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## **INITIATION OF DOMESTIC WATER PROJECTS BY NEO-PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES TO ALLEVIATE DOMESTIC WATER SCARCITY IN TIGANIA WEST CONSTITUENCY**

**<sup>1\*</sup> Kiambi James Thambura Atheru (PhD) & <sup>2</sup>Paul Gichohi (PhD)**

**<sup>1</sup>Meru County Government, P.O. Box 120-60200, Meru, Kenya.**

**<sup>2</sup>Kenya Methodist University, P.O. Box 267-60200, Meru, Kenya.**

**\*Email of the Corresponding Author : [kangroupofschools@gmail.com](mailto:kangroupofschools@gmail.com);  
[kaninternational@yahoo.com](mailto:kaninternational@yahoo.com)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** This study explores the role of Neo-Pentecostal Churches (NPCs) in addressing water scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya, where 97% of the population lacks adequate water access, despite their biblical mandate and strong community presence.

**Methods:** Using an interpretivist approach and qualitative methodology, the research employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to assess NPCs' involvement in planning, implementing, and maintaining domestic water projects. Data was collected through interviews with 22 pastors, focus group discussions with 59 church members, and analysis of church documents. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework.

**Results:** The study found that despite their strong presence and biblical mandate to address community needs, NPCs have demonstrated minimal engagement in water project initiatives. Most churches prioritized spiritual activities over practical water solutions, with only one church showing limited involvement through material and technical support to a community water project. This lack of engagement contrasts with successful water initiatives by other faith-based organizations both globally and locally.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that Neo-Pentecostal Churches (NPCs) in Tigania West have minimal engagement in initiating domestic water projects despite their biblical mandate. Addressing this gap requires a paradigm shift through theological reflection, strategic partnerships, and community-driven water initiatives.

**Recommendation:** The study recommends that Neo-Pentecostal Churches (NPCs) enhance their involvement in water projects through capacity building, strategic partnerships, and resource mobilization. Integrating water development into church policies and emphasizing biblical teachings on social responsibility can foster sustainable solutions.

**Keywords:** *Water project initiation, water scarcity Faith-Based Organizations, faith-based community development, religious social responsibility, Neo-Pentecostal Churches.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Efforts to alleviate domestic water scarcity have evolved over time, shaped by historical, cultural, and religious dynamics, with water scarcity remaining a global crisis affecting billions and threatening health, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Neo-Pentecostal Churches (NPCs) have emerged as key players in addressing these challenges through diverse interventions, yet their role in initiating domestic water projects remains underexplored. This study examines NPCs' involvement in tackling severe water scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya, where 97% of the population lacks adequate access to water. Water scarcity manifests through inadequate supply (Genesis 26:12–33), poor quality (Exodus 15:22–25), limited accessibility within one kilometer (2 Kings 20:20), unaffordability (Isaiah 55:1), insufficient daily usage below 40 liters per person (Ezekiel 4:11), inefficiencies in usage (Proverbs 21:20), and water-related conflicts (Genesis 26:12–33). Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that integrates infrastructure development, education, advocacy, and spiritual engagement. For NPCs, involvement in water scarcity alleviation often aligns with their religious practices, which include prosperity gospel, spiritual warfare, and community-focused initiatives. However, their interventions frequently emphasize spirituality over pragmatic solutions, raising questions about their potential to address tangible water scarcity issues effectively.

Globally, water scarcity affects 58% of the population, with 1.1 billion people suffering from waterborne diseases and 205 deaths occurring hourly due to related causes (WHO, 2019). Developed countries have leveraged advanced technologies and governance systems to mitigate water scarcity, yet disparities persist in marginalized communities. In Russia and Ukraine, some NPCs have contributed to water projects targeting underserved populations (Marsh & Tonoyan, 2009). These initiatives highlight the potential for faith-based organizations to complement governmental efforts, especially in resource-scarce settings.

In developing countries, water scarcity is more pronounced, with Africa experiencing the highest burden. Approximately 50% of Africa's population faces water scarcity, resulting in 112 hourly deaths from water-related diseases (Obi & Omulo, 2018). NPCs in countries such as Ghana and Malawi have engaged in water advocacy and infrastructure development, albeit inconsistently. The Church of Pentecost in Ghana, for instance, integrates faith healing and deliverance practices into its water conservation initiatives

(Donkor, 2020). Despite these efforts, many NPCs remain focused on spiritual dimensions, neglecting the pragmatic aspects of water scarcity alleviation.

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) faces severe water scarcity, affecting 58% of the population. Faith-based organizations, including some NPCs, have contributed to addressing this crisis. In Malawi, NPCs played a role in electing leaders committed to improving water access (Zane, 2020). However, the ambiguous relationship between spiritual practices and practical interventions remains a challenge. Most NPCs prioritize spiritual warfare and prosperity gospel, often sidelining actionable strategies for water provision (Sande, 2020).

Kenya faces significant water challenges, with 41% of the population experiencing domestic water scarcity and 3 hourly deaths attributed to waterborne diseases. While mainline churches like the African Divine Church and Action by Churches Together (ACT) have implemented successful water initiatives, NPCs' contributions are less consistent. In Meru County, where 92% of residents face water scarcity, efforts by organizations like the Methodist Church of Kenya have improved access through rainwater harvesting programs (MCK, 2020). However, Tigania West Constituency, with 97% of its population affected, has seen limited intervention from NPCs. Despite possessing strong social capital, NPCs in this region have yet to translate their resources into tangible water projects (Mwaura, 2020).

While various stakeholders, including Self-Help Groups, NGO-CDF, and the Roman Catholic Church, have initiated programs to address water scarcity, Neo-Pentecostal Churches (NPCs) have been conspicuously and dismally been contributing to this pressing issue. This is the case despite their strong presence and biblical mandate to address human needs, as emphasized in texts like Isaiah 41:17-20 and John 4:5-15 (Ruden, 2020; Smuts, 2019), the role of NPCs in alleviating water scarcity remains largely unexplored. This situation raises questions about the extent to which these churches align their practices with the community's needs and their potential contributions to sustainable solutions.

Existing studies, such as those by Martin (2017) and Vida (2018), have explored NPCs' focus on spiritual warfare, prosperity gospel, and faith healing but have not addressed their role in community development initiatives like water projects. Additionally, research highlights the significance of stakeholder training initiatives in addressing water scarcity (Ballard, 2015), yet there is a noticeable gap concerning NPCs' involvement in such programs in Tigania West. This gap necessitates an investigation into the strategies and

potential of NPCs in contributing to domestic water projects, particularly by examining the water project initiatives using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This study assessed the initiation of domestic water projects by Neo-Pentecostal Churches to alleviate domestic water scarcity in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya with a view to demonstrate existing opportunities for church's contribution to community development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The initiation of domestic water projects highlights the intersection of faith-based organizational roles and societal needs, particularly in fulfilling the fundamental human right to clean water. While Neo-Pentecostal Churches (NPCs) have been central to spiritual renewal, their engagement in tangible development initiatives, including domestic water provision, remains less pronounced compared to other faith-based organizations (Parsitau, 2014; Singleton, 2011). This study critically examines NPCs' role in alleviating domestic water scarcity by tracing their activities globally, regionally, and locally, identifying gaps in their contributions and potential for greater involvement.

Globally, faith-based organizations (FBOs) have played a crucial role in water project initiatives, often collaborating with governments and non-governmental entities. In developed nations, churches affiliated with the World Council of Churches (WCC) have spearheaded water projects, particularly in politically unstable regions (Muller, 2016). In the United States, African-American churches have historically led community-based water projects, while white-majority congregations have increasingly integrated social justice initiatives such as water provision (Yancey & Garland, 2014; Tan, 2009). Similarly, in developing nations, faith-based initiatives have significantly contributed to water access, with organizations such as Bethel Pentecostal Church in India and LWI in Latin America implementing water projects to serve rural and underserved communities (Bethel Pentecostal Church, 2016; LWI, 2018). However, NPCs have been less active in this domain, often prioritizing evangelism over socio-economic development due to resource constraints and theological orientations (Roser-Renouf, 2007; Tucker, 2011).

In Africa, Catholic and Protestant churches have made significant contributions to water provision, as seen in initiatives like Samaritan's Purse wells in South Sudan and Partners 4 Africa boreholes in Zambia (Samaritan Purse International, 2018; Rose Hill Church of Christ, 2018). While some NPCs, such as Zambia's Jubilee Centre, have engaged in borehole drilling, their efforts remain sporadic and often externally funded (Kaunda &

Kaunda, 2018; Burgess, 2015). In Kenya, faith-based initiatives, including Catholic boreholes in Eldoret and Protestant-led projects, have improved water access, yet NPCs have played a marginal role. Leaders like Bishop Margaret Wanjiru have supported water infrastructure development in political capacities, but NPC institutions lack structured approaches to water projects (Mwaura, 2012). In Meru County's Tigania West Constituency, where only 3% of the population has access to water that meets WHO standards, self-help groups, NGOs, and other churches have made efforts, yet significant gaps in coverage and quality persist (Karuti, 2015). Despite biblical precedents supporting water provision, NPCs' limited engagement in such projects represents a missed opportunity for holistic mission work, emphasizing the need for further research on how they can integrate community development with their spiritual mandates (Singleton, 2011; Wommack, 2020).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in Tigania West Constituency, Meru County, Kenya, an Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) region where 97% of the population experiences domestic water scarcity (Revolvy, 2018). The research adopted an interpretivist philosophy to explore the role of Neo-Pentecostal Churches (NPCs) in initiating domestic water projects. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design was employed to capture participants' lived experiences and perspectives on the theological, social, and practical dimensions of NPC-led water initiatives (Pulla & Carter, 2018; Sutton & Austin, 2015).

The study targeted all 22 registered NPCs in the constituency, collecting data from 22 pastors (via census) and 59 church members sampled using a 10% rule of church membership (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Members were clustered into five administrative wards—Mbeu, Nkomo, Kianjai, Akithi, and Athwana—ensuring constituency-wide representation through simple random sampling. Data collection involved interview schedules for pastors, focus group discussions (FGDs) for members, and documentary analysis of church records. Interviews examined NPC-led water initiatives, theological motivations, and partnerships, while FGDs explored members' perspectives, and church documents—such as annual reports and constitutions—provided contextual insights.

Pre-testing of research instruments was conducted in Buuri constituency to ensure validity and reliability. Validity was reinforced through construct, criterion, and testimonial checks,

while reliability was achieved through standardized procedures (Hudelson et al., 2014; Leung, 2015). Data analysis followed the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework, involving iterative reading, coding, reflexive memoing, and participant feedback to ensure accuracy (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Cutcliffe, 2003; Stiles, 1999). Findings were contextualized within theological frameworks, offering insights into NPCs' contributions to sustainable water management and community development in Tigania West Constituency.

## **RESULTS**

This section explores the performance of Neo-Pentecostal Churches (NPCs) in initiating domestic water projects in Tigania West Constituency. The findings are based on responses from interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentary analyses. The study assessed NPCs' endeavors in planning and designing, implementing, and operating and maintaining domestic water projects. The discussion is anchored on theological reflection theory and economic theory of the church, supported by scriptural and scholarly arguments.

### **Planning and Designing Domestic Water Projects**

The first indicator examined whether NPCs engaged in the planning and designing of domestic water projects. This aspect is rooted in II Kings 20:20, where King Hezekiah's leadership facilitated the construction of a water conduit to address Jerusalem's water needs. Historical insights by Wiemer (2012) reveal that this tunnel, constructed in 701 BCE, was meticulously planned to transport water from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam.

Despite this biblical precedent, findings indicate that NPCs in Tigania West had not ventured into planning and designing water projects. Responses from pastors and members (Tables 4.9 and 4.10) highlight a lack of awareness and initiative. One pastor remarked, "Planning and designing of water projects should be pushed up by community water project officials, not church pastors" (Pastor B). Similarly, members expressed ignorance of planning processes, emphasizing that such activities were beyond the church's perceived mandate. This sentiment reflects a misalignment with theological reflection theory, which advocates for churches to address societal challenges through ecclesiastical praxis.

Documentary evidence corroborated these findings, with no records in annual reports, constitutions, or committee meeting minutes indicating efforts to plan or design water

projects. These gaps highlight a missed opportunity for NPCs to emulate scriptural models, such as Genesis 21:15-19, where God provided water to Hagar and her son, demonstrating divine intervention in addressing basic human needs.

### **Implementation of Domestic Water Projects**

The second indicator focused on NPCs' involvement in implementing domestic water projects. Historical accounts of Hezekiah's conduit (Wiemer, 2012) underscore the importance of practical action in addressing water scarcity. However, findings revealed that NPCs had not participated in such initiatives.

Pastors largely attributed this inaction to competing priorities, with one stating, "I have never thought of water project implementation because I have been busy ministering" (Pastor K). Another noted, "This is the government's work. Ours is to preach the gospel" (Pastor N). Members echoed this sentiment, indicating that their engagement in water projects was limited to community self-help initiatives, not church-driven efforts.

Notably, one church (NPC-R 6) demonstrated isolated involvement by supporting a community water project with material and technical assistance. This included donating a gate valve and aiding in drafting a successful funding proposal. However, this singular effort was insufficient to form a broader theme, emphasizing the limited scope of NPC involvement in implementing water projects.

### **Operation and Maintenance of Domestic Water Projects**

The third indicator examined NPCs' efforts in operating and maintaining domestic water projects. As demonstrated in II Kings 20:20, effective water systems require ongoing management. Despite this, the study found no evidence of NPCs engaging in such activities.

Interviews with pastors revealed a consensus that churches had not prioritized water project operations. One pastor candidly stated, "We have not planned, designed, or implemented any water projects, so we cannot operate or maintain them." Similarly, FGDs with members revealed a lack of understanding of operational responsibilities. Documentary analysis supported these findings, with most churches lacking any records related to water project maintenance. An exception was NPC-R 6, which maintained a community water line, albeit as an isolated case.

### **Broader Theological and Scholarly Context**

The absence of NPC engagement in water projects contrasts with historical and contemporary examples of faith-based organizations (FBOs) addressing societal needs. The early church's goodwill in community projects (Acts 2:45; Galatians 6:10) and Emperor Constantine's initiatives (Cochrane, 1974; Pillay, 2017) illustrate the potential for ecclesiastical involvement in infrastructure development. Similarly, modern FBOs, including the Roman Catholic Church and mainstream Pentecostals, have successfully initiated water projects globally (Marie, 2018; Mwaomah, 2018; Silverman, 2019; Whitney, 2020).

Scriptural references further affirm the church's role in addressing water scarcity. For instance, Genesis 26:12-33 documents Isaac's construction of wells, while Exodus 17:1-6 recounts God's provision of water through Moses. These examples underscore the theological mandate for NPCs to engage in practical interventions, aligning with James 1:27 and I John 3:17, which emphasize care for those in need.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that there is a significant gap in NPCs' engagement in initiating domestic water projects in Tigania West. While scriptural and historical precedents advocate for active involvement, NPCs have largely abdicated this responsibility due to resource limitations and misaligned priorities. Addressing this gap requires a paradigm shift, emphasizing theological reflection and community partnerships to fulfill the church's social mandate.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends enhancing Neo-Pentecostal Churches' (NPCs) involvement in addressing water scarcity in Tigania West through capacity building, strategic partnerships, and resource mobilization. Capacity building should focus on training church leaders and members in sustainable water management and project planning, while partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and private sector actors can provide technical support and funding. Resource mobilization should involve integrating water development into church policies, establishing dedicated funding mechanisms, and encouraging congregational contributions. Additionally, incorporating biblical teachings on social responsibility and environmental stewardship can align theological perspectives with practical community

engagement. These recommendations have implications for academic research, policy formulation, and community development, offering NPCs a framework to transition from passive observers to active contributors in water provision, thereby fostering long-term sustainability and resilience against water scarcity.

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