

# Local Church and Livelihood Construction: Interlocking Social Domains and Evolving Scenarios of Synergy for Mission in Nyamira, Kenya

Transformation

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**Abstract**

Dominant Northern development expertise acknowledges religion mostly as impeding development processes and aim to secularize and ‘modernize’ the South. This paper seeks to map out the various intersections of church and actors’ livelihoods, and explain those nodal points through villagers’ eyes. The study employed ethnographic interviewing to weave life-histories of households, and analyzed data to locate patterns and concepts at intersections of church and livelihood. The paper reports that actors employed church as arena to construct, extend and defend livelihoods; and re-engineering a resource-system church is promising. Thus church interlocks with livelihood construction processes, presenting opportunities for synergy in mission.

**Keywords**

Africa, Kenya, local church, livelihood, mission

**Introduction**

Religion as an arena for the expression of transcendence, sacredness and ultimacy (Haynes, 2008: 111) is widely acknowledged by a variety of development agents including governments, civil society organizations and multilateral donors. It is fashionable in development circles for actors to investigate and ‘respect’ the religious beliefs, values and sanctions of communities and groups they work with, and to factor them into their plans and actions. Development actors including practitioners and policymakers at national and international levels take active cognizance of culture and religion in their plans and activities in the field.

Nonetheless, religion is not recognized as a contributing factor in the development process, but as an impediment to the process. Many agents of the western model of development recognize the religions of the people of the South as a starting and entry point to secularize and ‘modernize’

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them. The secularisation goal includes among others, the idea of drawing the people fully to market transactions and rationality, the pursuit of economic gain or profit and individualism. It is anticipated that once people take on individualist tendencies they will move out of communal activities that are considered wasteful and invest more of their time and resources in personal development and industry. At the national and governance level individualism was supposed to neutralize nepotism and replace it with meritocracies as leaders seek the best brains to run bureaucracies for the good of the citizenry. This is the paradigm of development as driven by most Northern actors and their adherents in the South.

This development paradigm has been in place for over half a century, but the South especially sub-Saharan Africa has not responded any positively. Poverty has increased, illiteracy abounds, corruption and nepotism reign supreme in many countries, infrastructure and healthcare are weak and sparse, environmental degradation is increasing and states are failing. The paradigm has not worked. Critics have emerged. For instance, Ryan reports that there was near unanimity among his interviewees – academics, policymakers, practitioners, clergy – that ‘the spirit of individualism associated with global free-market ideology and its faithful messengers – the transnational corporations and the Western media – are devastating family and community values that once were the foundation for an informal social security net’ (Ryan, 1995: 7–8).

As the tide turns against the dominant development paradigm, there is a realization that while religion remains relevant and active, as religions, religious movements and religious groups increase, there are hitherto unknown levels of tension and conflicts between religions. Haynes (2008) shows the conflicts between Muslims and Jews in the Middle East, Muslims and Christians in the Sudan and Nigeria, Hindus and Muslims in India, Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka. Therefore, religion is not necessarily a stabilizing factor in the world today. Intra-Muslim conflicts driven partly by the abuse of *Takfir*, i.e. condemning others as *Kafirs*, are common around the world. There are occasional tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Uganda.

Amidst the religious tensions and conflicts reside incredible stabilities that anchor religious groups and communities especially in the South. In the villages in Africa, many people spend significant time in sacred places every week. Some of these sacred places are built by the state. The Nigerian government constructed a church and a mosque in the new capital, Abuja, in the 1980s. And in 1989, Ivorian President Houphouët-Boigny completed the \$300 million Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro Basilica, the largest church in world. Pope John Paul II dedicated it on 10 September 1990. Throughout his 24-year rule (1978–2002) in Kenya, Moi regularly attended Sunday services and that formed the first news item on national radio and television. In most of sub-Saharan Africa, the rulers and the ruled have one commonality – reverence for the sacred.

Majority of the population in Kenya (83%) is Christian (Republic of Kenya, 2010). There are no clear statistics on church attendance in Kenya. Nonetheless, some churches, especially in urban areas, are usually open for lunchtime and evening prayers, in addition to the weekend services. In the villages Christians are equally committed to attending church services. Besides attending church services, Christians give offerings and in most cases maintain church buildings and often support some church workers.

This paper responds to the practical observation that villagers in Nyamira, Kenya, stop work to attend either the Seventh-day Sabbath or Sunday services. And, therefore, that church occupies a significant place in their lives. However, the literature observes (Francis, 2000; Ontita, 2007) that villagers are absorbed into struggles to make a living or to construct livelihoods. Therefore, the question that this paper addresses: How do villagers’ participation in church shape or contribute to their livelihood construction? More specifically, is church an interruption, an ally or an irrelevance

in livelihood construction in Nyamira, Kenya? The main thrust of the study was to map out the various intersections of church and actors' livelihood pursuits, and explain these nodal points through the eyes of the actors.

## Methodology

This study was carried out in Sengeta Village, Nyamira County, Kenya. The Abagusii people are the dominant population group in the county. People from other Kenyan communities live in the urban areas such as Nyamira and Keroka, doing business or working in the local bureaucracy. In the study village, Sengeta, all the inhabitants were Abagusii.

The Abagusii migrated from a place called *Misri*, North of Mount Elgon and were already dispersing from the latter place by 1560 AD (Were & Nyamwaya, 1986). The people claim common ancestry to Mogusii from whom the collective name, Abagusii, originates. From Mount Elgon area, they moved through Siaya, Kipkelion, Kabianga, Sotik, Gelegele, Ikorongo and Nyangarora to eventually settle at Manga and Isecha, from where they dispersed as population grew to occupy the entire present-day Gusiiland (Levine and Levine, 1966; Maxon, 1989).

According to Were and Nyamwaya (1986: 31), Abagusii oral history indicate their reverence of a god, *Engoro* – omniscient with the sun, moon and stars as his agents. However, the religion centred on *Engoro* has generally disappeared. Were and Nyamwaya (1986) add that when the Christian missionaries arrived in Gusiiland, they challenged the indigenous religious beliefs. By 1912, the Catholic Mill Hill Mission and the Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) had established a presence in Gusiiland. The Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Swedish Lutheran Mission, Church of God Mission and the Friends African Mission arrived in 1940. In the study village of Sengeta, the SDA and Catholic churches were most dominant.

## Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted in 2004–2005 and 2010, using ethnographic interviewing to develop life histories. This involved visiting households severally and interviewing two to three adults in each with a view to constructing a particular household's livelihood trajectory. The focus was usually on the *de facto* household head, a patriarch or matriarch, but other adults like a spouse or elder son helped with remembering past events, activities, contests and movements. The actors were tracked to church, market, tea-buying centre and local dispensary to understand their interactions beyond the household. Interviews touched on members of households that lived elsewhere in Kenya and abroad, hence an overall focus on confederations of households.

Data mainly constituted life histories and were analysed manually by identifying emerging themes, patterns and concepts that explained the gaps identified in the study questions. In this paper, parts of the life histories are reproduced to bring out the main themes that relate to the study questions at hand, namely, how does participation in church relate to villagers' livelihood construction efforts? This brings us to the issue of what the concept 'livelihood' means and how it is understood in this paper.

## Livelihood: The Genealogy a Concept

The Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom was designated by the new Labour government in 1997 with a full cabinet minister, Claire Short. The department was

instrumental in pushing the concept of 'livelihood' into development discourse and practice through her adoption of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) to development. DFID produced Sustainable Livelihoods Approach Guidance Sheets 1–4 (DFID, 1999) and 1–5 (DFID, 2000) laying out the SLA. By adopting the SLA as their main approach to development work, DFID attracted intensive research attention to the subject by Overseas Development Institute and the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex.

DFID (1999: 2000) adopted Chambers and Conway's (1992) definition of a livelihood as 'comprising the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of a living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, both now and in the future'. This second part of the definition accounts for the aspect of sustainability in the SLA.

Subsequently, livelihood studies have followed DFID's conceptualization and are based on identifying and analysing four main social domains. These are the assets, on which livelihood is based, the contextual/institutional setting that frames access to and utilization of the assets, the emergent livelihood strategies, and the particular livelihood outcomes of this process (Ahmed, 2009; Carney, 1998; Ellis, 2000; Francis, 2000; Scoones, 1998; Serrat, 2008; Swift and Hamilton, 2001). These analyses are underpinned by an assumption, largely derived from neo-classical economics that attributes an economic *vecúe* to individuals (Arce, 2003) implying that on balance people pursue economic and environmental goals. Furthermore, the livelihood approaches as described above also assume a linear process through these four domains. This reduces actors to the level of different types of capital continually being constrained or facilitated by the contextual/institutional settings in their everyday lives (Arce, 2003). Turton sums up the structural determinism inherent in the SLA as follows: 'The activities people adopt and the way they reinvest in asset-building are driven in part by their own preferences and priorities. However, they are also strongly influenced by external structures and processes (organizations, institutions and policies). These determine their access to assets and livelihood opportunities' (2000: 17). Challenging this structural determinism, Scoones (2009) argues that focus on capitals kept the discussion firmly in the territory of economic analysis, avoiding broader analyses such as of emancipatory action.

The SLA basically presents a linear notion of livelihood pursuits, depicts the assets as essentially material and the livelihood strategies as hierarchical. The hierarchical stance implies that livelihood security and superiority increases as actors move from agricultural intensification/extensification through diversification to migration based strategies (DFID, 2000; Ellis, 2000; Swift & Hamilton, 2001). This line of thought emphasizes competition and denies the social embeddedness of livelihood construction in which cooperation and sharing are possible and virtuous. Besides, as Scoones (2009) points out, there is need for understandings of power, politics and institutions to explain how and why diverse asset inputs linked to particular strategies and outcomes. These understandings could also explain why the linear relationship between access to capital and wellbeing may not necessarily hold.

Thus livelihood is more complex than implied in the SLA. Actors pursue interests and aspirations that stretch beyond economic gain. As Ryan (1995: 45) argues, 'what is being challenged in economic research is not the assumption of "rationality", but rather the excessively narrow limitation of "rationality" imposed by *homo oeconomicus* - that is, a "rationality" limited to a maximization of individual desires and needs'. It is imperative to factor into the conception of livelihood ideas about actors' preferences, relationships and self-perceptions. Actors often reflect on who they are, where they are headed, how they should relate to each other and with nature. These thoughts and a plethora others relating to culture and religion often precede actions.

As Arce (2003: 6) urges, ‘...a more dynamic approach to the understanding of local livelihoods, which stresses the interplay and mutual determination of the contestations of values and relationships and which recognizes the central place played by human action and identity rather than capital is needed’. A centre-piece of this kind of understanding is that institutions do not determine livelihood activities, they are contested. Furthermore, compartmentalizing resources into human, social, financial, physical and natural is untenable. In practice, resources often intersect, overlap and intertwine with each other beyond recognition; and many are difficult to assign to any of the five categories. For instance, how is time to be treated? Is labour time a human or a financial resource? How about time spent visiting a neighbour or chatting at a roadside kiosk? What should be the basis for making a decision? Is it the intention of the visit such as leisure or the output such as a piece of information gained or the outcome like labour-sharing arrangements? In the everyday lives of people resources are seamless and their use unfolds into complex and contiguous livelihoods that conform to concentric norms, values and identities; illegal and legal, formal and informal.

The complexities of livelihood construction cannot fit in the SLA. Wallman (1984: 22–23) presents a more nuanced conception of the concept livelihood:

Livelihood is never just a matter of finding or making shelter, transacting money, and preparing food to put on the table or exchange in the market place. It is equally a matter of the ownership and circulation of information, the management of relationships, the affirmation of personal significance and group identity, and the interrelation of each of those tasks to the other. All these productive tasks together constitute the work of livelihood.

Wallman’s conception of livelihood weaves formal and informal work, social and economic activities, together as constituting livelihood construction. More importantly, this conception frees the concept from the tyranny of materialism. The conception also humanizes people by recognizing their agency and compelling research on livelihoods with an open mind without assuming that actors necessarily pursue standard outcomes including food security, income and environmental sustainability as advanced by the SLA. This conception fits well into this paper’s position that emphasizes actors’ agency and their capacity to negotiate and struggle with and within institutions and other structures in the course of their livelihood pursuits. It follows then that in this perspective livelihoods are complex but flexible, even iterative in the manner that they are constructed.

Livelihoods do not just occur, they are constructed – actors apply themselves in some way to make or weave livelihoods. The context is one of competition and cooperation, sequentially and/or contemporaneously. It is also a cultural process involving self-understanding or identity and the concomitant avenues for making a living. Livelihood is also essentially a cultural process because it rests on the actor’s science and technology that are necessarily aspects of their culture as it develops and changes over time. Social relationships are critical in harnessing science and technology for a living and in extending them to better meet new livelihood challenges. Therefore, sites of social action, such as family and household, sacred places, village and clan, market and state, cyberspace, locality and globality, are critical to livelihood construction. These sites provide opportunities for actors to wield and yield power, take and defend positions, access and process information, and generally to negotiate their livelihood opportunities and avenues. This theoretical perspective that borrows significantly from ‘actor-oriented perspectives’ (Long, 2001) and ‘entangled social logic approach’ (Olivier de Sardan, 2005) informs this paper. The site of primary interest to this paper is sacred place – the church.

## Church and Livelihood: The Intersection

Village life in Sengeta is organized around tea, and tea earnings are a meaningful resource in mobilizing villagers around village-wide activities. The notion of community life is deeply entrenched in Sengeta, entailing people's participation in social life beyond the household or family, largely but not exclusively for the benefit of others.

The arenas for participation include taking tea with friends in the village kiosks, drinking *busaa* (locally produced brew) with friends, joining other villagers to negotiate bride price in the village or elsewhere as marriage relationships unfold, getting involved in the construction of a church, a school, a tea-buying centre or even protecting a village water point. In explaining the importance of communal life one villager said: 'In working with other people for the benefit of all of us, I feel alive'. Thus, if one were excluded from communal activities, they would be 'socially' dead. Therefore, villagers measure the success of their lives partly on the bases of their participation in sharing resources with others along life's way from cradle to tomb.

One arena for communal dealings that dominates in Sengeta is the church. Most households had more than one member attending church regularly. Besides, fund raising efforts in support of church activities attracted nearly every adult villager regardless of their religious affiliation. Therefore, householders were involved continually in attending church services, raising funds to build churches or maintain them, giving tithes and offerings, supporting members in need, visiting sick congregants, teaching and singing in church choirs, leading in bible study sessions and preaching. How do these activities and others relate to or interlock with villagers' livelihood pursuits and what are the outcomes? Three cases are used to tease out some of the key implications of church membership and participation to livelihoods.

### Case One: The Petro Household

Born in 1927, Petro was a strong Seventh-day Adventist who returned tithes and offerings to the church, was a church elder and choir member. He wedded in church in 1950 and had four sons and seven daughters. Three surviving sons were in teaching, farming and business, respectively. His children had all wedded in church and assisted both parents financially. Petro said God had blessed him with a united and supportive family in spite of Satan's attacks through diseases and an adult son's death. He believed he would meet with his dead family members after resurrection at the second coming of Jesus. Occasionally he went to take tea and chat with age mates at the village shops, spending money from tea earnings. Petro had divided up a purchased tea farm at Irandi for his sons' inheritance. Each was given 700 bushes, leaving Petro with the tea at his home. Church members visited his home especially to pray with his sick wife. Some church friends and relatives assisted him with finger millet for his wife's consumption as advised by a doctor.

Petro had initiated several projects such as Sengeta Primary School, a dispensary and a tea-buying centre in the village. Previously, children walked three kilometres to school. He worked with other villagers to improve their water point (*ensoko*) with support from the Ministry of Water. They had impromptu organizations that oversee funeral arrangements in Sengeta. When a death occurred, villagers set up an organizing committee to oversee the burial. They then contributed monies depending on the intensity of the problem including outstanding hospital bills and transport costs. The same occurred with weddings, and in both cases local churches assisted.

### *Ecclesiastical Anchors and Support*

Case one shows that participation in the SDA church provided significant ecclesiastical support to the household in line with the chosen livelihood style. The patriarch and matriarch are in a supportive household courtesy of bringing up their children in the church and inculcating in them values of honour to their parents. The SDA Church engages its membership, young and old, in systematic bible study activities that continually mainstream gathering evidence from science and experience to confirm biblical truths (Keller, 2005, 2006). The church cherishes and teaches the Mosaic Law, particularly the Ten Commandments in Exodus chapter 20. These include God's fifth commandment that favours and protects parents. It is recorded in Exodus chapter 20, verse 12: 'Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee'. These teachings are based on the principle of Christian love in this case privileging parents and setting them apart to be served not just by their offspring but also by the subsequent generations, if still alive. Crosby (2010: 23) elucidates on the concept of Christian love and links it to welfare arguing 'love exists when the welfare (satisfaction, security, happiness) of the loved is more important than one's own welfare'. Crosby draws this definition from the narrative of Christ lovingly laying His life for sinners at Calvary (1 John 3: 16–17). Therefore, the teachings establish a biblical basis for parental authority over children, and subdue them to their advantage. Power confers resources with which to support livelihoods, and this is the case with Petro, in that, aged as he was, his tea garden was intact and his sons and daughters made remittances to him.

Another form of ecclesiastical support that case one brings out is material and non-material support in times of merry or during bereavement. Church members usually pool resources to provide food and fuel-wood to support a family during a wedding, and they join the family in celebrations. During bereavement of a church member, fellow members grieve together with the affected family and also support them with food and other supplies. This is mainly because during the grieving period affected family members do not go to work and thus need support. When death occurs, the affected family takes a month to finish up grieving and return to work. This relates especially to the immediate family that must remain at home to receive relatives from distant places visiting to console. This practice of 'unity in grief' across families is a part of the Abagusii culture of showing solidarity and support to a family that has suffered loss. This is part of the people's livelihoods – managing relationships, spending time together and sharing resources. Church provides an additional organisational site for the expression of this livelihood style.

In visiting a grieving family and performing, a church choir resonates with local people and accomplishes at least four functions at once. First, they preach because gospel music has messages from the bible. Second, they demonstrate Christian love to the family and their friends. Third, they demonstrate solidarity with the family as they experience loss in the death of a loved one. Fourth, they link the church and the community. Hence, they demystify the church to non-members. They show that Christians have feelings and are touched by the losses of others in much the same way and to the same extent.

This non-material encounter of a church choir and a grieving family affirms the livelihoods of choir members and the affected family members in different ways. For the choir members, it delights them to preach and to demonstrate Christ's love in a sorry situation. That is what Christian identity is about and their participation boosts their collective and individual self-esteem. The way they invest their time in the enterprise often provides opportunities for self-actualization. On the part of the grieving family members and their friends, their encounter with the choir represents their social value in the community and their relationships with others. This encounter may draw some or all of them to church, if they were non-members and open up new

livelihood opportunities. This affirms Melgosa's (2010: 124) argument that most church 'congregations offer a platform where people meet and develop supportive friendships and the people help others and are helped in turn when needs arise'. Correspondingly, Nindi (2007) found that in Tanzania's Lake Nyasa areas 'besides fulfilling church obligations; (Anglican Church) choir members help one another in various farm activities. Thus, the community is working together to realize the stability of both its spirituality and its livelihood'. Thus the church is indeed a platform for congregants to *inter alia* organize their communities and livelihoods.

### *Living in Hope*

Case one portrays the household as living in hope. When death struck the patriarch displayed hope in meeting with the loved one in the resurrection morning. At the sickness of his wife – he prays with church members as they visit. At an advanced age he still sang in the church choir. The household's hope was not naïve though; it was based on sound biblical teaching. The patriarch managed his tea garden efficiently, he was a church leader and his children were in employment or engaged in long-term farm investments such tea-growing. They lived as if Jesus was coming the next moment and planned as if He would return in a hundred years. They took church and the soon return of Christ seriously and yet planned for their annual lump sum tea earnings, at the end of each year.

Living in hope represents an important form of actors' negotiations with church and doctrine, market and state; to make a living. The patriarch positions himself appropriately in the 'Jesus' soon return' narrative to reap benefits from the market as regulated by the state. This explains at least partly why the patriarch had not quit farming to depend on his sons and why the sons and daughters supported the parents – because apparently all of them hoped for the blessings of self-sufficiency and of caring for parents, respectively. It is possible that an important factor in the patriarch's continued management of his tea garden was to earn independently and return tithes and offerings to the church. The SDA church teaches members' economic self-reliance, first to fight want among members and affirm humanity as responsible stewards of God's resources; and second, to promote self-support in the local church.

### *A Springboard to Community Leadership*

The patriarch in case one is a community leader involved in community organization and action for local development. Many of these community leadership positions such as school committee chair, church elder and self-help group chair are elective. An important consideration in these elections is trustworthiness. In most cases community members consider the fact that one leads a church as an elder deeming him trustworthy and elect them to community leadership. Obviously there are successful community leaders from outside the church, but church remains an important reference point for community leadership in mainly Christian villages. Therefore, either church membership or leadership increased the propensity for one to successfully run for community leadership positions or community members tended to prefer church leaders for community leadership. Whatever the scenario, leadership comes with power and prestige, and increases spheres of influence, access to information and ultimately presents new livelihood opportunities. It is thus not too difficult to link church membership with opportunities for extending, defending or constructing livelihoods. Dijkstra (2010: 51) sums up Kenyans' confidence in the church thus: 'religious organizations were the only institutions that inspired confidence among the people' in Kenya as others had been compromised through corruption.



### Case Two: The Saulo Household

Saulo was born in 1928, married two wives, and owned a tea garden, a cow and some chickens. He made additional income from making and selling baskets, and from thatching houses. Saulo had many cattle and was prosperous until 1980 when his second wife was arrested for planting marijuana. This forced him to sell cattle to finance travels to court and eventually pay off a court fine. 'So that was the start of poverty in this homestead'.

In 1999, Saulo's sons, who had no source of income, started to agitate for inheritance of land and tea. In 2001, he sought baptism into the Adventist Church to avoid his sons, who drank and caused commotion in his house. He thought they would respect his house after his baptism. But when Saulo asked for baptism, the church leadership demanded that he first settle the conflicts over his land. So he divided it up between his two wives and subsequently between their sons. This left him with very few tea bushes (under his direct control – *emonga*).

His life changed as tea earnings dropped from about 2000 shillings per month to a mere 400–500. The first wife plucked both Saulo's and her tea while he was thatching houses or drinking. When their tea was not ready she plucked tea for neighbours at four shillings per kilogram. She used the money to buy necessities. His second wife and her sons had abandoned him. They did not assist him with anything and she did not give him food as custom demanded. Saulo had retreated to his first wife's house. When his sons were drunk they threatened to invade his *emonga*, but he told them 'you know my last weapon, I will curse you, *inkobarama*'. The sons' problems emanated from failure in school. He said his life was unsuccessful because his sons failed him.

### In Search of Peace

Case two depicts a patriarch on the swing, searching for peace. Unlike case one where the children had been brought up in church, were teetotallers and supported their parents; in this case, they harass and dispossess them. Saulo assesses his livelihood as unsuccessful, especially for lacking the peace and support from his offspring. Desperate for peace and some stability in his livelihood, he reaches out to the SDA church for baptism. This is recognition of the moral authority of the church in creating harmony and peace among congregants. The advice he receives from the church brings some stability to the household. But the patriarch remains weakened and isolated, with a low self-esteem hence his verdict of an unsuccessful livelihood. Melgosa (2010: 86) indicates that self-esteem is a matter of self-assessment, there is no objective measure to it. Peace and self-esteem therefore emerge as key elements of livelihood. There is evidence that the church has a role in bringing about the two elements, through mediation, conflict resolution and social support as demonstrated in this case.

### Wielding a Curse

Case two also brings out a state of ambivalence in the patriarch's repertoire of values and social instrumentalities. The sons' persistence to dispossess him pushes the patriarch to threats to unleash the curse. The patriarch swings between indigenous religion and Christianity in seeking peace and privacy from the sons' intrusion. While it is commonly acknowledged among the Abagusii that patriarchs have the capacity to curse or bless their children, for purposes of defending a livelihood as is sought in case two; withholding blessings or unleashing curses is only useful as a threat. This is true in this case because drunk and reckless as they were, the sons were incapable of appreciating the enormity of their father's commissions or omissions. Several

factors are thus at play in this case. An Adventist landscape of significant influence, the freedom of youthfulness and the recklessness of its energy (possibly driven by and fed with western movies watched in the video houses of the nearby town and the oozes from FM Radio talk shows), undercurrents of the traditional power of a curse; all play up in the life of the patriarch, testing his tenacity to the extreme. It is in this complex set of tensions that livelihood is constructed and defended.

### Case Three: The Nyandika Household

Nyandika was born in 1933, married two wives and had drunk *busaa* since childhood. He was Catholic and attended church weekly. He liked Catholicism because of the freedom to attend church and to drink. He joked that his age-mates who previously enjoyed drinking but joined the other church (the SDA Church) ‘were miserable, taking tea like children’. Nyandika bought *busaa* using tea earnings and remittances from his nephews in America.

Nyandika drunk with his friends to refresh and socialize, saying ‘sharing the little I have with others is a blessing’. While drinking they discussed and exchange ideas. They shared costs, reducing each other’s contributions by buying the drink in bulk. Those for whom he bought *busaa* in turn bought for him when he had no money. Nyandika’s eldest son completed secondary school, trained in carpentry and was self-employed in town. He occasionally assisted his father with money for *busaa*. He was married but had not paid a bride price.

The second-born son completed secondary education, was married, a farmer and specialized in pruning tea. Nyandika had shared out his land equally between his two wives. This was overseen by neighbours and his brothers. He kept a parcel of land for himself: his *emonga* – ‘cutting across the wives’ parcels from one end to the other’. In 2005, Nyandika’s two married daughters returned home, each with two children. They helped pluck tea and Nyandika occasionally gave them pocket money. They routinely brewed *busaa* and distilled *chang’aa* (a locally produced spirit) for sale, to make money for their upkeep. Nyandika considered his life successful because he was a Christian, lived in harmony with others and managed his family responsibly, transferring property for inheritance without conflicts.

### A Sense of Community

The Nyandika household brings out the premium the patriarch places in living in harmony with other people in the family and village. Catholicism enables him to link up with friends in the church each week and tap into the social support the church provides. Besides, membership in the church apparently provides a springboard for village networks and ‘sharing’ resources especially in local brew. Like the Petro household in Case one, the church has enabled Nyandika to manage his household efficiently including his intergenerational wealth transfer and relationships. His membership of the Catholic Church is strategic given its liberality allowing his household to pursue many livelihood possibilities including tea growing, brewing and off-farm employment. Brewing and ‘sharing his drink with others’ would not be possible livelihood options in a Lutheran or SDA orientation that emphasize teetotalism and prohibition of production or handling of beer. The ‘blessing narrative’ in the patriarch’s beer-drinking endeavours indicates the powerful relationship operative between livelihood and faith – harmony and sharing as investment for returns in blessings. Blessings are celestial and thus relate to what is learnt in the Christian faith about eternal life or indeed the convergence of Christianity and African religion.

### *Time and Information*

Case three brings out the issue of time and information exchange as components of livelihood. In church he has friends and assesses his life there and in the community as harmonious. This means that time in church and in drinking houses was worthwhile in terms of not only yielding harmony, that was a major livelihood goal, but also in terms of socialization which includes information exchange, learning and experiencing. Socialization is thus much broader than passing time; it involves information exchange and deeper discussions. Ontita (2007) found out that local brew drinking sessions started with discussions on development but strayed into pastime as the drink took its toll on participants. Nyameino (2006) also found that drinking parties were an important source of development information for villagers in Nyamira, Kenya.

Time and information are resources for livelihood construction, but also, more importantly, the two are constitutive of livelihood as perceived and as it unfolds. Livelihood unfolds variously in a variety of sites, in enjoyment of the outcomes of livelihood construction such as food, income, time, information, self-esteem, identity and so forth. In this sense then some livelihood resources also constitute livelihood outcomes. This is to argue that certain material and non-material things can be used to create and use opportunity, namely to create utility; but they may also constitute utility as and wherever they are. Time and information serve both purposes. Church is an avenue to time and information for both purposes as well. These findings confirm Wallman's (1984) broad conception of livelihood as including choices about the use of and management of time and information.

### **Livelihood, Church and Mission: A Future Frontline Synergy**

Mission essentially denotes answering to God's command to all Christians to engage in a whole-life Christian discipleship in their homes, communities and workplaces (cf. Killingley, 2011: 97). This demonstrated faith, Killingley contends, will attract people to ask about Christians' hope and also enable the Christians to seek ways to testify of God's work in their lives. Hence, mission is laying out one's Christ-affected life in their everyday practice and using the opportunities that the Christ's love radiating life presents to testify God's goodness to others. Practiced in this manner mission is holistic. Holistic in the sense of occurring in the everyday life of a Christian and affecting the other in a wholesome manner to the extent possible and necessary for meeting their immediate needs and pointing them to opportunities for responsible stewardship and enjoying the love of God. Inherent in this wholesome interaction is a transformational process that alters situations, perceptions, people and their relationships with each other and with God. Groups of Christians, churches, church organizations and other church-related formations also contribute to or carry out holistic mission. This section of the paper deals with the question: how can the understanding of the intersection of livelihood and church developed so far, help churches in Nyamira carry out holistic mission?

An important intersection of church and livelihood already identified is over information. Villagers deliberately or otherwise seek useful information in church and in other social places. Local churches can thus be stronger in mission by organizing into efficient information sites. This does not call for any structural or organizational changes. It only requires church leaders' sensitivity to local information needs. Once these needs are identified the leaders can access the information and relay it to members. This might be possible with information that does not require technical processing for example dates and venues of agricultural fairs, college intake dates and so on. Regarding information that require technical processing church leaders may invite resource

persons such as agricultural, biogas, solar, apiary or fisheries experts to break down the information for congregants and community members. These sessions will provide opportunities to testify about the goodness of God not only to church and community members but also to experts. Marsh (2002) supports this arrangement, arguing that churches have great potential for mobilizing their congregations to participate in community development, and are especially inclusive of women and the poor.

In the perspective of holistic mission and indeed in its true meaning, Christianity is not a weekend practice, it is a way of life. However, many rural churches in Nyamira are usually open for services on Saturday or Sunday, for choir practice once or twice a week and occasionally for church committee meetings. The latter might occur once a month, or quarter. Church members have to find leisure activities outside the church. Yet there is evidence that people are conscious of and seek ways to spend their leisure time, often in drinking places (Ontita, 2007). This opens opportunities for local church leaders to creatively weave leisure activities into their church spaces. A church sports day when church members engage in appropriate games on the church grounds or in a village school may offer opportunities for reaching out beyond the church membership to testify of God.

Besides, creating sites and opportunities for exercise including specific meetings for older people along the week that compel them to walk some distance has great health benefits. Melgosa (2010: 69) confirms this value pointing out that depressed people tend to remain isolated and evidence shows that if someone takes depressed people out of the house into a social context and helps them to become active they can recover. Additionally, studies show that physical exercise, even just twenty minutes of it, produces changes in mood including feelings of energy, refreshment and revival; and feelings of happiness, joy and pleasure (Melgosa, 2010: 31). Diabetes, depression, stress and heart diseases are common in rural Kenya and yet the onset of some of them can easily be delayed or reduced through physical exercise. The local church can lead in attracting older people to physical exercise and in inculcating the habits of physical exercise in young people.

The local church can also become a community troubleshooting site. This is because this study demonstrates that actors resort to church seeking peace for their families and households. However, sometimes they do this too late and church intervention bears little. The church can be pro-active and strategic, studying neighbourhoods, and knowing who the appropriate arbitrator might be in each conflict, abuse of the environment or of personal property. Deploying appropriate and acceptable arbitrators as situations unfold and, in time, will address people's short-term peace needs and even if they do not accept Christianity immediately, in due time they will acknowledge the God who got trouble out of their way. Local churches have no alternative to investing in peaceful and robust communities.

Strong communities depend on good social relationships. The church in Sengeta provides an arena for social support. Mendez (2011) had similar findings in Mexico, showing that religion is basically collective, and as a social phenomenon, reinforces fellowship and group unity. This unity can be seen as a basis for social support. But social support may strengthen social relationships or undermine them depending on how it is managed. As population increases, land scarcity sets in and unemployment rises; the burden of social support rests on the shoulders of fewer people. This small number of people can be discouraged. The church can also be pro-active in promoting economic self-reliance through micro-enterprises and intensive farming. This will spread the burden of social support in the long term, but its promotion will create new social spaces in the community and church for preaching. The local church leadership should also be keen to find information on emerging state social security programs and link members up to them as appropriate. State cash transfers for orphans and vulnerable children, the aged and disabled can relief local economic

stress. For this to happen, the church will have to mobilize internal human resources to the limit and link with neighbouring churches and other organisations for support. Critical to this aim is the creation of synergies with others.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to establish the role of the church in members' struggles to make a living. The paper is organized around the question: is the church an interruption, an ally or an irrelevance in livelihood construction in Nyamira, Kenya? Evidence has indicated that church is not only an ally, but a strategic one in livelihood construction in the study areas. Largely by happenstance, members have used the church as a site for friendship and social networks that anchor elaborate social support systems. Deep analyses of interactions reported indicate that members often negotiate intricately with church teachings to position themselves in the market and in community leadership with clear consciences. Church also provides an arena for members and others to extend, defend or construct livelihoods. This happens through the abundant social bonds and sanctions that come with membership.

As a people's ally in livelihood construction, the church should move from its passive position to the centre of those constructions and participate more forcefully in mission to neighbouring community members. Thus the local church should resonate with the needs of people in their everyday lives. These are needs for information, leisure activities and exercise, social support, relationships management and peace. A strategically positioned church will pre-empt conflict and its causes, link people with new services, promote innovative economic activities and self-reliance; and point people to God's goodness. This way the church will re-engineer and immerse itself in people's struggles to construct livelihoods thus creating synergies for mission in economically and socially hostile environments in rural Kenya.

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