



NORWEGIAN  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

“EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH ON WOMEN  
EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN YELEQUELLEH COMMUNITY, BONG COUNTY,  
LIBERIA”

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This Master’s Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the MA degree at MF Norwegian School of Theology

2017, Spring AVH 5035, Master’s Thesis (60 ECTS)

Master in Religion, Society and Global Issues

(35,038 word counts)

## **ABSTRACT**

The importance of women's education is a major concern and is gaining growing support in many parts of the world. Education, like other forms of investments in human capital, helps to contribute to the growth and development of women, thus enabling them to acquire their full potential. In particular, this study seeks to find out in which ways the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is either succeeding or failing to help educate and improve the lives of women in Yelequelleh. The thesis seeks to find reasons for this by asking the women themselves as well as pastors, church leaders and community leaders. In the end it summarizes the findings and gives recommendations about how to accomplish these goals.

Through an empirical inquiry involving interview, this thesis evaluates the status of women in Yelequelleh, the role and ministry performance of the LAC/UMC consistent with the social, economic, educational and development needs of the informants and their community. Through interviews and analysis, this study shows that the ministry of the LAC/UMC over 58 years has not provided a form of education that significantly impacts the lives of Yelequelleh women.

The study further indicates a great need for a clearly defined educational program that will sustain growth and development in the lives of women, their families, the church and the community. It is the duty and commitment of the UMC as transcribed in the Social Principles of the Book of Discipline to help educate and develop its members through the practice of its ministry both in words and deeds in every given human community of the world.

This qualitative in-depth study can probably function as a wakeup call to the LAC/UMC to address the high rate of illiteracy and decrease in membership of the Church in Yelequelleh as women are leaving the United Methodist Church and joining other churches like the Lutheran and Pentecostal Churches on grounds that they need education and skill training for a better living standard. The provision of education for rural women as indicated by this thesis will give them a sense of self-worth, empowerment opportunity, the freedom to make choices, and will prepare them to fully participate in the development of Yelequelleh. The combination of these efforts, by the LAC/UMC, will probably help to impact the lives of Yelequelleh women. Moreover, the LAC/UMC will retain its numerical strength in terms of membership amongst women in Yelequelleh.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Let me extend, with heartfelt gratitude, many thanks and appreciations to God Almighty for the opportunity, strength, and grace He has afforded me in facing this challenge. His plan is to make me a fearless advocate for the joy of His kingdom and the prosperity of humankind on earth; such in which I take pleasure.

To my supervisor, Dr. Marion Grau, thank you for your encouragement, supports, patient and constructive feedback that made this study a success.

I honestly appreciate the efforts of Rev. Dr. Jerry P. Kulah who, in his own wisdom and quest to empower young people, provided me the opportunity to be a part of the vetting process that led me to benefit an opportunity that has shifted my worldview.

I also extend many thanks to Rev. and Anne Lisa Aske, their two sons, Jorgen and Andre Aske for the friendly concerns they showed me during my time of study in Norway. Your doors and home were always open to me, which relieved me from loneliness. The Norwegian culture, food and many places you took me will always be remembered.

The United Methodist Church in Testida also proved genuine Christian love to me which I cannot forget.

To Mr. Ken Marblow, the Dequemenie family, Mr. and Mrs. Bortu, Ms. Maryann Kaifemah and the Liberian Community in Norway for their friendly association that provided me joy through this worthy cause.

To the Ma-Kaymah Memorial United Methodist Family, my relatives, and family members, I say thanks for your prayers, concerns, and love accorded my wife and children while I attended my studies.

It is meaningfully worthy to say thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Kertuah and Mr. and Mrs. Binda for your financial and moral support through this path.

I also extend many thanks and appreciations to the Kpoquinyan family for all the best wishes and prayers for me.

To my friend Allen, I say thank you. The jokes and challenges were timely during our studies. We always encouraged one another.

Those of you whose names were not mentioned herein, thank you for your contributions and efforts.

Finally, I remain humble and grateful to my beautiful wife, Annie and our children for your patience, loyalty and compassionate understanding. I never traveled this journey alone. Having you by my side and being excited about my study helped me end well what I started. May God grant you all the best as we continue to strive for a future that will help to improve the lives of the less fortunate.

**DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the Rev. Mulbah and Mrs. Klimah. Though illiterate, your courage, moral, financial and spiritual supports have been firm in my educational endeavors.

**ACRONYMS**

ACS	American Colonization Society
BOD	Book of Discipline
DGEM	Department of General Education and Ministry
EFA	Education for All
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDA	International Development Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRFR	International Religious Freedom Report
LAC	Liberia Annual Conference
LAC/UMC	Liberia Annual Conference, United Methodist Church
LIGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
MOE	Ministry of Education
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NDPL	National Democratic Party of Liberia
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PRC	People's Redemption Council
UMC	United Methodist Church
UMS	United Methodist Schools
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDP: HDP	United Nations Development Program: Human Development Report
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WHO	World Health Organization

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## **Introduction**

This thesis is an empirical study on the topic evaluating the impact of the United Methodist Church on women's education for development in Yelequelleh Community, Bong County, Liberia. As Samuel and Sugder assert, the Church is seen as a community that operates in words as well as deeds and has a ministry responsibility that stretches to everyone everywhere in all communities (1987:216). Additionally, it meets human needs through services that are conveying God's love for all. Moreover, the outreach of the Church ministry knows no limits (UMC Book of Discipline 2012:95). In other words, the Church should serve and witness to everyone in words and deeds that will heal and give them freedom from ignorance, disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustice, inequality, marginalization, etc. in every human community.

At the same time, the mission statement of the United Methodist Church is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" (UMC Book of Discipline 2012). Is this transformation concern about all in the Liberia Annual Conference through the provision of educational needs? Who are being transformed through education? Has the UMC's philosophy about change being realized through her educational programs by women in Yelequelleh? Or, is the United Methodist Church in Liberia playing any important role in providing the needed education for women in Yelequelleh amongst whom God has placed it (the Church) to serve?

Secondly, the church is a community that provides the potential that brings all of us into the fullness of our humanity (UMC Book of Discipline 2012:108). Additionally, the focus of the Church in preaching the gospel is that we must understand that all persons are important because they are created by God, not because of any merit significance. Therefore, the LAC/UMC should innovate, evaluate and plan new educational programs and provide sponsorship that will impact and encourage the development of the full potential in all of its members everywhere in Liberia, especially amongst rural women like those in Yelequelleh.

Thirdly, the United Methodist Church recognizes and supports the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," where the inherent dignity of all persons is respected (UMC Book of Discipline 2012:117). Notwithstanding, one of these rights is the right to education and training of the highest quality for all its members. However, the concern here is, has the Church's idea of the right to education and training of good quality for all being felt by women in Yelequelleh where the LAC/UMC has been preaching for the past 58 years.

I spent 12 years in Yelequelleh, Bong County, Liberia working with the United Methodist Church first as Youth and Young Adult Secretary, Lay-Servant, Pastor and General Secretary for the Gbarnga District Conference. During these years I observed the work of the church as I grew up in ministry. My father served the United Methodist Church in Yelequelleh as Senior Pastor for four local churches from 1964-2013, while my mother sang in the choir for the same period of time. As I traveled with the District Superintendents during these times, I could see young women doing all of their best to serve the church. Moreover, they served as ushers, choir members, clean the church, rang the bell every service time and make sure everyone who attends charge or district conferences is well taken care of. Additionally, the women's number, moral and financial support to the work of the church in Yelequelleh is always more than their male counterparts. I remember also during and before conferences, women gather at the venue of the conference for a week's period fasting and praying for a successful conference. With all of these physical, moral and spiritual supports, women in this community are lagging behind their male counterparts and other women who are in the urban areas of the conference in terms of education. The evidence is that, all of the District Superintendents that hail from Yelequelleh in service of the church are all males. Besides, there are only two female pastors out of the 48 pastors who are providing pastoral service in the community. This is due to the high illiteracy rate of women in Yelequelleh.

Since the establishment of the United Methodist Church in Yelequelleh, it seems that the church has made very little or no significant impact on this majority women population in terms of education. But the church, in its Social Principles, supports the right to education for all as a way of impacting lives so as to enhance individual and societal development. The question is, to what extent has the church been able to impact and transform the lives of women in Yelequelleh since it has the responsibility to everyone everywhere not only in words but also in deeds? Therefore, this study intends to investigate whether the United Methodist Church in Liberia is playing or has played any positive role in shaping women's conditions by providing them the needed education in Yelequelleh since its establishment. This research will mainly focus on the work of the United Methodist Church of Liberia as it relates to the provision of needed education and skills training as a way of reducing illiteracy, reducing poverty, addressing inequality and injustice, marginalization and disparity of women, serve as a means of creating health care, and empower women, etc, in Yelequelleh.

### **Motivation and Rationale of the Study**

My life and time working with the United Methodist Church in Yelequelleh and mainly observing the anxiety of women in serving the church through their financial and moral gifts, their presence and supports to the ministry work of the church, has inspired me. Having observed these numerous contributions and commitment of women in the work of the United Methodist Church in Yelequelleh more than their male counterparts, yet they cannot occupy key leadership positions in the Church due to illiteracy, deeply aroused my concern to research this topic. As I observed the backwardness in the lives of these women, my concern for their well-being grew stronger. Most importantly, my mother spent all her life serving the church as choir directress. But like other women in Yelequelleh, she feels the painful realities of illiteracy that has ruined her life through this long period of time. Moreover, I was attracted when the women of this community invited me to one of their annual meetings that were held in Gbartala in November of 2014 where I was asked to speak on the topic Women and the United Methodist Church: A time to wake up. I was moved when I heard these women discussing the need for education or skills that will build their self-esteem and make them like other women in urban settings. Their discussions drew my attention as they emphasized in the way they feel ill-treated by the church. Since then, I became motivated to do an in-depth study of how the United Methodist Church in Liberia has or is helping to positively change the lives of Yelequelleh women through education since education and quality skill training is a basic need that is supported by the church (UMC Book of Discipline 2012:117). Besides, the fact that no one has written about the work of the LAC/UMC in Yelequelleh also challenged me to conduct this study.

Since the UMC calls for a general transformation through its mission statement, my interest is to see if this statement meets the lives of women in Yelequelleh on a practical aspect through the provision of any form of education that will empower them and enhance development within their community.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to look at whether the United Methodist Church in Liberia meets or does not meet the educational needs of women in rural areas like Yelequelleh. In order to holistically transform and impact their lives and how the Church should empower women of this area to emerge as subjects that can witness to having been empowered through education by the United Methodist Church in Liberia. In order to show this, the study employs interview with Yelequelleh women to document this claim. Secondly, the study highlights the importance of the Social Principles of the LAC/UMC in providing education and higher skill training for all of its members across the Annual Conference. This will enable them to develop their potentials and contribute to improved living standards in their community. And thirdly, to suggest strategies that could be used by the LAC/UMC in particular and the Christian community, in general, to address and implement extension educational programs that will impact women in Yelequelleh and other rural settings of our conference. Finally, since the ministry work of the LAC/UMC in Yelequelleh does not have any official document besides District Superintendents' report, which only gives a summary of his yearly activities, this study enhances a concrete documentation of the role of the LAC/UMC in regards to impacting the lives of women through education in their community.

## **Research Questions**

This study focuses on the ministry implementation of the LAC/UMC with specific reference to education for women in Yelequelleh Community, Bong County, Liberia. In particular, I have been interested in the impact the Church has on their lives in relation to education and how the Church can help to improve women's education in local rural communities. The main research question, therefore, is to what extent the LAC/UMC is either succeeding or failing to educate and improve the lives of women in Yelequelleh Community? In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, I have identified the below sub-research questions:

- 1) How do women in Yelequelleh evaluate the efforts of the LAC/UMC education programs?
- 2) How do women in Yelequelleh evaluate the relationship between education and their own empowerment?
- 3) How do women in Yelequelleh connect education to community development?

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1 Context of the Study**

The geographical area of this research is the Republic of Liberia which is found in West Africa while the general context is the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, which consists of twenty districts. Notwithstanding, each district is located in each of Liberia's fifteen counties. However, a district, within the United Methodist context, comprises of fifteen to thirty or more local churches and preaching points supervised by a district superintendent appointed by a resident bishop. Consequently, the main context of this study is the Yelequelleh Community, a community located within the Gbarnga District Conference, one of the twenty districts of the LAC/UMC. Moreover, for a clearer understanding of the context, this section of the research will present a brief background of the republic of Liberia, where Yelequelleh Community is found and a historical overview of the UMC and the Liberia Annual Conference.

#### **1.1 The Republic of Liberia**

The republic of Liberia is Africa's oldest independent nation and is located on the west coast of Africa. However, the name Liberia, in Latin, means "Land of the free" (Lewis, Simons, Fennig & Charles D, 2015). Notwithstanding, "forests on the coastline of Liberia are composed mostly of salt-tolerant mangrove trees, while the most sparsely populated inland forest is opened onto a plateau of drier grasslands" (World Wide Fund for Nature 2016). However, Liberia has an equatorial climate condition with a huge rainfall during the periods of May-October which is referred to as the rainy season. The other months of the year comprise of harsh harmattan winds. Consequently, the country possesses 40% of the remaining Upper Guinean rainforest and was importantly known for its high production of rubber in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (World Wide Fund for Nature 2016). Accordingly, Liberia forms a border on the west with Sierra Leone, the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire on the east, while Guinea is located in the north and the Atlantic Ocean in the South. Moreover, the nation declared her independence on July 26, 1847. The USA did not recognize Liberia's independence until during the American Civil War in 1861. In January of 1822, more than 15,000 Freed and free-born black Americans, who faced legislated limits in the United States, and 3,198 Afro-Caribbean, were relocated to the new settlement. Ordinarily, the landscape of Liberia is 43,000 square miles with an estimated population of 4.5 million (LIGIS 2012). English is the official language of Liberia, but the country also has sixteen

major indigenous languages. Rice is the staple food for the people. The country is divided into three geographic regions: the coastal plane, which contains most of the population and is low and swampy; the central plateau crossed by numerous valleys and covered by dense tropical forests; and the mountainous areas (Guannu 2000). Liberia is divided into fifteen political subdivisions called counties that are governed by superintendents appointed by the president and confirmed by the Liberian Senate (World Guide 3-5). The nation was founded by freed slaves from America with the sole purpose of Christianizing and Civilizing Africa. The major religious practices of the country are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion with a small number of people practicing the Baha'i faith (IRFR 2010). The 2008 National Housing and Census Report put the practice of Christianity at 85.5% with the majority coming from a Protestant background while others are Roman Catholics (LIGIS 2008). These Christian denominations were brought to Liberia by black American settlers. "The Muslims, which make up 12.5% of the population, are largely Mandingo and Vai ethnic groups. About 0.5% of the population practice Traditional African Religion while 1.5% has no religion. Though Christians, most Liberians practice traditional gender-based indigenous religious secret societies such as the Poro, which is for the men and the Sande, for the women" (IRFR 2010). However, Liberia's constitution of 1847 which was revised in 1985 indicates that the nation has a strong Christian heritage (seen in practice) that counts from as far as 1820 with the release of free black slaves from the Americas. The constitution also provides and guarantees freedom of worship or religion, the right to education for all, etc; the government gives credence to such rights (UNHCR 2011). Several historical indicators authenticate that unlike other African countries, the birth of the nation began in a church; the Providence Baptist Church where its founding fathers adopted, signed and declared the independence of Liberia on July 26, 1847 (Guannu 2000:53). However, as a new community that depended on the saving grace of Christ Jesus, they firstly named their settlement Christopolis, meaning city of Christ. Robert Goodloe Happer, one of the key founders of Liberia, later changed Christopolis to Monrovia in honor of James Monroe, the fifth president of the United States of America. Hence, President Monroe gave an enormous financial contribution to the American Colonization Society (ACS) which was responsible to repatriate free slaves from America to Africa (Richardson 1959:15). "On January 3<sup>rd</sup> of 1848, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a worthy free-born black American from Virginia, who settled in

Liberia, was elected as the nation's first president after the declaration of independence" (The Day in History 2016).

During "World War II", Liberia supported The United States of America against Germany. Consequently, this led the US government to invest in infrastructure in Liberia in order to help its (USA) war efforts. This was a medium through which the government of the United States could help to modernize and improve Liberia's major airport, the Roberts International Airport. Additionally, "President William V.S Tubman encouraged economic changes". Internationally, the nation was a founding member of the League of Nations, United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (The Economist 2014). The objectives of these world bodies include human capacity development, socio-economic and educational enhancement as well as the security and well-being of all humankind in every community of the world. Conversely, Liberia faced the beginning of years-long political tensions and instability during the regime of President William R. Tolbert. Tolbert's government was overthrown by a military coup de' ta in 1980. "A five year period of military rule led by the People's Redemption Council (PRC) and another "five years of civilian rule by the National Democratic Party of Liberia (The Economist 2014)" (NDPL) was led by the then Head of State and President Samuel K. Doe. These two periods were followed by the "first and second Liberian Civil Wars" which resulted in the death and "displacement of more than half a million people"; devastated the economy, infrastructure and social structures of Liberia (The Economist 2014, WHO 2016). Nevertheless, peace negotiation was pressurized by both literate and illiterate women of Liberia which brought about a democratic election in 2005. Consequently, the women's efforts stimulated an electoral atmosphere that enhanced the emergence of an educated woman, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who is the first female president of the nation and Africa. Since 2005, the country has progressed to the process of recovery. But 85% of the country's population still live below the international poverty line and education for the majority women population in rural communities in Liberia remains a major challenge for development (The Economist 2014, WHO 2016).

## **1.2 The National Education Plan of Liberia 1978-1990**

In order to provide education nationwide, President William V.S Tubman issued a set of principles that could serve to guide the educational activity in Liberia. These principles or policy statements served the basis for a formal philosophy adopted by the Ministry of Education in

1970 at a Curriculum Conference and was restated in the National Education Plan 1978-1990 (MOE 1977). Tubman's philosophy emphasized personal development, responsible citizenship, cultural development, curriculum diversity, universal education, etc. For Tubman, education maintains democracy; enhance economic growth, social, political, moral and spiritual reform. Tubman also emphasized the need for establishing Night Schools especially for working class parents in urban as well as rural areas. The focus of night schools was mainly of women and mothers who do not have any means of attending morning schools due to their busy schedule in taking care of the home. However, Tolbert reemphasized Tubman's policy in 1974 by stressing the importance of education for all. For Tolbert, education develops the total person, creates equal opportunity through the diversification of educational programs. He highlighted both formal and nonformal education that could cultivate skillful population for a community and national development (UNESCO IBE: 1985:4). By providing both means of education, both men and women could get involved in the development initiatives in their community and the entire nation. Pointing from Tubman's policy, Bertha B. Azango, former deputy minister of planning and development at the Ministry of Education (MOE) reviewed the Tubman philosophical trends in the education sector of Liberia in a presentation to the 1981 National Conference on Education (NECL). By concluding, Bertha proposed a revised philosophy of Liberian education comprising of six counts. She sees education as individual rights and responsibilities, personal growth and development that function as national responsibilities and goals for community development. The mission of educational institutions (including the LAC/UMC), is to provide educational opportunities to as many people as possible and guarantee the relevance of that opportunity for individual, cultural and national enhancement. Additionally, the mission points to several issues, but key among them and relevant to this research are, a provision and proper management of education (both formal and nonformal) to all in every part of Liberia and to focus on the large portion of women who have no access to education and also those who dropped out of elementary schools, especially in rural communities (UNESCO 1985:6). Professor Bertha's summary of the proposed revised philosophy of Liberian education can be looked at in three most important counts that are applicable to this research:

- We believe that the search for meaning, purpose, and identity in life is necessary for both the health of the individual and that of the society.

- We believe that every individual has a right to develop his or her abilities and need to be accepted as a person and enjoy membership in society so as to develop his or her capacity for living.
- In order to ensure the speedy development of the social, moral, economic and political aspects of the nation, we are convinced that the provision of educational opportunities, both formal and nonformal for as many of the people as possible and the diversification of the curriculum in order to meet national manpower needs is indispensable (UNESCO: IBE 1985:5).

The report defines education as an individual right and responsibility, cultural diversities and understanding, personal growth and development and national responsibilities and a goal for society and community development. Hence, the mission of educational institutions (including the United Methodist Church) is to provide educational opportunities to as many people as possible and guarantee the quality and significance of that opportunity for individual, cultural and national improvement. However, the responsibilities of partner institutions (like the Church), in this mission were to properly manage and help deliver educational opportunities and services across the entire country. In order to adequately meet up with these goals, the mission presented two fundamental issues; the universality of opportunity and equity of opportunity. In other words, there should be an equal opportunity of education and skills provided by institutions for all in every part of Liberia (UNESCO: IBE 1985:6). In regard to the 1984 National Conference on Education and Training, objective II, which stressed the improvement of the educational sector in all parts of Liberia, the Conference called on the Church to aid in the human development process through its educational programs. As such, the government of Liberia resolved to provide subsidies to the church as a means of empowerment in executing her educational programs throughout the length and birth of Liberia with much focus on rural settings. Although President Tubman, in his 1965 nation address underscored this commitment by his statement that “education for all” is not only desirable but important for the success of a democratic society; and the National Social Development Plan, 1976-1980, made the concept of “education for all” an explicit development objective (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 1976), the fulfillment of this concept by the LAC/UMC for women in Yelequelleh is far lagging behind.

### **1.3 The United Methodist Church in Liberia**

This portion of the study presents a historical and global overview of the UMC and its ministries in Liberia. The UMC began as a holy club movement that was revealed in the life and ministry

of John Wesley to the deprived, oppressed and poor working class of England. The Wesley brothers engaged the status quo that supported class system and ignored the socio-economic difficulties of the poor and ostracized. John and his brother Charles ignored the institutional practice of the Anglican Church. They went out to the fields and cold mines and ministered the good news to the poor and marginalized people. The Wesleys shared God's desire with the poor as a means of experiencing abundant life in Christ Jesus (Heitzenrater 1995:24-25). Wesley and the Holy Club scheduled weekly meetings with their converts where they provided spiritual formation for them. This resulted in a Wesleyan style of life which is based on the three principles of Wesley: do no harm, do good and stay in love with God.

Later, the growth of the Methodist Movement started spreading from England to the Americas, to Africa and to the rest of the world. Liberia in Africa was the first country to receive and embrace the concept of Methodism. The Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian churches came along with the free slaves on the ship Elizabeth in 1820. Since their arrival with freed-black slaves from America, the Methodist and Baptists amongst others, have provided ministry activities such as education, training, healthcare, etc, and political leaderships to the country (Cox 1994:7). Kulah (2010) states that the UMC in Liberia can be examined in three different ways: the arrival of the settlers 1820-1822, the arrival of foreign missionaries from the USA, to supervise the work of the church 1833-1965, and the taking over of leadership by indigenous 1965-now (Kulah 2010:25). However, Liberia became the first Methodist Episcopal Church Mission Field in Africa under the administration of Rev. Melvin B. Cox, who was the first commissioned missionary to be assigned outside of the USA (Bailey 2007:8). Consequently, in April of 1833, Rev. Cox met with the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church leader John B. Penny in lower Caldwell, St. Paul River District to discuss the ministry activities of both denominations. Following this meeting, the United Methodist Church reinforced her ministry activities to the rest of the country thus enhancing Pastoral training in rural Liberia. Notwithstanding, the acceptance of the good news by the natives gave rise for urban-rural migration of the church which enhanced the establishment of four mission stations; Ganta, Nimba County, a Methodist Mission Station in 1962 by George W. Harley, an American missionary. This mission station has a nursing school and a hospital that attends to citizens of that county as well as Guinea and Cote d' Ivoire. The Gbarnga mission Station that hosts the Gbarnga School of Theology in Gbarnga City, Bong County was established in 1947, as well as

the Camphor Mission in Grand Bassa County, in 1947 and the Gbason Town Mission Station in Sinoe County in 1970 (Kulah 2010:28). As a result of these large ministry achievements throughout Liberia, the General Conference voted to allow Liberia to have an Annual Conference of her own. In February of 1965, the Annual Conference held in Seys UMC, Montserrado County voted upon establishing a Central Conference, where a Liberian Bishop could be elected to the Episcopacy (Cox 1994:8). Subsequently, in December of 1965, Stephen Trowen Negbe was elected the first indigenous bishop of the Liberia Annual Conference in Cape Palmas, Maryland County. The election of Bishop Negbe as indigenous bishop served to replace appointed missionary bishops to Liberia (Cox 1994:8). Since December 8-12 1965 to present, the LAC/UMC has had five indigenous Bishops, including Stephen Trowen Negbe, Bennie D. Warner, Arthur F. Kulah, John G. Innis and Samuel J. Quire, Jr.

Notwithstanding, the LAC/UMC is one of the largest Protestant denominations with a membership of 20,000 (A. Kulah1999:35). The Church has over seven hundred congregations within the twenty districts of the fifteen counties in Liberia, headed by over 850 pastors (Innis 2008:8). Moreover, the LAC/UMC owns and operates more than ninety academic institutions ranging from primary to higher education, a United Methodist University and a theological seminary (Annual Conference journal 2015).

Considering these achievements and activities of the LAC/UMC over a long period of time, this study will attempt to evaluate the impact of the Church on the lives of women in Yelequelleh, a rural setting with regards to education and skill training through its (UMC) ministries.

#### **1.4 Function of the DGEM/LAC/UMC**

The Department of General Education and Ministry of the Liberia Annual Conference serves as a liaison between local United Methodist School Boards, the Board of General Education of the United Methodist Church and the Liberian government (Annual Conference Journal 2014:196). The function of the DGEM is to monitor and supervise United Methodist Schools, distribute donated school supplies, and coordinate the teaching of teachers.

The 2012 report of the DGEM records 142 United Methodist Schools operating in Liberia. 82 of these schools are being held in church buildings. Statistics from the report shows 2011 enrollment of 15,220 students from 58 schools out of 142 UMS. According to the report, the

female population is 5,879 while the male population is 9,341. 70% of the total student population hailed from urban communities while 30% is found in rural areas (Annual Conference Journal 2012:186-190). However, these reports mentioned nothing about a specific learning process like vocation or night schools that aim at enhancing change in the lives of illiterate women in rural communities like Yelequelleh, even though the government of Liberia gives subsidies to the DGEM as a means of promoting an inclusive system of education that should touch the lives of everyone in all parts of the country.

### **1.5 Profile of Bong County**

Bong County is one of Liberia's 15 political sub-divisions and is located in north-central of the country. The county has an area kilometer of 8,772 km<sup>2</sup> (3,387 sq mi) with a total population of 328,919 inhabitants. Gbarnga which is the political capital of Bong County ranks second to Monrovia among the largest cities or towns in Liberia and holds a population of 45,835 inhabitants ("Kpelle". UCLA, Anthropology). Bong County is predominantly occupied by the Kpelle, which constitutes 20% of the total population of Liberia and is the largest ethnic group in Liberia. English is the primary language for commercial or business transactions. Politically, the County has 12 districts of which Yelequelleh is one. Bong County is represented in the national legislature by representatives from each district and two senators. However, Bong is headed by a superintendent appointed by the president of Liberia. Bong County is rich in natural resources such as iron ore and gold deposits, rubber and palm plantations. Young people in the county are eager for education and employment opportunities. But like most African countries today, these advantages are destroyed by the country's history of corruption, poverty, poor leadership and 14 years of civil conflict. Bong County is a host to two major religious groups, Christianity and Islam with 0.5% of other religious groups like the Baha'i Faith, African Traditionalists, etc. Among these religious groups, Christianity forms 94% of which The United Methodist Church constitutes 55% (County Report, 2013). The County is occupied by the Gbarnga District, Kokoyah District, and the Jorquelleh District, all of which are major Conferences of the Liberia Annual Conference. According to the District Superintendent's report, Gbarnga District has 98 pastors that are catering to 46 congregations in local churches and preaching points across the political landscape of Bong County (District Conference Report, 2014).

## **1.6 Profiles on Yelequelleh**

Yelequelleh is a rural community located in Bong County, Liberia. This area is one of Bong County's twelve political districts that form a major part of the Gbarnga District Conference. For the sake of this research, it is labeled Yelequelleh Community. Yelequelleh consists of 25 large and well populated towns and countless villages with a population of 36,097 thousand inhabitants, of which women form 65% (LIGIS 2008). Kpelle, which is one of Liberia's sixteen indigenous languages, is the major means of communication in the area. This community is dominated by Christians of the United Methodist faith. For the past six decades, Yelequelleh (with its huge United Methodist population) has only one United Methodist School in Taylor's Town (one of the largest towns) and the school runs from kindergarten to six grades since then. Members of this Christian community commit their services to the UMC through their commitment, financial, moral, presence, etc. Yelequelleh has produced five district superintendents for the Gbarnga District Conference of the United Methodist Church of which are all males. Of the majority women population and their enormous support to the ministries of the church, women have not assumed the superintendency in the Gbarnga District Conference or in the political sphere because of the lack of education.

## **1.7 A Brief History about Methodism in Yelequelleh**

The Methodist church was established in Dwayeapolu, a town in Yelequelleh in 1953 by Musa Nain, commonly known as Rev. Moses Taylor Johnson. The vivid growth and spread of the new faith in the community was overwhelmingly supported by women participations. Rev. Johnson built the central church in present day Taylor-ta where women with different sickness, including bareness, stomach problems, skin deceases, etc, attended in large numbers for prayer and healing purposes. From Taylor-ta, the new Methodist faith begins spreading in the entire community and beyond (Rev. Levi Johnson: interviewed). The first district conference was held and presided over in late 1953 in Taylor-ta by Rev. U.S. Gray, a missionary from the USA. At the seat of this conference, Rev. Gray instructed Rev. Johnson to recruit willing members to be trained as evangelists and other ministers of the church in Yelequelleh and beyond. Without thinking about any female, Rev. Johnson selected twenty-five males and sent them to Gbarnga Methodist Mission in 1954 to pursue pastoral and leadership training (Oldman Kerkulah: interviewed). Women at that time were mostly viewed to stay at home, work and give care to children, but not

to acquire formal training or take on clergy position. Culturally, the uprising of a woman among men was seen as an abomination in the society. This is why, according to Rev. Garso, they were not selected to be trained as clergy or evangelists (Rev. Garso: interviewed)

### **1.8 Education in Yelequelleh before the Methodist Church**

There was and is still a form of traditional education in the community before the arrival of the Methodist faith in the 1950s. Traditional education is education designed to develop the body, mind, and character of a person (Guannu 2010:13). These schools are headed by traditional priests who are responsible for the teaching and training processes. These priests are believed to have divine authority and incarnation from the gods. They perform sacrifices and other rituals on behalf of the community. The priests define the body of a person as a potential force that is able to move an object. The body must be fit and healthy so as to meet the demands of work and other activities. For the priests, a woman's body must be nurtured and beautified so as to meet the sexual demand of her husband. The woman must be healthy in her body; that is, she must reach maturity, prepared to have children. The mind is the aspect that controls the whole body and activities of the person. The mind must be trained to be able to make good decisions while the character was the path of the individual within his or her society. In other words, the character of a family qualified family members for a better marriage, leadership positions, etc, within the community. The priests took these three aspects of the person very important in both the Poro and the Sande schools. In Yelequelleh, like in other parts of Liberia, there are two forms of traditional educations: Poro and Sande. These schools are like other formal institutions that instill discipline in the students. The Poro School was mainly for men while the Sande School was for women (Guannu 2010:14). The Poro School which last for four years is where men are trained to be good husbands and fathers. They are also trained in medicine, carving, weaving and to be good hunters. They assumed responsibility as decision makers of the family, the home, the government and in public. The man is taught to exercise authority over his wife and children at all times. As breadwinner of the family, a man must be able to cultivate a large farmland in order to take care of his family, his wife's family and his parents, including his siblings. Women's sphere of the family was limited as subscribed by the Sande School. In Sande Schools, women were trained in midwifery, to take care of the home and children, cook and bear children (p.14). In most cases, women were not involved in the decision-making process of the home. Due to

their role in society, women were to remain silent during public discussions. According to Rev. Mineyah, these cultural practices were brought into the church in Yelequelleh, where men were prioritized. Gender disparity against women in this community could not allow them to acquire any form of education or skill training in the church. Rev. Mineyah further noted that as a result of these schools and cultural practices, women in Yelequelleh were and are lagging behind their male counterparts in terms of education (Rev. Philip Mineyah: interviewed).

### **1.9 Current Educational Realities for Women in Yelequelleh**

The focus of this thesis is on education for women in Yelequelleh and how such education can enhance development within their community. The Population and Housing Census of 2008 put the Population of this community at 36,097 with the ratio of 17,970 male and 18,127 females (LIGIS 2008). However, women's status varies across the rural parts of Liberia in regard to education, traditional practices, etc. For example, women in Yelequelleh have much less access to education when compared to their male counterparts; males are favored over females when it comes to education. Most families in Yelequelleh give keen attention to the education of males but rarely females. This points to Amartya Sen's theory of special Opportunity Inequality: where education opportunities are less for women than for men in all forms of education (Sen 2001). The reason for such unequal treatment of women in the community is due to traditional practices where the people felt that educating a girl child would not bring any benefits to the family except her husband's family (Mrs. Sianneh Cooper: interviewed).

However, the Methodist faith was fully embraced in Yelequelleh in the early 1950s. Since then the church has influenced the traditional and cultural practices of the people through its ministries. Consequently, the current membership of the church in all the 25 towns and villages in Yelequelleh stands at 12,831 of which women form 9,361 and men 3,470 (Gbarnga District Conference Report 2015). Moreover, the community was decimated by the 14 years of civil crisis in Liberia. Additionally, the Cobra Base of former President Charles Taylor's rebels was located in Yelequelleh from 1991- 2003. Cobra Base was a rebel community that was used to train and host a large portion of Mr. Taylor's fighters in Liberia. Consequently, many of the older girls and women were caught and sent to front line without any form of military training. Those who refused were killed, beaten or raped (Amnesty International 2004: pp.3-4). Girls and women experienced rape, attempted rape, and sexual coercion; an act where a woman is forced

into sexual relationship with a soldier in order to feed herself or her family, have shelter and clothing or for protection and safety (Swiss S, Jennings P.J, Aryee G.V, et al 1998:279). Infrastructures including schools were destroyed and the education system of the community is still fragile. As a result, girls that were affected by the crisis have grown into mothers over the period of time. The negative effect of the civil war, coupled with cultural practices etc, caused girls to drop from school while some did not even attend school. This has enhanced major female illiteracy in the community. Seven out of ten women cannot read or write while three out of ten are primary school dropout. The role of women in Yelequelleh like other rural women are to bear children, take care of children, cook, keep home clean, etc; but these contributions are not highly recognized as work. Notwithstanding, women are lagging behind their male partners in terms of education due to cultural practices such as pre-marriage, taking care of family members and siblings, etc. Hence, they are not influential in public decision making and leadership in the church and society due to lack of education. The traditional role of women as caretakers in Yelequelleh is what Martha Nussbaum points to as “resource-based approach, favoring protection of the status quo” (Nussbaum 2004:253). Subsistent farming accounts for 95% of the livelihood of the people. Women constitute 65% of the farming process because the majority of the women are divorced by their husbands while others are widows; so they serve as breadwinners for their children. A single mother giving care to many children reduces her socio-economical status and makes her vulnerable to poverty thus not enabling her educate her children.

Yelequelleh has been unable to achieve one of the important Social Principles of the United Methodist Church that states: “all should have equal access to education and quality skill training” (UMC Book of Discipline 2012:116). Also MDGs3; Gender equality and women empowerment, and MDGs5; reducing maternal mortality rates are lacking in the community. Yelequelleh still lacks EFA goal 3 that aims at ensuring the learning needs of all young people and adults, and that these needs should be met through access to appropriate learning and life skill programs, and goal 4; achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially women. Presently, Yelequelleh is faced with major economic and social improvement challenges. Over 20 thousand of the dwellers are faced with poverty, vulnerability to sicknesses and diseases and the corridor out of poverty is not easy. Educational and skill training programs, that should impact especially women and also serve as a major achievement for the Church and

the community is lacking. There appears a major bottleneck in the efforts of the LAC/UMC's educational programs to transform the socio-economic and cultural well-being of Yelequelleh women. Sine (1983) sees the essence of the Christian gospel to be expressed within cultural practices. That is, the church should be able to change the individual's situations, the culture of the people and develop the life of the person herself (p.417).

### **1.9.1 Method and Material**

This study is a qualitative research that will focus on an in-depth analysis of the educational programs of the LAC/UMC and how it is or has impacted the lives of women in rural areas (Yelequelleh). Qualitative research is a research that understands the social environment by examining how individuals interpret the world they form part of, the means whereby social properties are products of social actors and the interactions between individuals (Bryman 2012: 380,710). The qualitative methods used for collecting data in Yelequelleh will be: participant observation; where the activities of women will be observed in relation to their interaction in the programs and activities of the church and society, in-depth-interview; both unstructured and semi-structured, with women who are residents of the selected towns in Yelequelleh, with local leaders, teachers, and some key figures of the same community and with two staff members of the Department of General Education and Ministry (DGEM) of the United Methodist Church in Monrovia, Liberia. Examination of documents such as census reports, UMC Book of Discipline, Conference Journals of the church, and the evaluation of the educational programs of the UMC; analysis, recordings as well as writing down field notes.

Apart from observation and interviews in selected towns in Yelequelleh, I will interview administrators and officials involve in various educational and development programs at national and district level in order to gain their views on attitudes regarding education for rural women. These methods will be conducted as a means of gaining broader insight and to understand the phenomena in the context of the study. Five of the 25 towns of the community were purposively being selected for this study because they are relevant to the research question and data collection. The field work was done in Yelequelleh and Monrovia from July to September, 2016.

### **1.9.2 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is structured as followed:

The study begins with the introduction where the topic of this thesis is presented consistent with the support of the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church in regards to education for all and the mission statement of the church which aims at transforming and impacting lives. This portion of the thesis ends with the motivation, purpose and research questions. The next section is chapter one which begins with the context of the study. Here, the Republic of Liberia is discussed in connection with the National Education Plan of 1978-1990. This is followed by the United Methodist Church and the functions of the Department of General Education and Ministry of the Liberia Annual Conference. In this chapter, profiles of Yelequelleh and Bong County as well as Methodism, and the form of education in Yelequelleh before and after the arrival of the Church, are discussed. In concluding this chapter, the current educational realities for women in Yelequelleh are followed by the method and material used in writing this thesis.

Chapter two comprises of the methodological framework of the study while chapter three presents the concepts of the study. Chapter four is the literature used to address the phenomenon while in chapter five, the empirical findings are presented. In chapter six, I discussed the findings gathered from the participants on the field while chapter seven analyzed the findings of the work. Chapter eight comprises of conclusion and recommendations.

### **1.9.3 Summary**

This chapter aims to present an introduction and background information regarding the LAC/UMC's take on the provision of "education for all" as prescribed in the Social Principles of the Book of Discipline of the denomination. Besides, the motivation, purpose of the study, and research questions are discussed herein.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **2.0 Methodology**

The aim of this chapter is to explore the process through which this study will unfold. The technique used to interview, selection of respondents and the methodology I used to conduct this research, are included.

A methodology is the framework that presents different related processes used to collect empirical data materials for research purpose and it also describes the research that will be done. Such a method is arranged in a way that it will guide readers through the different means of a qualitative study. Thus, this study will be a qualitative research in a descriptive mode that will make use of a research-designed interview.

In order to conduct an effective research in the Yelequelleh Community, one needs to critically consider the method been used. Therefore, this chapter presents how the study was conducted as well as my choices, methods and the selection of materials that were used to answer the research questions of this thesis. Ethical issues as well as reliability and validity are also discussed in this portion of the work.

#### **2.1 Preparation for Fieldwork**

My initial step in preparing to go to Liberia for the conduct of this study was to fully attend the research methodology class where I gained broader insight on the conduct of social research. After critically thinking and formulating my topic, I shared it with few prominent officials of the United Methodist Church of Liberia and also Yelequelleh. Some of these people are former District Superintendents of the United Methodist Church, while others are elders, teachers and government officials who live in the community. In our separate telephone and email conversations, we discussed the goal, aims, and objectives of my study. Their responses were positive and were willing to assist me in the process. The fact that I lived in Yelequelleh for a decade and a half, couple with my experience as a pastor in serving the United Methodist Church during this time, also prepared me to undertake this study. I researched updated information through internet in order to access statistical data relating to education in Yelequelleh. I read books on the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church where education, development,

etc., among other things, are given priority. These steps were taken due to the effect they will have on my research.

## **2.2 Qualitative Research**

A qualitative research method is a research that sees through the eyes of those being studied and the subject of the study gives meaning to events and their environment. Unlike quantitative research that employs numerical statistic through questionnaires, qualitative research is one that is concern with words, storytelling, etc., where the personal experiences of the people are shared through a face to face interview. According to Alan Bryman, qualitative research is comprised of three characteristics. Firstly, it has an inductive view where theory becomes an outcome of the research (Bryman2012:380). Secondly, the research is interpreted in its epistemology position; that is, the social world is understood by examining how people interpret the world they form part of (Bryman 2012:380). Lastly, qualitative research, in its ontological position is seen as constructionist; that is, social properties are products of social actors.... (Bryman 2012:38,710). Qualitative research is not just about the way the researcher sees situations or his or her point of view, but also about the way those being studied see themselves (Repstad 2007:19).

The goal of this qualitative research is to understand how the informants, especially the local participants of Yelequelleh Community, church and government officials interpret the role or impact of the United Methodist Church in the lives of rural women in terms of education. Secondly, I will also want to solicit participants' views on how the United Methodist Church of Liberia can contribute to the education needs of rural women (Yelequelleh) so as to enhance positive development in rural communities.

## **2.3 Semi-Structured Interview**

An interview is a conversation that comprises of structure and purpose and contains an extreme questioning and listening approach with a purpose of obtaining thorough and tested knowledge. As Kvale and Brinkmann state, qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from a subject's point of view in order to unfold the meaning of their experiences. It also serves as a means of uncovering in which they live prior to scientific explanation (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:345). Semi-structured interviews are popular in a qualitative research because as Bryman states, they are flexible (Bryman 2012:471). That is, there can be changes in questions and new

questions are formulated. Semi-structured interview, also known as face to face interview is feasible in a Liberian context, especially Yelequelleh Community which is the main ground for this study because this is how problems are traditionally resolved. I also speak the vernacular (the Kpelle dialect) of the people in the community which I am assure will be of much help in the conduct of this interview and will also help to meet the objective of the study. During my field work in Liberia, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews.

According to Repstad, a semi-structured interview enables researcher to prepare an interview guide and some follow-up questions ready for use but does not follow a structured form and it also enables the interviewees to answer more specifically (Repstad 2007:78). With regards to Bryman and Repstad's semi-structured interview methods, I prepared an interview guide that was flexible and it entails questions that can lead me to answering my research questions. Flexibility of the semi-structured interview is helpful in that it enables the researcher to speak with the participants in a means of conversation where almost all interviews conducted with informants have follow-up questions in some cases where respondents may not answer questions in order. I refrained from interrupting interviewees and try to focus on my script. As Repstad stated, interrupting causes insecurity and confusion to informants (Repstad 2007:79). During the interview, I added questions that arise from new information from interviewees.

#### **2.4 Group Interview**

In continuation of the interview, I conducted two extensive group interviews in Taylor's town, one of the towns in Yelequelleh that hosts the only United Methodist School in the entire community. This was done in order to obtain information from teachers, students as well as community members about how the United Methodist Church of Liberia has impacted the lives of women with regards to education in this rural community.

According to Hoel and Hvinden, group interviews enable the researcher to acquire much information (Hoel & Hvinden in Repstad 2007:99). In this instance, a group's member answer can be followed up by another person who gives extensive information (Hoel & Hvinden in Repstad 2007:99). In Taylor's town, I conducted two separate group interviews in which one group comprised of four persons. Even though each group is small, Morgan mentions that it is necessary to have smaller groups in order to acquire quality information about the topic (Morgan 1998 in Bryman 2012:507). These two separate groups enabled me to gather genuine information

regarding the topic because they are permanent members of the community and the United Methodist Church. This method is beneficial in that it provided me the needed answers to my research questions and also enhanced an added benefit of time to reflect on the data I gathered there. This method also provided me the means to include new questions to the original questions during other interviews.

## **2.5 Population and Sampling**

According to Bryman, sampling in a qualitative research is known as purposive sampling where participants are not selected randomly, but instead, they are strategically chosen for the goal of the research question (Bryman 2012:408). This study concentrates on the ministry implementation of the United Methodist Church in Yelequelleh Community. To achieve the most useful data, participants should be different but have something in common. As Repstad states, differences among informants enhance the chance of acquiring new data (Repstad 2007:58). With regards to this, I purposively choose people of different category among whom the United Methodist Church serves as a common aspect. Therefore, the sample of this study will represent literate and illiterate women groups, male groups, clergy members, lay church members and officials of the United Methodist Church whose ages range from 25-80years. Official documents of the United Methodist Church in Liberia will be consulted as a means to assist answer the research questions by compelling the responses from the interviews and that of the documents. Since participants are members of this religious body, their insights and or responses were cardinal in providing light to the importance of the written sources. As such, the main documents that were analyzed are the United Methodist Church Book of Discipline 2012 edition considering the Social Principles of the church and the Annual Conference Journals of 2014 and 2016 emphasizing education as one of the key importance of the ministry of the church.

## **2.6 Instrument**

As mentioned by Edmond and Beverly Irby, in a qualitative approach, the researcher serves as the foundation for all instruments in the research process (70). He or she interprets and gives meaning to the collected data. In a qualitative research, the researcher needs to be careful of biases as the research unfolds.

As such and for the purpose of this study, I selected a case-study designed in a semi-structured interview process. I placed the questions into three groups, where each group responded to each of the three research questions of this study. The question was used to examine the performance and ministry impact of the United Methodist Church, to inquire into the educational nature of the Church from a biblical, theological and sociologically perspective and to suggest a process whereby the educational programs of the UMC might probably become more concern and committed to the educational needs of women in rural communities like Yelequelleh since the United Methodist Church preaches and teaches transformation in a holistic approach. Secondly, I used the question to inquire from the community dwellers into the evaluation of the United Methodist Church, how they understand the practices and social engagement of the church from a holistic perspective toward transforming and impacting their lives through education as a means of enhancing development in Yelequelleh.

### **2.7 Data Collection and Analysis**

The variable for this study is education for women for social development (especially women in Yelequelleh). Ten interviews were conducted with open-ended questions addressing the research questions. Similarly, two group interviews were also conducted in Yelequelleh considering the nature of the topic. Each group comprised of four persons.

Before the interview, I selected participants based on their experiences and knowledge about my topic. Letter was sent to staff members of the Department of General Education and Ministry (DGEM) of the LAC/UMC requesting their participation in the interview process and I assured them anonymity with regards to the interview. I verbally informed the selected women of Yelequelleh about my study because of their state of illiteracy. A schedule of three weeks was arranged with the participants including those of the group interview where a forty-five-minute interview was conducted with each informant at a convenient time.

I gathered information from participants through interview and analyzed them into the context of the educational programs of the UMC and its impact on women in Yelequelleh. During these interviews, field notes were gathered as well as recordings in order to properly and adequately transcribe information received from interviewees during the write-up of the thesis. Responses gathered from these interviews were prepared for processing.

## **2.8 Reliability and Validity**

In a social research process, there are criteria set for evaluating an empirical study. Since this study is a qualitative study, the criteria used to evaluate it are reliability and validity.

According to Bryman, reliability is the question or concern of the result of a research been reliable. That is, whether the data materials are influenced by the way they were collected; if the study can be done again with the same result (Bryman 2012:46-47). Validity is concern with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a research. In other words, it draws on the degree to which the result of a research can be valid or whether data materials can help answer the research question (Bryman 2012:47).

Since this study is based on interview, it can be repeated and the acquired results will be the same. With regards to the research and data materials I collected from the field through interviews, I am assured that this study is trustworthy. Also interviewing different categories of participants regarding my research topic, their different but comprehensible answers assured me trustworthiness of my study. Additionally, participants focus on the means through which the United Methodist Church of Liberia can impact women in Yelequelleh and the way they talked about the educational programs in regards to the research questions, sure that my data was collected successfully.

## **2.9 Ethical Considerations**

One ethical responsibility of a researcher is to accommodate security to his or her participants during interviews. As such, the researcher must critically and importantly consider those needs when conducting research of any kind. According to Diener and Crandall, the researcher must make sure of informed consent, be aware of invasion of privacy and must avoid deception that will cause harm to the participants (Diener and Crandall in Bryman 2012:135). With these ethical dimensions in mind, when I got to Liberia, I informed participants about my project and that the interviews will be done by means of recording. They were assured confidentiality and that recorded materials will not be shared with others except me and that they will be deleted after the study. I assured them that the interviews will be kept anonymous, including their names (except those who want their names availed), ages and other personal information.

## **2.10 Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology that will be used in the study. Firstly, I explained the means through which I approached the study and the preparation I made to carry on the fieldwork and interviews in Yelequelleh. The research is a qualitative study where various research methods that will be employed were presented. Some of those methods include semi-structured interview, group interviews, sampling, etc., For the sampling procedure, I specified how informants were selected, this will lead to the way I will collect data and analyze them as well as reliability and validity of the research were keenly considered where I discussed the trustworthiness of the study; having the same result if replicated. Lastly, ethical issues were discussed considering informing participants through written letter or verbal communication before the conduct of interviews.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3.0 Theory

Chapter three presents the theoretical frameworks that are been used in the conduct of this research. These concepts primarily focus on the research questions: efforts of the LAC/UMC educational programs for all, education and women empowerment, and education and community development.

The importance of theory is that it provides the researcher the rationale for which a research is done. According to Bryman, “theory also provides framework that makes social phenomenon to be understood and it also helps to interpret the research findings” (Bryman 2012:20). Bryman explains the importance of framework for a qualitative study. This study is basically focused on “education, empowerment and development” of women in Yelequelleh and how partners and agencies like the LAC/UMC, can impact the lives of women in rural areas through their educational programs.

In this chapter, I will separately define the terms “education and development”, and state theories that link these two concepts and their relevance for this thesis. As stated above, “education” is one of the basic concepts that form the theoretical framework of this research. Due to the importance of this empirical study, education, with its different principles, definitions and applications and the ways these diversities are applicable for this research in Yelequelleh will be discussed. These views will mainly concentrate on women living in Yelequelleh, which is a rural community. “Development” theories which form the second concept and framework of this research will be discussed. These concepts are important for this study because without education and skill training for women in Yelequelleh, the “millennium development goals” and “sustainable development goals” that prioritize women education and development initiatives, “poverty reduction and health care services”, etc, will not adequately be felt by the community. Again without education and quality skills for women in this area, the progress to development, even in the church in Yelequelleh will always remain a major setback because they (the women) are in majority and have the anxiety to improve themselves, their families and community.

### 3.1 Literature

The focus literature for this research is the 2012 edition of “The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church”. This literature is important in discussing my thesis because it provides insightful information regarding education and skill training for all members of the Church, regardless status, and or location. Part V of the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church which discusses the Social Principles of the church and society regarding education and quality skill training for all, is my focus.

Of the literature concerning education and skills as a means of impacting the lives of members of the church, I have selected “The Church in Response to Human Need” (1987) edited by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugder. This literature will play a significant part in discussing my topic in that it presents methods through which the church’s ministry can impact the lives of the “poor, vulnerable and marginalized” people through the provision of their needs.

For education and development, I will focus on “*Understanding Development*” (2012) by Paul Hopper. I cannot complete this thesis without discussing the concepts of “education and development” because education for women is an important component of development in Yelequelleh (Hopper 2012:84). This research sees “education” as a yardstick to the improvement in the lives of women in Yelequelleh and will also strengthen their capacities for “development” in the community. Hopper stressed forth some educational benefits for the individual and her community (2012). Hence in Yelequelleh, education and skill training will create “employment opportunities, empower women, reduce poverty”, and help to build new churches, close the gender disparity gap between males and females, make women of the community compatible with other women in urban settings and also help to construct a strong family bond in the community.

“*Development as Freedom*” (2001) by Professor Amartya Sen. Amartya Sen’s concept which qualifies sociological study in this manner is concern with education as a means of enhancing human capacity. Sen’s educational provision makes a person more productive and at the same time enables her contribute to the economic expansion of her community and her personal development (Sen 2001:292-93). His account of development, poverty and inequality incorporates concepts such as empowerment of women and a holistic take on inequality which are permeating Yelequelleh and its people. Desirable norms, as Sen asserts, “can be found both

in the individual and her environment (Sen 1997)". There are norms such as hard work, dedication, commitment and a quest for change that is observed in the lives of women in Yelequelleh and the United Methodist Church probably has the ability through a well planned educational program to improve these norms among women in the community. *United Nations reports, especially UNICEF (1999)* which provides alternative concepts on education and development with emphasis on women, UN Conventions on "Education for All" (EFA 1990), as well as MDGs reports are helpful sources in that they provide important information for the purpose of this study.

The "websites" and other meaningful sources will be considered in providing needed information for the purpose of this study.

Though there are sources regarding the establishment of the "United Methodist Church" in Liberia, Yelequelleh which is the focus site of the study does not have sufficient and significant document about the church's function in the community over the period of time of service. Hence, I gathered information about the church through talking to elders, church leaders, and other prominent members of the area so as to acquire knowledge about my topic. These concepts will set the stage for a holistic evaluation of the educational programs of the "United Methodist Church" in Liberia so to see whether it is improving women's live in Yelequelleh.

### **3.2 Etymology of Education**

The root of education can be traced from the Latin words "Educare" which means to train or to mold; to bring up or to lead out or to draw out, propulsion from inward to outward, while "Educatum" is the act of teaching. These two Latin words are an indication of developing the "latent faculties" of the individual person (Kumar & Ahmad 2008:1) In order to have a vivid image of the nature of education; it is worth mentioning few definitions from some scholars. Gandhi sees education as a "way of bringing out" that which is hidden in the whole person while for Plato, "education develops" the person's capacities (Kumar & Ahmad 2008:1). For Aristotle, education is a process whereby a sound mind is created in a sound body where the faculty of the person is developed as a means of enabling him or her to enjoy the contemplation of supreme truth, goodness, and beauty. As defined by the World Book Encyclopedia, education is a "process that includes all the ways in which a person deliberately tries to influence the behavior of another person". Some of these behaviors may include "knowledge", skills, habit, values and

attitudes (World Book Encyclopedia 1972:56). From this definition, one holds to the fact that, education is a continuing process whereby the whole person can be transformed by another person, a group or an organization to fit in the current state of a developed society.

With its different meanings, fields and implementers, where some actors see it as the development and training of one's mind, character and skills, education according to Dr. Joseph Saye Guannu, is a process of learning skills through membership in association of people with the same interest so as to improve their livelihood (Guannu 2010:13). Others still see education as the "development of all those capacities" in a person which will enable him or her to control his or her environment and fulfill his or her possibilities (Kumar & Ahmad 2008:2).

Drawing from the above arguments, it can be noted that education is given various meanings by different scholars. As a social phenomenon, education is immense and varied which makes it difficult for scholars to give it a specific definition. The differences in the opinions of these scholars are because most of who are "philosophers" see life from different perspectives. From idealist standpoint, "life aims at the spiritual development of an individual". Kumar and Ahmad assert that "idealists regard education as a spiritual process whose purpose is to bring together the soul and the creator where the person realizes his or her full potentials". For the pragmatists, "education is a process of social progress" (Kumar & Ahmad 2008:3). With these differences in the way of "life", scholars define this social problem differently. Hence, the real "concept of education" goes beyond these two schools of thoughts. For Kumar and Ahmad, "education" is a sort of combination of all the above viewpoints. In such regard, education includes the "individual, the society, his or her environment, the social fabric and the traditions" said persons find themselves in (Kumar & Ahmad 2008:3). With these diverse meanings, one can conclude that "education" needs to be comprehensively defined. As such, education may be defined as a purposive, conscious or unconscious, psychological, sociological, scientific and philosophical process, which brings about the development of the individual to the fullest extent and also the highest development of society in a way that all will enjoy utmost happiness and prosperity (Kumar & Ahmad 2008:3). In other words, "education" is the improvement of a person according to his or her needs and demands of the society of which he or she is an essential part.

In furtherance, education actors place education into two categories: "formal education", which includes organized instruction given by teachers in such institutions as schools and universities

while “informal education” involves learning from people and agencies (Church, etc.) whose primary purpose is something other than organized instruction (The World Book Encyclopedia 1972:56).

For the benefit of this thesis, I prefer Guannu’s definition of “education” because in a Liberian context especially Yelequelleh, the people believe in living and sharing together. Being a part of a “group” of people qualifies one to share the benefit of whatsoever the group owns (Guannu 2010). For example, the “Poro and Sandi schools” encourage knowledge acquired together and should be used to benefit the entire community. “Hunting” was a skill acquired together by men while “midwifery” was also a skill learned by women in the Sande (Guannu 2010). All these skills are for the benefit and improvement of the entire community. Therefore, being a part of the “United Methodist Church”, education for the large women population will help improve the livelihood of the people and their community.

### **3.3 The Aims of Education**

As a conscious effort, education has specific aims and objectives. Over the period of times, the aims of “education” change because of the changes that occur in life. Education can be viewed from an idealism and pragmatism standpoint. Idealism accounts for “absolute, ultimate, eternal and universal” values where ideas of life are advocated for and “knowledge pleads for knowledge’s sake”. In such a society, education is for the general and “moral development” of the person (Kumar& Ahmad 2008:7). Here, the aim of education is to provide a complete and better “living standard” for all persons everywhere. Pragmatists view life from a real approach where “social, political, and economic” aspects of life are prioritized. Moreover, they see human condition as always been changed through the aims and provision of education. Hence, scholars view pragmatism from different perspectives. For some, People living in a given community should acquire a good level of “education, while others prioritized an education that will instill discipline and enhance an orderly minded and organized community”. Still, some focused on “materials” where they see the aim of education as the provision of the “practical, social, and economic” needs of a people. In a community where material needs are highly rated, the aim of education, as Kumar and Ahmad assert, “is based on the material stance of the people (2008:7)”. Thus, education for such people will help to prepare the future generation to adequately manage their lives, the economy, and the social system of their community.

### **3.4 Education for All (EFA)**

Due to the debt and structural adjustment in educational budgets and programs in developing countries in the 1980s, the UN convened a conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in March of 1990 (Hopper 2012:87). The conference aimed at ensuring that all children and adults achieved a form of education by 2015. Hence, the Book of Discipline, which provides rules governing the United Methodist Church, affirms that education is a “basic right” that everyone should obtain in spite of age, sex, status and or location (UMC Book of Discipline 2012). The need for education is one of the priorities of the church; but is this need adequately being distributed or felt by women in Yelequelleh, without whose support, the church cannot fully carry on ministry work?

At the seat of this conference, the UN declared and provided that “all citizens” have the right to benefit from a form of education that will meet their learning needs and help to improve and transform their lives and societies (Hopper 2012:87). As a result, faith-based organizations have been very involved with the implementation of this declaration in most urban but few rural communities of which Yelequelleh is one. The United Methodist Church which is a “faith-based Christian” community should be in the full front to advocate to local and central government, or as a Church, undertake the initiative to provide her members, especially women in Yelequelleh the needed “education and skill” which is their right since they are part of the church. However, the meeting on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand did not only make emphasis on education as a basis for “fundamental human rights”, but also made education as the heartbeat of “international development” (UNICEF 1999:15). Consequently, the provision of education and skills for women in Yelequelleh will not only earn self-gain, but the structural and financial viability of the United Methodist Church will improve. The membership of the church will be stronger because of the church’s educational and skill training initiatives for women in the community.

In order to achieve the “EFA goals”, the “Dakar submit” was established in April 2000. Hopper (2012) states that, the Dakar Framework for action adopted and reaffirmed on behalf of the international community to achieve “EFA by 2015 (p.88)”. Additionally, the “Dakar Framework” adopted three key resolutions known as the “EFA 2000 Assessment”. Among these three resolutions, the third which states: “At least 880 million adults are illiterate, of whom the

majority are women” (World Education Forum 2000:12), is cardinal to this thesis because access to education for women in Yelequelleh is also considered to be integral to women’s empowerment. Consequently, education for women in Yelequelleh will provide more “opportunities” that will enable women to have control over their own lives, their family, and society and also enhance “development” within that part of the Conference and the nation.

Hopper further states: “education does not only improve women’s employment rates but also lower fertility rates” (2012:89). For Hopper, when women are actively involved in the “labor force”, they want to have fewer children (Hopper 2012). The lack of education and skills coupled with “empowerment opportunities” for women in Yelequelleh, has led to the increase of “maternal mortality, poverty, unemployment” for women and dependency syndrome of females to their male counterparts for a survivor.

The education and provision of skills for women in Yelequelleh will reduce the “fertility rate” among women in the community. They will have control over having children. For example, as Sachs states, “there was a major rise in literacy and school attendance in Iran after the Islamist revolution in 1979”. As women participation in education increased, Iran’s fertility rate dropped. The average number of births per woman decreased from 6.6 in 1980-85 to 2.5 in 1995-2000 (Sachs 2005b:317 In Hopper 2012:89). Accordingly, progress aimed at meeting the EFA goals was hampered by governments’ failure to deal with persistent inequalities in education (UNESCO 2009). These inequalities as Hopper states were “primarily based on gender, income, location, ethnicity, language and disability (2012:90)”. If the LAC/UMC believes in the principle of “education for all”, regardless of “income and location”, they need to strengthen their commitment to equity and inclusive education and skill training programs, so that women in rural communities like Yelequelleh will have access to their educational programs that are responsive to development initiatives.

### **3.5 Feminist Education**

“Feminism” as a movement that was established in the 1970s, aimed at “equal rights” for women. With its diverse cultures, countries, goals etc, around the world, the “Movement’s” objective was to obtain and maintain “women’s right”. Most Western Feminist historians argued that all women movements that worked to obtain women’s right should be considered feminist movement (Witt 2012). To further sustain the argument, Walker (1992) grouped “feminist

historians” in three categories with different aims. The First Wave Feminism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century aimed at overturning “legal inequalities” against women. The second Wave Feminism (1960s-1980s) broadened debate to include “cultural inequalities, gender norms” and the role of women in society. They attempted to combat social and cultural inequalities, while the third Wave continues to address the financial, social and cultural inequalities, and also call for inclusion of women in policy making (Walker 1992:pp.37-41).

Moreover, Bell Hooks described feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression” (2000), while June Purvis, a socialist feminist from England envisioned the movement as “a struggle for educational access and equality for many ordinary women and at the same time argued that education is for many a liberating experience.” Purvis stressed that women themselves are to talk about what their education meant in personal terms (Purvis 1991). In furtherance, Robyn Weigman, a scholar and feminist educational advocate argued that women education is one of the most successful institutionalizing aspects that develops new learning programs each year (Weigman 2002: 10). Consequently, four stages known as tenets or views that gained empirical support among feminist educators were outlined. First the “concept” creates communities of participation where discussions are built around individual involvement. The second view considers the validation of personal. “This tenet focuses on the individual providing her own insights and experiences in a group discussion, rather than depending on that of the educator”. Thirdly it focuses on the encouragement of social understanding and activism where social and societal problems are made known to the individual. Finally, feminist education is, “Development of critical thinking skills or open-mindedness” where the individual is encouraged to think and work for herself and to move beyond her comfort zones and work outside the bounds of traditions (Weigman 2002:11). In Yelequelleh for example, the church should be able to work with these women groups through the provision of “education and skills” as a means of improving their minds and conditions beyond their own status so as to break those “cultural and traditions norms” that have and are causing “illiteracy” amongst women in the area.

### **3.6 Development**

The word development is defined in diverse ways and can be seen in different contexts. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines development as the act or process of growing or causing something to become larger or more advanced; the act or process of creating something over a

period of time; something that has happened or has been known (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The word development gained its origin in the 1550s from the middle French word 'desveloper' which means to unwrap, and or unveil (Harper 2010). With the above definition, it can be noted that development is an act of progression and advancement in the life and community of an individual or a group of persons. Development is applied in many different aspects with different implementers. For some, it is a "change for the good while others interpret it as change for the bad". Brookfield simply defined the term as "change". In furtherance, Robert Chambers modified Brookfield's definition by describing development as "good change". Additionally, Hopper views the term as a "multifaceted phenomenon" that can best be understood from probing its history (Brookfield 1995& Chambers 1997 in Hopper 2012:3, 11, 12). Hence, a clearer view of the word starting with the concept of modernization will enhance a better understanding of development. The concept of "modernization" was widely accepted after "World War II" mainly as a way of responding to the "Cold War" and the needs of new communities and nations. For Bragg, the concept holds that "development" is to diffuse the industrial system of the "West" to these "less-developed" communities and nations. Bragg also views this as a goal that will increase production and "economic growth", were living standard will rise thus, providing "good life" for as many people as possible. For Bragg, this concept can be accelerated through "knowledge", "education and skill training, technology", etc, from those that are advanced (Bragg 1987 in Samuel & Sugden 1987:216). Since then, the modern concept of development can be traced from the early 1950s through the 1970s. Moreover, modernization gained prominence within the scopes of the "United Nations", "World Bank" as well as the "International Monetary Fund". The concept also initiated the establishment of the "United Nations" first "development decade". Additionally, modernists' concept focused on ensuring that nations and communities turn from "traditional lifestyles that are noticed as obstacles to development and embrace modern societies that enhance changes" (Hopper 2012:3, 7, 30). This leads to the concept of "sustainable human development" that can be traced from Agenda 21 of sustainable development which was a focus of the 1992 United Nations Conference on "Environment and Development held in Janerio, Thailand". The Latin origin of the word "sustainable, is 'sustener', which means to 'uphold' (Ruud 2006:136)". Furthermore, the Janerio report was based on the "World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)" known as the Brundtland Report; a name in honor of the then Norwegian Prime

Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland (Ruud 2006:135,137). In the report, Sustainable Development is viewed as “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987:41). For Sen, “economic development” was not the only major component for development; it also focused on the freedom of the individual to pursue the life she or he most values. In such regard, “poverty” was viewed as the cause of the lack of opportunities (Bull 2006:47). Hence, the “UNDP”, with its focus on persons, opportunities and their choices, defines Human Development as,

“the expansion of the richness of the life of the person rather than the richness of the economy in the person’s life (UNDP 2015)”.

This meaning highlights the interest of the people, their opportunities and their choices instead of “economic growth”. In regards to the 2014 “Human Development Report”, the report expressed that the choices one makes depend on her capabilities that make her the person she wants to be “(UNDP: HDR 2014)”. The aim of the report was to reduce vulnerability and advance “human development”. Accordingly, people are vulnerable to a certain extent, but most vulnerable are people living in abject poverty and are deprived, summing for over 15% of the world’s population (UNDP: HDR 2014). Furthermore, the report affirms that those that are vulnerable are lagging far behind from achieving a better “human development”. For the report, those without education and skills are more “vulnerable” than those with education and skills. These vulnerabilities and deprivations negatively affect the well-being of a people like women in Yelequelleh, thus enhancing a much lower degree of self-esteem, motivation, and self-confidence (UNDP: HDR 2014:2, 23, & 24). The term development emerged after “World War II” with the creation of the “UN” and other meaningful world bodies like the “World Bank (WB)” and the “International Monetary Fund (IMF)” that aimed at post-war reconstruction, economic and stability (Helleiner 2006 In Hopper 2012:3). For the sake of this thesis, Chamber’s definition of development is appropriate in the context of Yelequelleh women in that development through the provision of education and skills will enhance a “good change” in their lives and their entire community. “The 14 years of civil conflict affected lives especially leaving women of Yelequelleh vulnerable to socio-economic recovery, poverty, marginalization, as well as illiteracy, etc”. The church as a community of believers should take a radical approach and get deeply involved with compassion, in helping to provide good living conditions through

development initiatives such as “social justices”, and the quest for education and skills for women in Yelequelleh (Sine in Samuel & Sugder 1987:1).

The intended purpose of development emphasizes the importance of having a range of opportunities that will make one productive, creative and improve her “human capacities (UNDP 2009:9)”. Regarding this view, “development in Yelequelleh will expand and help women to make effective choices that will add value to their lives. These values will enhance “empowerment, employment opportunities” for women in Yelequelleh and also help to lead a healthy life that can be acknowledged through access to education and skills. The goal of development institutions including religious bodies (like the LAC/UMC), is to “create in community dwellers the ability to participate in the life of the community, human security and to empower members of the society (Hopper 2012:11)”.

### **3.7 Women Empowerment**

The concept of “empowerment” gained acceptance within gender and development cycles at the end of the 1980s. Young sees “empowerment” as a participatory means that can be enhanced by development agencies beginning with “UN” to the “World Bank (2002)”. However, empowerment can be understood in many different ways. Firstly, some scholars see empowerment as a self-actualization where a person is transformed into a productive member of society (Parpart 2002). For Rowlands, “empowerment is a process in which women and men gain self-confidence so that they are able to participate in all aspects of development and decision-making (Momsen 2004:14)”. From a feminist perspective, Parpart, Rai, and Staudt (2002) see empowerment both as a process and an outcome and that local empowerment are always embedded in “regional, national as well as global contexts”.

However, empowerment as a term firstly emerged in the “US” in the 1960s among Afro-Americans who advocated for their “democratic rights”. Unsatisfied with changes made, leaders of the movements called for “black power” to unite, recognize their heritage, define their goals and create their own organizations. Hence, the 1970s experience saw the emergence of empowerment within women’s movement. However, the term was introduced by Sen and Grown in 1985 in their book titled “Development, Crisis, and alternative vision: Third World Women’s Perspectives”. In this book, the authors discussed “women empowerment” and also identified women’s organization as the nuclear for gender transformation (Medel-Anoneuvo 1995:13).

Today, women empowerment as a term is been used everywhere ranging from the “UN”, World Bank to IMF” as well as religious institutions. But empowerment for women in Yelequelleh is far from reality due to the lack of education and skills. Moreover, the term aims at developing a goal. For example, the “UN’s MDGs 3” seeks to “promote gender equality and empower women”. Though women empowerment can be seen as self-confidence aspect of development, its meanings are unclear. Hence, Parpart states:

“Mainstream institutions and their practitioners for their most part envision empowerment as a means of enhancing efficiency and productivity with the status quo rather than as a mechanism for social transformation (2002:339)”.

Kadeer sees empowerment as a “process in which people that are denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability” (2001:19). This view is similar to Sen’s theory of development as freedom which expands choices where empowerment and development flourish.

Similarly, the United Methodist Church affirms the empowerment of women and sees it as a “right” for all women regardless of status or location. Paragraph 162 of the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church Book of Discipline states:

We affirm the right of women to equal treatment in employment, responsibility, promotion, and compensation. We affirm the importance of women in decision-making positions at all levels of the church and society and urge all to guarantee their presence through policies of empowerment and recruitment.

“How can women of Yelequelleh meet this affirmative action when they have no form of education or skills?”

### **3.8 Development as Freedom**

Amartya Sen’s concept of “development as freedom” criticized the conventional aspect of development as an increase in GDP. Subsequently, his understanding of development is that it is a “process whereby a person’s real freedom is defined”. For Sen, “economic growth and industrialization” are two aspects upon which development rest. Additionally, there are also other means on which development depends on. For example, the political aspect provides the individual the “right” to participate in public discourse, “social” as well as education and healthcare. Similarly, the United Methodist Church accords women the right to public participation and educational attainment which can also serve as a medium of freedom when acquired. However, Sen sees these aspects as the individual expansion of freedom and that they

serve as the central for development. For Sen, the attainment of individual growth through the expansion of real freedom serves as the goal of development (Sen 2002:pp.17-20). Hence, some of the social aspects that can be provided by communities and organizations such as the United Methodist Church for women in Yelequelleh are education and skill training, healthcare, etc; and these will have an impact on the freedom of the individual woman in the community. Sen sees women's education to have many positive effects. One of the major impact educations can have on women; according to Sen is a reduction in fertility rate. For example, educated women hold a strong position in the family. As such, educated women influence decisions in their family (Sen 2002:208). Maternal mortality rates will decrease among children in Yelequelleh when women are educated. Sen also notes that women's voices and actions through their independence and influence, a right to ownership of property, a right to opportunities and their role beyond the home, are gained through education (p.270). He expressed that the "progress of a woman's life in an area creates possibilities to impact not only her household but also her community" (p.270). Hence, women's ability to move beyond one aspect of their lives and create new opportunities as a means of development through freedom in Yelequelleh can only be attained through the provision of education and skills. For when educated, women in Yelequelleh have the freedom to make choices about childbearing, freedom to influence decisions, freedom of participation, etc. For Sen, freedom in one area of a person's life leads to benefit freedom in another area as well (p.276).

### **3.9 Participatory Development**

The concept of participatory development stresses forth the needs of local grassroots activities as well as empowerment. The focus is to have the local people, ranging from all levels involved in "development initiatives". This, in turn, keeps the locals in charge of their life (Hopper 2012:160).In affirmation of this claim, Desia states:

Since the people themselves know best what they need, what they want and what can afford, only close cooperation between project implementers and the community can lead to project effectiveness' (Desia 2006 in Hopper 2012:160).

For some scholars, "participatory development" is about power and who controls it while others argue that participation involves shifts in power. This serves as a challenge to the "traditional role" of actors and institutions in the development field. Once the locals are allowed to part-take in the development, they commit themselves to the project. Additionally, it gives a

“psychological satisfaction” that enhances one’s potentials, feelings of self-worth and self-esteem (Rowlands 1997 in Hopper 2012:161). Hence, the United Methodist Church encourages participation of women in all aspects of “life that will enhance the development” of the individual and her community. In Yelequelleh, “women’s participation”, is very limited in decision-making and development initiatives due to lack of education and quality skill training.

## **CHAPTER 4- Literature Review**

### **4.1 Education: A Tool for Capacity Building**

This chapter aims at presenting the literature materials used to discuss the thesis topic. It focuses on education as a tool for capacity building, educational investment for rural women, women education and economic development. More to that, this chapter will discuss the role of the Church in society and will conclude with a Biblical and theological foundation of education for all.

Regarding the content of this thesis, it is important to delve into Sen's capability approach and the means in which it will build the capacities of Yelequelleh women through education and skill training. Amartya Sen views education as well as skills training as the cardinal basis for building a person's capabilities and well-being (Sen 2001:292). Besides income generation, education and skill training will enhance the abilities of women in Yelequelleh in making critical decisions both in the church and community, and will also add values to them where they will compete with their male counterparts in the community as well as women in urban areas of the LAC/UMC. Drawing from Sen's approach, Hooper stressed that education is an important tool necessary for "capacity building", in that, skills acquire capacitates the individual, enhance productivity and also contributes to her self-development (Hopper 2012:85). In other words, when a person obtains a form of education and skills, she stands a better chance to add "values" to her life, her family and the community.

Hopper states three means through which education builds the capacity of the person: First, education qualifies and prepares one for employment, second, it develops values such as self-discipline, self-motivation and the sense of hard work. Third, education leads to opportunities and new ideas. For example, education builds the capacities of small skilled farmers in developing countries by increasing their production, motivated and encouraged parents to educate their children (Hoper 2012:84-85).

### **4.2 Educational Investment: A Need for Rural Women**

The provision of education and skill training programs for women in rural areas like Yelequelleh is difficult as compare to those in urban settings. However, investment in education and skills is a worthy cause that every institution needs to undertake at all levels. Access to education and

skill training has an important impact on the potential of women in Yelequelleh, in that; it will enhance “income generating opportunities” for them and also help to improve their well-being. These different approaches such as nonformal education, vocational and training, agriculture extension and services, literacy, etc (United Nations 2012), are needed to address the various challenges rural women, like those in Yelequelleh, are faced with.

Like other forms of investments in human capital, women education can contribute to economic development (Psacharopoulos & Woodhill 1985: 1). Bowman (1966) described such investment as the human investment revolution in economic thought. Some scholars measured the contributions of education to economic growth while others were at the same time examining the concept as investment in human capital (Becker 1975 in Psacharopoulos & Woodhill 1985:1). These initiatives, as Psacharopoulos and Woodhill state, should serve as a motivating factor to those responsible for educational programs and curriculum development such as those responsible for educational programs of the LAC/ UMC to stimulate the growing demand for education of women (p.3), like those in Yelequelleh which is a rural community. Hence, the “World Bank” policy recognized education as a productive investment in human capital. In 1962, the “International Development Association (IDA)”, which promotes higher standards of living and social progress in poorest communities, saw women education as one basic element of contributing to the social progress of a society. The Bank justified that education is not only a “basic human rights”, but also a basic component of social and economic development, and when planned adequately, investments in rural women education will pay major economic dividends (Psacharopoulos & Woodhill 1985:3, 4), especially in poorest communities like Yelequelleh. The “World Bank” presented four strategic principles that can enhance investments in education. These principles are as follow:

- “First, basic education should be provided for all children and adults as soon as the available resources and conditions permit. In a long term, a comprehensive system of formal and nonformal education should be developed at all levels” (World Bank 1980:10).
- “Second, to increase productivity and promote social equity, educational opportunities should be provided without distinction of sex, location, ethnic background or social economic status” (World Bank 1980:10).
- “Third, the education system should try to achieve maximum internal efficiency in the management, allocation, and use of available resources so as to increase the quantity and improve the quality of education” (World Bank 1980:10).

- “Fourth, education should be related to work and environment in order to improve the skills necessary for economic, social and other developments” (World Bank 1980:10).
- “Fifth, to satisfy these objectives, institutions need to build and maintain their capacities, to design, manage and evaluate programs for education and training” (World Bank 1980:10).

Women education is one of the most important investments the LAC/UMC needs to undertake in Yelequelleh because these women constitute more than half the population of the church. Educating them is an essential tool to the development of their community and the financial viability of the church since their skills and talent cannot afford to be ignored (Timbon and Fort 2008).

### **4.3 Women Education and Economic Development**

Education is considered as the critical software for development as it shapes the destiny of every individual and society (Mawaka, Nabwire & Musamas 2014). Education has been regarded as a potential tool for development and a “universal remedy” for all problems in developing nations. As such, the education of rural women is linked with the likelihood of earning incomes, effective population control and improving basic living conditions (UN, 1976; Safilios & Rothschild 1997, Stone 1983). However, the “UN” provides substantial proves that education is one of the most potent factors that can change women’s life (UN, 1986), but for this change to have a liberating effect on the women of Yelequelleh, the type of education they receive from the Church matters. Notwithstanding, development workers and educational practitioners have realized that nations can no longer continue to ignore women’s role in society or their potential contributions to development. Their role in development initiatives has gained a wide spread attention in recent years. As such, Boserup recommended the implementation of both education and skill training programs that would guarantee women the full rights to participate in social and economic development activities within their communities (Boserup 1970 in Triveda 1992:6). Consequently, the “UN” action at the “International Women’s Year” in Mexico in 1975 recognized the need for education and training for women. This plan of action suggests the “provision of adequate facilities for formal and nonformal education for women and girls”, especially those in rural areas (UN, 1975:87). Moreover, education for women provides solution for development in communities like Yelequelleh, in that; it helps forward the message and mission of the LAC/UMC regarding “education for all” its members as spelled out in the Social

Principles and to also help Liberia in achieving the “MDGs”. This section of the thesis emphasizes the need for both education and skill training opportunities for women in a rural Third World community like Yelequelleh because as Tembon and Fort states: “educational investment in women is more effective for development” (Tembon & Fort: 2008).

#### **4.4 The Church, Education and Society**

The “church” is an organized body of people who believe in the teaching of Jesus Christ; with a purpose of enabling all people to obtain better status than they were before. Subsequently, the “church” is seen as a community of gathered communities, not a group of individuals. Its mission stresses beyond it’s environ. The Bible did not limit the church’s response to its environment. The poor and needy are all objects of the “church” (Sine 1983:416). One of the important aspects of society is education. As such, the church is called to remember first and foremost, the educational well-being of its entire people (UMC Book of Discipline 2012). Education is a “right” of all people as affirmed by scripture: train them in the right way, Proverbs 22:6. Similarly, the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church affirms access to education (formal and nonformal) for all persons (UMC Book of Discipline 2012, paragraph 164D). The church sees education as an inclusive means of full participation in the “socio-economic and political development” of the individual and her community. However, the church has a moral responsibility to reform gender disparity against women, support and strengthen educational reforms both formal and nonformal. Ordinarily, the United Methodist Church Resolution states:

[...] the church has been and continues to be, both an avenue of opportunities and a major cohesive force in “societies that are culturally”, etc, diverse. As such, “John Wesley” himself undertook the education need of poor and underprivileged people. His Sunday School Movement was established in communities as means of providing “education for all” (UMC Resolution 2012).

The church has always been seen as a community that provides hope to all people, most especially the less privileged human societies.

#### **4.5 Biblical and Theological Foundation of Education for All**

Education is very important to the survival of all groups of people since a community secures it continues existence and development. The Bible stresses forth the needs for education for all humankind. Elwell notes that the Old Testament “repeatedly shows that the success of the

Hebrew community and the continuity of its culture were conditioned by the knowledge of and obedience to God's revealed law" (Joshua 1:6-8 in Elwell: 1996). In order to maintain development and growth of their community, God's mandate to them was to "teach their children"; Deuteronomy 6:1-9. This is inclusive of both males and females. Similarly, the New Testament in John 13:34-35, sees the Church as a worshiping community of "salt and light" that should reach out to a "dark world". Elwell (1996) noted that since education is the basic to the existence of any community, it is necessary that those foundational issues, methods, principles and "formal and nonformal" educational programs are shared among different groups of people everywhere. The goal of the church, as Elwell states, was to "transmit values" such as education (vocation and technical skills training) in to the individual in the community. The by-product of such education was to make citizens responsible, upright in character and moreover, productive in "community development" activities. The importance of the educational system in the Hebrew community was to adequately equip individuals to be functional members of family and society. As such, women being part of the "family and society" were educated in the way of God. They assumed "leadership positions" because of their education. For example, Judges 4:4-5, Deborah served as a prophetess and judge for Israel, while Huldah, in 2 Kings 22:14-14, also served the "Hebrew community" as a prophetess (Elwell 1996). Elwell summarized the Hebrew educational system in three folds. From a theological point, education was a blessing from God to the community. For them, these blessings included "political autonomy and security, agriculture and economic development". "Sociologically", the provision of education facilitated assimilation into the community of faith and ensured the stabilization of that community. Lastly was the "religious aspect" which sees the provision of education as a means of sustaining a covenant relationship with God thus enhancing God's presence with the community, (Leviticus 26:1-18 in Elwell 1996).

#### **4.6 Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the importance of education as a tool for capacity building. I used Amartya Sen's approach in this regard where education, as a social phenomenon, serves as an important mechanism in enhancing the ability of a person. Such education is seen as a basic investment which an educational institution needs to invest into most especially, for rural women like those in Yelequelleh who constitute 65% of the average population of their communities. The

Church which serves as God's redemptive agent in human society should help provide such investment for all persons in every human community. This leads me to the next chapter where I will present the actual voices of the informants during my field work in Yelequelleh.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5 Presentations of Empirical Findings**

This chapter presents the empirical findings during my fieldwork in Yelequelleh, Bong County and Monrovia, Liberia; from July to September 2016. The informants' own voices are to be presented before the analysis in the following chapter. It will aim at answering the sub-questions as followed:

- 1) How do Yelequelleh women evaluate the efforts of the LAC/UMC's education programs?
- 2) How do women in Yelequelleh evaluate the relationship between education and their own empowerment?
- 3) How do women in Yelequelleh connect education to development?

#### **5.1 Presentation of the Informants**

A total of 12 respondents were selected for this interview but only 10 were available. I conducted nine interviews between the period of July and September 2016. Eight of these interviews took place in Yelequelleh while one was conducted in Monrovia, which is the seat of the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, where the Department of General Education and Ministry (DGEM) is located. To keep the interview anonymous, informants' names and personal information are avoided. Hence, in order to categorize and present a better finding, informants are presented in the below groups as follow:

##### **Group A: Illiterate Women**

This group comprises of women who are members of the church who support the church with their prayers, gifts, services and presence; but do not have any form of education. A group interview that lasted for an hour due to the arrangement was conducted with them. In furtherance, I visited two families who showed me their homes and gardens through which they are surviving. I will refer to them as IW 1, IW2, IW3 and IW4.

##### **Group B: School Dropout**

This group includes women who did not complete primary education (nursery to grade 6) but dropped out of school due to reasons that will be unfolded in the work. They are subsistence

farmers and petty traders who manage and use the proceeds of their farms and businesses in order to sustain them and support the works of the church.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with them. I refer to them as SD1 and SD2.

#### Group C: Church and Community Leaders

This group comprises of pastors, teachers, and elders of the community. I met representatives from this group at one of their Charge Conferences in Taylor-ta from September 12- 15, 2016. The Charge Conference was presided by the District Superintendent and attended by 50 members including two pastors from each town. Eight churches were in attendance. Each pastor gave reports on achievements and challenges from the past quarter while new programs and goals, as well as budgets, were presented for the last quarter of the conference year. Two semi-structured interviews along with a group interview were conducted with these participants. I also refer to them as C1, C2, and C3.

#### Group D: Conference Staff

These are people working with the Department of General Education and Ministry of the LAC/UMC whose responsibilities are to craft policies, evaluate curriculum and develop new programs within the department. The General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church and other donors, including the government of Liberia provide funds for educational purposes through this department. I interviewed two staff members who have diverse backgrounds in education and their length of stay with the department. They are referred to as CS1 and CS2.

### **5.2 Education: A Means of Impacting Women's Lives in Yelequelleh**

When looking at the mission statement of the church, it is important to examine the extent to which the church meets the needs of all her members through equal distributions of the educational programs regardless of status and or location. The mission statement of the church is "Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world". In an interview, I asked the respondents this question; has the church enhanced education as a means of impacting the lives of women in this community and whether the LAC/UMC has or is exerting any efforts to providing any form of education for them in Yelequelleh?

They stated:

IW1 in respond said:

[...] well...I believe for me I join the church because the way they can preach... you just see in our charge conference today, we the women we are more than the men....Our money and our support to the church is plenty pass by them. But you see...they put us behind (marginalize). They na (are not) even thinking to bring any leaning business here for we women so that it will help to change (transform) the way we living here.

Additionally, in order to affirm the above claim, IW2 who is an elderly person and has lived longer in the community said that the LAC/UMC has applied no effort in changing their lives.

[...] for me I lived here for many years now... you see my children, I born them in the church; even my pa and ma born me too in the church....From that time I know myself to this time, me and my children we all in the Methodist church. I never see the church bring any school program here particularly for we the women; only the men they can take to go to school and, and....they forget about us. You see... They wa na (were not) even teaching us to read the Kpelle bible or to train us how to preach. The first pastor, Rev. Moses Johnson only take the men and send them to... to pastor school in Gbarnga, but no woman. He say we must stay to the house. That the reason why all the district superintendents here in Yelequelleh are so, so men.

IW3 said this:

[...] when we ask some of the church big people to bring school where we will learn to do something with our hands (vocation training school) so we can help our self, they say they will think about it but not now.

For IW4 she said it this way:

(Urr urr...) we want our church big, big people to come here with school that will make us know something good... good so we can make money like our friends, but they na even care; the only thing they want from us in the church is to pay all the money they want.

SD1 and SD2 responded in one definite response:

Well... my brother, the church is not encouraging us the women in this community to learn anything that will make us like our friends in the city. This is why some of our friends are leaving Methodist Church and going to different church.

When I ask why, they continued;

Maybe they Na forget about us or they are not thinking that we are part of the church, or maybe because we are in the bush (rural areas).

For CL1 AND CL2, they said:

[...] this is very shameful on the part of the church for education to be limited to our women. As you can see in our reports, we made recommendations and requests for either night school or some kind of training program for women in this community ..... but my friend, (umm...) our big people not care for that...

To affirm what respondents in Yelequelleh have said in regard to this question, I asked S1 and S2 the same question; they responded like this:

We have made a very, very (eei...) should I say mistake; yes indeed we have. This is a grievous oversight done to most of our members, especially women in rural areas like Yelequelleh.

This is how S2 answered:

[...] the church is for all of us but you see... our predecessors did not include a specific program that will validate women in rural communities (uur...). Since we took over, we have not designed within the curriculum a learning process that gives keen attention that will impact women in Yelequelleh.

With regards to the above responses and interactions with informants, it can be noted that the LAC/UMC has applied no specific efforts through the provision of a form of education that will create meaningful changes in the lives of women in Yelequelleh. These responses lead me to the next question of how women in Yelequelleh personally understand education.

### **5.3 How the Women of Yelequelleh Personally Understand Education**

My aim was to understand the informants view about education, how they perceive it. My experience as a researcher was a picture of interest and anxiety in their faces as they gave me their individual understanding about education (formal of nonformal). They expressed that women in other rural communities like Yelequelleh are making progress through the provision of education by their churches (e.g. the Lutheran Church in Gbono-ta), where they are trained in agriculture, make soap, etc, while Night School is provided for those wanting to sit in class by some Pentecostal Churches in Garyeah Town. Yet for them in Yelequelleh they still see a community facing extreme poverty, high rate of women illiteracy and the dependence of women

on their male counterparts for a survivor. I posted this question; what does education mean for you?

In answering the question, IW1 said:

Oh brother... I see education to be something that gives you power (empowerment); it mean to me, where I will get power to do my own work, get money to do something for myself and live the way I want.

IW2 states:

(Een...) to me education means light. It makes you to see clearly, you go where you want to go, you talk with sense and it makes you to be important among your friend women...

IW3 also agreed with IW1 but a bit detail. She said,

Well... education is power to empowerment, because, when you learn something proper, book or any training, you able to live on your own and make plenty money.

SD1: for me education means work (job opportunity) and or empowerment.

In making her response clearer, the informant continued,

[...] when I see my friend women of the same age that are educated... working and making money, I envy them. Yes.... I am saying true, I want to be like them, working and making big, big money for myself. Sitting in big cars... I want to be representative for my district.

In the case of decision making through educational empowerment, the respondent continued,

[...] one woman I admire in Liberia is ma Ellen, our president. It is education that gave her the power to be president for our country from 2005 to this time.

In furtherance to job opportunity and empowerment through the needed acquired skills, SD2 injected with anxiety and said this;

[...] education will bring help to us. You see our friend.....down there (withheld the name), The Lutheran Church sent her to Lofa (The Lutheran Training Institute in Lofa County, Liberia). They teach her to make garden for plenty things. She is making money out of the pepper, bitter-ball and okra she is planting..... You see that; at least if our Methodist church was doing the same thing for us... it will help us.

Continuing with empowerment, IW4 said;

[...] If the church can only teach us; see... we have our small organization called Kpo-iekporyah (in Kpelle-help yourself). Since the Kukertonor Swamp Rice people come here and teach few women how to make swamp rice farm, we do it good and help ourselves. The people who teach us the work, they are so...so men because no woman learn anything here. You see.... the money we get last year, we buy zinc for our church in Yandewon... we the women. No men join us to make the farm and buy the zinc. So if the church can help to teach us, we will get job and make money; we will help our church to do plenty good work here and we will send our children to school so they can't be like us.

For other respondents, education means health. They said that an educated family is a healthy family. CL2 who is an educator/teacher put it this way;

[...] well...education of all forms and manner gives a person the idea to take good care of his or her body. The person will know the kind of food to eat the type of clothes to wear. (Urr...) I mean she will always want to be clean and neat.

For example, as the informant continued,

Women who are educated know how to space their children through family planning, they know... when and when not to get pregnant.

For CL1 who is a community leader but also an educated pastor noted in the same vein that;

[...] education serves as a means of alerting women to prevent themselves from HIV/AIDs and other infectious and common killer diseases.

The respondent further noted;

[...] we listen to radio everyday that (urr...) HIV/AIDs are killing people all the times especially women are the main target. Other churches (like the Lutherans, etc) are conducting workshops and training their members how to prevent themselves for HIV/AIDs in other communities and places. Women are learning and teaching their daughters how to keep themselves safe in those communities. Why the Methodist Church can't come with same programs for the women of this area? The women contribute a lot to this church here in Yelequelleh... but ...you see nothing they benefiting.

S1 and S2 see education from different perspectives. This is what they said;

[...] Education is a transformative agent that can change the total individual and give her a new view of the environment around her.

S1 added;

[...] when a woman is educated whether formally or nonformally, she is able to transform her own life, her entire family and her home.

To affirm the respondent's case, he narrated a brief story;

[...] my younger sister was 25 years when the Tubman regime established a Night School in our town in Sinoe County (one of Liberia's 15 political sub-divisions in the Southeast). We encouraged her to attend the Night School because of her age, she did. She now has her own business with people working for her. She has built descent houses and her children are going to good schools in Sinoe. ... You see (urr...) through Night School she is transformed.

S2, see education to mean this way;

Well... as for me, education is freedom and development. I mean (uhmm...) total freedom from fear and ignorance. You see...development comes when people are free to think and do things for themselves.

Reflecting on feminist movements that pushed for the voices of women to be heard in development works, the informant stated that,

[...] this is while in the 1970s women groups around the world started speaking out for their own rights because (umm...) they wanted to be part of the development that was going on in the world; so they were brave to talk. Now they are free...just imaging my brother...well...all was because of education.

Perceiving education on the basis of human rights, SD2 states;

[...] we all have the right to go to school like our friends no matter our ages and where we live.

From our discussions and responses to the question, I realized that the women, in their own understanding, see education as a broad base aspect that provides them their rights, enhance transformation in and amongst them and their families, and creates opportunities for a better life for them. These responses led me to the next question of development which is one of the main concepts of this thesis.

#### **5.4 Women's Education in Yelequelleh: A Key to Development**

Education and development are seen as co-partners that work without the other. As a means of good change, development looks at the present and also the future where values are added to the individual and her community. Effective development cannot be met without education or skills. So if the objectives of the United Methodist Church which sees education and skill training as a

human right are to be achieved in Yelequelleh, women need formal or nonformal education to form part of the workforce. When trained in skills, women in Yelequelleh will not only be seen as caretakers of the home but will also help to shape the socio-economic condition of their community. In this regard, I sought the understanding of the participants about or whether education for them is important for development in Yelequelleh? I asked the question; is women education important for development in Yelequelleh and how can you connect education to community development? To answer the above question, the informants responded as follow:

IW2 states:

[...] education is important; that's what we really want. We are plenty passed the men in this area. (Een...) if we sit down and see them working they will not do much. So the way most of our men go to school and some of them learn different...different job, it will be (urr...) good you know for us to learn something (skills or academic) so we can join them to improve this Yelequelleh.

IW1: Education for us women here (umm...) will make us know our part to fix our home and community. Some of us when we learn how to do plenty work; we will do it quick and good because we are more than the men.

Stating a practical and tangible example of what a bit of acquired education or skill training has accomplished in the lives of few women in the community, the informant continued;

[...] when Kpo-iekpoyah people came to teach us how to make Swamp Rice farm, we wa (were) able to make one big swamp rice farm... we use some of the money to buy zinc for our church... (Een...) we gave small of the money again to the town chief to build the Palava hut here. To tell you that when we the women can have chance to learn... we will do plenty development work here.

SD2: [...] oh yes, development is good because it will change our community. We want Yelequelleh to be like other communities (transformed); by building vocation schools, and providing healthcare center. We ourselves can help to build these things when we are educated.

For the respondents, the church probably needs to serve as a driving force that will make them meet the development needs of their community. For them, this can be done through the provision of skills training or formal education for the majority women population of the area.

As such, CL1 states:

Well... (Urr...) in every conference, they tell us that the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world... How can our community be adequately developed when the women offer only 10% of their effort due to the lack of education and good skills. How can they form a key part of the development programs when the church cannot help to provide education and skills training opportunities for them?

With dismay of how this community which hosts a large population of the church in the Gbarnga District Conference of the United Methodist Church looks in terms of its high illiteracy rate of women and under-development, the informant continued,

[...] we need new church buildings, school buildings, women pastors, etc; but the women who should join us in meeting these goals do not have any qualify skills.

CL2: Well [...] poverty will reduce and development will increase when a good number of these women are educated here. You see, women care much about their homes and the well-being of their families; being educated does not only develop their community, but also will develop their self worth. My friend (uhmm...) when these women are educated, I believe....they will be economically strong and will greatly impact the development needs of this community because they form 65% of the population.

From their responses during our interaction, I come to see that though they are illiterate, the respondents have a very clear view of the connection between education and development. With education of all forms, development will be sustained in their community. For them, education serves as a chief corner-stone that upholds a sustainable development initiative where everyone's participation is important.

### **5.5 Education and Women Empowerment in Yelequelleh**

Education is seen as a major investment an individual or organizations can give to groups or individuals as a way of empowering them for the future benefit of himself, herself, family and the society. It serves as a driving force to enhance positive change. Therefore, my intent here was to seek the participants' understanding about education and empowerment. My thought is that one of the responsibilities of the church is to empower her members so as to be prepared for the ministry work of the church in every locale; and this can be done through education. Therefore, my question was; can education serve as a means of adequately empowering women in Yelequelleh and how do they see the relationship between education and their own empowerment? This is how the informants responded:

SD1: [...] because people don't learn to do anything...so they depend on their husband to give them money and other things every day. (Hum...) I will not ask my husband for food money every day when myself can work and get money.

To authenticate the relationship between education and self-empowerment where the person is independent and self reliable, the informant told me a brief story about skill she gained from a month's workshop conducted by the Baptist Church in the City of Gbarnga.

[...] there was a workshop in the Baptist Church in Gbarnga last year... my friend and I went there for one month. They teach us how to start market (business) with small money... the way we should be able to save our profit and how to talk to our customers. Now my business is growing because of what I learn from that workshop last year. For now I can help my husband to pay our five children's school fees. So when you learn anything and put it in use... you can have the power to do what you want.

For some respondents, education strengthens human relationship and creates a corridor of self and family empowerment. That is, an educated person does not have fear to relate and interact with other people because he or she is an asset to that body or organization.

IW3: [...] if you learn you able to do anything for yourself and your family... sometime you will not wait for people to tell you what you must do because you get the power. Our friend finished building her fine...houses in Gbartala because she go to the mechanic school in Monrovia and learn to drive truck. Now... she is working with the Chinese Company in Gbartala. Any clothes she wants to wear... she can wear. She can sit down with the white people and talk because she knows (learn) something which she depends on.

Others also see education as a medium of quality job opportunity and impressive salaries. As such this respondent asserted that:

SD2: [...] yes; because most of our men learn how to read and write that's the reason why all our district superintendents are men [...] you can't see any woman district superintendent because we don't know book (not educated). Even to the Chinese Company... all the good jobs are for the men because we don't have any skills. Only cooking and cleaning we are doing there...no good pay for our own of work. The only woman working for good money and has respect among us is the woman who can drive the big truck with the men...she learns something. So for your answer my...brother, when we learn we will be able to do something for our-self, our family, the Methodist Church and our community.

Everyone needs good job and encouraging salary in order to help meet those socio-economic needs that will create a relative environment for living. The relationship between education and the empowerment of Yelequelleh women can be measured through income generation, skill

provision through education and job opportunities. This will enhance social and economic development in Yelequelleh.

### **5.6 Most Needed Form of Education for Women in Yelequelleh**

My intent here was to exploit the informants' interest and priority regarding the type of education for women of the community since 43% of them range from age 35 to 43. I asked them; which form of education do you favor? The participants responded with almost the same view.

IW1: [...] Looking at my age now school where I will learn to do things with my hands (vocational education) will be good for me.

To understand what are some of the vocational training skills informants think they can learn to acquire skills in order to impact their lives in the community, W2 states;

[...] Tailoring, soap making, baking bread, tie and dye, and other things will be alright.

Some women probably see vocational school as a preferable means of shifting their lives and enhancing economic empowerment in Yelequelleh. However, SD1 asserted that

[...] in the vocation school, I think the people will teach us to manage our small... Small markets (small skills business), where we will know how to save money from our business. So for me I think that will be good for us in Yelequelleh because we will join the men to make our community good; all of us will be able to do something to get money ....you know.

Though some mentioned that soap-making and tailoring, etc, are skills needed, but majority of the women preferred skills in the agricultural sector because 95% of their livelihood comes from farming activities. Therefore, IW4 states

[...] well, if we can learn to grow food, make gardens (Sustainable Agriculture Programs) it will be good help for us. With this training, we can make our own small groups in the church and.... and.... our community and make big gardens and get plenty money. We can even help to pay some fees for some children who are not in school; we will even help increase our pastors' pay.

However, others still want to pursue formal education probably through night school which they see as a suitable means. Hence, SD2 asserted that

[...] Night School will be alright for some of us who think we can still make it. Just see... three of my friends who we all dropped from school since 96? Yes... 1996, they are in Night School in Salayea two now in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and the other person in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. If the church can bring the same thing for us here.... Plenty of us will go there to be like other people. Oh, go tell our big....people that we still want go to school, they must come with Night School.

Some of the respondents acknowledged that the women are highly occupied with the home work, as such; night school for those wanting to acquire formal education will probably help to reduce the problem of illiteracy amongst women in the community. Consequently, CL1 asserted that

[...] well Night School for women will be a good help... you see, the women do most of the works here in the home. After taking care of their children, they can go to school in the night. This will be a great help for those... that want to sit in class.

In most rural communities in Liberia, vocational education is helping to create skill and empower women in rural areas. For example, the Lutheran Church in Liberia, according to the informants, is making progress in the lives of its rural women through such initiatives. From the respondents' point of view, it can probably be noted that vocational education, where they will acquire skills such as tailoring, hair dressing, and sustainable agriculture programs through farming, etc, will best suit their context. Consequently, the tradition of silence for women will be broken and they will be involved in the decision making of the community.

### **5.7 Obstacles to Women Education in Yelequelleh**

Still wanting to understand the root cause(s) of why women are lagging behind their male counterparts when it comes to education in Yelequelleh, I sought the participants' views about the problem. My question to them was; what are some of the problems that are causing you to not have education? Their responses were different but needs keen attention. This is how they responded:

CL1: (uhmm...) I think ... I can call this "out of sight ...out of mind.

When I asked the meaning of this saying, the respondent continued,

[...] you see my brother; the big church people don't come and really see some of the main things people need in this community. So, what the people plan for education cannot meet the needs of those in rural communities like our area.

Some respondents attributed this problem to the lack of the LAC/UMC giving keen attention to the educational needs of women in rural communities of the annual conference.

CL2: For me... I believe that the people at the top of (uhmm...) of the school business in our church only focus on women that are in urban areas but not women in rural areas like Yelequelleh.

With emphasis to substantiate his claim of urban women of the LAC/UMC benefiting from the Church's educational programs than rural women, the informant continued,

[...] see I been on the Methodist Compound in Monrovia; and they have vocation school for plenty women who are learning different, different skills. Some learn to bake wedding cake, fix hair, etc. Even in Gbarnga City, they have one vocation school for women; they suppose to bring the same programs here for our wives and daughters too. They are all part of the Methodist church too; why they can't have the same opportunity?

Some respondents feel that leaders of the church are ignoring their quest for education that is been channeled through the reports of their Pastors.

SD2: [...] and our pastors make reports in most of the Charge Conferences asking (recommendations) for Night and Vocational schools so we too can be able to learn...but see here, they will always say no money no car no this no that to make us bring the school you want. Now for me I want to believe they feel we are not equal (inequality) to our friend women in the city. We are all members for the same church but our friend women in the cities are enjoying (benefiting) the church pass us.

For some women, they were victimized by traditional practices which the church needs to address.

IW1: [...] I don't see our church in this community teaching and preaching against these old ways of life that are keeping us women down in Yelequelleh.

The negative effects of traditional practices such as early marriage, etc, have left most women in the community vulnerable to illiteracy which the LAC/UMC needs to address. In this regard, IW1 continues:

My people give me to man soon (early marriage). So...I born my first son when I was 15; and the last two between 19 and 23...you see. I was not having anyone to help me with them. So, I suppose to take care of them; but I still want to learn something (have education) so myself too can do some good things in Yelequelleh.

For some informants, the cultural practice of prioritizing men over women in the community was seen as one of the major causes why women are highly illiterate.

CL2: [...] in the past...we have been more concern about sending boys to school than girls because our culture believes that (uhmm...) the woman will leave her parents home and live with her husband's family... so why should we send her to school to build another man's home. We believe that our sons will stay with us...build our home (in terms of wealth) and continue to carry the name of the family. And...and again our tradition says that women are not to be over their men (leadership) [...] if the woman acquire education or skill, she will always want to talk above her husband (dominate decisions) in their home. We were taught that a woman is not to be above her husband in anything. This is why you see... all our district superintendents are man because only men were allowed to go to school. We now know that that traditional practice (urr...) for me is wrong...

Some of the women were greatly affected by the civil conflict in Liberia that lasted from 1989-2003.

SD2: [...] for me I can say it was the war (14 years civil conflict in Liberia) that makes most of us now turning into women to not go to school. The soldiers used to leave Cobra Base and take (force) us to be their wives; we go anywhere they carried us and we fight along with them. Most of us born children the time we were not ready; and that was the only way we could survive. Despite our ages and conditions, we can still learn and be better like other women.

For some informants, poverty and the lack of educational facilities in the community after the civil conflict, was a hindrance to their achievement of education.

SD 2: [...] for me, I couldn't go to school because no school building here. Secondly, I had no means of getting money to go to school in Gbartala...so we sit down. Since my father and mother died in 1998, I had no means of going back to school... so I dropped and got married and now have all these children. Even though I am of this age, most friends and I, if we have people to help us, we stay want to learn something and be like our friends we see coming from Monrovia, Gbarnga... and...

Most women in South- Saharan African rural communities like Yelequelleh are affected by traditional practices that cannot allow them pursue education and skills that will create a better living condition void of dependency syndrome. Some are also and mainly affected by conflict thereby engulfing them into socio-economic abuses while the educational plights of majority women in rural communities like Yelequelleh are ignore by major educational institutions. The above responses show that in order to adequately address these obstacles, the Church should get

fully involve in the practical lives of the people by teaching and preaching. The Church is seen as a religious body where practitioners give ultimate adherence to their leaders and their doctrines.

In order to affirm the effective function of the church educational activities with regards to education for all for good living standard, with focus on women in Yelequelleh, I posed the below question especially to staff working with the Department of General Education and Ministry of the Liberia Annual Conference in Monrovia.

### **5.8 Educational Programs for Improvement**

Considering the mission statement of the United Methodist Church especially where the church focuses on transformation and in the social principles where it spells education as a right for all, I inquired from staff persons of the DGEM whether if the LAC/UMC is concern about any specific educational programs that will directly improve women's condition in Yelequelleh?

CS1: [...] friendly speaking...the church thinks about all her members but this has been a great mistake on the part of those who designed our curriculum and programs in the past. Their emphasis has not really focused on women in rural areas like Yelequelleh. Well... there are no specific designed learning programs for these women as the curriculum dictates.

When asked why, the informant attributed this to previous workers of the department. He said;

[...] maybe they thought that women in rural communities who have passed the age of sitting in class were not priority.

In order to strategize a means of inclusiveness where every woman both in urban as well as rural areas will have access to education or skills provided by the church, I asked a follow-up question; what is your vision in addressing the challenges of illiteracy among women in Yelequelleh? In answering the question, S2 stated that,

[...] But for now our vision is to revise the curriculum so that it will suit the livelihood of all United Methodists across our country, especially women in rural areas like Yelequelleh whose number outweighs the men. [...] well, it is time and our duty to address the challenge of illiteracy among women of our conference who live in rural areas, not only in Yelequelleh alone. Yes my friend... it is true that we have given too much attention to women in urban communities; they have and are benefiting from the church through academic and vocational training programs, but not those in rural areas.

Giving the large number and support of women to the church in Yelequelleh and the need for education that will equate them to male counterparts and other women despite their ages, I further inquired if the church is involved in any vocational training programs or Night School for these women.

CS2: (UHMM...) let me say this...you can't eat crab with shame; our curriculum has vocational training programs, but we have not really taken this program to women in rural communities of the LAC/UMC.

Wanting to understand why the church cannot provide education and skill training of any form for these women who are part of the church and are contributing immensely to the growth of the church in Yelequelleh, I further asked why they cannot be reached or benefit like those in the urban areas. The respondents attributed their failure to the lack of adequate funding, sponsorship and vehicles.

CS1:[...] if we must be able to fully carry on educational programs that will impact women in Yelequelleh...we need good funding from the general church and other donor agencies that are partnering with our department. You see... it takes good amount of money to establish vocational schools where we can train women in Yelequelleh in small skills business management, sustainable farming in agribusiness, soap-making, baking, tie and dye...and other things like tailoring and hair-dressing, etc. Night School too is ... a necessity for those who still want to have academic education. If the DGEM can be fully funded and given vehicles, we will make sure we meet the educational needs of all especially women of our conference who live in communities like Yelequelleh.

For the informant, education and skill training for women in Yelequelleh and other rural areas of the LAC/UMC will make the church socially and economically strong.

[...] I strongly believe when everyone has the needed education and or skills, people of the church, especially women, will be empowered and the UMC in Liberia...few years to come will be socially and economically strong. The church will do more ministry work by reaching to those in need; not only United Methodists.

It is noted by the respondents that everyone in the Church should have access to education no matter your location. The vision of the DGEM, during this interview is to design a program that will focus mainly on women in rural areas of the conference not only Yelequelleh. However, one of the causes for their failure to impact rural women in the LAC/UMC during this study is that those responsible for the diversification of the education programs are not adequately funded and provided with vehicles by the Church to fully implement their duties.

## 5.9 The Church and Holistic Transformation

Since the mission of the UMC is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, I sought the understanding of staff members at the DGEM about holistic transformation in terms of “education for all”. My question was; how do you understand holistic transformation in regards to education for all?

CS1: stated that;

[...] I see holistic transformation as a process of change for the whole person where basic social services and needs are provided for the upkeep of the individual. Again, holistic transformation in my mind could mean... developing the whole person’s mind, his or her well-being and his or her environment through the provision of knowledge and skills.

Looking at the role of the church in this process, the informant continued;

[...] the purpose of the church is to do ministry to all regardless of status or location. This is what Jesus commanded us to do in Matthew 28:16-20; “go make disciples of all nations, preach, baptize, and heal them and ‘teach them’ all I have ‘taught’ you”. The church is not to only meet the spiritual needs but also the socio-economic, educational and development needs of all of our members wheresoever they are...we can only change the condition of the poor and needy when we give those skills and education that will transform them.

According to CS2, the LAC/UMC conducts ministry in three key perspectives as a means of holistic transformation. In naming the three areas he stated;

[...] the church helps to change the life of people by providing their spiritual needs, healthcare and educational needs. This is what we United Methodists stand for and should do at all times.

Seeing the importance of education as it relates to impact and transformation, S2 continued;

[...] education is the most important thing that can help change the total person, to understand the Bible and do what it says; one must be taught even in their local vernacular. It is often said that an educated family is a healthy family. An educated woman will be able to transform her family by keeping them healthy even if they live in the village.

In order to transform the socio-economic status of women in Yelequelleh and provide the needed education for development purposes, CS1 said this;

[...] the church should provide the needed education for all women in rural settings. This will serve as a means of reducing poverty, enhance healthy family and empower women in Yelequelleh.

Seeing the gravity of education and skill training for women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the change education has brought to some Liberian women and some in other communities, the informant continued;

[...] a woman education is a direct medium for change...the example is our president. Transformation through education and development is her main agenda. I believe when women acquire useful skills even in the village, they will get involve in and participate in changing their own life, family, and the entire society. If we give them the needed education, they will help to build new churches, give more monetary gifts to the ministry work of the church and the... LAC/UMC as a whole will become more and more spiritual and economically viable.

As CS1 concluded, he said;

[...] our mission for a holistic transformation should cut across everyone of all ages and everywhere especially women in places like Yelequelleh. The church needs to do much publicity, re-examine our curriculum in order to correct the past mistakes where the educational needs for women in rural areas has not been prioritized. We need to reach across and see what people really need.

## **5.10 Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the empirical findings and the actual voices of the informants. This is because I intend this study to present the way most women in rural settings of the LAC/UMC, who are vulnerable to illiteracy and are unable to express their views in major conference gatherings feel. Second, readers of this thesis and officials of the LAC/UMC should hear and adequately develop means of addressing the needs of the participants. Out of the twelve participants that were selected and informed about this study, only ten were available for the interview. I therefore divided the respondents into three groups in order to have smooth access to the interview. Every informant provided his or her understanding based on the topic and the research questions that were formulated for this study. In their responses, the interviewees clearly stated that the LAC/UMC has applied no specific efforts in providing education that suits their context so as to help transform and impact their lives. Seeing the level of change education is enhancing for women in other communities and Christian denominations around them, it can

be noted that Yelequelleh women are eager and in great need of a form of education that will help impact their lives and their community.

## CHAPTER 6

### 6.0 Discussion of the Findings

In this chapter, I discussed findings from the field in Yelequelleh, Bong County, and Monrovia, Liberia, in connection to my research question “To what extent the LAC/UMC is either succeeding or failing to educate and improve the lives of women in Yelequelleh?” In light of the discussion, findings from the interviews are presented according to themes.

The detailed and thematic analysis of these topics is important in that they will help to evaluate the Church’s educational programs in line with the concept of education for all and the right to education. In furtherance, the Social Principles of the UMC as it relates to the provision of education for women will be critically looked at. Considering previous discussions, I will conclude on the role of the Church in response to the need of the people.

#### 6.1 Marginalization of Women in Yelequelleh: No Form of Education for Us!

It is in the scope of the United Methodist Church’s Social Principles that all must have equal access to education and quality skill training. Moreover, the concept of education for all declared by the United Nations is in line with the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church. These concepts emphasize inclusive learning programs that should cut across the Church in every part of the Conference. However, compared to the findings of my research, the concept meets the contrary amongst women in Yelequelleh. My research shows that the respondents feel marginalized in part because the Church has no form of educational programs for women of the community. Furthermore, they are marginalized in terms of the provision of education and skill training because of their rural location. This was observed during my interview with women in Yelequelleh. In an interview IW1 states:

[...] But you see... they put us behind. They don’t even care for us...for long time they not even thinking to bring any learning business here for we the women so that it will help to change the way we are living here in Yelequelleh (5.2).

The United Methodist Church in its Social Principles speaks against “marginalization” of any group in any form (UMC, Book of Discipline 2012). Marginalization according to Gabasiane can be understood as a “manifestation of humanity allowing the practice of disinterest, insensitivity,

and carelessness to poison relationship (2010:15)”. For the women of this community, they feel marginalized in that the United Methodist Church of Liberia is insensitive to their need for education and quality skill training that will serve as a means of impacting their lives and their community. For them, the church does not show any interest in helping to shape their conditions through the provision of education and skill training. Hence SD1 states:

[...] my brother the church is not showing interest in our well-being...we the women of this community cannot point to any training program that that United Methodist Church of Liberia has brought to make us look like our friend women in the cities. Maybe they finish forgetting about us or they are not thinking that we are part of the Church; or maybe because we are in the bush (rural area) (5.2).

Providing the educational need for those who feel marginalized is a key attention the church should focus because of the difficult conditions such as illiteracy, abject poverty, and illnesses etc, these people face. This will serve as a welcome to inclusive educational provision through diverse programs. Henceforth Gabasiane wrote:

Within and without the church doors there are many who feel that they are not welcomed into full fellowship of the church because they are vulnerable to illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, lack of empowerment opportunities, ill-healthcare, etc. Others feel not welcomed because of their gender, status or geographical location (Gabasiane 2010).

Looking at the world from an inclusive perspective where all human beings should have a sense of belonging, John M. Perkins wrote:

We live in a critical time which the least amongst us (Luke 19:48) are growing at a frightening rate. We no longer see their pain and suffering as something that takes place ‘over there’ in Third World communities. We now need to hear the cries of our own people, especially those in rural communities (Perkins in Gabasiane 2010).

I have myself witnessed a slight reduction in membership of the United Methodist Church in Yelequelleh, especially amongst women due to what they term as no interest and insensitivity of the church to hear their cry for improved standards of living through the provision of education and skill training. This reduction in membership may lead to a major setback for the ministry work of the Church in Yelequelleh because most of the women are now complaining and leaving the UMC and joining the Pentecostal and Lutheran churches where they think they will be accorded the opportunity of acquiring education and skills that can probably help to shift their lives in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, regarding Perkins' statement and the interview question posted to the informants, they affirmed their claim by saying

[...] we make recommendations requesting for either night school or some kind of skill training for women in this community...but the big people of our church do not show any concerns.... (5.2).

The Church is not static, but dynamic; in that the church, through its leaders, should be able to move to the community of its members. As such, policy and program planners will be able to identify and effectively deal with the actual need of the people. During my field work, I find out that the church's policies are made and implemented without implementers reaching out to the people to investigate and understand their basic need and how such need can be properly addressed so as to impact their lives. Gabasiane sees this as one of the major causes of marginalization. He wrote:

The concern of who are those marginalized and why are they marginalized is as important as the question of what they really need. "Church leaders" and program coordinators think, to sit in a distance and decide what the people need is appropriate. Many times, the church thinks the only way to attend to the needs of the people is to provide them with materials and services, but from a distance. Such an attitude often treats those "marginalized" as objects and not human beings (2010).

However, regarding the question of whether the United Methodist Church in Liberia has or is enhancing education as a means of impacting women in Yelequelleh, CS2 noted that the church has been in error from the past. He states:

[...] we have probably made a mistake.... there is no specific formulated education and skill training programs that will help to shape the lives and conditions of women not only in Yelequelleh, but also in other rural communities of our conference (5.2).

The effect of marginalization as Gabasiane wrote, is poisonous to a nation and moreover, the individual person. He stated that a whole nation maybe "marginalized", sometimes societies or communities, but more often it is the individual who bears the brunt of "marginalization" in their individual lives. Hence, women of Yelequelleh are eager for inclusiveness within the Church's educational programs that will make them feel part of the church and be like those women that are benefiting from education in urban settings. For them this will break the wall of being marginalized. As such SD2states:

[...] the only way we will feel that we are part of the church like our friend women in the cities is for the United Methodist Church to bring learning business here for us. I think this will satisfy and give us more value. Then we will know that the church is for all of us (5.2).

However, one thing I did find is that if the United Methodist Church in Liberia should meet its full objective of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world”, especially in a community like Yelequelleh, it needs to fully be sensitive to the education and skill training need of women in that area. The LAC/UMC should demonstrate Jesus’ sacrificial lifestyle where He reached across to all, broke barriers and impacted the lives of “marginalized” people by providing their basic needs.

## **6.2 Women’s Dissatisfaction with Inequality in Yelequelleh**

The act to improve women’s status in every society has been one of the main focuses of the United Methodist Church. The Social Principles of the Church gives credence to equal treatment of women in the church and society. The Church recognizes equality as a form of social justice.

We affirm the right of women to equal treatment in employment, responsibility, and compensation. We affirm the importance of women in decision-making positions at all levels of Church and society and urge such bodies to guarantee their presence through policies of employment and recruitment. We sponsor affirmative action as one method of addressing inequalities and discriminatory practices within our Church and society (UMC, BOD, 2012:119).

However, in most traditional communities like Yelequelleh, women are still not given equal rights and opportunities. My research in Yelequelleh shows that women are not given equal opportunities like their male counterparts and other women in urban areas in the United Methodist Church as well as in the society. In an interview with IW2 she states:

[...] they never even consider teaching we the women the Kpelle Bible or to train us how to preach...only the men were taken and sent to Gbarnga to be trained as pastors. They told us to stay home and take care of the children (5.2).

The Church is vision as a liberating community through which we witness against traditional practices and patterns that deny equality as well as justice. In the ministry of Jesus Christ, He related to women as persons of intelligence and capabilities. His ministry was without distinction to women and men. Hence, in the early Church, women had prominent positions of leadership

(UMC Book of Resolution 2012). However, my research shows that the Church is lax in breaking traditional practices that promote inequality between women and men thus causing a high rate of illiteracy of women in Yelequelleh. In an interview conducted with CL2, he states:

[...] in the past we have been more concern about sending boys to school than girls because of our cultural beliefs...we believe a woman will leave her parents and live with her husband's people; so why send her to school ? (5.7).

The culture of denying women the opportunity to education is what Amartya Sen refers to as the “theory of special opportunity inequality; where education opportunities are less for females than for males (Sen 2001)”.

The cultural practices of the people of Yelequelleh keep women out of the process of decision making. I observe that these practices have negative reflections on the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church in Yelequelleh which call for equal treatment for all. In an interview with CL2 he states:

[...] our tradition says that women are not allowed to be over their husband...we were taught that a woman is to be under her husband (5.7).

Again the study shows that most women in Yelequelleh are uncomfortable with acts of inequality seen through tradition that has permeated not only the society, but particularly the church which has and is denying them access to leadership both in the church and community. For them, the act of not ascending to leadership in the community is due to the lack of access to education and skill training. The Church is to teach and preach against these cultural inequalities, seek gender norms that should enhance the role of women in the community (Walker 1992). During an interview with SD2 she states:

[...] yes, because most men of our community were chosen and taught how to read and write and we the women were told to stay and take care of the home, that's why all our District Superintendents and Representatives in Yelequelleh are males; it is not fair for us (5.5).

The United Methodist Church also emphasizes inclusive equal treatment that should address inequalities and discriminatory practices in the Church (UMC Book of Discipline, 2012:119). This study shows a great deal of inequality and discrimination between women in rural communities to those in urban areas. Women in Yelequelleh expressed that education and skill

training facilities are mostly and easily provided and accessible for women in Monrovia and Gbarnga Cities than for them. Regarding the interview conducted with SD1 she states:

[...] I have been on the Methodist Compound in Monrovia and Gbarnga; they have vocation schools for our friend women who are learning different skills. They suppose to bring the same programs here for us. Are we not part of the church; don't we need the same equal opportunities like those in the cities (5.8)?

As Martha Nussbaum wrote, “literacy is very much connected to women’s ability to form social relationship with others and to achieve the important good of self-respect (Nussbaum 2004:314)”. This research shows that social relationship and self-respect are far from being achieved by women in Yelequelleh like other women in urban settings of the LAC/UMC due to educational and skill training inequality they are faced with in their community.

### **6.2.1 Women’s Empowerment through Education in Yelequelleh**

“Women empowerment” is defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituent of development, in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights, political and social participations, etc, (Duflo 2012:1053). The United Methodist Church affirms and supports policies that should enhance empowerment to all throughout the world. The process of empowering women in the scope of the Church, range from socio-economic, education, health, employment opportunities, etc;

We recognize the responsibility of governments to develop and implement sound fiscal and monetary policies that provide for the economic life of individuals and corporate entities and that ensure full employment and adequate incomes with a minimum of infliction...every person has the right to a job at a living wage. We deplore the selfish spirit that often pervades our economic life (UMC, Book of Discipline 2012: pp128-129).

The Social Principles and Values of the United Methodist Church consider a very strong stance on the “empowerment of women”. Education and skill training is seen as one of the many lasting impacts women of Yelequelleh are highly anticipating from the United Methodist Church of Liberia. Governments and “faith-based organizations” in developed and developing countries are critically assessed and judged by their inability in addressing the inequality in the educational sectors of many nations. Hence, the United Methodist Church sees the provision of education as “social service” and a responsibility to all and non- Methodists across the Conference in Liberia. The involvement of the “Church” in the education of the Liberian people dates as far back as the

arrival of the free slaves in 1822. As a means of empowering women, the United Methodist Church encourages the “support of more programs for leadership education for women and other educational programs that should upgrade the status of women everywhere” (UMC Book of Discipline 2012:126). The Church observes the high rate of “illiteracy amongst adult women” in many rural communities due to the lack of access to education and skill training. The Church also sees the need to reach out to adult women through massive “literacy campaigns”, using all necessary education means available (UMC, Resolution #3445; Book of Resolution 2008). This is seen in contrast to what this study found among women in Yelequelleh. According to the informants, they have not witnessed any literacy campaigns being conducted by the Church in their community. Though women of Yelequelleh expressed “marginalization and inequality” by the Church, finding from this thesis shows that they acknowledged the fact that educations of all kinds have the potential to empower them for better living conditions.

IW3 states;

[...] since we being here in Yelequelleh, no one Methodist people na come to talk about bringing school for us the women. But for some of us we see that education gives you power because when you learn something proper you are able to live on your own and make plenty money (5.3).

Amartya Sen sees education as a means of positively impacting the lives of individuals and societies. For Sen, education is one of the factors for “women empowerment” and the process of reducing fertility rates (2002:284). He wrote;

Literacy is vital in finding employment, understanding human rights, overcoming deprivation and raising the political voice of the underdogs. Educating women could sharply reduce fertility and child mortality rates, limit family size and increasing women’s import into family decision-making (United Nations Report 2014).

During my research, I find out that the respondents do not only see education as economic empowerment where they might obtain job and make more money, but also a path to making their voices heard in decision-making both in the Church, government and their homes. This approach is in connection to the feminists’ concept of the first, second and third waves that called for the inclusion of women in policy-making (Walker 1992:pp37-41). Hence, SD1 says that;

[...] I admire Ma Ellen our President. Education gave her the power to become President for our country from 2005 to now. She is making decisions for all of us now (5.3).

Women education and empowerment is one of the key factors for development. However, the years 1975-85 which was known as the International Women's Year witnessed simultaneous conferences where education and empowerment of women were highlighted. Henceforth, Medel-Anoneuvo sees education for women as a "path to empowerment and the acknowledgement of their rights (Medel-Anoneuvo 1995:5)".

During my field work in Yelequelleh, I find out that the respondents have the anxiety for empowerment and also they are aware that education is a right which they need to benefit. In a group interview with the informants they told me that the United Methodist Church of Liberia needs to fully prioritize these rights as a means of creating empowerment opportunity for them. Their emphasis on the right to education like women in urban communities was observed to be very important.

S2 notes,

[...] we all have the right to go to school like our friend women in the cities no matter our ages and where we live (5.3)

The outcome of the conference motivated the UN to enhance the following counts of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the well-being of women; to promote gender equity and empower women, to achieve universal primary education before 2015, and to reduce child mortality and improve health and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDs. Hence, findings from this study show that without adequate education and skill training opportunities, women in Yelequelleh are far from benefiting the achievements of these goals, the (MDGs).

### **6.2.2 Education and Skill Training: Yelequelleh Women's Desire for Equal Opportunity and Status**

This draws one's attention to the benefits gain from education. Many scholars have seen education as a "cardinal tool" for achieving the other MDGs including eliminating poverty, reducing infant mortality, achieving universal education and eliminating the gap in education by 2015 (Hayes 2007:176). Education benefits illiterate and poverty stricken communities like

Yelequelleh; research has proven this. As Hopper noted, educated farmers in developing nations enhanced productivity thus causing parents to educate their children (Hopper 2012:85). This can be seen amongst the very few women in Yelequelleh who have acquired very little amount of education and or skill training outside of the community. By achieving education and skill training in urban areas and other training institutions in small skill business management, agriculture and heavy duty mechanics, they help to support their homes and send their children to school.

Considering Sen's view on education, Hopper presents the following analysis of what education and skill training can achieve:

Firstly for Hopper, education provides access to employment opportunities that will make the individual person to take care of herself and her household (Hopper 2012:85). During an interview with the respondents on how they understand education and how they think it can impact their lives, they affirm with anxiety that if any learning opportunity is provided for them, it will initiate total change for them, their families and the community. They also expressed that acquiring education and skill will make them like other women both in their community and urban areas. As such SD1 states,

[...] Like my friend in Gbarnga... I can now help my husband to pay our five children's school fees. So when you learn anything and put it in use, you can have the power to do anything (5.5).

Finding from this study shows how women of Yelequelleh are eager to have access to education and skill training. For them, they feel positively envious of women whose lives are impacted through education and skill training. SD1 further states,

[...] when I see my friend woman of the same age that is educated, I envy her...yes I am speaking the true...I want to be like her (5.5).

Additionally, the respondent states that she wants to earn more money, own a car, and make laws in parliament as a representation of her community.

This leads me to an important point of why the LAC/UMC should address the educational needs of women in Yelequelleh. Another point the finding shows is how some of the women expressed

their concerns of reaching beyond individual enrichment when they have access to education and skill training. For SD2 she states,

[...] when we learn like other women, we will be able to do something good for ourselves, our families, the community and our United Methodist Church (5.5).

Hopper's second argument in his concept demonstrates how education builds up values such as self-discipline, self-motivation and the importance of hard work (Hopper 2012:85). Finding from this research does not only show that the participants affirmed the importance of education and skill training, but also work. Again, the United Methodist Church, through its Social Principles do not only show the need for education for women, but also the importance of work

[...] every person has the right to a job at a living wage... (Paragraph 163, Section C, and UMC BOD 2012:129).

My understanding is that women of Yelequelleh will be self-disciplined, motivated and hard working if they have access to education and skill training. They will be like other women in urban settings if the needed education is provided. Hence, SD1 states,

[...] for me education means work. Education will make us to work like our friend who is now working with the Chinese Company...driving truck in Gbartala; she can sit and talk with the white man...her boss man (5.4).

Hopper finally states that education creates new opportunities and new ideas (2012:85). My finding shows that education and skill attainment for women in Yelequelleh will create productivity and initiate a better function of women in their homes, their families and the community. This was proven during an interview with one of the participants who acquired skill from a workshop she attended in an urban community. This is what she said,

[...] they teach us how to start market with small money...the way we should be able to save our profit and how to talk to our customers. Now my business is growing because of what I learn from that workshop last year (5.5).

I found this to be an important means of how the United Methodist Church in Liberia can fully implement its educational programs across every sector of the Conference in all parts of Liberia so as to spiritually and physically impact women of the Church who live in rural areas. Through the provision of education and skill training for women in Yelequelleh, they will probably be able to help themselves, their families and community, have job opportunities, create new ideas

as a means of becoming successful and be like their male counterparts and other women in urban settings.

### **6.2.3 Education: A Path to Building the Capacities of Yelequelleh Women**

Professor Sen sees education as the ability and the freedom a people has to live their lives in the choices they have or want (Sen 2001:293). His focus is that education is central to building the capacity of the individual in a way that education and skill formation will help the person to be more productive thereby contributing to self-development (Sen 2001:293). Finding from my study shows that though the LAC/UMC is involved in the educational system of Liberia, the Church educational programs do not fully meet the needs of women in Yelequelleh. The participants also agreed that education is one of the best paths that can build their capacities in the community and make them compatible with their male counterparts and women in urban settings.

I see this as a key factor that, when given keen attention by the United Methodist Church of Liberia, women's ability to effect major change will impact their lives and the community, and then the church will be well noted for its human development approach for women in a rural Third World community like Yelequelleh. Hence, SD2 pointed out to the ability acquired by a friend who obtained quality skill training from the Lutheran Training Institute in Lofa County, Liberia; how the friend's capacity has been built over the time.

[...] they teach her to make garden for plenty things...she is now making money out of pepper, bitter-ball, and okra she planted... (5.3).

Regarding Sen's capability approach, it can be noted that education and skill formation will build the capacity of Yelequelleh women, thus enhancing a productive life.

### **6.2.4 Education as Human Right: They too must have the Same Right!**

Education is considered and given keen attention as one of the basic "inherent dignity" all persons should benefit. The "United Nations" conferences in Jomtien, Thailand and Dakar, Senegal emphasized the concept of "education for all" with a focus that provides that "all citizens" have the right to benefit from a form of education that will meet their learning needs

(Hooper 2012:87). Similarly, the United Methodist Church, in its Social Principles supports this concept of education as a right for all persons.

[...] “our respect for the inherent dignity of all persons leads us to call for the recognition, protection and implementation of the principles of the Universal Declaration of human rights so that communities and individuals may claim and enjoy their universal, indivisible and inalienable rights” (Paragraph 162, UMC, BOD 2012:116).

I come to realize that the solution to the problem of illiteracy amongst women in Yelequelleh is the provision of this basic social service which they see as their right. This will have a life time impact on them. Finding from this study also show that participants are actually aware that education and skill training is something they are entitle to and that the Church which they form part of should serve as an advocate and a major implementing factor in achieving this “basic right” in their community. Hence, SD2 said that,

[...] our pastors make reports in most of our Charge Conferences recommending Night and Vocational Schools so we too can have the right and opportunity to learn... (5.7)... [Uhhh...] I think these women have rights like men and other women in Monrovia and Gbarnga who are learning... (5.7).

I observed that if women in this community should realize this “inherent dignity”, which is the right to education, the United Methodist Church of Liberia should engage and collaborate with the local government to provide such needs for women of Yelequelleh.

### **6.3 Development**

“Development”, which is one main theme for this thesis aims at providing opportunities for productivity, creates and improve human capacities (UNDP 2009:9). Development does not only focus on the material needs, but also the political life of a people, their right to participate, social as well as education and healthcare. Development should probably seek to enhance a “good change” in the lives of the people (Chambers 1997 in Hopper 2012). Subsequently, the United Methodist Church also supports development for the good of its members in every part of the world.

[...] we affirm the efforts of all developers who place human values at the heart of their planning (UMC, BOD 2012:124).

Finding from my study shows that effective development in Yelequelleh cannot be met adequately without education and skill training for women. It is clear that though the community is not developed in terms of education, infrastructure, etc, participants acknowledge the good change development brings to a people and their community. Most of the informants spoke out of experience they said they have from other rural communities that are undertaking development programs like building vocational school, market buildings, etc. This is how SD2 put it,

[...] oh yes...development is good because it will bring change to our community like the people of Tokpayeapolu (5.4).

I also find out that development is lagging behind in Yelequelleh because women participation in important matters is almost impossible; that is, they have little chance to contribute to key decisions because they lack education and skill training. Hence, CL1 said it this way,

[...] how can our community be adequately developed when the women who are in large population offer only 10% of their effort; all because they have no good skills (5.4).

Regarding the importance of development in the life of the people, the informants asserted that their lives may probably meet improvement once the church is involved in the provision of education and skills for them.

### **6.3.1 Impacting Yelequelleh Women through Poverty Reduction**

Poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure a sustainable livelihood. The manifestations of poverty include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and skill training and other basic social services, social discrimination and exclusion as well as the lack of participation in decision-making (UMC, Book of Discipline 2012). The “United Nations” report on “Sustainable Development” states that over seven million people still live in extreme poverty of which majority of this population live on less than 1.9 dollars daily in Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. About 70% of the global total of extremely poor people account for this million population (UNDP 2016). The report further states that extreme poverty is caused by unemployment, social exclusion, lack of access to education and skill training.

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church affirms the alleviation of poverty as a means of impacting its members in every society in the world.

[...] As a Church, we are called to support the poor and challenge the rich. To begin to alleviate poverty, we support policies as: adequate income maintenance, quality education, descent housing, job training, meaningful employment opportunities, adequate medical and hospital care...to protect creation's integrity (UMC, Book of Discipline, 2012:130).

Though the Church sees the reduction of poverty in the human society as a means of impacting lives (UMC, BOD 2012), finding from my research shows that the inhabitants of this community, whose service has fully been concentrated to the ministry work of the LAC/UMC over the period of 58 years, falls below the “UN’s” poverty line. “Unemployment” rate is high amongst women of the community; they cannot afford to send their children to good schools because they themselves do not have means of generating funds.

[...] we will send our children to school if we are working and making money (5.7)

Secondly, the study shows that “basic social services” such as hospitals, clinics, vocational and skill training centers that should create job opportunities and help to reduce poverty in Yelequelleh, are lacking. I also observed that the community is poverty stricken because of social exclusion.

[...] maybe they finish forgetting about us or they are not thinking that we are part of the church or because we live in the interior... (5.2).

It is clear from this research that the cause of social exclusion which serves as hindrance to achieving basic social services such as education and job training, etc, for women in Yelequelleh is due to the lack of inclusive educational policy-making by the Department of General Education and Ministry of the LAC/UMC where even those in rural communities should be impacted through all forms of education. Again, the Church is not speaking as the voice of the poor and needy women of the community to local and national government. These policy-makers affirmed their acts as “mistakes” and “unequal treatment” done to women not only in Yelequelleh, but also to most rural areas of the Conference.

[...] we have made a very big mistake...no educational or skill training programs have been formulated to help not only women in Yelequelleh, but also in other rural settings of

our Conference...it is true that we have given more attention to women in urban communities than those in rural areas (5.2.8).

Thirdly, the study shows that if poverty must be reduced amongst women in Yelequelleh, the LAC/UMC of which they all form part should help to provide the needed education and skill training opportunity in their community. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church supports policies that will encourage equitable economic growth and the provision of a just opportunity to all (p.131). I observed during this study period, informants challenging the LAC/UMC to provide them this just opportunity of education through advocacy or Church initiative programs that should probably help to alleviate poverty from their community. This is how SD1 put it,

[...] the Church should help to provide the needed education and skill for women living in rural settings...this will serve as a means to reduce poverty and enhance healthy families...in Yelequelleh (5.9).

The United Methodist Church of Liberia, which serves as a liberating structure of God to humanity has an important role in making sure that education and skill training opportunities are provided for women in Yelequelleh. This will serve as a means to reduce poverty, promote economic opportunities where women's lives will be impacted in Yelequelleh.

### **6.3.2 Impacting Yelequelleh Women through Health Care Provision**

Health is an important social service that every person is entitled to. Women living in rural settings like Yelequelleh are to have equal access to health care as those living in urban communities. Hence, the United Methodist Church affirms the need for healthcare as a basic right.

[...] Health care is basic Human rights... (UMC, BOD 2012:126).

The Church, through its Social Principles call for the provision of healthcare as a responsibility we owe each other no matter our locations. Quoting from Ezekiel 34:4a, the Social Principles states that, God points out the failures of the leadership of Israel to care for the weak. "You don't strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strays or seek out the lost".

One of the astonishing things this study found out is the lack of health care facilities in Yelequelleh since the existence of the United Methodist Church over the past 58 years of ministry. The process of getting women to the Phebe Hospital, which is a distance of four hours drive from the community and a deplorable road condition, leads most pregnant women vulnerable to death or still-birth. Phebe Hospital is an Episcopal Church own and operated medical hospital located in Suacoco, another community after Yelequelleh. For the respondents, the lack of medical facilities in their community leads to the loss of lives. Hence, this is what IW2 has to say,

[...] we don't even have no good hospital that when we are sick or our children...we can go there. Pregnant woman-self can die here because before you go to Phebe...no way again (5.6).

The 6<sup>th</sup> “MDGs” which speaks about the combat of “HIV/AIDs”, malaria and other killer diseases, focuses on a healthy family. Research shows that countries with higher level of women education have lower rates of “HIV/AIDs”. Women in rural communities like Yelequelleh who have not received any level of education and skills are most likely affected by malaria and other killer diseases (Tembon and Fort 2008). Hence, the education of women in Yelequelleh as this study shows, will serve as an effective tool in combating “HIV/AIDs”, malaria and other common killer diseases. Again, participants acknowledged that it is the responsibility of the LAC/UMC to help provide these healthcare facilities, either through advocacy or Church own programs, which the community does not benefit. They told me that this could be done by telling local or national government or through the Church own initiatives. CL1 said that,

[...] we listen to radio everyday that...”HIV/AIDs” are killing people all the times especially women are the main target. The Lutheran Church teach their people in other communities to prevent themselves and children from “HIV/AIDs” and other infectious diseases...I think the United Methodist Church need to do the same in this community... (5.4).

The interviewees value healthcare as one of the paramount social services their community is in need of. In order to keep a healthy family, the women who are mostly vulnerable to infectious and common killer diseases asserted that the LAC/UMC should help provide the needed facilities that will address adequate health issues in Yelequelleh.

### 6.3.3 Impact through Sustainable Rural Agricultural Programs

Education and skill training can be linked to an increase in quantity farm productivity. This is because farmers who are educated stand a chance to produce in quantity due to access to agricultural and cooperative training. They are able to seek more contracts with agricultural extension agencies and are in better position to implement new ideas to use modern technology (Floro and Wolf 1990). This is in line with Hopper's theory of development where educated farmers stand to benefit from their farm by educating their children (Hopper 2012:85).

The United Methodist Church, through its Social Principles, supports sustainable agricultural programs as a means of impacting the livelihood of its people, especially those in rural settings who depend mainly on the soil for survivor.

[...] A prerequisite for meeting the nutritional needs of the world's population is an agricultural system that uses sustainable methods...and promotes a livelihood for people that work the land. We support sustainable agricultural programs... (UMC, BOD 2012:123).

The fact that the United Methodist Church supports sustainable agriculture programs as a means of impact, the LAC/UMC should help to provide agricultural facilities and educate women of Yelequelleh because 95% of their livelihoods depend on agriculture. Additionally, education and training is important for women in Yelequelleh because it will enhance much improvement in agricultural productivities since the women are mostly involved with the farming activities. This is affirm when IW4 said,

[...] since the Kukertonor Swamp Rice people come here and teach few women how to make swamp rice farm, we do it good and help ourselves...at least if our United Methodist Church was doing the same thing here for us...it will help us (5.4).

The research also shows that educating women through agricultural initiatives will not only improve productivity in the farming sector, but will help to eradicate poverty and end hunger, improve infrastructure development in the community, help women to send their children to school and also enhance freedom for them in the development process of Yelequelleh. This is similar to Sen's theory of development as freedom (Sen 2001:292). Again, participating in any development initiatives through agricultural training will help women in Yelequelleh to keep in charge of their own lives (Hopper 2012:160). Additionally, it will also help women of the

community to probably attain their individual growth which is a goal for development (Sen 2002:17-20).

[...] the money we got last year from our farm...we buy zinc for our church in Yandewon...we the women...no men join us to make the farm and buy the zinc. We only want the Church to come and train us in all these things...we will do plenty good things here if they teach us...we even help to pay some of our pastor salary and pay three children school fees (5.4).

Education and improvement in the agriculture sector is one of the focuses of “MDGs” 1: to end extreme poverty and hunger. Hence, the provision of skills for women in the agricultural sector in Yelequelleh is important because majority of them are in the fore front in the farming activities. This will subsequently enhance a better knowledge, skills and new ideas, productivity and self-development (Hopper 2012:85). Additionally, it will help to build their capacities (Sen2001:292) since farming forms 95% of their livelihood.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **7 An Analysis of the Findings**

The aim of this study was to see whether the United Methodist Church of Liberia had or is having any impact on the lives of women in Yelequelleh through the provision of education and skill training. This study was conducted with focus on the participants understanding on the role the LAC/UMC had or is playing to bring about positive change in their lives. With this study, I developed three sub questions that focused on how the informants evaluate the efforts of the LAC/UMC's educational programs, how they evaluate the relationship between education and their own empowerment, and how can they connect education to community development. The responses to these sub questions will help contribute to answering the main research question for this study.

#### **7.1 The Church in Meeting the Need of the People**

##### **How do women in Yelequelleh evaluate the efforts of the LAC/UMC's educational programs?**

The study shows that the informants serve and contribute immensely to the ministry work of the Church in their locale. Their involvement in promoting the functional activities of the church cannot be over emphasized. But the church has applied no significant effort through a specific form of education that aims at bringing changes in their lives. The participants also feel marginalized base on what they term as "their location or maybe the church has forgotten about them". This could be seen as the church been "thoughtless and neutral" in the well-being of this majority women "population" that is contributing to its ministry. The church is vision as a community that stands to give hope and transform its people. As a custodian of the message of change, Chavannes Juene asserts, the church cannot remain uninvolved and indifferent in providing the needs of the people (Juene in Samuel & Sugden 1987:222). It is important that the church gives more attention to needy people especially women in rural areas that are lagging behind in terms of education and skill training. The promotion of education is necessary, but its diversification in a context that will suit the "socio-economic" and physical needs of the people,

is very important. Such educational provision will enhance a great deal of “human dignity, empowerment”, respect and a total change for women in Yelequelleh.

Secondly, the participants expressed their dissatisfaction about the way they are treated both in the community and the church. Traditional acts create obstacles to their chance for education; the church is seen as being lax in breaking these barriers through teaching and preaching. Again, the church creates all forms of “educational opportunities” for their friend women in urban settings while they too do not have such means to their disposal. Juene terms this as social injustice (Juene in Samuel & Sugden 1987:222). Consequently, these acts are keeping the informants in bondage to “ignorance, illiteracy, poverty”, etc. Conversely, the Bible has provided means of dealing with unjust social and economic systems that dehumanize a people as it states in the writings of the Prophet Isaiah: “the spirit of the Lord is upon me; because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty for the captives and the opening of the prison, to them that are bound and to provide for those who grieve in Zion; to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:1-3, KJV of the Holy Bible). However, the United Methodist Church in Liberia is seen in a unique position of providing education for the informants either through advocacy or self initiatives. The study shows that informants are challenging the United Methodist Church in Liberia to reach beyond its urban horizons, identify and get deeply involved in the lives of women living in rural settings in a way that will enhance equality among them, their male counterparts and their friend women in urban communities. They see the Church as a “liberating” structure used by God to confront those unjust “socio-economic” and traditional systems that are suppressing them in their community.

## **7.2 A Need for Inclusive Educational Programs**

With regards to the positive impact education is providing in the lives of women in other parts of Liberia and the world, it will remain difficult for women in rural communities like Yelequelleh to deal with present day realities of “poverty”, common killer diseases like malaria, “infant and maternal mortality”, the abuse of their rights, etc, in the absent of inclusive education. “Inclusive education” is a system that affords everyone the opportunity to achieve effective and relevant

learning process in his or her life time either in academic or skill training settings (UNESCO 2015:3). Such “education” is important in the life of the person, his or her family and the community in which he or she lives. As a “fundamental right” that is not only enshrined in the “United Nations Declaration of Human rights”, but also in the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, education serves as a medium for good change in one’s life. Hence, the study shows that the informants are eagerly in need of an inclusive educational system that can be manifested through vocational training where they will acquire knowledge and skills in soap making, baking, tailoring, agriculture, etc. They expressed that this will help to improve their conditions in the community. The church, as Juene states, cannot choose to remain neutral or ignore this process and the well-being of its people who are in need of such learning opportunity (Juene in Samuel & Sugden 1987:222). Notwithstanding, the LAC/UMC through the “Department of General Education and Ministry” should include programs in their curriculum that will specifically enrich the lives of women even in their rural contexts. Inclusive educational programs can be achieved when the leaders understand the ministry objectives of the church through the Social Principles and mission statement where the felt needs of the people can be provided.

### **7.3 How do women in Yelequelleh evaluate the relationship between education and empowerment?**

It is clear from this research that before Methodism in Yelequelleh, a traditional form of education called the Poro and Sande schools exists. Male dominance silences and suppresses women and keeps them in the role of home keepers. The study affirms that such act has left women vulnerable and dependable to their male counterparts for survivor and decision-makings in the community. Women empowerment is far from reality in Yelequelleh due to the lack of education as proven by this research. The study shows that when the informants acquire education that suits their context, it will create more empowerment opportunities that will enable them work and earn money, establish cooperative agriculture farms and micro finance loan project that will help build their homes, their local churches and the community. Empowering women of Yelequelleh through the provision of education as shown by this study will serve as gateways to socio-economic viability that will enable them send their children to school. This,

for them will serve as a medium of investing and sustaining generational change within the community. Therefore, the informants see education as a direct medium for their empowerment.

#### **7.4 How do women in Yelequelleh connect education to community development?**

The informants' responses and the example of the Baptist Mission of Haiti integrated development program provide the need for education in developing the lives of Yelequelleh women and their community. The informants indicated their willingness to join their male counterparts in any program that will bring about developing their community when educated. They also expressed this when they told me about their gift of zinc to renovate one of their local churches and a Palava hut in the area. The fund was generated through a mini agriculture farm made by them. The research affirms that training in agriculture will eradicate hunger, poverty and also enhance development amongst women in Yelequelleh.

As per the Haiti experience, Juene asserts that the preaching of the gospel by over 200 Baptist Churches for 40 years period did not bring any change to the physical conditions of the people in that rural community. After a long period of no impact, the Baptist Church realized that its attitude towards the people could remain inert in their social and economic challenges. In August of 1979, as Juene states, leaders of the church met to analyze the situation of the Haiti society (1987:224). As a way of playing an important role as agent of change, the church decided to start a form of "Integrated Development Program" that seeks to create awareness of the people of their conditions and motivated them to act independently where they struggled for a better living condition through a development program they were trained to sustain in their local community. The program, as Juene asserts, gave the community dwellers a sense of dignity, achievement and a living hope (Juene in Samuel & Sugden 1987:224). The leaders of the Baptist church motivated the people to remain confident and present a list of priorities that will initiate self-development. They motivated and trained Haiti farmers in marketing that has made the people to have greater control of their own lives and socio-economic future. Through this program, local leaders were trained, agriculture cooperatives were organized for economic production, healthcare provisions were implemented, and the people were inclusive in decision-making, etc, thus making the gospel a liberating structure where Christianity gained deeper meaning in the lives of the people (Juene in Samuel & Sugden 1987:224).

The study affirms that women education is important to development in Yelequelleh. One of the paramount concerns this research also find interesting to the informants is sustainable agriculture programs since 95% of them are mostly involved in farming as a means of sustaining themselves and their children. The United Methodist Church in Liberia like the Baptist Mission Church of West Haiti needs to undertake an “Integrated Development Program” for women in Yelequelleh where they will be trained in their own areas of priority that will transform and impact their lives and add values to them. For example, training in quality farm productivities as an integrated program is one necessity since major portion of their survivor depend on farming. Being trained in agriculture will improve their socio-economic capacities and will also enable them to send their children to school (Hopper 2012:85).

### **7.5 The Church as a Steward**

The church is responsible to properly manage all available resources for ministry purposes that will respond to the felt needs of marginalized and underdeveloped segments of society (Juene in Samuel & Sugden 1987:225). In the scripture, God gives humankind responsibility for all creation; to take care and improve all living beings on the surface of the entire earth (Genesis 1:26, KJV of the Holy Bible). There is a doctrine of redistribution of what God interested us with in this responsibility. This doctrine calls us to redistribute all that God has given us so as to positively impact the lives of the neediest in our communities. The United Methodist Church which is seen as a long time partner in the provision of education in Liberia needs to demonstrate in its quest for holistic transformation, a pattern that will enhance a just redistribution of its educational programs that will impact not only women living in urban areas, but most especially those in rural communities who have the least possibility of access to education and skill training. Moreover, the study shows that leaders of the Department of General Education and Ministry affirm the lack of funds and transportation mechanism to establish and support any form of educational programs that will enhance impact in the lives of women in rural areas like Yelequelleh. The concern from this research is how is the LAC/UMC maintaining the 142 schools around Liberia, but cannot establish and sponsor an education program that will focus most especially, on women in rural communities that are vulnerable to illiteracy? This research sees a fractional stewardship on the part of the United Methodist Church in Liberia where the lives of one group of its members suffer the cost of illiteracy while the others are benefiting.

Stewardship through equal distribution of resources is what makes the church a unique community. As Juene asserts, redistribution of resources to everyone was a mark that distinguished the early church from the society (Juene in Samuel & Sugden 1987:222). In order to properly manage and equally distribute its resources and programs that should impact women and contribute to human and material development across the Annual Conference, the United Methodist Church in Liberia needs to return to the stewardship method of the early Christian Church mentioned in the scripture: “and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common” (Acts 4:32-35 in Samuel & Sugden 1987:222). All benefited from the Church rather than an individual or a specific group of people. They shared the resources and good of the entire body in order to impact the whole.

## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The right to and the importance of “education for all” is supported by world bodies such as the “United Nations”, “World Bank” and most religious communities of which the United Methodist Church of Liberia is a part. In development studies, education for women, especially in rural communities is important as proven by research. However, this cannot exclude the fact that the life and conditions of the people can be transformed and impacted by the influence of the Church. The Church can motivate and pursue a form of education that will enhance development work in this rural community. Moreover, Christainity is seen to be important in changing the lives of the people. Furthermore, the informants see how other Christian denominations are impacting, enhancing the dignity and a good living standard for women in other communities around them. They see these provisions as the outcome of education which is valuable in development initiatives. Though they are valued as housewives, home-keepers, caretakers and mothers in this patriarchal community, the informants acknowledged that education and skill training, when acquired, will add values to them, improve their conditions, enhance empowerment opportunities and add substance to their voices in decision-making in their homes, the church as well as their environment. Additionally, in the view of these women, when they receive education, it will help to reduce poverty and end hunger in Yelequelleh. Even though the presence and support of these women to the ministry work of the LAC/UMC in this community is seen to be more encouraging, they feel marginalized when it comes to the unequal distribution of the resources and educational programs of the United Methodist Church of Liberia.

In answering the question how do women in Yelequelleh evaluate the efforts of the LAC/UMC’s educational programs, women in Yelequelleh unanimously affirmed that the United Methodist Church in Liberia is insensitive to transforming and impacting their lives through the provision of education that suits their context. The informants told me that they are feeling the pains and frustration of illiteracy that has been creating backwardness in their lives. This is also causing some to leave the United Methodist Church and joining other denominations in the community. From their perspectives, it is clear that the LAC/UMC has applied no efforts that aim at providing an educational structure that will bring change to the lives of women in Yelequelleh.

From this study, it is visible that education and skill will enhance capabilities as well as promote women's independence in Yelequelleh when provided. Ordinarily, the ministry work of the United Methodist Church is not only rooted in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in words, but also in deeds. Proclamation in word is spiritual. However, the possibility of physical impact is the provision of social and economic needs such as education and skills. These requirements, as well as others, will probably improve the status of women in this rural community.

In addressing the second research question that speaks to the relationship between education and empowerment of women in Yelequelleh, the women's answer to this question enhances an urgent attention from the LAC/UMC in meeting their need for education and skill. For the informants, they see education as a concrete medium that creates opportunities. It is shown in this research that without education and skills, women risk empowerment opportunities in the area. Though the concept of empowerment has many different meanings, some scholars see it as a self-actualization where a person is transformed into a productive member of society (Parpart 2002). However, if the informants are to gain self-worth, be productive and gain freedom from traditional norms that are suppressing them in Yelequelleh, they need to be afforded the opportunity to acquire education and skills. It is shown by this research that the LAC/UMC, over the period of 58 years has ignored the educational need of these women within Yelequelleh by focusing mostly on the spiritual (the spoken word) but not on the physical, social, economic needs.

With regards to the discussion with the respondents about the connection of education and community development, their answer to the question is unmistakable due to the fact that, they form 65% of the overall population of the community. The study shows that women in Yelequelleh view education as a cardinal factor without which development in their community cannot meet its goals. Moreover, education will enhance development opportunities not only in their lives, but their household and the environment in which they find themselves. Though traditional practices affect the lives of women in Yelequelleh as indicated by this research, this does not give the LAC/UMC a ground to remain uninvolved and indifferent in helping to develop the socio-economic status of these women and their community. God's intention for the church is to help redeem the needy once and for all from their spiritual, physical and social decay

and incapability. This redemption does not occur in a vacuum, but in persons in relationship with their community where they will become better than they were before. Consequently, the informants see themselves as a major part of a community (which is the LAC/UMC) that gives hope and liberation. Conversely, the insensitivity of the United Methodist Church of Liberia to provide a form of education that will transform these informants could probably be termed as unfairness. This research shows that these women see education and skills to be more important in developing self-esteem, confidence, independence, and that education is an important tool for community development. In concrete realities, educated women have freedom to express themselves, influence decisions in their families, the choices of bearing children and reducing the rate of maternal mortality. While these concrete realities are important for development, it is probably seen as an error on the part of the LAC/UMC not to provide these women the needed education and skills that will eradicate illiteracy and help develop the people and their community over the period of 58 years of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in this rural community. Proclaiming the good news is good, but the provision of social and economic needs such as education and skills etc, that will shift the lives of the informants and provide real opportunities that will impact them, is the ultimate need the LAC/UMC needs to address for now. As this study has shown, education and skills for women in Yelequelleh will redeem them from ignorance and illiteracy; make them compete with their male counterparts and their friends in urban settings. This will make them to live a happy and productive live.

### **Recommendations**

Women education is a significant indicator of the social and economic development of Yelequelleh. Based upon findings from this research, and in order for the United Methodist Church of Liberia to enhance change in the lives of women in Yelequelleh, this study recommends some effective actions for the curriculum development and implementation process of the LAC/UMC and the leaders of the Church as well as the way forward for the education of women in the community.

First, a regular review of the DGEM's curriculum to reflect an equal and balance educational provision system where women of every sector and location of the Liberia Annual Conference will have equal access to a form of education that suits their context.

Second, the Church should provide in-service education on the implementation of policies that will impact women in rural communities.

Third, “agricultural education” should be intensified especially amongst women in rural communities like Yelequelleh since their survivor depends on farming activities. A quality engagement into the agricultural sector through cash and food crops production will enhance major support not only for rural women but also the entire Liberia Annual Conference. Additionally, it will help reduce the dependency syndrome of women to males in the community as well as the Liberia Annual Conference. It will also help to provide good salary incentives for Pastors across the entire Conference and support other mainline programs of the Church.

Fourth, to ensure a community in which all is treated equally regardless of sex, the LAC/UMC should get involve in preaching sermons and teachings that will directly address and help to eradicate those ill-traditional norms that are practiced against women in the community. Teaching is one of the attributes of the church that Jesus commanded to always practice in every society of the world. The LAC/UMC needs not to compromise or remain lax in helping its members understand God’s will for one another. When the people understand who each of them is in the image of God, they will treat each other with equal respect and dignity and males will not be given priorities over females in Yelequelleh.

Fifth, since education is an important process that brings positive change and development in the lives of a people and their environment, the United Methodist Church of Liberia should

- Establish an “Integrated Development Program” that will have components of both vocational training and night schools where women of the community will be able to acquire knowledge and skills. This program should mostly focus on women in rural communities of the conference because they are lagging behind in terms of education and a better living standard for decades. This will empower and strengthen them and also give them a sense of belonging to the Church.
- Establish a “rural women loan program” as a way of empowering women in small skill and medium businesses. This will also help them to maintain and sustain agricultural and other skill training initiatives. It will also enable them to give back to the church as a way of developing their community.

- Recruit and train people and provide them good salaries and incentives for a sustainable implementation of these programs.

Sixth, the United Methodist Church of Liberia should advocate to local and national government for the education and development of the people. Yelequelleh risks women full participations and representations in key positions both in the church, society, and government. It is because of traditional practices and the reluctance of the church to help them acquire any form of education within the course of 58 years of the church's existence in the community. Currently, there is a massive awareness of education both in the public and private sectors in Liberia and the government is advancing compulsory primary education that will impact all of its citizens. More besides, the government is collaborating with the church through the provision of funds as a means of helping to educate all the people in all parts of the country. If this system should affect especially women in rural areas of Liberia, the United Methodist Church, which is one of the largest Christian denominations in Liberia should engage government, utilize resources that will accommodate a learning process to impact women in rural settings of the conference. This will serve as a means of creating opportunities, enable women to be productive and independent and moreover, help to shape the future of the people and their community.

Lastly, I would like to submit the following idea for further research in the field of education and development for rural women: How the Church can do effective evangelism by providing education for rural women.

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**Appendix: 1 -Interview Guide**

Name

Age

Are you married?

Do you have children; if yes, how many?

How long have you lived in this community?

How long have you worked with the LAC/UMC?

**Questionnaire for leaders of the DGEM/LAC/UMC**

- 1) How are you contributing to the educational need of women in Yelequelleh?
- 2) Besides academic education, are you involved with vocational education for rural women?
- 3) What is your understanding of the Church in terms of education for all?
- 4) Does the LAC/UMC see education for rural women as a necessity for development?

**Questionnaire for informants in Yelequelleh**

- 1) How do you evaluate the efforts of the LAC/UMC educational programs?
- 2) Has the Church enhanced education as a means of impacting women in Yelequelleh?
- 3) How do you evaluate the relationship between education and your own empowerment?
- 4) How do you personally understand education?
- 5) What does education mean for you?
- 6) How can you connect education to community development?
- 7) What are or were some problems that stop you from having education?

**Appendix: 2**LETTER OF CONSENT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL EDUCATION AND  
MINISTRY, LAC/UMC

September 25, 2016

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am reading my masters in Religion, Society and Global Issues at the MF Norwegian school of Theology in Oslo City, Norway and conducting a research on the topic: **“Evaluating the Impact of the United Methodist Church on Women Education for Development in Yelequelleh Community, Bong County, Liberia”**. Yelequelleh is a rural community located in the Gbarnga District Conference of the United Methodist Church, Liberia. I will be conducting ten separate interviews in Monrovia and Yelequelleh Community, Gbarnga District of our conference. You have been selected as one invited to assist in this study.

I realize that education for women in rural communities is a sensitive problem as people hold different cultural and traditional views on the state of women in those communities. Again, the LAC/UMC is concern about holistic transformation through “education for all”. As we gradually transition from an illiterate society to a literate one, I believe that when women in rural communities such as Yelequelleh are educated, they will enhance major development initiatives in our churches, their communities and society. Again, I hope that the general Christian community will be helped because of your participation.

During the interview, recordings will be done and I assure you that your responses will be kept confidential and all data materials collected from the interview will be destroyed after the research is completed and my thesis is approved.

Please be aware that you can refuse responding to any questions during the interview and your participation is entirely voluntary and will highly appreciate you being part of this study. Below is my contact for any information you may need; 0886941045; email, [peterfkaykpah@yahoo.com](mailto:peterfkaykpah@yahoo.com).

Please sign and date this letter in the below spaces to indicate your voluntary acceptance to participate in this study. Thanks for your help.

Joy and peace,

Peter F. Kaykpah

I volunteer to participate in this study described above and so indicate my signature below:

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print your name: \_\_\_\_\_

