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The Role of the Catholic Church in Curbing Youth Unemployment, Insecurity, and Radicalisation in Kenya

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Abstract

Youth unemployment, insecurity, and radicalisation remain pressing and intertwined challenges in Kenya, with a disproportionate impact on urban and peri-urban youth. While government responses have been documented extensively, the role of faith-based organisations (FBOs) as non-state actors in youth empowerment and security promotion remains underexplored in academic discourse. This study fills this critical gap by analysing the strategic contributions of the Catholic Church in Kenya in mitigating youth unemployment, curbing radicalisation, and promoting community security. Drawing on a qualitative research design, the study utilised 25 semi-structured interviews with Catholic clergy, youth beneficiaries, and program officers, as well as content analysis of over 40 institutional reports and public documents from diocesan development offices across Nairobi, Kisumu, and Eldoret. Findings indicate that Catholic-led initiatives have directly supported over 20,000 youth through vocational training, entrepreneurship incubation, peacebuilding workshops, and counselling services between 2015 and 2023. Programs such as the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission's youth empowerment centres and Caritas Kenya's economic resilience hubs have enhanced skills acquisition, social cohesion, and nonviolent conflict resolution. The Church has also contributed to national policy conversations by advocating for youth-focused development strategies and forging interfaith alliances for peace. This paper recommends the urgent expansion of Catholic digital training academies, increased resource allocation to faith-based organisation (FBO)-led vocational institutions, and formalised partnerships between the Church, state, and private sector. By anchoring its interventions in moral teachings and providing practical livelihood support, the Catholic Church exemplifies how FBOs can be transformative agents in Kenya's security and development architecture.

Keywords: *Catholic Church, Youth Unemployment, Radicalisation, Economic Empowerment, and Peacebuilding*

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Introduction

Youth unemployment, insecurity, and radicalisation remain persistent and interrelated challenges threatening Kenya's social cohesion and economic trajectory. According to the 2023 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) report, nearly 40.2% of youth aged 18–34 are unemployed, a figure that has worsened due to the lingering economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and global inflationary pressures (KNBS, 2023). The lack of sustainable employment opportunities has not only deepened poverty but also created fertile ground for youth involvement in crime, substance abuse, and violent extremism. Marginalised communities, in particular, have become recruitment hubs for extremist groups like *Al-Shabaab*, who exploit economic vulnerabilities and social alienation through ideological indoctrination and financial inducement (Botha, 2021; Odhiambo, 2023).

Government interventions, such as the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) and the Ajira Digital Program, as well as counter-radicalisation frameworks spearheaded by the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), have sought to curb these challenges. However, research and audit reports reveal that many of these programs face critical implementation deficits, including limited grassroots penetration, politicisation, and systemic corruption (Mkutu, 2023; Oduor, 2022). As a result, large segments of the youth population remain economically disenfranchised and susceptible to radical influences. In contrast, faith-based organisations (FBOs) like the Catholic Church have quietly yet consistently engaged in alternative, community-driven interventions to mitigate youth unemployment and radicalisation. Through Catholic-sponsored schools, vocational training centres, youth empowerment forums, and peacebuilding dialogues, the Church has provided both material and moral scaffolding to vulnerable young people (Mutua, 2021; Wamwere, 2022). Rooted in Catholic social teachings—particularly the principles of the common good, dignity of labour, and preferential option for the poor (John Paul II, 1981)—these initiatives have addressed not only structural unemployment but also the psychosocial dimensions of marginalisation, such as alienation, despair, and identity crises.

Despite these sustained efforts, academic literature has mainly privileged government-led interventions, with minimal systematic exploration of how FBOs function as development and security actors. Where religious involvement is acknowledged, it is often treated descriptively or normatively, rather than analytically. This leaves a significant empirical and theoretical gap in understanding how faith-based institutions shape youth outcomes, particularly through faith-based social capital—defined here as the trust, networks, norms, and moral authority embedded in religious communities that facilitate collective action and resilience (Putnam, 2000; Burchardt, 2020).

This study seeks to fill that gap by critically examining the Catholic Church's role in youth empowerment, security promotion, and radicalisation prevention in Kenya. It advances scholarship by examining how faith-based social capital uniquely influences the shaping of youth attitudes, opportunities, and resistance to extremist ideologies, particularly through mechanisms such as trust in religious leaders, collective identity, and participation in Church-run economic and educational programs. Furthermore, the study examines how such interventions intersect with and complement state programs, highlighting areas of convergence, contestation, and potential missed synergy. Guided by qualitative data, this paper investigates how Catholic-led efforts function at the community level to equip youth with skills, values, and networks that reduce the appeal of violence and crime. It demonstrates that faith-based approaches, when grounded in local realities and moral authority, often reach segments of the population that formal state programs have left behind.

The following section examines relevant literature on teenage marginalisation, radicalisation, and the role of FBOs, highlighting both actual patterns and conceptual gaps. It then gives the theoretical framework that will serve as the foundation for the analysis, focusing on social capital and strain theories. The next part describes the qualitative technique used in this study, followed by a detailed discussion of the results. The conclusion considers the implications for policy and programming, providing specific

pathways for developing cooperation across religious organisations, government, and civil society to promote youth development and national stability.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework drawing upon Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), the Strain Theory (Merton, 1938), and the Collective Efficacy Theory (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997) to explain how Catholic Church interventions address youth unemployment, insecurity, and radicalisation in Kenya. Social Capital Theory emphasises the importance of networks, norms, and trust in promoting collective well-being. Putnam (2000) argues that institutions such as churches accumulate "bonding" and "bridging" capital, enabling community members, particularly youth, to access emotional, informational, and economic support. In this study, Catholic Church structures—such as youth ministries, parish-based vocational centres, and diocesan development offices—serve as platforms that generate high-trust environments. These networks create opportunities for employment, identity formation, and prosocial engagement, thereby reducing youth vulnerability to criminality and extremist ideologies.

The Strain Theory on the other hand, offers a complementary lens by examining the structural origins of deviant behaviour. It posits that when individuals experience a disjunction between culturally approved goals (e.g., employment, recognition) and legitimate means of achieving them, they are likely to resort to alternative, often deviant pathways (Merton, 1938). In Kenya, widespread youth unemployment and economic inequality, particularly in marginalised regions, produce psychological and structural strain. Radical groups such as *Al-Shabaab* exploit this frustration through "push-pull" mechanisms: push factors (e.g., poverty, exclusion, state violence) drive youth out of mainstream society, while pull factors (e.g., financial incentives, belonging, ideological purpose) lure them into extremist networks (Botha, 2021). Catholic Church interventions such as skills training, psychosocial counselling, and livelihood support serve to buffer this strain, offering alternative, prosocial paths that restore hope and agency.

The Collective Efficacy theory further deepens this analysis by emphasising the role of shared norms and mutual trust in maintaining public order. Communities with high collective efficacy are better positioned to informally monitor behaviour and respond to local threats such as crime or radicalisation (Sampson et al., 1997). In this context, the Catholic Church operates as a moral and social anchor that mobilises communities to engage in youth mentorship, conflict mediation, and informal surveillance. Church-sponsored youth forums and interfaith dialogues not only foster moral consciousness but also reinforce communal guardianship, functioning as a form of grassroots-level "community policing."

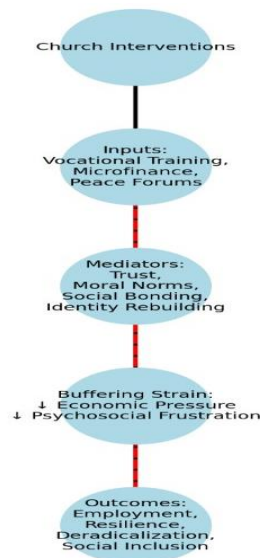


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework. Source: Author (2025)

This study synthesises the three theories into a unified model that explains how faith-based social capital interacts with community efficacy and strain-buffering strategies to disrupt radicalisation trajectories among youth, where the inputs are the Catholic Church initiatives. On the other hand, mediators will include trust in religious institutions, moral norms, social bonding, and perceived legitimacy of the Church. The Buffering Mechanism will also include the reduction of structural strain and reinforcement of positive identity narratives. Ultimately, the outcomes will include increased youth resilience, gainful employment, deradicalisation, and reduced susceptibility to criminal behaviour. This integrated model not only accounts for economic drivers of radicalisation but also incorporates identity-based and psychosocial factors, thereby providing a multidimensional understanding of the Church's role. Religious institutions are not merely service providers but are also sites where youth can reconstruct positive self-concepts grounded in moral and communal values, thereby countering extremist identity narratives.

From this conceptual framework, it is evident that church interventions initiate the process, while inputs (such as vocational training, microfinance, and peace forums) feed into it. On the other hand, the Mediators (trust, moral norms, social bonding, and identity rebuilding) buffer socio-economic strain by reducing economic pressure and psychosocial frustration, leading to outcomes such as employment, resilience, deradicalisation, and social inclusion.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate the Catholic Church's role in addressing youth unemployment, insecurity, and radicalisation in Kenya. The choice of a qualitative approach was informed by the need to generate a deep, contextual understanding of the lived experiences of youth beneficiaries, as well as the perspectives of clergy and Church program implementers. Qualitative methods were most suitable for examining the complex interplay between religious interventions and socioeconomic conditions that influence youth behaviour. As Patton (2015) notes, qualitative research is well-suited for capturing the meanings, interpretations, and depth of human experiences that cannot be reduced to numerical values. Through semi-structured interviews, documentary reviews, and thematic analysis, the study examined how the Catholic Church's initiatives influence economic opportunities and deter engagement in crime and radicalisation.

To ensure diversity and minimise sampling bias, the study employed purposive and stratified sampling techniques. Participants were drawn from multiple dioceses across Kenya, including Nairobi, Eldoret, and Marsabit, to capture the variations between urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts. Within these dioceses, respondents were further stratified by gender and role. Interviewees included Catholic clergy (bishops, priests, and youth chaplains), Church-based program coordinators, and young beneficiaries of Church-led initiatives. This approach enabled the researcher to capture a wide range of experiences and perceptions, particularly those of often underrepresented groups such as rural youth and female participants. By selecting information-rich cases with direct involvement in youth empowerment and counter-radicalisation programs, the study ensured both relevance and contextual depth.

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews from thirty respondents. Ten clergy members provided insights into the theological rationale and institutional commitment to youth empowerment, while ten program coordinators shared operational perspectives on the design and implementation of Church initiatives. Additionally, ten youth beneficiaries described how these interventions had influenced their lives. Interview questions focused on vocational training, peace forums, mentorship, moral guidance, and economic empowerment efforts undertaken by the Church. Interviews were conducted both in person and virtually, depending on the participants' accessibility and location. Ethical standards were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining confidentiality of respondents, as recommended by Creswell (2013).

Secondary data was also integral to this study. Documents were sourced from Church-affiliated bodies, including the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), as well as diocesan reports detailing youth and peace-building initiatives. Government policy documents from the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and the Ministry of Interior provided broader policy context. At the same time, academic literature and NGO reports offered external evaluations and critical perspectives on the role of faith-based organisations in development. Reports by organisations such as Haki Africa and Amnesty International were beneficial in offering non-church perspectives on youth and security challenges in Kenya.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of findings, the study incorporated multiple strategies to mitigate bias. Recognising that Church-affiliated respondents might present interventions in a favourable light, triangulation was employed to ensure objectivity. This involved comparing interview responses with independent NGO reports, media articles, and peer-reviewed research. Such cross-validation helped confirm the consistency and accuracy of claims regarding the Church's impact. Furthermore, member-checking was used whereby selected respondents reviewed their interview transcripts to verify accuracy and authenticity. The researcher also maintained reflexive field notes to monitor personal biases and assumptions throughout the data collection and analysis process. Peer debriefing sessions with fellow researchers further contributed to objective interpretation by enabling critical feedback on emerging themes.

Data analysis followed a rigorous thematic analysis approach, grounded in the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher employed NVivo 14 software to organise, code, and analyse the large volumes of qualitative data collected. NVivo enabled the systematic identification of themes across interviews and documents, including recurrent patterns related to moral guidance, vocational empowerment, identity reconstruction, and resilience. Deductive coding was applied based on the theoretical constructs of Social Capital Theory, Strain Theory, and Collective Efficacy, while inductive coding allowed emergent insights from participants' narratives. The use of NVivo enhanced the reliability and reproducibility of the analysis, particularly through the software's capabilities in generating visualisations, code hierarchies, and co-occurrence queries that supported theoretical refinement.

Despite the strengths of the chosen methodology, the study encountered a few limitations. There was a risk of social desirability bias in self-reported data from Church actors, who might have overstated the success of their interventions. Although triangulation and external validation helped address this limitation, it remains a notable one. Additionally, access to some classified government documents on radicalisation and counter-terrorism was limited, which constrained the ability to map the alignment between Church programs and national strategies fully. However, this gap was partially filled through the use of credible secondary sources and publicly available policy briefs. In conclusion, the methodology employed in this study provided a robust and ethically sound framework for investigating the Catholic Church's contributions to youth empowerment, peacebuilding, and deradicalisation in Kenya. By integrating stratified sampling, in-depth qualitative interviews, documentary analysis, and the use of NVivo software for thematic interpretation, the study generated nuanced, evidence-based insights that inform both academic discourse and practical policy interventions.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the multifaceted role of the Catholic Church in addressing youth unemployment, insecurity, and radicalisation in Kenya, highlighting how faith-based interventions intersect with socio-economic realities and individual lived experiences. Drawing on a thematic analysis of qualitative data, the discussion maps these findings onto the theoretical frameworks of Social Capital and Strain Theory, providing a deeper understanding of how Church-led programs foster moral guidance, economic empowerment, community cohesion, and resilience among vulnerable youth. The analysis also critically engages with patterns emerging from diverse diocesan contexts—urban, peri-urban, and rural—thereby providing a nuanced and context-sensitive interpretation of the Church's impact across regions.

Education and Vocational Training

The Catholic Church in Kenya has played a vital role in promoting education and vocational training as a means of addressing youth unemployment and fostering economic empowerment. Through its extensive network of schools, colleges, and vocational training centres, the Church has provided young people with opportunities to acquire both academic and practical skills essential for securing employment. By integrating moral and ethical teachings with professional training, Catholic institutions help shape a disciplined workforce committed to integrity and societal development (Omondi, 2021).

Catholic-sponsored institutions, such as the Christ the Teacher Institute for Education and the Don Bosco Technical Institute, offer a wide range of courses tailored to meet labour market demands. The Christ the Teacher Institute focuses on teacher training, preparing individuals to serve in Kenya's education sector and addressing shortages in qualified educators (Mutuku, 2020). On the other hand, Don Bosco Technical Institute specialises in technical and vocational training, offering programs in engineering, mechanics, carpentry, and information technology. These courses are designed to equip students with skills that make them employable in various industries or enable them to start their businesses (Wanyama, 2019).

Beyond formal education, the Catholic Church has established numerous vocational training centres targeting out-of-school youth and marginalised communities. Programs in tailoring, masonry, electrical installation, plumbing, and hairdressing have empowered many young people with practical skills, reducing their dependence on formal employment opportunities (Kiprono, 2022). Many graduates from these training programs have successfully entered the workforce or started their businesses, thereby contributing to economic growth and social stability (Kariuki, 2021).

Additionally, the Catholic Church collaborates with development agencies and international organisations to enhance vocational training opportunities. Programs such as Caritas Kenya's youth empowerment initiatives provide financial assistance, mentorship, and entrepreneurship training, fostering self-reliance among young people (Mburu, 2020). These partnerships have ensured the

sustainability and expansion of vocational education programs, benefiting thousands of young people in Kenya. The integration of ethical training within Catholic educational programs distinguishes these institutions from others. By instilling values such as hard work, honesty, and social responsibility, the Church fosters a workforce that not only possesses technical skills but also upholds high moral standards. Employers often prefer graduates from Catholic institutions due to their discipline and professionalism, further improving job placement rates (Njoroge, 2021).

Overall, the Catholic Church's initiatives in education and vocational training have played a significant role in alleviating youth unemployment in Kenya. By equipping young people with relevant skills and fostering moral responsibility, the Church contributes to economic empowerment, crime reduction, and social cohesion. Continued investment in these programs, along with stronger partnerships between religious institutions and government agencies, will further enhance their impact.

The paper reveals that the Catholic Church plays a significant role in addressing youth unemployment, insecurity, and radicalisation in Kenya. Through vocational training programs, the Church provided young people with practical skills that enhanced their employability, thereby reducing the likelihood of engagement in criminal or extremist activities. Economic empowerment initiatives, such as microfinance support and entrepreneurial training, enabled beneficiaries to establish small businesses and achieve financial independence. Additionally, moral and spiritual guidance from clergy members helped instill ethical values and resilience among the youth, discouraging them from participating in radical activities. The Church's involvement in interfaith dialogue and community peace programs further contributed to social cohesion and conflict resolution. These findings underscore the effectiveness of faith-based interventions in tackling socio-economic challenges among young people in Kenya.

Economic Empowerment and Job Creation: A Theoretical Perspective

The Catholic Church in Kenya has undertaken a range of initiatives aimed at enhancing economic empowerment and fostering job creation among the youth. These efforts not only respond to the immediate challenge of unemployment but also reflect deeper structural interventions that align with key constructs of Social Capital Theory and Strain Theory. Viewed through these theoretical lenses, the Church's programs are more than philanthropic responses; they are deliberate strategies to build resilience, foster social cohesion, and create pathways for legitimate socioeconomic mobility.

Social Capital Theory underscores the significance of social networks, norms of reciprocity, and institutional trust in facilitating access to resources and opportunities (Putnam, 2000). In this context, the Church's microfinance and youth entrepreneurship programs serve as vehicles for fostering social capital and bridging social gaps. Initiatives such as those run by Caritas Kenya, which provide small business loans and financial literacy training, exemplify how faith-based networks function as incubators of economic opportunity. These revolving loan schemes and savings groups enable young people to mobilise resources collectively, drawing on the trust embedded in Church-affiliated social systems (Kamau, 2019; Mwangi, 2021).

Moreover, by creating access to training in agribusiness and sustainable agriculture through Catholic institutions like the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, the Church cultivates bridging social capital—linking rural and urban youth to new markets, technologies, and knowledge systems (Ndungu, 2022). These linkages empower youth with both skills and social legitimacy, enabling them to pursue lawful economic pathways while incorporating ethical values such as integrity, stewardship, and responsibility into their business practices (Kariuki, 2021). The mentorship and vocational guidance programs operated within Catholic parishes further contribute to linking social capital, as they connect youth with experienced professionals, business networks, and sometimes external investors (Wanyama, 2020). These relationships not only offer critical career guidance but also create channels for social mobility by opening doors to economic ecosystems that might otherwise remain inaccessible.

From the perspective of Strain Theory, these initiatives serve as strategic interventions that mitigate the anomic pressures associated with blocked access to legitimate economic means. Merton's (1938) conceptualisation of strain posits that when individuals, particularly youth, are denied access to culturally approved goals (such as financial success or social recognition) through legitimate means, they may resort to deviant or criminal alternatives. By equipping young people with vocational skills, financial tools, and business mentorship, the Catholic Church offers legitimate alternatives to strain-inducing conditions, thereby reducing the allure of crime and radical ideologies.

For example, microfinance initiatives reduce the economic frustration that often fuels participation in deviant subcultures or criminal enterprises, particularly in Kenya's informal settlements. Agricultural and technical training, similarly, provides youths with tangible means to achieve economic self-reliance, directly countering the structural disjuncture between aspirations and opportunities that fuels social unrest. These efforts not only reduce economic desperation but also foster self-worth and social recognition, critical components for mitigating deviance according to Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992).

The Church's advocacy for supportive government policies on youth entrepreneurship and SME development also reflects a broader structural correction of strain. By influencing policy environments and lobbying for increased youth access to credit and business services (Mbugua, 2018), the Church contributes to systemic change that reduces the prevalence of socio-economic marginalisation, one of the core contributors to criminal behaviour and extremism among disenfranchised youth populations.

From this standpoint, the Catholic Church's multifaceted efforts in economic empowerment and job creation align coherently with both Social Capital Theory and Strain Theory. These initiatives foster cohesive community networks, legitimate economic pathways, and supportive institutional environments that together contribute to reducing youth vulnerability to unemployment, crime, and radicalisation. As such, the Church emerges not only as a spiritual authority but also as a pivotal socio-economic actor in Kenya's development landscape.

Advocacy and Policy Engagement: A Theoretical Interpretation

The Catholic Church's advocacy and policy engagement efforts in Kenya reflect a strategic response to the structural and social drivers of youth unemployment, insecurity, and radicalisation. These interventions can be effectively interpreted through the lenses of Social Capital Theory and Strain Theory, both of which provide a robust analytical framework for understanding the Church's role in socio-political transformation. Social Capital Theory emphasises the importance of networks, norms, and trust in facilitating coordinated action and collective well-being (Putnam, 2000). The Catholic Church, through its vast institutional infrastructure, mobilises social capital by creating dense networks that foster civic engagement, dialogue, and policy participation. Pastoral letters issued by the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), such as the 2021 communique emphasising the urgency of youth vocational training, exemplify the Church's role in shaping public discourse and instilling shared values that promote economic empowerment and social responsibility (KCCB, 2021). These communications are not merely symbolic; they galvanise communities and institutions around a moral consensus, thereby reinforcing both bonding and bridging social capital across denominational and socioeconomic divides.

Furthermore, the Church's engagement through entities like the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) reflects an operationalisation of social capital into advocacy networks that transcend religious boundaries. By convening forums that involve policymakers, youth representatives, civil society, and security agencies, the Church facilitates trust-building and horizontal linkages that are critical for responsive governance. These engagements also foster the development of social capital, as they connect marginalised youth with institutions of power and resource allocation (Woolcock, 2001). The promotion of community policing and restorative justice initiatives through these platforms enables young people

to become stakeholders in their security, reversing the alienation that often drives radicalisation and crime.

Strain Theory, as articulated by Robert K. Merton (1938), provides further insight into the Church's advocacy. This theory posits that societal pressure to achieve culturally prescribed goals, such as economic success, without equal access to legitimate means, results in strain, which can lead individuals to adopt deviant paths, including crime or radical extremism. The Church's persistent lobbying for increased investment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) addresses this structural disjunction. By expanding access to skills-based education and employment pathways, Catholic institutions intervene directly in the strain-inducing conditions that marginalise youth and restrict their access to legitimate opportunities. Advocacy for funding SMEs and TVETs is, therefore, not merely an economic measure—it is a preventive measure against deviance born from systemic exclusion.

Moreover, by pushing for restorative justice as an alternative to punitive and carceral responses to youth crime, the Church promotes a structural correction of societal strain. Rather than perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and resentment, restorative justice reintegrates youth into society, thereby offering them renewed access to legitimate means of social mobility. This aligns with Strain Theory's call for institutional reforms that minimise anomie and reduce the appeal of illegitimate avenues for success.

In sum, the Catholic Church's advocacy efforts—manifested through pastoral letters, civic dialogues, and institutional lobbying—serve as interventions that align with both Social Capital Theory and Strain Theory. These efforts not only amplify the voices of marginalised individuals but also facilitate systemic reforms aimed at restoring equity and opportunity. The Church's moral authority and institutional reach provide a unique platform for addressing the root causes of youth unemployment and insecurity, positioning it as a critical actor in Kenya's pursuit of sustainable peace and development.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church has played a pivotal role in addressing youth unemployment, insecurity, and radicalisation in Kenya through education, economic empowerment, peacebuilding, and advocacy. By leveraging its vast network of schools, vocational training centres, and community-based programs, the Church has provided young people with the necessary skills and opportunities to secure employment. This proactive approach has significantly reduced youth vulnerability to crime, radicalisation, and other social vices that stem from economic hardship and lack of opportunities. Beyond education and job creation, the Church has been actively involved in peacebuilding initiatives that foster social cohesion and conflict resolution. Through interfaith dialogue, youth mentorship programs, and restorative justice efforts, it has promoted non-violent conflict resolution and encouraged reconciliation in communities affected by crime and radicalisation. These initiatives not only mitigate insecurity but also cultivate a culture of peace, tolerance, and responsible citizenship among the youth.

The Church's role in advocacy and policy engagement has also been instrumental in shaping national discourse on youth employment and security. Through pastoral letters, public campaigns, and active participation in policy discussions, Church leaders have urged the government to implement youth-friendly policies, invest in education and skills training, and strengthen community policing initiatives. This sustained advocacy has reinforced the need for systemic reforms that address the root causes of youth-related challenges.

Despite these significant contributions, the complexity of youth unemployment and insecurity demands stronger collaboration between religious institutions, the government, civil society, and development partners. The Church alone cannot fully address these challenges, making it essential for all stakeholders to work together in designing and implementing sustainable solutions. Resource-sharing, policy

alignment, and joint efforts can help scale up existing interventions and create more impactful, long-term strategies.

Moving forward, a multi-sectoral approach is necessary to ensure that young people in Kenya are empowered to become active contributors to national development. Strengthening partnerships, increasing investment in youth programs, and fostering a culture of peace and opportunity will be key to addressing these pressing issues. With sustained commitment from all stakeholders, a more stable, inclusive, and prosperous society can be realised.

Recommendations and Way Forward

A key strategy in addressing youth unemployment and insecurity is strengthening partnerships between the Catholic Church and the government. The Church has a well-established network of schools, vocational training centres, and community-based programs that can be leveraged to complement government initiatives. By fostering stronger collaboration, the government can provide additional funding, technical expertise, and policy support to expand vocational training programs and job creation initiatives. This partnership would ensure that more young people, particularly those from marginalised areas, gain access to skills training and employment opportunities, ultimately reducing their vulnerability to crime and radicalisation.

Another crucial intervention involves scaling up economic empowerment programs, particularly in regions that face economic marginalisation. Many young people struggle to secure formal employment, making self-employment a viable alternative for them. To achieve this, more resources should be allocated to initiatives that support entrepreneurship, such as microfinance programs, business incubation centres, and start-up grants. The Catholic Church, with its extensive community outreach, can play a vital role in identifying and mentoring young entrepreneurs. Additionally, integrating financial literacy training within Church-led empowerment programs would equip the youth with the necessary knowledge to manage and grow their businesses sustainably.

Enhancing peacebuilding efforts is also essential in combating insecurity and radicalisation. While the Catholic Church has been actively involved in promoting peace through community engagement and interfaith dialogue, there is a need to expand these efforts. Radicalisation often thrives in environments where young people feel alienated or lack hope for the future. Expanding interfaith initiatives that bring together young people from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds can foster mutual understanding and social cohesion. Furthermore, the Church should strengthen its community outreach programs to address the root causes of youth involvement in crime and violent extremism, offering them alternative pathways through education, mentorship, and economic support.

A sustainable solution to youth-related challenges also requires greater youth engagement in policy-making. The voices of young people must be actively included in discussions and decisions that affect their future, particularly in areas such as employment policies and security strategies. The Church can play a facilitative role by creating platforms where young people can engage with policymakers, express their concerns, and contribute to the development of meaningful policy solutions. Government institutions should also work towards institutionalising youth participation in governance through advisory councils and structured dialogue forums, ensuring that policies reflect the realities and aspirations of the younger generation.

Finally, leveraging digital platforms for youth empowerment is critical in today's technology-driven world. Many traditional vocational training models are becoming outdated due to rapid technological advancements and shifting labour market demands. To remain relevant, the Catholic Church should integrate digital training programs into its existing initiatives, equipping young people with modern skills such as digital marketing, coding, and online entrepreneurship. By adopting e-learning platforms, virtual mentorship programs, and online job-matching services, the Church can expand its reach and make skills

development more accessible to youth in both urban and rural areas. Digital empowerment will not only enhance employment prospects but also enable young people to participate more effectively in the global economy.

Addressing youth unemployment, insecurity, and radicalisation requires a holistic and collaborative approach. Strengthening Church-government partnerships, expanding economic empowerment initiatives, enhancing peacebuilding efforts, increasing youth involvement in policy-making, and integrating digital skills training are all critical steps toward sustainable solutions. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can create an environment that enables young people to develop the skills, opportunities, and support necessary to make meaningful contributions to society.

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