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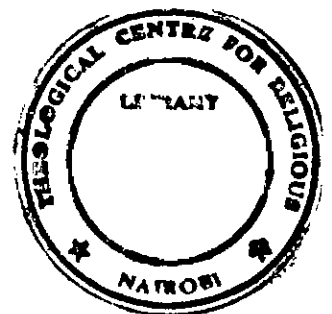
**ROLE AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY:
A CASE STUDY IN NYERI**

An Essay Submitted to the Pastoral Department in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the B.A. Degree in Religious Studies.

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my original work. It has not been submitted to any College or University for academic credit. I also declare this work is based on my personal research and conclusions. All sources and people interviewed have been fully acknowledged.

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DEDICATION

To all women in Nyeri and their families

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INTRODUCTION

GENERAL REMARKS

Women in the family are living a very miserable life. They are overworked because they are pressed by many duties and obligations. They are struggling hard for the survival of their marriages in family life for the sake of their children. For the family, instead of being a place of support, joy and happiness, has become a place of an unavoidable hardship and a place of oppression. A place where women capabilities of moulding a family by giving birth and nurturing it, is taken for granted, is deliberately underrated and underestimated; yet, without them human species would be no more. It is in this view that this study attempts to present and show the urgency and the imperative need to respond to the challenges facing and posed by women, who are nurturers of life from birth to death.

Today more than ever before, women are looking for a common ground within the spheres of life where they are born, bred, grow and die. 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 are not questioned nor challenged. While others are there and thrive because some of us who are sexist and classiest perpetuate them.

However, today I see a promising future, a future where broken lives and hearts of women in the families will be healed: a future when men and women in the family will sit at table together to share as equals as the creator intended from creation (cf Gen 1:27): a future where women's pain from discrimination, oppression and all kinds of sufferings women undergo within the family setting will be minimised or stopped forever.

Indeed, what I have mentioned above and what I will present in this case study is a result of a social order, which we have to work together transform. The burden of women should be seen as men's burden as well.

CENTRAL AREA OF INVESTIGATION

Kenyan society is patriarchal where women are marginalised, and their dignity and rights are denied. This has always bothered me and I have always asked myself many questions without finding any answer. Due to this, I have decided to reflect and investigate the problems and the prospects of what it means to be a woman in our time. In particular and without being exhaustive I am taking as my focus of investigation the roles and empowerment of women in the family: a case study in Nyeri.

Today, empowerment of women is a priority for the country. The future of family and humanity lies with the women. Inevitably women in the family are raising fundamental questions and are looking around to see whether the country really seeks to help them, to give authentic meaning to their roles in the family. But, more than often,

women are not receiving any answers to their questions. Their search meets with frustration and they themselves choose to organise themselves in the spirit of Harambee and try to empower themselves: this is the reality of women in the area of my research.

WORKING HYPOTHESIS

The future of families in Nyeri lies in the hands of women themselves; but those hands are weak and almost empty, and are rapidly getting weaker and emptier. And now the hope of the area depends on quick and drastic action to heal those hands, strengthen them and give them the right tools they need to participate fully in helping to slow down and turn around the quickening pace of deterioration in family welfare. This is what I am presenting in this essay. Empowerment is very unique to me and, therefore, it will run throughout my essay.

METHODOLOGY

I hope to arrive at the goal of this essay through personal field research and reflection. Most material in this essay is based on a field research I conducted; I mainly used field work information and not what has been written. I interviewed people working in women lobby organisations: NGO's, schools, hospitals, women leaders of self-help groups, religious sisters, and some men who gave different views, in Nyeri. They were women and men of varying ages, different occupations and different social status. I mainly did oral interviews, rather than using a questionnaire which could have given my work the appearance of some official inquiry. The interviews were carried out in English

and Kikuyu languages. All information was compiled in English. I tried very much to avoid influencing the personal opinions of the people who were interviewed.

DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED

I had to persuade some of my informants in order to get the information I needed. However, some shied off while others were reluctant to answer some of my questions. Nevertheless, I tried to establish as far as I could, on a footing of equality if indeed not of friendship, a good relationship with my informants. During my sessions for interview, I introduced myself, the purpose of my research and what I intended to do with the report. To avoid breach of confidence, some of the names and accounts relating to the individuals in this essay are either pseudonymous or composites of typical responses. I carried out the interviews in Ruruguti, Thunguri, Othaya town, Giakanja and Karima in Nyeri in 1997 and 1998.

The role and empowerment of women has been and is a concern of the many people who have recognised the importance and the urgency of incorporating vigorous and well planned empowerment strategies and viable development plans. Women are at a critical phase of their transformation. Their roles are changing and they are taking up roles that were carried out by men in the traditional societies; therefore, they are at the cross-roads. On the one hand, they are trying to find their true selves and dignity in freedom; and on the other hand, they are torn between uncertainty, anxiety and confusion.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this work I am making an attempt of showing who a woman is; what is a family and its various types, and their relationship with the woman. Then I shall also define empowerment.

WOMAN

According to the Webster Dictionary, "a woman is a female of the human race distinguished from a man"¹ She is a human person with her full, complete nature perfectly equal to that of the man in status and moral values. A woman is a complete human beings with her rights, status and dignity.

FAMILY

A family is a "household composed of parents and siblings."² Therefore, a family could be seen as the primary and most important social unit. It is also an institution to which each one of us owes his / her humanity.

NUCLEAR FAMILY

Nuclear family refers to the family unit in its smallest form. Generally, it includes the husband, wife and their children. A nuclear family may or may not include marriage partners, but consists of any two or more persons related to one another by blood,

¹ Webster New Dictionary, Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1962; p 1680

² Ibid. p.525

marriage or adoption in the assumption that they are of the same or adjoining generation.³

CONJUGAL FAMILY

The conjugal family on the other hand is a family that include a husband and a wife without children.

EXTENDED /CONSANGUINE/JOINT FAMILIES

Extended family refers to family structures that extend beyond nuclear families. It consists of multiple nuclear families grouping. Sometimes extended family is referred to by the name of "consanguine" or "joint" family. The families are joint together either through blood, on the basis of blood relationships or descent from the same ancestor, so that several generations of offspring, are included within one family unit.⁴

In short, all the above describe what a family is or ought to be plus it types.

In conclusion, a family, whether small, nuclear, conjugal or extended is structured and involves father, mother, children and other relations.

EMPOWERMENT

"Empowerment" can be defined as a process as well as a strategy used to break the relations of dependence. As a process, it has as its main components awareness - raising and confidence building, and creation of a support systems. It is also a strategy for improving people's position in society. Premises in the empowerment approach are the people reflecting

³ Julius Gould & William Kolb, A Dictionary of Social Sciences, (USA: The Free Press of Glencore, 1965), p. 257.

⁴ Ibid. p 164.

on social reality and able to criticise the social system and its ideological concepts, and that this may lead to determined actions to change the situation.”⁵ In another way, “empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater decision making, power and control and transformation to action.”⁶

From the research I carried out it was very clear that, though most of the old women here are not educated, they have a clear understanding of what empowerment should be. Karimi Faith stressed to me that women yearn to empower themselves and to be empowered in order to raise their standard of living and those of their families. For her, empowerment of women should not be seen as a way of competing with men.⁷ This goes contrary to the way Mwangi Simon sees the whole issue: for him women are seeking to empower themselves or to be empowered, so as to compete with and rule men.⁸

CONCLUSION

In the introduction we have seen that a woman is a female of the human race distinguished from the man, and she enjoys full equality with that of a male as to what pertains to status, rights and moral values. A family is an institution to which each one of us owes his/her humanity.

⁵ FEMNET: Connection: Gender Perspective on International Co-operation. No. 6 (June 1997) p10.

⁶ Marilee Karl, Women and Empowerment Participation and Decision- Making (London & New Jersey: zed Books Ltd, 1995), p.14.

⁷ Faith Karimi, A widow of 78 years and a pot seller in Nyeri., Interviewed 23/12/97.

⁸ Simon Mwangi, A secondary teacher and a husband living in Ruruguti, Interviewed 23/12/97.

There are two types of family: first the smallest unit of a family which is referred to as nuclear family; the other type of family is referred to as extended family: it consists of several nuclear families. Having understood who a woman is, Chapter one will explore the role of a woman and the family.

STRUCTURAL PRESENTATION OF THE ESSAY

This essay is divided into five chapters which deals with some specific role of women and how they can be empowered within those roles.

Chapter One: Discusses women's workload, women's central roles in the family: domestic, education, socialisation and empowerment of women in those roles.

Chapter Two: Will deal with women's economy and the family in Nyeri and women in economic labour market and its impact.

Chapter Three: Discusses women's role in the family health care with some focus on empowerment in this area, and women and HIV/AIDS.

Chapter Four: Focuses on domestic violence against women in the family.

Chapter Five: Discusses religious role of women in the family, focusing on catechesis and evangelization, Church's teaching about women, and Church's pastoral approach in empowering women. The chapter will also deal with the observations and recommendations which have featured in different chapters of this essay, and end with a general conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

1. ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

A woman has various roles in the family, be it the nuclear family or the extended families. She plays a vital role. She has domestic, health, economical, educational and socialisation roles in the family. All these roles will help us to grasp the greater responsibility of a woman without which a family cannot live; i.e., her roles are indispensable.

Women are the heart of the family. They are the root from which the whole family sustains itself and grows. They are responsible for bringing forth children and play various roles in the economic sectors of their families. In all societies, all over the world, whether matrilineal or patrilineal, women have several roles that they perform within the family. Their roles are the most basic services human beings render to one another; and they cover all aspects of human life; for example motherhood: i.e., nurturing and life giving through feeding, clothing, health care, emotional support etc.⁹ Women provide very noble social roles, as wives, mothers, food providers in many family set-ups, in addition to economic and small scale enterprises activities within the family. Women also keep together the marriage institutions by their varied housekeeping roles. They have

⁹ Romano Rossi, , Human Labour: The social teaching of John Paul II (Rome Vatican City, 1981), p. 16.

economical roles which involve pottery, weaving and feeding their families, either by growing food crops in agriculture themselves, or by earning the money necessary to buy food.

1.1. WOMEN'S WORKLOAD IN THE FAMILY.

Women in Nyeri engage in multitask activities and roles not only for their own survival, but also for the survival of their families. Today the social economical changes in our country seem to have loaded the women with other duties, both in offices and in the house, making life harder for them especially in those areas where labour-saving technologies in daily tasks that involve women are rare.

Women here work almost for 16 hours a day; they feel overworked. They work in agriculture, collecting firewood and water, transport, income generating sectors, domestic work, animal and poultry care, and other community related activities such as building schools, clinics and water storage tanks. They are responsible for about 80% of all self help labour.¹⁰

1.2. WOMEN DOMESTIC ROLES

The United Nations has stated that women in many families perform almost ninety five percent of all domestic labour. In Nyeri women perform double work in most of the families with no or less benefit that men have. Most of them work for 16 hours a day: they are the first to rise and the last to go to bed. Before the sun has risen, and while

¹⁰ Michael Wainaina, Sub-Chief Thunguri sub-location, Interviewed 28/12/97.

the men are still sleeping, women are already preparing food, sweeping the ground, cleaning the house, getting the children up and preparing them to go to school, cleaning clothes and doing other domestic chores. For hours they would be busy preparing grains for the daily needs of the family. There are infant children to care for, water to get from the wells often a number of miles away, and to gather firewood.¹¹ These activities carry no remuneration for the women of Nyeri, and are not included in the national production statistics. Apart from this, women in Nyeri are also taken as rulers and managers of household under their husbands and they are primarily concerned with the internal order and organisation of the family household. They are the heart of household life, ordering the life of the household and seeing that the needs of the people in the household are met. They take active responsibility for the affairs of the house and they are expected to handle them compliantly.¹² Within the household the women's special concern is to see that the members of the household are served in their needs, fed, clothed, and provided with what each need to function well. They make a household a home, a place where others are strengthened and refreshed. They are a source of personal service to them. Women are also involved in what we call charitable work: they serve the needy members

¹¹ Francis .W.Mulwa, Enabling the rural poor through participation.(Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba publications • Spearhead No. 132 -133 p. 158

¹² Industrialisation increasingly is depriving women active participation in the life of the society "woman is a queen " but her kingdom is the domestic kingdom, New York: Globe, June 22 1911. Documents of the Catholic Bishops against women's suffrage 1910 - 20 Sophia smith collection, smith college.

of the community, either in person or by seeing that other members of the household provide help.¹³

These are some of the roles that nature, as many put it, has assigned to women, roles that consumes a lot of time in the early hours of the morning only to be increased with other roles during the day: cleaning animal sheds, milking cattle and goats, grazing them and tending them when they are sick. In most cases while women are doing all this, most of the time men are busy loitering, listening to the news, reading newspapers, sitting idle in the market place and sometimes taking illicit drinks. They rarely assist, but remain to the peripheral; the only time some try to assist, is during the times of crisis, illness, pregnancy, afterbirth, and in most cases this help is unreliable. All this makes women's burden unbearable, because most of them have to look for income and to cater for all the family needs. This leaves women with little or no time to rest while men have all the time for themselves.

However, women find great joy and fulfilment in nurturing and fostering life. Children have always been the greatest gift they have given to their families. They are entrusted to protect and safeguard the lives of their children which they value very much. Women also play the role of comforter, acting as mediators between father and children, and comfort any of them whenever they have problems.¹⁴ If there are misunderstanding between the children and their father, women always rush to restore the relationship and

¹³ Susan Nyawira, Housewife. Interviewed 27/6/98.

¹⁴ Margaret J. Hay and Sharon Stichter, African Women South of Sahara (United States of America: Longman Group (FE) Ltd, 1984), p. 103

in most cases act as judges: they listen to everyone and never frustrate the looser. Women also act as entertainers in the family. They entertain relatives and friends for both children and their husbands. They treat them courteously and respectfully. Women also keep their husband's diaries up to date, and always remind them of what is to be attended first and what function or ceremony is to take place and when. In spite of all the work women do for their family in Nyeri, they do not play a major role in the decision-making process concerning their family; this, therefore, calls for urgency to empower women in all the above roles and activities.

1.3. WOMEN AND EDUCATION IN THE FAMILY

For many, education refers to formal education which begins with primary school and ends at the university. But it is the informal education which is carried out by women in the family. In the olden days and even today, women have been endowed with the gift of forming human beings both for human and spiritual growth. They are the first and main educators at the early stages of a child's development. They teach children how to walk, eat, drink, bath, and good manners. Informal education for both boys and girls is exclusively assigned to them, because the majority of men do not live in the family, or cannot see to it because they work away from their families.¹⁵ This role of educating the young ones is very vital and no family would have managed to be where it is, if this role were neglected by the women

¹⁵ Elizabeth Fiorenza S. and Carr Anne, Women Work and Poverty (Edinburgh: T&T clark Ltd, 1987) p.4

Through informal education women in this area pass on values to their children and prepare them to be responsible adults and leaders. They instruct both boys and girls to be responsible adults, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives. In doing so, women make sure that all those values that are central to the society are adhered to, values like the sense of belonging and the sense of being a community member; proper formation during initiation to adulthood, respect for people, sacred respect for life, solidarity, hospitality, seriousness in taking life commitments, etc. In this area they also act as counsellors in their families and as a source of family unity and social solidarity. Women are the main transmitters and preservers of their ethnic groups' cultural values and traditions. Being the first teachers, they prepare their family members for societal life. Today, while doing this, women are trying very hard to stress equality of both sexes. They advocate also for equal vocation training of boys and girls in their families. They are refuting the idea that girls should only be trained in feminine skills, such as home economic, embroidery, sewing, handicraft, and animal husbandry among others, which are largely non employment geared skills. Both girls and boys should have equal education according to their ability.¹⁶ Women do this because they believe that education is a liberating force for all, a force that will enable women to free themselves from the imprisonment of discrimination, oppression, poverty, ignorance and diseases. Their role in this area brings about the education geared toward transforming and changing people's attitudes in the way they view and treat women in the area and everywhere.

¹⁶ Jane Mwangi, Headmistress Giakanja primary school. Interviewed 24/12/97.

Women in this area are working and putting a lot of resources in the field of education, because they believe that proper education is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Their education is an important key to improving economy, health, nutrition and education in the family, and it also empowers them to participate in decision making without feeling inferior to men.¹⁷ This is exactly what women in Nyeri are doing in empowering themselves and their families.

1.4. SOCIALISATION

Socialisation is a process through which, community social values, norms, beliefs, wisdom, philosophy, customs, skills and practice are learned, accepted and internalised.¹⁸ It is a process of learning what the society defines as good or bad. In many societies, socialisation is based on gender and gender roles; hence society roles assigned to men and women are pre-determined and different. The family as an agent of socialisation assigns different status, values and roles to boys and girls. The society ensures that its culture, language, mannerism (discipline included), cultural taboos, customs and traditions are maintained.

The main goal of socialisation is to prepare an individual for adult life, instilling moral principles, developing individual potentials and thus making him/her a useful member of his/her society. The family plays a great role in the socialisation of its members. It is the immediate teacher of the children, though today other institutions have

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Newcomb T..M., Social Psychology (New York: Dryden Press, 1950) p. 51.

also been entrusted with this noble role. Women are the main agents of socialisation. They inculcate in the young people the societal roots. They are given the task of socialising the now “mature” or young adults in the new Kikuyu tribal roles. In this area of socialisation, women prepare boys and girls in their family in the art of living in wider societies and to be responsible people in their societies. However, according to several social scientists, socialisation is to blame for the plight of women in the power game. The roles of women in socialisation of the family members is too complex and cannot be fully defined unless one tries to look at it from the fact that women are very interactive socially, and it is in this state that they socialise their family members in different roles and in all aspects of life.

1.5. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY

By now we have seen the domestic roles that women play in family life in Nyeri. The roles that these women play are aimed at helping a woman to realise herself as a human person and somebody with a great responsibility to the family. However, after fulfilling all these roles, women are seen as “nobody”. They are seen as mere objects. They are discriminated against in this sphere of domestic roles in this area. However, some remarkable changes are taking place today. It is after seeing how women are oppressed and discriminated that I want to say how they can be empowered within their domestic roles hence, helping them to regain the original dignity given to them at creation (cf Gen 1:27.) This should be done keeping in mind that the first primary right of women

is to be treated for what they are. It is time that we should look for the things that hold us together, but not at the expense of dominating or oppressing others. Cultures and traditions are good if they fit human persons for living: otherwise they should be thrown away. The family must not require anything of a woman if they diminish them as women. It is time that customs and traditions, long established, go their untroubled way if they cannot serve for the good of the family because they are one-sided.

Today more than ever before, all people should join hand in fighting the discriminative and oppressive culture and traditions towards women, because these are the ones giving men much control over women's reproduction, labour and conscience. In attempting to empower women in all their domestic roles, man is called upon to make these domestic roles his very own, e.g., all should get up from bed at the same time: man should not consider the woman as the only person supposed to wake up early while he remains in bed as she continues to perform the daily household chores. The man is obliged to feel that he has the same responsibilities toward the daily household chores that call for equal responsibility as the woman. In-fact, it will be good and fair that when the woman wakes up to prepare breakfast, clean the house, sweep the compound, the man could be helping by doing some other urgent domestic roles.

The idea of looking at a woman as a helper should be ruled out of men's mind, even if she has been seen over the years as a servant. This has a negative implication which tend to mean that, the woman is a servant of a man, but not vice versa. Note that this same idea of helper and servant could also have a positive implication which is the

very core of man and woman being together. This is indeed what the empowerment of women today calls for, in the sense that the man must also play his helper and servant duties toward the woman, Both of them should be open to doing any household chores if and when they are needed. Also in her role of procreating new life, family members should stop blaming a woman when she does not give birth to the sex they expected to have. A woman should not be seen as the person who determines the sex of the child she wants; rather the family should accept what they get from God. All should be proud of the child who is born, whether a boy or a girl; both are children with equal rights and dignity.

Also to empower woman in this role calls for man's acceptance of his roles in nurturing, caring, and protecting the young ones. As I have said before women could also be empowered by giving them formal education which will help to enlighten them in their personal ability and those of others to overcome what appear to be insurmountable obstacles. Education will be the greatest empowerment and liberating force for women. Proper education will also enlighten women to socialise and prepare their childrens whether boys and girls, knowing that men and women are equal.

Women are marginalised and disempowered, but they are not destined to live in this situation forever; in fact through education and socialisation, women, if they want, they can succeed in changing the attitude in the next generation by the values and belief they pass on to their children: this is what women in the area are working for. Education will also help women to appreciate themselves as women, and free them from cultural

practices that deny them their humanity, and thus empower them to develop themselves and their families. Women in different families need also to organise themselves and start empowering themselves. "Women should not expect others to do this for them: they should know that the majority of men are against their empowerment. This, therefore, calls for women to get themselves fully involved in their empowerment process".¹⁹

Family should also favour togetherness. The togetherness of men and women will help both sexes in sharing responsibility, in having deep sharing which will lead to mutual understanding. People should stop fearing to empower women in their roles because the time has come and we can not go back to where we are coming from; we have to accept change and be ready to change our attitudes. We should stop seeing the empowering of women as a risk. If we have to, then let us take it as a risk that will challenge each one of us. For all of us, men, owe our life to women; therefore, it is the duty of men to be their companions in their search for their lost dignity. Still, in empowering women, society has to redefine the roles of the husbands, wives, boys and girls in the family. By redefining these roles, the status of women, which is very low, will be uplifted.

All the above mentioned points will help to empower women who have been stripped of any decision making; with this also the family will be thinking about a bright future for it will have recognised that, by empowering women, they are empowering the heart of the family.

¹⁹ Jane Mumbi, Women Co-ordinator, Empowerment strategies, Ruruguti. Interviewed 27/7/98.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with women's domestic roles within the families in Nyeri which sustain the well being of the family. Women act as agents through which the first part of both formal and informal education is passed on to their children. Hence, women are instructors as far as socialisation is concerned; they transmit not only the informal education but also culture to the young ones, so that they can be well integrated in their tribe and society.

Seeing and examining the roles women play in the family, they merit a credit of liberation rather than oppression. Women in the family should be appreciated so that they can fully realise themselves. Women are not only involved in the affairs of their homestead, they are also engaged in the growth of the society and the nation in matters of development and economy. This aspect is the one I am going to deal with in the second chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

2. WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ROLE AND THE FAMILY IN NYERI

INTRODUCTION

Women in Nyeri contribute with their labour to the economy and well being of their family as they are engaged in either direct or indirect production. Most of the women in the area of my research work in the farms and in micro enterprises which improve the well being of their families and the country. They contribute a lot in the agricultural sector, first in order to sustain their families and secondly in order to sustain the Nation. Women in this area are not only involved in food crop production, but also in the cash crop production of tea and coffee.

In Nyeri women have always involved themselves in the economic development of their families and today, "in addition to 85% of their traditional unpaid labour required to maintain a household, which often involves growing food, and securing water and fuel supplies, women are increasingly taking paid work outside the home to supplement personal and family income"²⁹ These reproductive and productive roles of women in Nyeri

²⁹ Ibid.

have been vital to the economic development of their families, in feeding, clothing, education, etc. and their growing independence, economically, socially and legally. Increasingly, women's "household" work which has been long taken for granted, is now being acknowledged as a central contribution to the family and the country's wealth. Equally important, the new found economic independence of women in this area has inevitably caused a dramatic transformation of the women's self image, their growing sense of independence as well as mounting responsibilities and expectation at home and in their communities.²¹

Evidently I personally noticed that over 50% of the small scale enterprise in Ruruguti, Thunguri, Othaya, Giakanja and Karima are owned by women. Women have a dual role in the economy: as workers, they are engaged in direct production, in family farms and enterprises, commercial self employment and wage employment: in the sphere of reproduction as unpaid labour, they serve the family and the household; this includes their roles as consumers, primary purchasers of market items for household consumption.

The "Harambee spirit" which means "pull together" is a slogan that women in Nyeri are using. This spirit relies primarily on the coming together of the people and utilising of available human resources, and has attracted an increasing amount of capital for the individual and overall family economy. This is a spirit that many women have

²¹ FEMNET: Preliminary Version of 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development. E/1994/86, para. 18.

embraced today and is boosting their family well-being. Women in this area have also started group entrepreneurship which has also created job opportunities for them as well as for others. This has provided women with great flexibility in regulating their working time which enable them to harmonise household chores and child care with outside work.²²

Today most of the work in the micro enterprises, which is mostly an extension of agricultural activities, such as processing and marketing of the home grown produce are run by women. Other works comprise cottage crafts, such as basketry, weaving, the crafting of clay utensils used in cooking and storing food and other hand-made products. Other women are flourishing in services such as trade of used goods, dressmaking operations and curb-side beauty saloons. Women have managed to venture in these enterprises because they are easy to start and manageable. They can be owned by the family, because they rely on the local resources, are small scale operations, use low cost technology, can use skills acquired outside school and they are irregular and competitive markets.²³

It is important to note that the income that women get from these small enterprises supplement the family income and this raises the standard of living of their families. It is also true that many of the women working in formal sectors carry out more than one trade. A vegetable vendor would sometime double-up as a barmaid, potter, curio seller, basket weaver, etc. These women do so because of the low level earnings earned from

²² , Damaris Wambui, Chair-Lady of Mabati Women Group Ruguti. Interviewed 17/06.98.

²³ Ibid.

each activity. In other words, most women engage themselves in several enterprises with little skills or sometime with no specialisation. Their activities are regarded as supplements. All in all the increased productivity in these micro enterprises uplift their families standard of living which is a benefit to the whole country. This too attracts NGO'S who are willing to fund women's self help projects in the area.²⁴

Personally I see women of Nyeri as heroes in the field of economy, hero's who with very poor technology and minimal resources have managed to feed their families, and sell surplus for an income. They have empowered the area which would have collapsed had there been a food crisis. Through their activities in the informal sector, women have helped in boosting the area economy by foreign exchange earnings. So the result of women entrepreneurs, could be seen, even though it may be misjudged if compared with that of men. Surely women suffer in economy because their production has been approached in isolation from other social groups such as men and the youth. In both cases some of their dynamic contribution in production has been unfairly credited to men. Their reproduction and maintenance activities which includes child-bearing and catering for family members are seen as non economical.²⁵ From what I gathered it was clear to me that women go into business to make a living.

²⁴ Jane Nkatha, , Chair-lady of Women Help Group, KanyekinI. Interviewed on 18/07/98.

²⁵ Martha Koome, Women and Democracy, A Voters' Handbook League of Kenya Women Voters: (Nairobi: Views Ltd: Kenya, 1992) p 1.

2.1. WOMEN AND AGRICULTURE AND ITS IMPACT.

Women in Nyeri account for 60/80 percent of agricultural labour force in many families. They play a central role in the development and production of food and agriculture, participating actively in all the phases of the production cycle including conservation, storage, processing and marketing of food and agricultural products. With this they make a vital contribution to the economic development of their families , particularly in agriculturally based economies, which must be better recognized and rewarded. Women are the back-bone of both cash crops and subsistence farming of this area. Though their productive and reproductive activities are neither marketable nor recognised as an economic output, they are the main providers and traditional managers of food at the family and house hold level.

Women in the agricultural sector also undertake substantial portions of weeding, planting and the harvesting task in the farms; they also do a lot in land preparation, especially when their husbands are lazy and use most of their time in idleness and beer drinking. This is a reality in some parts of Nyeri.²⁶ However, having a lot in the field of agriculture which earn the area foreign income, women productivity has remained low because of their inability to have access to credit facilities and other productive inputs which have been there due to the existing legal framework. Women in the area are now working on to change this framework to allow them to develop their full potentials for the benefit of their families. They are doing this through development strategies and

²⁶ Simon Karimi, A father and a small scale farmer. Interviewed, 19/12/97.

programmes, as well as incentive programmes and projects in the field of food and agriculture. All this they do by integrating themselves at all levels of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluating at all stages of a development process of their projects cycle.

By coming together women have tried to empower themselves by having access to factors of production, such as financial resources and extension services which have always remained a serious drawback to women's development for many women who are involved in production or other economic activities. They are also working hard through women's campaigns to educate people to change the negative attitudes and perceptions they have about women, which has deprived many families in Nyeri from making effective use of valuable skills and new talents available in the area especially with respect to women's involvement in economic activities.

From my research, I found out that the women's economic activities in many families have been restrained by a number of factors. The one most commonly mentioned by those I interviewed includes, among others include unequal access to education and training, restriction from employment in both public and private sectors of the economy, limited access to resources, attitudes and cultural practices. All these factors overburden women with work; these factors have, therefore, combined to restrict women from full participation in socio-economic activities of their families. They are the very factors that men and women of good will are today working to transform in order to empower women in the area. Today women should be viewed as co-partners who are

equal to men and they should be encouraged to participate and be fully involved in associations and co-operatives of development projects which are related to food crops. They should be involved in associations and co-operative movements in the area. Also women access to and control of domestic and agricultural technology should be facilitated without much male domination. They should be consulted and be fully involved in stages of preparation, implementation, supervision, and appraisal in all development projects the family plans to undertake. Capable women should also be exposed equally with men to appropriate technologies and help them in sharing of information with women at the grass-root level. Efforts should be made to alleviate the burden of women on the drudgery of transporting food from the farm, water, energy, fuel and other supplies. Women in the area are trying to do this for themselves by introducing wheelbarrow, cart-oxen or donkey driven carts to transport firewood and water which has reduced the time women spend in transporting these essentials many times and give them ample time to do other duties. Other measures could be investment in rural roads for better transport, supply of piped water, introduction of more efficient technology for processing of agricultural produce and labour-saving devices to enhance and increase women's productivity. Apart from all the above, there should be inclusion of all agricultural activities carried out by women, including unpaid domestic cares, in the statistics. These statistics when translated into monetary terms will definitely reflect the actual contribution of women in the labour market and to the national economy.

I believe that if the above measures are followed and implemented in the families, it would not only be empowering women in this area but will also help many families elsewhere recover from economic restraints they are undergoing now, not to mention the increase in economic production.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen that women play a very important role in the economy, agriculture and development of their families. They strain not only to support their family through direct production, but also engage themselves in small enterprises in order to uplift the family's well being. In this chapter we have also seen that because of all these restraints women's situation economically is generally too low: lack of access to equal chances of education, restrictions of employment in both public and private sectors, limited access to resources, attitudes and cultural values limit the women to fully realise themselves in the social economic activities of their families. Also something has been mentioned of what women are doing in this area to empower themselves. All the above point-out the importance of seeing women as co- partners with men and not as slaves in the social economical sector. All the above has a great repercussion on women's health in the family; this issue be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

3. WOMEN'S ROLE IN FAMILY HEALTH CARE.

INTRODUCTION

Women have a role of health care in the family. But on the other hand, the health of women is at stake today. This hinders their family progress and development. In this chapter I am going to present the role of women in matters of health.

Women in Nyeri play the great role of nursing the sick and the old members in the family. This role fitted and fits them very well because in many societies medicine was often monopolised by women, and pharmacy was an extension of their roles as cooks and gatherers of herbs. Most of them have the knowledge of the curative effects of herbs which they themselves have learned by watching their mothers and grand-mothers. Many families have herbal gardens which replace going to the pharmacist for expensive, unknown medicines or to a physician.²⁷ Women as mothers are also midwives and healers of injuries and diseases, although today there are great discoveries in the field of medicine. This has not deprived women of their role of people closer to the sick and the old. In fact, no family that wishes to ensure that its old, sick and disadvantaged members

²⁷Jane Nyokabi, Traditional medicine woman and a house wife. interviewed 24/ 7/98

lead a dignified life can do without this work, even though for most part women do perform it voluntarily.²⁸

In many families here in Nyeri women take direct care of the patients. They are directly involved in the holistic health of their families. They play the roles of physical, psychological and spiritual healer. They start to take care of their family health immediately after conception, they take care of the life they carry in their bodies by following a proper diet, though to many women this is hindered by poverty and lack of proper nutrition.²⁹

Women do a lot in the field of health in the family: this is why they are referred to as informal or domestic healer by Carol Shepherd Mc Clain "In this domain, the curing strategies of first resort are those that women employ in the households; mothers and grandmothers treat children, wives treat husbands, daughters and daughter-in-laws treat parents and parents-in-law and so forth. Grave illness and serious injuries are usually recognisable as such and, in these cases, family members immediately seek the care of a specialists, either indigenous or biomedical. But most illness are not life threatening and their entire course play out in domestic contexts."³⁰ Looking at what Carol has stated, it goes without saying that women's maternal roles are very essential for the structure of a healthy family.

²⁸ Fiorenza and Carr, Op. Cit; p.4.

²⁹ Lucy Kamau, House wife and midwife, Nyeri Provincial hospital. Interviewed 24/7/98.

³⁰ Carol Shepherd Mc Clain (ed): Women as Healers. Cross-cultural Perspectives (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1991) p.21.

Without them there would be a high number of psychosomatic illnesses. This is why even today women hold this responsibility in high esteem, and that is why we see many more women than men in nurses training colleges and in hospital helping the patients.³¹

However, despite women taking great a role in this field, health and well being elude the majority of them and their families because of inequality between men and women. This therefore, calls for all to emphasize that to obtain optimal health throughout the life cycle, equality, including sharing of family responsibilities, is essential and vital. In many families over half of the population are women, who are mostly being compelled by circumstances to assume responsibility for social and health problems encountered by them and their families as they struggle to enhance the equality of life which is being eroded by the process of urbanisation and industrialisation which consumes a huge amount of the national budget to the deprivation of simple and effective health and social investments. In the Kenyan villages, therefore, most health care is provided by women informally as wives, mothers, grandmothers and older sisters caring for young siblings.³²

³¹ Lucy Kamau. Interviewed 24/7/98.

³² Charles Muiruri, Nyeri Provincial Hospital. Interviewed 24/7/98.

Although many families depend so much on women for health care delivery, it appears and was said to me by Komu Jane and Murage Susan, that little attempt has been made by these families to acknowledge this crucial mass of “manpower” by incorporating it into an overall development process and in particular the area health system.¹³ It is a pity to see that women contribution in this area is undervalued and their working conditions neglected. However, I saw in some parts of Nyeri that there has been recognition of this reality, because you could see in some villages women based organizations dedicated to the health of families. I see this as the first and most important entry in strengthening a national health system based on primary health care.

¹³Jane Komu and Susan Murage, Nurses of Ruruguti Dispensary. Interviewed on 25/7/98

Women are also housekeepers, family nurses, and traditional mid-wives; being responsible for these tasks, women in Nyeri always try to resolve the immediate problems of the members of the family.

Though women play a vital role in the health of all family members, they lack any influence in decision making in matters pertaining to health, a role played by them with great dedication from conception to death. Lack of decision making power in all areas of life is a reality which has an adverse impact on women's health and that of their families. Lack of food and inadequate distribution of food for girls and women in the house, inadequate access to safe water, sanitation facilities and fuel supplies, and poor urban areas and deficient housing conditions all overburden women and families and have a negative effect on their health. Though women play the greater role in health in their families, there is a lot of discrimination against girl children, often resulting in preference for access to good nutrition and health care services by boy children.³⁴ There is also lack of information and proper health care which poses great risks to women health and their productivity. This calls for men to be educated to respect women in matters of health. Still there are wide spread mental disorders related to marginalization, powerlessness and poverty, along with overworking and stress, and the growing incidence of domestic violence and substance abuse: these among other are health issues of growing concern in most families in Nyeri.

³⁴ Kivutha Kibwana (ed) Women and Autonomy in Kenya: Policy and Legal Frame work (Nairobi: Clarepress limited, 1997), p. 86.

It is after seeing all this that women in the area with the spirit of “Harambee” started several health care centers owned and managed by them and offering medical attention and counseling sessions to people. Being involved in the field of health in the area, women are trying to advocate for appropriate medical services for both boys and girls without discrimination. This is how women in the area are trying to empower themselves in the field of health.

3.1. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH CARE AND FAMILY.

Looking at the above I now suggest what I think should be done to empower women in the field of health in the family. First, there is need to start and implement in co-operation with women community based organizations, gender sensitivity health programs which should include decentralized health services which the women of Nyeri have already done with less or no help from men. Allow women access to social security system in equality with men throughout the whole life cycle. Provide affordable primary health care services of high quality. Introduce training for gender sensitive health workers, making sure that all health services and workers conform to human rights and to ethical professional and gender sensitive standards. Strengthen and reorient health services, particularly primary health services, in order to ensure equal access to quality health services for women and girls. Women here are trying to do most of the above but they still have a long way to go.

Support organizations working to improve the health of girls and women. Implement programs aimed at improving the nutrition status in the family. Ensure the availability of aid, access to health care infrastructure and services for rural women. Encourage men to share equally in child care and household work and provide their share of financial support for their families health and well being. I noticed that in several families this is a reality now in Nyeri. Other measures include strengthening programs and services, including medical campaigns addressing family and women's health. Increase budgetary allocation for primary health care and give priority to women's health. Lastly I would like to stress that good health is essential to living a productive and fulfilling life, and the right for all women to control all aspects of their health is basic to their empowerment.

3.2. WOMEN AND HIV/AIDS

Women whose role is that of health care are today challenged by poverty and diseases. Here in this area they have to tackle the issue of HIV/AIDS which is in the increase, though no statistics were given to me. Today, even though nobody is immune against HIV/AIDS, women are unevenly affected by the epidemic. Their social and economic status make them ill-equipped to protect themselves and their family against this epidemic. If infected, women face the risk of passing on the disease to their children. And yet they are the ones who take great care of the sick and, when they themselves fall

ill, they face more problems than men; some husbands reject their wives, even when they may be the cause of the women's condition.³⁵

³⁵Lucy Kamau, House wife and Midwife, Nyeri Provincial hospital. Interviewed 24/7/98.

In many families women are at risk of getting HIV/AIDS: this could be as a result of infidelity in marriage on the part of their husband who officially is married and unofficially some time has, a harem of mistresses. This happens because women are assumed, or have been forced through centuries due to male chauvinism, to lie low. This makes women particularly susceptible. When a man has an affair with a “thousand and one” sex partners and come home to his sometimes trusting wife, this causes a situation in which women can be forced into a problem they know nothing about. Traditionally men are supposed to test their virility by going around with numerous sex partners; this causes women and the family to become victims of moral laxity.³⁶

In some families women find themselves faced with the task of bringing up children alone, especially if their husbands are irresponsible men who spend all the time drinking. So such women knowing that they have no source of income and no piece of land to till, may be forced to seek the easiest way out: they get involved with a man or men who could pay them for services rendered, that is, commercial sex. So they are able to feed their children but no thought is given to HIV/AIDS. This is happening with several families in Nyeri.³⁷ There is a call for joint effort of men and women to play their role effectively and responsibly in the family to avert this calamity of many falling victims of this deadly diseases, HIV/AIDS. Women should be empowered here by allowing them to have full control of their sexual life. In this area of HIV/ AIDS women

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John Mwangi J, Pastor A.I.C Church Ruruguti. Interviewed 25/7/98.

here are trying to help those who are already affected and at the same time educate those who are not yet affected to take care of themselves.³⁸

³⁸ Rose Mukami, HIV/AIDS counsellor in the area. Interviewed 24/7/98.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen that women over the centuries play a very important role in matters of health. They nurse both their children and the members of the family. Over the centuries, they have played very basic roles of health such as mid-wives hearers of some injuries and some diseases. In spite of advances in the domain of medicine, their role in matters of health remains indispensable. We have also seen how a good number of women have been affected by HIV/AIDS due to various factors, some of them being economical poverty. We have also seen how women are trying to cope with the situation.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE FAMILY

Domestic violence against women in the family is a widespread phenomenon, more so in the recent past. It almost happens daily in families. It is a problem that affects many rich and poor alike here in Nyeri. Oppression and exploitation being the worst form of violence committed in many families against women. There is a lot of domestic violence against women in the family: women battering, child defilement, rapes, and other general abuses.⁴⁰ Domestic violence against women in the family has become like a virtue not a vice. Today it seems that domestic violence against women is something accepted because, when this violence is done and the authority or society is called upon to investigate, the issue is thrown overboard using these words “that is a family issue.”⁴⁰ These are painful occurrences that we should all co-operate to eradicate in our families. Violence against women in the family is manifested in the traditional, social, economical, sexual, intellectual and also religious sphere in this part of the country.⁴¹

¹² Ibid.

⁴⁰ Maina Abraham, Othaya Catholic Parish. interviewed, 25/7/98.

⁴¹ Ibid.

To curb the incident of domestic violence against women, women in the area try to teach people through forum and women campaigns that domestic violence against women is wrong and is a violation of human right. They also try to help those who are violated to seek legal action against the offender. Most of the time they do this themselves on behalf of the victim. Another form of domestic violence against women in the family is divorce which is on the increase in Nyeri these days.

Oral literature also contributed a lot to women oppression; this is because most of the stories, proverbs, songs, myths and other forms of literature depict women as weak and untrustworthy. This distort the image of women, their vitality and dignity as mothers of human-kind, thus making women to be viewed as immature and unstable persons. For the Agikuyu there is a proverb that says, "Woman have no upright words, but only crooked ones"; the idea behind this saying is that women can never be trusted to keep any secrets.⁴² This is a violence against the integrity of a woman in the family and I found it widely used by men in Nyeri. Also there is a saying that women breed and make trouble. This tends to put women in the same category as children. Women are irrational, weak and have no self control. As this were not enough, women are also considered to bring misfortune and evil. All this domestic violence against women happens to them regardless of their age, social status or ethnic background and too often this violence goes unrecognised, unreported or under-reported and is, therefore, invisible⁴³.

⁴² Mwangi Kiai. A retired chief and a father of three girls. Interviewed 28/12/97.

⁴³ Ibid.

In Nyeri, domestic violence against women in the family has reached epidemic proportion and, yet, from the interviews that I carried out, it was evident that domestic violence against women has been one of the family kept secret. However, increasingly women from all walks of life are beginning to talk about this phenomenon and to tell their stories of physical and mental intimidation to a society that is becoming more aware of the problem. Gradually some of these stories are finding their ways to the media, but still much has to be done because when some of these form of violence are reported, nothing at all is done and sometime it brings with it more humiliation and violence toward those who report them. This is because the judiciary power has become very corrupt and always compromises; so the offences are shelved and nobody cares. At other times, domestic violence is not investigated for it is said to be a family issue.⁴⁴ Women battering is another form of violence against women. Battering is not just a physical attack. It is a number of intimidation tactics, threats, economic deprivation, psychological and sexual abuse, used repeatedly. Physical violence is one of those tactics. Battering is another type of domestic violence against women that occurs everywhere and at anytime. Sometimes it happens when children are present.⁴⁵ This affect women's initiative for advancement in all areas of life. Today we also see in our daily newspaper how many women in the families have lost their lives through battering; we have also seen women admitted in hospitals with battering or burn injuries that sometimes leave

⁴⁴ Maina Abraham, Othaya parish. Interviewed 28/12/97.

⁴⁵ The Tribune, Violence Against Women: Invisible Barriers to Development, International Women's Tribune Centre, United Nations #46 June 1991.

them helpless for life. Battering affects family in all aspects of life.⁴⁶ Concerning women battering, most of the women I interviewed concur that battered women are often very active on their own behalf. Their efforts often fail. However, because the battering and assaults continue they become as if institutionalised, so that even police and courts continue to deny women the most needed protection in the family.

Rape and incest is another kind of domestic violence; this is an issue taking toll today. It is becoming a daily occurrence in a number of families. It has implicated children and adults. This depicts a rotten society that dehumanises the girl child and the woman. A counsellor assured me that many women go to her office for counselling and they mostly complain of having been forced to have sex against their will sometimes even by their male relatives.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

All in all, it should be noted that domestic violence against women affects every part of our lives. The well-being of women, their full participation in family plan policies and programmes are essentials if development that benefit the whole population has to take place.

⁴⁶ George Nyabuga, Editor of Standard Newspaper. Interviewed 15/7/98.

⁴⁷ Charity Maitu, A Saloon operator in Othaya town. Interviewed 26/7/98.

There will be no peace or stable environment, no educational progress if women are afraid to take their rightful position and are suffering physical and emotional abuse. Therefore, this calls for gender sensitivity and law enforcement structures through which the rights of women can be addressed more responsibly and responsively. All should join hands to condemn all forms of violence against woman.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. RELIGIOUS ROLES OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY

Apart from being the pillar of the family, in Nyeri women are also the pillar of the Church. "The majority of the them attend Church and are active in Churches and sects in Nyeri, where they form over 80% of believers."⁴⁸ Within the family setting, women play a vital role in teaching their family members about God. They are always at the center of any religious functions in their families. Their roles function at best as healers, alleviating suffering, giving consolation and building up families and communities.⁴⁹ By their nature women play the role of witnessing the image of God within them; this is mainly because God has created them with such unique characteristics as tenderness, sensitivity, capacity of loving without counting the cost, capacity of adaptation in the face of varied and often unexpected needs in life, and sincere devotion to supernatural realm. Here in Nyeri women are the first teachers of faith and belief to their family members. As the first teachers they are proclaimers and educators of faith for their family members from the tenderest age. They gradually pass out to them and open the truth of faith and teach them how to set up relationships of love, fidelity, prayer and obedience to God. They teach religious values and morals to the family members making them God-loving people.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Francis Warutara, Pastor Chrigo Church Thunguri. Interviewed 26/12/97

⁴⁹ Lucy Muthoni, Catchiest St. Joseph Catholic Church Othaya. Interviewed 25/7/98

⁵⁰ James Nderitu . Secondary teacher, Othaya Girls. Interviewed 24/12/98.

Through their own ways of life women take up the role of evangelizing their family members and those near them, by bringing them goodness in all spheres of family life and, through their influence, they help in transforming humanity from within and making it anew. This is why the Church documents addressed to all Church members and people of good will, refer to the family as the “domestic church”. In many families women are known to teach family members what is necessary in order to live a fully human and Christian life; by doing so, they hand on to each family member what he /she should know for a harmonious development of his/her physical and intellectual life and for the acquirement of spiritual maturity. They do this because they believe that their family members are destined for a life beyond this earth. Thus, they prepare them with respect to their ultimate goal. In this regard women play a role of proclaiming both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and a hope of a blessed life to come. Women are also involved in preparing future Christians through the teaching of catechism and in other Church organized Sunday school sessions for the young. Through these vital roles, women preserve spiritual values and sanctify other church. For sure the religious role of women in the family is a complex, rich and dynamic matter which can not be fully defined, but whose factors must be investigated and distinguished in a fixed order.⁵¹

In religious sphere women have a lot to offer to their families. But, sometimes, their religious experience is regarded as magic, though today they do enjoy these religious roles which have found outlet and accommodation in African established

⁵¹ Nancy Mukami, Sister in-charge of parish Christian instruction, Othaya. Interviewed 20/5/98.

churches. Nevertheless, after playing those vital roles in their families, women are regarded as inferior; they are put in a low status positions which could be traced from Biblical authorship, Jewish tradition and culture, African traditional culture, lack of education and even more worse religious policies. All the above portray how our churches and religions are still structured patriarchally and how many of us use some Biblical teachings especially the second creation account and some other Old Testament texts and Pauline literature, to justify our attitude and ill treatment of women.

Today women in Nyeri are concerned about the religious roles they play in their families; they are asking to be seen and viewed as co-partners with men in the work of evangelization, not merely as listeners. They are now challenging the structures of the family; they want a higher role in matters pertaining to their family spiritual well being. They want to be fully involved in ecclesiological matters, in formulation and re-formulation of church doctrines, in order to cater for women as part and parcel of “man” and the Gospel itself. Personally, more than ever before, I feel that women need to be empowered in this great role they play in the family. And the only way this can be done is first by appreciating what they do, encourage them to continue doing it and also by trying to overcome negative attitudes people have towards woman leadership in religious roles. For sure, some of the measures I suggest to be taken are already being taken by the women themselves in Nyeri, but they still need the support of men to excel in this field.

5.1. CHURCH'S TEACHING ABOUT WOMEN

It is a fact that the Church acknowledges women's work in nearly every sector of life and stresses that women should be able to fulfill their tasks in accordance with their nature, without being discriminated against and without being excluded from jobs of which they are capable, but with respect for their family aspirations and for their specific role in contributing, together with men, to the good of their families.⁵² Human work affirms again and again the need to protect the dignity of a women. A number of Papal Encyclicals have made profound statements about the issue of discrimination against women. For example Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical "Inter Insigniores" says that women roles today are of the greatest importance both for renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery of the true face of God. "Rerum Novarum", No 18 stresses that women are workers in their various roles in the family and, therefore, they should never be treated as slaves; justice demands that the dignity of a human person be respected.⁵³

Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic letter "Mulieris Dignitatem" pointed out that being a woman or a man is a question of understanding the reasons for and the consequences of the creator's decision that the human beings should always and only exist as a woman or a man. And it is only by beginning from these bases, that it is possible to understand the greatness of the dignity and a vocation of a woman that one is

⁵² John Paul II, Human Work, (Uganda: St. Paul publications, 1991) p.77.

⁵³ Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum (U.S.A. Daughters of St. Paul, 1942) No.18.

able to speak of their active presence in the Church and the family on an equal degree with men.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Pope John Paul II Apostolic letter "Mulieris Dignitatem," (Limuru: St. Paul Publications, Koble Press 1988) p.5

Biblical texts also provide sufficient bases for recognizing the essential equality of man and woman from the point of view of their humanity. Fathers of the Church also affirmed the fundamental equality of men and women before God, (Origen). The Church's teaching also puts it clearly that the women can not become the "object" of "domination" and male possession.⁵⁵

Although the Church's hierarchy theoretically recognizes women as "subjects" with rights of their own, in practice women are considered as "objects" with assigned roles, as wives, mothers, or virgins. The roles of wife and mother are at the service of the patriarchal system in general. In each of the role women play in the Church they are controlled and expected to follow the Church's established norms. It is a pity to see that what the Church stands for is not practiced. To empower women the Church needs to stand for what it teaches and practice it in deeds not only in words.

5.2. CHURCH'S PASTORAL APPROACH IN EMPOWERING WOMEN

The Church in her teaching, which is also addressed to all men and women of good will, affirms again and again the dignity of women and recognises the injustice done to them. This therefore, indicates that the Church and all her pastoral agents should take an active role in the process of empowering women. She should device strategies that openly challenge the structures that hinder women from attaining the dignity that is theirs, equal to men in creation.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 20.

This can be achieved by advocating the Biblical principle of human dignity, care for the underprivileged and the improvement of the lives of all. Through the institutions of learning, where the Church is involved in education both formal and informal for both boys and girls, men and women, it stands in a higher position to advocate for and facilitate the freeing of women from cultural practices that deny them their humanity. If this is done well it, might help a lot in removing gender based oppression and discrimination.

The Church should also try to empower women by encouraging and utilising all women's qualities. It should also preach through her pastoral agents equality of sexes, and not only preach about it but practice it within her administrative roles. In the Church women should be given roles to play, as these roles would challenge them to play their roles effectively in their families. Through the Church's organs women in the family should be conscientized about their dignity and worth as human beings and encouraged to articulate the problems affecting them in the family. In doing so women will feel empowered and identified with their roles in the family. In the same line the Church through the help of her pastoral agents should work for the liberation of the family from the attitudes and practices that are destructive of it. This will raise women's self esteem and empower them to contribute effectively to the life of their families. The Church also has a role in stopping her members from taking literally the Bible message and using it to hold women down, preventing them from full participation in their roles in the family, and making them feel guilty if they do not comply with what is written in the Bible.

Furthermore, the Church's pastoral agents should challenge and address the structures that create poverty in the family.

However, from past experience, the Church has been striving for upholding the dignity of each person, regardless of sex; it has been doing something in empowering women in the family, but a lot still remains to be done by a Church which is still structured patriarchally. The Church hierarchy and her pastoral agents need to face the challenges posed by women with a lot of sincerity and openness, putting aside the patriarchal model in which the Church is strongly mirrored and rooted. If the Church refuses to act on the plight of women in the family, it will be guilty of this crime just as the family because it will have failed in its task of advocating justice in every realm.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen that women are the pillars of the Church. They make the highest percentage of practising believers in churches and sects gathering; as such they are the educators and formators of faith in their families they teach them both moral and religious values in order to grow as God's loving people. In this chapter we have also seen how women in the family are violated, economically, socially, sexually, intellectually and even by religious biases, which become sources of physical and psychological violence for most of the women in all walks of life. Lastly we have seen how the Church views women and what she is doing or supposed to do to empower them.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to make the following observation and recommendation from the study.

OBSERVATIONS

- From this study I discovered that women are good managers, devoted and honest; they can excel in positions which require transparency and accountability if given a chance, and whoever doubts their accountability should look at organisations or groups run by them. Women do combine motherly approach with a sense of dignity; hence, their empowerment in the family can hold ground if it is encouraged from the grassroots, that is at the village level.
- At the grassroots, women still need to be emancipated from cultural bondage which have tied them for ages. This will be effected if men in the family allow their wives to play their role effectively without interference.
- Men feel insecurity and inferiority complex in regard to women and that is the reason they block women's upward mobility.
- Most women are well organised, committed and loyal to their work more than most men are.

- Women maternal instincts are usually more likely to favour the less fortunate whose social and economical rights are violated; this is because women are unlikely to turn away from the agony of the poor and disadvantaged children and they easily relate to the concept of family life.
- Women do a lot in the family and get into the emotional essence of the issues which are important in maintaining the family elements in the way they relate to each other. They address issues of importance most often overlooked by their male partners, in an effort to keep their family together.
- In the area of health, women seem not to have complete control of their sex life. It was so evident to me that women's health problems cannot be solved with health initiatives alone, women themselves must become more aggressive, organise themselves better to improve their health situation and those of their families. Also poverty, lack of medicine in health centres makes women's health role in the family very difficult.
- Women today may not be able to live in the freedom they desire in the family. But they are able to change the attitudes of the next generation by the values and beliefs they pass on to their children.
- Education is a vital power for the empowerment of women; without it, it will be difficult for women to enter into the struggle. In the area of education women are discriminated.

- Socialisation has done a lot of harm to women especially in those areas where women are socialised to be docile, ignorant of self and, therefore, willingly susceptible for whatever comes.
- Exclusion of women from technical and vocational training jobs, including agricultural training, seriously discriminates against women in all societies and contributes to the worsening living standard of their families.
- Though women can be the worst enemies of themselves, especially if they are jealous of each others it was so evident to me that women are denied the opportunity to use their potential through retrogressive societies attitudes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The family and the society must learn to look at women for their ability, and not for their biological make up. Hence they are to be seen as human beings, created by God as helpers and companions of men and thus be granted their rightful status in life.
- There is a great need to reduce women's work load and allow them leisure time. In the same line families should stop the separation of the domestic roles from other domains. This will enable women to penetrate into those domains which were regarded only for men.
- All forms of discrimination and violence in the family against all genders should be condemned and particularly those against women. The issue of discriminating and

violating the rights of single mothers should stop; rather, they should be seen as people who need a lot of care, help and concern.

- There is a great need for women to appreciate their role in the family in order not to see themselves merely as mothers, cooks and sex objects. They should also be given complete control of their sex life and power to control their reproductive abilities.
- New forms of relationships founded on mutual respect should be developed. This can be achieved if men and women together undergo sensitisation programmes in order to understand the cultural basis of negative attitudes to women and that they can be changed. Hence, they should lobby together for the elimination of all laws that are oppressive to women.
- Women need to be empowered in their role in the family to enable them to serve their family members effectively.
- The society and the Church should work for the liberation of the family from the attitudes and practices that are destructive of it. This will raise women's self esteem and empower them to contribute better to the life of their families.
- Policies that deny women equal ownership of family assets should be abolished, laws like land inheritance and registration that currently favour males. People should be educated to change their conscience and accept that women can own assets and resources individually or jointly with their spouses. This would empower women economically for they would have control of resources and benefit from these resources.

- All barriers and systems which block women from performing their role in the family effectively, by portraying false pictures of them, should be removed.
- Attempts should be made to promote an educational setting that eliminate all values that impede the schooling of pregnant girls and young mothers from continuing with their studies after delivery. Efforts should be made to help them achieve their dreams.
- Today there is a need to re-examine role-definitions with courage and openness, to redefine and reallocate to women those roles that they can perform like men or even sometimes better than men. Roles should be assigned to those who are capable and qualified for them, regardless of their sex.
- Lastly there is an urgent need to transform unequal relationships in the family and increase women's capacity to cope with situations that threaten their lives and survival; this means working for a new world order where a just family depends on just people, where a just family is where men and women are equally involved in the struggle and in their reward (loss or gain, success or failure), a family of true partnership among men and women, characterised by righteousness, justice, peace and undisturbed security. A just family is one in which men and women struggle equally and benefit equally, where gender roles are neither unchangeable nor divine. They must change over time as contexts change over time.

If the above is understood and followed correctly we will go a long way in empowering women in the family, enhancing their self-esteem and, subsequently, uninhibited contribution to their family welfare and that of the society.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In a few words we can say that women in Nyeri have good and very essential roles to play both in the family and in the society at large. But in spite of this, women are still in cultural, economic and social bondage from which they need to be liberated so that the factors which contribute to their oppression may be condemned in order to promote their dignity and rights. It is also important to educate women on their responsibilities and rights. Empowerment of women is empowerment of the whole family, and the task of empowering women is for all of us, men and women of good will. Empowerment of women in their domestic roles, which are vital and noble for human existence, will enable them to perform their roles more effectively for the improvement of their families, society and nation. This will also ensure proper human growth and development, boosting women's self esteem and subsequent uninhibited contribution to their own families and the people they serve.

Conclusively, I must insist on the vital importance of the need for openness on the part of those who are dealing with women as people, and to understand their state of life, as a significant component for human growth. We should always appreciate that just as much as the women learn from men, men also have a lot to learn from women. Women must be empowered to become free and able to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from achieving integral development: humanly, socially, professionally, economically and, most important, spiritually. These are the things that matter in promoting the role of women in the family.

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