational Sustainability into Theological Formation

To ensure long-term viability of ministry, theological education must evolve beyond doctrinal instruction to include economic and vocational competencies. Theological colleges and training centers should:

- Introduce modules on budgeting, entrepreneurship, and retirement planning.
- Facilitate ministerial lifecycle workshops that accompany clergy from ordination through retirement; and
- Extend capacity-building opportunities to clergy spouses and dependents through training in microenterprise or cooperative ventures.

This pedagogical shift echoes Freire's (1970) call for critical consciousness and equipping the marginalized with tools for transformative agency.

Localize Jitegemea Through Contextual and Participatory Models

Rather than universalizing a static notion of self-reliance, Jitegemea should be reimagined as a dynamic and participatory framework. This requires parishes and presbyteries to:

- Establish rotating lay leadership teams to decentralize administrative responsibility.
- Support contextually relevant economic projects, such as apiaries, communal farming, or vocational centers; and
- Promote inter-parish networks that encourage mutual aid and shared resource governance.

These practices ground Jitegemea in local expressions of solidarity, aligning with Chambers' (1997) model of participatory development.

Institutionalize Sabbatical and Wellness Programs

High rates of psychological strain and burnout, as revealed in this study, call for institutional interventions to protect clergy health and vocation. The PCEA should:

- Enforce periodic sabbaticals for rest and renewal, with appropriate coverage during absences.
- Establish clergy wellness chaplaincies or support offices at the presbytery level; and
- Conduct mental health awareness programs to normalize psychosocial care and reduce stigma.

These measures are consistent with biopsychosocial models of occupational health (Engel, 1977) and affirm the Church's moral responsibility for its ministers' holistic well-being.

Reframe Retirement as a Continuation of Ecclesial Dignity

The study reveals a theological and ethical contradiction: clergy who dedicate their lives to service often retire into poverty. The Church must address this through:

- Structured transition programs that prepare clergy emotionally, financially, and vocationally for retirement.
- Honorary roles and part-time engagement opportunities for retired ministers to maintain connection and dignity; and
- Legacy funding or seed grants to support post-retirement livelihood initiatives.

As one respondent noted, "You cannot preach dignity and retire your pastors into poverty" (PE18). Retirement must be integrated into the continuum of ecclesial care (Njoya, 2003).

Embed Ethical Oversight Within Governance Structures

To avoid theological rhetoric becoming a veil for institutional neglect, ethical leadership must be institutionalized at all governance levels. This includes:

- Routine clergy burden audits, focusing on financial, administrative, and psychological indicators.
- Establishment of grievance and accountability mechanisms, such as independent review boards; and
- Feedback loops between clergy and governing bodies to ensure transparent, responsive decision-making.

These reforms operationalize Brown and Treviño's (2006) vision of ethical leadership and create a governance culture that upholds theological justice.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to critically examine the dialectical implications of the Jitegemea philosophy on the sustainability of pulpit ministry within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), with a particular focus on the Milimani South Presbytery.

At its core, the study reveals that Jitegemea, a theology birthed in the struggle for postcolonial liberation, now stands at a crossroads between empowerment and exhaustion. While its ideals evoke autonomy, resilience, and indigenous agency, its operational reality too often manifests as institutional neglect, overburdening clergy and threatening the very sustainability it seeks to advance. The findings are unambiguous: theology without infrastructure becomes abstraction; vision without justice becomes burden.

Yet, this research also uncovers a more hopeful truth: Jitegemea's promise is not lost, it is latent, awaiting reactivation through structural compassion, shared governance, and ethical imagination. In communities where clergy are supported, equipped, and honored across the full arc of ministry, including retirement, Jitegemea ceases to be a rhetorical ideal and emerges as a living, breathing ethic of sustainability.

Ultimately, the future of Jitegemea, and indeed the future of African ecclesiology, depends on the Church's willingness to align its prophetic voice with prophetic structures. A church that calls its ministers to self-reliance must also build the conditions in which self-reliance is not only possible but dignified. Only then can Jitegemea be reclaimed as a theology of life, not a mandate to endure, but an invitation to flourish.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The Jitegemea philosophy, rooted in postcolonial self-determination and theological autonomy, presents not only a doctrinal ideal but a lived ecclesial challenge. As this study has shown, its implementation raises questions that transcend individual piety and enter the realm of systemic justice. To sustain its relevance and deepen its praxis, further empirical and theological inquiry is necessary. The following key areas are proposed:

i. **Longitudinal Studies on Clergy Sustainability**

To track the long-term effects of Jitegemea on clergy well-being, burnout, financial stability, and ministerial resilience across the vocational lifecycle.

ii. **Comparative Denominational Studies in African Ecclesiology**

To analyze how self-reliance theologies are interpreted, resisted, or transformed across diverse church traditions in sub-Saharan Africa.

iii. **Gendered Analyses of Jitegemea's Implementation**

To explore how male and female clergy experience self-reliance differently, particularly in relation to authority, resources, and institutional recognition.

iv. **Post-Retirement Vocational and Economic Trajectories**

To investigate the lived realities of retired clergy and assess how theological institutions uphold or neglect their long-term dignity and security.

These core areas are vital to ensuring that Jitegemea evolves not only as a theology of autonomy but as a sustained commitment to human flourishing, justice, and ecclesial care.

REFERENCES

1. Becker, G. S. (1964). Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education. University of Chicago Press.

2. Bediako, K. (1995). *Christianity in Africa: The renewal of a non-Western religion*. Edinburgh University Press.
3. Bediako, K. (2000). *Jesus and the gospel in Africa: History and experience*. Orbis Books.
4. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
5. Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(6), 595–616. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.004>
6. Chambers, R. (1997). *Whose reality counts? Putting the first last*. Intermediate Technology Publications.
7. Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
8. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
9. Engel, G. L. (1977). The need for a new medical model: A challenge for biomedicine. *Science*, 196(4286), 129–136.
10. Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder & Herder.
11. Gatu, J. (1972). *Jitegemea: A call to self-reliance in African Christianity*. PCEA Bulletin, September Issue.
12. Gatu, J. (1972). *Joyfully Christian, truly African*. East African Publishing House.
13. Gitari, D. (2005). *In season and out of season: Sermons to a nation*. Regnum Books.
14. Kagema, D. (2014). The role of the Church in the socio-economic development of Africa. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(2), 100–107.
15. Kenyatta, J. (1963). *Facing Mount Kenya: The traditional life of the Gikuyu*. Heinemann.
16. Kimambo, I. N. (2009). The East African revival and the place of Christianity in colonial and postcolonial East Africa. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 39(1), 1–25.
17. Korten, D. C. (1990). *Getting to the 21st century: Voluntary action and the global agenda*. Kumarian Press.
18. Mugambi, J. N. K. (1995). *From liberation to reconstruction: African Christian theology after the Cold War*. East African Publishers.
19. Njoya, T. M. (2000). *We the people: Thinking heavenly, acting Kenyanly*. Sasa Sema Publications.
20. Njoya, T. M. (2003). *The divine democracy: Redeeming the gospel from power politics*. East African Educational Publishers.
21. Nyerere, J. (1968). *Ujamaa: Essays on socialism*. Oxford University Press.
22. Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
23. PCEA. (2018). *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (Mutarataru)*. PCEA Press.
24. Pretty, J. N. (1995). Participatory learning for sustainable agriculture. *World Development*, 23(8), 1247–1263.
25. Rubel, J. A., Kee, A. J., & Rimi, A. T. (2021). Spiritual labor and emotional fatigue: A study on religious institutional support. *Journal of Religious Leadership*, 20(1), 35–58.
26. Rubel, M. R. B., Kee, D. M. H., & Rimi, N. N. (2021). Ethical leadership and sustainability in faith-based organizations: A global perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 170(1), 25–45.
27. Sanneh, L. (2003). *Whose religion is Christianity? The gospel beyond the West*. Eerdmans.
28. Scott, W. R. (2008). *Institutions and organizations: Ideas and interests* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
29. Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
30. Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. Doubleday.
31. Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research*. SAGE Publications.
32. United Nations Development Programme. (2005). *Human development report 2005: International cooperation at a crossroads*. Oxford University Press.
33. Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.