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## **Neo - Pentecostal Churches Advocacy and Alleviation of Domestic Water Scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya**

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## Neo - Pentecostal Churches Advocacy and Alleviation of Domestic Water Scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya

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### Abstract

Most neo-Pentecostal churches contravene Luke 4:16-19, Psalms 41 and Exodus 18: 21 by failing to advocate for peoples' water rights. This stance has of late interested many scholars to do studies on churches and advocacy for water rights. In line with this, this study analyzed such advocacy by neo - Pentecostal churches in alleviating domestic water scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya. The objectives were to: investigate how neo- Pentecostal churches advocated for water rights on their own, assess how Neo-Pentecostal churches partnered with other water advocacy groups, and, investigate how neo-Pentecostal churches supported politicians for the alleviation of this menace. Theological reflection theory, interpretivist philosophy, qualitative approach and phenomenological design guided this study. The sample entailed 22 pastors taken through census, and 59 out of 594 members belonging to these pastors' 22 churches, taken through 10% in the 10-30 % formula. This was followed by cluster and simple random samplings. Tools used on them were interview schedule for the 22 pastors, documentary analysis for their churches, and focus group discussions for the 59 members held in 4 groups of 12 members each and 1 group of 11 members. Data collected was purely qualitative and was analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. The findings indicated that these churches did not engage in advocacy for water rights. But, they agreed that they supported 'good' political leaders to win elections so as to help in alleviating domestic water scarcity. The study recommended that training actors should organize premises to train neo-Pentecostal Churches on advocacy for water rights. This would orient the latter to social gospel and thus push for advocacy for water rights and the best practices in electing political leaders to alleviate water scarcity in the constituency.

**Key terms:** *Neo-Pentecostals churches, advocacy or water rights, domestic water scarcity, ecclesiastical praxis*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Church and advocacy for water rights was mainly birthed mainly during the struggle for post modernism in the 1950s to 80s Christian Era [CE] (Alvin & Day, 2017). Entities such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) were the front liners in this (Beukes & Huffel, 2016). Along this premise, this study focused on analysis of neo - Pentecostal churches [NPCs'] advocacy in alleviating domestic water scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya.

According to King James Version [KJV] Bible Dictionary (2019), domestic water is a colorless, tasteless and odorless liquid. It originates from rain or flows through springs that often combine to form streams and rivers. Its scarcity is risky because without it there can never be life (Moss, 2013). Water scarcity is more than simply a shortage of water in time and space” (Boberg 2005, p.8): science, supported by religion generally agree that domestic water scarcity is mainly characterized by water resources: stress (Genesis 26:12-33) (Parker, 2016); poor quality (II Kings 2:18-22) (WHO, 2017); accessibility from over 1 Kilometer [Km] (II Kings 20:20) (Agesa & Agesa 2019); unaffordability (Isaiah 55:1) (Ruden, 2020); and, below 40 liters per person per day [l/p/d] (Ezekiel 4:11) (Demie et al, 2016). It is also indicated by usage in-efficiency (Proverbs 21:20) (Sandowich, 2016), and water conflicts (Genesis 26:12–33) (Kreamer, 2013).

The global population averages 7.7 billion, with 4.5 billion (58 percent) having domestic water scarcity, out of which about 1.1 billion people have water related diseases any time of the year with deaths of about 205 people per hour (World Health Organization (WHO), 2019). In intervention, churches such as Asha Pentecostal organization mobilized groups to push for their water rights in India’s New Delhi slums with success (Martin, 2017). Africa has a population of 1.2 billion out of which 600 million (50 percent) have this scarcity with 250 million having water related diseases and 112 dying hourly (Obi & Omulo, 2018). In intervention, some churches such as the Association of Evangelicals of Liberia (AEL) partnered with civil activists to push for water rights (Titus, 2018). Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) has a population of about 760 million, out of which 440 million (58 percent) are faced with domestic water scarcity. An estimated 188 million people have water related diseases with about 81 hourly deaths (Tumble Green Editorial Team, 2015). Churches such as the Malawian Pentecostals participated in electing President Chakwera for, among other things, alleviation of water scarcity (Zane, 2020).

Kenya has a population of 47.6 million people (Trading Economics 2019), with 19 million (41 percent) having domestic water scarcity (Water.org, 2019). 15 million have water related diseases with an average of 3 hourly deaths (Bissht, 2020). Action by Churches Together (ACT) has been among the interveners advocacy for water rights in counties such as Mandera, Taita Taveta and Tana River (ACT, 2006). In Meru County of 1.75 million people, 1.622 million (92 percent) are faced with domestic water scarcity (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), 2019). Though no quantified impacts are available, water related diseases are prevalent among the un-served people in this county (Kenya Red Cross, 2019). Tigania West Constituency, has a population of 139, 961 people (KNBS, 2019), with 135,762 (97 percent) facing domestic water scarcity (KNBS, 2019; Meru County Government (MCG), 2013). The

Catholic Lay Volunteers International Association has been conspicuous in enhancing advocacy for water rights (LVIA) (2012).

The foregoing discussion generally shows that NPCs did not suffice in advocating for water rights. The variables that quantitatively suffice here are churches advocacy that is: self-initiated, in partnerships and in support of political candidates. Qualitatively however, the underlying NPCs' epistemology on these variables with regard to alleviation of domestic water scarcity was not clear. This necessitated for an analysis of the same using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis [IPA]. For instance, the Diocese of Meru through LVIA has been pushing for water rights in parts of Meru County including Tigania constituency (MCG, 2019).

However, the role of NPCs in advocating for water rights in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, now standing at 97 percent is not felt. This has resulted into many water related problems including diseases which account for about 80 percent of all reported cases (Vision 2030, 2018). This raises concerns on how these churches heed to biblical prescriptions on advocacy. Several studies such as that of Martin (2017) and Vida (2018) indicated churches' advocacy for water rights as either done alone by individual churches or in partnership with others, and support of the political candidates as the main variables involved. But no study had presented NPCs as handling any of these variables in Tigania west constituency. Consequently, it was on the basis of this gap that this study was conducted in Tigania West Constituency, using IPA. The purpose of this study was to analyze neo - Pentecostal churches' advocacy in alleviating domestic water scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya.

Literature reviewed defined advocacy as the participatory role of all churches as prescribed in Luke 4:16-19, Psalms 41 and Exodus 18: 21 (New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), 1964/1991). Some NPCs have at times been having self-initiated advocacy in alleviating of domestic water scarcity. They have done this through, for instance, enlightenments in their conferences (Nancy, 2017); protection of water laws (Vida, 2018) and helping communities to demand for water rights (Martin, 2017). A few other NPCs have for instance been found to partner classic Pentecostals and other Faith Based Organizations [FBOs] in advocating for the alleviation of domestic water scarcity. Many have pushed for water resources conservation through such partnerships (Donkor, 2020). Still some NPCs have been doing political advocacies to elect their own, who in turn handle water problems directly (Kaunda & Kaunda, 2018). On the other hand, majority of them just do the opposite: They legitimize the unjust political elite, who make domestic water problems worse (Gregory & Gabrielle, 2013; Kakwata, 2017; Maseno, 2017; Parsitau, 2019).

The following are a few examples from global to local levels: On the global level the Salvadoran Church fought and won against its government's attempts to privatize water services, an act that would raise water tariffs. In Africa the election of former Benin Marxist 'converted to Christianity', Mathieu Kérékou as President in 1996 CE led to unfair 'Neo-Pentecostalisation' of the government (Mayrargue (2008). This led to 50 percent of this country's population facing water scarcity problems (Gazard, Marcel de Souza, & Kassa, 2013). In the SSA, Sperber and Hern (2018) collected original data through a stratified random sample of 1500 members of Zambian NPCs

and the results indicated that they were often impediments in the advocacy for water rights (Zenner, 2018). In Kenya, advocacy for the alleviation of domestic water scarcity was fairly done between 1970s -80s CE by clergy such as bishop Okullu, Rev Njoya bishop Ndingi Mwana a' Nzeki on one hand (Parsitau, 2019). On the other hand, most NPCs have been found to legitimize elected political leaders instead of advocating against their developmental failures (Gregory & Gabrielle, 2013; Kakwata, 2017; Maseno, 2017).

## 2.0 Conceptual Framework

In this study, the independent variables touch on the Tigania west constituency NPCs' own water advocacies, partnered water advocacies and political support. The dependent variable is domestic water scarcity. Figure 1 shows these variables.

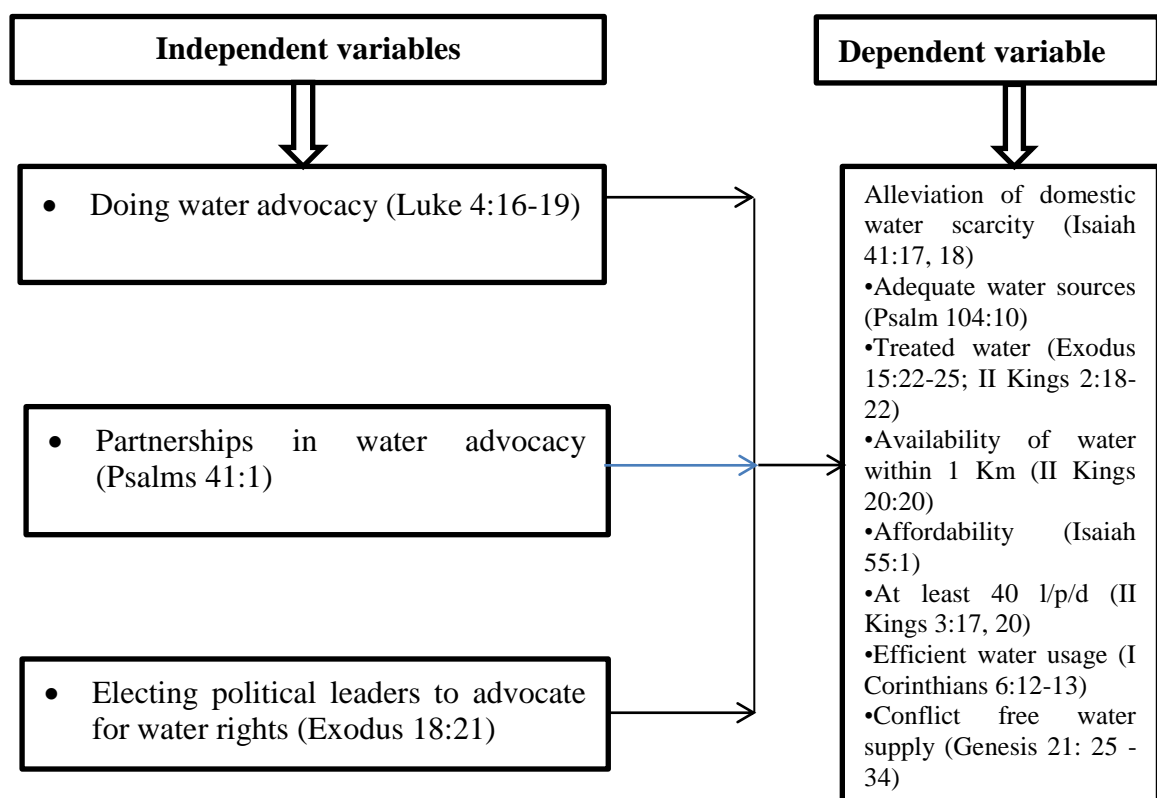


Figure 1: *Conceptual framework*

## 3.0 Methods

This study was conducted in Tigania West Constituency in Meru County, Kenya (appendix I). The constituency was fairly placed centrally on the map of Kenya about 295 Kms North East of Nairobi. Its  $\frac{3}{4}$  land area was situated on the leeward side of Nyambene range (NDMA, 2019) making it Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) with domestic water scarcity (Revolv, 2018). This scarcity had been fought by Imetha Water and Sanitation Company (IMETHAWASCO) covering only 3 percent of the

population. Other actors such as the community self-help projects, NG-CDF, MCG, and the Roman Catholic Church had been helping this remaining 97 percent, though the water they supply did not meet WHO standards. More was needed (UN, 2015).

The study adopted interpretivism because its problem and questions would make it seek, analyze and present epistemological data on ground reality (Pulla & Carter, 2018) and further suggest action on the same, in order to satisfy reflection theology (Wepener, et al, 2017; Sallai, 2019), which was key in this study. Its approach was qualitative while its design was phenomenological research because it aimed at 'describing', to understand a phenomenon socially and psychologically, from the epistemology of respondents (Pulla & Carter, 2018). The target population was all registered neo-Pentecostal churches in Tigania West Constituency, which were 22 (AECK, 2020). Since these churches were few, they all were the unit of analysis with the units of observations being their 22 pastors and their 594 members, all of over 18 years of age.

Quota sampling technique was used. It caused stratum of the target population by use of demographical variables of 'pastors', and 'members'. It was used to have the group of the 22 pastors and another group of 594 members as advised by Khan et al (2015), though all the 22 pastors (taken through census) participated in the study. Also, The 594 members were divided into 5 civic ward-clusters and since all of them had same Neo Pentecostal characteristics, they were sampled using, simple random as guided by Etikan and Bala (2017). All the 22 churches were considered in this study. Since the pastors were few, all the 22 of them were taken by census to participate in the study. The 594 members were divided into 5 civic ward-clusters of Mbeu, Nkomo, Kianjai, Akithi and Athwana; according to the ward of each respective church location. For each church, '10% - 30%' formula on the targeted population applied (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003), whereby 10% of each church membership was preferred. Accordingly, sample size of members was 59. This sample size was appropriate for this study since it was mainly for member clusters' FGD. Thus the specific subjects constituted 22 pastors and their respective church members totaling to 59 spread over 5 clusters (the current civic wards)

In this study, the instruments of collecting data were interview schedules for 22 pastors, documentary analysis for their 22 churches and, FGD for the sampled 59 members in their small groups within their respective clusters. These instruments strengthened and enabled triangulation of data as recommended by Oliveira, Azevedo and Gonzalez (2018). The questions in the schedule were open-ended, based on the literature reviewed and conceptual framework. Since documentation of individual NPCs by scholars is relatively slow, only respective church annual reports, Church constitution, Church committee's meetings' minutes, Calendar of events, policy frameworks, liturgical practices and any written past sermons, all of the last 5 years were examined for the needed information from each church. 5 FGDs were arranged for members as follows: 4 ward-clusters each with 12 sampled church members and 1 ward- cluster with 11 sampled members.

For pre-testing of the instruments of collecting data, this study adopted 10 percent of the sample. Overall, this process helped in determining the validity and the reliability of the research tools. Validity of research instruments was follows: The content

validity of instruments was realized through engagement with the supervisors, so that inclusivity of all variables' indicators were clearly placed in these three tools. Misunderstandings were ironed out by further consultation of the supervisors and the literature review. For construct validity, the tools were clearly explained to the respondents before writing or taping, so that data given by respondents was complete, concise and clear. Criterion validity was ensured for by checking the criteria used by related studies to ensure for a concrete relationship with the tools in this study. For instance Mwaura (2012) on NPCs and advocacy was consulted. This helped to strengthen accurate measurement of each indicator of the variables. Bracketing validity was done by writing memos throughout data collection exercise and analysis as a means of examining and reflecting upon the researcher's engagement with the respondents and their data as advised by Cutcliffe (2003). In testimonial validity, participants were given opportunity to identify any misrepresentation of any of their epistemological expressions during research, as advised by Stiles (1999). This helped in verifying and refining the accuracy of the findings.

For this study, reliability of these three instruments; interview schedule, documentary analysis and FGD was ensured by making the interview schedule clear and with the same questions on NPCs own-advocacy, advocacy partnerships and political support. Questions on these variables in the schedule were aligned with exactly the same format and sequence of words for each of the respondents. Documentary check lists were also checking on the same record for each church viz annual reports, constitution, committees' meetings' minutes, Calendar of events, policy frameworks, liturgical practices and any written past sermons. FGD questions were also reviewed well before the actual collection of data from the respondents.

After data collection, it was analyzed using IPA as follows: First, the transcripts and audio recordings were closely read and listened unto severally for grasping of concepts (Pulla & Carter (2018). Second, subordinate themes were developed out of these concepts (Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014). Third, similarities between the emerged themes were sorted, grouping and tabulating them into persuasive clusters (superordinate themes) (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Fourth, a narrative account of the tabulated subordinate themes and superordinate themes (clusters) were written down. The fifth step was the conclusion of data analysis by stating the findings and study outcomes based on the study objectives as shown in the next section.

#### **4.0 Results and discussion**

This study had the 22 pastors and the 59 members as the participants. There was 100 percent response rate from these respondents in the interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Twenty two pastors and their 59 church members participated in this study.

The research questions were on how advocacy for water rights, either alone (Luke 4:16-19), in partnership with others (Psalms 41:1) or through politics (Exodus 18:21) informed their engagement in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania west constituency. The findings are tabulated in tables 1 for pastors' interview and 2 for members' Focus Group Discussions separately.

**Table 1**  
*Pastors' Interview Results on NPCs Advocacy Role on Alleviation of Domestic Water Scarcity in Tigania West Constituency*

Subordinate themes derived from related questions	Superordinate themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We know that the bible has advocacy directives, though we have never looked at it as something to be literary executed on the ground by the church.</li> <li>We have never partnered with others to have advocacy for water rights. This has never been in our agendas</li> <li>Politicians who seek prayers and blessings from us are welcome. We always ask God to do his will on them.</li> </ul>	<p>Though it's not in our direct calling to engage in water advocacy, we support good political leaders to win elections so that they can be our panacea in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania west constituency.</p>

**Table 2**  
*Church Members' Focus Group Discussion Results on NPCs Advocacy Role on Alleviation of Domestic Water Scarcity in Tigania West Constituency*

Subordinate themes derived from related questions	Superordinate themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No water advocacies have been done in our church on water rights for this constituency</li> <li>We have not been partnering with others to have any advocacy on water rights towards alleviation of domestic water scarcity in this constituency</li> <li>We generally pray for politicians who approach and facilitate our ministries' growth asking God to generally help them ascend to power in order to alleviate our water woes.</li> </ul>	<p>Though it's not in our direct calling to engage in water advocacy, we pray for the good political leaders to win elections so that in turn, they can be our panacea in the alleviation of domestic water scarcity in Tigania west constituency.</p>

## 5.0 Conclusion

The respondents indicated that advocacy wasn't in their mandate but they supported and voted for good politicians in order for the latter to reciprocate with alleviation of societal problems such as domestic water scarcity.

## 6.0 Recommendations

There was need for relevant actors to pass knowledge and understanding to neo-Pentecostal churches. This knowledge and understanding should be on areas of the gospel related to theological reflection and social capital works.



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