

The Covid-19 and Drought Cabal Impacts on the Landscape of Faith Based Tourism in the Maasai Pastoralists Rangelands

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ABSTRACT

In Kenya, tourism is one of the most dynamic sectors of the economy, and has specific features that are different from other industries. Faith based tourism is one of the segments that comprise the tourism industry, offering travelers with opportunities to principally reflect on own faith and secondly admire related religious constituencies. The sector is however subject to various challenges. At the Olkesument Prayer Center located in Kajiado County, whose core business is spiritual tourism was hard hit by the advent of Covid-19 pandemic, causing stoppage of visitors' flow to the facility, leading to a recession and regression. The period also housed a drought that was a carry-over from 2019. Given the standing of the resultant drawbacks, this study aimed to evaluate the impact of the pandemic and drought to the investment and related chain of activities. The undertaking employed explanatory mixed-methods of study to understand the heterogeneity of the disease outbreak and drought on the venture. The process involved collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data collected at the center, conducting literature review and, evaluating responses to explain the variability in the outcomes. The accrued data was subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Results showed that the pestilence and rains deficiency occurrences depressingly affected the enterprise, resulting in loss of livelihoods. The study recommends encirclement of a new frameworks to facilitate modifying of operations by up taking investment policy reorientation to mitigate fallouts and repackaging to gain a competitive edge in the faith based tourism arena.

Keywords: Spiritual tourism, Consumer demand, hydrologic drought, Culture, repackaging.

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1.0 Introduction

Tourism, as an industry, has become one of the most dynamic sectors of the world economy and has specific features that are different from other industries. The production and consumption points occur spatially at the

same time and, contributes to the social, economic and environmental growth of regions and simultaneously distributes the wealth created geographically. The Government of Kenya places emphasis on tourism, identifying it as one of the main drivers of the economy (GOK, 2002). It is reputed to represent a cheaper

alternative for diversification of the economy, particularly considering the country's competitive advantage in terms of environmental attraction suitable for nature tourism, together with an abundance of labor. The importance of tourism as a foreign exchange earner is emphasized by its higher contribution to the total export at over 20% of exports (Valle, *et al.*, 2017), with one of contributors being the faith based tourism. Visiting religious destinations and sites for pilgrimage by religious faithful and tourists has gained recognition in Kenya, with investors developing destinations in response to traveler's needs. Increasingly, religious ceremonies have become an attraction that spurs faith-based travel. The resultant tourism has expanded into an integral part of regular tourism as people seek to enjoy their travel even though their main travel intention is spirituality.

The faith based tourism has religious motives or a combination with others that include visiting holy places (Terzidou, Scarles & Saunders 2018). Accordingly, it comprises a changeable phenomenon composed of a set of mutual interactions of religious, lay and natural factors occurring in a geographic space of pilgrimages. Visits to holy sites are considered to be the oldest form of tourism (Apollo *et al.*, 2020) which have contributed to the development of cultural and civilizational horizons of nations in all religions of the world (Singh, 2004). This has made faith based tourism become a significant and constant element of the tourism industry, recognized as one of the most effective tools to foster inclusive and sustainable development (UNWTO, 2020).

Faith based tourists can in general be divided into two groups, the first being pilgrims whose motive for travelling is only to do religious affairs and whose time and duration of stay are not subject to leisure. The second category involves religious tourists who visit other religious and nonreligious places in addition to participating in religious rituals. In other words, they make a multipurpose trip with pilgrimage as a priority. Another classification presents two types of tourists, including those who visit holy places related to their own religion and those who visit the holy places of other religions as well (Nyaupane *et al.*, 2015).

Over the centuries religion has played a significant part in the development of religious buildings, rituals, festivals and ceremonial events to attract visitors (Raj & Griffin, 2017). Visitation to the faith based destinations

has been growing, with motivations ranging from strict adherence to faith, to broader forms of spirituality, and even secular motivations. Raj & Griffin (2015) highlights that both historical and contemporary visitor motivation related to religious tourism and pilgrimage results in the act of travel regardless of challenges and risks.

Holy sites, sacred shrines and other religious places host-believer pilgrims at times have had to overcome risks, challenges, fears, worries and uneasiness. Some have faced conflicts and terror attacks, but they have recovered and maintained a place in society (Raj and Griffin, 2017). In 2020, the faith based tourism was hit by the advent of COVID-19, presenting an unprecedented health and economic crisis. Travels were hit hard, with jobs put at risk in one of the most labor-intensive sectors of the economy (UNWTO, 2020). This created a major challenge for socio-economic systems, resulting in struggles to cope and deal with the ensuing vulnerabilities such as in the financial markets, supply systems and local and international relations. Tourism destinations were forced to close, leading the sector to struggle for survival and facing major challenges to re-design business models. The sector faced cancellation of travel plans, with the subsequent shocks affecting both the demand and supply-sides. The pandemic caused a 22% fall in international tourist arrivals during the first quarter of 2020, placing millions of livelihoods at risk and threatening to roll back progress made in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNWTO, 2020).

The pandemic exposed the fragility of tourism when not prepared to manage associated risks. Beyond the devastating direct health impacts and loss of life, the associated disruptions to societies and economies were unprecedented. The other revelation was that epidemics and pandemics are two of the most disappointing news for travelers and planners. Travel insurance had to consequently become a major concern in the industry as a way of reanimation by offering travel packages, including travel insurance services. In the study area, the prevailing drought aggravated the vulnerability of the faith based tourism enterprise due to Covid-19. It led to severe livelihood losses, characterized by reduced access to clean water, food security, and income for the faith based outfit, and households depending on it. The drought resulted in increased commodity prices, which further affected business operations, community well-being and weakened adaptations.

2.0 Concept of Faith Based Tourism

Faith based tourism is a niche within the segment of cultural tourism and, generally comprises of pilgrimages, visiting sacred sites and travel for purpose of mission or worship. Travel for the purpose of mission involves spreading faith, charity work, or volunteering from a religious perspective. Worship attracts mostly believers and are made to religious or spiritual places to experience religious or personal enlightenment. The most popular form of faith based tourism is sightseeing of religious sites, which is done by most of the people regardless of religious affiliation, art and architecture and, missionizing to promote religion, and provide services.

Faith based tourism is a substantial and growing form of tourism, recognized as among the oldest forms of planned travel, and making up a sizeable chunk of the overall tourism sector in the world (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). About 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites every year, generating around US\$ 18 billion in global revenues (Raj *et al.*, 2017). Jackowski (2000) estimates that roughly 240 million faith-based tourists go on pilgrimage each year, most of whom are Christians, Muslims, or Hindus. Cognizance is faith based tourism comprises temporary movement of people away from their place of residence to experience destinations that hosts sacred sites or shrines. Taken this way, the phenomenon involves individuals travelling in part or whole to destination to demonstrate and promote their religious beliefs by attending religious events, participating in religious programs, or visiting religious sites. This brand of tourism therefore showcases various holy sites and other attractions across religion lines capable of attracting tourists for various reasons, major among being the search for spiritual edification and enrichment (Digance, 2003).

Tourism Tidbits Archive (2014) opines that faith based travels can be motivated by the quest for humanitarian causes, including meeting of new friends. The index in the arguments illustrates faith based tourism to be a journey outside one's place of residence motivated by religious or humanitarian causes. As such, the tourists on pilgrimage or missions oscillate between religious and non-religious activities, which makes it at times challenging to draw a distinction between faith-based tourists and tourists of other types. Religious destinations may be strictly for faith-based tourism or can be both religious and cultural. As such, tourists to a site may also

be either faith-based tourists or cultural tourists depending on whether they have religious intent or not. The uniqueness of faith based tourism is its efficacy of appealing to people of different categories (Tourism Tidbit Archive, 2014).

Tourists to the same religious destinations are likely to share religious beliefs and behavior, since the destinations often appeal to specific religious faiths. Being in the same physical space can result in faith-based tourists sharing beliefs and behavior with one another. Tourists' destination choice reflects their beliefs, ideas, and impressions they have about the destination. Similarly, faith based tourists to the same destination mostly engage in similar behavior. Furthermore, the fact that they are travelling allows for greater opportunities to engage in common touristic behavior such as shopping for souvenirs, taking photos, or participating in tours. The shared beliefs and behavior, along with their interaction, create an ideal condition for emotional solidarity to emerge between faith-based tourists Kaell, (2014).

While religious destinations rarely prohibit followers of other religious faiths from entering, sacred sites within the religious destinations usually remain exclusive to those who adhere to certain religious beliefs and behavior (Hassner, 2003). Rarely, are there religious destinations that are contested by multiple faiths. Religious theme parks such as the Holy Land Experience in Florida, U.S. that are non-sacred in nature have been purposefully built (Blackwell, 2007).

3.0 Faith Based Tourism in Kenya

Religious demography and evolving roles of religious institutions have shaped Kenya's political, economic, and social and environmental history and present. Kenya offers inspiring examples of dynamic development and entrepreneurial verve, as a lower-middle income country that is an important hub for the whole Eastern Africa region. Religious institutions and activities are part of Kenya's successes, but they are also pertinent for each of its significant development challenges. The country's religious landscape has also undergone considerable changes, both in complexity and numbers of institutions, as well as in the social and political roles that religious actors play. In the whole, Kenya's religious landscape has also undergone considerable changes, both in complexity and numbers of institutions, as well as in the roles that religious actors play.

The history of Kenya has shaped the country's religious systems. Diverse ethnic communities and cultures in the country influence morality and how they draw from unique cultural experiences. Indigenous religious views continue to define the mindset of the citizens and the rise of African-initiated religious movements is a statement of resilient cultural heritage, hence the increasing number of religious sites in the country. In their interactions, religious systems shape value systems and provide cultural mechanisms that inform social behavior, whether this role is that of sanctioning or rewarding conformity or discouraging and punishing deviant behavior. Visiting the faith based sites show that religion is not only about spiritual experience but also about attitude and identity formation.

This echoes words of Emile Durkheim who describes religion as a way of life-based on its influence on culture, identity, and moral values (Durkheim, 1982). The fact is further reiterated in Geertz's (1973) who finds religion to be a cultural system. These two positions decry the Western and modern perception that attempts to delineate religion from culture. For Kenyans, the influence of religion on culture is irrefutable since to be Kenyan in the traditional sense is to be religious. To Kenyans, as with most Africans, to be religious is to participate in all of the religious rituals of one's community and to respect the values and beliefs of a people at all times (Mbiti, 1989; Tshimbangu, 1993).

Cultures and religions in Kenya vary even as they overlap. The cultural and religious landscape reflects a variety of local and international influence. According to the World Population Review (2019), Christianity is the dominant religion in Kenya, with approximately 83 percent of adherents. Muslims make up about 11 percent of the Kenyan population. Other religious communities in Kenya include the Hindus, the Sikhs, and the Bahais. About 10 percent of Kenyans claim affiliation to indigenous or traditional religions. Even though available data indicates that indigenous religious practitioners are few, quite a number of Kenyans remain indigenous in their daily practices. This is because indigenous religions are more integrated with Kenyans' cultural heritage, with most Kenyans embracing them as a way of life rather than as a religion (Nyangweso, 2002).

The religious groups make Kenya a home to a multitude of religious sites that include traditional worship ones that annually attract tourists and excursionists. The sites endear themselves to domestic and international religious

tourists, with packaging strategies determining product performance at destinations. Religious centers in Kenya develop by establishing attractions, activities, and basic facilities. Areas with diverse shrines are considered important due to their inertia for religious tourism products. Existing shrines in Kenya serve natural, physical, and cultural functions. Among the shrines, the undeveloped natural areas such as forests and caves have more potential for religious tourism activities compared to artificial settings such as churches. Built settings such as churches and mosques have a lower development index since they are perceived to be closed entities.

Kenyan religious faithful are more attracted to pilgrimages. The numbers are however generally low. Of the over 80% of Kenyans who are Christians, only about 1 million spend in religious tourism activities (Parsitau, 2006). This segment is however seen to represents a good market for religious products consumption. Increasingly, psychological and spiritual healing are the most sought after pilgrimages.

4.0 Research Methodology

4.1 Study Area

The Olkesumet Prayer Center is located in the Loodokilani area of Kajiado County, Kenya. The overall goal of the establishment is to serve as a unifying place of worship that welcomes all denominations to seek spiritual comfort through conversations on faith and values aimed to enrich belief. The facility features seat auditorium, accommodations, conference center, restaurant, as well as recreational gardens and flexible event space. Direct sources of revenue for the center include facility hiring and accommodations. Various cadres of volunteers and employed workers keep the center running to meet its objectives.

The local community is predominately comprised of the Maasai pastoralists whose traditional lifestyle concentrates on livestock keeping which make up the primary concern as food source, ceremonies and economic base. Aggravated by land tenure changes from the commons to individualization, recent years have experienced livelihoods diversifications in the Maasai setting, characterized by hitherto unknown mineral mining, sand harvesting and crop farming. Tourism activities are not well pronounced and, tourists drive into the rangeland largely to watch cultural ceremonies, the landscape and the few wild animals.

4.2 Data Collection Methodology

The study sought to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the faith based tourism and the resultant experienced changes. It also looked at the implications of the then period of drought on the prayer center as an investment, the workers and the surrounding community. Primary data was obtained from respondents by use of questionnaires and interviews while, the secondary data was from documented evidence. Structured questionnaires were administered to 51 respondents comprising the Olkesumet Prayer Center investors and workers, neighborhood community, and policy makers. Descriptive analysis was applied to the accrued data.

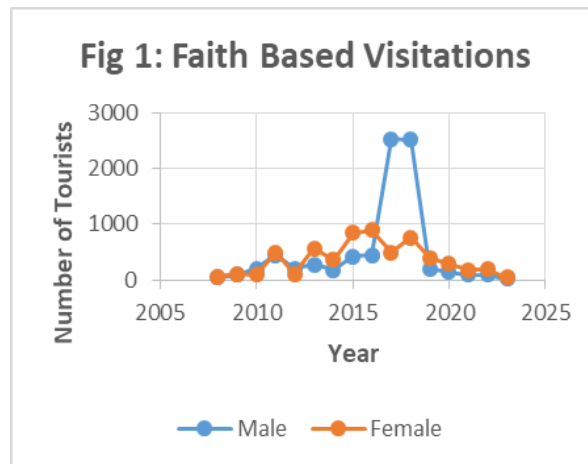
5.0 Results and Discussion

5.1 Benefits of the Faith Based Tourism

The number of visitations showed a rising trend since the prayer center's inception in 2008 when it received 102 tourists (Fig 1). Visitations increased by 96% in 2009, with the same ascendant tendency being experienced in 2017 and 2018 that had the highest number of tourists of over 3000 each. The end of 2020 revealed a numbers slump of about 30% due to the advent of Covid-19 compared to the previous year. The ravages of the pandemic lowered the numbers further in 2021 by close

to 40% with 2022 experiencing a rise of only 15 (6%) tourists compared to the previous year. The consequent period did not show an encouraging visits trajectory, implying a need for drawing measures to improve the situation.

58% of the local people interviewed indicated that unlike the other forms of tourism, the faith based ones benefits them in multiple ways. The people repute the Olkesumet Prayer Center to be a place of harmony where they go to seek peace with God. 74% of the local respondents repute the center to be an entrepreneurship drive to local residents and, a consumer of goods and services that makes them obtain employment, get contracts to supply goods and, participate in environmental conservation. The people complain that the other forms of tourism in the milieu make them objects and not beneficiaries. They justify this by illustrating that the Maasai are possibly the most photographed community in Kenya, appearing in coffee-table books, postcards, paintings, documentaries, films, billboards, and souvenirs which do not result to benefits that go to them. The community traces the genesis of the problem to the deliberate colonial transfer of all Maa-speaking people into the dry southern reserve, which blocked them from accessing various resources, knowledge and skills which not only marginalized them, but turned them into objects of gaze as they struggled to make sense of the new territories.



5.2 Faces and Drawbacks of the Coronavirus Pandemic

Globally, the spread of COVID-19 had a devastating impact on faith based tourism, bringing isolation, uncertainty, pain, suffering and deaths of people. Travels had to be cancelled leaving major challenges from which

to recover, and in some vulnerable situations, even to survive. The pandemic proved capable of bringing societies and economies to their knees.

The results of this research reveal that the tourism sector is sensitive to global crises. The unfolding consequences of Covid-19 pandemic showed the sector to require

addressing structural conditions, reflecting on complexities, uncertainty, contingency and context-specificity. The dichotomy in the conditions and processes of pandemic emergence, progression and impact provided a lens to view key challenge areas.

One was how scientific advice and evidence are used in policy, when conditions are rigidly locked in to established power relations and yet so uncertain. The second was how economies function in crisis, having revealed the limits of conventional models of economic growth. The third concern was how new forms of politics can become the basis of reshaped citizen-state relations in confronting a pandemic, such as those around mutual solidarity and care.

COVID-19 demonstrated that tourism faces uncertainties, where anticipation of and resilience to major shocks must become a core area of concern in the related investments and practice. As such, post-COVID-19 development invites a radically transformative, egalitarian and inclusive futuristic knowledge approach at its essential. Based on past epidemics, it is evident that similar problems albeit at lower magnitude have previously been realized. Yet it is striking how approaches, including in the context of climate change, are reduced to treating symptoms, focusing on addressing problems as if they were one-off disasters. A wider perspective that accepts the unruliness of nature and the non-linearity of outcomes suggests approaches that are more contingent and precautionary. This in turn requires a greater attention to dynamic social, economic and environmental considerations, alongside attention to the structural political and policy underpinnings and consequences, across tourism development, practice and sustainability.

The pandemic made travelers dive into decisions to cancel or delay their trips. A striking resultant feature was the importance of travel insurance. Travelers who did not take into account the possibility of crises and risks occurring and ruining their travel plan, and did not need to invest in travel insurance, sought different ways for refund. In Kenya, much policy discussion continues to be centered on the need for stimulus packages to get the economy moving after the pandemic crisis recedes. The aim has been to encourage growth and get economies back on track through forms of Keynesian-type stimulus, as used after the Second World War. Lessons, both positive and negative are drawn from recovery attempts after the 2008 financial crisis, based on a major re-capitalization of the global banking system.

However, these approaches are focused on fixing existing structures through standardized investments to boost economic growth, and miss opportunities for a deeper rethinking of economic systems for a post-pandemic transformation.

In order to contain COVID-19, the Kenyan government shut down economies, resulting in a huge impact on employment and economic output. Though the country developed plans to counter the challenge, the scale of the pandemic economic impact, both in terms of loss of economic activity and the requirements for credit and loan finance to keep businesses functioning was beyond made estimates, requiring some major rethinks, jettisoning long-established rules about government spending limits, debt caps and fiscal austerity.

5.3 Covid-19, Drought, and the Loss of Livelihoods

The drop in demand for services and the consequent economic crisis dealt a big blow to the Olkesumet Prayer Center's short and long-term development plans. Incomes contracted in the period 2020 to 2023 by 97%. The crisis affected the economy and social arrangement beyond traditional measures with potentially long-lasting and far reaching repercussions. On the supply side, shortages reflected lingering disruptions to labor markets, production and supply chain bottlenecks, disruptions in energy markets, and transportation constraints, adding to inflationary pressures. Employment losses were driven by demises in services, leading to household income falls. Covid-19 machinated with drought in disrupting people's lives and livelihoods, devastating core social and economic aspects. Key impacts included massive livestock mortality, plunging market prices, acute food insecurity, and environmental degradation as communities resorted to unsustainable income sources like charcoal burning. The formal livestock markets were closed while the informal ones exploited farmers through throw away prices. Table 1 shows indications from respondents on how their lives and livelihoods were challenged by drought, leading to decreased water quantity and quality (79%), increased incidences of disease (57%), increased livestock mortality rates (61%), and peoples' mental health outcomes (23%). 71% of the people indicated waterborne diseases to have become common while 96% found market values to have fallen. Crop failures were experienced by 26% of the people, acute malnutrition by 49%, conflicts over resources by 14% and heightened crimes by 18%.

Table.1 Effects of Drought on Lives and Livelihoods

Disruption		[N=51]
1.	Water scarcity	41
2.	Waterborne diseases	36
3.	Livestock decimation	31
4.	Plunging market values	49
5.	Vulnerability to diseases	29
6.	Negative mental health	12
7.	Crop failure	13
8.	Acute malnutrition	25
9.	Resource conflicts	7
10.	Increase in crimes	9

The drought condition fueled drying out pastures and water in pans. While the water levels in the seasonal rivers went down, the households' low incomes lessened the capacity to operate and maintain the borehole, aggravating water scarcity. Families and livestock were forced to travel increasingly long distances in search of water. Resulting from water scarcity, households often shared dwindling water sources with animals. This led to spikes in waterborne illnesses, which were expensive to treat and impacted overall household productivity.

Lack of pasture and water led to severe undernourishment and high livestock mortality due to drought, destroying the primary household wealth. The few animals remaining faced a plummeted market values because of their weakened status and room for exploitation by buyers. As the pastoralists were forced to sell stock at below-average prices. The low amounts of money received severely diminished the peoples purchasing power for basic household needs.

Malnourished animals were found to be highly susceptible to infectious diseases, further compounding losses. Crop failure occurred which led to and food insecurity as a result of reduced agricultural output. For agro-pastoralists, consecutive failed rainy seasons decimated rain-fed crops, causing widespread food shortages. The loss of crops and livestock forced families to drastically reduce daily meal intakes, resulting in high rates of malnutrition, especially among vulnerable groups in the community.

Conflict and social disruption occurred, emanating from resource conflicts. The extreme scarcity of water and pasture frequently triggered disputes between individuals and neighboring households. Increased Crime was

witnessed as a result of lack of on-farm employment and the depletion of traditional wealth which led to spikes in livestock thefts.

5.4 Lessons from the COVID-19 and Drought Situation

The rupture created by COVID-19 challenged the Olkesumet Prayer Center's old assumptions, ways of doing business, heralding in a fundamental rethink on essential changes for posterity, with desire for effective innovations, and implementation of resilient alternatives. The overall lessons were of need to deliberately diversify activities and products by expanding the faith based tourism to involve enhanced local cultural and eco tourisms activities. In the changes, the objectives of religious tourism were envisioned to alter, envisaging benefits as a means of sociocultural exchange, regional development, economic development and environmental enhancements. The change was invited to adapt to pilgrim demands that reflect increased contemporary consumerism and hedonistic behavior and capitalize on the strength of faith based tourism and linking it to existing local Maasai cultural products.

72% of the study responses vouched for linking religious products with local cultures. The Maasai community is considered a brand and, their annual traditional ceremonies have capacity to attract tourists. Linking the occurrences with religious pilgrimages was found to proffer prospects to sell the cultural practices which are highly religious. Even with the rapid social and economic transformations of the Maasai people, there is continued embracement of ceremonies that mark transitions in their life as a people. Among the many Maasai ceremonies which also serve as tourist attractions include *Enkipaata*

(senior boy ceremony), *Emuratta* (circumcision), *Enkiama* (marriage), *Eunoto* (warrior-shaving ceremony), *Eokoto e-kule* (milk-drinking ceremony), *Enkang oo-nkiri* (meat-eating ceremony) and, *Olngesherr* (elder ceremony). The prayer center is recommended by 65% of respondents to think of hosting some of the cultural activities to partly bring the local community together to mark and celebrate, and use the occasion to accord tourists the opportunity to experience the Maasai culture in situ as one of the key ways to provide authentic rather than staged or reconstructed experience. The center is also advised by 45% of the study participants to strategize and be the forefront in offering occasions for rites of passage for the girl child as a method to eradicate female genital mutilation.

The Olkesumet Prayer Center investor and stakeholders opined religion to be a major component of culture. Notably, Christianity among the Maasai community has been on the rise since the late 1900's and exists alongside the traditional religions. Both Christian and traditional believers repute the two beliefs not to conflict, with both subscribing to belief of presence of only one. In the circumstances, the Maasai Christians are able to maintain both the Maasai and Christian identities which allows them to participate in ceremonies undertaken to mark traditional rites.

Table 2 shows some of the learned lessons from the drought. These revolved around adaptation strategies and use of indigenous knowledge. Of the 51 respondents,

cultural resilience building was indicated by 62% of the people as a way to manage disasters. The Maasai have developed a cultural resilience to drought by diversifying their livelihoods beyond livestock. They have for example learned to move to land tilling and planting drought-resistant crops, and engaging in small-scale farming to ensure food security even during dry periods. The Prayer Center is recommended by 57% of the study respondents to endeavor to act as an incubation center for livelihoods diversification. Utilization of indigenous knowledge such as the traditional weather forecasting methods to predict drought onset and prepare for dry spells is indicated by 62% of the people as a most viable tool. Appreciation of the knowledge is voted for as being crucial for effective climate change adaptation planning. The conventional meteorological weather heads up are reported not to be easily accessible or understated. Use of indigenous knowledge is vouched for in identifying medication for people and their livelihoods. This was found to offer solace from the economic hardships brought about by Covid-19 and the drought.

The coping strategies of the Maasai pastoralists of moving cattle to areas receiving rain and accessing reserve grazing territories during dry periods indicated by 71% of respondents is reported to be facing a dilemma from land sub division and consequent heavy fragmentation. They have also learned to sell animals before crisis hits to mitigate losses. The Covid-19 lockdown made the movement impossible, which also suppressed the marketing dynamics.

Table.2 Learned Lessons

Strategy		[51]
1.	Cultural resilience	32
2.	Indigenous knowledge	32
3.	Coping strategies	36
4.	Community support	28

A key survival and recovery strategy among the people has for long been the community support system, which the pandemic could not allow. Through this, local institutions, families and friends traditionally come to the aid of the people, providing food and support during severe droughts. 55% of the people feel that is still a viable option but not sustainable. Other than the dwindling resource bases, land fragmentation is fueling households to become more individualistic while the social institutions are increasingly taking an economic

path with the aim of building peoples capacities to mitigate, manage and recover from calamities.

6.0 Opportunities to reduce vulnerability

6.1 Exploiting the Local Environment

86% of the local community members advise on a new phase of the Olkesumet Prayer Center faith based tourism activities that makes more exploitation of the

opportunities provided by the surrounding. The hills in the area and their caves are vouched for to provide good closets for prayer, their gloom and solitude being helpful to the exercise of devotion. The community also recommends marketing the center's faith based tourism as providing nature-based travels and have it included in the national tourism circuits. The center sits astride a wildlife corridor, creating space for people on faith missions to appreciate nature. Customer feedback shows a 51% desire to experience a balance between traditional faith-based travel, sightseeing and encounters with wildlife. Tourists also want to not only be able to describe nature from a creationist perspective, but also to enjoy the experience, do tours in the name of volunteer mission or engage in shopping after performing a pilgrimage.

6.2 Investing in Networks

69% of former tourists recommend having an alumni arrangement to share on experiences. 58% indorse showcasing the rich cultural surrounding and establishing an ethnic delicacies outfit. 62% feel that religious and cultural museums interpretive facilities, as well as staged performances specifically designed for discerned audiences would be more fulfilling and raise the center's sustainability. The crossings of cultures, manifested in the form of historical monuments are seen to undoubtedly form an extremely attractive and diversified tourism product, with something to offer to tourists from all walks of life. For international tourists, this tourism resource can nurture a sense of respect and understanding of other cultures, while the domestic tourists, the cultural heritage is envisaged to stimulate a greater understanding and conversation on the local history, which may transcend into the feeling of pride and patriotism.

6.3 Investment in Continuous Assessments

A sustainability lesson from the study is the need for regular evaluations to enable making adjustments to existing models. Covid-19 heralded in a realization that while the faith based tourism derive satisfaction from physical interactions, enterprises that invested in digital strategies emerged from the pandemic more competitive through use of virtual realities. Despite the challenges associated with the cybernetic approach such as connectivity, 26% of respondents were found keen to have a hybrid model of in-person and computer-generated tourism services.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study takes cognizance that the management of faith based tourism will keep facing challenges within the ever changing global social economic, environmental and political landscapes. The Covid-19 pandemic and drought manifestation led to a realization that investors in the faith based tourism have to consider existing and potential adversities in their investments and have strategic plans that can cushion them against drawbacks as part of sustainability building. While working to maximize benefits, investors must diversify products in order to meet the ever increasing customer demands. Increasingly, people are seeking more unusual holiday experiences, and heterogeneity in their travels. The faith based tourism market covers a broad range of tourism products that cuts across the tourism sector. Added, the segment is appreciated to raise awareness of humanity's common heritage, build cultural understanding and provide resources to contribute to social and economic development. An advantage is that locations to accommodate faith based tourism are largely not bound by the weather vagaries.

Therefore, the study suggests embracement of opportunities that foster sustainable transformation and structural changes directed towards greater resilience to withstand shocks. Strategic development and management frameworks consisting of aggressive products redefinition, marketing and capacity building for posterity are of essence, characterized by diversification interventions that encourage long-term solutions, and support particular directions of sustainable existence.

Expanding the criteria for success beyond growth and profit to thinking about resilience and sustainability suggests a set of directions requiring diverse and new skills. That the faith based tourism is a major player in the Kenya's tourism industry and, appreciated to offer sources of income and spiritual solace, it is prudent for the government to encourage its growth through feasible policy thrusts that include subsidies and relief packages, along with the implementation of comprehensive recovery measures to help revive customer trust and lead to increased travel in the advent of crisis.

7.1 Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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