Analysis of Christian-Muslim perceptions in Nakuru Municipality, Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract

Christians and Muslims relationship has had differing perceptions that have created a barrier over centuries to date. These perceptions have not been subjected to investigation and analysis in Nakuru Municipality. Numerous instances have occurred that have left the perceptions of either religion somewhat indifferent on the intentions of the other. Terror attacks and radicalisations in various areas have left many suffering from the loss of loved ones, property and eventually causing negative perceptions between the two. This study investigated and analyzed perceptions via social-theological approaches and textual sources, of the fluid relationships between Christians and Muslims within Nakuru Municipality. The study established that divergences between the two religions outweigh the convergences which cause negative perceptions. The study thus recommends concerted effort from the government, religious leaders and the community to develop joint action plans for tackling and eliminate causes of negative perceptions.

Key words: Perceptions; Religious; Christian; Muslim; Faith; Faithful; Relationships.

1 Introduction

Religious perceptions have existed over a long period of time dating back to the 7th century. According to Assan (2003), the views from either (Christians versus Muslim) of the two religions vary greatly. The two religions have their own perceptions towards each other with reasons behind them. It is paramount to demystify these perceptions to create awareness among the two faiths. These perceptions form mental models that highly influence the manner in which the two interact. Coexistence in the current era has become a challenge with extremism and radicalisation taking their toll. Hatred, fear and mistrust have infiltrated the fabric of the two religions in the society, turning it to having a woven antagonistic view and approach of each the others faith. This premise of view with antagonism, bias and lack of information, if not addressed can likely cause negative repercussions. Views on the two religions tend to converge and diverge at some point, with the divergences causing the negative perceptions.

Historically the two faiths in one way have lived peacefully socially, religiously, politically and economically. In another they lived in complex and dynamic ways, where their interactions were polemical. These interactions locally and internationally have not been understood with any credible certainty (Soares, 2006). This misunderstanding and complexity in interrelationships make Nimer (2007); argue that there can never be meaningful peace in the world unless there is peace and justice between the two religious communities. The understanding needed for peace to prevail needs more of dialogue to ensure negative perceptions are dissolved in the minds of the two religions faithful's. These two communities have always perceived the other as a threat to either peace or religious teachings. Perceptions that have existed are on which religion will have more converts. Muslim religion views their own converts to Christianity as deviants with greater magnitude. According to Abdalla (2002), Thordsen (1999, terrorism has impacted negatively on the

perceptions Christians have on Muslims in Eastern Africa due to the attack on the American embassy in 1998. According to Mbiti (1969), Muslims and Christians view one another with suspicion. Branch (2010) on the other hand states that churches view Kadhi courts as an indicator of trend in Islamic radicalism in Kenya. That caused negative perceptions as depicted during the constitution making process in 2010. These views were experienced in other parts of the country and also in Nakuru Municipality. Chesworth (2010) argue that inclusion of Kadhi courts in the constitution made Christian to react against it.

According to Mwakimako (2002), the social, economic, religious and political interactions of the two religions have latent differences, misperceptions and suspicions, which likely hinder co-existence and efforts to successful interfaith relationships. The process of integrating and disintegrating positive and negative perceptions respectively thus requires a great deal of effort. The efforts can not only come from religious perspective but also needs to emanate from political and all leaders in the various sectors within a region. This article highlights the various perceptions wielded by the two religions within Nakuru Municipality. It further describes the nature of these perceptions highlighting key factors that influence them and possible solutions for mutual coexistence.

2 Perception Problem

Long existing perceptions amongst Christian and Muslims on religious or faith backgrounds have created a misunderstanding between the two. These misunderstandings have always created a rift between the two religions Faithfull's making each to perceive the other from a malicious perspective. These perceptions are important as they create an image for either religion. The study by enumerating the perceptions that exist between Christians and Muslims within the Nakuru municipality creates knowledge on the causes of perceptions.

2.1 Perception Perspectives

Nakuru Municipality in Kenya is a diverse society that is pluralistic and non-homogenous with many groups of different cultures, languages and religions where Christians and Muslims are the majority. Nakuru town experiences influx and rapid population growth of both Christian and Muslim religions making it necessary for justice and peace to be sought. These two faiths interact in all sorts of complex and dynamic ways, but their interactions locally and internationally have not been understood properly (Soares, 2006). These misunderstanding and complex relationship contribute greatly to the perception wielded by both. The stability and peaceful coexistence of the two faiths in Nakuru Municipality is threatened by extremism, marginalisation and radicalisation arising from Islamic and Christian fundamentalism. Peace and justice has to prevail between the two religious communities for meaningful development in all sectors. Mbiti (1969) points out that Muslims and Christians view one another with suspicion where actions of Muslims in the name of religion remain incomprehensible to Christians. This creates a need for the two faithful's to have an understanding of each other.

The increase in insecurity due to terrorism creates a rift between Christian and Muslim religious relationships. This is due to news of terrorists' attacks in the country; for instance Westgate Mall attack (Sunday Nation September 22, 2013), Mpeketoni Church (Wednesday January 1, 2014), Likoni Joy in Jesus Church (Daily Nation, Monday March 24, 2014), Eastleigh commuter bus bombing (Daily Nation, Monday March 31, 2014), Garisa University attack and Marsabit town series of attacks respectively. These incidences created a perception on the activities of terrorists, where Christian associated the attacks to the Muslims.

The debate on the Kenyan Constitution Draft (2010) precipitated differences and negative perceptions among some Christians; this was due to the inclusion of Kadhi courts.

Christians were opposing this as they perceived that it would favour Muslims and make Kenya a strict Islamic State, which was a perception perpetrated by Church leaders. Christians and Muslims share the ideal of unity, but in reality they fail to live up to their self-proclaimed ideals (Goddard, 2000). According to Chatsworth (2008), Muslim advocacy for enhancement of the Kadhi courts led to the negative reactions, participation and discussion by Christians. The rejection of inclusion of Kadhi courts was a blow to Muslims (Tayob, 2012). These instances further created a negative perception between the two religions. Wario (2013) from the eight thematic issues of Kadhi courts points out that there has been misunderstanding, fears and contestation about the courts. These are affected by social, political and economic difference. These contestations were evident necessitating Christians and Muslims need to build bridges other than walls for harmonious coexistence. Previous studies have not adequately and systematically provided information about perceptions between Christians and Muslims in Nakuru Municipality. This study investigated the perceptions between Christians and Muslims by identifying the factors that influence the perceptions, not addressed in these works.

The population of Christians and Muslims in Kenya is about 83% and 11- 15% respectively poses a perception. Muslims in Kenya are approximately 11.2% of the Kenyan population (Kenya Population and Housing Census, 2009) this makes them feel marginalised. Association between the two religions has been on social, economic, religious and political levels for over 14 centuries (Oded, 2000). The Kenya constitution review process controversies around Kadhi courts and emergence of Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) have created a "negative" image of Islam and Christianity. These have greatly influenced the perception of Christian about Muslims and vice versa.

Public preaching by Muslims (*Mihadhara*) and Christians crusades (Tayob, 2012) lead to competition and contestations. According to Kubai (1999) and Maina (1995) mission

activities between the two faiths have created tensions and recommended more research for better understanding of the effects of these missions on the two faiths. Christians negotiate their space in crusades, rallies, conferences, streets and open air preaching. These interfaith engagements may be polemical and confrontational leading to mistrust, fear, distress, suspicion and tensions, which may trigger public duel.

Nakuru Municipality being a cosmopolitan town with majority being Christians and few Muslims adherents' creates differences between the two groups. For development to take place, the two must find a common ground of living together in spite of the apparent social, political and religious challenges. The article examined the extent of the perceptions of Christians and Muslims relations. These will help in creating and promoting peace, harmony, co-existence, dialogue and engage people in more productive projects for sustainable development.

There have been various conferences and dialogues since 1950s to acknowledge the volatility of the relationship between the two faiths to promote peaceful co-existence. This caused what Mazrui (1990) called as, "a dialogue of the deaf," since meaningful peaceful coexistence has not been achieved. It is therefore as a result of this that Christian-Muslim suspicions, tension, conflicts, fears and war continue to rage in most parts of the world and particularly in Africa despite the existence of the Program for Christians Muslim relations in Africa (PROCMURA) since 1959.These events have resorted to destruction of churches, mosques, schools, important buildings and loss of lives, Ngumbao (1999).

The relationship of Christians and Muslims examined under interviews in churches and mosques revealed the underlying religious perceptions. Church and mosque are powerful agents of socialization; the habits and character formed by individuals are greatly shaped and influenced by the doctrines and dogmas prescribed by these institutions. In Nakuru

Municipality the perceptions between the two religious groups are important due to the cosmopolitan nature of the population. Maina (1995) gives the historical relationship between Christian and Muslim and indicates past events as polemical.

The negative perception of each other grow daily, especially through media reports about phenomenon Al-Shabaab terror groups, youth radicalization, political issues and past historical events which are sensational. Recent reports, "Second Muslim cleric charged with incitement against Christians as appeared in the Daily Nation (Nairobi), 13th June, 2013". This has created fear among Christians because they have been target in the past incidences. This article examined the Christian-Muslim religious relationship with a view to highlight misunderstandings and dispenses the fears and distorted perceptions and look for ways of promoting sustainable and peaceful co-existence.

3 Methodology

3.1 Location of Study

The study was conducted in Nakuru Municipality of Nakuru County which is geographically located in the Central Rift Valley (Fig. 1 below). Other districts in the County are: Rongai, Subukia, Bahati, Gilgil, Naivasha, Njoro, Molo and Kuresoi.
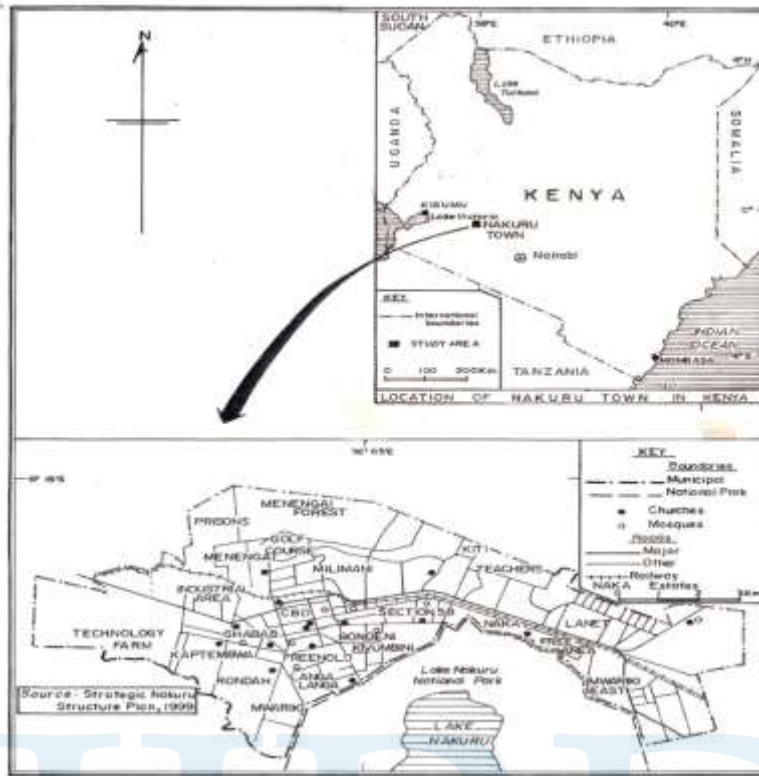
Figure 1 Location of Nakuru Municipality

Source: O. Ojode

3.2 Research Design

The research design employed was a descriptive field survey. It was designed to obtain social data concerning the current status of phenomena and to draw valid general conclusions from the facts discovered. Descriptions, narrations and explanations were used to determine opinions, attitudes, preferences, and perceptions of groups of interest. The paper used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to draw perception information from the respondents.

3.3 Target Population

Random purposive sampling was used in selecting the respondents based on the researcher's judgment and preference in selecting the sample units that would provide relevant information or meet the purpose of the study. Descriptive research was used which

focused on 255 sample size, 130 Christian respondents and 125 Muslim respondents. Stratified random sampling techniques were used through proportional allocation to ensure representation in all the strata represented in the eventual sample.

3.4 Data collection and Research Instruments

The study used questionnaires and interview schedules to collect information from the field. The questionnaires were administered physically by the researcher, research assistants and some through mails. Those sent through mails were responded through mail and others physically collected. The interview schedules were physically administered. These instruments assisted in making informed opinion about the perceptions of the two groups. These instruments were supplemented by participant's observations in mosques, churches, *mihadharas* and crusades. Secondary data was based on the information in existing documentary source in both public and private universities in Kenya; Journals, books, archives, unpublished theses, newspapers, the Bible, Quran and published research papers.

3.5 Data Analysis

Analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. This was used to merge and locate codes of the perceptions and patterns of Christians-Muslim relations. Data was put in several categories for analysis. In addition, the researcher used correlation analysis and a simple linear regression analysis to determine the relationship between Christian-Muslim perceptions (dependent variable) and religious affiliations (independent variables).

4 Results and Discussions

The paper focused on perceptions between Christians and Muslims and religious aspects of Christianity and Islam that create the existent perceptions. The data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The study considered respondents' demographic

characteristics such as, gender, age, level of education, occupation and religion. Frequencies,

percentages, means, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data as shown in figure
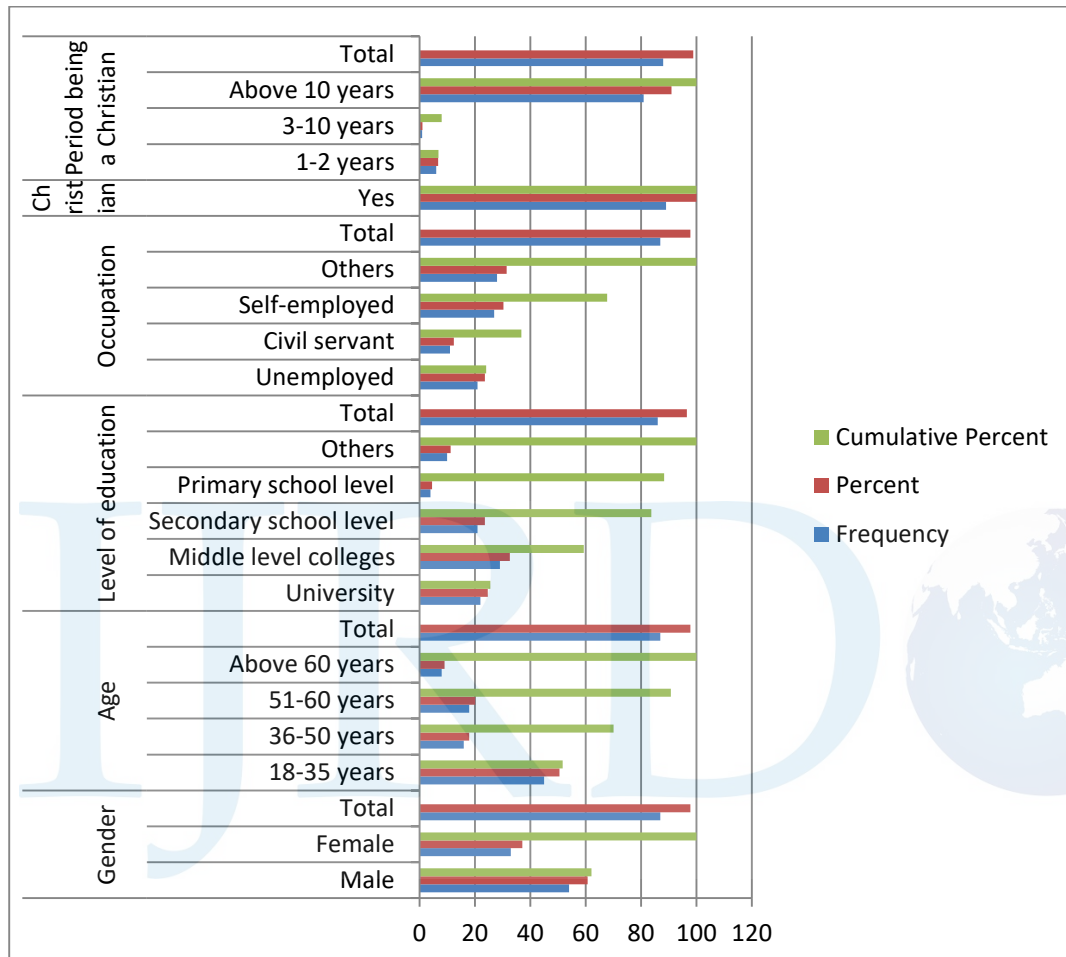
1.1.

Figure 1.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Christian Respondents

Source: Field Data (2015)

From the results, the study established that majority of the respondents were male 54

(60.7%) compared to 33 (37.1%) who were female. Majority of the respondents 45 (50.6%)

had age bracket of 18-35 years, 18 (20.2%) were 51-60 years, 16 (18%) were 36-50 years and

8 (9%) were above 60 years. In terms of occupation, majority of the respondents 28 (31.5%)

were unspecified, 27 (30.3%) were self-employed, 21 (23.6%) were unemployed and 11

(12.4%) were civil servants. In terms of their level of education, 29 (32.6%) of the

respondents were middle level college, 22 (24.7%) had attended university, 21 (23.6%) were

secondary level and 4 (4.5%) were primary level. The study also established that 100% of the

respondents were Christians. The study further established that 81 (91%) of the respondents

had been Christians for a period of more than 10 years, 6 (6.7%) for a period of 1-2 years and

1 (1.1%) for a period of 3-10 years.

Figure 1.2: Demographic Characteristics of the Muslim Respondents

Source: Field Data (2015)

Based on the results, the study revealed that majority of the respondents were female 58

(70.7%) compared to 22 (26.8%) who were male. Majority of the respondents 46 (56.1%)

had age bracket of 18-35 years, 22 (26.8%) were 36-50 years, 6 (7.3%) were above 51years.

In terms of occupation, majority of the respondents 27 (32.9%) were unspecified, 22 (26.8%)

were unemployed, 15 (18.3%) were civil servants and 13 (15.9%) were self-employed. In

terms of their level of education, 20 (24.4%) of the respondents were secondary level, 18

(22%) were middle level college, 17 (20.7%) were university level, 13 (15.9%) were unspecified and 8 (9.8%) were primary level. The study also established that 100% of the respondents were Muslims. The study further established that 70 (85.4%) of the respondents have been Muslims for a period of more than 10 years, 6 (7.3%) for a period of less than 1 year, 5 (6.1%) for a period of 3-10 years and 1 (1.2%) for the period of 1-2 years.

Comparatively Christians and Muslim based on table 1.1 and 1.2 on Christians and Muslims religious characteristics, 70.1% Christians were 18-50 years while 85% were Muslims. On the other hand 83.7% Christians had attained at least secondary education while 72.4% Muslims had attained the same. The respondents who had been Christian for a period less than 10 years were 8% and above 10 years 91%, while the respondents who were Muslims for less than 10 years were 14.6% and above 10 years 85.4%. These demographic characteristics were important as they helped in forming the perceptions between the two faiths.

4.1 Perceptions between Christians and Muslims in Nakuru Municipality

Descriptive statistical analysis used in the study revealed numerous images that the two religions have on each other.
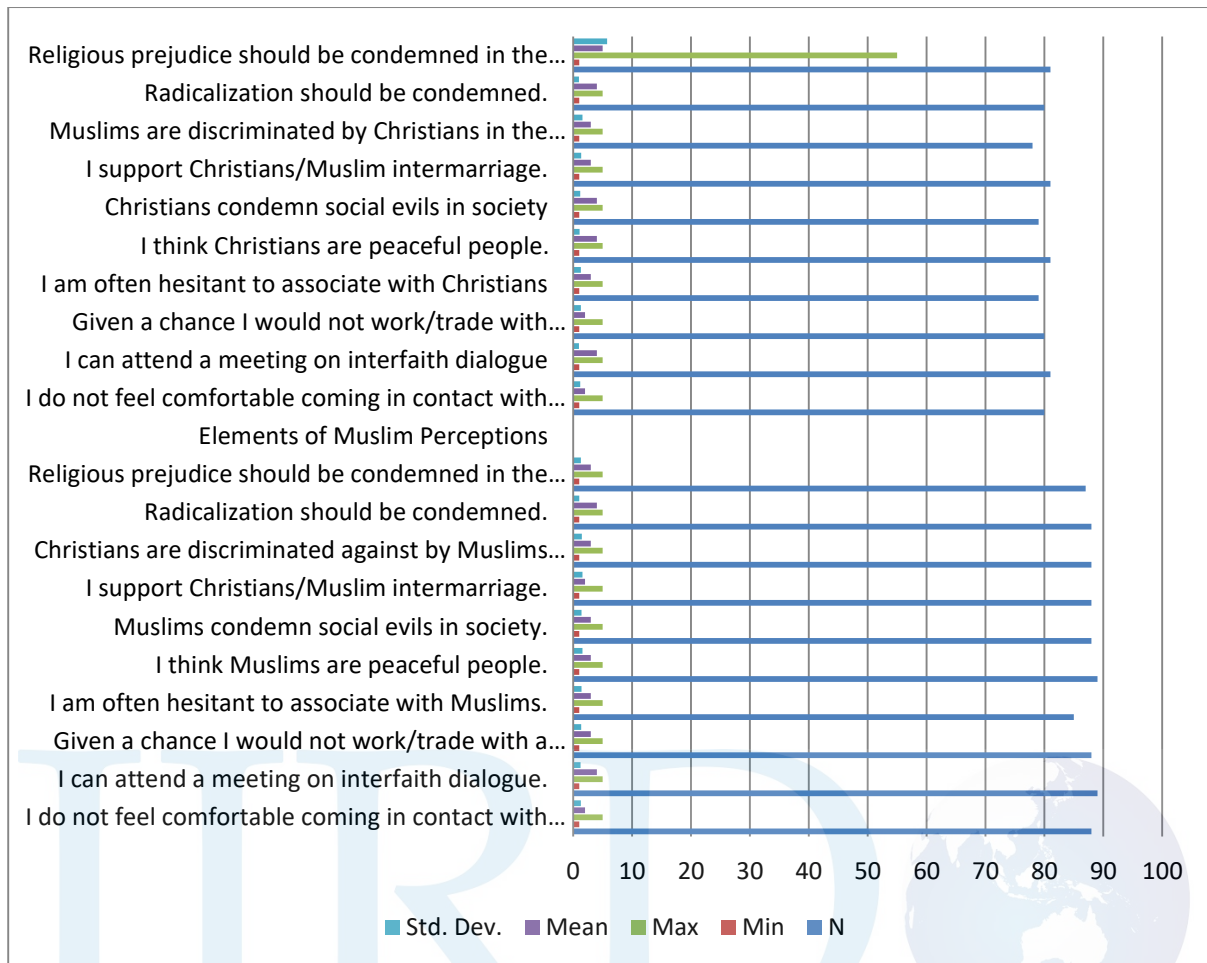
Figure 1.3: Christian-Muslim perceptions

Source: Field Data (2015)

The perceptions existing between Christians and Muslims in Nakuru Municipality were established from the respondent's answers. In reference scaling used in the study design, 5 representing strongly agree, 4 representing agree, 3 representing undecided, 2 representing disagree and 1 representing strongly disagree, therefore strongly disagree (1) was minimum, strongly agree (5) was maximum. The mean was analyzed based on the respondents' choices scaled between strongly agree and strongly disagree as indicated in figure 1.3 above.

From the tables both respondents agreed that they could attend interfaith dialogue and condemn radicalization with a mean of approximately 4 (agree). However, on coming in

contact with each other, both respondents disagreed with a mean of approximately 2. The perception of the two religious Faithfull's was of each being independent of the other. Muslims preferred not to work/trade with Christians with a mean of approximately 2, while Christians on the other hand given a chance were not sure whether they would work/trade with Muslims, with a mean of approximately 3. This revealed the mistrust and fear between Christians and Muslims. The study established that individual faith was paramount and integrating it in others' religion would mean losing identity, faith, fame and leadership.

It was observed during the study that Christians and Muslims live together in their day-to-day activities such as; doing business , learning in schools, politicking, tackling social issues, trading and interacting. In spite of all these, their relationship is tepid and multifarious faced with various latent challenges as it was found out from the respondents who were interviewed. It is important to note that due to religious perceptions, not all dialogues are achievable since religious persuasion and internal wrangles among faithful delay dialogue that can help enhance perceptions (Akinande, 1999). The study concurred with Goddard (2000) who suggested that the two faiths should operate on the basis of honest dialogue and mutual respect in debates and conversion missions. These missions should be done in moderation. Much can be done when the two faiths are united and having willingness to respect each other's cultural and faith differences since such an environment ensures peace, co-existence and harmony according to some respondents.

There are many points of convergence between the two faiths as the study established. Both faiths believe in a God who is merciful and just, God who reveals his word and one who will call people to be answerable of their own actions. The values and ideals shared includes; helping the needy in society, search for justice, condemnation of social evils, love for the neighbour and importance of security, peace and harmony. Christians and Muslims however, tend to be blind about these factors with each considering themselves as special and unique

over the others. However, Ethics (akhlaq) require that people to practice humanity (virtues) in all events of life, and love of God should prevail. Q 9:24. Christians on the other hand believe in God and also on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. This is not so among Muslims making it becomes a point of contention. The paper found out that both faiths should not try to affirm who they are but rather try and share their faith even when it is opposed by other faiths. For effective interfaith relations to be achieved the challenges such as distorted image of one another, unplanned mission works, questions of the Holy books (Quran and Bible), grievances of historical perspectives, doctrinal differences, cultural differences and stereotypes need to be addressed.

The study also determined that there should be willingness to work together and interact more to remove stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. This will remove fear, mistrust and negative perceptions. Views from respondents indicated that the current terrorist attacks in the country increases tension rather than reducing, hence creating more fear, distress and mistrust on both faiths. It also found out that adherents of both faiths have very little or no in depth knowledge of the other. Both faiths should come together irrespective of culture, religion, doctrines, customs and past historical perspective to mutual understanding.

5 Summary

Terrorism as indicated by respondents is a challenge to perception in Nakuru Municipality between Christians and Muslims. Frisking of people in public areas or social halls portrays misperception on terrorism especially where one of the religions is perceived to harbour terrorists. The social media may at times blow out of proportion incidences that are touching on the perceptions during attacks which may fun religious differences. The cultural practices of the two religions differ in various ways making the two to have different approaches to issues such as believe on Jesus. This as a differing ground makes the two

religions differ greatly and at times the contestation may yield negative perception. The mannerism of the Muslim differing from those of Christians causes differing opinions which greatly yield to the difference in perceptions. In their views on marriage Christians and Muslims have different views which aggravate the social and cultural problems that are faced by people of different faiths. The manner in which Christian generalizes Muslims to be associated with terrorist groups is an example, living ever with suspicion of the Muslims likely relating with the groups.

Christians and Muslims believe that revelation truths and guidance enlighten adherents socially, politically and economically. Islam does not separate religion and politics and, that is another source of misperception while Christians separates the two and become the conscious of the society. It is dangerous to politicize religion since it presents a challenge to interfaith relations; most respondents referred to Nakuru as a hot bed of politics thus a very sensitive area. Religio-political aspects in Nigeria for example have destabilized the society and hence affecting interfaith relations and aggravating mistrust and misperception between Christian and Muslims (Akinande, 1996).

6 Conclusions

In conclusion, religious leaders and the government can emulate the Ghanaian people, Australia, South African people where Muslims and Christians live together in peace without suspicion (Mustapha, 2011). Their living together and sharing in all sectors creates understanding of each other's faith hence the perceptions have been changed greatly. Ghanaian people for example appreciate that the element that brings them together is God who creates all humanity and diversity is their strength and prosperity (Mustapha, 2011).

These two faiths should come together and desist from viewing the other through the lenses of religion or tribe. Christians and Muslims have to make the choice between

integration and assertion. Both religions leaders should affirm that for positive perception to prevail both faiths should explore elements of political values that support living together with full recognition of the best of the other faith and ignoring self and claimed religious demagogues.

The study established that economic, political and psychological factors have been influenced by religious perceptions which in turn influence their behaviour, thinking, feeling, reasoning and dealing of one faith towards the other within the Nakuru Municipality. The inability of religious leaders to extract religion from people and people from religion coupled with inability to disembody ideology has contributed to the continued negative perceptions. Christians and Muslims should encourage a lifestyle that considers homes, churches and mosques as schools and powerful agents of socialization that helps to build positive traits, character and habits to reshape the perceptions to positive view of both religions.

The interviews and questionnaires of Christian respondents have shown that 58.3% of the population sampled indicated that fear and mistrust are serious challenges in Nakuru Municipality. Christians perceive Muslims from their dress code, hair, language and appearance; others associated them with terrorists, mosques and Quran. Christians also fear the fact that Muslims do not believe in the Holy Trinity. There is also lack of democratic institutions, abuse of human rights on matters relating to alienation of those perceived to be engaged in terrorism. This contributes to Muslim to perceive Christians as uninformed on the terrorism issue creating a negative perception.

The study recommends emphasis to make on convergences of the attitudes the two faiths have rather than dwelling on the divergences that exists. This would in turn make the two faiths followers more receptive to change and more tolerant. The religious and cultural aspects that are similar should be used to create bridges between the two faiths. Affected

communities should share knowledge to ensure those in position to inform policy do so with more informed background knowledge.

The government should address issues like poverty and systems of employment to prevent the youth from being vulnerable to narrations of radicalized groups. The adherents and even religious leaders in various denominations do not understand the doctrines and tenets of their faith. This becomes a hindrance to positive perception efforts. In spite of the two faiths trying to have positive perceptions the study portrays suspicion, fear and mistrust which still prevail. It is the understanding of one another, education, learning about and from each other, avoidance of negative criticism and judgment, separation of religion and culture, religious leaders becoming more sincere and honest in matters of perceptions that can help communities easily transform their skewed perceptions.

The paper also recommended that since religion has powerful influence on people's way of thinking, acting and perceiving others, religious leaders have a role to play in the success of interfaith dialogues. These will aid in establishing informed decisions and avoidance of negative perception.

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