



CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

**AN ANALYSIS ON EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN GITHUNGURI,
KAMBAA AND MIGUTA PARISHES IN KIAMBU**

BY

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THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	i
Student's declaration.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
General Introduction.....	1
Central Area of Investigation.....	2
Methodology.....	3
Structural Presentation of the Essay.....	4

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 THE GENERAL VIEW ON WOMEN IN KENYA

1.1 Introduction.....	5
1.2 Cultural status of women in Kenya.....	6
1.3 Status of women in education in Kenya.....	9
1.4 Women's status in power and politics in Kenya.....	12
1.5 Economic status of women in Kenya.....	14
1.6 Legal status of women in Kenya.....	16
1.7 Conclusion.....	18

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN KIKUYU TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

2.1 Introduction.....	19
2.2 Social status of women in Kikuyu traditional society.....	20
2.3 Education status of women in Kikuyu traditional society.....	22
2.4 The status of women in power and politics in Kikuyu traditional society.....	24
2.5 Economic position of women in Kikuyu traditional society.....	26
2.6 Women and religion in Kikuyu traditional society.....	27
2.7 Conclusion.....	29

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN GITHUNGURI, KAMBAA AND MIGUTA PARISHES IN KIAMBU

3.1 Introduction.....	30
3.2 Statistics.....	31
3.3 Education status of women.....	32
3.4 Economic status of women.....	34
3.5 Participation of women in power and politics.....	36
3.6 The role and status of women in the Church.....	38
3.7 Conclusion.....	40

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 WOMEN IN SCRIPTURE

4.1 Introduction.....	41
4.2 The Old Testament view on the status of women.....	41
4.3 The New Testament view on the status of women.....	44

4.4 Teaching of the Catholic Church on women.....	47
4.5 Impact of the teachings in Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta parishes.....	49
4.6 Conclusion	52

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN GITHUNGURI, KAMBAA AND MIGUTA

5.1 Introduction.....	53
5.2 Women's role in empowerment process.	53
5.3 Role of men in empowerment process....	55
5.4 The role of the Church in women empowerment.....	57
5.5 The role of the government on women empowerment process.....	58
5.6 Conclusion.....	59

5.7 GENERAL CONCLUSION.....	60
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BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	62
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used here-in has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution. All sources have been acknowledged.



Signed

6/2/01

Date

DEDICATION

This work is a sign of thanksgiving and appreciation to God and to all those who have helped me materially and spiritually to reach where I am today in my religious life. In particular I dedicate this work to my sister and friend Mary Magdalene Kiruki who has been so close and loving to me, ever available to listen, to assist and to give me the encouragement and hope I needed in this journey.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world where every sphere of human life is advancing to a great height, the issue of gender equality and fair treatment is among the issues discussed. For a long time women have been considered and taken as the second sex, weaker sex, the second class human beings. They have been neglected, oppressed, discriminated against, ridiculed, abused and above all their presence and contribution in the development process has been under-rated.

In post-independent Africa, especially in the last three decades, many voices are raised in defence and uplifting of women. There is a realisation that women have a high potential and that their place in the society is equal to that of their male counterparts if not even better. This has caused an explosion of liberation theories and practicalities that geared to raising the status-quo of women. Different countries, cultures and localities have come up with strategies of empowering women. Much effort has been put into this issue, but much is yet to be done, and to be achieved.

In Kenya, issues concerning women have been mostly addressed and effected in urban areas while the rural women in many cases have remained in the same situation. It is the rural women that this study will concentrate on, trying to investigate their education, economical, political, cultural, and religious status and the extent of their empowerment. Muriithi observes that:

They are seeking for unconditional possibility of time and space to project for a better future. They are seeking for a reversal of relationships in which most of the problems that they are facing in life will be minimised. Problems that have been inherited from the cultural set-ups of many societies and are not questioned nor challenged.¹

¹ Stephen Muriithi, *Role and Empowerment of Women in Nyeri*, (Unpublished Thesis, Nairobi: CUEA, February, 1999), 3.

The proper empowerment of these women that we hope will be effected gradually; will witness a tremendous revolution for the better of the present women and men.

Central Area of Investigation

Like many of the African communities, Kenyan communities are patriarchal. Women's dignity and value are not well accorded just because they are women. They are marginalised, exploited and discriminated against. It is for this reason that we decided to focus our attention on the situation of the rural Kikuyu women.

Our investigation begins by looking at the status of women in Kenya. Then we shall look at the status of women in Kikuyu indigenous society to place the women in Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta in a certain social-cultural context.

Generally, an attempt has been made in empowering Kikuyu women in areas of education, economics, oppressive cultural practices, the religious sphere among others. By empowerment, we mean "a process as well as a strategy used to break the relations of dependence. It has as its main components awareness - raising and confidence building and a creation of support system."² It is also taken as a strategy for improving peoples position in the society. It is a process of recreating the lost value, dignity and recognition. It also means "a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater decision making power and control and transformation to action."³

We would like to find out how far this empowerment has gone and what is being done. Towards the end of this study, we are going to recommend some strategies towards these women's empowerment, in order to improve their status all the more.

² Julius Gauld and William Kolb, *A Dictionary of Social Sciences*, (New York: The Free Press of Glencore, 1965), 257.

³ Marilee Karl, *Women and Empowerment Participation and Decision-making*, (London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1995), 14.

Methodology

Our goal is accomplished through secondary sources. To collect information from the field and from the people some of whom we could not reach for interviews, we used questionnaires, whereby the informant was required to give his/her views by answering 28 set questions.

The questionnaires were distributed through friends and parishioners, in each of the parishes, and they were responsible to collect them and hand them back to us for analysis.

Our target was to send one hundred copies of questionnaires to each Parish and distribute them to both Catholics and non-Catholics in order to get a general view of the situation of women from different people and areas. According to the statistics, the whole area of our study' had population of about 56,474.

In our research, we interviewed nine people from every outstation of each of the parishes, thus 72 from Githunguri that has eight outstations, 36 from Kambaa with four outstations and 18 from Miguta that has two outstations; a total of 126 interviewees. We also interviewed 83 people from other denominations and 30 people who do not go to any Church. This brings to a grand total of 239 interviewees. Our target was to interview at least 300 people, but due to time and scarcity of resources, we did not reach the target.

The people interviewed were the working class, church leaders, farmers, students and pupils. We interviewed both males and females of different ages. The language of interviews depended on the preference of interviewee. We offered it in English, Swahili and Kikuyu languages. The analysis of the information was in English without interfering with the personal opinion of the informants

Structural Presentation of the Essay

This work is divided into five chapters, each one looks at the status of women from a different perspective. Chapter one deals with the general view of women situation in Kenya, while chapter two deals with the status of women in Kikuyu indigenous society, both focusing on cultural status, education, power and politics, economic status, legal status and religious role of women. These factors are also reflected in chapter three that deals with the status of women in Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta parishes in Kiambu.

Chapter four discusses women in the scriptures. Our emphasis here is on selected Old and New Testament views on the status of women, teaching of the Catholic church on women and the impact of the teaching in Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta Parishes.

The fifth and the final chapter is on the strategies for women empowerment. It looks into the role of women, role of men, the church and the government in the empowerment process in the areas of education, politics, economics and religious spheres. Each chapter has a short conclusion and we shall end with a general conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 THE GENERAL VIEW ON WOMEN IN KENYA

1.1 Introduction

While the world is undergoing rapid changes in human development, science and technology, and as a result of globalisation, gender equality and equity capture the attention of the world too. At present, almost every state is greatly involved in extensive research and fact finding on the position and status of women. It is a fact that women today are assuming positions of influence in all areas dominated by men before, but those involved remain a very small percentage.

In his message on International Women's Day in 1998 (quoted by Adagala), the United Nation's Secretary General Koffi Annan said that " Gender equality and equity is not only a good in itself, it is a means to meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance."⁴ Gender equality and equity, that is, the ensuring of justice and fairness for all, is a fact that is far from being realised.

Women are voicing their concerns now, they talk because they have realised what they need in today's world. There is yearning for freedom, for flexibility, for liberation and empowerment, and for the recognition of their abilities and potentials. "Women want to move forward, they want to participate fully in politics, to enjoy their full human rights and to feel understood in their culture."⁵ The positive or negative response to these pleas, determine the status of women in the society.

⁴ . Kavesta Adagala, "Involve women fully in reforms" in *Daily Nation*, (Nairobi: Thursday 19th March 1998.), 7.

⁵ Lilia Sebastian, "Women's long march in History" in *Jesus, Citizens of the World*, (Society of St. Paul: No. 2 Feb, 1989), 7.

Over the recent past in Kenya, the government has tried to improve the status of women in areas of education, employment, freedom of expression among others. According to Patrick Wachege, what has been done is just a tip of the ice-berg, for the change has not been adequately aggressive and rapid enough.⁶ A lot of effort and energy is required in all areas of women's lives to raise their status.

1.2 Cultural status of women in Kenya

Culture is a way of life. "It is a pattern of values and meanings expressed through images and symbols, which is transmitted by a human society and which enables human beings to communicate and develop their understanding of life."⁷ Cultures are different and keep on changing. For example Kenya as a nation has fifty two different ethnic communities, hence as many cultures. In all these cultures, women are treated differently. The common denominator in all of them is that women's status is low.

Due to women advocacy, gender conscientization in the mass media and civic education, there is a gradual change towards improvement on women status. For example, among the Kikuyu, those people who are educated and who hold strong religious beliefs especially Christians, they do not circumcise their daughters, they do not believe in education discrimination, they reject wife beating and other oppressive cultural practices that women have been subjected to. Some groups which are well exposed to modernity like some of the Akamba and Luhyas are also moving towards this improvement. Among those whose status is improving, are the few educated women, mostly living in urban areas and a few in the rural areas.

⁶ P.N. Wachege, *African Women Liberation: A Man's Perspective*, (Nairobi: Industrial Printing Works Ltd, 1992), 20

⁷ Aylward Shorter, "New Attitudes to African Culture and African Religion" in Shorter A. and others, *Towards African Christian Maturity*, (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications- Africa, 1987), 18.

To be general and taking different aspects of the cultural life of some major communities in Kenya like Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kamba, and Kuria, not much has changed. Women are perceived as possessions of males.⁸ The payment of bride wealth (as practised today) by men reduces many women to the level of objects, or properties. In these cultures women have to exist under the mercy of their male counterparts. For example, among the above mentioned communities, women have to adhere to the father's line age implying that it is to their fathers kin they owe their existence. These cultures hold women to be inferior to men and portray an image that women have to be submissive to men and their social position has to remain low.

Among the Akamba, "the woman is disregarded in the family and her children are called after their father's name and not after their mother's."⁹ The woman is identified with the husband and the "family dignity and respect are bestowed upon the man, and the woman's identity disappears or is absorbed."¹⁰ Among the Kikuyu, the culture does not favour women either. From birth a woman is exposed to discrimination in the way she is welcomed in comparison to a man. When a baby boy is born, the welcome is jovial with five ululation done by women themselves, while when a baby girl is born the welcome is less dramatic with four ululation. As we are going to see in the next chapter, boys were esteemed as heirs and the future pillars of the society deserving a jovial and dramatic welcome, while girls were associated with domestic activities. Some of the Kikuyu men still believe in wife beating, this makes women feel powerless, unappreciated and unworthy to contribute to the community's development.

Among the Kuria, daughters are seen in terms of cows. The father decides who is to marry his daughter and the bride wealth to be paid. Once the daughter is married, she is treated

⁸ Hazel Ayanga, "Violence Against Women in African Oral Literature as Portrayed in Proverbs" in Grace W. and Mary Getui (Eds), *Violence against Women*, (Nairobi: Action publishers, 1996), 15.

⁹ Wachege, Op. Cit., p.50.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

according to the number of cows paid. These Kuria women are taken as men's possessions as the culture has taught. This being the case, they are taken as objects of oppression in the sense that these women are neither given a chance to express and defend themselves in case of misunderstandings or a mistake. They are not allowed to question men. Many under age girls have been discontinued from school and forced into early marriage and misery.¹¹ Misery because they have no security, they have to adhere to the will of the husband whatever it entails. Educated girls are taken as morally weak.

Female circumcision is a practice that was held strongly by many of the indigenous communities in Kenya. It was not entirely negative. The aim of the practise was to initiate the young girls into womanhood, allow them to acquire new responsibilities in the community and pave the way for their marriage. According to scientific research, the operation is detrimental to women's health.

The abusive side of this practice is that it affects the reproductive core of the women, it affects women psychologically because it reduces their natural sensitivity to sexual response. When poorly done, it leads to over bleeding, serious infections and it can also cause death. These reasons, among others, make this practice to be called Female Genital Mutilation, because it damages instead of improving. It is damaging because its positive implications of initiating young girls into womanhood, and of preparing them for marriage, is outweighed by the negative implications it has on women.

The campaign against this practise is intensifying. For example, a fruit of this campaign in Kenya is the graduation of forty Masai girls from childhood to adulthood in a ceremony that bore slight resemblance to the traditional rite of passage.¹² Apart from the 'clitoridectomy'

¹¹ John Oywa, "The child brides" in Wednesday Magazine; *Daily Nation*, (Nairobi: 18th March 1998), 1.

¹² Njoki K., "The Middle Road" in Saturday Magazine; *Daily Nation*, (Nairobi: 29th April 2000), 5.

that was not performed, these forty Masai girls, were secluded from other people, and they received the instructions pertaining to their culture just the same as they would have done if they underwent the circumcision ritual. During the day of incorporation, there was jubilation and joy signifying that more adults were added into the community. This was a good sign that old and oppressive cultures can be replaced by healthier, simpler and constructive cultures without compromising the value.

We cannot be exhaustive in this work on this issue, but the fact is that the signs of the time require women to be culturally liberated and be empowered, to be aware of their cultural rights and be encouraged to stand to them. The time challenges men also to rethink and reconstruct the destroyed "image of God" (Gn 1:27) in which He created both male and female. He created them equal to complement each other as distinct but not different human beings in value and in nature.

1.3 Status of Women in education in Kenya

Education is the key to any development. The more people are educated, the easier to catch up with a rapidly changing world. Education should be given to everyone in the society. Considering women's status, education must be one of the areas in which the campaign for women's rights should be carried out.

The most basic indicator of the status of women is the illiteracy level. In Kenya the rate of illiteracy varies considerably from the rural to the urban situation, and from one social class to the other. In rural areas, the level of illiteracy is far much higher than in the urban areas. This is because of economic constraints, cultural beliefs and sometimes ignorance. Low-income women living in urban slums contribute to the majority of the illiterate women in urban areas.

To illustrate this:

Statistics reveal that Provinces like Nairobi have a literacy level of over 90% while North Eastern has about 30%. Female literacy rates are high in Nairobi with 89% while North Eastern has 13%. Over all, Central, and Nairobi Provinces have an advantage over other areas due to their proximity to urban

areas, cultural flexibility, a developed infrastructures among other reasons. Another interesting feature is that parents in urban areas have tended to send their children to school in higher numbers regardless of sex than those in the rural areas. According to 1989 Central Bureau of Statistics Census, the literacy rates in all the provinces were as follows:¹³

RURAL

URBAN

	Female	Male	Female	Male
Nairobi			89.32	94.78
Central	78.77	90.69	88.51	94.81
Coastal	40.36	68.27	73.05	87.73
Eastern	64.79	73.35	76.74	89.69
N. Eastern	8.11	35.84	32.26	70.00
Nyanza	63.01	81.75	79.95	91.42
R. Valley	56.97	71.54	80.02	90.59
Western	65.45	79.89	76.87	89.33

Table No. 1 (*Figures are in Percentage*)

The statistics above, give us a general picture of what has been prevailing. Up to now, no much change has taken place in terms of literacy and illiteracy aspects.

Currently in Kenya, the younger the women's age group is, the greater the percentage of literacy. This results from the awareness created by women's lobby groups, Non Governmental Organisations like United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Children Welfare Association (CWA), Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) among others, in the empowerment of the girl child. Women lobby groups have shown that the girl child is of equal need of education as the boy child in both urban and rural areas. Even in societies where the large portion of the women population is illiterate like some parts of the Rift Valley, North Eastern and areas of Eastern province, there is now an increasing tendency to educate the girl child.

Liberation and empowerment in terms of education means uplifting the status of women. "No improvement in the condition of these women can be expected before illiteracy has been

¹³ Mary C. Barngetuny, *Women's Education and Career Opportunities in Kenya*, (Nairobi: Creative Publishing Company Ltd, 1999), 8.

practically eradicated and literacy be promoted."¹⁴ To improve women's status, training in basic skills will be necessary for them in order to join skilled labour and be creative to do a variety of economic and development projects for their own economic independence and welfare, for their families and the community at large.

Attention has to be given to the enrolment of females in schools both in rural areas as well as in urban areas especially the slum areas. Kenya has tried to do this but the imbalance has persisted.

According to the statistics of 1995 in terms of ratio, "the disparity of female and male ratios was highest at the university level. The ratio was 2:79, 1:02 and 1:18 at the university, secondary and primary levels respectively."¹⁵ At a lower level the gap narrowed, but more girls still lack access to schools.

Later years show that the enrolment of girls at primary level is almost at par with that of boys. But, many girls drop out in the process due to some cultural practices like early marriages, teenage pregnancies and lack of money for fees. In 1997 47.1% of the students in secondary schools were girls while less than 33% students in public universities were women. In private universities 50.3% of the students were women,¹⁶ expressing that while not considered by the government, women have taken the pain of joining other academic institutions. This implies that many women are aware of the need to be educated and yet the government is not ready to balance the chances. The major hindering factor is the old mentality that men should get the first chances in education. This urge for education drives these disadvantaged Kenyan women

¹⁴ Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, "The current status of women cross-culturally: changes and persisting barriers" in Walter B., S.J (ed) *Woman. New dimension*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1997),4.

¹⁵ Mark Agutu, "Varsity: No end to gender disparity" in *Daily Nation*, (Nairobi: Saturday 14th March 1998),16.

¹⁶ Lucy Oriang, "Facts and figures that say it all" in *Wednesday Magazine; Daily Nation*, (Nairobi: 8th March 2000),6.

to organise themselves to get money from their friends or organisations willing to help them uplift themselves academically.

This fact shows that though the level of illiteracy might be overcome, the problem of securing chances in the job market for women, if the stop is at the primary and secondary levels will still persist. The statistics conducted by Provisional Economic Survey in 1997 indicate that:

The bulk of educated women who joined the labour force after graduating from secondary and higher education ended up in jobs in public administration, education, domestic and community services. Fewer women feature in jobs such as manufacturing, electricity and water, building and construction, and other areas.¹⁷

In the civil service, and in the private sector majority of women are employed as receptionists, service managers, cash clerks, secretaries and typists, junior clerical officers and other such lowly jobs, showing that higher education is needed for women to engage themselves in highly paying jobs.

1.4 Women's status in power and politics in Kenya

“ What we need are not just a few women who make history but many women who make policy.”¹⁸ Empowerment is realised when every woman is involved. This is far from being a reality in Kenya. Since the beginning of multipartism in Kenya, women have tried to let their voices be heard in political issues. They have formed lobby groups, political caucus and Non Governmental Organisations among others. Civic education has been offered to many women on politics especially in the rural areas, but it seems gender equality and equity in Kenya as regards to politics and other associated institutions leaves a lot to be desired.

With regard to voting, women are the majority of the eligible voters especially in the rural areas. For example in 1997 general elections, 9,028,789 people voted. Women who voted

¹⁷ Bang'etuny, Op. Cit., p. 50.

¹⁸ Geraldine Ferrano, 1984 vice-presidential candidate in the United States, at the 1991 International women's day event at the UN.

were 5,809,462 which is 64.3% of the total number of voters.¹⁹ Out of this percentage, most of the women came from the rural parts of Kenya. Surprisingly enough, many women did not vote for female candidates. What contributes to this low spirit in voting of women by women is the traditional belief that politics and power are male activities.

In 1997, out of 880 candidates nominated for parliamentary positions, only 47 were women. Out of the 47, only four were elected into the parliament, that is, Charity Ngilu (SDP), Martha Karua (DP), Wamwachai (KANU) and Beth Mugo (SDP).

Reflection on the positions women hold in Kenya, reveals that at higher levels of political leadership, the level of participation of women is extremely low. There are hindrances that block women from rising to high positions and this contributes much to their low political participation. Some of these hindrances include belief that high positions like ministerial posts are reserved for men, lack of enough education on the side of women, discrimination of women just because they are women to mention but a few..

The issue of men and women in striking a balance in decision making in politics has not yet been reached. This is because, if it is a matter of voting to pass a decision on certain issues, and the majority of voters are men who may not be in favour of the idea of women, the decision will end up being passed by the majority, and in this case men. This unfairness in political decision making denies women their full rights of contributing towards nation building as Kenyan citizens, their voices lack on key decisions such as the country's budget and setting the government's vision, thus their skills and ideas are normally unheard and remain unrepresented in most crucial issues.

¹⁹ Arcadia Communications, *Report on the General Elections in Kenya, 23-30 DEC. 1997*; Institute for Education in Democracy, Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, NCKK, 1998. p. 188.

Where we find the number of women rising in Kenya is in the area of civil service namely, teachers, police women, nurses, and secretaries. Critical areas like department of defence or finance, only a few women are given top positions. In most cases, “when women do rise to top positions, their potential is often under-utilised. Stereotypes and misconceptions prevent organisations from appreciating the distinctive approaches that women bring to management and decision making.”²⁰

Realising that generally women have not played an effective role as stakeholders in the democratisation process, leaving them marginalized in politics, in economics and in public decision process, there has been a fight in Kenya to change a section of the constitution to allocate to women significance and compulsory percentage of political posts. Among the efforts being made is the recent Affirmative Action Bill tabled by Beth Mugo and the drafted Equality Bill to address discrimination against women, by the Home Affairs, Heritage and Sports minister, Mr. Noah Katana Ngala. It is so unfortunate that quite a good number of people among them Muslim women, some members of Parliament and Cabinet ministers, senior government officials are very much opposed to the Affirmative Action Bill. If they are passed, they will witness a major step in political empowerment of women in Kenya that will improve even other areas of their general life including their present economic status that we are going to discuss here.

1.5 Economic status of women in Kenya

Economic strength defines the amount of wealth a country has and the well being of its people. Distorted economy is symbolised by among others escalating poverty, inflation, collapsed infrastructure, low education standards, and low per capita income just to mention

²⁰ *The Advancement of women: Notes for speakers.* (Department of public information United Nations 1995), p. 79.

a few. Economic status rises when everyone is fully involved in production, decision making and execution of the objectives without gender, racial, religious and class discrimination. The economy grows when specialisation, division of labour and utilisation of potentials is realised.

In Kenya today, the economic situation is recessing due to high inflation rate which is estimated to be 2% per annum, the repercussions of the Structural Adjustment Programme that has reduced employment in the formal sector, economic globalisation and the growing level of poverty.

Many of the Kenyan people are living below poverty level, 54% of them being women.²¹ There are barriers like low education, domestic ties, cultural prejudices and lack of exposure especially of the rural women that are hindering the vast majority of women in their efforts to achieve parity with men in the economic arena in terms of employment, labour force, wages and professionalism. So the small number of women that is recognised in economic activities does not automatically result in commensurate gains in income or improvement in living conditions.

Most of the time there has been a serious underestimation of women's economic contribution in Kenya. Just to mention, most of the rural areas' occupation is agricultural and it has been estimated that 70-80% of agricultural labour supply is carried out by women. According to statistics enumerated in the May 2000 issue of *Parents Magazine*, women contribute 70% of the work force in the agricultural sector and mostly in small scale subsistence farming, but they control only 8% of its operations implying that they do not enjoy fully the fruits of their labour.

²¹ Rose Thuo, "Women's Economic Activities" in *Parents*, (No. 167 May 2000), 35.

This labour goes unpaid and unaccounted for. Since these “important economic roles played by women cannot be classified under the traditional defined regular gainful employment, economic analysis omits them or seriously under estimates them.”²² This results in the fact that where majority of women are not employed or are in lowly paid jobs, where many women live in the rural areas illiterate and economically strained, their status is very low.

For example, the 1995 Kenya Report, presented to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, indicated that at the head quarters of government ministries, majority of men were appointed Permanent Secretaries and directors of various disciplines. Women graduates who joined a government ministry often stayed in the same grade for years.²³ Referring to the Provisional Economic Survey, 1997, the women officers found in the ministries were fewer than men. The high level decision making jobs in job group ‘P’ there were 4.9% females. The second highest decision making level was group ‘I’ to ‘N’ which had 13% females. A high percentage of women was therefore found in the lower ranks with 22%.²⁴

Generally Kenyan women have made a step forward in the economic field, but a force is needed, empowerment is required to see them reaching the economic status that is worthy of them.

1.6 Legal status of women in Kenya

United Nation’s Declaration On Human Rights calls equality a right, but powers on earth have never turned it into a fact. The constitutional reform in Kenya is a process that is aimed at attaining considerable equality in rights. The Affirmative Action Bill on women calls for equal rights of both women and men.

²² Burkhardt, Op. Cit., p.11.

²³ Barngetuny, Op. Cit., p.53.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

Many laws in Kenya hinder women's empowerment. Mostly they relate to land and property, inheritance laws, family laws, laws governing the financial sector, labour and employment laws among others.²⁵ Generally, women in Kenya are faced with a lot of difficulties as concerns land rights in terms of inheritance, control and ownership. This has been affected mostly by cultural biases and ties that include beliefs, practices and traditions.

Section 70 of the constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, including discriminatory laws. The laws governing men's and women's access to land in Kenya ultimately fall under the constitution which was drafted at independence in 1963. The law of succession Act which came into force in 1981 does provide for widows and both female and male children to inherit property of a person who dies without making a will.

But although the Kenyan law today allows women and girls to inherit land, cultural practices still lag behind these statutes and still confine inheritance of land largely to men. Women are left without rights to land transfer, instead they have the use right by virtue of their positions either as wives, mothers, or other relations in the communities they live.

Majority of women cannot get loans for investment or credit for their own development using land because they simply do not have it. This affects women, for ownership of land certifies citizenship. It has an impact on an individual's social economic status particularly in rural areas of Kenya²⁶ where agriculture is the main occupation. The result to this is the low productivity and the growing level of poverty.

A good number of women especially in the rural areas and urban poor, are not informed on their rights and the land laws. Apart from the Federation of International Women Lawyers

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²⁵ Rose Thuo, Op. Cit., p. 27.

²⁶ Kenya Human Rights Commission, *Women and Land Rights*, (Nairobi: KHRC, 1998), 4.

(FIDA) who advocate for women's land rights, not much effort has been put on to conscientize women of their rights.

The result is that they remain nominal and silent with the oppressive structures existing around them. Due to this fact they have no force of action and the capacity to mobilise for change. The knowledge of laws and rights is one way of effecting changes in the political field, change within the family and economic change in the whole community for the better.²⁷

The issue is that when legal rights are recognised, there will be an increase in productivity stemming from access to loans and credit, investment and economic security that will enhance self respect and confidence. There is needed a legal reform that will elevate women status, this will not only empower them, but it will allow the policy makers to seek change in all areas of their activities.

1.7 Conclusion

We may say that the effort has been put on to raise the status of women in Kenya, but it has benefited just a small section of women. Most affected of Kenyan women are the rural Kenyan women and those who live in urban slums.

We have seen that in all areas of life, Kenyan women and the society has a complaint to make because the women and the girl child get the second priority after men. Women find themselves being exploited without gains.

What the concerned parties are supposed to do is to set the strategies. First to recognise who a woman is, a human person with all the potential and to throw the pride of male chauvinism away and embark on renewing and allowing women greater chances in all aspects of human life. This is what liberation and empowerment is all about. In the next chapter, we analyse the status women were assigned in Kikuyu traditional society.

²⁷ Rose Thuo, OP. Cit., p. 35.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN KIKUYU TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

2.1 Introduction

The Kikuyu comprise the largest ethnic community in Kenya with a population of 5.3 million people according to 1999 Population and Housing Census Report released on 29-1-2001.²⁸

The community occupies the central part of the country, administratively the Central Province, and are spread in small or big numbers in other parts of the country. The origin of the group is a prominent aspect in the life of the Kikuyu community. The myth of origin has it that, *Mogai*²⁹ took Gikuyu who is the father of the group to the top of Mt. Kenya. He showed him the wonderful landscape and gave the whole land to him. *Mogai* gave him a wife Mumbi (creator or moulder) who bore him nine daughters whose names Wanjiku, Wangui, Wangari, Waithira, Wanjeri, Wacera, Wambui, Wanjiru, and Wangeci represent the nine clans of the Kikuyu ethnic group.

In this aspect, we recognise the priority God gave to women. He gave women a first chance to give an identity to the community's social system. Women are the original founders of the clan system. Nine men to marry the daughters were to come later after Gikuyu beseeched God to give him some men to marry the daughters. The myth provides a solid rationalisation for a period of domination of the matrilineal system in the Kikuyu social organisation³⁰ where women were the rulers. This was overthrown later on by the revolt of men. Men felt threatened by their wives and they agreed among themselves that all women should become pregnant the same season. Upon giving birth, when they were weak and helpless, men took

²⁸ Ken Opala, "Census figures released" in the *Daily Nation*, (Nairobi: Tuesday, 30th January 2001), 3.

²⁹ *Mogai*: The word refers to the Divider of the Universe. The word that will develop to *Ngai* later, that is the kikuyu word for God.

³⁰ Silvania Bottignole, *Kikuyu Traditions: Culture and Christianity*, (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984), 31.

over the ruling and women became the ruled. The legend does not indicate the time of this revolt.

With the overthrowing of matrilineal social system, a strictly patrilinear system was adopted and the man became the head of the family. He became the master of the land which the family occupied. Ownership of land symbolised power and authority, and since the women did not own the land any more, it meant that they had no power or authority at all. The women became part of the family of the husband after he completed paying the bride wealth. Once married, the woman took residence in her husband's land and cultivated the land given to her.³¹

Kikuyu women found themselves in this situation where men owned everything. This situation of men over women though not openly criticised, did not spare women of exploitation, discrimination and oppression.

2.2 Social status of women in Kikuyu traditional society

Like other communities, life among the Kikuyu begun by birth and the child born was welcomed differently depending on the sex. Once a child was born, the women ululated with joy five times for a boy and four times if the baby was a girl. The five or four ululation were to alert the family members and neighbours who were waiting outside during the delivery of the sex of the child that was born; but the question comes, why five for a boy and four for a girl?

This was because, boys were more valued as heirs to their fathers while girls were to get married and leave their community of birth. After giving birth, the woman was put into seclusion to avoid any contamination with the world and to protect the child from witches

³¹ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya. The tribal life of the Gikuyu*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953),XV.

while on the other hand, she was termed as unclean until the ceremony of purification was done.

A woman who gave birth to girls only was not respected as a good woman for she failed to offer a heir to the family. A sterile woman was the object of the spite of other women and the pity of her friends. She was segregated, and if every possible remedy had been tried and the last hope failed, such a woman committed suicide.³² A barren woman or one whose children were still born or died very young was an object of scorn among her more favoured sisters. It was taken that such a woman was immoral while young, she was lazy and careless in caring for her children or she was cursed.

In cases of adultery, rape and other assaults on a woman, the treatment was taken as a property violation requiring compensation to the husband or the father of the woman, that is, the victim had no right to receive the compensation paid for the damages because, she was 'owned'; either by the father if she was a daughter or by the husband if she was a wife.

If a woman was caught in adultery, she was liable to be severely beaten and then to have ewe's urine poured over her wounds to make them painful. Some men punished adultery by breaking a nest of tree ants over the woman so that she was severely stung and bitten.³³ All was to make the woman feel guilty and apologise for the act committed. For a man, no corporal punishment was imposed. He was taken before the council of elders and had to pay a fine of goats to the elders.

Young girls were not ill-treated. They were appreciated because of the invested capital they represented. This invested capital was bride wealth. To the father of the girl, the bride wealth meant partly an increment to his wealth. It also symbolised unity among the in-laws, it was a

... ..
³² L.S.B. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903, Vol 11*, (London: Academic Press, 1977), 542.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 814.

sign that the girl belonged to another family. Girls were accustomed early to daily duties, in preparation for their marriage. Once married the girls had to live up to the responsibility of the bride wealth paid by their husband. Failure or any avoidance in any of the numerous tasks would be punished with a good thrashing.

According to the customary law, a wife may be divorced on the grounds of barrenness, refusal to render conjugal rights to the husband, practising witchcraft, being a habitual thief and continual misconduct.³⁴ A wife had the same right to divorce her husband on these grounds in addition to cruelty, ill-treatment, drunkenness and impotence. These were said but could not apply because, once the husband had offered the *Ngoima ya kuguraria*,³⁵ the woman became legally married and had no right to return to her home because it meant that the father had to pay back the bride wealth.

Kikuyu women lived totally under men, governed and controlled. The culture had no liberating power but rather overpowering power. They had no voice, and this remained part of their normal life. Today some of these issues are still found in the community especially in the conservative Kikuyu areas. Women are silenced and cannot express any injustice they experience.

2.3 Education status of women in Kikuyu traditional society

Education begun at the time of birth and ended with death. Children had to pass various stages from childhood to adulthood with a system of education defined for every stage of life. The major educators were the parents mainly in the family until the children reached the stage

³⁴ Kenyatta, Op. Cit., p. 183.

³⁵ *Ngoima ya kuguraria*: A ceremony for sealing marriage arrangement. It was done by slaughtering a goat offered by the husband to the in-laws. It was the 'final pay' for bride wealth that made the woman a full member of the husband's family.

of communal education. There were no formal schools, the place for education was the homestead.

Both girls and boys had chances for education, but the education to be given was determined by the identity one had in the community, that is, whether one was a female or a male. When the children grew beyond babyhood, the father took charge of the boy's education. The boys were taught agricultural practical training, about the family, clan and communal lands while the girls were taught all things concerning the domestic duties of a wife in managing and harmonising the affairs of a homestead.³⁶

Special care was also devoted to physical development. Different dances were the means of providing healthy and bodily exercises. In this respect, boys had more facilities than girls. While they had wrestling, running and jumping, sparring with sticks and shields, lifting weights and club throwing; girls had their share in the house work, nursing the babies, cutting and gathering firewood and fetching water,³⁷ leaving them alienated from different activities outside.

When of age, both boys and girls underwent the biggest and drastic step in their lives, that is initiation. This was a ritual ceremony accompanied by thorough instructions about the life in the community. The initiates acquired a new status, moving into adulthood from childhood. The next stage in educational advancement was marriage. This was a superior status and it involved rights and duties. The education given did not concern sex only, but also respect for elders.

While men were taught how to provide for wives and children, girls were taught how to behave when married, that they had to get married and bring wealth to their family by bearing

³⁶ Kenyatta, *Op. Cit.*, p. 103.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

many children and bring honour to the family and the whole community. They had to behave like gentle women, not to raise their eyes or voice while talking to men in public, and not to eat in the presence of men other than those of their own age or kinsfolk.

Women themselves in the advisory council of women gave this kind of education. They warned the girls against hasty and impetuous behaviour, to regard all the children and property in their husband's homestead as theirs and treat them with the care they would give their most personal belongings. For women, education meant not how to develop or uplift themselves, but on how to give honour and submit to men. Women's status in education was at the same level as that of their cultural status. The status of being underdogs, second to men and in the middle between men and things as proverb goes, *mundu muka ndari igweta*, that is, no one bothers about a woman, showed the little regard the Kikuyu had for their women.

This tradition of women being second still persists in the Kikuyu community especially with conservative members who do not see the need of educating their daughters. In their minds, the boy must get the priority in education and if the resources are available the girl can also advance in education. A lot of effort is needed to open the minds of many of these people to realise that both sexes have equal rights and potential to execute different opportunities that nature offers to human beings.

2.4 The status of women in power and politics in Kikuyu traditional society

This is one area where the status of Kikuyu women was almost zero. Women were only respected in their role as mothers and educators, but the traditional society did not allow them to have any say in the public life while every male adult who attained the age of thirty, had an equal right to participate in political life in terms of law, justice, customs and religion.

According to the customary law, the political activities started at the family level and extended to the village, district and communal level.³⁸ Every major decisions were passed by the oldest male elders.

They discussed legislative matters, set priorities and made the laws effective in punishing the offenders. They safeguarded the peace and the respect of the traditions within the group. Unfortunately, in all these councils of elders, there was not even a single woman. They were judged but they could not judge. Women were punished, but they could not punish. This means that women had no representatives in the village, district and community councils. Any decision passed over them, they had to obey without question and a chance to appeal. Not at any moment did they participate in judging men. They had an advisory council that took the role of advising and instructing the young ladies on how to make good wives and mothers.

Women suffered under the authoritative rule of male political system without having even a single chance to appeal. To an extent as we shall see later, this custom is still present in Kikuyu land because, women up to now are very reluctant to engage themselves in politics. They do not speak out apart from a few. Women do not attend *Barazas*³⁹ in order to know what is happening. Many kikuyu women in the rural areas argue that politics is the business of men.

Currently, as we are going to see in the next chapter, civic education is going on in the churches and in the Small Christian Communities to awaken women in realising that power and politics is not a game for men only, but for all, and any bad political system affects all, to the disadvantage of women and children.

³⁸ Bottignole, Op. Cit., p. 33.

³⁹ *Barazas*: Local gatherings called by chiefs and sub-chiefs to discuss matters affecting the local communities and government plans in the villages and rural areas.

2.5 Economic position of women in Kikuyu traditional society

From the economic point of view, the Kikuyu country was a source of immense agricultural and forestry resources.⁴⁰ Agriculture then was the main occupation of the kikuyu people. Both women and men were fully involved.

Each family constituted an economic unit and a controlled division of labour according to the sexes. According to kikuyu customs men had the duty of deforesting and breaking the soil, to plant specified crops like yams and bananas, providing sticks for falling bananas and cassava, dealing with irrigation and looking after the domestic animals. They were also in charge of building the hut frame, defending their families and homestead, hunting and iron processing. In the case of women, their duty was to prepare the soil for sowing, planting maize, beans and sweet potatoes, taking care of the fields and the crops. Women too had to take care of the running of their homes by supplying wood and water, cooking food, taking care of the husbands, children and the guests. They had a duty of manufacturing leather clothes, pottery and weaving and completed the building of the new houses by thatching.⁴¹

Apart from home responsibilities, both women and men did trading through barter. While women bartered cereals and vegetables, men exchanged cows, goats and sheep. Women were the sole managing directors of the food supply in their respective family groups and any woman who managed efficiently the economic affairs and other duties in her family group, was highly respected in the community.

⁴⁰ C. Cagnolo, *The Kikuyu: Their customs, traditions and folklore*, (Nyeri: The mission Printing school, 1933), 50.

⁴¹ Bottignole, *Op. Cit.*, p. 32.

Generally the customs and traditions taxed the mother of the family with considerably heavy toil, in the sense that she had to join others in farming and also do the home duties and responsibilities as a wife. The custom barred husbands from helping the wives. If any man attempted to take one of the women's responsibilities, he would have become the laughing-stalk of the whole neighbourhood. Surprisingly, this did not prevent a real bond that could be recognised by general opinion existing between husband and wife/wives. As Cagnolo says, "the woman understands her position perfectly well, and claims no more than is due to her by common custom, being patient and resigned, even satisfied, in conditions that would appear to us oppressive."⁴²

Even today, agriculture remains the major occupation of the Kikuyu people. Women are faithful providers of food, but to their worst, they are not uplifted from the trends of the traditions. Even most of the duties done by men traditionally, today they are left to the common rural kikuyu women. Empowerment is required in the agricultural activity in such a way that they become the executors and the beneficiaries of their energy.

2.6 Women and Religion in Kikuyu Traditional Society

The Kikuyu community believed in a supernatural being, spiritual, ruler and governor of the universe called *Ngai* (God). They maintained a close and vital relationship with Him and other spiritual entities like the ancestors.

The community had no ministerial priesthood or religious preaching due to the fact that religion was interwoven with traditions and social customs of the people. This being the case, all members of the community were supposed to know all that was necessary to be known about religion and customs right from their childhood. The duty of imparting this knowledge

⁴² Cagnolo, Op. Cit., p. 52.

to the children was entrusted to the parents, and especially the mothers who were looked upon as the teachers of both religious ethics and social custom. This was the first and major religious role of women because the children were closer to them at their early childhood.

The most solemn religious service was of sacrificing to *Ngai*. This duty and privilege belonged mainly to the elders (*athuri aigongona*) who were mostly chiefs, sub-chiefs and high political figures. According to Kenyatta;

The elders involved must be the ones who have outlived their more worldly desires and can now be believed to have only the consideration of the welfare of the community at heart. If women were to be permitted, they must be only those who have passed child-bearing age, for they were considered to be immune from worldly mischief and are now mothers not of individuals, but of the community. Two children a male and a female who were to take part, must not be above eight years of age, children under that age were considered of pure heart, mind and body, and were free from worldly sins.⁴³

This shows that women were not excluded from religious activities, although their presence was not guaranteed during the sacrificial ceremonies. The purpose of this choice and preference of elders and young children was to make the sacrifice holy, pure and uncontaminated as the offerers were. Any impurity during the sacrificial offering either for rains, calamities, thanksgiving, among others, rendered the whole sacrifice unworthy and unaccepted to *Ngai*.

In the spirit realm, there were no differences between the spirits of women or men. They belonged to the same category, that is, the spirits of the parents (*Ngoma cia aciari*). The custom demanded the veneration of all equally, failure of which would bring disharmony.

The whole picture shows that women were not alienated from religious activities. They imparted much of religious knowledge to their children, participated in the sacrificial ceremonies and secured a chance of honour when they joined the spirit world. This is a sign

⁴³ Kenyatta, Op. Cit., p. 245.

that in matters of religion and worship, there was no much discrimination and exploitation accorded to women.

2.7 Conclusion

To close this chapter it is important to mention that in the day to day life of the kikuyu community nothing seemed to be oppressive. Everyone took it that life was designed to be that way, thus nobody could oppose the system. The problem was that women suffered unknowingly if not acceptingly.

According to the findings we may say that traditionally the kikuyu women were taught that theirs are domestic related responsibilities, and beyond this meant trespassing. The tradition taught women that they had no place in public life, and in case of problems, they were supposed to keep quiet and suppress all. As some of these traits of fear are still seen even today, our next chapter will try to examine and analyse the present status of women, concentrating much to the localities of Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta parishes in Kiambu.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN GITHUNGURI, KAMBAA AND MIGUTA

PARISHES IN KIAMBU

3.1 Introduction

Kiambu is located in central province. It is the smallest district in the province. It borders Nairobi city to the south, Nakuru district to the west, Nyandarua district to the North, Thika and Maragua districts to the East.⁴⁴ Ecclesiastically, Kiambu is under the archdiocese of Nairobi.

It is divided into five administrative divisions namely Limuru, Kiambaa, Githunguri, Kikuyu and Lari. Our area of study falls in Githunguri division. Githunguri, is predominantly an agricultural area with subsistence crops being maize, beans, potatoes, cabbages and carrots among others. The climate is favourable for the growth of such cash crops as coffee in Miguta; tea, pyrethrum and floriculture. Zero grazing, poultry and piggery are more prevalent in Githunguri and Kambaa having milk production as the main livestock products. People also rely on small scale enterprises like retail shops and grocery outlets for their economic support.

Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta are fairly well served with various education facilities like pre-primary schools, primary and secondary schools. Health facilities are not up to date and infrastructures like roads and communication network are collapsing. In terms of religion, these areas are predominantly Christian with many Protestant churches coming up. They

⁴⁴ Office of the President and ministry of Planning and National Development, *Kiambu District Development Plan 1997-2001* p. 4.

include Full Gospel, Word of Faith, Christian Evangelical Church, Jerusalem Church of God among others.

According to our interviews and the questionnaires, the general picture is that the situation of women empowerment is improving but still a lot has to be done. Analysing the situation then, we are going to look at the statistics, look at the education status of women, their economic status, their participation in power and politics, and their role in the church.

3.2 Statistics

Kiambu district registered an estimated population of 767,209 in 1999. Given the annual growth rate of 2.87% as the Kiambu Statistics Department shows, the population is estimated at 812,535 persons by the end of 2001. The district records a higher proportion of females to males in the population. According to 1996 figures, the sex ratio was at 1:0.99, implying that for every 100 females, there were 99 males. In Githunguri division according to Kiambu district statistics office, the population was expected to count at 161,355 persons by the end of the year 2000. (*District Statistics office*)

Since our target was not only the status of women in the catholic church in these areas, we went out to find out the general population estimates within these parishes. According to the Githiga Location chief's office data that takes the whole of Kambaa and some areas of Githunguri parish, the population is estimated at 29,017 while Ikinu Location chief's office data that takes Miguta and the rest of the areas of Githunguri parish estimates the population at 27,457 respectively. In total then, the whole area of our study's population is estimated at 56,474, that is, 35% of Githunguri division's total population.

As is generally true in almost all the places, women in these areas are more than men. Our research indicates that females consist around 54% of these areas' population that is, 30,496 females, and they play a vital role in small scale farming, and small scale entrepreneurship

that result to a higher contribution to the gross domestic product.⁴⁵ For those who are married, they use their husband's land. Some do their farming on their father's land especially those who are not married while others rent land for farming. Surprisingly most of the time this aspect of women is not complemented, it is taken for granted that women are to stay at home taking care of the family and the farm.

Education plays a vital role in the opening up of the mind to see things in a wider sense. Without education for women there is no empowerment and without empowerment, there is no progress.

3.3 Education status of women

Illiteracy and dependence are the key contributors to women oppression and discrimination. If women are well educated, they will secure chances in the job market, minimise the level of poverty and become independent economically, hence uplifting their own status.

The whole of Kiambu enjoys various educational facilities especially schools. The Kenya Rural literacy survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics showed that 77% of the adult population are able to write and read while 22.99% could not. Of the 77%, women constitute 33% and 44% are men.⁴⁶ This difference of women to men may be explained by the African traditions in that most parents favour educating their sons than their daughters.

According to the ministry of education office in Kiambu; Githunguri division in which Miguta and Kambaa are found, the enrolment of girls is more than that of boys at the primary and secondary school levels as illustrated below.

Pre-primary			Primary			Secondary			Youth Poly.	College
No	M	F	No	M	F	No	M	F	No	No
75	2392	2373	48	16399	16515	20	3513	4014	2	1

Table No. 2 (Source: An extract from the Ministry of Education Office, Kiambu, 1996 data. The number of enrolment in Youth Polytechnic and the college was not given)

⁴⁵ John Kiarie, Statistics officer, Kiambu District. *INTERVIEWED* 27-6-2000.

⁴⁶ Office of the Vice-President and Ministry of Planning and National Development, Op. Cit., p. 43.

This number goes down with regard to admission to university and other colleges. After this post-secondary school, males go to specialised and professional orientation while many women acquire simple knowledge for simple jobs and others get married. Most of the women turn to be teachers, secretaries, receptionists, cleaners and casual labourers among others. This is because the community has categorised the male and female careers. Males are supposed to go for such aggressive careers like engineering, accountancy, medicine, architecture and law, while women turn in big numbers to simple ones. Their economic status, although they are literate, is brought down by their education level.

By the fact that a good number of women stop schooling after completing secondary school while others join simple local colleges and youth polytechnics; the highest probability is that they can only engage in the simplest jobs and farming, hence remaining highly dependent.

Most of our informants, accepted the idea that chances of enrolment of females and males in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools are favourable in these areas, but women loose it all when it demands higher education.

At present, some women among them Margaret Ngechu who deals with the Marriage Encounter Movement, are fighting for equality and equal share in education chances in the family on the basis of capabilities. They are advocating for women to acquire knowledge and skills in areas of their interest but not the society's determined areas.

Those women who are educated and committed Christians especially in Githunguri, are advocating for the spirit of flexibility with the aim of transforming and changing people's attitude and stereotypes in the way they view and treat women. They are doing this through seminars and workshops organised in particular churches. Women are realising that good and proper education is necessary for any development. What they have discovered is that

education is the key to improve the economy, health and nutrition, power and politics, decision making and the elimination of poverty for sustainable development.

This is witnessed by their effort to conscientize the parents on the importance of educating their daughters and allowing them the freedom to choose their careers. It is during parent days in schools that some of these women are invited to give talks to parents and to share with them their experiences as women who have enjoyed the fruits of education.

3.4 Economic status of women

The economic activities undertaken in these areas include farming, livestock production, and small business operations. Mostly, women work in the farms. The most important objective of this agricultural sector is to achieve household food security, while at the same time they grow tea, coffee, pyrethrum and flowers in small scale. Since many of the families' land is not big enough, women act as the backbone of the practised small scale farming. They directly provide most of the farm family labour because of their food provision responsibilities to the family, and the taking care of the cash crops.

Normally in these areas, majority of women achieve household food security for their families while men especially those who are employed, cater for the other needs. Many women are not employed in the formal sectors for wages and for those employed, are not in highly paying jobs. According to the Welfare Monitoring Survey II (C.B.S) Kiambu, 1996, females constitute about 49.6% of the total labour in the district but majority of them are engaged in unpaid family labour category. Of the total labour force, 40.4% is in unpaid family labour which is mainly agricultural.⁴⁷ The table below gives a general picture of the whole district, but the facts reflected apply too in our area of study.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

SECTOR	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
Public Sector	44,739	8.7	18,398	3.4
F. sector own business	7,269	1.4	4,551	0.9
F. sector employee	32,414	6.3	9,260	1.8
Informal sect. own business	42,646	8.3	22,253	4.3
Informal Sect. Employee	27,277	5.3	9,848	1.9
Casual Labour	24,755	4.8	16,678	3.3
Unpaid Family Labour	26,840	5.2	180,308	35.2
Other Sectors	19,449	3.8	25,159	4.9

Table No. 3 (Source: An extract from Welfare Monitoring Survey II, Kiambu, 1996 data)

Many women have never worked for wages, they are unpaid family employees, or self-employed, engaging in small scale trading activities. Their lack of training limits their access to well paying jobs. Their need to combine employment with child rearing responsibilities relegates the majority of them to low paying jobs (like cleaning, as casual labourers, receptionists, teachers) in the informal sectors which often only offers low and unsteady income.⁴⁸

Some women's husbands are working for wages. Those whose men are employed for wages rely on them for support and supplementing their income. But the area of concern in women's economic development in these areas touches on women's access to land.

Bound by the traditions, women do not own land. The inheritance practices still favour men and only give women tenurial rights but not ownership. Women of these areas like others, have less or no access to loans for investments since they lack guarantors or security. Therefore, they do not invest much or purchase farm inputs. They lack additional cash from cash crops, milk and livestock because every little income received, is used in the family and what remains, the man takes. This increases the burden of agricultural and livestock production significantly because instead of development, there is retardation. Most of our informants expressed concern about the fact that due to so many economic responsibilities, women finish the day exhausted because they are generally over burdened.

⁴⁸Shanyisa A. Khasiani, *Migration, Women's Status and Poverty in Kenya*, (Nairobi: FASIPRESS, 1995),11.

Apart from farming, women in these areas have come up with other ways of raising their economic status. For example, each Outstation of Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta Parishes have formed a group called Credit Union Group (CUG) where women are supposed to contribute some money every month for buying shares. In case of anything that requires money, like school fees, sickness, a need of investment, they can get a loan and then they pay back slowly.

Women in these areas are able to work and improve their lives even more, but many men still see women as inferior following what the culture has taught them. These cultural attitudes and practices, in this part of the rural Kiambu, deny women and their households opportunities to advance in eradicating the existing level of poverty. The economic activities these women are doing at present and their efforts to liberate themselves economically exempt them from being termed as economically destitute, but economically poor.

Women should be supported to transform their image, create confidence, stop discrimination and create a sense of independence. If women are economically handicapped, it will affect all aspects of their life because economic stability is a departure to the improvement of life in general.

3.5 Participation of women in power and politics

Political status involves holding of leadership positions, and participating in decision making. Like other areas, women in Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta consist the majority of voters. Our research shows that there is not a single woman in these areas who participates actively in politics. The woman who attempted was Rose Waruhiu in 1992, she contested for a Parliamentary seat on a Democratic Party (DP) ticket. She was fighting a battle of five men and out of 52,618 total votes casted, she managed 3,450 votes that accounted to 8.08% of the

total votes.⁴⁹ In 1997, there were 16 contestants in Githunguri in both Civic and Parliamentary seats, but there was no woman candidate.

The traditional belief that politics and power are masculine activities still remain in the minds of these rural people. Majority of women cannot dare to elect their female candidates. For example, in 1997 general election, many women in these areas were very much opposed to Charity Ngilu who was nominated by the Social Democratic Party (SDP) to vie for the presidency, and she was challenged as taking what belongs to men.

There is no woman who holds an influential position in these areas apart from those who are employed as simple civil servants and businesses entrepreneurs. For example, in the elections for Tea Factory Directors that were held in July 2000, no woman was elected out of the six directors elected in Kambaa Tea Factory.

All major decisions concerning Rural Development like electricity, water, tea and coffee sectors are made by men. Equality in decision making has not yet been reached because women are not outspoken in expressing what they need, it has largely remained dominated by males without much influence of women. One of our informants feels that women's exclusion from politics is in sharp contrast to their ability to make crucial decisions relating to the survival of their family⁵⁰ because politics shape how people live. Njeri Njoroge finds it very difficult because:

As long as the husband is there, no woman will make any crucial decision. The man has the 'final' say, but where women live alone in the family without any man's influence, it is possible for them to make decisions. Such are the women who do not fear to express their views in public, they are the figures to be emulated because they tell us what it is to be a woman.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Institute for Education and Democracy, *Understanding Elections in Kenya: A Constituency profile Approach*, (Nairobi: 1998), 189.

⁵⁰ John, Mburu, A secondary School Teacher. *INTERVIEWED* 1-7-2000.

⁵¹ Mary, N. Njoroge, A personal secretary, salary department; Teachers Service Commission. *INTERVIEWED* 10-8-2000.

A good number of these rural women of Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta do not see the value and the importance of their participation in politics as part of their life. The majority feel at home with their domestic responsibilities only, and for those who are not, they fear to be challenged by their male counterparts.

Civic education and especially in the Catholic Church is going on in the churches and Small Christian Communities to conscientize women on the importance of voting and engaging in political activities like the current struggle for Constitutional Change, succession debate, Justice and Peace activities, fight against corruption and grabbing among others.

3.6 The role and status of women in the Church

According to the bible, any Christian by the virtue of baptism, is called to serve without any discrimination. A priest, a layman or woman offers service in the Christian community according to the way of Jesus.⁵² There are many Christian churches in Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta, but in many of them, women are not involved in the decision making in terms of what is needed, who is to be baptised, when to expand the Church building and other related decisions.

In Presbyterian Parishes in Githiga and Miguta for example, there is not even a single woman in the Council of elders. Women are involved much in the women's guild and organisation of the children. In the women's guild, there is a man appointed to oversee things in the group. Women are not trusted that they can organise themselves without a man present. In the small churches like Full gospel, Word of Faith, New Apostolic Church, Jerusalem Church of God, the Church of Calvary among others; no woman is allowed to be in the leadership. They are

⁵² Fr. Cecil Mc Garry, S.J., "The Practice of Jesus" in *Mwananchi*, (No. 201 April, 1992), 3.

all under men's rule obeying any decision they make and expected to follow the church's established norms.

In the catholic church, the women's status is a bit different. A sign of empowerment can be realised but it is not encouraging. There are at least two women representatives in each parish council. Although it is hard for them to convince their male counterparts in passing decisions, at least, their voice can be heard. There are women who help in distribution of the Holy communion a service that was purely reserved for men before.

There is no men's interference in women's organisations like Catholic Women Organisation (CWA), Women's Credit Union Group (CUG), Catholic Women Self-help Group among others. They have freedom to run their organisation and make decisions fit in empowering themselves in faith and other needs.

Our informants expressed the great potentialities that women have in church leadership in terms of preaching, leading and chairing the committees. Quite a good number of our informants have appreciated the role the catholic church plays in empowering women, but they conclude that a lot has to be done still. Among those issues suggested by our informants in empowering women in the Church include, balancing the number of men and women in the leadership in all the churches. That there is a need of women to be given top leadership in the parish or in the churches as an appreciation of the contribution they make in evangelisation.⁵³

Thomas Mungai feels that women need to be given financial assistance to help them uplift their standard of living by embarking on income generating projects. Our informant who asked us not to use her real name, suggests that women should be liberated and be empowered. They should be respected in the church as women, and their efforts to evangelise

⁵³.Elizabeth, Mwangi, A secondary school Teacher. *Questionnaire, No. 4.*

be recognised. She sees the situation of women as pathetic. The experience of living with an alcoholic husband has exposed her to abuses and a lot of suffering like beatings and insults. In the Church, though she is very active, she cannot receive the Holy communion because they have not blessed their marriage. She hopes that something can still be done.

Looking into the women's situation in the church today, the late Fr. Kahia of Miguta Parish expressed that:

Financial support to stand on their own is necessary. Women just like men, need spiritual, emotional and physical support. The church should intervene more in matters of domestic violence, while liberation and empowerment in terms of respect, recognition, education and appreciation are very necessary. Today our role in the church is to provide women with leadership knowledge, skills and educate them not only on spiritual matters, but also on economic development and self employment.⁵⁴

During Marriage Encounter seminar facilitated by Margaret Ngechu and her husband in Kambaa from 14th -16th July 2000 women asked men to see them as co-partners in the work of evangelisation, but not as merely listeners. They expressed their need to be fully involved in ecclesiological matters, in formulation and reformation of church guidelines, in order to cater for both women and men equally for the growth of faith and other spiritual needs.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the statistics have shown that the number of women is higher than that of men in these areas. In education status we have seen that higher education for women is a necessity for them in order to fit in the modern world and to participate fully like their male counterparts.

Looking at economic status of women, we have seen that empowerment is required for sustainable development. Collaboration is called for, where equality and appreciation of the efforts of each one should be considered. On politics, women need to be re-awakened in order to realise their role in politics. They should also be given power to contribute even more in politics and in the areas' development activities.

⁵⁴ Fr. John Kahia, Former Parish Priest, Miguta. *INTERVIEWED*. 3-7-2000.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 WOMEN IN THE SCRIPTURES

4.1 Introduction

The bible is a book that has shaped and continues to shape the lives of the Christian communities. The power of the scripture in women's lives has functioned as a force for life, for hope and for liberation. Women's lives have been enriched, sustained, and empowered in communities that affirm that within the bible, one encounters not only the divine will for human life and behaviour, but the very presence of God.

On the other hand, there is a sign of alienation of women in the scriptures. Rarely if ever do women in the bible get to speak for themselves. They are portrayed from the perspective of male authors and in the context of religious communities where authority was vested in men and where men's decision was the norm.

4.2 The Old Testament view on the status of women

The Old Testament deals with a male-orientated and male dominated society, but the fundamental principle is the fact that God created man and woman in His own image (Gn 1: 27). The creation of humankind as male and female is an integral part of God's decision to make man and woman to complement each other. In the whole of creation accounts, (Gn 1-2) there is no distinction between male and female in their creation in the image of God. There is no explicit hint of subordination of female sex, both male and female are equally entrusted with the dominion over the rest of creation. "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters (both man and woman) of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth" (Gn 1:28).

This indicates that from the beginning God intended man and woman to be equal, having the same priorities and equal share of God's gifts. God Himself created both man and woman; the male has no part in making a female, he is neither a participant nor a spectator, nor a consultant at her creation. Like man, "the woman owes her life to God, for both of them, the origin of life is a divine mystery and thus, equal with the same rights and dignity."⁵⁵ Each person is seen as a complete individual created with a purpose without a hierarchy in sex, but equal to work together, each playing his/her part in the God given task of filling and governing the earth (Gn 1:26-28).

Both male and female were created and empowered by God. It is an abuse when this work of God is dishonoured and women are subordinated. In some instances in the Old Testament practice, women were subordinated and their status considered low. For example, Ezekiel used sexual similes demeaning to women saying, "to me, their conduct was unclean as a woman is during her monthly period" (Ez 36:17). Zechariah turns to a woman as a symbol of wickedness saying, "at this a disc of lead was raised, and I saw a woman sitting in the basket, and the angel said, 'this woman represents wickedness' " (Zec 5: 7-8). Sirach finds women quarrelsome, talkative, malicious, deceiving men by their beauty (Sir 26:6-12) and concludes that sin begun with a woman and because of her, we all die.

The book of Proverbs use women as a symbol of folly, (Prov 9:13-18) when they provide and give service to men, it speaks well of them. Their role is taken as being good wives (Prov 12:4; 18:22; 31:3).

Ruth highlights women positively, (Ruth 4:14-17) the woman of Bethlehem asserts the importance of females by saying that Ruth is more to Naomi than seven sons. In festive

⁵⁵ Mary J. Evans, *An Overview of the Crucial Passages on Women's Roles: Women in the Bible*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 15.

celebrations, women had a part to play, their songs and dancing were appreciated and remained the principal elements of the celebration (Ex 15:20).

In the Old Testament, there are stories of intelligent and devoted women who are the model of how the present woman should strive to be. Some of these women include Rahab who helped the men sent by Joshua (Js 2), Michal who saved David(I Sam 19:11ff), Abigail (I Sam 25:14ff),Ripzah (IISam 21:7ff) and the woman of Shunem (IIkgs 4:8ff)⁵⁶

As per responsibilities "the work of women was long and hard; theirs were the milling, the baking, the processing of fuel and water, spinning, weaving, sewing, the care of the house and care of children."⁵⁷ They also shared with men in agriculture, ploughing and sowing, reaping and threshing.

Women were considered in relation to men under whose authority they were placed. Sometimes they were taken as men's property which they could use for their own defence. For example, although the motive was good, Abraham cheated that Sarah was his sister to avoid being killed by the Egyptians (Gn 12:12-20). Lot offered her virgin daughters to save the two angels who visited him . He said, "I have two daughters who are virgins, I am ready to send them out to you, for you to treat them as you please" (Gn 19:8). To prevent the townsmen from having intercourse with the Levites, the old man in Judges 19:24-27, offered to give his daughter. "Here is my daughter, she is a virgin I shall bring her out to you, ill-treat her, do what you please with her." The normal leader of the family was the male. Women in Israel, did have rights, "both legal and economic, but their rights were secured and safeguarded for them by the men under whose authority they were at the time."⁵⁸ For example:

⁵⁶ John L. Mckenzie, S.J., *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 936.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 936.

⁵⁸ Evans, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

Like children and slaves women could not make moral decisions, their oaths for example, had to be ratified by husband or father before they could become valid, for women did not have the freedom which moral responsibility of this kind entailed.⁵⁹

Though there are various positive factors concerning women, some factors left the Israelite women subordinated to their male counterparts and generally having lower status than men. Though considered as full members of the covenant community, women's roles in the life of the community were seen in most part as child-bearers, at best homemakers and least as companions and partners; this picture shows the distorted image of God by the society He created, the picture, that partly Jesus came to restore.

4.3 The New Testament view on the status of women

Jesus' attitude towards women comes across in every form; parables, miracle stories, and discourses among others. Jesus healed women, for example he healed a woman who had been possessed by a spirit for eighteen years (Lk 13:10-17). Jesus healed a woman who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twenty years and at the same time he raised to life Jairus' daughter. (Lk 8:40-56) He cured Simon's mother in-law just to mention a few (Lk 4:38-39). Jesus allowed women to touch him and to follow him, he spoke without restraint of women. He related to women primarily as human beings rather than as sexual beings, that is, he was interested in them as persons.

In the parables, Jesus shows women as responsible people. He sees the adulterous woman, (Jn 8: 3-11) the woman of the city, (Mtt 26: 6-13) and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1ff) as responsible people for their own sins and in need of forgiveness. He showed that the opinion of women mattered, in a way that Judaism rarely acknowledged. He did this by paying attention to their pleading for healing, and forgiveness, he listened and considered them. Jesus

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

performed miracles at the request of women just as he performed them for men. For example, the wedding at Cana, He responded to his mother's request and gave them the wine. (Jn 2: 1-12) The healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15: 21-28), the healing of the crippled woman (Lk13:10-17), the restoration of joy to the widow of Nain whose son Jesus raised from death and many others.

Again, to show the importance of women, Jesus accepted the anointing offered him by a woman and defended her against the criticisms of the Pharisees (Mt 26:10ff). Jesus' needs were served by a group of devoted women, many of whom witnessed his resurrection (Lk 8:2ff). His relations with Martha and Mary were those of close and ordinary friendship (Lk 10:38-42).⁶⁰

In all these Jesus did not attempt at all to show any sign of inferiority women were accorded in the Jewish world. His attitude towards women therefore was radically different from views and attitudes of the Old Testament laws during his time. He saw both men and women as persons, as responsible individuals, with individual needs, individual failings and individual gifts.

In the epistles, the relation between men and women is presented in terms of the three principles of diversity, unity and complementarity.

Diversity in that they were created distinctly and differently and that distinction can and must never be negated; unity in that they are one in Christ and stand side by side as heirs of God, and complementarity in that they are interdependent and each needs the other if their lives are to be lived as God intended them to be.⁶¹

In the early church, women were accepted as full members of the community with their own rights, and responsibilities before God. This acceptance is what empowerment means.

Although 1Tim 2:12 indicates that no woman was permitted to teach or have authority over

⁶⁰ Mckenzie, Op. Cit., p. 937.

⁶¹ Evans., Op. Cit., p. 132.

men, and that women should be subordinate (1Cor 14:34) while the head of a woman is her husband (1Cor 11:3); no function or activity within the church was specifically or absolutely barred to women, they played a full part in the life and worship of the churches (1Cor 11:2-16). The bible says, since all are baptised and clothed in Christ, "there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female for you are all (equal) one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26-28). This text makes it explicit what is clear throughout the New Testament that in relation to God, men and women stand exactly at the same position.

On the respect towards women, 1Tim 5:2-3 indicates that "treat older women like your mothers, younger women like sisters in all purity and to honour widows. Concerning leadership, authority and submission in Eph 5:23 and 1Cor11:3, Paul provides an analogy of the headship of Christ over the church in terms of his loving and giving of himself on behalf of the Church. Paul also wills that the headship of the husband be seen in this way. Senior leaders were almost always males, but women could and did exercise leadership within the Churches, for example, the missionary work of Priscilla, Aquila, Junia and Andronicus. Women took active part in the life of the Church by doing good works as well as receiving them, which included assistance to the apostles in their ministry (Rom 16:1,3; 1Cor 16:19). Priscilla shared with Aquilla the office of instructions (Acts 18:26).⁶²

1Cor 11:2-16 shows that Paul accords full equality to women in leadership roles of prayer and prophecy but stressed that in any worship occasion, men should be like men and women be like women, that is, if covering of the heads during prayers for women is meaningful, then they should do it as women, and if keeping long hair for men is against what they are, then they should cut it short. This brings us to a conclusion that the body of Christ consists of

⁶² McKenzie, Op. Cit., p. 937.

males and females loved by God equally and so, women not only belong to the Church, they are the church just as men are.

4.4 Teaching of the Catholic Church on Women

In the history of the Catholic Church before Vatican II, women had no direct involvement in the activities of the church. They were active in transmitting the faith through a variety of ministerial roles particularly in the family, education and health care. These are almost universal roles which women everywhere were accorded. The church kept silent about women and where she talked, it was to the disadvantage of women insisting that women should not work away from their houses, unless on account of grave or compassionate necessity. The Church insisted above all, on the 'natural' submission of wife to her husband.

Women were not mentioned explicitly in the Church or in the Papal encyclicals until the Pontificate of John XXIII, who convoked the Vatican Council II. The first sign towards empowerment and liberation that was not negative came in John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* meaning, peace on earth. The Pope showed that one of the key signs of the contemporary life is the awakening desire of women for free and responsible participation in determining their own lives in the social and economic spheres, in the fields of learning and culture, and public life.⁶³

Vatican Council II recognised that the human race is passing through a new stage of its history, and it urged all to scrutinise the signs of the time (GS No. 4). One of these signs is the increased recognition of the equality of women and their potential for new contributions to public life. *Gaudium et Spes* considers a human being as an integral being and as an embodied subject. This means that both women and men are understood in the eyes of faith

⁶³ Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*), (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1963), 19

and reason, and none is understood in isolation for they are all "relational beings without subjugation whatsoever."⁶⁴ The church continued to teach that every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the ground of sex, race, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's designs.

Later Papal encyclicals like *Octogesima Adveniens*, (A call to Action) of Pope Paul VI in 1971, indicated that women possess equal rights to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life in the society (no. 13). The Pope also taught that women's roles today are of the greatest importance both for renewal and humanisation of society and the rediscovery of the true face of God.

From this teaching we can realise that since Vatican II, there has been a continuous effort to include women in the various activities related to church life like teaching, reading, sharing the word of God, leadership among others, from which they were either always or usually excluded in the past. Vatican II laid before us the realisation that new forms of insertion were being called for by the changes that had come about in the society.

Today women are increasingly assuming responsibilities in various aspects of secular life. Within the church in general, they are also exercising new pastoral responsibilities. Currently, women not only participate but even provide creative pastoral and institutional leadership in deanery, national, diocesan, and parish settings wherever church ministry is done. They are doing parish administration, Catholic women have also emerged as lay leaders of the church, organisers of self-help groups to improve women's economic status, "participation in the struggle against unjust social conditions, violent and corrupt social regimes."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid., No. 41.

⁶⁵ Bernard Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 67.

Like other areas of human existence, the number of women involved in these activities is small compared to the number of men. In many areas of local churches, apart from the religious nuns, the roles of women as wives, mothers and homemakers is still very prominent, thus being shut out from most of the pastoral activities. Another issue is the fact that in each of the roles women play in the church, there is more control and monitoring than it is to men, an aspect that is not very friendly to women.

If empowerment and freedom to women in Church activities is given to a small number of women in all areas, then the Church remains handicapped because there would be no synthesis between the teaching and the practice, hence leaving her flock unfulfilled and dissatisfied.

4.5 Impact of the Teachings in the Rural Githunguri, Miguta and Kambaa Parishes

When the church teaches, the teachings are supposed to affect every Christian who is affiliated to the faith. We have seen that in her teaching, the Catholic church has acknowledged the dignity and freedom of women in most aspects of their lives. The Church has recognised women's independence and freedom as persons, and having equal rights to participate in cultural, economic, religious, social and political life in the society. This recognition and teaching are not supposed to be limited in some localities and fully open in others, its impact and effect is supposed to be felt in every local church without hindrances.

As concerns Githunguri, Miguta and Kambaa Parishes, the teaching is effective to an extent, and more is being done. Concerning church activities in general, women's presence is felt because they are involved in the ministry although the sharing of responsibilities is not balanced. In leadership and administration, we indicated above that there are at least two women present in each of the Parish councils in these three areas. Formerly, women were not

permitted in the church executive and so everyone feels that there is a change, however minimal, because women are represented.

As pertaining to economic aspects, women have formed their self-help groups like Credit Union Group, (CUG) *Rucio Ruela*, (Better Tomorrow) Merry go Round, Catholic Women Association (CWA) among others. They organise everything by themselves and take control of every activity in collaboration with the pastor. This has been brought about by Vatican II teaching on the rights of women, their potentiality, independence and dignity. In spiritual activities, there is no difference between men and women. Anyone chosen by the community can help in reading, preaching in the absence of the priest and also help in distribution of the Holy Communion.

There is a sign of liberation from cultural ties that prevent women from full participation in the church activities like domestic engagements, prohibitions from speaking before men, among others. For example, Beatrice Wangui says that:

Today, we really feel that the church is ours, we are part of the Church. Whatever is happening, there is no single moment we women have been left aside. My appreciation goes to our priests who do not want to hear that men are taking everything. We can teach catechism, we can lead the Small Christian Communities, we can take care of our church. Our prayer is that given more opportunities, we can still do more.⁶⁶

In these parishes, women are active in almost all areas of the church's life. The negative aspect for this implementation is the attitude of a few priests and some faithful who are not convinced that women have the right to participate fully in the Church activities. This creates a situation of anxiety and uncertainty on the side of women. The biases and superiority complex of men experienced especially in the leadership, and the inferiority complex from the side of women are still felt. Just to give some examples, towards the end of May, 2000, there were elections in Small Christian Communities in preparation for the general election

⁶⁶ Beatrice Wangui, Catholic Women Association member, Githunguri Parish *INTERVIEWED* 1-8-2000.

for Miguta parish. We had a chance to talk with some people on what they thought about the elections. We asked James Gitau who was the Out-going treasurer of St. Christopher's Small Christian Community, Kiriko about whether they can elect a woman to lead the group. Responding to our question, he said:

It is not possible here, for the time I have been a member of this community, there has never been a woman as the Chairperson. Even now men and women will not accept to be led by a woman. Our culture too does not allow this at all. We can give them the Secretarial post, but not the Chairperson, treasurer or disciplinary post.⁶⁷

In St. Patrick's Kianduma, Mama Njenga (*the name she gave*), observed that:

We can lead even bigger groups, but men do not respect us. They always condemn us as disorganised, incapable, home specialised and other descriptions. We are in fear, we can not work well because men want to show that they are the best. The Church gives us the opportunity, but back at home the culture has a greater influence. We are happy that our men can see and learn from other parishes like Kagwi, Ngarariga, Ikinu and other neighbouring parishes. They can elect anybody to any post, this eliminates the feelings of being superior and inferior respectively⁶⁸

Despite these feelings of uncertainties and anxieties, the church preaches unity, equality, freedom from discrimination and appreciation of everyone be it women, men or children.

As concerns education and politics, the Justice and Peace Commission in these parishes in collaboration with the priests, are helping the Christians to understand their importance. The Church also extends the Pastoral care in Primary, Secondary and technical schools around. In politics, women are encouraged to participate in political issues fully. As we mentioned in Chapter three, conscientization programme is carried out in Small Christian Communities to let women know that it is their duty and right to participate fully in local politics.

So the Church in Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta, "by preaching the truths of the Gospel and clarifying all sectors of human activity through its teaching and the witness of its members,

⁶⁷ James Gitau, A member of St. Christopher's Community *INTERVIEWED* 27-5-2000.

⁶⁸ Mama Njenga, A secondary school teacher *INTERVIEWED* 27-5-2000.

she encourages the political freedom and responsibility of the citizen"⁶⁹ both in the parishes and outside.

4.6 Conclusion

God did not create some human beings with higher dignity than the others. Both male and female were created equal to share in God's creation. We have seen that Jesus did not adhere to Jewish law about women, He was so caring to them, he treated them as dignified persons and not objects. Jesus rejected all the discriminative practises accorded to women and showed them love. The Catholic church after Vatican II took the same line and taught that the image of God in women has to be restored. Women have to be respected and be given equal opportunities in this life. This implementation is taking place gradually.

In our areas of research, Githunguri, Miguta and Kambaa Parishes empowerment is taking place. The teachings are being implemented because there is a general understanding and recognition of the abilities of women in building the society and nurturing the faith, but more is to be done in the areas of leadership, training for teachers, administration among others, to let women themselves feel that the church considers them fully the way she does men. In our last chapter, we are going to look at the strategies we can set in these areas for more and better empowerment of women.

⁶⁹ "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Vatican II, *Gadium et Spes*, 7 December, 1965)" in Austin Flannery, O.P., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents*, (Bombay: St. Pauls Press, 1995), 865.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN GITHUNGURI, KAMBAA AND MIGUTA

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, we have been analysing the status of women especially in areas of culture, education, politics, economy and religion.

Being aware of the situation, we are going to focus on the strategies that can be recommended for further empowerment. We are going to look at these paying attention to the role of women in empowerment process, role of men, the role of the Church, and finally the role of the government in empowerment process.

5.2 Women's role in the empowerment Process

Women as individuals want to be treated as people, as full human beings; they want to develop, and be like any other human being. Women just like men have a special responsibility to accord dignity to their work, and to recognise their ability in all fields of engagement.

So, the first role and strategy for women empowerment in these areas is to conscientize all women that they have a great potential to do everything that any human being can do. What is needed is determination, confidence and the provision of opportunities. The society has to do away with the prejudices of what field belongs to women and men and open up the horizons for everyone to exercise his/her freedom and make use of the abilities that God has given so generously.

In areas of economic empowerment, there is a necessity to form more self-help groups to start business, community projects and revolving loan associations. These groups can assist women in times of need, and working together to feed their families. The groups can also

offer the best hope of improving their lives, a way to survive periods of hardships or an opportunity to earn cash to pay their children's school fees. For some, it may be a chance to save for a better shelter, for others, a place for socialisation and exchanging information on improved farming methods or health concerns. During our interviews, Ruth Waithira from Miguta told us:

Were it not for this *Mucango* (merry go round), Kimani and Njenga (her sons), would not have gone to school. Their father is ever drinking, he is not employed and he does not think of his children's future. As a mother, it causes me a lot of pain to see them at home while their colleagues are in school, but thanks to women of Kanjai village who agreed to come together to contribute monthly in order to lighten our burden. Whoever does not have children in school, she gets a chance to do something that unburdens her shoulders.⁷⁰

Every woman should be ready and open to contribute what she has, skills, goods, money, to a project that is benefiting to the entire community. James Kimani observed:

Women are full of talents, they have a lot of great ideas but they fear to speak their mind, they are afraid of us because sometimes we also deny them a listening ear. But today especially here in Githiga (outstation of Githunguri), they have their own groups, organisations but we do not ask them, so they should feel free to contribute to their welfare.⁷¹

Women groups should be aware of some donors and Non Governmental Organisations who deal with women programmes and who are ready to provide funds to organised women groups for 'women and development' activities. Such groups include: Kenya Women Finance Trust, (KWFT) Kenya Rural Enterprise Programme, (KEREPE) Kenya National Council of Catholic Women among others. In reference to this, Joseph Muigai told us:

We have many organisations especially here in the arch-diocese of Nairobi. They want to see many rural women's groups applying for funds, but up to now they are very few groups. It's your work as ministers (referring to me) to encourage them and where necessary call them yourself and insist on it. You can also invite us to share with them what it entails to form an income generating project and how to apply for funds.⁷²

⁷⁰ Waithira Ruth, A farmer. *INTERVIEWED* 7-6-2000.

⁷¹ James Kimani Waithaka, A Small Christian Community member, Githiga Outstation *INTERVIEWED* 3-7-2000.

⁷² Muigai Joseph, Assistant Field Co-ordinator, Kagwi Parish self-help groups (neighbouring Githunguri) *INTERVIEWED* 16-7-2000.

Like other women in Kenya, these women from Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta, must be made aware by the Church and the civic educators that they have a right and responsibility as citizens to participate actively in politics, in religion and all other forms of public life. They therefore must struggle for equality and equity with men in public life. This is the only way true democracy and sustainable development can be attained. Expressing her views, Jacinta Kamau observed:

As far as nobody mentions about it in the church, or in Small Christian Communities, many women will never see the sense in politics, but call it a God given gift to humanity and all will respond. So, we need education, we need knowledge. Ask our women here about home business and they will get distinctions; ask them about politics, their heads will be down. So, it should be taken seriously and if possible, to train people who will take the responsibility of teaching both women and men about politics⁷³

The struggle may make use of the available means like the media, for example Kikuyu publications, regular seminars and workshops, Small Christian Communities, Church sodalities like St. Annes group, Pioneer, Legio Mary, St. Joseph and associations like Catholic Women Association (CWA), Catholic Action (CA) just to mention a few. In this way, there will be a possibility of addressing such pressing issues like equality in education, domestic violence, physical burning, sexual abuse among others.

There is a lot for these women to empower themselves in these areas such that we cannot exhaust all, but the ones mentioned if implemented can give birth to many more for the benefit of these women.

5.3 Role of Men in Empowerment Process

Among other factors, men are said to be the major hindrances for women empowerment, but they can also be a way to their liberation and empowerment. Their major role in the

⁷³ Jacinta Kamau, A Christian, Kambaa Parish *INTERVIEWED* 23-7-2000.

empowerment process is to let women free economically, culturally, religiously and politically.

As a strategy, men from Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta, should consider women equal with them in decision making, they should recognise their intelligence, value their capabilities and the contributions that they can make in economic, political, educational and religious development. In terms of culture, men should consider helping in house-hold work when necessary. They should admit that parenting is not primarily a woman's concern, but a shared responsibility. For more productivity, men should allow women to inherit land and control resources, without prejudice and restrictions.

Economically, men have to advocate for just wages for women and doing away with laws that are biased on women's employment. They should be given equal privileges, that is, equal access of girls and women to vocational training and career freedom at all levels, with a view of achieving their full participation in the economy and social life.

Another strategy for empowerment is that men have to learn to listen to women, to hear what women really say but not what they expect them to say. They have to encourage, accept, appreciate and understand what women need. Men should consult women to ensure that their contribution to household economy as well as workloads are fully incorporated into planning.

To sum it all for men, the major strategy is the change of heart and attitude, and being open minded and flexible in working to achieve equality in social activities, political participation and decision-making, education, employment, health, science and technology and in all areas that affect human life. This will bring about the collaboration in every field of human existence and as a result it will seal the existing imbalances that create a division between men and women.

5.4 The Role of the Church in women empowerment

The word of God teaches that God created human being for himself, He willed that all live in love and harmony. In His presence, all are equal and they are embraced together by His love. As we saw above, the Catholic church has advocated for the empowerment of women for many years trying to adhere to the will of God, thus the church should be an important stepping stone to women's empowerment not only in Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta, but everywhere. Normally the church is devoted to helping individuals and the community to recognise the purpose of human life and attaining it.

This being the case, the role of the Church then is to teach the divine revelation on the relationship between male and female. To show the equality that God intended and to advocate for the restoration of rights and privileges women have as human beings. The Church in these areas has to fight for justice and freedom from any kind of oppression and exploitation that may be experienced.

The strategy for the Church is to set a good example by involving women fully in the activities of the Church. This will open up the horizons of touching other areas of exploitation 'outside' the Church like health, education, employment, unjust wages, physical and psychological abuses among others.

The Church also has the role of creating the awareness of the situation and to help women exercise the right to free, conscious, and responsible choices and help them to widen their vision to the full scope and extent of their ambitions to realise the full dimension of their present situation.

Lastly, the Church's role is to teach in a simple and understandable way, the teaching of the Vatican II concerning women, and to make sure that this teaching does not remain at the

theoretical level, but rather, it is implemented as much as possible. The Church teaches:

Most of the duties most appropriate to our times, above all for Christians, is to work untiringly for fundamental decisions to be taken in economic and political affairs, on the national as well as international level, which will ensure the recognition and implementation everywhere of the right of every 'man' to human and civic culture in harmony with the dignity of the human person, without distinction of race, sex, nation, religion or social circumstances.⁷⁴

Specifically on women, the Church teaches:

at present women are involved in nearly all spheres of life: they ought to be permitted to play their part fully according to their own particular nature. It is up to everyone to see to it that woman's specific and necessary participation in cultural life be acknowledged and fostered.⁷⁵

While the pope indicates:

When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman within all the interpersonal relationships which, in the most varied ways, shape society and structure the interaction between all persons, men and women. In this broad and diversified context, a woman represents a particular value by the fact that she is a human person, and, at the same time, this particular person, by the fact of her femininity. This concerns each and every woman, independently of the cultural context in which she lives, and independently of her spiritual, psychological and physical characteristics, as for example, age, education health, work, and whether she is married or single.⁷⁶

5.5 The Role of the Government on women empowerment Process

The government has to be aware that it has a role to play in advancing women's status. It has to make policies that do not sideline women in any way. To begin with, the government should work on diversifying the school curricula to remove all forms of gender discrimination and stereotyping, and improve on women's access to scientific, technical and commercial education to enhance their employment opportunities, as well as positive portrayal of women in the media and various publications.

⁷⁴ "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Vatican II, *Gadium et Spes*, 7 December, 1965)" in Austin Flannery, Op. Cit., p. 848.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 848.

⁷⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 107.

Government has to create an awareness in parents and educators as socialising agents to arrest the formation of stereotypic script and images. Other areas of concern include, establishing an atmosphere for collaborative ministry with both men and women where all work together in harmony to achieve the set vision from the grass roots to the national level..

The government again should be in contact with Non Government Organisations in order to help in evaluating the condition of women and to assist women projects as a way of dealing with poverty eradication.

There should be an advancement of the informal sectors in the economy in order to create more chances for women to engage in. The government should make use of the mass media and other available means to make all sectors of the population especially in the rural areas be informed of government policies and strategies.

5.6 Conclusion

These strategies are not meant for putting a division between men and women. The purpose is to lift these women from where they have been, bring them to the same level with men so that the movement towards development may be harmonised.

The setting of the strategies is necessary because the relationships between men and women are not stationary but on-going and developing, and women's present vision of new areas of achievement and services may be the beginning of a new era in personal relationship, and co-operation between men and women on the basis of mutual concern and self-respect.

5.7 General Conclusion

Reflecting on what we have discussed in this essay, the fact is that rural women experience very difficult moments in their lives. Difficult in the sense that their contribution in the society, to a greater part is not considered and valued. All through, this work has reflected on some kinds of discrimination, oppression, exploitation and abuse on the side of women, socially economically, politically, educationally and in religion. There has never been a balance and equality in relating to these issues of women existence.

The other side of the coin is that given the opportunity by the society they live in, women just like men are able and they can do all that men are able to do. Women's intelligence is not less than that of men, their psychology and spirituality is not inferior, the potentiality is the same as that of men in all aspects. Women are willing to engage in all activities but the society still perceives them as being weak just because they are women. They do not yearn to be good farmers and mothers only, but also good managers, members of parliament, scholars, and academicians *inter-alia*. Women from Githunguri, Kambaa and Miguta will appreciate the education worthy of them, employment that is not discriminative, full participation in church activities and well established political play ground for everyone to participate.

To conclude then we must say that the will of God is for everyone to enjoy his love, presence and His creation. God willed all to be equal in all ways and to live together helping one another to make the world a better place to live. This being the case then, each human being has a role to play in reconstructing the fallen status of women.

Empowerment and rebuilding the existing inequality to equality and equity, is a responsibility for all. It requires the realisation that the vision of God towards human beings in terms of

living together, complementing one another, is not realised; hence taking a step forward to realise it by giving women their value, dignity and recognition as full human beings with perfect and equal rights as men.

There is in a woman what the world lacks, in her there is the potential for the preservation of the globe, the health of the society and the community life of the human race. She was created with a purpose just like any other creation, this purpose when denied, the creation remains incomplete. "In God's image He made them: Male and Female, He created them," (Gn 1:27) as God is pure this image should also be kept pure.

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