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An investigation of the Catholic Church's viewpoint on miraa production and consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the Catholic Church's viewpoint on miraa production and consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive research design. Data were obtained from oral interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires, primary and secondary sources, and participant observation to ensure the study's validity and reliability. The study was based on the Structural-Functionalism and Social Conflict theory in order to establish the viewpoint of the Catholic Church on miraa production and usage in Igembe Deanery despite the CC policies on drugs of all kinds except on therapeutic grounds. A sample of 348 of the 3614 church members in Igembe Deanery was chosen for the study. Ten (10) priests, eight (8) catechists, ten (10) elders, ten (10) farmers, ten (10) traders and three hundred (300) church members from sampled parishes of Igembe Deanery were used as key informants. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, tables and the mean were used in analysing data. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 27.0 was used to analyse the data. This study's findings were that the Catholic Church in Igembe Deanery, Diocese of Meru, views miraa as the main source of livelihood for Christians, and miraa's economic, socio-cultural, religious, and educational functions are the main reasons for the Catholic Church in Igembe Deanery to accept Khat's production and consumption. This study recommends that the church in Africa needs to enhance efficient and effective Christianity by enhancing the inculturation of Christianity in Africa.

Key words: Catholic Church, consumption, investigation, miraa production, viewpoint.



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INTRODUCTION

Diverse churches have different viewpoints on miraa; those outside the Igembe region promote a negative view of the substance (Carrier, 2008). Other Christian denominations have a softer stance regarding miraa. Some Pentecostal customers are willing to fight back against such unfavourable attitudes, citing Matthew 15:11-17, which states, "It is what you think or say, not what you chew or eat, that makes you filthy." As a result, the CC voice is not clearly heard in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese (Carrier, 2007). As a result, this study looked into the Catholic Church's viewpoint on miraa production and consumption in Meru Diocese's Igembe Deanery.

The Roman Catholic Church has put in place various policies pertaining to drugs. These policies are drawn from the Pope, Roman Catholic Bishops Conferences, Catholic Catechism, and Roman Catholic Church Social Teachings and through Pastoral Letters. Despite the fact that RCC views drugs as a sin, it also offers pastoral care to people who are struggling with addiction. Several declarations were made by Pope John II regarding the serious issue of drug abuse. He outlined the dangers that narcotics pose to people and our entire society. The top place goes to drugs as a hidden and insidious threat whose gravity has not yet been sufficiently assessed (Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, 2002). Catholic Catechism number 2291 makes it plain that drug usage is a grave sin except when done strictly for therapeutic purposes. This is contrary to Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese, where they use the same Catechism book, but the same church tolerates miraa farming, trade, and consumption (RCC Catechism, 1990).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Igembe region, in Meru County, is the main miraa growing area in Kenya. Mwaniki (1985) asserts that the Igembe people used miraa since the 1890s, while Carrier (2005) contends that miraa evolved over the 20th century as a commercial crop. Mwaniki (1986) avers that the miraa trade began in the 1940s as a result of the Lubeta age group of Igembe. Since the 1940s, demand and production of miraa have been rising.

In Kenya, growing and marketing of miraa, as well as its consumption, are legal, and it is listed as one of the

horticultural crops. Despite the establishment of the Catholic Church in Igembe region, it does not condemn miraa farming, trade and consumption in as much as the Catholic Church as a whole condemns and is against all pharmaceuticals outside of medical necessity (Pontifical Council, 2002). The church's purpose is to serve as a protective factor against pharmaceuticals outside of medical necessity, but the Catholic Church in the Igembe region tolerates miraa production and consumption, resulting in elaborate farming, trade and consumption of miraa in the region (Kiunga, 2017). Thus, this study sought to establish the Catholic Church's viewpoints on miraa farming, trade and consumption in Igembe Deanery.

Gichunge (2016) argues that Njeru's teachings are neither Catholic, theological, nor Biblical but misleading personal views. He further argues that although miraa is a stimulant, it does not drive people away from their faith. He also argues that he has chewed miraa herb for 30 years, and he is not about to stop. He argues that those who give it a bad name take alcohol! The churches across the denomination in Nyambane have been built from the proceed of miraa. People bring miraa as an offering, and they tithe from their crop's earnings (Gichunge, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design was adopted in this study. The core concept underlying descriptive research is to collect data that depicts actual phenomena by asking people about their views, attitudes, and values (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). The research was descriptive as it established the Catholic Church's viewpoints on miraa Production and consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese. In all this, there was no manipulation of the variables, and the study reported the exact responses from the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

Response rate refers to the number of questionnaires sent to the field divided by the number of questionnaires completed and returned. The study targeted the collection of data from 10 elders, 10 miraa farmers, 10 priests, 8 catechists, 10 traders, and 300 church members. Out of the 348 targeted groups, the study managed to obtain data from 303 respondents, giving a response rate of (85%). These included 255 church

members, 10 elders, 10 miraa farmers, 10 priests, 10 traders and 8 catechists. Cooper and Schindler (2014) claim that a response rate of more than 50 per cent is adequate, 60 per cent is better, and more than 70 per cent

is great. The response rate for this study was consequently considered excellent, as shown in Figure 1, with a rate of more than (70%).

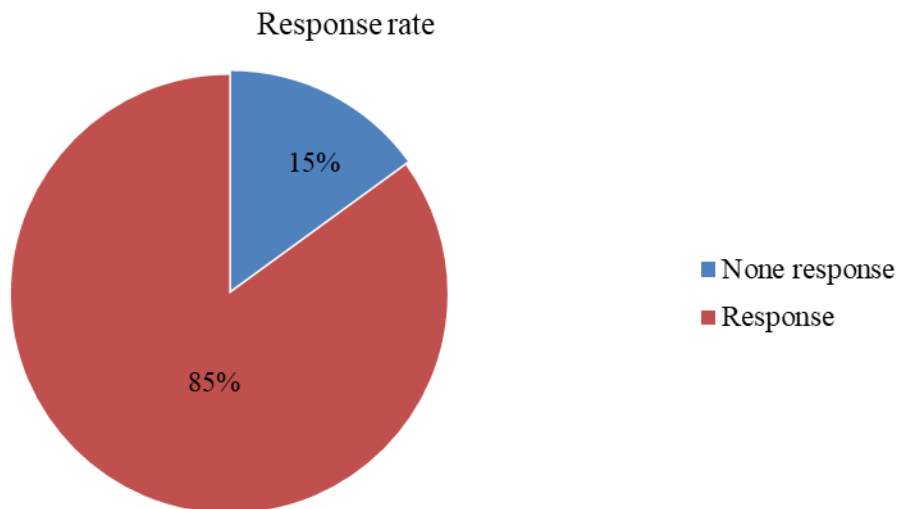


Figure 1: Response Rate

Socio-Demographics of the Respondents

This section presents the research findings on the bio-data and general information on the characteristics of the respondents of this research.

Age of the Respondents

The survey identified the age of the respondents to assess how it affected the Catholic Church’s perspective

on miraa farming, trade and consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Age of the Respondents

The age bracket for Church Members	Frequency	Percentage
18-25 Years	6	1.9
26-40 Years	199	66.2
41-60 years	72	24.2
Above 60 Years	23	7.7
Total	300	100.0
Age bracket for miraa farmers	Frequency	Percentage
31-40 years	2	20.0
41-50 years	6	60.0
51 and above years	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0
Age bracket for miraa traders	Frequency	Percentage
26-30 Years	2	20.0
31-35 Years	6	60.0

Above 35 Years	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0
Age brackets for Priests	Frequency	Percentage
36-45 years	4	40
46 years and above	6	60
Total	10	100.0
Age brackets for Elders	Frequency	Percentage
41-50 Years	4	40.0
Above 50 Years	6	60.0
Total	100	100.0

Age brackets for Catechist	Frequency	Percentage
26-30 years	2	25
31-35	4	50
36-41	2	25
Total	8	100

The results in Table 1 showed that most 199 (66.2%) of respondents were between the ages 26 and 40. Moreover, the finding shows that the minority 6(1.9%) of the respondents were aged 18-25 years. Further, the findings indicate that 72(24.2%) were between the ages of 41 and 60, while 23(7.7%) of the respondents were over 60. These findings are similar to the findings of Cooper and Schindler (2014), who found that the age of respondents affected the CC’s perspective on miraa farming, trade and consumption.

From the above findings, the research further showed that miraa farmers who were between 41-50 years accounted for 6(60%) forming the majority group. Additionally, the minority group of miraa farmers was between 31-40 years and 51 and above, which accounted for 2(20%) of the respondents. On the other hand, the research also demonstrated that the majority group of the traders, which accounted for 6(60%), lay between the age of 31-35 years, while 2(20%) were the minority group which lay between the ages brackets of 26-30 and above 35 years. The findings further show that the majority of the priests lay between the age of 46 years and above, who accounted for 6(60%) forming the

majority group, while 4(40%) were the minority who range between the age of 36-45 years. The research also shows that the majority of the elders formed 6(60%) of the group, and they ranged between the age of 50 years and above. The results also show that a minority of the elders accounted for 4(40%) who ranged between 41 and 50 years old. The age of the respondents was important as it enabled this study to find out how the age of the respondents affected the perspective of the CC on miraa farming, trade, and consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese. The Catechist formed one group discussion, which had eight members selected from the various parishes in the Deanery.

Level of Academic Qualifications for the Respondents

The academic qualifications of the respondents were a necessary consideration for this study because it enabled us to find out whether they affected the CC’s perspective on miraa farming, trade, and consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Academic Qualifications

Academic level for Church members	Frequency	Percentages
Form four and class eight levels	144	48
Certificates	69	23
Diploma and Degree	42	14

Total	255	85
Academic level for miraa Traders	Frequency	Percentage
Form four and class eight levels	6	60.0
Certificates	2	20.0
Diploma and Degree	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0
Academic level for elders	Frequency	Percentage
Form four and class eight levels	8	80.0
Certificates	1	10
Diploma and Degree	1	10
Total	10	100.0
Education level for miraa farmers	Frequency	Percentage
Form four and class eight levels	6	60.0
Certificates	2	20.0
Diploma and Degree	2	20
Total	10	100.0

Education level for Catechist	Frequency	Percentage
Form four and class eight levels	4	50
Certificates	4	50
Total	8	100

The table above shows that there was a considerable variation in respondents' levels of education. Results indicated that most of the church members, 144(48%), were form four and class eight school levels, while a smaller group, 69(23%), said that they had certificates in their level of education. Findings further indicated that 42(14%) of the church members had diplomas and degrees in their level of education. The findings further showed that the majority group of the miraa traders, 6(60%), were form four and class eight levels, while 2(20%) of the traders were those who had certificates in various levels of education.

The research further showed that 2(20%) of the respondents had a diploma and degree level of education. The research also revealed that the majority of the elders who accounted for 8(80%) were form four and class eight levels, while 2(20%) of them who formed the minority group had a certificate and a

diploma level of education. However, the research findings showed that none of the elders had a degree level of education. On miraa farmers, the research showed that 6(60%) of them who formed the majority group were at form four and class eight levels, while the minority group 2(20%) had a certificate level of education. The research further shows that 2(20%) of the miraa farmers had a degree. The research also shows that 4(50%) of the catechists were class eight and form four levels, while 4(50) of the catechists had certificates, but none of them had diplomas or degrees.

Working Experience of the Priests at Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese

The working experience of the priest helped to find out the CC's perspective on miraa farming, trade and consumption in the region. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Working Experience of the Priests

Working Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0-5years	1	9.1
6-10 years	5	54.5
11 years and above	4	36.4

Total	10	100.0
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The results in the table above show that there was a significant difference in work experience among the priests. Results indicated that most of the priests, 5(54.5%), had 6-10 years of work experience, while a smaller group, 1(9.1%), said that they had worked 0-5 years. Findings further indicated that 4(36.4%) had 11 or more years of experience.

Gender of the Respondents

The gender of the respondents enabled the researcher to find out whether it affected the CC’s perspective on miraa farming, trade and consumption. Further, men and women hold different views on the production and consumption of miraa. This necessitated this analysis. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Age of the Respondents

Gender of the elders	frequency	Percentage
Male	6	60
Female	4	40
Total	10	100
Gender of the church members	frequency	Percentage
Male	177	58.9
Female	78	26.1
Total	255	85
Gender for miraa farmers	frequency	Percentage
Male	8	80.0
Female	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0
Gender for miraa traders	frequency	Percentage
Male	8	80.0
Female	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0

Gender for Catechist	Frequency	Percentage
Male	3	37.5
Female	5	62.5
Total	8	100

Results in the table above show that there was no significant difference in gender among respondents. Results indicated that most of the elders, 6(60%), were male, while a smaller group of elders, 4(40%), were female. Further, the findings indicate that 177(58.9%) of the church member respondents were males who formed the majority group, while 78(26.1%) of the respondents were females who formed the minority group. Research also showed that most of the miraa farmers, 8(80%), were males, while the small group, 2(20%), were

females. On miraa traders, most of the respondents, 8(80%) were males, while the least group 2(20%) were females.

Parishes of the Respondents

The parish of the respondents enabled the researcher to find out whether it affected the CC perspective on miraa farming, trade and consumption. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Parishes in Igembe Deanery

Parish of the traders	frequency	Percentage
Athiru Ruujine	1	10

Nthambiro	1	10
Laare	1	10
Amungeti	1	10
Mutuati	1	10
Tuuru	1	10
Antobetwe A kiongo	1	10
Athi	1	10
Kangeta	1	10
Athiru	1	10
Total	10	100.0
Parish of the priests	frequency	Percentage
Amungeti	1	9.1
Mutuati	1	9.1
Athi	1	9.1
Maua	1	9.1
Athiru	1	9.1
Kangeta	1	9.1
Antobetwe A kiongo	1	9.1
Nthambiro	1	9.1
Tuuru	1	9.1
Laare	1	9.1
Total	10	100.0
Parish for church members	frequency	Percentage
Laare	26	8.5
Kangeta	21	7
Athiru	24	.8
Tuuru	19	6.2
Atobetwe A kiongo	23	7.7
AthiruRuujine	25	8.3
Athi	21	7
Amungeti	24	7.9
Maua	24	8.1
Mutuati	24	8.1
Nthambiro	25	8.2
Total	255	85
Parish for Catechist	frequency	Percentage
Maua	1	12.5
Nthambiro	1	12.5
Athiru Ruujine	1	12.5
Laare	1	12.5
Athi	1	12.5
Antobetwe A Kiongo	1	12.5
Mutuati	1	12.5
Nthambiro	1	12.5
Total	8	100

The results in Table 5 showed that there were ten parishes in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese. The table also shows that each parish had one priest, one miraa farmer, one miraa trader and one elder in each parish who were interviewed to give the perspective of the CC on miraa production and consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese. The research further shows the various numbers of church members from each parish who participated in this study. Laare parish had 26(8.5%), Kangeta parish had 21(7%), Athiru Ruujine parish had 25(8.3%), Tuuru parish had 19(6.2%), Atobetwe A Kiongo parish had 23(7.7%), Athi parish had 21(7%), Amungenti parish had 24(8.1%), Maua

parish had 24(8.1%), Mutuati had 24(8.1%), Nthambiro 25(8.5%). The research further shows that catechists from eight parishes who were purposively selected from various parishes formed one group discussion.

The Various Respondents who Chew Miraa in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese

It was important to know the number of respondents who chew miraa in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese, so as to find out whether it affected the CC viewpoint on miraa farming, trade and consumption. The findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Respondents who Chew Miraa in Igembe Deanery

Response for the Elders	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	90.0
No	1	10.0
Total	10	100.0
Response for the catechists	frequency	
Yes	7	86.7
No	1	13.3
Total	8	100.0
Response for the church members	frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	253	83
Agree	1	1
strongly disagree	1	1
Total	255	85
Response for the Priests	frequency	Percentage
Yes	6	60
No	4	40
Total	10	100.0
Response for miraa farmers	frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	90.0
No	1	10.0
Total	10	100.0
Response from the researcher		
Yes		98.0

Results indicated that most of the elders, 9(90%), chewed miraa while a smaller group of elders, 1(10%), did not chew miraa. On catechists, the research showed that most of them, 7(86.7%), chewed miraa while 1(13.7%), who are the minority group, did not chew miraa; further findings show that most of the church members who accounted for 253(83%) strongly agreed that they chew miraa while a small percentage of 1(1%) of them just agreed that they chew miraa. However,

1(1%) of the church members strongly disagreed with chewing miraa. More so, the research shows that most of the priests, 6(60%), chew miraa while a smaller percentage of 4(40%) did not chew. Research also showed that most of the miraa farmers, 9(90%), chewed miraa while the small group, 1(10%), was not involved in chewing miraa. In this research, at 98 per cent, I agree that Christians chew miraa in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese.

Kaimenyi and M'nja (2022, OI) affirmed that their church members chew miraa at their will. They argued that even when they have church fundraising (Harambee), most of their church members continue chewing miraa at their will and as they proceed to give their contributions. According to Gitonga (2022, OI) argued that miraa sold in the church Harambee is shared among the church members by the one who has bought it, and they continued chewing as they proceeded with their church fundraising. However, various priests who were interviewed acknowledged that they chew miraa at

their will during their free time and at some time, they are invited by most of their church members to their homes when they have their various family celebrations, and they are given miraa, and they chew as they celebrated with them.

The Various Respondents who Own Miraa Plantations in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese

The study identified the number of respondents who owned miraa to find out whether it affected the CC viewpoint on miraa farming, trade and consumption. The findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Respondents who Own Miraa Plantations

Response For The Church Members	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	252	84
Disagree	3	1
Total	255	85
Response for the elders	frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	80.0
No	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0
Response for the catechists	frequency	Percentage
Yes	7	88.9
No	1	11.1
Total	8	100.0
Response for the miraa farmers	frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	100
No	0	0
Total	10	100.0

Results indicated that most of the church members, 252(84%), confirmed to have owned miraa plantations, while a smaller group of church members, 3(1%), did not have miraa plantations. Further, the findings indicated that 8(80%) of the elders owned miraa plantations, while 2(20%) did not own miraa plantations. Regarding catechists, the research showed that most of them, 7(88.9%), owned miraa plantations, while 1(11.1%), who are the minority group, did not own a miraa plantation. In addition, the research showed that 10(100%) of the miraa farmers owned miraa plantations. Thus, from the findings, it is clear that the majority of the people in Igembe Deanery, including Christians, own miraa plantations.

that miraa is the source of livelihood for the people of Igembe Deanery, just like tea and coffee are the cash crops for the various groups of people in various parts of the country. Miraa is the principal cash crop for the residents of the Igembe region, according to them. They affirmed that the various developments in the Igembe region are attributed to income from miraa. Through the group discussion with the catechists, various catechists acknowledged that they also had various miraa plantations. They affirmed that due to high income from miraa farming and trade, one cannot fail to plant miraa in his or her land. They argued that the church members who owned large plantations of miraa and, in particular, miraa Imiiru (Black miraa) from Mbaine are very lucky because it is the variety that is most valued and has the highest income. This is because the people of Igembe hold it with a lot of respect because it has reverence with

Kimathi (2021) and Gitonga (2021) affirmed that their church members owned miraa plantations. They argued

their ancestors, and it has a lot of religious significance and cultural heritage to the people of Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese.

Miraa Plantation in Churches

This study established the number of churches that owned miraa plantations in order to find out whether it affected the CC viewpoint on miraa farming, trade, and consumption. The findings are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Miraa Plantations in Churches

Response from miraa traders	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	80.0
No	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0
Response from the elders	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	80.0
No	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0

On miraa traders, most of the respondents, 8(80%), said that their churches owned miraa plantations, while the least group 2(20%) said that their churches did not own miraa plantations. The research further shows that most of the elders, who accounted for 8(80%), affirmed that their churches owned miraa plantations, while a few of them, 2(20%), said that their churches did not own miraa plantations. Through observation, it was confirmed that most of the parishes in Igembe Deanery owned miraa plantations. It was an observable fact that many parishes in Igembe Deanery had miraa in their compounds. For

instance, out of ten parishes visited by the researcher, eight parishes had miraa in their compounds and even in their various prayer centres.

Prohibition of Miraa Production and Consumption by the Catholic Church

The study investigated whether the church prohibits miraa farming, consumption, and trading among people to find out whether it affects the CC viewpoint on miraa farming, trade, and consumption. The findings are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Prohibition of Miraa Farming, Consumption and Trading by the Church

Response for the traders	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1	10.0
No	9	90.0
Total	10	100.0
Response for the farmers	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1	10.0
No	9	90.0
Total	10	100.0
Response the catechists	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	1	1.0
No	7	99.0
Total	8	100.0
Response for the church members	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	1	0.35
strongly disagree	253	84.3
Disagree	1	0.35
Total	255	85

The findings show that the majority of the traders, 9(90%), are not prohibited by the church from engaging in the miraa trade, while the minority 1(10%) of the traders responded by saying that the churches prohibited them from engaging in miraa activities. Further, the research shows that most farmers 9(90%) responded by saying that the church does not prohibit them from engaging in miraa trade activities. Responses from the catechists clearly show that most of them, 7(99%), responded by saying that the church does not prohibit them from chewing and growing miraa, while a few of them, 1(1%), indicated that the church prohibited them from growing and chewing miraa. On church members, the research shows that 253(84.3%) strongly disagreed on the issue of the church prohibiting them from growing and chewing miraa, while a minority group, which accounted for 1(0.35%), strongly agreed that the church prohibited them from growing and chewing miraa. However, another category of church members, 1(0.35%), just disagreed on the issue of the church prohibiting them from chewing and growing miraa. Thus, according to the findings of this research, the church in Igembe deanery does not prohibit the production, trading or consumption of miraa among its Christians.

Kithinji (2021, OI) and Kaimenyi (2021, OI), the priests who were interviewed, reported that miraa is so much treasured by the people of Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese. They assured that they do not prohibit miraa farming, trade, and consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese. This was because miraa has a lot of significance to the people of the Igembe region. They affirmed that miraa cuts across all aspects of human life, that is, socio-cultural, economic and religious

dimensions. Therefore, the people of Igembe treasure miraa a lot. They argued that you cannot spread the gospel of Christ in Igembe if you prohibit miraa production and consumption. The church in the Igembe region cannot make any attempt to curb miraa farming and trade in the region. This is because miraa is the backbone of the various churches in Igembe region. Notably, it is because of miraa that their members have given full support to the church in the region, and the church has been able to expand in the region.

Church’s Condemnation of Miraa Production and Consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese

The study inquired whether the church condemned miraa farming, consumption and trade among Christians to find out how it affected the CC viewpoint on miraa farming, trade and consumption. The traders reported that they have equal opportunities when buying miraa produce in their various church compounds. Most priests who were interviewed reported that they did not condemn miraa because it is the main cash crop of the people in the Igembe region, and even their churches had various miraa on their farms. They acknowledged miraa as the source of livelihood for the people in the Igembe region. They reported that if you try to condemn miraa in the Igembe region, you might end up risking your life and, more so, lose the church members at the same time.

Church's Perception of Tithes Given from Miraa Farming and Trade Income

The research investigated whether the church allowed tithes given from miraa income and how it affected the CC perspective on miraa farming, trade and consumption. The findings are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Tithes from Miraa Farming and Trade

Responses from the traders	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	80.0
No	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0
Responses from the priests	frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	90.9
No	1	9.1
Total	10	100.0
Responses from the catechists	frequency	Percentage
Yes	7	98.9
No	1	1.1

Total	8	100.0
Responses from the elders	frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	90.0
No	1	10.0
Total	10	100.0
Responses for the miraa farmers	frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	90.0
No	1	10.0
Total	10	100.0

On catechists, the research showed that most of them, 7(98.9%), were sure that church members gave tithes from miraa income, while 1(1.1%) who are the minority group said that church members did not give tithes from miraa income. The research also shows that a large number of priests, 9(90.9%), allowed church members to offer tithes from the income generated from miraa. However, this study indicates that a minority of 1(10%) of priests did not allow tithe that came from miraa income. Further, the findings indicate that 9(90%) of the elders who formed the majority group gave tithes to the church from miraa income while 1(10%) of the elders did not give tithes from miraa income to the church and thus forming the minority group. In addition, the research showed that 99 per cent of the miraa farmers respondents gave tithes to the church from miraa income, while (1.0%) of them did not give tithes from the miraa income to the church. According to the various priests who were interviewed, their church members,

who are farmers and traders, gave their tithes from the income they got from miraa in miraa activities. They also reported that there are some other people who gave tithes from miraa income indirectly. This was because miraa farming and trading activities have emerged as a booming business in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese, which has attracted very many people from various parts of the country, such as the Somalis, Boranas, Kikuyus and other people from various sub-tribes of Ameru community who are engaged in various businesses in the region.

Miraa as an Offering in the Church

This study examined whether the church allowed offerings given from miraa's income to find out whether it affected the CC perspective on miraa's farming, trade, and consumption. The findings are presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Miraa as an Offering in the Church

Response from the church members	Frequency	Percentages
strongly agree	254	84.6
Agree	1	0.4
Total	255	100.0
Response from elders	frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	90.0
No	1	10.0
Total	10	100.0
Response from miraa farmers	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	80.0
No	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0
Response for the priests	frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	90.9
No	1	9.1
Total	10	100.0

Responses from the Catechists	frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	88.9
No	1	11.1
Total	9	100.0

Research shows that a large number of church members, 254(84.6%), strongly agreed that they offer offerings from the miraa income, while a small group, 1(0.4%), just agreed on giving offerings from miraa income. However, none of them disagreed or strongly disagreed on that. Further, the findings indicate that 9(90%) of the elders who formed the majority group offered offerings to the church from miraa income, while 1(10%) of the elders did not offer offerings from the miraa income to the church, thus the minority group. In addition, the research showed that (80%) of the miraa farmers offered offerings to the church from miraa income, while (20%) did not offer offerings from the miraa income to the church. The research also showed that a large number of priests, 9(90.9%), allowed church members to offer offerings from miraa income. However, a small number of priests 1(9.1%) showed that they did not allow offerings that came from miraa income. On catechists,

the research showed that most of them, 8(88.9%), were sure that church members give offerings from miraa income, while 1(11.1%), who are the minority group, said that church members did not give offerings from miraa income. According to most of the priests who were interviewed, church members offer miraa as an offering in the church during their Sunday services. They reported that when miraa is offered, they normally convert it into money or left for the priest to chew during his free time.

The CC’s Viewpoint on Miraa Production and Consumption in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese

The study examined the views of the respondents on miraa production and consumption of miraa to find out whether it affected the CC perspective on miraa farming, trade and consumption. The findings are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: The CC’s Viewpoint on Miraa Production and Consumption in Igembe Deanery

Response from elders	Frequency	Percentage
Good	9	90.0
Bad	1	10.0
Total	10	100.0
Response from the church members	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	254	84.2
Agree	1	0.8
Total	255	100.0
Response from traders	Frequency	Percentage
Miraa is the source of livelihood for the Igembe people	9	90
Miraa is good as it provides parents with school fees	8	80
Response from Priests	Frequency	Percentage
It is good as it is their source of livelihood	9	90
Miraa is good as it provides parents with school fees	8	80
Response from catechists	Frequency	Percentage
Miraa is the source of livelihood for the Igembe people	9	90
It is the cultural and religious heritage of the Igembe people	8	80
Responses from miraa farmers	Frequency	Percentage
Main source of income in Igembe	9	90.1
Main economic activity in the region	7	70

In this research, 9(90%) of the elders responded by saying that according to their view, miraa is good, while the minority, who accounted for 1(10%), responded by saying miraa is bad due to their various reasons. The majority of the church members, 254(84.2%), strongly agreed that miraa is good, while just 1(0.8%) agreed. However, none of the church members disagreed or strongly disagreed. 9(90%) of the traders argued that miraa is good as it is the source of livelihood for the people of the Igembe region, while 8(80%) viewed miraa as a good thing as it provides school fees to the parents. The majority of the priests, 9(90%), responded by saying that they view miraa as a source of livelihood for the people of Igembe, while 8(80%) said that miraa is good because it provides the parents with school fees. Further research from the catechists shows that the majority of them, 8(90%), view miraa as a source of livelihood for the Igembe people, while 8(80%) of them view miraa as a cultural and religious heritage of the people of Igembe. Of the miraa farmer respondents, 9(90.1%) said that they view miraa as a source of income, while 7(70%) of them said that they view miraa as an economic activity. Thus, miraa is viewed in many ways as beneficial to the Igembe people.

Miraa Trade

Mwiti (2021, OI) and Mutoria (2021, OI), the farmers who were interviewed, affirmed that they sold their miraa produce on all other days except Sundays, and a few farmers argued that sometimes they also sold their miraa after Sunday services which normally ends at 2 pm. They reported that there is a type of miraa, which is called *Alele*. Mutoria (2021, OI) reported that *Alele* is harvested and prepared from 3 pm so as to be taken to Maua town for it to be transported to Garissa, Mandera and Wajir, which have large markets. Some of the traders who were interviewed reported that they sell miraa on all days, but on Sundays, they normally attend morning Mass services, which normally end at 11 am, and thereafter, they go to the markets to sell their miraa twigs. They reported that for many people, Sundays are the days when they rest (Mwiti & Mutoria 2021, OI). Therefore, many Christians buy miraa from them after attending their Sunday services in their various churches, and they later go to relax as they chew miraa while enjoying it with their friends (Mutoria, 2021 OI). Of the priests who were interviewed 8(80%) argued that in most of their churches, miraa traders attend Sunday

services in the morning section and later on go to engage in their miraa businesses.

Challenges Facing Miraa Farmers and Traders

Miraa farmers and dealers, who also happened to be church members of several churches in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese, experienced various problems in miraa production and consumption, according to the research. All the informants argued that since the colonial period, miraa has been facing numerous challenges. They claimed that miraa has joined the drug battle and that the fact that miraa is classified as a drug poses a significant problem to the people of Igembe. Khat was listed as a substance that can cause psychological dependence by the WHO in 1980 (Becklerg, 2010). Furthermore, in 2007, NACADA classified miraa as a narcotic similar to alcohol, marijuana, and heroin, among others. This is a big challenge to the people of Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese, whose miraa is their main economic activity. As a result of miraa entering the war on drugs, the people of Igembe Deanery have been negatively affected.

The research established that the people of Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese, who happen to be miraa farmers and traders, have a major challenge in the market for miraa produce. According to Bururia and Nyagah (2014), miraa is illegal in various countries in North America and Europe. For instance, the USA, Canada, Norway, the UK and Netherlands banned miraa trade and consumption among their people. The countries which banned miraa argue that it is a dangerous drug which has adverse health and social effects. This research noted that the people of Igembe have lost their miraa markets due to miraa being banned in various European countries and, more recently, miraa from Kenya being banned by the Federal Government of Somalia. This is a great challenge to the people of Igembe Deanery, whose miraa is their source of livelihood.

Church Prayers for the Challenges Facing Miraa Activities

Informants were asked as to whether the church prays for the challenges facing miraa production, consumption, and trade. All the informants reported that the church prayed for the various challenges that miraa farmers and traders faced. They averred that miraa is at the centre of all the aspects of human life of the people

of Igembe Deanery. They argued that they prayed for God's intervention so that God could intervene with them to overcome the challenges faced by miraa farming and trade. They said that most of the Christians in Igembe Deanery in Meru Diocese were miraa farmers and traders. Therefore, they prayed to God to intervene so the people of Igembe could get a market for miraa throughout the country and beyond. On various Sundays, prayers are offered for miraa activities. Thus, various individuals are chosen to pray for miraa and other crops. In addition, the priest presiding over various Sunday masses in various parishes always prays for miraa farming and trade. This research, therefore, established that the church in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese, prays for miraa production and consumption so that it gets the market and also be categorised in the group of cash crops and other crops like tea and coffee throughout the world.

The Church as an Encourager of Miraa Farming and Trade

According to Mutoria and Meeme (2021, OI), the church encouraged the farmers who were interviewed to grow miraa in Igembe Deanery, Meru Diocese. They reported that many Christians in the Igembe region participated in miraa farming and trade, and the Church has been encouraging them. They argued that miraa is the main economic activity in Igembe Deanery, and it has a high income compared to other crops. According to all the priests who participated in this study, miraa is the source of the livelihood of the people of Igembe Deanery. They all affirmed that due to this, they encourage their church members to expand their miraa farming as it is the main cash crop in the Igembe region, just like coffee and tea are in other parts of the country. They also claimed that the church regards miraa as the people of Igembe's principal cash crop, much as the Kenyan government has classified it among cash crops. They argued that due to the economic, socio-cultural, religious and educational significance of miraa, they encourage their church

members to engage in miraa production and consumption. They reported that most of the churches in the region also engaged in miraa farming, as it is the main economic activity in the Igembe region. The priests, however, opined that they discourage and warn the parents from allowing children who are below eighteen years old to engage in miraa production and consumption so that they can be able to concentrate on their education and minimise the cases of school dropouts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: In conclusion, the findings of this study show that most of the elders (90%) chew miraa. Most of the Church catechists (86.7%) also chewed miraa. Further findings show that most of the church members accounted for 83 per cent chew miraa. Interestingly, this research also showed that most of the priests (60%) chew miraa. More than 90 per cent of the farmers also chewed miraa. This indicates that the majority of the inhabitants of the Igembe region chew miraa regardless of whether they are Christians or not. The other notable thing is that the Church in Igembe Deanery does not prohibit its church members from engaging in miraa production, consumption and business. Since miraa is the main economic activity in the region and it has high cultural resonance or value, the church does not abhor its activities or involvement. In this regard, the church encourages its church members to engage in miraa farming and trade. This is because it is the primary source of income for the residents of the Igembe region. Undoubtedly, miraa has enabled the people of Igembe to get their basic needs as well as support the church's activities or mission.

Recommendations: As per the findings of this study, the church in Africa needs to enhance efficient and effective Christianity by enhancing the inculturation of Christianity in Africa. Thus, this makes Christianity an African religion but not an alien religion in an African society where religion is an integral part of the culture.

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Oral Informants

1. Gitonga Julius – (60 years old) A Priest, A/Kiongo Parish. Interviewed on 5th January 2021
2. Gitonga Peter – (55 years old) Priest, Athiru Ruujine parish. Interviewed on 7th January 2021
3. Kamanja John- (70 years old) An elder, Athiru Parish. Interviewed on 7th January 2021
4. Kimathi Lawrence – (60 years old) A priest at Maua Parish. Interviewed on 2nd February 202
5. Kimathi Nicklus – (55 years old) A priest at Amungenti Parish. Interviewed on 5th February 2021
6. Kithinji Simon (66 years old) A priest at Athi Parish. Interviewed on 12th January 2021
7. Koome Stanley – (65 years old) A trader in Athiru Parish. Interviewed on 7th January 2021
8. M'nja Philip – (55 years old) A Priest at Tuuru Parish. Interviewed on 15th February 2021
9. Murithi Josphat – (54 years old) A farmer in Nthambiro parish. Interviewed on 10th January 2022
10. Mutoria Andrew – (70 years old) is an elder Laare parish. Interviewed on 8th February 2022
11. Mutoria Joseph – (70 years old) An elder Laare Parish 15th January 2022
12. Mwirigi Nicklus – (55 years old) A priest in Laare parish 19th January 2022
13. Mwiti Coronelius – (46 years old) A trader, Athiru Ruujine, 17th February 2022