

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL MINISTRY

TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

**THE WELFARE OF THE ELDERLY IN CONTEMPORARY
KENYA**

STUDENT: JOSEPH MARANGO WAMALWA

TUTOR: DR. MARY GETUI

2000

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*LONG ESSAY; SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE AWARD OF A
DIPLOMA IN SCIENCES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*

DATE: 31 MARCH 2000

NAIROBI-KENYA

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution. All sources have been cited in full.

Joseph Marango Wamalwa.....

JOSEPH MARANGO WAMALWA

To my mother and to the elderly people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to register my sincere thanks to Dr. Mary Getui who accepted to accompany me as my supervisor in the process of writing this paper. With her assistance I managed to write it with enthusiasm up to the end. I am also grateful to entire team of Help Age International for their encouragement and for accepting me to use their resource centre for my research. I wish also to recognise Mr.Casper Masiga, Mr. Jim Agengo and Alois Otieno who did proofreading. Finally, I extend my gratitude to Allamano House Community for their moral and financial support. I specifically thank Br. Maurice Awiti who helped me in typing. May God bless them and accompany them always.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GS - GANDIUM ET SPES

PP - OCTAGESIMO ADVENIENS

LE - LABOREM EXERCENS

UN - UNITED NATIONS

WCC - WOLRLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

HIV- HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS

UK- UNITED KINGDOM

LK- LUKE

MT- MATTHEW

JB- JOB

TB- TOBIT

GN- GENESIS

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Bukusu tribe of western part of Kenya has a proverb, which says; *The older person has the eyes of a hawk*. This proverb implies that an old person is valuable thanks to having a lot of experience in life and a wide spectrum of knowledge that can benefit the society a great deal. It reminds me of my grandmother who died at the age of eighty-four. She was not getting tired of advising me on how to go about with life. She was fond of instructing me to be charitable and to respect the people whom I interact with. It was her pleasure even to tell me whom to marry and the qualities I should look for. This was a routine whenever I paid her a visit in her hut. In fact I presumed that it was a nuisance. Now she has joined the invisible world and there is no one intimate to impart the wisdom of the sages. I feel ashamed and hollow in that I did not ask many things about our family genealogy. It seems that I was being affected by modern civilisation, which has 'wrong' impression of old age. This is because I did not think that at her advanced age, she was capable of telling me anything in line with our modern life.

Elderly people are archives of wisdom that the society may borrow from to advance in social justice. Therefore, their welfare should be taken into account. In African society, the aged had social responsibilities in the extended family and in the community or nation as a whole depending on who they were. Their needs were catered for in all ways. These days, they are being forgotten in social life as well as in economic life. We have to admit that we are doing a disservice to this vulnerable group which can give us incredible insights about life. I can not generalise that all is unwell in all families. But in one way or another, the aged are being excluded from contributing whatever they may wish to give to the community due the mobility of people's to different places. Therefore, in order to restore the glory of our

elderly relatives, we have to put their needs on our agenda. In this paper we are going to see what the problem is, how it is a problem and how we can address this problem to make the lives of the elderly decent, beneficial and useful.

1.1 Background of the problem

What is evident about the demographic profile is that life expectancy is lengthening and so we expect to have more elderly people than in previous years.¹ This is being occasioned by medical advancement. Thus the diseases that were thought to be unmanageable are being treated without many struggles though new ones are cropping up. Therefore, we see that this third millennium will be apparently composed of many elderly people. Questions that remain begging are: What does this imply for developing countries like Kenya where forty-seven percent of the total population is encountering absolute poverty?² What are the connotations that may be constructed as the decline of traditional values is being accelerated by influx of western cultures? As the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) scourge takes away the lives of many youthful people in many families, the elderly are assuming the responsibility of taking care of their families. How will this affect them? All these questions are disturbing and need precise answers. (See appendix one).

According to World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics, the number of older persons is expected to rise to 1.2 billion from 580 millions by the year 2025.³ This is increasing rapidly especially in developing countries. Help Age Kenya estimates of old people above 60 years here in Kenya to be 2,007,000 and this is expected to increase tremendously.⁴ This is a warning in advance to prepare for any eventualities. It indicates

¹ Ogova Ondego, "Who Will Look After The elderly? 'Aging Population A World Wide Problem,'" In Daily Nation (Nairobi) Friday Oct. 23rd, 1998, 24.

² Republic Of Kenya, "National Poverty Eradication," Sessional Paper No. 3 (1999-2015), Government Press, June 1999, 2.

³ "Aging In Africa," In New People Magazine, No. 62 (Nairobi) Sep-Oct. 1999, 14.

⁴ Aging In Africa (Nairobi), issue 6, May 1999, 2.

that there should be welfare programs to deal with old age problems. United Nations assembly declared 1999 as The International Year for Older Persons. The theme *Towards a Society For All Ages* was to highlight the challenges and opportunities of astronomical increase of aging population. Help Age International with its partners who are concerned with the welfare of the elderly called for lobbying so that the message about the older persons may be known far and wide.⁵ Already some countries in the west have included old age problem in their development policies and thus have operating pension schemes and care centres. In Kenya, there is nothing like that. The government has only invested in the youth programs and women. And as social- economic condition is worsening, we do not know what lies ahead. Therefore, we have to weigh and consider what appropriate action to be undertaken. The battle is ours and we have to fight fiercely with other interested parties in order to win it amicably.⁶

1.2 Statement of the problem

The fundamental problem is that the elderly population is likely to grow and yet they are being marginalized and suffering from poor quality of life due to lack of preparedness and social welfare. They are stumbling with among other concerns poor health, absolute poverty, lack of basic needs, loneliness and disrespect. This is even being accelerated by the dramatic changes in social, economic and technological spheres. At present the oldest of the old generation are being affected most. Women who are the majority and outlive men are particularly at greater risk due to gender biases.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study aims at:

⁵ Help Age International, " Our Aging World, 'Facts About Our Older World,'" (Nairobi), 1999.1-2.

⁶ Deborah Eade And Suzanne Williams, The Oxfam Development And Relief, Vol. One (London: Oxfam), 295 295.

- Analysing the situation of the elderly people in Kenya.
- Creating awareness on the rights of the elderly and the need to appreciate them.
- Analysing how social agents of the church may integrate the question of the elderly in their social apostolate.
- Deepening the understanding of the writer about the plight of the elderly so that he may be able to deal with similar situations in his future missionary assignment.

1.4 Scope and limitation of the study

This study is about the welfare of the elderly in Kenya focusing on the old of the 'old generation', destitutes and the secular retired. We shall see the treatment of the elderly in African traditional setting, the challenges and problems that they face at present and the response to these problems. Then, the Christian perspective on this matter. This study is limited in that it will only give general outlook of the situation of the aged. We shall not provide all answers but we are just joining other campaigners who have written or have undertaken the same issue.

1.5 Methodology

The adopted method of the study is marked by See, Judge and Act and supplemented by qualitative and quantitative methods of research. The techniques used were interview of ten selected people from two tribes. These are Bukusu and Kikuyu. This is because one has been affected adversely with modernisation (Kikuyu) and the other (Bukusu) is relatively intact in the traditional culture. The names of those interviewed are changed to respect their privacy. Observations of the elderly in the homes of the aged and personal reflections are incorporated. We are also indebted to include secondary data that will provide a wide range of ideas from different writers who have written on the subject matter. Consequently, it will be an analytical approach as we go along with the information sliced from primary and

secondary sources.

1.6 Definition of terms

Welfare- It is the state of human wellbeing. In our context, we are referring to the wellbeing of the elderly socially, economically and spiritually. We see that these three aspects should be given a greater attention for the betterment of the elderly. And it can only be realised when we have programs providing such necessities and proper care of the aged in their families.

Elderly- It is any person who is 55 years and above. This definition is based on the mandatory retirement age here in Kenya. However, in many countries, it has different implications. It may mean when one is incapable of working (frail) or when one has grandchildren. WHO defines an elderly person as one who is 60 years and above.⁷ Anyhow, we shall stick to the first definition since we are dealing with a Kenyan situation.

1.7 Summary of the chapters

This paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter as we have seen, introduces us to the subject matter. The second chapter deals with the elderly in African traditional society, while the third chapter examines the situation of the elderly today. In chapter four we expound on what is being done about the situation. In chapter five, we look at how this issue of old age may be tackled from the Christian perspective. Finally we end up with recommendations and a conclusion that point out a further research and awareness on this issue. We were at pain to accomplish this paper because most of the literature tackles the old age issue from the western perspective. So it was tedious for us to intermarry with our Kenyan situation. Nevertheless, through discussions and inquiries from our friends and interviewees, we have made it.

⁷ Ibid., 293-294.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THE OLD IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we focus on the implications of old age and the role-played by elderly people in traditional African set up. We examine how the aged were benefactors to the society in terms of social and economic spheres. We further narrate how their welfare was sustained. We also point out some areas where there were conflicts and problems.

2.2 Old age in traditional African understanding

Old age had been held with high esteem in all societies since time immemorial. To day, it has diverse connotations in many societies. Some see it to be a bother while others acknowledge it to be a way forward to the invisible world. This has been the wave in traditional and agricultural societies. It is expected to change tremendously as we move more and more into the world of technology and money economy. In fact many people do not want to be associated with the old or to grow old. They think that it is a terrible misfortune that should not come their way. Nevertheless, in African society old age was glorified. We examine this phenomenon basing it largely on the Bukusu tribe.

2.2.1 Blessing

Old age in traditional Africa is understood to be a blessing from God. It was an indicator that one had lived morally upright and the Supreme Being endowed him/her with the longevity of life.⁸ It seems that few people lived up to the advanced age. Bayemba of 95 years concurred with us by saying that: *Old people were very few in our village. Many people died relatively young due to sickness. I remember my grand father telling us how blessed he*

⁸ New People magazine, 16.

was, to have lived to have a glance on his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.⁹ To live long to see the fruits of young blood was a grace from God. People prayed that they might live long to share experiences in life with their offspring. This does not mean that some good people died quite young or no virtue persons attained old age. Kinoti observes that: *In the traditional Kikuyu philosophy of life, non virtuous people may attain old age but on the whole, they may lack iri (blessings) to the degree enjoyed by the virtuous and might not enjoy iriiri (honour) either.*¹⁰ Death of a relatively young person was received with deep sorrow. It was associated with misfortunes like illness and witchcraft. In Bukusu tribe, people could moan bitterly if such a person died. However, they had to condone it. And such persons were recalled in the family offering and sacrifices. A disgraced person was not respected and honoured. When an individual of this category had died, it was a relief for the society and no one remembered him or her.

2.2.2 Wisdom

Wisdom and old age are inseparable in traditional Africa. We believe that, it was this way in many cultures in the world before modernisation took place. Old people are considered to be wise because they ‘saw the sun’ first before the young ones.¹¹ In fact, the elders in African society are seen to be formulators and instructors of the people in wisdom.

Bujo notes that:

*It is significant that some tribes in Africa compare the female sex organ with an old man. In the sexual acts it 'eats' the man receives the seed and transforms it into life, which is anew. Similarly the old man receives the word through the ear – an organ which is similar to the female sex organ and transforms it into the wisdom which emerges from the mouth as life.*¹²

⁹ Rastus Bayemba, *Interview* By Author, 10 Nov. 1999, Bungoma.

¹⁰ Cf. Hannah W. Kinoti, “Growing Old In Africa, ‘New Challenges Of The Church In Africa,’” In *Pastoral Care In African Christianity*, eds., H. W. Kinoti And Douglas Wanjohi Waruta (Nairobi: Action Publisher, 1994), 171.

¹¹ New People Magazine, 18.

¹² Benezet Bujo, “Ethics And Aging In Africa,” In *Aging*, eds., Lisa Sowle Cahill And Dietmar Mieth (London: Trinity Press International, 1991), 109.

Thus, it was considered sacred because the elderly secured an opportunity on which the good life of individual was founded. That is to say: *The well being of children, regarding both property and other necessary things depends on their readiness to listen to the wisdom of their parents and the elders, making use of their experience.*¹³ Wisdom of the sages assisted the African society to accommodate or rather to endure recurring hardships like disease and hunger. In other words elderhood is essential nature to the collective wisdom of the whole community. Therefore the elders commanded high respect in the community.

2.2.3 Guardian of life

Life is sacred and God, who upholds it, gives it freely. African traditional school of thought understood that those who cherish this life with God are the ancestors and elders. The elders in the visible realities are on the forefront of guarding it. They knew better how life came into being, how to preserve it and finally how to hand it on.¹⁴ This is through long experiences, wisdom and spoken words. Though they may not transmit life biologically but in their words and deeds, life was upheld. Consequently, it was not permissible to abandon the elderly person. To attempt it was tantamount of abusing the highest good - which is life and God himself.¹⁵

2.3 The roles of the elderly

Old persons participated actively in social and economic life of African community. 'Retirement' was only occasioned by sickness and frailty. They made the society move forward. At no time were the elderly sidelined in the normal running of social activities unless one was a pariah. They acted explicitly and implicitly in the events of the community.

¹³ Cf. New People Magazine 16.

¹⁴ Bujo, 109.

¹⁵ Benezet Bujo, *African Theology In its Social Context Life As Unity*, trans., John O'Donohue (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), 21-23.

Shortcomings of old age did not deter them from executing duties endowed in them. They performed assignments unceasingly, generating a driving force that kept the society informed and prosperous. These tasks were either in the family circles or in the community at large.

2.3.1 Judges and Counsellors

Elderly people played a profound role of judging and counselling since they had enormous experience in life.¹⁶ These duties were preserved for them. In fact it was automatic. They settled disputes within the household and community as a whole. Immediate elderly members of the family had to solve conflict as pertains to the family matters. If the issue debated upon was grave, other elderly people were contacted. For instance, if there was a friction between a father and a son, respected old members were called to reconcile the two. In Bukusu tribe, beer was prepared for the elderly to take while investigating who was on the wrong. If the father was the one bringing trouble, they had to advise him accordingly and vice versa (khungambila). Thus the enmity was destroyed and peace restored.

Another very important aspect that the elderly performed was arbitration over land disputes because they were custodians of the land.¹⁷ They had an obligation to divide it according to one's need. All in all a final word came from their mouths to arrest whichever problem disturbed the prevailing harmony. One of our informants said: *You will hear people talking in low tones that let us wait for what the Basakhulu (elders) will do on this complicated debate.*¹⁸ This indicates that they held moral authority to dispense justice. Their verdict was ultimate. To reject their ruling implied that one has disowned their wisdom and

¹⁶ Ogova, 24.

¹⁷ Eric O. Ayisi, Introduction To The Study Of African Culture (London: Heinemann Education Book, 1988), 68-69.

¹⁸ Wanjala Wekesa, Interview By author, 4 Jan. 2000, Bungoma.

mystical power invested in them by the ancestors. This was not allowed and no one dared to challenge them.

2.3.2. Parenting

Elderly members of the family were parents *per excellence*. They taught and advised youngsters. Most of the time, children spent more time with them than with their actual parents. They were important educative agents and social integrators. Their homes served as places of refuge and protection. Children encountered a sense of affection, tenderness, security and liberty. Prior to rest in the evenings, they narrated stories and proverbs that adversely touched on moral teaching.¹⁹ Through this teaching, they discouraged immorality, greed, stubbornness and selfishness. Hospitality and sharing was encouraged. All these were meant to help the young people grow as disciplined and respected members of the family so as to build a united community. Seeing their grandchildren was the their happiest moments to share with them about the mysteries of life.²⁰ In this regard, the gap between the elderly and children was narrow. Thus children grew while knowing that the elderly were part of them and their welfare was to be considered.

2.3.3 Religious services

As it has been coherently experienced by African people, there is no distinction between secular and sacred. Both of them go hand in hand. Good social life was shouldered on the religious aspect. Mbiti affirms that: *Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religion system with set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so full that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.*²¹ Consequently religion guided African traditional society step by step, from an individual to

¹⁹ Pierre Emy, *The Child And His Environment In Black Africa*, An Essay On Traditional Education, Trans., G. J. Wanjohi (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 50-51.

²⁰ New people Magazine, 17.

²¹ Cf. John S. Mbiti, *Africa Religions And Philosophy* (London: Morrison And Gibbs Ltd, 1969), 1.

the whole clan. Those who inserted this realm of sacredness were the ancestors. They continued to mould the society through the elderly. Thus the aged officiated over religious ceremonies on behalf of the family and community. Religious rites like sacrifices, prayers, offerings, libation, invocations, blessing and salutations within the household and community at large did not bring a lot of meaning without the elders.²² They either took charge or helped the specialists. What does this mean? It shows that the elderly were well qualified to give directives. Their participation made a greater impact since they enjoyed blessings from God and ancestors. In this way they enhanced right relationship between God and family or the entire community.

2.3.4 Traditional Healers

The elderly were well versed with traditional medicine. They knew different herbs that could treat different kinds of illness such as malaria and heart disease. This special knowledge was a form of employment for them to earn their livelihood. With this special knowledge, they were recognised and respected in the society.

2.3.5 Chiefs of various activities

The elders were masters of ceremonies of many social events in the community and family. They were protagonists in the rites of passage. For instance, they were consulted in naming of new-born babies. In initiation and marriage celebrations, their advice was sought for.²³ These examples vividly show that they were active in social matters and thus were honoured very much. This made life meaningful for them and therefore, they were rejuvenated physically to continue serving the people.

²² Ibid., 58-62.

²³ Jesse Mugambi And Nicodemus Kirima, The Religious Heritage (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), 56.

2.3.6 The place of elderly women

Women have been looked down upon ever since due to gender biases in all societies. Here in Africa, women were subject to men and were not supposed to surpass them. A newly married woman had little say in decision making in the family. As she settles down and in fact giving birth to a number of children, became somewhat free to handle some issues in the household. When old, past menopause is when she had the same footing with the men and recognised as a mother of the community. Her roles were honoured and sought for. In absence of elderly men they could be mandated to perform rituals. In Bukusu tribe they could advise the newly circumcised young men on matters related to family life.

2.4 Services for the elderly

We have seen that the old persons were the backbone of African traditional society. With their effort, harmony and togetherness was strengthened. People understood that old age was not a bed of roses but had limitations. It is concomitant of loss of memory, frailty, chronic illness and loss of energy. So it was a full responsibility for the immediate family members to render maximum care for the welfare of their grandparents.

2.4.1. Work

Work is a communal affair in traditional Africa. It is a social event in which everybody participated with an objective to satisfying the individual and community needs and wants. There was no competition or individualism.²⁴ In this regard, the elderly were assisted in various ways. Boys and girls could cultivate and make sure that the elderly harvest good crops. Girls fetched water and firewood. Boys could look after the livestock of the elderly men. They could also accompany them on a long journey. All these services were

²⁴ Mugambi and Kirima, 72-83.

made clear to children from their youngest days to make sure the welfare of the elderly is respected.²⁵ If one was specialised in handiwork such as weaving and ironwork, was helped by the young. In this way they handed over these skills to them.

2.4.2 Companionship in difficult moments

Difficult moments in elderhood were related to sickness or frailty. This attracted all family members. In Bukusu tribe, they had to keep a cock in old man's hut. If in the morning they hear it crowing outside the hut, they knew that the person was a live. If he was very ill, all his sons and daughters were to come and comfort him at his bedside until he dies. They were keen to hear his last departing words because they carried blessing, curse or may be wisdom on matters concerning medicine. Death is received with deep sorrow. Yet, it is believed to be a partial departure from earthly life. Old persons are handled with greater care. They had to receive a decent burial with appeasement of the ancestors. If one is not given a good sending off, they believed that one might cause havoc in the community. So the best gift was to perform all surrounding burial rituals and continue remembering them in family or clan sacrifices. With the above examples we can conclude that the elderly in the African community felt a sense of belonging in these moments.

2.5 Draw backs in old age

Old age was respected and acknowledged by the people. But we believe that no one desires to grow old though elderhood is indispensable under normal circumstances. Elderhood in later years is a state that may not be desired by many people. We have expressed that elderly have lived with creativity and dignity but no one is anxious to reach that condition. Physical, mental and health drawbacks seem to make us sceptical if this was desired. Just the following proverbs suggest that old age was not admired.

²⁵ Bujo, 1991, 109.

An old man is a child (Rundi, Burundi).
An old man has no admirer (Kikuyu, Kenya).
The dance of an old man doesn't last long, (Kongo, Zaire).
An old man is like a wounded antelope (Kalenjin, Kenya).²⁶

Thus the elderly suffered in one way or another. Our informant Mwangi concurred with us by saying that:

The elderly were exalted in our Kikuyu tribe, especially when they were still energetic. But it was about turn when one was chronically sick. Such sick persons were taken to the forest or footpaths with little food to upkeep them for some time before facing death.²⁷

We could also derive the element of not appreciating old age from nomadic tribes such as Maasai and Samburu. Their nomadic lifestyle could not allow them to cater for the elderly. Thus, they could abandon them as they move elsewhere in search of pastures for their cattle. It is also interesting to note that some tribes in West Africa executed their older leaders on the pretext of protecting the community.²⁸

2.6 Destitution

The so-called destitutes in traditional Africa suffered socially, spiritually and economically as the society refused to attend to their needs. These were those who did not achieve anything in life and people who were antisocial and anti-life. They include witches, selfish persons, mentally ill and those with no children. The elderly in this category encountered many untold sufferings. They were rebuked and nobody wanted to be associated with them. Even some parents hid their children from them so that they may not bring bad omen to them. Therefore most of them had to fend for themselves.

2.7 Conclusion

We have seen that old age was exalted in traditional Africa. The elderly had an enormous influence in all matters that concerned the community and within the family

²⁶ Cf. New people Magazine, 17.

²⁷ David Mwangi, *Interview* by Author, 25 May, 1999, Murang'a.

²⁸ Mugambi And Kirima, 61-62.

circles. Although old age was exalted, physical and mental disabilities led to negligence of some elderly. Therefore we can not generalise that all elderly were cared for. In the next chapter, we shall examine the challenges and problems that they face in the contemporary Kenya.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES THAT FACE THE ELDERLY IN CONTEMPORARY KENYA

3.1 Introduction

Old is gold, yet the marginalization of the aged ones is surfacing here in Kenya. This phenomenon which had been in the western countries is here with us. The glory and wisdom of the elderly is now divorced from civility.²⁹ In this chapter we discuss how social- economic factors are set backs to the welfare to this vulnerable group.

3.2 Impact of modernisation

With the advent of modernisation combined with urbanisation and industrialisation, old people are at the crossroads. Tount observes that:

*Modernisation with the increased physical and social mobility is shifting people from traditional pattern of family and clan settings. New factors of social stratification based on new forms of political leaderships, modern up to date skills, education, occupation and income have taken precedence over traditional ones*³⁰...

Therefore values that harmonised the cohesiveness of the welfare of the elderly are on the verge of collapse in tradition society. This is due to the disintegration of extended family to nuclear family where by the family only consists of a father, mother and children.³¹ Grand parents are excluded. This nuclear family has no time or temperament to care for them. These elderly are left in isolated housing and especially the frail and very old. They suffer from loncliness and even lack basic requirements like food and clothing.³²

²⁹ Eugene Biachi, *Aging As A Spiritual Journey* (New York: Cross Road Publishing Company, 1989), 148.

³⁰ Cf. Kent Tount, *Aging In developing Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1989), 38.

³¹ G. Wakuraya Wanjohi And George Mulatya, "The margilisation Of Older People," In *Wajibu*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Nairobi) 1998, 9-10.

³² Mary Getui, "Aging," In *Caring And Sharing*, ed., Douglas Wanjohi Waruta (Nairobi: Atiea, 1995), 236.

With modern civilisation, the attitude toward the elderly is changing. Grey hair is now not respected. Instead the society is focussing on things over being.³³ The more you produce, the more you are valuable in the society. The elderly who may not produce the results of this kind are regarded as powerless and useless who are just there to exploit others. In fact a slogan has been formulated in which the aged are called *useless eaters*. It means that they are just there to consume without contributing something. It is even worse in that some elderly people are also responsible for this negative attitude. They are not role models. They encourage young people to value people according to their status.

With modern education, wisdom of the elderly is being lost. Intellectual wisdom of schools is now overvalued than wisdom from the elderly.³⁴ The more you are educated, the more you command high attention from the public. Thus the elderly who may like to give a piece of advice to the young are not taken seriously and even are rebuked as outdated with nothing good to give. Above all, the encroachment of modern institutions such as courts has taken over the clearly defined traditional roles for the elderly.³⁵ Roles like conflict resolutions in the community are now handled by the courts to some extent. With this development though noble, the elderly are seen as non-inconsequential in community matters.

3.3 Rural urban movement

Urban mobility is contributing very much to the detrimental of the welfare of the elderly in rural areas. Many young people after school are gradually moving out of their rural homes and settling in towns leaving behind older people. It has been estimated that about 500 new immigrants flock in to Nairobi City every day either to seek employment or to visit their

³³ Bianchi, 149.

³⁴ Bujo, 1991, 112.

³⁵ Henry O. Ochido, "Changing Roles Of grandparents In The New Millennium, 'A Guest Lecture,'" (Nairobi) 1999, 108.

next of kin.³⁶ Some come presumably to enjoy life because they believe that life in the villages is boring with no social amenities. In real sense many do not get well paying jobs. They find it difficult to send some little money back home or to visit their parents. These parents wait anxiously that their sons and daughters will uplift them financially in vain. Though some try their level best with little funds available to support their parents in the countryside, it is exception rather than a rule.³⁷ So many elderly people are forced to work extra hard to sustain themselves economically. This is sad because their parents could have been at pain to educate them as a security for them when they are old.

On the other hand, many wish to stay with their parents at their working place so that they may provide necessary support for their love, their pride and social standing but are at stake. This is owing to housing problems.³⁸ In African culture, for instance in Bukusu tribe, a grown up person cannot stay in the same house with his/her parents. It is anathema. And as the houses occupied in towns are rather small and congested, it is almost to impossible to accommodate them. Therefore the elderly are left alone in rural areas and hence suffer from loneliness. This is a serious challenge that should be addressed by the government and other interested parties like donors to see to it that the people live in better housing which are affordable by all.

Urban environment has also led some people to waste their lives and resources in the life of debauchery. When they are old have no place to go. *A good number are yesterday prostitutes or male loafers on whom life has turned sour. But the majority are poor on whom fortune has never smiled and does not intend in old age.*³⁹ It follows that going back to their

³⁶ News Bulletin At 9:00 PM, Kenya Television Net Work (Nairobi) 20, Nov.1999.

³⁷ Wanjohi And Mulatya, 9.

³⁸ Susanne S. Paul And James A. Paul, Humanity Comes Of Age: The New Context For Ministry With The Elderly (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 49-51.

³⁹ Cf. Kinoti, 183.

home villages is a nightmare because the community would not accept them. They are seen as outcasts in cultural limbo, urban dwarfs in a state of oblivion and defecting traitors.⁴⁰ A survey in the homes of the aged (Cottolengo and Mji wa Huruma) revealed that the majority are of this type. Omare whose ancestral home is in Butere - Kakamega district confirmed without shying by saying that:

I came from Butere in 1974 for work in a sisal factory around Thika. Since that time I never went home. I just stayed a round with my few friends working and enjoying ourselves. I became sick and no one came to assist me. Luckily a catholic priest found me and brought me here (Cottolengo Home). Now I am okay and I feel happy to be here despite of being old.⁴¹

These are destitutes who have no children, cut off from family relations and even forgotten completely by family members due to overstaying in towns. (See appendix 2). Their pieces of land are sold in case they had one. This upheaval is becoming rampant, which needs a critical examination. The people in this category need our service. We need to give them hope so that they may spend their last days in peace. A home like Cottolengo fits well for them to be together and share their joys and sufferings. In fact as the number of street children is increasing at alarming rate, we expect to encounter many older destitutes. This is a wrong signal that calls for a mechanism to address this problem.

3.4 The scourge of poverty

The escalating rate of poverty in our country is detrimental to the welfare of the elderly people. UN defines poverty as; *Hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, homelessness, unsafe environments, inadequate health care and education and social discrimination.*⁴² Poverty leads to destitution, abandonment and abuse of the elderly people. The rapid increase of the

⁴⁰ Tount, 46.

⁴¹ Philip Omare, *Interview* By Author, 4, July 1999, Murang'a.

⁴² Cf. Emmanuel Mwendwa, "The Face Of Poverty," In *East African Standard* (Nairobi) Wednesday July 30 1999, 21.

population thanks to decrease of mortality rate has left many to be landless. Even the small holder substance families in the rural areas are not able to produce enough for their daily livelihood. This is due to change of climate time to time and infertility of the soil because of over-cultivation.⁴³ Thus aggravating poverty levels in many families. In such situation many prioritise their children at the expense of their older parents. These grandparents do not get enough to eat or even in some circumstances they are given the left over food. Others have lost hope in the farming and resorting to paid work which is very scarce these days. They encounter unemployment and underemployment.⁴⁴ Again with this situation their parents continue to suffer. The little they get cannot satisfy their needs. *I have no money, I need to pay fees, feed my family, service the loan I took three years ago*, says our informant Ngare who sees old age as an extra burden.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, the government squarely carries the blame for escalating poverty among the people. It is through bad structures together with poor governance. Policies like (SAPS) have made the cost of living to be too high. Now there is cost of sharing of services the government is obliged to give such as health which most elderly cannot afford.⁴⁶ Mismanagement of funds and corruption is the order of the day in the public sector. Finance meant for the welfare of the people in social development projects usually finds its way to the pockets of few disgruntled elements.⁴⁷ Therefore development projects are thwarted. All in all, these have caused a menace on our economy. The sufferers are poor families with their elderly parents. We need to have mutual trust and seriousness to improve our economy so that each individual may benefit from it.

⁴³ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁴ Mutatya, 9.

⁴⁵ Duncan Ngare, *Interview* By Author, 21 Jan. 1999, Sagana.

⁴⁶ Judith Bahemuka And Others, *The Poverty Situation In Kenya, Poverty Revisited*. Analysis And Strategies In Kenya (Nairobi: Ruaraka Printing Press LTD, 1998), 20-35.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

3.5 Lack of adequate social policies.

Social security policies are crucial for the retired and the elderly. This is to protect them from abuse and neglect by their relatives and from financial constraints. It has been acknowledged that retirement and aging is a serious problem affecting the entire society. Unfortunately we do not have policies and laws that deal with this scenario.⁴⁸ What we can recall is that the government formulated a parliamentary sessional paper in 1971 to provide social welfare for older persons.⁴⁹ However, this had not been put into practice. Therefore the elderly in their homes are abused and neglected by their relatives. Their sons, who should support them, as it should be, are not making any move. Some even sell land that may be the only asset they depend on for their existence. (See appendix 3). Ochido expresses that:

In Kenya, particularly among the Kikuyu, old people are coping up with the breakdown of the traditional support system by holding onto the economic leverage which they possess by virtue of their custody of family land and property, by refusing to devolve these assets to their children they are able to ensure that they are respected and treated well by the latter.⁵⁰

This is good, but we believe that when good social policies are in place, the elderly may live in dignity. Especially if there are social workers employed by the government to work in the villages for the welfare of older persons, to promote their ability and opportunities to make their own decision on what they want. Otherwise, everything will continue falling apart as our traditional values that protected the elderly erode.

3.5.1 National social security fund (NSSF)

NSSF is the only current organisation that may be considered dealing with retirement. Moreover it only caters for those who were formally employed. This means that those who work in the informal sector are locked out. As many women are in the informal sector, they

⁴⁸ Peter Mwangi, "The Burden Of The Elderly," In Daily Nation (Nairobi) Monday Feb. 15 1999, 17.

⁴⁹ Philip M. Mbiti, Rural Sociology And Rural Development: Its Application In Kenya (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1974), 225-227.

⁵⁰ Cf. Ochido, 108.

stand a bad chance to be considered. Mckinney poses:

It has been pointed out that the informal sector in Kenya as an example employs approximately 18% more Kenyans than the formal sector. Without a retirement or pension schemes, will the informal sector employees become the new faces of poverty in the new millennium?⁵¹

His argument is noble, which needs frame work to embark on modalities of coming up with concrete social policies to help the older persons to retire with dignity. On the side of NSSF things are not for better. *The feeling of many retirees is that the fund does not provide old age security.*⁵² It has been estimated that NSSF gets 1.5 billion shillings yearly from 2,299,000 plus employees in the country.⁵³ Surprisingly, very little is left for retirees. Those requesting for their due, many times wait for too long before they are served. This has been due to mismanagement of the organisation. It is even sad because what they incur is normally more than what they get from their contributors.⁵⁴ In this case, those who have invested in it are just on the same wavelength with those who have not.

3.5.2 National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF)

NHIF may also be seen as a social security that may cover medical bills for the sick. But it covers only for its contributors and their families. These are mostly salaried people who contribute some money out of their pay. NHIF provides about fifty percent cost sharing for the hospital bills. However, it has a limited coverage with only thirty-three percent of the total population covered.⁵⁵ Needless to say, the members get low claim and had to wait for too long before the settlement is met. Poor administration system and investment portfolio

⁵¹ Edward A. Mckinney, "A Society For All Ages, 'A Guest Lecture,'" (Nairobi) 1999, 98.

⁵² Patrick Wafula, *Interview* By Author, 15 Dec. 1999. Bungoma.

⁵³ Kurgat Marindany, "Pension Schemes In Financial Mess," In East African Standard (Nairobi) Wednesday Feb. 24 1999, 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Wasuma Owino, "Revamping's Health Care Financing And Delivery For The 21st Century," In Kenya Strategic Policies For The 21st Century, eds., Peter Kimuyu And others (Nairobi: Institute Of Policy Analysis And Research, 1998), 241.

contributes to the delaying of the payment.⁵⁶ However as the situation is, it does not guarantee for old age. It is high time that NHIF broaden its operations to enabling good environment of serving its members. Moreover, NHIF should not be a monopoly. Competition should be allowed so that it may come to its grip to serve its members with sincerity.

3.6 The condition of work.

There is a growing culture on age discrimination as concerns employment. The elderly who are still energetic are now sidelined. The society considers them as spent forces who cannot work competently as the young ones. This is evidently reflected when there is advertisement in our local newspapers for jobs. Always age limit is stated and ordinarily is not more than 40 years. This is contrarily to UN principle for older person on work which state that: *Old people should be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability or other status and valued independently of their other economic contribution.*⁵⁷ By denying them a chance to work, they lack economic standing. Thus they continue to remain in a state of poverty and begging. But we have to remember that experience in work goes with years. Therefore, there should be no speculation that in advanced years you can not do something. However we have to admit that in advanced age you cease to do strenuous work. Needless to say, the work that is now readily available is heavy and arduous like mining stones and pottering. These need young people who are energetic. Thus the elderly are apparently out.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Cf. Katrina Payne, "UN Principle On Older Work," In Older Women In Development, Help Age International, ed., Anne Marrie Sharman (London: St James Wark, 1995), 5.

3.7 Retirement.

The question of employment brings up that of retirement. It is an attempt to deal with the declining productivity of older employees. Here in Kenya, the mandatory retirement age is 55 years except in special cases like for university lecturers and chief justice who retire at the age of 75 years.⁵⁸ Moreover the government has adapted structural adjustment programs (SAPS) which involves retrenchment of civil service. World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed these policies on African countries since 1980 as a corrective measure of imbalances between nation and government income and spending.⁵⁹ Although their objectives are sound, they entirely affect retrenched workers.

Retirement from work denies older persons dignity particularly when one is still strong to continue working. Dignity is a virtue that everyone should enjoy in his or her lifetime. With retirement, the elderly are considered not only old but also useless.⁶⁰ This stereotyped mentality of seeing the elderly, as less productive does not augur well with them. It intensifies isolation and one feels rejected and unwanted.⁶¹ With retirement loss of status and friends is evident. For instance, if one was holding high position in a company or in civil service, respect that was attributed to him diminishes when he quits that position. He feels empty and broken. A research conducted by Dr. Xavier in Busia district indicates that many retirees have faced early death due to their sense of frustration and embarrassment.⁶² This is devastating and calls for early psychological preparation for those who are anticipating retirement.

Retirement from waged work may also promote poverty especially for low earners

⁵⁸ New people Magazine, 18.

⁵⁹ Peter Gibbon And Adebayo O. Olukoshi, Structural Adjustment And Economic Change In Sub-Sahara Africa, Research Report No. 102 (Nairobi) 1998, 57-58.

⁶⁰ Getui, 235.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Mark X. Xavier, Research On Dying Retirees, Igara , Busa District, 1999, 2.

whose income may not allow them to invest. This is happening to many low-income earners in Kenya especially teachers, nurses and junior officer's in the government and private sectors. They find that mandatory retirement age reaches without having something tangible to depend on. And as longevity of life expectancy is expected, they languish in poverty as if they were never employed. Mr. Makokha a retired teacher says that:

When I was working, I managed to feed my little family and educate my four children with the little salary I was getting. But now I have nothing to count on to help me take my two children to secondary school, leave alone feeding my family with a decent meal. I feel lost as if I never had a job.⁶³

Consequently, retirement is reducing economic status of many people who languish in poverty. And as many people are marrying a bit older, they may encounter hardships of raising up their families. On the other hand, some that could have stayed ceremoniously are misusing their retirement benefits in unjustified activities such as over drinking and engaging in promiscuous sex.⁶⁴ It means that they use their leisure in the wrong way. In the long run face bankruptcy when it is too late.

Retirement does not only dehumanise individual persons but it also affects national income.⁶⁵ When many elderly are out of the spectrum of work assuming that they are not productive as young, national out put is affected. They are experienced people who could do well without having power syndrome. Their talents could be enriched to come up with strategies of improving our economy. This has not yet been foreseen but sooner or later it is going to be established.

We cannot absolutely conclude that retirement is only problems. It has also merits that

⁶³ Bernard Makokha, Interview By Author, 28 Dec. 1999, Bungoma.

⁶⁴ Xavier, 3.

⁶⁵ Michael Bruno And Estella Fame, Averting The Old Age Crisis: Policies To Protect The Old And Promote Growth (New York: Oxfom University Press, 1994), 324 -330.

are laudable. When senior citizens retire, they give a chance to young people to find a place in careers with limited openings.⁶⁶ At present here in Kenya, nearly 9000 graduates complete university without mentioning others from tertiary colleges every year.⁶⁷ Now, if our older citizens do not relinquish their positions, where will this lot get a place to earn a living? Hence it is paramount to relinquish some places for them. If not, we shall be training people who will not find jobs and resort to burglary. Retirement for our elderly is also for their betterment. After working for a long period of years, one should at least rest to enjoy his fruits in relaxation to promote positive aging.

3.7.1 Cause of action on retirement

To assist waged workers to retire with honour, it is dual fold whereby the employer and the employee should work hand in hand. We believe that a mandatory saving for every worker may help him/her to restart life when retired. May be a certain percent to put in the bank for any eventuality.⁶⁸ This can be worked out between the employer and his employee. On the other hand when one gets his/her retirement benefits, he/she should invest in equities and real property to ensure against unexpected longevity. Real property like land and building appreciates with time. Therefore one could invest in them by renting or using them for businesses by him/herself. At the advanced age, he/she just sits and reaps the profit to enhance his/her economic status independently.

The government should not be adamantly static on the retirement age. It should be raising it regularly as life expectancy increase to reserve those who have got employment when they are relatively old. Hopefully, they may get organised and plan for their retirement when they are ready for it. And to those who have retired, their monthly pension should be

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ News Bulletin At 9: 00 PM, Kenya Broadcasting Co-operation (Nairobi) 25 Nov. 1999.

⁶⁸ Bruno And Fame, 326.

increased with advance in age to be able to handle economic profile without depending on others.

3.8 Health factor

The great success in medical advancement is one of the reasons, which is promoting the astronomical population of elderly persons. However, eliminating these major infectious diseases should not make us to conclude that the degenerative disease of aging may similarly be over come. Diseases associated with old age like cancer, heart disease, strokes and alzheimer's are a thorn in the flesh.⁶⁹ We believe that as many age, they will encounter these diseases in one way or another. As it is traditionally believed that when the older person is sick, they say that it is due to old age. And so, no effort is made to take the sick person for medication. Even some elderly refuse to be taken to the hospital because they presume that they have reached the end of their lives. But they are human beings whose welfare must be addressed because: *If older people receive health education and receive medical attention whenever it is necessary, they are less likely to develop serious medical conditions and complications, which are difficult and expensive to treat.*⁷⁰ Unfortunately many elderly people have no access to the medication especially in rural areas. And in case there is, the question of poverty comes in. Many cannot afford it because it is very expensive thus may die from the diseases that may be treatable. Old people need health care like anybody else. Therefore, health programs whether started by the state or private sectors should include special services for the elderly that are affordable. It is then that we shall affirm that we are improving in our health care as a nation.

⁶⁹ Harold G. Koenig And Andrew J. Waeber, Pastoral Care Of Older Adults (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 25-30.

⁷⁰ Help Age International, "Health Aging, 'Facts About Older persons,'" (Nairobi) 1999, 1.

3.8.1 The effects of Aids / HIV.

Aids has become a tragedy of devastating proportion in the country and is affecting mostly young people of the age between 15 and 49 years.⁷¹ At the beginning of this century, it was estimated to reach the toll of about two million people.⁷² This rapid increase has generated serious consequences on the social and economic welfare of the people. The bishops of Kenya state:

*We recognise that those days of harsh economic realities compounded by the epidemic, families are going through very hard times indeed. Many uncles, aunts, grandparents have had to take in orphaned children of brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Many families have lost more than one member often the very one who provided support for the families. We know that many families are being stretched to the limits and some have collapsed under the weight with children being left to their own devices to fend for themselves as best they can.*⁷³

This disease has caused havoc in many families leaving only the elderly and children. The elderly now in some families are becoming principal breadwinners of their grandchildren and their children battling with the disease. Financial support the elderly could rely on diminishes as their sons and daughters die. This burdens the older persons that have little resources to take care of both parties, which requires intensive caring. They have to provide medical care and school fees for children. Alternatively old persons with Aids are isolated by their families leaving them destitute and traumatised. In fact the official figure of Aids victims above 60 years was 700 in 1999.⁷⁴ This is our responsibility as a people of God, a healing community that should effectively change the behaviour of the youth. We have to show love to those affected by the menace by visiting their families. However a long-term

⁷¹ Bill Rau, "Introduction To Kenya's Epidemic," In Aids In Kenya: Socio-economic Impact And Policy Implications, eds., Steven Forsythe and others, (USA), 1996, 1-6.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Cf. Pastoral Letter Of The Catholic Bishops Of Kenya (Nairobi: Pauline Publication Africa, 1999), 3.

⁷⁴ Kathleen Okatcha, "HIV/Aids, 'Recognising Older Peoples Needs,'" In Appropriate Technology, Vol. 26, (London), June, 1999, 14.

solution is to carry out an extensive awareness about this deadly disease in our community and church gatherings. Anyhow, this is one of the reasons why the elderly should be empowered economically to sustain themselves and their families.

3.9 Conclusion

We have discussed the fundamental challenges and problems facing the elderly people today. We have also discussed some suggestions that may be put into action for the good of the older persons. In the next chapter, we shall examine what is being done by some of the institutions that deal with the aged people.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 RAY OF HOPE

4.1 Introduction.

All is not lost in that the old age phenomenon is a global concern. And as we said before, old age question has been included in the UN charter on human development. October first is designated for celebrations of old age every year and many organisations have been started to deal with it. This is a right signal to see to it that the elderly in our midst live a life of love and tranquillity. Here in Kenya we have two charitable organisations that strive to make the lives of the elderly better and useful to the society. In addition to these, we have some institutional homes at hand that have elderly residents. Therefore the elderly problem is being tackled.

4.2 Help Age International (HAI)

HAI is a global network of organisations committed to the welfare of the aged. It was founded in 1983 and has 62 partners world wide including Help Age Kenya. It seeks to recruit many organisations that share same goals and objectives on the aged. Its primary mission is to develop and sustain practical activities with older persons in the local communities. Hence, here in Kenya, it supports homes for the aged and care centres with financial and human resources. It draws directly the views from the elderly, needs and contributions to the mainstream the issues they are concerned with. This is to facilitate the fuller understanding on what they need and how to be helped. It provides direct support to the older people disadvantaged by politics, tribal conflict and natural disasters. Older persons are helped to move away from conflict zones and are provided with food and temporary shelter.

HAI carry out awareness program about the rights, needs, problems and plights of the elderly. HAI has been trying to convince governments to consider social protection of the

elderly. Some African countries like Uganda and Ghana have included social provisions for the elderly in their programs. HAI was the one instrumental in pressurising these countries to consider the plight of the elderly. Here in Kenya, consultations are going on and we hope that things will be put in order.⁷⁵

4.3 The work of Help Age Kenya (HAK).

HAK is the sole Kenyan independent charitable organisation that was launched in 1982 with the mission of improving the quality of life and prospect of older persons. It works countrywide to respond to the needs of older people in conjunction with (HAI) and religious institutions. It sponsors projects of income generating in nature under the administration of older people themselves. This is to help them to get little finance to avoid dependence on other people who may not provide even the minimal basic needs for them. Some of the projects are shelter program, drinking water, cattle dip, and farming. HAK facilitates skill-training programs for older persons to enhance their managerial capabilities so that they may run the above projects skilfully.

HAK co-ordinates the 'Adopt a Granny' program based in UK that donates funds and material for promotion of projects for the old people. About 31000 older persons benefit from this organisation here in Kenya.⁷⁶ HAK also engages in fundraising locally which has been initiated to expand this 'Adopt a Granny' program. Furthermore HAK is concerned with the health of older persons. Deterioration of health can lead to over dependence and can even accelerate aging. With other institutions such as Kikuyu Eye Clinic and Sight Wings, they periodically carry out eye screening in remote areas of the country. It also participates in emergencies where the lives of the elderly are in danger. A good example is that of land

⁷⁵ Cf. Help Age International, "The Work Of Help Age International," (Nairobi) 1999, 1-4.

⁷⁶ Cf. Help Age Situation Report, 'A periodical Review Of Help Age Kenya,' No. 4 (Nairobi), 1993, 14-15.

clashes that occurred in 1992. It worked hand in hand with the Catholic Church in securing the lives of many old people.

Above all, HAK focuses on the public awareness on the matters concerning the aging. Its interest is to teach the young about the primary duty to care for the elderly in our midst. And as the future caregivers to know that it is through them that the elderly will live in peace. *A lot of schools are engaged in education programs and their preferred strategy is the collection of funds that are donated to HAK who in turn use it to support projects of benefit to the elderly throughout Kenya.*⁷⁷ This is a good program, which requires support from all Kenyans to put a landmark on our children who will be future parents and leaders. The children have to know and assimilate the basic duty to help their parents when they are old. The work of HAK needs to be popularised and many people should be encouraged to join it to enhance its working capacity so that all elderly may be reached especially those in the rural areas. Prominent and influential people in the society need to be identified and used to mobilise rich people in our society to reconsider the welfare of the elderly in their budgets.

4.4 Homes for the aged

The ideal for the aged is to remain in their families where they could enjoy reasonable social and economic assistance, which the challenges of the elderhood entail as we saw in the previous chapter. However with concrete reasons that includes chronic illness, lack of family members, constant physical assistance suggest that there should be institutions that could constantly take care. In developed countries we have public and private institutions that handle the problems of the aged. These include adult foster homes, homes for the aged, rest homes, nursing homes and family care homes.⁷⁸ Here in Africa, the concept of keeping older

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Henry C. Simmons And Mark A. Peters, With Gods Oldest Friends: Pastoral Visiting In the Nursing Home (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 6-13.

people in institutions like these is new. They are coming up under the auspices of religious institutions, which have borrowed this idea from western countries. The table below shows some of these homes in Kenya and their sponsors.

NAME OF A HOME	LOCATION	SPONSOR
ST MARY'S VILLAGE	SAGANA	CONSOLATA MISSIONARIES
COTTOLENGO	MURANG'A	DIOCESE OF MURANG'A
MJI WA HURUMA	NAIROBI	LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR
PUMWANI HOME	NAIROBI	MUSLIM FRATERNITY
CHESHIRE HOME	NAIROBI	FRANCISCAN SISTERS

Note: For our case here, we use St Mary's Village as a base for all, because this is where we had our long holiday experience.

4.4.1 St. Mary's village home for the aged women.

This village was established in 1974 by Consolata Missionaries at Sagana parish, in Central province. Its primary purpose is to provide a healthy environment for those who are old, poor and neglected so that they may be served better. That is bringing the most marginalized old people together so that their needs may be addressed collectively. These needs include food, clothing, shelter, medical care and spiritual nourishment. As the Consolata Missionaries proceed with their mission of evangelization, proclaiming the gospel of Christ far and wide, they see the project as a kind of human promotion. This is a good gesture of emulating Christ who did good to the sick, poor and the humble in his pastoral activities (Cf. Jn 6:1-4, Lk 4:38-41, 3:10-16).

In the struggle to offer the needs to the occupants of the home, the following objectives are set to be achieved. First, to promote Christian spirituality among the aged mothers through prayers and catechism. This objective is vital if properly cherished. Spiritual

nourishment is of paramount importance particularly for this vulnerable group, which need a driving force from the people around it. This is to facilitate the firmness in faith so that what they gain about the Christian life may be practised until they are called to eternal rest. In most cases, old people find it difficult to attend church services regularly due to feebleness and also the church may be far away. Due to their state, they may not be able to attend. Therefore, this may inconvenience many old churchgoers. When the church is near and the people around are ready to assist, these may act as a catalyst for them to gain good spiritual nourishment. In addition to these, those old people who are not Christians and are accommodated in the home where there is Christian atmosphere, it will be very easy for them to get converted.

Second, to occupy the aged mother in active work so that boredom may not arise, as a kind of physical fitness and to generate some income. Keeping the mothers busy may help them to work and feel that at least, they can do something. On the other hand, by working to generate income, one may feel that she is not worthless but can still do something to upkeep the home. Giving a hand in work will ease the work of the helpers. Consequently services offered to them may be reasonably well done. Therefore, this insight is very nice which should be organised in such way that anyone capable of doing something is fully utilized. It does not matter what one may do, however small an assignment may be.

Third, to make the aged mothers feel needed and appreciated by the society so that they may not have bad feeling against the society. In the institutionalised-based homes like this one, this may be realised when the helpers show the concern about the needs of the aged. One may feel that the society /family has abandoned him/her, but if he/she sees that some people are ready to help, definitely one may not judge the entire society as bad. He/she will also feel that even if some are not generous, there are others who are good. Above all the society should be enlightened to accept the reality of the aged and thus show appreciation to these

people in deed and word.

Fourth, to enhance love and unity towards one another by encouraging them to be helping one another. Love and unity are the prerequisite to be a good disciple of Christ. These should be proclaimed in all angles for the gospel to remain intact in our hearts. The best way to make these a reality is through constant practical undertakings such assisting one another in whichever field. Therefore, the old people are not an exception. In fact, these should be manifested in them so that the youth may learn from them.

Fifth, to prolong the life of the aged mothers by offering the basic needs so that their lives may not be cut short due to lack of the necessities. Life is a gift from God and we, as humankind should strive by all means possible, to preserve it. Life is precious and everyone longs to live longer. In connection with this, the elderly population needs maximum care as regards their health. What are needed are proper foods - well-balanced diet, good shelter, proper clothing and medical attention. If these are provided well, there is no doubt that someone may live longer than expected under normal circumstances.

4.5 Rationale against the institutionalised homes

According to our observation, these kinds of homes may trigger irresponsibility on the part of children. When children are freed from the role of looking after their parents, they may presume that there is a place where they can be catered for. They may become lazy and unconcerned about the fate of their parents. Parents normally strive to give necessary support to their children so that when they are old, their children will in turn take charge of them. Therefore, it is disrespect to take them to the homes of the aged. Homes for the aged are like prisons, they deny freedom of movement for the elderly. Nasike observes that:

Sending your parents to the institutionalised homes is like a day light robbery. It drains away those who could deliver wisdom and talents to the society and to the young people in the family. It took time to build a home,

*why then take them to the home surrounded with wall fence.*⁷⁹

This kind of attitude is making many people to desist from thinking about their parents being taken to the institutionalised homes although they are unable to provide them with even the minimum care. There is also a danger of these homes being based on the organisation concern rather than on loving concern.

*In the institutions, the elderly person must accommodate to greater degree to routines not her/his own choosing care will be also less personal, staff do not often have the occasion to build up long-term relationship with patients; and they must distribute their time over many patients. Because long-term care patients frequently require much attention to physical needs, staff has little occasion to spend social time with them. A very quality-nursing care will tend to be less personal, indulging the patients likes and dislikes*⁸⁰.

Consequently, the family environment is best because the old person will be near his family, with which he/she has a say. The family will feel guilty, thus fulfil the demands of their elderly parents.

Finally, these homes may prove to be costly due to the expenses involved. For instance medical care, food and salaries for the caregivers. Here in Kenya where poverty is looming everywhere, the problem may be serious. They may get donors like from (HAI), but will they sponsor them forever? Even some homes that exist now are experiencing a lot of problems and strain to minimise the costs. (See appendix 4). By doing so, the elderly do not get better services. Most of them complain of being served with the same type of meal. *Every time we are given ugali and beans, which my teeth cannot chew*, says a complainant in one of the above homes.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Agnes Nasike, *Interview* by Author, 2 Jan. 2000, Bungoma.

⁸⁰ Cf. Drew Christiansen, "Creative Social Responses To Aging," In *Aging*, eds., Lisa Sowle Cahill And Dietmar Mieth (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991), 118.

⁸¹ Mary Miru, *Interview* By author, 30 Jun. 1999, Sagana.

4.6 Rationale for institutionalised homes

Notwithstanding the demerits of erecting institutionalised homes, they have reasonable merits, which are for the betterment of the elderly and their families. These homes meet minimum human needs. These are shelter, nutrition, health and clothing. These may be easily accessible by an elderly person from a poor background. They are nice places for prolonging life because the older persons get special treatment and other basic needs. These homes can foster intellectual, psychological and spiritual growth. Older people in a group and in good environment may use the resources available to grow in all these aspects. They may promote companionship among themselves to see to it that they are together and share common hardships and joys.

Finally older people in the home can enhance the initiative in social policies that favours them. When such homes are in existence, concerned people or the elderly themselves may have a strong weight to demand for their rights from the government.

4.7 The Way forward

We have highlighted the pros and cons of these institutionalised homes. What is required is to make them impartial. They are not merely a necessary evil but a real need. Thus a positive attitude ought to be cultivated amongst the people.⁸² They should not be considered as places only for the destitutes, poor sick or those with no relations. They are here to stay and for the elderly in need to enjoy their last days on this planet earth. Respected people should enrol their elderly parents to prove that they are not dumping grounds when the need arises. It reminds us about the former Cardinal of Nairobi Archdiocese who joined Mji Wa Huruma Home. After spending the better part of his life serving the church, he retired

⁸² Getui, 244.

honourably in this home. We believe that this has made the people to appreciate them.

These homes can be rewarding if families, friends or parish communities help the elderly residents. The elderly may see themselves as useful, loved in the society. Especially they should be in rural setting where we have many elderly people so that their relations may come to see them on a regular basis. However, the government has a responsibility to support the elderly in the homes as a gesture of appreciation for their contribution to the economy when they were in their hey days. Nevertheless these institutions should be as a last resort when the situation is not promising to promote family care. In the family environment, the elderly are a great resource of learning and inspiration for the young ones.

4.8 Conclusion

We have seen what is being done at the moment to help the elderly in our society, which is encountering ups and downs. We have to come together and complement the efforts of these institutions. Elderly people are our parents and friends. We have to start helping them right from our homes. After all *charity begins at home*. In the next chapter we look at what the church can do to help the elderly.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 THE CHURCH AND THE ELDERLY

5.1 Introduction

The ultimate goal of the church is salvation for all men and women. This salvation does not mean an escape from the realities facing the people in the world but is the redemption of creation of God. The people to be redeemed are not abstract beings but are subjected to the social and economical questions.⁸³ Therefore in order to save the human race to the fullness, the church tirelessly agitates for the common good of all. With this reality, the elderly amongst us should be accompanied to fight against marginalization and abandonment. Moreover, they should also be assisted and guaranteed a dignified life in their struggle with old age problems. Social ministers as agents of the church have a big responsibility to bring this special group into the realm of life so that God's blessing and manifestations may be everywhere.

5.2 Biblical foundations

The bible presents vivid examples of the elderly people who worked well, lived morally upright lives and even won divine favours. These are worth emulating by the young and old alike to erase the concept of trivialising old age. Abraham at the age of seventy-five years won God's favours with a promise. He was upright man and faithful to the Lord he did not know before. By his living trust with his wife Sarah in a state where there was no

⁸³ George Vanchipurackal, Why The Mission?: A study On The Necessity Of Evangelisation (Bangalore: Claretion Publications, 1981), 95.

possibility of getting an offspring, God blesses them with one (Cf. Gen. 15:1-21). We have to appreciate our elderly people because God has a purpose to prolong their life. Tobit was old and blind but strived to remain under the guidance of God's law. His firmness in the statutes of God brought the merciful hand of the Lord who sent his angel to set him free from blindness (Cf. Tb. 3:16-17). The story of Job is much encouraging. In spite of terrible temptations he underwent, he was strong in his conviction about the wonders of the lord (Cf. Jb. 1:21). *Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall return again. Yahweh gave Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the Name of Yahweh* (Cf. Jb. 1:21). This shows explicitly how the wisdom of the elderly is manifested. He trusted God and what afflicted him, he put under the authority of the Almighty. In this boldness, he was rewarded with plenty of riches.

The gospel starts with introducing the couple in advanced age. These are Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Surprisingly, they did not have a child. But God blessed them with one. Zechariah proclaims the benedictus. Thus we see them in sincerity in the spirit of prayer and thanks giving (Cf. Lk. 1:7, 67-79). In the temple, when Jesus was presented, as the law demanded, there we find aged Simeon who has been waiting to see him, blesses him (Cf. Lk. 2:36-38). In the same temple we get the widow of eighty-four years called Hannah. No sooner had she seen Jesus than she began to praise the Lord and to say what Jesus would be. She was a frequent visitor to the temple at this advanced age (Cf. Lk. 2:36-38).

The gospel also presents us with two events of poor old widows. In (Lk. 18:1-8), a widow is bold before the bureaucratic bungling to ask for justice until she is given a hearing. In (Lk. 21:1-4), the passage describes a poor stricken old widow who contributes generously two coins toward the temple treasury. This was the only money to depend on. That is why:

Jesus showed special affection for widows, who were among the most poor and oppressed people of his day. After loss of husbands, widows had almost no means of livelihood or standing before the law, nor anyone to provide

*for them.*⁸⁴

The example of Jesus demands from us to be compassionate to these kind of people who are very many in our midst. Their voices are not heard due to poverty. They can not claim anything since the society now focuses on production rather than on service. It is the duty of the church to empower them to find means for their livelihood.

5.2.1 The concept of respecting our parents

The commandment in the decalogue reminds us to honour our parents (Cf. Ex. 20:12). In all human races, it is a value and a basic duty for the young people to look after those who gave birth to them. This commandment is parallel with African responsibility of a child to honour his parents as we saw in the second chapter. Pope John Paul II, points out that:

*The full and consistent application of this commandment has not only a source of the love of children for their parents, but it has forged the strong link, which existed, between generations. Where this commandment is accepted and faithfully observed there is little danger that older people will be regarded as useless and troublesome burden.*⁸⁵

He continues to clearly express that respecting our parents has three fold responsibility. That is *welcoming them, helping them and making use of their qualities.*⁸⁶ Doing all these remarkable aspects is not only limited to our parents. It should be extended to other elderly people who are not even our relatives. Thus it is a call for everyone to participate in these duties, to ensure that the elderly around us stay with dignity despite their vanishing strength. These are the best Christian virtues that may be cherished towards the welfare of the elderly. The church being the mother and teacher of all peoples has an obligation to effectively encourage the masses to establish that, they are obliged to make the lives of the elderly worth

⁸⁴ Cf. Fischer Kathleen Fischer, Winter Grace: Spirituality Of Aging (Nashville: Upperroom Books, 1998), 113.

⁸⁵ Cf. Pope, John Paul II, "Letter To The Elderly," In L'Osservatore Romano, No. 44 (1615) (Vatican City) 3 Nov. 1999), 4

⁸⁶ Ibid.

living. This is a matter of assuring them food, shelter, clothing and even burial. They should also acknowledge the presence and abilities of the elderly around them to boost them emotionally and morally so that they may feel part of the community.

We ought to recognise the elderly in our daily undertakings.

Elderly people help us to see human affairs with greater wisdom, because life's vicissitudes have brought them knowledge and maturity. They are the guardian of our collective memory and thus the privileged interpreters of that body of ideals and common values, which support and guide life in society. To exclude the elderly is in a sense to deny the past, in which the present is firmly rooted, in the name of modernity without memory. Precisely because of their mature experience, the elderly are able to offer young people precious advice and guidance.⁸⁷

It is worthwhile for the young people to show love and generosity for the welfare of the elderly. The church can be instrumental in making this visible by organising outings where by the young visit the elderly in their environs to help them in work on regular basis.

5.3 The dignity of human person

It is by no means that human beings deserve the dignity of the highest order. The apparent fact of this affirmation is that we are created in the same likeness and image of our God. We are valuable beings who share the divine state of our almighty. The psalmist confirms that we are far much greater than other living creatures (Cf.Ps. 8:5-9). Hence, we have absolute right to exist in this world. We are called to live a life of hope and to champion the dignity of human vocation, so that all may live a life of integrity, especially the most vulnerable in our environs (Cf. GS. 19). That is why:

The church always directs her attention to these new 'poor'- the handicapped and the maladjusted, the old, different groups of those on the fringe of society and so - in order to recognise them, to help them, defend their place and dignity in a society hardened by competition and attraction of success (Cf. OA. 15.2).

The elderly being the target in this respect, the church through different religious

⁸⁷ Ibid., 5.

congregations has devoted much of her apostolic efforts in their service. Religious communities like Consolata Missionaries and Little Sisters of the Poor operate institutionalised homes as we saw in the previous chapter. They strive to provide for material needs as well as for spiritual needs. This restores the dignity in the elderly persons, which may have not been possible in the outside world. It is a lesson to all of us to consolidate our efforts together in supporting such initiatives.

5.4 Elderly and Work

Work has a divine source in that when God created human beings and the universe, He commanded them to continue creating. *Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish, of the sea, the birds of the heaven and all living creatures.* (Cf. Gen. 1: 28-30). Thus work justifies our fundamental existence on earth. All people are called to work in whatever field, manual or intellectual in that:

Through work man must earn his bread and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology and above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family (Cf. LE. Preface).

It follows that we derive our dignity in work. The elderly should be given the opportunity to work as part time teachers, counsellors and advisers in legal matters because they have the potential concerning their experience and wisdom. In the secular environment these chances should be made available to them. The age should not matter if one is capable of working up to advanced age if necessary because:

It would be radically unworthy of man and a denial of our common humanity to admit to work, only those who are fully functional. To do so would be to practice a serious form of discrimination, that of the strong and healthy against the weak and sick (Cf. LE. 22).

The church also needs to address this problem within its circles. Many elderly persons could be welcome in the mainstream services to serve as parish council mentors and to carry out

evangelical work. They could also participate in manual labour such as lawn tending in the church compound with some incentives.

5.5 Elderly and Development

The church always has a deep interest and concern for those who are endangered by hunger, poverty, ignorance and disease (Cf. OA. 1). The elderly who are also in this category need to be put into consideration. It must be noted that development programs must be authentic. That is to develop the whole person. Such programs should target the elderly in that *each man is also a member of the society, hence he belongs to the community* (Cf. PP. 17). It is then that the elderly in the society will be at peace with the environment within which they live. The elderly should be helped to see that they are productive. Their talents and experience may be useful in setting up developmental programs. *Utilising only his talents and will power each man can grow in humanity, enhance his personal worth and perfect himself* (Cf. PP. 15). There is an urgent need to put a halt on the values systems that are against the aged. The church can facilitate this by embarking on educating the young through seminars to promote a positive thinking about the old age.

On the other hand, old people should be encouraged to adjust to positive new life styles such that the youth and the society may look at them a fresh and respect them.⁸⁸ This is because, they have a responsibility to champion for their welfare. In particular, those who have retired or who are still energetic should be supported by the church to examine policies of the society, local and national and political structures to transform them to fit the elderly situation. By these we hope that these will amicably achieve development of people's when the element of the elderly is looked after.

⁸⁸ Paul Schotsmans, "Life As Full Flowering," In *Aging*, eds. Lisa Sowle Cahill And Dietmar Mieth (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 56.

5.6 Spiritual nourishment

Spiritual nourishment enhances the possibilities for the elderly to grow inwardly, interpersonally and communally. Thus it is the most ultimate effective means to influence the mind and health of the elderly to find fulfilment in life.

Such elders have a future in the quality of life meaningful to them. They will live on in those who they have helped and they will hope to live on in God. These older people will not allow themselves to be hurled into a society existence on the periphery.⁸⁹

Their loss, pain and suffering should be seen in a positive sense. These are instrumental to pursue spiritual realities in their lives. Therefore, the church needs to address the meaning and purpose of these encounters. That, the blessing of the aged by God is not devoid of hardships, loss and diseases.⁹⁰ God provides such circumstances for the realisation of the greatest value of living. The pastors should articulate these in their sermons when preaching to the elderly so that their faith in Christ may be strengthened. The elderly should be encouraged to use their talents and wisdom to serve God by generously giving their time and talents to meet the need of others. Above all they should develop a routine of regular meditation.

Death may be terrifying for the elderly yet it is indispensable for everybody. Spirituality for the aging should help them to see death as a prelude to get to another birth.

It may be that one of the gifts of the elderly to Christian community is to fully and vividly witness to this pattern of Christian existence which is marked by suffering and death on one hand and divine strength on the other, a dialectic of weakness, dying and death on the one hand and power of resurrection on the other.⁹¹

Death of older people' should be viewed as a value and orientation of life. To see that they have achieved many things for the society and death will only be an occasion for their rest in

⁸⁹ Cf. Biachi, 64.

⁹⁰ Don S. Browning, Toward Practical Theology Of Aging (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 114.

⁹¹ Fischer, 181.

the paradise and change of life in our Christian way of viewing life.

5.7 Conclusion

We have explored what the church is doing and how it can be a gateway to empower the elderly in our modern Kenya. As we come to an end of this study, we put across some recommendations as crystallisation of what we have discussed herein.

GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The old age phenomenon entirely affects every one of us in that we are all growing toward that state. It is in line with this observation that we would like to offer the following recommendations that can enhance the welfare of the elderly in our country.

Old age is complex with many health problems and mental disorders which need some knowledge to deal with. It is precisely that the church should promote education on the existential mysteries of aging and the aged. At the parish or community level, the church should facilitate this education to the family caregivers to know how to respond to the demands of their elderly parents. This is to help them not to despair in taking care of them. Church leaders could invite specialists like counsellors, doctors and social workers to assist in imparting this fundamental education. In connection with this, the church should facilitate pre-retirement and post-retirement counselling services for the retired and the aged. This is to help them to have a positive attitude toward the aging process and how go about with it.

The church can start a ministry for the aged. In local churches, Small Christian Communities can be instrumental to champion this ministry. They could organise outreach programs of assisting the unfortunate aged persons in their vicinity with garden work, repair of houses and even fetching water for them. Special occasions in the church calendar like Lent and Christmas should be a point of reference to do these works of charity towards the elderly.

The church needs to form a fora of discussion between the young, middle aged and the old to exchange views and ideas about family life, social life and morality and values of African culture. This will help the young to understand the wisdom of the aged and also to narrow the gap between them.

Media is the most powerful tool of communication in the modern society. Therefore

the church should use it to highlight issues affecting the elderly. Particularly, the church should intensify mass education on the importance of appreciating the elderly through its print media. We see that the mentality of many people may be changed and start volunteering themselves to engage in activities for the good of the aged.

Many aged people are very poor with no one close to help in terms of basics needs. They need someone to assist in these aspects so that they may live a decent life. The church can be instrumental to run 'adopt a granny program' where by those who are well off to support these kind of the elderly people.⁹² Young people with stable financial status could be approached to commit themselves in supporting them. This is financial, material and even moral support. For instance catering services for the elderly at the homes for the aged and paying regular visits to them.

One finger cannot kill a louse, so goes the proverb. It is therefore that the church should enhance collaborative ministry with other secular agents such as (HAI, HAK) on matters pertaining to the aged. The aim is to avoid duplicating services already supplied by these secular institutions. Rather, the church should act as a facilitator, liaison, and directly providing special services that are not provided these by agencies such as spiritual food in that man does not live on bread alone (Cf. Mt. 4:4). The church should also be in coalition with these movements to press for broad just laws and rights that favour older people. The church should sensitise the employers to recognise the rights of older workers, their contributions, pension rights and problem of *ageism* in the work place. In this way, concrete and visible impact on the society will be realised. On the same point, it is high time that the church issued a pastoral letter to highlight the aging question as an encroaching problem in our country, which requires some mechanisms to deal with it.

⁹² Anthony Campolo, *A Handbook On Mission And Service For Christian Young People: Ideas On Social Action* (Michigan: Zonderran Publishing House, 1983), 23.

Above all, we recommend that day care centres and community care services are the best as compared to institutionalised homes in our African environment. This is because our culture presupposes that the elderly need to stay within their relations. These institutions may give basic services such as treatment, food and counselling on regular basis. In this way, family responsibility will not be distorted. We also strongly believe in this because the elderly are an asset to the family due to education they impart to the young and their fulfilment in life.

In conclusion, we state that the wisdom of the elderly is paramount in our society if we hope to move forward in human development. We cannot discard it on the pretext of modernity. It is our duty therefore as social ministers of the church to bring transformation in our cultures. To offer education that will reconcile the African culture and with modern one at our place of work. In doing so, the people will have an opportunity to intermarry the two without infringing African values that are an asset for the wellbeing of the elderly. This is a difficult task that should be undertaken without fear.

As social change agents of the church, we have to advocate programs for the aged that fosters self – reliance, integration in the family and community. Our role in these programs should not be a patronising act but should be geared towards human dignity. This is because humanity dignity is what brings about respect and recognition. The elderly do not entirely need charity but justice. So our duty is to be their voice, monitor and advocate for their welfare which is their truly given right in our community. We have to be bold in challenging the structures that down plays the welfare of the elderly so that they may be restructured before it is too late to fit the elderly situation.

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Who will look after the elderly?

Ageing population a worldwide problem

By OLYA ONDRO

Over the world the elderly require other services being with them. Who will look after them?

The United Nations has recently reported that the elderly population is increasing rapidly in all countries. The number of elderly people is expected to reach 1.5 billion by the year 2000. The average life expectancy was 72 years in 1950, but is expected to rise to 78 years by the year 2000.

Through the world, the elderly are becoming a major problem. In many countries, the elderly are becoming a burden on the state. The number of elderly people is increasing rapidly in all countries. The number of elderly people is expected to reach 1.5 billion by the year 2000.

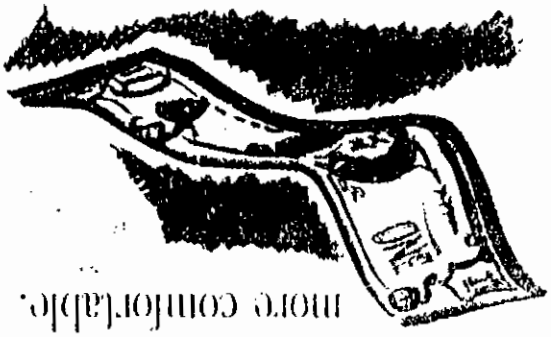
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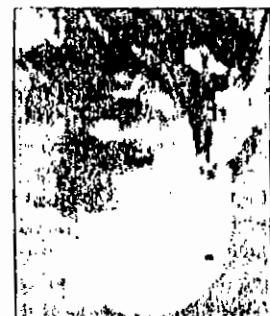
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'Dead' man returns home

A 70-year-old man who had long been presumed dead surprised members of his family when he came home last Friday, after 27 years.

Ayub Okoti left his Shiatsala village home in Butere-Mumias District in 1973, and his whereabouts had remained unknown until Friday, when he resurfaced to

the amazement of relatives and villagers.

Speaking to the Kenya news agency yesterday, his cousins, Arthur Maleshe and Justus Ambuko, said that they had searched for Mr Okoti throughout East Africa and when the search proved unfruitful for 10 years, they declared him dead and performed burial rites.

Mr Okoti's wife and child went away after losing hope of his return, while his father died 10 years after his disappearance, leaving no share of land for him.

Upon his return, Mr Okoti found a sister and a brother, Dinah Akutswa and John Okoti and his hundred-year-old mother, Florence Okoti, who is blind and bed-ridden. (KNA).

Old Shakwe crying for her land

MY RIGHT: "I will fight to the bitter end."



AT 82, lone-ranger Maria Shakwe Kigen is desperately searching for justice. Justice that she may never live to see.

Sleepless nights on cold Nairobi streets, on church-door steps, at times at relatives and at times at sympathisers' houses, have characterised her efforts to seek redress.

Shakwe comes from Turbo, Uasin Gishu District, and owns a 20-acre parcel of land in Tapsagoi sub-location. In spite of her advanced age, she appears strong, courageous, and determined. Persistence seems to be her drive.

She came to Nairobi earlier this month to petition the President on a matter close to her heart.

Armed with a paper bag, documents, and a letter addressed to the President by her lawyer, she set for the city.

Her grievance? The grabbing of her land and continued harassment by her son and family. She claims that ever since her husband died 52 years ago, her land has been grabbed and most of it sold, leaving her with the 20 acres in Tapsagoi, that was given to her by the President. She claims that now, the 20

Age may be inhibiting for many, but not for Maria Shakwe Kigen who is on a mission to get justice. She will struggle to the end to get back her shamba. Bernadette Murgor writes on the family saga.

acres in her name has also been grabbed by her son. She claims he has not only taken this land by force, but has also denied her the use of the land.

Shakwe has made countless trips to the local sub-chief, to the chief, local priest, the police, and even to her lawyer, but to no avail.

Some have dismissed her as a crazed hag who wanders in search of justice against imagined grievances.

In her mother tongue, she says *chebyoso ne ombenati mungen kole ne cheai* (a woman who wanders around not knowing what she is doing).

The old woman does not appear insane, crazed, confused or whatever many would like to think of her.

"She is an old, tired, and unhappy woman who has gone through tough times. Her

aim is to resolve the issue once and for all.

In her words *Agoi au anyulili guni kian'ge!* (for how long will I suffer like this, I am tired).

Her story is enmeshed in tradition, modernity, and greed.

Shakwe lives with her daughter Salina, and her children in two huts that hardly have enough space for the family.

These two huts are patched on a plot that often hardly gives room for the children to play. The compound is surrounded by the son's maize farm. Salina claims her mother's efforts to build a bigger house have been thwarted by her brother.

Salina displays a scar on her forehead she claims was a wound inflicted by her brother. Her mother, she says, has also been battered by her brothers' wife.

Shakwe says her son's violent

behaviour is his fear that his mother would give the daughter a share of the land.

She believes her son has a huge appetite for land. She complains that he does not allow her to use part of the land. One time, she says, he punctured the tyres of a hired tractor.

The son, she says, has felled her age-old trees and that she can no longer tolerate him.

When I visited the home, the son, Clement Kigen, was ploughing his mother's backyard.

Traditionally, a woman is not meant to inherit land, even in cases where the woman may be the sole heir. In Salina's case, it is not only that she might inherit part of the land, but also that she and her husband are living with their children on the same land.

Now, this is what offends Kigen. "How can my in-law stay with my sister in our home," he asks. "Since when did girls inherit land?" he wonders.

"This man should have had his own land when he married my sister?" Kigen, who says his mother wants to sell the land, denies the allegations against him. He says his mother should rest while he caters for her needs. He contends that the reason he has ploughed all the land is to stop his mother from selling it.

However, the mother claims ownership and the title deed is in her name. She blames her son for having sold all the family's land after the death of her husband.

Shakwe maintains that she obtained some land elsewhere

for her son and does not understand why he is so insistent on hanging onto this parcel. She believes daughters, too, should be eligible for inheritance.

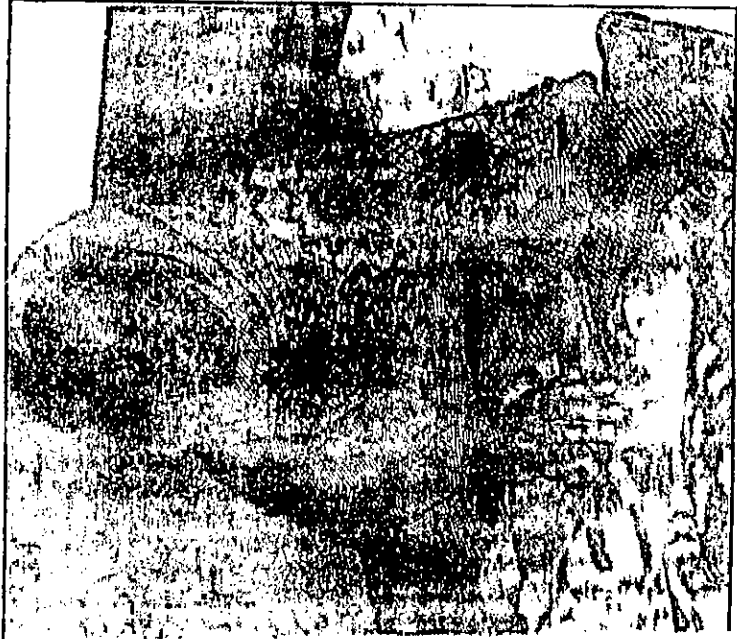
"After all, whose children are they?" she asks. "Where will Salina go if she has nowhere else?"

Amidst all these claims, nothing seems to have been done to settle the dispute. This is in spite of the fact that she has visited the local administration, a lawyer, the clergy, and even policemen who seem not to know what to do.

Neighbours describe the case as difficult and prefer to keep off. "Please, if it is Shakwe's home, do not involve me," he pleaded.

Others asked: "Whose son is Kigen? If Shakwe's, then what is the problem?"

Where the aged find solace and succour



Uzana Musinyi Karebo, one of the elderly people at the home.

OLD is glad, so goes the adage. But for Hauama Haji, it is not so. In the past 100 years, this is not true. As we approach the 21st century, Hauama is determined to open up the next millennium through a life of difficulties.

She is old, frail and sickly. Unlike other elderly people who turn to their grand and great grandchildren for care, Hauama's case is different. She never had to see any fruit of her womb. All she knew were her parents who loved and cared for her. She has no relatives in her life. Today she lives in a small room at Punwani Muslim Home for the elderly, Hauama remembers her life in younger days with nostalgia, but has no gratitude to share it with.

She has all the sweetest memories could be telling, like all other living grandmothers, to her tiny grandchildren as they mill around her next to the fireplace, but for her she sits with all her grandchildren in her bed as she has no one to talk them to.

All was the knees and sees eye to eye with her. She has no one to clean, feed and change her at her age. Hauama is one of the elderly women who live in the premises of a home in the city. She is one of the elderly women who live in the premises of a home in the city. She is one of the elderly women who live in the premises of a home in the city.

By Tacitha Othori

It was worse as she was growing old faster due to lack of sufficient food and care. The blood pressure ailment rendered her incapacitated and unable to fend for herself.

At Punwani Muslim Home for the Elderly, Binti Abdallah can afford to relax as she now enjoys something to eat, however small. These two elderly women and five more who live in this home could be used by her and it has been for the efforts of Muslim women who came to their aid when their life was in jeopardy.

Punwani Muslim Home for the Elderly was established in 1984 when 60 Muslim women, some of whom were the same age as Hauama, were suffering from various ailments. They could not take care of themselves and were in need of help.

The women began by admitting three women and four men. At the time, the home was run by a group of women who were also suffering from various ailments. They were in need of help and care.



Hajia Hajia makes a point at the home.

Only four members remain in the home, dependent entirely on donations from Muslim non-governmental organizations which cover doors on them when they were in need of help. The NGOs used to assist us with food, medicine and medical care for these elderly women but since their de-registration last year, we have been struggling on our own for so many months.

Organizations like Crescent of Hope which were closed and Al-Brahimot South Coast to visit the home and offer free medical services but they no longer come. When these women fall sick we are forced to take them to hospital as they cannot walk due to old age, said Aisa. Aisa said the home now depends on members who go out appealing

to fellow Muslims and members of the public to buy them clothing and bedding. She said the mosque has been assisting them with food and bedding. "These women are very old and caring for them is a very daunting task. Some of them like Hajia Hajia cannot stand on their own and need someone to be with them all the time. They need winter clothes and wash for them daily as some of them have themselves in bed. Their bedding need to be changed every now and then as they age very fast," said Hauama Kibwe the vice chairlady.

Due to lack of sufficient clothing and bedding, the women are now avoiding these elderly women with strong eyesight in sewing bed sheets for themselves. "We realised that some of these

women who have struggled to stay in the home. We have some small sheets which we patch together to make them stay together. Some women we try to get to stay busy. The home also offers elderly people who live in the home and orphaned children around the home and Maungo slums. As the women struggle to stay in the home, these elderly people are able to live in the home. They are also able to live in the home. They are also able to live in the home.

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APPENDIX NO. 5

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of the person interviewed.....

Q.1. Who is an elderly person?

Q.2. What is the concept of old age in African tradition society?

Q.3. What are the roles that were performed by the elderly people in the African society?

Q.4. How was the welfare of the elderly catered for in an African family?

Q.5. In which ways has modernization affected the welfare of the aged?

Q.6. What is the impact of retirement?

Q.7. Which problems are the elderly encountering today?

Q.8. Give reasons for and against the homes for the aged