

# **Determinants Of Youth Participation In Church Programs In Africa Inland Churches In Kisumu County, Kenya**

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## **Abstract**

Youth's attendance in Africa inland churches are in large numbers, however, there has been a major concern with regards to their participation in Church programs in the Africa inland churches (AIC) in Kisumu County. Most of the church programs are being led by elderly people ignoring the role of the youth. This means that the present and future leaders are not being mentored for continuity of church leadership. The purpose of this study was to assess youth participation in church programs from the perspective of AIC churches in Kisumu County. The study adopted a survey research design in which quantitative research approach was utilized. The research was conducted in three of the four District Church Councils (DCC's) within Kisumu City Region. The target population of this study was two hundred youths, ten pastors and thirty church elders. Purposive and Random sampling procedure were adopted. A sample size of one hundred and seventy participants was adopted using Morgan sample size determinant table. Questionnaires was used to collect data. Data analysis was conducted using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 and the results were summarized in tables and figures which were later presented using frequencies and percentages. Findings from the study indicated that most of the youth do not participate in church programs due to various challenges including leadership issues, lack of mobilization, search for livelihood and modern secular influence, faults in idealism, and failure to meet some of the biblical qualification for leadership among others. The study recommends that there is need of the church to enhance youth discipleship and equipment programs, create diverse vibrant youth programs and work on strategies to increase their church participation. There is need for the church to mobilize youth to be active in the church as well as practice youth inclusivity in major decision-making bodies in churches so that they can be able to join in the service of God.

**Keywords:** Leadership, AIC youth programs, and church participation

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## **I. Introduction**

Africa Inland Church-Kenya was established as a result of the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The work which began in 1895 in Kamba Land, was carried out by Africa Inland Mission (AIM), under the leadership of Rev. Peter Cameron Scott. Bible-believing AIM missionaries together with the new believers who responded to gospel actively evangelized and planted new churches. As the church multiplied and matured, it assumed more and more responsibility in its ministry administration. In December 1940, the leaders of both the established indigenous church and Africa Inland Mission met to prepare a constitution. In 1943, it was decided that the church be called the Africa Inland Church (AIC). The first constitution of the church was completed and approved in 1952 in which the AIC-K began to govern its affairs constitutionally. On 21<sup>st</sup> October 1971 in Machakos mission station, properties formerly owned by AIM were officially handed over to AIC-K. At that time, AIM became a department of AIC-K in all matters pertaining to the church. At the end of December 1979, AIM-Kenya was dissolved and AIM Missionaries became linked administratively to AIC-Kenya (AIC-K Constitution, 2018).

Youth participation in church programs is not divorced in the Africa Inland Churches; however, there are gaps which must be fixed so that full youth participation can be realized. The definition of youth varies across countries of the world. The UN (United Nations) describes youth as a person aged between 15 to 24 years old

(Jalata, 2014). In the African Union context, the terms youth refers to individuals aged between 15 to 35 years old. This study adopts the UN definition of youth. The African population is estimated to be more than a billion people, among whom more than 65% are young under the age of 35, and the youth make up 40% of Africa's working age population. In Africa, young people aged 15-24 account for 20.2% of the population and "constitutes a fifth of the world's population. In the secular society, youths face problems of that include marginalization, barriers to community activities involvement, multiple forms of discrimination and limited employment prospects and opportunities according to UN, Youth Political Participation and Decision-Making (UN 2006). In many cultural contexts, being young was viewed as being inexperienced, unstable, unwise and ignorant and less was expected from them to hold leadership and ministerial roles.

According to Paul (2012), the church has tremendous opportunities for service that should engage the youth in our local churches to be involved in church ministry. Churches do not lack gifted and potential youths who should nurtured, encouraged and mobilized into satisfactory involvement and participation in the life of the church to meet the present church and societal demand significantly as the future leaders. The youth remain a distinct relevance in the present- day Churches that must be developed and trained to be ambassadors of the church and the nation at large. The youth, well cared for have the inspiration and strength to do great exploits in the Kingdom of God. According to Nel (2000), youth ministry should enhance participation as a goal and a part of building up the local church. This implies that the local church includes and concern the youth as an integral part of the body of believers.

Nel (2000) further explains that the talents, gifts and abilities of the youth are a great asset for the church to nurture and use for the growth of the church. Scriptures states that "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others faithfully, administering God's grace in various forms." (1 Peter 4:10) and John writes to the youth, "you are strong and the word of God lives in you and you have overcome the evil one". Unless these gifts and energies are not properly directed into the right channels the youths will use them in a way that will hurt their spirituality and keep them away from the church. When youth turn to God, the church has a responsibility to disciple and equip them to participate in the Lord's work (Ellen, 2012).

From a biblical perspective, however, the scripture has episodes of numerous youths whom God used for His purpose. King Saul, along with the sons of Jesse (David's older brothers) and Goliath looked down on David because he was but a youth (1 Sam 17:28, 33, 42). Biblical scholars, Flavius Josephus (Caspi and Greene 2012), indicate that David was thirteen or below. It was probably because of the prejudice of society against young people that Paul exhorted Timothy to not let anyone despise his youthfulness by setting "an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim 4:12). Yet, against such cultural suspicions regarding the youth in biblical days, God kept raising up young people to leadership positions during critical periods in the history of Israel.

Bailey and Reddon (2013) notes youths are agents of change marching forward to the future and have the potentiality of dragging the older, less active reviving their energy and joy in doing the work of God. The Youth participation in the church is not only vital for a church's future and ministry but also for allowing them to develop their faith, leadership skills, and sense of community through hands-on service, creative expression, and participation in activities of the church. This can be fostered and enhanced through active roles, meaningful engagement, and supportive programs.

### **Problem Statement**

Young people are an integral part of the body and community of the church of Christ. They should be responsible to participate in the life and mission of the church. Youths can play a significant role in church programs, yet their participation in the church remains a concern. Despite the efforts of many churches to engage, attract and retain youth, there is no clear record of youth participation and involvement in the local churches of AIC. Hanna (2020) notes that there are factors that contribute to the lack of participation within youth ministry such as ineffective leadership, failure to establish relationship and decisions without purpose. This study analyzed the determinants of youth participation in church programs in the Africa Inland Church (AIC) in Kisumu City.

### **Purpose of study**

The purpose of this study was to analyze youth participation in church programs from the perspective of AIC churches in Kisumu County and its effects in the spiritual growth of the youths and the church.

### **Study objectives**

- i) Establish the Biblical basis for youth participation in the ministry
- ii) Determine the factors that deter youth from participating in ministry in the AIC
- iii) Determine the effects of alienating youth from participating in the ministry in AIC
- iv) Make recommendations on enhancing youth participation in AIC

## **II. Literature Review**

### **Biblical Perspective of Youth Participation in God's Ministry**

William (2019) affirms that Scripture points to the fact that God has consistently picked young people and those who are faithful, diligent, and obedient, as his chosen instruments to carry out the work related to redeeming fallen humanity. God's approval of youth participation transcends cultural barriers and the cultural traditions of biblical times, which was marked by a high degree of gerontocracy whereby leadership was generally reserved for elders. Respect for the aged was a cherished value and the very fact one had grown old conferred merit (Berlin 2011:23).

In the Old Testament, God chose Jacob, the younger of the two sons of Isaac, when he was but a little boy under the care of his mother to become the father of the nation of Israel (Gen 25, 27-28). It is indicated also that God called Joseph, the second youngest son of Jacob and not Ruben, the oldest son, to be the means by which he would save Egypt and the surrounding nations from an unprecedented famine. To accomplish the work of God, Joseph witnessed the greatness, the sovereignty, the wisdom of God. Samuel was a child when God called him to become a prophet (1 Sam 3). Gideon was a young man, the youngest in his house, when God called him to become judge in Israel (Judg. 6). Esther, as a beautiful young girl, was God's chosen one to advocate for the lives of her people and overthrow Haman's malignant plot to annihilate all Jews in the nation (Esth. 1-10).

These stories indicate that it is not age that qualifies one to participate in God's redemptive plan, but a person's obedience and faithfulness. King David is known as a young man whose trust God made him do great things for God. He served as one of the greatest kings of Israel. Joash was seven when he became king (2 Ki. 11:21) and Josiah was eight (2 Ki. 22-23). Among their predecessors was Solomon, whose reign was long, prosperous, and successful. Solomon was David's youngest son when he was anointed as King of Israel, rather than his older brother Adonijah (1 Kgs 1). The Hebrew young boys captivated by King Nebuchadnezzar, played a critical ministerial role in the palace that made the pagan kings recognize the sovereignty of God. Later, God called Jeremiah who believed he was too young for the difficult task of bringing the Lord's word of judgment to the corrupt and wicked leaders of Israel. God's response was to rebuke him, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak" (Jer 1:7.).

Brawley (2014) explains that books of wisdom, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, were written with young people as the primary recipients. In the prologue of Proverbs, it is written, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8). The intention of Solomon was for the youth to acquire wisdom not only by listening to their parents, but also by heeding the Word of God, which was the source of wisdom par excellence. In Proverbs 22:6 he recommends to "start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." In the same way, Ecclesiastes was primarily addressed to young people, remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them" (Eccl 12:1). More so, Jesus reached out to children and youth to bless, heal, and teach them. The disciples were often upset by the presence of children coming into contact with him.

God has set the example as the Promoter of authentic youth participation by calling them to play key roles in his mission and reckoning them as primary recipients of his loving attention and care. No wonder Satan relentlessly attacks young people. The above discussion highlights a few examples that serve as rationale for a theology of mission that seriously advocates a youth-focused approach whereby young people are both key players and recipients in all interventions.

### **Factors that Deter Youth participation in church programs**

**Level of pastoral care and discipleship:** A lack of pastoral care and discipleship for youth stems from a failure to provide robust teaching, meet their holistic needs, and build genuine relationships, often leading to disengagement and church dropout (Robin, 2011). It can also be caused by a reliance on passive programs instead of active, student-led ministry, and an inability of adult leaders to connect with youth through modern communication and address their real-world questions about life, career, and mental health. This deficit results in future leadership voids and a less spiritually mature church body (Oestreicher, 2020)

**The love for the world:** 2 Tim. 4:10-13 it is evident that as the Apostle was dispatching Timothy, Crescens, Titus, Tychicus, and Mark to the spiritual battlefields—and they were ready to go, Demas, one of his men was not heading for this assignment "because he loved this world," Paul wrote, "has deserted me and went to Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul contrasts "love" for the present world (2 Tim. 4:10) with "love" for Christ's appearing (v. 8). Demas had apparently chosen the immediate, attractive offerings of the contemporary (present) secular environment (world) over the challenge of living the good fight... keeping the faith (2 Tim. 4:7). Today's young people whom, according to Kinnamnon we have "lost," never really experienced the call of discipleship, settling rather for a youthful, inadequately formulated, self-centered faith majoring on fun and celebration?

**Modern Secular Influences:** Secularization has gradually permeated the Christian world (Momen 1999). It follows that the young people are subjected to such a barrage of information, contradiction, and entertainment that the voice of the Spirit of God is easily drowned out in a cloudy atmosphere of worldly practices and beliefs. The youth's lifestyle choices and attitudes, aspirations and longings display the effectiveness of the communications. Kimathi (2017) explains that secularism and modernism affect the livelihood of young people in Kenya by attracting them to the worldly affairs which essentially result in driving them away from participation in church affairs. Secularism influences youth participation in the church by drawing them away with worldly concerns, making Christian life appear irrelevant, and boring.

Young churchgoers are not immune to the effects of secular influences the modern culture is rapidly propagating. Today's generation of youths are falling victim to secularism at a greater rate than any previous generation in the United States over the last century. Secularism is widely spreading throughout all facets of society, including the Christian church. This has also resulted into decreased attendance, moral drift, and a rejection of traditional faith as young people become more skeptical, prioritize material wealth, and are influenced by secular media and technology.

**The cramping church Style:** A study by Barna Group (2013) noted that there exists a conflict between traditional church styles and modern youth culture, with some arguing the church's "cramped" style hinders its appeal to a younger generation. Many young people feel alienated by a church that seems out of touch with their daily lives, music, and social concerns. This can be seen in areas like outdated worship music, rigid dress codes, and a lack of engagement with contemporary issues, while others believe youth should adapt to church traditions rather than the church changing for them.

Masback (2014) asserts that too many of our denominations and congregations are struggling because they are failing to transmit the faith to a rising young generation, and too many of our young are struggling because they lack the foundations that were traditionally supplied by communities of the faith. They youth tend to see the church as cramping their aspirations, thwarting their desires, and failing to answer their questions. Many find creeds too dogmatic, commands too oppressive, disciplines too overbearing, leadership too inflexible, the elderly too elderly, worship too boring, preaching too irrelevant, and relationships too superficial. So, they're leaving. The may result into a low key participation of the youth in the church.

**The effect of generationalism in the Church:** The problem of generation gap has remained serious issue in the contemporary church today. The Boomers initiative insisted that they were "different" and maintained that they were right about that! The Boomers majored on difference and uniqueness, demanding and getting special treatment to accommodate their differences. They, of course, raised a generation of "Busters" who, having recognized their parents' uniqueness, understandably began to demonstrate their own. And Generationalism was born, a state of affairs where that which divide is more important than that which unites.

Sadly, the church has bought into this idealism view and responded by designing services for specific groups and even designing churches that appeal to specific generations. This scenario has resulted into divisions in the church, lack of church community, and tensions between the youth and older generations. This has also had a direct impact on youth participation in the church.

**Church Leadership Dynamics:** Effective church leadership should engage youth through teaching and discipleship programs and by giving them real responsibilities, meaningful tasks and opportunities to lead, involving them in decision-making, and creating a supportive environment that values their input (Hanna, 2020). Paul (2020) in a study on preparing youth for leadership indicates that by actively involving young people through church programs, planning their own church activities, and providing mentorship, churches can foster spiritual growth, develop future leaders, and ensure the vibrancy of the faith community. The leadership should create challenging activities, such as music, drama, or service projects, to help youth build a sense of accomplishment and competence. This implies that the church leadership in the church cannot escape the reality that our young people are a result of the way their church prepares and treats them.

### **Impact of Youth Alienation from Participation in Church Programs**

Recent and irrefutable statistics about youth participation in the church are forcing churches to face the truth. A pollster George Barna (2021) in a study based on interviews with 22,000 adults and over 2,000 teenagers in 25 separate surveys, the results quantified the seriousness of the effects of lack of youth participation in the church. The study indicated that six out of ten youth who were involved in their church during their teen years were already gone. Many young people without genuine faith in Jesus possess no real commitment to or excitement about religious faith.

These young teenagers tend to approach ministry participation, like music and sports, as an extracurricular activity something suitable to do, but unnecessary for an integrated life. Proper engagement of youth should

motivate them that the church is a place where God is moving and working in the lives of young people. His presence brings conviction, encouragement, peace, rebuke, repentance, and grace to a youth service. The Holy Spirit causes youth fellowships to be sweeter and more meaningful than just a convenient thing.

The alienation of youth from the church can lead to negative effects such as spiritual distress. It makes the youth struggle with sense of trust and betrayal. Young people may feel a sense of betrayal or question the church's sincerity, leading to difficulty in rebuilding trust with institutions and individuals. It has an effect of a loss of identity and purpose. Being disconnected from the church can disrupt a youth's sense of identity, purpose, and community, potentially leading to emotional distress and lack of interest in spiritual matters. The alienation can also result in a higher risk of engaging in risky behaviors. Some research suggests a connection between social alienation and risky health behaviors. Young people may question their faith or feel that the church has become too focused on power, politics, or exclusive rules. Disconnection can lead to insecurity and a feeling of being abandoned by God.

### **Strategies to Enhance Youth Participation in Church Programs in AIC**

**Make Relevant Youth Programs:** This a strategy developed by the church within the framework of the scriptures to ensure that the youth navigate modern life using the Bible's teachings. A "relevant" program should reach out to *all* youth, regardless of their upbringing, cultural backgrounds and differences laying a foundation that Christ unites us all through His word. Making programs that focus on these values can resonate with these youths' upbringing and encourage them to participate in church activities.

**Involve youths in church Programs:** As the youth are being nurtured to play their roles in the church, they must also be given the platform to practice what they learn from their leaders. The church should what each kid, teen, or young adult is good at and find a way to include them in various church activities. For instance, church that runs a social media account should engage youth writers can come up with relevant and engaging blog posts on spiritual topics. More musically-inclined youths can choose and perform songs at church events, and the artists can help with everything from youth ministry t-shirts to informative church media materials. This will act as motivation to children and youths experience God at church in their own way and encourage them to participate in church activities and serve God.

### **Reach out through social media:**

The church can devise ways of using social media to engage more of the youth in designed areas of church ministry. However, the church must take great precaution since using media in the wrong context can damage the intent of the purpose of the church. Therefore, it's crucial to build a social media strategy that is suitable for the church and engaging he youth in church activities. Play to the strengths of each platform used. YouTube and Tik-Tok are great for long- and short-form videos, and it also does well with aesthetically pleasing shots on Instagram. Besides these there is need to involve the youth to be in the Media Team of the church, this will motivate their desire all the time to be in church without fail because they know they have a role to play in your church service. All the posts should also have a call to action to encourage the youth to participate in the initiatives you're broadcasting. The AIC in Kisumu City has the potentiality to engage the youth in the use of media as a way of helping other churches develop media programs.

**Ensuring an authentic approach to Church ministry:** In engaging youth, the purpose of their participation to serve God and spread the Word and love of Jesus must be made crystal clear. By doing so, the authenticity of the church, should promote the church as warm and a welcoming safe space in which all people can worship God. Hansen (2017) poses the question on what makes the church authentic. Being authentic in the dealings with youth gives them a clear purpose, something to strive toward, and something to encourage them to keep participating in the church programs. Declining youth participation in church is one of the foremost pressing issues of our time. By reaching out to youth in ways that are relevant, accessible, and authentic, church will overcome this challenge and help our younger generations find and serve God.

The church leaders should endeavour to increase the frequency of youth participation in church programs, develop quality attractive programs, enhance youth perception in the church and even keep them loyal to the denomination they have ascribed to. Quality youth programs should create vibrant personal religion and be a source of sacredness in the youth spiritual life which is equally indispensable for effective ministry. Lack of good youth programs and rigidity of leaders have tempted and forced many youths to migrate to other denominations which they deem to interesting and inspirational church programs. This becomes the pillar of the successful youth ministry (Hershey, 2008).

**Influencing digitalization of the church:** One of the most important strategies the church can use to attract, retain and enhance participation of the youths in the church most importantly because we are in the era of

digitalization. The church should be cognizant that as the world moves it should also with the world changes but not to conform to the pattern of the world Rom.12:1-2. Their retention requires that they are trained and be involved in using the instruments for digitalization in the church. Subsequently the church leadership should make sure that the church instruments are serviced and maintained properly to avoid discouraging them as they are being used.

### **III. Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative survey research design and approaches with primary and secondary sources to analyze youth participation in church programs in Africa Inland Churches in Kisumu County. The study focused on four DCC's (District Church Council) within Kisumu City Region that comprised of East Winam, West Winam, Ramba and Winam. The target population comprised of the three of the four DCC's with eight hundred and fifty youth members and seventy church elders. Random sampling was used. Morgan (1970) table of determining sample size was used to arrive at the sample size of 200 youth, 10 pastors and 30 church elders.

The research used questionnaires and interview guidelines as instrument of the study to collect data. The researcher also used was face-to-face conversation, note taking, participation observation, and comparative analysis. The tools were the New International Version, concordances, and Bible Dictionaries. Mobile phone recorder was used to record answers given by the respondents. Structured questionnaires were used for interviewing the targeted group of respondents. Note book diary was used to put down notes and some significant participant observations during the interview were used in the data collection process. The tools were vital in that they helped in documentation of the accurate information. These questionnaires were administered to both the youths, Pastors and the elders.

Legal and ethical considerations were highly considered when collecting the data. The data collected from the study were analyzed statistically using statistical package for social sciences version 21.0 (SPSS). Distributions of these data involved the use of frequencies and percentages and the results were summarized in tables and figures.

### **IV. Results**

#### **Demographic Information**

The study sought to establish the demographic distribution based on gender, marital status, age bracket, occupation, and educational level. A significant (51.6%) of the youth who participated in the study were female while nearly a half (48.4%) of them were male. This shows that there was a slight even distribution of youth in church based on gender. However, females are more in churches as compared to their male counter parts. A vast majority (86%) of the youth were single while a few (14%) were married. In relation to age, half (50%) of the youth were between 15-20 years of age, (29.1%) of them were 21-25 years of age, while (21 %) indicated that they were 26 years and above. Nearly two thirds (64.7%) of the youth indicated that they were not employed, (18.2%) of them were employed while 17.1% were self-employed. Slightly less than a half (41.5%) of the youth had KCSE certificate as their highest level of education, 17.1% of them had a diploma. whereas 25.2% had attained degree level.

The majority (75%) of the church elders who participated in the study were male while 25% were female. An overwhelming majority (95%) of the church elders were married while a few (5%) were widowed. A slightly more than two thirds (70%) of the church elders were 46 years and above, (30%) were 45 years of age and below. This implies that most of the church elders had experience in youth and participation in church programs. More than a half (57 %) of the church elders were self-employed and 43 % were public employees. A slightly more than a third (37.5%) of the church elders indicated that they had attained diploma as their highest level of education, (22.5%) had a degree, whereas 17.5% of the elders possessed a Master's degree.

#### **Youth Programs and Participation in the Church**

The study sought to establish whether youth were being involved in the various youth programs in the church. To answer this objective, the items that were analyzed included: youth membership in different programs, factor deterring youth participating in Church programs, programs that attract youth in the Church, the areas that the youth leadership have failed to address in regard to church programs, the elders' response on financial Support for youth Programs.

#### **Factors Deterring Youth's Participation in Church Programs**

The youth were further asked to give reasons which deter them from participating in church programs. The results showing the reasons that were suggested are indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Reasons for not joining church programs**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (100%)</b>
Lack of time	21	10.5
Secular Modern influence	25	12.5
Church is cramping their style	30	15
Generationalism	15	7.5
Faults of idealism	19	9.5
Lack of pastoral care and discipleship	28	14
Studies	37	18.5
Lack of motivation	25	12.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows that an insignificant number (10.5%) of the youth indicated that lack of time was a factor in their participation in church activities. A few (12.5%) of them indicated modern secular influence of the youth church programs made them not be involved. Other key reasons suggested included church cramping its style (15%), the problem of generation gap (7.5%), faults in idealism (9.5%), lack of pastoral care and discipleship (14%), studies (18.5%) and lack of motivation (12.5%) respectively. The results imply that many of these cited factors determine the level and extent of youth participation in church activities. While the percentage indicate that some youth participate in church programs, a significant number do not.

**Table 2: Areas where youth leadership need to address in terms of church programs.**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (100%)</b>
Lack of follow up/mobilization	22	11
Empowerment/innovation	18	9
Addressing contemporary issues	40	20
Supporting talents/sports evangelism	33	16.5
Diversification of youth activities	27	13.5
Mode of dressing and conduct	20	10
Facilitation of bible study	25	12.5
Pastoral Counseling	15	7.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As shown by the table 2, nearly a half of the youth are not sure on the areas that their youth leaders have failed to address in the church. However, 11% of the youth indicated that the youth leaders had failed in terms of follow ups and mobilization of youth in the church. Other key areas the youth leaders failed as suggested by the youth included: innovation empowerment (9%), addressing on contemporary issues (20%), supporting talents and sports evangelism (16.5%) and diversification of youth activities (13.5%), Mode of dressing (10%), bible study facilitation (12.5%) and counseling (7.5%).

In terms of youth and leadership, the responses of the church elders varied. Slightly more than half (55%) little had been done with regards to the inclusion of youth in the church leadership programs. As such, they suggested that there was need for the church to include the youth in the leadership positions. This may by inference explain be the reason why the youth lack the moral attitude to participate in church programs as they perceive that programs are led by elders and not their fellow youth members.

For leadership preparation and positions, a few (7.5%) of the church leaders indicated that the church was currently in the process of mentoring young people in their respective congregations for leadership roles. The church elders also gave varied opinions regarding what the congregation was doing towards supporting youth programs. The opinions given included allocating of funds, allocation of own services to the youth, engagement of well-trained youth leaders services and mobilization and mentorship programs. The responses are further summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Elder's Response on enhancing Youth participation in Youth Programs**

<b>Elders Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Youth Pastor to engage the youths through their leaders to engage more on sports evangelism.	6	20
Increase youth mobilization and mentorship programs	5	17
Youths have been incorporated into the church services	8	27
Youths have their own programs supervised by the Pastors	6	20
The is church allocating funds to support the Youth Programs	5	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

In supporting youth programs in the church, less than a third (20%) of the church elders indicated that the church had plans to engage the services of a well-trained youth director to enhance youth ministry in the church. 17% of the elders reported that their congregation was working to improve on youth mobilization and mentorship programs. Mentorship and coaching provide optimal preparation for the attainment of youth potential

and well-being ready for ministry. This is a source of motivation of youth for their commitment towards church activities and is key to their retention. Youths in the church can be motivated through words of motivation and encouragement, gifts presentations, spiritual organized recognition celebrations. Studies indicate that such motivation also attracts more young people to involve themselves in church work

More so, 27% of the elders indicated that the youths had been incorporated in church services within the congregations, (20%) youths had their own programs supervised by the Pastors, and (17%) of the elders indicated that the church had allocated funds to support the youth programs. The low percentage of the respondents implies that the church had done very little to increase the capacity of youth participation in the church.

### **Respondents Views on Programs that Attract Youth in the Church**

The youth gave responses regarding programs that attract them in the church. The results are summarized by Table 4.

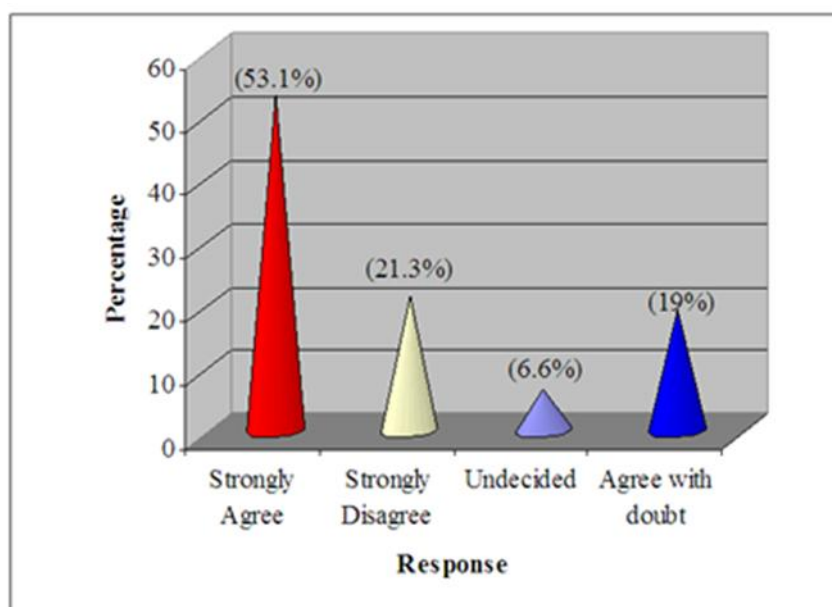
**Table 4: Programs that attract Youth in church**

<b>Programs</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (100%)</b>
Follow up mobilization	35	17.5
Rallies/Retreat	30	15
Diversification of Programs	25	12.5
Sport Evangelism	35	17.5
Music and Dance	35	17.5
Bible Study	25	12.5
Age groupings of the youths	10	5
Not sure	5	2.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4 shows that the key programs that the youth indicate were attractive to them in the church included: Retreat/Rallies (15%), diversification of programs (12.5%), bible study (12.5%) and follow up mobilization (17.5%), sports and evangelism (17.5%), Groupings of youths (5%). On the other hand, less than ten percent (10%) of the youth in the churches are still not sure about what should be put in place so as to encourage and promote discipleship among the youth in the church. The low response rate implies that the youth interest in these key ministries of the church is also low and less attractive to them. This is a determinant of the youth participation in the church programs.

### **The Respondents' Perspective on Church's Financial Support on Youth programs**

With regards to the role played by the church in supporting youth programs, the respondents were asked to indicate their extent of agreement on whether the church supported the youth programs financially in the following categories: strongly agree, strongly disagree, undecided and agree with doubt.



**Figure 1:** Whether the Church Supported Youth programs financially



As shown by the figure 1, slightly more than half (53.1%) of the youth strongly agreed that the church did support the youth programs financially. This was however not the case among 21.3% of them who strongly disagreed with the statement, 6.6 % who were undecided, and 19% who agreed with a doubt. The variation in the responses implies that though some church provides financial support for youth support, other churches do not and this determines the overall decision on youth participation in church programs.

### **The Prospects of Youth's Participation in Church Programs**

Respondents itemized some prospects of their involvement in church activities as discussed in proceeding lines. 79% and 76 % respectively cited pastoring and evangelism, while 40% stated that teaching and doing other lucrative things such as singing, decorating and dramatizing had some prospects. 45% of the respondents expressed that they are advanced, meaning being more contemporary than some adults and could bring in great innovations that will bring about growth in the church. Quite far below average were two other prospects observed. These were leadership in which they can change the world which had only 28%. The possibility of them becoming good examples for the contemporary world just as Joseph, Daniel and David were in their days- being vessels of honor unto God were 38%. Interestingly, the findings seem to have similarity of results. The first are the 70% and above result on pastoring and evangelizing prospects. Youth participation in church activities is an avenue for grooming them for leadership in the future. The youth are the future of the church. The second similarities in the results are those just below average in the margin of 40% and above that established opportunities in performance arts and innovations. These depict areas/programmes that are relevant and are quite good motivators for youth involvement. A prominent finding though with a lower percentage (28%) is the prospect of leadership in government parastatals from which they can change the world. These finding prompts having re-think about stewardship. The youth see it as an all-encompassing responsibility; hence they are both responsible to God, to others in and outside the local church fellowship, and even at the government workplaces. This seems to corroborate the ideas of Bakke, Smith, and Hendricks (2005) that often time emphasis of Christian service has always been on the four walls of the church and for church work alone while the youth portray a very good idea of integrating their faith with work such as there could be spiritual transformation in public service. The prospect of being good examples of biblical youths like Joseph, Daniel, David and many whose influence in transforming their world was quite apt.

## **V. Discussion**

The results indicated that there were more female youth as compared with male. These findings concur with studies by Magee (2010) on spirituality and religious involvement of young adults in which 200 youths were surveyed online and 25 % of the respondents were male while 75% were female. The majority of the youth respondents were between the age brackets of 15-20. Generally, it this age brackets where most of the youth are transiting from primary schools to secondary schools while the age brackets of 21-25 consist of college and university students. This concurs with the same study by Magee (2010) in which she conducts research on spirituality and religious involvement of young adults in the age brackets of 29 years and younger. In the studies, she established that 66.7% of the respondents were vibrant in their faith and actively involved in the church community. As reviewed in the literature by most of the youth in this age are busy looking for jobs in different places most likely from rural to urban, and therefore there is the need for the church to create an alternate environment for them.

Most (60.5%) of the youth are not members of any program in the church. The remaining indicated that they were members of various groups the key group being praise and worship team (9.7%), dancing club (7.0%), football club (7.0%), choir (3.9%) and Sunday school teachers (3.1%). This aligns with a study by Rackley (2013) which established that 60% of young people will leave the church permanently or for an extended period (Rackley, 2013). Additionally, a study by Vitisia (2016) among evangelical youth by Christianity today in America indicated that 70% of young adults of age 14 to 24 stop attending church regularly. The same studies identify a survey by Life Way Research where it was found that 70% of 23–30-year-old dropped out of the church (Vitisia, 2016).

A vast majority (93%) of the youth indicated that parents encouraged them to participate in church programs. These findings align with a study by Kim-Japheth, (2012) on how parents' religiousness interfaces with mediating and moderating processes (such as adolescents' religiousness and parent-child attachment) to influence adolescent adjustment. From the data, "inadequate pastoral care and discipleship" received highest-rated factor (86.25%) as the factor that would most likely hinder the youth to not only leave the church but also to participate in church programs.

Slightly more than half (53.1%) of the youth strongly agreed that the church did support the youth programs financially. This concurs with research by Wilson on church programs initiated by mega churches and some of which involve the youth (Priers et al, (2010) In the studies, it was established that mega churches directly supported the youth ministry. Furthermore, from their survey, it was found that 78% of African American mega

churches act as their own sending agency for some or all of the missionaries whom they support financially. However, this is contrast with about 49.1% of youth who indicates that their churches do not provide financial support to youth programs in the church.

Nearly half (45.7%) of the youth strongly agreed that there was a proper mentorship program in the church. These findings concur with a study by Chiroma that focused on a critical evaluation of mentorship programs in three Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) seminaries. From the research that was conducted in the three major denominational seminaries in Nigeria, it was established that mentorship plays an important role in the holistic development of seminary students especially in three areas, namely spiritual formation, character and ministry formation (Chiroma & Cloete, 2015). Categorically, the incorporation of mentorship programs in churches is necessary to shape the youth in terms of their spiritual growth and leadership skills.

Positive youth development for ministry was a key aspect of the findings. The youth were asked whether Discipleship and Gift nurturing would develop them into mature Christians ready to do God's work. Data from the study reported that 67% agreed with this statement while only 23% disagreed. This implies that youth desire discipleship to become mature Christians in the church. Mainline churches have good theoretical discipleship concepts but lack a practical approach to that effect. Greg Ogden (2007) explains that disciplining is creates an intentional relationship with the youth to encourage, equip and challenge them in love to grow toward maturity in Christ.

In discussing Jesus' method of discipleship, Ogden discusses notes that Jesus was consciously meticulous in training the disciples through teaching (Matt. 5:3-11), instructing (Acts 1:4-5), empowerment (Lk. 9:1-6), and involvement (Matt. 28:18-20) to enhance effective participation. It is about time the church took time to develop practical measures rather than theoretical concepts to disciple the youth. Through effective discipleship, the spiritual gifts and potentials of the individual youth may be identified and nurtured to enhance their motivation and participation in church programs.

The goal of youth dynamic involvement in the local church activities should be participation as part of building up the local church as well as equipping them for ministry. According to Ephesians 4: 11-13, the body of Christ may be built up when God's people are equipped and trained for works of service. Youth are part of the congregation in the local church. In other words, the church must incorporate their youth into every part of the ministry. Therefore, it is necessary to youth workers to learn more about the youth and to be aware of their developmental needs. Youth workers must know the different theories on child development to understand and teach the youth effectively. Youth workers need to work with parents of the youth, because family ministry focuses on strong religious education and connecting the generations. When youth workers understand the world of the youth and the challenges facing young people today, they can be more effective in reaching and ministering to them to build up the local church.

## **VI. Conclusion**

From the analysis and summary of the findings of the study, it was concluded that a number of issues deter and limit youth participation church programs. The study noted that some of the key issues included lack of motivation, mobilization, modern secular influence, church cramping in their own style of leadership, the problem of generation gap, failure to inspire youths, faults of idealism, change of environment, digitalization, age grouping and time.

The study further concluded that the AIC has responsibility to enhance youth discipling and training programs to not only make the youth aware of the roles of these programs but also participate in the programs. There is need for an awareness program to be initiated within the congregations regarding the various programs available in the church for the youths. The church should also design youth programs which are youth oriented and are in a position to meet their needs in different stages. The local churches with devolved cell-groups fellowship should emphasis youth and participations in those cell-groups.

In the overall, it can be concluded that the church should provide numerous opportunities for youth to serve and lead, allowing them to develop their skills and grow in their faith. These opportunities can include serving in the worship team, leading small groups, volunteering in outreach programs, and participating in evangelistic missions. By providing these opportunities, the church empowers youth to take ownership of their faith and become active participants in the church's mission. This not only prepares them for future leadership roles but also allows them to contribute to the church's growth and impact (Musonda, 2023).

Young people bring energy, enthusiasm, and a fresh perspective to the church, challenging traditional modes of thinking and inspiring innovation. They also have a unique ability to connect with their peers and invite them into the church community, expanding the church's reach and influence. By investing in youth and empowering them to lead, the church can create a culture of growth and vibrancy that will connect with them. Ultimately, the church's success in fulfilling its mission depends on its ability to engage and empower youth, preparing them to become the next generation of leaders and ambassadors for Christ (Turpin, 2023).

## **VII. Recommendations**

On the basis of the study findings, the following recommendations were made: The church must strive to encourage the youth to participate in church growth and development through properly designed programs of discipleship, Christian education, mentorship and biblical preaching and teaching to ground them in their faith in Jesus Christ, motivate to serve God by participating in church programs.

The church should have strong family programs that aim to educate the parents on parental responsibility and care for children and youths. Parents should be in the frontline to cultivate the behavior of their children at an early age so as to encourage them to be responsible. The parents can influence the youth through family altar by teaching on the effects of negative behavior, drug abuse and spirit of ungodliness that works to kill their desire for loving and serving God. This demands that both parents and leaders should be good examples to the youth.

The church should strengthen youth ministry in the church by engaging a dynamic youth pastors and mentors. A church without youth and children is a dying church. To prepare strong youth in the church, the youth pastor must know and develop a strong relationship with the youth praying with them, showing them genuine love, displaying firm care through talk and play therapy, attending and involving them in their youth functions such as graduations, weddings, family celebrations. (Heitman, 2018) adds that the youth pastor must make deliberate effort to involve the youth in such church programs as ushering, sound and video booths, church website, music ministry, youth missions, Sunday school teaching and serving as well as leading in Sunday service programs.

In his book, Town (2012), indicate that youth sometimes fail to participate in the church programs due to their stereotyped image as viewed by adults who consider them as impulsive, immature, unreliable, undependable, inexperience, untrusted, dishonest, leadership threat due to their education or disobedient which hence erects psychological barriers between the older generation and youths commonly referred to as generation gap. The church must teach the church about the sinful nature of man and the love of for all that comes from knowing Jesus as saviour.

The church should develop programs for mentorship and coaching to provide the youth with optimal preparation for the attainment of potential and well-being ready for ministry. Mentorship and coaching are important in behavioural modification, reducing risky sexual activities, improving skill and career development, self-identity and positive self-esteem, self-determination, societal bonding, cognitive and emotional maturation and sound moral values

The church should also build strategies for youth leadership skill development through youth discipleship programs. Studies have shown that youth with adequate leadership training and who became leaders during their youthful age subsequently become better future leaders compared to those who did not have that opportunity. The church must therefore groom the youth to fit into church ministry, and take up leadership positions in the church as disciples of Jesus Christ to serve God and humanity. As the youth are being nurtured, they must also be given the platform to practice what they learn from their leaders and mentors through participation opportunities in church programs.

The local churches and DCC's need to diversify church programs, increase more seminars and retreat for the youths, sponsor their activities more often, engage them with positive mentors and engage them fully in church Programs. The youth leaders should work closely with the CED Coordinator and Pastors both locally and at the DCC's and regional levels so as to help accelerate youth programs effectively. Regional youth committees should work closely in consultation with the Area CED-Director from the area level to fill the gaps that therein and be responsible in designing most of youth programs through youth's involvement.

The study recommends that further study should include personalized interviews with the youth generation within different churches to understand their perspectives more on their feelings about the church and their participation in the church. More facts should establish why some youth feel that many churches are not relevant to their generation and lack engagement with the real world, especially concerning spiritual issues.

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