

**PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE PROMOTION OF CHRISTIAN-  
MUSLIM DIALOGUE WITH REFERENCE TO UMBRELLA RELIGIOUS  
ORGANIZATIONS IN KENYA**

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## DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has never been presented for any academic award for a degree in any other university.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my beloved late mother, Mary Shumila, who firmly advocated for girls' education. I am grateful to my husband, Indembukhani, and my two children, Holly and Hazel, for their understanding during the extended periods I spent away from home due to this study.

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## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Balanced World** : A visionary, fair, and inclusive world.
- Christian-Muslim dialogue** : Dialogue that is specific to the two-world Religions of Christianity and Islam.
- De-radicalization** : De-radicalization is a religious process aimed at overcoming violent ideologies, religious extremism, and terrorism.
- Dialogue** : Christians and Muslims encounters.
- Dialogue of Life** : Christians and Muslims encounters arising from day to-day experiences.
- Ecumenical** : Christian denominational relationships.
- Engage positively** : People of differing worldviews involved in formal and informal interactions.
- Feminist Theologies** : They are primarily Christian, Judaism and Islamic ideologies that intend to re-examine scriptural texts, critique traditional doctrine which reinforces gender hierarchies, and emphasize the lived experience of women, intersectionality and women's roles.
- Feminism** : A movement that champions for the rights and

		equality of women.
<b>Feminist Theories</b>	:	Presuppositions which justify women's perspectives.
<b>Formal Dialogue</b>	:	Organized form of dialogue that is deliberate and exclusively designed.
<b>Framework</b>	:	A foundational support structure or system.
<b>Inclusivity theory</b>	:	The understanding that while one set of beliefs is true; other sets of beliefs are at least partially true.
<b>Informal Dialogue</b>	:	Spontaneous dialogue, arising from social encounters without prior planning.
<b>Interfaith action/cooperation</b>	:	Joint action for a social concern of mutual interest carried out by people of different faiths.
<b>Interfaith studies</b>	:	Interdisciplinary, but can also be a multi-Disciplinary field of interreligious dialogue studies.
<b>Inter-faith relation</b>	:	The relationship established and nurtured among peoples of different faiths.

- Intergroup dialogue** : A face-to-face encounter facilitated between faith groups.
- Interreligious dialogue** : A constructive, honest, objective and sincere conversation between people of different faith traditions.
- Interreligious relations** : Interactions and friendships established and nurtured among peoples of different faith traditions.
- Intra-religious dialogue** : In-depth encounter of one's religiousness, in which the challenge of conversion to other religions are genuinely accepted.
- Mixed-dialogue** : A type of dialogue that is intergenerational or intersectional.
- Mono-religious dialogue** : Individual group dialogue that seeks to interrogate religious traditions about their own lived realities and experiences.
- Othering** : The process that people use to disconnect from others who are different from them.
- Patriarchy** : A system of relationships, beliefs, and values

embedded between men and women. In this system, men hold power and women are excluded from it.

**Pluralism** : Diversity which permits peaceful coexistence of varied views.

**Relativism** : A view that there is no universal objective truth.

**Religion** : A people's world view regarding beliefs, rituals, doctrines, institutions, and practices that enable the members of that tradition to establish, maintain, and celebrate a meaningful world.

**Religious radicalization** : Belief or support of extreme views of beliefs and practices.

**Religious Other** : An individual who has a different faith tradition than one's own.

**Umbrella Religious Organizations:** Overarching Christian and Muslim Organizations which have a relationship with the programs they oversee and are meant to

enhance mutual understanding and respect for each other's faith traditions.

- Secularism** : Indifference to the belief in the Supreme Being.
- Spontaneous dialogue** : Informal dialogues that emerge out of the prevailing needs.
- Sustained dialogue** : A structured dialogue that is translated to the larger community.
- Theology of Religions** : Examining the phenomenon of religions, nature and the relationship between them.
- Women participation** : Women's presence in interreligious dialogue, presentation and representation.
- Worldview** : An orientation to a religious, spiritual, or secular tradition that gives a person's value system and ability to create meaning.

## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

<b>ACK</b>	Anglican Church of Kenya
<b>ACRLFP</b>	Africa Council of Religious Leaders for Peace
<b>ACW</b>	A Common Word between Us and You
<b>AICs</b>	African-Instituted Churches
<b>AMECEA</b>	Association of Member Episcopal Conference of Eastern Africa
<b>AYPs</b>	Adolescents and Young People
<b>CAMNET</b>	Christian And Muslim Network
<b>CBM</b>	Christian Blind Mission
<b>CCAWT</b>	Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
<b>CCISA</b>	Christian Centre for Islamic Studies in Africa
<b>CCMRE</b>	Centre for Christian Muslim Relations in Eastleigh
<b>CEDAW</b>	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
<b>CICC</b>	Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics
<b>CJPC</b>	Catholic Justice and Peace Commission
<b>CVE</b>	Countering Violent Extremism
<b>CWA</b>	Catholic Women Association

<b>DRG</b>	Dialogue Reference Group
<b>EACC</b>	Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission
<b>EAK</b>	Evangelical Alliance of Kenya
<b>EDAN</b>	Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network
<b>FBOs</b>	Faith Based Organizations
<b>FIIDI</b>	The Foundation for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Initiatives
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>FORB</b>	Freedom of Religion and Belief
<b>GAD</b>	Gender and Development
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>GOK</b>	Government of Kenya
<b>IOC</b>	Initiatives of Change
<b>IPK</b>	Islamic Party of Kenya
<b>IRCK</b>	Inter-Religious Council of Kenya
<b>IRDIS</b>	Institute for Interreligious Dialogue and Islamic Studies
<b>KAICIID</b>	King Abdullah International Centre for Inter-religious

and Intercultural Dialogue

<b>KCCB</b>	Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops
<b>KII</b>	Key Informants Interviews
<b>KMYDO</b>	Kenya Muslim Youth Development Organization
<b>MUHURI</b>	Muslims for Human Rights
<b>NACOSTI</b>	National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation
<b>NACRA</b>	National Advisory Councils of Religious Affairs
<b>NAMLEF</b>	National Muslim Leaders Forum
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan
<b>NCCK</b>	National Council of Churches of Kenya
<b>NDC</b>	National Dialogue Conference
<b>NPB</b>	National Prayer Breakfast
<b>OIC</b>	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
<b>PAS</b>	Peace and Security Studies
<b>PCEA</b>	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
<b>PCID</b>	Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
<b>PROCMURA</b>	Program for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa

<b>PWD</b>	People with Disability
<b>RCC</b>	Roman Catholic Church
<b>RCEA</b>	Reformed Church of East Africa
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
<b>SUPKEM</b>	Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)
<b>URI</b>	United Religious Initiative
<b>VAW</b>	Violence Against Women
<b>WCC</b>	World Council of Churches
<b>WFDD</b>	World Faith Development Dialogue
<b>YMCA</b>	Young Men Christian Association
<b>YWCA</b>	Young Women Christian Association

## ABSTRACT

This study assessed the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. The study is important due to the weakening relations between Christians and Muslims. Faith communities are striving to bring harmony through umbrella religious organizations such as the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), Interreligious Council of Kenya (IRCK) and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM). However, the lacuna of women is evident in Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is in spite of the women's potential to dialogue. Informal Christian-Muslim dialogue tends to appeal to women. However, these are not well organized. As a result, women's potentials in Christian-Muslim dialogue are under-utilized. This study sought to examine the framework for women participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue; their role; the impact and challenges of women participation in promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. The Standpoint theory in gender studies guided the study. This theory values the social positioning (standing) and the experiences of women and minorities, as a source of knowledge. The theory helped the study to bring women from the periphery to the centre of Christian-Muslim dialogue, so that the women may provide new nuances from their perspectives. The conceptual framework showed that novel scholarship has paid little attention to the subject matter of the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The study used descriptive survey design with a mixed methodological approach which was qualitative and quantitative. Purposive sampling was used to select umbrella religious organizations while saturated sampling technique was used to select top Christian and Muslim leaders for Key Informants Interviews. Simple random sampling was used to select 10% of the middle-level leaders for the administration of questionnaires. To collect primary data, questionnaires and interview guides were used. Likert scale tools were used to collect data on women perspectives, their attitudes and behaviour. Library research corroborated the information obtained from the field. The data collected was collated and organized according to research objectives. Quantitative data was analysed using a statistical package for social sciences (IBM SPSS\_20). Descriptive statistics were used to interpret data. Qualitative data was transcribed, coded, triangulated and analysed according to research objectives. Key findings showed that 81.6% participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue was at the informal levels of community engagements. Most (84.2%) of formal dialogues in Kenya were based on civic or government-related functions with the least women participation. The religious factor in Christian-Muslim dialogue was more definitive than it was functional. The study provided an in-depth analysis of women participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue which may be utilized by interfaith practitioners to harness women's potential and hence, increase the impact of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The study recommended a comparative study of women in Christianity and Islam in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0. Introduction**

Chapter one weaves together the background to the study, a statement of the problem, research objectives, and questions. It also states the study's assumptions, significance, and justification.

### **1.1. Background to the Study**

Interreligious dialogue impacts an inclusive and spiritually based model that addresses the pressing global crises linked to the possibilities for a balanced and better world. Christian-Muslim dialogues also envision this impact, primarily focusing on the two religions, Christianity and Islam, which frequently engage in conflict. A balanced world implies a fair and inclusive world where everyone, including women, have equal access to opportunities and resources and work towards achieving peace through existing frameworks. Islam and Christianity's teachings and doctrines uphold the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion. The Qur'ān advocates equality between all and says that only good deeds may raise the status of one human over another (Qur'ān 49:13; 4:134). In Christianity, all laws are summed up in a single commandment, in Mark 12:31: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Freedom, equality, and dignity are bestowed upon all by being human, made in the image of God (Galatians 3:26).

Umbrella religious organisations exist as part of the support system or framework to champion interreligious dialogue where the religious 'other' may provide space and platform for women to participate. Umbrella religious organisations have overarching programmes that may cut across genders and provide intersectionality. They seek the representation of either the whole or part of what constitutes the larger picture. These

organisations are usually organised alongside denominations, genders, religions or ages. They can speak in one voice and provide a position statement', which may assume a representative position alongside extended administrative boundaries of regions and national level programmes as an official stance of the members. Moreover, umbrella religious organisations may rally their members for the ordinary course and marshal for bargaining power at global levels, which the single isolated religious entity may find challenging. The intensity of umbrella religious organisations and the broadness of being representational as all-inclusive movements are underscored in Wittberg (2012).

In Kenya, umbrella religious organisations include the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK), NCCCK, the Organization of African Independent Churches (OAIC), The Hindu Council of Kenya (HCK), the SUPKEM, National Muslim Forum (NAMLEF) Christian and Muslim Network (CAMNET), IRCK, the Program for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), among others. They operate at national and regional levels while remaining relationally linked to their local communities and members. They may be domiciled in significant cities or operate on a large scale regardless of geographical location. A cursory look at Kenya's recently engineered Religious Bill (2024) defines an umbrella religious organisation as a registered body comprising at least 25 religious organisations. This study was strategically situated within the ambit of these umbrella religious organisations because of their potential to cascade dialogues down to the regional and national levels while addressing the communities' pressing issues concerning women. They are better placed to engage at higher levels since they have the mosaic outlook and the general overview, which others lack. Christian-Muslim dialogue situates itself within the two world religions of Islam and Christianity; however, the fact that these two religions are neither monographs nor

all-inclusive prompted the current study on the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The world is yet to recover from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. If anything, the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore the deep-seated imbalance in the world. The socio-economic and political divide is destroying the global community, while gender inequalities within societies and world religions underscore the need for interreligious dialogue. Women, for instance, are the 'missing link' in formal interfaith dialogues (King, 1998). This is despite the existing robust frameworks and the internationally agreed standards and norms in policy, legal, and religious teachings and beliefs that uphold equality, diversity, and inclusivity.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2024), the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, policies that include the participation of all citizens guarantee social cohesion, peace, and the vitality of civil society. The Declaration was adopted in 2001 by the 31st session of the General Conference of UNESCO. Several instruments on international laws and regulations help underscore the necessity for women's participation in peacebuilding and their protection in times of conflict. On the other hand, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 2024) is an international legal instrument adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and it promotes women's and girls' equal rights. On October 31, 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 (UNSCR, 1325 (2000)) on women, peace, and security, following the recall of resolutions 1261, 1265, 1296, and 1314. The resolution acknowledged the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on

women and girls. Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase women's participation and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2024), also known as the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights, adopted in 1979, provides comprehensive rights for women and girls in Africa. The Protocol guarantees extensive rights to women, including the right to take part in political processes, to social and political equality with men, improved autonomy in their reproductive health decisions, and an end to harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, among others. The agenda 2063 and continental, regional, and national gender architectures envisage a non-sexist Africa, an Africa where girls and boys can reach their full potential and where men and women contribute equally to the development of their societies. By 2063, the goal is to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination (social, economic, and political) against women and girls, enabling them to enjoy their human rights entirely. Similarly, local country-specific concern for women in Kenya's most recently promulgated 2010 constitution puts forth the two-thirds gender rule. It underscores the need for women's involvement across various sectors.

The doctrinal framework in most world religions upholds inclusivity, unity in diversity, and equality. Christianity and Islam are no exceptions. Egalitarians believe that males and females were created equally without any hierarchy of roles, as God created both woman and man in his image and likeness: "So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them". Humanity has equal tasks of ruling and subduing all creatures (Genesis 1:28). Islam indicates the ideal

concept of equality and justice of gender in numerous verses such as Qur'ān Surah al Imran verse 195, "Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female: Ye are members, one of another", An-Nisa verse 124, and An- Nahl verse 97.

On the positive side, COVID-19 buttressed the central role of women as primary caregivers. Women spontaneously respond to issues first-hand. They start conversations informally and in small ways to broker peace and address conflict. As a result, they carry out unstructured and informal dialogues at grassroots levels which need to be better organised and translated into policy frameworks that can influence decision-making. Informality could explain the need for more scholarly focus on women's role in advancing Christian-Muslim dialogue. These are deep-seated issues that concern players in interreligious dialogue.

As researchers, it is essential to understand the larger picture of the interfaith movement and its perceived objective in achieving social change in the theory of Change and understand the experiences and voices of leaders and participants. Looking at how interreligious dialogue can achieve socio-political change, the theory of Change sets the precondition: "addressing a wide range of people" (multi-level engagement) and expanding their focus and reach (Neufeldt, 2011, p. 360). It is crucial to spotlight the dialogue and its achievement thus far. Today, dialogue is employed to promote collective learning, improve workplace democracy, resolve conflict, and much more. Women who are part of the religious community must become part of these conversations in interreligious dialogue in the search for a viable model of cooperation in building a human community. Harnessing women's potential in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue is crucial.

Lately, there have been attempts on the global scene to foster interreligious dialogue. King Abdullah International Centre for Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), Global Dialogue Forum, The Foundation for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Initiatives (FIIDI), and Initiatives of Change (IOC) are a few examples. The Kennedy Centre in Washington D.C. was a leader in bringing together Jews, Christians and Muslims in dialogue. In India, the practice of multilateral dialogues developed with Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. Pope John Paul II added his blessing to dialogue in 1986 (Assisi, 2024) when he invited religious leaders to pray for peace and explore ways to bring about a humane and religious goal, an interreligious experience that has been repeated annually in Rome, Kyoto, Warsaw, Bari, Malta, and many more places (García, 2017; Vatican News, 2024).

Interreligious bodies emerged to foster religious dialogue among the world religions (Scarboro Missions, 2024). The World's Parliament of Religions (1893), the World Muslim Congress (1926), the World Congress of Faiths (1936), the Muslim World League (1962), the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) in 1964, the World Council of Churches' Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (WCC-sub-unit), the United Religious Initiative (URI) in 1996, and A Common Word (ACW) are some examples of these interreligious bodies. Studying these groups and how they talk to each other about women's role in promoting interfaith dialogue would take a lot of time and space, which was beyond the scope of this study. However, a closer examination of 'A Common Word between Us and You (ACW), a letter from global Muslim community leadership representatives to global Christian church leadership, reveals the absence of women among the addressees. Women were not only

absent as signatories but also as recipients, denoting the exclusion and marginalisation of women from high levels of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

There has been a resurgence of religion-related conflicts and religiously motivated intolerance and violence in nearly all parts of the world (Bauma, 2007). Most interreligious dialogues have a specific impression within regional contexts. Examples include, the Jewish-Muslim dialogue in the Middle East, the Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Asia, and the Christian-Muslim dialogue in Africa.

In Europe, the post-war era in Bosnia and Herzegovina required interreligious dialogue platforms to help rebuild national identity as envisaged in enormous post-war changes, even though the changes upset gender relations and decreased women's access and participation in rebuilding the nation. In the post-war changes, women were among the 'ordinary people' who had conducted 'extraordinary' activities to bridge the gaps between Christianity and Islam conflict groups (Al-Qurtuby, 2013).

An outbreak of sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims in the city of Ambon, Indonesia, between 1999 and 2002 caused the death of at least 5000 people and displaced close to 700,000 others in the sub-continent of Africa. Indonesia's post-Suharto period was characterised by hundreds of inter- and intra-religious clashes and numerous instances of religious intolerance (Achmad, 2008; Siregar, 2016). There have been religion-related conflicts in Syria, Iraq, the West Bank and the Southern Philippines.

The African regional scenario is not different. Religious-related conflicts have occurred in Sudan, Nigeria, and the Central African Republic (CAR), among other regions, and there has been a resurgence of religious extremism. Interreligious dialogue banners partially deflect Nigeria's ethno-religious rifts between its Islamic north and Christian south. Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan (RSS) were significantly divided along religious lines that required interreligious dialogue. The same applies to the Central African Republic (CAR), where extreme views of Christianity and Islam were perceived to have been drivers in the social-political anarchy of the warring Seleka and anti-Balaka sects (Pew Research Centre, 2024). The intensity of religious rife in Africa requires that women join the forces to counter it in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The goal for women in their promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Africa could be different. It could be a shared search for a way to work together to build a community of Christians and Muslims that protect religious freedoms, treats everyone equally, and values differences and uniqueness. It is, therefore, critical to find ways to reduce acts of religiously motivated intolerance and violence. Increasing contact between members of religious groups, as hypothesised to induce positive attitudes towards the religious out-group, is one influential idea (Allport, 1954).

Interreligious dialogues at the national level are designed to address local and national concerns. Most of these may result in the formation of interreligious initiatives, platforms, or councils. The National Advisory Councils of Religious Affairs (NACRA) or Interreligious Councils (IRC) represent the countries' religious entities. They sometimes advise the ruling governments in South Sudan, Nigeria, and Kenya.

Kenya has not experienced religious violence, even though tensions between Christians and Muslims have been evident, as witnessed in church/mosque attacks. The question of Christian-Muslim relations remained insignificant until the 1998 United States (US) Embassy terrorist bombing in Nairobi. There has been more heightened attention as a result of radicalisation since 2010 and violent extremism, which divide Kenyans along religious lines. However, the report by Isiolo County Action Plan, 2018-2022, on radicalization, violent extremism and interreligious dialogue in Kenya is championed by men. According to Wandera (2011), in Kenya, Christians and Muslims attempt to build interreligious relations through *mihadhara*—religious public debates. However, these are mainly organised by self-appointed Muslims and Christian preachers who may not be a representation of the community. Open public spaces in pockets of Christian and Muslim predominance, like Eastleigh, Mumias, and Mombasa, host *Mihadahra* performances. These do not reflect the participation of women either as protagonists or passive 'out-group' audiences, despite their potential to dialogue. Therefore, the question of women's promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya requires adequate attention.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Women have the potential to dialogue, yet their gap is evident in interreligious dialogue. Umbrella religious organisations champion Christian-Muslim dialogue and tend to be all-inclusive and representational. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1323 (2000) and other legal, doctrinal, and international frameworks demand that different parties involved in resolving conflicts and building peace take gender perspectives into account. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity Policies for the Inclusion and Participation of All Citizens guarantees social cohesion. However,

the lacuna of women in dialogue is more palpable at high levels of formal interreligious dialogue. Nonetheless, the international legal framework on freedom of religion and belief guards against religious discrimination and upholds equality, diversity, and inclusivity policies.

In Kenya, women face marginalisation and exclusion from Christian-Muslim dialogue (National Commission on Gender and Equality Commission, 2013). The Bill of Rights Article 32 of Kenya's 2010 Constitution provides freedom of religion and belief and prohibits discrimination. Women, however, participate in informal dialogue at the grassroots levels. Informal dialogue is not well organised. Informal dialogue is fragmented and lacks proper coordination to influence decision-making. Women's contributions are not felt and there is need to document them. However, why are women excluded and marginalised from dialogue? Could it be because of the strategies used in interreligious dialogue? Is it theological underpinnings? Or could it be culture and gender-restrictive norms? Moreover, how can women's participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue be enhanced? This study sought to assess women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with regard to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya.

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

This study sought to:

1. Examine the frameworks for women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations.
2. Examine the role of women in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya.

3. Assess the impact of women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya.
4. Investigate challenges facing women in their participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

1. What are the frameworks for women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya?
2. What is the role of women in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya?
3. What is the impact of women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya?
4. What are the challenges to the participation of women in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya?

#### **1.5. Study Assumptions**

1. Umbrella religious organisations provide a basic framework for women's promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya.
2. Women are willing to promote Christian-Muslim dialogue.
3. Participation of women in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue increases awareness of gender perspectives in interreligious dialogue.
4. There is an overall consciousness of women's incapability to dialogue that challenges women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in umbrella religious organisations in Kenya.

## **1.6. Justification and Significance of the Study**

Today, interreligious dialogue builds interfaith relations and understanding while dismantling stereotypes and misconceptions (United States Institute of Peace, 2002). However, there has not been much research on how women in Christianity and Islam contribute to the advancement of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. Oseje (2021) study focuses on converting Christian women to Islam and its implications for witnessing in Kendu Bay. Women and Christianity, therefore, become objects of research and not subjects of study, thus decentring them. Kamau's (2013) study is on Christian-Muslim dialogue with particular reference to Pentecostals and Muslims in Nairobi. Alio (2015) examines the bridging factors and persisting challenges for Kenyan Christian-Muslim relations without regard for women.

Interreligious discourses and scholarship have yet to tell women's stories. There was a need for this gap to be filled. Women's networks continue to influence society today, drawing it closer together and strengthening the ties between diverse people as essential resources; women could play important roles in preventing conflict and promoting dialogue. Women's discourses could help popularise the UNSCR 1325 (2000), which asks everyone involved in preventing conflict and building peace to take a gender perspective into account. Gender perspective includes supporting local women's peace initiatives and indigenous ways of resolving disputes and including women in all the ways that peace agreements are implemented. The resolution urges the Secretary-General to furnish Member States with training guidelines and materials that address women's protection, rights, and specific needs. It also emphasises the significance of including women in all peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities, and it urges all parties involved in armed conflict to implement specific measures to safeguard women

and girls from gender-based violence. Documenting these efforts in Christian-Muslim dialogue could aid in evaluating the extent of women's involvement in interreligious dialogue, thereby enhancing the body of knowledge that practitioners can utilise to encourage more women to participate.

Advocating for women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue spaces is a worthy discourse. Interfaith movements address each other's concerns. What are the connections between women, who are 'others' by their sex and gender roles, and the work of women to build bridges with religious others? Practitioners of interfaith dialogue firmly believe that the interfaith movement will benefit from an intimate exploration of the experiences and perceptions of women who act as leaders and participants in peace and relationship-building movements. Such an examination of women's experiences, told through their voices, is keen to the goals and purposes of dialogue.

When employed as a tool or strategic practice, interfaith dialogue may facilitate discussions to combat intolerance, hate speech and discrimination. Interreligious trust and respect through bilateral and multilateral dialogues and regional and cross-cultural encounters may foster peace and tranquillity. Some tools may be spiritual disciplines such as joint prayer, study of scriptures, witnessing, and mediation. Other tools may be less specifically religious. In the spirit of peace and tranquillity in the context of global religious plurality, including women in interreligious dialogue is a timely endeavour to enhance and consolidate efforts for enhanced, more significant impact. The data gathered from leaders on effective strategies for women's participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue may be used to design mechanisms to respond to the lacuna of

women's exclusion in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Interreligious dialogue is pedagogically a critical educational approach that can help students develop skills such as empathy, respect, tolerance, listening and identifying commonalities.

### **1.7. Scope and Limitation of the Study**

Interreligious dialogue encompasses a broad range of fields. To achieve the set goals within the stipulated time, this study focused on Christian and Muslim women and their participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue, with reference to the umbrella religious organisations in Kenya. In some cases, Christian-Muslim dialogue encounters have been plagued by turmoil resulting from polemics. This study focused on positive and structured dialogue encounters between Christian and Muslim women. However, the researcher made generalised assumptions about interreligious dialogue.

Christianity and Islam are vast groups with major and minor subdivisions within them. Christianity's major subdivisions are Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. Islam's significant divisions are *Sunni* and *Shia*. This study was conducted only among selected umbrella religious organisations. The umbrella religious organisations represented Christian and Muslim groupings, and within Christianity are ecumenical organisations that work towards their unity. The umbrella religious organisations have a high potential to participate in interreligious dialogue, unlike ordinary groups of believers who patronise mosques and churches.

Just like any other significant research, the study had potential limitations. The primary limitation to generalising the study results was the qualitative research data, which could not be generalised. However, the researcher used quantitative data to measure the validity of the obtained data.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided context for the study's focus on women in interreligious dialogue and their participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. The background provided the rationale for the study, highlighting the need for women to promote Christian-Muslim dialogue in light of the prevailing global conflicts and the desire for peace. Also discussed in the chapter was the critical statement on the problem of the gap in women's participation in interreligious dialogue in the selected religious umbrella organisations. The study provided an overview of research questions with hypothetical answers.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.0. Introduction**

This chapter reviewed the literature on women's participation in interreligious dialogue, identifying research gaps and demonstrating how the study addressed them. It reviewed interreligious dialogue framework discourses about women's involvement in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. Further, the researcher reviewed the participation of women in the formal and informal dialogue levels. The review helped to answer the research questions relating to the role of women in their involvement in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. The review weighed in on women's contributions to determine the impact of their participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. Moreover, the literature reviewed the challenges for women's involvement in Christian-Muslim dialogue promotion. The last part of the chapter illustrated the conceptual framework and how it helped guide the study.

### **2.1. Literature Review**

#### **2.1.1. Conceptualizing the Interreligious Dialogue Framework**

The study used the term framework to refer to the support system underlying women's participation in interreligious dialogue. The researcher reviewed Christian and Muslim religious communities' teachings, practices, and views in order to establish the framework for women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. A review of the existing legal instruments, international standards, and norms deemed appropriate for the study were also reviewed against Kenya's Christian-Muslim dialogue study context. The section begins by contextualizing women in inter-religious dialogue while interrogating scholarly views on the participation of women in their

promotion of inter-religious dialogue. The second part reviews legal policies, instruments, norms, and standards that give prominence to women's potential to dialogue. The last part reviewed Kenya's interreligious dialogue context.

### **i) Contextualizing Women in Interreligious Dialogue**

The institutionalized studies on interreligious dialogue, including the *post-Nostra Aetate* discourses, envisage interreligious dialogue as 'to talk and listen to the world' (García, 2017). Such studies have fostered a theology of religions and plurality (Amalados, 2017; Küng, 1997). Küng (1997) affirms that there can be no peace in the world without peace among religions. Therefore, peace is a component of interreligious dialogue, typically from the dialogue between religions. Dialogue among religions is an aspect that interested the current study as the basis for fostering peace due to women's participation in promoting interreligious dialogue. Where religions live and let live is where they foster peace. Thus, academic enquiries into interreligious dialogue have flourished today, and women's dimensions in interfaith dialogue are being explored.

Eboo (2013) and Nielson (2004) demonstrate that examining the theology of religions within the framework of interreligious dialogue needs to be revised, as it rationalizes itself as an academic discipline within institutionalized organizations. Negative evaluations of this dialogue must be taken seriously, as they reflect personal frustrations. But what does a study on the theology of religions mean to women in their promotion of interreligious dialogue? It is observed that, too often, dialoguers in institutionalized dialogue studies have adopted the style of academic seminars. The participants gather in a plenary as an assembly for long hours in a conference, eliciting

some form of elitism and a group of professional dialoguers. It has been noticed that this could lead to the exclusion and marginalization of women who aren't in formal positions of religious leadership or who haven't been trained in theological seminaries as religious scholars because of cultural and spiritual traditions that make it hard for them to do so.

Svare (2019) defines dialogue in more general terms as theoretical or practical conversations conforming to specific standards and ideals, like fairness and openness, with a unique capacity to realize significant organizational and societal goals. Novak (1989) notes that dialogue in the context of interfaith dialogue should be open, honest, and based on a shared commitment to God and the world. Svare's definition doesn't match up with this. In the context of Christian-Muslim dialogue, Opeloye and Yahya (2004) as well as Mbillah (2004a) define dialogue as an intentional, structured encounter between Christians and Muslims, albeit with a more specific focus. The emphases in the definitions are in the *structure, form* and *intentions* of interreligious dialogue.

Interreligious dialogue, generally defined, gives a dimension to all-encompassing aspects of dialogue. The general definition provides a framework for focusing on dialogue participants, their content, methods, forms, and goals, thereby introducing women as participants in a dialogue that is specific and exclusive; some insights were gained in the study on the peculiarity of women's methods and contributions. However, women are not a homogenous group, and their lives vary depending on the place in which they live, (Piette, 2023), as well as their age, social class, ethnic origin, and

religion, as postulated by Khan and Suriseti (2022). This study took cognizance of the social location of women.

Unless there is a more focused study on the specific group category of women, it remains unclear how policies such as inclusivity and gender equity impact different groups of people, more so if they are not spearheaded by someone who looks and sounds like them. But it is easy to understand why people don't relate to policies that represent them or why they aren't involved in the making of policies. Studies conducted by the Children and Young People Evidence Bank (2020) have recently raised general consciousness about the need to disaggregate seemingly homogenous groups. This study focused on Christian and Muslim women in umbrella religious organizations and their participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

A review of studies conducted by Fletcher (2013), O'Neill (2015), Cornille and Maxey (2013), as well as Jacobsh (2006) on women in interreligious dialogue examine the place and role of women as a disaggregated group, with distinct concerns for women only, and less consideration is given to integration and cross-sectional themes. These tend to affect women specifically and society as a whole. This approach needs to be revised, too, as it introduces compartmentalization of groups of people and themes. The current study looked at how women's participation affected the bigger goals of interreligious dialogue, like fostering understanding between Christians and Muslims, ending conflicts, and building peace, as well as addressing what is perceived as women's only concerns.

## **ii) Women's Involvement at the Formal and Informal Levels of Inter-religious Dialogue**

Allwood et al. (2000) indicate that dialogue is rooted at two levels; public civic engagements (at high levels) and personal, pastoral, and spiritual (at grassroots levels), where questions about one's own religious or spiritual identity about others are brought to the fore. The two levels are also underscored in the dialogue self-theory of Hermans (2010). Anderson et al. (2003) propose that bilateral and multicultural public engagements in dialogue may be equated to the parliamentary model of interreligious dialogue. It happens among top religious leaders. However, these circumstances do not prompt a study on the role of women in the parliamentary model, a gap that the current study aimed to fill. Both Christianity and Islam traditionally merged religious leaders and religious scholars into one. In Islam, religious leaders or scholars, called *Ulama*, have studied and are experts in different aspects of Islam, such as Sharia, Hadith, or Qur'ānic recitation. Further, the *Ulama (scholars)* are the public leaders and imams who tend to lead mosque congregational prayers. According to Aslan et al. (2020), the *Ulama* have historically played the role of those who interpreted God's speech. Thus, many of the interpretations are devoid of women's perspectives. The *Ulama* were not authoritative because of who they were as individuals or their lineage but because of their Islamic law and theology expertise. They explained what scripture meant, issued *fatwa* (formal rulings on a particular point of law) and played an essential role in applying Islamic law in pre-modern times. The idea that the *Ulama* were male religious professionals or mosque clergy is a modern phenomenon. In Islamic history, the *Ulama* were judges, market inspectors, scribes, prayer leaders, and public educators, providing more inclusivity regarding women.

In Christianity, the clergy (scholars) are unlike lay readers. The clergy hold official positions within the church, such as bishop, priest, or deacon. The laity are members of the church who are part of the congregation or other affiliates who are not ordained as official church leaders. The clergy are formal leaders within established religions. Their roles and functions vary. Historically, traditional religions often integrate religious elements, and given their public status, the clergy must advocate or demand for a better life. Since the top leadership in Christianity and Islam is still largely patriarchal, the parliamentary model of Christian-Muslim dialogue tends to be elitist, excluding women's participation. The study on the involvement of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue went beyond the few expert-oriented Christian-Muslim dialogue by focusing on the demographic dividends of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue; hence, women were drawn into the matrix to increase the impact.

Feminist theologies and African womanist theologians have widely discussed the notions of patriarchy in Christianity and Islam. Oduyoye (1995) writes about the sexism that existed in Africa, where women's discrimination exists. Mombo and Joziase (2022) strive to deconstruct gendered *vumilia* (perseverance) theology in times of the gender-based violence pandemic. They aim to demonstrate the profound engrailment of patriarchy in Christianity. Dube (2024) observes that Christianity has entrenched patriarchy in the African social and spiritual worldview. This development legitimizes the marginalization of African women in Christian-Muslim dialogue, which was an area of focus for the current study.

The patriarchy situation is no different in Christianity than it is in Islam. Aslan et al. (2013) enlist the new voices of women theologians who echo sentiments on patriarchy

in Islam. Mernissi (2004), for instance, demonstrates how it is not the Islamic texts themselves but their interpretations that have allowed patriarchal traditions to persist. According to Mernissi (2004), the roots of female subjugation in the Islamic world do not lie in Islam but in the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic ethics and beliefs. For Mernissi (2004), Islam was always defined and interpreted by men, and the theological class that provided lengthy commentaries on the Qur'ān and the Hadith were all men interested in defending patriarchy.

Nthamburi (1991) observes that interreligious dialogue has been restricted *to a few formal meetings* and contact. Dialogue in public civic engagements assumes religious diplomacy at an international level of bilateral or multilateral relations (Cox, 2003; Danan, 2012). It goes hand in hand with a dialogue of religious scholars (Swindler, 2013) or simply a dialogue of theologians of different faiths (Tyagananda, 2011). The current study on the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue went beyond the few expert-oriented Christian-Muslim dialogues by focusing on the demographic dividends of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

King (1998) postulates that high-level interreligious dialogue assumes an ivory tower and elitist outlook. It is 'expert oriented' as it does not consider everyday encounters by everyone, thus excluding women's experiences. At these levels, the values of inclusivity and representation are challenged. Some people may not be allowed to speak on behalf of their religions. However, the lighter side of high-level interreligious dialogue is its considerable success in building international relations and religious harmony among world religions.

Studies by Eboo (2016), Achmad (2008), and Lebow (2009) located the second level of interreligious dialogue at a personal, pastoral, and spiritual dimension. The dialogue occurs at the level where individuals from diverse professions engage with their respective religious theologies. It tends to be poorly organized and unstructured, involving ordinary people of different faiths at the grassroots levels.

This study found that while women's unstructured methods and content in promoting interreligious dialogue may resonate with this model, this model cannot make and influence fundamental decisions, policies, and procedures. It takes on an "activist model" with a mainly civic view in the public sphere to deal with public issues at more localized levels (grassroots) that are very practical (diapraxis). The third study objective, which focused on women's roles in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue, investigated evidence of diapraxis activities for women's peace dialogue initiatives and their participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. Diapraxis among Christians and Muslims is underscored in several studies.

Mvumbi (2009) and Langas (2008) show interfaith dialogue as a culture of working together (diapraxis). Forums for exchange and diapraxis have been rays of hope for dialogue. Diapraxis involves a lot of hard that is practical work. It is about setting out hands-on tools to conduct a dialogue. The assertion is that diapraxis reveals all that is said, unsaid and sayable. According to Dickens (2006), diapraxis refers to two people engaging in everyday life even when there is no common ground. Bauma (2016) affirms diapraxis as the power of 'walking conversations' and adds that, "there is something about walking and talking that is dissimilar to sitting for dialogue, maybe its full inclusion of our bodies". The researcher sought evidence of diapraxis activities for

women's peace dialogue initiatives and participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya.

The researcher established that the experiences of women peace practitioners were replicative, albeit not explicitly under the auspices of interreligious dialogue. Juma (2000) writes specifically on Rose Barmasai, who, while engaging other women across the religious divide in Kenya, worked on the peace issues in the Rift Valley. Barmasai's work was done under the umbrella organization of the National Council of Churches of Kenya. Another example is the work of peace laureate Wangari Maathai, who focused on environmental justice, and Dekha Ibrahim, who worked among the Muslim and pastoral communities of the North-eastern region. According to the researcher, however, much of these women's work in peacebuilding initiatives does not assume an interreligious dialogue model. It needs to be more cohesive, having not been institutionalized in umbrella religious organizations. This study investigated these women's initiatives and found that women were involved substantively at informal grassroots levels.

In this section, we've broken down interreligious dialogue into two levels: i) public civic engagements at high diplomatic levels and ii) personal, pastoral, and spiritual interreligious dialogue at the local level. There is bipartisan exclusivism and marginalization of women and men in the two levels. When women are underrepresented, they feel marginalized at high levels of interreligious dialogue. Religious scholars and top religious leaders are excluded from informal interreligious dialogue at the local grassroots level. The study showed a gap between the high (ivory tower) and low (grassroots) levels of interreligious dialogue. New interreligious dialogue strategies are needed to close this gap by creating mixed

dialogue strategies, which are not only cross-sectional but also intergenerational, and were recommended as one of the alternative dialogue strategies in the current study.

### **iii) Legal Framework Supporting Participation of Women in Dialogue**

Existing policies, norms and international standards provide the basis for promoting women's potential in interreligious dialogue. For instance, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) suggests that the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace, and Security' should address the multiple levels of discrimination that women face. It is essential to include women of faith and female interfaith dialogue initiatives in building peace because women of faith face various types of oppression (Egnell, 2003, p. 117), and discrimination based on multiple levels of identification is a leading cause of human rights violations. The UNSCR 1325 underscores the prominent role of women in peacebuilding. It urges different stakeholders to increase the participation of women in peacebuilding processes while considering women's unique needs during times of conflict. The resolution recognizes that women bear most of the effects during times of war. This study investigated the untapped potential of women in interfaith dialogue initiatives to facilitate peace and cohesive societies through Christian-Muslim dialogue. The study established that women contribute to interreligious dialogue in subtle yet numerous ways, often in unique and unpublicized ways. Most women's contributions, however, have not influenced policies at national levels because of the nature of the informal dialogues that are unstructured and undocumented.

Researchers have often highlighted that women appear to have an inherently 'peaceable' character (Boulding, 2000) that makes them more pacifist than men (Tessler & Warriner, 1997, pp. 250-281). The debate on the Women and Peace Hypothesis (WPH)

discusses the viewpoint that women are more oriented towards peace and are more cooperative in negotiations than men. This hypothesis has been criticized for its limited empirical verification and the inherent binary gender system perpetuated by the WPH. The study findings raised the question of the unique 'peaceable' character of women of faith and female interfaith initiatives. The current study revealed that women participate in interreligious dialogue not just in their own right as women but also make unique contributions as women to interfaith dialogue.

A "sustainable and just peace is a holistic task that includes multiple actors, activities, and institutions at multiple levels". Global, regional, and national human rights bodies have recognized the importance of women's inclusion in peace processes and are addressing this issue. The Beijing Platform for Action, which came out of the Fourth World Conference on Women, UNSC Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace, and Security," the Maputo Protocol, Agenda 63, and Kenya's Two-Thirds Gender Rule all aim to enable more women to get involved in conflict resolution and making decisions. Studying women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue was, therefore, a deliberate attempt to dissect the persisting lacuna of women in interreligious dialogue. The study focused more on women in interfaith dialogue while bringing to the limelight the possible challenges facing women's effective participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Analyses of women's activism in conflict settings, specifically in Israel and Liberia, have revealed that women's activism tends to occur at the community- or grassroots levels. However, statistical research on the role of women in building peace shows that their participation in peace negotiations is essential to the outcome and, by extension, to long-term peace. As inclusiveness enhances the sustainability of peace efforts,

including women of faith and female interfaith initiatives in Christian-Muslim dialogue could improve the chances of sustainable peace. The current study helped to build a case for women's potential in interreligious dialogue. It was indicative in the third objective of the study on the impact of women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue that the contribution of women is not limited to 'feminine' arguments or encounters of only women. Still, that interreligious dialogue is a path that men and women must accomplish together as they try to address issues plaguing the society in which they are intrinsically interconnected.

The National Council of Churches International Conference Report in 1987 on *'Christian Presence and Witness Concerning Muslim Neighbour's* in Mombasa at Kanamai underscored Christian women's potential in interreligious dialogue. The Conference and the Central Committee recommended that more efforts be made to draw Christian and Muslim women into dialogue with each other and their fuller participation in dialogue encounters. The first International Conference of Muslim Women in 1981 in the Philippines, which brought together over 200 Muslim women representatives from Middle Eastern countries, Asia, and North Africa, echoed similar sentiments. One of the main concerns was the Christian-Muslim conflict.

The conference resolved that Muslim women should seek dialogue with Christian women (Philippines Studies, 1983). The same conference noted that, though not fully explored, women's participation in promoting interreligious dialogue could employ unique methods. For instance, the interreligious marriages implied in tribal societies of Mizo women in India could foster interreligious dialogue (Vanlatalani, 2011). The current study showed similar parallels in the area of Mumias in the Western part of Kenya, where not only interfaith marriages are witnessed but blood ties across families

with mixed religions of Islam, Christianity and African traditional Religions (s) play prominent roles in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

#### **iv) Kenya's Christian-Muslim Dialogue Framework**

Swartz (2013, p. 10) says that theological works by African theologians like Mbiti (1990), Mugambi (1995), Magesa (2014) and Bujo (1998) support the idea of community as an absolute religious or theological category in Kenya. Christians and Muslims see themselves from the perspective of a community. The 'theology of reconstruction' by Mugambi (2020) provides a helpful framework for analysing texts of a socio-political nature. The theology of reconstruction encourages Africans to collaborate in finding solutions to their social, economic, and political challenges in building their nations. Scholarly and popular writers may not all agree with the theology of reconstruction. Still, the idea of religious involvement in building the country socially, economically, and politically gave the study a pointer on how women could help promote dialogue between different religions.

However, Kubai (2004) observes very little interaction between church leadership and Muslim leadership communities on such matters as interreligious dialogue in Kenya. The current study confirmed this, indicating that Christians and Muslims did not organize themselves into interfaith dialogue, instead they focus on evangelism and *da'wah* outreach or mission. Both Christians and Muslims objectified each other's encounters for mission and evangelism aligning Jose's (2014) and Twibell's (2020) views of interfaith dialogue as a mode of evangelism.

Hermeneutical discourses geared towards mission and evangelism as opposed to interreligious dialogue drive the rift further between these two communities of

Christians and Muslims in Kenya. Muslims are to be won to Christ by highlighting obstacles which prevent them from converting to Christianity; the Christian view that the gospel is God's final self-disclosure and other religions are reflections of a fallen humanity serve to worsen an already worse situation. This argument implies that with appropriate methodology and a firm dependence upon the Holy Spirit, Muslims could be saved. Studying Islam and having the zeal to win Muslims' faith in Christ should strengthen a compelling mission for Muslims. The Christian evangelistic view of interreligious dialogue contends that Christian-Muslim dialogue should be apologetic in order to win Muslims to Christ. By centring women as subjects of study, this study enhanced non-objectification of women in the context of their involvement in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Mazrui (2006) discourses make meaning out of Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya by acknowledging that Muslims have regarded Christianity with high esteem. Muslim men are encouraged to marry Christians as long as the offspring are brought up in Islamic teaching as guided by the 'ecumenical' principle of *ahl al-kitab* (people of the book), which regards relationships of Muslims with Christians and Jews. Christian-Muslim marriages in Kenya exemplify this, adhering to the tolerance principle of *Ialkraha fid-din*, which emphasizes the absence of religious compulsion. The analysis borders on an interpretive framework for enhancing Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya. Mazrui asserts a division in the Muslim worldview between the *dar-al-Islam* (house of Islam), where Muslims rule and enforce Sharia, and the *dar-al-harb* (house of war), where the rest of the world either adopts Islam or submits to Sharia. There is little exploration of interfaith marriages in Kenya in Mazrui's arguments; this would have helped leverage the current study on women's participation in the promotion of

Christian-Muslim dialogue. It provided the basis or framework for women's involvement in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Omar (2009) agrees with Kubai (2004) that there has not been much interreligious dialogue in Kenya; mainly, what brought Christians together were issues other than religion. Writing in the context of the then-ravaging religious extremism in Kenya, Omar (2015) observes that there are failures in tackling the challenge of radicalization and violent extremism due to a lack of religious dialogue among Christian and Muslim communities and leadership. Unlike Omar (2015), Kubai (2004) shows collaborative efforts between Christians and Muslims even though the two authors have a generational gap. Both Omar (2015) and Kubai (2004) pay little attention to the subject of women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. The current study revealed women's robust participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue at the informal level.

Further, Kubai (2004) opines that whenever there is a state function, different religious traditions offer prayers for the nation for peace and stability. Christians and Muslims interact at various levels and jointly participate in diapraxis development projects in the spirit of '*Harambee*'- pooling the resources together. However, few incidences have developed in some town centres in Christian and Muslim-predominant areas such as Nairobi's Eastleigh and Mumias, where freelance Christian and Muslim preachers have had confrontational arguments on their different sermons; at one time, the police had to intervene. Kateregga and Shenk's (2011) studies in the same area show that the problems Christians and Muslims face are very serious and profound. They bring up fundamental questions about life that may be painful but are necessary to understand both faiths. The study delved into some of the issues. For instance, the study addressed

inclusivity issues and the fundamental question of gender parities in women's participation in interreligious dialogue.

### **2.1.2 The Role of Women in Interreligious Dialogue**

Women's participation in the promotion of interreligious dialogue is two-fold. First, there are differences in doctrinal and theological perspectives between women and men in faith communities, underscoring the need for 'feminine arguments' in interreligious dialogue. Panikkar (1999) discusses that 'it is impossible to disregard personal religious beliefs to empathize with another culture,' thus underscoring women's gnosis in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Secondly, apart from feminine arguments in Christian-Muslim dialogue, "women contribute to Christian-Muslim dialogue in their own right". Women in interreligious contexts need not to restrict themselves to feminine themes and arguments since the issues they face are many and they cut across gender. For instance, empirical research (Furseth & Repstad, 2017, p. 190) has shown that women have higher attendance at religious ceremonies and more positive attitudes towards religion, which we may harness to exploit women's potential in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Hackett et al. (2016) studies reveal that 83.4 % of women worldwide are affiliated with religion, in contrast to 79.9% of men. Given the high number of religiously affiliated women, one could assume equal representation of women and men in religious leadership roles and inter-religious dialogues. However, current studies have showed a skewed graphical representation of women and men in leadership in Islam and Christianity. This in turn has challenged women's participation by a mean of 1.18

compared to other challenges of knowledge (1.68) and gender (1.08) in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Fletcher (2013) and Smock (2002) support the inclusion of women's voices in inter-religious dialogue and indicate that, as women's voices and experiences are incorporated into inter-religious dialogue, we begin to see a more dynamic construction of "the religions". This resultant feature, however, still needs to be explored in Fletcher's discourses. According to Fletcher, the impact of a more dynamic construction of religions reveals that the dialogue project operates on a slippery surface, and any gains in understanding may have an unsettling undertone when gender is considered.

Fletcher looks at three different models of inter-religious dialogue, namely the parliament, activist, and storytelling models, that demonstrate this fluidity and why women's voices matter in the dialogue of religions. However, the current study aimed to establish a connection between the three models of the parliament, which represent formal interreligious dialogue. The study discovered that incorporating women's stories and experiences into interreligious dialogue models introduces an unsettling undercurrent of balanced and imbalanced perspectives on their participation. Gender complex dynamics in religious construction begin to emerge. Women's perspectives bring a freshness to interreligious dialogue that religions have never experienced.

Babacan (2013) observes that gender is socially constructed and is one of social theory's most complex and essential concepts. Yet, women and gender studies are inherently interdisciplinary. Gender assigns men and women characteristics such as roles, tasks, functions, and roles in public and private life. It determines what is expected, permitted, and valued in men and women in specific contexts. These permeate religious contexts,

which may affect women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Gender studies is a field which focuses on gender identity and gendered representation as central categories of analysis. In contrast, women's studies are a field that focuses on the roles, experiences, and achievements of women in society. How women have helped promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims taught us about their role and impact. The current study showed an in-depth view of how gender, sex, and sexuality affect social relationships in interreligious dialogue. The study revealed an interplay of inter-sectionalism between gender, faith and women as cross-cutting in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

### **2.1.3 The Impact of Women in Interreligious Dialogue**

In her most influential work, 'Mending a Torn World: Women in Interreligious Dialogue', O'Neill (2006) demonstrates that women's methods and content, previously absent from interreligious dialogues, hold the key to unlocking a peaceful world. Cornille and Maxey (2013) concur with O'Neill (2006) demonstrating that there needs to be more research on women in interreligious dialogue. O'Neill (2006) explores women's self-understanding in specific religions and their participation in various aspects of interfaith dialogue. Cornille and Maxey (2013) emphasize women's dialogue's interpersonal and practical nature and recommend it for adoption and simulation. Nevertheless, an essential aspect of the ideological dialogue needs to be included in both works. These two authors further disenfranchise the interreligious dialogue by breaking it down into its parts. Grung (2004) proposes a movement from compartmentalization to remedy the disenfranchised nature of interfaith dialogue, which resonated with the current study, although she sees that as a complexity. The

study revealed that Christian-Muslim dialogue validated the restriction of women to sexual and reproductive roles.

Anderson et al. (2003), Cissna and Anderson (1998) as well as Pearce and Pearce (2003) studies argue that women bring *unique perspectives* — emphasis mine — to interreligious dialogue. They have abstracted women's dialogue in peace studies and conflict resolution. The field of peace and security studies (PAS) observes that soft approaches are similar to the methods and contents women use in peacebuilding. Thus, they provide an answer to the frequently asked question about women's role in promoting interreligious dialogue, specifically the unique contributions women can make.

Smith (2007) explores the perspectives and contributions of women in Asian contexts, positing that Asian women in interreligious marriages contribute significantly to interreligious dialogue. The researcher considered these aspects in the current study. The study notes the almost similar underpinnings of interreligious marriages in Kenya, particularly in Mumias, where Christians and Muslims peacefully co-exist. Smith's (2013) research dedicates an entire chapter to 'New Dimensions', exploring various methods of interfaith dialogue, the resources available for such conversations, and the contributions women make to these dialogues, along with their reasons.

The current study, however, focused on women's contributions to interreligious dialogue in the Kenyan context to try and establish if there are any similarities with other contexts. The study also focused on women's rights as participants in promoting interreligious dialogue, regardless of their contributions is because, first, conditioning women for interreligious dialogue may prove counterproductive in their effort to enhance women's participation in interreligious dialogue. Second, sometimes,

measuring impact may require a long time, and the best way to gauge women's contributions to interreligious dialogue may be to imagine women's absence from interreligious dialogue.

According to Bijfeld (1998), Christian-Muslim encounters are necessary because of Christians and Muslims' scriptural persuasion. Christians must seek to meet Muslims and vice versa to understand their near-similar yet conflicting faiths. Ahiokhai's (2016) studies reveal that encounters between Christians and Muslims can manifest as either sympathetic contact or hostile conflict, highlighting the intricate nature of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The current study, however, focused on positive encounters of Christian and Muslim dialogue done in an open and non-persuasive manner in an environment of mutual respect while determining aspects of women's promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The studies by Cardoza-Orlandi (2015), Bohm et al. (2004), and Burbules et al. (1991) show that research into interreligious dialogue indicates that women need to be involved in this type of dialogue, which is based on multicultural and diversity studies of humanity. Further, specific findings of the same studies indicated that the more diverse the interests of a group with many different stakeholders, the more cultural differences and assumptions and beliefs there are. The higher the hierarchical levels of power differences, the less likely a common understanding will be realized, and the more essential it is to use dialogue to succeed.

The current study recommends a variety of groups within Christians and Muslims, highlighting the hierarchical nature of both Christianity and Islam. It posits women as a diverse group of their own, though most often, they are generalized as a homogenous group while focusing on Christian and Muslim women and the strands within them.

Levinas's (1986) study on "The Ethics of the Other" shows how important ethics are in interreligious dialogue by looking at the encounter with the other person as a unique relationship, epiphany, and encounter with the other person, in which both their closeness and farthest proximity are strategically felt. Levinas's thoughts on 'self' were traditionally held as men were accepted as the dominant power or the self and women as the second other sex or the 'Other'. On the other hand, Levinas (1986) emphasizes the importance of a proper relationship between the self and the 'Other', which leads to the creation of the 'essential we' or common cosmos, which each individual contributes to through speech and social interactions (Martin, 2005). The concept of the ethics of the religious other is of interest to the current study on women as the 'Other' in Christian-Muslim dialogue. The current study discovered that women complemented men in the ethics of the religious other.

Stoke's (2010) study observes that women's voices in interfaith movements have been distantly present since the first World Parliament of Religions in 1893 and the blossoming of the women's rights movement that has been taking place since the second World Parliament of Religions in 1993. O'Neill (2006: 60), a philosopher who writes about women in the interfaith movement, agrees that "women all over the globe are demonstrating a growing determination to be actors who participate in shaping society rather than remaining victims". The current study recommended further research on how women are faring today in local and international interfaith dialogue organizations.

Stoke (2010, p. 104) maintains, that women are crossing boundaries that have traditionally divided people. However, the study does not provide specific details about the boundaries where women make positive contributions. Instead, it affirms that despite the significant contributions made by women, interfaith groups tend to replicate,

rather than reform, existing gender power dynamics in the larger society. Deductively, men typically take on formal local leadership roles and are often the formal representatives for their faiths in international interfaith conferences. Women were primarily involved in informal local grassroots dialogues.

Scholars such as O'Neill (2006) emphasise the necessity of addressing women's particular experiences due to the difference between women's and men's interfaith experiences. According to Teague's (2011) research, experience is mediated not only by time and location but also by the subject's gender. Thus, the first feminist critique of the epistemological endeavour consists of recognising that men's experience is different from women's experience. If we consider male experience to represent human experience, the resulting theories, concepts, and methodologies could distort human social life and thought. What men know is what we know. Not only are the experiences that underlie our knowledge different for men and women, but the reasoning process by which these experiences become integrated into our knowledge is also differentiated by gender. The preceding arguments underscored the need to study the aspects of women's promotion of interreligious dialogue. The current study showed that female interfaith initiatives use interfaith dialogue and religion to build peace and bridges between faith communities, thus reaching out to an untapped potential of peace efforts.

King (1998) notes that while women frequently perform significant work, such as serving on boards, they rarely hold formal top leadership positions in religions. This study revealed that the lack of women's formal leadership, in addition to the lack of academic and professional attention to women's participation and leadership, points to an essential area for growth and maturation in the interfaith movement. But why are women capable in all areas except for top leadership that are conduits to their

participation in the promotion of interreligious dialogue? The current study recommended research that focuses on women doing interfaith work, and particularly the phenomenon of "otherness" involved in both interreligious and feminist work, as both feminism and interfaith work seek to address questions of how to deal with the Other - be it the religious other or the sexual, gendered other.

Henderson (2006) suggests a way of naming women's social change work that she calls "women's mode of ethical action". Henderson's research raises interesting points about women in the interfaith movement. How do women doing interfaith work connect their work to having a more significant impact? Do they have greater visions for change that inform their interfaith work or to which they hope they contribute? What values do women bring to their work and the interfaith institutions that serve as platforms for their work? The contribution of women in the current study attested to this inquiry. Women offer unique perspectives, particularly in their soft approach to peacebuilding and caring roles. Women in Islam, for instance, are beginning to reclaim their place as was in history when they were taught publicly in media stations. The literary works of liberal women scholars in Christianity and Islam, such as Fatuma Mernissi (2004) and Musa Dube (2013), reveal the public voices of women relating their own experiences as they dialogue with issues such as gender-based violence that affect humanity cannot be dismissed as being simplistic or merely femininely unique.

#### **2.1.4 Challenges for Women's Promotion of Interreligious Dialogue**

A literature review on women's challenges in promoting interreligious dialogue revealed two perspectives closely aligned with the research objectives. Gender difficulties in religions, how religious knowledge is postulated in gender discourses as a problem of epistemic loci and the gap of women in interreligious dialogue.

**(i) The Difficulties of Gender in Interreligious Religious Dialogue**

Exploration of the relations between groups in interreligious dialogue draws attention to women and men as separate groups. Gender constructs emerge through the exclusion of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Women are dichotomized alongside the 'religious other', and King (1998) captures these sentiments evidently in the marginalization, invisibility and exclusion of women in interreligious dialogue. Wherever interreligious dialogue has developed, women seem to have little part in it, at least at the official levels. Proof of King's (2009) sentiments is found in every book on interfaith dialogue. Religious leaders today who are exclusively male may not legitimately 'voice' the concerns of women and speak on their behalf as if women could not speak for themselves. The gender barrier was a challenge in the current study, with a high frequency of 71.1%. Women were primarily restricted to traditional reproductive and caring roles or women-only dialogues.

Elaborating further on the difficulties of gender, Grung (2004) study of King's use of the notion of feminism underscores the need for careful consideration when used in a Christian-Muslim dialogue context. So, what is it all about Christianity and Islam and Feminism? In response to this question, King (1998) points to men in dialogue speaking on behalf of women and women's perspectives needs to be added to the agenda pieces through the neatly woven fabric of interreligious dialogue. The current study interrogated these viewpoints and posits that it must be a crucial step to include women participants in interfaith dialogue at all levels. Including women's issues in Christian-Muslim dialogue discourses makes the interreligious dialogue relevant to women's current needs and aspirations.

The exclusive nature of Christian-Muslim dialogue originates within the religions of Christianity and Islam itself and extends to women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue (Ingram, 2021). Even though discourses advanced by Muslim scholars in Islam on women's rights presuppose teachings in Islam guarantee equal rights for men and women (Gökarıksel & McLarney, 2010), however, as is the case with other religions and societies, perceptions about the rights, identity, and roles of Muslim women are socially constructed and culturally defined. The response to this challenge has led to various discourses on Islam and women's rights.

The discourse about women's rights in Islam (Anwar, 2007) has taken three broad strands: First, there are those Muslims who acknowledge that Islam liberated women and granted them rights unknown to any other society. The second strand reflects the obscurantist view that men and women are inherently unequal in Islam, quoting verses in the Qur'an such as 4:34, which talks about men being responsible for women and 2:228, which mentions that men are a "degree higher" than women. Thirdly, there has emerged a contemporary discourse about women's rights, human rights, democracy, and modernity led by scholars and activists who advocate a review and critical re-examination and re-interpretation of exegetical and jurisprudential texts and traditions within religions. The discourses argue for a distinction between divine revelation and human understanding of the sacred text, allowing flexibility in response to changing times, places, and circumstances while providing room for women's participation in public spaces in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Studies by Pedersen (2004) and Hayward (2012) on interfaith dialogue within Christianity found that it tends to focus on Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and ignores other faiths that are not Abrahamic. The implication is that

interfaith dialogue has an exclusive quality that tends to spread and permeate the aspect of women's participation. Christianity, for instance, is assumed to garner the most attention in scholarship on interfaith work, as most comparative scholarship on religion has taken place in the West, carrying with it the mores and attitudes of urban Middle Eastern society of the classical period and the classical period viewed women as sexual objects, allowing for polygamy, concubinage, and easy divorce for men. These practices shaped the prevailing ideology of the time, influencing the text's reception, interpretation, and eventual codification into law. This heritage, which views women and men as inherently unequal, has come into conflict with the changing realities and aspirations of women today, particularly their participation in the promotion of interreligious dialogue. Hayward (2012) draws attention to the lack of representation of women in interfaith work.

Researchers have attempted to investigate the reasons behind the under-representation of women in interreligious dialogue (Fletcher, 2013, p. 26; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2013, p. 163), focusing on gender and traditional cultural dynamics within religions. Recommendations for inclusion of women in interreligious dialogue have become a rallying call. Yet this has remained a distant reality. Some fear that including women in interfaith dialogue could lead to criticism of religious structures and portray it as an attempt to reform traditional religion from within (Jakobsh, 2006, p. 187). While this could threaten some, feminist theologians such as Egnell (2003) have argued that women's inclusion in interfaith dialogue would bring many advantages, such as the awareness of social hierarchies. Responding to the discourse of women's representation and inclusion in interreligious dialogue, participants in this study reflected the same fluidity. They believe in women's equal rights to men, but not, for example, males and females' equal rights in marriage.

The current study research findings showed that women's presence in interreligious dialogue resulted in inducing balanced views of males and females' perspectives but, at the same time, an imbalanced effect on interfaith dialogue. Some fear that including women in interfaith dialogue could lead to criticism of religious structures and portray it as an attempt to reform traditional religion from within (Jakobsh, 2006, p. 187).

Hackett et al. (2016) corroborate these views in their study of gender gaps in religions. Nevertheless, women of faith have contributed to peace processes, either individually or through interfaith initiatives such as the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement (Press, 2010).

The current study revealed that women engage in dialogues due to their deep-seated concerns about the injustices they face in society's social and economic systems and structures. Professional women, activists, and other women often confront a variety of issues, including marital and gender-based violence. When faced with these problems, they approached the religious authorities to seek redress. However, there was always a disconnect between what they read in the revealed texts and the androcentric human understanding. Women got together first to look into the ways to solve these problems. They began reading their religious texts and discovered a rich juristic heritage. They began to understand the religion better, and with this knowledge and new-found conviction, they began to stand up to fight for women's rights to equality, justice, freedom and dignity within the religious framework.

Feminist theological scholars and women interfaith groups, such as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT), have brought attention to the several layers of discrimination that women of faith are facing due to their gender, religious affiliation, class, race, sexual orientation, age and disability (Egnell, 2003).

p.217; Ammah, 2004). These researchers have noted that women of faith could help open interfaith dialogue by addressing the different types of discrimination mentioned above (Egnell, 2003, p. 217). From a feminist theological viewpoint, interfaith dialogue would not be about religious teachings but about solving all women's everyday concerns (Egnell, 2003, p.120). As a result, the difficulty lies in the interpretation. Who, for instance, decides which interpretation, juristic opinion, or traditional practice would prevail and be the source of codified law in this modern world to govern our private and public lives and punish if one fails to abide, and which would fall by the wayside? On what basis is that decision made? Whose interests are protected, and whose interests are denied? The current study clarified that this was more about power and politics than living the divine will on earth. Women, as believers and as activists living within a democratic constitutional framework, decided to participate in the promotion of interreligious dialogue. They did this to assert and claim their right to have their voice heard in the public sphere. These researchers have said that women of faith could help open interfaith dialogue by addressing the different types of discrimination mentioned above (Egnell, 2003, p. 217).

Global commitments promoting women's inclusion in peacebuilding and conflict transformation rarely mention women's interfaith initiatives, despite their significant role in shaping peace, as evidenced by the UN Fourth World Conference on Women and the UN Security Council 2000. The United Nations has a long record of defending Freedom of Religion and Belief (FORB) as a fundamental human right and a foundation for peace and justice. The global community first stated this right in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights gave it the force of international law. Since religions are known to

uphold morality, fundamental liberties and equality provisions typically do not align with religious laws and policies. The question, therefore, is, should the state legislate on morality? The current study response to this challenge took cognizance that if religion governs the public and private lives of its citizens, everyone, including women, has the right to discuss religion and voice their views and concerns about the impact of such laws and policies.

In 1981, the UN General Assembly adopted the declaration on eliminating all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. The UN acknowledges numerous interreligious and intercultural initiatives and activities that religious communities, interreligious organizations, humanists, and other civil society organizations have been conducting in an organized manner for over a century. The initiatives of women must be acknowledged, however benign. Its lessons could be learned from this rich history. The current study revealed that most women-related interreligious dialogues were informal and less organized at the grassroots levels, with numerous spontaneities. Hence, the contributions of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue were pioneering, breaking new ground in the empirical study.

King (1998) and McGarvey (2009) show profound difficulties in relations between men and women in interreligious dialogue. King (1998) indicates explicitly that women are the missing link in religious dialogue. McGarvey (2009) poses a question, "Where are the women in interreligious dialogue?" Berstein (2005) observes that Christian-Muslim dialogue is a gendered arena and rationalizes that Christianity and Islam provide a binary of men and women, which shows male privilege in leading public prayers and male privilege in interpretational issues. Religion is known to co-regulate gender structures (Avishai et al., 2015, p.25). For example, Nussbaum (2003) found that

religion in its binary form harms the eleven "central human functional capabilities" related to gender. These include women's equal dignity in their right to life and health, the right to bodily integrity, reproductive rights, the right to move around and gather with others, the right to free religious practice, the right to political participation and speech, the right to education, the right to work, the right to own property and have civil capacity, nationality, family law, and the right to practice religion freely.

The current study shows how they need not look any further from their religions to validate their struggle to participate in the promotion of interreligious dialogue. It is more convincing now than ever that it is not a religion but interpretations of religious texts influenced by cultural practices and values of a patriarchal society that regards women as inferior and subordinate to men. Nussbaum (2003), on the other hand, observes that religion and gender inequality don't always go together (Avishai et al. 2015, 5–25, p. 7).

The two researches add that religion can be a place where women can fight back and seek power. The current study postulates that these sentiments offer opportunities for women to flourish in their pursuit of promoting interreligious dialogue. These views open spaces to interrogate religious tenets in reconstructive ways, liberating women and men in interfaith dialogue. They aim to surmount barriers that impede the active involvement of diverse groups. Women, in particular, gain maximum benefits from their participation in promoting interreligious dialogue as their views were pivotal in seeking to unleash their potential. Women viewed religion as a 'soft power' to interact with rather than a catalyst for conflict and oppression.

Lamb (1985) remarks that, "there is already a profound difficulty of relations between Christian men and women and Muslim men and women that permeate Christian-Muslim dialogue". However, Lamb (1985) does not specify the nature of the existing challenges. The study highlights the obstacles in promoting Christian–Muslim dialogue that may be an impetus for women to promote interreligious dialogue. D'Costa (2021) states that the meeting of religions has produced racism, intolerance, bloodshed, cooperation, hope, love, sympathy and misunderstanding in almost equal doses.

The current study, however, focused only on positive encounters. There is intellectual vigour, and knowledge is no longer a barrier. There is moral courage and political will to strive for a more enlightened and progressive understanding of religion and religious heritage. Enlightenment is in search of answers to deal with changing times and circumstances. There were strong indications that religion should be a source of peace, not conflict and oppression.

On the other hand, anyone engaging in religious pluralism may raise many practical and theological questions, so the question of women makes it more complex. D'Costa (2021), for instance, raises many critical questions about whether Buddhist meditation groups should be allowed to use the church halls. How should religious leader's education be taught? What social and political cooperation is permissible with people of other faiths? In addition, fundamental theological issues are at stake, such as who sets the agenda in dialogue and why. Do the dialogue teams participate as equal partners, as men and women? These questions revealed a myriad of challenges that women face in their participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

**(ii) The Problem of Epistemic Loci and Women in Interreligious Dialogue**

Until recently, the significance of gender and epistemic loci in the philosophy of religion remained virtually unacknowledged until gender theories began to question the biological attribution of norms, knowledge, functions and responsibilities, among others. Anderson (2012) highlights the epistemic locus of gender and how it intersects with religion, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. Intersectionality marks each human subject socially and materially; as a result, the gender of the subject of knowledge plays a crucial role in determining epistemic norms. The current study showed a symbiotic relationship between knowledge and women's participation in promoting interreligious dialogue by bridging the gap between theory and action. For instance, women's knowledge experiences provided the starting point for dialogue engagements in informal conversations. Sometimes, all that was needed was to initiate dialogues, as demonstrated in the following report.

During the Women's Consultation Report in PROCMURA, which took place from August 11th to 16th, 1998, at the Salvation Army Training Centre in Accra, Ghana, Nathan Samwini delivered a lecture on the role of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue. However, a significant portion of the lecture material focused on Islamic education rather than discussing the role of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue. One can easily deduce that there was nothing to write about women in Christianity and Islam.

Reiterating these sentiments, William Bejlefeld, the first general adviser of PROCMURA, recognized early in the program's formative years that 'the most significant problem about Christian dialogue with Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa was a lack of knowledge and understanding of Christianity and Islam. At that time, seminary

studies were not accessible to women. Writing later in the years, Mbillah (2004b), the then General Adviser of PROCMURA, makes a case for the inclusion of the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa, an imperative for theological education in Africa (Mbillah, 2004c). Mbillah, however, does not emphasize the need for seminaries and theological institutions to consider women for the same studies in the same field.

The current study found that public universities, such as Kenyatta University, offer numerous courses on gender studies and interfaith/interreligious dialogue; hence, increasing consciousness on developing women's participation in interfaith dialogue, which may alter the field in many years to come.

Msingi Trust's (2022) studies, however, established that the situation on gender studies has not changed much today in the seminaries and theological schools. Education in Christianity and Islam for women has remained elusive as the current research shows that the knowledge barrier prevents women from participating in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Regarding how to address the challenges of knowledge barriers, Mukonyora's (2005) study offers a temporal solution when she points out the challenge of women's interest in Africa that is yet to be taken seriously in the development of peace. The more extended challenge is for women theologians to actively conduct theological inquiries and highlight woman gnosis as the critical explanation for women's popularity.

Therefore, we must consider the intersecting factors in gender identities to understand how the gendering of our epistemic norms shapes debates about religious diversity and dialogue. A research question was raised about epistemic norms and how to shape women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue: the emphasis on

integrating and liberating women into academies and religious seminaries is central to the effective epistemic locus of women's perspectives in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The current study aimed to empower women and promote women-focused content in research, which could influence knowledge products and practices that support women's involvement in interreligious dialogue. Jarra (2004) reinforces the importance of locating women's gnosis by highlighting their inadequate understanding of other religions' beliefs and practices, which results in a diminished appreciation for their worth. The current study showed a construed underappreciation of women's knowledge capacities in their religious experiences, which were inextricably interlinked with an insufficient grounding in one's faith. As a result, the current study shows that this led to a gap in interreligious dialogue for women.

### **(iii) The gap of Women in Interreligious Dialogue**

Ariarajah (1999) focused on the gap of women in interreligious dialogue and narrates the case of Diana Eck of Harvard University, who was the moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) sub-unit's work group for many years. As a woman, Eck not only gave outstanding leadership but was also one of the most effective spokespersons and promoters of concern in the churches and the academic institutions during the most critical years of the WCC's interreligious dialogue work. Her report to the workshop group meeting in Casablanca, Morocco, in June 1989 pointed out how the absence of women was glaring in interfaith events and efforts. In recent years, there have been numerous international interfaith initiatives. The most published were those that involved 'religious leaders' brought together at the Assyrian Day of Prayer called by Pope John Paul II or the Oxford Global Forum of spiritual leaders and parliamentarians. According to the report, there was strain over the years to involve

women in dialogue, but to no avail. The current study reveals a sustained strain on women's participation in formal dialogues.

Numerous interfaith initiatives could heighten awareness of the importance of interreligious relations and independence. Nonetheless, the events have also starkly and shamefully highlighted the absence of women's voices and faces in contemporary international and religious affairs. The report does not provide further details because women are missing from the interreligious affairs. In 1989, the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recommended that member states report on violence against women (VAW), raising awareness of women's rights. The current study findings indicated that women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue was obscured at the high levels of international religious affairs in spite of increased gender awareness in Kenya.

Christ's (1980) study points out that the lack of interreligious dialogue has prevented the telling of women's stories in interreligious debates. Dogbé's (2005) study concurs with Christ's (1980) study on the issue of women not occupying influential positions within their respective religious institutions, which hinders their ability to contribute to desired societal changes fully. As a result, women are the missing participants and their related content. Therefore, attention is drawn to 'dialogues and the content of dialogue. Nthamburi (2000) asserts that up until now, the dialogue has remained limited to a few formal meetings and personal interactions among interested individuals. It has not penetrated deep enough to involve community leaders and opinion brokers in community dialogue that has taken place without the close involvement and consent of the respective communities' community leaders. Individuals have often been invited to formal dialogue meetings because of their academic standing or because they held

certain offices. There has been no dialogue where communities were requested to choose the participants representing them and inevitably report back the findings.

Nthamburi (2000), however, ignores the participation of women in interreligious dialogue. Rather his discussion alludes to methodological gaps in interreligious dialogues on how members of the dialoguing group are drawn to formal dialogue and to whom they account. The current study revealed that women were less likely to participate in Christian-Muslim dialogues because they were not represented in top leadership positions in their respective religions.

### **Conclusion**

Literature reviews reveal theoretical and methodological research gaps on women's participation in interreligious dialogue promotion. Only a few scholars have paid attention to women's involvement in interfaith dialogue promotion. Existing doctrinal and legal frameworks for women's participation in interreligious dialogue needs to secure a place or space for women to participate in Christian-Muslim dialogue. In interreligious discourses, women's experiences and knowledge have not been relayed. The current study investigated women's participation in promoting interfaith dialogue with a focus on umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. The current study uncovered practical and conflicting gender complexities embedded in spiritual teachings and practices, impeding women's involvement in advancing Christian-Muslim dialogue. The study relayed empirical evidence of women's experiences in unstructured grassroots levels of interreligious dialogue.

## **2.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

### **2.2.1 Theoretical Framework**

Two related theories were independently and progressively reviewed to assess their suitability in enhancing the theoretical framework of a more contained theory which addressed the study's fundamental questions. The Dialogue theory derived from Martin Buber (1878-1965) in his seminal work of *I and Thou*, 1923; Buber's dialogue theory presupposes relational theology with self and others. It has a mystical dimension that lacks specific, tangible results. His main proposition is that we may address existence in two ways: first, the attitude of the "I" towards an "It", towards an object that is separate in itself, which we either use or experience. Secondly is the "I" attitude towards "Thou" in a relationship in which the other is not separated. At the heart of Buber's theory of dialogue — is the idea that what matters is not understanding God in abstract, intellectual terms, which most often predicates on conventional forms originating knowledge from experts in a given field but entering into a relationship with Him in the two pairs of; I—Thou and; I—It: The experiential aspect of relationships as underscored helped guide the current study. Women's experiences were deemed alternative forms of gnosis in search of genuine interreligious relationships.

The second theory was the Theory of Communicative Action derived from Habermas's (1981) study. It is a modern critical theory that stays true to the enlightenment ideal of societies based on reason and a theory of meaning based on the logic of world history. The theory enabled the recognizance of different levels of discourses in the interreligious dialogue setting. If the practical dimension of the dialogue is emphasized, which includes respect, goodwill, sincerity, and honesty, then argumentation, proclamation, and disclosure are seen as complementary. However, the challenge with

this theory lay in the fact that these aspects the practical dimension on a human level could not be 'manufactured' instead, they must be references to a transcendent realm which ties in the mystical element of the dialogue theory as already discussed.

The Communicative Action theory served to transmit and renew cultural knowledge to achieve mutual understanding, as championed in interreligious dialogue. It proposes universal rationality, public discourse, argumentative speech, or communicative action as alternatives to myth and action in the real world. It connects a "two-level concept of a society of a 'life-world' and 'system' paradigms" yet denigrates non-traditional forms of generating knowledge (Halton, 2017. P. 46).

The Dialogue theory and the theory of Communicative Action are rooted in traditional objectivism, which has little regard for women's experiences and consideration of their knowledge. Yet women's experiences are formed and maintained in collective experiences and memories that either fragment society or disintegrate their identity. Christian-Muslim dialogue participants in umbrella religious organizations act in a way that benefits society, although this may only sometimes be the case. There have been instances where dialoguers do not represent the community at all. They were not known to report back the dialogue outcomes to the community. Participation by women in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue meant maintaining a delicate balance between objective knowledge and women's lived experiences.

The 'standpoint theory' is an interplay of theory and action in gender studies derived from Sandra Harding (2004). Harding followed the developments of Smith's (1987) gender theory and coined the 'standpoint theory', which presupposes that knowledge is socially situated and stems from one's social position, such as gender, race, and socio-economic class. So that marginalized groups have a unique perspective. People at the

bottom of the social hierarchy have a unique perspective that can provide a better starting point for scholarship. Standpoint theory denies that traditional science is objective and postulates that research and theory have ignored and marginalized women and feminist ways of thinking and experiencing. The standpoint theory helped underpin the current study, pitting women's *gnosis* (knowledge) and actualities of their experiences in modern rational thinking while seeking genuine and authentic relationships in women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Harding (2004) argues that instead of beginning sociological analysis from the 'abstract' point of view of institutions or systems, women's lives could be more effectively examined if one started from the 'actualities' of their lived experience. The Standpoint theory helped to guide the study in letting women's lives become the frames of reference in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. Harding (2004) notes that women's experiences are in the immediate local setting of "everyday/every night" life. Smith (1987), for instance, asks the question, "What are the common features of women's everyday life?" From this standpoint, Smith (1987) opines that women's position in modern society is acutely divided by the experience of dual consciousness of particularising work about children, spouses and households to an institutionalized world of text-mediated, abstract concerns of work in their dealing with schools, medical systems, or government bureaucracies.

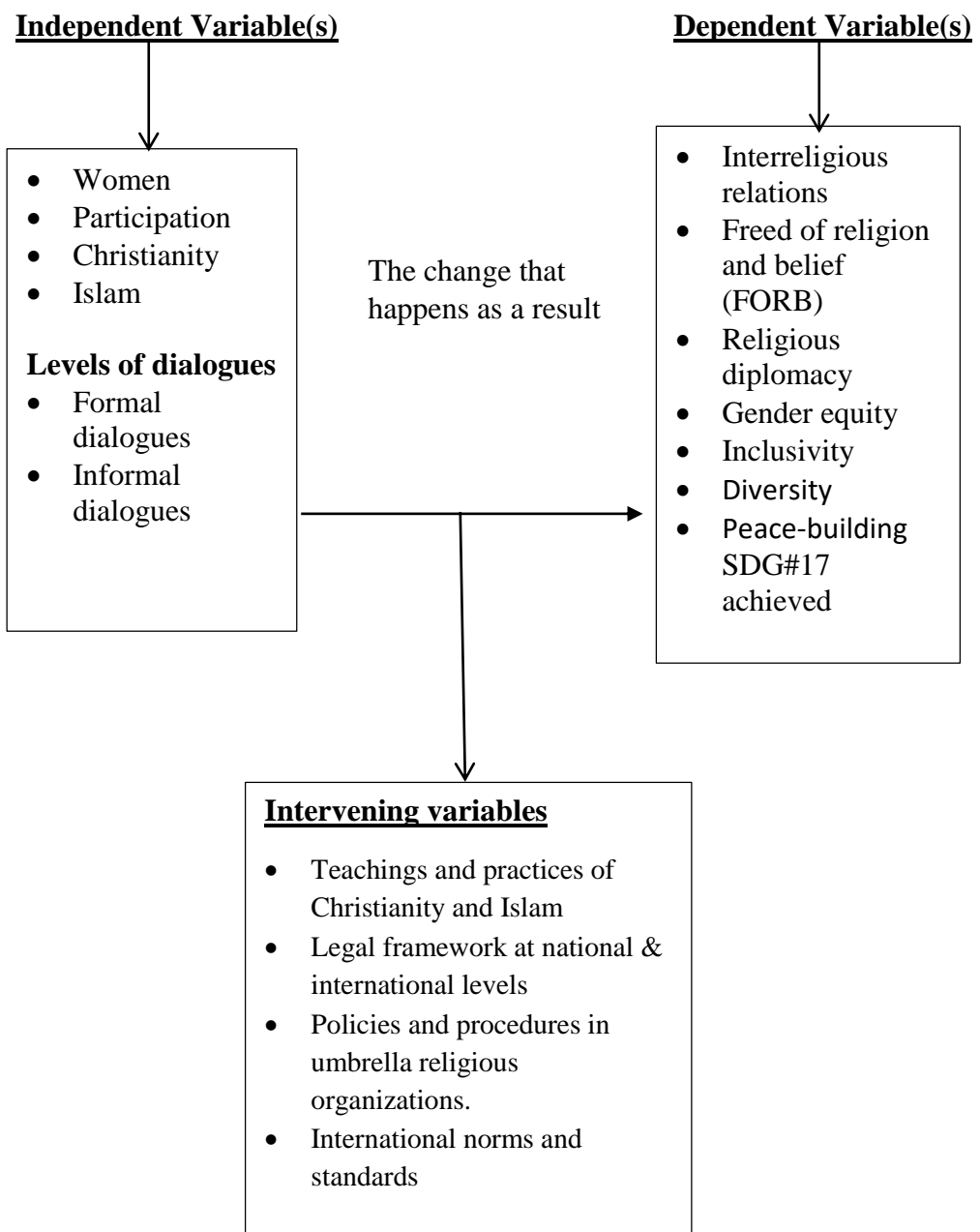
In the abstract world of institutionalized life, the actualities of local consciousness and lived life are obliterated. Standpoint theory blended faith and feminism in social spaces alongside the reductive and religion-centric approach to conventional knowledge and objectivism. The researcher notes that it is essential to approach feminism in Christianity and Islam with caution as it is indicated that feminism in the two religions

of Christianity and Islam was overly confused with gender advances for women's inclusion and participation.

The Standpoint theory concerns the practice of interreligious dialogue while providing unique perspectives also intrinsic to an intersectionality component. It emanates from the consciousness of marginalized groups while providing more objective accounts of the world. The Standpoint theory detaches from intellectual discipline and moves into a worldly art of grappling with issues of daily and urgent human significance. To assess the knowledge contribution of women from the standpoint theory, for instance, "the women may challenge gender-based violence (GBV), which women belonging to religious communities face within and outside of their religious communities" (Beasley, 1999 & Cott, 1987).

### **2.2.2 Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is a research tool that guides the researcher in understanding and communicating the issues under scrutiny. In the conceptual framework presented in Figure 2.1, women's involvement in promoting Christian-Muslim relations within the umbrella religious organizations in Kenya could be attributed to their progressive interpretation of religious texts and their operation within the existing legal framework. This approach has led to the desired improvement of gender equity, inclusivity, and diversity and the achievement of best practices such as freedom of religion and belief (FORB). Figure 2.1 shows the conceptual framework of the study.



**Figure. 2.1 Theory of Change**

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter discussed the following subtitles: research design, study location, the study population, sampling frame, sample size, methods and instruments of data collection, validity and reliability of data. Further, the chapter presents data collection and analysis procedures as well as ethical considerations of the study.

### **3.1. Research Design**

A descriptive survey research design was used for this study. This method allowed for triangulation and corroboration of information, with each technique reinforcing the other to study women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya.

According to Thomas, Silverman and Nelson (2015), a quantitative descriptive survey approach allows for objective comparison of different numerical variables to improve the understanding of the problem. The purpose of the descriptive survey design in the current study was to test the research assumptions.

### **3.2. Site of the Study**

The study was carried out in 16 umbrella religious organisations in Kenya, which are, in whole or in part, national representative organisations of Christianity, Islam and Interreligious Council in Kenya. The umbrella religious organisations may also be cross-cutting, going beyond ethnic, social, economic, gender and age boundaries. The umbrella religious organisations were selected because they have a high probability of representing the smaller parts of their religious whole while participating in interreligious dialogue, unlike individual religious organisations of churches, temples

and mosques, which may not be broad enough to go beyond their geographical limitations. Umbrella religious organisations are also over-arching and can oversee national and regional programmes with a clear mandate of unifying denominations for an ordinary course. Umbrella religious organisations have the propensity to be all-inclusive. Table 3.1 shows a list of selected umbrella religious organisations and their location.

**Table 3.1. Selected Umbrella Religious Organizations in Kenya**

S/N	Category	Location
<b>Christian Umbrella Organizations</b>		
1.	Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC)	Waumini House- 4Th-Floor, Westlands
2.	Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK)	Langata Road, Nairobi
3.	Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN)	Waiyaki Way, Westlands Nairobi
4.	Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB)	Waumini House- 4Th-Floor, Westlands, Nairobi
5.	National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK)	3rd Fr, Jumuia Place, Lenana Road, Nairobi
6.	Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA)	Prof. Saitoti Avenue, Westlands Nairobi.
7.	Young Men Christian Association (YMCA)	Along State House Road CBD, Nairobi,
8.	Young Women Christian Association YWCA	Nyerere/Mamlaka Road Nairobi
<b>Muslim Umbrella Organizations</b>		
9.	Kenya Muslim Youth Development Organization (KMDYO)	Shopping Centre, Off, Old Nairobi Rd, Nakuru
10.	Kenya Muslim Women Association (KMWA)	Bishop Makarios Road, Nairobi
11.	The Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance (KMYA)	Islamia House, Nairobi, Moktar Daddah St, Starehe, Nairobi
12.	National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF)	Address: Mararo Avenue off Gitanga Road, Nairobi
13.	Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM)	Njuguna Lane, Nairobi,
<b>Interreligious Organization</b>		
14.	Christians and Muslims Network (CAMNET)	Mumias, Western Kenya
15.	The Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC)	Kongoni Road, Off Beach Road, Nyali, Mombasa
16.	Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK)	Mararo Avenue, off Gitanga Road, Nairobi

### 3.3 Study Population

The study targeted Christians and Muslims in umbrella religious organisations. Umbrella religious organisations are strategic and have unique opportunities for interreligious dialogue. The umbrella religious organisations were selected as sites for the study mainly to provide a general overview of Christianity and Islam on women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya while at the same

time providing a mosaic of unique representational aspects of each of its smaller parts. Leaders in the umbrella religious organisations were mapped out and identified as being strategic in providing first-hand experience as active participants in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Top-level leadership included the general secretaries, Supretendant, Programme Directors and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). Middle-level leadership would also hold the fort in the absence of top leadership and would equally have first-hand experiences, though not as much of the overall picture as the top leadership and management. The middle-level leadership included the programme/project managers, field officers and departmental heads.

The study shows that umbrella religious organisations such as the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) have the distinct mandate of speaking in one voice for the Catholic Church in Kenya, sometimes existing solely as the only umbrella religious organisation with no other parallel or competing organisations from their religions. The researcher mapped out 16 of such national/regional representative umbrella organisations in Kenya. Table 3.2 below shows the general study population of the mapped-out umbrella religious organisations.

**Table 3.2 General Study Population**

S/N	Category	Top Leadership		Middle-Level Leadership		Totals
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
1.	CAMNET	4	0	11	4	19
2.	CICC	7	0	21	2	30
3.	CJPC	4	1	7	4	16
4.	EAK	3	1	7	4	15
5.	EDAN	6	2	19	4	31
6.	IRCK	8	1	11	8	28
7.	KCCB	24	0	73	12	109
8.	KMDYO	2	1	3	5	11
9.	KMWA	0	4	0	7	11
10.	KMYA	3	1	6	3	13
11.	NAMLEF	3	0	7	1	11
12.	NCCK	5	3	25	8	41
13.	PROCMURA	2	6	11	3	22
14.	SUPKEM	6	0	10	1	17
15.	YMCA	5	1	11	6	23
16.	YWCA	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>25</u>
	<b>Totals</b>	<b><u>82</u></b>	<b><u>26</u></b>	<b><u>231</u></b>	<b><u>83</u></b>	<b><u>422</u></b>

Source: Field data, (2020)

The Christian umbrella organisations included but not limited to The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), which is the umbrella organisation for Christian protestant churches in Kenya; Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK) is the umbrella organisation of the Evangelical Christians in Kenya, Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) is the umbrella organisation of young Christian men in Kenya, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) is the umbrella organisation of young Christian women, Program for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) is a pan African Christian organisation which promotes Christian-Muslim dialogue and Ecumenical Disability Network (EDAN) is the umbrella organisation for the disabled in Kenya. Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) are umbrella organisations for the Catholic Church.

**Table 3.3 Target Population of Umbrella Christian Organizations**

S/N	Category	Top Leadership		Middle-Level Leadership		Totals
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
1	EAK	3	1	7	4	15
2	EDAN	6	2	19	4	31
3	CJPC	4	1	7	4	16
4	KCCB	24	0	73	12	109
5	NCKK	5	3	25	8	41
6	PROCMURA	2	6	11	3	22
7	YMCA	5	1	11	6	23
8	YWCA	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>25</u>
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>282</b>

**Source: Field data, (2020)**

This study focused on Muslim umbrella organisations, including the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), which is an umbrella organisation for Muslims in Kenya, the Kenya Muslim Youth Development Organization (KMYDO) is an umbrella organisation for young Muslim men, the Kenya Muslim Women Alliance (KMWA) is an umbrella organisation for young Muslim women, the Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance (KMYA) also an umbrella organisation for young people and the National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF) is a national Muslim leaders forum. Table 3.4 shows the population of umbrella Muslim organisations.

**Table 3.4 Target Population of Umbrella Muslim Organizations**

S/N	Category	Top Leadership		Middle-Level Leadership		Totals
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
1	KMDYO	2	1	3	5	11
2	KMWA	0	4	0	7	11
3	KMYA	3	1	6	3	13
5	NAMLEF	3	0	7	1	11
6	SUPKEM	6	0	10	1	17
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>63</b>

Source: Field data, (2020)

The umbrella religious organisations that encompassed a diverse range of religions included the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics Trust (CICC), the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) and the Christians and Muslims Network (CAMNET). The umbrella religious organisations are presented in Table 3.5, which shows umbrella interreligious organisations.

**Table 3.5 Target Population of Interreligious Organizations**

S/N	Category	Top Leadership		Middle-Level Leadership		Totals
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
1.	CICC	7	0	21	2	30
2.	CAMNET	4	0	11	4	19
3.	IRCK	8	1	11	8	28
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>77</b>

Source: Field data, (2020)

### 3.5. Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out in one of the participating organisations. A pilot study was carried out to validate the ability of the questionnaire to collect reliable data from the participants. The primary benefit of pilot studies is that they eliminate trial and error and save the researcher a significant amount of time, money, and energy (Wright, O'Brien, Nimmon, Law, & Mylopoulos, 2016). The validity of the questionnaire was verified using a pilot test with a few respondents before the actual study. A pilot study was conducted among four (4) religious leaders at the Centre for Christian Muslim

Relations in Eastleigh, Nairobi. The sample used in the pilot study was not included in the actual research. The pilot study allowed the researcher to determine the approximate time it would take. It also assisted the researcher to establish the respondents' comfort in answering the questions and if there was a need for modification of the research instrument. The piloting organisation was excluded from the primary actual sample for the research.

### **3.4 Sampling Size**

A sample refers to a specific number of participants representing the entire priority population. The sample was based on the respondents' study criteria, with the chance and probability of promoting or recommending a participant from their religion to promote interreligious dialogue. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) suggest that a sample of 10%–30% is sufficient for any study. Alreck and Settle (1985) indicate that a sample size of ten per cent (10%) ensures a more evenly distributed sample population across the entire population. To address this trade-off problem, the researcher employed two strategies: either obtaining large amounts of data from a smaller sample or obtaining a small amount of data from a larger sample. According to Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (2023), the sample size also depends on the degree of variability (homogeneity/heterogeneity) in the population: As the degree of variability in the population increases, so should the size of the sample increase. The researcher's ability to take this into account depended on knowledge of the population parameters. The researcher maintained a small sample size to stay within the recommended limits. Dale (2004) suggests that a highly representative sample with low uncertainty will be smaller units under any realistic circumstances. The study sampled ten per cent (10%) of the total population of four hundred and twenty-two (422); hence, forty-two (42) males and females in top and middle-level leadership formed the sample size.

The leader of a group of people or an organisation is referred to as top leadership. These individuals hold control or responsibility over the organisation. They have an overall view of the organisations and can be in-depth in understanding the issues. Top leadership makes decisions and takes responsibility for them. Top leadership in this study included the Supervisor, General Secretaries, Directors, and program officers.

Key informant interviews were carried out among top leadership to solicit first-hand knowledge. The middle-level leadership recommends suggestions that influence decisions at the top leadership. Mid-level leaders are accountable for results—getting the job done right—they need to take charge, assign tasks, coordinate work, control the budget, and make all critical decisions, using the one-to-one skills that worked at the top-level leadership position. The middle-level leadership, which includes heads of departments, field officers, program managers, and project coordinators, represents the second tier of leadership in management. Both top- and middle-level leadership are strongly associated with participating and representing their organisations in promoting interfaith dialogue. The sample size was spread equally among the sixteen (16) participating umbrella religious organisations, with each organisation having an equal chance of two (2) and an extra provision of one (1), which provided for non-response to questionnaires.

### **3.5 Techniques and Sample Size**

Sampling involves gathering information from a given sample to aid decision-making and constructing conclusions (Shorten & Moorley, 2014). In this study, quantitative research aimed to collect reliable and valid data from the target population to represent a particular phenomenon of women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This data is displayed in Table 3.6 below.

**Table 3. 6 Study Sample**

<b>Target Population</b>	<b>Target Population</b>	<b>Sample Size =10% of the Population size</b>
<b>Top Leadership</b>	108	11
<b>Middle-level leadership</b>	314	31
<b>Totals</b>	422	42

*Source: Author, (2020)*

According to Kothari (2014), approximately 10% of a sample is sufficient for a pilot study hence;

$$\text{Pilot study} = 10\% \text{ of Sample study}$$

$$10\% \text{ of } 42 = 4$$

Respondents sampled for the study = sample size – 10% of sample size

$$\underline{42 - 4 = 38}$$

We provided a sample size of 11 top leaders from the participating organisations for key informant interviews (KIIs). We conducted three (3) provisional interviews, ensuring each participating organisation had an equal opportunity. Eight (8) organisations were umbrella Christian organisations, five (5) were umbrella Muslim organisations, and three (3) organisations were interreligious. When comparing the samples at the highest levels of leadership, only three (3) Christian women and one (1) Muslim woman were interviewed, compared to three (3) Muslim men and six (6) Christian men. The response rate was 85.71% for the Key Informant Interview levels of data collection.

The middle-level leadership of each participating organisation distributed a sample size of twenty-two (22) evenly among the sixteen (16) participating organisations, with an additional questionnaire per organisation to account for non-response. This spread allowed for equal participation of both males and females in responding to the questionnaire tools that solicited data on the four objectives of the study. We sent out 42 questionnaires, with sixteen going to umbrella Christian organisations, ten to umbrella Muslim organisations, and six to interreligious organisations.

### **3.6.1 Sampling Techniques**

Three sampling techniques were used:

#### **i) Convenience Sampling**

Convenience sampling was used to select four (4) male and (4) female respondents at the top and middle levels of Umbrella religious organisations' leadership for a pilot study. These were selected based not only on proximity to the researcher but also on the willingness of the respondents to participate in providing initial data, as well as in testing the validity of the instruments.

#### **ii) Stratified Sampling**

The study used a stratified sampling technique to select eight (8) Christian umbrella organisations, six (6) Muslim umbrella organisations, and three (3) interreligious umbrella organisations. Respondents were drawn from the stratified Christian and Muslim top and middle-level leadership populations of 108 and 314, respectively. Respondents were further stratified along the gender of 339 males and 109 females who had an equal opportunity to be sampled for participation as respondents to both closed and open-ended questionnaires. Each stratum was mutually exclusive (there was no overlap between them), even though they contained the entire population. We then

conducted a simple random sampling of the ten per cent (10%) of the population, therefore, randomly selecting 42 individuals with more provisions supplied to cater for null responses. Ten per cent (10%) of the population of 422, each with an equal probability of selection, completed the questionnaire for quantitative data. Nearly all the questionnaires were returned because the researcher administered and collected them on the agreed dates.

### **iii) Saturated Sampling**

Using saturated sampling, we selected sixteen (16) top leaders of the national umbrella religious organisation for key informant interviews from each of the 16 saturated national umbrella participating organisations. The researcher sought to find expertise on how women could help promote interreligious dialogue and used this method to carefully choose top leaders such as the general secretaries, senior vice presidents, and directors of umbrella religious groups for in-depth Key Informant Interviews.

## **3.7 Research Instruments**

### **3.7.1 Research questionnaires**

The study used questionnaires to collect quantitative data from middle-level leaders on the research questions. The researcher visited the mapped-out organisations to introduce the study and the administration of research tools. The researcher delivered the questionnaires on the agreed-upon date while eliciting partial responses via email. Further, the researcher distributed 42 questionnaires, each containing thirteen questions. Ten questions (10) were closed-ended, and three (3) were open-ended—the open-ended questions aimed at capturing data beyond the scope of the researcher's framed questions. The general response rate was 85.71%. As shown below, the response rate was calculated by dividing the respondents by the number contacted.

Number of respondents (36) x 100 = 85.71%

Number contacted (42)

### **3.7.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**

In-depth qualitative interviews were administered to 14 top leaders from each of the 16 umbrella religious organisations, ensuring equal opportunities for each organisation. The interviews administered were 3 for interreligious organisations, 6 for umbrella Christian organisations, and 5 for umbrella Muslim organisations. Out of these, only three women, 1 Muslim and 2 Christians, at the top level of leadership were interviewed, highlighting the scarcity of female members in Christian and Muslim organisations.

The researcher conducted Key Informant Interviews to gather qualitative data on the conceptualisation of Christian-Muslim dialogue and women's participation. The questions sought insights that could support women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya, their contribution to this dialogue, and their challenges in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. It was in the considered view of the researcher that key informants understood the policies and processes in interreligious dialogue. The researcher conducted fourteen (14) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), each lasting no more than 45 minutes, using audio and recordings. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some KII were conducted on the virtual platforms and cell phone responses, while others took place onsite.

### **3.7.3 Library Research**

The researcher conducted a further review of available resources on the subject in light of collected data on the participation of women in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. The focus was on women's involvement in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. The researcher visited institutional libraries such as Kenyatta University-Post Modern Library, St. Paul's University in Limuru, Hekima College and Tangaza University College, which were considered resourceful.

## **3.8 Validity and Reliability**

### **3.8.1 Validity**

The researcher ensured internal validity by ensuring that the data collected was accurate and consistent with the variables to ensure it corresponded to the real world. Content validity was also ensured. Each questionnaire was considered valid because each question addressed specific and relevant aspects of the study subject. Statistical checks were done to avoid erroneous conclusions.

### **3.8.2 Reliability**

To ensure reliability, the researcher carefully planned appropriate methods to carry out the same steps in the same way for each measurement. For example, when conducting interviews, the research questions were clearly and consistently framed in the same way to elucidate research variables. Further, consistence was observed when phrasing questions, understanding that a lack of consistency could result in errors like omitted variables or information bias. There were also standardised research conditions for collecting data. Circumstances were kept as consistent as possible to reduce the influence of external factors that might create variation in the results. In an adequately

randomised setting, all participants were given the same information and tested under the same conditions.

### **3.9. Data Collection**

The data collected was coded and analysed in line with the research themes. Descriptive statistical analysis was carried out to quantify the problem by generating data on the sample groups to obtain a clear understanding of the population because interreligious dialogue is about a diverse group of people trying to get a shared sense of common knowledge.

#### **3.9.1 Data Analysis**

Data was disaggregated, collated, and triangulated. According to Carter et al. (2014), data triangulation is the use of a variety of data sources, including time, space and persons, in a study. The study used more than one approach to researching a question. The objective was to increase confidence in the findings by confirming a proposition using two or more independent measures, as opined by Forbes (2023). The study corroborated the findings, compensating for any data weaknesses with the strengths of other data, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the results.

Data was coded, segmented, and categorised from interviews and research questionnaires alongside generated themes to address research questions.

The researcher triangulated the findings in different data collection tools of KII's and questionnaires to arrive at a well-rounded understanding of women's participation in interreligious dialogue. Findings from desktop data review in library research, KII, and questionnaires were put together giving a full picture of the results of the study. For instance, the interplay of gender dynamics was understood through respondents' opinions in open-ended discussions rather than surveys, among other examples.

Measures of central tendency (means, medians, and other percentiles) and dispersion (standard deviations, ranges) were computed. The bivariate correlation was used to determine the strength of the direction of the relationship between women's participation and contribution to Christian-Muslim dialogue. The results were interpreted in percentages to provide a symbolic deduction. The data analysed was structured and presented in tables, graphs, pie charts and pictorials where necessary.

### **3.10. Data Management and Ethical Considerations**

The researcher adhered to the regulations of the Kenyatta University Ethical Review Committee by striving for honesty in all scientific communications. Further, the researcher did not fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent data. Also, she did not deceive colleagues, research sponsors, or the public. The researcher obtained informed consent before collecting the data on all research undertaken with human participants. Pseudonyms were used where respondents did not give consent.

Moreover, the researcher assured the respondents that the information obtained was exclusively used for academic purposes. The consent form was developed as reflected in the study's intentions to all the umbrella religious organisations and the respondents involved in this study. Kenyatta University Graduate School provided a research authorisation letter that was used to obtain permission from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) to carry out this Research. Then, the researcher committed to providing a copy of the final research document to the concerned organisations to ensure they were fully involved and informed of the research outcome.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **4.0 Introduction**

The chapter begins by presenting analysed data on religious demographics and gender, to provide an overall framework that leverages women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. It then proceeds to present the study's findings as guided by the key thematic areas of the study objectives and the respective assumptions made. The thematic areas with reference to the umbrella religious organizations include; 1) the framework for the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue; 2) the role of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya; 3) the impact of women in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya and; 4) the challenges facing women in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. To help guide the study, four assumptions about the research questions were made.

The first assumption was that both Christians and Muslims see the need for the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue as embedded legal and international frameworks as well as within their doctrinal framework which underpins women as equal participants in their respective faiths. Secondly, women are willing to participate in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. Women play complementary roles to that of men in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Another assumption was the overall consciousness of women's incapability to dialogue as underpinned by religious teachings and interpretations of scriptural texts in Islam and Christianity.

### **(i) Analysis of Religious Demographic Data of the Participants.**

Preliminary questions were used to determine the religious affiliation of the 38 respondents in the study. The study revealed 33 leaders, representing 86.8% were Christians, while 5 leaders representing 13.2% were Muslims. This data is presented in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4. 1. Religious Affiliation**

		<b>Frequenc y</b>	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Christian	33	86.8	86.8	86.8
	Muslim	5	13.2	13.2	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

**Source: Field Data, 2022**

### **ii) Disaggregation of Data on Gender**

Getting insight into gender-disaggregated data required asking respondents for information on their gender identity. This study elucidated a respondent's gender ratio of 22 males to 16 females, representing 57.9% and 42.1% leaders respectively. Out of the 22 male respondents, 17 were Christian male leaders and 5 were Muslim leaders. Of the 16 female leaders, eight were Christian and eight were Muslim. Gender disaggregated data are essential to assess the basic framework of women and men. Further, disaggregated data are essential to evaluate and track the pivotal role of women in development and to apprehend the specific contributions of women as a "Major Group" in society (as detailed in Sustainable Development Agenda 21 of the UN).

Data obtained in the study was used to comprehend the extent and perspectives of men and women, their access to interfaith dialogue opportunities and related activities, and the challenges women faced when participating in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The study adopted the Standpoint theory whose basic tenets highlights a research scope that can adapt to an evolving understanding of rationalized gender perspectives. The theory, fosters a more practical, and action-oriented, comprehension of an inclusive gender perspective, as demonstrated in Table 4.2 below.

**Table 4.2 Respondents Gender Ratio**

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	22	57.9	57.9	57.9
	Female	16	42.1	42.1	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

**Source: Field Data, 2022**

The population data revealed a gender standard deviation of .491 with a variance of .211, significantly deviating from the mean of 1.405, while religious affiliation displayed a standard deviation of .338 and a mean of 1.132.

The religious affiliation variance was .114. A standard deviation close to zero indicates that data points are close to the mean, whereas a high or low standard deviation indicates that data points are above or below the mean. A low standard deviation indicates that data are clustered around the mean, whereas a high standard deviation indicates that data are more spread out. This is shown in Table 4.3.

**Table 4. 2 Population Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Sex	37	1.405	.491	.241
Religious Affiliation	38	1.132	.338	.114
Valid N (list wise)	37			

**Std. Deviation in the Variance used N rather than N-1 in denominators.**

These demographic representations are in line with the general view that Christians form the majority of the religious group population of 60-80% in Kenya (Kenya Population and Housing Census, Vol. IV, 2019). Demographic studies show deficient demographic dividends for women in umbrella religious organizations. This may inhibit the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

#### **4.1. Framework for Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

The first objective of this study sought to examine the basic framework for Christian-Muslim dialogue while answering research question number one; What are the frameworks for the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue? Essential data on the existing framework for the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue were sought on the following: The study focused on the nature of Christian-Muslim relations and dialogue practices in Kenya, the role of religious dialogue practices in socio-cultural, economic, and civic/government engagements that stem from the interpretation of religious

experiences and concepts, and the legal policy elements that facilitate the localization and implementation of international norms and standards. These aspects provided dimensions on the prevailing conditions for women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. These dimensions are discussed in the following sections.

#### **4.1.1 Nature of Christian-Muslim Relations in Kenya**

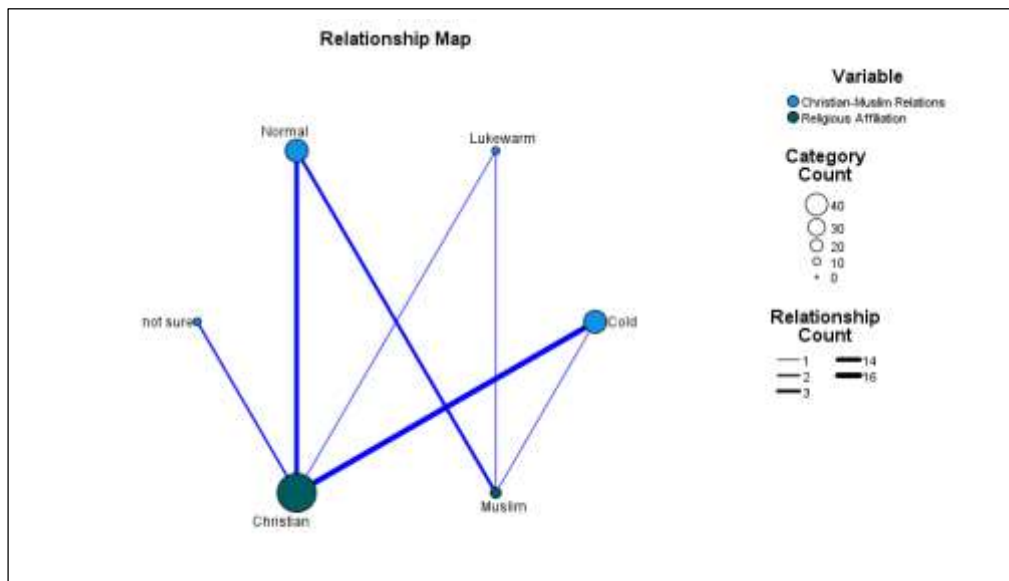
The study sought to establish the nature of Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya to gain insights into the prevailing conditions for women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Descriptive data was derived from key informant interviews and research questionnaires administered to the middle-level leadership of the participating umbrella religious organizations. Four parameters were provided to describe the nature of Christian and Muslim relations: 'normal', 'cold', 'lukewarm', and 'not sure'. Two open-ended questions asked were: How can you describe the Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya? And what are the reasons for the above relations?

The findings revealed that Christian and Muslim relationships in Kenya were ambivalent. The relationships diverged from the varied perspectives conveyed. Four (4) leaders representing (10%) of the Christian respondents indicated that they were 'not sure' how to describe Christian and Muslim relationships in Kenya. Muslim respondents stayed clear on the 'not sure' aspect. Fifteen (15) leaders representing (40%) of the Christian respondents and (30%) of Muslim respondents described the relationship as 'normal,'. Eleven (11) leaders representing (10%) of Christians and Muslims termed the relationship between Christians and Muslims to be 'lukewarm'. These data are presented in Table 4.4 below.

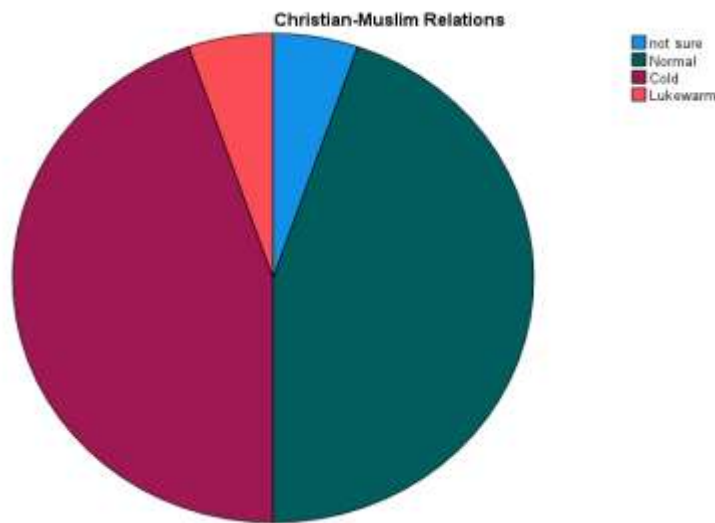
**Table 4.4 Descriptions of Christian and Muslim Relationships**

S/N	Nature of Relations	Christian	Muslim
1.	Normal	40%	30%
2.	Cold	40%	10%
3.	Lukewarm	10%	10%
4.	Not Sure	10%	0

The study determined that respondents were unable to decide on the general outlook of Christian-Muslim relations in the country. Some respondents were ‘not sure’ how to describe Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya at all. These data are presented graphically in Fig 4.1 and 4.2.



**Figure. 4.1 Christian-Muslim Relationship Map**



**Figure. 4.2 Christian and Muslim Relations in Kenya**

Data from key informant interviews highlighted specific current-day Christian-Muslim relationship dynamics that significantly impact the framework for women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. These are covered in the following subheadings.

***i) Normal Relationship***

There was a 10% marginal difference in opinion between Christians and Muslims on the nature of the normal relationship. Thirteen (13) respondents, representing 40% of the Christian respondents described Christian and Muslim relationships as normal. Only 2 Muslim respondents, representing 30% of the respondents described the relationship as normal as shown in Table 4.4. Some of the reasons advanced for the normal relationships included: The belief that there is relative peace between Christians and Muslims. This is especially true in predominantly Christian or Muslim areas. According to Dola Oluoch, the program officer for the Coast Interfaith Centre of Clerics:

Christians and Muslims have lived side by side amicably on the Kenyan Coast, despite the challenges of religious extremism that have plagued the region, they are in talking terms. As a result, the relationship should be considered normal and mutual. (Oluoch, D., Online Personal Communication, August 1, 2021)

People view cooperation among Christians and Muslims in transactional businesses and partnerships as fostering normal relationships. Hisham Abdul Aziz, who was a youth leader with the Kenya Muslim Youth Development organization and also a long-time manager at Crown Bus Travel Company observed that:

Crown Bus Company which is reputable for public transportation has employed scores of people. It is owned by a Muslim in Mombasa and yet it is run and managed by both Muslims and Christians at the topmost level of management (Abdul-Aziz H., Personal Communication, July 22, 2020).

People perceived the proximity of mosques and churches as reflecting normal relationships between Christians and Muslims, who continue to co-exist and respect each other's places of worship. Co-existence was attributed to both the *dialogues of life* that emanate from day-to-day encounters in social and public spaces as citizens of the same nation. Hajj Hassan Ole Naado, affirmed that:

*Dialogue of life* is about experiencing – letting ourselves be immersed in cultures other than our own – rather than just listening to the media and reading books, newspapers and social networking sites that, inevitably, give us a very incomplete picture of the world around us. In dealing with religions or beliefs other than our own, it is better to talk about the commonalities rather than the differences. We all recognize that there are lots of differences when it comes to our traditions, beliefs and understanding of things. However, what is important for us is to recognize the oneness and commonalities among us' (Ole Naado H., Personal Communication, July 15, 2021).

Data revealed that normal relationships were underpinned by blood ties and mixed relationships of Christians and Muslims co-existing peacefully in families while also working closely on economic matters to overcome life challenges. In Kenya, researchers cited Christian-Muslim marriages as contrasting yet equally significant in

influencing Christian-Muslim relations. In certain areas, families orchestrated the expulsion of Muslim women who intermarried with Christian men for defying their religion's teachings and practices, resulting in strained relationships between Christians and Muslims. There were Christian–Muslim marriages that had thrived well. There were reports of Christian women who had married Muslim men and these had enhanced normal relations between Christians and Muslims. One key informant noted that Christian-Muslim marriages however are not without their challenges, mostly due to the differences in religions. The women were the most affected. Parents either disowned the women or forced them to convert to the respective religions either as, Muslims or Christians, against their will.

The researcher observed that the intermarriages that led to the emergence of the Swahili people and Kiswahili language on the coastal line of East Africa, as discussed by Alio (2015), continues to this day. They have spread into the hinterland to the Western part of Kenya, embedding the cultural and social identities embodied by Bantu, Islamic, and Christian cultures. A Key Interview opined that; this is a sign that Christians and Muslims are on the verge of relating cordially.

Small groups and movements for local women empowerment were seen to provide structures for normal Christian-Muslim relationships. According to Rukia who was a member of the Muslim women informal group, noted that community women small groups locally known as *chamas* brought together both Muslims and Christian women. She said:

Usually, we eat together during meal time and we share stories about our life experiences, the people we have met and our journeys in life. One time during supper, we talked about our different cultures, religions and languages. There are many languages in Kenya, with each different tribe having their distinct language. For instance, my language is Taita; Susie my companion at the time speaks Luhyia which has more dialects than you can imagine. Those two and my two juniors have their own very distinct language also. But here, we are sisters, united for development (Rukia, H. Personal Communication, August 17, 2020).

Rukia's observations buttress Heck's (2009) study that explores the commonalities between Abrahamic religions while underscoring what unites Christians and Muslims which is more than what divides them.

Muslim respondents provided various indicators of normal Christian-Muslim relations from their point of view. They highlighted the ways in which the two religions respect and support each other's worship practices, such as when Muslims invite Christians to celebrate *Eid Fitr* and Christians invite Muslims to celebrate Christmas; when Muslims and Christians collaborate on national issues; and when there were instances of Muslims defending Christians from *al-Shabaab* attacks in Mandera. In 2015, the Islamist gunmen ambushed a group of Kenyan Muslims in a bus, but they protected Christian passengers by refusing to split into groups. A group of Kenyan Muslims shielded the Christian passengers and told the attackers that they were prepared to die together. The Muslim passengers, who were mostly women, told the Islamic militants to kill them all or leave them alone. Also cited were Christians and Muslims intermarriages and civic government functions participation such as Parliament and National Day of Prayer Breakfast (NPB).

Christian Respondents underscored normal Christian-Muslim relations based on the co-existing frameworks in communities to: Mingle and relate freely, do business

together, hold meetings together and respect each other's religion and religious days such as Christmas Day, and *Eid Fitr*. They teamed up to solve problems, pulled together resources in *harambees* (fundraising events); held common meetings to come up with solutions on social and political issues e.g. common voice on Covid-19 measures and plans of worship. All these was attributed to the respect accorded to each other in places of worship and religious days of worship. They even wished each other goodwill on feast days; the fact that there was no physical fighting between the Christians and Muslims despite having sometimes internal squabbles was indicative of a normal relationship. Harmony and respect in the communities that are a mixed group of Christians and Muslims; working together and solving problems amongst themselves was indicative of an existing framework that brought together Christians and Muslims through church structures and platforms that fostered good relations between Christians and Muslims. This was further exemplified when Muslim ladies had to donate their *hijab* to Christian counter-parts to protect them from religious extremists.

Normal relationships provided ample space for men and women to interact in communities. Normal relationships registered the presence of women and men, Christians and Muslims, each inviting the other to various functions in their communities. Field data however showed that where either a Muslim group invited a Christian group or a Christian group invited a Muslim group over a certain matter, the invited party played an insignificant role of being an invitee only (guest) alluding to the fact of playing public relations (PR). Buber's Dialogue theory underscores human personal relationships that are genuine; however, this study's findings revealed that public relations lacked genuine and authentic conversations that may yield reasonable outcomes or impact. Much of these were casual as earlier shown in Mbillah (2004d)

who insists that Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya reflects a ‘majority and a minority syndrome’, lacking in mutual approach to each other’s encounter.

More recent studies by the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations (Moywaywa, 2018) corroborate the study findings, revealing saturated interreligious activity in Kenya. The studies further reveal that individual Christian and Muslim groups and organizations actively participate in interreligious field activities in Kenya, each pursuing their own interests and occasionally competing for limited resources. The findings also reveal disconcerted efforts towards a common goal of formal Christian-Muslim dialogue which disenfranchises further the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya.

## **ii) Cold Relationship**

The cold nature of the relationship between Christians and Muslims brought to the forefront prickly modern-day issues in Christian-Muslim dialogue, an eccentric framework that underpins the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Forty per cent of the respondents Christians described their relationships with Muslims as cold. Similarly, thirty per cent (30%) of Muslims described the relationship between Christians and Muslims as cold. According to field data, there was a significant 10% marginal difference in the views of Christians and Muslims in describing relationships. This difference in view called for a comparative study which was beyond the scope of the current study. The reasons given for cold relationships were as follows.

Most negative views were accessed through social media and other non-official sites. Sheikh Yusuf Nasur Abu Hamza who was a family life and marriage counsellor with

SUPKEM, associated cold relationships with the diminishing religious authority which impacts the youth, who have found alternatives to learn from like the “Google platform’ as a teacher and other secular sources that are easily accessible online with extremist ideologies which incite one religion against the religious ‘other’ (Abu Hamza, Y. N., (SUPKEM), Personal Communication, August 14, 2021).

There were also religious differences that led to mistrust, unhealthy relationships, and suspicion in schools, especially government-owned schools, hospitals that were missionary-focused, and privately owned public transportation. This emanated from the fear of Islam and bias against the Christian elite, who come from the *bara* (the hinterland) and take up jobs in Muslim-dominated areas. Some respondents were yet to experience, “Proper Christian-Muslim dialogue,” because the dialogue is not only a conversation (dialogue of ideas) but also an encounter between people (dialogue of life). It was indicated that this depends on mutual trust, demands respect for the identity and integrity of the ‘other’ and requires a willingness to question one's self-understanding as well as an openness to understand others on their terms. However, the term "dialogue" refers to the locally organized Christian-Muslim religious debates *mihadhara*, in which one or two Christian and Muslim preachers, renowned for their persuasive oratory skills, freely challenge each other in public, drawing a small audience interested in religious discussions.

The debates major in the comparative study of the two religions thus showcasing the public who is right and who is wrong, just like in the old-time polemics.

Debates and not dialogues have often happened in predominantly Christian and Muslim areas of Nairobi’s Eastleigh and Mumias in the Western part of Kenya as well as on the

Coastal parts of Kenya. The religious debates tend to drive a wedge further between Christians and Muslims as each side sought to win. Social media platforms such as TikTok, where video clips of one or two Muslims and Christians exchange views on various topics were also evident. Christian and Muslim debates have recently become a focal point on Kenya Debate Street, with discussions such as, did Jesus sing and dance in church? The video clips from these debates would strive to show which debater wins. The short video clips are shared widely sometimes attracting ‘likes,’ ‘dislikes and subscribers.

Ombati's report of 2023 indicates that religious conflicts have only occurred in isolated cases in Kenya, including the burning down of mosques and churches amid accusations of sponsored thuggery. In retaliation, a group of youth raided the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) in the area and set it on fire. Several other stalls near the mosque and church were demolished. This in itself was perceived to be a reflection of the cold relationships between Christians and Muslims.

Further, the cold relationship between Christians and Muslims was reflected in the spark of incidents involving a close neighbour whom they wished they never had. They had negative perceptions of each other; there were several issues that they disagreed upon as a result of a lack of trust. Occasionally, doctrinal conflicts between faiths emerged, revealing themselves in public discourses such as sermons or *hotubas* that denigrate the other religion. Tribal discrimination was also manifested along religious lines. Field data showed that perpetrators of discrimination were from both sides of the divide. The perpetrators of discrimination in predominantly Christian and Muslim areas could distinguish between Muslim and Christian individuals based solely on their first

and indigenous names, thereby granting them privileges such as job recruitment, bursaries, and scholarships.

Militant extremists' attacks were particularly viewed by respondents as indicative of the cold relationships between Christians and Muslims, for instance, in the Garissa University College siege in 2014, Christians particularly female students who were unable to scale the high walls in the flight from the attackers had been an easy target for elimination. As a result, 'Christians developed the fear for Muslims (Islamophobia) and some even do not love them,' said one of the respondents, whose identity was withheld for confidentiality purposes.

The lack of knowledge about each other's religion resulted in cold relationships between Christians and Muslims. This led to stereotypes which permeated casual discourses of intolerance, such as a depiction of non-Muslim lifestyles and cultures in predominantly Muslim areas of Kenya, calling of names and the gross generalization of all Muslims as al-Shabaab (militants) in areas which are predominantly Christian. These were exemplified in derogatory language like *Kefir* (unbeliever) or *Nywele-ngumu* (kinky-haired) terms used to refer to Christian residents who could not conduct night vigil prayers (*Kesha*) because of insecurity.

Cold relationships were also a result of governance and management of national resources and unequal resource distribution amongst religious communities. For example. Field data showed that Islamic schools (*Madrasas*) are built with public resources at county levels but not Christian schools (this was case in Mandera) and there were unfair land allocation procedures. Christians noted that they were frequently denied land to build churches (in Mandera and Garissa).

Specific areas that were deemed to have especially cold relationships included Eastleigh and Majengo in Nairobi which have a significant majority of Christians and Muslims with competing interests in trading activities. For instance, according to Jay Salim, a leader for Kamukunji Community Peace Network (KACPEN), Christians and Muslims in Kamukunji live in fear and suspicion of each other due to the presence of community and religiously aligned vigilante groups, who are disguised as trusted advisors to law enforcement agencies. The vigilante groups have sometimes, out of malice or competing rivalry, 'told on each other' to the law enforcement authorities, in the event they notice any signs of radicalization and violent extremism in the community (Salim J., Personal Communication, and August 4, 2020).

Also, the cold relationship was reported in the areas of Lamu and Watamu on the coastal strip in Mombasa sprawling into the northern corridor of Somalia which is the neighbouring country and home to the *al Shabaab* militant group as indicated by the respondents from the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics. Other areas included; Isiolo, Garissa and Mandera where Christians and Muslims have continuously experienced a spate of intermittent attacks carried out by the *al Shabaab* militants. In these areas, both Muslims and Christians live in fear and suspicion of each other; hence, cold relationships form the delicate tapestry for allowing women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The belief that 'one must always be above the other' in the relationship between Christians and Muslims is a latent feature which contributed to cold relationships, that in turn affected women's participation in dialogue. This view is based on the traditional religion-centrism of superiority versus inferiority complexes of men jostling for spaces

for representation and participation. Religio-centrism is defined as the “conviction that a person's religion is more important or superior to other religions” (Corsini, 1999, p. 827). In Kenya, Christians and Muslims are faced with this difficulty. Mbillah (2004a) revealed a ‘Christian and Muslim majority and minority syndrome’. This results in one religion positing itself as superior to the other. Mbillah opines that the majority syndrome specifically makes it difficult for the two faith groups to relate as *equal partners* in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Knitter (2009) had earlier relayed the same sentiments while writing in the context of pluralism and the superiority and inferiority complexes. Knitter notes that too many religious scholars and spiritual seekers have fallen into the trap of proclaiming one faith or path as superior to all the others. This “holier than thou” approach has fostered religious wars, anger, and a lack of cooperation among believers. However, Eck (1987) sees no religion as superior. Challenging Christianity in the Western world, Eck insists that, “Confucians and Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims, are not only in the United Nations, but down the street”.

Besides, field data showed that negative perceptions of the religious “other” were more often a resultant feature of the differences in faith. False images of the “other” developed in both communities resulting to fear and misunderstanding. Both Christians and Muslims often acquire negative ideas, images, and stereotypes that shape their mutual perceptions. Christians have often (but not always) perceived Islam as a political, economic and theological threat and have painted it in a negative hue, in contrast to their positive self-image. Many Muslims, likewise, have been inclined to regard Christianity and Christendom as often identified with each other and with the West and engaged in an ongoing crusade against the Muslim world. Equally, the mass media continues to perpetuate such images.

The study established that the two religions; Christianity and Islam need to rethink their approaches to each other. The process of rethinking their approach, Christianity to Islam for instance require a curative measure for cold relationships. Many Christians accept that, much has passed for "objective scholarship" in past years was not free of bias and untruth.

During the last twenty-five years, dialogue between Christians and Muslims, as initiated by the World Council of Churches and the Vatican as well as by other Muslim organizations at both international and national levels, have seen the beginning of a new understanding based on a reciprocal willingness to listen and learn. Christian-Muslim dialogue forums at international levels, now embrace other groups, including women. Individuals involved in organizing and funding interfaith work consistently prioritize eradicating negative stereotypes, while simultaneously advocating for the inclusion of previously excluded groups, such as women.

Patterson's (2015) reveals that Kenyan Muslims harbour several grievances, many of which stem from colonial history. The current study provided an in-depth dimension by showing that the grievances are exacerbated by structural and institutional vulnerabilities, such as the underrepresentation of women or religious groups in politics. Moreover, there is discrimination, and limited access to economic, educational, and other opportunities. Police brutality, violations of human rights, and antiterrorism legislation and tactics are other factors as well. These issues directly and indirectly affect women in Islam and Christianity and underpin the most urgent need for the involvement of women in interreligious dialogue.

In areas that have experienced cold relationships, it was observed that it requires much effort to rebuild them. This provided the basis and motivations for women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. The dialogue was not only a conversation (dialogue of ideas) but also an encounter between people (dialogue of life). It depends on mutual trust, demands respect for the identity and integrity of the other, and requires a willingness to question one's self-understanding as well as an openness to understand others on their terms. Tables 4.7 and 4.8 provide a summary of the factors contributing to the cold Christian-Muslim relationship in Kenya.

### **iii) Lukewarm**

Three (3) Christian leaders and one (1) Muslim leader representing 10% of both Christian and Muslim respondents described Christian and Muslim relations in Kenya as 'lukewarm'. Lukewarm refers to a moderate state that is neither hot nor cold. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, lukewarm means showing little enthusiasm, apathetic or half-heartedness. The description of lukewarm relationships provided two reasons: the mistrust between Christians and Muslims, and the fear of Islam.

Speaking on mistrust Scholar Wayua, the director of the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Eastleigh noted:

Every terror attack tends to reignite mistrust and fear. Fear for both Muslims and Christians, because when the attack happens, you never know, anybody can be a casualty. It seems for every one step we make forward, in building bridges between Christians and Muslims, two steps are made backwards. At first, we had limited mistrust among fundamentalists, but now there is outright mistrust. Christians, particularly Pentecostals view Muslims with distrust, apprehension and rivalry. Here, in Eastleigh features of mistrust, disharmony, and intolerance among Pentecostal as well as other churches toward Muslims have been witnessed and vice versa. It is difficult to say nowadays that it is just this group or that group that is intolerant (Scholar Wayua, S. Personal Communication, July 16, 2021).

Field data revealed fears of religious extremism for both Christians and Muslims. According to Abdullahi Boru, a Nairobi-based East African researcher with Amnesty International, he noted that “the overall goal of the militia was not only to make the government look bad, but ultimately to drive a wedge between the Christian and Muslim communities in Kenya,” (The Christian Science Monitor, November, 2015).

Religious leaders throughout Kenya who deal with growing Christian-Muslim tensions indicated that they were not sure how much longer communities that had lived side by side for years could withstand the pressure.

We feel targeted, we feel scared... It is becoming more and more difficult to tell Christians to be patient. Some of them are saying the time has come to react and defend ourselves (Lagho, W. Personal Communication, November 15, 2022).

In the reparations debate on mending the past and forging the future, an in-depth report on Kenya described religious co-existence as feeling the pressure of a stronger Muslim identity. For some pastors, it meant obtaining permission to carry guns. “To arm pastors – meant moving into the militarization of society,” (Oluoch, D., Personal Communication, July 4, 2021).

Focusing on the coastal city of Mombasa, Father Willybard Lagho of the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics observed that churches in the coastal city of Mombasa, where Muslim and Christian leaders had been killed, beefed up their security, making arrangements for police protection during services. This is a common feature in the city churches in Kenya today. “Christians are scared, yes, but we are trying to encourage them not to give up, not to revenge,”. “Some individuals call Muslims terrorists. The

line is becoming a bit blurred now.” (Willybard, L., Personal Communication, May 8, 2021).

According to Lagho, break-in attacks and killings had helped cool down the anger that could have motivated revenge attacks. Extremists had intimidated Muslim leaders into not publicly condemning such attacks. Khalef Khalifa, chairman of the Mombasa-based Muslims for Human Rights organization, alongside other Muslim clerics remained emphatic that al-Shabaab would not succeed. He observed that:

People here understand this is the work of *al Shabaab*. They know it’s not the work of Muslims in Kenya. The killing does not affect the Christians alone. It even affects us. I was at home here with my wife and she’s so pissed off. Asking, ‘Why are they killing innocent people?’ (The Christian, Science Monitor, November, 2015).

One respondent indicated that in Wajir, the next County north of Garissa that also borders Somalia, suspicions run deep. The indigenous population is almost entirely Kenyan Somali and Muslims. Most of the Christians, usually few in number, are civil servants or businesspeople from other parts of Kenya who come for work. Earlier in 2015, Sunday worshipers at the local Roman Catholic Church spoke of the deep distrust of their neighbours resulting from their church which was attacked the year before, and the statue of Jesus on the crucifix in the courtyard is now behind glass, with gaping holes in its torso from the attack as a constant reminder.

The then Wajir Deputy County Commissioner, Peter Mgeleiyo Lotulia was reported to have said that the Somali couldn’t be trusted to guard the church because “suspicion was creeping in, “You don’t know the difference between a friend and an enemy.” He had quipped. (The Christian Science Monitor, November 2015).

Muslims, too, are on edge. Suspicion of them exacerbates the tensions. According to Mr. Boru of Amnesty International. They are stuck between a government that sees them as al Shabaab sympathizers and the actual militants who have, in some cases, killed them as easily as Christians. Mass arrests, such as the one carried out in the Nairobi neighbourhood of Eastleigh in March, 2014, resulted in the apprehension of thousands of people.

These reports confirm the magnitude of fear and suspicion between Christians and Muslims' lukewarm relationships in Kenya. Yet, Kenyans are "still saying 'We are all Kenyans.' I don't know how long that will hold," Boru observed.

#### **iv. Not Sure**

Three (3) leaders, who accounted for 10% of the Christian respondents and were all Christian women, expressed uncertainty about how to characterize Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya. The Muslim respondents, both male and female did not respond to the 'not sure' parameter. The researcher's deductions in lieu of the responses were cast in two dimensions. Perhaps the inability of women to describe the nature of Christian and Muslim relations could be related to either their being out of touch with the reality of what happens in Christian-Muslim dialogue spaces. It could be because of their non-involvement in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Another possibility was that of being simply oblivious of the existence of their religious other in their neighbourhood as stated by Gruber (2020) study which begs the question, 'can women speak in interreligious dialogue?' The deafening silence and absence of women in interreligious dialogue, despite all the necessary preconditions and their potential to dialogue raises pertinent questions.

#### 4.1.2 The Framework for Christian-Muslim Dialogue Practice in Kenya

To study sought to establish the framework of Christian-Muslim dialogue practice in Kenya. Four parameters were analysed in the following categories: 1) religious engagements 2) socio-cultural engagements. A Likert scale to test each of the parameters was used. Burns and Grove (1997) define a Likert item as a statement that the respondent evaluates by assigning a quantitative value on any subjective or objective dimension, with the most commonly used dimension being level of agreement/disagreement. Likert scale items were designed to exhibit both "symmetry" and "balance" in measurements of attitudes or to what degree a statement agreed with a particular ordinal value.

Symmetry means that they contain equal numbers of positive and negative positions whose respective distances apart are bilaterally symmetric about the "neutral"/zero value (whether or not that value is presented as a candidate). Balance on the other hand, means that the distance between each candidate value is the same, allowing for quantitative comparisons such as averaging to be valid across items containing more than two candidate values. A Likert scale was provided in Table 4.5 on the question: What engagements bring Christians and Muslims together? [Tick as appropriate].

**Table 4. 5 Likert Scale on Christian-Muslim Dialogue Practice Framework**

<b>Reason engagement</b>	<b>for</b>	<b>Most often</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Once while</b>	<b>in</b>	<b>a</b>	<b>Not all</b>	<b>at</b>
		<b>(5)</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(2)</b>			<b>(1)</b>	
Religious	-	-	-	-	1.79	-	-	-	-
Socio-cultural	-	-	1.42	-	-	-	-	-	-
Economics	-	-	1.42	-	-	-	-	-	-
Government/Civic functions	1.18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The study's results, shown in Table 4.5 indicated that the religious reasons for Christian-Muslim engagement are the least important for Christian and Muslim dialogue in Kenya, with a mean score of 1.79. On the other hand, social and economic reasons are just as important, with scores of 1.42 each. The studies further revealed that engagements were more based on government/civic functions whose mean was 1.18. This data is presented in summary tables as follows on motivations for Christian-Muslim engagements in Kenya.

**Table 4.6 Summary Table on Christian-Muslim Dialogue Engagements in Kenya**

**Table 4.6 Summary Table on Christian-Muslim Engagements**

		<b>Statistics</b>			
		Religious Engagement	Social Engagement	Economic Engagement	Government Functions
N	Valid	38	38	38	38
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.79	1.42	1.42	1.18
Median		2.00	1.50	1.00	1.00
Mode		2	2	1	1
Range		3	3	2	2
Minimum		0	0	1	1
Maximum		3	3	3	3

Further discussion of each of the parameters is as follows:

*i) Government/Civic Functions*

The study revealed that in Kenya, religious leaders are interlocutors between the government and their communities; hence, their frequent participation in government/civic-related functions. Field data revealed the Christian-Muslim

**No table of figures entries found.**dialogue as shown in Table 4.7, the dialogue frequently shifted away from government and civic-related functions, with a frequency of 32 representing 84.2%, a frequency of 5 representing 13.3% once in a while and a frequency of 1 representing 2.6% who were not sure.

**Table 4.7 Frequencies of Christian-Muslim Engagements on Government/Civic Functions**

		Government Functions			Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Valid	Often	32	84.2	84.2	84.2
	Once in a while	5	13.2	13.2	97.4
	Not sure	1	2.6	2.6	100.0
Total		38	100.0	100.0	

**Source: Field Data, 2020**

Field data provided the quantitative dimensions of the strength of the phenomenon under observation. Christian-Muslim dialogue frequently happened around civic government functions that were facilitated and coordinated by government ministries. According to Kubai (2004) study, Christian and Muslim leaders only came as invitees to perform the item on the agenda in government civic functions. Even though Kenya's 2010 Constitution states that Kenya is a secular country, religious leaders under the banner of civic faith-based organizations (FBOs) participate in government-related functions on matters of governance and nation-building.

Government/civic functions in Kenya constitute a broad array of events, including debates on constitutionalism, officiating opening prayers on public official holidays, vetting of senior high-profile public officers such as chairs of commissions for example, the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) and organizing the National Prayer Breakfast (NPB). The NPB for instance is an annual 'ecumenical' event offered under the auspices of the Speaker of the National Assembly and the speaker of the Senate and it is organized by a group of dedicated volunteers that make up the National Prayer Breakfast Organizing Committee.

Spontaneous or casual conversations would usually emerge due to the networking space and opportunities provided by government/civic engagements. However, these conversations do not qualify as formal dialogues because they lack the necessary dimensions and content, relying heavily on an individual's charisma to initiate or interact. According to Kubai (2004), the government typically invites Christian and Muslim leaders to participate in events as part of their civic duties, but these dialogues have not yielded much due to their limited scope of individual contacts and exchanges. Data from the field showed that Christian-Muslim dialogue was more frequent at government and civic-related functions. The civic and government-initiated platforms were pivotal in bringing Christians and Muslims together not as exclusive guests but among other stakeholders on a particular matter of national or civic interest. According to the researcher, one can deductively conclude that the government, as an independent entity, acts as a neutral convener between the two groups, ensuring that neither group feels patronized. This is because historically, the two religions have been known to compete, become rivals, and occasionally coexist in mutuality.

## ii) Religious/Spiritual Engagements

Frequency Table 4.8 shows that dialogues were religiously motivated ‘once in a while’ at the frequency of 20 representing 52.6%. With a frequency of 8, leaders representing 21.1% of the respondents indicated ‘not sure’ of any dialogues that were religiously motivated. The frequency of 4 leaders representing 10.5% indicated that dialogues were ‘often’ religiously motivated. The frequency of 6 leaders representing 10.5% indicated that dialogues were ‘often’ religiously motivated. The frequency of 6 leaders representing 15.8% indicated that there were ‘not any dialogues at all’ that were religiously motivated.

Engagements such as the Open Education Day at Nairobi's Jamia Mosque in November 2017, reflected religiously motivated dialogues, inviting neighbouring communities, including Christians, to learn more about Islam and Muslims. There were also academic exchanges on interreligious dialogue at institutions of higher learning such as the Institute for Interreligious Dialogue and Islamic Studies (IRDIS) at Tangaza University and St. Paul’s University Christian Centre for Islamic Studies in Africa (CCISA) (Key Informant Interview, Wayua, S. July 14, 2021).

**Table 4. 8 Frequencies on Religious Engagement**

		Religious Engagement			Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Valid	Not at all	6	15.8	15.8	15.8
	Often	4	10.5	10.5	26.3
	Once in a while	20	52.6	52.6	78.9
	Not sure	8	21.1	21.1	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Scholar Wayua, the Director of the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Eastleigh (CCMRE), observed that on one side, either Christian or Muslim, organized most

religious dialogues and invited the other party for dialogue. The organizing side sets the agenda, decides who participates, and what should be the thematic area of focus, and provides resources for the whole venture (Key Informant Interview, Scholar Wayua, July 2021). Initiatives of Change (IOC) (2023) organized interfaith dialogues to aid Christians in understanding Islam dubbed 'Understanding Ramadhan Dialogue questions'. Data on Christian-Muslim religious specific dialogues, in which either group initiated an official meeting to enhance mutual understanding, is scarce.

There was no marginal difference between religious leaders-initiated dialogues and government-initiated dialogues with means of 1.79 and 1.18 respectively. The incoherence however, is reflected in the qualitative data where no religious or spiritual dialogues were referenced. Religious dialogues primarily occurred once in a while accounting for 52 %, during which Christians and Muslims engaged in discussions about their respective religious or spiritual themes. These discussions aimed to enhance mutual understanding or dispel stereotypes about other religions, that often lead to conflicts between them. These sentiments are in agreement with Dogbe's (2005) who observes that Christians-Muslims dialogue to better understand each other and dispense and dispel stereotypes.

### **iii) Social Engagement**

Frequency data presented in Table 4.9 below indicates that 16 leaders representing 42.1% viewed social engagements having provided a framework for dialogue 'once in a while'. Thirteen (13) leaders representing 34.2% saw social engagements as providing the basic framework for dialogue 'often'. Six (6) leaders representing 15.8% felt that social engagements diminished dialogue, whereas three (3) leaders representing 7.9%

were ‘not sure’ whether social engagements played any role in providing a framework for Christian-Muslim dialogue.

**Table 4.9 Social Engagement Frequencies**

		Social Engagement			Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Valid	Not at all	6	15.8	15.8	15.8
	Often	13	34.2	34.2	50.0
	Once in a while	16	42.1	42.1	92.1
	Not sure	3	7.9	7.9	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Field data revealed that Kenyans have for decades realized social and religious integration brought about by shared classrooms, hospitals, weddings and funerals. Both Christians and Muslims are forming civil rights advocacy groups such as Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) and the Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI). According to Hajj Hassan Ole Naado, SUPKEM Chair;

The social engagements are mostly evident in initiatives that seek to bring social and cultural change in societies (Ole Naado, H., Personal Communication, July 15, 2021).

Interreligious groups such as IRCK, the CICC, and the interreligious networks in the counties, among others, showed that social engagements do happen.

Both formal and informal social engagements took place in joint forums, for instance, the Relief Web reported on November 22, 2022, under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), that 100 religious leaders from Christian, Muslim, and Hindu faith communities in Kenya had joined a training on how they could fight to sustain a reduction in new HIV infections,

teenage pregnancies, and gender-based violence (GBV). The training was based on the belief that religious leaders, who are trusted stakeholders in responding to social issues involving adolescents and young people (AYPs), the trust and confidence that AYPs and communities place on religious leaders gives them a vital role in providing guidance and adequate psycho-social support.

Nonetheless, field data showed informal dialogues were more spontaneous and socially motivated with no consideration of structured frameworks. Jay Salim, the director of Kamukunji Community Peace Network (KACPEN) described a scenario in which two women, a Christian and a Muslim, were queuing for maternity services at Pumwani Maternity Hospital, a government hospital in Nairobi. They found themselves waiting longer than expected in the queue, leading them to question why their treatment was taking longer than expected. They then started a conversation. They initiated a conversation on how inefficient the services are in that hospital; in the process, the two developed an interest in each other and got to know each other a lot more and better. The two women developed a friendship they later met for a cup of tea in their homes and soon they thought about ways in which to advocate for better maternal care services from government health facilities in the county. Later, they realized they could continue to work together and decided to form the current “Parenting Circle” which brings both Muslim and Christian women together in Majengo, Nairobi to address the common challenges of parenting. The respondent indicated that ‘this is something that may grow into formal dialogues or remain informal between the women.

Formally, social engagements facilitated interactions between Christians and Muslims within the framework of religious alliances. In Isiolo County, for example, the Isiolo

Interreligious Forum, recognizing the threat of radicalization due to its proximity to the northern corridor of Somalia, has implemented programs embedded in the National Action Plan (NAP), localizing it to the county level to combat radicalization and violent extremism (Kalunyu M.S., Personal Communication, July 2021).

However, social and development matters tend to overlook religious ones, except prayers at the start and end of program events. One respondent who sought anonymity observed that if,

You want to engage women from our religious community, you could do so easily on social activities and community development projects at community levels, but not on religious matters. (Rukia, B., Personal Communication, July 2021).

#### **iv) Economic Engagements**

Field data revealed an equal mean of 1.42 for both social and economic engagements. Economic-related encounters provided the basis for informal Christian-Muslim dialogues in trading towns and centres across the country. According to Jay Salim the director of Kamukunji Peace Network;

The general business trend between Christians and Muslims in Kenya is continuous despite the many challenges. Trading ranges from buying, selling and exporting 'Khat' or 'miraa' as it is locally known, to other assorted goods being imported from Dubai, Turkey, etc. The Somali Muslims are generally perceived to be a very enterprising group (Jay, S. Personal Communication, July 4, 2021).

Wairimu (2012) demonstrates that Somali immigrants, primarily Muslims in Nairobi's Eastleigh area, are the driving force behind the city's business activities. They would convert the rooms into shops during the day and lodgings during the night.

The study underscores the importance of economics as the fundamental basis for Christian-Muslim dialogue encounters. This is exemplified in Eastleigh, home to nearly equal Christian and Muslim populations, which stands out as one of the few locations in East Africa where people openly trade in pure gold jewellery and exchange various hard currencies for a wide range of goods. Eastleigh is the only place where you can buy everything from a pair of socks to a lethal firearm at a reasonable price. The impressive cash flows have attracted sizeable investment in the estate while enhancing Christian and Muslim encounters.

It is noted that Eastleigh has more than 10 banks and numerous forex bureaus or foreign exchange markets. No other area in Nairobi has so many financial service providers. Some banks have more than one branch and operate even on Sundays. Thanks to the large Muslim population, most of them also now offer Islamic banking, which prohibits interest. Shipping companies and airlines have also opened offices in Eastleigh. Though locals (both Christians and Muslims) are happy with the growth of the business hub, many have voiced concern that they may soon have nowhere to call home as business encroachments edge them out.

#### **4.1.3 Legal Framework for Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian–Muslim Dialogue**

Existing legal frameworks at both national and international levels demonstrate the purpose of women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue, with the primary goal of fostering just communities of faith and peace. To achieve this goal, interreligious dialogue is being carried out on four different levels: Policy framework levels of common life; international norms and standards of collaboration for a better

world; principles for theological exchanges and best practices of sharing religious experiences.

Policy framework levels of common life where every one's participation — including women, are involved in interreligious dialogue based on the principles of inclusivity and in the spirit of Vision 2030 of 'leaving no one behind.' For instance, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000), which calls on different stakeholders involved in conflict transformation frameworks to involve women, provide a common denominator for Christian and Muslim women's participation in the interreligious dialogue. These laws, along with others like the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Union (AU) Protocol on Women's Rights, and Kenya's 2010 Constitutional Provision for the Two-Thirds Gender Rule, make it possible for women to help promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

Field data revealed that interreligious dialogues had been carried out for collaboration for a better world while seeking to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The practices, international norms, and standards, such as Freedom of Religion and Belief (FORB), are buttressed. From a religious perspective, honest and sincere conversations are pursued, even if they reveal discomforts with one's own tradition or that of the 'other'. The mantra was that everyone must assume that everyone else is equal. This meant coming together, sharing aspects of the respective faiths, and striving to understand what is foreign. What is essential in this respect is that the participants engaging in dialogue lay aside attempts to missionize, which is always accompanied by

an attitude of exclusive superiority and can be equated with the spoken or unspoken belief that one's own religion is the "true" way, or effectively the only way.

According to Hassan Ole Naado, the chairman of SUPKEM, there was need to allow everyone to define their own religious experience and identity by basing it on internationally recognized best practices. It was required that others respect this in dialogue spaces. It was believed that religion's power could be used as a major force. Religion, as a force of unification among divergent factions, can play a critical role in promoting global peace and reconciliation. This may be made possible by bringing varying groups, including women, together to establish and maintain constructive channels of communication and sustainable collaboration. So, the legal framework is very important for interreligious dialogue because it can help bring different religious groups together and help them understand, accept, and tolerate each other. Interfaith dialogue can in this way break down walls of division and the gender barriers that stand at the centre of numerous wars, in order to achieve peace.

### **Conclusion**

So, the legal framework is very important for interreligious dialogue because it can help bring different religious groups together and help them understand, accept, and tolerate each other. However, harnessing the demographic dividends of women in Islam and Christianity does not translate directly into their participation. This is because there is a discrepancy between the existing policies and legal frameworks and their actual implementation within the context of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya.

Socio-cultural, economic, and civic interactions between Christians and Muslims ended as mere conversations, not leading to tangible goals and outcomes intended for Christian-Muslim dialogue, which is intended to foster religious understanding of the

'other' religion for respect and tolerance. This encourages religious practitioners and interested parties to be intentionally strategic for women to participate in interreligious dialogue. A general understanding of existing best practices from around the world and the policy framework and resolutions made in recognition of women's potential did not make the situation any better for women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is due to the religious dialogue framework. The bi-focal tension between the conflicting need for women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue and the absence of a necessary framework for their participation undermines the assumption that Christians and Muslims see the need for women's participation.

#### **4.2 The Role of Women in Promoting Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

The second objective of the study sought to assess the role of women in promoting Christian Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. This objective was associated with the assumption that women are willing to participate in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. Data was analysed on the inclusion of women in both formal and informal Christian-Muslim dialogue engagements. The study adopted a bi-focal approach to levels of inclusion at the formal and informal dialogues. Formal dialogues typically follow a predetermined agenda and have a structured form and content. For example, religious leaders dialogue on areas of convergence in Islam and Christianity. However, informal dialogues constituted dialogues that were spontaneous. Informal dialogues tended to emerge naturally from life encounters which tended to be unstructured at the informal dialogues of grass roots for Christian and Muslim women encounters. Data was analysed on women's involvement in interreligious dialogue based on three parameters: i) active

participation, ii) limited participation, and iii) non-participation. Further data were solicited by probing for reasons provided for each of the selected choices. This data is relayed in the following discussion.

#### **4.2.1 Women's Inclusion in the Formal and Informal Dialogues.**

Key informant interviews were administered to 11 respondents with four (4) questions which were framed as follows: 1. Are women involved in Christian-Muslim dialogue? 2. If the answer to the above question is yes, how are women involved in Christian-Muslim dialogue? 3. If the answer to the above question is no, why not? 4. How can you describe Christian-Muslim engagements of women in Kenya? The analysis showed that formal dialogues were structured and intentional in their approach, to promote understanding between Christians and Muslims for acceptance and tolerance. Questionnaires were also administered to assess the strength of direction of the responses received. The questionnaires administered were in two parts. Further, the formal and informal levels of Christian-Muslim dialogues from the Key Informant Interviews were analysed and examples provided in the second part of the question on Christian and Muslim women's engagements. The set parameters for questionnaires included the following; a. formal, b. informal, c. both of a. and b. and last but not least, d. none of the above. These questions are listed in the data collection tools in Appendices II, and III.

##### **i) Women Inclusion at the Formal and Informal Levels of Dialogue**

There were two levels of inclusion: formal and informal levels of Christian-Muslim dialogue. According to the field data presented in Table 4.10, women were heavily included in the informal Christian-Muslim dialogue. The frequency of 21 respondents (15 Christians and 6 Muslims) at the informal level represents 55.3%, while the frequency of 8 respondents (5 Christians and 3 Muslims) at the formal level represents

21.1%. The frequency of 7 (6 Christians and 1 Muslim) representing 18.4% indicated that women were involved both at formal and informal levels, whereas 2 (2 Christians and null Muslim) leaders representing 5.3% indicated ‘none of the levels. As a result, this indicates that women are heavily involved in informal spaces that are more localized and may not be structured. Table 4.10 shows the levels of women inclusion in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

**Table4. 10 Frequency for Women Inclusion in the Formal and Informal Levels of Dialogue**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None of the Formal and Informal	2	5.3	5.3	5.3
	Formal	8	21.1	21.1	26.3
	Informal	21	55.3	55.3	81.6
	Both of the Formal and the Informal	7	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

**i) Women Inclusion in the Formal Levels of Dialogue**

Eight (8) respondents (5 Christians and 3 Muslims), representing 21% of the respondents, stated that women were included in the formal Christian-Muslim dialogues. A few reasons were advanced for inclusion of women in the formal dialogues as follows:

**a. There is an Emerging Clique of Female Preachers in Kenya with Vested Religious Authority**

Islamic public sermonizing has traditionally been the domain of male clerics but more recently women are coming up to speak on various issues that represent their religion in public discourses. In Christianity, the female priesthood has witnessed the emergence of women ordained into church leadership, who speak as representatives of their religious communities. Women taking on leadership roles and positions of authority increased their chances of participating in formal dialogues. The Ndzovu (2020) study corroborates the emerging clique of female preachers in Kenya, where women's stories are disrupting the traditional role of Muslim preachers. Ndzovu also explores the controversial status of the 'female voice' as one of the major mediums of transmitting religious knowledge to the Muslim public thus, opening spaces for dialogue. This is happening despite the limitations imposed by some conservative Islamic religious scholars. New forms of female religious authorities represent a significant development among Kenyan Muslims for formal dialogues. Women are becoming more prominent in radio programs, serving as religious authorities. This has elevated the social status of women in society, thereby providing them with opportunities within formal interreligious dialogues.

There are a variety of female church leaders, pastors, bishops, and televangelists in Kenya who have mastered the art like their male colleagues amassing some level of authority to represent their organizations in formal interreligious dialogues. Some of the women sampled among the top 10 leading Kenyan female church leaders who have rocked the pulpit with the power of the Word includes Rev Natasha, Lucy Muiro, Ada Adoyo, Kathy Kiuna, Teresia Wairimu and many others. Women's interreligious programs under Women of Faith department in Interreligious Council of Kenya have

invited these individuals to participate in their full roles as church leaders. National Catholic Reporter News shows how the modern-day priesthood has greatly evolved; and it is noted that, gone are the days when it was an all-male affair; nowadays things are changing and the female folks are equally taking over the tasks.

**b. Themes that are Common to Women in Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

Common interests among women propelled formal interreligious dialogues between them: Intercultural marriages provided localized but formal spaces for women's inclusion and interaction in interreligious dialogue. Intercultural marriages and the attendant challenges for women in such marriages; employment of women in public spaces provided formal structures where women dialogued on themes that were of common interest.

The program for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa and the Interreligious Council of Kenya for instance *have women only programs* that seek to build dialogue between women of different faiths. Nearly all counties in Kenya have established Women of Faith networks and programs. Women of Faith Network national secretary Sabina Ng'ang'a says that when they [women] came together, they realized some issues affected them as women, regardless of their religious affiliations and where they came from.

Formal dialogue experiences were relayed from different perspectives. Women participate in formal dialogues, such as peacebuilding forums, when they share a common interest. The Women Peace Link in Isiolo County, for instance, constitutes both Christian and Muslim women. There were seemingly rare occasions where women were involved in dialogue forums through invitations from religious leaders. In other instances, it was unavoidable for women to miss out on formal dialogue levels.

Depending on the magnitude of the theme, formal levels of engagement in public spaces while attending to parenting challenges amidst the growing challenges of child radicalization begged the need for women's participation simply because they are on the front lines of parenting by natural occurrence.

At higher institutions of learning, a comparative study of the two religions in formal settings led to a more formal approach, where faith communities, living side by side and inviting others into their sacred spaces, realized formal dialogues between Muslim and Christian women in academic exchanges and dialogue settings.

Field data has shown that women's participation in formal dialogues primarily occurs in women-only dialogues. However, it was observed that, because formal dialogue occurs among leaders whom are mostly clergy, part of the reason is that Christian women are put to leadership as clergies in the church but Muslim women have no such equivalent responsibility as clergies due the doctrinal teaching; hence, the difficulty of formal dialogues among women and men in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

#### **ii) Women's Inclusion in the Informal Levels of Dialogue**

The frequency of 21 (15 Christians and 6 Muslims), representing 55.3% of respondents, showed that women were substantively involved at the informal levels of dialogue. Informal dialogues constituted spontaneous dialogues. In life encounters, informal dialogues tended to emerge naturally. These were unstructured. In informal dialogues, at grass root levels, Christian and Muslim women encountered each other as neighbours in social events and ceremonies. According to Phyllis Kamau, the Programs Manager at the National Council of Churches of Kenya, at the head office in Nairobi (NCCK):

Informal dialogues were viewed as ‘culturally friendly’, ‘space-wise fluid’, and ‘usually not pre-conditioned with time. Informal dialogues afford women an unconventional way of dialoguing that may be referred to as unique method for women participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This method in dialogue and peace building may not be popular but is unique to women (Kamau P., Personal Communication, August 21, 2021).

Field data showed informal dialogue experiences for women that were *unique and spontaneous* at the same time in various incidences. Engagements were mostly in informal business and social forums of local women such as local business franchises, which are locally known as *chamas* or Merry Go Rounds. Women found themselves in parent associations in the same neighbourhood schools that their children attended. Matters of cultures were found to be cross cutting in Christianity and Islam leading women to dialogue informally as they realized that it had affected them disproportionately.

In their fight for women's rights, other women in the communities organized informal rallies without formal invitations, encouraging them to carry placards with strong advocacy messages against social vices such as child labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and femicide cases. During times of calamities, such as the aftermath of terror attacks and other related cases, women found themselves on the front lines as caretakers. Also, in events such as weddings or funerals committees, women found themselves in informal dialogues.

Women's involvement in informal dialogues showed the potential and unique calling of women in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Ruether (1985) summarized the unique place of women by asking pertinent rhetorical questions:

What can women do? A few women whom the world listens to less than it should? The partial responses to the questions posed suggest that women should continue to listen to and care about each other's stories, just as they have done in the past. Keep widening the circle, building bridges, overcoming barriers, and turning the other into a human. Ruether's study challenge the notion that women today have a special or unique calling, arguing that this question carries significant risks. However, the question is often posed in terms of the concept of a woman's "uniqueness" as different and opposite to males. It is answered by trying to find a different or distinct role for women, one that corresponds to the feminine nature. Underneath this type of answer, Ruther explains, lies a model of complementary male-female "natures" and roles: men are the head, women the heart, men the actors, women the nurturers. And it concludes that, if women have a role and a ministry, it cannot be the same as men's. Women should be the comforters and nurturers, the hospital visitors, the children's catechists, and so on. This, she says leads to what society perceives as auxiliary and powerless roles of women in a position. Ruether introduces a controlling principle that rejects anything that denigrates women and accepts anything that uplifts and values them (Ruether, 2018).

The study showed that informal dialogues were usually unstructured with less concretized resolution which scarcely yielded into a policy framework. Informal dialogues also tended to be more personalized, with minimal follow-ups or post-activity evaluations to hold individuals accountable. These dialogues though relational had scarce quantifiable effects as a result of their informal outlook. This is underscored in the Juma (1999) interim report to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on management development and governance division bureau for development policy. The report was on women peace movements in Kenya that help

foster dialogues in communities for peace. Juma reported that they organized dialogue meetings and workshops for religious leaders (both Christians and Muslims) to try and use religion as a tool for peacebuilding in Kenya's fragmented context, laying the groundwork for reconciliation. Starting with a vanguard group of women, the peace wagon accommodated people from various fields. By 1994, as a result, Wajir was experiencing a window of peace.

It is important to note from the report that using traditional administrative channels, the women's peace movement broke the cycle of violence and began nurturing peace through community informal dialogues. From village to village, the women's peace movement carried the message of peace, encouraging various groups such as chiefs, elders, police, and women to collaborate. Through informal dialogues, women cultivated peace across various sectors of the community and sparked off peace activities at different levels. The 'challenge however was sustaining peace,' as observed by Phyllis Kamau, the program manager at NCK's head office in Nairobi.

The researcher believes that the degree of internalization and further embedding of informal levels within formal dialogue structures determines the formal levels of dialogue. For instance, women's participation at informal levels of dialogue helped redefine women's informal purposes for dialogue. The International Coordinator for the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN), Anjelin Okola, says that in well-established religious communities, basic questions would lead to a look at how private and semi-public events and conversations connect to bigger issues in public discourse, like women's issues. Questions such as which voices are represented could perhaps be raised. Interrogating the public participation sphere and what is brought to

the table as an agenda for dialogue and whether it is inclusive of the women and minority groups' agenda.

### **iii) Women Inclusion in the Formal and Informal Levels of Dialogue**

The frequency of 7 (6 Christians and 1 Muslim) representing 18.4% of the respondents indicated that women were involved in both formal and informal levels of dialogue. There was a razor-sharp distinction of the views between Christian and Muslim respondents. Among the respondents, six (6) out of seven (7) Christians and one (1) out of seven (7) Muslims agreed that women participated in both formal and informal levels of dialogue.

Some practical and theoretical approaches to women's activities were considered formal (theoretical exchanges) and at the same time informal (practical) levels of dialogue. Interfaith marriages, for instance, were viewed as fostering formal and informal dialogues. Vanlatalani (2011) conducted studies in India among Christian Mizo women who married non-Mizo men. The study's findings revealed that their fellow Mizos, both men and women, as well as their family members, close friends, and relatives, initially looked down upon these women. However, the study reveals that some Mizo women have maintained excellent interfaith relations through their marriages with people of other faiths. The studies indicate that the techniques that Mizo women *apply are prayer and an exemplary life as well as sharing their Christian faith* [emphasis mine] with their husbands.

Lutheran World Federation Studies series 10/2003 also identifies interfaith marriages as interfaith relations in practice which fosters dialogue. Although the write-up does not explicitly illustrate interfaith marriage between Christians and Muslims in dialogue,

it suggests that women in tribal societies can promote interfaith relations by engaging in inter-religious or inter-cultural marriages with individuals from different faiths or communities. Interfaith marriages facilitate life dialogues, enabling both parties to gain a deeper understanding of each other's religious beliefs.

According to Scholar Wayua, the director of the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Eastleigh, he noted that;

Post and pre-dialogue events constitute informal dialogues which act as side events that women use in fostering Christian- Muslim dialogue and are usually sandwiched by women in between formal dialogues. Yet pre- and post-dialogues neither constitute a formidable force for recognition nor seek media attention. Yet women have continued to make use of side events where their voices remain unheard to address their issues in between formal dialogues (Wayua, S., Personal Communication, July 16, 2021).

Kathleen McGarvey, a Sister of Our Lady of the Apostles, reported on women's inclusion at both formal and informal levels of dialogue. She acknowledged that women may not receive invitations to decision-making tables, so they have informally pushed their agenda during scheduled time. For instance, in 2002, eleven Muslim and eleven Christian religious leaders, who were exclusively male, signed a Kaduna Peace Declaration while conversing over a cup of tea. At the same time, women organized a formal workshop under WIPNET (Women in Peace Network) to dialogue and draw up a peace agreement. However, they were advised not to publish it but to consider it included under the one signed by their male religious leaders. McGarvey (2009) notes that 'the content of the two declarations is quite different and they could have complemented one another'.

Salli Effungani, the Programme Officer for PROCMURA, described the women's interfaith diapraxis project in Zanzibar, known as the Upendo Diapraxis Project, as a

combination of elements. It involves a significant amount of practical work aimed at achieving shared goals among Christian and Muslim women in Zanzibar, while also providing a formal environment for women to learn about and respect each other's faiths. The Langas (2008) study also underscores these views, emphasizing that the practical work in diapraxis involves fostering mutual understanding between Christian and Muslim women in Zanzibar. Diapraxis involves the collaborative efforts of two or more religious groups or cultures, to dismantle prejudices, fear, enmity and foster mutual understanding among individuals. Nielson and Knitter (2004) argue that diapraxis takes place in the border area between religions and cultures, and there will always be an overlap between the work of the dialogue team and the poverty eradication team. This reflects an interplay of formal and informal levels of dialogue.

Field data demonstrated the inclusion of women in both formal and informal dialogues on issues like female genital mutilation (FGM) and gender-based violence (GBV), among others. Hanifa Adam, the Project Officer at the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) reports that the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and (SUPKEM) have collaborated on various projects related to climate justice, both in Kenya and throughout the continent. The formula they employ involves first engaging women in intra-religious dialogue within their respective denominations, sometimes in an informal manner, before introducing them into formal dialogues at higher levels. This approach tended to work well with women and often yielded maximum benefits for the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue, firstly at the informal levels, then at the formal levels of dialogue.

#### **iv) Non-inclusion of Women at the Formal Levels of Dialogues**

A frequency of two respondents, two Christians and one Muslim, representing 5.3%, indicated that women were not included in both formal and informal dialogues; 'I haven't seen any formal engagement of women'.

The study found that women's inclusion in formal and informal dialogues was more informal than formal. Most of the dialogue activities always happened in local communities and at the grassroots levels. These elucidate the potentials that can be harnessed for more formal dialogues with women. According to the researcher, the intensity of women's promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue lies within the informal level.

#### **4.2.2 Status of Women Participation in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

Middle-level leadership of the chosen umbrella religious organizations received questionnaires based on three parameters: i) active participation, ii) limited participation, and iii) non-participation. At the second level of an open-ended question, reasons for the selected choices were sought. The tools for data collection are shown in Appendix A3. Key informants' interviews were based on three questions as follows: i) Are women involved in Christian-Muslim dialogue? ii) If the answer to the above question is yes, how are women involved in Christian-Muslim dialogue? iii) If the answer to the above question is no, why not?

The field data revealed that a frequency of 17 respondents, 9 Christians and 8 Muslims, represented 44.7% active participation, A frequency of 1 (Christian and null Muslim) representing marginal percentage of 2.6% poised the participation of women as 'limited

participation.’ while a majority of 20 respondents, 10 Christians and 10 Muslims, representing substantive 52.6%, demonstrated non-active participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This data is reflected in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11 Status of women participation in dialogue women**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Non participation	20	52.6	52.6	52.6
Active participation	17	44.7	44.7	97.4
Limited participation	1	2.6	2.6	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

**Source: Field Data, 2020**

**i) Active Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

Field data showed a frequency of 17 (9 Christians and 8 Muslims) representing 44.7% respondents participating actively in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. However, informal dialogues or engagements at local community levels constituted the majority of active participation. These arose from the prevailing needs and conditions of conflict in Christian and Muslim communities. For instance, when religious extremism threatens the community and radicalizes children into violent extremism, women, in their role as primary caregivers, must engage in discussions about the essentials of effective parenting. Such needs necessitated *women specific* interventions.

Roselyn Pepela, the women program officer, at the Kenya Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) observed that:

Women abilities and services were fully appreciated in the care much more in what has come to be known as 'soft approaches to peace-making' in interreligious dialogue. As a result, women participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue has become an important discourse in the interreligious field of peacebuilding and general development. The participation of women in the promotion of interreligious dialogue therefore should be broadly conceived as accepting women's viewpoints, seeking them and raising their status through education, literacy, awareness, and community training (Pepela R., Personal Communication, July 11, 2021).

Women's active participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue was variously reflected in the field data. Women perspectives to life received general attention, as they learned from each other's religious perspectives and how various issues affected them in society. Active participation of women in dialogue helped bring awareness of the women's collective needs. Women engaged in dialogue for social-economic goals of self-actualization and empowerment, realizing the potential of collaborative movements that transcend religious boundaries. Through dialogue, women ventured beyond their familiar local circumstances and spaces, thereby gaining exposure to new experiences by comparing their own religious experiences with those of others.

The exposures enabled them to learn that sometimes they were not alone in the challenges they faced in their own religions. They knew they could soldier on in solidarity if they were not alone. Some eventually went further to seek national levels of involvement in dialogue matters in social and environmental matters. As a result, few women have risen into political and economic leadership positions. Through active participation in local grassroot dialogues, women have actively joined together in the

fight for the rights of women. They are fully involved in small businesses and market centres, and they are now actively involved in addressing religious and cultural misunderstandings, which are mostly attributed to the disempowerment of women in their religions.

Field data also showed that the gender-defined study of roles of women in religion validates their positioning as entailed in the Standpoint theory which helped to guide the study. Positions of women in faith, and their participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue reinforces these roles. In religions, traditionally, women take responsibility for caring for children, pass traditions on to children, serve husbands in the home, follow gender-specific commandments, assist their husbands and other male family members in political and religious decisions, and care for familial assets from home. However, unlike specific religious traditions, interreligious dialogue has a neutral public space appeal. Interreligious neutral spaces challenge the religious traditional roles of women in their active participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in the formal dialogues. Since no one single religious tradition takes pre-eminence. To back up what was said above about how faith communities should talk about the traditional roles of women and how they can actively promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Eusebius Atamalo, a senior staff member at the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, said:

Women have certain characteristics and powers which they carry *because they are female* [emphasis mine]; they are expected to bring those gifts to the world on how they love, work, and lead and actively participate in the life and work of religious communities (Eusebius Atamallo, E., Personal Communication, August 12, 2021).

The study found that women's only movements in churches and mosques, such as the Catholic Women Association (CWA), the Woman's Guild, and the Women's Mosque Movements, carried out women-only dialogue programs within their religious communities and umbrella organizations. Annual events such as women's joint meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops, and short-term projects embed women-only dialogues, occasionally inviting an external expert speaker, thereby fostering an inward-focused environment. Women-only dialogues have little external or foreign contact or intrusion. Other than their own religious texts, these programs are largely localized, semi-formal, and have little influence on the general national policy framework.

According to the study, most informal dialogue focused on the unique issues women faced and how to address them. These issues included; high expectations of women from society, multi-tasking with family and professional life as well as distance and security. Sometimes the distances needed to travel to a community building meeting are far and this is not always safe for women. There was also gender stereotyping where women are not always taken as seriously as men in similar situations/positions. Women dialogue teams discussed the challenges to achieving maximum trust in communities, and most of the time unanimously agreed that there are issues on culture and patriarchy that need to be 'unlearnt' to keep going.

There were some indications for active participation of women in the *formal interreligious dialogues*. These had been organized by umbrella religious organizations. However, despite women's active participation in many religious traditions, the same religious traditions hindered their active participation in the

promotion of interreligious dialogue. These dismal aspects of a handful of women's participation were bolstered in this study. The discussions about the active participation of women in the formal dialogues showed that mostly leaders including youth and women in religious leadership (who are few) stand a chance of being considered representatives to participate actively in the formal interfaith dialogues. According to Eusebius Atamallo, he noted that:

During the Garissa University College attack in 2014, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) brought Christian and Muslim youth together to dialogue with the objective; of fostering harmonious living. The criterion used to select delegates was that the delegates fit the age group of youth. They were also representing youth in church leadership. This dialogue was youth-specific and is a pointer to what happens in the field of interreligious dialogue. As a result of the youth dialogue, it is indicated that the problem did not escalate to the whole region (Eusebius Atamalo, E., Personal Communication, August 12, 2021).

Discussions about women's active participation in interreligious dialogues reveal that most leaders, including women in leadership roles, are viewed as representatives who actively participate in formal interfaith dialogues. Although interpretations of faith which is mostly patriarchal continue to restrict the rights of women in very significant ways of determining leadership roles, it is clear that faith traditions – just like the rest of the world – have much more to do to make their professed esteem for women in leadership to represent their faith in interreligious dialogue.

Jay Salim, the Director of Kamukunji Community Peace Network, reports that Initiatives of Change (IOC) in Kenya has organized several formal dialogues for women. Initiatives Of Change is a global organization dedicated to "building trust across the world's divides" of culture, nationality, belief, and background. The series of

dialogues include the interfaith dialogue on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2024, an interfaith dialogue with clergy in June 2024, and parallel interfaith sessions in July 2024. The topic of these interfaith dialogue meetings, separated by gender, was to challenge the trust building for (wo)men in the community. Twenty male participants from various locations in Kenya joined in the dialogue for men. There were 25 participants in the women's dialogue which included guest speakers such as Amina Khalid (United Kingdom), Cleo Mohlaodi (South Africa), Jane Jilani and Sureya Hirsi (Kenya - Mombasa) and Sr. Evelyne Ingotse (Kenya - Garissa). Each participating woman inspired others with their diverse positions of influence.

In other cases, women ventured out to dialogue on their own. Women like Amina Wadud and others founded religious congregations to empower other women in dialogue forums and movements. In Islam for instance, in 2009 under the patronage of Amina Wadud, women established Musawah, a global organization dedicated to empowering Muslim women and in particular reforming Personal laws in Muslim-majority countries. The laws relating to divorce, inheritance and custody were often based on sexist medieval interpretations of Islamic texts. On the Christian side, Roselyne Pepela of the Young Christian Women Association leader related how women have ventured out and said:

There were reports of women, who venture out to dialogue as liberals to make their participation meaningful, having realized that, the mainstream women's movement which have concentrated on the relatively less threatening aspects of the liberal agenda for women's concerns. The primary goal has been to allow women to do what men do (Pepela, R., Personal Communication, July 11, 2021).

Using the standpoint theory, the study demonstrates that gender-defined roles involve a commitment to the view that all attempts by women to engage in dialogue are socially situated. The social situation of an epistemic agent—her gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and physical capacities—plays a role in forming what is known and limiting what can be known. Here the standpoint theory stands out as a productive methodology to analyse women's roles and the need to demonstrate women's potential contribution to the field of interreligious dialogue.

## **ii) Limited Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

A frequency of 1 (Christian and null Muslim) representing a marginal percentage of 2.6% described the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue as 'limited participation'. Field data showed two reasons advanced for the choices made on limited participation as follows: Few women are given opportunities to participate despite a majority attending and that these women are usually recycled thus, the majority are just spectators.

Field data revealed that the interreligious and umbrella religious organizations invited a limited number of women compared to men to participate in interreligious dialogue. Sally Effungani, the Programme Officer in PROCMURA, for instance, narrated that in the early years of 2000, HIV/AIDS had ravaged the Sub-Saharan African countries. Kenya had declared the disease a national pandemic in November 1999. For the Women Programme in PROCMURA, that meant examining what drew Christian and Muslim women together. Effungani indicated that for almost 7 years, what dominated the

women interreligious dialogue thematic discussions were the burning issues of the time that were interlinked with human sexuality, reproduction and HIV/AIDS.

Moreover, field data revealed that umbrella organizations have conducted a series of seminars and workshops, bringing together Christian and Muslim women leaders. To train them and to dialogue on how to mitigate the stigma associated with the disease. However, the participation was limited due to the small number of women who took part. For the few women who participated, their active participation resulted in an understanding of their religions and how to work together in dialogue forums.

Key informant interviews revealed that inadequate policy framework limited women's participation. Anjelin Okola, the Director of EDAN, asserted that the historical legacy, factors of religious traditions do not serve as significant explanatory factors for any aspect of gender inequality, and she observed that policies which favour leaders in assigning participants to represent their denominations in the promotion of interreligious dialogue.

The absence of an inclusive policy framework in the interfaith dialogue field gave discretionary exclusivity to the male-dominated leadership. Regarding the participation of women in the promotion of interreligious dialogue about the general legal framework for the inclusion of women, Fr Joseph Mutie, the chairman of the Interreligious Council of Kenya claimed that:

The legal framework in Kenya promotes women's participation and gender equality. The Constitution of Kenya 2010 Article 27 (8) provides affirmative action that requires the State to take legislative action and other measures to ensure that no more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies are of the same gender. This law recognizes that in specific sectors of society, women have historically been marginalized, discriminated and excluded from leadership. This law guarantees women's right to equality in leadership (Mutie, J., Personal Communication, August 6, 2021)

However, most public and private institutions, including religious institutions, have not implemented the policy since the promulgation of the Kenyan Constitution in 2010. As a result, the inclusive policy has yet to be fully implemented in religious institutions and remains optional. A survey conducted by the Msingi Trust in which the researcher took part between August and December 2022 on 'Faith and Feminism in Communities of Faith: 100 Voices for Change,' for example revealed that:

Some churches consider the policy on the Two-Thirds Gender Rule, discriminatory in nature, as it favours women more than men. Some thus, suggested that it should not be a matter of concern in the church as it is unbiblical. Women in Islam on the other hand thought that no other religion bequeathed women better status than Islam. Males and females were created equally in the image and likeness of God in Christianity; none of them should thus, feel inferior or favoured against the other (Msingi Trust, 2022).

Religious organizations' ambiguous stance on the Two-Thirds Gender Rule in Kenya's New Constitution of 2010, undermines both the spirit and the letter of an affirmative action to increase women's participation in the promotion of interreligious dialogue.

Participation of women in interreligious dialogue, nonetheless, is done without clearly stipulated policies that seek to de-escalate the limited participation of women. In umbrella religious organizations, elections determine the appointment of leaders to

positions of power, while religious councils nominate other leaders. Corrupt practices such as chest thumping and bribery taint some elections, thereby excluding women from leadership roles. This is because most women, particularly those in rural areas, may find it difficult to bribe their way into positions of religious leadership.

For instance, choices of dialogue representatives were solely done by the appointing authorities in the respective religions traditions who later requested them to report to the community of churches which they represented. In other cases, there were no set criteria for one to participate in Christian-Muslim dialogue thus, leaving the discretion to the appointing authority. This sometimes led to limited participation of women, even when religious doctrine had express provisions for the inclusion of both males and females. Islam for instance, places women as the most precious human beings in the Holy Qur'ān, 31:14. Christianity has high regard for both males and females as standing equally before God as reflected in the holy biblical text of Galatians 3:28.

Women have not found leadership roles within mosque committees. Furthermore, some women leaders who have been nominated to leadership positions resign due to marital and family issues that repress women's access to power. Most churches have doctrinal statements; however, written documents that seek to include women in leadership are missing. Such policies, including those from the government's two-thirds gender rule, may be considered by the two religions of Islam and Christianity in support of inclusive leadership and increasing women's roles and participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

An analysis of the Dialogue Reference Group (DRG) as discussed by Fr. Joseph Mutie (IRCK) gave further insight exemplifying limited women participation in interreligious dialogue. DRG is an interreligious dialogue group that brings together representatives of religious groups in top leadership in Kenya to jointly address national issues such as the religious stance on the COVID-19 pandemic and worship protocols. One of the major achievements of the DRG was the highly acclaimed National Dialogue Conference (NDC) that brought together more than 600 religious leaders from across the country to dialogue at Ufungamano House in 2018. The National Dialogue Conference had the objective to initiate an inclusive dialogue process to effectively address the political and governance crises in Kenya. The conference also aimed at generating content for the dialogue process and outlined the key principles, strategies and structures for the dialogue process. This helped buttress the first objective of the current study on examining the framework for women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The Conference drew wisdom from the scripture recorded in the Bible in Isaiah 1: 18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord" And also from the Qurān Chapter - Shuura (42) verse 38 "... Dialogue amongst yourselves" (Dialogue Reference Group, 2018). A closer scrutiny of the Dialogue Reference Group, however, reflected strongly male-constituted small group. This groups set the agenda and modalities for the National Dialogue Conference hence leaving women on the margins not only in participation but also in the contribution to the agenda of the day.

The participation of women in the promotion of Interfaith dialogue in Kenya remains a grey area. This is despite of clear policy frameworks in place such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in Vision 2030, which advocates for 'leaving no one

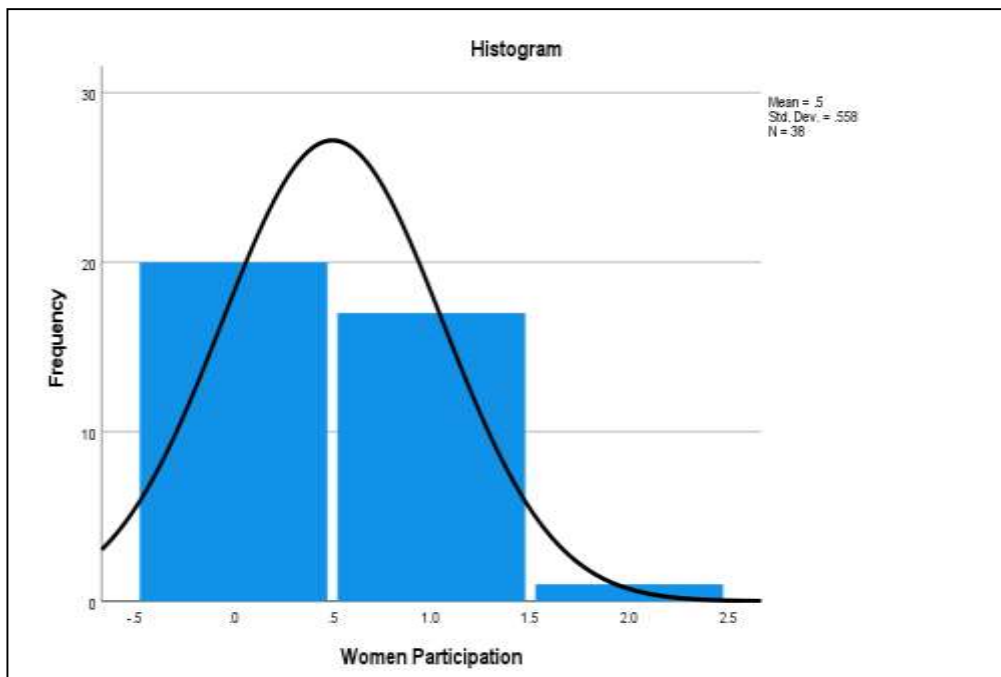
behind', and the United Nations Resolution 1325 (2000) which implores member states to ensure participation of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution among other areas. The Maputo Protocol envisions an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa driven by its citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena. Moreover, the Agenda 2063 of the 'Africa we want' is one of the instruments that could facilitate women's involvement in interreligious dialogue as it tends to seek inclusivity of women in all aspects of development.

### **iii) Non-active Participation of Women in Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

The majority of 20 women (10 Christians and 10 Muslims), representing 52.6%, indicated the non-active participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. There was no significant difference in views between Christian and Muslim women regarding the non-active participation status of women.

A two-part question posed was; i) How can you describe women's involvement in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya and ii) Give reasons for the choice made.

The responses led to a demographically skewed histogram with a mean of -5 and a standard deviation of .558, leaning towards the non-participation of women in interreligious dialogue. Figure 4.3 below presents this data.



**Figure 4.3 Histogram of Women Participation in Interreligious Dialogue**

The reasons for women's non-active participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue were numerous and varied. Field data revealed that some steps had been taken to reverse the trend of non-active participation and even though it needed to be enhanced. Though some involvement has been achieved, it needs to be meaningful not just ceremonial or for the purposes of filling out a participant list that would show that women were present for political or conventional purposes.

Non-active participation of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya was associated with two main reasons. One, women not being in leadership in both Christian and Muslim religious communities. And two, inadequate policy framework, to support women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. It was noted that Christians and Muslims meet on political grounds which are predominantly male,

during government functions and being convened by the government to engage in government business agenda and not in interreligious dialogues.

Women's non-active participation in interreligious dialogue was also attributed to religious and social differences between men and women in Islam and Christianity underscoring the Standpoint theory on the women's social location and their experiences on the margins of discourses of knowledge in religions, which are unconventional. Women in some Muslim and Christian denominations were viewed as having limited freedom of expression to participate in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Leaders appeared to lack the necessary goodwill to encourage interaction between Christians and Muslims women, citing a lack of rapport between pastors and imams as a barrier to women engaging in dialogue. Lack of vision towards women participation and their inclusivity in interreligious dialogue meant that the two parties; Christian and Muslim women could not come together in the spirit of interreligious dialogue. Without intentional forums or a strategic plan to effect change, women's participation was hindered, given the lack of a shared platform for dialogue between women and men.

Equally, fear propelled the non-participation of women. There was a fear of conversion across the divide of Christians and Muslims. The perception of women as weak in the two religions prevented them from participating in dialogue. Non-participation of women was also attributed to their lack of leadership roles in their respective religions. For instance, in Islam, Muslim women are not ordained. The difficulties surrounding women's non-participation in interfaith dialogue stemmed from historical factors in

Christianity and Islam, which, from a theoretical perspective, fail to support gender equality in interreligious dialogue.

Field data further indicated non-active participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The ideology of patriarchy in Christianity and Islam has elevated the status and power of men over women, placing women in a subservient position in public domains, thereby challenging women's participation in interreligious dialogue. In Christianity, God reveals Himself as masculine, not feminine. God ordained distinct gender roles for man and woman as part of the created order. A husband and father is the head of his household, a family leader, provider, and protector. In Islam, it is evident that where the central patriarchal concept that men are superior to women influences the understanding of the Qur'anic text. Here, women face a male-dominant system of gatekeeping and organizational culture which relegates women to second positions after men in leadership and therefore they likely require additional help of a legal framework of rights to succeed in enhancing women participation in interreligious dialogue.

The measure of cultural modernity is the single most important explanation across all aspects of gender equality, along socioeconomic factors that influence the care ministry in which women are mostly involved. Concerning institutional design factors exerting influence on one or two aspects, Inglehart and Norris (2003) studies found that *cultural modernity* holds real positive consequences for women. When controlling for alternative hypotheses, their measure of attitudes towards gender equality is the sole predictor of the proportion of women in decision-making levels of leadership. In later work, Inglehart (2012) modified these findings. It's not so much gender-neutral

attitudes that make women more likely to be empowered, but rather the liberating effects of self-expression values in general. This could have a big impact on how much women participate in society as a whole. This was exemplified in the following narration by Scholar Wayua, the Director of the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Eastleigh (CCMRE). He noted that:

I have sat in front of panels of interreligious leaders, in front of the Citizen Television, when the leaders are giving joint communiqué's regarding faith communities' position on matters of national interest either on leadership and governance issue or just religious positional paper on Covid-19 Pandemic Protocol, the entire panel consisted of men! The bishops; the grand mufti; the traditional chief, and all the rest were all men (Wayua, S., Personal Communication, July 16, 2021)

The explanatory stories emphasized more specific institutional design factors than conservatives. Most of the time, the non-active participation of women is the result of representation from denominations or organizations that restrict certain religious roles to men. However, often that is not the only contributing factor as Roselyne Pepela asserted:

Sometimes there is the unconscious desire for the best diplomacy photo with the flanking of bishops and clergy. The colourful display of traditional garb can hold the imagination – cardinal red and episcopal purple is juxtaposed. I have attended interreligious meetings where the first group photo participants were to be officially clad in the official religious regalia, emphasizing some exclusivity of some sort, clearly an indication of the dialogue emphasis (Pepela, R., Personal Communication, August 11, 2021).

Women non-participation in dialogues is largely institutionally engineered by the systems and structures that are in place within religions which hinder women participation. Scenes from around the countries in the world, or from the latest national and international interreligious dialogue on Interreligious Day of Prayer and the Day of

Peace, comes to mind and often photographs grace the pages of diplomatic agenda. However, often these highlight top leaders, who are a representation of the systems in place, may be less involved in relationships, less involved in the leadership of the dialogue between religions itself, or the formation of it. While getting the bishop's support and blessing is always important, the person(s) most dedicated to championing dialogue within the church might be among the non-ordained, the lay pastoral workers, the missionaries – whether religious or 'secular'. Their leadership ought to be celebrated, supported, and brought to the fore. Many if not most of these are typically women.

Thus, Johnson (2014) study offers a diagnosis of the problem in dealing with masculinities and calls our male-centred, male-identified, male-dominated social structure of "patriarchy". Johnson's study teases out several under-theorized areas of patriarchal influence on women. This is particularly in women's participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue by giving illustrations of how other oppressive systems (capitalism, slavery, destruction of the environment, and warfare) are, in reality, manifestations of patriarchy, by-products of a society obsessed with power and control. Johnson tackles these exceptionally thorny, complex issues by presenting them in manageable prose with accessible examples, opening up the feminist critique of patriarchy to a larger audience. In his own words he says:

What drives patriarchy as a system - what fuels competition, aggression, and oppression - is a dynamic relationship between control and fear. Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status, and other rewards through control; to fear other men's ability to control and harm them; and to identify being in control as both their best defence against loss and humiliation and the surest route to what they need and desire. In this sense, although we usually think of patriarchy in terms of women and men, it is more about what goes on among men. The oppression of women is certainly an important part of patriarchy, but, paradoxically, it may not be the point of patriarchy (Johnson, 2014).

Religions establish social structures that are predominantly male-centred, male-identified, and male-dominated, and they act as custodians of these structures; thereby, valuing qualities that are narrowly defined as masculine. However, there is a glimmer of hope, as some men are aware of this and are willing to challenge the status quo by allowing women into religious leadership positions. This may begin to change the matrix of women non-participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is in line with what Scholar Wayua the director at CCMRE put forth. He noted that:

Some steps have been taken to ensure gender correctness which needs to be enhanced. Though some involvement has been achieved, it needs to be meaningful not just ceremonial or for purposes of filling the participants list (Wayua, S., Personal Communication, July 16, 2021).

The changing and expanding roles and positions of women in religion are a departure from the traditional viewpoint, as evidenced by the data obtained on the frequency of active participation of women in dialogue, which stands at 17 frequencies representing 44.7% of the total. Women's roles in a variety of faith traditions have expanded over the last few decades to include higher leadership and greater authority, though there is still progress to be made.

Following the changing roles, the standpoint theory posits that increasing women empowerment may feature prominently in the following factors (1) socio-economic

development; (2) rising gender-egalitarian attitudes that transform economic development into a cultural process of human development; (3) historical legacies stemming from a society's cultural and political traditions; and (4) institutional design factors for women's role and positioning in interreligious and Christian-Muslim dialogue. Therefore, as their roles expand, women in faith communities receive leadership opportunities on par with men. Unfortunately, the role of teachers, ministers, and leaders remain limited within women-only departments or programs. King's (1998) study in the field of interfaith dialogue, which assert that women's representation in interreligious dialogue is inadequate and their influence is negligible, align with these findings.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this section was to examine the role of women in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. The study analysed the inclusion of women and their statuses in the 'formal and 'informal' dialogues and also deconstructed patriarchy in order to address the non –active participation of women in the promotion of interreligious dialogue. The study findings showed that women were more involved at the informal levels of dialogue. This was mostly in the grassroots where much of their roles took up the traditional roles on the themes of caring and nurturing and issues that plague them specifically. Few women were involved in the formal levels of dialogue where their roles were obscured. The study further indicated that the obscurity of women roles in Christian-Muslim dialogue was a result of inadequate support frameworks in the religions of Islam and Christianity.

After the study, it became clear that women are willing to participate in Christian-Muslim dialogue, based on the study's assumptions. Thus, the assumption that women are willing to participate in Christian-Muslim dialogue was upheld. The willingness of women to participate in Christian-Muslim dialogue provides a window of opportunity for relevant stakeholders to exploit women's potential in their participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

#### **4.3. The Impact of the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

The third objective of the study was to assess the impact of women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were carried out among top leaders who have first-hand information from a wide range of experiences in the umbrella religious organizations. The KIIs were conducted based on the interview schedule question number 10 to determine the impact of the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The interview question was framed as follows: What are the contributions of women in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue? Questionnaires were administered to the middle-level leadership in two parts of closed and open-ended questions: i) what is the result of women's engagement in Christian-Muslim dialogue and ii) give the reasons for your choice.

The questions were to gauge women's contributions in a bivariate view of 'a balanced' or 'an imbalanced' outcome. Bivariate analysis is one of the simplest forms of quantitative analysis. It involves the analysis of two variables to determine the empirical

relationship between them. Bivariate analysis can be used to test simple association hypotheses. The two main parameters for data analysis were identified based on the gender theory of building binaries of males and females to contribute to a balanced gender equation. Another subcategory of 'not sure' was included to provide for neutrality as follows: 'balanced community', 'imbalanced community', and 'not sure'.

Field data in Table 4.12 showed a significant frequency of 9 (6 Christians and 3 Muslims), which is 23.7% of the respondents. This showed that women's involvement in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue had led to an "imbalanced community." The frequency of 24 (16 Christians and 8 Muslims), representing 63.2% of the respondents, demonstrated a 'balanced contribution' from women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. A significant frequency of 5 (3 Christians and 2 Muslims), representing 13.2% were 'not sure' how to quantify the contribution of the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in religious umbrella organizations. Table 4.12 presents this data.

**Table 4. 12 Women’s Contribution to Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not sure	5	13.2	13.2	13.2
	Balanced	24	63.2	63.2	76.3
	Imbalance	9	23.7	23.7	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

**Source: Field Data, 2021**

### 4.3.1 Balanced Community Contributions

The frequency of 24 (16 Christians and 8 Muslims) representing 63.2% of the respondents shows a balanced contribution resulting from the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Field data revealed that when women participated in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue, it resulted in a balanced contribution that was all-inclusive. Hence, the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue enhanced the principles of *inclusivity* and *diversity while* at the same time creating religious-neutral spaces where women in dialogue felt safe to express themselves and dialogue about the issues that affect the society.

Concerning inclusivity, for instance, Watson Aquilla who was one of the NCKK leaders in the programs department highlighted women's contributions in fostering peace, justice, and mutual respect in their communities and beyond. His sentiments further indicated:

When women take up matters of Christian-Muslim dialogue the results were balanced perspectives of both males and females, with women feeling and seeing themselves not only included but also represented in the dialogues. Unfortunately, strands within religions provide a binary of both the expanding and traditional renderings of the role and position of women and men (Aquilla, W., Personal Communication, July 17, 2021).

Data revealed that women were concerned about the needs of men, women and their children. They always listen, with care and empathy. Care and empathy reflect an attitude taken to melt a breach in the deep sense of mistrust that begets violence and gradually insinuates in the people who are trapped in the links of divisions and

intolerance to bring healing and peace. With tenderness and compassion, they strive to restore dignity and a sense of respect for men, women, and children.

Women brought new and unique perspectives to interreligious dialogue. Feron (2015) study indicates that in situations of conflict, women are more likely to use dialogue to resolve conflicts. In addition, women are socially conditioned to be more peaceful and less violent than men. Women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue also made male dialoguers aware of women's and other disadvantaged groups' needs. The needs of human groups are made vulnerable by power inequalities, such as women and girls, migrants and minorities, and people impoverished by patterns of exploitation. Gender equity lenses were introduced in interreligious dialogue, nurturing the diversity of women roles from grassroots action to official religious community structures. By doing this, women share the same goal – turning religious divisions and differences into advantages and promoting peace and coexistence in a diverse world. Women's contributions to interreligious dialogue according to Amina (2018) study show that women and organizations play an essential role in conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding.

They de-escalate violence by facilitating social reconciliation at the grassroots levels and in communities at large. Msingi Trust (2022) Survey on Faith and Feminism in Faith Communities: 100 Voices for Change identifies the contributions of religious women in interreligious discourses noting that the Salvation Army (SA) and the Quaker Churches, for instance, give a complementarity of males and females in their faith traditions to give a more balanced view of women and men contributions. Msingi Trust Report, however, notes that the policy of (non) engagement of untrained women in the

ordained ministry impedes active participation of women in Episcopal churches. The dim hope for Episcopal churches is exemplified in the recent Catholic Church. The National Catholic Reporter (2014) announced a “new day is dawning,” as more than 200 women claimed they were official Roman Catholic priests. This may provide an opportunity for Roman Catholic women to participate in the Christian –Muslim dialogue.

Some African-Instituted Churches (AIC) are under scrutiny for-not allowing women to be ordained into ministry. Protestant denominations such as the Lutheran Church generally have a “priesthood of all believers,” hence, leadership and pastoral roles are for every baptized Christian. This means that religious denominations have led the way by including women in pastoral and leadership roles.

By increasing the opportunities for women to assume leadership roles, there can potentially be an increase in their participation in formal Christian-Muslim dialogues as leaders of their respective religions; thus, bringing their unique experiences to the table. This, in turn, enhances balanced contributions based on the standpoint theory levels of beginning conversations from women’s own experiences.

The balanced impact implied that it is only fair that women are seen as equal contributors in the efforts to sustain a plural society where a multiplicity of views, truths, and identities can coexist harmoniously.

#### **4.3.2 Imbalanced Community Contributions**

A significant frequency of 9 respondents, 6 Christians and 3 Muslims, representing 23.7%, alluded to the possibility of an "imbalanced community" in the promotion of

Christian-Muslim dialogue. One respondent whose name is withheld for confidentiality purposes indicated that ‘imbalanced contribution,’ was brought about by women’s emotions that tended to derail, ‘proper dialogue’. Another respondent, whose name was withheld joked that the imbalance stems from women's limited knowledge of Christianity and Islam. The respondent highlighted the inadequacies of women, stating that during diplomatic consultations, it takes a significant amount of time to explain basic religious concepts; therefore, it is preferable for women to handle women's issues. Scanty data were provided regarding an imbalanced contribution resulting from women's participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue promotion.

The researcher asserts that an imbalanced perspective on women's involvement in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue highlights the challenge of incorporating the gender process into interreligious dialogue, a concept that has remained elusive and has contributed to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are overgeneralizations about the characteristics of an entire gender. Delving into the definition and examples of gender stereotypes and their negative or positive connotations, the impact of gender stereotypes, and sociological perspectives on stereotypes are areas that were beyond the scope of the current study. The Gender theory aims to question the role of gender in religion, which serves to maintain the status quo within a patriarchal society.

#### **4.3.3. ‘Not sure’ of the Impact of Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

A significant frequency of 5 (3 Christians and 2 Muslims), representing 13.2% were ‘not sure’ how to quantify the contribution of the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

No data was provided for seeking neutrality on the impact of women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

A gender-neutral perspective, according to the researcher, reflects a conflict between the privileges of patriarchy and gender inclusivity, which frequently fails to effectively challenge the structural determinants of gender inequality, as evidenced by the lack of women in positions of religious authority, their fear of self-incrimination, and their reluctance to collaborate with feminist faith-based actors.

### **Conclusion**

The emblematic impact of women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue is the deep sense of urgency that gender equilibrium brings to the field of interreligious dialogue that has been lacking. Women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue also brings new and unique perspectives to interreligious dialogue. This is despite the path that promotes participation of women that seems complex with some parties to dialogue feeling disenfranchised by the presence of women in dialogue. Such is the case of determination for the imbalanced contribution of women in their participation in interreligious dialogue. Therefore, the study's assumption, which holds, is that women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue raises awareness of gendered perspectives in interreligious dialogue.

#### **4.4 Challenges for Women in their Participation in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

The fourth objective of the study was to investigate challenges for women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to-umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. Key informant interviews were conducted with 14

top leaders of the umbrella religious organizations, including general secretaries, directors, and/or chief executive officers, to gain insights into qualitative data. Interview schedule of Appendices A4 were used to collect data and frequencies related to the following question; What are the challenges for the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya?

A questionnaire tool in two parts was administered to 22 middle-level leaders from the second tier of management of the umbrella religious organizations, which included field officers, program managers, and heads of departments. Part 1) asked about the extent to which gender, knowledge, and leadership barriers hinder women's participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. Part 2) of the question required respondents to mention any other challenges. A Likert scale was used to analyse the frequencies, which ranged from 'mostly', 'little', 'somehow', 'not sure', to 'none'. Field data in Table 4.13 revealed that gender barriers had a mean of 1.08. The barrier in leadership followed closely with a mean of 1.18. Knowledge barrier had the least mean of 1.68.

**Table 4. 13 Frequency challenges to the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

		Gender Barrier	Knowledge Barrier	Leadership Barrier
N	Valid	37	38	38
	Missing	1	0	0
Mean		1.08	1.68	1.18
Median		1.00	1.00	1.00
Mode		1	1	1
Range		3	3	3
Minimum		0	0	0
Maximum		3	3	3

**Source: Field Survey, July 2022**

Further analysis of each of the aspects revealed the following:

#### **4.4.1 Gender Barrier to the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

The gender parity variance was reflected between males and females in terms of how separately and independently males and females view barriers to women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is discussed in the following sections.

##### **i) Disaggregation of Data on Gender Barrier in the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

The gender factor variant revealed that males in leadership believed women lacked the necessary knowledge to participate in Christian-Muslim dialogue, as discussed in the following section. In contrast, women participants perceived the absence of women from clergy leadership as the most significant obstacle to women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Data disaggregation was done by separating compiled information into smaller units of males and females, as well as the different disaggregation variables, to elucidate trends and patterns between them.

When data on gender barriers was broken down by gender, differences were found between men and women. For gender barriers, the female factor concentration was 1.615 while the male factor concentration was 2.173. The mean for males was 1.13, while for females it was 1.00. Female variance was lower (.286) compared to male variance (.814). The Skewness for males was 1.401 compared to the females at .000. Table 4.14 presents this data.

**Table 4. 14 Disaggregation Data on Gender Barrier**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Male (statistics )</b>	<b>Female (statistic s)</b>	<b>Stand ard Error Error (Male)</b>	<b>Stand ard Error (Female )</b>
Mean	1.13	1.00	.170	.138
95% Confidence level for Mean				
Confidence interval for Mean (Lower bound)	.78	.70		
Confidence Interval for Mean (Upper Bound)	1.48	1.30		
5% Trimmed mean	1.09	1.00		
Median	1.00	1.00		
Variance	.664	.286		
Std. Deviation	.815	.535		
Minimum	0	0		
Maximum	3	2		
Range	3	2		
Interquartile Range	0	0		
Skewness	1.401	.000	.481	.580
Kurtosis	2.173	1.615	.935	1.121

**Source: Field Survey, August 2022**

The data presented, reflected patterns of gender differences which yields an appreciation for the complexities of the relationship between gender and religion. It was difficult and beyond the scope of the current study to exhaustively establish a definitive, empirically based explanation of why there were gender differences. However, the Standpoint theory explains this by starting with the distinct experiences of men and women. Each person has access to different knowledge based on categories such as their gender, race, and socio-economic class. The Standpoint theory posits that a person knows as much as they are socially situated, so, women have access to different knowledge to that of men.

Survey data revealed that males felt that women had different roles not necessarily subsidiary but equally important and demanding; as a result, they would not provide

adequate representation of their religious groups in interreligious dialogue. Hassan Ole Naado, the Chair of SUPKEM maintained that:

Christian-Muslim dialogue with women may be conducted at the communal level, and that has been happening anyway, women in their capacity carrying out development projects under the banner of interreligious dialogue. There is no problem with that. However, if you look at the Christians they have women clergies, but Islam has no women clergies therefore, it is difficult to conduct dialogue with women unless we arrange dialogue among women themselves. It is good to respect what religion teaches (Ole Naado, H., Personal Communication, July 15, 2021)

The researcher asserts that religion served as a potent tool to fortify gender barriers. Religion provides the structure for how women should live their day-to-day lives. People viewed and valued men-women relationships through this prism. Religious traditions, laws, and cultural factors treat women differently than men. According to Rudolf Muchobi (not the real name) he opined that:

It is true, women have made huge strides in various fields, and nobody denies that, however, it must be understood that religion is different. Not many women are well equipped in religious matters (Rudolf, M., Personal Communication, September 12, 2021)

Instead, the respondent suggested that women could convene at their own level, for instance, within organizations like the Catholic Women Association, the Woman's Guild, the Mothers Union, the Kenya Muslim Women Alliance, the Muslim Women Association, and the League of Muslim Women in Kenya, among others. As they gradually acquire knowledge and continue to engage in dialogue at these levels, they could eventually transition into 'mixed dialogues,' which include both males and females. Women respondents decried the difficulties of gender barrier that was intertwined with culture and religious interpretation of texts that are male centred. 'Look at interfaith marriages, and burials for instance, it affects women more than men,'

said Ms. Deborah Olwal-Modi who serves as the National General Secretary of YWCA-Kenya and serves as the Secretary to the YWCA National Board. Olwal-Modi continued to note:

You may want to consider interfaith marriages as a gendered perspective which affects mostly Christian women in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya and particularly how it is intertwined with burial and inheritance rights for widows as a starting point, and sometimes, I have seen women together dialogue on the theme of interfaith marriage. But interfaith marriage at least from my recollection, affects Christian women with bare minimum of a handful of Muslim women. And you know marriage is about two people, at least in the traditional sense, involving a male and a female(s) in plural just in case it is polygamy which complicates that matrix further, because it takes two to tangle. So, if I may ask a question, why don't we have men and women dialogue about interfaith marriage in Kenya? Come to think of it (Olwal-Modi, D., Personal Communication, August 13, 2021).

The researcher observes that despite heightened awareness of the increased roles of women in Kenya, the gender barrier remains a complex reality.

These affects women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

**ii) Frequency of Gender Barrier to the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

Field data revealed that gender barrier 'mostly' affected the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue by a majority frequency of 27 representing 71.1%. It 'somehow' affected the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue at a frequency of 2 representing 5.3%; and 'little' at a frequency of 3 representing 7.9%. However, a simple majority of 5, representing 13.2%, expressed uncertainty about the impact of the gender barrier on women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This data is presented in Table 4.15 below.

**Table 4. 15 Frequency of Gender Barrier to Participation of Women**

		Gender Barrier			Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Valid	Not sure	5	13.2	13.5	13.5
	Mostly	27	71.1	73.0	86.5
	Somehow	2	5.3	5.4	91.9
	Little	3	7.9	8.1	100.0
	Total	37	97.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	2.6		
Total		38	100.0		

**Source: Field Survey, 2021**

It is evident from the field survey that systemic and structural gender injustices deterred synergies between men and women in religious institutions. This was practically transferred to women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is reflected in the majority frequency of 'mostly' 27 representing the (71.1%) gender barrier. Only 5 (13.2%) respondents were not sure of gendered dynamics in interreligious dialogue. A paltry 3 (7.9%) respondents thought that gender barriers had 'little' bearing on women participation in interreligious dialogue and 2 (5.3%) respondents referred 'somehow' to gender barriers in the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The field data as reflected in the study corroborated earlier studies that have been carried out in various disciplines on gender. Feminist social scientists have criticized the marginalized dimension of gender in religious sociological research. There is the recognition that gender and religion are mutually constitutive social categories. According to Avishai et al. (2015), religions collectively reproduce gendered identities.

Sociological researchers, in their study of gender and religion, have primarily concentrated on understanding the reasons behind women's higher attendance at religious ceremonies compared to men, as well as exploring the roles and experiences of women within various religious communities.

The Women Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa Report (2009) recognizes that it is difficult for men to enter into the women's 'world' because of restrictions derived from the teachings. This entails casual intermingling of sexes and mixing with members of the opposite sex who are not related, highlighting the need to empower Christian women to address issues of concern for women in Christian-Muslim relations. Grung (2004) articulates this reality well when he states that Christian-Muslim dialogue is a gendered arena. Challenging patriarchy in religions that provide a binary of men and women, Carmody (1989) observes that Buddhist women could not head the religious community; in Hinduism, usually women are ineligible for salvation; Islam made a woman's witness only half that of man; Christianity calls a woman the 'weaker vessel', and Jewish men blessed God for not having made them women. In consonance, with the same sentiments, Pui-Lan and Donaldson (2002) reference to traditional embodiments of the woman as backwardness, challenges the perspective towards exploiting women's potential.

These findings help underline the gendered perspective that feminine and masculine personalities play a crucial role in interreligious dialogue. It is evident that both men and women are aware of their gendered identities before engaging in dialogue. This makes females overly attentive to their own spaces and that of the other (males). As a

result, field data showed that where women viewed themselves as potentially productive, males suppressed such views.

Examining the role of the female voices in authoritative public discourses is crucial, as it provides a platform for women to engage in dialogue. Ndzovu (2019) studies on the Muslim female voice shed light on the ambiguity of women's voices and the contested religious authority of female preachers, highlighting the significant gender barriers. The study shows that as women continue to offer exhortations on the radio in public speeches, it is noted that the female preachers are confronted with the prevailing belief that classifies their voices as nakedness (*aura*) and also questioning their competency as religious authorities responsible for *da'wah* (inviting people to the religion of Islam). A section of male clerics has reportedly criticized some female preachers for their religious radio sermons, citing gender barriers as the primary reason. Their presence on the radio is questioned by conservative *ulama* (Muslim religious scholars), as well as some male supporters of *Salafi-Wahabi* tendencies.

Ndzovu (2019) presents the case of Mzamil from Magic Studio, a recording studio for religious programs, who criticizes Muslim female preachers, citing their lack of authorization to engage in such activities. Mzamil goes further to explain his understanding of the issue of women and *da'wah* in Islam by emphatically arguing that:

So why should we allow female preachers to engage in *da'wah* to propagate Islam while there are men who can undertake this duty. If there was a need for women to address the *ummah* (community) as propagators of the faith, then God would also have sent to humanity, for example female prophets. Why did God not send female prophets? Clearly, God has bestowed the responsibility of learning the faith and propagating it to the *ummah* upon a specific category of people—the males. So, if women had similar mandate, God would have also sent female prophets (Ndzovu, 2019, P. 18).

The Mzamil perspective upholds a misogynistic interpretation of religious texts, which hinders Islamic women participation in the public spaces. Women's absence from sacred text interpretations has resulted in numerous misogynistic interpretations and practices including interreligious dialogue practice, which progressive voices within Islam and gender theory have contested.

Textual sources definitely paint a complicated picture of what it's like to be a woman, which has led to different interpretations of gendered rituals and social practices that support gender roles. The androcentric interpretation of texts to buttress gendered perspectives need not go unchallenged. Responding to the question of the lack of female prophets in Islamic history, Wadud-Muhsin posits that:

Both men and women have been included in divine communication as the recipient of *wahy* (*Revelation*), but there is no Qur'ānic example of a woman with the responsibility of *risala* (*Prophet-hood*). However, all those chosen for this responsibility were exceptional...In fact, given the difficulty they have faced in getting others to accept the message when these exceptional men have come from poor classes, the likelihood of failure for the message might have been greater if women, who are given so little regard in most societies, were selected to deliver the message. It is strategy for effectiveness, not a statement of divine preference (Wadud-Muhsin, 1998, P. 27)

The discussion in Ndzovu (2019) studies on the aspect of *aura* in the religion of Islam, for example, comes in handy. Reports indicate that radio stations uphold the stance that the involvement of female preachers in their programs does not conflict with the Islamic perspective that views their voice as revealing. The stations argue that there is no conflict because these programs are most listened to by women. Their participation in radio sermons is not considered as addressing the *ummah*, but rather women who are alleged to prefer listening to their fellow women. Apart from the women being the main audience, the broadcasters add that the female preachers “speak with a lot of respect,”

a view, suggesting that their voices are not perceived as feminine and seductive. Just to ensure that the aspects of *aura* are checked, there is a deliberate effort to constantly select those female preachers *ustadha* (graduate from an institute of higher Islamic learning) whose voices are not regarded as soft and seductive.

The danger in conditioning women into males' cajoled outfits in themselves reflects a sexist attitude characterized by or showing prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women. It defeats the spirit and letter of interreligious dialogue, where principles of diversity and inclusion are undermined. From the Standpoint theory, women must come to dialogue as women and not seek to wear the garb of an androcentric representation. The Gender theory challenges patriarchy entrenched culture. The researcher posits that the gender barrier rides on vital drivers of gender stereotyping, which impeded the participation of women in interreligious dialogue.

Using religion, society's ethics, values, morals, and culture have been framed in the patriarchal way to promote the suppression of women while at the same time barring women from participating in interreligious dialogue. Johnson, a sociologist working on masculinities, calls the male-centred, male-identified, male-dominated social structure "patriarchy". He also identifies male distrust and fear of women as patriarchy's core motivating forces. Patriarchal culture values "control and domination" most because control and domination of women ensure one's own safety from them. Religion, a *prima facie* of human's moral lives, is the primary driver of patriarchal culture. Indeed, patriarchy is the social norm. In that case, its legitimacy is largely derived from religion, which is the most important rule pertaining to societal dos and don'ts in any community. A male-centred social structure perceives and treats women as second class and their existence are premised on their service to the men. The service

overly centres on reproduction, nurturing, and caring duties that attune to women perceived emotional drive to survival (Johnson, 2014, p. 2).

Women are encouraged to view themselves as hindered by internal obstacles and personal deficits arising from cultural socializations. Unsurprisingly, women in the orthodox and Roman Catholic churches cite the leadership foundations as contributing to their exclusion in interreligious dialogue forums. Although the subjugation of women is not the central dynamic force driving patriarchy, patriarchal culture is deeply misogynistic and valorises masculinity across boundaries, especially in religious spaces of interreligious dialogue. In such a culture, women are viewed and have internalized that they are less than fully human and less trustworthy in leadership positions, more so as ratified in the two religions of Christianity and Islam to represent them in Christian- Muslim dialogue.

#### **4.4.2 Knowledge Barrier in the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Kenya**

The second parameter in measuring the challenges that women face was the knowledge barrier. The study alluded to the possibility that the knowledge barrier could have been a subtle challenge to women in the formal interfaith dialogues. This is due to the gap in gender and women studies in Bible and theological schools. Data was disaggregated on knowledge barriers to women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue by separating compiled male and female responses to reveal specific trends and patterns. Disparities between males and females were revealed. Table 4.16 shows a negative female factor concentration of -1.102 compared to a negative male factor concentration of -1.375. The variance for males was .949 and for females 1.095, standard deviation

for males was .974 and females 1.047. Skewness for males was .361 and for females it was -.080 as shown in Table 4.16.

**Table 4.16 Disaggregation of Data on Knowledge Barrier**

Descriptive Data

<b>Description</b>	<b>Male (statistics)</b>	<b>Female (statistics)</b>	<b>Standard Error (Male)</b>	<b>Standard Error (Female)</b>
Mean	1.70	1.67	.203	.270
95% Confidence level for Mean				
Confidence interval for Mean (Lower bound)	1.27	1.09		
Confidence Interval for Mean (Upper Bound)	2.12	2.25		
5% Trimmed mean	1.71	1.69		
Median	1.00	1.00		
Variance	.949	1.095		
Std. Deviation	.974	1.047		
Minimum	0	0		
Maximum	3	3		
Range	3	3		
Interquartile Range	2	2		
Skewness	.361	-.080	.481	.580
Kurtosis	-1.375	-1.102	.935	1.121

**Source: Field Data, 2021**

Knowledge barrier was a challenge to the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Majority of respondents, 17, or 44.7%, viewed knowledge barriers as the primary cause of women's non-participation. Women struggled to comprehend their own religious knowledge and the interreligious dialogue process, with 11 respondents, or 28.9%, citing 'little' knowledge as a barrier to non-participation. Meanwhile, 7 respondents, or 18.4%, acknowledged knowledge as a barrier for women in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. Frequencies of 3 representing 7.9% of respondents were 'not sure' that knowledge was a barrier for women participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. Table 4.17 presents this data on the frequency of

knowledge barriers and women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

**Table 4. 17 Frequencies of Knowledge Barriers**

		Knowledge Barrier			Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Valid	Not sure	3	7.9	7.9	7.9
	Mostly	17	44.7	44.7	52.6
	Somehow	7	18.4	18.4	71.1
	Little	11	28.9	28.9	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Evidently, a knowledge barrier exists for the participation of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue. There should be plenty of reasons why dialogue arenas should be acknowledged as knowledge gendered spaces and therefore "gender issues" discussed and articulated openly. Grung (2004) study show that the participants are always present in the interreligious dialogue either as a man or a woman and this means that the experiences and content developed or expounded upon are different.

A patriarchal heritage marks the religious space and praxis of both Christianity and Islam, with one gender (men) dominating the top level of leadership in both civil society and the religious communities of Christianity and Islam. The General Adviser of PROCMURA, Adrake Komi Dzinyefa, stated that the lack of religious training among women hindered the knowledge awareness concept. He quipped that:

Knowledge barrier to women's promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue can be viewed as; both Christianity and Islam lacking the necessary discourses or theoretical tools to deal with gender relational issues. A part time solution that is offered was that the important first step is nevertheless clear that Christians and Muslims need to address this, together in a dialogue, but not isolated from the particular challenges and resources which arise from different contexts of culture and deficiencies of religious hermeneutics (Dzinyefa, K. A., Personal Communication, July 8, 2021).

Following the Women Programs in PROCMURA, and other umbrella religious organizations' the Kenyan dialogue situation seemed complicated. For example, in the Christian-Muslim dialogues that dealt with gender issues and women's issues in particular, ecumenical and interfaith women groups started and funded projects for "women concerns" that dealt with Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, and many other issues. The women aimed to tackle these issues and subsequently increase awareness by sharing their personal experiences. It was not particularly using feminist analysis of the two religions or the dialogue. However, it was about the voices heard in the project, which were women's voices, and their reflections and the essence of women being agents themselves in sharing and articulating traditions in their own experiences. Conversely, in Kenya's larger dialogue projects and processes that involve broader participation, there has been minimal progress over the years towards achieving a gender balance among participants, a goal that has, for the most part, failed due to under participation of women. Salli Effungani, the PROCMURA Programme Officer noted that:

Other than acknowledging a gendered knowledge perspective as integral in Christian-Muslim dialogue processes, the so-called 'women issues' are also sometimes put aside in order not to create 'unnecessary tensions'. There have been attempts to have a gender balance amongst participants in different dialogues, as most religious leaders from Christian and Muslim communities are men. A gender perspective balance did not necessarily imply an equal gender power balance in terms of content outcomes (Effungani, S., Personal Communication, July 2022).

The researcher notes that often 'gendered content' was mistaken to be 'women issues'. It was also fragmented into single-case discussions without including an overall gendered perspective of men and women. Simply put as secondary issues under headlines such as 'family issues', 'interfaith marriages and its attendant challenges' and 'dressing or veiling issues'. Women participation was restricted in advancing Christian-Muslim dialogue on issues specifically relevant to women.

Being polemic towards gendered discourses is relatively easy, but what are the issues that need to be addressed. How possible is it to create conversation on the barrier of knowledge for the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. It is in the same context that Phyllis Kamau noted that:

Is it too ambitious to throw this into a dialogue arena as some of the Christian and Muslim communities are still struggling, amongst themselves to have open discussions about gendered knowledge? Or perhaps the dialogue arena can be an open space for discussing 'gender issues' which are crosscutting between the two genders and 'women issues' which are women specific to a greater extent than within the respective traditions? The aim in these dialogues is not to achieve agreements so much as to explore the relational differences (Kamau, P., Personal Communication, August 21, 2021).

Ndzovu (2020) asserts that the traditional gender customs prevalent in other Muslim societies restrict the feminine voices of authority in Islam in Kenya. Notwithstanding their level of Islamic knowledge, the general instructional role of women is restricted to the traditional Qur'ānic school to teach on how to read and memorize the Qur'ān.

This explains why, historically, Muslim women were denied opportunities to pursue higher Islamic learning beyond the “essential” basics. Even reputable early Muslim scholars in Kenya, like Sheikh Al-Amin Ali Mazrui and Sheikh Sayyid Ali Badawi did not make efforts to recruit and encourage women to advance their knowledge in Islamic education.

According to Ndzovu (2020), historically, the male members of the society have occupied all the institutions of Islamic authority. These range from *caliph* (the chief Muslim religious and civil leader), scholar, *mufti* (Islamic jurist), *kadhi* (Muslim judge who renders decision according to Islamic law) and *Sufi Sheikh* (literally meaning elder in Arabic and mosque preacher). The male religious scholars regarded women as unfit to qualify for these public positions because of their supposed ability to distract the attention of the males. These conservative restrictions led Azara Mudira, a leading female scholar who sought to feminize Islamic education in Kenya, to establish an advanced Islamic theological school for Muslim women in Kenya in 1987. Her goal was to "challenge the exclusionary male-centred tradition of advanced education in Islamic studies and to create an alternative space for authoritative intervention by Muslim women Islamic scholars in the religious realm" (The Conversation, 2020). The institute was founded in Nairobi.

A few female Muslim preachers in Kenya have made their mark too. One illustrious contemporary example is that of Nafisa Khitamy Badawi, who emerged as one of the highly respected female religious authorities in Kenya (and may be the East African region). Despite their advanced education, traditionally, Muslim women are not mandated to speak in public. They must also not engage in a public disputation of

religious matters. However, the appearance of female preachers offering advice, known as *mawaidha* in Kiswahili, to the Muslim public in coastal Kenya is casting doubt on this notion. Regardless of their exceptional position as female preachers, these women are confronted with the challenge of justifying their activities. They have to convince the male religious scholars that they are knowledgeable. They also need to argue that, despite their gender, their voices are deep and less feminine, rather than soft and seductive. This is because female preachers are confronted with the prevailing belief that classifies their voices as nakedness *aura*. One of the female preachers argued that,

For me, being at the radio station is similar to being behind a curtain, a strategy that Aisha used to conceal herself while addressing her male students (Ndzovu, 2019).

Ndzovu (2019) vows that in Islamic history, Aisha – the wife of Prophet Muhammad – was very knowledgeable on Islamic matters. Behind a curtain, several Prophet Muhammad's companions went to her to seek religious knowledge. Thus, in equating a radio station to a curtain, the female preachers emphasized that it is “possible to interact with the public without people [read men] seeing me”. Jay Salim has a different opinion on the rise of women leadership authority against the backdrop of tactful knowledge barriers in their participation in religious discourses; he narrates:

The rise of female preachers in coastal Kenya on the other hand has compelled women to talk with a “manly” voice in order for them to be accepted and provided with a platform to articulate issues concerning their faith. As a result, the female preachers can only exist with the consent of the male religious authorities in the Muslim communities. But female preachers are reluctant to challenge the existing behavioural norms. This is out of fear of losing the preaching platforms availed to them at the Muslim radio stations. Their adherence to the “acceptable” religious and social norms guarantees their participation in the Muslim public sphere, thus toeing the delicate boundary between obedience to religious authority and building up of feminine content for knowledge in Christian Muslim dialogue becomes a challenge (Salim, J., Personal Communication, August 4, 2020)

The researcher maintains that religious knowledge for a long time remained elusive for women. Christian and Islamic texts were written at a time when patriarchy was underway. Christianity never attributes anything to Jesus that could harm or marginalize women. In Islam, women are regarded with high esteem. Part of Hernández (2023) study shows that Prophet Muhammad's legacy was to end infanticide and establish explicit rights for women. Islam teaches that men and women are equal before God. It grants women divinely sanctioned inheritance to property, social and marriage rights, including the right to reject the terms of a marriage proposal and to initiate divorce.

According to Hernández (2018), the proclamation of the Kingdom of God breaks the patriarchal structures; it inverts the hegemonic values and structures of that moment. In the beginning of the proclamation of the good news, the participation of women in Jesus' group, although it seems very little, is very important because it seems that they are included when we talk about disciples in general. When they are named for some reason, especially as witnesses, followers and ministers; for example, in the story of the passion of Jesus, women appear in the crucifixion, death, tomb and resurrection of Jesus; they are the ones that announced the paschal *kerygma* and they are sent to the other disciples to announce the new knowledge.

Knowledge of women's own religious texts and their surroundings is essential for their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Currently, the training of female theologians, or women who create and compose theology, has been steadily increasing. This has challenged the study's fourth assumption, which posits a general awareness of women's limited ability to engage in dialogue due to the influence of

religious teachings and doctrines from both Islam and Christianity. In this context, it is seen that learning/teaching theology and doing theology are two pillars that allowed women's voices to be heard.

#### **4.4.3 Leadership Barrier to the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

The Key Informants who were the top leaders of the umbrella religious organizations were interviewed to gain more information for in-depth qualitative part of the study. The interview was based on Interview Schedule question 11 in Appendices III, which was, "What problems do women in Kenya face in their promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations?" The questionnaire tool was administered to the middle-level leadership of the umbrella religious organizations to determine the strength and direction of the qualitative study. The questions were in two parts; closed and open ended. As follows: i) To what extent is the leadership a challenge for women in their promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue? ii) Mention other challenges (if any). A Likert scale was used to measure the frequencies, which ranged from 'mostly', 'little', 'somehow', 'not sure', and 'none'. Field data revealed that gender barriers had the most frequency with a mean of 1.08. The barrier to leadership followed closely with a mean of 1.18. The knowledge barrier had the least frequency of 1.68.

The data obtained indicated that either women are not in leadership positions themselves, or the leadership in place is a barrier to women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya, as Table 4.18 shows. For

instance, in church structures; systems in place undermined women in the promotion of Christian-dialogue by deliberately choosing to ignore gender representations when sending delegates for dialogue. Leadership barrier revealed a mean of 1.18 with a frequency of 29 representing 76.3 % for ‘mostly’; frequency of 2 representing 5.3% was ‘not a barrier’; frequency of 4 representing 10.5 % was ‘little’ and frequency of 3 representing 7.9 % were ‘not sure’. This data is presented in Table 4.18.

**Table 4.17 Frequency of Leadership Barriers to the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

		Leadership Barrier			Cumulative
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
Valid	Not sure	3	7.9	7.9	7.9
	Mostly	29	76.3	76.3	84.2
	Somehow	2	5.3	5.3	89.5
	Little	4	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

**Source: Field Data 2022**

Survey data in Table 4.18 indicates that all the respondents agreed though on varied proportions that leadership was a barrier to women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The majority, with a frequency of 29 represented 76.3% of respondents who agreed that leadership was a major barrier ‘mostly’ to the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Three (3) respondents representing 7.9% respondents, expressed uncertainty. The other 4 respondents representing 10.5% viewed leadership barriers as ‘little’ inhibition for women's participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue. The lowest percentage, 5.3%, representing 2 respondents, believed that leadership was ‘not a barrier’ to women’s participation. It

is possible therefore to posit that the few women in leadership positions in Christianity and Islam limits their representation in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Similarly, patriarchy, which manifests in hierarchical leadership structures closely intertwines with the leadership barrier. Traditional leadership structures in Christianity and Islam are patriarchal. Patriarchy is about power dynamics that have made it difficult for women to participate and promote Christian-Muslim dialogue. Being cognizant of the leadership barrier and the need to overcome it, Phyllis Kamau underscores the need to emphasize women in leadership positions and she noted:

It is important to empathize with women in clergy positions because, when we talk about dialogue, we anticipate participation, representation, and presentation of thought forms, negotiation, and decision which, influence all that goes with the power of the leader. It is power dynamics that are at play. Take for example in early 2000, when the country was going through the defining moment of constitutional review. Religious leaders were invited to Ufungano house, but then how many women went there? Probably 'few' well no, not few, say one or two, or just handful of them, because how many women were in positions of clergy by then? It is just recently that we are beginning to see Churches accept women clergy into positions of influence, in the Anglican Church of Kenya, we just, saw the other day (21<sup>st</sup> January, 2021) the first female bishop from Bondo Diocese (Kamau P., Personal Communication, August 21, 2021).

Field data revealed a myriad of reasons for the leadership barrier in women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Generalizations about women's potential often portray them as weak and incapable. Because of their inferiority complexes, it was opined that women lack courage to stand up for their rights despite being aware of them. Culture was also faulted as it tended to relegate women to the position of 'followership' being followers of men and not leaders.

Further, field data showed that cultural beliefs of African world views and of men being the preferred leaders, then women in communities and men taking leadership roles in families as heads were particularly considered to be barriers for women getting into leadership positions and roles in religious communities. In some incidences, it was observed that religion had become a custodian of culture, particularly based on misogynist interpretations of the Holy texts through the patriarchal lens. Men remained dominant in leadership position making it difficult for women to participate in the promotion of Christian –Muslim dialogue. One of the respondents, who wishes to remain anonymous, stated that women in religion do not believe in themselves and are therefore finding it difficult to participate in interreligious dialogue. ‘Who knows they are here today and tomorrow who knows where they will be? Women still consider themselves as the ‘weaker gender’ and believe that leadership is for men.

Abd al-Azeez ibn Baaz explained that what is lacking in women is not something for which she is called to account for or blamed, rather it is something that happens by the will of Allah; for He is the One Who has prescribed that out of kindness towards her and so as to make things easier for her, because for instance, if she were to fast during menses that would harm her. By His mercy Allah has prescribed that she should not fast at the time of menses, and she should make it up after that. With regard to prayer, at the time of menses she is unable to purify herself, so by His mercy Allah has prescribed that she should not pray and He has not prescribed that she should make it up, because making it up would be very difficult, as prayers are offered five times a day, and menses may last for several days, seven or eight or more. So, because of His mercy and kindness towards her, Allah has waived the duty of offering and making up prayers.

Many perspectives on culture highlight cultural beliefs as obstacles that prevent women from assuming leadership roles. In some churches, women view key leadership positions, like the priesthood, as reserved for men. According to the 2021 Msingi Trust Survey on 'Feminism and Faith in Communities of Faith: 100 Voices for Change', which was conducted in Kenya between August and December 2022, the Orthodox Church, for example, has a highly patriarchal leadership structure, primarily consisting of ordained priests. Women in this church can take up other leadership roles, especially at the laity level. This view is highly influenced by the church tradition, as was noted in most churches where women's access to leadership is highly influenced by the church's Patriarchate tradition, especially in the mainstream churches. The Orthodox Church tradition allows only men to be priests. As a result, women cannot be ordained as priests, as is the case in the Roman Catholic Church. Women can take on leadership roles, but they cannot assume key leadership positions in the church, as most respondents sampled in the survey noted. While this is the position of most mainstream churches, the Salvation Army church tradition allows both men and women to lead in the church as long as one is qualified for a given position. This is drawn from the church's history, where the founder of the Salvation Army church (General William Booth) is acclaimed for working alongside his wife in his ministry (*Msingi Trust, 2022*).

Due to cultural influences of the preference of males over females, women fear taking up key leadership positions in dialogue spaces, especially where their male counterparts are present. African culture's repressive aspects, which perceive women as inferior to men, cause women to shy away from leadership roles in religious institutions. According to Joseph Wandera, chair of the Christian and Muslim Network (CAMNET), he noted that:

In most churches in Western Kenya, women cannot officiate in religions-cultural ceremonies such as burials which are deemed as a preserve for males. For instance, the Salvation Army women soldiers have faced resistance from the Tiriki and Bukusu communities in officiating burials for older men. In these communities, such ceremonies should be led by a respected old man according to the community's customs and traditions. The dominant culture thus influences women's access to church leadership. A more liberating approach has been adopted, especially in churches in urban settings where women are encouraged to lead in such services and to sensitize the community members in rural settings on the role of women in church leadership (Wandera, J., Personal Communications, July 17, 2018).

Misinterpretation of scriptures dissuaded women's access to leadership positions in Christianity and Islam. Data obtained revealed that women were not called to be Jesus' apostles but only men. Therefore, women are to assist men in church ministry as those in Jesus' ministry did. While this is true from the Scriptures, women have been given the freedom to lead throughout church history, notwithstanding the differing positions of the church. Such misinterpretations and non-contextual understandings of the Scriptures have denied women access to leadership in their respective religions.

When it comes to women representing their denominations in interreligious dialogue however, there has been hesitancy to allow them to speak on behalf of their religions or denominations. In the Friends church, for instance, the researcher asserts that women are mostly in charge of their women-only services though they can speak to the entire congregation of men and women once in a while. The expectation to address women's issues on most occasions challenges their unlimited access to power. "There is a general perception among churches that women should lead themselves only through church women groups such as Women's Action, Catholic Women's Association (CWA), *Wanawake wa Kristu*, among others." (Msingi Trust, 2022).

According to Gregory Wekesa, who was the director of the Young Men Christian Association in Kenya (YMCA) and in charge of project implementation, he noted that:

Umbrella religious organizations have continuously organized for seminars and capacity-building workshops that seek to empower women and men in equal measures; as a result, an increasing number of young women and men are now taking leadership positions in small groups and group movements within religious groups. Churches, for instance are beginning to acknowledge women's invaluable role in the church and society (Wekesa G., Personal Communication, July 14, 2021).

It is anticipated that the rise of women into leadership will have a great bearing on women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. Churches such as the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) have appointed women as regional overseers, senior pastors, and pastors, providing a glimpse of hope for women leadership and inversely interreligious dialogue. Gregory Wekesa, the Director of YMCA maintains that:

Leadership is a calling from God, who calls all people irrespective of their gender. Some African Independent Churches, such as the African Christian Church and Schools and on the Muslim side, women are beginning to take up leadership roles in public spaces of media politics and civil societies. Women are being ordained in once strong cultural and patriarchal societies in Kenya. For a long time for instance, the Reformed Church had not ordained women for leadership until five years ago.

(Wekesa, G., Personal Communications, July 14, 2021).

The World Economic Forum Report (2023) projects that it will take 131 years to close the gender gap by the year 2152. Collaborations with faith-based organizations, civil society, and various governments are realizing this shift. More women are also willing to enrol in theological institutions, increasing their access to church leadership and extending into civil societies. New strategies are being tested and implemented more recommendations for sustainable societies to ensure no one falls behind as women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue becomes imperative.

This was the main outcome of the study under review, which is reflected in the summary and recommendations section below.

## **Conclusion**

The study on the challenges women faces in participating in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue sheds light on the complex nature of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya, which is characterized by difficult discourses on gender, knowledge, and leadership barriers. The women's leadership gap in Christianity and Islam which is necessitated by the patriarchal nature of Christianity and Islam extends to the women's gap of women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya.

The study findings revealed that gender and leadership barriers have a high propensity to impede women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue as compared to knowledge barrier. Therefore, the study's assumption of objective 4 was held, which focused on the general awareness of women's limited capacity to participate in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya, as false.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter provided a summary of the findings and conclusions drawn from the current study on women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations in Kenya. Also provided are some of the recommendations generated from the field that may enhance the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

Based on the study objectives, several findings were generated. The study's first objective examined the framework for women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. The second objective sought to analyse the role of women and their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. The third objective sought to assess the impact of women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. The last objective investigated challenges hindering participation of women in their promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. The following is a summary of some of the key findings of the study.

#### **5.1.1 Framework for the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

There is a general awareness of the principles and laws of inclusivity, diversity and equity in Kenya, which borders on women participation and involvement in all peacebuilding efforts. These includes the legal framework of international laws, such

as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), often referred to as UNSCR 1325, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is an international treaty to end discrimination against women and girls among other international legal instruments which Kenya has domesticated. However, these international legal instruments are yet to be domesticated in umbrella religious organizations in Kenya.

At the national level, the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 underscores the Two Thirds Gender Rule, (Article 81 (b) which seeks to ensure that no more than two-thirds of members elected or appointed to any elective or appointive seat shall be of the same gender. The religious doctrinal underpinnings in Christianity and Islam upholds principles of equality among genders as well as the best practices from around the world on women inclusion and participation in interreligious dialogue. However, men still dominate most formal interreligious dialogues at the same time, they hold most substantive leadership positions.

There was consensus among respondents, both males and females, Christians and Muslims on the need for the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya, yet there is an inadequate framework to support the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. There was minimal if any, ongoing efforts to dismantle the traditional, cultural, and structural barriers that prevent women from participating in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations in Kenya.

The nature of Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya was varied. In some areas it reflected 'normal relationships, in other areas, 'cold', 'warm' or just 'lukewarm'. As much as it is a challenge, this offers opportunities for Christian-Muslim dialogue. In a predominantly Christian and Muslim country, Christian-Muslim dialogue stands out as a deliberate attempt towards religious "soft diplomacy," which resonates with women's adopted method in their quest for peace through interreligious dialogue, both at local and national levels.

Faith-based organizations were fairly saturated in Kenya, with equally competing interests that made women participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue a competitive space for women but also allowed for possibilities for collaboration with their male counterparts. It is important not only to examine the process of interreligious dialogue and learn from it, but also to pinpoint areas where women's participation in interreligious dialogue could be improved. As the Standpoint theory elucidates, this does not obliterate the intellectual knowledge, rather it presupposes a starting point from women's own experiences that provide narratives for consideration.

There was a religious (spiritual) dialogue gap in Kenya as evidenced in both formal and informal dialogues of women in their promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Christians and Muslims dialogue along the lines of social, economic and civic functions. The gap was inversely extended to women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations. Hence, Islam and Christianity remain more a matter of identity than a factor of functionalism. This hinders honest *intra religious dialogue* on gender related issues in Christianity and Islam. This de-escalates women participation in the promotion of

Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya. Informal dialogues were not only spontaneous but also localized, lacking in; national appeal, policy influence and institutionalized structures for enhancing the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

### **5.1.2 The Role of Women in their Participation in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Kenya.**

The study's findings revealed that women's role in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue was varied. Women's participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue adopted their traditional role of caring and nurturing. This spontaneously emerged naturally out of the dialogue of life with the religious other; hence, limiting their participation to informal interreligious dialogues at the grassroots levels. Moreover, women participation in their promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue was majorly on women related issues and concerns at the grassroots levels of informal dialogue. The study established that women participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya was substantive in the informal dialogues at community grassroots levels; however, informal dialogues lacked structure and form leading to less influence in the religious and national policy frameworks.

The study showed that women were substantively (55.3%) involved in informal dialogues at the grassroots levels, using their own experiences and their social location in the grassroots to build bridges in women development movements (*chama*) at the same time dialogue and were willing to participate in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in the formal spaces with reference to umbrella religious organizations. However, we are yet to fully explore the potential of women in formal

Christian-Muslim dialogue due to inadequate framework put in place in the respective religions of Christianity and Islam to support women to get to leadership positions, to represent themselves and their religions in dialogue forums. These presents an opportunity to examine strategies for promoting women's participation in interreligious dialogue.

The study found that there were strong connections between dialogue strategies and dialoguers (participants). Spontaneous dialogue naturally emerged alongside women's own experiences and knowledge building into the Standpoint theory which challenges the conventional traditional view of knowledge emerging from the lecture rooms and devoid of stories and experiences of people in the margins of the society. Where religious groups were yet to institutionalize women leadership in their top most cadres of leadership, women could be facilitated to have *women-only specific* dialogues, where they tackle women-related issues such as interfaith marriages, parenting and family life. It is therefore possible for intergroups of women-only dialogues to be gradually merged into mixed dialogues involving both men and women.

There is a need to mainstream gender in interfaith dialogue in today's context. The role of women organizations among others is underscored, in identifying possibilities for action to develop. This is a recommendation to develop gender sensitive frameworks that advocate for women's inclusion in formal dialogue. It entails a review of the interpretation of scriptural texts of these Abrahamic faiths, cultural norms and traditions that lead to the domination of women by men or their subjugation. Other tasks included rebuilding women's roles in Christian-Muslim dialogue aimed at empowering

ecumenical organizations like YWCAs to actively promote interfaith dialogue, from local to national levels.

Informal dialogues offered safe and unrestricted spaces for women to discuss social, governance, and economic issues that affect them as women and as a community.

They engage in addressing their human rights, such as sexual and reproductive health issues, reducing conflict through conflict transformation, and advocating for peace - building in the education sector, among other areas. Women's' discrimination based on their gender impinged on their role in interfaith dialogue at the national level where major decisions are made.

### **5.1.3 The Impact of the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

Participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue resulted in balanced view or an imbalance. The participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue introduced gender fluidity, which complicated the already complex relationship between Christians and Muslims. Women brought new, fresh and unique (sometimes feminine) perspectives to Christian-Muslim dialogue. They for instance were concerned about their needs, those of their children and those of their husbands; hence, (*all*) providing a balance.

Women autonomously and in groups and of their own volition, ceaselessly directed their efforts towards enhancing informal dialogues by converging around more inclusive themes such as peacebuilding and countering violent extremism. Christian-Muslim women initiatives have contributed immensely to 'soft diplomacy' through informal dialogues in building societal cohesion. They have coalesced and dialogued

around common themes to address community issues on health, advocate for the education of their children, climate change, the need for women in political leadership positions and peacebuilding among other issues.

Few women who are brave and liberal had gone ahead and worked their way to formal dialogues while affirming their commitment to provide alternatives to existing gender-sensitive models. This has been done by seeking to engage with crosscutting themes and not just those that are of 'women only concerns. Women's potentials to dialogue in both formal and informal Christian-Muslim dialogues in Kenya were underscored. The study helped demystify the notion that knowledge is a barrier to women's participation in the promotion in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Women in their distinct denominational umbrella organizations, such as Catholic Women Associations (CWA), Woman's Guild, or Mothers Union, Mosque Women Movements, were equally concerned with 'women issues' as they were with cross-cutting (intersectional) issues such as conflict prevention, climate change, peacebuilding, youth aggressions, human trafficking, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

#### **5.1.4 Challenges for Women in their Participation in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

The findings of this study revealed the exclusive nature of formal ivory tower Christian – Muslim dialogue which relegated women on the periphery leading to their substantive participation in informal dialogues. The dialogue spaces were dominated by hierarchical top religious leadership, which belonged to the patriarchal male elite and had neither doctrinal bearing nor hermeneutical concern for fostering inclusivity across

genders and thematic areas which had a representational value for feminine thought forms.

The study revealed a higher frequency of informal dialogues among women compared to formal dialogues, thereby shifting the focus of women's participation in Christian dialogue to unstructured forms of interreligious dialogue at grassroots levels. Informal dialogue are less visible avenues for women's contributions to interreligious dialogue. Contrary to the belief that women lack knowledge of the content of dialogue, the study showed that patriarchal leadership within Islam and Christianity is the leading barrier to women participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The patriarchal system affirms male dominance and relegates females to the second hierarchical position in Christianity and Islam hindering their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

It is important to pay attention to the media space in the context of gender identities and female voices, as these emerging trends seem to be taking a divergent tangent in overcoming gender barrier. It is the opinion of the researcher and hopefully, most dialogue participants in the different ongoing dialogues, would agree that 'gender issues' and 'women issues' are very important to deal with in the dialogue, some will say 'time is not right yet' - one needs to wait for the right moment to appear sometime in the future.

Even though it had been observed that patriarchy which prefers male dominance in leadership hindered women participation in their participation in the promotion of formal Christian-Muslim dialogue, unfortunately few women in leadership positions

have used the patriarchal structures to affirm the very patriarchal structures they used to fight by using high positions to suppress other women's voices.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

Studying women participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organisations was the task under investigation in this study. This study's data presentation revealed that addressing the gap in women's participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue requires careful consideration of certain issues. It was evident that women have the potential to dialogue and have been key players in strengthening social cohesion in Kenya at the grassroots through informal dialogues. But few women have been able to foster dialogues beyond the grassroots levels. Their impact is not fully felt in areas that matter. Policies and decisions that directly touch on women's lives are passed without them. In order to maximize the benefits of Christian-Muslim dialogue, there is need to harness the great potentials of women, as evidenced by their untapped demographic dividends in various religions. Hence the following recommendations are put forward.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

Investigation of women participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations in Kenya was the task this study undertook. Umbrella religious organizations have been formulated with inclusivity frameworks being established to allow for dialogue for all and sundry. Different stakeholders must support and establish the necessary framework for informal dialogues, ensuring a smooth transition from informal to formal dialogues.

Doctrinal teaching in Christianity and Islam and legal frameworks, underpin inclusiveness for all. The gap of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue, however, is

palpable in the formal structured dialogues. This is in spite of women's potential to dialogue. In a world where interreligious dialogue has become a crucial component and tool for conflict resolution, religious diplomacy, and fostering cohesive societies, it is crucial to harness the potential of women.

### **5.3.1 The Framework for the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

The study recommends inclusive formal and informal Christian-Muslim dialogue practices in Umbrella Religious Organizations in Kenya. A deliberate effort to implement an inclusive policy framework that adheres to the letter can achieve this. The policy framework should ensure that a particular dialoguing community does not proceed in dialogue without the representation of women from the participating religious groups.

### **5.3.2 The Role of Women in their Participation in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Kenya.**

Given the centrality of Christianity and Islam in Kenya, it is not adequate that women are relegated to informal and non-religious dialogues.

Religious leaders need to be honest and open to carry out spiritual/religious dialogue in Christian-Muslim dialogue to avoid misunderstandings and blanket generalizing statements on the exclusion of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Since Christian-Muslim dialogue sessions take place in neutral spaces (usually not in churches and mosques) that are non-religious-specific, this could be an opportunity for women participation in interreligious dialogue in what would otherwise be impossible within their religious specific sacred spaces of mosques and churches.

Efforts need to be put in place to enhance the inclusion of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue which is crucial, particularly in situations where there are uncertainties about their role and position of women in interfaith dialogue. There should be a concerted effort to achieve clear objectivity and implement empowerment programs for women delegates, including pre- or extra-dialogue provisions for participating.

### **5.3.3 The Impact of the Participation of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

There is need to formalize informal dialogue. Formalizing may mean different things to different people. It means to ritualize by giving a definite structure or shape. Make informal Christian-Muslim dialogue official. An example could be done through developing a legal framework structure that would be the basis for the establishment of a policy on informal Christian-Muslim Dialogue as well as provide proper documentation.

Formalization can give women a reason to take part in dealing with both specific issues that affect them and issues that affect many people. It could also strengthen the results of these processes by creating real frameworks for accountability and responsibility. This strategy is a plan of action to achieve short, middle, and long-term desired goals.

Contextualized dialogue allows for the development of dialogues that are deliberate in objectives and forms to fit a particular context.

### **5.3.4 Challenges for Women in their Participation in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

To effectively achieve progress towards systematic women's participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue, mainstreaming women in religious leadership and promoting gender equity and equality are recommended.

Women's empowerment in religious spaces on how to confidently take up leadership and an understanding of policy frameworks, as well as on how the religious community and umbrella religious organizations, offers safe and relevant avenues will enhance their ability to participate in the promotion of Christian –Muslim dialogue.

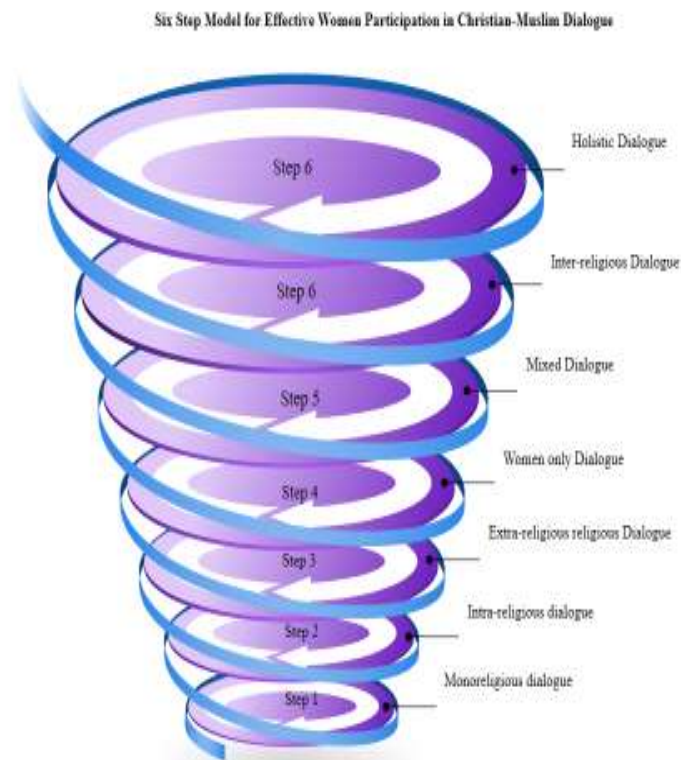
These are platforms that could be exploited and amply resource women, since such spaces tend to be 'neutral' of individual religion's specifics. The umbrella religious organizations are strategically placed and work at the intersection of faith and justice in Kenyan communities. Collaboratively, they could draw from gender inclusive theories and start from women's personal experiences, as suggested by the Standpoint theory. This approach can facilitate and direct efforts to enhance the representation of women at all levels dialogue; thereby achieving gender parity and promoting gender equality.

The two religions should allocate more resources to women's religious movements to facilitate the institutionalization of informal dialogues, foster a sustainable dialogue, and generate momentum for the development of policies and frameworks. This would ensure that informal dialogues do not end in themselves, but rather transition into formal dialogues. This could potentially help women navigate specific structures with a degree of formality, thereby enhancing their influence at policy and decision-making levels.

While recommending strategies for effective women participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue, it was difficult to separate Christian-Muslim dialogue from the contextual issues that it sought to address.

## Overall Conclusion

The researcher believes that most of the themes considered for women's active participation in local informal interreligious dialogue reinforce women's traditional roles. This, in turn, enhances women's exclusive dialogues at informal levels. These informal dialogues progress to find spaces where women can actively participate in mixed dialogues with men and women at formal levels of interreligious dialogue. For effective participation of women in Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organization, a six-step model is proposed for a step-by-step progressive participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue as shown in Figure 5. 1 below.



**Figure 5.1: Six-Step Model for Effective Engagement of Women in Christian-Muslim Dialogue.**

**The Model Anticipated the Following Steps**

**Step 1.** Begin by enhancing *mono-religious* dialogue of religious self-awareness by allowing the study of Scriptures in one's religion that build confidence and dispel fear of conversion to the other religion.

**Step 2.** Allow for an *intergroup dialogue* of women studying the same religious traditions as a baseline of the religious group's understanding on specific issues.

**Step 3.** Allow for *intra-dialogue* among women in the same faith cultures to Enhance a shared value system and understanding.

**Step 4.** Allow *extra dialogue*, where the women study the religious traditions of the 'other'.

**Step 5.** Allow an interreligious dialogue, creating awareness, and dialogue between Christian and Muslim *women only* study each other's religious traditions together.

**Step 6.** Allow women to participate in mixed dialogues with men and women on cross-cutting themes, leading to a holistic approach to Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The urgency of this study was to refocus Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya to where it matters most: the women. The study centres on women as subjects and not the objects of study in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in umbrella religious organizations in Kenya. The main study outcome indicated that women have thrived incognito at grassroot levels of informal (unstructured) Christian-Muslim dialogues in Kenya while situating themselves in the Standpoint Theory which brings to the fore women's own experiences and knowledge, within their own social

location in the religious community margins of Christians and Muslims. This necessitates the need to tap into their potentials in the formal dialogues. The study challenges the status quo in the conventional field of knowledge in the formal Christian-Muslim dialogue to progressively integrate women in the formal Christian-Muslim dialogue. It introduces an interplay of theory and practice from women's day-to-day experiences as opposed to the traditional expert-originated conventional gnosis. By putting women at the centre and as the subject of focus in Christian-Muslim dialogue, the difficulties in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya are made even more complex.

#### **5.4. Suggestions for Further Research**

Only one umbrella religious organization, IRCK, had shown a composition of varied faith communities within her top leadership and decision-making level. It would be interesting to study how such an organization operates. Since this study only focused on women participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue with reference to umbrella religious organizations.

The temptation to do a comparative study of Christians and Muslims or men and women's perspectives on the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue was always there. However, that was not the scope of this study. Therefore, a comparative study would be an interesting area for further study.

Another area worth further investigation is the role of women in interreligious diplomacy using soft power approaches in communities of faith. Further research could also be done on how the involvement of women in the Christian-Muslim dialogue both in the formal and informal levels would impact on the problem of terrorism in the country. This should be motivated by the fact that women are the nurtures, providing

values, promoting peace and enhancing mutual respect in the communities. The foregoing suggestion is based on the contemporary challenge of global terrorism that has become quite elusive. This may require the use of soft power diplomacy rather than coercion and women are best placed to use this approach.

These are good directions for further research on the area of women participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue in order to develop more knowledge and establish linkages for gender inclusive dialogue practices. The Christian-Muslim dialogue has a rich history and institutional anchor within its precepts which tend to overlap (Knitter, 2009; Miller, & Mwakabana, 1998). Studying this area may enrich the efforts aimed at supporting a more cohesive and closely interwoven social fabric in Kenya.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Glossary

<i>Al-Shabaab:</i>	A Somalia-based Islamist group.
<i>Awrah:</i>	This is the part of the body that is not supposed to be exposed.
<i>Bara:</i>	Hinterland
<i>Chamas:</i>	Informal women groups which provide social, spiritual, economic and financial capital
<i>Da'wāh:</i>	“Islamic outreach” or “Islamic Mission”.
<i>Dhimmī:</i>	Non-Muslim minorities under the protection of Muslims.
<i>Dhimmī status:</i>	Legal protection of non-Muslims, mainly Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Sabians living in an Islamic state.
<i>Eid Fitr:</i>	The festival of breaking the fast of Ramadhan after the fasting month in the Muslim Lunar calendar feast or festival.
<i>Fatwa (plural–Fatawa):</i>	Formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law  Islamic courts.
<i>Harambee:</i>	Kiswahili term for pulling resources together.
<i>Hijab:</i>	A head covering worn in public by Muslim women.
<i>Hotuba:</i>	Kiswahili for Sermon
<i>Madrasas:</i>	Islamic schools.
<i>Mufti:</i>	Legal scholar

<i>Mihadhara:</i>	Religious public debates.
<i>Kadhi:</i>	A Muslim judge who renders decisions according to the <i>Sharī‘ah</i> (Islamic law)
<i>Kafir:</i>	Unbeliever.
<i>Nywele-ngumu:</i>	Kinky-haired.
<i>Risala:</i>	Prophet-hood or the message.
<i>Roho:</i>	Holy Spirit.
<i>Sahaba:</i>	Companions of the prophet Muhammad.
<i>Sharī‘ah:</i>	Islamic law.
<i>Ustadhi:</i>	One who graduated from an institute of higher Islamic learning.
<i>Ulama:</i>	Muslim Scholars.
<i>Umma:</i>	Muslim community.
<i>Qawwam:</i>	Protectors (Guardians)
<i>TikTok:</i>	Social media platform with short-form video hosting service owned by Byte Dance.
<i>Viongozi:</i>	Leaders.
<i>Vumilia:</i>	Perseverance.
<i>Xawilaad:</i>	Popularly known Somali money transfer system.
<i>Wahy:</i>	Revelation

## Appendix II, Questionnaire

### KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

Dear Friend,

Thank you for accepting to take part in this study. This study aims to learn more about women and their participation in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. This study is carried out purely for academic purposes. There is no right or wrong answer. What you contribute is valuable. Everything you say is confined to this research work and if you require further confidentiality, your name will not be mentioned anywhere unless you give consent. What you indicate will help carry out this research successfully. Thank you in advance.

Indicate Religious Group Name -----

Indicate your name [optional] -----

Indicate your gender-----

Indicate your religion [Tick one]

Christian	
Muslim	
Other	

**A. Framework for the Participation of Women in the Promotion of  
Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Kenya**

1. How can you describe Christians - Muslims relations in Kenya [tick as appropriate]?

Normal	
<u>Cold</u>	
<u>Lukewarm</u>	
Not sure	

2. What is the reason(s) for the above relations?

a.	
b.	
c.	

3. What engagements bring Christians and Muslims together? [Tick as appropriate]

	<u>Reason</u>	<u>Often</u>	<u>Once in a while</u>	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
a.	Religious				
b.	Social/ cultural				
c.	Economic				
d.	Government functions				

### **Inclusion Levels of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

1. How can you describe the Christian-Muslim engagement of women in Kenya [Tick as Appropriate]?

a.	Formal	
b.	Informal	
c.	Both of the above	
d.	None of the above	

2. Give example(s) of the above

-----  
-----  
-----

**B. Promotion**

1. How can you describe women involvement in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya [tick as appropriate]?

a.	Active participation	
b.	Limited participation	
c.	Non-participation	
d.	Not sure	

2. Give reason(s) for the above response

a.	
b.	
c.	

3. What are some of the Christian and Muslim women engagements?

a.	
b.	
c.	

## Women Contribution in Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Kenya

1. What is the outcome of women engagement in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya [tick as appropriate]?

a.	Balanced community	
b.	Community imbalance	
c.	Not sure	

Please provide the reasons for the aforementioned response. -----

-----

-----

### C. Challenges of Women in the Promotion of Christian-Muslim Dialogue

- 1a. To what extent are these challenges [please tick as appropriate]

S/N	Suggested Challenge	<u>Mostly</u>	<u>Little</u>	<u>Somehow</u>	<u>Not sure</u>
a.	Gender Barrier				
b.	Lack of knowledge				
c.	Absence in leadership				

1b. Any other challenge(s)

Please mention -----  
-----  
-----  
-----

**D. Recommendations**

1. What is the suggestion for solutions to the challenge(s) mentioned above?

a.	
b.	

**Appendix III, Interview Schedule**

1. How can you describe Christian-Muslim relations in Kenya?
2. What are some of the guiding principles for the participation of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue?
3. Have you participated in Christian-Muslim dialogue?
4. If yes, please share your experience
5. If not, why?
6. Are women involved in Christian-Muslim dialogue?
8. If the answer to the above question is yes, how are women involved in Christian-Muslim dialogue?
9. If the answer to the above question is no, why not?

10. What is the contribution of women in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue?

11. What challenges are women faced with in their participation in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kenya?

11. What is your recommendation for effective involvement of women in the promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue?

## Appendix IV, Consent Form

### Consent form for Personal data collection

#### Consent Form for Personal Data Collection

I hereby declare that the personal data I provide is done so voluntarily and I understand that the data will be used by the staff members and students who are participating in the service-learning project

(Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_) Name: \_\_\_\_\_).

I hereby agree to release my personal data for the following purposes:

- for processing the service-learning project in the above-mentioned project;
- for identifying the needs relevant to the abovementioned project;
- for reporting or making presentations subject to the requirements of the abovementioned project,  
the school/college, or other participating or sponsoring organization(s) involved;
- for educational research and analysis in an anonymous format in which no identifying information can be found.

I understand I have the right to access and correct all personal data in accordance with the provisions of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance.

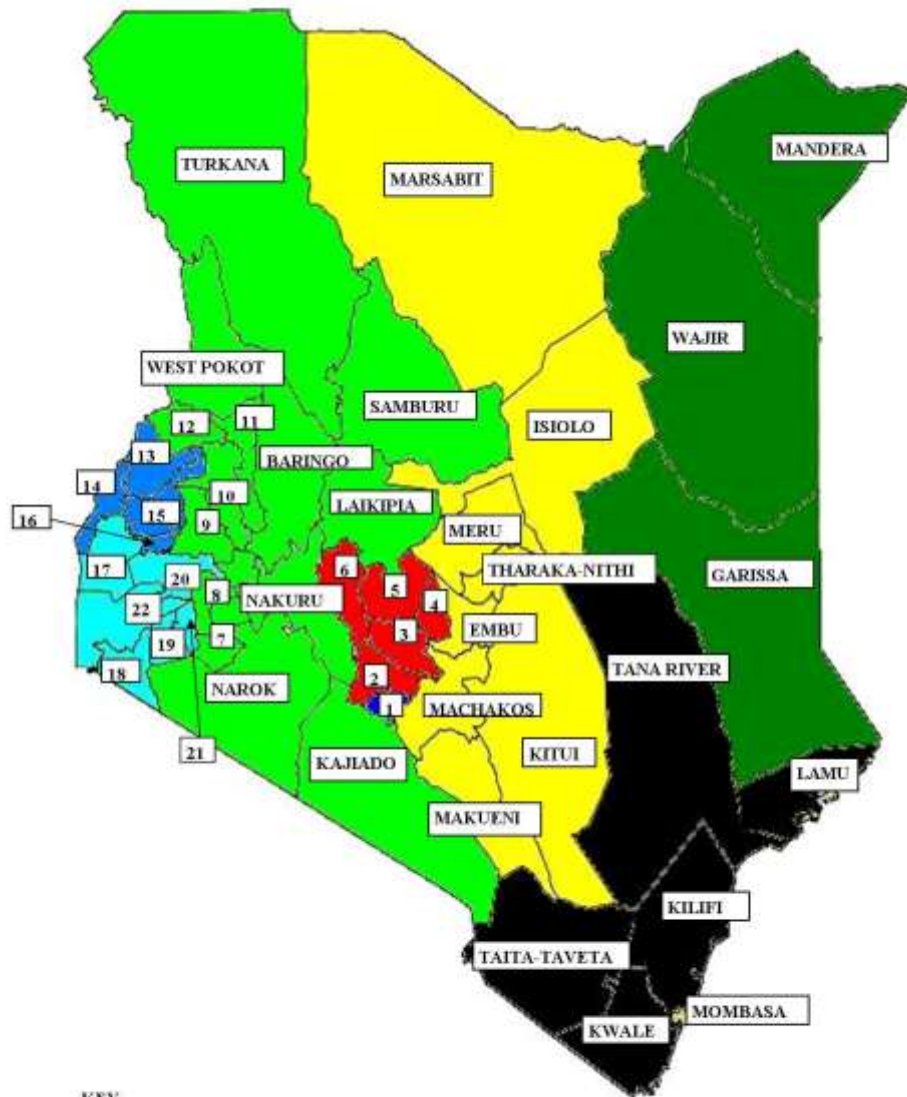
Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact method (email or phone): \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix V Kenya Counties

COUNTIES OF KENYA



**KEY**

- |              |                     |              |              |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. NAIROBI   | 8. KERICHO          | 15. KAKAMEGA | 22. HOMA BAY |
| 2. KIAMBU    | 9. TRANS NZOIA      | 16. VIHIGA   |              |
| 3. MURANG'A  | 10. UASIN GISHU     | 17. SIAYA    |              |
| 4. KIRINYAGA | 11. ELGEYO-MARAKWET | 18. MEGORI   |              |
| 5. NYERI     | 12. NANDI           | 19. KISII    |              |
| 6. NYANDARUA | 13. BUNGOMA         | 20. KISUMU   |              |
| 7. BOMET     | 14. BUSIA           | 21. NYAMIRA  |              |

## Appendix VI: Research Authorization



KENYATTA UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL

E-mail: [kubps@yahoo.com](mailto:kubps@yahoo.com)  
[dean-graduate@ku.ac.ke](mailto:dean-graduate@ku.ac.ke)  
Website: [www.ku.ac.ke](http://www.ku.ac.ke)

P.O. Box 43844, 00100  
NAIROBI, KENYA  
Tel. 8710901 Ext. 57530

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Our Ref: C82/26647/13

Date: 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2020

The Director General,  
National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation,  
P.O. Box 30623-00100,  
**NAIROBI**

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION FOR FLORENCE IMINZA-REG. NO. C82/26647/13

I write to introduce Iminza who is a Postgraduate Student of this University. The student is registered for a Ph.D. degree programme in the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies in the School of Humanities & Social Sciences.

Iminza intends to conduct research for Ph.D. thesis entitled, "Women's Participation in Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Kenya".

Any assistance given will be highly appreciated.






Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E. Kimani', written over a blue circular stamp.

PROF. ELISHIBA KIMANI  
DEAN, GRADUATE SCHOOL

RM/cao

**Appendix VII: Research Permit**

 <p>REPUBLIC OF KENYA</p>	 <p><b>NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION</b></p>
<b>Ref No: 495466</b>	<b>Date of Issue: 20/January/2021</b>
<b>RESEARCH LICENSE</b>	
	
<b>This is to Certify that Ms. FLORENCE Iminza of Kenyatta University, has been licensed to conduct research in Nairobi on the topic: WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE IN KENYA for the period ending : 20/January/2022.</b>	
<b>License No: NACOSTI/P/21/8672</b>	
<b>495466</b>	
<b>Applicant Identification Number</b>	<b>Director General NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION</b>
<b>Verification QR Code</b>	
	
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