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# An Evaluation of How the Catholic Church's Climate Change Mitigation Efforts Align with its Fundamental Teachings and Local Community Ecological Care: Evidence from Ngong Deanery, Kajiado County, Kenya

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***Abstract*: Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the twenty-first century, affecting ecosystems, livelihoods, food security, water resources, and social stability. Religious institutions have increasingly become significant actors in environmental stewardship by mobilizing moral teachings, community engagement, and ecological advocacy. The Catholic Church, through its social teachings and environmental encyclicals, particularly Laudato Si', has emphasized the moral responsibility of humanity to care for creation and protect the environment for future generations. Despite the Church's active involvement in environmental conservation initiatives, questions remain regarding the extent to which these practical efforts align with its theological teachings and the ecological practices of local communities. This study evaluated how the Catholic Church's climate change mitigation efforts align with its fundamental teachings and local community ecological care in Ngong Deanery, Kajiado County, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey research design informed by a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected from clergy, religious leaders, catechists, parish leaders, and community members through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that the Catholic Church has made significant strides in promoting environmental stewardship through tree planting, environmental awareness programs, sustainable resource management, and climate advocacy. These interventions demonstrated substantial alignment with Catholic teachings on stewardship, social justice, and care for creation. However, the study established gaps between theological ideals and practical implementation, including limited environmental catechesis, inadequate resource allocation, inconsistent participation among parishioners, and insufficient integration of indigenous ecological knowledge. The study concludes that while the Church's climate change mitigation efforts substantially reflect its fundamental teachings, greater institutional commitment, ecological education, and contextualization of environmental programs are necessary to enhance effectiveness. The study recommends strengthening ecological theology within pastoral programs, increasing environmental education at parish levels, fostering partnerships with local communities, and integrating indigenous knowledge systems into climate action initiatives.**

***Keywords*: Climate change mitigation, Catholic Church, ecological stewardship, environmental theology, Laudato Si', local community ecological care, Ngong Deanery, Kenya.**

## 1. Introduction

Climate change continues to pose significant environmental, social, economic, and moral challenges across the globe. Scientific evidence indicates that increasing greenhouse gas emissions have contributed to rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, biodiversity loss, and changing weather patterns (IPCC, 2023). These effects are particularly pronounced in developing countries, where vulnerable populations depend heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods. In sub-Saharan Africa, climate variability has intensified food insecurity, water scarcity, land degradation, and human displacement.

Religious institutions have increasingly emerged as important stakeholders in environmental conservation efforts. Their influence extends beyond spiritual guidance to social transformation, ethical formation, and community mobilization. Among Christian denominations, the Catholic Church has demonstrated notable leadership in addressing environmental concerns through theological reflection and practical interventions. The Church's environmental engagement is rooted in biblical teachings concerning stewardship, responsibility, justice, and care for creation.

The publication of Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si' in 2015 marked a significant milestone in Catholic environmental thought. The encyclical emphasized the interconnectedness between environmental degradation, social injustice, and human wellbeing while calling for an "integral ecology" that recognizes the relationship between humanity, nature, and God (Francis, 2015). The document challenged Catholic institutions worldwide to actively participate in climate change mitigation and ecological restoration.

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In Kenya, environmental challenges such as drought, deforestation, land degradation, and erratic rainfall patterns continue to affect communities, particularly those residing in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). Kajiado County, where Ngong Deanery is situated, has experienced recurrent climate-related challenges that affect pastoral livelihoods, agricultural productivity, and ecosystem sustainability. In response, the Catholic Church has implemented various climate mitigation initiatives aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and community resilience.

Despite these efforts, there remains a need to evaluate whether the Church's practical interventions genuinely reflect its theological teachings and whether local communities perceive these initiatives as contributing meaningfully to ecological care. Understanding this relationship is essential for strengthening faith-based environmental action and ensuring that climate interventions are both theologically grounded and socially relevant.

## 2. Background of the Study

Environmental stewardship has long been embedded within Christian theology. The biblical narrative presents humanity as caretakers of creation, entrusted with the responsibility of managing natural resources responsibly (Genesis 2:15). This stewardship mandate has informed the Catholic Church's understanding of ecological responsibility and environmental ethics.

Historically, Catholic social teaching has addressed issues related to justice, human dignity, and the common good. More recently, environmental concerns have become integrated into these teachings as ecological degradation increasingly threatens human wellbeing. Pope Benedict XVI emphasized ecological responsibility as a moral obligation, while Pope Francis significantly expanded this discourse through *Laudato Si'*.

The concept of integral ecology introduced by Pope Francis underscores the interconnectedness of environmental, social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of life. According to the encyclical, environmental degradation cannot be addressed independently of social inequalities and economic injustices (Francis, 2015). Consequently, climate change mitigation is not merely a technical challenge but also a moral and spiritual responsibility.

Kenya has experienced numerous climate-related challenges over the past decades. Droughts, declining water resources, deforestation, and biodiversity loss have adversely affected livelihoods, especially in ASAL regions. Kajiado County has been particularly vulnerable due to its dependence on livestock production and natural ecosystems. These environmental pressures have necessitated interventions from government agencies, civil society organizations, and faith-based institutions.

The Catholic Church in Kenya has responded through various environmental initiatives including tree planting campaigns, environmental awareness programs, sustainable agriculture promotion, water conservation projects, and advocacy for climate justice. Within Ngong Deanery, parishes have implemented ecological activities intended to support both environmental conservation and community resilience.

While these initiatives demonstrate institutional commitment, limited empirical research has examined the degree to which such interventions align with Catholic teachings and local ecological practices. This study therefore sought to fill this knowledge gap by evaluating the relationship between Church teachings, climate mitigation efforts, and community ecological care.

## 3. Statement of the Problem

Climate change poses serious threats to environmental sustainability, human livelihoods, and social wellbeing globally and locally. Although the Catholic Church has increasingly embraced environmental stewardship as part of its mission, questions remain regarding the effectiveness and theological consistency of its climate change mitigation efforts.

In Ngong Deanery, various environmental initiatives have been undertaken in response to climate-related challenges affecting local communities. However, little empirical evidence exists concerning whether these interventions adequately reflect the Church's fundamental teachings on stewardship, justice, and care for creation. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether local communities perceive these efforts as contributing meaningfully to ecological conservation and sustainable environmental practices.

The absence of such evaluation creates a knowledge gap that may hinder effective integration of theological principles with practical climate action. Consequently, there is a need to assess how the Church's climate mitigation efforts align with its doctrinal teachings and local community ecological care within Ngong Deanery.

## 4. Literature Review

### *A. Catholic Theology and Environmental Stewardship*

Environmental stewardship is a central theme within Catholic theology and social teaching. The biblical understanding of stewardship is rooted in Genesis 2:15, where humanity is entrusted with the responsibility of caring for creation. This mandate emphasizes responsible use and protection of natural resources, fostering a balanced relationship between human beings and the environment.

Catholic Social Teaching reinforces this obligation through principles such as human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good. Environmental degradation is increasingly viewed as a moral concern because it threatens human wellbeing and disproportionately affects vulnerable populations. The publication of *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015) further strengthened the Church's ecological mission by introducing the concept of integral ecology, which highlights the interconnectedness of environmental, social, economic, and spiritual realities. Consequently, climate change mitigation is understood not only as a technical challenge but also as a moral and spiritual responsibility.

### *B. Faith-Based Responses to Climate Change*

Faith-based organizations have become important actors in

climate change mitigation and adaptation due to their moral influence, grassroots presence, and ability to mobilize communities. Studies show that religious beliefs significantly influence environmental attitudes and behaviours, encouraging stewardship and sustainable living (Jenkins, Berry, & Kreider, 2018).

Across Africa, churches have contributed to climate action through environmental education, tree planting, advocacy, water conservation, and sustainable development initiatives. These efforts are often grounded in theological teachings that emphasize care for creation and social justice. Despite their contributions, faith-based organizations frequently encounter challenges such as inadequate funding, limited technical expertise, and weak institutional structures, which may hinder the effectiveness and sustainability of environmental programmes.

### *C. Local Ecological Knowledge and Community Environmental Care*

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) provide valuable insights for environmental conservation and climate resilience. Such knowledge encompasses traditional practices, cultural values, and community-based approaches to natural resource management developed through long-term interaction with local ecosystems.

Among the Maasai communities of Kajiado County, traditional practices such as rotational grazing, protection of water sources, and preservation of ecological sites have historically supported environmental sustainability. Scholars argue that integrating indigenous ecological knowledge with contemporary conservation approaches enhances community participation, ownership, and resilience (Nyong, Adesina, & Osman-Elasha, 2007). Consequently, effective climate mitigation initiatives should recognize and incorporate local experiences and cultural perspectives.

### *D. Empirical Review*

Empirical studies indicate that religious institutions can positively influence environmental stewardship when ecological teachings are integrated into worship, education, and community outreach. Catholic dioceses and parishes across Africa, Europe, and Latin America have implemented initiatives such as afforestation programmes, environmental education, renewable energy projects, and climate justice campaigns inspired by *Laudato Si'*.

However, existing studies also reveal persistent challenges, including inadequate resources, weak institutionalization, limited technical capacity, and inconsistent participation among congregants (Conradie, 2011). Furthermore, a gap often exists between official Church teachings and practical implementation at parish and community levels. While faith-based environmental engagement has received increasing scholarly attention, limited empirical research has specifically examined the effectiveness of Catholic Church climate change mitigation efforts within local Kenyan contexts. This study addresses this gap by assessing climate change mitigation initiatives undertaken by the Catholic Church in Ngong Deanery, Kajiado County, and evaluating their contribution to environmental sustainability and community resilience.

## 5. Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This mixed-methods design enabled a comprehensive understanding of perceptions, experiences, and practices related to climate change mitigation and ecological stewardship.

The study was conducted in Ngong Deanery, Kajiado County, Kenya. The area is characterized by climate-related challenges such as recurrent drought, environmental degradation, and shifting rainfall patterns. It comprises several Catholic parishes that are actively involved in pastoral and social development initiatives.

The target population consisted of clergy, religious leaders, catechists, parish pastoral council members, environmental committee members, and lay faithful within the deanery. These groups were selected due to their direct involvement in Church leadership and environmental programs.

Purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used to ensure adequate representation of key stakeholder groups engaged in environmental activities and Church governance structures.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. These instruments focused on environmental initiatives, theological understanding, community participation, and perceptions of ecological stewardship within the Church context.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and graphical presentations. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, themes, and perspectives on Church engagement in environmental conservation.

Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and participated voluntarily through informed consent.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings on the alignment between the Catholic Church's climate change mitigation efforts, its core teachings, and local community ecological care in Ngong Deanery, Kajiado County. The discussion is organized according to the study objectives and research questions, integrating both quantitative and qualitative findings with relevant literature and Catholic ecological theology.

The study established that most respondents were aware that the Catholic Church has official teachings on environmental stewardship and care for creation. These teachings were mainly communicated through sermons, pastoral letters, catechetical sessions, parish meetings, youth programs, and Church-led environmental activities. Environmental stewardship was widely recognized as a moral and spiritual responsibility linked to obedience to God's command to care for creation and

preserve natural resources for future generations. Many participants referenced biblical principles of stewardship in their understanding of environmental care.

However, the level of understanding varied among respondents. While clergy and parish leaders demonstrated a stronger familiarity with Church documents such as *Laudato Si'*, many lay faithful had only a general awareness of environmental responsibility without deeper theological grounding. This supports Pope Francis' (2015) emphasis that ecological conversion requires not only awareness but also transformation of values and behavior. It also aligns with Deane-Drummond (2017), who observes that ecological teachings often remain more developed among Church leadership than at grassroots levels.

The study further found that the Catholic Church in Ngong Deanery has implemented several climate change mitigation initiatives. Tree planting and afforestation emerged as the most prominent activity, with parishes regularly organizing planting exercises involving schools, youth groups, women's associations, and community members. These activities were often linked to Church events, environmental days, and outreach programs. Participants reported that these efforts contributed to environmental restoration, soil conservation, and increased community awareness, positioning the Church as an important actor in local environmental action. This aligns with Jenkins et al. (2018), who highlight the role of religious institutions in mobilizing environmental stewardship through practical action.

Environmental education also featured strongly in Church mitigation efforts. Clergy and parish leaders frequently integrated environmental messages into sermons, seminars, retreats, and training sessions. These programs addressed issues such as climate change, waste management, water conservation, deforestation, and sustainable resource use, aiming to build environmental responsibility among parishioners. This reflects the educational emphasis of *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015), which calls for ecological awareness as a foundation for sustainable living.

The study also found that parishes promoted sustainable resource management practices, including proper waste disposal, water conservation, energy efficiency, and general environmental cleanliness. Several parishes had established environmental committees to coordinate these activities and ensure continuity. These efforts demonstrate a shift from purely theological teaching to practical environmental action within Church spaces.

In addition, Church leaders were found to engage in advocacy on climate justice issues affecting vulnerable communities. Environmental degradation was frequently linked to food insecurity, water scarcity, poverty, and displacement. This advocacy reflects Catholic social teaching, particularly its emphasis on justice, solidarity, and preferential concern for the poor.

A key finding of the study is that Church environmental initiatives largely align with Catholic teachings on stewardship of creation. Respondents consistently viewed environmental conservation as a moral obligation rooted in Scripture, particularly Genesis 2:15. Environmental actions were therefore interpreted as expressions of Christian discipleship and responsibility toward God's creation.

The findings also show alignment with the principle of the common good, as Church initiatives were understood to benefit both current and future generations through the protection of shared natural resources. Similarly, environmental work was strongly linked to social justice, with participants recognizing that ecological degradation disproportionately affects vulnerable populations. This supports Pope Francis' integrated view that environmental and social crises are interconnected and must be addressed together.

Regarding alignment with local community ecological care, the study found generally positive synergy between Church initiatives and community practices, particularly in conservation, sustainable land use, and environmental protection. Community members appreciated Church involvement in environmental awareness and action.

However, gaps were also identified. A key challenge was the limited integration of indigenous Maasai ecological knowledge into Church programs. Participants noted that traditional practices once played a significant role in sustainable land and resource management but are not sufficiently incorporated into current Church-led initiatives. This observation aligns with Nyong et al. (2007), who emphasize the value of indigenous knowledge in climate adaptation and sustainability.

The study also revealed uneven levels of community participation. Youth and women were more actively involved in environmental initiatives compared to other groups. Barriers such as competing economic priorities, limited awareness, and weak follow-up mechanisms affected consistent engagement.

Several challenges were found to hinder effective alignment between Church teachings and climate action. These include inadequate environmental catechesis, which limits deeper theological understanding among parishioners; resource constraints, which restrict the scale and continuity of programs; and institutional inconsistencies across parishes in implementing environmental initiatives. Additionally, the complexity of climate change itself requires technical expertise and broader collaboration beyond parish-level capacity.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Catholic Church in Ngong Deanery has made significant progress in integrating climate change mitigation with its theological teachings. Activities such as tree planting, environmental education, resource management, and climate advocacy reflect the principles of integral ecology as outlined in *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015). These efforts demonstrate recognition of environmental care as part of the Church's mission.

Nevertheless, gaps remain between theological ideals and practical implementation. Strengthening environmental catechesis, improving institutional coordination, addressing resource limitations, and integrating indigenous ecological knowledge would enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Church-led environmental initiatives.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes several key

recommendations aimed at strengthening the Catholic Church's engagement in climate change mitigation and ecological stewardship.

The Church should strengthen ecological catechesis by integrating environmental stewardship more deliberately into catechetical programs, faith formation, and theological education. This will deepen parishioners' understanding of ecological responsibility as a core aspect of Christian faith and discipleship.

Parishes are encouraged to institutionalize environmental ministries by establishing permanent environmental committees with clear responsibilities, defined mandates, strategic plans, and allocated budgets. This will ensure continuity and effective coordination of climate mitigation initiatives.

There is also a need to enhance community participation through more inclusive and participatory approaches that actively engage youth, women, men, schools, and broader community groups in environmental programs. Strengthened participation will improve ownership and sustainability of initiatives.

The Church should further integrate indigenous ecological knowledge by working closely with local communities to incorporate traditional environmental practices into modern conservation and climate mitigation strategies. This integration will enrich ecological programs and strengthen cultural relevance.

In addition, the Church should strengthen partnerships with government agencies, environmental organizations, academic institutions, and civil society actors. Such collaboration will enhance technical capacity, resource mobilization, and the overall effectiveness of environmental initiatives.

Finally, the Church is encouraged to continue and expand its role in climate advocacy by promoting environmental justice and supporting policies that address the needs of vulnerable communities affected by climate change.

## 8. Summary

This study assessed the alignment between the Catholic Church's climate change mitigation efforts, its fundamental teachings, and local community ecological care in Ngong Deanery, Kajiado County. The findings show that the Church is actively engaged in environmental stewardship through initiatives such as tree planting, environmental education, sustainable resource management, and climate advocacy.

The study further established strong alignment between these initiatives and Catholic teachings on stewardship of creation, social justice, the common good, and care for the environment. However, several implementation challenges were identified, including limited ecological catechesis, resource constraints, inconsistent participation across parishes, and inadequate integration of indigenous ecological knowledge.

## 9. Conclusion

The study concludes that the Catholic Church in Ngong Deanery demonstrates a meaningful and active commitment to climate change mitigation and ecological stewardship. Its environmental initiatives strongly reflect key Catholic teachings on care for creation, stewardship, social justice, and the common good.

The Church has emerged as a significant actor in promoting environmental awareness, ecological education, and community participation in climate action. Nevertheless, the effectiveness and sustainability of these efforts can be further improved through strengthened institutional frameworks, expanded ecological education, enhanced community engagement, and better integration of indigenous ecological knowledge.

Overall, the findings affirm that faith-based environmental action plays an important role in addressing climate change while also promoting spiritual growth, social responsibility, and sustainable development. The experience of the Catholic Church in Ngong Deanery offers valuable insights for religious institutions seeking to contribute meaningfully to ecological sustainability and climate resilience.

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