Small Christian Communities Involvement in Social Justice in the Catholic Church in Vihiga County, Kenya

Abstract: This paper studies the important role of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in promotion of social justice in the Catholic Church. This paper therefore, specifically analyzed the involvement of SCCs in promotion of social justice based on four basic principles of social justice namely: human dignity, common good, subsidiarity and solidarity in the Catholic Church in Vihiga County. The study was based on both primary and secondary data. The study was conducted in 279 SCCs in the five parishes in the Catholic Church in Vihiga County. Through questionnaires, observations and in depth interviews, the paper shows that the SCCs plays a key role in promotion of social justice to the Church’s mission derives from Jesus declaration: “Whatever you have done for one of these least brothers of mine, you have done it for me Matthew 25:45. SCC is seen as an agent of social justice in the Catholic Church at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Small Christian Communities, social justice, human dignity, common good, subsidiarity, solidarity.

INTRODUCTION.

Institute for Catholic Education (2013) notes that the foundation of social justice is the principle of the dignity of the human person. “Social justice has to do with changing the way the world is organized so as to make a level playing field for everyone. In simple terms this means that social justice is about trying to organize the economic, political and social structure of the world in such a way so that it values equally each individual and more properly values the environment. Accomplishing this will take more than private charity. Present injustices exist not so much because simple individuals are acting in bad faith or lacking in charity but because huge, impersonal systems (that seem beyond the control of the individuals acting within them) disprivilege some even as they unduly privilege others.” (Rolheiser:1999). This may have been attributed to the lack of knowledge of what social justice is.

In the course of history and with the light of the Spirit as pointed out by Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace(2005) in Compendium, the Catholic Church has wisely reflected within her own tradition of faith and has been able to provide an ever more accurate foundation and shape to the principles of human dignity, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity, progressively explaining them in the attempt to respond coherently to the demands of the times and to the continuous developments of social life. The current study analyzed the Catholic Church teachings on the above principles as applied in the SCCs in promotion of justice.

According to Lloyd (2013) our God-given dignity as human persons with human rights comes from having been created by God and being capable of knowing, loving and glorifying God, unlike all other earthly creatures. Christians are all children of the one God. They are brothers and sisters to each other. Their respect for each person’s human dignity is the basic principle of Catholic Social Teaching.

Their human rights flow from their dignity as human persons. The right to life from conception to natural death is the basic human right, the condition for the exercise of all other human rights, such as the rights of the child to live in a united family and a moral environment, the right to food, clean water, clothing and shelter, as well as health care, education and truth, the right to work, the right to marry and have a family, free speech, the right to participate in society and government, and religious freedom.
Because of people’s primacy and their human dignity as children of God and as brothers and sisters in one family, they must be respected in the building and developing of a more humane society (Tien, 2006). Their primacy also requires integral human development incorporating the Marandu (2013) noted that, the desire and initiative of the African for community living and communal discernment has endured the challenges of the times and has remained a gift to the African society. Today, the Church in Africa as family of God is constituted of SCCs in which there are youth groups, and different women and men associations. In the SCCs, people come together for prayer, retreats, seminars, and both spiritual and material sharing, while searching for solutions to the problems and challenges of everyday life. Such gatherings and sharing promotes the spirit of common good whereby each individual is responsible for the wellbeing of the community.

God created human being as social beings that exist best in relationships with others. Lloyd (2013) states that, the first community a person encounters is family. This is the fundamental building block that sets the stage for future relationships. Society is interdependent in that each individual is responsible for the other’s wellbeing—physical, psychological, and spiritual. Human beings establish many relationships in a lifetime in areas such as school, extracurricular activities, clubs, organizations, work places and church. Each individual has the responsibility to contribute positively to their relationships and society always striving for the good of humanity. The Common Good is achieved when those who are marginalized (such as the poor, immigrants, those facing physical and mental challenges, and the homeless) have a place at society’s table, sharing in its wealth and goodness.

The principle of subsidiarity protects people from abuses by higher-level social authority and calls on these same authorities to help individuals and intermediate groups to fulfil their duties. This principle is imperative because every person, family and intermediate group has something original to offer to the community” (Compendium, 187). The practical application of this principle is participation. Each person is encouraged to fully participate in the cultural, economic, political and social life of their society, both as an individual and in association with others.”Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility, and with a view to the common good” (Compendium, 189).

Feely (1994) states that, certain societies, such as the family and the state, correspond more directly to the nature of man; they are necessary to him. To promote the participation of the greatest number in the life of a society, the creation of voluntary associations and institutions must be encouraged “on both national and international levels, which relate to economic and social goals, to cultural and recreational activities, to sport, to various professions, and to political affairs. This socialization also expresses the natural tendency for human beings to associate with one another for the sake of attaining objectives that exceed individual capacities. It develops the qualities of the person, especially the sense of initiative and responsibility, and helps guarantee his rights.

The church follows the triune model of solidarity with humankind, in creation (Gen 1:26-27) and in history (Tien, 2006). Here it follows Jesus who describes his mission as life-giving and as a salvific solidarity with all people in order to build the reign of God (John 10: 10, Mt 5:3-10). God created all creatures to live in interdependence and harmony. However, this harmony was broken by Adam and Eve. Jesus came to reconcile people with God and with one another. Jesus in his teaching and life showed his solidarity with people by protesting against injustice in religious and social institutions. He left his mission to the church. This mission includes active engagement to promote human dignity and to achieve just societies.

The Jewish and Roman religious and civil structures during Jesus time were highly hierarchical and stratified. However, in that context, Jesus proclaimed a new social order where people could commune across class, gender and descent barriers, with equal dignity (Crossan, 1995). All people were valuable and no one was expendable. Jesus had preferences for those of lower classes or the marginalized because they were often more open to, or more receptive of God’s will. In this sense, his mission was social, even if he combined the social and spiritual mission into action.

Kurgat (2004) notes that through SCCs Christians promote social justice by taking care of the disadvantaged. Solidarity towards humanity is emphasized, whereby there is reasonable sharing of responsibilities and decision making. The church’s mission of reconciliation of humanity, God’s family and of creation itself has expressed itself in a concern for justice and peace in the world. The church has taken desire to give clear and effective answers to the suffering of its people through SCCs. This is an effort to make a concrete plan of God, which are justice and love for all people.

The study adopted functionalism theory developed by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and expounded by Bronislaw Malinowski, Talcott Parson and Alfred Radcliffe Brown; and much later by people like Francis Abraham (1982). The latter explains that every element of a system has a function that contributes positively to the continued operation of that system or negatively to its disintegration and change. The central focus of functionalism is analysis of such contributions, which are called eufunctions (positive), dysfunction (negative) or ‘survival’, that is, an element that makes no contribution at all or has outlived its purpose.
Central to his work, Durkheim emphasized that societies are held together by means of a collective conscience i.e. powerful beliefs and sentiments that are shared in common by members of the society, and that exert a strong influence on individual’s behavior (Goring 1992). In his view, the function of religion is the creation and maintenance of social solidarity. The study therefore adopted functionalism approach to evaluate SCCs involvement in social justice in the Catholic Church in Vihiga County.

Objective.
The study aimed at analyzing SCCs involvement in promotion of social justice in the Catholic Church in Vihiga County.

METHODOLOGY
This study sought to analyse and give a descriptive scrutiny of how SCCs are involved in promotion of social justice within the Catholic Church, and communities in Vihiga County, Kenya through four principles of social justice namely; Human dignity, common good, subsidiarity and solidarity. The study was carried out between 2016 and 2017 and targeted a strata of 74 SCCs from the 279 SCCs in the five parishes of the Catholic Church in Vihiga County namely: Luanda, Hambale, Buyangu, Chamakanga and Erusui. Qualitative methods of data collection, which included in-depth oral interviews and questionnaires were employed. Open-ended questionnaires were prepared and administered according to the information required as per objectives of the study. For selected SCCs, a chairperson was purposely sampled for the study and issued with an open ended questionnaire. In-depth oral interviews were done with two respondents randomly picked in each SCCs, using non-structured interview guides. Inductive coding was used because the questions used were open-ended. Data was classified and coded into meaningful themes. Thematic analysis was used in analyzing data where major concepts or themes were identified and discussed. Data from open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interview were organized into themes and presented using verbatim excerpts. This shed light on how SCCs are involved in promotion of social justice.

Empirical findings.
1.1 Promotion of Social Justice in SCCs through Application of the Principles of Social Justice
With reference to the principles of social justice, Stratford (2001) states that, the central theme of the Catholic teachings on social justice is the human person created in the image and likeness of God. This is the reason behind argument for social, political, economic, cultural and religious activities that are all suitable for human existence. The teachings provide principles of reflection, criteria for judgment and guidelines for action. It includes a collection of key themes which have evolved in response to the challenges of the day rooted in biblical orientations and reflections on Christian tradition. The major themes of the Catholic social justice include: Dignity of the human person, Common good, Solidarity and Subsidiarity. These were the basis for the study’s exploration of social justice because they seemed to provide a good summary of the definition of what social justice meant to the respondents.

5.3.1 Human Dignity
From the questionnaires and from in-depth oral interview, respondents gave their various views of human dignity and how it was applied in their respective SCCs in promotion of justice. The following were gathered from the questionnaires:
SCC 1: Human dignity has to do with respect. We respect each other in our SCC by fighting for the rights of the underprivileged.
SCC 23: We show our human dignity by treating our neighbors well irrespective of our different cultures.
SCC 70: We respect each other opinion in our SCC meeting and show love to all.

From the oral interviews conducted the following were captured in support of the above.
Table 5.1 below shows summarized views on the human dignity was exercised in the SCCs in the Catholic Church in Vihiga County. The views were obtained from 5, priests, 5 assistant priests, 5 catechists and 148 SCCs members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency out of 163</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect of life</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education on human rights</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerating each other</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing needy with basic needs</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating others fairly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting others opinion</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field data
From the table above, 28.2% of the respondent indicated that human dignity is highly exercised through showing respect to life while closely to that, 21.5 shows that human dignity is expressed through educating others on human rights. Human dignity was achieved through tolerating each other at 17.2% and by providing the needy with basic needs at 14.7%. Finally, 11.0% reported that human dignity was acquired through tearing others fairly and respecting others opinion which was rated at 7.4%. Therefore SCCs in the Catholic Church in Vihiga County were involved in promotion of social justice as indicated above. The following were captured from respondents during the study.

**Respondent 23:** We exercise human dignity through showing respect to life by taking care of the sick in our SCCs. We encourage them through visitation and offering help where necessary. We fight for the rights of the physically and mentally challenged in the society by ensuring that they get access to education in the church based institutions for the physically and mentally challenged. We ensure the challenged persons are not isolated or discriminated in any way. Once we identify them in our SCCs and our neighbouring, we ensure they are fairly treated and granted all their rights.

**Respondent 90:** We have CJPC officials in our SCCs who teach us on various issues pertaining our human rights. For example during election year, a CJPC official educates us on our rights to vote especially on civic education. People have been taught on their rights to votes and on other rights such as on women participation and youth’s participation in various activities in the church and society.

**Respondent 122:** We express the human dignity in our SCCs by tolerating each other irrespective of our different ideologies. We are supposed to treat well those who think and act differently from us and forgive whose who offend us and forget all offences against us as a way of creating a just society.

**Respondent 141:** We assist the needy in our SCCs by providing them with basic needs. We donate clothes and foodstuffs to them for them to feel they are part of the community. During our weekly meetings we preach equality for all whether rich or poor by discouraging SCCs members from offering meals because it can lead to competition and division among members.

In support of the finding above, Stratford (2001) notes that, the foundation of human dignity is God’s plan of creation. God created human beings in His own image and likeness (Gen 1.27) hence the root reason for human dignity. It is also rooted in our call to communion with God. Every person regardless of race, sex, colour, national origin, religion, economic status, health etc is worthy of respect. It is not what a person does or what one has that gives a claim on respect, but it is simply by being human that establishes ones dignity. Given that dignity, the person is never a means but always an end.

Feely (1994) adds that, human dignity originates from God and is of God because we are made in God’s own image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27). Human life is sacred because the human person is the most central and clearest reflection of God among us. Human beings have transcendent worth and value that comes from God; this dignity is not based on any human quality, legal mandate, or individual merit or accomplishment. Human dignity is inalienable, that means it is an essential part of every human being and is an intrinsic quality that can never be separated from other essential aspects of the human person. Human beings are qualitatively different from any other living being in the world because they are capable of knowing and loving God, unlike any other creature. Belief in the dignity of the human person is the foundation of morality. The principle of human dignity is the foundation of all the Catholic social teaching principles.

Similarly, Kizito (2015) states that every person is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. Consequently, every person is worthy of respect simply by virtue of being a human being. People do not lose the right to being treated with respect because of disability, poverty, age, lack of success or race, let alone gain the right to be treated with greater respect because of what they own or accomplish. People can never forfeit their right to be treated with respect because God, not us, assigns it.

In addition, Windley-Daoust (2005) pointed out that all people have dignity because they are loved and created in God’s image. They are called to love others regardless of race, gender, social status, disability or history. No behaviours or actions can take away God’s love or the fundamental and inherent dignity of a person. Windley-Daoust adds that, the respect for human life is the basis of all Catholic social teaching, and, consequently, means more than to allow individuals to live. Such respect expects that Christians will be called to ensure that each person lives life fully, experiencing the abundance of God’s love and participating in all aspects of society. Kizito (2015) states that, The Catholic Church teaches that the human person is both sacred and social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. As Saint Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:26, Christians are one body: when one suffers, they all suffer. They are called to respect all of God’s gifts of creation, to be good stewards of the earth and each other. Human dignity can only be realized and protected in the context of relationships with the wider society. How we organize our society - in economics and politics, in law and policy -- directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to love our neighbor has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute.
to the good of the whole society, to the common good. In addition, Trisolini (2011) also pointed out that love of neighbor is an absolute demand for justice, because charity manifests itself in actions and structures which respect human dignity, protect human rights, and facilitate human development. To promote justice is to transform structures which block love.

SCCs in matters of assisting the poor, eradicating hunger and poverty, and promoting human development, social reforms and justice are in a special position to assume roles of service and leadership as pointed out by Majawa (2005). The involvement of SCCs in such an apostolate is a public witnessing to the dynamism of the Gospel message. SCCs should be guided in such a way that the true evangelical vision and prayerful discernment can be the principles in holding at all costs the dignity and rights of the human person as the greatest values in political and social life in promotion of justice.

In promoting human dignity the church through SCCs is involved in a number of activities. From the findings, justice has been exercised in the SCCs through promotion of human dignity in the following ways; SCCs members have been able to take care of the sick, the physically and mentally challenged. The SCCs try to identify the needy in the society and help them or channel them to government or non-governmental bodies so that they can receive help. In some of the SCCs they evidenced that they have made efforts to have the needy access to good health care and education.

There are some centers that have been set aside to cater for people with various challenges. An example that was given during interview was in Parish one where there is rehabilitation centre for street children from the nearby market centre. The centre caters for street boys picked by members of various SCCs. In this centre they are rehabilitated and educated to make them fit in the society. The church through SCCs offers for all their needs and upkeep. In addition the same Parish has a primary school and secondary for the hearing impaired which are results of SCC in their effort to enlighten the community on justice for all without discrimination. To maintain these projects, the SCCs make contribution in their kitty and when need be hold fund raising ceremonies to support the projects.

In addition, it was reported that SCCs have created a just environment where there is fair treatment of all irrespective of their different, social and cultural backgrounds. Human dignity also entails good neighborhood through the virtue of love and forgiveness. Fair treatment of neighbors without exception is encouraged as a way of promoting justice in the SCCs.

It can be concluded that the SCCs contribute to the welfare of the members of the Catholic Church, and the community at large by drawing teachings on human dignity from the scripture. This therefore becomes the foundation of the teachings on justice. SCCs in the Catholic Church in Vihiga County ensure justice is achieved by taking care of the sick, the physically and mentally challenged and the underprivileged such as orphans and street boys. They ensure these groups get their rights and are fairly treated in the society. They also have encouraged good neighborhood by treating each other well without any exceptions. They forgive each other and respect each other opinion. They teach people about their rights especially on equality for all genders and encourage active participation of all individuals in the church activities. Therefore they have developed a culture that protects and cares for the community members as a way of promoting societal justice.

### 5.3.2 Common Good

In defining common good, there seemed to be a connection with this terminology and human dignity in that common good strengthened human dignity. The participants explained that for human dignity to be all encompassing for humanity there has to be common good, that is, efforts have to be directed to the less privileged in the society. From the in depth oral interviews, observation and through questionnaires data was generated on how the principle of common good was achieved in the SCCs in promotion of social justice for all. The aspect of common good was defined as follows:

**SCC 2:** It is our duty to take care of the poor, physically and mentally challenged, destitute and orphans. We ensure they have a place in the society where they can feel at home through our SCCs.

**SCC 45:** As members of SCCs we work together as a community. We give equal chances to all during our meetings. We appreciate their contributions towards our social and spiritual growth.

**SCC 60:** We depend on each other for our survival. This is because we are talented and blessed in different ways. Whatever we do in our SCC is for the benefit of us all.

This was also evidenced in the in-depth oral interview as summarized in the table below and in the oral excerpts from 148 SCCs members.

#### Table 5.2 Principle of Common Good in the SCCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency out of 148</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identifying the needy and taking care of them</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Working together for the benefit of all</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Giving equal chances in participation in the SCC</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Being concerned about others welfare</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cultivating the spirit of interdependence</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2 above gives a summary of how the principle of common good is achieved in the SCCs in Vihiga County. Twenty five per cent (25%) of the respondent stated that common good is promoted through identifying the needy in the society and taking care of them as part of their society and as their duty. They also emphasize on working together as a team for the common good of all at rated at 23%. 20.3% of the respondents reported that they give equal chances to all in participation of various activities in their SCCs. They are also concerned about others welfare as rated at 18.2%. Finally, 13.5% noted that they have cultivated the spirit of interdependence for the benefit of all. This was evidenced in the following oral excerpts.

**Respondent 91:** Human being is social by nature. We need each other to thrive. We depend on each other for our survival and comfort in life. In our SCCs we encourage members to cultivate the spirit of sharing whatever they have with the needy. We should be mindful of others especially vulnerable members of our society and treat them well. This is because although they lack material things they are blessed in other ways which can be of benefit to us as a community.

**Respondent 120:** As SCC members, we are all responsible for each other and work for social conditions which ensure that every person in our community is able to meet his/her needs and realize their potential. We always take in to account the rights and aspirations of all our members, and of their well being and for the benefit of all of us.

The researcher observed some donation of clothes and foodstuffs in some SCCs. They were to be given to a group in one of the special needs centers. There was evidence of rehabilitation centre in parish one, orphanage in parish three and a center for the mentally challenged in parish four through the support of SCCs. The findings revealed that SCCs members ensured common good was achieved in their quest for justice by ensuring that the vulnerable members in the community were helped. It was reported that all SCCs members contribute to life in the community, and all members share in the mutual benefits of life in the community. The spirit of sharing and caring was emphasized as it was believed that when one suffers, all suffered. Therefore, interdependence was encouraged to ensure a place for all in the SCCs and society at large. Justice and Peace Commission (2009) states that, common good is to be understood as the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. The common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence from each, and even more from those who exercise the office of authority. It consists of three essential elements: First, the common good presupposes respect for the person as such. In the name of the common good, public authorities are bound to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. Society should permit each of its members to fulfill his vocation. In particular, the common good resides in the conditions for the exercise of the natural freedoms indispensable for the development of the human vocation, such as the right to act according to a sound norm of conscience and to safeguard ... privacy, and rightful freedom also in matters of religion. Second, the common good requires the social well being and development of the group itself. Development is the epitome of all social duties. Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on. Finally, the common good requires peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order. It presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable means the security of society and its members. It is the basis of the right to legitimate personal and collective defense.

A basic moral test of society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. According to Kizito (2015), morality which involves trust and credibility should be examined in view of what the Church calls “option for the poor”. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. The option for the poor is a perspective that examines personal decisions, policies of private and public institutions, and economic relationships in terms of their effects on the poor - those who lack the minimum necessities of nutrition, housing, education, and health care. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for all. The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. The option for the poor is an essential part of society’s effort to achieve the common good. A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those with special needs, to those who are poor and on the margins of society.

In support of Kizito on the option of the poor (Tien, 2006) states that, the church of the poor is grounded in the social teaching on the option or love of preference for the poor. The Catholic Church acknowledges this option as its vocation for the proclamation of the good news and the promotion of justice. The church encourages all people of God to carry out this mission. Many projects, mainly on the parish, religious, religious congregation or lay volunteer levels have been carried out for the needy.
Common good involves interdependence. Kizito (2015) states that, interdependence concerns the sharing and caring aspect that is co-operation and participation. The Catholic Church teaches that the human person is both sacred and social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. As Saint Paul said 1Corinthians 12:26, “We are one body: when one suffers, we all suffer.” We are called to respect all of God’s gifts of creation, to be good stewards of the earth and each other. In a culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social.

Similarly, Ihuoma (2014) avers that Christians recognize human interdependence not only as a necessary fact but also as a positive value in their lives. The full potential and dignity of the human person is realized through a life that he shares with others. Mutual benefit comes through just cooperation with others in society. The consequence is a transformation from an inner attitude about solidarity, not manifested in action, to the engagement in external activities that demonstrate our commitment to the well-being of others.

The research findings also showed that every SCC has a ministry of justice and peace referred to as Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC). Within the five parishes and their sub-parishes in Vihiga County, CJPC plays a major role in fighting for justice for the underprivileged. Through the SCCs, members are able to identify the physically and mentally challenged and accord them the necessary treatment. For example a school of the mentally challenged in Parish four was initiated through the efforts of SCCs. SCCs members identify the children from the villages and bring them to the school. In most cases, these children are stigmatized, isolated and hidden by their parents and relatives. With the assistance of SCCs members, they receive care and attention in the church which acts as their home. This promotes common good for all irrespective of their social or physical statues. These findings are in line with what Kizito (2015) observes, that, human dignity can only be realized and protected in the context of relationships with the wider society. How we organize our society - in economics and politics, in law and policy - directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to “love our neighbor” has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, to the common good.

The study therefore concludes that the principle of common good has been achieved in the SCCs through the following ways: first, there is sharing and caring for the needy with and aim of making them feel they are part of the community since their suffering affects others; second, there is sharing by working together not for self benefits but for the good of all in the SCCs and the wider community; third, there is togetherness where people work in unity in order for all to thrive; finally, there are contributions in interdependence whereby all have a voice in decision making in their SCCs. Therefore, the social well being and development of the SCCs members is emphasized for the common good of all.

5.3.3 Solidarity

In order for the virtue of common good to work, working in togetherness becomes very important. The SCCs must unite since their mandate in ensuring that social justice is enhanced, strengthening human dignity and common good requires solidarity. The study findings show that SCCs members embrace the principle of solidarity through working together in the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. This was evident from information gathered on the questionnaires and from discussion in the in depth oral interviews.

Data from the 74 questionnaires administered to chairpersons of SCCs had the following information on how solidarity was achieved in the SCCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency out of 74</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Treatment each other as brothers as sisters</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Participating in various activities as a family</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Assisting each other in times of need.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sharing social and spiritual challenges</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Emphasizing on cooperation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field data

The table above shows that 31% of respondents indicated that they show solidarity in their SCCs by treating each other as brothers and sisters and participating in various activities as a family at 20.3%. They also stated that they assist each other in times of need through sharing their social and spiritual challenges at 18.9 % and 17.6% respectively. Finally, they emphasize on cooperation in their attainment of solidarity. This was proved in the following excerpts from the questionnaires.

SCC 2: We treat each other as brothers and sisters and we work together as a team in solving challenges that affect us as a community.
SCC 15: we work together as a family through cooperation and assist each other in times of need.

SCC 50: we relate as a family and we are united in whatever we do. We participate in various activities together such as in wedding preparations and during bereavement.

SCC 74: we share our different social challenges and address them as a group and as a family. Similarly, during oral interviews it was confirmed that,

Respondent 25: We emphasize on cooperation in our SCCs, we treat each other as one family of God and we share our spiritual goodness through our Bible sharing and in cash and kind to support those in need.

Respondent 133: We encourage unity among ourselves during our interaction within and outside the church for the good of the community and church at large. We believe as SCCs member it is our duty to stand with those who are suffering by being compassionate to them. We visit the sick and pray with them, moan with the bereaved and make merry with the happy ones.

The practice of solidarity within the SCCs is evidenced in these narratives and as Kizito (2015) in giving the meaning of solidarity states, Christians are our brothers and sisters keepers. Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that loving our neighbor has global dimensions in an interdependent world. Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.

SCC members work together as one family guided by the principle of solidarity in promotion of justice. They treat each other as equal and believe that that they belong to one body of Christ. They accommodate each other in all times in their daily activities. In case of events such as a wedding, they are all involved in preparation and ensuring the success of the event. During bereavement they support the bereaved through financial support and offering any form of assistance. There was a reported case in one of the SCC where members volunteered and re-constructed a house to a member after the house burned down in accident. There was also another incident when SCCs members contributed to raise house rent for a member who had some financial challenges. The Catholic Church through SCCs participates in addressing issues of injustice on the vulnerable members of the society as each other’s keeper. The SCCs members not only participate in establishing social care centres as already discussed above, but also visit the rehabilitation center, orphanage and institutions of physically and mentally challenged and offer them assistance in form of foodstuffs and clothing.

Ryan (2005) argues that solidarity means that individuals should consistently work together for the common good. Human beings are co-dependent on one another for their survival. All are responsible for one another. This means to be true brothers and sisters to one another. Catholic social teaching rejects competition and conflict; instead it focuses on working collaboratively for the good of society, the nation, the church and community through cooperation, compassion and social initiatives.

The church, including its members must be present among the marginalized because practical solidarity and presence are not given realities. These realities must be struggled for and achieved through immersion and socialization with people. Aguilar (1995, P 75) argues, “the individual Christians personal responsibility towards justice, community solidarity and the social outcasts has to be channeled through the common solidarity of a larger community by the pastoral agents”. He further notes that it is through presence among people that the church by its teaching and training can help them actively to be involved in the social mission of the church as their responsibilities towards other members of the church.

Orobator (2000) on his part explains that solidarity with the needy is doing the social mission of the church as family needs to be practiced by confronting and denouncing the very structures of society which produce injustice. The story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 could be differently interpreted for it has some influence on the image of the church. In an uncritical hermeneutic, the Samaritan stands as an active agent who seeks to redress the unjust violence happened to traveler. Charitable work is admirable, but it is not an adequate remedy. Therefore the church is challenged to carry out a ministry of active participation in order to address social issues for the sake of the needy.

According to Nduku (2011), solidarity helps people to feel that they form one family. It creates a bond between all people and fosters a spirit of responsibility. It does not aim at elimination of one class by the other but enhances cultural tolerance by bringing people of various cultural backgrounds to participate actively at all levels in building up appropriate structures for their integral development. It also rejects violence as a solution to social, political and economic injustices. It further recognizes the noble and just struggle for justice, but it is categorically opposed to violence as a means of achieving this noble struggle for justice.

JPC (2009) states that the exercise of solidarity within each society is valid when its members recognize one another as persons. Those who are more influential
because they have a greater share of goods and common services should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of solidarity, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all. The intermediate groups, in their turn, should not selfishly insist on their particular interests, but respect the interests of others.

According to Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), the home is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solidarity and communal responsibilities. Parents should teach children to avoid the compromising and degrading influences which threaten human societies. In addition, it also presupposes the effort for a more just social order where tensions are better able to be reduced and conflicts more readily settled by negotiation. Socio-economic problems can be resolved only with the help of all the forms of solidarity: solidarity of the poor among themselves, between rich and poor, of workers among themselves, between employers and employees in a business, solidarity among nations and peoples.

The spirit of solidarity is important because it is the foundation of equal development as noted by Tien (2006). It is fostered when it is grounded in human rights, moral values, and legitimate independence of people and autonomy of civic organizations. It must go beyond the benefits of particular organizations and groups in order to serve the development of society and the promotion of human beings and family.

The Catholic Church teaches that there is an intimate connection between solidarity and the common good, between solidarity and the universal destination of goods, between solidarity and equality among human beings and peoples, and between solidarity and peace in the world (Ihuoma, 2014). This is the reason why the Catholic Church supports ties that unite individuals and social groups in which they participate and share their natural gifts and exercise human freedom for common growth. It is an opportunity for men and women to engage in beneficial sharing with their neighbors beyond individual and particular interests as opposed to separation and fragmentation. The principle of solidarity has the character of inspiring willingness in a person to give himself for the good of his neighbor. It makes a person live a life that goes beyond any selfish interest.

In conclusion, solidarity has been achieved in the SCCs through working together in the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood through sharing with the needy. SCCs members ensure fair treatment of each other by working together as a team and as a family. They share and solve challenges affecting them in their SCCs. They assist each other in times of need through the spirit of cooperation. They create a sense of responsibility for the weaker through the virtue of love.

5.3.4 Subsidiarity

Pennock (2007) states that Catholic Church defines subsidiarity as a social doctrine where “all social bodies exist for the sake of the individual so that what individuals are able to do, society should not take over, and what small societies can do, larger societies should not take over”. Pennock gave a contemporary example on any construction site in Ontario. There are a variety of trades people, each with their own area of expertise, that come together to build a house. Each trade is given the responsibility to apply its craft, whether it is carpentry, masonry, electrical or plumbing, without interference. Only when blueprint or government code is violated does a project manager interfere and give direction. This means that only when individuals or groups cannot carry out their responsibilities should managers, organizations or governments intervene. In the pastoral letter, Economic Justice for All, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops notes that a government should not replace or destroy smaller communities and individual initiative. Rather it should help them contribute more effectively to social well-being and supplement their activity when the demands of justice exceed their capacities.

The teaching of the Church has elaborated the principle of subsidiary. According to Justice and Peace Commission (2009) a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society. God has not willed to reserve to himself all exercise of power. He entrusts to every creature the functions it is capable of performing, according to the capacities of its own nature. This mode of governance ought to be followed in social life. The way God acts in governing the world, which bears witness to such great regard for human freedom, should inspire the wisdom of those who govern human communities. They should behave as ministers of divine providence. The principle of subsidiarity is opposed to all forms of collectivism. It sets limits for state intervention. It aims at harmonizing the relationships between individuals and societies. It tends toward the establishment of true international order.

The findings of the study show that SCCs promotes the principle of subsidiarity through participating in various activities in the community. This was proved through the data gathered from the questionnaires, in depth oral interviews and participant observation as discussed below;

SCC1: We participate in civic education during election year to be educated on our civic rights so that we can vote wisely.

SCC 23: We organize our own SCCs programmes such as saint’s day celebration and SCCs mass celebrations in our respective homes.
SCC 60: We choose our own leader in the SCCs and in the parish without interference of the priest or political leaders.

In addition, during the in depth oral interview, respondents pointed out the following as captured from 148 SCCs members interviewed during the study.

The table below gives a summary of how the principle of subsidiarity was applied in the quest for justice in the SCCs in Vihiga County is reported by two members from each of the 74 SCCs.

Table 5.4 Principle of Subsidiarity in the SCCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency out of 148</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Working with the priest</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Taking care of institutions that promotes human life</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Regular meetings and training sessions for leaders</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Organizing retreats</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Organizing for baptism of infants and new converts</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Organizing Eucharistic celebrations within SCCs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field data

The highest opinion count recorded 22.3% of respondent who were interviewed. They stated that they work with the priest by communicating to him all their SCCs activities and plans. 20.3% reported that they normally take care of institutions that promote human life within the county that are run by the Catholic Church. 18.9% reported that they have regular meetings and training sessions for their leaders. 16.9% stated that they organize retreats within the SCCs. In addition, it was also reported they also organize for baptism and Eucharistic celebrations at SCCs level.

Respondent 35: The Church empowers SCCs for effective participation in various church activities. At parish level we have regular meetings and training sessions (workshops and seminars) of the SCC leaders. Leaders are trained on leadership skills, the liturgy of the Catholic Church and on self awareness. Once leaders are trained, they disseminate this information to the members of their respective SCCs. This is aimed at empowering them and equipping them with leadership skills for effective running of SCCs.

Respondent 45: We at the SCCs are the church at the grassroots. we are encouraged to have Eucharistic celebration within our SCCs in our various homes. Therefore, we are at task to plan and organize for these celebrations within the SCC and inform the priest to conduct the service. Above all we educate one another in the SCCs on the need of these celebrations in our faith formation.

Respondent 55: We normally organize for retreats annually at Vincentian Prayer House Kisumu and we encourage members to go for retreats frequently. If it could be possible we would wish our members to be going for retreats monthly for spiritual nourishment.

Respondent 127: It is our duty as SCC members to ensure smooth running of the SCCs. Our leaders in the SCCs communicate directly with the priest. In case of any issue that require priest intervention, they contacts the priest for advice and action. For example in case of death of a member of SCCs, we report to the priest and co-ordinate with him on when the burial will to be conducted. Also the sacraments of Baptism for infant and adults catechumen are organized within the SCCs and we assist the priest in identifying the eligibility of the Christians in taking those sacraments based on the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Respondent 140: We take care of institutions that promotes human life such as the rehabilitation center in parish one and the orphanage in parish three. We offer donations of all types and visit the institutions. We feel it is our personal responsibility to take care of those institutions. We only involve the church and the government in coordinating activities in these institutions such as in provision of education.

The researcher visited some SCCs during Lent season and participated in the discussions of various topics that touched on subsidiarity. Among the topics discussed were: youths and modern society, good citizenship, security and environment. All members were involved in sharing their views and suggesting on the best way forward for a just society. The researcher also attended an SCC service (mass) in one of the SCCs and noted that SCCs have a right to organize Eucharistic celebrations in their homes. After planning, they contact the priest for his availability.

Tien (2006) states that the practice of subsidiarity facilitates the presence of the church in a given place. The Holy Spirit as the advocate or the defender of the accused helps the church in carrying out its social mission as happened to Jesus. Jesus went to villages, entered houses and ate with people because he considered them his family members. Beabout (1998)
This principle of subsidiarity encourages communities to be more involved. Nduku (2011) contends that, it places responsibility as close as possible to the grassroots. The people or groups affected by the decision or policy should have a key decision making role. The church has worked hard to empower and support community to ensure that they participate in development and decision making processes at the various levels. The establishment of SCCs, support of different lay movements and devotion groups in the church and lay participation is a clear indication of this involvement. The church too encourages her members to be actors in the social, political and economic arena so that they can be able to infuse ethical values in the decision making processes.

In addition Kizito (2015) reiterated that people have a right, indeed a duty to participate in shaping a more just and human society, seeking together the common well and wellbeing of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. All people need to take an active role in the development of socio-economic, political and cultural life. They should be shapers of history (subjects), not just passive recipients of other people’s decisions (objects).

The clergy in the Catholic Church should guide the laity into full participation in a holistic ministry as pointed out by Msangaambe (2011). Through the SCC, the Church must reflect God’s presence and make a difference in society. To enable a holistic ministry in the Catholic Church, SCCs must be empowered to do theology, to discern God’s will, and develop their gifts to make a difference. Such empowerment will further enable the congregations to play a part in addressing the many facets of poverty. In the process of a church’s growth or decline, Hendriks (2004) records that positive lay leadership is needed for the transformation process to succeed. He reiterated that transformation can only succeed if SCCs are empowered and committed to deal with new realities.

It was also reported that CJPC in SCCs also provides civic education during election year in the country. It was pointed during interview that the Catholic Church trains leaders of CJPC in every SCC on civic education. The leaders then disseminate the information to the grassroots to ensure that church members know their rights as citizens, reasons for participating in elections, how to vote wisely and on how to handle the outcomes of election results.

From the information obtained from in depth interviews with the priest, we gathered that the church supports SCCs in promotion of justice through organizing seminars and workshops for SCCs leaders. This is done to equip them with necessary skills to enhance their active participation in the SCCs. For instance, skills on how to take care of areas of which they assumes personal responsibilities as leaders. The church also intervenes to support in case of need for example during bereavement of a member in the SCC and weddings. The church also coordinates activities of SCCs through visitation by the priest or the catechist where they advise and give direction on the smooth running of SCCs as a way of empowering them.

From the findings above, it can be deduced that the principle of subsidiarity is applied in the SCCs in promotion of justice through participation. SCCs members are granted freedom to participate in various activities in the church without interference of the parish priest or any other influential person. They have assumed personal responsibilities in taking care of institutions within the church such as the orphanage and the rehabilitation centre. They also take part in social life in promotion of civic education during Lenten campaign in the election year. They organize various activities in the SCCs such as Eucharistic celebration and saint’s day which they invite the priest to preside. The church coordinates SCCs activities such as seminars, workshops and SCCs visitations as a way of empowering them for active participation. SCCs member also organize retreats for their spiritual empowerment for effective participation in church activities.

**Conclusion**

It can be concluded that SCCs in the Catholic Church in Vihiga County has achieved its mandate in promotion of social justice. This has been achieved through SCCs involvement in various activities in promotion of human rights guided by four principles of social justice namely: Human dignity, common good, subsidiarity and solidarity.

The four principles were interdependence in that promotion of one lead to achievement of the other. When human dignity was upheld in promotion of human rights, common good was achieved. When the respect for all was emphasized and interdependence encouraged in promotion of common good, subsidiarity was achieved which advocates for active participation for all. Finally, participation of all in decision making lead to solidarity for the common good of the community and the church.

**Recommendations**

There is need for SCCs to be well equipped with more knowledge on social justice as it cut across all aspects of life as far as human rights are concerned. This is because SCCs takes church as a family model where family values, pastoral care and
Socialization takes a sociological set up in local communities. This will help in catering for the less privileged and the needy in the SCCs.

REFERENCES