



SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND CHURCH GROWTH: INSIGHTS FROM THE KENYA ASSEMBLIES OF GOD, MOMBASA COUNTY

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Abstract

An ethical climate fosters ethical behavior among leaders, exemplifying servant leadership and encouraging employees to act morally responsibly, thereby improving overall performance. This study examined the effect of ethical behavior dimension of servant leadership on the church growth of the Kenya Assemblies of God church in Mombasa County, Kenya. Grounded in servant leadership theory and employing a descriptive research design, the study targeted 1810 members across six branches of the church, selecting a sample size of 300 through stratified random sampling. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires. A pilot study with 30 randomly selected church members was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the instrument. Primary data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that ethical behavior influenced church growth of Kenya Assemblies of God in Mombasa County, Kenya. The study concluded that ethical behaviour, a dimension of servant leaders, is a significant predictor of church growth. The study recommends that churches should implement comprehensive ethical training programs for all church leaders, establish transparent decision-making processes, and appoint leaders of integrity and solid ethics. Further study should focus on the long-term effects of ethical behavior on church development, community engagement and financial stability.

Keywords: Church growth, Kenya, Servant leadership, Ethical Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, there have been increased cases of unethical practices and corporate corruption in the churches (Zuber, 2015). Church leaders and members of their congregations have been accused of misappropriation of offerings, embezzlement, inadequate financial oversight, excessive compensation, and unauthorized borrowing (Funga & Sambu, 2023). These chronic problems have eroded trust and credibility within the church community, and many Catholic and Protestant churches have experienced high member exit (Frick, Moser & Simmons, 2021). Decline in church membership and attendance is a major concern for churches, especially in Africa where churches solely rely on offerings and donations from members. The lack of funding for church activities has resulted in discontinuation of social outreach and evangelistic programs. Ultimately, this will affect church growth in terms of membership, congregation size, denominational reach and infrastructural development (Igboin & Adedibu, 2020) and is a threat to the Church's efforts and its enduring impact on society (Elliot, Murayama & Pekrun, 2011).

Empirical studies on church growth have focused on the role financial management on church growth. However, there remains a gap on the role of value-laden leadership, such as servant leadership on church growth (Barros & Garoupa, 2002; Finke & Stark, 2001; Hayward, 2005). Furthermore, these studies have examined the effect of servant leadership as a multidimensional construct on growth (Saleem, Zhang, Gopinath, & Adeel, 2020), with limited focus on the dimensions of servant leadership on church growth (Mehta & Pillage, 2011; Paesen, Wouters & Maesschalck, 2019; Mwarania & Kihika, 2022). This paper seeks to determine the effect of ethical behavior dimension of servant leadership on church growth in Kenya. A Case Study of Kenya Assemblies of God in Mombasa County. The guiding hypothesis is: There is no significant relationship between ethical behaviour and church growth of Kenya Assemblies of God, Mombasa County.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Servant leadership

The concept of servant leadership is rooted in the ideas that the "servant-leader is servant first" (Greenleaf, 1970). The primary goal of a servant leader is to prioritize and meet the needs of the followers (Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson, 2008). This leadership style multidimensional, encompassing several dimensions, namely voluntary subordination, authentic self, covenant relationship, responsible morality, transcendental spirituality and transforming influence (Sendjaya, Sarros and Santora, 2008). Servant leaders focus on cultivating an

environment where followers feel valued and are inspired to contribute more to their community (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016).

The Leader's ethical behaviour is fundamental in creating a servant organization, earning stakeholders' trust, and demonstrating transparency. Research on servant leadership has been recognized as a leadership philosophy that addresses the concerns of ethics (Carter & Baghurst, 2014; van Dierendonck, 2011). Unlike traditional leadership models, servant leadership focuses on the humble and ethical use of power as a servant leader while ensuring that other people's highest priority needs are being served (Graham, 1991; Greenleaf, 1977; Wong, 2007). Given that the exercise of authority and power often presents ethical dilemmas in leader-follower relationship, servant leaders must strive to ensure that both their goals and the methods they utilize are morally sound, carefully considered, and ethically justified (Sendjaya, 2005).

Ethical behaviour involves engaging followers in an open, fair and honest manner (van Dierendonck, 2011, Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson, 2008). According to Liden et al. (2015), ethical behaviour embodies trustworthiness, establishing as a role model of integrity. Servant leaders actively transform their moral values and intentions into ethical behaviors that promote organizational transparency and accountability. Additionally, servant leadership leverages relational power to facilitate good moral dialogue between leaders and followers, which fosters trust and commitment to collective goals. The alignment between a servant leader's intrinsic values with their behaviors is vital for achieving positive outcomes (Graham, 1991; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010). Servant leadership encourages reflective behaviours that enhance ethical climate of the organization (Ciulla, 1995; Graham, 1991). Importantly, servant leaders do not compromise their ethical principles for the sake of success (Igboin & Adedibu, 2020).

For churches to thrive, it is imperative to cultivate a culture of transparency, integrity and ethical conduct among church leaders and members. Church members will be inspired by leaders who demonstrate integrity and strong ethical standards (McNeff and Irving, 2017). Research shows that when church leaders embody moral principles and consistently uphold ethical values, church members are more inclined to emulate their behaviour. Imitating the leader's ethical behavior and attitudes helps to lessen the likelihood of inappropriate behavior among followers (Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson, 2008). By serving as ethical role models and providing necessary training and guidance and training, servant leaders can instill qualities of service in their followers, helping them develop into service-oriented individuals (Greenleaf, 1977).

Church growth

Growth in the number of people attending has been widely used by researchers and commentators as an indicator that a church is healthy or vital. Understanding sources of church growth has been the source of multiple investigations (e.g. Wagner, 1976; Hoge & Roozen, 1979; Stetzer & Rainer, 2010). Church growth patterns indicate two distinct numerical pointers, namely internal growth and external growth. Internal growth dimensions are church attendance and membership at a single church gathering. The focus on numerical growth is based on the rationale that growth in attendance was a measure of whether a church was effectively fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission to "make disciples of all nations" – with disciples being persons who actively involved in the church activities (McGavran & Arn, 1973; Wagner, 1976; Hoge, Stetzer & Rainer, 2010). Other growth measures include attendance measures such as newcomers without a church background and young adult retention and growth in church offerings, and church programs (Bellamy, Cussen, Sterland, Castle, Powell & Kaldor, 2006; Mwanzwii & Kising'u, 2022). On the other hand, external church growth patterns include new church plants or branches (Mwanzwii & Kising'u, 2022). Empirical studies have highlighted external and internal factors that influence church growth. These factors may include the shopping malls on Sunday, population change, changes in values and beliefs of the population, the nature of the congregation, attender enthusiasm, congregational involvement in small groups, evangelism or recruitment activity, congregational harmony and cooperation, members empowerment and leadership (Gruber & Hunderman, 2008; Sullivan, 1985; Wallace, 2019).

Effect of ethical behaviour as a dimension of servant leadership on church growth

Empirical studies indicate that servant leadership is a significant predictor of church growth, organizational commitment, community citizenship behaviour and in-role performance (Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson, 2008). One of the pioneering studies on servant leadership was conducted by Erhart (2004) which empirically examined the concept within grocery store departments. The study findings revealed that servant leadership is distinct from leader–member exchange and transformational leadership styles. Furthermore, servant leadership fosters fair workplace environments and encourages organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Similarly, Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson (2008) created a 28-item scale for assessing servant leadership scale. Their research reaffirmed the distinctiveness of servant leadership from both transformational and leader–member exchange styles. They also identified positive correlation between servant leadership and in-role performance, organizational commitment, and community citizenship behaviors.

In a study by Schaubroeck, Lam and Peng (2011), which involved 191 financial services teams in Hong Kong and the U.S. The study found that servant leadership impacts team performance through affect-based trust and team psychological safety. They revealed that servant leadership accounted for an additional 10% of the variance in team performance, beyond the effect of transformational leadership. Mwarania and Kilika, (2022) assessed the effects of leader's ethical behavior strategy on performance of the evangelical churches in Kenya. The study adopted a positivistic research philosophy and cross-sectional research design. The target population comprised of 174 churches registered under the umbrella of the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya. According to the study findings, there was a variance in performance of 75.7% among the evangelical churches in Kenya. The study concluded that the leader's ethical behavior strategy was positively related to performance of the evangelical churches in Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was guided by descriptive research design which ensured accurate data collection aligned with the study's objectives (Kothari & Garg, 2019). The target population included 1810 registered members from six (6) Kenya Assemblies of God (KAG) churches: KAG Tudor, KAG Changamwe, KAG Likoni, KAG Airport, KAG Mikindani, and KAG Miritini across Mombasa sub-counties. The church members have been actively involved in church activities for a period of year preceding the survey. A sample size of 300 was selected using Yamane's (1973) formula, with participants randomly chosen from the target population.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where

n = sample size

N = study population

e = Margin of error is, 0.05

The estimated sample size was thus:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{1810}{1 + 1810(0.05)^2} \\ n &= \frac{1810}{1 + 3} \\ n &= 300 \end{aligned}$$

Primary data was collected using self -designed structured questionnaires. A pilot study involving 30 respondents constituting 10% of the sample size, randomly selected from the six KAG churches, assessed the questionnaire's suitability. The respondents for the pilot study were not included in the final study. To ensure construct validity, the questionnaire was based on relevant existing knowledge. Content validity was tested by pastors and experienced leaders, ensuring the tool accurately measured theoretical concepts. Cronbach's alpha coefficient, calculated at 0.7 was used to confirm that the questionnaire was reliable. Primary data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. A simple linear regression analysis was used to test the effect of ethical behaviour on church growth of Kenya Assemblies of God, Mombasa County, Kenya. The findings were presented in tables.

FINDINGS

Response Rate

Out of 300 questionnaires distributed, 233 were returned, while 67 were not. The resulted in an overall response rate of 92.62% from the completed questionnaires. A response rate of 80% or higher is recommended for social studies, indicating that the outcomes could be generalizable to the target population (Morgan, 2017).

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The study findings revealed that majority of the respondents were females (56.7%) while the rest were male (43.3%). In addition, the majority of respondents were 40 years and below (63%) while 37% were above 40 years. Furthermore, the findings showed that majority of respondents had been Christian faithful for more than 5 years (91%) and only 9% of the respondents had been Christians for less than 5 years. Finally, the findings revealed that 90% of the respondents had joined Kenya Assemblies of God after exiting other churches. Many of them had moved to the present church after relocating to the area (36%), others felt that the church leadership structure was better than where they were before (26%), yet others moved to the church because it had a successful children's ministry (21%) and 17% stated that they moved to the church because the worship format appealed to them

Descriptive Statistics for Ethical behaviour

The objective of the study was to examine the effect of ethical behaviour dimension of servant leadership on church growth of Kenya Assemblies of God, Mombasa County. The respondents were asked to present their opinions regarding ethical behaviour and church growth by indicating the level of agreement or disagreement with the statements on ethical

behaviour arranged on a Likert scale of 5 items that is: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. The responses were illustrated on Table 1 below.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Statistics for ethical behavior

Ethical Behaviour statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
1. Our leader plans for open day forums where we get to meet and greet, interact and have dialogue on ethical issues.	1.4%	1.7%	2.1%	52.6%	42.2%	4.96	0.627
2. Our church is significantly impacted by our leader's high standard of moral conduct.	0.6%	5.2%	4.9%	45.8%	43.5%	5.18	0.669
3. The church leader respects and embraces church followers	7.4%	4.5%	5.2%	39.1%	43.8%	5.27	0.693
4. The leaders are honest with the congregation	0.8%	4.8%	1.9%	42.9%	49.6%	5.07	1.459
5. Our leaders treats all followers equally	9.2%	2.5%	1.5%	41.2%	45.6%	5.22	0.534
6. The leader's judgements are fair when it comes to settling misunderstandings amongst followers	2.4%	1.2%	0.2%	36.8%	59.4%	5.39	0.499
7. We feel secure sharing our deepest secrets with our leader for guidance and prayer	1.3%	1.3%	0.2%	40.6%	56.6%	4.69	1.421

On the first statement, our leader plans for open day forums where we get to meet and greet, interact and have dialogue on ethical issues, the mean score of 4.96 indicates a high level of agreement (SA) with the leader's initiative to facilitate open day forums, fostering interaction with congregants and have dialogue on ethical issues. The relatively low standard deviation (0.627) suggests a high level of consensus among respondents regarding this ethical behavior.

Second statement, our church is significantly impacted by our leaders' high standards of moral conduct, the mean score of 5.18 reflects a strong agreement (SA) of the positive impact of the leader's moral conduct on the church atmosphere. The standard deviation (0.669) indicates a relatively consistent agreement among respondents regarding this ethical behavior.

On the third statement, church leader respects and embraces church followers, the mean score of 5.27 signifies a high level of agreement (SA) that church leaders were respectful

treatment of church followers. The standard deviation (0.693) suggests a relatively consistent agreement among respondents regarding the respectful treatment of women.

Fourth statement, the leaders are honest with the congregation, the mean score of 5.07 indicates a strong agreement (SA) with the church leaders' tendency to be honest with the congregation.

Fifth statement, our leaders treat all followers equally, the mean score of 5.22 reflects a high level of agreement (SA) with the equitable treatment of all followers by the leaders.

Sixth statement, leader's judgements are fair when it comes to settling misunderstandings amongst followers, the mean score of 5.39 signifies a strong agreement (SA) with the fairness of the leader's judgments in resolving misunderstandings.

Seventh statement, we feel secure sharing our deepest secrets with our leader for guidance and prayer, the mean score of 4.69 indicates a relatively high level of agreement (A) with feeling secure in sharing personal matters with the leader.

Descriptive statistics on Church Growth

The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they concurred with the church growth statements in Kenya Assemblies of God Kenya Assemblies of God church as illustrated on a Likert scale of 5 items below, whereby: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. The responses were illustrated on Table 2.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Statistics for Church Growth

Church Growth statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
1. Our church is growing very fast in numbers	17.4%	14.5%	0.8%	29.6%	36.8%	5.71	0.704
2. Our church is financially stable	8.4%	3.5%	0.7%	47.2%	40.6%	4.93	0.697
3. Spiritually, many people have received salvation and the teachings of God.	1.8%	4.4%	1.7%	36.5%	50.7%	3.87	0.652
4. The number young attendees is increasing	2.8%	4.6%	0.9%	24.5%	61.8%	4.29	0.583
5. Many people attending our church are committed to God and church programs such as evangelism	2.2%	2.7%	0.6%	26.1%	65.6%	4.91	0.821

Church Growth statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
6. We often receive new members joining our church like on a weekly basis or in every worship service.	19.5%	33.1%	0.9%	3.3%	40.4%	5.34	1.569
7. We have adopted strategies that bring the members together rather than scatter them to ensure conflict is avoided at all cost.	5.3%	24.7%	4.7%	28.6%	39.4%	5.06	0.649

As illustrated in Table 2, on the first statement, our church is growing very fast in numbers such as the youth, men and women, showed that the mean score of 5.71 indicates a strong agreement (SA). The low standard deviation (0.634) suggests a high level of consensus among respondents regarding the clarity of the church's goals. The standard deviation (0.704) suggests a relatively consistent agreement among respondents regarding the church experiencing rapid growth, especially among different demographic groups such as youth, men, and women.

Second statement, our church is financially stable through sustainable projects. The mean score of 4.93 reflects a high level of agreement (A) while the standard deviation (0.697) indicates a relatively consistent agreement among respondents regarding the church's financial stability status.

Third statement, spiritually, many people have received salvation and the teachings of God. The mean score of 3.87 signifies a moderate level of agreement (A) with the increasing number of people receiving the teachings of God which enhance the church to growth. The standard deviation (0.652) suggests a relatively consistent agreement among respondents regarding the number of people who have received salvation and the teachings of God.

Fourth statement, the number of young attendees is increasing. The mean score of 4.29 indicates a high level of agreement (A) with the increasing number of children in the church. The standard deviation (0.583) suggests a relatively consistent agreement among respondents regarding the increasing number of children in the KAG church.

Fifth statement, many people attending our church are committed to God and church programs such as evangelism. The mean score of 4.91 reflects a strong agreement (A) with the high number of people attending the church and committed to church programs. The standard

deviation (0.821) indicates a moderate level of variability in the responses, suggesting a great testament to the spiritual vitality among the congregation.

Sixth statement, we often receive new members joining our church like on a weekly basis or in every worship service. The mean score of 5.34 indicates a strong agreement (SA) with the new church members recorded on weekly basis. The relatively high standard deviation (1.569) suggests a wider range of responses and potentially less consensus among respondents regarding the number of new members joining KAG church in every week.

Seventh statement, we have adopted strategies that bring the members together rather than scatter them to ensure conflict is avoided at all cost. The mean score of 4.88 signifies a high level of agreement (A) with the church adopting strategies to solve conflicts. The standard deviation (0.649) suggests a relatively consistent agreement among respondents regarding the church having measures in place in case conflicts among members occur.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficient was applied to determine the correlation between the dependent variable (church growth) and the independent variable was ethical behaviour. According to Sekaran (2015), the correlation coefficient ranges from -1.0 (perfect negative correlation) to +1.0 (perfect positive correlation). The results were presented on Table 3 below.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Results

		Ethical behavior	Church growth
Ethical behavior	Pearson Correlation	1	.175**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	233	233
Church growth	Pearson Correlation	.175**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	233	233

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Mean is 2.8456

Standard Deviation is .44782

The results reveal that ethical behavior is positively and significantly related with church growth of Kenya Assemblies of God church in Mombasa County ($r = 0.175$, $p = 0.004$), suggesting a weak positive relationship between these variables. From the results, it was evident that ethical behaviour had a significant relationship with growth of. These findings

corroborate with those of Mbogori and Matena (2020); and Funga & Sambu (2023) which emphasized that servant leadership played a key role in the growth of Pentecostal churches in Africa.

Regression Analysis

Table 4 presents the results of a linear regression analysis model, including the model fit statistics, coefficients, standard errors, standardized coefficients, t-values, and significance level for the predictor which is ethical behavior in relation to the outcome variable (church growth).

Table 4: Model Summary of ethical behaviour and church growth

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.814 ^a	0.599	0.292	1.36439

a. Predictor: (Constant), Ethical Behaviour

The study findings established that there was a strong correlation ($R=0.814$) between ethical behaviour and church growth. This further implies that the model to a large extent provides a good estimation for the real data points. The R-Square of 0.599 implies that 59.9% of the variance in variance in church growth is explained by ethical behaviour. The adjusted R-Square, on the other hand, indicated that 29.2% of the variance in church growth is explained by ethical behaviour strategies.

Table 5: Model Coefficient of ethical behaviour and church growth

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	5.28	0.896		4.977	0		
Ethical Behavior	0.397	0.098	0.563	3.629	0.001	0.412	2.896

b. Dependent Variable: Church Growth

The fitted model from the results in Table 5 was as follows:

$$Y = 5.281 + 0.623 (X_1) + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots \text{Equation 1}$$

This implies that with all other variables held constant, the growth of the church is projected at 5.281. An enhancement in ethical behavior is predicted to lead to a 0.623 increase

in church growth. The null hypothesis stated that ethical behaviour has no significant relationship with church growth of Kenya Assemblies of God, Mombasa County. The study rejected the null hypothesis and confirmed that ethical behavior was statistically significant relationship with church growth of Kenya Assemblies of God, Mombasa County. These findings concur with Mwarania and Kilika, (2022) which found that the leader's ethical behavior strategy was positively related to performance of the evangelical churches in Kenya. The findings concur with George Homans' Social Exchange Theory (1958), which posits that social behavior results from a cost-benefit analysis. The theory posits that Individuals assess the rewards and costs of their social interactions, maintaining relationships when the perceived benefits surpass the costs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that ethical behaviour is a significant predictor of church growth of Kenya Assemblies of God in Mombasa County. The results revealed that when church leaders prioritize integrity, honesty, fairness, and ethical conduct in their interactions and decision-making processes, it can lead to enhanced church growth. Ethical behaviour of church leaders was found to be statistically significant predictor of church growth. The null hypothesis stating that ethical behaviour has no significant effect on church growth of Kenya Assemblies of God, Mombasa County was rejected. Based on the study results, the study concluded that open day forums where meet and greet, interaction and dialogue on ethical issues, leaders' high standard of moral conduct, respects and embracing of church followers, treating all followers equally, being fair when settling misunderstanding amongst followers, being honest and maintaining confidentiality can improve the growth of Kenya Assemblies of God churches.

The study recommends that churches should implement comprehensive ethical training programs for church leaders to foster a culture of open communication, continuous conversations on ethical issues, integrity and accountability. In addition, churches should establish transparent decision-making processes that respect and embraces followers, treat all followers equally. Furthermore, churches should incorporate ethical guidelines in their policy framework to ensure that all actions and decisions are guided by ethical principles. Lastly, churches should endeavour to appoint church leaders of integrity and sound ethics.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study focused on the effect of ethical behaviour on church growth in Mombasa County, Kenya. Consequently, further research could be extended to investigate the effect of political factors on church growth of Pentecostal churches. Future research may also focus on

long-term effects of ethical behavior on different aspects of church development, such as community engagement and financial stability to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of ethics in church growth.

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