



NORWEGIAN  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

**The Role of Women Groups in the Methodist Church in Kenya: The Complexity of Fighting Against Poverty.**

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## **Dedication**

*To my dear dearest Husband George Lingili, my beloved children: Loise Makena Lingili,  
Stephen Justus Munene and Abigail Kathure*

*To My dear mother, Elizabeth John.*

*In loving memory of my dear father, John Kiaira*

## **Abstract**

This study seeks to explore the role women groups in the Methodist church in Kenya are playing to fight poverty. To realize the aimed goal of exploring what role women are playing in the Methodist church to fight against poverty, the questions guiding the study were (a) what are women's experiences as far as poverty is concerned and how do they conceptualize it? (b) What activities are carried out by the women groups and ways are the women in the Methodist churches under study doing to fight poverty? (c) To what extent does the Methodist church the umbrella of the women group organizations; support the women in their fight against poverty?

The study used qualitative inquiry employing a multiple case study approach. The tools used for collecting data were semi-structured interviews, observations and a field notebook. Key findings from the study indicate that: The women had suffered the effects of poverty such as inability to meet basic needs: food, decent shelter, clothes, inability to cater for maternity cost, illiteracy and lacked income; Landlessness; Single parenthood; violence against women and could not access funding from regular lending agencies.

The women in the Methodist churches in the study have formed self-help groups and are carrying out projects to generate income. They are planting trees to control environmental degradation. They are learning family planning and prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. They are also being educated on; human rights, curbing child labor and school-drop outs, female genital mutilation (FGM), better methods of agriculture, such as poultry rearing, production of bio-gas, making of improved *Jikos* (*Jikos* is a Kiswahili name for stoves), learning general hygiene, cookery, weaving, basketry and knitting. They sing inspiring and educative songs, dance for entertainment and dramatize bible verses as a way of expressing their ideas, feelings and opinions. All these are done in the name of fighting against poverty.

This makes the style of fighting poverty employed by the women groups look complex. The focus of the thesis is the complexity of their experiences and conceptions of poverty on one hand and the activities they take part in to fight poverty on the other. Hence

the title of the study is: The role of women groups in the Methodist Church in Kenya: The Complexity of Fighting Against poverty.

The church is supporting women under study to fight against poverty by offering pastoral care. It offers moral support to the women as they carry out the projects. The other members in the Methodist church in study help the women to contribute when they hold Harambee. <sup>1</sup>A Kiswahili word used to mean joining hands to make any challenging task easy.

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<sup>1</sup> A Kiswahili word used to mean join hands to make any challenging task easy. It is a tradition that was started after independence to raise the standard of living. People come together to help. It is a communal self-help event. This is used too to mean coming together to solicit funds. People are invited from the society and government officials as special guests to help raise fund for different purposes.

## **Acknowledgements**

This journey started in January 2012 when I enrolled at MF. It was so clear that the time to write as other scholars do had come. I had considered religion being one of the dominant features in both the rural and urban set up. Its varied roles lingered in my mind. Another group of people that I considered were women who as far as I know are a key people in any social setup. I have grown up with a mother who I thought never got tired till one day when my father encouraged me telling me: “Mukiri everybody gets tired, even, the most hardworking.” This is the time it dawned on me that under all cost I had to work hard.

When I coined all these issues in my mind I concluded on the title of my research to be: the role women in the Methodist church were playing to fight against poverty. Why the Methodist church? This is a church I was brought up in.

The journey of writing started, but can never be a one man’s job. Hence this is not a sole person’s glory. First I thank God for enabling me. I am grateful to Christ embassy “Love World Inc.”. Here I have developed a mindset of Excellency. With a slogan: I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me!

Various other people have been instrumental academically too. To my supervisor Liv Lied, I can only say you are a great woman! Thanks for molding me. I am also thankful to my brother Tiwonge Manda. This is a man who I can refer to as a technician devoted to his area of specialization. He responded to my calls for assistance at any time, especially when I needed help formatting my document. Likewise, I am grateful to Vanasio Kashoni, who he helped me pick as I drew the very first draft preliminary draft.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This is a study that seeks to explore the role women groups in the Methodist church in Kenya are playing to fight against poverty. This study is based on a case study of two Methodist churches in Kenya; named church A and B. The women groups in the two study churches have employed a variety of ways to fight against poverty. They have projects that are income generating ;they plant trees as away of controlling environmental degradation, for fuel, fruits, timber, herbs and to beautify the environment among other uses. The women objectively seek information on issues that slow development such as uncontrolled giving birth which they call having a big family. They learn more about diseases, such as malaria, HIV and AIDS, their causes, spread and how to control. They are being informed on human rights, among these rights are women's rights, how to curb child labor and school drop outs. They are obtaining information on the dangers of female genital mutilation (FGM).

The women in the study churches are learning better methods of agriculture such as poultry rearing, production of bio-gas, making of improved Jikos (stoves), improvising lamps, learning general hygiene, cookery, weaving, basketry and knitting. The women are being introduced to funding agencies, sing song for; inspiration, expression of ideas, opinions, discouraging violence among others. They dance for entertainment, exercise and dramatize bible verses to express their ideas, feelings and opinions. This makes the style of fighting poverty employed by these women look complex. The focus of this thesis is the complexity of their experiences and conceptions of poverty on one hand and the activities they take part in to fight poverty on the other. Hence the title of the study is: The role of women groups in the Methodist Church in Kenya: The Complexity of Fighting against Poverty.

To realize the aimed goal of exploring what role women groups in the Methodist Church are playing to fight against poverty, the research questions that guided the study were: what are women's experiences as far as poverty is concerned and how do they

conceptualize it? What activities are carried out by the women groups and what ways are women in the Methodist churches under study concerned with the fight poverty? To what extent does the Methodist church the umbrella of the women organizations, support the women in their fight against poverty

## **1.2 Poverty: Topic of the thesis and motivation**

Poverty is a state where someone lacks basic necessities and opportunities that are required for life and wellbeing. Poverty manifests itself in many ways, for example hunger, nakedness, lack of shelter, inability to pay for required necessities such as hospital bills. Its consequences are countless. Some of which are; deprivation, isolation, alienation, insecurity as well as despondency (Nafula 2005).

Poverty is something that can also be identified as relative or absolute according to Kimalu (2002). He defines relative poverty as a situation where one cannot be able to cater for basic needs available to a given social group, a situation where one cannot afford to raise the income in order to buy the basic requirements because of low income. This type of poverty shows itself in form of lack of balanced diet, high mortality rate, illiteracy, inability to access to basic education, drinking water, health facilities and shelter. In Kenya poverty is said to be the absolute type (Kimalu 2002).

Poverty is something that can be said to be present all over the world and experienced in all countries the rich and the poor as well alike Shah (2010). The gap between the poor and the rich is noticeable and is said to be widening. Poverty may be caused by many things which range from individual responsibility to bad governance policies. This also can be said to be due exploited by other people or by powerful and influential businesses. Some of the causes of poverty are a combination of all these factors and others which are not stated in this study (Shah 2010).

## **1.3 Women and poverty**

This study assesses women groups in the Methodist church A and B all of the Meru people in the former Eastern Province of Kenya. The groups are self-motivated to fight against poverty with or without the help from the government. They are purposed to do

something about poverty with a vow not to keep quiet. They intend to raise their standard of living under all cost and with great consideration and understanding of those who are of their group and the society at large. They are guided by the question “nitia tugwita nendi? Which means: Now what are we going to do?”

This study was conducted in 2013. The two churches are found in the same Meru County. The study churches are found in difference economic and climatic set up. The study churches are in my home county hence I considered them for the study as I could easily access them. Church A is locally situated though near a growing market whereas church B is situated in one of the rapidly growing big old town Kenya.

Among the Meru people women are the ones that are mostly affected by poverty. This to a large degree is as a result of Land laws (2009). Customary laws usually discriminate against women. Women cannot own land, nor can they own property because in some cases they themselves are property. Customary land laws lead to limitations, when it comes to women exercising their full economic, social and cultural rights. This is so among the Meru where the women groups in the study churches are found. In Kenya, the Trust Land Act, the Land Adjudication Act, the Land consolidation Act and even the Land Dispute Tribunals Act; all of these laws build on the customary law. The law, favors men as far as control of land, is concerned. In Meru local government officials apply the customary law when they are not so sure of the written laws. This is because according to them the customary law is what they are sure of as compared to the written law.<sup>2</sup>

Matrimonial property on the other hand is another cause of increased poverty among women in Meru. Despite the fact that a marriage is formalized, as per the statutes or custom, women have no right to control property. In case of separation and divorce women are not able to take any part of the matrimonial property; they may be thrown out of the matrimonial home with nothing more than just the personal effects. In Meru women fear to be beaten by in-laws in case there is a disagreement with the spouse. So in case of divorce

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.law.georgetown.edu/academics/law-journals/giil/upload/3-PropertyReportFIXED2.pdf>. Cited on 5/12/14.

few of divorced women ever leave with anything other than personal clothes.<sup>3</sup> This is probably the reason why women in the study churches keep saying, “We don’t divorce”.

Polygamy is another factor that makes women poorer in Meru. This is because men are allowed to marry as many women as one can. Majority of the women fight to stick to the marriage despite the challenges they face. Others are beaten and thrown out, in case one ask for anything, despite the fact that the Kenyan Law states so well , in section45.(1), about The Family: “( ....) partners are entitled to equal rights at the time of the marriage, during marriage and at the dissolution of marriage” (Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

The above issue on polygamy will be addressed more in the part of analysis of this study. Another factor that makes women poorer in Meru is increase in unwanted births. This leads to bearing many children which one is not able to care for. This was proven by one of my informants as she narrated a tale of being a mother to thirteen children. This will be captured in the analysis part of the thesis.

Women work on casual basis in other people’s farms; they get cleaning jobs and even baby seat. This is mainly due to lack of formal education which may be as a result of school dropout, illiteracy and lack of salaried job.

Meru being a patriarchal society, the girls are taught the man is always the controller. This started right from home. The father and the brothers are given reference. For example male children might not do domestic jobs such as cooking or carrying bathing water to the bathroom when their sisters are around. This is transmitted from generation to generation. It is sometimes justified by use of the biblical teaching, when a woman is instructed to submit to the husband. This is taught on the pulpit, in women’s gathering and girls’ seminars.

Early marriages, high illiteracy rate, high fertility rate, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and lack of participation in decision making for women,

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.womankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/FIDA-Kenya-Report-on-Gender-Based-Domestic-Violence-in-Kenya.pdf>.cited on 5/1/14

are other causes of poverty increase among women in Meru. Hence this thesis, therefore, sets out to explore the role women in the two Methodist churches, church A and church B, in Meru County in Kenya are playing to fight against poverty.

### **Motivation**

The motivation for considering this topic was stirred up as I did a course *named, Religion and development*. I first thought the role religion was playing in development activities, seeking to visualize the role of religion was doing in relation to development. Since development is a term that has a diverse meaning, my concern in this thesis is fighting against poverty as a means of attaining development. Hence I based my study on the grass root level because religion can be found right at the local level of society. It came to my attention that much was being done as far as development is concerned which included poverty reduction in the developing world. According to Haynes (2007), poverty is one the things the secular development system has been unable to work out (Haynes 2007).

The other reason that drove me on exploring on this topic is the aspect of Gender Corporation in development. This has been debated with considerations being made to involve women in development. This led to the birth of Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) approaches respectively (Rowlands 2012).

I grew up a Christian in the Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK). This was the first church that came to mind as it is a faith based body. I thought about the activities carried out which I was involved in as a member in the church. I specifically considered the women's role in the church.

Women have always been described as the backbone of the church. This can be said to be an indication that women are not passive members of the church. Women carry out a large part of church work in the local congregation, in the schools and in pastoral work among others (Adogame 2013)

On the other hand women have formed groups, whose general targets according to Adogame (2013), are:

Living a sincere and steadfast Christian life; promote the religious morals and social advancement of church members; to engage in educating the children by instilling the fear of God in them; to contribute to the progress of the church; to ensure that women live according to the articles of faith guiding the church; to train younger women in vocational work; to waken in members a sense of social responsibility aimed at improving their communities; to commit members to faith as Christians in order to understand Jesus Christ and to share his love for all people (p.165)

The above reminded me of my mother who has been inspirational. She has been a member of one of the Methodist women groups. She mentored me as I grew up. She taught me the word of God. She used to tell me whatever she learnt from the women group she belonged to. She involved me in the running of some of the activities they were carrying out as part of self-help projects, at home. We made food of different kinds from the recipes she learnt from the women group. We worked in the garden, knitted, weaved mats, ropes and baskets. We made homemade soap, jam as well as homemade pesticides. Some of these were used at home and others were sold to generate income. The women had bought for each other a dairy goat, which my mother had. I helped her feed the goat, collect eggs, water Sukuma wiki<sup>4</sup>, onions and other vegetables in the kitchen garden. Every rainy season she planted tree seedlings with an aim of helping conserve the environment.

I grew up admiring the activities carried out by the women in the Methodist church. I learnt the songs the women sang as my mother kept singing as she was working and even when she was relaxing. These songs always carried a message in them. This gave me a

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<sup>4</sup> Sukuma wiki is a Kiswahili name for kale.



desire to study more about women groups, and specifically those in the Methodist church. This is because I felt as far as I knew women worked so hard to achieve their set goals. They are not passive in relation to world, concerning on poverty. They are vitally involved and hence they play an important part towards acquiring changes which are economic, environmental and social as will be discussed in this thesis. The mentioned changes are needed to attain sustainable development, <sup>5</sup>since it is a type of development that addresses the needs of the today without tampering with the coming generations' ability to attend to their social, economic and environmental needs (WCED 1987).

This is a thesis that is breaking new ground. As far as I know, no one has written about women in the Methodist church in Kenya. Hence, my motivation is to document the role the women groups in the Methodist church in Kenya are playing to fight against poverty.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the stated objectives, the following were the research questions which helped and guided the study. The main question for this study is; what role are women groups in the Methodist Church playing to fight against Poverty? To have this question answered, the following questions were asked:

- (a)What are the women's experiences as far as poverty is concerned and how do they conceptualize it?
- (b)What activities are carried out by the women groups and what ways are the women in the Methodist churches under study concerned with the fight against poverty?
- (c)To what extent does the Methodist church, the umbrella of the women group organizations, support women in their fight against poverty?

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/lo/news/in-focus/rural-women-food-poverty.5/1/14>.

## **1.5 Objectives of the study**

Hence from the research questions the following specific objectives were generated:

(a) To explore women's experiences in the Methodist churches under study concerning poverty.

(b) To identify what projects the women groups under study were involved in

(c) To investigate how the Methodist churches under study support the women groups in the fight against poverty.

(f) To find out why and how, the women in the Methodist churches under study were concerned with the fight against poverty.

## **1.6 Research assumptions**

There were some assumptions that guided the formulation of research questions. These included the following:

First, women in the study have experienced poverty. They are among the women who face the challenge of accessing maternity services. Girls' dropout from school when there is a strain in the family to pay fees; this is common in a patriarchal society like the one where the women groups under study are found. It is believed that educated women enrich the husband's family. In this society women do not own land. They belong to the man (husband). Girls are seen as sources wealth. The greater the number of girls one has, the greater the amount of wealth s/he will get if all get married. The dowry is paid to the father of the girl who is getting married. Women are the ones who care for the children and sometimes have no resources. As such, my assumption was that women in the church might have experiences in as far as poverty is concerned

Second, women in the study are homemakers, they are nurses, and they are disciplinarians, teachers and cooks. They are wives and mothers. In addition, women work in the farms, rear animals and run small businesses. Women have formed self-help groups

in the villages, market places and at work place. Hence, my assumption was that women in the study were doing something to fight poverty.

Third, the church has the potential to help fight against poverty. My assumption was that the Methodist churches in which the women groups are do help the women fight against poverty.

Fourthly my assumption was that women under study were aware of their poor economic status and that they were doing something about it. Poverty is a social ill. As such, it has to be fought at all cost. Through fighting poverty better living standards can be realized, better education, health basic needs and self-reliance can be attained.

### **1.7 Relevance and significance of the study**

The study is relevant because poverty is a world concern. It needs collective responsibility in order to reduce it. There is a high opportunity to cut world poverty. When world poverty is cut more people in the world would enjoy the fruits of the world economy Haynes (2007) says that the UN Millennium project 2005 states:

Whatever one's motivation for attacking the crisis of extreme poverty, human rights, religious values, security, fiscal prudence and ideology-the solutions are the same. All that is needed is action (p.101)

So this study is intended to examine what women in the study churches are doing to fight against poverty. Also it is intended to encourage the spirit of self-help groups this is why it examined groups. Since when people are united, they act collectively and possibly they do big things even as far as fighting against poverty is concerned (Rowlands 2012).

### **1.8 Methodology**

The study is based on a qualitative research design (Punch 2005:142). It adopts a case study approach. Basically it consist of a multiple case approach since two Methodist churches, coded A and B, were the focus. The tools used to collect data were: formal and informal semi structured interviews to collect data for the study. Eight respondents were

interviewed. The sample included six women and two men. The pastor and two women leaders of church A were interviewed in the church. Second the material is drawn from informal talks; as part of interaction and observation were done.

### **1.8.1 Observation**

This is another method I used to collect data. I saw the things which they make and the activities they do. I also saw the women dance. In their songs they mentioned issues of HIV&AIDS, how to fight and eradicate poverty, how to stop men from oppressing the women. They performed drama. In the drama they acted the bible verse in Mathew25:14-30. In the drama, the women encouraged hard work and investing as a way of fighting poverty. These observations were conducted during church meetings, women fellowship meetings and during a wedding conducted in church A.

### **1.8.2 Field-note book**

I used a field note book and a pen, which I used to write down notes which I found worthy noting. I could not keep all the observations and the gathered information at different times of data collection in my memory.

I noted important information mainly when the women secretary was making announcement to the women, on what activities they were to carry out in the of course of the week, which included reminding them of their projects ,visits ,contributions and when they were to meet. I took note of the requests they were making to the entire congregation, through the church chairperson.

I recorded in a detailed manner what women were doing to fight poverty; the experiences of the informants as far as poverty were concerned. These were personal experiences which they shared. The challenge of bearing more children than one is able to care for, guiding and counseling girls and other details which are found in the analysis chapter.

In church A, I noted a lot as i visited the women on a Wednesday .The women had some visitors from United Kingdom. This was particularly interesting for me. I noted the

songs, dances, poems, bible verse and drama. I noted all my observations, which included their mood as they danced the information from the pastor, women leaders, two women who had a wide experience in the women fellowship, since when church A was founded.

The interviews in the study churches were conducted in three languages; English, Kiswahili and Kimeru (mother-tongue). This is because the questions were stated in English, informants' responded in any of the mentioned languages, though Kimeru dominated the talks. On Thursday of the following week, I interviewed the chairperson of church A. I noted all his responses to the guiding questions. The following day was a Friday. I visited women group in church A. I recorded the information I got from the women I interviewed. They were of different age; one was almost a mother to the other. Finally I attended a Sunday service where there was a matrimonial wedding. After the officiating of the wedding the pastor preached. As he preached, he mentioned issues on abuse of women, which included; buttering, discrimination, and the importance of family planning, good dieting and exercising as he preached. All this I recorded in my field notebook, for reference after the data collection. The observation shall be discussed in details in the next chapter.

### **1.8.3 Citation**

The citations in this thesis are translated and edited versions of the informants' utterances, based on the notes I took during interviews and talks. This means that I have not captured word for word version of their responses but the main contents as memorized and noted by me. This main interest is not the way the respondents put it but the main contents of their answers. This is because I wrote down what they were saying in response to the interview questions. The interview questions led to each other depending on how the respondent answered.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The data acquired from the websites has been foot noted, for example the information about the tribes in Kenya, Meru being one of them has few reference books. so I relied on the web for reference. The meanings of some words used in the thesis in Kiswahili and kimeru too are foot noted. This is because some informants were using Kiswahili which is the national language in Kenya. The other foot note is on the meaning of kimeru words which were used by informants and other terms used in the context of this study

### **1.10 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher observed ethics by first of all calling the circuit ministers or the pastors (the two terms in this paper will be used to mean the same) of the Methodist church A and B. This was to explain to them that I was to carry out this research and that I needed their permission and their assistance as well. I informed them that they were key respondents which they agreed. The ministers promised to organize meeting all the people I needed to meet especially the women. The minister for church A fulfilled the promise though the researcher could not meet the minister for church B on the agreed date. This is because there was an annual conference and was compulsory for him to be there.

The researcher on the date agreed met the pastor of church A and the women required. The pastor had set the women who were to be interviewed. For church B the minister concerned told me to feature in the study church early on a Sunday and explain to the officials that I had the permission to carry out the research, which I did. The chairman of church B, said he was busy .He also said that the information I wanted about his church could be got from the internet. However he organized for me the women to be interviewed.

On the interview day I explained to interviewees what the study was about and then sought their consent to participate. The respondents were informed that the information was for academic purpose only. The researcher guaranteed the respondents that they and their churches would remain anonymous unless there was permission to the contrary (consent). I was keen on this as it an important requirement in research work (Bryman 2012:137-138).

### **1.9 Position of the researcher**

My position as far as this study is concerned is that of an analytical insider. I have been in the Methodist church since I was young. My mother belonged to a different group from the one in the study. Hence as she practiced some of the activities like knitting, weaving and cookery I saw and sometimes did. I have been involved in women's activities.

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for example ministers for clergy and all what I thought needed clarification has been attended to as shall keep showing in the thesis.

This is because when I married, I automatically became one of them. Hence, I have a clear picture of what happens in the women groups. Therefore, I have a conviction that women are doing something to fight against poverty in their lives, the church and in the society. I feel they can do more if they are empowered morally, spiritually and materially.

My being an inside analytic is both advantageous and a challenge as well. This is because there is the possibility having the feeling that a lot of good is being done by the women groups in the Methodist church to fight against poverty as I have since long been an outside admirer of women activities until when I married and joined these groups. Bryman (2012) states that qualitative research is usually criticized when it comes to what is significant and important because the researcher might have a close personal relationship with the people in study (Bryman 2012).

As far as this study is concerned trust was enhanced which is an important requirement in research as I found in Church B. The women who were my interviewees were happy as they first showed a lot of appreciation towards my interest in wanting to research on their women group among so many other groups in the broad Methodist church. They showed a great desire of their works documented. They expressed how many researchers researched on other fields; women battering, Female Genital Mutilation, Educating a girl child among others but no one else has shown interest in women group activities in the Methodist church. The groups in the study felt that the study would be for the good of the groups and the church and also the entire community, though I clearly told them it was for my academic importance.

## **Chapter 2**

### **2.0 Context of the study**

#### **2.1 Meru Tribe**

In this chapter is a discussion on the Meru people (Tribe). These are the people from which this research has been carried out. This section introduces the women's way of life, social and economic profile. These factors determine directly or indirect, whether people advantaged or disadvantaged. In order to achieve this, there is a brief description of Meru County. This is one of the forty seven counties in Kenya and is the county where the Meru tribe is located. Also this is where the women in the study are located geographically. The women in the two study churches are found in Meru County and are Meru(s) by tribe. Meru is one of the fifty two tribes in Kenya who live together as is found in the other peoples of African descent.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter has the following sub-headings which fall under the context of the study: Meru tribe; Meru county; geography and climate of Meru; economy of Meru; people and their languages; history, religion and culture relations; population; industrial art; division of labor; land tenure and finally marriage and inheritance.<sup>8</sup>

These sub-headings are going to help us visualize and form a picture of the women in the study churches; geographical position in relation to the bigger nation of Kenya. The geographical location can be a natural advantage or disadvantage. This is so when geographical factors like amount of rainfall, temperature and the type of soil found in the region directly or indirectly dictates the economy, food, way of dressing and even the means of transport and communication. No one has choice when it comes to natural location unless if one has power to change. The chapter also discusses economy, culture and religion among the Meru. Culture and religion of Meru now and before the coming of the colonialists is briefly discussed. This is because changes took place during and after

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<sup>7</sup> <http://allboutkenya.blogspot.no/2012/04/meru-county.html>. Retrieved on 5/3/14

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.kenya-information-guide.com/meru-tribe.html>. Retrieved on 5/3/14.



colonization by the British. This is the time Christianity came to Meru as it shall be discussed in the brief history of Methodist church.

In this chapter also is a brief history of Christianity; Methodist church and that of the two studies churches; church A church B. This will conclusively give background information of the women groups in the study churches.

### **2.1.1 Meru Tribe**

The Meru tribe is one of the fifty two tribes in Kenya. Meru tribe is so homogenous. It has nine groups. Each group speak an own dialect of Kimeru language. All the Ameeru(s) understand each other though they speak differently (Mukaria 2011).

The Meru are Bantus .Bantu language is one of the languages of the three language groups in Kenya. These language groups are Bantus, Cushitic and Nilotic. These language groups influence each other in one way or another as far as Cultural practices concerned. For example circumcision was done by Cushitic and the Bantus are said to learn it from them. This means even languages may be compromised as a result of interaction, trade and intermarriage. So these dialects of the Meru possibly might be as a result of influence from the Cushitic and Nilotic and their fellow Bantu neighbors; the kikuyu and the kamba.<sup>9</sup>

### **2.1.2 Meru County**

Meru County is one of the counties found in the Eastern part of Kenya. It is neighbor to Isiolo, Tharaka, Nyeri and Laikipia counties. The Meru county is made up of the following districts; Meru Central, Imenti North, Igembe, Meru North, Tigania and Meru South. the county due to political reasons is further divided into constituencies, which are Tigania West, Tigania East, Igembe south, Igembe north, Igembe central, North Imenti, Central Imenti, South Imenti .The women groups in the study churches are in the Meru county but bears different naming. They have same senator but are in different

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<sup>9</sup><http://www.kenyacolors.com/tribes.htm..cited> on 3/3/2014..

constituencies in Meru and hence have different Members of Parliament (MP). Church A is in Tigania West constituency whereas church B in North Imenti constituency

### **2.1.3 Geography and climate of Meru County.**

Meru County is situated in the north eastern side of Mt.Kenya. Among its physical features are; Mt.Kenya, which is said to be approximately 5199m high, and Nyambene hills. These highlands are responsible to the type of rainfall and temperatures found in Meru County. Areas around Mount Kenya have cool climatic characteristics which makes farmers grow crops such as tea, coffee, and keep dairy animals, grow bananas and sugarcane. The same case applies to the regions around Nyambene hills (Mukaria 2011:17).

The county has two rainy seasons; the long rains and short rains which fall between March to May and October to December respectively. The study churches are located differently as far as rainfall received and temperatures are concerned. This is because Church A is in the leeward side of the two highlands; that is Mt. Kenya and the Nyambene Hills. Church B is in the windward side. This means more rainfall is received in the area and cooler temperatures are experienced around church B. whereas hot temperatures and less rainfall are found in the areas around church A. High rainfall of about 1300mm is received in highland places and low rainfall of about 380mm is received in lowland areas of the county.<sup>10</sup>

### **2.1.4 Economy of Meru People**

Meru people are agrarian. They keep animals mainly in the northern part of the county. This is because the area receives little rainfall that encourages growing of only drought resist crops, which require little rainfall to grow and mature. This makes farmers in these areas grow crops such as millet, cotton, katumani maize, katumani peas, pulses, black beans, vegetables, sorghum and vegetables. (Katumani is the name given to fast growing crops of different kinds and that require little rainfall. It is a breed name which has come up

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<sup>10</sup> <http://allboutkenya.blogspot.no/2012/04/meru-county.html>.

after research at Kenya Agricultural Research institute, (KARI).<sup>11</sup> The women in church A, are found in the region described above.

Some parts of Meru have fertile soils and favorable climatic conditions that encourage the production of crops such as wheat, barley, potatoes, millet, sorghum, maize, Bananas, yams, cassava, pumpkin and sugarcane. The central part of Meru where the women group in church B are geographically positioned enjoys this advantage. Maize is widely grown as the staple food and also grown for commercial use. Tea, coffee and miraa (is Khat –which is an herbal plant) are also grown as the major cash crops. Miraa is a cash crop for the local people. It is mainly grown in Maua, Igembe and parts of Tigania and fetches income as is even exported by those farmers who grow it on large scale basis<sup>12</sup>

Other crops are groundnuts and a variety of legumes, vegetables (cabbages, kale commonly called Sukuma wiki) and fruits. The Meru people also keep livestock for subsistence and for sale. They keep dairy and beef cattle, goats, sheep, poultry and honey bees. Meru is good for tourism because there is Meru national park and Mount Kenya National Park which are found in Meru. Also there is the Lewa Conservancy. This makes Meru attractive to both domestic and foreign tourists.<sup>13</sup>

### **2.1.5 People and their languages**

This study is carried out among women in the Methodist church in Kenya who are among the Meru people of Kenya. (The Person is referred to as Mumeru, the People are Ameru and the language is Kimeru). Meru is one ethnic group in Kenya. Kenya has three broad ethnic groups, but it has over seventy specific ethnic groups, which make up the fifty two tribes of Kenya. The ethnic groups are different in population. The largely populated ethnic group is Kikuyus. The least are said to be the El molo, who are approximated to be

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.kari.org/KARI\\_katumani](http://www.kari.org/KARI_katumani). Retrieved on 11/5/13.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.kenya-information-guide.com/meru-county.html>. Cited on 11/5/13.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000075934&storytitle=Kenya-Columns:20Meru20County20will20be20a20beneficiary20of20immense20Lapsset20opportunities.Cited> on 5/13/14.

about five hundred in number. Interestingly they are said to live on the shores of Lake Turkana.<sup>14</sup>

There are three main language groups in Kenya. These are: Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic, as mentioned in the study earlier. The Bantu are the largest language group in Kenya. They are mainly farmers. This study is concerned with the Bantu language group, whose main economic activity is farming. This is because the women groups in the study churches are in Meru geographically and the Meru are in the group of Bantu speakers. The Bantu peoples in Kenya include: the kikuyu, the kamba, the Luyha and kisii (who are found in western part of Kenya). Other Bantu speakers are the Swahili and Mijikenda (Fadiman 1993).

The language of the Meru resembles the kikuyu and kamba languages. The dialects of Kimeru include Imenti, Igembe, Tigania, Igoji and Mwimbi. Kimĩru (kimeru) is the ethnic language used in Meru together with Kiswahili and English languages.

This study has considered the kiimenti which is the dialect of the women in the study church B and kitigania which is the dialect used by the women in study church A, Kiswahili the national language and English which is the official language in Kenya.

The Swahili language is said to have come up as a result of the natives at the Kenyan coast intermarrying with the Arabs and Persian. This led to the birth of Swahili people who speak Kiswahili which was adapted as the national language spoken in Kenya. English language is the language of the colonial masters, the British. It is the official language spoken in Kenya. The Swahili and English languages are taught in schools together with the mother tongue, depending on the location of the school.<sup>15</sup>

In this study Swahili is important because the Meru use it interchangeably with Kimeru in expression and naming. Hence the women in the two study churches expressed

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.africa.upenn.edu>. Retrieved on 12/5/13.

<sup>15</sup> <http://sandavysafaris.com/facts-about-kenya/kiswahili-language-of-kenya/>. Cited on 5/3/14

themselves in kimeru, Kiswahili and sometimes in English depending on the level of education.

### **2.1.6 History of Religion and Cultural Relations of Meru**

Meru history is said to be approximately three centuries old. The first two hundred years are documented only through oral testimony. The origin of Meru has conflicting views. There is the Mbwa tradition which is the most popular of all. This tradition explains that the Meru migrated to the Mount Kenya region from Mbwa Island. Mbwa Island according to historians is off the coast of Indian Ocean (Fadiman 1993).

It is said in the year 1700; Mbwa was attacked by the red people (Nguuntune). The Meru were captives up to when a great leader organized their escape across the vast waters. The Meru then moved along the Tana River, until they reached the base of Mount Kenya. Those found in Tigania and Nyambene reached there in the 1730s. Europeans are said to have arrived in Meru at the end of the nineteenth century. They were part of Arab trading caravans. The region was made an administrative district of the British colonial government in 1910. The Meru were converted to Christianity, through the efforts put in converting by Church of Scotland, the England Methodist Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. Meru(s) are of Christian faith. The following denominations are found there: the catholic, the Presbyterian, the Anglicans and the Methodist. All in all the Methodists takes the day in the region. There are Muslims and Hindus who live around Meru towns. These are the smallest religious group. The Meru traditionally believed in a god called Murungu. Despite the coming of Christianity, the main religions in Meru today is the Traditional African Religion which believe in a god addressed as ngai wa Kirimara na Nyambene and then Christianity (Nthamburi 1982).

The Meru offered sacrifices to their ancestors. Even today the Meru believe in offering sacrifices to appease God. They offer one colored lamb, when disaster strikes like; rain failure, sicknesses, landslides and overflowing. The Meru are religious. These cultural practices are not as tightly held as before because of Christianity, which has influenced people's religious life in one way or other. Christians especially in the Methodist church

which is the interest of this study are not allowed to practice cultural activities such as traditional circumcision of boys and girls, offering sacrifices to god mentioned earlier and being initiated in Njuuri. If any of these is done by a Christian in the Methodist church, the person is ex-communicated for a maximum of six month (Mukaria 2011).

The church has devised a method of circumcising girls. These they call ntanira Mwari na mugambo which means circumcise the girl by use of the word. This is done by the women in the women fellowships. The Methodist church chooses experienced women, who become the chief advisers; teachers and nurses are all involved to teach girls important things in a woman's life and great emphasis being laid in education.<sup>16</sup>

In the Meru culture, Male and female circumcision is one compulsory ritual. Though the practice is gradually dying out; most girls are not being circumcised as before. The culture has ceased. A boy in Meru must be circumcised both in the past and the same practice is carried out even today. This is because it is a rite of passage that is believed to transform a boy to an adult. After circumcision a boy's name changes from muiji, meaning uncircumcised boy to muthaka, which mean a circumcised boy. The boy is said to be totally transformed, to that which cannot be born. Hence it is not a surprise to hear a Meru man brag saying even if muiji dies another can be born, but if muthaka dies, there cannot be another muthaka. This shows how important circumcision of boys is to Meru. The position at which a boy child is placed, gives the boy the right to be a man, have sexual relations ,can marry , can acquire wealth and property after circumcision. The boy after circumcision is culturally allowed to make independent decisions.<sup>17</sup>

At this stage boys may approach girls for sexual relations, not necessarily for marriage. Others rape. After the rape girls must keep quiet. This is because according to the custom sex matters are never discussed. This leads to early marriages because according to Meru culture if a circumcised boy or married man gets a girl pregnant, the boy or man

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<sup>16</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/200101080370.html.cited> on 10/5/13

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.kenya-information-guide.com/meru-tribe.html.Retrieved> on 12/3/13.

should marry that girl unless the girl refuses. Whereby, in the traditional past, the girl had no right to refuse to be married. On the other hand even if a girl is raped by a man, who can be even a relative, the girl could not say it. She was expected to keep silent. If she becomes pregnant, this is the time the mother got concerned since the father of the child had to be known for marriage purposes so that the father of the girl can get dowry. This is also because even if the girl refuses to marry the father to her child, customarily, the child belongs to the father and the girl remains the man's wife unless she marries another man other than the one who fathered her child or children (Fadiman 1993).

The consequences of this tradition are many: young mothers, increased number of children brought up by single mothers, Children reared by stepmothers or step fathers, High number of children brought up by grandparents, incidences of children neglect and child abuse, unwanted pregnancies, high school drop outs, high spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. To crown it all the girl who becomes pregnant before marriage is said to be a disgrace to her father and the entire family. She is supposed to be married as a second wife by a married man .If a man who has never married before marries her, the man is ridiculed by his age mates. This is because he has married a defiled woman. This shows how stressing it is to a girl who gets pregnant. Hence mothers keep warning their daughters not to play with boys because they make girls pregnant. Sex was never mentioned and even today some mothers' who are entangled in the customs does not mention it.<sup>18</sup>

This culture directly or indirectly is a major factor that aggravate poverty in the area this study is conducted. With this in mind the Methodist church is today organizing, putting boys in specific hospitals, where they are circumcised by qualified personnel, or are secluded in an institution's dormitory, this is a way of ensuring all parents afford. The boys are advised and taught the tradition of Meru, what they are expected to do from then on. Generally they are taught manhood as they are no longer children but reliable men. Specifically, the boys are encouraged to acquire education as they are the future of the

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<sup>18</sup> <http://theequalityeffect.org/pdfs/ChatelaineSept2011%20%282%29.pdf>. cited on 4/23/14

church, the society, the nation and the world future presidents. According to Meru customs, just as in other African customs children are a security to their parents. Meaning childlessness was a disgrace but even if one did not father a son and had only girls, the concerned was referred as barren (muumbi) as girls culturally are not of the same value as boys. So boys are reminded of their customary roles as future inheritors of their fathers'. The Methodist church and other organization have been in the frontline to ensure boys 'circumcision is done in a modern way, as a way to curb the spread of HIV /AIDS. This is period the boys are put together to be taught other important things as sexual reproduction, health together with gender issues and cultural practices.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.1.7 Population**

According to the national census that was carried in 2009, Kenyan population is said to range around 38,610,097 million people, as per July 2013 the population of Kenya was estimated to be 44,037,656 people (CIA World Fact book, December 6, 2013).Meru population: 1,356,301people.<sup>20</sup>

This made Meru be said to be highly populated in Kenya. The census has led to the discovery of the fact that 12% of the Meru population lives in the urban areas and 88% live in the rural part of the county. The women group in church B is in an urban set-up, they are in a municipal. The women group in church A are in the rural area though in a very busy market area which is attended by many outsiders from neighboring districts for trade.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.malecircumcision.org/programs/documents/TMC\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://www.malecircumcision.org/programs/documents/TMC_final_web.pdf) .Cited on 4/23//14.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.scribd.com/doc/36672705/Kenya-Census-2009>.Cited on 4/23/14

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.infotrackea.co.ke/services/leadership/constituencyinfo.php?cinf=wards&t=56> .cited on 4//23/14



### 2.1.8 Industrial Arts

The Meru worked on Pottery, ironwork, weaving, basketry and leatherwork. These were the common industrial products among them in the past. The handicrafts that are in practice today, includes; weaving, basketry, clay work, knitting, and crocheting. Palm baskets and mats are common in Tharaka, where palms grow besides rivers. Due to the added knowledge through the campaign on caring for environment, the knowledge on recycling of waste also has been of use as people use polythene papers to weave baskets, hats and also mats. This is a very popular art today because polythene papers come in varied colors, hence making the products beautiful and attractive. On the other hand it saves the cost to buying colors for dyeing the fibres. Hence this becomes an indirect way of caring for the environment through making use of the polythene bags which when scattered everywhere in our environment makes the environment dirty, are dangerous to the domestic animals which are let loose in the context where this study is carried out. This is because animals like cows, goats and sheep may feed on these polythene bags especially when there is food shortage and mainly if the animals have deficiency of some mineral salts. The polythene bags and plastic in general are known to be dangerous. To human beings, they cause accidental falls. They can also struggle if carelessly handled. They can also cause suffocation to children. Hence should not be left scattered all over. The dangers caused by polythene bags possibly can be said ranges from domestic to wild; hence we have records of incidences such as: marine animals dying after consuming plastic, flamingoes and other birds being struggled after consuming them.<sup>22</sup>

The use of polythene bags as a source of raw material required for weaving mats, ropes, baskets, and huts provides an alternative to the natural fibres from sisal which is scarce today. This has created jobs for many jobless people, especially those who live in towns as they collect polythene paper bags and sell to users.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup><http://advocacy.britannica.com/blog/advocacy/2008/12/plastic-bags-and-animals-making-the-wild-safe-for-wildlife/.cited> on 2/23/14.

<sup>23</sup><http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Meru.aspx>.cited on 2/23/14.

### **2.1.9 Marriage and inheritance in Meru**

Courtship, bride-wealth, and marriage are important to Meru peoples' way of life. Close bonds between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are common. Divorce was difficult to obtain in the past. Even today it is not so much pronounced among the Meru because it often requires the intervention of the clan and the church if the concerned are Christians. For Christians the couple vows, (swears an oath) saying, "Till death do us part" before a cloud of witnesses, mainly a congregation in the church .Polygamy was officially allowed in the traditional Meru community. Today it is not as common as before because of the great influence of Christianity, Western education, diminishing resources to support more wives.<sup>24</sup>

According to Meru custom, inheritance practices are patrilineal. Property, such as land, livestock, and buildings, is divided equally among the deceased's sons. As per the traditions, responsibility for the widow of the deceased was left to the appointed head of the family. This would act as the guardian for her and her children. In most cases the younger brother of the deceased inherited the widowed woman and could bear children with her. This practice had ended by the time of independence, with women obtaining use rights to the deceased husband's property through their sons.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Meru.aspx>). Cited on 5/6/14.

<sup>25</sup> <http://fidakenya.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Women-land-rights-brochure.pdf>. cited on 2/23/14.

## 2.2 The Methodist church in Kenya a brief history

Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK) is a faith-based institution. It was started in 1862 by a group of missionaries. These missionaries were sent by the United Methodist Free Churches of Britain. The missionaries started the station at a place called Ribe. (Nthamburi 1982)

This was the first station this is approximated to be close to 40 kilometers North of Mombasa. Methodist was introduced to that region by Dr. Ludwig Kraft; a German Lutheran, who worked under the Church Missionary Society (Anglican). The Mission stations were opened at Ribe, Mazeras, Jomvu, and Golbanti. Thomas who was a pioneer missionary worked opening many mission stations in the coast. A missionary by called R.T. Worthington opened a mission station at Kaaga in 1912.<sup>26</sup>

In 1967, the MCK became an independent body from the British Methodist Church Conference. This was on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1967. A Methodist Church in Kenya was opened in Nairobi in 1967. The church is called Charles New Church in Jericho (Nthamburi 19982).

MCK has spread to several parts of Kenya. It has missions in Uganda, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the youngest mission is in Southern Sudan. The members of Methodist Church in Kenya has a population of almost three million active members .The people are joining the church. This means the members are increasing reasonably. MCK is development conscious. It has initiated many community-based projects whose aim is reducing poverty, disease, illiteracy, general human suffering and

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<sup>26</sup>[http://www.gmmcd.or.ke/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=83](http://www.gmmcd.or.ke/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=83).cited on 2/23/14.

empowering the marginalized groups .Theirs is to encourage the marginalized groups to be responsible for their lives. The projects they carry out include: Mission and Evangelism, Education, Health, Disability Empowerment, Women Fellowship, Youth and Junior Sunday and Church development. <sup>27</sup>

The Methodist Church in Kenya, mission is to adhere to the divine call of the Lord Jesus Christ and savior, to advocate the holistic Gospel in words and deed through the power of God’s Holy Spirit. The Methodist church in Kenya has a vision too. This is to know Jesus Christ and to make Him known to others.<sup>28</sup>

### **2.2.1 Church A and church B in the study**

Church A according to the respondents originated from church B. This is because church B membership had increased in number. They said it was the only MCK church in the whole Meru District. Hence it had grown in population. Members covered long distance to reach where the church was located. This why mama in church A said, “we used to wake up so early. Finish with household chores and hurry to church.” Church B was the first Methodist church in Meru. So it is said to be the mother of Methodist churches in Meru.

It is from here the Methodist churches in Meru originated and spread to the rest of Meru. That is in Nkubu, Nyambene, Tharaka and Miathene. Hence church A is established in in the northern region of Meru, because according to my respondents the Methodist church wanted to spread as far as it could as its mission and vision indicates<sup>29</sup>.

So church A is in Tigania, the present day Tigania west district was established. All who came from the area around where church A was established became members of church A. One of the respondents in church A said that church B, was more advantaged in terms of assets more than church A, because church B had the benefit of being left with the

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.methodistchurchkenya.org/index.php/our-partners/projects.html>.cited on 4/23/14.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/methodist-church-in-kenya>.cited on 4/23/14

<sup>29</sup> <http://books.google.no/books?id=BHVP57IsDt4C&pg=PA90&lpg=PA90&dq=mck+church+mission+and+visi+on&source=bl&ots=bkmz35vBXt&sig=1uKBL054uSdo>.cited on 5/6/14.

collectively constructed buildings whereas church A had to go and start building, soliciting funds for different structures and evangelizing to increase membership.

An informant said after church A was established church B, still remained the Centre. The offices of the ministers (pastors) in charge were at Church B which was established 1912.

The study aimed at finding out the role women in the Methodist church in Kenya are playing to fight against poverty. It employed case groups in two study churches, church A and church B, which are in the same county but different constituencies.

## Chapter 3

### 3.0 Theoretical Structure

In this chapter I examine the main concepts and theories that relate to this study. First I will define feminism and look at the two feminist approaches, which are women in development (WID), gender and development (GAD). Finally, I address empowerment, which I am going to use as a theoretical tool since it suits the this study, which is a micro level society or what can be termed as a small society level.

In relation to empowerment, I will briefly talk about different forms of power. These are: power over, power to, power with and power from within. Then I will look at the three dimensions of empowerment, which include; personal empowerment, collective empowerment and relational empowerment (Rowlands 2012).

My main reference as far as this chapter is concerned is Rowlands Jo work on her book *Questioning Empowerment: working with women in Honduras*, which is a shortened and edited version of her PhD thesis: “Empowerment examined: an exploration of the concept and practice of women’s empowerment in Honduras”, 1995, University of Durham.

Rowlands has a vast experience in issues concerning the community because she worked for over ten years as a trainer and a consultant for co-operatives and NGOs in Britain and Latin America (Rowlands 2012).

She became a feminist in the late 1970s. She discussed vastly about power, its forms and ways of obtaining power. Today Rowlands is working as an Evaluation Officer for Voluntary Service Overseas. She has a history of having supported staff and also partnering in empowering poor women and men so that they are enabled and are heard by decision makers. She studied issues of power and the idea of empowerment at community level

where she did two development projects in Honduras, which lead to her acquisition of a PhD at the University of Durham<sup>30</sup>.

She is an academician as well as an anthropologist. The fact that Rowlands is an academician makes me consider much her work as my working material for my thesis. She also has experience in matters concerning poverty and support to poor women and men. This too made her work appealing as far as this study is concerned because the women groups in this study do not work without men in their undertaking. Probably it can be said that poverty can be arrested by use of empowerment.<sup>31</sup>

In one of her examples she quoted one of her respondents as she carried her research, a woman who said, that women themselves are the ones who knew what was happening to them and therefore they had to look for solutions to challenges they were going through. This is because people from outside cannot do what concerns them for them. It is only the women, who know their challenges and hence are the very ones who know what to do about them (Rowlands 2012).

The Honduras women whom Rowlands worked with though are of the western set up, their way of addressing their issues may be interpreted in almost the same way the women groups in the Methodist churches in this study look at their issues. This is because one of my respondents told that me they first identify the problem, own it as group and after owning it, they refer to it as their “problem”, “murio jwetu” in Kimeru. This means our burden. At this point each is convinced that, the problem will be solved by the women in the group and if they have to get some help, they should initiate it. They quickly pose the question mentioned earlier in the study, “*nitia tugwita nendi?* This meaning, “What are we going to do now?”

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<sup>30</sup> <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-people/programme-policy/jo-rowlands.cited> on 5/6/14.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/publications/FullSurveyEmpowerment.pdf.cited> on 5/9/14

### **3.1 Definition of Feminism**

Feminism is described as an ideology, a secular belief system that suggests that equality between sexes is the fairest and viable basis for effective social organization, productivity and humanly well-being (Hall 1992).

It is said to be a powerful combination of assumptions as well as prepositions. It involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference. Hence I feel to define it as a theoretical perspective of looking at gender issues more so gender equality as much as it may be a movement.

### **3.2. Three waves of Feminism Theories**

In this part of this study I shall briefly observe the three waves of feminism. These are: the first wave; second and the third wave of feminism. The first wave is said to be from the 19th century; the second from the 1960s and went on up to 1990. The third dates from 1990s and is the very that is functioning today.<sup>32</sup>

The First wave target was to open up chances for women to have accessibility and equal opportunities such as those to vote and to be voted for electoral office as men. This was termed as legal rights or women suffrage. The first wave of feminism caused changes that could be observed in that women started speaking in public. This became a great blow to what was referred to as the “cult of domesticity”.<sup>33</sup>

The discussions concerning voting and women’s participation in politics yielded to the desire to examine the differences between men and women. This led to great awakening because the good in women was made evident; until some started feeling women were

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<sup>32</sup> [http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/6236\\_Chapter\\_1\\_Krolokke\\_2nd\\_Rev\\_Final\\_Pdf.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/6236_Chapter_1_Krolokke_2nd_Rev_Final_Pdf.pdf). cited on 5/9/14.

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.pacificu.edu/magazine\\_archives/2008/fall/echoes/feminism.cfm](http://www.pacificu.edu/magazine_archives/2008/fall/echoes/feminism.cfm). cited on

5/9/14.



morally better than men .This meant that their presence and involvement in the civic field would improve public behavior and also the political processes (Martha 2008).

The second wave of feminism laid emphasis on the possibilities of going against men dominance and the acts of victimization on women.<sup>34</sup> It began in the 1960s and went on into the 1970s.This is the time when the blacks, the homosexuals and the rest of the oppressed groups were being defined. In the 1980s up to 1990s, second wave feminism was brought into existence by women of color and those of developing countries. <sup>35</sup>

The wave had in it women opening up and spreading out forming civil rights movements with growing self-consciousness of several minority groups around the world. The main issues of concern were sexuality and reproductive rights. The movements put efforts on passing equal rights in the society without considering sex (Martha 2008).

The wave fought against women being looked at as beauty instruments.<sup>36</sup>It became very fruitful in that; women could hold properties, it influenced the establishment of marital rape laws, divorce laws, sexual harassment policies in working places, Sex and gender were made different, whereby Sex was said to be biological whereas gender was said to be a social construct that makes cultures different, as time goes by (Martha2008).

The waves led to feminist forming organizations that were consist of women only. Hence we see today women grouping themselves all alone without men in. This was born by the thinking that women working together created a special specialty that is not found in mixed-groups. This uniqueness was hoped to work for women’s good in the whole world (Martha 2008).

The third wave of feminism was born as a way of responding to some failures of the second wave of feminism. It was a way to counter initiatives and movements which were created by the second wave. The wave intended to challenge what was termed as femininity

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<sup>34</sup> Lydenberg 1999.

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.sagepub.com/upmdata/6236\\_Chapter\\_1\\_Krolokke\\_2nd\\_Rev\\_Final\\_Pdf.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upmdata/6236_Chapter_1_Krolokke_2nd_Rev_Final_Pdf.pdf).cited on 3/7/14.

<sup>36</sup> Mason 2007

by the second wave. It embarks on individual empowerment of women instead of activism. It encouraged women to build meaningful identities in the diverse today's contemporary world. The wave sought to encourage personal empowerment and action as a point to start from for promoting changes in the society. It looked at women on a broader perspective unlike the second wave. It involved anti-racism, women of color consideration and also the postcolonial theories and other broader construction of gender. This wave also considered subordination of women and mainly how to empower women in different fields.<sup>37</sup> The wave explains change which can occur in the private, personal life of a woman consciousness. Which can be interpreted to mean that development is not only outward, it can occur inwardly too (Lydenberg 1999).

At this point one could possibly say the role played by these waves of feminism is vital. This is in as far as challenging gender inequalities and male domination is concerned. Through the effort of these waves positive change in the society can be claimed to be when it comes to women oppression. In some parts of the world it can be said that liberation of women has been highly achieved, whereas for other parts a lot has to be done, to ensure equality, is exercised in the society. This is because still the element of women being considered as of lesser worth is still there. This is because for a long time, women have not been as valued as they deserve (Zechariassen 2012).

Another thing that would probably be recognized in these waves is the fact that democratic rights of women have been witnessed though not in all parts of the world. There are traces worldwide though the density varies depending on regions. Right to education and employment, right to own property, right to vote, right to enter in the parliament. These are the fruits produced by the early feminism, that today's women are enjoying though not to the fullest (Karl 1995).

One way of interpreting this could be that the empowerment of women might be a prerequisite to achieving of desired results. That is addressing disparities related to gender

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/588436>.03/17/2014.

and those of the entire human society, social, economic and political around the world. Power is a requirement. Hence I will later in the chapter look at the issue of power .Power over; power to; power with; power from within. I will too discuss the three dimensions of empowerment which includes personal empowerment; relational empowerment and collective empowerment (Rowlands 2012).

The above named forms of empowerment will be discussed in the next part of this chapter to see how they can be applicable devices to addressing different issues in relation to human development.

### **3.3 The two Approaches in relation to gender and development**

The two approaches in relation to women and gender are; Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD), which may be said to be afterbirth of the waves of feminism. Hence this section of the thesis examines the two approaches respectively.

#### **3.3.1 Women in Development (WID)**

Women in Development (WID) are an approach which emerged as a result of the waves of feminism which were concerned in the women condition. The first wave of feminism majored on the issue of inequality and deprivation across the world, such as voting and being voted for. The second wave keenly went into issues concerning women in relation to social and cultural inequalities. These inequalities were pressurizing women on daily basis. These were issues in relation to sexual violence, reproductive rights and sexual discrimination .The third wave majored on women's role in economic development with the argument that the worth of women's work was not considered and not only the value of their work but also their status in relation to development. Women's particular needs were ignored and development projects which affected women in specific ways were not considered. This is because women were left out and were never considered, they were seen as only good for homemaking, mothering good for receiving good and men were being termed as producers and the heads of households (Rowlands 2012).

The encouraging thing about the creation of WID is that, it resulted in establishment of a new policy which targeted integration of women in development. This was meant to improve women's situation. Women were to be included in development projects and programs. The inclusion aimed at helping women change their status from that of welfare to that of equality. On the other hand, it helped to improve their situation because they would be liberated from marginalization hence benefiting as a result of the visibility of women and inclusion in development process. The inclusion of women in development can be interpreted to be a means and a way of revealing women's potentiality in production. Since it made Women be seen and be used and look at as a resource not as recipient. That is resources that can be used to achieve other developmental goals such as population control and sustainable development (Rowlands2012).

I may say that the content of this approach can be regarded as true because on practical basis it is not right to rule out that women are really recipients and not resourceful in any form. This is evident by the fact that women carry out many activities as far as development is concerned. This is what the study tried to seek as it examined the role women in the Methodist Church in Kenya were playing in fighting against poverty.

The Women in Development approach (WID) helped open a door to women being incorporated in workforce and also improved their productivity in order to better their lives. Despite this the WID approach did not include women of color as well it did not address the issue of diversified cultures more so in the developing societies. It majored on group affairs ignoring the individual sphere. It was a top-bottom approach which made it not hold popularity so much.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.3.2 Gender and Development (GAD)**

This thesis considers Gender and Development as one of the key approaches. This is because the approach seeks to evaluate women's unique roles to those of men. It also considers the dynamics of gender relations. Since gender relations are vital to social

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<sup>38</sup> <http://cn2collins.wordpress.com/2013/03/19/the-wid-wad-gad-approach-on-gender-development/>

organization and hence to development. This thesis considers this approach as it is concerned with matters of development which are; the social, economic, political and cultural improvement of individuals as well as the society. Possibly development can be said to be a unique process, which involves diverse things. This, then, may mean the definitions said to have been given by citizens in developed and developing countries may be considered as appropriate. Phillips and Payne (2011) wrote:

Development can be said to be: higher living standards, a rising per capita income, increase in productive capacity, mastery over nature freedom through control of man's environment, economic growth. But not mere growth but growth with equity, elimination of poverty, basic needs satisfaction, catching up with the developed countries in technology, wealth, power, status, economic independence, self-reliance, scope for self-fulfillment for all, liberation, the means to human ascent. (p.2)

As per the above paragraph among the meanings of development is elimination of poverty. This is the major things this thesis is concerned about whereby it is specifically evaluating the role women groups in the study Methodist churches are playing to fighting against poverty. So it may probably be said that fight against poverty is possibly a way of bringing development which is a multidimensional process that includes the social, economic, politic and cultural betterment of both the people and the society as a whole (Rowlands 2012).

Gender and Development (GAD) as far as this thesis is concerned therefore becomes an approach to consider since it examines all that concerns life. It analysis and puts in consideration the private and the public, formal and informal, urban and rural, production and reproduction, to in cooperate women's physical state, which concerns the household, health, sexuality ,education and all means of livelihood. This is because when it comes to gender discrimination it involves all aspects of women's lives (Rowlands 2012).

Hence a probable conclusion is that Gender and Development (GAD) approach shines light on the power relations between men and women and the aspect of discrimination that majority of the women go through in many societies as well as reveal the male bias found in the development process (Rowlands 2012).

Therefore, the vice of subordination can not only be handled through employment and the national accounting schedules but will require cultural, economic and political changes, which can be stimulated by means of empowerment and for that matter women empowerment, which am going to use in this thesis as a theoretical tool because it fits the society from which this study has been conducted. Hence I will discuss women empowerment, in the next subsection by first defining empowerment, name and explain the four forms of power and the three dimensions of power.

### **3.4.3 Women Empowerment**

I wish to define empowerment as the act of enabling or giving power. This means the ability to pressurize by either a group or individual hence their will gets done (Rowlands 2012).

Women empowerment is a state of supplying women with the means of being in a position to autonomy and be able to control their lives on economic basis, socially, legally and also politically. This means being conscious of the external realities and also their internal thoughts, constructions and belief systems all which affect their wellbeing in terms of gender and social justice. To enable them to purposefully use their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual resources to protect their lives and also sustain values that ensure there is observation of gender equality personally, socially, economically and also at political and institutional levels. Women empowerment is acquisition of autonomy and authority over own life which in cooperates many dimensions such as economic, social, legal and also the political (Bheemarasetty 2012).

Probably the idea put across by UNDP may be said to be relevant. That is looking at Gender equality and women empowerment as not just human rights but more so as a means of realizing the millennium Development Goals and Sustainable development. This may be

said to be implying that women are a means of poverty eradication, demographic governance, crisis prevention and recovery and environment and sustainable development, which are all important areas of concern though the main theme of this thesis women's role in the fight against poverty.<sup>39</sup>

Empowerment is enabling one to acquire power. In this case power is something exercisable .In relation to the theory in the study, it refers the ability to resist, oppression, marginalization and demeaning acts on women which are ways of stripping them off power. This means that internalized oppression becomes a barrier to women's ability to exercise power. The end result is dominance of inequality among men and women. Therefore for women to be wholly empowered they must be equipped with the following forms of power; Power over; power with; power to and power from within (Rowlands 2012).

I shall briefly explain these forms of power and then finally summarize their applicability in relation to empowerment as used in this study.

### **The four Forms of power**

The four forms of power which are going to be discussed in this part of the thesis are: Power over; power with; power to and power from within. This is because I may say they can be regarded as a means to being well empowered, since they concern the individual and the groups too. They can be said to be tools usable to realize transformation both socially and politically.

### **Power over**

This is the power that enables one to control. It is related with repression. It puts in force. It carries discrimination in it and other vices as corruption and abuse of power. It is categorized with win-losing behavior. To acquire power over one needs to be endowed with

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<sup>39</sup><http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/womenempowerment/overview.html>03/17/2014

the power to take it from someone with an aim of using it to over shadow and prevent others from gaining it. When the marginalized groups or persons gets this power through resistance they may end up oppressing and sometimes they may be said to imitate the oppressors. Power over is a type of power that promotes inequality. It encourages injustices and hence opens doors for poverty. This is because they that have this power, may most of the times controls resources and controls decision making. This makes them over rule to their good disadvantaging them that they have power over. This power can lead to people being denied access to important resources such as land, jobs and services. Some of these services may include health care.<sup>40</sup>

This form of power becomes something that can be said to be suitable for acquisition, by the women groups in the study churches being addressed in this thesis. This is because it weakens and may overcome the discriminative cultural practices, such as women not owning land and being seen well for home caring only. This power breaks the chains of victimization and discourages the chances of being manipulated. Hence empowerment should be away to bring in people who are outside decision making in. This means incorporating them in participating in political structures, formal decision making processes and also economic matters (Rowlands 2012).

### **Power with**

Power with, is concerned with getting a common ground in the midst of different interests. For this reason it ends up building collective strength on the basis of collaboration and oneness. Power with; increases individual abilities, skills, talents and understanding. It builds a connection that helps reconciles those interests that seem irreconcilable. This brings transformation, hence leading to reduction of social conflict. Moreover, it brings up a relation that can be defined as equal. Power with is a strong tool that functions in groups that argue for. This is where these groups look for allies and they unite (Miller 2002).

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/expressions-of-power/3/24/2014>.



Power with bring the aspect of group work being valued more than individual interests mainly when a group is handling a problems together This is the power in the whole group. It is a collaborative type of power (Rowlands 2012).

### **Power to**

Power to, can be described as the distinctive ability of every individual to design his or her life and world. When it is looked at on a group level, this is the power that opens up the possibilities of collective activity, what can be termed as power with. To issues concerning the local people and leadership development, it holds that each individual has the power to make an impact (Miller 2002).

Power to, can be said to be the decisive power. It shows itself in form of exploitation. It is so beneficial in that it creates new possibilities and activities without intimidating. This mean it causes impact without ruling. It is the productive power. It is manipulative in nature. It cause things happen and situations change. It has force in it (Rowlands 2012).

### **Power from within**

Power from within is power that has to do with one's own sense of self-worth and self-knowledge. It in cooperates the ability to acknowledge people's individual differences and respecting others. This too can be said to be the ability to imagine and be hopeful. It affirms that every human being looks for dignity and satisfaction. At the grassroots many people tell personal stories and reflections to proclaim own worth and recognize their power to and power with, which are two forms of power that have the capability to act and cause changes (Miller 2002).

This type of power is also said it involves the spiritual ability that indwells in each one and is the very that makes man human. This is the power that brings in self-acceptance, self-respect and enables people with it to accept others and accord them respect as equals (Rowlands 2012).

Therefore for women to be fully empowered the four forms of power should be made to function at very high levels in them. Women should be helped to attain the power over which helps them to understand the countenances of oppression and internalize the evil of oppression. This is not only something for women but also for the girls. This is being done by women groups in the study churches, as will be found in the next chapter on analysis. One could possibly say that empowerment should not be based on just being involved in decision making. It should be a tool to enable people to see themselves as capable and hence enlisted to make decisions, making use of all human abilities and potentialities, keenly ensuring that all are being engaged. This may mean enforcing the power to, power with and the power from within. On the other hand not ignoring the power over which in this case I may say topples hence can be means to overthrow all that relates to discrimination and subordination. Ending up demolishing all the negative constructions from the environment and enabling individuals perceive their capacity and their right to act and influence decision making at all levels of society (Rowlands 2012).

In the next section of this thesis I shall discuss the three dimensions of empowerment, which are the personal, relational and collective dimension. These dimensions go hand in hand with the four forms of power. The term power is a root-concept which has been discussed in the section above as a way of realizing empowerment (Rowlands 2012).

### **3.3.5 The three dimensions of empowerment**

To realize meaningful development empowerment is vital. Empowerment may be said to be a process which enables people be aware of their personal interests and also help them realize how personal interest relates with the interest of the rest, so that all can participate from a much stronger view point as far as decision-making is concerned and also manipulation of the decisions made. Hence empowerment manifests itself in three dimensions. These dimensions are as I mentioned earlier. That is the personal dimension; relational dimension and the collective dimension which I will briefly described below.

#### **Personal Dimension**

Personal dimension of empowerment is a type of empowerment which pays special attention on individuals. It stimulates the development of a sense of self. It boasts personal confidence, capacity and ability to clear off the oppressing cultures; the cultures that is planted deep within and keeps emphasizing that a woman “cannot”. An individual woman is helped to develop the feeling of self- confidence and enabled to acquire the conception of being capable (Rowlands 2012).

In relation to the personal dimension one could possibly say that it is important when it comes to acquisition of self-confidence because possibly it may be said that it leads to individuals giving themselves some value. That is self-worth. This may be said to influence how one feels about self. Hence may lead to the conviction that if one value self, he or she may love and respect self and acquire the ability to be certain of what one can do and then reach to a point of making self-declarations such as; I am honest, I accepts myself and have the feeling of being good and therefore I like myself.

Therefore the dimension boosts personal confidence, capacity and ability to scrub off the oppressing cultures; the cultures that are planted deep within and without that demean individuals. This may mean that the individual’s point of view towards self, which may be as a result of one not understanding self , unfair treatment from people who might be close, the negative comments by others , abuse which might be physical and emotional ,negative attitude toward self-physical appearance, unhealthy competition or comparison and finally the social cultural stereotypes (Ng’ang’a 2009).

In relation to empowerment women should be empowered to have that individual boldness and capability to beat up all sort of oppressive cultures which segregates and marginalizes them. They need be empowered with the ability to scrutinize their present condition. Then think of means and ways of improving. With a belief that their actions, towards change have ability to cause effects. Hence more and more women should be empowered to get the capacity to be curious about the broader world. Being confident that they have the power to learn and therefore perceive the benefits of being empowered economically, educationally, mentally and socially.

### **Relational dimension**

The other dimension of empowerment is the relational dimension. This is the type of empowerment which enables individuals to be able to negotiate and hence influencing the nature of relationship and the decisions made in the relationship. Relational dimension works on advancing the power to negotiate and impact the way of a relationship and the decision made as per that relationship (Rowlands 2012).

This may mean that women need to be empowered to attain capacity to influence their alternatives, interests and decisions in the relationships in which they are involved in. They should not be quiet and just be recipient to orders in these relationships. Women should be encouraged to be vibrantly involved in making decisions in the different relations they are involved in.

### **Collective Dimension**

The third dimension of empowerment is the collective dimension. This is a state where individuals work together with an aim of making a more extensive impact as compared to what one could have done while all alone. It involves collective actions. This is a state where collaborative working gives results as found when groups work together in the local levels either in the church or in the village as found in the groups in the study churches in this thesis (Rowlands 2012).

This may be interpreted to mean group empowerment helps the discriminated women in villages to form groups. These groups are for operating small businesses, entrepreneuring and innovation. This then may imply helping them develop skills and ability to dominate their lives without tampering with other people's rights. This collectivity always yields results because it has been noted that women's social movements have been a means to bring down repressive dominations. One could possibly say that this clearly indicates if women, more and more team up, they will succeed in bring to an end the horrifying form of unfairness which has in it acts such as; the painful female genital

mutilation in societies like the one in this study, sale of child brides for dowries, wife beating, murder of women by husbands due to their own given reasons, killing of women said to be caught in prostitution, rape and wives being sent away bare handed simply because the husband is head of the household (Handelman 2011).

These dimensions of empowerment may be described as interwoven. This is because an empowered individual is self-confident and can relate with others without being intimidated or having the feeling of worthlessness. This probably may mean that they can relate appropriately without being oppressed or the individual oppressing the rest in the relationship. This may be said to be the reason why these dimensions are illustrated as not individual entities but are intertwined as shown in the diagram below (Rowlands 2012). Figure 1 depicts interaction of the three dimensions of empowerment.

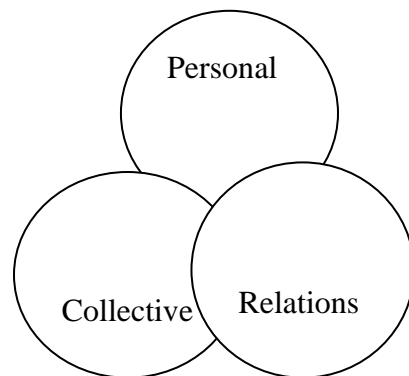


Figure 1: Interaction of the three dimensions of empowerment.

Empowerment cannot be said to be a matter of getting the power to dominate on others. It is that when a group or individual is empowered it helps facilitate the empowerment of the other segregated groups and persons in the society. This is because empowerment is for the eradication of oppressions of all forms and the effect caused by unjust inequalities in the society (Rowlands 2012).

This will be looked into further as I will use the three dimensions of empowerment and these concepts discussed above as tools to study my data. I will discuss more on how women groups in the Methodist churches in the study are empowered and the way they use their acquired skills to empower other women and the other people in the community

including men. Empowerment in this study has been used on small scale basis here because It has brought people together who are experiencing same situations through; self- help; education and social action groups hence have come up with network building (Rowlands 2012).

## **Chapter 4**

### **4.0 Findings, Analysis and discussion of the study**

This chapter presents analyses and discusses the findings of the study. This is done by laying out the results of the study. This study was concerned with examining the role women in the Methodist church in Kenya are playing to fight against poverty. This will be laid down by exploring the women's experiences as far as poverty is concerned. Then discuss the role women in the Methodist in Kenya are playing to fight against poverty; by examining things, activities and projects which women are involved in as a way of fighting against poverty.

The chapter will discuss the role the MCK church is playing to help women fight poverty. Also, in the chapter is an examination on why women in the study churches are concerned with fight against poverty and how women are being empowered to enable them realize their intended objective which is fighting against poverty. The chapter ends by discussing the benefits of fighting against poverty, which are presented as; individual women's benefits, group benefits and church benefits. Then an exploration on the challenges encountered as women fight against poverty has been done hence a conclusion of the study.

#### **4.1 Women's experiences as far as poverty is concerned**

In this part of the thesis I shall state some of experiences women in the study churches had in relation to poverty. The women in this study said that some had experienced poverty in different ways. Hence they defined it differently and it ended up looking quite complex as this study reveals.

Some of the women said that poverty is something that is experienced differently. For example Maria, the women group secretary in church B said that poverty is a lack which ranges from lack of basic needs such as food, shelter, education, health and even lack of friends. Kanja a woman from church A, defined poverty as an obstacle that hinders development in an individual's life and that of the society.

According to Muroria of church B, poverty can be in the mind and is also seen physically. Teresa who said her career is farming, a woman in church A, asserted that poverty can be as a result of laziness. She argued that if one refuses to work hard poverty increases. Laila strongly felt poverty is lack of income which according to her leads to lack of basic necessities that are required for life and hence she said its repercussions are countless many.

The woman who forms the women groups in the two study churches had a wide experience as far as poverty is concerned. This is because some of the women expressed their encounters and the suffering they had gone through as a result of poverty. Some of the women in church A, testified that some could not meet their basic needs; such as food, decent shelter, clothes and some could not meet maternity costs hence had the experience of delivering at home and others for example Kamathi in the bushes around their homes. This is why Kabuli talked of her experience when she was giving birth to her first born. She said:

When time to giving birth to my first born Tisa, the labour pains started late at night. It was too disturbing because I did not know what to do. There was no money to hire a taxi. So i called mama Jiro, who accompanied me as i walked slowly hoping to reach the hospital which was around five kilometers away .The pain was so much that I could no longer walk. Hence we had no alternative other than to just rest by a nearby garden and I delivered my beautiful baby girl. This is why I called her Kajira<sup>41</sup>.

The other thing the women talked about in relation to their experience on poverty is that some of them did not have land and for that matter those fixed by that challenge lived in hired flats and others were kept by their parents or brothers temporarily. This is because according to the informants a girl child, who is referred to in Kimeru as Mwari, cannot own or inherit a father's land. As this conversation was going on Kailu smiling said, "I am out

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<sup>41</sup> Kajira is a name given to a child who is born along the road. This is because njira is the name of a road in kimeru.



of that my dear women. I have been saving for the last five years. Last year i bought a piece of land at Ncuraine,<sup>42</sup> but it is my top most secret”.

The above respondent’s testimony was interesting. So I asked her how she managed to come to the idea of deciding to save and buy a piece of land. Kailu started narrating her story saying:

When I was working in Meru town, I worked for a woman who was a lawyer. She knew that I was single. One day as we were talking, she asked me what I had in mind about my son Tom. We continued talking and she challenged me, by telling me that I had to know that I was the mother and father to Tom. Therefore I had to plan for him. Kailu paused and said, this was very challenging to my mind. I asked my employer for advice. She boldly told me, women can do what men can do. She encouraged me by telling me to save money and promised support of half of the money required to buy my own small piece of land enough to build a house, grow vegetables and keep chicken. Kailu said, a woman helped me hence I go telling other women that a woman can. Today I have built a house but not many know how I made it.

Kailu could possibly be referred to as a living testimony in relation to what Rowlands says about empowerment being the act of encouraging ordinary people to take charge of their own lives which leads them to becoming more responsible for their own development (Rowlands 2012:1).

On the other hand I may say that Rowlands’ idea of empowerment may possibly be relevant as a means of undoing all sought of negative construction such as in the case of Kailu above; that Mwari,<sup>43</sup> cannot own or inherit land. One way of interpreting this is empowerment has taken place since the negative cultural thinking has been watered and this woman sees herself with ability and not only the ability but also the right to act and influence decisions about herself and others (Rowlands 2012:14).

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<sup>42</sup> Ncuraine is a name of a place

<sup>43</sup> Mwari is a name meaning girl

The above participant's experience may be interpreted to mean that the empowered individuals may become a resource to empower others. This may mean that empowered individuals lead to empowered groups as they keep on sharing their experiences at personal level or in groups. This leads to the group working together in fighting all the unconstructive beliefs such as it is only a man who can own land. Possibly they are felt more while in a group as compared to how it could have been when one is alone. In this case I may say that this group becomes more influential. Since when they sing as I shall discuss in the next part of the thesis; they pass these ideas along to the listeners of all kind.

Some of these women claimed to be single parents as a result of being disowned by their husbands. Others lost their husbands due to sicknesses and accidents. Some widows for example Kamari a member of church A women group shared her experience of being thrown out by her in-laws after the death of her husband. The other one of the same church Eliza said that she was still living in her matrimonial homes though experiencing opposition and pressure from in-laws. These widowed women for example Eliza addressed me in a conclusive manner saying; "nukumenya kinya ii i thina inene mono we?" This meaning, do you know even this is a big form of poverty?"

Amongst these women were those who had experiences relating to violence against women which they categorized as poverty. This is why Mworu who claimed to have been beaten by her husband after he came home drunk. On hearing that women are battered and still held on to the marriage, I wanted to know how and why. Then I asked her if she found it right. Mworu started giving her experience by saying; "It is not a good thing to be beaten, though I had to bear it for the sake of my growing children." When I inquired the reason why she felt she had to bear, she said, "according to Meru culture the husband has a right to beat the wife as a way to disciplining her, for whatever reason he feels like". She shook her head and said; "This violence against women is poverty".

The women in church A, shared their experience on how some of them could not access the funding bodies such as banks. This is because they did not have securities such as salaried jobs and properties like title deeds. Kamuti a woman in church A, told of how she wanted to rear chicken on a large scale but did not have enough capital to expand her

project. She said when she went to the nearest National bank branch at their local market, she was surprised to be told that she could only get funding in form of a loan if only she had security. This according to Kamuti was a limitation since she had none of the securities. This limitation she described it as a challenge hence to her and the rest of the women facing similar limitation, this was poverty.

The other thing the women groups in the study churches talked about in relation to poverty was failure to family plan. Kanga a woman in church B, described how she ended up having a big family, which she described as poverty. Her description made me get concerned and then I asked her to tell me what she meant by “a big family”. Kanga told me that a big family is the issue of having many children. She told me of having given birth to thirteen children. Hence she explained:

This made me feel ashamed and lack confidence. This is because my children did not get quality education like those of my age mates. I went on getting children since my husband could not allow me to get help from family planning facilities. This is because he kept saying if I do family planning it will give me room for prostitution.

She concluded saying, “giving birth to children without plan is real poverty”. Kanga further said, “I got pregnant, gave birth but some of my children died at age two, others three, due to lack of required attention. Those who lived were quite weak and I was not sure of their survival.” At this point I interrupted since I really wanted to know how many children she had alive. Kanga said, “Hey! I am a mother of nine not counting the dead ones.” She further had this to say, “i was a depressed, an ever sad woman both at home and at work.” She went on:

This made my employer father Nganji to get concerned as I used to work for the church to teach some students how to knit. Thanks to father Nganji, he is the one who helped me from the problem by visiting our home and he talked to my husband. He convinced him on the importance of family planning. My husband agreed saying, “I will agree for you are a man of God. If it were not for that I cannot after all children are riches and they are God given.

Kanga quoted her husband laughing. Then she added:

The old women are people of importance to me, they kept encouraging me by saying that it shall be well, especially Grace.....I used to confide in her all I was going through. Also I sought advice from kaki who is married to a man who is the same age as my husband. She assured me that family planning was not harmful since inwardly I was fearing what was being called “family planning “.I wanted to know the bad of it to me .My conviction was that it was something of the wazungu (meaning a white person’s ideology). My fellow women in this group also repeatedly discussed family planning and they could quote examples of women who have done it and were well in their families. They kept encouraging the whole group to seek it saying in Kiswahili; “panga uzazi Kwa maisha bora ya badaye” (This meant plan your family for good life in future).

Kanga said finally, “I am so grateful to the man of God, to those women (pointing to the women). I do not know how many children I could have ended up giving birth to.”

From Kanga’s story one could possibly say that a lot in relation to the importance of personal dimension of empowerment has been made manifest. This is because when an individual is empowered develops self-confidence. Kanga could be said to be speaking confidently about her experience since probably she had already been helped and had already dealt with it. Also she may be described as a resource .Hence she can be used to help and empower others with similar issues like those of her more so the younger women in the group who I heard referring to her as mama. This meant in English mother.

On the other hand relational dimensional of empowerment can be said to possibly be identified in the above conversation as women can interact with ease , can open to each other, share experiences and knowledge and ask for help where there is need. The collective dimension of empowerment in this case may be said to be evident in this respondent’s story. This is for example, where she says “fellow women in the group repeatedly discussing family planning”. This may be said to mean that the women have been empowered and therefore are able to handle issues of life individually and as a group.

Out of how the women in the study churches conceive the term poverty, it may mean that it may be described to mean something that seems complex. Because they are looking at it as a lack of not only basic needs but also of friends. It is made to mean being widowed. It is also related with violence against women, inability to have access to credit, giving birth to many children as well as gender biasness for example in the case of owning land above. Also the very complexity of term is manifested by the means the women in the study churches use to fight against poverty as shall be discussed in 4.2 below .The activities being carried out mirror the complexity of how the term and how it has been conceived to be.

Another thing that is portrayed in the cases above is that Rowlands model of the three dimensions of empowerment may be said to be relevant. That is the Personal dimension, relational dimension and collective dimension. This is because these women can be said to have gained as individuals, as a group and also can relate in a manner that can be said to health in relation to person to person relationship (Rowlands 2012:14)

#### **4.2 The Role Women in the Methodist Church are playing to Fight against Poverty.**

In this part of the thesis I will lay out the activities that are being carried out by the women groups in the two study churches as a way of fighting poverty. Then I will explain how the women were carrying out these projects and activities as i observed during the field study.

Women in the two study churches that is church A and church B, are doing several projects and activities as ways of fighting against poverty. The women have formed self-help groups; carrying out projects to generate income; they are planting trees to control environmental degradation; they are learning methods of family planning and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and Human Immuno-deficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS)<sup>44</sup>;they are being educated on human right; they

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<sup>44</sup> <http://aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/what-is-hiv-aids/:cited> on 4/17/14.

are fighting against child labour , school-drop outs and Female Genital Mutilation(FGM)<sup>45</sup>; They are learning and practicing better methods of agriculture and livestock production; they are learning means and ways of generating and saving energy; they are learning more about general hygiene; cookery; weaving and basketry , knitting and are being introduced to funding bodies. The women in the study sing objective based songs, to inspire, motivate acceptable behavior, express feeling, ideas, and opinions and to educate. They sing songs and dance for entertainment and as a way of exercising. They recite and dramatize bible verses as a way of expressing their ideas, feelings, opinions and also to convey the messages in bible verses.

#### **4.2.1 Self- Help Groups**

Self-help groups: These are groups which are usually made up of people with same experiences, issues or needs. They are groups that are composed by the act of people coming together with an aim of achieving same objectives which includes saving money and improving one another's welfare. In these groups members contribute, until they gather enough capital. The goal of self-help groups is meeting the needs of each other in the group. The capital the groups collect enable them, sometimes, to access credit facilities which, then, help the groups make a living. These savings helps the members at the time of need. In self-help groups members involve themselves in all the undertakings of the group. They usually have regular meetings, which they attend once a week or as the group agrees. In these meetings the members discuss matters concerning the group and come to a collective agreement. This way they find solution to the issues that trouble them. In these meetings the group carries out what concerns them as a group and also attend to individual group members issues<sup>46</sup>.The women groups in the two study Methodist churches have formed self –help groups. The groups have no limited number of members since they are consisted of all women in the church. The women groups in both churches meet every

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.desertflowerfoundation.org/en/what-is-fgm/>. Cited on 4/17/14.

<sup>46</sup> <http://ideas.repec.org/p/igi/igierp/401.html>. cited on 26/4/14

unday after the Sunday service and also have a meeting on other day in the week. According to informants Women in church A meet on Wednesday as those in church B meet on Friday. The groups have leaders who include the; secretary, who is named as Karani in kimeru, the chairlady who is referred to as mwene giti and the treasurer who is called mwiki mbeba. When I asked the respondents how they come to have those leaders as the leaders of the group, it came to my realization that in both churches they held elections after every two years. This is when the leaders are elected by the entire church congregation.

According to the respondents when women meet, they discuss what to do to promote each other spiritually, socially and economically as a group. After agreeing they said that they contribute money of equal amount which can be afforded by all .This amount according to the respondents is usually from hundred to two hundred Kenyan shillings. The women said that the amount is that which every woman cannot fail to work and have in a week's time.

The women said that the secretary keeps the register which contains all the names of the women in the group. She is also the one who call out the women's names during the meeting. The informants said that the answering of one's name when called out means giving the money required by the group at that time. After giving the money one is marked has having paid. The total is counted and is given to one woman who is supposed to receive the money.

This made me inquire from my respondents how they tell who should have the money collected on particular date. The respondents said they exercise democracy in their activities in that, they roll papers written from number one to the last, depending on the number of the group members. Then the group members pick, each becomes the position showing on the piece of paper picked. This way each woman knows who gets the money at different times of collection. This money they call it, *merry –go round money*.

The informants said that through this way of collecting money from one another has been of helped to them. It has helped them improve their way of life in that at each of

their homes they have enough cups, plates, spoons, cupboards to store the utensils, a water storage tanks, a dairy goat chicken, dairy cows and pigs. This is a benefit from merry –go-round money. Hence they generate income from this money, which comes as a result of the goats producing milk for home use and sale which helps them save the money which could be used to buy milk and also have some increase from the sale. The dairy cows too produce milk for sale and all other benefits related to this.

As per my observation I found that the self –help group could be described as having become a way to empower individuals, which finally may lead to an empowered group. This is because at one time all the members of the group will have the so called merry-go round money. Then this money enables them meet their needs which included paying of their children’s school fees. This is what Kaali a woman in church A, testified about the way the merry –go round money mainly pays her child’s school fees. Others make their merry-go round money capital for their small business just as Eunice a woman in church B, says that she started her grocery shop using the merry go round income.

According to these respondents experiences one may say then that these self-help groups have been an empowerment ground for individual women, hence the groups end up being empowered as these women socio-economic status improves. This also illuminates the aspect of collective dimension, which comes up with the idea that when individuals work together they achieve more and makes a more intense impact than each could have made when alone.

In regard to these activities being done by the women in the study churches i may say this is why empowerment is looked at on individual basis, aiming at increasing individual capability for self-reliance. On the other hand the empowered women gain self-confidence, bring in increments to their individual homes , hence increase their self –confidence as they attain the feeling of capability and increase their feeling of self-worth as Rowlands puts it (Rowlands 2012:15).

The above discussion can be described as that portrays that the advantage of empowering women is that, they can end up carrying out undertakings which are



traditionally said to be men roles mainly in a patriarchal society. For example in the case in this study some women have told of having bought land .Others has told of paying school fees for their children. There are those who have bought animals such as dairy cows and goats, pigs, chicken and have even planted trees. Women are caring for their children and those of the entire society. This may be said to be confirmed by what they are doing through campaigning against child labor, fighting illiteracy through speaking against school drop outs, encouraging youths to enroll in vocational courses, carrying out farming activities and providing income to their families. All these are men's role because the man is said to be the bread winner, caretaker and provider yet in this study I saw women having done what probably can be said to be same as the stated men roles.

After my informants told me all women were doing i asked them to tell me those duties that were compulsorily men roles. My respondent Gakii a woman from church A, said:

Land, Trees, animals, children and wife(s) belongs to men and women ask for permission from the husband to cut some firewood from the trees. Animals except chicken belong to men such that no woman is allowed by the culture to go and sell an animal as long is the husband is a life unless chicken. Children too belong to men since especially girls are counted as wealth. This is because when girls marry the dowry is paid to the father by the groom in form of cows, goats, sheep and this makes the bride's father richer. If a wife separates with the husband and goes with children, when the girl grows and is engaged to a man, the father is called for the dowry. If not he claims and rightly he is given. Hence men are expected to plant trees, buy animals, care for the wife and children. (See<sup>47</sup>)

This sounded interesting so I asked the respondents what the men's response was now that the women are carrying out the said traditional men roles. Kamami a woman in church A, said

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.kenya-information-guide.com/meru-tribe.html>

Men are appreciating and have become very supportive. This is because they have seen the development we are bringing home. These days we have reduced cases of men complaining when we go to women affairs unlike before. They allow us to go to women meetings freely. For example my husband every Wednesday reminds me not to miss the women's meeting. He inquires to know if I have group money. (Which they referred to in kimeru as mbecha cia gikundi).

The women's activities described in the above paragraphs probably can be described to be an eye opener to the society on the importance of women's unpaid work. This portrays that there is acceptance of women's new roles as Kamami is saying which can be said is the result of women's proper organization and the benefit of collective strength which can help suppress the oppressive man dominated culture. Due to this I may say that empowerment has led women to see themselves as able and people who are entitled to make decisions.

#### **4.2.2 The Projects**

The women in the two Methodist churches, church A and church B, are carrying out projects as a way of fighting poverty. The main purpose of operating these projects according to my respondents is to generate income. These projects which I found in both church A and church B, are ; plates, spoons, cups and pots project; the tents and chairs projects and the hall projects. Though in church B, there was a chick incubating project which the women group had just started. According to my respondents, in both churches the plates, spoons, cups and pots project was the first one to be established in both of the study groups.

In church A, the construction of a hall project was considered after an old woman by name Mambo visited her husband who was working in another district in 1980. This woman told me while she was with her husband she attended a Sunday service in a nearby church. That church had a beautiful hall which had hostels. The woman said that she inquired to know how they had managed to build such a good hall. She told me that the women who welcomed her to that church told her that it was a women's project.

When she learnt it was a women's project; she further inquired to know how those women functioned to an extent of realizing money enough to build such a hall. She told me that a woman by name Mwaniki whom she said, said that women can do anything because they are helpers and God has given them the ability to help not only at home but also in the church. Mambo said when she went back to her church she shared the idea to her fellow women. The women liked her idea though a challenge stood. The challenge was: how to get enough money for the project. According to Mambo the women agreed to ignore all the limitation they were seeing and believed they could.

The women officials led by Mambo went to the church officials which are called Kiama<sup>48</sup> in kimeru and told the group of their plan. The leaders did not object but the money challenge was the obstacle that was sighted by the Kiama. The women proposed to the Kiama that they will call for help through Harambee. According to these respondents, when they went back to the women group they organized for a Harambee, they got the first amount of money which was not so much but only bought five Lorries of construction sand. Mambo continued with her narrative on how the hall's construction money was realized as she said:

After three years I met a woman friend who lived in Geneva, I shared my dream hall, as a women's project with her. This friend promised me help in money form. She shared my idea to her friends and they sent my church, the money, which we used to lay the foundation. She lamented, if this money was used as planned, that hall (pointing to the hall) could be complete

At this point I wanted to dig further and know what happened to the money. Then Mambo said reluctantly, "there was mishandling". Further I questioned, "How?" Mambo laughed and said, "this was not a big thing, God is our auditor, don't mind", (pointing at the hall) she said, "The hall is there". When I realized she did not want to talk more on the

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<sup>48</sup> Kiama is a kimeru name for the entire church officials

issue of misappropriation, quickly i went on to inquire on if the hall was in use. Carol who was with Mambo answered me saying:

The hall is not yet complete because we have not installed tapped water and hostels, we are yet to. The financial challenge is still their though we shall continue till we see it is as Mambo explained to us. Unfortunately today none of us is in leadership; the young women have taken the responsibility and leadership. She pause and asked me, don't you remember the Methodist rules when it comes to election of leaders?

The women concluded by telling me that the hall was in use and they were renting it as it is since it is the only in their area .So meetings were being held there both by the church and the outsiders. The outsiders hired it at an affordable fee, which they use to boost the church in its functions, pay cleaners, subsidize women expenses as they carry out their activities and pay for maintenances of the hall.

Mambo's narrative was interesting such that one can possibly conclude that women cannot be ignored and be looked at just as housewives and mothers, neither be looked at as just recipients. Hence I may say that the ideas of WID approach, which sought to bring women into development by ensuring they are cooperating in broader development projects and programs as a way of halting marginalization and hence leading to the benefit of all can probably be said to be a viable approach (Rowlands 2012:5).

The women in church A, both Mambo and Carol, who the group identified as the pioneers and most knowledgeable in relation to women's development projects further told me of how the tents and chairs projects came about. These women said that the tent and chairs project was as a result of the idea of constructing a hall. The women thought that a hall could not be without chairs. Mambo said the women's income from plates and cups was a motivation. This is because according to these respondents on weekly basis they got some income from the hired utensils. This is why Carol posed a question to Mambo expecting some confirmation saying, "nkuruki ya nusu ya iti biu ri ; biuri na bia cia thaani na ikombe, Mambo.Tibuo?" Meaning, "More than half of the chairs have been bought from

the income received from hiring of plates and cups, Mambo. Isn't it?" These projects were started as a result of women's desire to solve the problems that emerged as a result of church and other social gatherings which the same women and men in church attended. This possibly could lead to the conclusion that women in the study churches were able to identify needs, opportunities and act towards meeting them.

According to these women from church A, whenever they attended these meetings, they kept identifying the need for chairs and shade. This is because every time they were addressed as they sat on the grass and were being scorched by the sun or sometimes could be rained on. This continued until the day Mambo talked a bought the hall and was backed by the women in the group which led to opening of their eyes further to see the need of chairs and the tent to use during the outdoor meetings. The challenge of lacking these items during their church meeting and other social ceremonies such as weddings also lead to the desire to have the utensils, chairs and tents which could be used whenever these ceremonies were held in the church function and in the society.

The two women named other examples of the ceremonies usually conducted in church and among them were; the family Sunday service which according to them was an annual event, fundraisings popularly called Harambee as mentioned earlier in this thesis. Carol alerted me that the Harambee were not only done in church but were a very common function in the society which could be done almost monthly to raise school fees, hospital bills and to erect development projects and other meetings such chief's baraza<sup>49</sup> since churches A from which this study has been carried is a centers for other social meetings and church meetings such as circuit services<sup>50</sup> for a service and synod gatherings<sup>51</sup>.

This explains the reason why the women came up with the idea of hall construction as a women's project. The women said that they first started the plates, spoons, cups and pots project. This was made possible by women group members contributing very little

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<sup>49</sup> Chief's baraza is a Kiswahili name for meeting

<sup>50</sup> Circuit service refers to gather of the twelve churches under a superintendent minister

<sup>51</sup> Synod gatherings refer to those meetings which are chaired by the bishop.

money which they had agreed could be afforded by all members. The women in church A, added some extra ten shillings to the merry-go –round money mentioned earlier. The additional money according to the informants was for buying the utensils. The project fee went on increasing slowly by slowly and by the time I was conducting the research they were contributing fifty shillings. The women testified that the amount accumulated and when it was an amount that could buy a minimum of fifty plates, fifty spoons, fifty cups and a pot, they could go and buy, until the plates, the spoons and cups were five hundred and the pots were twenty .

The women in church A said that they continued using these things when they had their parties and ceremonies. They let out the same to other people who were not church members whenever they needed them at an affordable fee. Together with their contribution, they bought chairs and started the hall project which they explained how it started and how they reached where they are. Since the halls are in use. The women in church A claimed that their hall was incomplete hence they were working on it as it was being used to bring in income.

This was becoming quite interesting to me. Hence I wanted to know how they maintained the project. This is because plates and cups could break or even get lost as they moved from one party to the other. According to me the pots could be spoilt. Karii a woman from church A said:

To maintain the projects the people who hire these items pays a deposit together with the hiring fee, the deposit is refunded if none of the items is destroyed or misplaced. This applies to the hall , the tents and chairs.

As a result of the women’s activities one could possibly say that the women have acquired knowledge of business skills as they carried their activities. This can be evidenced as the money they collected through these projects according to the women groups in the two study churches is used to replace lost items, pay cleaners and repair. The women’s cost when going out to visit other women groups to learn from them, visit to resource centers where they learn about good methods of livestock and crop production is also paid for in part. This is because according to my respondents this money earned as income buys them

refreshments, gives tokens to facilitators such as gynecologists and other specialists whom they invite to teach them about the woman's body and health, issues concerning HIV/AIDS and STIs, family planning, stress management, their rights as women, how to invest among others.

At this point I was eager to know who owns these items, the hall, the utensils, the tents and the chairs. The respondents were pleased to say these things belonged to their churches. Kambanja for example a woman in church B said, "as per the M.C.K.<sup>52</sup>: rules and regulations found in the Standing Orders<sup>53</sup>; all properties belong to the church." this meant that on completion of these halls they will be recorded in the list of the church properties.

Looking at all these projects one may end up to saying possibly these women have been made to learn skills. These skills may be said to be important in increasing empowerment of women. This is because the learning of different skills and topics such as business skill, record keeping, leadership skills, life skill for example stress management, learning more about diseases, their prevention and cure, communication skills, good crop and animal husbandry, making of bio-gas and energy saving Jikos, caring for the environment by planting trees, recycling of used up material such as polythene bags as will be discussed in this study. The women on the other hand can be said to have acquired investing and saving skills. Looking at all this one could possibly say that women have become more independent hence likely to be more self-reliant as Rowlands puts it (Rowland 2012).

#### **4.2.3 Planting Trees**

The women groups in the two study churches said that poverty manifests itself in different ways. According to my respondents they fight against poverty by cutting short its causes. One of the causes of poverty according to my informants is deforestation. They asserted that Meru from time immemorial has been the home of big forests with indigenous trees. These trees women named them in mother-tongue since they did not know their

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<sup>52</sup> MCK stands for Methodist Church in Kenya

<sup>53</sup> Standing orders is a MCK constitution book

names in English. The trees named were mwangua, muumo and mukundukundu. They lamented that today the forests have been destroyed for settlement, cultivation and also due to search for fuel. This has led to drying up of water sources and has encouraged drought.

Hence the women in both of the study churches said that to discourage deforestation every rainy season, they plant trees collectively as a group. Then every individual woman plants trees at her farm and compounds for those with land. As the interviewing was going on, i got interested to know where they got the seedlings that they planted from. The women told me that they usually planted seeds in packs. These seeds they watered and then they grew together with the vegetables in the kitchen gardens. The respondents said that way they were sure they will make in their fighting against poverty. This is because by planting trees according to what they have learnt from Simon a researcher in forestry, they will control air pollution, soil erosion since trees acts has wind breakers; they preserve water sources and hence control desertification, beautify their environment and provide home for wild animals. They said trees are a source of food, medicine and fuel for home use.<sup>54</sup>

What the women groups in the study churches are doing in relation to conservation of environment, may be interpreted as that women have gained awareness that trees are important for food, soil conservation and attraction of rainfall. Also they are a home for wild animals, beautifies the environment, controls pollution and can be away of preserving indigenous trees. Therefore, what these women are doing by planting trees probably can be interpreted to mean that they have been empowered for sustainable development (Singh 1995).

Another thing women said they were doing to fight against poverty was learning proper methods of agriculture and livestock production. The woman in church A told me of their learning tours to different places for learning purposes. Among these places was

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.haryali.org/importance-of-trees.htm4/1/14>



Kaaga Bio-Intensive Agricultural Training center. The women said that the center majors in empowering landholders to improve income and nutrition by means of organic farming.

The women in church A affirmed that they had been helped to maximally use their land .This was so for them who had benefitted by use of bio-intensive farming methods. They stated that not all women had their own land. This was interesting hence I wanted to know how they benefited from the tours or visits to these learning places.

The women in church A enthusiastically explained saying that they apply the knowledge on small scale. This meant that they improvised portable pieces of land, which were made of containers to hold the soil with. They named these materials as plastic bags, sacks, old basins in which they put soil and planted vegetables around their houses. These respondents in church A, said these portable gardens are useful to them as they are always assured of vegetables for home use and sometimes for sale. They described what they learn as good since they used organic manure which does not destroy the soil; instead it improves the soil structure.<sup>55</sup>

The women in both churches said to have been saving energy as a way of fighting poverty. This they were doing by use of improved Jikos<sup>56</sup>. These Jikos used less charcoal and less firewood. On the other hand women were generating biogas from the livestock waste. This was an activity being done women in both study churches church A and B.This according to the respondents was because the region where the women groups are found, firewood is highly used. The respondents asserted that that has been one of the causes of uncontrolled deforestation .The respondents in both churches complained that there were few trees. When I tried to inquire the reason they had for the decreased number of trees in the forest, they said that the place has no big natural forests except the one they named as kuuru ,<sup>57</sup> which is at the boundary of the two districts from which these churches are found.

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<sup>55</sup><http://www.umcor.org/Search-for-Projects/Projects/14217A.cited> on 4/3/14

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.co2balance.com/improved-energy-efficient-cookstoves/.cited> on 5/11/14

<sup>57</sup> the name of the place where the forest is found.

The respondents said that in the past the named forest was vast and had variety of indigenous trees as compared to today.

At this point I wondered what really happened and I interrupted by asking the respondents why it is that the forest had decreased so much as they are describing it. Catherine a respondent from church B, had this to say, “This is because people today have settled in places which were said traditionally to be sacred”. This sounded more interesting hence I asked Catherine which places were sacred. Catherine continued, “Sacred places include forested area, and swampy places like mbututia.”<sup>58</sup> A possible conclusion that can be made as pertains this is that population pressure might have contributed. Catherine went on saying, “this is why our women group has continued to plant trees at our compound, round our garden and we even have planted along the main roads. See those trees there” (Pointing at a young growing forest by the tarmac road).

Kaburo a women from church A, told me of how their group learnt how to make biogas from an agricultural training centers. She said that the group sponsored some of their members to go and learn. Then when they came back they taught the rest of the group theoretically and then implemented at the group members homes. This according to Kaburo was done for those who had one or more dairy cows reared by zero-grazing method. As far as I am know the use of biogas is one of the ways of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. This is because biogas is a special energy technology which is being used for varied uses and has many benefits in public health, agricultural production, and environmental sustainability as well as in economic development.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Mbututia is a swampy place in Meru

<sup>59</sup> [http://kerea.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Promoting-Biogas-Systems-in-Kenya\\_A-feasibility.-study.pdf](http://kerea.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Promoting-Biogas-Systems-in-Kenya_A-feasibility.-study.pdf). cited on 4/3/14

The activities women groups in the study churches are doing explains clearly that the women are learning important skills and techniques of life such as gardening, keeping animals, making of biogas and the use improved *Jikos*.<sup>60</sup>

This shows acquisition of these skills and techniques can be said to be an important way of increasing empowerment of women. The learning of different skills makes these women more independent. Hence they can be said to reach a high level be self-reliant. Hence Rowlands (1997) states:

Empowerment is a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choice and to control resources which will assist them to challenge and eliminate their own subordinations (p.17).

The concern for environment which has been shown by these women in the two study churches can be interpreted to be agreeing with the fact that, environmental matters are vital correlates of poverty. Since rivers, lakes and ponds are the main source of drinking water in areas where the poor are found. On the other hand Forests are a source of fuel in form of firewood and charcoal (Nafula 2005).

The women groups in the study churches can be said to be portraying signs of empowerment. This is because empowering individuals is act of enabling them to make maximum use of the opportunities available to them. It is also a way in which people are made aware of their own interests and more so how these interests of theirs relates to the interests of others. This is advantageous in that it enables the people to participate from a point of greater ability in decision-making and more so in influencing decision (Karl 1995).

#### **4.2.4 Information on issues that slow development**

The women groups in the study churches receive education on issues that slow development as a way of fighting poverty. This is because according to Mary one of the

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.co2balance.com/improved-energy-efficient-cookstoves/.cited> on 5/11/14.

respondents, a woman in church A, who was saying, “A woman in a Methodist church is one who is development conscious.” This sounded quite motivating and so I asked Mary why she said that. Mary explained by saying, “this is why the women in my group are actively fighting against that which hinders development. One being poverty hence we are fighting against it.” She added, “Poverty is lack of development which results from lacking information.” This respondent informed me that the women in church A have set days when they invite facilitators to educate them on what they called in Kiswahili “yaliyomo”<sup>61</sup>. According to these women in churches A, they receive information on: family planning ,HIV and AIDS, STIs, Human rights, causes of school drop outs, disadvantages of early marriages, disadvantages of FGM; corruption and other things that discourage development in their surroundings.

Mary’s information was interesting to me. This is because among the things she told me women in church A, were doing, can be said to be tool of helping realize the millennium development goals as stated by UNDP. Which include:

Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, promote child mortality, improve maternal health, stop spread of HIV and Aids, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development.<sup>62</sup>

In regard to what these women were doing, I sought to know how they got this information. According to my respondents, they choose among themselves facilitators. This is because according to the informants their women group composition is diverse in that among them are teachers, nurses, politicians, preachers and women advanced academically

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<sup>61</sup> Yaliyomo a Kiswahili word for present or latest news or information

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/4/3/14>.

and women advanced in age too. The women expressed how they treasured the old women as a source of advice and counsel to the younger women.

Moreover, information is power. So when women receive information , for example on family planning, disease such as HIV and AIDs, STIs, malaria and other diseases, their ways of transmission and prevention, human rights, causes of school drop outs, disadvantages of early marriages, disadvantages of FGM and corruption. This may be interpreted to mean that the women are being empowered through information on all these areas concerning life. This may be said to imply that these women can participate more in development. This is because they have access to information, control over information and have the chance to share information which is an important component in women's participation and empowerment (Karl 1995).

The information women are receiving probably can be said to be vital information, since the women are being made aware of important issues that are entitlement to all both men and women. For example, when it comes to Human Rights, it is clear that in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, it is well stated:

Everyone is entitled to all rights set forth in the declaration, without distinction of any kind such as color, race, sex.... (Karl 1995).

Also just as the feminists have it, one could possibly say that all issues can be said to be women issues. This is because the women groups in the study churches are attending to different kinds of issues that concern their life and the life of the entire human society. This ranges from the traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, to the environment, education, business, health, to human rights and development of all kind. (Karl 1995).

The women groups in church B, had other activities that they referred to as usual woman's activities which they engaged themselves in as a way of fighting poverty. These activities are: Practicing general hygiene; cookery; weaving; basketry and knitting. On seeking to know from my respondents what they called general hygiene they said in kimeru

it is utheru,<sup>63</sup> which included washing hands after visiting the latrine or toilet, before eating and handling food. This prompted me to inquire if all women have reliable water supply. The respondents said that they did not have. Then Prisy added;

Though we lack reliable water supply, we have learnt how to maximize the use of the little water we have. This we do by improvising taps with running water near the latrine. Such that when one comes out of the latrine he or she washes the hands especially our children. We have tied containers which are filled with water regularly and we have made holes that we drive in nail in to ensure water is not pouring and drive out the nail when we want the water to run out for washing of the hands. This way we are sure our children wash their hands after using the latrine. Next to the improvised tap is a piece of soap. This has helped us fight against disease like cholera.

This woman's statement confirmed that personal empowerment can be said to indeed be a process that incorporates both the psychological and psycho-social process and changes, which makes an individual woman repeatedly do the same thing again and again. This makes individual women develop a feeling that she can interact with her surrounding causing things to happen (Rowlands 2012).

The other activity the women groups in the study churches are involved in as a strategy to fight against poverty is cookery. The women in these groups have learnt different methods of cooking which includes; boiling; roasting; frying; baking; and steaming. All these methods are important to these women since they cook different types of foods using different methods of cookery. My respondent to whom somehow one of the women the rest referred to as mama<sup>64</sup>, explained to me the reason why they learnt these cooking methods. The woman told me the main reason was that through well-made food love will never miss in their homes. Also they had it that when they learn cookery they cook food for sale.

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<sup>63</sup>Utheru means general hygiene

<sup>64</sup> Mama is a Kiswahili name meaning mother.

One way of interpreting the above information from the respondents is that cooking has several benefits. These can be put as; it makes the food diet better, connects people to the nature and also their bodies. On the other hand I may say probably through cookery creativity is promoted and also patience is boosted.<sup>65</sup> This may be concluded as a way of empowerment as women's creativity is improved and hence their personal confidence is built up by the feeling that they can influence their families as they serve good well cooked food (Rowlands 2012).

#### **4.2.5 Weaving, Basketry, sewing and Knitting**

The women groups in the two study churches practice handicraft activities such as weaving, basketry, sewing and knitting (Griffen 1987).

The women groups in the study churches practice weaving as a way of fighting against poverty. They weave ropes for home use. Meaning they use ropes for tying their animals such as goats, cows, sheep and animal feeds. They use the ropes to tie their loads on oxen and donkeys. Some use ropes to tie round their backs as they carry different types of loads including firewood<sup>66</sup>.

These loads according to the respondents include water, firewood and farm produce. The farm produce such as harvested bananas, yams and other products which they first put in a sack and then tie on their back to carry home or to sell in the market. On hearing the great the women on the use of rope I inquired to know what the ropes were made of. The respondents said that the ropes they made were mainly made using sisal fibres and they improvised fibres from used polythene bags. This way they made ropes which lasted longer as compared to those made of sisal fibres only. These polythene made ropes according to the informants could withstand wetness since they are stronger and therefore does not cut easily.

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<sup>65</sup><http://www.thekitchn.com/michael-pollan-on-the-importance-of-cooking-food-news-188121>.Cited.on 4/4/14

<sup>66</sup><http://www.rnw.nl/africa/article/doing-business-world%E2%80%99s-biggest-refugee-camp>.Cited.on 5/11/14

One of my respondents in church A told me that they not only made ropes but also they made baskets, mats and hats. This is something I found out in church B. It was quite interesting to learn that in both churches the women groups made baskets, hats and mats, using both sisal and polythene fibres. According to my respondents in church A, they blend different colors hence end up making very beautiful colored baskets, hats and mats. These items they said are for their own use and for sale. After knowing that the baskets, mats and hats that the women in both churches make are both for sale and for their own use, then I was interested to know how this was done and when, since it was a time consuming activity as far as I know. So I asked the women leader in church A, who was my respondents how they managed to make baskets, mats and hats in large scale until they could have some for sale. Kang' ondu, who is the secretary to the women group in church A, said this:

We have set days when we weave for the group, which we announce and women come to the group meeting knowing so well that we are going to weave, hence the activity is scheduled for an average of four to five hours. The products we make are sold and then we put the money in the group's account. When individual women weave at their own time, they use the items and can sell to meet their own financial needs.

The women in church B also knit pullovers, scarfs, socks and dresses. They sew night dresses, and pajamas, embroider table clothes and handkerchiefs. This is an activity I felt I wanted to inquire more on how they did it. Hence I asked Ntitu a member of the women group in church B. Ntitu explained to me as follows:

Majority of the women in our group knew how to sew and knit. One day Laila a white woman visited our church from London. As a sign of appreciating to our visitor Laila, we gave her a pair of knitted leg warmers and an embroidered table cloth. Laila was so happy until she promised to help each one of us with money to buy machines to sew as well as those that knit. When she went back to London, she came back after one year and she brought us these machines you see here.



Then I asked Ntitu, if all women can machine knit and sew. Ntitu answered this by saying:

All the women in our group can knit and sew including the young women around. This is because we have sewing and knitting classes where the young women are taught how to sew and knit. Then our money from the merry-go round has helped us buy each an additional machines.

I further asked another question to Ntitu trying to know if all women like both sewing and knitting. Ntitu answered my question by saying, “some women have both machines and others have just one type. Some of us here have tailoring and dress making shops and others have sewing shops.”

In relation to these activities that are mentioned above, a possible conclusion can be said to be that weaving is one of the activities that is done by both men and women in this context<sup>67</sup>. This is why Kamee, One of the respondents from church B proudly explained how her husband helps her to make ropes, baskets and mats especially at their leisure time. This concurs with the description of empowerment according to Gender and Development (GAD). Since GAD describes empowerment as a series of actions .Something highly spirited and not constant and that which keeps changing and may vary as per a specific culture, social location or out of a person’s particular life experiences. Not only that but also ones interaction with these aspects in relation to gender relations particularly in a set society (Rowlands 2012).

As per what I heard from these women, I supposed that they had been personally empowered. This is because according to my respondents they talked of acquiring different kinds of skills which one can say that they can use to earn a living and are bettered economically. This can be interpreted to be a way of empowerment. On the other hand the women in the two study churches in their explanations, they showed that it is they

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<https://www.google.no/search?q=basket+weaving+in+kenya&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=4YFCU83KKYr9ywOa74G4BA&ved=0CDsQsAQ&bi cited on:4/7/14>

themselves who identifies what they could describe as a requirement and then they find the solution without seeking external bodies to help. This may as well be interpreted as a sign of empowerment (Rowlands 2012).

#### **4.2.6 Songs, Drama, Poems and Dance**

The women groups in the study churches sing inspiring and educative songs. Their songs are sometimes calmly sung whereas other times the songs are accompanied by vigorous dancing. During my study I visited church A on a Wednesday, which was the day they meet in a week. The women in church A, told me whenever they meet they have a programme for the day. These women said that every day they ensure they follow the programme strictly so that they could be able to accomplish what they had planned for the day. On this particular day of my study I sat with them in their meeting since they had told me their main agenda on a Wednesday was to sing, dance, recite poems and bible verses which they dramatize bible often .

The women groups in church A, characterized singing songs and dancing as their main activity whenever they meet in the church, ceremonies and other social activities. According to this women group in church A, songs and dances are one, there cannot be one when the other is not there. The women said that any function, religious or social can never be said to be complete without singing and dancing. As per my observation the women didn't just sing and dance but they accompany their singing and dancing with instruments such as drums, shakers, whistles, wrattles and choro.<sup>68</sup>

The women group in study church A, put on costumes which they make themselves using locally available materials such as sisal fibres, beads, seeds and feathers. They have a uniform which they call *nguu ya muzabibu*<sup>69</sup> *na lenywa*.<sup>70</sup> I asked my respondents why they had that dress called like that. Kamwira a woman in church A said, “That is the drawing on the material. It is a material meant for Methodist church women fellowship”.

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<sup>68</sup> *choro*; a type of horn traditionally blown by women

<sup>69</sup> Muzabibu is kimeru name for a vine tree

<sup>70</sup> lenywa is kimeru name for giraffe

The women in church A, according to what I saw decorate themselves using different colors which are made from ground chalk or red ochre which appears in different colors, These colors are usually yellow, purple and red .This to me was interesting since I recognized high level of creativity. I observed the women dance and as they danced their dressing, their style of dancing and gestures all went hand in hand with the songs.

According to an elderly lady in church B, whom i interviewed as pertains songs and dances, she told me every occasion has songs. She named to me occasions such as marriage, which she said they sing songs that connects to the married couple, on religious occasions she said they sing songs related to the creator. She referred me to an occasion when she composed two songs to the present president of Kenya thanking him for winning the elections. According to this respondent singing is purposeful. It gives relief and consoles. To her she derives all her comfort and happiness from singing particularly kimeru songs. According to her she started sing and dancing these songs when she had a sorrowful encounter of losing her children. Then she put it this way to me; “I lost my two children and one way that comforts me is through singing and dancing to Meru songs also sing and dance to the same songs to thank other people and make them happy.<sup>71</sup>”

According to these women in the study church A, they not only sing in the church and at occasions, they also sing at home in their houses and they teach the same to their children. This is because their songs are topical in that they sing songs about fighting against HIV and Aids, those that discourage child abuse and violence against women that spell out the role of husbands, wives and children as per the bible. Pamela a woman in church A, whom I sat next to before the group started singing said that their main motivation was the bible and its teachings.

These women in church A, sang a song composed from Proverbs 31 and another composed from Ephesians 6. These two song were sang while the women arranged themselves in lines which curved at the ends and they described the singing saying to one

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<sup>71</sup>[http://m.standardmedia.co.ke/story.php?articleID=2000087105&story\\_title=Granny-75-composes-two-songs-for-President-Uhuru-Kenyatta](http://m.standardmedia.co.ke/story.php?articleID=2000087105&story_title=Granny-75-composes-two-songs-for-President-Uhuru-Kenyatta) cited on 4/8/14.

another in kimeru, “twineni rwimbo rwa utunga mbere,twibangeni milaini,tutume C, which means in English , “lets sing the own composed choir song first, we arrange ourselves in lines then curve like letter C”. The two songs had different messages. These are; the qualities of a prudent wife, the other was telling the role of wives which is submitting to their husbands, husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church, the conduct of parents to their children and children being compelled to obey their parent.

The singing and dancing of the women in church A, could be described as functional as per my observation. This is because the women showed a group feeling in them and according to my respondents this is sustained by participating. The women said that under all circumstances they remain united .One of them said, “We use songs to call one another in the neighborhood to go to our meetings in the church.” This sounded interesting hence I asked kirii to tell me the song they use to call. Kirii sang to me and I wrote down as found below and then translation in English.

Mwekuru uu, Mwekuru uui;  
Uka twite kanisene, uukere jesu akuonokie.  
Warea ii ukaria ukia ubwone.

Woman come we go to church  
To tell Jesus to save you  
If you refuse poverty will overpower you.

The going to church according to these women could possibly be said to be a way of fighting poverty (*ukia*) and that going to church for the women could be interpreted to be a way of empowerment. In relation to the group in church A, going to church was a sign of unity. At this point I wondered how they organized things at their home and there were no disagreements with their spouses and children. Hence I inquired from two women who were not in the dance Gatwiri and Ntii. Ntii answered me by saying;

We have songs which we sing to tell our husbands to take responsibility at home when we will be away. This is mainly when one of our group members has a function like a wedding .This is because a woman is other women; we have to go helping in preparing, cooking,

washing and other things such as receiving the visitors and serving them. Too we have songs to welcome visitors and the like.

This sounded interesting .I was prompted to ask these two women if they could sing the song they sing to tell their husbands to take responsibility at home and also the one they sing to visitors. When they sang the song they sing to visitors i remembered that the same song is the one they sang when I arrived at their meeting .Ntii asked Gatwiri to help her sing the song they sing to men to discourage them from refusing women freedom to attend women functions and activities . Then they sang like this:

Kwi ntomurume urerire muka group iri aka ukoromikinya Kwi  
ntomurume urerire muka group iri aka ukoromikinya Natwi itukwenda  
bumenya group iri aka tutimitira, Ekuru ntuku Mwekuru ari na kiatho  
ibukamaa Aitwii tutikamaa Ntuku Mwekuru aria na kiatho  
ubuonkankia Aitwii tutionkankia Eekuru ntuku Mwekuru ari na kiatho  
iburimaa Aitwii tutirimaa.

The song means;

There is a man who told his wife not to go to a group where other women are.

We want you to know when a woman group member has a function,  
We don't milk, we don't breastfeed we don't go to weed and we don't cook.

The other song that was sang and sounded interesting and entertaining was the one they sang when I arrived. It went as follows:

Mugeni werwa mugaa, kethi ya kimeru,  
Mugeni werwa jambo kethi ya Kiswahili,  
Mugeni we good morning kethi ya gichunku

Meaning

Visitor you have been greeted, mugaa in kimeru,  
Jambo in Kiswahili  
Good morning in English

The songs sung by the women in the study churches could be described as communicative.<sup>72</sup> This is because the songs showed the image of the activities and the setting of a typical patriarchal society and the women's traditional responsibilities.

The songs the women in church A, were singing are used to pass specific information. This is because the women sang and danced a series of songs and as they sang and danced the songs and the sound made by the instruments pulled a crowd of observers. In the songs were issues on HIV/AIDS which they referred to as mukingo in kimeru, were issues on violence against women and children, laying emphasis on a girl child, human rights, which they called in Kiswahili (haki zetu) and they sang emphasizing the importance of harmony in the family and its importance. The women in this performance talked about ways of fighting against poverty as working hard and investing in children's education. This was confirmed when they sang a song saying, "menyera mwana ya title ee munda (this meant care for a child as a land title deed) family planning and fighting against corruption."<sup>73</sup>

The description of women group in church A, use of songs and dance to communicate, to educate, express their ideas, feelings and opinions, shows the importance of the collective dimension of empowerment. This is where individual do things together as a group to achieve more and broader impact than when it is done or said by just an individual. As this is a thing women were confirming, when I asked Peninah a woman in church A, if an individual woman could say the words in the song to the husband. Peninah said, "No, we advise one another not to ever behave as though not submissively to the husband since he is the head. I ask my husband to be left home as I attend training, seminars and meetings."

This sounded interesting and then I had to ask why. Peninah said that they let their husbands and other men hear from the song what women really want. Not an individual woman's demand. Peninah continued to say, "Together with a song like the one we just

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<sup>72</sup><https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Aest/AestWort.htm>:cited on 4/8/14.

<sup>73</sup><http://ryankwillis.hubpages.com/hub/WAYS-TO-FIGHT-AGAINST-POVERTY>:cited on 4/8/14.

sang, we mix with others that emphasis on the care and respect to our husband and those that encouraged women group members to be time conscious. “I wanted to get this other song because the use of songs by these women was interesting and hence I asked Peninah if she could sing the song for me to hear it. Peninah agreed and then she sang;

Thaa cia Mwekuru ni thaiku...ayia ni thaikumi. Wetwa ni mukuru  
garura muga...ayia garura mugambo. Chai ya mukuru ongera  
Kari...ayia, ongera karimo.”

The song can be translated as follows in English.

The time of a woman to be home is four o'clock in the evening. If a  
woman is called by the husband should answer nicely. The tea of the  
husband should be added more milk

The song was advisory as I listened to it. This song contains what I probably could have described as empowered communication. Empowered communication is that which encourages using language that enlarges goodwill, health and friendly relation leaving out the language that creates room for conflict hence messing self-esteem.<sup>74</sup>

The language used in the song is that which encouraged health husband wife relationship which leads to building of a happy marriage. Happy marriage is built by among other factors, according to these women by health communication which includes being polite. This may be said to be a skill that these women in church A, have learnt from their meeting and this can be interpreted to be a sign of empowerment. This is because communication skills are vital in all areas of life. Hence in their view communication can be said to be important; since they list it as one of the strengths of a happy marriage.<sup>75</sup>

#### **4.2.7 The role the church is playing to help women fight against poverty**

The Methodist church is helping the women groups in the study in the fight against poverty. The respondents said that the role the church was playing was to preach the word of God to them .This according to them was done when they were in their meeting or when

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<sup>74</sup> <http://cascadiaworkshops.com/our-tools/empowered-communication/> cited on 4/20/14.

<sup>75</sup> <http://firstthings.org/10-strengths-to-make-a-happy-marriage>.Cited on 4/20/14.

the preaching was done to all church members in the church. This is why Mwarabu a woman in church A, said:

The church is not silent in the fight against poverty. It is helpful because what we call the church is we, women and other members. What we can again call the church are our ministers<sup>76</sup>. Our ministers are doing a lot to us in order to fight poverty. This is because they are the ones that preach the word of God. The word of God encourages us so much and motivates us to work more. Don't you know the bible says if you don't work don't eat? .She asked me.

She asked posing the question to me. Then Ruth added, "The ministers pray for us when things are good and when we are facing difficult times. We like his prayers so much he is heard more by God. " This was interesting to me and then I asked the respondents what other ways the church was helping the women. Mwarabu said, "The minister is our counsellor. Those with issues visits his office on Wednesday for counselling. The minister is the ones who facilitates when we have seminars." Here I wanted to know more about the role of the church according to these women in church A . Hence I asked my respondent Mwarabu to add more on what the church did to help the women fight poverty. Mwarabu answered me by saying:

Our minister enlightens us on issues such as family planning, our rights and our roles in our Christian families. This is because a Christian family is a different family from that of a non-Christian. You can tell the difference between those who are our members and those of other churches from the way they do things, talk, their knowledge and the way they look at things. They are bold

This was interesting hence I asked how a Christian family was different from that of none Christian family. Then she asked the other respondent to add more saying, "Ruth, what more can we say?" Ruth added saying in kimeru;

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<sup>76</sup> Ministers are the clergy



kulingana na batwi ekuru ba ngwataniro, Mwekuru nowe mwene njaa.nibuo unto Mwekuru wa ngwataniro ati Mwekuru wa utheri, atiunyaga ncobi kana dawa cia kulebia, atikiraa kii atikurita ngugi, ni Mwekuru wa kuthoma kuma kiri ekuru bangi. Bungi, minister natuliungaira umwe wetu ena bajua kana mutino.ii ni murithi.

This meant that according to them, a woman of their group is the owner of the family. This is why a woman in the group cannot be a useless woman, cannot be one who drinks beer or one who takes drugs, is not an idler but she is a woman who learns from other women. The other thing is their minister visits their homes when a member of the church is sick or when a member has a misfortune. They described the minister as their shepherd.

The church is helping women fight against poverty by ensuring that women and girls enjoy equal rights. This has been done by engaging in campaigns against women and girl abuse. Hence Kambanja a woman in Church B, who is a primary school teacher, told me of how the church protects women and girls by saying, “The church is the one which officiate the girl child graduation ceremony from childhood to adulthood”. This was interesting and I wanted to know how the transition was done. So I asked Kambanja to tell me more. Kambanja had this to say:

Every august holiday girls of age twelve to twenty five years attend the alternative rite of passage function. In this period girls are all hosted at one particular area chosen by the church. Girls are made aware of FGM and are taught on the disadvantages of it. They are enlightened on the importance of acquiring formal education. They graduate after three weeks. We like this so much, it is a way of fighting against girl child abuse.

The respondent continued to tell me of what the church was doing to fight against women abuse and all forms of violence. “The church excommunicates members who exercise violence such as fighting verbally or physically. This happens to them that are married and the rest. Kilemi the chairperson of church A, added to Kambanja contribution saying:

The church has ensured that women participate in decision making.  
This is being done by ensuring women are part of the church executive.  
The minister ensures that a third of the church officials are women.

The other thing my respondents had to say as the role the church is playing to help women fight poverty is that the church is the umbrella .This according to my respondents in church B, meant that women groups within the church set up are under the church. This showed that the women groups did no function in isolation .This is something I found out because I saw these groups in the two study churches ;church A and church B are uniformed and are organized and are properly linked to their circuits<sup>77</sup> ,their synods<sup>78</sup> and the Major MCK connection.<sup>79</sup> This is the whole MCK which is headed by the presiding bishop<sup>80</sup>.

As I listened to the respondents in what they thought was the role the church was playing to help them fight poverty, I noted that the women valued prayer. Hence I discovered that prayer was meaningful to them. So I asked Mwari a respondent in church A, why they thought prayer was important. Mwari said that it gave them spiritual comfort and connected them with the divine and that made them feel better .In their view this divine was bigger than human beings. This helped these women in that it made them feel better. Probably this can be interpreted to mean it helps them find purpose in life. Since believing in something may be said to be a way to helps people find their way in the tangled life.<sup>81</sup>

According to what I learnt from the women made them feel better and therefore find purpose in life, which enables them to withstand and be bold to address hard situations .In their view they are empowered to make positive decisions hence being at a position to

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<sup>77</sup> A term used to describe a list of churches in the Methodist church which are usually under one leader called superintendent minister who is answerable to the bishop.

<sup>78</sup> a term used to refer to a group of circuits put together under a bishop who is answerable to the presiding bishop.

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.methodistchurchkenya.org/index.php/programmes/women-fellowship.html>.cited on 4/20/14

<sup>80</sup> The presiding bishop is the president of the Methodist church(the top most seat of the MCK clergy)

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.achievesolutions.net/achievesolutions/en/Content.do?contentId=22850>.cited on 4/20/14

overcome stress and stress related issues. The women asserted that they are taught to be better mothers and good wives.<sup>82</sup>

According to the respondents information in relation to the role of the church one could possibly say that the church has a role that it is playing. It is addressing the spiritual needs of its members and the women in the study church A which according to them seemed to be equally important to the material needs. The respondents recommend it for offering counselling and making information available to the women. Also it agitates for equality and the care of the girls and it is the umbrella that covers and protects it members. This may probably mean that the members have a sense of belonging.<sup>83</sup>

#### **4.3 Why and how women in study churches are concerned with the fight against poverty**

In this part of the thesis I am going discuss the reasons why women in the study churches are concerned with the fight against poverty and how they are fighting against poverty. This I will do by laying down the reasons my respondents gave to me and also explore how they are fighting against poverty.

The women in the study churches said that they are concerned with the fight against poverty because poverty is a disease which is worse than acquiring the dreaded disease which is HIV and AIDS. Nambui, an elderly woman from church A, said, “Poverty is a disease whose consequences are worse than those of HIV and AIDS.” This was interesting until I could not help seeking to be explained why she likened poverty to HIV and AIDS. Nambui started explaining by saying,:

Poverty is a state where the poor has no house and no latrine. It is a state that makes one lose hope and lose meaning in life. The HIV

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<sup>82</sup> <http://www.make-my-christian-life-work.com/christianwomen.html>. Cited on 4/21/14.

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html.cited> on 4/21/14.

victims have hope of living. The poor are hopeless to a point of not seeing the point of bathing and hence one is attacked by even jiggers.

The women in the study churches also said they are concerned with the fight against poverty because poverty is lack of knowledge. This according to Ruth a respondent from church A, said, "Poverty is lack of knowledge." This was something I desired to know more from this woman. Hence I asked her to tell me what she really meant. Ruth started by saying:

Poverty is lack of knowledge. This ranges from lack of knowledge on wise spending, where someone earns but misuses what one has earned. Too Knowledge on what is required to be health, knowledge on the cause of disease and how to prevent them and even knowledge about God. On the other hand poverty is lack of education .This is because a person who is not educated will never cease to be poor.

At this point I turned to Nambui inquiring if she had another reason which she felt was the reason they were concerned with the fight against poverty. Nambui said:

Poverty is lack of resources. This is why we are trying so hard to ensure we have something of our own for example land, businesses and even educating our children as women. We are ensuring we build our self-help group, and also we participate in harambee, fighting diseases and their causes and too initiating projects such as weaving, sewing, tailoring and dress making as well as tree planting to control desertification.

Ruth continued to say,

Because we are sure as time goes by we shall be able to use these projects as security to get loans from the loaning bodies. The other thing we are doing so much is ensuring we are informed as much as we can on our rights which when we know them we ensure we acquire them both at home and outside. Also we are seeking information on modern technology for example using bio-gas and improved Jikos.

The information from the above respondents can probably be interpreted to mean the reasons why women in the study churches were concerned with the fight against poverty was that; poverty is as bad as a disease, it is lack of knowledge and information and also lack of resources. Hence the women in church A, were fighting poverty by discouraging all the causes of poverty which according to them included ignorance.

Due to this one could possibly say that the women were seeking knowledge by all means through attending seminars ,ensuring their children were acquiring education, belonging to self-help-groups, buying and acquiring resources such as land and also starting businesses to fight poverty and its causes.

#### **4.4 .How women are empowering each other as individuals and as a group as way of fighting poverty**

The women in the two study churches are empowering each other individually and as a group. This according to them is a way of fighting against poverty. When I visited church A, I inquired on how women were empowering each other. Njau, had this to say, “No woman lives in isolation we are interconnected. Women empower each other by sharing information and also helping each other to overcome challenges that come their way.” This sounded so accumulated hence i wanted it explained further. Hence I asked Njau to tell me more on what she meant by interconnecting and also tell me more about this empowerment. Njau said in kimeru, “Ekuru ibagwataniro imwe.Murio jwa Mwekuru ni murio jwa ekuru.” This meant that women are interconnected in that one woman’s challenge is the whole groups challenge. This made me want to be told more about this oneness. Njau continued saying:

When a woman has some hardship for example her family member is admitted in hospital, we visit the family. If the hospital bill is big and the woman is not strong to pay, we help by contributing. Not just in case of sickness, we also help to educate by loaning one another .When loaned the helped woman pays slowly in cash form or can work for the one who loaned her.

This to me needed some more explanation. So I asked at what times the women loaned each other. Njau told me that they loaned each other in case the individual woman wants money for school fees for their children. This is given out on friendly basis not a whole group's affair. If none of the women can lend, the concerned woman presents the issue to the group officials.

The group officials take the issue to the whole group for discussion. The woman is given money in loan form from the group's savings which she pays with interest. Njau said that, that is how they ensure their children learn and are maintained in school. She said that the children of the financially able woman and for them that are not end up schooling. This according to my respondent is one way they apply to discourage school drop outs.

After talking on the issue of helping, i asked Njau if she could tell me more about sharing information that she had mentioned earlier. Njau told me that Mrs. Karani could answer that better. So I asked Mrs. Karani to tell me about sharing information as a way of empowering each other and then fighting poverty. Mrs. Karani started by saying:

Women need information on different aspects of life. This includes information on how a woman's body functions; diseases such as STIs and Mukingo (HIV and AIDS).We enlighten one another in ways of generating income too, which we call kuthuria (meaning to make profit).

This captured my attention more hence I desired to know more about how it is done by the women. So I asked Mrs. Karani to tell me about it. Mrs. Karani had this to say, "We have market days every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. On these days we go to the market to trade". I interrupted trying to know if all women in the group were traders. Mrs. Karani said:

This is something we encourage women to do as extra work because majority of us are farmers.so for those days we are not tied so much in the farm and at home most women go to the market. The women buy beans, maize, vegetables, bananas both ripe and unripe ones and are sold back to buyers making some profit.

This was quite interesting hence I wanted to know more about it. so I asked how they buy and sell at a profit. Mrs. Karani said, “On a market day we who are interested in business go very early, we buy products from farmers directly. Then after buying we sell later ensuring we get some increase”. Still I felt I needed to know more, so I asked Mrs. Karani if all women had capital for business. Mrs. Karani explained,

We do not have equal financial ability. We help one another by lending money on market days. Even the men from our church who own businesses, they help on market days in the same manner. This help is not for women only the men in the men group who like trading are helped the same way. When the woman gets money to buy after selling, she gives back the money to the owner and can borrow again in the next market day. Some of us started this way until today we have stable businesses and we lend too.

Another way women empower each other is by peer tutoring. This was information that I got from Ciaina a teacher who was a woman from church B, when she explained to me how they ensure that all have learnt especially, when they are taught new skills. Ciaina said:

When for example we are learning cookery and other practical skills such as knitting, it is not easy for all to catch the skill at the first time. So women go to one another later and learn how the skill was performed .sometimes the concerned make arrangement and they go to practice more at home. This is applicable to a lot other things like farm activities for example planting. Here we help one another apply the right amount of fertilizers, correct spacing and even ensuring one puts the right number of seeds in the planting holes.

#### **4.5 Benefits and challenges women in the study churches are facing in their fight against poverty.**

In this part of the thesis I am going to discuss the benefits and the challenges women in the study churches are facing as they fight against poverty. This I am going to do by first laying down the benefits put across by the respondents and then the challenges. The

benefits gotten in the fight against poverty were of three categories according to the information I got from my respondents. These benefits are individual benefits, group benefit and benefit to the church.

#### **4.5.1 Individual benefits**

Individual benefits refer to how the women in the study churches benefitted personally from the fight against poverty. Edina a woman in church B, said that the benefits that women get from their involvement in the fight against poverty were several. At this point I encouraged her to explain to me what these benefits were. Edina started by saying:

In our fight against poverty we have been able to get training. Most of us women can cook and not just cooking, we can make quality food. We have learnt different methods of cooking which include; boiling, frying, roasting, steaming and baking. We bake cakes for our birthdays and also for weddings. This is not done for a fee to outsiders. We charge a certain fee hence getting some income. Another thing I know we have benefitted in is we have acquired skills. We can knit, weave, embroider and we can sew. These skills have made us be able to create jobs. Therefore we are self-employed. This means that women employ themselves. For example mama kanyani is now a baker, she bakes cakes and breads for sale, Mrs. Mwangi has a hotel, she cooks food for sale, Mrs. Kalaine is an address maker and I am an embroiderer. Mainly I sew table clothes, loose cover and this way I earn a living.

As I continued with my interview I asked Mutara a woman in church B, to tell me what other benefits other than those of cooking, weaving, dress making and sewing they have gotten from their fight against poverty. Mutara started by saying, “the benefits are many”. I further asked her to elaborate. Mutara said,

Women have learnt from other women. Some of us have been exposed through the tours and visits we make to other women groups. We share our experiences, knowledge and skills. On the other hand we have the feeling of belonging we are no longer addressed as individuals, many people may say for example when they are referring to me; Mutara of



kangangi group in church B. We like it. we are one family. This is because no woman is lonely in our group, we care for one another by caring each other's burden, and we are keepers.

The use of the word keepers sounded interesting and I wanted to know what she really meant. So I asked her to tell me what she meant by being a keeper. Mutara went on saying,

We are keepers of one another because we are keen to know about the welfare of our members. We help freely when a member of the group has a function we avail ourselves fully to help for free. We carry to our member thing like milk, rice and money together with our service but if called as a group to help elsewhere to those who do not belong to us we are paid for the services we give and the money goes to the gikundi account. This meant (group account). Another thing we gain from belonging to the group is when one of our women has difficulties in settling maternity fee we help for free. Also women are loaned in case one wants money to clear school fees or to trade with. This loan is given and is refunded at the end of the month but with a little interest. We offer employment to some of our members on casual basis.

. Here I asked what type of employment she was talking about. Mutara said, "The hall always after use needs to be cleaned. So we have hired two women from this group who does the cleaning."

The women in the study group in church A, said that they benefit from the fight against poverty. This was confirmed by Gakou a woman in church A, when she said, "Today at our homes we have dairy cows and dairy goats, we have pigs and chicken, we have well equipped cupboards." This was interesting to me, so I asked Gakou what she meant by having equipped cupboards. Gakou responded by saying:

We buy one another cups, plates, spoons, thermoses and dishes, enough to serve a minimum of hundred visitors. Hence when one of our women group members has a function with more people than a hundred, we combine our utensils and other times we get the project cups plates, spoons and pots.

In addition to the above benefits, Julia a respondent from church B, said,

Our fight against poverty has brought us benefits in that we have man-made forests. These are the trees we plant every rainy season. The oldest trees today are big; we get firewood after pruning and thinning. This is not all, we have beautiful environment around our homes. We rest in the shade during the hot sunny afternoons. I believe in the coming years, we are going to receive our original amount of rain we used to receive when I was small.

This was quite interesting I asked Julia to tell me by what she meant by the rain they got when she was small. Julia responded by saying, “when we were small we never had issues of crop failure due to drought nor did the rivers and wells dry.”

The women in the study churches said that the fight against poverty has provided them with security and support. This is because if other person does something to them another member of the group comes and protests against it. This was according to Mungatia the leader who said, “if such things occur I am pleased because I was alone but there are other members with me who give support.”

#### **4.5.2 The benefits the women groups in the study churches get in their fight against poverty.**

The women groups in the study churches benefit from their fight against poverty. This was confirmed by the respondent in church A, Mrs. Mwita a secondary school teacher when she said, “The women benefit from the fight against poverty in that we have reduced tour fees. This is because our officials buy us refreshments from the savings of the group. Other benefits may not be tangible.” Here I asked my respondent Mrs. Mwita, what she referred to as non-tangible benefits. Mrs. Mwita had this to say,

None tangible benefits include; happiness, unity, confidence, self-esteem and others that can be seen such as ability to use communication to work for our good both at home and away from home. We too have skills such as; book keeping and recording skills, business management skills and leadership skills among others.

I further asked Mrs. Mwita to tell me more about the non- tangible benefits she was talking about. Mrs. Mwita said:

May I give you a few explanations on what I said; For example happiness is something we cannot touch but we see and feel it. When women come together they laugh, talk, and inform each other on yaliyomo (latest news), sing and dance. It is usually so good to be together. We speak and we are heard more as a group. This is what we call unity. We do things together including eating and drinking. We put on a similar uniform when going for trips. When we meet we enjoy feeling free from the long hours of hard work either at home or in our garden. We rest and entertain each other. Our singing and dancing is always for pleasure though the messages in the songs are our greatest agenda.

#### **4.5.3 The benefits the church gets from the women's fight against poverty.**

The church benefits in the women's fight against poverty. This was confirmed by Kandidi, the minister in church A. Kandidi said,

As the women fight against poverty, the women carry out projects. For example in my church the women have bought plates, cups, spoons, pots, chairs and tents. They have built a hall that is already in use. All these things belong to the church. They are recorded in the list of the Methodist church in Kenya properties. The women plant trees every rainy season in the church compound. These trees include even fruit trees. When fruits are in season they are eaten by my members while raw and also when they ripen. They are harvested and are sold. The money got from the sale does not belong to the women group. It is put in the church account. The women pay a type of money to the church we call assessment. This is paid by the women while in the group because they have a percentage that is assigned them. Too, these women pay the amount assigned to the church since they are members of the church. The money they pay to the church is used to educate the clergy. The church uses the facility built by the women for free. The women's projects are income generating projects. The income they get from these projects for example tree planting project is not an

individual woman's benefit, they are the benefits of the group and the group is the church.

At this point I asked Kandidi to tell me more about the benefits the church get in the women's fight against poverty. Kandidi continued and said:

Another thing is that the churches members are empowered as they associate in this group. They are enlightened and informed hence the church has empowered members. This is a benefit to the church. The members in the church get employment from the women's projects. For example when women plant trees they hire a member or two from the church who may be a man or a woman to water and care for the growing trees. They employ a church member to clean the hall and attend to the visitors who might be using the hall. Hence the church benefits from the women's fight against poverty by having members with income.

The information I got from my respondents showed that in the process of women groups in the two study church fighting against poverty, there can probably be said to be benefits. These benefits are; personal benefits, group benefits and church benefits. Personal benefits are; individual benefits that a woman in the women groups in the study churches church A and church B, have gotten. These are acquisition of training. Meaning women have been trained to cook, garden and rear animals. They have been trained to manage and care for the environment. Women have been skilled in hand craft activities such as weaving, knitting and sewing.

Women may be said to have ended up being self –employed since they are enabled to open and operate small businesses. They are probably exposed and hence have learnt from other women, from other groups hence have improved skills, knowledge, experiences and attitudes. The women in the study churches may be described as having the feeling that they belong and hence may be said to be more confidence and have improved self –esteem. Women get loans, their children learn without being sent home for school fees, hence probably they have reduced school drop outs. Women get employment hence they have a source of income. The women's standard of living may be described as improved; probably

they have better homes with major requirements such as utensils, animals such as goats and cows. These may be listed in the group of resources.

Women may be said to have cared for the environment by planting trees and hence are sure of fruits, cleaner air since trees purify air, fighting desertification and preserve water sources such as rivers, lakes and wells and beautified the surrounding.<sup>84</sup> This is not just tree through tree planting but also through re-using of used polythene bags and containers as they explained. In this case we may say they not only care for the environment but also cared for both the domestic animals and the wild animals too.<sup>85</sup>

The groups probably might have benefited as the cost of women's trips in the study churches is reduced. They may be said to be enjoying togetherness which might be giving them a voice and are heard since they probably can communicate and run and manage businesses. The churches may be said to have benefitted out of the activities women are involved in their fight against poverty. This because according to informants the projects may be said to be ending up being the church property hence in this case we may say that more clergy are trained and finally the church may be said to be having empowered members.

The a above benefits realized in the course of the women groups in the two study churches fighting against poverty may be said to concur with the women in development approach(WID) in that women cannot just be said to be just housewives and mothers who can be said to be receivers of good and not contributors to the welfare. Instead one could possibly say that women are a key resource in development. Hence if they are involved in the development an issue there is a probability that everyone would benefit (Rowlands 2012:5).

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<sup>84</sup> <http://www.haryali.org/importance-of-trees.htm>.cited on 4/22/14.

<sup>85</sup><http://advocacy.britannica.com/blog/advocacy/2008/12/plastic-bags-and-animals-making-the-wild-safe-for-wildlife/>.cited on 4/22/14.

Too the three fold benefit laid out by the respondents as benefits realized as women in the study churches fight against poverty can possibly be liken to some extent to Rowlands three dimensions of empowerment, which are personal, relational and collective dimension. (Rowlands 2012)

#### **4.6 The challenges women in study churches as they fight against poverty.**

The women in the study churches have faced challenges in their fight against poverty. The challenges are: Limited finances; lack of own trained personnel; management skills; work load; landlessness others that are not stated here. This section of the thesis discusses the named challenges and the efforts women are making to overcome them.

##### **4.6.1 Limited Finances**

One of the challenges the women in the study churches named was lack of sufficient financial. They explained to me how money to run their activities was scarce. Njau, a woman in church A, mentioned the incidences they got stuck in their projects due to lack of money.

At this point I was interested to know from this woman, why money was that much a problem. Njau said:

Money has been a challenge because the women who are the contributors have no promising money sources. Most of them are not employed hence have limited resources. Some run small businesses, others are subsistence farmers. This becomes more challenging because some of us do not have our own pieces of land. Instead we farm on hired farms, which we pay for seasonally.

Njau added to this saying, “We pay the landlord if there is a harvest or if there is none”.

Njau appreciated the role of the self-help group in their life as she said, “our merry –go round and loans from other women or from the group has made us different.” This was interesting hence I wanted to know what she meant by being different. Njau said, “This has been the source of the money we contribute to run these projects, to pay assessment, to pay our children’s school fees and even to hire land and to do all those things required at home.

Njau went on, “When we need so much money we plan to be helped by church members and others through Harambee.”

This was becoming more interesting hence I inquired to know why they persisted in contributing despite the difficult of getting the money they required. My question was answered by Susana a secondary school teacher who was with Njau from church A. Susana said, “Our main motivation was the fact that our contribution was away praising God.” This was very interesting to me to an extent that I asked her to tell me more on the same. Susana said, “Before we start any project we call our minister to pray for the project. “I wanted to be told what this meant to them. Susana said, “This way we dedicate our project to God and hence they become Christ centric”. At this point I asked to be told further what she meant by Christ centric. Susana said:

The projects are not for the glory of any man or any woman. When the projects are complete we are happy that we have praised God in them .Our purpose goal is the project to succeed under all cost.

This informant views may be concluded to mean that self –help groups has been a source of empowerment to individual women and the group. Through it women have met their needs, those of the group and the church .On the other hand women may be described as the backbone of the church. This has been evidenced by the above respondent. Their commitment to Christian faith is also barely visible here. This may be said to make Adogame’s view relevant when he says that women are the backbone of the church and their commitment to Christian faith (Adogame 2013).

#### **4.6.2 Lack of own trained personnel**

The other challenge women in the study churches were facing in their fight against poverty was lack of own trained personnel. This is because according to Karuta a woman in the study church B. I asked her how it could be if they had their own people with all the needed skills. Karuta said that they would run the projects with ease and at a cheaper cost. This is something I wanted to know more what in their view they meant by their own personnel. Karuta a respondent from church B explained by saying:

What i referred to as “own personnel”, was that we always wish all the required experts from planners to builder were church members. This is because hiring carpenters and builders made the cost of construction very expensive.

This is another thing I wanted to know more about. So I asked Karuta to tell me what could make the cost of construction to reduce if the constructors were their own. Karuta said:

Our own personnel could charge less and even sometimes volunteer as some were doing when it came to activities that did not require skill. This too is what the nurses and teachers in the women group do. They teach us for free when women have seminars. All the women do is just inform them on what topic they want to learn. They prepare and we are taught and learn for no cost.

Karuta went on saying:

When the foundation of the hall was being laid, women dug the trenches as their contribution and some men helped for free. Also when we plant trees all we need is instruction from a specialist on what to do. We dig the holes and plant the trees as required. This is how we reduce the cost of the projects

This respondent’s views made me ask her to tell me what they were doing to solve the problem of not having their own trained personnel .Karuta answered and said:

We are encouraging our children to join our village polytechnic to learn these skills. These are the ones who do not qualify to join secondary schools. Also those who complete secondary and cannot get to colleges and universities. We ensure they are trained to do technical tasks like masonry, carpentry, dress-making and others. The school is there (Pointing at the school)

The above respondent information may be interpreted to mean that the women in the study churches are looking forward to being self –reliant. This evidenced by their encouragement to their children to join vocational training institutions to acquire skill needed for their need. This then may be said to concurs with Rowlands thinking in relation



to being self-reliance; where she defines empowerment as a process which enable women and for this case not only women but also the youth and the entire society to be able to organize themselves and be able to increase their own self-reliance hence being able to challenge and eliminate own subordinations.

#### **4.6.3 Management skills, famine and illiteracy**

The other challenge women in the study churches were encountering as they fought against poverty was that they lacked proper management skills according to a respondent in church B called Warania. This was something that seemed complex as far as I know hence; I wanted to capture the women's view of management skills. So I asked Warania to briefly tell me what they meant by management skills. Warania said:

Management according to her was something that is required not only in the running of women's activities but also at home as one run's own things.

Then I asked her to tell me why in her opinion proper management skills were missing. Warania said, "For proper management to be, time must be well utilized." This was sounding interesting so I was prompted to know how they used their time. Warania said, "time limit should be when one is carrying a task. The issue is our projects are accomplished when they complete and other times they fail." This was so interesting so I inquired to know more. The respondent referred to the hall construction and said:

We started that hall more than ten years ago. We went at a loss as the building sand wasted waiting for the construction to start which did not. The sand mixed with soil after many years. Yet it is not complete to our expectation.

Warania added shrugging her shoulders "This is not really our fault money and other things like famine have been a challenge."

At this point I wanted to know more about management skills being a challenge as far as these women in the study churches were concerned. So I asked Gatiti a worker in a

law firm a woman in church B to tell me her view as far as management was concerned. Gatiti said:

As far as I know the group management is there. This is because to me management means taking care of a lot of things which included not only time but also the group. It also involves planning, leadership and even delegation.

This was quite interesting as far as I was concerned .I requested her to tell me about what she thought about management if it was all that. Gatiti said, “Our group survives because of team work since always we ensured we are one in all we do.” .She added:

Our leadership is good only that most of the people we are led by lacks formal education but according to me they are experienced hence are the best coordinators. They are the only who could be able control women especially the young ones.

From these respondents ideas the possible conclusion was famine and illiteracy were other challenges that women faced as they fought against poverty. This made me pose a question intending to know women’s opinion as far as these two challenges were concerned. Kangai a women from church A said, “Always in our planning we pick men who we call a “woman in a trouser”. This sounded interesting hence i asked my respondent Kangai to explain to me how they chose these men and what their role was. Kangai said, “These men are those whom we find honest and God fearing, those who willingly help in decision making not only in the church but even in the society.” Then I further asked what the men did when in the group. Kangai said, “These men write and keep records for us. They help us in planning and help us to assess the projects progress, threats and how we can face them.” At this point Kangai looked down and this I did not assume so i asked her to tell me what had come to her mind. Kangai said:

This discussion has reminded me of the death of one man who was the most resourceful person to us and the society. This man used to be a woman in a trouser in all our projects plans. His gap will never be filled.

Having Warania's idea on famine in mind, I asked her to tell me if they had issues of famine. Warania said:

This is one of the things that slows our developments both individually and as a group. This is because when hunger strikes, the main activity for everyone is looking for food. Food becomes the main project. For example in 2011 the famine was so much. People were starving. Our women group was also receiving aid. It was so bad.

At this point I turned to Warania and reminded her she had mentioned illiteracy as a challenge. Then I wanted to know what they were doing about it. Warania said:

This is the thing we want to eradicate. This is because the families that are said to be poor today are those whose parents never got concerned in their children's education in the past years. Instead they let their daughters to early marriages and their sons to herding, farming and early marriage on the expense of schooling. Women are going back to school. Our young women who married before they joined colleges today are there. Others have finished and are waiting to be employed. These are the women who have taken the leadership, the secretary, the treasurer and the chairlady. The chairlady was a primary school teacher. She went to the university, got a degree, masters, she is learned. She is now the principle in that secondary school (pointing at a school) we are making all effort to ensure we curve dropping out of school.

The women group's idea of having a man who is named "a woman in a trouser" was interesting. Hence in this case one may say that Gender and Development (GAD) is a key approach since gender relations are important to social organization as Rowlands (2012:5) puts it hence the same may be said to apply to development.

"A woman in trouser", may be interpreted too as a way of the women in the study churches' cooperating men in their activities. This may be to ensure that men are not left out in the development activities This probably is due to the issue of them being referred as

heads in a patriarchal set up like the one the women in the study churches are found. This is why Kwani said, “We do not leave men behind in our planning.”

Another possible conclusion that may be made from this conversation is women educational empowerment has not been left behind as women fight against poverty. Because women are said to be in college others have finished school. There are those who finished and are employed and others are waiting to be employed. This may mean that when women are empowered through education their status increases and promote positive changes in the women group which may be said to positively affect the society.

#### **4.6.4 Work Load**

Even though the women in the study churches may have benefited from the fight against poverty they lamented of having a lot of work that was bestowed on them directly or indirectly. This is because most of their time is spent doing domestic work which according to Nkirote does not finish. In relation to this work load I wanted to be told more. So I asked Nkirote a woman in church A to tell me more. Nkirote said:

Women who work outside home are too burdened. This is because a woman in our society even if employed, domestic work in the house and garden are her responsibilities. This makes women to have work burden hence their effectiveness is challenged. When it comes to these church and group matters the load becomes heavier and heavier.

This was something I wanted to know more about; hence I asked my respondent if men do not help them in house and garden activities. Nkirote said:

Very few men help in these activities and those who do are discouraged by their friends. Others their parents who see them as those who have been fooled by their wives

Nkirote continued to say, “Our greatest help is our daughters for them with big ones and others are other women whom we call to assist when work becomes much either for a pay or for free.”

The above respondent's views may be interpreted to mean though women have been able to make decisions and better their life in the fight against poverty domestic activities have remained with little change for most of the women. This possibly may be interpreted to mean men who assist their wives in doing house work are few and those who try to are discouraged by their friends and relatives as the above respondent puts it. This may be said to be an indication that there has not been a noticeable change of men towards women roles. In relation to such an argument probably this is why Rowlands (2012) states as follows:

A woman may become personally empowered in many ways, including becoming able to earn her own living. However, if she continues to carry the full responsibility for domestic duties, including child care, at the same time her "empowerment" has actually increased her burden. In some cases this also enables the man to take even less responsibility than before (p.132)

At this point I may concur with Anurather (2010) too who says,

The division of labor in domestic chores and child care is rarely renegotiated across genders, despite the women increased labor input to paid work; women continue to bear the main burden of domestic work, or share it with other female members of the household often their daughters. (p.12)

This may be said to be confirmed by the informants' involvement as they carry out their varied activities and projects both at home and in the church. Women in the study churches have affirmed that they are wives, mothers, women group members, traders and farmers. They have animals to tend which include pigs, goats, chicken and cows. This may be concluded that women are directly or indirectly loaded. When relaxing at home according to them is when they weave, knit and sew. Another thing which might be said to

be evident here is that women may be said to have worked hard to be heard, make independent decisions, discourage inequality but the very may be said to be lingering. This is because they say they get help when pressed by work from their daughters or other women. This may lead to the conclusion that man's dominant still holds in a patriarchal type of society.

#### **4.6.4 Landlessness**

The other challenge women groups in the study churches pointed out was landlessness. This is because some respondents were saying a girl child has no land rights according to the custom in their patriarchy society. The most affected women are those who are single or the widowed. The respondents argued that though through the women group activities they have learnt skills though implementing was a challenge. Kangai a respondent in church A said:

there is no way one can go planting trees in other peoples land, nor establish a zero grazing stall, unless the land is yours. The good thing is the seminars we attend have helped us to know our rights. This is because women lawyers are invited to enlighten us on the law of the land and what it says about women. Our ministers also keep on enlightening us on gender issues and our right as women.

The above respondent's views could be said to be significant. This is because they could be interpreted to mean that seminars may help women to respond to contemporary challenges in patriarchal societies. They probably can be referred to as a tool to change oppressive systems in the society. One can possibly argue that it is not easy to change a patriarchal system overnight, but on the other hand awareness created in the seminars on gender issues and women rights may sensitize women to fight for justice. Agitate for widow's inheritance rights. This is because according to my observation most widows and women in general in the grass roots do not know their inheritance rights.

In relation to the issue discussed above, a possible conclusion also could be that woman groups in the study churches bring women together .This may be said it contribute to the empowering of widows and women in general on how to acquire their right to land

and properties. This type of empowerment may be said to enable them to challenge the oppressive cultures and laws which subordinate them socially, economically as well as politically. At this point Schuler (1986:29) may be said to be relevant in the argument that collective form increases the capacity of women to work together for identifying their problems and countering all forms of oppression laid over them.

The same case may be said to apply when Rowlands says that the collective dimension of empowerment is where individuals work together to achieve more extensive impact..... For example group acting in the village or neighborhood level. (Rowlands 2012:15).

## **Chapter 5: CONCLUSION**

The women in the study churches have made great effort in the fight against poverty, which they look at as a lack of not only basic needs but goes further to describing it as a lack of friends. It is also made to mean being widowed and homeless. It is related with violence against women. Poverty is also meant to be an inability to access loaning bodies, a disease which to them is worse than HIV/AIDS. The same was said to be an obstacle that hinders development in people's life and that of the society. It is portrayed as giving birth to too many children. The same is meant to be gender biasness, inequality, landlessness and also laziness. Poverty according to these women can be seen physically and can also be in the mind. This is because it has been said to manifest itself as lack of food, clothes, shelter and even attack by jiggers. This also lead to emotions like aggression, anger, bitterness, hopelessness, depression and withdrawal. The women in the study churches description of poverty portrayed it to seem a complex phenomenon.

The women in the study churches have experienced poverty in different ways. Some have not been able to meet their basic needs. These include food, decent shelter and clothing. Some women in the study churches shared experiences of being unable to meet maternity costs. Others claimed to be landless. This is because some had been thrown out of their matrimonial homes hence are hosted by their brothers or parents. This was said because Mwari (daughter) does not inherit father's land. So they can only be kept by brothers or parents till one gets married. Some women talked of how they strained bringing up children as single mothers as a result of their husbands' death due to sicknesses and others accidents. While others claimed to be single because they were thrown out of marriage by their husbands.

On the same line women in the study churches had issues of violence against women. This was evidenced by one woman who told of having been beaten by her husband. The women lamented of their inability to access credits from loaning bodies due to lack of required securities such as title deeds, salaried jobs or other assets. Some women had experiences of poverty as a result of having a "big family" which they said was as a result of failure to family plan.



The women in the study churches have hence come up with ways of fighting against poverty. This is by carrying out projects and activities. These projects are; construction of halls, plates, spoons, cups and pots project, chairs and tents project and tree planting project. These projects are income generating and a source of employment to the church members, community and to women. They are a solution to environmental degradation; they conserve the soil, they attract rainfall, break the wind, provide food, home for animals such as birds they beautify the environment. They are a source of food and refreshment<sup>86</sup>

The activities the women in the study churches are carrying out are; running a self-help group through it they raise money and realize a capital that they use to loan the members. Together with this they have an activity they call a merry-go-round, where they collect money from one another and give to one of them on weekly basis. This has helped them boost one another economically. They have enabled each other have purchasing ability, hence this money from the merry –go-round is used to buy household items such as utensils, cupboard and water storage tanks. The same enables women hire farm land, buy planting material and fertilizers and pay the labor. The very money is used to buy dairy cows and dairy goat, pigs and also chicken. These animals provide milk and eggs for sale and for use at home and all benefits related with these. This way merry-go-round becomes a source of income and resources as they save the money they could have used to buy these things for home use.

The women in the study churches have established kitchen gardens which are portable hence benefitting even them that live in hired flats. In these gardens is where tree seedlings are grown together with vegetables. This probably can be interpreted to mean that the women maximize the use of land, water and time; they recycle the used containers hence increasing their usefulness and beautify their environment as it is freed of garbage inform of used bags and containers as they fight against poverty. The vegetables are used for subsistence and for sale.

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.savatree.com/whytrees.html>. cited on 5/7/14

The women in the study churches have been learning as they fought against poverty. This is through inviting resource people to give information on various issues. Among the type of information they receive is on diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, STIs and others, family planning, causes of school drop outs, early marriages, corruption human rights, woman body, how to invest and introduction to loaning bodies. Women also are informed on animal husbandry and proper methods of agriculture. They learn how to generate energy and how to save energy. They learn cookery and hand-craft activities. As women fought against poverty they have interacted with different people and learning situations. These are other women, women groups, instructors, research centers and training centers.

The women in their fight against poverty concluded that they learnt skills which can probably be described as important. These are; gardening, keeping animals, investing, saving and generating energy, recycling, aesthetical skills, creativity, reading and writing, record keeping, management, leadership and communication skills among others.

The church and the community may be said to have benefitted as women fought against poverty. The church has increased its properties, gained income from tree produce which include fruits. These fruits are sold and eaten both raw and ripe by its members. The clergy have been educated as one respondent said, assessment is paid and the church members' standard of living is raised.

In all these things the most interesting point is the projects and activities that women are involved in as they fight against poverty may be described as mirroring the complexity of the term poverty and how it can be dealt with. What poverty is, what it can be, what it is thought to be and what it may mean in different contexts.

These women's extra- ordinary way of doing things may be said to prove Rowlands idea right that; women are a key resource in development. If they are involved more in development matters everyone would benefit (Rowlands 2012:5)

The women have been involved in practical activities which have made them improve their living standards. This is because these activities have helped them to increase

the skills and experiences. Women have started small scale businesses which they run just like men do. They have acquired resources and have gained information as described above. By doing all these probably they are promoting feminism unconsciously, which agrees with Oduyoye and Kanyoro African feminists who assert that feminist theories are a discourse which aimed at empowering women worldwide.

On the other hand the fight against poverty has been a footstool to help collaborate in global efforts to attend to women's concerns and attend to sources of oppression and discriminations. This has contributed to women empowerment in the study churches discussed in the thesis.

The fight against poverty can be said to have provided women with opportunities. These are, opportunities for independent resources, income, education, training, learning of skills, which changes their self-confidence, esteem, the respect accorded to them by others and challenges the patriarchal traditions where men have held high roles. This may be concluded to mean empowerment has taken place. Not on individual basis only but to the group, the church and the community.

The women in the study churches can be said to have been enabled to make maximum use of opportunities available. They use locally available material for example fibres, used polythene bags and containers to make useful things like mats, ropes, baskets and hats. Animal waste is used for bio-gas. Women activities and projects may make them to be described as entrepreneurs. They can be said to be people who can identify a need and in the process of attending to the need, they create an opportunity which they utilize appropriately. The women in the study churches can be described as having the ability to foresee. This is something that is evident in their saving activities and making of investments, asking of deposits which can be said to be a way of risk awareness. Therefore they may be described as people who can evaluate by keenly identifying their strengths, weaknesses and opportunities when they come.

All this can be said to be in the name of empowerment which make it to look unique and complicated. Since the women's activities described in this thesis can be termed

as a clear eye opener to all on the importance of women's unpaid work, self-help groups, and their resourcefulness in development as they counter gear hindrances to development. They act on all these using songs, poems, drama, projects, activities, training and acquisition of information. This may be said to probe that they have developed skills and ability to dominate their lives without tampering with other people's right. This then may mean if women team up more and more, they may be able to discourage woeful injustices as discussed in this thesis. This too can be said to be a benefit of empowerment.

On the whole women in groups can achieve more in the fight against poverty. This means when women are together, with sufficient resources and financial support, they can initiate projects, come up with activities that can suppress the causes of poverty and help reduce poverty in developing countries as the one where the study has been carried.

The church has not been silent as women in the study fought against poverty. It has been addresses the spiritual needs of its members through pastoral care. The women equate spiritual need to material. Therefore the clergy preach the word of God to them. This word motivates them to work and encourages them in times of difficulties. This can be interpreted to mean they are helped to manage stress too and are comforted. The clergy prays for the women, their projects before they start and as they continue. He visits women's and members' homes when they are celebrating and also when going through hardships.

The clergy offers guidance and counselling services and offer information on issues that concern women's good; their rights, family planning, their roles as Christian women, wives and mothers in their home according to the bible hence being, " good" and the country's constitution. This is done inform of seminars where the minister is the facilitator. The church ministers campaigns against women and girls abuse, officiates the ceremony of alternative rite of passage, excommunicates the violators. The church has involved women in decision making. The church has provided a meeting place for the women in the study all they do is in the name of the church. They do not function in isolation other members are involved, ministers, circuit, synod and the conference (highest office in MCK church).

The women in the study churches are fighting against poverty because, one: it as a disease worse than HIV/AIDS. This is because an AIDS victim is hopeful whereas a poor person has no hope and loses meaning in life to a point of not bathing until some are attacked by jiggers. Two: It is lack of knowledge on wise spending, health, causes and prevention of disease and knowledge on God. This can be interpreted to mean it is ignorance. Three: poverty is lack of information. Hence the women were fighting against poverty by discouraging all the cause at their reach including ignorance by seeking knowledge through seminars and visits to research centers, enrolling in self-help groups, acquiring resources, starting businesses, taking their children to school, generating and saving energy, caring for the environment, conserving the soil, working hard in improvisation and creativity together with devoting themselves to God and the church.

This study on poverty can be described as that which has portrayed poverty to feature as something which can be said to be quite complex. It is something that concerns the economy, environment, education, life skills such as issues on self-confidence, self-esteem, cultural aspects such as patriarchy, cultural practices and beliefs and spirituality. Two: the means and ways of fighting against poverty are also as dynamic as the term itself. Meaning it requires complex machinery put in place such as entrepreneurship, innovation, acquisition of education, conservation of environment through discouraging pollution and desertification, preservation of indigenous trees, family planning, use of traditional hand craft, family care, preservation of marriages, discouraging all forms of violence and abuse, Observation of human rights and a wide concept of empowerment as well as how to deal with poverty.

This also shows another important way of dealing with issues of concern such as poverty. That is the group owns the problem and the issue becomes theirs. Then they start dealing with it as a group. This shows the importance of individual and group empowerment. The women have been seen empowering each other as individuals and as a group without depending on outside help. This has enabled the “good” women in the study to be described as having acquired some control over discrimination, hence are involved in decision making and socio- economic matters which may be said to be a result of

empowerment. Since empowerment may be said to be as Rowlands says that it is for the eradication of oppressions of all forms and the effects resulting from inequalities in the society (Rowlands 2012).

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## **Interpretation of Major Words and Abbreviations**

### **Interpretation**

Harambee-a Kiswahili word that means coming together to make heavy work light (joining hands)

Kimeru-The word used to mean the mother tongue of the women in the study churches.

Mumeru-A word used to a person of Meru origin.

Kiimentti-The dialect of the women in study church B

Kitigania-The dialect of the women in study church A

Ntanira Mwari na mugambo-An alternative rite of passage for girl meaning; circumcise the girl for me by use of words.

Muiji-A word used to mean a grown up uncircumcised boy.

Muthaka- A word used to mean a circumcised boy.

Muumbi-A word used to mean barren.

Kiswahili-The national language in Kenya

English –the official language in Kenya

Nguuntune-A word that the Meru people used to refer to the white man when he first arrived in Kenya

### **Abbreviations**

FAO-Food Agriculture Organization

FGM-Female Genital Mutilation

HIV/AIDS-Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune deficiency Syndrome

WID-Women in Development

GAD-Gender and Development

MCK-Methodist Church in Kenya

UN-United Nations

UNDP-United Nations Development Programme



## **Appendix1: Questionnaire for individual people**

### **Individual Questions.**

What is poverty?

What is your experience in relation to poverty?

What are women doing to fight poverty?

Why are women concerned in the fight against poverty?

How are they fighting poverty?

What benefits have you gotten as a result of the fight against poverty?

How has the group benefitted from the women's fight against poverty?

### **Women group Leaders' Questions**

What is poverty?

What role is the group playing to fight poverty?

What projects and activities does the group carry out a way of fighting poverty?

How as the group benefitted from the fight against poverty?

What challenges has the group encountered in the fight against poverty?

### **Minister's question**

What is poverty?

What role are women playing to fight poverty?

How does the church support the women in the fight against poverty?

How does the church benefit from the women's activities as they fight against poverty?

What challenges do the women face as they carry the activities to fight against poverty?





## **Appendix 2: Interviews Report and Personal Observation**

In this case, the names of churches and the interview informants visited for personal observation have been withheld as part of this research ethics.

Two women in church A, interviewed on, 7th August 2013

Two women in church A, interviewed on 14th August 2013

Two women in church Interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2013

One person interviewed on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2013.

One person interviewed on 22<sup>rd</sup> August 2013

Personal observation on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2013

Personal observation on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2013

Personal talks with informants on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013.