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**MOTIVATION AND STRATEGIES FOR A HOLISTIC CHURCH  
INTERVENTION IN CARE-GIVING TO AIDS WIDOWS IN KISUMU,  
KENYA.**

**BY REV SILAS OYARO.**

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KENYA.**

**BY REV SILAS OYARO**

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Masters of Theology  
(Theology and Development) in the faculty of Human and Management Sciences,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal.**

**Supervisor: Professor Isabel A. Phiri.**

**Pietermaritzburg 2004.**

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation brings into perspective the plight of AIDS widows in Kisumu. Often widowhood in general focuses on the older women, while AIDS has created a generation of young widows. A high percentage of these widows are immediately pushed into poverty by the death of husbands. AIDS widows' poverty and vulnerability to external shocks and stresses increases dramatically, while the delicate process of juggling competing needs and pressures becomes a far greater challenge.

The range of forces against which widows in Kisumu must struggle is formidable: low self-esteem, complex family relationships, hostile or indifferent communities, systemic gender discrimination and harassment, property loss, unemployment or underemployment, lack of education and a daily grind that leaves widows with scant energy to contemplate the possibility of transforming and regaining their dignity/condition.

For these reasons this dissertation contends that the church has an obligation to strategise a holistic intervention to care for these widows who are part of the church and society.

This dissertation manifests an on going struggle and quest for adequate instruments to understand AIDS widows in the light of God's promise of the fullness of life to all. AIDS leads to severe social, psychological and financial consequences for the affected families, hence the challenging question how the widows can move from deprivation to begin self-reliant sustainable livelihood is addressed.

Since widows' lives are complex and constantly changing, their livelihoods wholly depend on their identifying and building their own various strengths, assets and capabilities. In this way the dissertation suggests that the following areas should be secured overtime.

Supportive relationships, networks and environments, that is relatives, the church and church organization, government and other agencies should pool and pull together with the widows.

Long-term earning power and financial security is badly needed. That means that their property should be secured and their land be on their hands for continuous utilization, contrast to the current state where they are ejected and driven away of their homes.

Up-to-date skills, knowledge, self-esteem, motivation, self-confidence and spiritual well being. In this area it is suggested that capacity building would play a major role in moulding their current and future life.

Finally the church is challenged to cultivate an alternative theology to address the ever-growing problem of marginalization and violence against widows. That is to say all forms of prejudice, for example stereotyping, isolation and condemnation must be strongly rejected and urgent need for justice, reason and deep faith be employed. As a result the widows would be integrated and feel valued in the society and the church.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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First and foremost I would like to register my gratitude to God for enabling me to come this far. It is not by might, but by the guidance of the LORD.

A very, very special thank you goes to Professor Isabel A. Phiri for her helpful insight, guidance and understanding throughout this study. Thank you to Dr. Steve de Gruchy, the director of Theology and Development programme. I wish also to thank the head of School of Theology, Professor Gerald West and Professor Philippe Denis the head of history of Christianity and all other staff of the School of theology for all their contributions in my life as a student in the University of Natal.

I cannot forget to thank Keith and Gloria Knott for their genuine friendliness and warmth all the time we have been together. They invested heavily on this project, may God grant them peace.

Indeed during critical time of my studies my beloved wife Millicent took the full responsibility of our house, paying rents, providing fees for our daughter, nursing our son and all required things in the family. I am forever indebted for your support. You have demonstrated that success of a family depends on unity, equality, power, respect and mutual understanding.

Finally my appreciation goes to Africa Inland Mission International, Africa Inland Church Nam DCC, Western Lake Region and Central Office for their financial and prayer support.

## DEDICATION

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*This dissertation is dedicated to Jane Adhiambo my dear sister who first became a widow and subsequently fell in the dreadful hand of death survived by three children, Kesiah, Hellen and Eunice.*

*And  
to all the widows in Kisumu, Kenya.*

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## DECLARATION

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I, Silas Oyaro, candidate for Masters of Theology (Theology and Development) in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg hereby declare that: this dissertation is wholly mine except acknowledged quotations.

This work has not been submitted elsewhere except for the above mentioned degree.



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Silas Oyaro  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Pietermaritzburg, 2004.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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ABCD	ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
ACK	ANGLICAN CHURCH OF KENYA
AIC	AFRICA INLAND CHURCH
AIDS	ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME
CBO	CHRISTIAN /COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATION
CCA	CHURCH OF CHRIST IN AFRICA
CDC	CENTRE OF DISEASE CONTROL
CHAK	CHRISTIAN HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF KENYA
EAC	EAST AFRICA COMMUNITY
KDH	KISUMU DISTRICT HOSPITAL
KEMRI	KENYA MEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
HBC	HOME-BASED CARE
HIV	HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS
GOK	GOVERNMENT OF KENYA
MAP	MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME
MTCT	MOTHER TO CHILD TRANSMISSION
MOH	MINISTRY OF HEALTH
NCC	NATIONAL AIDS CONTROL COUNCIL
NNPGH	NEW NYANZA PROVINCIAL GENERAL HOSPITAL
NGO	NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
NT	NEW TESTAMENT
OT	OLD TESTAMENT
PJAW	POWER OF JESUS AROUND THE WORLD
PLWA	PEOPLE LIVING WITH AIDS
RC	ROMAN CATHOLIC
STD	SEXUAL TRANSMITTED DISEASES
TOT	TRAINER OF TRAINERS
UNAIDS	UNITED NATIONS AIDS PROGRAMME
VCT	VOLUNTARY COUNSELLING TESTING
WCC	WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

<b>BOOKS OF THE BIBLE</b>
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GEN.	GENESIS	NAH.	NAHUM
EX.	EXODUS	HAB.	HABAKKUK
LEV.	LEVITICUS	ZEPH.	ZEPHANIAH
NUM.	NUMBERS	HAG.	HAGGAI
DEUT.	DEUTERONOMY	ZECH.	ZECHARIAH
JOS.	JOSHUA	MAL.	MALACHI
JDG.	JUDGES	MATT.	MATTHEW
RUTH.	RUTH	MK.	MARK
1SAM.	1SAMUEL	JN.	JOHN
2SAM.	2SAMUEL	ACTS.	ACTS
1KGS.	1KINGS	ROM.	ROMANS
2KGS.	2KINGS	1COR.	1CORINTHIANS
1CHR.	1CHRONICLES	2COR.	2CORINTHIANS
2CHR.	2CHRONICLES	GAL.	GALATIANS
EZRA.	EZRA	EPH.	EPHESIANS
NEH.	NEHEMIAH	PHIL.	PHILIPPIANS
EST.	ESTHER	COL.	COLOSSIANS
JOB.	JOB	1THESS.	1THESSALONIANS
PS.	PSALMS	2THESS.	2THESSALONIANS
PRO.	PROVERBS	1TIM.	1TIMOTHY
ECC.	ECCLESIASTES	2TIM.	2TIMOTHY
SS.	SONG OF SONGS	TIT.	TITUS
ISA.	ISAIAH	PHILE.	PHILEMON
JER.	JEREMIAH	HEB.	HEBREWS
LAM.	LAMENTATIONS	JAS.	JAMES
EZEK.	EZEKIEL	1PET.	1PETER
DAN.	DANIEL	2PET.	2PETER
HOS.	HOSEA	1JN.	1JOHN
JL.	JOEL	2JN.	2JOHN
AM.	AMOS	3JN.	3JOHN
OBA.	OBADIAH	JD.	JUDE
JON.	JONAH	REV.	REVELATION
MIC.	MICAH		

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgement.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Declaration.....	v
Abbreviation.....	vi
Books of the Bible.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of maps and tables.....	xii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Motivation and background of study.....	1
1.2. Preliminary Literature Review.....	6
1.3. Research Problem.....	13
1.4. Hypothesis.....	14
1.5. Aim And Objectives.....	14
1.6. Theoretical Framework.....	15
1.7. Methodology.....	16
1.7.1. Personal Observation.....	16
1.7.2. Interviews.....	17
1.7.3. The use of Documentation.....	17
1.8. Scope and Limitation of the study.....	18
1.9. Research ethics.....	19
1.10. Thesis overview.....	19
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE BACKGROUND OF THE LUO IN KENYA .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1. Introduction.....	21
2.2. Historical and geographical settlement.....	21
2.3. Luo Social Structure.....	22
2.4. The Luo Women and Men leadership.....	24
2.5.1. Marriage in Luo Society.....	27
2.5.2. Polygamy.....	28
2.5.3. Dowry and Bride price.....	30

2. 5. 4. Levirate / widow inheritance.....	31
2. 6. Conclusion.....	34
<b>CHAPTER THREE: HIV/AIDS IN KISUMU.....</b>	<b>36</b>
3.1. Introduction.....	36
3. 2. Global epidemiology.....	38
3. 3. HIV/AIDS Transmission.....	39
3. 4. Family and HIV/AIDS.....	40
3. 4. 1. Economical impact of HIV/AIDS on the family.....	41
3. 4. 2. Emotional impact of HIV/AIDS on the family.....	42
3. 5. The Situations of HIV/AIDS In Kenya.....	42
3. 5. 1. AIDS Effect in Kenyan Society.....	43
3. 5. 2. AIDS, Women and Kenya's Household Economy.....	45
3. 5. 3. Families living with HIV/AIDS and stigmatization.....	46
3. 6. Myths about HIV/AIDS.....	47
3. 7. Conceptualization of Illness in Luo Culture.....	50
3. 8. Implications for HIV/AIDS in Luo cultures.....	52
3. 9. Traditional African perceptions of sexuality.....	53
3. 10. Cultural Implication.....	54
3. 11. Conclusion.....	55
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: BIBLE, WIDOWS AND CHRISTIANITY.....</b>	<b>57</b>
4. 1. Introduction.....	57
4. 2. Old Testament Teaching.....	58
4. 2. 1. Levirate Union.....	60
4. 2. 2. Mosaic Law.....	63
4. 2. 3. Psalms and Prophets.....	64
4. 3. New Testament Teaching.....	67
4. 3. 1. The status of Women in Jesus' time.....	67
4. 3. 2. Jesus disregards taboos on Women.....	70
4. 3. 3. Devouring Widows' houses.....	72
4. 4. Widows in the early church.....	75

4. 4. 1. Widows in Patristic literature.....	78
4. 4. 2. Widows in the African Church.....	80
4. 5. Conclusion.....	83
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SURVEY OF AIDS WIDOWS IN KISUMU.....</b>	<b>85</b>
5. 1. Introduction.....	85
5. 2. Methodology.....	85
5. 3. The Study Area.....	90
5. 4. Study Findings.....	94
5. 4. 1. Marginalization, Discrimination and Gender violence.....	94
5. 4. 2. The Widows' Mobility/ Movements.....	100
5. 4. 3. Church relationships.....	101
5. 4. 4. Psychological and emotional stress.....	102
5. 4. 5. Workshops and community meetings.....	104
5. 4. 6. Conferences.....	107
5. 5. Discussion.....	108
5. 5. 1. Living without husbands.....	108
5. 5. 2. Family Support System.....	109
5. 5. 3. Food Security.....	110
5. 6. Funerals and Burial ceremonies.....	113
5. 7. Conclusion.....	113
<b>CHAPTER SIX: THE CHURCH AND ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.....</b>	<b>115</b>
6. 1. Introduction.....	115
6. 2. The Church.....	115
6. 3. Social Development.....	116
6. 3. 1. Asset Based Community Development.....	118
6. 4. The Church's involvement in development.....	119
6. 4. 1. Voice of Truth and Justice.....	119
6. 4. 2. Voice of the Gospel.....	120

6. 4. 3. Voice of Believers.....121

6. 4. 4. Voice of the Universe.....122

6. 5. How can the Church engage itself in AIDS Widows Development?.....123

6. 5. 1. Pastoral Care and Counselling.....123

6. 5. 2. Showing Solidarity.....124

6. 5. 3. Advocacy and Prophetic Voice.....125

6. 5. 4. Support Systems.....125

6. 5. 5. Capacity Building.....126

6. 6. Some Practical suggestions.....127

6. 7. Conclusion.....130

**CHAPTER SEVEN: RECCOMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.....131**

7. 1. Introduction.....131

7. 2. Recommendations.....131

7. 2. 1. Utilising the minimum available resources.....131

7. 2. 2. Strengthen the capacity of families to cope with their problems.....132

7. 2. 3. Stimulate and Strengthen Community/Church based responses.....134

7. 2. 4. Build Capacities of Women to support themselves.....135

7. 2. 5. Create an enabling environment for appropriate responses.....135

7. 2. 6. Involving Government Ministries.....136

7. 3. Creating an alternative theology.....136

7. 4. Conclusion.....138

Bibliography.....141

Appendix A.....158

Appendix B.....163

## **List of Maps and Tables**

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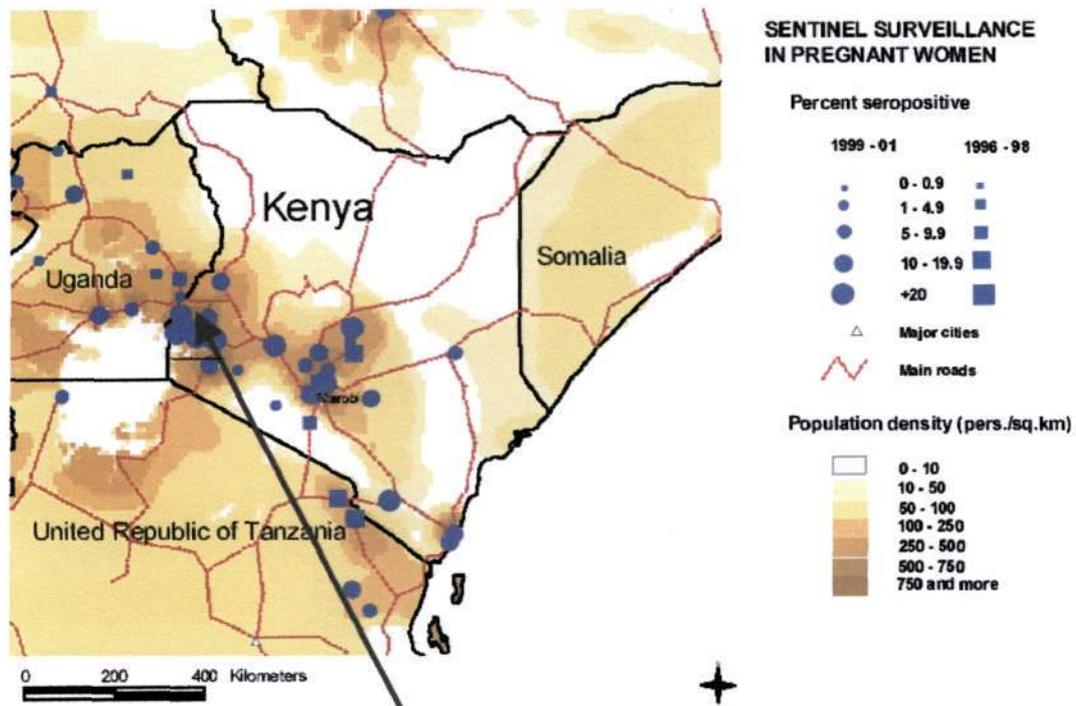
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Map of Kenya.....	xiii
Table 1 Distribution of Patients by Marital Status.....	90
Table 2 Distribution of Sample Population by area.....	92
Table 3. Age range of widows.....	92
Table 4. Widows' status of earning living.....	93
Table 5. Educational standard of widows interviewed.....	93
Table 6. Emotional effects on widows.....	103
Table 7. Misconceptions about AIDS.....	106
Diagram 1.Church Capturing local Associations.....	129

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## MAP OF KENYA AND HER NEIGHBOURS



Source, UNAIDS epidemiological update 2003.

### Kisumu the Location of Study

It can be seen that Kisumu has been highly affected by HIV/AIDS Pandemic. It is a high dense populated place, but now it is a place of mourning and grief. This map demonstrates that Kisumu is seriously affected. At a glance we see that it is located at the tip of lake Victoria which covers Uganda and Tanzania. And from the history of HIV/AIDS, it is known that Rukai in Uganda and Kagera in Tanzania were the first affected places. These two places are close by and share the same lake, easing the spread of the disease in Kisumu and its surroundings.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

---

#### **1. 1. Motivation and background of study**

The background and motivation for writing about Care giving to AIDS widows emanated from my days as a church minister with Africa Inland Church and co-ordinator of missions and evangelism in Western Lake Region in Kenya since 1991. Since then, I encountered the reality and effects of HIV/AIDS. As a co-ordinator, I met with many people who were affected once or twice by this pandemic. These were children who had lost single or both parents, men and women who had lost their spouses and children to AIDS related ailments, and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWA).

In 1992 and 1994 while leading Bible College students in an evangelistic campaign in Uganda, I attended HIV/AIDS workshop in Rukai and Kampala respectively, where I was challenged and persuaded that the church should respond positively to the pandemic. By this time many people including some churches in Kenya were very silent and viewed HIV/AIDS as a curse, a punishment from God and a disease of promiscuous or sinful people with whom one should not be associated.

It did not take long before we started experiencing many deaths in the local churches in Kenya as a result of AIDS related illnesses. Many people who were working in the towns returned to their rural homes with illnesses, which prevented them from working and after a short period, died. Sadly, the church condemned such deaths, while the community charged those deaths to a disease with similar symptoms as AIDS known as *Chira*. Unfortunately, the church (Roman Catholic and Protestant) had very strict policies on HIV/AIDS and therefore, made it very difficult to help the affected people. Many members of the church felt neglected and unwanted. Pastoral care that involves home and hospital visitation became minimal to the members of the church who had persons suffering from AIDS related illnesses. Other members were discouraged from associating with PLWA for fear of catching the disease. This was due to a lack of knowledge about

modes of transmission of HIV. It resulted in stigma, rejection, discrimination, denial and silence about HIV/AIDS in many families and communities.

In 1999 I attended training for training of trainers (TOT) in HIV/AIDS information, dissemination and counselling. During this time the church had experienced its failure to address the problem of AIDS appropriately and now opened up to respond responsibly. I received books from Medical Assistance Programme (MAP) International, the Christian health association of Kenya (CHAK), and other Christian organisations on the subject and my interest grew in training the church and society about HIV/AIDS. We formed a taskforce to reach a wider area, holding seminars, public talks and conducting funerals. It was during this time that we realized that many women had lost their husband to AIDS related ailments. Though in this region women were (are) more infected than men, yet many men die faster than women, leaving them to fend for themselves and their children.<sup>1</sup>

In 2002 when I registered at the University of Natal, and started my studies, I took courses as follows: *The making of redemptive community, Church and AIDS, African Women's theologies, The Bible in African Christianity and a Research Project*. These courses ignited my old interest of responding to the situation at hand in the church.

In the *Church and AIDS* course I was attached to "Christian Care Training" a Christian based organization (CBO) which was helping HIV/AIDS sufferers in Mphophomeni near Howick and noted the same trend of deaths of men leaving women to fend for themselves and their children. This prompted me to write about care giving to AIDS orphans in my honours project.

The AIDS pandemic in Kenya began in the early 1980s among the prostitute population in Nairobi. It has since spread to most areas of the country. AIDS quickly became a very serious problem in Kenya. By June 1996 Ministry of Health (MOH) reported that over

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<sup>1</sup> David Sanders and Abdulrahman Sambo, "AIDS in Africa" in Kenneth R. Overberg (ed), *AIDS Ethics & Religion, Embracing a World Suffering*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 42-47.

65,000 deaths due to AIDS related illnesses occurred and 1,030,000 adults were infected with HIV.<sup>2</sup>

By 1997 urban areas in Nyanza province, the location of this study had the highest prevalence among pregnant women, 35%. Data collected by the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) from rural sites in western Kenya indicated that Kombewa in Kisumu between 1997-1999 had a prevalence of between 29% and 36%. The highest increase was observed in Siaya rising from 24% to 40%.<sup>3</sup>

HIV is passed more easily from men to women through sex, than the other way around.<sup>4</sup> But, what is probably the most important factor is the fact that women tend to become infected at a much younger age than men. Current studies have shown that in several African populations, girls aged between 15 and 19 years are five or six times more likely to be HIV-positive than boys of the same age. The infection rate in men eventually catches up, but not until they are in their late 20s or early 30s.<sup>5</sup>

It is believed that older men are the main source of HIV for younger girls.

Sub-Saharan Africa has a pyramid-shaped population; with many more young people than old. HIV prevalence, which is the total number of people who are infected at any one time, rises very fast in women, peaking at exactly the age range which forms the base of the pyramid. Men, on the other hand have their peak HIV prevalence later, and are a smaller fraction of the overall population.

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<sup>2</sup> TM Okeyo, et al (eds.), *AIDS in Kenya: Background, Projections, Impact and Interventions*, Nascop, 1996, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> HIV/AIDS profile: Kenya, <http://www.census.gov/ipc/hiv/Kenya.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> S. Baden and H. Wach, *Gender, HIV/AIDS transmission and impact: A review of issues and evidence*, (Brighton: institute of Development Studies, 1998), p. 15. They argue that women have a large area in the vagina through which the virus penetrates and semen stays longer, while men have smaller surface area in their penises.

<sup>5</sup> S. Baden and H. Wach, *Gender, HIV/AIDS transmission and impact: A review of issues and evidence*, (Brighton: institute of Development Studies, 1998), p. 7.

So, figures spanning the whole 15 to 49-age range will show higher numbers of women since they have the highest infection rate in younger age groups. Studies in Western countries before the arrival of anti-retroviral therapy have shown that the older you are when you contract HIV, the shorter the time between infection and death.

African women, who become infected younger than their male counterparts, will, on average, live longer than HIV-positive men. So at any one time, there will be more HIV-positive women alive than there are HIV-positive men, even without women being newly infected more often.<sup>6</sup>

It is noted that HIV/AIDS is devastating the educational, military and agricultural sectors, among others, in Kenya. According to the National Aids Control Council (NACC), Kenya loses Sh210 million daily to HIV/AIDS. The Lieutenant General John Koech, deputy chief of the Kenyan general staff, lamented that PLWA now occupy between 50% and 60% of beds at the Forces Memorial Hospital in Nairobi, a hospital which is for military and para-military personnel.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Mr. Abraham Kamakil, the commissioner of Kenya Prisons acknowledged a loss of 10-15 staff in a month to AIDS related illnesses. A similar trend was noted in 1997 at Kenyatta National Hospital, in Nairobi.<sup>8</sup> It is estimated that, about 700 Kenyans die from AIDS related illnesses daily, according to government figures.<sup>9</sup>

From the above we can see that HIV/AIDS is wiping out a whole generation of people in Kenya. The economic and social cost is such that its stability is at threat. This has been realised as fields lack labourers to sow and harvest. Schools go without teachers. Hospitals lose doctors and nurses. Security weakens as the police force and entire armed forces fall prey. Business is losing entrepreneurs who bring dynamism and investment.

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<sup>6</sup> *AIDS in Africa*, [http:// www.health.iafrica.com/doonline/\\_and aids/africwomen.htm](http://www.health.iafrica.com/doonline/_and aids/africwomen.htm)

<sup>7</sup> *AIDS takes toll on Kenyan army*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2992089.stm>

<sup>8</sup> Alyward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha (eds.), *The Church and AIDS in Africa. A case study: Nairobi City*, (Limuru: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> *AIDS burdens Kenya prison warders*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3007108.stm>

Previous studies attach the staggering death toll related to AIDS illnesses to many factors, including severe poverty, a high population density and the constant movement of people due to thriving trade and migration routes between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania under the auspices of the East Africa Community (EAC). Similarly silence on the subject of HIV/AIDS and sex, traditions of widow cleansing and inheritance, widower remarriage and conceptualisation of illness and myths about HIV/AIDS also contribute to many deaths. As a result, the number of AIDS widows has increased and has a profound impact on societies in Kenya.<sup>10</sup> Nyanza province, commonly called Luo land has the highest rate of HIV and AIDS infection, involving as many as 25% of the region's 3.5 million people.<sup>11</sup>

As the pandemic devastates, it leaves the affected persons, in this case widows, to suffer the loss of families, depression, lack of health care, loss of inheritance, forced migration, homelessness, vagrancy, starvation and crime.<sup>12</sup> These sufferings are due to stigma and discrimination attached to HIV/AIDS. Constance Shisanya notes that,

The widow loses all her social security the moment her husband dies. In some cases, the seropositive widows could be disinherited by their fathers in-law as punishment for having caused the death of their husbands.<sup>13</sup>

Discrimination against widows and HIV/AIDS are interrelated in two ways: HIV/AIDS significantly adds to the burden of the already inferior status of widows. At the same time, this economic, social and political inferiority makes widows and women in general more vulnerable to HIV infection. It is a vicious circle of discrimination and poverty.

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<sup>10</sup> TM Okeyo, et al (eds.), *AIDS in Kenya: Background, Projections, Impact and Interventions*, Nascop, 1996, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> DASCO report Kisumu District Hospital, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Janet. Wash, "Double Standards: Women's property rights violated in Kenya", <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/kenya0303>

<sup>13</sup> Constance R.A. Shisanya "The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Women in Kenya" in Getui, N. Mary and Mathew, M. Theuri (eds.), *Quest For Abundant Life in Africa*. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2002), p. 58.

Widowhood in general often focuses on the older women, while in fact AIDS has created a generation of young widows. These young widows, frequently with young children, face the burden of discrimination on two counts: the loss of their husbands and the disease.<sup>14</sup>

The church in Kisumu is not exempted from the agony these challenges present, as they demand active response. The church recognises the reality of AIDS and its ever increasing and threatening implications on humanity. As a church minister, the effects of AIDS in the church and entire community have prompted me to ask, what would Jesus do for widows who suffer triple loss; that is loss of dignity, property and husband? It is from this that I am motivated to search for some strategies and modalities for appropriate intervention, which would relieve AIDS widows from the above-mentioned sufferings.

## **1. 2. Preliminary Literature Review**

The preliminary literature available does not directly deal with the topic of this research. This means, therefore, that the study did not duplicate the existing literature. However, the study utilised the existing literature to solidify the data collected.

Kretzmann and McKnight in their book, *Building Communities from Inside Out: A Path toward finding and mobilising a community's assets*<sup>15</sup> describe an asset based community development approach (ABCD), as one that recognizes that it is the capacities of local people and their associations that build powerful communities. They argue that the process of recognizing these capacities begins with the construction of a new lens through which communities can begin to assemble their strengths into new combinations, new structures of opportunity, new sources of income and control, and new possibilities for production. As an approach to community-based development, it rests on the principle that the recognition of strengths, gifts, talents and assets of individuals and communities

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<sup>14</sup> Agnes Abuom, "Women's issues in Health and Education", in D. Belshaw, R. Calderisi and C. Sugden (eds) *Faith in Development: Partnership between the World Bank and Churches of Africa*. (Oxford: Regnum, 2001), pp. 111-130.

is more likely to inspire positive action for change than an exclusive focus on needs and problems. They elucidate that seeing the glass half-full as well as half empty is not to deny the real problems that a community faces, but to focus energy on how each and every member has contributed, and can continue to contribute, in meaningful ways to community development. Focusing on uncovering the merits of all members encourages a spirit of egalitarianism, even in societies that are hierarchical in structure and differentiated by culture, educational background and gender. At its core are associations of community members, both formal and informal. As engines of community action, and as a source of power and leadership, these are considered assets of the community.

Finally, they place ABCD as is a strategy for sustainable community-driven development. Beyond the mobilization of a particular community, ABCD is concerned with how to link micro-assets to the macro environment. In other words, there is attention paid to the boundaries of community and how to position the community in relation to local institutions and the external economic environment on which its continued prosperity depends. The theory in this book is regularly referred to in this research, as it is the framework to be utilised.

Elizabeth Reid and Michael Bailey in their issue paper, *Young women: silence, susceptibility and the HIV epidemic*<sup>16</sup> explored the possible reasons why proportionately more girls and young women in their teens and early twenties are becoming infected than women in any other age group. This relates to the situation in Kisumu especially along the main Kenya-Uganda road and Lake Victoria beaches. The problems of poverty and lack of means of survival has brought about what they fully described.

Raphael Tuju in his book *AIDS: understanding the challenge*,<sup>17</sup> incorporates information initially published in the AIDS Watch column of the East African Standard newspaper.

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<sup>15</sup> John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. *Building Communities from Inside Out: A Path toward finding and mobilising a community's assets* (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1993), pp. 22-89.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Reid and Michael Bailey. *Young women: silence, susceptibility and the HIV epidemic*. New York: UNDP, HIV and Development Programme, 1992. - 9 [12] p. - (Issues paper, 12), p. 6.

He gives a comprehensive study on all aspects of the pandemic. He includes a number of case studies which served as an eye opener to the study.

*AIDS in Kenya: the church's challenge and the lessons learned.*<sup>18</sup> This book contains the results of a nation-wide survey of sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS prevalence, and gives information on prevention methods used in Kenya. Although my study is focused on AIDS widows it is important to relate the sexual behaviour in this particular region to locate the source of the problem.

*Focusing interventions among vulnerable groups for HIV infections: experiences from Eastern and Southern Africa,*<sup>19</sup> is a paper based on presentations of two regional workshops, one held in Nairobi in 1990, the other in Zimbabwe in 1993. The paper discusses interventions among vulnerable groups, such as female sex workers, long distance truck drivers, and miners, as well as military and para-military groups. It further deals with the underlying social problems, which for some of these groups, is the cause of their susceptibility to HIV/AIDS. It also details the very good results obtained with the targeted interventions. The fact that this paper dealt with different kind of interventions makes it a stepping stone for my study.

*AIDS in Kenya: background, projections, impact, interventions* edited by T. M. Okeyo et al.,<sup>20</sup> gives current and future estimates of HIV prevalence as well as statistics on past and present deaths attributable to AIDS. It also discusses the social and economic impact of AIDS and answers a number of frequently asked questions about HIV/AIDS. As it is the emphasis of this study to investigate the power and livelihood of widows, this book opens up this project not only to the current problem, but also to the future effects of AIDS.

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<sup>17</sup> Raphael Tuju. *AIDS: understanding the challenge*. (Nairobi: ACE Communications, 1996), pp 10-16.

<sup>18</sup> *AIDS in Kenya: the church's challenge and the lessons learned*. (Nairobi: MAP International, 1997), p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Focusing interventions among vulnerable groups for HIV infections: experiences from Eastern and Southern Africa* / Network of AIDS Researchers of Eastern and Southern Africa. - vi, 124 p. - (NARESA monograph ; no. 2 ). Nairobi: NARESA, 1994, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> T. M. Okeyo. et al.(eds). *AIDS in Kenya: background, projections, impact, interventions* 4<sup>th</sup> ed (Nairobi: NASCOP, 1998), pp. 1-9.

*Questions and answers on AIDS: a handbook for adult readers and educators*<sup>21</sup> is a little book consisting of 183 questions and answers divided into nine chapters dealing with the causes, the symptoms and the treatment of HIV/AIDS, among others. It unveils Barclays Bank in Kenya best work place policies on HIV and AIDS in Kenya. In essence this study investigates a favourable atmosphere for the affected group to work and use the talents for their survival and community development.

Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha's book, *The Church and Aids in Africa a Case Study: Nairobi City*,<sup>22</sup> is based on a survey of opinions among church leaders, pastoral workers and people involved in church organizations. The aim of the research was to evaluate the response of the churches to the AIDS crisis in Nairobi, to foresee future trends, and to make appropriate recommendations.

The book starts with describing the dimensions of the AIDS pandemic worldwide and then explores what it means in terms of the Kenyan situation. The question being answered in this book is: what are the responses of NGO's and church related bodies to this scourge?

The response that was elicited from these bodies is that a wide range of non-governmental organizations, religious groups and others is actively involved in HIV/AIDS activities in Kenya. These include Community Based Organizations (CBO's), self help groups, private and parastatal sectors and professional associations. The main bodies involved have adopted a partnership approach, sharing information and pertinent strategies. This has enhanced their effectiveness.

There is still much stigmatization of the people who are affected. They discuss the various ways in which this discrimination reveals itself. They also show that theological opinions can affect the response to HIV/AIDS.

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<sup>21</sup> *Questions and answers on AIDS: a handbook for adult readers and educators* (Nairobi: Barclays Bank, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha, *The Church and Aids in Africa a Case Study : Nairobi City*. (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), p. 20.

The authors' objective for writing the book is "to dispel some of the ignorance surrounding the response of the churches and the NGOs to the AIDS pandemic in Africa."<sup>23</sup> This book gives a good account of what the churches are doing although restricted mainly to activities in Nairobi.

*African Widows: An empirical study of the problems of adapting Western Christian teachings on marriage to the leviratic custom for the care of widows in four rural African societies*<sup>24</sup>, is a book on one of the most pressing problems facing the African Christian churches namely the constant confrontation between African marriage customs and Christian marriage customs taught and enforced by Western missionaries. The conflict stems from the African custom of leviratic marriage, mainly cohabitation of a widow with her deceased husband's brother. Many Christian churches have prohibited this custom, even though for many widows there is no other acceptable and decent way to live. Michael Kirwen asks, "Is leviratic marriage truly incompatible with Christian theology, or merely at variance with Western Christian marriage custom?" He then roots his answer in a sociological study of four traditional societies in Tanzania, including the Luo. His conclusions suggest that the source of conflict is found, not in the traditional African marriage custom of the levirate, but ethnocentrism of Western missionaries, and failure of dominantly Western theology of Christian marriage and family life. This implies that if Christianity is to be authentically African, the church must be truly indigenous.

This is a very technical area to address, especially as we examine the whole problem in the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As mentioned earlier on, HIV/AIDS has brought about young widows who might need other partners to cohabit or marry. Kirwen's work will be helpful for he has dealt with the old way of care giving to widows in four communities including the Luo. I will explore the contemporary model and alternatives whenever necessary.

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<sup>23</sup> Shorter and Onyancha, 1998, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Michael C. Kirwen, *African Widows: An empirical study of the problems of adapting Western Christian teachings on marriage to the leviratic custom for the care of widows in four rural African societies*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1979), pp. 38-46.

*Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?*<sup>25</sup> is about the common patterns that emerged from poor people's experiences in various places in the world. It discusses poverty from the perspective of the poor, and highlights concerns central to poor people's definitions of poverty. It examines poor people's experiences with the state, including access to health care, security, justice and education. It considers the household as a key social institution, and discusses gender relations within households and how these relations affect and are affected by larger institutions of society. It focuses on social fragmentation, and includes discussion of social cohesion and social exclusion. At this point, it discusses the widows' condition and how they are treated in the family and society at large. The case studies in chapters six and seven are directly related to my study and will assist me to have better understanding of widows' situation. Interestingly one of the widows in this text (is) was drawn from Kisumu where my work is situated. She was quoted as saying, "bereavement and funerals can cause poverty. In Kisumu the widow(s) and children are often left bankrupt. This marks the beginning of poverty for the bereaved family members".<sup>26</sup> This book notes that widows the world over share similar problems, while some are in even worse conditions. They are the excluded group in the society according to Deepa Narayan and therefore, call for integration into society.

*Women of Tropical Africa*<sup>27</sup>, is a book in which each chapter deals with the African woman in her everyday life and with the problems that particularly concern her. It gives a balanced picture of the position of women in more traditional societies. The essays emphasize the relative power and status of African women matched by equally compelling evidence of the strains and tension in the traditional role. It corrects the casual preconceptions about the inferior position of women in a traditional setting. Along with the books below it expounds women's power and demeanour.

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<sup>25</sup> Deepa Narayan et al., *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 254-257.

<sup>26</sup> Nerayan et al., p. 257.

<sup>27</sup> Denise Paulme, (ed.), *Women Of Tropical Africa*. (USA: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 30-33.

*Women in Africa: studies in Social and Economic Change.*<sup>28</sup> The papers in this collection attempt to analyse women not as objects but actors. In documenting the wide variety of activities in which African women have participated, the authors go beyond descriptions of roles and statuses. Here, women interact with their society and alter their environments; they become visible and thus part of history. The authors recognize that women cannot be wholly in control of all the social and economic forces which affect their lives. The book clarifies analysis of the twentieth century economic innovations among Luo women in western Kenya by tracing corresponding fluctuations in the economic activities of men. This book is concerned with participation of women in activities beyond the closed circle of childcare or household maintenance. This book is relevant to the approach which my study utilizes, because already it placed women as custodians and economic drivers in the Luo community, and that is what I would like to emphasise. Widows can use their assets, talents and skills.

*African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*<sup>29</sup> elaborates everyday struggles of women in East Africa to support themselves economically. It presents a detailed picture of the multitude of ways in which these women earn their living and even how they come to solidarity with other women. In this way we can see that their capacity is essential in working out ABCD.

*The Bible of the Oppressed*<sup>30</sup> discusses oppression in many forms and relates it to the contemporary enslavement of people through ideologies and structures that deprive them of healthy living. It portrays theft and impoverishment of the powerless by their oppressors. In this context it provoked my thought, as I relate the situation of AIDS widows who have been stripped of their properties by families and societies. It therefore

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<sup>28</sup> Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (eds.), *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*. (California: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 14-20.

<sup>29</sup> Christine Obbo., *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*, (London: Zed Press, 1980), p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Elsa Tamez., *Bible of the Oppressed*. (New York: Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982), p. 8.

sets a new way of reading the Bible to see how God and especially through Jesus of Nazareth is in ontological solidarity with the oppressed of human history. This freedom begins in the praxis of God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit, who identify with all humankind.

In conclusion the study is different from the consulted literature because the researcher's focus is an asset based development approach. It asked, what do we have and how can we use it to make progress toward what God wants to happen to widows? This led to an examination of strengths and capacities to be enhanced and make linkages with associations and institutions within the locality.

### **1. 3. Research Problem**

This study seeks to examine AIDS widows' experiences of stigmatization and ostracization in Kisumu, Kenya. The discrimination and stigma felt by widows affected by AIDS is not limited to psychological trauma but also affects their social and economic status.

It is underscored that grief, bereavement, rituals, forced re-marriages, harassment, rejection, loneliness, poverty and relatively high mortality, characterize widowhood all over the world.<sup>31</sup> Widows are associated with more poverty and higher mortality rates than other groups in the society. A high percentage of widows is immediately pushed into poverty by the death of husbands.

In attempting to address the problem it would be prudent to ask the following questions:

- What causes AIDS widows' rejection and discrimination in Kisumu?
  - How have widows been dealt with in the Bible, Old and New Testaments?
  - Is there any relevance of biblical widowhood to the Kisumu ones?
  - Are there modalities that can be employed to reduce widows' problems?
  - What is the role of the church to AIDS widows in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
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#### **1. 4. Hypothesis: The Church is obliged to give a holistic care to AIDS widows.**

The church in Kenya cannot afford to ignore the problem of AIDS widows today. This is a duty given to the church by God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (Triune God). It is the church's prerogative to care for the marginalized, especially widows, orphans and aliens in society. We can see this in the Old and New Testament teachings of the Bible on care giving to widows in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, the Gospels, Acts, Galatians and I Timothy. Widows, who are enslaved to poverty by traditional culture and stigma, hopefully would find their freedom through such action.

The Church as a transforming agent can do this in various ways including, the prophetic voice, advocacy, pastoral care and counselling, capacity building, education and healthcare provision and enhancing livelihood strategies that are already in place. In its engagement, the Church can employ an Asset Based strategy to reach this goal.

#### **1. 5. Aim And Objectives**

- The aim of this study is to seek how the church can provide strategies and modalities that will empower lives and livelihoods of AIDS widows in the Kisumu region of Kenya.

#### **Objectives Are:**

- To find out the specific problems that widows experience after the death of their husbands due to AIDS.
- To assess the cause of problems faced by widows.
- To identify the agency of widows, their assets, resources and livelihood strategies.
- To ascertain and bring into perspective the role the Church can play in AIDS widows experience.

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<sup>31</sup> Hill, M.S., G.J. Duncan et al., *Living arrangement: trends and their influence on family economic well-being 1968-1982*, unpublished Abstract: Popline, 1986, p. 10.

## 1. 6. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts conceptual framework which is informed by “Asset Based Community Development”<sup>32</sup> theory (ABCD).

This approach sees communities not as complex masses of needs and problems, but rather as diverse and potent webs of gifts and assets. Each community has a unique set of skills and capacities to channel for community development. The ABCD approach categorizes asset inventories into five groups: individuals, local associations, local institutions, physical assets and the local economy (including local business assets and local expenditures).

It assumes that social and economic revitalization starts with what is already present within a community, not only the capacities of residents as individuals, but also the existing commercial, associational and institutional foundation. This involves pinpointing, or mapping, all of the available assets in the community, and connecting, or mobilizing, them in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness. An asset-based approach to community building perceives local residents and other community stakeholders as active change agents, rather than passive beneficiaries or clients. The individual capacities of residents are the basic building blocks of any community. As people exercise these capacities, they often find they need the talents of others in their enterprises. This leads them to join with other individuals who will work with them toward a common goal. When they do this, individuals combine their own talents with the capacities of others to form associations and support local institutions that can make extensive and valuable contributions to their community. For example, friends and extended family members can be the main source of support in low-income families. Therefore informal supports in the community which encourage and enable friends and neighbours to care about each other should be strengthened. Thus, a significant premise of asset-based community development is to involve as many community stakeholders,

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<sup>32</sup> John Kretzmann, and John McKnight, *Building Communities from Inside Out: A Path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*, (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1993), pp. 1-376.

residents, voluntary associations, and neighbourhood-based institutions in the creation of plans, visions, and projects that support community building, as possible.<sup>33</sup>

Church as a community of faith should seek and affirm the gifts of our neighbours, to link them with the challenges of our community, and to build a common vision. In this way this study involves widows participation in areas of their skills and use of their assets. It must be noted that widows are not always half empty, but half full, actors and contributors even as others have skills, for instance, School teachers, nurses, farmers, artists and singers. When they are given opportunity to release their capacities, that will strengthen partnerships and one-on-one relationships, which is also a form of therapy in their condition of loneliness. It is from this that local associations and organisations will be consulted, for example women groups and church groups and other homogenous groups. These groups can bring some bargaining power to access credit loans and ownership of business premises which cannot be owned by one widow.

## **1. 7. Methodology**

This study employs multiple methodologies: personal observation, interviews, focus group discussions and literature review. Interviews serve as the primary source while critical literature review is secondary.

### **1. 7. 1. Personal Observation**

The purpose of personal observation is to gain first hand experience of the phenomena in the field of study, that is the affected households, churches and the villages in order to record less obvious but essential information about HIV/AIDS stigma in the area. By walking around in the villages and visiting with the affected families, some vital information about the households, practices and beliefs were recorded to verify certain issues observed. This was conducted in the area of study in July and August 2003.

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<sup>33</sup> Kretzmann and McKnight, *Building communities from inside out*, pp.110-114.

### **1. 7. 2. Interviews**

This study utilises qualitative interviews, according to Rubin and Rubin,<sup>34</sup> Babbie and Mouton.<sup>35</sup> The researcher conducted interviews in the identified location of study using open-ended questionnaires.<sup>36</sup> These interviews were face to face for deeper and more mutual interaction between the researcher and the interviewees.

#### **Interviewees**

For holistic features, the researcher interviewed persons with the following characteristics:

- AIDS widows who shared their experience and worldview.
- Workshops were convened to evaluate and draw strategic principles on how to curb the problem. These were open workshops involving (role players and stake holders) members of the church and society in an open discussion on what and how they think is better in care giving. It had set queries on how the community and the Church should be involved.

### **1. 7. 3. The use of Documentation**

Documentation such as articles, books, journals, newspapers and media reports, and information available in the Internet were collected and integrated with the data already obtained in an endeavour to add any nuances that were found in these sources. The documentary was compared to the already gathered data and served as new information in the research where they are applicable and of use.

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<sup>34</sup> J. H. Rubin and Rubin, I.S, *Qualitative Interviewing: The art of hearing data*, (London: Sage, 1995), pp. 38-45.

<sup>35</sup> Earl Babbie and Johann Mouton, *The Practice of Social Research*, (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 20-30.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Dune, *Interviewing Techniques for Writers and Research*, (London: A & C Black, 1995), pp. 34-36.

## **1. 8. The Scope And Limitation**

The study is limited by the quest for the experience and livelihood of AIDS widows in Kisumu. It is propelled by theory of 'asset based' in the community and the way that the church can draw strengths from it to identify resources and capacities in an endeavour to reintegrate widows into society and communion. The Luo culture, that is customs and traditions, is also considered as a tool to open up areas that would contribute to in-depth of the realities.

It was the researcher's concern that it would be limited by the fact that it was conducted by a male church minister among female widows respondents. But it turned otherwise as respondents were very open and willing to share their plight without reservations. This was because the researcher is a member of this community and had served as a minister in the location sometime back.

Normally there are several contributing factors that limit any study related to HIV/AIDS because it is accompanied by fear, denial, helplessness, panic, despair and blame among the affected persons. This has made the diseases associated with the HIV virus, such as Tuberculosis, Pneumonia, Meningitis and others often stated as the diagnosis and cause of death rather than AIDS. This lends to denial and silence about HIV/AIDS and also implies that no one dies of AIDS.

Given the subject of AIDS which has been associated with immorality the researcher was uncertain as to whether he would sail through, however, people are now realising that AIDS is similar to other diseases which infect indiscriminately. That made it possible to speak without mannerism and fear.

As the study is driven by the love and compassion of Christ to the marginalized in the society, it addresses a few areas that demonstrate his compassion and liberation which is realised in his ministry to the marginalized, the disabled, the women, the outcasts, the poor, the sick and the sinners as illustrated in the gospels.

Realizing the enormity of such work, time and money became limiting factors, as the study in the location had only a two-month duration that is July and August 2003.

### **1. 9. Research Ethics**

As required by the code of research, the researcher embarks on this study with transparency, respect and accountability to all that are in accord to the discipline. It is conducted with honesty and integrity. The researcher acknowledges any assistance; any work drawn from, and holds to the code of confidentiality whenever required.

The researcher upholds ethical responsibility to the people whom he works with in this research. He appreciates that interviewees have a right to privacy, including the right to refuse to participate in his interviews.

### **1. 10. Thesis Overview**

Chapter one has dealt with the introduction of the Study underlining motivation, background and hypothesis of the study. It further spells out aims and objectives, then leads us to methodology and theoretical framework that guides the whole thesis.

Chapter two examines the background of the Luo people of Kenya. This covers socio-historical, socio-economic and geographical setting. Taking into account their culture and tradition, relationship between men and women in general. It is from these revelations that we realise how widows were/ are viewed and treated within the Luo cultural framework.

Chapter three endeavours to explore HIV/AIDS in Kisumu, this encapsulates an overview of AIDS pandemic in the region, its primary mode of transmission, people's perceptions of HIV/AIDS, myths about HIV/AIDS, its effects on society and how people generally conceptualise illness, and finally implications which lead us to the very situation of the affected groups in this case AIDS widows.

Chapter four takes us to biblical examination of widows. It starts off by exploring widows in Old and New Testament passages, but put much emphasis on the liberatory work of Jesus to the marginalized in the society. These include widows, the sick, poor and outcasts. Finally it stretches to the early and contemporary church in Kenya.

Chapter five becomes the epicentre of this thesis as it surveys AIDS widows in Kisumu. The chapter brings to light the phenomena of AIDS widows as they are interviewed and share their experience and condition. It also involves church leadership, medical and government personnel as it tries to link them together in the intervention of care giving to the widows through their institutions and organizations.

Chapter six brings to perspective the church and Asset based community development. Here the importance of church involvement in social development is spelt out, as it is through this that the church employs empowerment through assets and capabilities, associations, advocacy and self-help projects and support groups, and concludes by pragmatic approaches.

Chapter seven looks on the way forward by giving recommendations based on the plight of widows in Kisumu, their livelihood, theological persuasion of the church, culture of the Luo and asset based development framework. Finally it rounds up with a conclusion which is a brief recapitulation.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BACKGROUND OF THE LUO IN KENYA

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#### **2. 1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter we discussed the motivation of this research and went through the methodology, theoretical framework, hypothesis, limitation, research ethics and finally concluded with the overview of the whole thesis. In this chapter it is imperative to examine the background of the Luo people to situate the place that a Luo woman occupies, since we are dealing with AIDS widows in Luoland. Therefore, we will explore in brief the socio-historical, socio-economic, culture and tradition, relationships between men and women in Luo society in general, and finalize with how widows were/ are treated or cared.

#### **2. 2. Historical and geographical settlement.**

In the nation of Kenya there are forty to sixty cultural groups depending on how one describes them, including pastoral nomads, prosperous agriculturalists, and traditionally urban dwellers. There are Bantu, Nilotic and speakers of numerous Cushitic languages. Additionally, Kenya's history has also been significantly impacted by the legacies of European, Asian, and Arab settlers.<sup>37</sup> The Nilotes are traditionally cattle-herders, although some groups, especially the Luo and some Pokot of Kenya, and the Anuak of Sudan have converted to agricultural ways of life. Nonetheless, even these people retain an almost mystical view of cattle, which for most Nilotes provide them with almost all their daily needs. Cattle are not slaughtered indiscriminately for meat; they are paid in compensation and bride wealth, and their ownership determines status and wealth.

The Luo live along Lake Victoria basin from Homa Bay in the south to Sio Port, close to the Uganda border in the north. Professor Bethwel Ogot of Nairobi University indicates that their first settlers in western Kenya were supposedly moved south after 1000AD.

That is, “from the Nile region, through Sudan, arriving in Uganda by the early 1400’s, and then in Kenya toward the end of 1400’s and 1500’s.”<sup>38</sup> He argues that the Luo who were “originally cattle-herders” are believed to have converted to “an agricultural and fishing lifestyle” when they arrived in Kenya some five hundred years ago. He builds on that their arrival caused the displacement of many Bantu-speaking peoples, notably the Gusii, Kuria and Luhya, who were forced into the highlands east and north of the lake Victoria.<sup>39</sup>

According to the Luo oral history it is maintained that they migrated from Sudan due to differences with their neighbours. This could be due to the large herds which they had, and scarcity of pasture.<sup>40</sup> So as early as 1900 the Luo settlements were consummated and their politico-religious and socio-economic systems were in one piece. Today they are the second largest ethnic group after the Kikuyu in Kenya.

### 2. 3. Luo Social Structure

Homestead *Pacho or Dala* was the basic unit of society politically, socially, and economically. Thus the structure of the Luo society was determined by the grouping of a man, his wife/wives and children as well as the type of economic production utilized by the household.<sup>41</sup> The owner of the homestead was the main power in his court. It is also important to mention that in the polygamous homestead, the husband was the head of many households. Co-wives lived in separate houses.<sup>42</sup> Each co-wife was, therefore,

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<sup>37</sup> The Europeans, Asians and Arabs came to Kenya due colonisation and trade, though Asians mainly were brought to build railway line to transport raw material from inland to the coast to sail them to Europe. This was real exploitation of African resources by colonisers in the name of civilisation and development.

<sup>38</sup> Bethwell A.Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo. Vol.1*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> Bethwell A.Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo. 1967*, p. 72.

<sup>40</sup> These are undocumented history disseminated orally by grandparents to their grandchildren.

<sup>41</sup> D. Schiller, L.D, “Gem and Kano: A comparative study of the Luo political systems under stress 1880-1914 Vol Phd”, Thesis North Western University, 1982, p. 45.

*wuon ot*, that is, the head of the house and the leader of its domestic and economic activities.<sup>43</sup> Under the wife were her children who grew up with the idea of *odwa* (our household) and thus lodge the impression of joint or communal possession.

In the jostle for identification and autonomy of *odwa* our house, children of one household became rivals of those of another household. Wives also became antagonists in the possession of property and competition for the household favour.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, antipathy (*nyiego*) was implemented as a means of facilitating self-pride or self-worth and unity. Sometimes good circumstances precipitated co-wives to collaborate. Simply each household (*ot*) was mandated with all the activities essential for the sustenance and provision for the needs of its members. These included production, operation and employment of work force and the willpower of fiscal objectives.

As noted earlier on, land and cattle were allocated to the household. That is to say, wealth or property was shared amongst wives. In other words women were the stewards of all property. However, women could not dispose of wealth without consultation with their husbands. Meanwhile the sons shared the land of their mother as they got married. A mother as a rule shared with her son portions of her farms, while her son's wife retained the use of the land and was referred to as *Lop nyar kumanyio*, which literally means the farm of the newly wed woman from the foreign village.

This became an inalienable property of her sons.<sup>45</sup> It is significant to highlight that in most ethnic groups in Kenya, inheritance was patrilineal. A married woman did not

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<sup>42</sup> Ayayo Ocholla, *The Luo culture: A reconstruction of the material culture patterns of a traditional African society*. (Wiesbaden, Frazsteiner Verlag GMBH, 1980), p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> It is worthwhile to note that, wife/wives were the managers and force on economic drive. It shows that Luo women had power and influence over property and even the running of daily activities in the family which extends to the larger community. We cannot talk of society without noticing households which are led and managed by women. It is here that we will take our step of examining women's power and livelihoods to enable us make way forward for the widowed women in the coming chapters.

<sup>44</sup> G. E. M. Ogutu, "An historical analysis of the Luo idea of God c. 1500-1900", MA Thesis, University of Nairobi. July, 1975, p. 50.

<sup>45</sup> The rights of women to possess land and property was well established in the old Luo culture and should be properly understood by all the proponents of Luo culture and traditions. The researcher would

inherit from her parents since her husband's family was expected to provide for her. Unmarried daughters in rare cases could expect to inherit something, but not on an equal basis with their brothers. Women did not inherit from their husbands, but if they had sons, they could continue to live and work on the husband's land, holding it in trust for the sons.

Every Luo wife principally controlled the crops grown on her land, which primarily were used to feed the family or if need be for exchange for livestock or any valuables needed by the family.<sup>46</sup> She was responsible for all labour provisions on the farm and afterwards processed the crops.

The social structural framework of Luo society manifests a gendered division of roles and responsibilities. They are patrilineal and patriarchal, that is to say inheritance and habitation is entirely on the male lineage. Men therefore, are the major decision makers and managers of family's property and wealth. In similar structure, Grace Ndyabahika says, "woman as a mother, helper and companion is often overwhelmed by her father, brother, husband, colleague or son. She may be deprived of her rights and marginalized into a position of helplessness even within her own home".<sup>47</sup> This leads us to Luo ethics and women leadership role.

#### **2. 4. The Luo Women and Men leadership**

In all matters of regulation, policy and protocol, the senior wife (*mikayi*) in a polygamous family was very important. Often she participated in conflict resolution at home and

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like to mention that there has been some sporadic difference from one location to another. This can be attributed to poverty that has made people to find alternative sources of survival.

<sup>46</sup> Margaret Jean Hay, "Luo Women and Economic Change During the Colonial Period", in Hafkin, J.N. and Edna G. Bay (eds.), *Women In Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Chang*. (California: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 88-109.

<sup>47</sup> Grace N. Ndyabika, "Women's Place in Creation", in Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge (eds.), *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996). pp. 26,27.

settlement of land disputes.<sup>48</sup> This came about as a result of her working together with her mother in law on their land and learning from her about ethical issues, relating to harmony and peace at home. When it comes to agriculture or farming, she always began the clearing of fields, planting, weeding and harvesting before anyone else. Failure to wait for the *mikayi* chief wife to act first was a bad omen, taboo and a breach of village discipline.

Like in the Baganda's myth, which maintains that women infuriated God for disobedience marking the beginning of hard labour for the women,<sup>49</sup> the Luo had a similar thought that woman caused problem and her toil became greater as evidenced by the division of labour that left a lot of continuous agricultural labour to the women. In fact, a young woman only received marriage recommendation as she showed power in the fields, *Nyano nyar rapur*.<sup>50</sup> It is sad to note that women had accepted this as the norm and even internalised it as their lifestyle.

The separation of labour within a typical homestead was based on sex and age. Women and men had different roles (though overlap occurred in certain instances), as did the young and the old. The males were heads of homesteads and sometimes households depending on the number of wives and family size. In decision making some exerted control over many aspects of household functions while others tended to entrust power to wives and sons. In smaller homesteads with fewer people the heads would be involved in many aspects of household operations. While in larger homesteads, decentralization and allocation was easily done. No matter how involved the men were in household operations women were in control of the domestic economy. Though women were not

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<sup>48</sup> See S. Kobia "In Search of a Participatory and Inclusive Society", in Koegelenberg, R. (ed), *The Reconstruction and Development Programme: The Role of the Church, Civil Society and NGOs*, (Cape Town: EFSA, 1995), pp. 255-283.

<sup>49</sup> See Christine Obbo, *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*, (London: Zeds Press, 1980), p. ix.

<sup>50</sup> See Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (eds.), *Women In Africa: Studies in Social Economic Change*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 9-17.

expected to express their views publicly on important matters, they were consulted privately, before a man took a decision with a consequence on the family. On such cases he begged consultation with his wife, namely, *Min nyithindo* the mother of his children before making the decision. This woman was, frequently the first wife in a polygamous home or the only wife in a monogamous household.<sup>51</sup>

Men consulted particularly with the first wife because of her prominence in the performance of all crucial rituals.<sup>52</sup> She was considered the co-owner of the homestead with the husband. On attainment of menopause all sexual relations with the husband ceased but she participated in decision-making. Older women were regularly consulted on numerous issues of significance.

At this point we can say that men saw themselves best in the public arena and in that way arrogated power to themselves while women were confined to domesticity. Therefore, patriarchy in Luo society excludes women who are another segment of its population from certain roles to produce hegemonic consensus.

On the other hand contribution of women to societal development was always accorded acknowledgment in spite of the fact that they were viewed as dependants. They were considered the weaker gender needing security of the men in the homesteads. All in all, despite these allowances to women, the Luo system was patriarchal and theoretically the men were expected to govern in spite of the obvious allowances. This was a system that was easily manipulated by a more dominant system. Colonialism, which was a male dominated system, generated the alienation of women through practices like the monetisation of several Luo practices. Several colonial economic, social and political policies had adverse effects

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<sup>51</sup> Hafkin and Bay (eds.), *Women in Africa*, 1976, pp. 16,17.

<sup>52</sup> See Rosemary N. Edet. "Christianity and African Women's Rituals", in Mercy Amba Oduoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (eds.), *The Will to Rise*, (New York: MaryKnoll: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 25- 39.

### 2. 5. 1. Marriage in Luo Society.

Ochola Ayayo argues that culture plays a role in human's life as it takes a person many years to mature and become a functional adult. It is only through culture that a person is able to protect and take care of their own infants as they go through the various social and biological developments. Culture provides the means of protecting the human infants but also the old adults, the widows, the orphans, the handicapped, the sick and the weak.<sup>53</sup> The function of culture therefore summarizes all or most of human development.

Research has established that in most African cultures marriage and death are matters of concern for the entire society. For that reason it was/is, therefore, treated with a lot of concentration in both families of the marrying parties.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, in the Luo society marriage is for the entire clan and not for individuals. In sundry times Luo parents arranged marriages for their children. It involved intimate consultation between the relatives of the male and female to evaluate the suitability of both the girl and the boy for marriage. Everything was negotiated by the old folk, leaving the anticipated spouses to yield. It was during these times that families exchanged valuable gifts of livestock to seal the agreement and boost their pride. All these were signals that the woman/wife belonged to the lineage. Children as well belonged to lineage. Deep down we can realize why widows were not permitted to walk out of the family or clan to remarry after the death of their husbands. The widow belonged to the lineage and not the individual man whom she got married to. And this created leviratic union to protect the lineage and dowry paid to the family of the woman by the deceased family. We will examine dowry or bride price after a short while, but let us see polygamy first.

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<sup>53</sup> See, Ochola Ayayo, *The Luo culture: A reconstruction of the material culture patterns of a traditional African society*, (Wiesbaden, Frazsteiner Verlay GMBH, 1980), p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Transforming Power: Women in the Household of God. Proceedings of the Pan African conference of the circle of concerned African theologians*, (Accra: Sam-woode Limited, 1997), p.112.

## 2. 5. 2. Polygamy

In Luo culture, polygamy was the language spoken. When a man had one wife, it was as if he had one eye. Due to that monogamous men felt inferior, unrecognised, and uncomfortable as later called *Nyiek dhako*, literally a co-wife. During festivals, when people drink traditional beer *busa*,<sup>55</sup> monogamous man was not allowed to sit far interior, because he could be called that his wife is dead, and thus cause chaos by trampling (jump) over the pot with the beer, causing loss of the drink.

In the old tradition, polygamy showed one's wealth. As farming and economic strength depended solely on the size of the workforce, the women worked on the farm and brought forth the yield in the name of the husband. The greater number of wives and children, the richer a man became and gained much fame. Cadwell and associates have argued that in Sub Saharan Africa,

30 to 35% of married women are in polygamous marriages and nearly all wives must be emotionally adjusted to the possibility of finding themselves in a polygamous marriage at any time.<sup>56</sup>

A survey conducted in Kenya and particularly in Kisumu found that over sixty percent of women viewed polygamy in a positive light. In some villages, 20 out of 30 women considered polygamy to be the superior form of marriage.

Reasons being:

- Women in Kenya are notoriously hard workers, with many labour intensive domestic and field-related tasks that keep them busy from dawn until after dark. With another woman to help, a wife's burden would be lightened.
- The addition of a wife also relieves a woman of her sexual duties during the later stages of pregnancy and during a child's nursing years. This in turn can help her space childbearing more easily, leading to better health for both mother and child.

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<sup>55</sup> *Busa* is a traditional beer made from millet and corn. It is porridge like, though fermented and sieved before it was taken, otherwise it could be called *lingo*. The Luos call nicknamed it "old men's porridge".

<sup>56</sup> See J. Caldwell et al, *The Socio Context of AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, Population and Development Review* 15(2), 1989, p. 189.

- It also provides the means for a career minded woman to focus on her work by having a female friend and husband to share family responsibilities.

From the point of view of a second wife, polygamy is a good thing because one is able to acquire proof that the man she is going to marry will be a good provider. This system has a serious implication for the spread of AIDS epidemic, since the entire family could find themselves victims of the disease through the polygamous association.<sup>57</sup>

It seems to me that polygamy is inherently disrespectful to women. It neglects their emotional, physical, and financial needs in favour of what is best for the man (patriarchy). That is, multiple sexual partners and a large labour force to work his fields and increase his profits. Polygamy does not guarantee a woman a happy marriage and is not concerned with her wellbeing. Jane Awiti had this to say,

The appearance of the second woman changed things around our home. My children were affected psychologically. They were used to seeing their father around the home and suddenly he became rare. He was not doing much for them or spending enough time with them and their academic performance became poor.<sup>58</sup>

We can then say that there are two groups of women, the opponents and proponents of polygamy. However, what is evident is that we need to be true to our contemporary age and be human in all circumstances. The researcher disprove the practice of polygamy as it does not benefit women and therefore is not right as it subjects women to low self esteem as they are thought to be subordinate to men, which not true because both male and female are created in the image of God. Let us then view dowry or bride price.

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<sup>57</sup> Prof. Philip Denis of the University of Natal has disputed it, however his argument can be true just if the husband and his wives are morally disciplined, which often not. See, P. Denis, "Sexuality and AIDS in South Africa", in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 115 (March 2003), p. 67.

<sup>58</sup> Jane Awiti, interview conducted by Silas Oyaro on 7 August 2003 in Kisumu.

### 2. 5. 3. Dowry and Bride price

Luo marriages necessitate a hefty bride price also called bride wealth or dowry, paid for in head of cattle from the groom and his family to the family of the bride. In the past, twenty cattle were not unusual. Dowry or bride price was a sign of appreciation to the bride's family and parents for having nurtured their daughter. Though studies show that husbands and families exchange bride wealth during marriage for the reproductive and productive capabilities of women.<sup>59</sup> But in the Luo society, it was a way of blessing the marriage and both the bride and groom felt a sense of dignity when the negotiations were over and done with.

The issue of dowry in many Kenyan societies is viewed as a way in which the couple and the two families are joined together. Sadly, today these noble thoughts have been overtaken by events and thwarted by their proponents. Parents have given this practice an economic face. It has actually become a booming business so much so that, if a man has a number of girls he is considered a rich fellow because of the anticipated dowry. Many parents demand such huge amounts of money and possessions that the young couple can hardly afford to meet. At times it forces the groom to acquire loans or sell assets to pay the dowry, leading to financial stress from the first phase of marriage. During hard economic times, the man begins to blame the woman and this becomes the beginning of domestic conflicts. The woman is simply considered as a property, some thing bought and paid for, who or which, the man can treat as he wishes.

Some parents also refuse to let their girls proceed with their education. They want their daughters married off so they can acquire the dowry. Unfortunately, they use the paid dowry to pay school fees for their male children. In most cases marriages are also arranged without the girls consent, and in other cases the girls opt to get married after

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<sup>59</sup>D.W.Cohen and E.S.A.Odhiambo, *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape*, (London: James Currey, 1989), p. 51.

Pala, Achola Okeyo, "Daughters of the Lakes and Rivers: Colonization and the Land Rights of Luo Women", in M. Etienne and E. Leacock (eds.), *Women and Colonization*, (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp.

becoming disillusioned because the parents make no steps towards getting them to school.<sup>60</sup>

There are several implications here, first, is the Luo women's invisibility in the history of their society. That is, their male counterparts have not allowed them to articulate their thoughts, fears and hopes. Second, patriarchy assumes that women are accessories to be owned. Third, men are better or important than women.

As a result we can say that male influences prove to be negative in most cases and have deepened women's problems in contemporary way of life. It is therefore necessary to revisit these negative areas for eradication and readdress.

#### **2. 5. 4. Levirate / widow inheritance**

Among the Luo, widow inheritance, or the levirate marriage, was/is widely practised. Some months after the death of the widow's spouse, she is ceremoniously connected to one of her husband's brothers or other close male relative. Erecting a pinnacle on the roof as a sign that there is a man in the widow's house and that she is no longer alone *chuooyo osuri* marked this ritual. Michael Kirwen says, "this ritual was meant to protect the widow, children and property of the deceased."<sup>61 62</sup> It results in a relationship more or less similar to remarriage, as the inheritor serves as a widow's sole legitimate sexual partner. He functions as a husband in other respects; for example, the inheritor stands in for the deceased husband in rituals, including acting the father figure during the marriage of a widow's children.

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186-213.

<sup>60</sup> The above portion is from personal observation and participation in Luo society. It is also worthwhile to say that this tradition is embedded to an extent that even some Christians bow to it.

<sup>61</sup> Compare with Michael C. Kirwen, *African widows: an empirical study of the problems adapting Western Christian teachings on marriage to the levirate custom for care of widows in four rural African societies*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1979), pp. 11-12.

<sup>62</sup> See C.C. Ryrie, *The Role of Women in the Church*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 81.

Another reason behind the practice was that a widow was seen as having physical, emotional and material needs. It was therefore, thought and understood that levirate union would cater for the needs of the widow.<sup>63</sup> According to the Luo's, levirate union was placed to prevent intruders from possible interference with the material possessions of the deceased. These could be land, livestock and children in some occasions. Traditionally, all widows were inherited, with only a few women rejecting the practice if they were past menopause and unable to bear more children. However, still there was a symbolic ritual of inheritance to the seniors. In such a situation a man's staff and cloak was brought in the widow's house to stay overnight. That symbolised man's figurehead in that house that night, it was called *yiengo luth*.

It is significant to mention that, the new partnership between the widow and her inheritor is not completely equated with marriage, and both parties maintain few rights and obligations compared to wives and husbands. Luo widows maintain a high degree of autonomy; they have a say in the choice of their inheritor and usually continue to reside in their deceased husbands' homesteads instead of relocating to the residence of their inheritors.<sup>64</sup> Widows have no domestic responsibilities toward the inheritor.

Luo widows are largely responsible for their family's economic support, and they manage their own households and children. This autonomy does not always coincide with financial security, however, with continued rights to farming their husbands' land, many widows work the fields to meet subsistence needs, although they have lost husbands' labour inputs with respect to clearing the fields, ploughing and harvesting. The loss of a spouse decreases a widow's access to cash, which is needed for larger expenses and land preparation in his absence.

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<sup>63</sup> G. Wamue, "Gender, Violence and exploitation: The widow's dilemma", in Wamue, G. and Getui, M. (eds), *Violence against women*, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996), p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> Wamue, "Gender, Violence and exploitation", p. 41.

Normally women receive starting capital or cash needed for small businesses from their husbands, and they often discontinue this work upon their husbands' deaths. Conclusively widows have an added problem because they do not have husbands to support them.

As time has passed, things seem to have changed, putting the inheritor's primary responsibility to his own wife and children, leaving the widow without economic support. Though sporadically some inheritors may help the widow with ploughing or paying for food or school fees, this is not a formal duty and appears to depend more on individual relations between the couple. The only responsibility of an inheritor is to build a house for the widow if she does not have her own.<sup>65</sup> It is important to note that the kind of a house we talk about here is not tin roofed. You may find a widow in a hut that is grass thatched. Let me underline some of the burdens which women undergo.

At the same time the Luo observe ritual of distributing the deceased property among themselves just like the Abaluhya in western Kenya.<sup>66</sup> They believe that the ritual keeps the spirit of the deceased among the family and clan. In most cases the ritual has been abused, as many widows lament that their brothers-in-law seize the most valuable assets, for instance cars and land. This cripples the widow in so many aspects and leaves her financially handicapped. It is important to note that, other in-laws jostle to cohabit with the widow due to economic benefits. These unscrupulous men enhance their economic capacity by the virtue of inheriting the widow.<sup>67</sup>

The traditional and cultural legalisms like do's and don'ts cause serious misunderstandings and conflicts amongst the individual families and communities. In

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<sup>65</sup> Constance R.A. Shishanya, "The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Women in Kenya", in Getui, N. Mary and Mathew, M. Theuri (eds), *Quest For Abundant Life in Africa*, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2002), p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> Distribution of property of the deceased sparked a very hot controversy at the funeral of the late Michael Wamalwa Kijana (Kenya's Vice President who died in London). It has been realized that in some cases widows are stripped of valuable assets and resources.

<sup>67</sup> Constance R. A. Shisanya, "Death Rituals: The Case of the Abaluhya of Western Kenya", in M.R. A. Kanyoro and N. J. Njoroge (eds.), *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996), p. 187.

conflict situations, women suffer more repercussions and in most cases they have nowhere to go and no one to turn to.

This contextual background has shown that Luo widows are not passive women who are at the mercy of others to care for them. Indeed, widows have limited autonomy with respect to residence and household management. Inherited widows, in particular, often opt to form new partnerships with men and continue childbearing.

These choices are constrained, however, by the cultural expectations for production and reproduction placed on Luo women that continue throughout widowhood. Consequently, widows are not supported socially and economically to the same extent that married women are in Luo society, including those married women whose husbands are absent due to labour migration.

## **2. 6. Conclusion**

In the chapter we have tried to locate a Luo woman as we discussed historical, geographical settlement and social structure of Luo people. It has revealed how the Luo managed their homes through their political and economical powers.

It became evident that women were subordinate to men in society. They had very little power in the decision-making panels and were controlled by the masculine power in all aspects. They were taken as weak partners who needed security from their male counterparts and that placed them in an inferior position.

On marriage, they had to leave their natal homes to cohabit with their husbands in their homesteads. As mentioned earlier on, the Luo are patriarchal in every aspect. That has been demonstrated in the male domination and their command for obedience.

It was also noticed that bride price given to the bride's parents can be interpreted as human sale. For in many occasions women are seen as accessories bought by their husbands. Unfortunately, this has made women to be voiceless even on the issues that

dehumanise them. In fact in the era of HIV/AIDS women are unable to bargain for safe sex even with their husbands, in the fear that they would be branded as unfaithful.

It was apparent that marriage places women under community's commitment and not husband's or individual's responsibility. This brought about levirate marriage or widow inheritance upon the death of a husband. Actually such controls make women susceptible to all kind of sexual harassment and infections by STDs and HIV. In the course of widow inheritance, there is no HIV pre-test done to ascertain whether either of the party is HIV positive or not.

In fact from the whole chapter we realize that women are the most vulnerable group in the Luo society for they are not free from the cultural yoke. This can support the fact that women and girls in Kisumu and other patriarchal societies have higher prevalence of HIV infections than men and boys as indicated in chapter one.

In property inheritance we saw that women do not inherit property when their husbands die. It is their male children who inherit the land and other property for they are supposedly seen as perpetuators of their father's lineage. These of course have a serious implication, as it is argued that one of the catalyzing forces on the spread of HIV infections is poverty amongst people with particular reference to women.

This chapter has given us a clue to investigate HIV/AIDS in Kisumu. We have noticed that some cultural practices have straight links with the spread of the disease.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### HIV/AIDS IN KISUMU

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#### 3.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the researcher explored the Luo of Kenya and how men and women relate in society. Their sociology placed men and women as the primary source of community's life/continuation which is imperative in most, if not all cultures in Africa and world over. It was also noted that marriage is a code which is not easily broken and that places both the husband and the wife in a state of endless relationship. For even at death a Luo widow is known as the wife of the grave *chi liel*. This chapter endeavours to explore HIV/AIDS in Kisumu, it includes overview of HIV/AIDS pandemic in the region, its primary mode of transmission, people's perceptions and myths about HIV/AIDS, its effects on society and how people generally conceptualise illness. It further brings to light the effect of the pandemic in the family's economic, social and psychological life. It concludes with the implications that lead us to the very situation of the affected groups in this case, AIDS widows.

This chapter is important for it enables us to understand and determine factors related to the problem of AIDS widows, drawing from the region's perspective and behaviour toward the disease.

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) can lead to the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) which is a progressive and often fatal disease because it reduces the body's ability to fight infections. The disease does not only affect the physical body it also affects the social body. HIV/AIDS is an epidemic disease with profound social effect.

There is no consensus as to where, when and how the HIV/AIDS pandemic began and there is currently also no available cure. According to United Nations AIDS Organization (UNAIDS), it was first identified in Los Angeles in the United States in

1981 and later, in 1983 by Scientists in France who also confirmed; the modes of transmission.<sup>68</sup>

The acronym has been explained by Whiteside and Sunter; Heather Snidle and Rosalind Welsh this way:

- The 'A' stands for Acquired. This means that the virus is not spread through casual or inadvertent contact like flu or chickenpox. In order to be infected, a person has to do something or have something done to them which exposes them to the virus.
- 'I' and 'D' stand for Immunodeficiency. This virus attacks a person's immune system and makes it less capable of fighting infections. Thus, the immune system becomes deficient.
- 'S' is for Syndrome. AIDS is not just one disease but it presents itself as a number of diseases that come about as immune systems fail. Hence, it is regarded as a syndrome.
- Similarly HIV is explained as Human Immunodeficiency Virus. This a retrovirus, meaning that it is one of the first known viruses to transcribe DNA from an RNA template.<sup>69</sup>

They suggest that in order to exist, the virus has to enter a cell and insert itself into the cell's DNA to reproduce itself. Therefore AIDS is a disease syndrome whose parameters can be described and whose etiology is thought to be known. It is also a symbol upon which have been projected several of the cultural anxieties of our contemporary age. It is not just a disease of persons who have AIDS; it is in a sense, an affliction of a society suddenly aware that there is no known cure, the fear of which is projected onto the people living with AIDS.

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<sup>68</sup> UNAIDS 2000

<sup>69</sup> See, Whiteside and Sunter, *AIDS: The Challenge for South Africa*, (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau Tafelberg, 2000), pp.1-2.

H. Snidle and R. Welsh, *Meeting Christ in HIV/AIDS: A Training Manual in Pastoral Care*, (Methodist Publishing House, 2001), p. 25.

### 3. 2. Global epidemiology

HIV/AIDS has been labelled as one of the greatest calamities ever to befall humankind. Despite interventions to curb its spread, and because there is no available cure and no vaccine yet, HIV/AIDS continues to inflict incalculable suffering upon those who are infected and affected by it, especially People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), their families, communities, as well as greater society. Those infected by HIV/AIDS eventually fall ill and die. The costs are multi-faceted thus: economical, psychological, social, physical and spiritual.<sup>70</sup>

The estimated number of adult HIV/AIDS infections worldwide has trebled since 1990 from ten million to a total of about thirty four million in 1999, with sixteen thousand new infections a day.<sup>71</sup> Research indicates that Africa claims the greatest share of HIV/AIDS cases in the world with seventy percent of HIV/AIDS cases, although the continent has about ten percent of the global population.<sup>72</sup> It is noted that the disease has spread most rapidly in the impoverished communities which depend on human labour for survival and where poverty is already a problem.

In Kenya HIV/AIDS is now the leading cause of death, with forty percent of the deaths of all Kenyans aged 15 to 49 in 2000-2002 being HIV/AIDS related. In terms of absolute numbers, most of those infected in Kenya are women,<sup>73</sup> albeit there is evidence that the epidemic is spreading through all groups. It is realised that there is a tendency for HIV/AIDS to thrive in poorer and under resourced communities, thus highlighting social and economic imbalances within society. This, in turn can be directly attributed to the

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<sup>70</sup> R. Bor. & J. Elford, *The family and HIV Today*, (London: Wellington House, 1998), p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> UNAIDS 2000.

<sup>72</sup> UNAIDS epidemiological fact sheet update 2002.

<sup>73</sup> See The Hunger Project., *AIDS in Africa: A Crisis of Leadership, Briefing on the Strategy to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa*, 2001, p. 1.

culture of gender imbalance, which caused the unequal access to resources through its discriminatory policies and practices.

Due to the huge number of people infected with HIV/AIDS, an enormous burden has been imposed on the national health system's budget. This has resulted in the introduction of home-based care (HBC) as part of the national health policy.<sup>74</sup> This move to family and community care of PLWA helps alleviate the burden on the health system. At the same time HBC is believed to provide affection, care and psychological support for PLWA. However, in the latter stages of HIV/AIDS, families find it difficult to cope.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.3. HIV/AIDS Transmission

The dominant modes of transmission vary from country to country. Transmission could be through sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal and oral), which is the most frequent mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS world wide or through contact with infected blood, cervical or vaginal fluids.<sup>76</sup> The infected blood could be contacted through blood transfusion, injecting equipment such as needles or syringes contaminated with HIV virus. The most common mode of HIV/AIDS transmission through blood is from sharing of contaminated needles which occurs with intravenous drug users. Mother to child transmission (MTCT) of HIV/AIDS can occur during pregnancy, labour and delivery or as a result of breast feeding.

The pattern of HIV/AIDS transmission is such that in Kenya and especially in Kisumu it is mainly through heterosexual contact,<sup>77</sup> mother to child transmission and blood

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<sup>74</sup> Ministry of Health Kenya, 2000

<sup>75</sup> Report from Centre for Disease Control Kisumu 2001

<sup>76</sup> UNAIDS, Report on Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic 2000.

<sup>77</sup> See Sally Baden, and Heike Wach, *Gender, HIV/AIDS transmission and impacts: A review of issues and evidence*, (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 1998), p.7.

transfusion, whereas in the other parts of the world it is mainly through homosexual contact and intravenous drug use.<sup>78</sup>

### **3. 4. Family and HIV/AIDS**

The family stands at the frontline of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, because those infected by the virus are mostly living with families.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, HIV/AIDS can be considered a disease of the family. A family can be unaffected, affected or afflicted by HIV/AIDS; or both affected and afflicted and, according to report by Kenya Medical Research Institute most Kenyan's families have been touched by the spectre of the pandemic.

An unaffected family is one that has not had an ill member or had to care for one, or relatives of a dead one; an affected family is one whose lifestyle has been affected through illness or death of someone related to the family or through taking an extra member, for example, orphans due to their loss; and an afflicted family is one on whom HIV/AIDS has had a direct impact, for example, due to illness or death of a member.<sup>80</sup>

The presence of HIV/AIDS in a family has a multifaceted impact. The impact may be economical, psychological, social, physical and spiritual. This may result from such issues as disclosure of HIV status, orphanhood, stigmatization, social support or lack thereof, and financial problems.

In the 1980s HIV and AIDS was conceived more as an individual rather than a family or society's issue. Today its recognition as a family problem is evidenced by the declaration of 1994 World AIDS Day theme of "AIDS and the Family" and its effects in society as a

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<sup>78</sup> UNAIDS 2000

<sup>79</sup> H. Jackson, *AIDS in Africa: Continent in crisis*, (Zimbabwe: SAfAIDS, 2002), p.12.

<sup>80</sup> T. Barnett & P. Blaike, *AIDS in Africa: Its Present and Future Impact*, (London: Belhaven Press, 1992), p. 86.

whole. The extent to which families can mitigate the consequence of HIV/AIDS depends on the state of the households resources before, during and after the disease affects them. This sometimes prompts material relief and moral support furnished which are more viable alternatives during extreme crises. However, the impact of such relief assistance at the household level is not sustainable in and of itself. Over the long run, the household must continue with its internal resources. In addition, a resilient safety net requires community members who are willing and able to volunteer their time and resources. However, as many families slide into destitution, the community safety net is overwhelmed. Fewer people are able to avail themselves to share their resources within the community. This must be taken on board when help is offered. It must be realistic and may have to be long term.

### **3. 4. 1. Economical impact of HIV/AIDS on the family**

If the breadwinner gets ill from HIV/AIDS, the family's income is reduced dramatically, and the existing resources utilised in order to adapt to the effects of the sickness, or in caring for the person. Due to the protracted nature of the syndrome, a lengthy depletion of family resources may result. Thus, the family is caught in a double bind, whereby more resources are needed at the same time as these may be reduced.<sup>81</sup>

Regardless of who within the family falls sick, the impact of HIV/AIDS on the socio-economic status of the household is keenly felt. When AIDS-related illnesses arise within the family, employed household members are forced to take time off to nurse the sick members. Family income is threatened and savings are reduced to pay for medical expenses. Surviving family members will face a decrease in family income, particularly upon the death of the primary income-earner.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Whiteside and Sunter, *AIDS A Challenge for Southern Africa*, 2000, pp.89-91.

<sup>82</sup> See the survey of widows in Kisumu chapter five.

It has been realized in some sections that, infected adults occasionally break away from the family upon learning their diagnosis. This comes as regret and shame falls upon them. This, too, may result in a reduction of family income. As parents become ill and die, households are restructured, with an increasing number of children left to take care of themselves or to be cared for by aging grand parents or other relatives.<sup>83</sup>

As for the children of HIV infected parents, the impact is often profound. The children's basic and socialization needs are often inadequately met. Soon the children themselves become caregivers of the sick parents, rather than attending school and receiving care from their parents. Even when other members of the family are available to take care of the sick adults, children may be withdrawn from school as the family is unable to pay for school fees and uniforms. After the parents death, children are left without supervision and the money for school fees and often drop from school altogether.

#### **3. 4. 2. Emotional impact of HIV/AIDS on the family**

The clinical course of HIV/AIDS is uncertain and unpredictable, involving intermittent crises interspersed with periods of wellness. This may result in much emotional distress for the family, especially the children who sometimes have to be temporarily fostered, due to parent's hospitalisation. In some cases, normal parent-child roles are reversed as older children and adolescents assume responsibilities such as taking care of the ill parent, home and younger siblings.<sup>84</sup>

#### **3. 5. The Situations of HIV/AIDS In Kenya**

The number of infected individuals has increased from one case in 1984 to more than 2,200,000 by June 2000. The National AIDS and Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STD) Control Programme (NASCOP) estimated that by June 2000 for every 100 adults there

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<sup>83</sup> Silas Oyaro. "Church intervention in care giving to AIDS orphans in Western Lake Region", Unpublished BTh Honours Project, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2002.

<sup>84</sup> Oyaro, "Church intervention", 2002.

were 13 people living with HIV/AIDS. In urban areas it is estimated that 17 to 18 people are infected for every 100 adults while in rural areas the number estimated to be 12 to 13. However the actual number of HIV infected people is greater in the rural areas because there are more people living in rural areas than in urban areas.

### **3. 5. 1. AIDS Effect In Kenyan Society**

Families bear most of the social and economic consequences of the AIDS pandemic. Illness or loss of the main/sole breadwinner causes a decline in family income thus rendering the family poor and more at risk of HIV. A joint programme of UNDP and Kenyan Government has revealed that there is an estimated one million AIDS orphans in the country today and this may increase to over one million five hundred thousand by 2005.<sup>85</sup> Efforts to care for and support these orphans have resulted in an increase in the burden and stress on the extended family. Many grandparents have been left to care for young children and children as young as ten to twelve years head some families especially in urban slums.

Economically, AIDS poses a big threat. Absenteeism from work due to illness or sickness and time lost attending funerals or caring for the sick contributes to decline in production of goods and services while death of people in the productive age represents a big loss of human power.<sup>86</sup> For example a Nyanza based company lost eight thousand and seven labour days between 1995 and 1997 most of which were due to AIDS related illness.

Agriculture, the largest sector in Kenya's economy, accounts for a large portion of production and a majority of employment. AIDS has adverse effects on agriculture, including loss of labour supply and remittance income. A loss of agricultural labour is likely to cause farmers to switch to less labour intensive crops. That is to say, turning

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<sup>85</sup> UNDP/Kenyan Government initiative HIV/AIDS Project, 2002.

<sup>86</sup>See chapter 5. 6. Funerals and Burial ceremonies.

from export crops to food crops. Thus AIDS affects production of cash crops as well as food crops.<sup>87</sup>

The effects are evident in Nyanza Province where sugarcane is grown in large scale. In Nyanza, Sugar companies like Muhoroni, Miwani, Chemelil and Sony have been affected, as the workforce is perpetually decreasing due to sick leave and finally to AIDS deaths. Similarly out growers who are the feeders (suppliers) of sugarcane to these companies face the same loss. The medical expenditure on these employees is a loss to the whole economy.

Resources meant for developmental purposes have also been diverted to HIV/AIDS awareness creation and prevention work thus slowing down the expected pace of social and economic development.

By the end of year 2000, the total cost of AIDS to the country was estimated to be fifteen percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The rising cost of AIDS is extremely worrying for a low-income country such as Kenya having per capita income of only US\$ 330.<sup>88</sup>

According to Lori Bollinger, health care has also deteriorated as more of the country's health budget is being used on HIV/AIDS prevention and care activities. For example in the 2001/2002 budget the Government of Kenya allocated Kenya shillings 2 billion for purchase of condoms. The estimated direct cost of treating a new AIDS patient at Kenya shillings 34,680, while indirect costs (lost wages) amounts to Kenya shillings 538,560. This brings the estimated total cost of AIDS (direct and indirect) to over Kenya shillings 573,240 per patient. The direct cost of AIDS comprises cost of drugs, laboratory tests, radiology and hospital overhead costs while indirect cost encompasses the average productive life-years lost.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Lori Bollinger et al, *The Economic Impact of AIDS in Kenya*, (The Futures Group International: Research Triangle Institute, 1999), pp. 6-7.

<sup>88</sup> Whiteside and Sunter, *AIDS: A Challenge for South Africa*, p. 62.

HIV/AIDS has also caused a rise in demand for health services. This can be illustrated by looking at hospital bed occupancy. Although not all people with AIDS seek hospital care for those that do, the average length of stay is considerably longer than for most other diseases, perhaps as long as 60 days of total hospital stay. According to J.K. Torrens,

In 1992, as much as 15% of all hospital AIDS patients occupied beds in the country. In 1995 the rate rose to thirty percent while by 2000 about half of all hospital beds were required for AIDS patients.<sup>90</sup>

This leaves an insufficient number of beds for patients for all other illnesses.

Life expectancy has also gone down due to HIV/AIDS. According to a health and demographic study of 1998, a Kenyan born today may not reach his or her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday while those born after 2010 may not reach their 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

The country's ability to provide education has also been affected. About eighteen teachers die daily due to AIDS, which translates into 6750 teachers a year. The school drop out rate has also risen.

### **3. 5. 2. AIDS, Women and Kenya's Household Economy**

Many HIV seropositive women are marginalized in the community, at their workplace, in public gathering and sometimes denied access to social facilities. And they fall in deeper problem when their husbands die. They are often blamed for the deaths. And because of patriarchal cultures in some cases women are blamed for the unfaithfulness of their husbands, as the family say that they are incapable of gratifying their partners' sexual need. World Council of Churches concurs with this fact.<sup>91</sup>

Many men work in the formal labour market in urban areas, whereas the women, who form the majority of Kenya's rural population, represent the backbone of Kenya's

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<sup>89</sup> Bolinger et al., *The Economic Impact of AIDS in Kenya*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>90</sup> J. K. Torrens, "HIV and Tuberculosis in a Rural Hospital" in *Kenya East African Medical Journal*, vol. 77, no. 4, 2000, pp.185-188.

<sup>91</sup> World Council of Churches, *Living Letters: A Report of Visits to the Churches during the Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), p. 40.

smallholder agricultural and informal sectors. Cash remittances from the male household head and the earning from the woman working in farming and or the informal sector, often sustain families. In addition to her contribution within the labour market, the woman also maintain her role as nurturer and often bears the responsibility as the *de facto* house hold head in the rural home.

When the woman in a household dies, Family food security is threatened, particularly when the families depend primarily on women's labour for food production, animals tending, crop planting and harvesting. In fact studies in Africa have shown that children's nutritional status is more closely related to mothers work and income than that of the Father.

The illness and death of female will have a particular dramatic impact on the family, especially given that women provide the majority of labour and managerial services for small holdings in rural areas. Moreover if the women become ill while the husband is working in an urban area, the overall socialization and education of the children, may be seriously affected.<sup>92</sup>

### **3. 5. 3. Families living with HIV/AIDS and stigmatization**

Families, just like PLWA, are not exempt from being stigmatised and ostracised by their communities. HIV/AIDS is still commonly viewed as a punishment for “immoral” lifestyles such as promiscuity, homosexuality and drug use, and viewed with an often irrational fear of contagion.<sup>93</sup> Nation newspaper reported on the excommunication of partners, children and families by extended family, friends and, or by society at large.<sup>94</sup> Children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS have been reported to be discriminated against within the extended family, in church and at school due to the myths about how

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<sup>92</sup> S. Forsythe & B. Rau (eds.), *AIDS in Kenya: Socio-Economic Impact and Policy Implications*, US Agency for International Development, (U.S.A.: AIDSCAP/Family Health International, 1996), p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> UNAIDS, *Report on Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic* June 2000.

HIV/AIDS is transmitted. For example, some people believe that it is transmitted by sharing plates and cups and sharing a bed or a home with a person who is infected and this is why they marginalise people who are infected. Furthermore, people believe that children whose parents are ill or have died are a danger and could transmit the disease to others. Anecdotes of some teachers refusing to mark books of children living with HIV/AIDS and of teasing by other school children have been told. This has resulted in families cutting themselves off from social support networks, being silent about the illness of their relatives, or giving alternative explanations of the illness. Although this “conspiracy of silence” is understandable given the stigma that still surrounds HIV/AIDS, it can leave those affected without anyone with whom to share their feelings and fears and associating their loss with a sense of shame. Alternative explanations such as witchcraft are common, especially among African people.<sup>95</sup>

### 3. 6. Myths about HIV/AIDS

In every culture, rumours and myths exist about HIV/AIDS based on fear, denial, or misinformation. Common misconceptions can hamper people’s abilities to protect themselves from infection and may lead to increased stigma and prejudice against people with HIV/AIDS. It is important to note that, myth is a story accepted as true by the people who narrate it. In other words it is a synonym for error and fallacy. In our case it is fallacy about AIDS. Let us see some examples of myths:

- **There is no HIV/AIDS it is just a witch**

Many people in Kisumu and Nyanza at large believe that AIDS is a witch by people who envy the progress of the victims. This has become a blanket to cover up the reality of this pandemic. At times they change the matter to curse due to unfulfilled taboos of Luo traditions. These can be things like second born son moving out to build a home before the firstborn. Or a conflict between husband and wife that culminated in swearing which must be ritually undone. This is known in Luo *chira kata dhoch mimadhoe manyasi* and

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<sup>94</sup> Daily Nation 12/10/1999.

<sup>95</sup> UNAIDS 2000.

requires the sufferers to use some recommended herbs. These herbs are syrup and others are put in water for bathing. However AIDS is not a curse or taboo and is not an evil eye but rather it is a disease, which has been identified by medical scientists to be caused by the HI virus that must be treated realistically or face death. In connection to this point I need to say loudly that it has caused us the community much in Kisumu for giving deaf ear to the reality of AIDS. I can remember that the community lost a very instrumental person along with his two wives, because they adamantly denied their HIV status.<sup>96</sup>

- **HIV infected individuals without sign of illness will not infect their partners.**

It has been maintained by many people that people without symptoms of HIV positive cannot transmit the HI virus, however, the reality is that people who are HIV positive must be assumed to be infectious all times. Immediately after they are infected (window period)<sup>97</sup> that is between first day of infection and six months and later as they begin to fall ill, they are more infectious than usual because their viral load is higher.

- **You can get HIV from using an infected person's utensils or by touching and kissing, being close to an infected person.**

There are people who believe that HIV/AIDS can be transmitted through sharing a drinking glass with a person with AIDS, being coughed or sneezed on, or using a public toilet. This has resulted in people who are HIV positive being ostracized and rejected by others. From past research the public is more likely to stigmatize persons with AIDS to the extent that they believe that the virus is easily spread and that people with AIDS should be blamed for their illness.

Reality is that blood, semen, vaginal secretions or breast milk have to be involved for the HIV infection to occur. However, chances of infection from blood spilt in the absence of contact with other person's open wound are minimal. The virus can only survive for a

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<sup>96</sup> A case of a senior assistant chief and his two wives dying of AIDS related illnesses.

<sup>97</sup> During the early period of HIV infection, the antibodies to the virus what is usually test for may not be identifiable. This is called window period. An infected person will be very infectious this phase.

short period outside the human body. Though contact with blood should be avoided, as mentioned earlier on.

- **HIV/AIDS can be cured**

While many make claims of miraculous cures, the sad truth is that there is no cure for HIV/AIDS.<sup>98</sup> Although the medical advances have been spectacular, there is still no cure or proven vaccine for AIDS. What is known is that taking various combinations of drugs can reduce the virus to undetectable levels. It is important to note that this does not work for all people, for there are side effects and compliance is not easy. The virus develops resistance to some drugs in some people and it is obvious that when drugs are dropped the virus particles will rebound.<sup>99</sup>

- **HIV/AIDS is only for promiscuous people**

In fact, HIV can infect anyone, babies, women, and men of any age group. A risk behaviour can lead to infection in anyone. It is important to know that mode of transmission here is what determine how one catches the virus. There is therefore no need to look at every one who is infected as promiscuous.<sup>100</sup>

- **HIV/AIDS means death sentence**

This is the biggest myth of all. In fact people are living with HIV longer today than ever before. Medicines, treatment programs, and a better understanding of HIV allows those infected to live normal, healthy, productive lives. Therapies are available which reduce viral load. They definitely improve the quality of life of people living with AIDS.

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Equally, at this time a person may experience a short bout illness. This cause is a rapid multiplication of the virus and correspondingly rapid response from the body.

<sup>98</sup> Traditional healers have proclaimed the claim of cure to HIV/AIDS mostly in rural parts of Kenya prompting people who are desperate to run to them. There are other church leaders who claim miraculous healing to PLWA's. For example Woud Jakobo at Kajulu in Kisumu.

<sup>99</sup> A case with one of our family friend in Kenya and one woman whom I have known here in South Africa for the last two years.

- **HIV is a unique virus inflicted on humankind as punishment for the wicked.**

The reality is that HIV is like any virus except that it attacks the immune system itself. If only people would see there is nothing mysterious about HIV, we could remove the stigma surrounding it and combat it more openly and effectively.

- **HIV tests are not accurate.**

In this age they are extremely accurate, but for the window period when people have not yet developed antibodies tests could prove false negative. All HIV tests have an accuracy of over ninety nine percent. They produce very few false negative and false positives.<sup>101</sup>

- **One can be cured of AIDS if he sleeps with a virgin.**

This is a myth going round in most African countries. It is found in Kenya as well as South Africa. It shows how desperate the pandemic has made people feel. It has placed young girls to vulnerability or susceptibility, for they are the targets as therapeutic means to the infected men. This is placing our communities in a quagmire. It is at such a time we ask who will save us from this deadly monster?

### **3. 7. Conceptualization of Illness in Luo Culture**

This segment attempts to provide an overview of the Luo culture regarding its conceptions of illness and its implications to HIV/AIDS. It explores the conceptions of illness (including HIV/AIDS), its nature, cause and course in the Luo culture. In undertaking this task, the importance of being aware of, recognising and respecting the customs, value systems and ancestor belief systems within the Luo culture cannot be overemphasized. In this regard, Paul Mboya speaks of explanatory models, which are ways in which we all understand our illnesses, and these are considered important when

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<sup>100</sup> This is the belief which has been held by so many including church leaders and led to a theology of condemnation and judgement or punishment. It pushed the PLWA to the margin as they are stigmatised in all quarters.

<sup>101</sup> Whiteside and Sunter. *AIDS The challenge for South Africa*, (2000), pp.16-7

elucidating illness within Luo culture.<sup>102</sup> The paragraphs that follow will therefore look at the multiple etiological views of illness in Luo culture.

In African culture, ideas about the causation of illness are associated with a range of issues in the natural, social, personal, spiritual, and political realms. One essential traditional distinction made by Luo people about illnesses is on the basis of their causality. There are four areas seen as the causes of illness in Luo culture, namely: natural causes (biological and ecological), sorcery, pollution (mystical), and ancestor related. Sow, in explaining the causal mechanisms of illness in the traditional African world-view, distinguished three cosmic orders: the macro-cosmos, the meso-cosmos and the micro-cosmos.<sup>103</sup> Without a thorough knowledge of these three cosmic orders, the psychological as well as the social dimensions of HIV/AIDS in Africa cannot be fully understood. Let us see them below.

- **The macro-cosmos**

According to Sow, the macro-cosmos consists of ancestors and the spirits of the chosen dead. These are kind and concerned spirits who preserve the honour and traditions of a tribe, as well as protect their people against evil and destructive forces. However, if the people do not comply with the wishes of the ancestors, for example, regarding how certain rites and practices are to be performed, or by neglecting these, the ancestors may withdraw their protection, thus causing the people to be vulnerable to attacks by witches and sorcerers. Therefore, one way illness is explained in Luo culture is as ancestor-caused. However, there is no indication in the literature that HIV/AIDS is ever ascribed by traditional Africans to the wrath of ancestors.

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<sup>102</sup> Paul Mboya, *Luo Kitgi Gi Timbegi* (Nairobi: Equatorial Publishers, 1967), p. 57.

<sup>103</sup> I. Sow, *Anthropological structures of madness in Black Africa*, (New York: International Universities press, 1990), p. 89.

- **The meso-cosmos**

Sow argues that meso-cosmos is the universe that consists of evil spirits, witches and sorcerers. As a result nearly all forms of illness, disease, suffering, accidents and death are ascribed to this part of the cosmos.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, when people get ill, in their quest to understand illness, they ask questions such as, why me, why now, how has it happened, who or what produced it, what will make me better? Witchcraft occurs when witches, who are believed to have supernatural powers, commit evil deeds and cast spells with the help of mythical animals and supernatural creatures. On the other hand, sorcery occurs when sorcerers cause harm to people by misusing their natural ability or knowledge of medicine for non-healing purposes.<sup>105</sup> So, once again, illness is conceptualised as being caused by external factors and the index patient is seen as a victim of external forces.

- **The micro-cosmos**

This represents the daily practical, social and collective life of people in Africa. Although most illnesses are located in the macro and meso-cosmos, not all illnesses are believed to be caused by the ancestors or witches and sorcerers. Some illnesses are believed to be influenced by the micro-cosmos. Pollution, for example, ritual impurities usually associated with death, the reproductive system and the violation of sexual prohibitions, and germs are also believed to cause certain illnesses in the traditional African's life.

### **3. 8. Implications for HIV/AIDS in Luo cultures**

Due to HIV/AIDS being a relatively new disease, coupled to the fact that there is a lack of cross-culturally published empirical studies, especially relating to the Luo, it renders

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<sup>104</sup> I. Sow, *Anthropological structures of madness in Black Africa*, (New York: International Universities press, 1990), pp. 88-98.

<sup>105</sup> F. Kabasele Lumbala, *Celebrating Jesus in Africa: Liturgy & Inculturation*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), p. 20.

some limitations to the current discussion. This scarcity becomes problematic when one considers that Kenya is hardest hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, especially the region from which the sample comes, namely, Kisumu.

The researcher has been exposed to repeated anecdotes of witchcraft as a causal factor in HIV/AIDS transmission. Although witchcraft is believed to be the causal agent in HIV/AIDS transmission in many of Kenya's tribes, including the Luo, there is no indication in the literature that HIV/AIDS is attributed to ancestors. Though, when Luos talk about *chira* which is a disease similar in symptoms to full blown AIDS, takes it to be from the curse of the ancestors due to trespass on Luo traditions and rules that govern Luo society.

Ascribing HIV/AIDS infection to witchcraft or sorcery helps the bereaved family to avoid feeling stigmatized by their community as the cause is then not the individual's promiscuity, but something external. However, this has the effect of removing the responsibility and accountability from the individual. As a result, in the context of HIV/AIDS, responsible sexual behaviour may not be undertaken.

Attributing illness to external powers such as witchcraft and sorcery means that traditional healers are consulted to solve the problem. Therefore, collaborating with these healers by health workers is important. The combination of scientific fact with witchcraft has been advocated in various studies and HIV/AIDS programmes in order to take advantage of the various strands of medicine practiced by Kenya's diverse population.<sup>106</sup>

### **3. 9. Traditional African perceptions of sexuality**

The influence of the macro-cosmos in African society also applies to the African perceptions of sexuality. For the traditional African, sex not only serves as a biological,

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<sup>106</sup> The Researcher can mention an example of Professor Obel who has tried to bring into perspective traditional herbs, though he is professionally trained medical doctor. In his endeavour, produced "Pearl Omega" and other drugs to counter HIV/AIDS pandemic in Kenya.

micro-cosmic function but also serves as a symbol of immortality.<sup>107</sup> Through having children, the traditional African ensures that personal immortality is acquired. According to Mbiti, in traditional African thought, after physical death, a person continues to exist as the “living dead” for as long as he or she is personally remembered by relatives and friends who have survived and knew him or her when she was still alive.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, if an African man cannot have children with his wife, or has daughters only, he takes on another wife. Consequently, for an African woman, failure to bear children would be “worse than committing genocide” because she would be “forgotten” with nobody to keep her in a state of personal immortality.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, masculinity in African culture is closely linked to the number of women a man has, as well as the number of children. The African man’s wealth depends on the number of his children who play an important role in the day-to-day micro-cosmic existence, helping the men to work on the land of their ancestors .

### **3. 10. Cultural Implication**

The above discussion indicates that the Luo culture appears to have both positive and negative implications for HIV/AIDS. As far as illness is perceived as something beyond one’s control, for example, when it is located at the macro or meso-cosmos, the patient is absolved from responsibility and accountability. This has a negative impact on the fight against HIV/AIDS; on the other hand, traditional healers can be brought in, as experts in matters relating to the macro and meso-cosmos and impact on the micro cosmos, for example, by preventing germs through advocating condom use. This is further complicated by the perception of sexuality as a means to acquire personal immortality.

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<sup>107</sup> Lumbala, *Celebrating Jesus In Africa*, 1998, p. 20.

<sup>108</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Hinnemann, 1969), pp. 40-60.

<sup>109</sup> Mbiti, 1969, p. 29. From Mbiti’s argument we can deduce similarities of other diseases to HIV/AIDS that resulted in the stigmatisation and discrimination of those infected.

Although the above sections have focused on the traditional view of illness in Luo culture, culture is a wheel which keeps on rolling and therefore, the Western views of illness have achieved increasing acceptance by many Africans, including the Luo. Hence one can speak of a dual culture.

For example, many Luo women often insist on having children despite being HIV positive due to the stigma attached to not having children.

At the family level, the African perceptions of sexuality and the dominance of traditional values which discourage open discussion about issues such as sex, renders the use of condoms for HIV/AIDS prevention problematic, especially for women. Moreover, many embrace both traditional African and Western beliefs regarding illness. Accordingly we can say that, both rural and urban Luo, including the educated, uphold the traditional beliefs and practices regarding illness and in times of stress there is a tendency to revert to these traditional beliefs and practices.

### **3. 11. Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen that HIV/AIDS is infecting people indiscriminately, but comes with a big burden to families affected or inflicted. It ravages communities in Kenya and Kisumu in particular, leaving them helpless.

Clearly the nature of the virus, its routes of transmission and the ability of medical science to protect people against HIV or cure it, makes AIDS a unique health and social problem. We realised that HIV/AIDS pandemic affects households economically, socially and emotionally. These factors worsen especially in the households whose breadwinners are infected and consequently die. We also realised that AIDS was previously seen as individuals' problem but now it is familial, societal, national and global problem. It has expanded to affect nations and the whole world.

Unfortunately, AIDS widows and orphans struggle to fend for themselves while others suffer starvation, loss of dignity and stigma. The pandemic has also brought many myths, which of course have made counteractions and interventions difficult. Many young women and girls have become vulnerable as it is maintained that sleeping with a virgin cures AIDS. Since HIV is mostly transmitted through heterosexual means, it has touched a very sensitive part of African culture. For it is maintained that sex does not only serve

as a biological function, but also a sign of immortality as children reincarnates the ancestors and ancestresses.

Overall we realise that the grip of HIV/AIDS is greater on women than men, due to their status in the community. It is this masculinity and patriarchal culture, which place women to suffer loss that needs immediate address. This calls for egalitarian and humane society. Most people faced with problem as big as AIDS pandemic will impulsively ignore it and will refuse to accept that it might affect them personally in any way. As the church we do not have an option open to us and have to do whatever we can to help.

Given the situation of HIV/AIDS in Kisumu and how it affects the homes and families, it would be prudent to examine the biblical widowhood in order to relate with the situation of widows in Kisumu in the succeeding chapters. It is important for we will examine how God of the Bible dealt with widows who are mostly seen as vulnerable and poor in society. This will help us to critique and adopt a system which is humane to all in the society.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### BIBLE, WIDOWS AND CHRISTIANITY

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#### 4. 1. Introduction

This chapter examines experience of widows recorded in the Scriptures and the early period of Christianity. It seeks to establish the lifestyle of widows in different time periods, and therefore covers, socio-economic, socio-political and socio-religious aspects. Thus it seeks to reveal the support systems and conditions of widows. In that respect the Old and New Testaments mechanisms of care to widows are explored with a major emphasis on the way Jesus overrode the theology, tradition and practice of the day and brought about an alternative theology and practice of liberation, life giving and saving, which included all in the commonwealth and household of society and God. The Christology which prophesied against all evils and unjust orders which make women in general, and widows in particular, second class citizens is of great interest in this section. Areas like levirate union, kinsfolk redemption, and fields' gleanings by widows are highlighted. Advocacy and prophecy by the Old Testament prophets is also stressed as God used them to condemn unjust treatment of widows. It concludes with the early church's care of widows.

- **Definition**

In Merriam-Webster English dictionary, a widow is defined as, "a woman who has lost her husband by death and . . . has not remarried."<sup>110</sup> While G.R. Driver points out the Greek term translated widow (*chera* "bereft") conveys a sense of suffering, loss or being left alone, the term does not tell us how a woman became a widow and therefore the cause is not limited to a husband's death. On the same note another word for widow is qualified by the Greek term translated desolate, "having been left alone", which indicates that there is no one to rally round such a woman, and has similar implication as

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<sup>110</sup> Philip Babcock Gove (ed.), *Merriam-Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., (Springfield, Mass: Meriam-Webster, 1986), p. 830.

*Almattu*.<sup>111</sup> In this case it would be said the widow has no males responsible for supporting her.

It is also important to point out that Bible scholars have indicated that in the Bible personified cities could be described as widows (Is. 47:8-9, 54:4; Lam. 1:1) as explicated in Eerdmans Bible Dictionary this way,

Widowhood in these grounds was seen to metaphorically express the vassaldom of previously autonomous cities. The widowed city metaphor brings on an analogy between a wife bereft of her husband and geopolitical entity of its male citizenry abandoned by its male deity.<sup>112</sup>

Let us then, turn to the Bible.

## 4. 2. Old Testament Teaching

Studies by Thurston, Elwell, Cecil & Wigoder indicate that widows' maintenance and protection was not solely found in Bible, that is the Old Testament; rather they bring to attention the fact that it has been the tradition and policy of the Ancient Near East. In that way the Orientals saw it as the mandate of the community, gods, and kings to protect the widow and the orphan.<sup>113</sup> However, the Bible overwhelmingly discloses that the true, supreme provider and protector of these vulnerable groups is none other than the God of the Bible. The Bible sets God as the liberator and warrior leaning on the side of these disadvantaged groups. This argument is built on a perspective of human sinfulness, which makes humanity susceptible to injustice and failure to fulfil its obligation, while we find true justice and fulfilment in God.

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<sup>111</sup> G.R. Driver and J.C. Miles (eds.), *The Assyrian Laws*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 403.

<sup>112</sup> N.D. Freedman et al (eds.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), p. 1337.

<sup>113</sup> B.B. Thurston, "The Widows as the "Altar of God", *SBL Seminar Papers 24* (1985), p.279.

Similarly widows and orphans were an especial charge on the community's care and concern of God. Abuse of widows and orphans is a sure indication of a failing society (Ex. 22:7).

Discussion pertaining to widows in the Old Testament era refers largely to the question of remarriage. If a man died without children, his widow was obliged to marry her deceased husband's brother, and if the latter refused to take her to wife he was put to shame before the people (Deut. 25:5-10). However, the high-priest was forbidden to marry a widow (Lev. 21:14), but other members of the priesthood were free to take to wife the widow of another priest, but not the widow of a layman (Ezek. 44:22). Outside of these prescriptions, there is no law in the Old Testament restricting a widow's remarriage.

The support of widows was commended to the charity of the Israelites, and they were to have the gleanings of the cornfields, olive trees, and vineyards (Deut. 24:19-22). As mentioned in passing there above, it is important to highlight that the widow, the orphan and the alien are often mentioned in the same passages of Scripture. Hence we can assume that, when a husband died, the widow and her children lost their means of livelihood. It is also argued that if the husband owned property, it went to the eldest son, leaving the widow and daughters to the mercy of a benevolent son and brother. But if she had no sons, the widow still lost the property and could not gain use of it unless a near relative, the kinsfolk-redeemer, married her to give her rights again to the family land.<sup>114</sup>

The case of Ruth and Naomi sets a model as they became destitute because their husbands were dead. And that forced them to glean in the field for their survival. It was only when Boaz married Ruth, as a kinsfolk-redeemer, that they gained back their use of the family land and their dignity. So it can be realized that the alien was included in the group due to the status of helplessness and need of protection from the people of a given community. It also relates to the history of the Israelites as they journeyed from Egypt to

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<sup>114</sup> E.W. Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage" *VT* 31 (1981), pp.138-39.

Canaan, when they had nothing and needed mercy from the nations and people they passed through.

#### **4. 2. 1. Levirate union**

Due to widows' condition of being alone and helpless, the Bible discloses a unique and strategic way to care for them. It is here where levirate union comes in. The levirate is a widespread institution, which requires that a man becomes the husband of a deceased brother's widow.<sup>115</sup> In the biblical text this imposition is seemingly restricted to a situation in which both brothers reside in the same household and where the deceased has no son to succeed him. It is justified in terms of the need for him to have an heir so that "his name may not be blotted out of Israel" (Deut. 25:5). In this regard, the dead brother rather than the living biological parent becomes the acknowledged or "sociological father" of the child, especially in regard to the establishment of an official genealogical line. As mentioned above, we note that leviratic union was the ideal care for a young widow. However, where this cohabitation was not possible, a widow could stay either in the house of her parents (Gen. 38:11) or in-laws (Ruth 1:16). According to Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-6), the brother of the deceased husband could marry her. If he refused, he was shamed publicly and then the next male-of-kin was free to stand-in. Leviratic marriage from the point of view of the lineage involvement in the marriage system shows that the men of the lineage take full responsibility for the women they marry. There is subtle interaction between the lineage and each of its wives in the continuance and stability of their marriages.

- **An Example of Tamar**

Precisely we can notice a very vivid, though, audacious example of the levirate union of Tamar, whose chronicle is ingrained in the ancestor narratives of Genesis, and highlighted as the ancestress of much of the tribe of Judah and distinctively of the Davidic family.

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<sup>115</sup> Kirwen, *African Widows*, p.81.

Genesis 38 reveals the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar. After the death of Er, Judah's firstborn son, he gives Tamar his second son, Onan to perform duties of levirate as the law required (Deut. 25:5-10). As levir, he is to continue Er's lineage. In this way, Tamar would be assured a place in the family of Judah.<sup>116</sup>

However, Onan, in the course of having sex with Tamar, decides to withdraw before the climax, spilling his semen on the ground, refusing to father children for his deceased brother. This results in Onan's death as the Lord kills him because of his evil action, just like Er (Gen. 38:39).

From Onan's action it is apparent that he was selfish and had interest in seizing the firstborn's inheritance and so knows that, if he continues Er's lineage, he would lose it.

On the other hand, Judah is afraid to give Tamar his youngest son, Shelah, since two of his sons who had been engaged to her had died. He then tells Tamar: "Remain a widow in your father's house." His word is interpreted as directly opposite from other widows, because Tamar cannot remarry and must stay alone despite her sorrow of death. It also suggests that a childless widow should return to her natal home. It is apparent that Tamar is anticipating Shelah the youngest son to grow up and mate with her. But after some time has elapsed, she discovers that her father-in-law is not going to effect that union. She then goes it alone, that is, she devises a plan to secure her own future by tricking her father-in-law into having sex with her. She sees to it herself that an offspring be raised up for her dead husband. Dressing in disguise, she sits by the city gate, luring Judah, her father-in-law to have intercourse with her. Judah being a widower approached her, and in the negotiation, submitting to give a goat for her services. But since the goat is not at hand gave her his seal and staff, which is argued to be equivalent to contemporary credit card in pledge.<sup>117</sup> Absolutely, Tamar took a very nasty and dangerous step which could cost her both her life and honour. Yet she willed to procure her right by herself.

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<sup>116</sup> Davies., "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage", p. 138.

Interestingly, she becomes pregnant and her pregnancy can no longer be concealed, making Judah to seek to burn her as a prostitute. But Tamar in her subtlety has imagined this jeopardy. She sends his identifying pledge to him, urging him to ascertain that its owner is the father. Repentantly, Judah realizes what has transpired, he openly declares Tamar's innocence. "She is more in the right than I" (Gen. 38:26). His confession seems a dual acknowledgment of her innocence and Judah's wrongdoing of not releasing her or performing levirate. And extensively it can be related to say that the child is Judah's. That is to say that Judah has now performed levirate. Unambiguously, Tamar's place in the family and Judah's posterity is secured. She gives birth to twin boys, Perez and Zerah (Gen. 38:29-30).

From the story we learn the following lessons:

- Tamar was assertive and revolutionary in gaining her rights, yet loyal to the family of Judah. We find this loyalty displayed also in Ruth's life to her mother-in-law Naomi.
- Injustices embedded in an Individual's selfishness, extended family framework and androcentric cultures result in the domination and subjugation of women.
- Widows' accusation and condemnation by society they live in is partial and inhuman. This can be referred from the way Judah was sending Tamar away, thinking that she is cause of death of his two sons and judgement to be killed for becoming pregnant outside wedlock.
- Women are seen as accessories of men and are not recognised without them. That is to say, women's safety, economically and socially, depends on their husbands and children (especially male) who give them right to live and possess basic necessities of life. It is here we can pose the question which Mercy Oduyoye asks,

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<sup>117</sup> Carol Meyers et al (eds.), *Women in Scripture, Dictionary of Named and Unnamed women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrophal Deuteronomical Books, and the New Testament*, (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), p.161.

“Are widows human in their own beings, or cared for only in so far they perform the biological function of child bearing?”<sup>118</sup>

- The inconsistency in the culture of continuing the line of the deceased, something which occurs in Ruth’s story as well. When we examine the law of levirate union, the levir was not raising children for himself, but for the deceased brother or kin (Gen. 25:7). Yet, in cases of Tamar and Ruth, their children are given to levirs (surrogates) as their biological and sociological fathers, that is, Judah and Boaz respectively.<sup>119</sup> What puzzled me is the fact that their husband’s name did not appear as the father of these children. It is clearly indicated that Boaz was continuing the house of Mahlon and Judah the house of Er.

It is apparent that widows throughout ages encounter unjust treatment, as in Tamar’s case where we realise pain, sorrow and ejection from the deceased family or land. These facts put widows in a vulnerable situation and make them susceptible to a series of evils. It is due to such societal mistreatment of women that Oduyoye alludes,

Women’s subordination is accomplished and maintained by patterns of interpersonal interaction prescribed by culture and social structures. Hence such negative attitudes are institutionalised. Because male supremacy is institutional they do not need to invoke a plot to account for mistreatment of women.<sup>120</sup>

#### 4. 2. 2. Mosaic Law

The Law of Moses recorded in the OT has a clear call for just and equitable treatment of the powerless, the poor, the alien, the widow and the orphan. Besides legal prescriptions for the protection of widows, the Old Testament contains many general precepts

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<sup>118</sup> M.A. Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands, Reflection of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa*, (UK: Editions Clé and Regnum Africa, 2002), p.62.

<sup>119</sup> Ruth 4:9ff Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. “Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today.” ...

<sup>120</sup> Oduyoye, *Transforming Power: Women in the household of God*, 1997, p.111.

commending them to the reverence and benevolence of the chosen people and bitter denunciations of their oppressors and defrauders.

In (Ex 22:21-22), God forbids any advantage taken over widows or orphans, and declares that if they are exploited and they cry to God, God will certainly hear their cry and act on their behalf by punishing exploiters or oppressors. This shows that God defends these vulnerable groups.

According to Deuteronomy 10:17-19, God commands that love should be shown to widows. It is in this very passage of the Bible that God is depicted as God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes, who defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien by giving them food and clothing. In fact, this portion of scripture can be paralleled to what Jesus said in Mathew 25:31-40 about end times when people will ask him when he was thirsty, hungry and without shelter. The Bible, in one or the other way, tells us that God bestows mercy upon widows and orphans.

It is due to God's concern that God does not want to see the alien or the fatherless deprived of justice, and taking of the cloak of the widow as a pledge. God proceeds by saying, "when you are harvesting your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (Deut 24:17-19). While in 27:19, God spews curses on the oppressors of widows and other vulnerable groups. And says, "Cursed be he who withholds justice from the ... the ... widow."

#### **4. 2. 3. Psalms and Prophets**

In the Psalms, widows were God's concern (Ps. 68:5), while the Old Testament prophets frequently appealed to the nation's conscience on their behalf (Is. 1:23). The book of Psalms which is normally used as an instrument of worship through which the praises of God were sung, comprises songs of praise and whole range of petition including the cry

of the oppressed for vindication and justice. In this book it is noticeable that God is not just a provider and object of worship, but rather the judge.

This is vivid in Ps. 94:3-6, where the psalmist brings before God works of the wicked and their jubilation. "They crush God's people, and they oppress God's inheritance. They kill the widow and the alien and they murder the fatherless". We can then say that in such petition the widow, the alien and the fatherless look to the God as their refuge, hope and friend for deliverance from their adversaries.

We realise that widows underwent sufferings as they found themselves helpless and oppressed or deprived of what we call today basic human rights. This made them call upon God to arise and to intervene in their situation (Ps. 10: 12,13).

Precisely we see from their expression, a concept of God as the defender of the weak. The petitioners see themselves as objects of God's special attention and confidently expect God to support their cause. For we can note the sequence in (Ps. 146:5-9), which indicates that God watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but thwarts the ways of the wicked.

In the prophecies we find that prophets declare that religious observance divorced from justice to the widow and fatherless is offensive to God. This is a theme with a strong prophetic outcry against those who meticulously perform all the required sacrifices of the law and abdicate their moral obligation to seek justice. As noted in Isa. 1:11-17, "learn to do right! Seek justice and encourage the oppressed. Defend the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." While Amos 5:21-24 says, "I hate, despise your religious feasts... But let justice roll on like a river righteousness like a never failing stream". This notion is also found in the New Testament teachings, especially in the epistle of James.

Importantly, we notice that God throughout history did not leave widows out of God's plan of redeeming and consummating the work of creation. That is to say that we cannot demean how God used widows, for example the unnamed widow of Zarephath who gave an outstanding hallmark of hospitality when she gave shelter and food to Elijah, in spite of her extreme poverty. Thus God used her to save the life of the prophet to make the

history come to what it is today and will ever be (1Kgs 17:8ff). In relation to this study, what is important to note is that God used the assets at hand to liberate and enhance their wellbeing. It would be out of order and ill to limit a widow to petty hand-to-mouth handouts that cannot stabilize her and her household. (1 Kgs 17:9) "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."

In that respect, we can also highlight the widow of the prophet who was left in poverty and the creditor wanted to take her son a slave. We see how God intervened by using the little oil she had to save her from the hand of that merciless and unscrupulous man. Her little oil served the purpose and therefore indicates that God given abilities and resources are there to save widows in their ghettoised situation (2 Kgs. 4:1 ff.).

- **Implications**

As far as Old Testament is concerned we can note the following implications: The mosaic law provided security from exploitation and a social safety net to the widow, for example, gleaning during harvest time and benefiting from tithes. Meanwhile levirate marriage gave her the opportunity to continue utilizing the property of her deceased husband and also enabled her to integrate in the society. Unambiguously, the treatment of the widow, orphan and alien stood as the standard to judge the king and moral standard of the land. This is alluded to in Jer. 22:3-4 "do no violence to the ... widow... For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this place accompanied by their officials, and their people."

Conclusively, we can say that the law provided protection to the widow from exploitation from unscrupulous people and injustices, for God was on their side. God was their liberator and warrior in the time of oppression and this is likened to the condition of the Israelites in Egypt and their exodus in the wilderness. Thus reminding them of dispensing justice and assisting the widow in whatever condition.

### 4.3. New Testament Teaching

As the OT manifested a special care for widows, so too that very teaching is found in the New Testament. During this time, widows very often were without any means of material support, and were objects of charity. As in the Old Testament (Deut. 24:17-22), widows were thought of as vulnerable people who had to be looked after and treated fairly, and the rich had to make provision for them because they were so poor. This point is problematic, for, if there was levirate and other laws which God placed to cater for the poor in society, it should be unusual to see a widow as vulnerable and therefore in reference to that the problem of widows is human and specifically man made.<sup>121</sup> Widows formed a group that suffered financial paralysis because of social deprivation (Deut. 15:4).<sup>122</sup>

In reference to the Old Testament Jesus becomes the ideal Jew in the New Testament time. All that is tender and humane in the institutes of Moses shine forth in him with an added grace and loving kindness. Hence we find so many instances of his peculiar care for this class of helpless sufferers. For example, he calls back from the dead the only son of a widow; a poor widow besetting an unjust judge is his illustration of the prevailing force of prayer and he indignantly denounced those who devour widows' houses. However, it is inferred from many incidents in the sacred narrative that his own mother becomes a widow before the beginning of his public career, and thus personal knowledge of the-trials of such added to his feeling.

#### 4.3.1. The Status of Women in Jesus' time

In this section the researcher shifts his focus from widows to women in general to illustrate the condition which they were in. History of Israel declares that women were segregated from men both in synagogues and in the Jerusalem temple. Women had to remain behind a screen in the synagogue. They were not counted in the number ten which was the minimum required to hold a synagogue service. The Temple forecourt

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<sup>121</sup> The androcentric culture which suppresses women and does not recognise them.

<sup>122</sup> Amartya Sen, has argued that poverty is deprivation of capabilities and resources which enable one to live humanly. See, *Development as Freedom*, 1999.

was divided in two by a wall, the western half and the eastern half. The eastern half was called the women's forecourt, because women were also allowed access there and only male Israelites had access to the western half of the temple, which was the temple proper.<sup>123</sup> Women were of course allowed to participate in the Passover Seder meal, but forbidden from participating in the Passover Seder liturgy. Leonard Swidler says,

as Judaism developed, women became more segregated and among the morning prayers of orthodox Jews was this prayer, "I praise you, O Lord, that you have not made me a woman, a slave or an ignorant man".<sup>124</sup>

Given the background, suggests, when Mary presented Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:22-38), she would have had to let Joseph take Jesus into the court of Jews for the sacrifice. She could have entered as far as the Court of Gentiles, but they would have had to part at the Beautiful Gate.

Barbara MacHaffie states "the rabbinic literature regards women as socially and religiously inferior to men and sometimes even expresses contempt for them."<sup>125</sup> That is to say that segregation of men and women in society was thorough. Seemingly men were cautioned against speaking to women in public; a point evident from Jn 4:27, when Jesus' disciples marvelled that he was talking to a woman. It has been established that women's witness had no validity in law courts. By the time of Jesus, segregation of women had become harsher. They were forbidden to take part in a meal when someone was invited to the house. It is debated how far segregation of women had spread in Palestine. Only the upper class women could stay shut up in their houses, the rest would have to fetch water from the well, work in the fields and help their husbands with their business. Men were not to walk behind women and one of the six things rabbis considered unsuitable for one of their disciples was talking to a woman in a square. One occasion when women

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<sup>123</sup> See W.R.F. Browning, *Oxford Dictionary of the Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 397.

<sup>124</sup> See Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), p.155. See also Browning, *Oxford Dictionary of the Bible*, 1996.

<sup>125</sup> Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story, Women in Christian Tradition*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 9.

played a large part outdoors was at funerals. Only boys could go to school from the age of 5 or 6. Girls were not to be taught. It was generally considered bad to teach the Torah (Jewish law) to women. In fact the rabbi maintained that is better to burn the words of Torah than to let them be entrusted to a woman. Male children were preferred to female children. Unfortunately, the law states that a woman was ceremonially unclean for twice as long after the birth of a daughter than a son (Lev. 12:2-5).

However, there were a few exceptions: there is evidence that some women held the office of synagogue ruler in ancient Judaism and of priest in Roman religion, and had some role in business in the Roman world.

Despite the socialisation of that time, Luke portrays women as equal to men in dignity before God. The paralleling of events involving men and women shows this.

- Simeon praising God for seeing the baby Jesus (2:25-35), Anna praising God (2:36-38).

Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, and was very old. She was a widow, for her husband had died when they had been married only seven years. She was now eighty-four years old. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about Jesus to everyone who had been waiting for the promised King to come and deliver Jerusalem. (Lk. 2:36-38).

In the Old Testament some widows devoted themselves to a life of special religious observance, as is recorded of Anna the Prophetess, “who departed not from the temple by fastings and prayers serving night and day” (Lk. 2:37).

Curiously, Luke tells us that Anna never left the temple. There she prayed and fasted. That a pious woman could have lived in the women’s court of the temple, probably set a precedent the order of widows in the early church.

The continuation of pairing women and men in the Gospel according to Luke hints to us greater facts of equality which Apostle Paul later describes in Gal. 3:28.

- During his sermon in Nazareth, Jesus spoke about widows (4:25-26) and lepers (4:27).
- The healing of the centurion's slave (7:1-10) is followed by the raising of the widow's son (7:11-17).
- Jesus chose twelve apostles from his disciples (6:12-16) and women also accompanied Jesus (8:1-3).
- Jesus offered Jonah as a sign to his generation (11:30) and the Queen of the South (11:31).
- The Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven are paired; the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which a man took...(13:18-19) and like leaven which a woman took...(13:20-21).
- The healing of the woman on a Sabbath, bent double with a spirit of infirmity (13:10-17) is paired by the healing of the man with dropsy on a Sabbath (14:1-6).
- Two men in bed, one will be taken and the other left (17:34) and of two women grinding together, one will be taken and the other left (17:35).

The prominence of women in Luke's Gospel is clear from the beginning with two women playing enormously important roles in the history of salvation Mary and Elizabeth, as well as Anna roles which are described in such detail only by Lk. 1-2. In addition, it is also apparent that there is concern for widows in the Gospel; they are mentioned occasionally (2:37; 4:25-26; 7:12; 18:3; 20:47; 21:2). Mark (15:41) and Matthew (27:55) relate that women accompanied Jesus during his ministry but only Luke points out that they provided for him out of their own means (8:1-3). Martha and Mary received Jesus into their house and Mary sat at Jesus' feet, the position of a disciple (10:38-42).

#### **4. 3. 2. Jesus Disregards Taboos on Women**

Olivia Nassaka points out that taboos cover all quarters of life, from birth, and childhood, through marriage and death. In other words they filter through the existence of people and

their practices. So people live within the frame or cage of their societal control. Thus all are cautious in their daily activities not to go beyond the prescribed border.<sup>126</sup> Yet Jesus undermines rules which disregard others.

The cure of Peter's mother-in-law is recounted in Mt. 8:14-15; Mk. 1:29-31 and Lk. 4:38-39. After her cure she rose and served. Jesus freed women from customs that hindered them, by allowing Martha to serve him (Lk. 10:38-42). While it is possible that the Martha and Mary mentioned in Luke are the sisters of Lazarus and so the incident took place in Bethany (Jn. 11-12), there is nothing in the text to suggest this. Another interesting fact about that incident is that Mary sat at Jesus' feet (Lk. 10:39). This was the position of a disciple or a student. It must surely have been remarkable for Jesus to allow this, considering the fact that women were not supposed to be taught.

Allowing women to accompany him (Lk 8:1-3) was breaking down barriers on Jesus' part because it would have been scandalous for women to leave home and travel with a rabbi.

It would be of interest to bring to our attention some areas in which Jesus overlooks taboos about women, but to fully grasp them, it is necessary to know what is meant by being ritually unclean. The OT book of Leviticus contains various rules about clean and unclean. The concepts of clean and unclean for the Jews may be seen under four categories which you can read in the book of Leviticus.

- Food: Clean animals are those with a cloven hoof which chew the cud, otherwise they are unclean. (Lev. 11). If you ate unclean food you became unclean.
- Leprosy and skin diseases made one unclean (Lev. 13-14).
- Contact with a corpse made one unclean (Num. 19:11-19).

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<sup>126</sup> Olivia Nassaka, "Women and Taboo: A Case Study on Buganda in Uganda", in Musimbi RA. Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge (eds.), *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996), p.164.

- Sexual functions and bodily fluids also made a person unclean, man or woman (Lev. 15). For the purity laws concerning childbirth are found in Leviticus (12).

The duration of the impurity varied according to the cause. One remains unclean until one undergoes purification. As specified in Leviticus most purification or cleansing can be achieved by bathing. The point was that if unclean you were forbidden from taking part in worship, so therefore called ritually unclean. The concept of clean is somehow connected with the holy and uncleanness is somehow connected with the profane.

Now as we relate to some passages in Luke with new meaning as a result of our knowledge of clean and unclean. Jesus healed the woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years (Lk. 13:10-17). Not only did he do it on the Sabbath when work was forbidden but he also called her a “daughter of Abraham” (13:16). Elsewhere in the NT people are called sons of Abraham or children of Abraham but nowhere else is a woman called a daughter of Abraham. Jesus is making it clear that she is as good a participant in God’s covenant as a male. It should be noted that being bound by Satan would have made her ritually unclean. It is arguable that the crippled woman can represent all whose faith never wavers despite misfortune which befell them; although deformed she spent her Sabbaths in the synagogue.

The story of the raising of the little girl to life forms a sandwich around the story of the healing of the woman with the haemorrhage for twelve years (Lk. 8:40-56). According to Jewish law anyone who touched a corpse would be ritually unclean but nevertheless Jesus took the little girl by the hand. Concerning the haemorrhaging woman, Jesus would have been ritually unclean after being touched by her. But Jesus doesn’t observe the law and does not undergo purification.

#### **4. 3. 3. Devouring the widows’ houses.**

Mark chapter 12, tells us that Jesus sat opposite the place where the offering was placed and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. He noticed that the wealthy gave large amounts of money but a poor widow came and put in two very small

copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Jesus said to His disciples, “this poor widow has put more than all the others who have put into the treasury; for all they did put in of their abundance, but she of her want did put in all that she had, even all her living”(vv. 43-44).

This story has often been retold as an exemplum for stewardship campaign. But sensing the inappropriateness of interpreting the poor widow as a model of charity, Gerald West suggests that we can realise a lot if we employ critical tools especially in this passage. He draws attention to literary context of the passage, that is, socio-religious and surrounding verses if necessary for an establishment of solid meaning.<sup>127</sup> In this sense, we begin with 12:35-40 and then re-read vv. 41-44 in a broader context. Interestingly, we notice that careful readings of these verses reveal some linkages between the two passages. For example Jesus contends against the teaching and practices of the scribes. As we can see, one of the practices of the scribes which Jesus warns his disciples and the crowd to beware of is that they “devour widows’ houses” (verse 40). While in the following verse we notice people and the poor widow putting money in treasury. It is from this we can relate to the scribes that devour widows’ houses to the poor state of this widow. It is therefore significant to know that the widow was not simply a faithful giver, but a victim of the oppressive practices of the scribes.

Thus our focus is removed from the widow to the practices by which the scribes devour widows’ houses. It is now clear that her poverty is as a result of an oppressive system and this makes her giving more remarkable. Apart from the portrayal of the widow’s selfless giving, Mark wants us to realise the connection between the practices of the scribes and this woman’s poverty.

It is interesting that Jesus leaves the temple and then curses it (13:1,2). It would be of good understanding to see the movement of Jesus. For he entered the temple in (11:11) and briefly leaves temple. The next day he comes and enters the temple (11:15) then drives out sellers and buyers in the temple, overturning the tables of money changers and

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<sup>127</sup> Gerald West, “Karios”, in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 108 (November 2000), p. 64.

seats of dove sellers. Jesus then accuses the temple leadership of turning it to den of robbers and yet the temple is purposely for prayer.

The above section results in anger and threat by the temple leadership to kill Jesus which did not occur due to support he garnered from the crowd. These are the people who are victims to teaching and practices of the scribes and priests.

However, our interest is on the widow who gave her money. Interestingly, we can now note that Jesus, after revealing the ills and teachings of the scribes, sits to watch for the victims or people who fall into the snare of these unscrupulous religious leaders. It is then, that this poor widow comes and Jesus points her out to his disciples, who seem slow in learning. The widow, then, serves as a visual aid to what Jesus has taught in the previous verses.

From the background, as they walk out of the temple his disciples have a high regard for that beautiful building, but Jesus condemns it for he sees an institution of corruption and oppression. It is within this context that Jesus predicts the fall or destruction of the temple (13:2); God will not tolerate an abomination.

From this story we can have some implications:

Widows in many African cultures fall prey to losing all that they had acquired with their husbands in the name of rituals and ceremonies which are performed before and after burial. Instead of widows being protected, they are left vulnerable to any eventuality. It also brings to our attention that there are some traditions which need to be discarded as Jesus prophesied against and condemned the temple (institution) that harbours corrupt administrators.

The Christological analysis shows that, structures, theology and tradition did not limit Jesus Christ. He departed from the Mosaic Law as we saw above, in order to affirm the equality of rights and even roles of men and women with regard to many areas. We can realise that Jesus liberated widows from the burden and suffering of being a woman by his actions and teaching.

#### 4. 4. Widows in the early church

The early Christian church was conspicuous because “there was not a needy individual among them” (Acts 4:34), and one of its first benevolent works involved the widows. We can see that biblically, no poverty was expected in Israel, had everyone obeyed the Lord, who said: “However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, the Lord will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today” (Deut. 15:4-6). Perhaps the church manifested this by obeying the Lord. For we are reminded that believers were called Christians due to the life they demonstrated.

In the apostolic Church the widows were sustained at the public expense, the relief being daily administered in kind, under the superintendence of officers appointed for this special purpose. Originally widows were simply the worthy recipients of charity from the churches. They had to be known for their righteous lives and to be completely without resources. They were enrolled or registered throughout the early centuries of the church history as eligible for donations along with orphans and strangers. We realize this at the church at Jerusalem.

Due to its rapid numerical growth "there arose a murmuring of the Grecians<sup>128</sup> against the Hebrews<sup>129</sup>, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" (Acts 6:1). Apparently the Hellenistic widows in the church did not receive the same care as those from Palestine. Perhaps that was because the Hellenistic people were not a part of the original Jewish community. Whatever the reason, the apostles gathered the believers together and asked them to find "seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" to care for the Hellenistic widows (v. 3). Honesty was necessary since they

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<sup>128</sup> "Grecians" (also called Hellenists) refers to Jewish people who had been dispersed or scattered outside of Palestine. Hellenists came to Jerusalem for holidays, and some even moved to Palestine to live. Perhaps those referred to in Acts 6 were residents of the city, or stayed in homes with other Christian families, or were housed at various inns.

<sup>129</sup> Hebrews refers to Jewish people living in Palestine

would be handling money and food; wisdom and the Spirit's control were necessary to evaluate each widow's need with sensitivity. It is argued that all widows were economically disadvantaged and dependent upon charity of others for their well-being within the Greco-Roman world. However, some widows were economically self-sufficient through the return of their dowries, the inheritance of property and wealth from their husbands or their own economic activities. But the chapter puts Hellenist widows among the needy of the community. It is evident that the church at Jerusalem established a system to provide for the needs of those widows who had no support. In later decades a corps of widows was established in many churches.

A similar trend was evident at the city of Joppa where we find a kind and gracious believer named Tabitha also called Dorcas, who ministered to the needs of widows (Acts 9: 36-40). Dorcas had apparently used her own resources to make clothing for a number of destitute widows. What is significant is that this woman though a widow worked by herself using her skills, resources and capacity to survive and also to assist or provide for the poor in her community. We can note that even widows when empowered are capable of making a positive contribution to society and the church where they are located.

By the time Paul wrote 1 Timothy in the mid-sixties, provision was made for a definite order of widows. For Paul discusses the relief of the widows (1 Tim. 5: 3-16). From the tone of the letter, it seems over the time certain abuses had arisen. One of these was that relatives of widows were not assuming their own responsibility toward their widows but rather were pushing the matter of support onto the church.<sup>130</sup>

Paul gives Timothy admonitions as to how to rectify this problem. Here are his words: "Honour widows who are real widows". If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents, for this is acceptable in the sight of God. A special group of older widows was formed. The church supported these women, noted for good deeds. She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and

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<sup>130</sup> C.C. Ryrie, *The Role of women in the Church*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p.82.

prayers night and day,<sup>131</sup> whereas she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command this, so that they may be without reproach. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (5:5-8).

The harshness of these words reflect how important this issue was in the early church and in principle, how important it should be to the modern day church.

However, those who were listed on rolls for help dedicated themselves to a life of prayer, never marrying, and helping others in need. In order to qualify for these services the women had to fulfil at least five qualifications.

They were to be real widows that is to say they had no family to help them. If they had children or grandchildren they had the responsibility to take care of the older members of the family, especially the widows who had no other means of support. This established the principle that it is really up to the family to take care of all its members, as far as this is possible. If the need went beyond the family's ability to help, the church would then assume that remaining responsibility.

She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. This indicates that widows who were to be supported by the church were to give themselves to a spiritual ministry. They were to keep busy during these declining years of their life. They were not to utilize the time to entertain themselves, but they were to have a spiritual ministry. This can also be seen in Titus 2:3-5, as older women taught younger women in the congregation to handle their houses.

The church did not only support the widows but by the second century they were elevated to the status of a clerical order. That order was the most prominent group of women in the first three centuries of the church. The widows, as a recognized group were referred to by all the church fathers and were mentioned in all the major Church orders as Barbara MacHaffie reinforces,

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<sup>131</sup> We can see the picture of Anna the prophetess appealing here.

However, widows also began appearing in many places as members of a special order to which they were appointed. To qualify a woman had to be over sixty and married only once. She was obligated to live a life of complete chastity. Her main task was that of prayer for the whole church and for her benefactors. Behind this task was the ancient belief God heard the prayers of the widowed and oppressed. The widow was thought to be particularly effective in praying for the sick and she was sometimes encouraged to lay hands on the sick. Frequent fasting became an additional obligation accompanying prayer in some places. The widow exercised no liturgical ministry, although in some literature her function involved the teaching of younger women were new in the Christian faith.<sup>132</sup>

The implication is that, widows of repute in the early church were a highly respected group of women who played a vibrant active role in the church. They played an active role in the spiritual community ministering to the needs of others mainly through prayer. That is not to negate the acts of service they performed within the community such as ministering to the sick, doing good deeds, and teaching the younger women to be good wives and mothers. Many valuable lessons can be learned from these women and the principles God established to provide for their needs. We also need to recognize the spiritual ministry that these older women can have in our churches today. Many times the elderly are overlooked due to their age, and we forget the talents and resources they have available to them, mainly time, that could help in the building a stronger church community.

#### **4. 4. 1. Widows in Patristic literature**

The church fathers after the apostolic age, wrote some literature, which women theologians have demonstrated concern on some matters which deal with women especially how they are perceived by the church fathers. It is argued that throughout the centuries, the Church's theology of womanhood has been characterized by blame, a trait that made it easy to shame and tame women. This theology of 'blame' says that women are responsible for the fall of humanity and are, therefore, evil, inferior, unequal, and

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<sup>132</sup> Barbara MacHaffie, *Her Story, Women In Christian Tradition*, (Fortress, Philadelphia: 1986), p. 31.

unclean. This unbiblical and inhuman thinking must be reread, re-interpreted and rooted out, not merely covered over by convenient modifications.

For example, Thomas Aquinas believed that a woman does not possess the image of God in the same way that a man does, and therefore, is spiritually inferior. He also believed that woman is both biologically and intellectually inferior to man. Such a belief and teaching about women is worrying for they are gender biased and discriminative. In fact, those persuasions led the church of that era and made women to be subjugated and dominated.

However, it is noted that despite the negative views the church fathers had about women, they dealt positively with the problem of widows in the church. It is noted that some of the bishops stood with the widows and exemplified outstanding examples to the church. For example, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria and even Tertullian supported the honouring of the widows. In this way widows were supplied with subsistence and served God. The outstanding model was realized when Cyprian provided for the widows from his own portion, he said "be diligent to take care of the widows, the sick, and all the poor. Moreover, you may supply from my own portion".<sup>133</sup> Tertullian held to the teaching in (1Tim 5), which insisted that enlisting of widows in church order should be 60 years and above. On that note Ignatius says, "I salute...the virgins who are called widows."<sup>134</sup> There are many things which came from them for example John Chrysostom who wrote a lot dealing with the young widows.

In contrast to the Catholic teaching in the Reformed churches women were not denounced as seducers and corrupters. That is, in the Lutheran and Calvinist literature they were not treated with scorn and derision. MacHaffie contributes to this point thus,

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<sup>133</sup> Quoted in D.W. Bercot (ed.), *A Dictionary of early Christian beliefs: A reference guide to more than 700 topics discussed by the early Church Fathers*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p.491.

<sup>134</sup> Bercot (ed.), *A Dictionary of early Christian belief*, 1998, p. 683.

Calvin objected to the vulgar expression that women were “a necessary evil” while Luther took stand against those who “despised the female.” Men and women had the same potential for sin and the same opportunity for redemption.<sup>135</sup>

It is apparent that some difference were created though realising that culture also played some role in moulding the thoughts as surrounding is all about there were some ambiguities in their practice. Yet both Luther and Calvin express the idea of ministry and church organization that could have been used to support the full participation of women and men in the new Reformed congregations. Here too MacHaffie says,

Luther, for example, confidently asserted the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. By this he meant that all Christians had the responsibility of carrying out certain priestly duties.<sup>136</sup>

In all these works it is still held that women did not serve as ordained clergy in the Lutheran and Calvinist churches. Yet they conducted a whole range of activities that supported and spread the ideals of Luther and Calvin.

#### **4. 4. 2. Widows in the African Church**

It is agreed that the principal purpose of the church as a mission is to spread the Good News to the world (Mt. 28:16-20, Lk. 4: 16-19). However, the movement of the church cross-culturally seemed particularly exclusivist. That is exclusion of the reached culture to influence the faith and life of the people reached. The Africans were considered to be *tabula rasa* empty slates that were expected to memorize and absorb everything from missionary teaching and preaching. The missionaries did not appreciate and recognise African presuppositions, philosophy, theology and culture. For the missionaries, the conversion of the Africans meant a complete repudiation of their religious heritage and total acceptance of the missionary interpretation of Christian faith in accordance to these missionaries Christian tradition. Most of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries identified Christianity with Western culture. This was far outstretched to doubt the possibility of non-western’s capability to understand Christian faith. That therefore reinforced deletion

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<sup>135</sup> MacHaffie, *Her Story*, 1986, p. 63.

<sup>136</sup> MacHaffie, *Her Story*, 1986, p. 65.

of the indigenous culture to create room for appreciation of Christian faith. Concisely, we can say that mission was equated to westernisation. And thus Christianity was inseparable from European cultural imperialism and colonialism.<sup>137</sup>

When the missionaries introduced Christianity to Kenya, they effected changes in culture and traditions of the people. For example rituals and ceremonies linked to death, burial, initiation, marriage, polygamy and levirate union.

It is maintained that one of the most pressing problem in the African Christian church is the constant confrontation between African marriage customs and the Christian marriage customs taught and enforced by Western missionaries.

Many cultures in Kenya practise leviratic marriage or widow guardianship, for example, the Kalenjin, Luo, and Kikuyu. The African leviratic custom arose in the context of certain presuppositions about the nature of marriage institutions. This was strange to westerners due to the fact that they did not share these presuppositions; hence they had no comparable custom. Due to lack of understanding of all these, the church, through their Western missionaries, rejected the widow guardianship as a practice which was incompatible with the Christian way of life. They declared it an unlawful type of sexual union, and interpreted it as another type of polygamy, sanctioning all Christians who participate in it.<sup>138</sup>

That is to say, widows in mainline churches were confronted with cultural problems and were disillusioned. Sadly, the Western missionaries did not substantiate their claim and did not elaborate the significance of their stand from the Bible. As a result many schisms occurred in the mainline churches. This among other reasons brought about African Independent churches, where women have liberty and play significant role. These churches for example Church of Christ in Africa accommodates widows who cohabit in

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<sup>137</sup> See Kwesi Dickson, *Uncomplete Mission: Christianity and Exclusion*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), pp.3, 124,52.

<sup>138</sup> Michael Kirwen. *African Widows*, 1979 p.11.

levirate union.<sup>139</sup> They partake in all events of the church, worship and sacraments. In this way their spiritual, social and emotional well-being is catered for. They are neither condemned as sinners nor rejected by the church and society.<sup>140</sup>

However, the researcher does not justify the practice of widow guardianship as good and should continue. The fact is that the church needs to articulate African theology that suite its people and that does not go against God's justice.

Kirwen argued that,

Western missionaries are often so narrowed by their mass culture that they are hardly aware of the bigger and infinitely more complex world surrounding them; consequently they are closed to being influenced by it. On the other hand it has been argued that the charm of the African to so many western people is that they feel immediately accepted by the Africans as human beings and treated as such: an acceptance that is often interpreted as due to childish and unsophisticated nature of the Africans rather than their deep understanding of the human condition and their openness to novelty.<sup>141</sup>

In essence the church succeeded in establishing a European image of widowhood in Africa and especially Kenya. Though people normally say that the church brought liberation to the African woman, it is very hard to hold some tangible and concrete examples.

On the other hand it is maintained that the benefit of levirate marriage if properly administered is as follows: It ensures proper economic and psychological security of a woman, helps to eliminate bearing of bastard children in the family, encourages continuity of the family line and ensures integration of all the family line. It assumes that

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<sup>139</sup> Church of Christ in Africa split from Anglican Church of Kenya in early 1960's and claimed polygamous families including the levirate united families as genuine members and partakers in all fellowships and rituals. It is founded by bishop Mathews Ajuoga and the late bishop Meshack Owira, both Luos.

<sup>140</sup> It has been found that people live longer and better lives when they are accorded spiritual and emotional care. And this is what is practiced in AICs.

<sup>141</sup> Kirwen, *African Widows*, p.50.

the widow is an agent<sup>142</sup> not merely an object. She can bring complaint to court and perform legally binding ritual acts.

#### **4. 5. Conclusion**

I must admit that this chapter is really difficult to untangle in this era of HIV/AIDS. The chapter has brought to our attention some of the complexities and troubles which widows go through. It highlighted the widows as vulnerable persons who live on charity and favour of other people. Apparently most of them lost they dignity and property upon the death of their husbands and their children at times were sold to slavery due to poverty and injustice.

In the patriarchal culture of the Israelites where levirate union was placed as a safety net to the widow, it turned into subjugation of the widows. We saw pictures of Tamar, Ruth and Naomi who fell in the trap of that strong patriarchal system.

It is notable that God used the prophets to fight for the widows and condemned the injustices directed to them. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus displayed an extraordinary model of integrating the alienated widows, the marginalized and the outcasts. He removed the norms and traditions which were subjecting widows and women in general to objects of slavery and dehumanisation. He demonstrated love and compassion to them and declared them equal to men. That meant that they have rights to live free from the law that kills.

Therefore it is significant to note that patriarchy is man made and reflects his selfishness. God on the other hand opposes all forms of dehumanisation, and that puts patriarchy in the line of injustice against women. We can then relate to how God responded to the plight of women, marginalized and the poor and conclude that anything that does not equally benefit all people in the society is sin and should not be condoned.

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In the early church we realised that the church was still real to the teaching and practise of Christ. But later the church got trapped in a secular treatment of women and widows. We also saw that although the tenor of the Christian gospel is in favour of a true evaluation of women according Gal. 3:28, the church has been slow and reluctant to incorporate it into its institutions and rituals. That is the challenge that the church must act on, probably by repenting from status quo.

Some of the questions which the researcher is asking are: if the widows have to wait until they reach 60 years to be helped by the church, what about the current upsurge of widows who are below 30? Is the church going to wait? Again with the African Independent Churches which accepted widow inheritance, how do they go along with AIDS widows? Are they part of the problem which widows go through?

The chapter has given us an understanding that widows throughout the past ages have been subject of dehumanisation, neglect and discrimination. Given the background we will link it to the situation of widow in Kisumu. It was also noted that there were some widows who used their resources no matter how little to run their houses and even to extend the benefits to the wider community.

In the next chapter we will examine the life of widows in Kisumu through interviews to hear their voices on what they go through, so that we can think of appropriate strategies that should be put in place to enhance their wellbeing.

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<sup>142</sup> It can be seen that the tradition maintains that women are agents in the progressive work of creation and not just objects. That indicates that women are equal partners and participants in any given area. However, it was somehow obscure.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SURVEY OF AIDS WIDOWS IN KISUMU

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#### **5. 1. Introduction**

In the preceding chapter we examined widows' life in the Bible and Christianity. It was very evident that God and Jesus Christ demonstrated compassion and deliberate defence upon them. Having seen that, this chapter attempts to look honestly at the phenomena of AIDS widows as they unfold. It brings out the voices of widows and key players in the fight and intervention in HIV/AIDS programmes in Kisumu who participated in the study. General livelihood is looked at. Research findings and data analysis are discussed.

The work of collecting data started by a short investigation in Kisumu, the sampling area to get to know what has been done or what is being done with regards to HIV/AIDS in the location. Supportive people were contacted and informed of the research project. An attempt was also made to contact key people such as religious and civil leaders, and other opinion leaders in the area of operation. A letter from the director of Theology and Development in the School of Theology, university of Natal played a big role in this introductory part of the study. The data collection was conducted as follows:

#### **5. 2. Methodology**

The study employed a variety of methods: participant observation, workshops, individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Although the combination of different methods was an integral part of the research design, we will examine them systematically.

- **Participation observation**

Throughout the study the researcher had an ongoing commitment to participant observation. Particular details of the social dynamics of the scene were supplemented with intense two months researcher's bond with the people involved. The researcher is part of this community and serves as an insider in this study. However, realising that this

research is difficult to handle. He resorted to personal observation, so as to gain acceptance in the affected households, churches and the villages in order to record less obvious but important information about HIV/AIDS management in the area. By walking around in the villages and visiting with the affected families, some critical information about the households, practices and worldview were noted and are presented in this report. To verify certain issues that were observed, these were brought up for discussion during the workshops.

- **Workshop**

Through the assistance of the Superintendent of Kisumu District Hospital, workshops were organised in two places for grass-roots community workers and selected villagers. In attendance were village elders, assistant chiefs, church leaders, widows and community health workers. To facilitate active discussion and to provide new ideas, the discussion topics were presented in question form as follows:

- How can we involve the whole community in assisting widows gain their dignity?
- How can widows be empowered to take the major role in running their own lives and households?
- What are the various Luo community strengths that can help manage the care for the widows' interventions?
- What are the major community weaknesses that may hinder the smooth running of the intervention? And how can we deal with them?
- What resources are available in the rural areas that can be used to manage such an intervention?
- What are the possible community difficulties that may be encountered by the intervention?
- Which customary laws and norms can be used with government laws in protecting the needs of widows?

## **Interviews**

The subsequent part of the data collection process involved personal interviews with local authorities. These included interviews with NGOs staffers, selected officials from the Ministries of Education, Health, and Social Services; Churches; community workers in the location. These groups were interviewed on their activities to alleviate the impact of HIV/AIDS, what they thought was lacking in their programmes which could be supplemented by community-based intervention. They were also interviewed on what their association could contribute to the initiation of and support for interventions.

Personal interviews with widows themselves and terminally ill men in their homes and hospitals were conducted to learn how people living with HIV were coping with their headship roles during the last days of their lives. Others included AIDS workers in the area, medical personnel, and counsellors. An effort was made to talk to every person or group involved in any aspect of HIV/AIDS prevention in the community. It was necessary to have all such individuals involved because their support for interventions would be crucial.

- **Interview Setting.**

In this study the researcher went for consented places where the interviewees could open up and honestly relay their conditions. This was enabled by having consensus with the interviewees on the setting in which the interviews were to take place. Relaxed and favourable venues were provided for the interviews where widows felt free to open up and be honest.

The researcher had already established relationship with the interviewees, as he is known and familiar with them as an Africa Inland Church minister. Having served this location of study for nine years as a minister he knew most of the people. This worked out as a jump off point to the success of data collection. However, the researcher took keen attention not giving room to any assumption, as it is very crucial to obtain valid data. Though it is important to note that his familiarity eased bond and quick cultivation of confidence and relationship with people concerned.

Normally, once confidence is established with interviewees it becomes easy to work together without suspicion and concealment of matters which are investigated. Interestingly, this opens them up to go further than the questions asked. Actually, it made the study easy and tensionless, removing an anxiety of finding the study difficult as a male church minister conducting it amongst female respondents.

As it is maintained that interviewees have the right to refuse to be interviewed, the researcher appreciated and thanked all interviewees at the beginning of every interview.

The study questions were open ended to guide interviewees to tell their story as they express their emotion and experience. This provided a detailed data for the study in their own words and brought a lot of insight in the discussion of their own experiences.

They were interviewed following the below questions, though it is important to note that sometimes these questions were changed to suit particular interviewee as it happened that other questions were combined in one response.

- 1) Their names, duration of their marriage, duration of illness?
- 2) Their experiences during husbands' illness?
- 3) New experiences after demise of their husbands?
- 4) The cause of these new experiences?
- 5) Capacity, skills, assets and resources they have?
- 6) What they have been doing to help them survive?
- 7) What they can do best for their survival?
- 8) How the community, extended family respond to their situations?
- 9) How they relate to members of the church?
- 10) What is the current church reaction to the general situation of widows?
- 11) Their thought on what the church could/would do to help in alleviating their problems?

The above questions were aimed at mapping widows' strengths so that any intervention taken by the church/community and government would not see them as problems, clients, or consumers, but as people who are able to shape their destiny. In other words widows

come in as participant, decision makers and contributors in their own and community's wellbeing. They were meant to assess the kind of assets which they possess including their skills and physical and emotional health. They were also designed to locate areas of strengths and weaknesses in dealing with cases of widows especially on the church, family and entire community.

These would pave ways of dealing with these particular associations and individuals for the betterment and good nurture to the widows and even their children.

- **Community meetings**

The Researcher also participated in a couple of community meetings such as religious congregations and chiefs' barazas<sup>143</sup> to address the villagers on HIV/AIDS and widows issues, and to collect information for the research wherever this was possible. It was at such meetings where the Researcher heard the community members talk about what they were going through and how they were responding to the problems as individuals, households and as a community. During such meetings, the Researcher learnt how the villagers discussed the issue amongst themselves.

- **Focus Group Discussions**

A total of four focus group discussions was conducted. In these forums, we discussed existing ideas about survival of widows in rural areas given the poverty situation, fear and uncertainty amongst the villagers. Cultural practices of widow's caregiving were discussed to further the researcher's understanding of how these may prevent, inhibit or discourage a relative from taking care of a widow. The main objective of the group discussions was to provide a forum for the affected groups to discuss in more detail what affects them and to explore ideas for support groups, and interventions. Convenient areas in the location of study were selected for the focus group discussions. In each of the area,

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<sup>143</sup> Chiefs' barazas are meetings which chiefs, elders and members of the location hold forum to disseminate Provincial Administration's and the National Government's plans and also discuss matters of particular. At times educational materials are delivered as expertise of diverse fields utilize them as channels to reach people in the grass root. Occasionally, people who breach constitutional or customary laws are censured.

there was one group for widows and another group for key leaders. The leaders' groups mainly discussed the various traditions, customs and norms in the Luo community that govern widow caregiving in the event of the death of a husband. Possibilities for income generation activities were also explored to assist economically poor women.

### 5.3. The Study Area

As indicated in chapter one the study was conducted in Kisumu district in Nyanza province. Nyanza is an administrative province in western Kenya with a total population of 3.5 million.<sup>144</sup> A mid-year medical report of 600 patients at the antenatal clinic (ANC) from the Ministry of Health, Kisumu District Hospital indicates that a total of 34.3% of mothers who visited the clinic were HIV positive. HIV prevalence is uniformly distributed amongst all types of homes.

This is realised in table 1 below that shows details of reported cases of the epidemic amongst women in the antenatal clinic (ANC).

Table 1 Distribution of Patients by Marital Status<sup>145</sup>

Status	Number tested	Percentage HIV positive
Single	118	32.2
Monogamous	330	35.7
Polygamous	150	33.3

It is accepted that Nyanza province has the highest number of HIV infections in the country. The province is divided into ten administrative districts of which Kisumu is the

<sup>144</sup> Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2001.

<sup>145</sup> Source: NACP Sentinel Surveillance Summary Sheet, Kisumu District Hospital - 2002, Analysis of ANC Patients

most affected district with the highest levels of HIV prevalence and HIV/AIDS related mortality.

- **Sampling Population**

Purposive and convenience sampling methods were applied. The researcher chose this model because it results in more diversified array of responses. It also affords a more extended basis for systematic research on the situation in hand and contributes to interpretations grounded in the experience, of the experimental data on the effects of the situation. Realising the kind of subject being handled and time span, it was just this model which was favourable and efficient in this case. The researcher approached the widows who in turn identified others of their community. And as mentioned earlier that wide array was needed and the researcher went ahead identifying other widows in local congregations. The below-mentioned two conferences became fruitful occasions of encountering widows with diverse backgrounds.

A total of 80 people participated in the study with a total of 40 widowed women. From Kisumu district, 80 (100%) households from four locations were strategically selected as the home location for the Researcher, such that all households identified with widows were included in the study.

The initial intention was to cover the neighbouring areas while working from outside inward. But given the distance to be covered, weather conditions and limited time and resources, only a few places were covered. This brought about the inclusion of a few respondents from the neighbouring areas such as Kibuye and Manyatta in Kisumu. In any case the sampled households display a typical pattern of the spread of widows in the region.

The researcher delights to mention that the study embraced a bigger area than the initial plan. This was due to two conferences which he got involved in, one as an interpreter and the other as a consultant in matters dealing with church and development. These conferences took place in different venues, these are: Africa Inland Church Ogada for two weeks and the Catholic Church Ojolla for four days. These two conferences brought

church leaders and lay people from all over Nyanza and Western provinces. It is important to highlight that the conference at Ojolla was mainly for widows and also coincided with the centennial celebration of Hill mission since it came to Kisumu.

Table 2 Distribution of Sample Population by area (N = 80)

Kisumu	Frequency	Percentage
Kanyawegi	20	25%
Korando	25	31%
Kapuonja	15	19%
Kolwa	20	25%
Total	80	100%

The widows who participated in this study had the age range from 20 to 55 years old.

Table 3. Age range of widows

Age (years)	Frequency	Percent
20-30	13	31.5 %
31-40	13	31.5 %
41-50	9	25%
51-55	5	12%

Table 4. Indicates how widows interviewed earn their living that is through formal, self-employment or small businesses, while others are neither employed nor have small businesses. From the table below we can interpret that over half of the widows were / are displaced economically. For if they are not working or running any businesses it is obvious that they have to undergo a lot of struggle especially in contemporary age where everything has become monetary.

Table 4. Widows' status of earning living

Status	No employed	Percentage
Formal employment	7	17.5%
Self employed/Small businesses	9	22.5%
Unemployed	24	60%
Total	40	100%

The age of widows interviewed ranges from 22-55 years. Their educational status ranged from Primary School to University. Over 50% of widows interviewed were unemployed, 17% were employed and 22% were running small businesses.

The researcher discovered that most of these widows over 60% are living below poverty line, with just about 15% able to cope with the struggles of life effectively. Property ownership is another factor that varied from one to another. In other parts property was identified with men that results in squabbles between widows and the relatives after the demise of their husbands.

Table 5. Summarizes the educational standard of widows interviewed.

Level of education	No of women	Percentage
University	3	7.5%
College	4	10%
Secondary School	10	25%
Primary School	23	57.5%
Total	40	100%

## 5. 4. Study Findings

### 5. 4. 1. Widows' Marginalization, Discrimination and gender violence

Marginalization is treatment of person or persons as unimportant.<sup>146</sup> Stereotyping and blackmailing that leads to discrimination and unequal treatment accompany it. Discrimination is the silence, exclusion and isolation that limit the people's ability to provide the care and services needed by widows. As important research questions were posed in investigating the experiences of AIDS widows, it was crystallized that widows are discriminated against and marginalized. The observation reminded the researcher of what Daisy Nwachuku in her words said,

Although the widow is perceived as someone to be pitied, sympathized with, and helped, she suffers emotional and spiritual violence. The widow is perceived as taboo to living husbands and other males. She is subject of hopelessness, neglect, contempt, suspicion about her treachery, or lack of good care. She is perceived as threatening to other couples' relationships and suspected of adulterous living. The result is that a widow is usually a neglected and deserted lonely woman.<sup>147</sup>

As Nwachuku noted it became evident that the problem of HIV/AIDS in any society where it is not understood brings with it a big baggage to those it affects. In response to question no 1., the duration of marriage and duration of illness is relatively short. But the experiences are varied, torturing and depleting. Over 80% of the widows said:

We enjoyed our first years of marriage; we were loved and accepted by the family of our husbands. When our husbands fell sick, we were neglected and accused as the cause of their illness.<sup>148</sup>

What could be seen is that these families held women as the cause or transmitters of the pandemic, instead of helping them to find the true cause and appropriate treatment and care. This of course added another concern and anxiety to them. For instance when they

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<sup>146</sup> Cambridge International Dictionary of English, Cambridge low prize edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 865.

<sup>147</sup> Daisy N. Nwachuku, "The Christian Widow in African Culture", in Oduyoye, MA and Musimbi RA Kanyoro (eds.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 61.

<sup>148</sup> Focus Group 1, interviewed by Silas Oyaro 23 July 2003 Kisumu.

were narrating their past condition which still is very memorable to them, others were shedding tears and sobbing.

When queried how they handled the days of the spouses' illness, they responded,

In our experience in care giving to our husbands, we had to divide our time for attending to survival earning work or activities and our care giving work at home and hospital at times.<sup>149</sup>

They continued to say,

Due to consistent misses at work, we earned very bad reputation in our workplaces that other colleagues saw us as burdens. While some of us we lost many of our customers for they could not find us at appointed time.<sup>150</sup>

It means that these women had to find ways of dealing with their daily needs in the family and as well take full care of their sick spouses. Apparently these women had hard time in their families and at the same time at their work place. These burdens were loaded on their shoulders yet even apart from the sickness of their husbands, their children were also anticipating attention from them.

Similarly widows who were running small businesses and subsistence farmers said this:

There are some cases that those of us within the family had to rotate our times for schedules and decking to giving care, sacrificing some of the hours to earn more income, thereby limiting our income earning capacity and thus depleting some of the resources for the entire family.<sup>151</sup>

What was related to the above was that some of these women ended up borrowing money thinking that their husbands would recover and find some way of paying back. Some ended up selling their meagre properties or they had to pawn their valuables and ended up with nothing because they no longer had the means to earn to pay off the pawned property.

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<sup>149</sup> Focus Group 1, interviewed by Silas Oyaró 23 July 2003 in Kisumu.

<sup>150</sup> Focus group 1, interviewed by Silas Oyaró 23 July 2003 in Kisumu. These are the employed and business managing widows.

<sup>151</sup> Business widows, interviewed by Silas Oyaró 25 July 2003 in Kolwa.

In response to question number 2., on their new experiences after the death of their husbands, it was noticed that cultural attitudes concerning the family and sexuality were prominent in the narratives of widows. This answer was given by significant number of the widows' majority in Kisumu. That is the reality of their lives after the demise of their husbands they had these to say:

Shortly after the death of our husbands, our in-laws grabbed our farms and equipments, livestock, household goods, and clothing. The in-laws insisted that we be "cleansed" by having sex with *jakowiny* a social outcast, as a condition of staying in our homes. Others went as far as hiring herdsmen to have sex with us, against our will and without a condom.<sup>152</sup>

This was a very critical point in the study and the researcher went further by asking how they responded or reacted to such phenomena. They said,

We sought help from the local elders and chiefs, who did nothing. Our in-laws forced us out of home, and our children and us became homeless no longer able to afford school fees, most of our children dropped out of school.<sup>153</sup>

This is clear sexual harassment and domestic violence to this group of women for they are vulnerable and had nowhere to find protection and vindication.<sup>154</sup> Gender violence is all pervasive in Kenyan society but the problem is that it is not brought to light. Clearly, the Kenyan society is facing an enormous crisis regarding the prevalence of sexual violence. But the most unfortunate thing now is that sex cannot be excluded from HIV/AIDS crisis because they coexist. Oduyoye alludes to it this way; "The traditional African rites of passage carry within themselves some kind of subtle violence which are prevalent during special occasions, for example weddings and funerals".<sup>155</sup> What she

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<sup>152</sup> Widows in four focus groups, interviewed by Silas Oyaro 27 -30 July in Kisumu.

<sup>153</sup> Group of widows in POTE club, interviewed by Silas Oyaro 26 July 2003 in New Nyanza General Hospital in Kisumu. The club act us support group in time of need.

<sup>154</sup> Isabel A. Phiri, "Domestic Violence in Christian Homes: A Durban Case Study", in *Journal of Constructive Theology* vol. 6, No. 2, (December 2000), pp. 85-110.

Beverly, Hadad, "Gender Violence and HIV/AIDS: A Deadly Silence in the Church", in *Journal for Theology in Southern Africa*, (November 114), pp.93-106.

<sup>155</sup> Oduyoye, *Transforming Power: Women in the Household of God*, p.111.

means is that, mostly, women undergo these demeaning practises in the community for they are seen as no people and subordinate.

When asked question No 4., the cause/s of these experiences they said:

Many of our in-laws are interested in plundering the spoils of the deceased, ignoring our children and us as the genuine heirs/heirresses of those properties. We too are contributors in the acquisition of the plundered wealth. And because they see us as threat and hindrance to enjoy those wealth, they adopt a violence strategy in the name of culture and tradition of widow cleansing and widow inheritance. Formerly these traditions were not employed in the manner they are advocated today.<sup>156</sup>

One of the widows shared her predicament as a sequence of deaths in her household, which created bitter relationship between her and her in-laws.

I don't have any child of my own. I lost my three babies in infancy and then my husband died also. My brother-in-law inherited me but he also died two years later before we could have any child. I lived a miserable life after the death of my second husband. Everybody in my in-law's extended family did not want to associate with me. They all called me a devil woman and claimed that I am carrying some bad blood that should not be buried in their home lest it bring a curse to the whole household. My in-laws therefore sent me away.<sup>157</sup>

A similar case is evidenced in the case of one of the widows who was ejected from her marital home. This is one of the most sad and heartbreaking experiences where a widow from Kolwa had to leave the family and struggle with life in the slums of Kisumu, Manyatta.

I was thrown out of my home when my husband died because I had only given birth to girls. Until my husband's death in 2002, we lived in a house on my husband's homestead. We were able to grow potatoes, sorghum, maize, rice and vegetables

When my husband died, his relatives came and took everything. They told me to take my clothes in *juala* a paper bag and leave. I left, because if I had resisted they would have beaten me up. The relatives identified someone to inherit me. It was a

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<sup>156</sup> The Voice of 90% of widows interviewed by Silas Oyaro 6-11 August 2003 in Kisumu.

<sup>157</sup> Key informant 1., interviewed by Silas Oyaro 10 August 2003 in Kisumu.

cousin of my husband. They told me, 'now you are of less value, so we will give you to anyone available to inherit you.' I did not say anything. I just left and went to my parents' home. This is customary. If I had married the cousin, I could have lived where I was. I decided not to because I know if a woman is inherited the one who inherits her normally mistreats her.

Had I sons instead of daughters, they would have allotted land to me. As they sent me away, they said daughters would marry and leave the homestead. They said I wasted their brother's strength by bearing just girls. They then took everything. *Ne gi riemba ka gouk* They chased me away like a dog. I was voiceless.<sup>158</sup>

Nwachuku noted that "the Christian woman in the contemporary world is culturally and socially endangered species" why would she say this since humanity is totally interconnected? She argues that, "her plight is compounded by a transitional society's tenacious hold to traditional norms while it grapples with the social changes of intruding foreign cultures".<sup>159</sup> From the informant's response we realise dehumanising effects and how Luo society's patriarchal system makes norms and sex roles dictated by dominant male sex. And women are expected to adhere to them, as it is known that social cohesiveness is perpetuated by strict adherence to social roles. These have placed women in awkward situations of rejection and ostracism in any case of rejection to the prescribed roles by their male counterparts.

There is a growing concern among women for being blamed for the death of their husbands. Many young Luo women whose husbands die are frequently encouraged to remarry within the extended family regardless of what caused the death of their spouses. When such husbands subsequently die, lack of adequate knowledge about HIV transmission encourages negative rumours associating the death with the widow's witchcraft.<sup>160</sup> They are thus branded "husband killers", mistreated and encouraged to leave their marital homes. It is clear from above narrations that in-laws expect widows to undergo a traditional ritual involving sexual intercourse with inheritors, but they refused. And this made the in-laws angry, resulting to widows' harassment and ejection. With a

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<sup>158</sup> Key Informant 2., interviewed by Silas Oyaro 28 July 2003 in Manyatta Kisumu.

<sup>159</sup> Nwachuku, "The Christian Widow in African Culture", p.61.

lot of fear the widows left their homes and went to safety places including their parents homes.

Antonia, a widow from Kanyawegi said that when her husband died of AIDS in 2000 she was left HIV-positive with five children. Her life dramatically changed from being relatively middle class to destitute after her husband's family took her property. Her in-laws grabbed household items from her town home and took over a rural home, land, and livestock even though she contributed to property acquisition. Her father-in-law called *buch okwaro* a family meeting, told her to choose an in-law as an inheritor, and ordered her to be cleansed by having sex with a professional cleanser, which women has nicknamed 'terrorist' because the Luo word is *tero*. She openly refused, and fled when in-laws threatened her.<sup>161</sup> She now struggles to meet her children's basic needs. Within this experience we see that question No 8., is being answered how the extended families respond to situation of widows in this region.

When asked question No 7., how they survive, they said that they have small businesses which are keeping them though not adequately for their daily needs as life is just too high. Others who are not suspended, or expelled from their marital homes, continue to utilize their land and other assets, for example raising of traditional chicken for sale and subsistence. But the employed are depending on their wages and supplementing with subsistence farming. It is here where the researcher realised that these women have a lot of potential for among them are experienced farmers, School teachers, administrators and businesswomen. They narrated how they have been struggling with life and realized that they have shown amazing resilience, capacity for suffering, and resourcefulness against the odds. This is evident in that even at times of crises, they held their nerves and did not give in to their circumstances. In fact most of them said that God always stood with them. In the profiles we realise how these women have demonstrated their demeanour.

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<sup>160</sup> The problem of accusing widows as the killers or source of their husbands' death is widespread nearly all over Africa. They are associated to witches and ejected out of the family and community.

<sup>161</sup> Antonia, interviewed by Silas Oyaró on 20 July 2003 in Kisumu.

#### 5. 4. 2. The Widows' Mobility/ Movements

A number of widows move to new localities to live with natal families on the death of their husbands. Others simply run away in an effort to find a more suitable living arrangement for themselves. During focus group discussions, the women discussed the feelings brought about by moving to live outside their marital families. During those discussions the researcher noticed change of mood as sorrow, sadness and inner pain engulfed them. Others could not afford to hide their tears. These gestures meant a lot especially, given the realization that they are no longer in their houses, which they used to live in, and even their properties confiscated.

In the course of the study the researcher realized that Kisumu had a major migratory pull on AIDS widows. In this study the researcher mainly interviewed widows, and so he cannot make direct comparisons with other people's reasons for migration to Kisumu. However, there is, a significant move that supports the view that migration to Kisumu by widows is significantly greater than for other sections of the population. Anyway care must be taken in equating widowhood to this mobility; the findings do support the view that migration, especially to urban areas, is a key factor accounting for the population distribution of widows. Various reasons can be suggested for this, including the opportunity for more social contact with other people and relative anonymity of the big town for a stigmatised population.

When asked how they feel far from their marital homes and how they survive, they responded as follows,

Some friends know that we are widows back at home everybody knows. We thought to ourselves that we could be free to do some business here in Kisumu. It is a lot harder to come out back at home, we do not know how to describe it, but with us who are known that our husbands died of AIDS related illnesses *tuo maduong*, it is a lot more difficult. They would not understand, they do not know that we need to live like any other women in the society. It is a lot better here.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Migrant widows, interviewed by Silas Oyaro 25 July 2003 in Kibuye, Kisumu.

As with the widows responded above, distance from family had become important for them. Since they were out of stigma and could perform duties to earn their daily bread.

#### **5. 4. 3. Church relationships**

The study also found that there was strong evidence of societal stigma and isolation from friends, particularly social avoidance. A further pressure was the stigma from the religious sectors, associating AIDS with death and damnation which was reported as being particularly hurtful.

When the respondents were asked whether they had any positive experiences with bereavement, some mentioned that they developed useful survival mechanisms to help ease suffering and pain, while others claimed they depended on the strength and support provided by their friends, working colleagues and the church. It was noticed that positive experiences fall into two categories of development of coping mechanisms and social support. For instance friends who were very supportive and understanding were about 25%, those who were able to cope with stress better were 25% and finally those who were able to cope with the reality of death about 44%.

They had this to say,

I have reached a spiritual plane that I never thought was obtainable. I actually know, beyond doubt, there are ways of communicating, other than the physical. And probably the best experiences I have had are with people from work, how accepting they were and how understanding they have been.<sup>163</sup>

And from another respondent:

The compassion, the unconditional love, support through friends and working with people who have AIDS, is the most beautiful and important thing in our life so far. Our lives seem to blossom.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Nominated Councillor, interviewed by Silas Oyaró 8 August 2003 in Kisumu County Council.

<sup>164</sup> Team of Medical Workers, interviewed by Silas Oyaró 16 August 2003 in New Nyanza Provincial Hospital, Kisumu.

Respondents emphasized support received by friends and the church, and continually praised professional help provided and support networks set up to help them. They could still tell of goodness and love.

I have got friends whenever I need them, who help to the best of their ability; I have been amazed at just how much supportive everybody has been.<sup>165</sup>

Raphael says something to what these widows are experiencing because sooner or later grief would work itself out and bereaved persons will eventually stop grieving and observe death in a more positive and objective light. This can be seen in the way friends; support groups, the church and professionals help to lift the weight and burden of grief off the bereaved. In this regard, AIDS bereavement would appear little different from other bereavements.<sup>166</sup>

#### 5. 4. 4. Psychological and emotional stress

Respondents described a barrage of varied and often conflicting emotional states, when asked to describe how bereavement had affected their lives. Although most of them had accepted the death, 25% were still confronted with problems socially, physically and emotionally. They described intense feelings of isolation or disconnection, which were connected to theme of loneliness, sadness and confusion, 44%. This is probably due to their inability to express their feelings and their thoughts to their families and at times to their friends. Most social support was gained from friends, 44%. Only four individuals nominated family as the source of support. It was realised that most of the widows did not prepare well for bereavement or loss of their husbands. In some cases, it was the unreality of losing a husband early in life. AIDS related bereavement is very real in the account of young widows as narrated below.

We had, had trouble with anger, a lot of feelings are caused because we feel lonely, shut off and when we do start to express our thoughts we are often made by others to feel self-indulgent. We guess the things that have affected us are sadness, and depression and at times wonder when it will all be over. We feel

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<sup>165</sup> Agness Agness, interviewed by Silas Oyaro 2 August 2003 in Kolwa Kisumu.

<sup>166</sup> See B. Raphael. *When Disaster Strikes: How Individuals and Communities Cope with Catastrophe*. (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 34.

incredible sense of loss that we cannot seem to replace with any positive feelings. We are so lonely we really find it hard to believe it is so final.<sup>167</sup>

As discussed above and in chapter three, this table reveals that most of the widows were overwhelmingly traumatized by the death of their spouses. It is important to note that the trauma is not only caused by death of their husbands, but also by the additional worry of how to take care of their children and sometimes rejection by their in-laws.

Another woman said,

After my husband died after ten years of marriage, I was devastated. I wish someone from the church expressed care, understanding, or support. But instead people avoided me. No one called or came to pray with me. After meeting with Pastor, I realized even he had no clue how much pain I was in. I rarely go to church any more. It hurts too much.<sup>168</sup>

We can see that the church did not realise the importance of drawing close to these widows and even made them bitter and hurting. They saw that nobody is concerned and could not see the relevance of church in their life. It is a problem which quite often occur due to fear of associating with women who are subjected to stigma in society. This can also come because of lack of knowledge, how much support and care has been given to the bereaved.

Table 6. Table shows the emotional effects by widows upon the death of their husbands.

Effect	No widows	Percentage
Stressed	10	25%
Bleak future	10	25%
Fear and anxiety	4	10%
Felt rejected and useless	5	12.5%
Psychological trauma	13	32.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>167</sup> Group of young widows, interviewed by Silas Oyaro 3 August 2003 in Kisumu.

<sup>168</sup> Key Informant 4, interviewed by Silas Oyaro 7 August in Kapuonja.

It is important to note that the above table just gives a clue of the great effect of the loneliness and rejection of widows in Kisumu which can also occur else where in the world. On the other hand we should realise the figures and percentages were arrived at as the researcher worked out the responses of different widows with similar problems. It may seem problematic, but there is flexibility on percentages as they are not dogma pattern. The main thing is that widows who were interviewed demonstrated signs of despondency.

Precisely we can see that women process pain differently than men. Women need to talk about it, to get it out in an affirming environment before receiving direction. Empathetic listening skills are critical. Understanding is essential. In some ways, women desperately need the comfort only other women can give.

Achieng' another respondent, was just beginning to move from shock to anger after her husband died. Fortunately, Aluoka who is one of the women's leaders identified with her and spontaneously connected with Achieng' for assistance. She was able to bring her back to understanding, and comforted her during painful and tough months.

Actually the church ought to be a place where people understand the depths of pain, where they are vulnerable enough to comfort others with the comfort they received from the Holy Spirit our comforter. While there may be more kinds of pain than we can ever have shepherds for, those who lend support from an empathetic heart are changing the lives of the women in our church.

#### **5. 4. 5. Workshops and Community meetings**

In the workshops and community meetings it became evident that the upsurge growth of widows is not only limited to the location of study. People in attendance narrated how they have seen and heard of great increment of deaths all over. This made them to rethink how to address the problem of death in general and its repercussions in the family and entire community. Interestingly, even the church leaders were prompted to rethink and innovate new ways of dealing with the great problem of widowhood which is rampant in

many local congregations. In answering the question on how the whole community can assist in regaining widows' dignity, they said:

The most powerful tool we can employ is love and acceptance, for these widows have been with us since they got married to our sons and brothers. This problem also faces our daughters and sisters, for even they lose their husbands. Others are well cared for by their in-laws while others face great sufferings. There is no way we can allow arrogance to continue like this. The government also has realised the importance of women and now the law protects them.<sup>169</sup>

Then the researcher asked how the widows can be empowered to run their lives and households.

They all said that the only way is to give them the freedom to use the land and their possessions without interference from the extended family and clan. But if there is a widow who does not have land or any possession or any other things she is doing to earn some income then the community, the church and entire family should lift her hand to enable her to stand.<sup>170</sup>

When asked about resources available in the locality that can help in the intervention programmes, they said:

From sundry time we had widows and they ate and lived like anybody else in society. Likewise the current widows who of course have been mistreated by us due to 'ill will' and ignorance will live and survive. In fact today we have a lot of things here. For example lake, schools, dispensaries and market all these can be used to at least see them eat with their children. We know that many of them are educated and that is a resource which none can deny one to use<sup>171</sup>

They were pin pointing the above things because medical and NGOs staff had challenged them that they are very fortunate to be in that location yet they under utilise the available resources. This made the researcher to realize that there is the possibility of mobilizing others and even leveraging more resources to empower widows and their community.

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<sup>169</sup> Workshop at Korando A., interviewed by Silas Oyaro in Kisumu, 26 July 2003.

<sup>170</sup> Workshop Korando B., interviewed by Silas Oyaro 29 July 2003 in Kisumu.

<sup>171</sup> Workshop Korando B., 29 July 2003.

The Medical officials and NGOs staffers indicated interest in helping in availing their services to AIDS widows and their children. They reiterated that opportunistic illness can be treated and managed and that is the area they would intervene. Apart from that they would assist in counselling and join hands with the church to put up counselling centres in local areas to decentralise service. They indicated that as far as the church leaders are willing they can leverage medicine and other required support.

There could be seen that Chiefs and their Assistants felt that they had not responded well to the plight of widows, since many widows appealed to them for help but they turned a deaf ear. There was some kind of remorse amongst participants in these workshops, which of course was a good sign to change of worldview.

When asked how they conceive HIV/AIDS and if people who have no signs or symptoms can be positive and spread this disease, many responded as shown on the table below.

Proportion of people who correctly reject the two most common local misconceptions about AIDS transmission or prevention, and who know that a healthy looking person can transmit AIDS

Table 7 Shows people who know that one can have AIDS without signs and spread it.

Year	Area	Age group	Female	Male
2003	Kisumu	25-30	39.2%	10%
		31-35	44.3%	5%
		46-55	44.0%	7%
		20-24	49.1%	8%

Realising the result, it immediately rang in the researcher's mind why widows are forced to be inherited for the misconception is fully rooted in the mind of male residents of Kisumu and therefore deny that it is possible to have AIDS without showing any sign. It was a big shock to the Medical officers who were present and realized the urgent need of educating people on facts about HIV/AIDS.

#### 5. 4. 6. Conferences

Turning to the conferences at Africa Inland church Ogada and Catholic Ojolla respectively, the researcher had a series of dialogues with leaders of the church to hear how they go about handling AIDS widows in their congregations and community. These turned to be very interesting, as other leaders did not think that it is the church's duty to initiate programmes and even to get involved in the widows' home and private affairs.

However, there were others who had made radical resolutions in helping widows spiritually, emotionally and materially whenever necessary and possible. This was very evident mostly in the Catholic Church, which has formed widows' groups. These groups serve as linking points and support groups.

The Catholic church of Kenya has tried to implement the suggestion which Shishanya laid as one of the ways the church can help curb the problem of infecting and re-infecting widows through male guardianship which is practiced both by the Luo and Abhaluhya of Kenya.<sup>172</sup> These are evidenced in the way it assists in giving homes to widows who are ejected from their properties. And also leads in erecting buildings to widows in the widows' own land as its leaders stand with them.

It is important to note, that although the church has been very efficient in other development activities, it has been sluggish in dealing with matters pertaining to AIDS widows and therefore contributed to stigma and ostracism. Similarly Isabel Phiri quoted Daisy Nwachuku's work this way,

Unfortunately modernisation and Christianity has not done much for the African widow. At the end of the day it is African women who must bring to the attention of the world their spiritual, emotional, and physical suffering.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Shishanya, "The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Women in Kenya", p. 63.

<sup>173</sup> Isabel A. Phiri, "The case of African women theologians in the 1990s" in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (November 1997) 68-76.

And really this has been the case as we examined the plight of widows. There are no people ready to show compassion and empathy to them, rather, they have been condemned, judged and rejected.

Bright refutes the church theology which is not interacting with the situation at hand thus:

A theology of community and psychology of community which does not result in solid action can only lead to an anaemic body. Perhaps one of the greatest criticisms of the church is that the community of worship has been so disassociated from action. 'We are members one of another, people have said liturgy, and have knelt and received the consecrated bread in the same congregation, unaware that one member of the congregation lives in hostel for the homeless and another in comparative luxury. Communion and community have seemed two different words, two different worlds.'<sup>174</sup>

According to Bright, love and charity with your neighbour are critically essential in the church or Christian faith. We know that it not only care but protection that is also very essential in this matter.

## **5. 5. Discussion**

### **5. 5. 1. Living Without Husbands**

Traumas of husbands' deaths were still very fresh in widows' minds as they narrated how they are learning to live alone. This was realised for more than 40% of the widows interviewed had been made widows in the last eight months prior to the interviews. About 20% had been widowed for one year and only 15% had been widowed for two years.

It was noted that death of a husband deprives women of male partner, breadwinner and authority, a status symbol in many African communities, and furthermore deprives the women of crucial emotional, social and economic security as well.<sup>175</sup> Because their husbands died of AIDS related illnesses, many women infected by HIV migrate back to their natal homes during the later stages of their illness for support and care.<sup>176</sup> However,

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<sup>174</sup>L. Bright, *The Christian Community*, (Great Britain: William Clowes and Sons, 1971), p.110.

<sup>175</sup> Oduyoye, *Transforming Power: Women in the household of God*, p.108.

frequent illnesses that precipitate deteriorating economic conditions, a sense of despair and worthlessness has weakened many marital bonds that necessitate wives to remain in the nuptial home when husbands die. As such, a significant number of women return to their natal homes when their husbands die. Other women return to their homes because they are too frustrated by their in-laws to continue living with them. A few terminally ill women respondents in this study opted to return home with a hope that children would find male authority for instance maternal grandfathers and uncles,<sup>177</sup> and social and emotional security amongst maternal kin. Of course, this has not solved the problem in many homes because death still catches up with many.

### **5. 5. 2. Family Support System**

Frequent deaths are weakening the extended family support system and threatening to separate family tenacity. It is probable to continue sinking existing members' ability to handle and maintain each other until an effective empowering initiative is established. Widows and orphans are the major victims of the incohesiveness settling on the community.

The upsurge of individualistic trend could also be attributed to a poverty sweep that has weakened and undermined many other societies. The current urban lifestyle and tendency to imitate the Western nuclear family are also playing a role in eroding the idea of extended family support system in Nyanza. It is realised that funeral rituals and expenses that were once a matter of the whole community are becoming a household (homestead) burden. It was noticed that rearing children is no longer the collective responsibility of communities, a legacy that has been historically associated with Africa. Extended families no longer feel indebted to welcome or safeguard widows and orphans when they are not even sure of the future for their own children. These are caused by over stretched

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<sup>176</sup> It is argued that women are the caregivers to their family members in the time of sickness but when they fall sick there is none to take of them. See I.A. Phiri, "African Women of Faith Speak Out in an HIV/AIDS Era", p. 15.

<sup>177</sup> Many widows take that option as they think that their children would be frustrated and not taken care of properly by the relatives of their deceased husbands. Eventually death catches up with them leaving children in desperate situations.

household resources and the discouraging number of deaths in communities from HIV/AIDS. Kenyan communities have been known for their spirit of support *harambee*. Family and friends would unite in pooling resources together to help each other during major financial needs.<sup>178</sup> Such devotion and attachment are slowly fading away as each family fends for its own survival.

### 5. 5. 3. Food Security

Food security is a major concern for households affected by HIV/AIDS for the following reasons.

- **Small and insufficient Land**

Like other parts of Nyanza, many parts of Kisumu district are situated on marginal land. Most of the households in the region cannot therefore produce an adequate food supply to last a whole year using traditional technology. This is a threat to food supply and predisposes the households to low food supply for six to eight months after harvest.

Another causative factor to lack of food in households is deficient land for food production. Some families do not own adequate land for agricultural production. During the terminal stages of the illness, many households sell off land to raise money for hospital bills and medication. Some hospitals and clinics also encourage terminally ill patients to surrender land title deeds as security for medical bills.<sup>179</sup> This happens with full knowledge of the medical personnel that the patients will not recover fully to claim back the documents. This makes certain households lose a lot of land to such medical institutions. Furthermore, property such as land is sold off in a desperate bid to raise money for medication and other essentials to support families when the husband is ailing. By the time the husband is dead, families are left with limited land and property. The

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<sup>178</sup> This spirit is manifested during time of need as people come together to partner with others in the name of *Ujamaa* or African socialism. In Luo it is known as *saga*.

<sup>179</sup> C. O., interview conducted by Silas Oyaro on 21 July 2003 in Kisumu.

situation is even made worse in cases where the ancestral land has not been subdivided yet amongst the sons. The grandparents (in particular the grandmothers), in an effort to save their dying sons, sell possession to raise money for medication. Such activities deprive households of the essential means for sustainable livelihood in rural areas.

- **Deficient Incomes**

Research has revealed that HIV/AIDS is one of the most expensive illnesses ever recorded in the history of health in Kenya and in many other countries. The pandemic has made many rich families experience extreme if not abject poverty and lack of resources to purchase the basics of life. Although there is sufficient supply of staple foods for sale in these areas, many households cannot manage to acquire them because they have no earnings. On the other hand natural disasters like prolonged droughts, el nino, floods and poor harvests have increased levels of poverty in Kisumu, Kenya. This has destabilized the structure that bonded relatives to provide for each other in times of need, that is *kisuma*. Widows and their children as a vulnerable group are most affected by this lack of bond. Apart from all the mentioned above, widows and their children are vulnerable to both malnutrition and even starvation due to the marginalization and lack of resources in the community.

Meanwhile, other dynamics such as lack of 'title deeds' to enable people to request loans to upgrade crop and animal production also contribute to food and financial insecurity in the HIV/AIDS affected households. Agriculture therefore is concentrated on production for home use only. Such a system does not support the establishment of reserves of food grains for back up during shortages.<sup>180</sup> The area also suffers from problems associated with lack of diversification in production.

However, there are widows within this group who are directly opposite the normal trend. They manage their homes, educate their children and are well established. Interestingly, they reject all traditions and customs which subjugate them. Their freedom and openness

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<sup>180</sup> This is where we realise the importance of Sustainable Livelihood Framework which enables people to have resilience and strength to go through stress and shocks.

to the wider world made them completely another class of widows in this study. They serve as models in this research see the profile below.

### Profile

Agnes Agnes Nyalik is a high School teacher and an examiner with Kenya National Examination Council.

Importantly, she rejected anti-development traditions and laws that dehumanise widows. She stood out as a pillar of development and demonstrated that widows are capable of managing their lives, homes and perpetuate development even in the absence of male figure in the family/household.

Agness rejected levirate marriage, widow inheritance and agitated for building a home outside her father- in-law's where they had a house. In Luo, is known *golo dala maonge dichwo*- erecting a home without a male head, which is taboo in Luo tradition. She did not only talk it to her in-laws, but went on to leverage support from the church parish headquarters at Chiga in Kolwa. Interestingly, amidst opposition from the clan, the church accompanied by police officers came on the day she planned to build her own home and everything workout without interference of intruders. Today Agnes has developed her home, which she built without a husband to an admirable and envied level.

- She has cows, Solar heating and electrifying system
- She maintains her farms
- She continues with her work as a teacher
- She is a leader of widows in her local parish and a representative in the diocese.

## 5. 6. Funerals and Burial Ceremonies

What shocked the researcher is the rate in which people die in Kisumu. For the period of two months there were so many funerals which hinder people from their regular duties. Ironically, people no longer meet at weddings and other social occasions but at funerals. Anybody dressed neatly is going to the funeral. It was common to hear people say, *tinde onge yweyo en mana liel* which means, nowadays there is no rest it is funeral everyday. *Nindgi lawi* that is prepare your clothes ready for death hits anytime. There is very limited time for weddings, traditional rituals, and other partying because of attending funerals. However as mentioned earlier on it was noticed that despite many frequent deaths, a number of homes still feel indebted to send off their dead in the conventional way by slaying at least one animal to ensure that all relatives who come for the burial ceremony are fed.<sup>181</sup> People are still dispensing the African hospitality, *Kik uwe welo odhi gi dhogi* which literally means, don't let any guest go home without eating something for that would mean they leave no blessing. Therefore they serve the meat, staples and other drinks to mourners. In the course of showing respect to the deceased, the funeral only worsens the already threatened food security of the bereaved.<sup>182</sup> In fact all these beg attention.

## 5. 7. Conclusion

This chapter has showcased how families and the entire community treat widows in Kisumu. Their stories became the epicentre as most of them live in poverty due to culture, which see them as killers of their husbands and therefore abandoning them, seizing all their property and driving them away. Other widows undergo dehumanising situation/rituals, as they bend to please their proponents'/ in-laws, while others who know their rights stand firm and utilise the available machinery to rescue them.

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<sup>181</sup> The Late Bishop Henry Okullu of Anglican Church of Kenya condemned this tradition.

<sup>182</sup> See Ayieko, *From Single Parents to Child-Headed Household*, 1998, pp1-14.

The chapter echoed a wide reality of widows in Kenya that needs to be addressed appropriately. That is, their marginalization, discrimination, psychological and emotional stress, gender violence and deficient income, lack of protection and love. It was also apparent that the Church that had been seen as a major liberating agent has done little in the widows' cases. The church's theology fell under scrutiny as it fails to show practical commitment to the widows as mandated in James 1: 27. It became apparent that some church leaders have no clue as to the kind of sufferings widows are in. Due to such inabilities, the church needs radical changes in its trainings and should opt for an alternative theology. This is the theology of gender justice, compassion, life-giving and life protecting. In this regard the Church needs to address various issues that affect women in the event of illness and death of their husbands. The church needs to begin to address specifically the issue of human sexuality and power relations in families and society at large.

Given the condition of widows it would be prudent to examine them in the light of the church and development, so that, their problems are approached and tackled appropriately.

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**CHAPTER SIX**  
**THE CHURCH AND ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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**6. 1. Introduction.**

Having examined the paradox and effect of AIDS on widows' lives, it became evident that HIV/AIDS penetrates all aspects of life. For this reason it is important to examine how the church can engage itself realistically in addressing what affect its members, the community and particularly widows in this case. In realizing that development is also another discipline that cuts through all parts of life, it is brought forth here. This chapter therefore examines asset based community development in relation to the church's capability and capacity. The capacities of the church in conjunction with widows' assets and capacities are entwined to create sound life to the widows. Capacity building, pastoral care and counselling, advocacy and prophetic voice, solidarity and support groups are highlighted. All these are encapsulated in one word 'empowerment' which includes freeing widows from norms and codes that enslave them.

**6. 2. The Church**

Church can mean the universal body of believers in Christ or a denomination in a particular area or region (local). In this study the church refers to an interdenominational group of churches in Kisumu unless otherwise indicated. According to Orlando Costas the church can be defined by its activities thus:

A living community that comes into being when the message concerning God's self-giving, redeeming act in Christ calls people into fellowship of God through the Spirit, overcomes their enmity against each other, grants them a share of new life in the risen Christ. This life with each other and fellowship with God liberates them from their spiritual enslavement. It empowers and involves them in the dynamics of God's redemptive love as the manifestation and instruments of God's intention to transform the world and assures them of God's future for them and their world.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> E.O. Costas, "A Wholistic Concept of Church Growth" in Shenk, R. Wilbert. (ed.), *Exploring Church Growth*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), p. 100.

Development is the process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.<sup>184</sup>

It is also important to highlight that the World Council of Churches described development thus:

Development should be understood as a liberating process aimed at justice, self-reliance and economic growth. It is essentially a people's struggle in which the poor and the oppressed are and should be the active agents and the immediate beneficiaries.

We can note that development is diversely understood and examined. However, it can be summarised in these points:

- A process by which persons and societies come to realize their full potential of human life in a context of social justice- a people's struggle in which the poor and oppressed are active participants and beneficiaries.
- The improvement of people's well being.
- The utilization of resources in a sustainable way for long lasting benefits.
- Helping people to help themselves, so that they can become self-reliant.
- Freeing people from their limitations and the process by which people gain greater control over themselves, their environment, and their future, in order to realize the full potential of human life that God has made possible. Development is a process towards a goal.<sup>185</sup>

Concisely, we can say, development is a process by which persons and societies come to realize their full potential of human life in a context of social justice, that is, a people's struggle in which the poor, disadvantaged and oppressed are active participants and beneficiaries. It is the improvement of people's well being.

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<sup>184</sup> David C. Korten, *Getting to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (1990), p. 67.

<sup>185</sup> S. Roland, *Multiplying light and Truth through, Community Health Evangelism*, (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1990), p.45.

### **6. 3. 1. Asset Based Community Development**

Asset Based Community Development assumes that people have the innate skills and abilities to take charge of their lives while at the same time acknowledging the need for facilitators to provide example, instruction, and access to needed resources. Development brings together and keeps them working together. Interestingly, ABCD sees communities not as complex masses of needs and problems, but rather as diverse and potent webs of gifts and assets. It argues that each community has a unique set of skills and capacities to channel for community development.

The ABCD approach categorizes asset inventories into five groups: individuals, local associations, local institutions, physical assets and the local economy (including local business assets and local expenditures). It assumes that social and economic revitalization starts with what is already present within a community not only the capacities of residents as individuals, but also the existing commercial, associational and institutional foundation. This involves pinpointing, or mapping, all of the available assets in the community, and connecting, or mobilizing, them in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness. An asset-based approach to community building perceives local residents and other community stakeholders as active change agents rather than passive beneficiaries or clients. The individual capacities of residents are the basic building blocks of any community. As people exercise these capacities, they often find they need the talents of others in their enterprises. This leads them to join with other individuals who will work with them toward a common goal. When they do this, individuals combine their own talents with the capacities of others to form associations and support local institutions that can make extensive and valuable contributions to their community. For example, friends and extended family members can be the main source of support in low-income families. Therefore "informal supports in the community which encourage and enable friends and neighbours to care about each other should be strengthened". Thus, a significant premise of asset-based community development is to involve as many community stakeholders residents, voluntary associations, and neighbourhood-based

institutions in the creation of plans, visions, and projects that support community building.<sup>186</sup>

#### **6. 4. The church's involvement in development.**

Many scholars have given different reasons supporting that Christians have to be concerned with development issues in our society. These reasons spring from the theology of development, which gives us more challenges on how we do take initiatives in development activities for and with the poor. The Christian theology of development is based on the biblical understanding of development. It commences in God from whom and to whom all things belong God creates and relates to the whole creation (Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:1-3). The breath of life that animates the whole creation is God's Spirit. All creatures, human and non-human, are called to live out their unique character in joyful obedience to the Creator of all things. There are several voices that invite the church to take part in development.

##### **6. 4. 1. Voice of Truth and Justice.**

The Bible maintains that humankind is inclined to sin, that is corruption, selfishness and other injustices. It is the church which has been sanctified to address these faculties that are affected in view of renewing and correcting them. Justice and truth are both embedded in our Christian tradition and shared with other religious groups too. The church is not of this world but is church in the world.<sup>187</sup> If the Church is to remain true to its nature as the body of Christ and have a redemptive impact on society, it must maintain a distinct identity within the surrounding culture.

It is accepted that the purpose of the church is to provide framework and mechanism for the fulfilment of God's mission, that is the development of the universe and humankind. We realize this in Jesus' declaration, "I have come that they may have life and have it

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<sup>186</sup> Kretzmann and McKnight *Building communities from inside out*, pp.110-114.

abundantly”(Jn.10:10). In order for the church to be realistic to society it must address matters of concern to the society. Laurenti Magesa posits that:

The church has a duty to bear witness, in humility, to its understanding of the will of God for man [sic] in organized society. For that reason, it dare not assume passive, indifferent or neutral attitude towards the crucial political and social issues of the times. It must uphold righteousness, champion the oppressed, and declare the sovereignty of institution of man [sic].<sup>188</sup>

We can then say strongly that the church has to act because it has been mandated and has the heart of God. God asks the church to act justly, to love tenderly and walk humbly with its God. It is important to note that the kind of religion that pleases God is to break unjust fetters, and to undo thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and break all yokes. God continues to impress a rhetoric question on true religion thus, “is it not sharing food with the hungry and housing the homeless”? (Is. 58:6-7 and Mic 6:8). It is contended that participation in development is a cardinal responsibility of the people.

#### 6. 4. 2. Voice of the Gospel.

Steve de Gruchy and other scholars say that “the call to be engaged in development is that of our triune God and the gospel.”<sup>189</sup> The nature of God embodies a perpetual creativity towards the completion of the creation. God is engaged in ongoing development of the cosmos (Rom. 8:18-25), and so to worship this God is to be open to, and engaged in, God's change, transformation and development of the world around us.

In the person of Jesus Christ, is exemplified God's special concern for humanity. The apostle Paul unambiguously describes Jesus as the new Adam, and further illuminates the eschatological possibility of what humanity can become. Bible scholars maintain that born of this vision of a new humanity in Christ, Christians are invited to participate in the

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<sup>187</sup> White and Tiongco., “What has Theology to do with Development, Peace and Reconstruction?” 1996, p. 27.

<sup>188</sup> Laurenti C. Magesa “Theology of integral development in Africa” in Agbasiere, Joseph T. and Zabajungu B. K.(eds) *Church Contribution to integral development*. (Eldoret, Kenya: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1989), p.119.

<sup>189</sup> Steve de Gruchy, ‘Church and development’ unpublished MTh Lecture notes, University of Natal, 2003.

struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, so that the people of the planet can be rid of the structures and circumstances that dehumanise them.

Such participation is really involvement in God's Mission *Missio Dei* in the world. In the power of the Holy Spirit the church seeks to proclaim the whole gospel to the whole person in the whole world Lk. 4:16-19. De Gruchy further says, "this message of redemption responds to the human needs of work, bread, shelter and peace."<sup>190</sup> Our concern for development is a seeking to share in the Trinitarian action of God who seeks the well-being of creation.

#### 6. 4. 3. Voice of Believers.

Steve deGruchy has summarized the involvement of the church in the words of other theologians in this manner:

The Church feels this desire on the part of its members, but also hears a call from the God whom it worships, to be engaged in making life 'better' for all God's people. Thus, however much the 'end of development' is proclaimed, or people speak of a 'post-development' phase, the Church in South Africa - and more broadly, throughout Southern Africa - sees itself as needing to be involved in 'development', as a way of proclaiming the Gospel in both word and deed.<sup>191</sup>

The call to participate in the work of development is not just vertical, that is to say from God above, but also horizontal, from fellow humans. That is from the members in the church. This is a particular reality, for the church is made up of people who are thirsting for development. What we have to acknowledge is that many people who struggle to achieve a basic sustainable livelihood are found in the church pews. A motherly and pastoral concern for its own membership will see the church engaged in the issues of development, for example in the areas of housing, education, health care, food, and employment.<sup>192</sup> As well, when the church listens to the faithful, to the wisdom of the lay people in the church, especially those who have skills in the field of development it will

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<sup>190</sup> deGruchy, MTh Lecture notes 2003.

<sup>191</sup> deGruchy, "Guest Editorial", in *The Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 110 (July 2001), p.2.

<sup>192</sup> deGruchy, MTh Lectures on Church and Development 2003.

be fully involved in development agendas. An engagement in the concerns of health, education, agriculture, job-creation, and the like, must bring the church to a renewed sense of its incredible human resources. They must take the challenge that if it thinks of mission only in spiritual terms, that is standing on the pulpit and preaching or evangelisation, then, it overvalues the ordained ministry. Therefore hearing the concerns of the church's skilled lay people compels the church to be more engaged in development.

#### **6. 4. 4. Voice of the Universe.**

In the first face of the Hebrew Bible we see that the earth is characterised by beauty and bounty and comprises extraordinary variety and diversity (Gen.1:31). This calls for an attitude that respects the inherent goodness, the holiness of the created world.<sup>193</sup> The church as the body of Christ that has the understanding of God's intent should be able to listen to the cry of our mother, the earth. As we noted earlier on, truth and justice is required by all God's creation. In that way several people have noted that the earth is crying out in crisis.<sup>194</sup> Floods, famines, fires, earthquakes, volcanoes, ozone layers, global warming, el nino effects, forest depletion, and water pollution manifest pain and agony that the earth and its inhabitants go through. The point here is that problems facing the earth have tremendous impact on the people who inhabit it, but fall heavily on the marginalized, in our case the widows. It is due to these effects, of which to ensure the future of our earth, and its entire people the church must join forces with others in attending to the earth crisis. It would be of importance to realize that, the Church is called to engage in critical reflection on praxis, taking the time and the energy to think theologically about what it is or, should be doing. This means focusing on issues at the

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<sup>193</sup> Andrew Warmback., "The Earth is God's and all that is in it: Development from the perspective of the environment", in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 110 (July 2001), pp.77-88.

<sup>194</sup> Andrian K. Ddungu., "Environment protection: Church responsibility", in Agbasiere, Joseph T. and Zabajungu B.K. (eds.), *Church Contribution to Integral Development*,(Eldoret, Kenya: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1989), p. 237.

heart of development, such as power, gender, freedom, land, ecology, values, partnerships, and initiatives 'from below'.<sup>195</sup>

## **6. 5. How can the Church engage itself in AIDS Widows Development?**

With the realization that successful community development grows out of policies and activities based on the capacities, skills and assets of lower income people and their neighbourhoods, the church can contribute to what is already available on the ground. We recognize the God-given potential and vocation of each person, and therefore their participation is critical in the redemption or humanizing our society.

According to the study, that is the interviews, workshops and observations which we saw previously, it would be prudent to draft the following:

The widows have diverse skills as noted; some are teachers, businesswomen, dressmakers, Civic leaders, administrators, farm managers and church leaders. Therefore the church can help build on their strengths, playing the role of a facilitator, while the participants are the widows themselves. Let me underline that the church can facilitate:

### **6. 5. 1. Pastoral care and counselling**

The eventual death of a husband is profoundly traumatic and may leave serious, though invisible scars. As well, women deprived of normal socialisation may sink into stress and depression.

Counselling which is a process that helps people to understand and deal with their problems and communicate better with those whom they are emotionally involved is a key to healing and empowerment. As usual the counsellor and the client together explore the issues and problems and find new or different approaches to dealing with them. Sometimes solutions are found, but sometimes this is not possible. However, often just talking about a problem, and expressing it helps relieve much of the burden. That is why

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<sup>195</sup> deGruchy, "Guest Editorial", p.2.

the church should be involved in deep listening to the throbbing heart of context. The voice calls upon it to develop and extend its listening skills so that it can begin to hear the 'cries of context' in and through its praxis. It is empathy, interpathy and communiopathy with the criss-cross rhythms of inter-familial encounter which is desperately needed. We have to accept that the AIDS paradox has placed the church to embrace from neurotic patriarch-ism to celebratory inter-gender-ism. Elsewhere Emanuel Larrey has called upon the church to listen to the earth and world.<sup>196</sup> What is meant is that the problem in the church in Kisumu should be felt and shared by all and the church world over.

It means that the church has to find ways of entering creatively into the passion and pathos not only of individuals and small groups, but also of whole communities, structures and systems. Men and women are deeply affected by the inter-relationships they develop within the communities they participate in. They are thus affected for good or ill, by the state of health or disease of the communities of which they are a part.

The voice of widows has informed us that the church should serve as a consolation centre and therapeutic place, in that it shows solidarity with the people affected.

#### **6. 5. 2. Showing solidarity.**

The bereaved may have to face a double burden. The first is that associated to the loss, the second is associated with the stigma. AIDS is a highly stigmatised condition and the bereaved who survive an AIDS related death may be cut off from normal grieving process by hurdles created by stigma and a need to counterbalance the stigma. Death, therefore, brings another integral work in the holistic development ministry of the church. The church has to shoulder the challenge of both counselling the person who is dying, but also counselling those who are left behind, that is, the spouse and the children and the close friends. The funeral is not just a church function, but an opening to meet the reality of death honestly, together, and to remind ourselves that death is not the final word that

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<sup>196</sup> Emmanuel Y. Larrey, *In Living Colour: An Intercultural approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling*, London: Cassell, 1997.

God proclaims to humanity, for there is life in Christ forever with God.

### **6. 5. 3. Advocacy and Prophetic voice**

Research has revealed that because of fear and prejudice, the basic rights of people affected by HIV/AIDS and PLWA are being eroded and violated all over the world. Many have found themselves thrown out of their jobs, some even evicted from their homes. These issues, whenever and wherever they become visible, should be on the agenda of the church and agencies that struggle for justice, peace and human rights. In nutshell the church must press government leaders to provide adequate medical and social support services to the families affected. It must push and persuade its congregations to include PLWA, AIDS widows within the community of parish life.

As the church advocate for medication to PLWA it must condemn individuals and companies who use this pandemic to fame and enrich themselves. The Church cannot forget that alongside its diaconal ministries it also has a prophetic ministry. That is to address the leaders and the powerful in society with a word about truth and justice. That would mean that the church brings its perspective to bear upon policy issues.

With the various problems that widows face the church should help them in legal cases especially those involved in burial problems and property seizure. In this way the church will advocate the voice of the voiceless in the society. Thus the critical voices of widows and women in general would be heard in faith forums. As a result the principle of relationality, inclusivity, and mutuality will be recognised as vital for the survival of the human society in dignity and solidarity. In essence the church does not displace or replace the voices of widows but give widows voice to address their problems.

### **6. 5. 4. Support systems.**

It is argued that many church ministers regard grief in purely rational terms as an event that occurs and likely to end with the funeral. Occasionally after the funeral service the

church walks away from the bereaved, but the HIV/AIDS pandemic is forcing the Church to change, due to its devastating state. It leaves the bereaved with a baggage that they cannot carry alone. The Church must develop support systems that make a lasting contribution in the face of this crisis. New ways of caring for widows and of integrating them into the community will have to be explored.

It has been established that support groups provide recognition, identification and differentiation. Identification is needed because support groups are homogenous in the sense that all widows are bereaved, heterogeneous in the sense that widows carry with them different backgrounds, different coping styles and different conception about death. Additionally, support groups have the potential to bolster self-esteem that is temporarily lowered because of death. Facilitate a safe place for widows to express their feelings unconditionally.

#### **6. 5. 5. Capacity building**

The church should organize teaching sessions, that is seminars, retreats and workshops to conscientize people on gender issues. Through training and education people get more exposed to new ideas and opportunities to contribute to the growth and humane of society. Capacity building does not only involve the creation of new human and institutional capacity, but also the effective utilization of existing capacity as well as the retrieval and regeneration of hitherto lost or decaying capacity or untapped skills. This is what Kretzmann and McKnight call mapping the capacities.<sup>197</sup> The widows in this study have gifts, talents and skills, yet they are in the margin. They suffer what Sen calls “deprivation of capabilities”,<sup>198</sup> for they have no chance to employ what they have already acquired to benefit from their experience. The church can create some activities that will enhance life to these people for the good of entire community if not themselves.

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<sup>197</sup> Kretzmann and McKnight 1993, p. 44.

<sup>198</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development As Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), p. 38.

## **6. 6. Some practical suggestions**

Widows have potential power that needs to be released, which means identifying and connecting their special energy to the energies of others and to the assets of the specific community in which they live. According to this study widows are perfectly capable of relating creatively to the various institutions, organizations and opportunities existing in Kisumu in exactly the same manner as would any other individual. It is only that AIDS widows are labelled and marginalized that their potential as partners are usually ignored. For this reason we have to learn to think positively about ways that widows can connect productively with all others who are actively engaged in developing their community.

As the study theory stands, it should be realised that every person no matter how poor, has certain specific ideas about where s/he wants to be and what s/he wants to be doing in future and each person also uses individual creativity to attempt to make these dreams true.

With that background in mind, the church in Kisumu can facilitate partnerships with local associations, individuals, public and private institutions within the community and others which are outside to humanise their community especially in relation to protection and care for the widows. Church buildings can serve as halls where widows are trained by specialists from various fields, for example entrepreneurships and micro credit corporations, how to start and manage a small business, and in turn enable them to obtain small soft loans to initiate and support their businesses.

The church should also involve Municipal hospitals, for example Limumba, Ojolla, Ober Kamoth and Nyahera to bring their services to local communities by allowing them to use church facilities to ease/waive transportation and avail healthcare to widows and the entire community. Chapter five noted that some of these widows are living with AIDS (PLWA) and that would be a convenient way of treating/managing their opportunistic illnesses. These are illnesses like herpes, pneumonia, tuberculosis and chronic cough.

A model was set by one of the local councillors, a Mr. Kotingi of Korando ward who advocated for a team of medics to come to St. Mark Anglican Church to conduct health-services. Such like connections between local leaders and institutions can be broadened with specifications to the particular needs of community that would reinforce the weak areas.

The church facilities can also serve as advisory centres for all community members, and even to an extension of Voluntary Counselling Centres (VCT), while the church personnel in collaboration with other personnel would serve as counsellors.

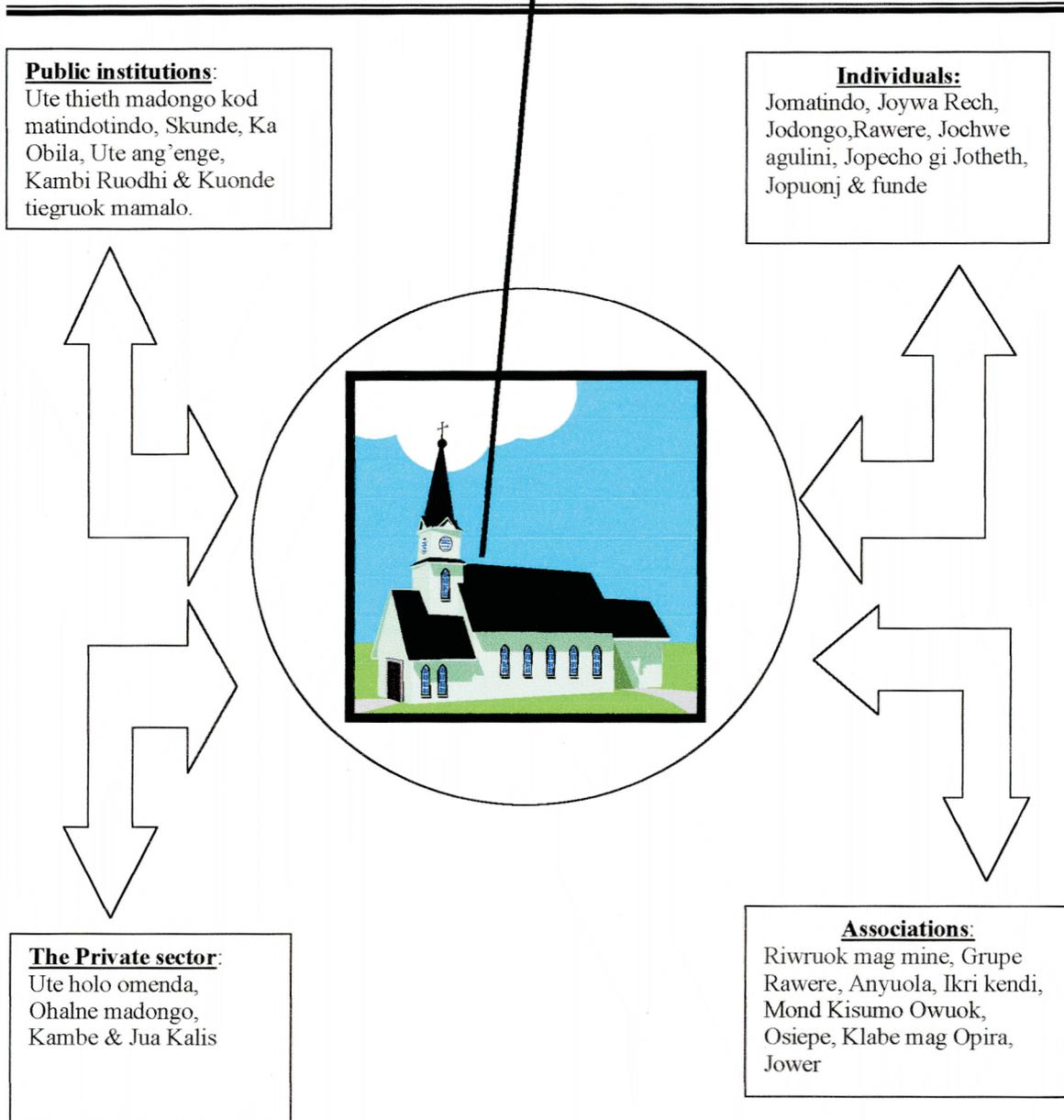
The church can also serve as a link to other organizations like FIDA, that is federation women lawyers that deal with the rights of women, for example, property inheritance, and other rights of their humanity. They extend to right to have shelter, and safety amongst others. We saw that many widows are disowned and lose their property and the church should not be silent on such matters, since there are arms, which can deal with such like cases. However, the church has ability to bring peace and reconciliation between widows and in-laws so that they accept each other and live in harmony. Many times these acts of violence occur because of a lack to accept widows as apart of the entire community.

The church has several assets. For example the Catholic church in Kisumu has St. Monica hospital, Grail Centre, Children's home at Pandpieri, and many schools, while Africa Inland has Ogada children's home, Nyakach dispensary, Theological college at Ahero and Church of Christ in Africa has schools and colleges. What we can note is that the church has greater influence in the community because its resources and assets are widely shared by all for the benefit of entire community. Therefore, it has access to assets and resources in the community. That means it has linkages with the outer space or macro links that are capable of transforming widows' lives. Just to mention a few; it can create jobs in its institutions and influence other organizations to employ widows to enable them to manage their households. And through trainings/capacity building women in general and widows in particular can identify services and goods/commodities that they can

supply to the above-mentioned institutions. Therefore, the livelihood of widows would be stable and their health blossom.

**Interdenominational church/ group of churches**

Diagram 1. Shows how the church in Kisumu can capture local institutions, associations, individuals and private sector to enhance and harness development of widows in society.



## 6. 7. Conclusion

This chapter looked at the church and asset based community development. It presented that the church has to join hands with God in the work of ongoing creation and transformation of the world toward consummation of the whole creation. It explained clearly that development is part of *Missio Dei* and is not separate from spiritual ministry of the church. It also clarified that asset based development is not monetary or economy focused. It is people focused and meant to capacitate the powerless by using God given abilities and resources to enable people to stand and speak or have voice and feet. The chapter has underpinned that pastoral counselling and care are indispensable in the process, since they enable the church to listen to the throbbing pain of the affected.

Without ambiguity it also highlighted that the whole process is conducted because of the voices that call upon the church to participate in the liberation and life-giving service to God's people and all that is on earth. Given the condition in the world, as it is, prophecy and advocacy are employed to confront injustices entrenched and embedded in society, that is, patriarchy, gender inequality, gender violence and subjugation of women as seen overwhelmingly in this study.

Finally it concluded with some practical suggestions related to widows in Kisumu, touching on how the church can link and broaden their world through its agencies. All these are knit together in a search for logical steps that are possible in the realistic pursuit of the ultimate goal of bringing back dignity to widows. The next chapter will then endeavour to highlight some things the church, society and government should consider doing in order to reverse the ever-escalating problem of widowhood especially as families' tenacity fall apart.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### RECCOMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

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#### **7. 1. Introduction**

The AIDS pandemic requires the analysis of cluster of interrelated factors, since it challenges the church in several ways. It confronts the church's pastoral and caring ministries, just as it does our training and evangelism. That is, spiritual and social development. It begs action and compassion, which demand new joint ventures and readiness to include the outcast; these are vivid in Christ's ministry to lepers and women in the gospels. Importantly, we do realise that it also challenges the church at a more theoretical level, where it demands clear theological reflection as we saw in chapter six. In this chapter we examine the way forward as we have analysed materials and data which others seem as problematic while others give us insight that there is hope of changing the darkness to light through God given abilities and resources. The profiles in the study are imperative as we keenly knit them together. In this way we are asking what the church can do in the condition of AIDS widows. We have to note that there are a lot of challenges which have been disclosed. Previous chapters have demonstrated to us the situation of the widowed women. We realise that the problem is not only the loss of husbands; it is multidimensional, multifaceted and multi-fanged. As said previously it embraces every aspect of life. These areas need coverage to enable these women to live normal human lives. However, we don't dwell on problems for there is a lot within these widows and their community which can be utilised for their good and entire society.

#### **7. 2. Recommendations**

##### **7. 2. 1. Utilising the Minimum Available Resources**

In most typical rural communities, there are certain resources available for all residents. These resources can be identified to support women in their rural homes. AIDS widows are often left with some minimum resources such as land, housing, their

own skills and groups which could be approached to associate with them. With additional support from outside, such resources could effectively be utilised to sustain widows within their natural surroundings and communities. Such an arrangement would also minimise the future cost of land to settle their children during their adult lives because these children would then automatically inherit their own ancestral land. It would also reduce the number of cases in which corrupt and calloused relatives swindle their rightful land inheritance.

#### **Profile**

A widow from Kapuonja whose husband was a former Army officer, realized her husband's HIV status when he was tested in preparation for deployment in peace keeping mission in Timor. The husband died, but she held to her guns that she would not be inherited or cleansed according to the Luo tradition. They had purchased a large farming land and had been involved in extensive agriculture. After the death of her husband she expanded her work and supplied the nearby secondary schools, Health centre, and local traders with vegetables. Her farm also served as a demonstration farm under Maseno Farmers Training Centre (FTC). Her project claimed a big name and spread to district level. Currently she is a nominated councillor with Kisumu county council. She fights for the rights of women and balanced treatment in all aspects of society. Her name is withheld.

#### **6. 2. 2. Strengthen the capacity of families to cope with their problems.**

The most effective way of dealing with problems faced by the AIDS widows is through programmes and policies that enable families and households to cope more effectively. The capacities of these families and households to provide for their basic needs continue to be undermined by HIV/AIDS. These capacities must be reinforced. These households have skills and gifts that can be used for their sake and others. Livelihood support, in the

shape of income generating projects, sharing lifeskills, food gardens, and the like are a further clear way the Church can make an impact as part of a holistic ministry.

It is acceptable that many of the problems facing AIDS affected families are fundamentally economic. In fact, these households generally struggle to make ends meet and suffer setbacks when a member falls ill or dies of AIDS, as we saw in chapters three and five. These poor households are impoverished when illnesses and deaths reduce male labour. It was realised that in Nyanza Western Kenya, funeral expenses alone can amount to more than one year's income and families often exhaust their resources seeking care for the sick even before their demise.

In this respect it would be appropriate to provide material input for specific activities like gardening or raising livestock, if the recipients have know-how or skills.

Access, control and mobilisation of household resources for the advantage of a family may facilitate a sense of security and social stability amongst widows. Such a condition is necessary for fostering a healthy attitude to cope with the burden in the family created by loss of male labour. It was noted that widows who live in households with better economic prospects perform much better than those in relatively poorer homes. Conversely, widows joining poor natal families only increase the level of poverty in the households. It follows that the external community, particularly the government and supporting organisations such as the church and NGOs, can improve the well-being of widows by strategically directing their support to households with widows so as to empower the custodians to take on the task at hand. What is meant here is that there are widows who need care in their homes or neighbourhood due to their state of health.

However, the welfare of widows generally depends on their being able to reside in their marital home and continue to utilise land and other property. That means effort must be put in place in regard to property and inheritance rights of women. Therefore the following are important:

- Informing HIV infected men and women about laws that protect their inheritance rights.
- Helping people to prepare written wills before they die.

- Supporting legal services for widows to help them gain property
- Sensitising traditional leaders and Provincial Administration about the need to protect survivors' rights.

As noted that widows and their children form a household, children living in the households with an HIV infected mother may be exposed to tuberculosis, pneumonia, diarrhoeal diseases, respiratory infections, or other opportunistic illnesses. Here the following measures can be taken:

- Developing church based home health services for households caring for patients using church volunteers and Para-church Organisations/NGOs networks.
- Expanding and supporting church/community based child nutrition programmes in more seriously affected areas.
- Subsidising or waving health care charges for widows and their children and others especially vulnerable persons.
- Improving access to safe water in more seriously affected areas. Organisations like World Vision and Ministry of water can be involved.

### **7. 2. 3. Stimulate and Strengthen Community/Church-based responses.**

In the African context widows whose families cannot adequately provide for their basic needs, community is the second safety net. Spontaneous, the community/church-based interventions can help care for women who remain in families under great stress.

Therefore assisting communities in developing and implementing assistance programmes would mean respecting community decision-making and enhancing their ability to target assistance to vulnerable families.

Sustenance of widows in rural villages requires the involvement of the whole community to ensure a supportive external and internal environment for the households. It cannot be overstressed that the welfare of widows living in a village depends to a great extent on the socio-economic well-being of the whole community. This can best be achieved by empowering the people in the communities with the ability to appreciate the important task that they are performing both for themselves and the nation. A general observation of

the study is a need for an integrated approach to supporting the welfare of widows through support for adopting families and the community in which households live.

#### **7. 2. 4. Build capacities of women to support themselves.**

Widows often support themselves and their children. AIDS catches women in a double bind. At a point where widows face an urgent need for skills and training that would help them support themselves, economic pressures and the need to replace lost male incomes/labour often force them to indulge in unbecoming or dangerous activities.

On the other hand enabling their children to stay in school or to be offered vocational training improves their ability to provide for their own needs in future. Therefore, intervention to help children continue their education must address the specific factors that cause them to drop out, for example lack of school fees or money to buy books, and uniforms.

It is important at this point to highlight that each approach has strengths and limitations. For example, paying school fees are not sustainable, particularly when the number of children affected becomes very large.

#### **7. 2. 5. Create an enabling environment for development of appropriate responses**

This is the point where collaboration is greatly needed to realise the goal. The best efforts of women, families and communities to help themselves will be wasted if they are not enabled to optimize the use of resources for prevention, care and survival. Government ministries, donors, NGOs and community concerned with the welfare of widows and families must be fully involved.

### **7. 2. 6. Involving Government Ministries**

All government ministerial organisations have important roles to play in rehabilitating widows in their rural homes. Departments such as Ministries of Health, Education, and Agriculture have critical functions in the lives of these needy widows. Through their extension systems, they can reach women at home. Most of the major difficulties that widows experience in the rural areas are very basic and can be addressed by these ministries. The departments have a network of extension services which can collaborate with the church/es and other external agencies to reach out and work with households.

Government of Kenya previously lacked clear policies on how to proceed with the situation. They were slow in defining how to respond to new issues emerging in the wake of the HIV pandemic. The pandemic has, however, intensively affected their work both in the rural and urban areas. But thank God that the government has woken up and is trying all means to curb the effects of AIDS. Today there are serious campaigns, mobilising and leveraging forces toward prevention and care. On that note the Departments of Commerce and Science and technology have vocational and career training officers who have a capacity for expanding training, for example running small business and entrepreneurship, which should be fully integrated in the programme.

### **7. 3. Creating an alternative Theology**

The church needs to cultivate and inculcate an alternative/new theology. Musa Dube and other theologians have ably argued that the church and its institutions in general, have a reputation for responding to the issue of HIV/AIDS in negative terms. Its response is attributed to shortsightedness or ignorance in a wider spectrum of the pandemic. Factors that influence this perception have included judgmental comment from church leaders, debate about condoms, and an obstructive stance towards policy development, particularly regarding commercial sex, and harm reduction approaches. The church has been largely unwilling to engage in any way that could imply dilution of its moral

standards. As a result, PLWA have experienced rejection by the church people, congregations or institutions and such experiences have been widely shared.<sup>199</sup>

Dube quoted Mathew 23:23 where Jesus woes Scribes and Pharisees for neglecting weightier matters, that is, faith, justice and mercy which are indispensable for life in preference to light issues made for humanity and not vice versa.<sup>200</sup>

In other words the church needs to re-evaluate, re-read and reinterpret the Bible. Amazingly the overriding theme is 'life'. A survey of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation discloses the source of life, how it is given, valued and protected by God. Unproblematically, the Bible vividly declares that God offered Jesus Christ to redeem human life Romans 5: 6-11. It would then pose a question of why should the church let that very life perish. If God does value life more than any other thing and is not sidetracked by sin or any other behaviour, why do we destroy it?

Life is ruined because of patriarchal systems in our society and in the church. As it is well known and has been pronounced severally that HIV/AIDS in Africa is predominantly transmitted through sex, it would be of great step to look into gender relations. Obviously, we have what is known as 'gender imbalance' which has promoted rape in and outside of the church, financial insecurity amongst women which has made many to resort to prostitution, polygamy and widow inheritance which are falling under patriarchy. These are concrete facts and reality on the ground that should prompt the church to be real to its context and act justly. Therefore what is necessary is a theology that addresses them, and in this case 'a theology of gender justice'<sup>201</sup>

The church and its constituents have obstructed response. Often this has happened in a context of passionate defence of moral principle, consistent with its vocation and vision of service to God and to people; yet also with too much distance from local reality.

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<sup>199</sup>Musa Dube, "Preaching to the converted: Unsettling the Christian Church! A Theological View: A Scriptural Injunction", in *Ministerial Formation*-April 2001, p. 38-41.

<sup>200</sup>Dube, "Preaching to the converted", pp. 38-41.

<sup>201</sup> Dube, "Preaching to the converted", p. 44.

There can be dysfunction between beliefs and practice, in any organization. With religious people, vision is not in question generally, because it is not difficult for people to subscribe to the concepts of loving care and the need for hope. However, corresponding practices are often in question. For the church there is an immediate need to develop convictional motivation based on theological grounding for both beliefs and practice.

The church as an organization needs to build confidence to and act in and on the world in a way that it believes can be effective and have an impact, that is being the salt and light of the world Mathew 5:13-16, accepting responsibility for the social and physical conditions out there.

It would be agreed that with clarity of understanding and sense of confidence and responsibility comes the possibility of developing church vision and strategy. In other words understanding and responsibility lead to sense of purpose, and once aims and strategy are clear, it becomes possible to structure the church in such a way that roles and functions are clearly defined and differentiated.

A theology of HIV/AIDS needs to make it clear that God did/does not send HIV/AIDS as punishment, it needs to reveal the compassionate dimension of our Christianity, and should seek to give us a spark of hope in darkness. Crucially, it should reflect that HIV/AIDS concerns all Christians, a notion that is neatly encapsulated by the analogy: "The body of Christ has AIDS".<sup>202</sup>

#### **7. 4. Conclusion**

The study has posed challenges to the church and entire society to respond to complex ethical, theological and societal issues with profound personal needs. It has put across that socio-economic and cultural contexts are determining factors in the spread of HIV/AIDS, though the response has been mixed, as other people have described AIDS as God's punishment for sexual sin. However, some people have attempted to nuance their

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<sup>202</sup> Dube, "Theological challenges: Proclaiming the fullness of life in the HIV/AIDS & Global economic era", in *International Review of Mission*, p. 539.

reactions, judging some actions as evil but also helping people in need. Still the church has to stress the need to commit people and resources to humane care of people affected by AIDS including PLWA.

In summary we can note the following:

- HIV/AIDS is a human illness, not restricted to one group or social class. It's an ominous presence, calling for the best possible response from the medical and scientific communities.
- Members of the church have the responsibility to reach out with compassion and understanding to those suffering from AIDS and it's effects.
- The crisis demands of the church a clear presentation of its moral teaching concerning human sexuality.
- Discrimination against persons with AIDS or affected by AIDS is unjust and immoral.
- Those who are HIV positive ought to live in a way that does not expose others to the disease.

The church's prophetic ministry should cut through the despair of the people and provide symbols that are adequate to negate situation of hopelessness. It should stand in solidarity with the people affected by AIDS. Therefore people who are affected and infected by AIDS should be encouraged to continue leading productive lives in their community. That is to say all forms of prejudice, for example stereotyping, isolation and condemnation must be strongly rejected. For the indefinite future, we/human society will be living with AIDS. As the crisis worsens, the church indeed has an urgent need for understanding, justice, reason and deep faith.

The church and society has neither directly tackled the inequalities of men and women in Kenya and Africa in general. These inequalities are deep seated. HIV/AIDS has revealed them like never before. Kisumu and Kenya in general will solve the problem of AIDS when the church and society realistically address cultural, social, and sexual practices that put women at risk.

In the area of polygamy and other Luo cultural practices which endanger Luo women must be totally eradicated. Despite the extent of complexity of the problems, the church can make an effective healing witness toward those affected by HIV/AIDS. The most powerful tool is love and acceptance within the community. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, therefore, presents the church both with tremendous challenges and unprecedented opportunities, of offering hope even in the midst of suffering and death.

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**Appendix A. Samples of interviews**

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**Interviews**

Interviewer Silas Oyaro: SO.

Interviewee : MA.

Date: 13 July 2003 14hrs.

Venue: New Nyanza General Hospital

Duration: 1½hrs.

SO            what is your name?

MA            I am M A. I come from Kano. My husband died then I came to Kisumu.

SO            For how long did you stay with your husband?

MA            We lived together for seven years.

SO            Can you remember how long he was ill?

MA            His serious illness lasted for two years. His people said that he had *Chira* and therefore was treated with traditional herbs.

SO            What are some of the experiences you went through during his illness?

MA            My husband was the sole breadwinner in our family and during his illness it forced me to leave our children and him to search how we could eat in our house. This was very hard, for the sick was in the house and at the same time he could not earn. The other problem was that even the herbalist was expecting to be paid as he dispensed treatment. Many people also were accusing me as the cause of his sickness.

SO            Are there any new experiences you have undergone after his demise?

- MA His brother inherited me and after seven months he became sick and also died. After one year I became sick and went to Masogo dispensary but was referred to New Nyanza General Hospital. I was tested and was found HIV positive. Since then, I am attending Centre for Disease Control (CDC) clinic. The family branded me a killer; they pulled down my house and chased me a way. I have four children and it is very painful what I go through, though health wise is not so bad for I am given medicine and I am going strong. You can see that if I don't tell you that I am HIV positive you cannot know.
- SO Do you have some skills, assets and resources?
- MA I am a dressmaker and that is what I am doing now. A certain lady at Kibuye Market employed me. My brothers in-law and members of the family of my husband confiscated my assets. We had sewing machines and a shop where I was working in. All were taken from me.
- SO How do you relate to members of the church?
- MA I attend the Catholic Church here at Kibuye. There are so many widows who have decided not to be remarried or inherited and we have fellowship together and we are really encouraged.
- SO What does the church do or could do to help in your situation?
- MA You see, I have four children and I cannot bring them up properly, because what I am earning is very meagre and cannot allow me to give them good life and education. But if the church can help me to get a loan so that I have my small Kiosk and sewing machine I can be stable. I have decided to live without a husband.

The second interviewee : A.O.

Interviewer Silas Oyaro: SO.

Date: 20 July 2003 16- 17.30 hrs.

Venue: Tivoli Voluntary Counselling Centre.

Duration: 1 ½hrs.

SO A. what are the names you would like to be addressed with?

AO My names are A. O. I come from Gwasi and I am a widow.

SO How long did you stay with your husband?

AO We stayed for twelve years.

SO Can you remember how long he was ill?

AO yes he was sick for three years 1999-2000. He had cough and continuous headache. People in the family named it *Chira* because many in the family do not like attending hospitals or dispensaries.

SO What are some of the experiences that you went through during his illness?

AO Yes, in the second year, we came to hospital and just within three days we used a lot of money on medicine. At the same time children's education demanded money and we had to feed and dress them well.

SO Are there any new experiences you have undergone after his demise?

AO Yes, I too had herpes and came here to Kisumu to seek treatment.

SO How did you get money to come to Kisumu for such a treatment?

AO My husband had fishing nets and boats, so when he was sick we had people helping. But the problem was that they stole a lot of money from us

by cheating the real amount of fish caught per day. In fact after my husband's death those nets were all stolen. They were fourteen in number.

SO Do you have some skills, assets and resources?

AO Now what is remaining is just those boats which are hired by people and they pay monthly. I also have land which I grow some crops like maize and sorghum.

SO What have been doing to help you survive?

AO Because in our place what people do is just farming and fishing, I have resorted to farming. I normally get good yield that I sell surplus and use the other bit to sustain my family. You know I have four children, three girls and one boy.

SO How do the community, extended family respond to your situation?

AO They do not have any problem with me. They have shown me a lot of love and that has helped me a lot with my children. In fact brothers in law show me a lot of support in all things. And because the family have no problem with me, the extended family and community accepted me fully.

SO How do you relate to members of the church?

AO The church came and buried my husband and paid me few visits thereafter. But these days, the church leaders are not concerned with my daily living.

SO What does the church do or could do to help in your situation?

AO A part from prayer, I think the church has a lot of influence and could help especially, as my nets were stolen get new nets to enable me continue with that business of fishing. It is something we've been doing since I got married. The church can approach charitable organization in that line or even the government for the matter was reported to them and they know it.

Interviewee : BA.

Date: 22 July 2003 14- 16hrs

Venue: Korando

Duration: 2hrs.

SO           What is your name?

BA           My name is B. A. I come from Kolwa Kunya and my husband died in 2002.

SO           Can you remember how long he was ill?

BA           My husband was ill for a long time. But it was on and off so it is very hard to put exact duration.

SO           What are some of the experiences that you went through during his illness?

BA           It was very traumatic at times when the entire burden in the family was upon me. It gave me a lot of stress. I had to provide for the family and see that my husband is treated well.

SO           Are there any new experiences you have undergone after his demise?

BA           Oh yes, I am saved and did not like the Luo culture of widow inheritance. This brought me a lot of problems with my in laws. They chased me a way from their home. They took everything from me and said that I am the cause of their son and brother's death.

SO           Where do live now?

BA           The church intervened, they bought for me Iron sheets and other building materials and settled me in a small plot away from my husband's relatives. Now the problem that I have is that I do not have a plot of land where I can even dig to get my subsistence crops.

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### Appendix B. Story of a peasant and an antique dealer

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This story of a peasant and an antique dealer culminates this thesis.

There was an antique dealer who heard about a peasant up country who possessed a saucer decorated with an Imperial Crown. The antique dealer travelled by plane and jeep and finally for several miles on foot until he came to the village of the peasant. The villagers directed him to the peasant's hut where he was made welcome. His eyes immediately lit on a sleek black cat lapping up milk from a saucer. As the cat licked the last drops of milk the antique dealer could see the Imperial Crown marked upon the saucer and knew it to be very valuable. He sat talking to the peasant and after a while remarked upon what a fine cat the peasant owned. They chatted further and then the dealer said he thought the cat was so fine that he would like to purchase it. The peasant demurred at first but after several minutes of haggling agreed to sell the cat. The dealer was delighted but concealed his pleasure and as he was about to depart said casually: 'I shall need something to give the cat its milk, so if you don't mind I'll take that old saucer as well.' 'You can have the cat' replied the peasant, 'but not the saucer. We need the saucer to sell cats'.

The whole thesis has grappled with the condition of widows as they continually face antique dealers of our day who have heard of the peasant widows' property. As a result they travel far and wide to acquire or seize what these widows and their children should live on.

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