

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF CHILD- LABOUR:

A CASE STUDY OF THE EMBU COMMUNITY

**THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS**

**BY
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2001

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.


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30/7/2001
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This thesis has been presented with our approval as university supervisors.


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DEDICATION

To my parents:

Alphonse and Venasia.

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ABSTRACT

About 250 million children in the world work in hazardous and exploitative labour conditions. Child-labour is a controversial and an emotive phenomenon that defies simple solutions. The idea that children have special needs, which sparked the founding of UNICEF fifty four years ago, has now given way to the conviction that children have same spectrum of right as adults.

This study is an attempt to highlight the complexity of child-labour, its persistence and adverse effects in the society. To facilitate this broad perspective, the study aimed at identifying the Aembu's traditional religious values, customs and practices that should be revitalized for prevention or reduction of child-labour. In a nutshell, we are examining a situation which is fluid and dynamic, yet recommending some of the traditional and customs that are based on the values developed and generated for generations.

Chapter one shows the course towards this study by making a general analysis of the problem, and specifying the methods used to collect the data. This chapter further highlights how the course towards the ending of child-labour can be hastened or helped using the sentiments of various organisations and parties that are interested in the issue of child-labour.

Chapter two gives an account of the basis of religion and work among the Aembu. From birth, children went through certain stages of life which exposed them to a milieu filled with religious rituals and practices. These rites were aimed at moulding them into upright members of the society. Children

participated in economically productive labour activities within the context of their families. Through working together children learnt the required moral values such as mutual social responsibility, and corporate living. They also learnt that there were more blessings from *Ngai* (God) in sacrificing their efforts to the welfare of the other than in making oneself rich and prosperous at the expense of others.

Chapter three identifies the place and role of children in the Embu community. Being the focus of our study, a child is not an isolated entity. There is the society in which it is born. There are also divine entities and social relations that are recognised by the society as valid and binding. This chapter further highlights some basic understanding of the African religious and socio-philosophical thinking, and the rationale for the established relationships with which the African child interacts. At the same time, the society is dynamic and experiencing changes that affect the status of the child. It is from this perspective that we proceed to assess the factors that contribute to exploitation of children in the labour industry.

Chapter four examines the issue of child-labour in all its complexity, exposing the common myths about it, and exposing its causes. The contributing factors are multiple and overlapping. Denied their most basic rights, such as education, health and even shelter, children are trapped in cycles of poverty that put their lives in jeopardy. Compounding the problem is the paucity of statistics about the number of child-labourers, because the vast majority of children work in invisibility.

Since the causes of child-labour are complex, the solution must be comprehensive and multi-pronged. Chapter five assesses the role of contemporary institutions in ending child-labour. The single most institution that is best suited for the task of mobilising the society against child-labour is the church. The church can motivate and sponsor projects which have the merit of uplifting the standards of living of the people. Religious institutions can work in collaboration with the government and other parties or organisations to redress the plight of child-labourers.

In line with the findings of this study, several strategies are proposed to help eliminate and prevent child-labour. The best method of protecting children from hazardous and exploitative labour is to revitalise and implement the traditional religious child-centred values, customs and beliefs. In the African traditional society, there were some values, beliefs and customs that were instrumental in promoting the welfare of children. Finally, some suggestions for further study are outlined.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

A.C.K.	Anglican Church of Kenya
AMREF	African Medical Research Foundation
ANPPCAN	African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect.
C.B.O.	Community Based Organisations
C.B.S.	Central Bureau of Statistics
C.L.U.	Child Labour Unit
C.H.C.	Children - Help - Children
D.C.O.	District Children Officer
D.L.O.	District Labour Officer
E.D.D.P.	Embu District Development Plan.
FEMNET	African Women Development and Communication Network
F.K.E.	Federation of Kenya Employers
GoK	Government of Kenya, also abbreviated G.K.
I.L.O.	International Labour Organisation
I.P.E.C.	International Programme of Elimination of Child labour.
N.C.C.K.	National Council of Churches of Kenya
N.C.W.K.	National Council of Women of Kenya
N.G.O.	Non-governmental Organisation
N.I.C.A.	National Independent Church of Africa
O.I.	Oral Interview
O.A.U.	Organization of African Unity
R.C.C.	Roman Catholic Church

S. C.C.	Small Christian Communities
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation.

Child-labour - The engagement of children in employment, often exploitative, abusive, and in contravention of International Conventions which provide for their protection against slave and economic exploitation. This employment interferes with their education, and is harmful to their mental/physical development.

Harmony - The community sense of collective responsibility which enables people to work together for the common good.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

- Child** - Any person aged between 5 and 14 years.
- Child-labour** - The engagement of children in employment, often exploitative and abusive, and in contravention of International Conventions which provide for their protection against abuse and economic exploitation. This employment interferes with their education, and is harmful to their mental physical development.
- Harambee** - The community sense of collective responsibility which enables people to work together for the common good.

CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

About 250 million children in the world work under abusive and exploitative conditions that are inimical to their entire development (I.L.O., 1996). They are mainly found in the following areas:

- * In domestic service as maids, houseboys, herdsboys, farmboys boys, etc.
- * In streets as hawkers, vendors, rag-pickers, prostitutes, beggars, parking boys, shoe-shinners, etc.
- * In agriculture especially in plantations, estates, and small scale farming areas working as casual labourers.
- * In industries, quarries and other business carrying out heavy work that is associated with the situation.

Child-labour is quite prevalent in Embu district. Children are found working in the situations already cited as well as in other similar situations. These children have become so familiar and ubiquitous such that they are taken for granted and even their plight ignored. The beneficiaries of child-labour are unaware of its threat to the physical and psycho-social development of the victim. They find it difficult to imagine of a work situation morally injurious to children. This is because they view child-labour as a social activity aimed at acquainting children with their life. Perhaps that is why there is a need to bring to the fore the facts about the work situations and the nature of the threat they pose to the child.

Children are equally and even more susceptible to the dangers that may be faced

by adults in a given work situation. This is because children are still in raw stages of development as compared to the adults. Therefore the study was envisaged to go beyond the concept of work hazard as applies to adults, expanding it to include developmental aspects of childhood.

From the point of view of the Africa traditional society, work was a crucial aspect of imparting socio-religious values among children. This concept was based on the fact that religion permeated all the departments of life so fully that it was hard to make a clear distinction between the sacred and the secular (Mbiti, 1969; Leakey, 1977). As the child grew up it was sensitized to an ideal of conduct which assumed two main domains, namely, technical and moral. Technically, the child learnt through observation and imitation of both the peers and the older people. Morally, children learnt social values such as obedience, social responsibility, diligence and how to relate with the supernatural entities.

In imparting moral values, children were taught and encouraged to share each others problems and misfortunes as well as material things. Children of one family would interact freely with children of the neighbours, share meals and even help in various tasks. In such a situation, children came to learn that social responsibility was essential. They also learnt that there are more rewards in self-sacrifice than in self-centredness. Teachings of this kind are not absent in the modern society. It is only that they are surpassed by modernism as will be explained later.

Having underscored the existing correlation between work and religion, as well as religion and morality, it would be correct to assert that any interference with

work affects morality as well as religion in society. In the African traditional society, the essential role played by work in imparting socio-religious values can never be under-rated. Despite the fact that the role has been affected by forces of change, *viz.*, urbanization, modern economy, politics, modern religion and culture, there is need to revitalize this role in an effort to curb child-labour. There is also a need to find out the forces that lead to child-labour and the factors hampering its elimination. Hence we will be able to design a multi-faceted approach of combating child-labour. This approach will be designed out of a thorough inquiry based on empirical research.

In this regard, a research proposal was put forward as an attempt to high-light what the researcher intended to do and the method applied. The proposed views and ideas were by no means inflexible. As the research progressed, they had to change. That did not, however, reflect the inadequacy of the proposal. It was assumed that more ideas and information would help to stimulate or advance even modest approach to the matter in question.

Since the start of industrial capitalism in the latter part of the nineteenth century, continued protests from the working people were generated. Among other things, these protests centered around the excesses of the new industrial order, namely, child-labour, low wages, long working hours, physically debilitating and harzadous conditions.

As the twentieth century progressed, people continued to press for changes as far as child-labour was concerned. Various conventions calling for elimination of child-labour were held. The most important convention was the Inter-

national Labour Organization (I.L.O.), Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), which has hitherto become the cornerstone of the current child-labour law (I.L.O.,1993). Following the above convention, the International Programme on Elimination of Child-labour (I.P.E.C.), was launched in 1991. This agency was aimed at giving a new impetus in the efforts to stamp out child-labour after years of wrangling over how to move progressively towards the elimination of child-labour.

In Africa child-labour dates back to the colonial period. Colonialism led to the introduction of forced labour and cash economy which were perhaps the most disruptive types of changes in the division of family labour (Rodney, 1989). Children were drawn into exploitative non-family labour for the first time. They were supposed to accompany their parents to help them accomplish their daily tasks and in return, either increase their parents' earning or get some payments themselves.

The I.L.O. survey (1996), indicates that over 80 million children in Africa are employed in various sectors of the economy. This is dangerous to the future African society given that children are one of its major resources. The persistent employment of children implies that, the current methods of dealing with child-labour are inadequate and so there is a need for more effective methods.

In Kenya child-labour is a widespread phenomenon (GoK and UNICEF,1992). Though accurate data is lacking, scattered evidence and casual observation indicate that child-labour is prevalent. What is even more alarming is the growing evidence of a deterioration in the child-labour situation, impacted by

the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), (ILO, 1993). The phenomenon of child-labour is a complex one and is so deeply entrenched in the socio-economic fabrics of society.

Child-labour constitutes a serious problem in Embu district. Although somewhat open in some areas, child-labour is almost obscure and clandestine in many work settings. This has perhaps made scientific inquiry and direct intervention to the problem far difficult. By their very nature of physical, mental, moral or spiritual immaturity, the plight of child labourers deserves special attention and redress.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

From the foregoing, the researcher noted that there existed a conflict between the indigenous and the modern concept of work as far as the nurturing of children was concerned. For example, in indigenous Embu community work was a vital means of imparting socio-religious values among the children. In work situations, a child was exposed to an atmosphere filled with feasts and religious rites, sacrifice and benedictions, myths and legends, riddles and proverbs as well as gestures aimed at moulding him or her into a socially and morally upright member of society. Today, work is used as means of exploiting children. Children are being used as a source of cheap labour for realization of maximum profits. This is not propitious for the development of a healthy self esteem, confidence, and mutual social responsibility which are necessary bedrocks for the moral and spiritual development of a child.

The crux of the matter is that child-labour persists in both urban and rural settings. Arrangements that have been made to reverse the trend have tended to have negligible impact. In this respect, the cardinal aim of this study was to identify traditional religious values and practices that should be revived for prevention or reduction of child-labour.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was identify traditional religious practices that should be sustained for prevention or reduction of child-labour. More specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the place and role of children in:
 - (a) the African traditional setting,
 - (b) the African modern setting.
2. Discover the forces that lead to child-labour and assess the role of contemporary institutions in ending it.
3. Show the impact of child-labour on children's moral and physical development.
4. Assess the extent to which the Aembu apply the Kenyan laws of protecting children against exploitation.

1.4 Hypotheses

The study was designed to test the following hypotheses:

1. That the traditional religious functions or practices eliminated the need for child-labour.
2. That certain factors such as poverty, disintegration of socio-cultural norms, rapid urbanization and capitalism lead to child-labour and thus constrain the efforts of contemporary institutions in ending it.
3. That child-labour has contributed to immoral and non-religious tendencies among child-labourers in the Embu community.
4. That the laws protecting children from exploitation in Kenya are unknown or have been ignored by Aembu.

1.5 Rationale of the Study

Various reasons made this study important and necessary. They include:

1.5.1. Child-labour is source of international and national concern due to its adverse effects on human development. In Kenya the situation has attracted the attention of N.G.O.s, government planners, educationists and politicians. The predicament implies that the existing policies and programmes are inadequate in combating child-labour. That being the case, there is an urgent need to redress

the problem in order to promote sustainable development so as to meet the needs of the present generation and the posterity.

1.5.2. The progress of any society depends largely on the knowledge of its history and culture . On this score, there is a need to carry out a study on the indigenous beliefs and practices of the Embu community. The introduction of Western civilization in Kenya led to the disregard of those beliefs and practices that were cherished by the Africans for generations. This study will hopefully be a contribution to the already existing literature on African traditional heritage.

1.5.3. An important step in tackling the problem of child- labour is to carry out research. The research should be aimed at determining the nature, extent, causes and impact of child-labour in a given community. This would provide useful information on child-labour which could be incorporated into the national child-labour programmes. Such a research was lacking in Embu district.

1.5.4. Comprehensive literature on the socio-religious implications of child-labour is inadequate and scanty. This study will be useful to other researchers who may wish to inquire into socio-religious aspects of child-labour.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

Several scholars have formulated various theories concepts on particular or general issues. However, most of these theories are not relevant to this study. The theories which are relevant to this study are specifically those focusing on the effects of child's development in relation to societal values and customs. In this treatise Some theories are accepted as supportive to the principal theory. For example, Sears' theory (1951) on child's moral development and social behaviour gives an explanation on a child's background and social orientation in relation to its behaviour. Every moment of a child's life that is spent in contact with its parents has some effects on its intellectual and emotional development, present behaviour and the future potential.

Alienation of children from their parents is a reality as far as child-labour is concerned. The theory may enlighten us on the consequences of children working outside their families as labourers. However, it remains inadequate to this feat because it fails to account for the causes of child-labour in a society.

Marxist theory of historical materialism brings to limelight the social intercourse as far as the economy is concerned. According to Karl Marx (1818-1883), in a capitalistic society, there exists two classes of people, namely, the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and the proletariat (workers). The former own means of production while the latter work in the industries owned by the former. The relationship between these two classes is characterized by sheer exploitation and abuse. In order to realize maximum profits, the capitalists have to constantly step up the rate of exploitation of their workers. The workers are compelled to

accept any wage offered them because otherwise they could not afford to live on the products of their agriculture alone (Lasker, 1958:229).

Marx's concept of labour can be used to explain some of the causes of child exploitation in Kenya. Kenya's socio-economic structure is based on capitalism whereby most of the people belong to the proletariat. This situation augurs well for the employer who needs cheap labour for realization of maximum profit. It is from this perspective that employers seek to employ children. Poor parents send their children to work, and in turn depend on wages of these children. Thus child-labour could be as a result of economic strains in the society.

Marx's concept seems to be suitable for this study because it explores some of the causes of child-labour in a society. This theory is supportive to this study because it explores the socio-economic aspects of child-labour in a society. It however remains inadequate in respect to our study in that it is not only the socio-economic strains that may cause child-labour in a society.

The social structure and anomie theory is the cardinal theory for this study because it played a catalytic role in making us achieve our objectives. The theory was formulated by Durkheim (1873). In developing the theory, Durkheim sought to explain deviant behaviour by focussing on the ways in which various social conditions lead to unlimited aspirations, which ultimately produce breakdown of regulatory norms. Thus, the society becomes unstable, and there develops what Durkheim called "anomie", or normlessness.

Merton (1949) systematized and extended this theory, directing his attention to patterns of disjunction between culturally prescribed goals and socially organized access to them by legitimate means. Having identified the patterns of disjunction, Merton was able to define anomie more precisely: *Anomie (may be) conceived as a breakdown in cultural norms and goals, and the social structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them.*

Tonnie (1957) and Spencer (1971) have also articulated their views along the scheme of anomie.

The proponents of this theory underscore that the indigenous society was being governed by social structures which exerted definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in conformist rather than non-conformist conduct. The theory further stresses that there were culturally defined goals, purposes and interests held as legitimate objectives for all or diversely located members of the community. Thus the individual viewed the society in terms of himself or herself, and so endeavoured to live in harmony with the others. This enhanced a "we" attitude that promoted cohesiveness in the society. Consequently, the catering for children was taken as a collective responsibility.

The proponents of this theory argue that division of labour produces social reciprocity and shared moral values. It is only through abnormal forms that social disintegration results. The theory is clearly linked with the modern economy. It states that economic development affects the social integration exerted by religion, government and other institutions of social control. Consequently insatiable appetites become freed and greed is aroused from top to the bottom on the social ladder. Traditional rules tend to lose their authority,

and then appetites arise which are very hard to control. An example of such appetites is the crave for employment of children for realization of maximum profit.

In the modern culture there exists socio-economic and political systems which govern the behaviour of individuals. These systems have created an attitude within the members of the society. This attitude has led to a state of anomie. The underlying forces leading to anomie is the disintegration of cultural values that governed the well-being of the child. The society has undergone socio-economic, cultural and political transformation which has disrupted the traditional social structures.

Therefore, according to the theory, humankind must be controlled because of his insatiable appetites. These appetites must be restrained by some external forces. This theory suggests that it is only the society that has the power to set rules that can effectively combat child-labour.

In the indigenous Embu community, the upbringing of children was the responsibility of the community as a whole. Nowadays, the family is increasingly becoming a smaller unit, thus reducing the roles played by the extended family and the community at large.

The indigenous concept of social cohesion can be utilized to redress the plight of child- labourers in the Embu community. The social structure and anomie theory was employed in our study to establish the socio-religious implications of child-labour in Embu district.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study was classified into four categories. The first category dealt with the place and role of children in a society. The second category dealt with the causes and consequences of child-labour in the society. The third category was concerned with the socio-religious implications of work among children in the society. The fourth category focused on various methods of controlling child-labour.

Kenyatta (1938), Krige and Krige (1943) and Erny (1981) explain the importance of work as far as teaching of moral values are concerned. Through work, children imbibed moral values of the society in terms of virtues such as perseverance, diligence and responsibility. Children usually worked along-side their parents. The role of work in transmitting moral codes among children in Embu community was examined.

Mwaniki (1980), and Njiru (1990), argue that work had moral and religious values in Embu community. These values were inculcated through rites and ceremonies. There existed a rite called *igongona ria kuumagaria mwana* (rite of escorting a baby) which conferred the accepted career on a child. The ceremony involved presenting a baby boy with miniature bow and arrows to symbolize the boy's role as a hunter and protector of the Embu community. For girls, a bundle of dry twigs was presented to symbolize their role as producers and providers of food for the sustenance of the community. This study was envisaged to carry out a detailed study that would examine to what extent this

socio-religious aspect of work is enforced by the Aembu.

Gathigira (1942), Mbiti (1975), Kobia (1985), Mugambi (1989), Getui (1990), and Wasike (1992), contend that children occupied a very central place in a society. They further observe that children served as an economic asset to the society. Realization of such role and place of children should inculcate a need in a community to protect children against exploitation. A need arose to find out whether the Aembu are indeed creating a motivation to foster collective responsibility of their children.

Saberwal (1966,1970), Mwaniki (1973), and Kirika (1988), observe that in the indigenous community, there existed a suitable framework for the nurturing of children. The community had a collective responsibility of catering for the needs of its children. Whiting and Whiting (1971), and Muga (1975), concurs that what children learnt at home especially in the early years was highly resistant to change. Rarely could one find children completely rejecting the decrees of their parents and running away from their families. The application of the indigenous concept of nurturing children to the modern society, and the constraints faced in catering for the need of children by the community were examined.

Cagnolo (1933), observed a notion of child neglect in his study on the Gikuyu people. He groups the Gikuyu people into the Embu, Mbeere and the Gikuyu communities. He thus asserts:

Childhood so neglected and thoughtless cannot afford great hopes for later years. This is no doubt one of the reasons why the

Kikuyu people never emerged from its primitive condition until the Western civilization came along to rouse these primitive folk from the age-long inertia...(p.80).

His observation is quite biased and hostile towards the African culture as far as catering of children was concerned. The study examined the place and role of indigenous African culture in the present society as far as catering of children is concerned. It also assessed whether Western civilization has had any impact on child-labour.

As can be surmised, there seems to be no consensus among scholars on the most suitable values and norms, policies, ideologies or methods and effective strategies of combating child-labour globally. The proposed study will investigate the role of indigenous beliefs and practices in enhancing the programmes, policies or strategies for elimination of child exploitation in Embu district.

Mendelievich (1979), Barnerjee (1980), and Valcarenghi (1981), express their concern over the high rate of child-labour especially in developing countries. They point out that parents and employers are the major obstacle to solving child-labour problems. They note that there is often a bond of silence between parents and the employers of children. This indicates that there are underlying social conditions that force children into work and force parents into co-operation with typically unscrupulous employers. What are these social conditions? What is the situation in Embu where child-labour is prevalent? The researcher intended to examine the social conditions that cause child-labour in Embu today.

Levine and Levine (1981), Kabeberi (1990), and GoK and UNICEF (1992), view disruptive social change as the principle cause of the growing number of child-labourers in Kenya. Rapid urbanization associated with socio-economic and cultural-political transformation has resulted in numerous negative changes on the family and its traditional support system. Similar views are expressed by Korbin (1981), and Njoroge (1982), who note that the society has undergone a social transformation which has seen the withering away of indigenous values that governed the well-being of children. The transformation has promoted the ascendancy of individualistic norms that have undermined the status of children in a society. It was therefore necessary to find out whether social changes were creating an atmosphere for prevalence of child-labour in Embu district.

Haugerud (1981:18), notes that 65 to 75 per cent of peasant farmers in Embu district live in poor economic status. For them poor cash returns in agriculture coupled with rising cash demands for health, education, food, and clothing leave them with little or no cash to invest in anything outside of education for their children. She notes that their future economic status is tied to the success of their children in obtaining wage employment and income. A need therefore arose to explore whether socio-economic differentiation among peasant households contributes to child-labour in Embu district.

Schapera (1966), and Stephen (1979:72), observe that if children are thoroughly punished and so often reprimanded by their parents while

working, they may begin to hate work and end up in continuous conflicts with their parents. Consequently, children end up running away from their families to seek employment elsewhere.

This study sought to examine the extent to which the reign of parents in their families promote the urge in their children to seek waged employment in Embu district.

Thomas (1952), Challis and Elliman (1979), Anti-slavery Report (1978), and FEMNET (1992), have identified some of the consequences of child-labour on the victim. They argue that employed children suffer physical injuries, poor health, sexual abuse and moral decadence. While they spend this time working at various tasks to earn a living for themselves and to some extent for their families, they forego the opportunity for education. They lack the support of a loving family, suffer emotional alienation and economic marginalisation which may push them into anti-social behaviour such as stealing, drug trafficking, prostitution or begging simply to survive. The study examines the extent to which the Embu community is aware of such consequences of child-labour.

Mohler (1982), and Mwelekeo (1999), notes that a child's moral reasoning will be determined by modeling and social reinforcement process provided by the family. Therefore, if a child is alienated from the family, his or her moral potential will be underdeveloped. This can explain why most child-labourers become victims of deviant behaviour.

How far is the family and the society at large creating a conducive atmosphere for the moral development of children? It was important to assess role played by the Embu community in enhancing moral development of its children.

Several scholars and organizations have shown a great concern over the escalating cases of child-labour. Sicault (1963), Mead (1975), and the United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF) (1991), observe that hiring of child-labourers could only be solved through provision of adequate schools and free education up to a minimum age fixed for entry into employment. On this note Male (1984), asserts that if child-labour is essential to the family subsistence then, *a fortiori*, even free education will not alleviate the problem. For example, 1979 was the United Nations Year of the Child. Throughout the year, persistent attacks on child-labour continued. An article appeared in one of the local dailies entitled, "Children Used as Cheap Labour". It is thus stated:

Unscrupulous businessmen at Runyenjes township in Embu use school children as cheap labour, it has been claimed. The chief of Kagaari Location Mr. Jacob Njeru has warned traders of the area to stop luring school children to the township. He said children aged between 7 and 15 years are being employed as waiters in hotels, *matatu* touts, and water sellers using ox-carts...he blamed parents who allowed their children to roam the towns in search of employment instead of taking advantage of the free primary education...(East African Standard, 1979:2).

Hence, could it be that what was happening at Runyenjes township in Embu was only a microcosm of what was happening in numerous townships and villages of Embu district? This study sought to investigate the facts.

Commenting on child-labour and laws in Kenya, Ng'ang'a (1979), Nyaoga (1984), and Kabeberi (1990), note that as long as children have to be employed, law has to be more protective of the rights of these young employees. They therefore suggest that there should be minimum wage payable to child labourers and that the state should provide free legal advice to all employed children. Could this be an effective approach of combating child-labour in a community?

The foregoing review confirms the existence of substantial literature on the place and role of children in a society, socio-religious aspects of work among children in indigenous society, some causes of child-labour and various methods of controlling child labour. However, literature on socio-religious implications of child-labour in the modern society is limited in scope. Moreover, an analysis of the application of indigenous values of work in combating child-labour and the role played by modern social institutions in grappling with child-labour in Embu district is lacking. The proposed research, guided by the objectives already outlined, will hopefully contribute towards filling this lacuna.

1.8 Actions Against Child-labour in Embu District

The phenomenon of child-labour is so complex and deep rooted in the socio-economic fabric of the community that there is need for broadly based initiatives for combating it. What is even more alarming is the growing evidence of orientation of employers towards child-labourers. This is impacted by the already mentioned causes of persistence of child-labour, viz., poverty, unemployment, vested interest of employers, irrelevant and inadequate educational curriculum, and lack of awareness among parents and society in general about the implications of child-labour on health and development. An equally disturbing trend that is closely linked to the above causes is the growth of child-labour in the rural areas. This trend has been exacerbated by changing family structures and value systems as a result of increasing economic pressure and the onset of changing lifestyles (I.L.O., 1992:4).

We should mention that redressing of the plight of child-labourers largely depends on the dedication and interest of the community. Despite the commitment of the government in controlling child-labour, preventive initiatives against child exploitation should first and foremost come from the community, religious organisations, employment and labour groups. Even if the government were to implement laws against child-labour, they would remain inert unless the community strongly takes the initiatives to enact them. Historically, the amount of protection offered to children through the government usually reflects the extent of initiatives and dedication applied by the local community, on behalf of the whole society (Ruchiu; I.O., 12/12/98).

Community mobilisation notwithstanding, the role of the government in protecting children against economic exploitation is quite decisive. The government has an upper hand in virtually all aspects of national life such as agriculture, industry, municipal and urban development, villages, health and education, media, and a wide range of culture and social services. In a nutshell, the government can pass and enforce laws which would vigorously pursue child-labour issues. Moreover, it can control the national values, goals and public opinion by mobilising more resources to cater for any move directed towards creating the welfare of children. In other words, the role of the government is so crucial that the absence of a policy or programme for protecting children from abuse would be viewed as a calculated move to exploit them. An examination of child-labour policies and programmes that apply in Kenya, in general, and Embu district, in particular, is therefore imperative.

1.8.1 Child-Labour Policies and Programmes in General

Since the inception of industrial capitalism in the 19th century, there has been several laws and regulations prohibiting the employment of persons below a certain age, and providing protection for working children. In recent years a firm and humane international commitment to progressive elimination of child-labour has taken place. A number of international agreements on reduction of child-labour has been formulated. While the agreements differ in form and content, they uniformly underscore the necessity of protecting children against work-place hazards. Their focus is based on a number of considerations.

First, the conditions of work have been found to be more exploitative where children are engaged in wage labour than where they work within their households. Second, sometimes it is impossible to prohibit the employment of children. For that matter, efforts must be made to regulate the conditions of work so that they perform tasks which are commensurate with their age and potentialities. Moreover, employers of children should be monitored so that they provide child labourers with proper protection, reasonable wages and shorter working hours. Third, efforts can be made to rehabilitate children who toil in sordid work environments like in the streets. This could be done through the establishment of children's homes and children welfare centres. Fourth, efforts can be made to boost and even start income and employment generating programmes, and provide education, health, nutrition as well as vocation training schemes on areas with high incidences of child-labour.

It should be noted that Kenya is one of the signatories to some of the international agreements that explicitly commit themselves to the elimination of child-labour. Below is an extract from the **Declaration of the Right of the Child**, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly on 20th November, 1959:

The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age; he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education, or interfere with his physical, mental or moral development.

The ILO's Minimum Age Convention (1973) which was ratified by 46 countries in 1994, made the following recommendations:

Article 1:

Each member for which this convention is in force undertakes to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child-labour, and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to

employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons.

Article 2:

... Each member which ratifies this convention shall specify... a minimum age for admission to employment or work... The minimum age [for admission to employment] shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory school, and, in any case shall not be less than 15 years.

Article 3:

... The minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work, which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardize the health, safety, or morals of young persons shall not be less than 18 years.

Article 5:

... A member whose economy and administrative facilities are insufficiently developed may... initially limit the scope of application of this convention.

Article 7:

... National laws or regulations may permit the employment or work of persons 13 to 15 years of age on light work which is:

- (a) not likely to be harmful to their health or development; and
- (b) not such as to prejudice their attendance at school ... or their capacity to benefit from the instructions received...

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which was ratified by 168 countries by the end of 1994 made further recommendations:

Article 32:

1. State Parties recognize the rights of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health, or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

2. State parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant Convention on the Rights of the Child...provisions of other international instruments, State Parties shall, in particular:

- (a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;
- (b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
- (c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

Another agreement, **The World Declaration and Plan of Action on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children** (1990), signed by 159 countries, states:

We will work for special protection of the working child and for abolition of illegal child-labour. More than 100 million children are engaged in employment, often heavy and harzardous and in contravention of international convention which provide for their protection from economic exploitation and from performing work that interferes with their education and is harmful to their health and full development. In the light of this, all states should work to end such child- labour practices and see how the conditions and circumstances of children in legitimate employment can be protected to provide adequate opportunity for their healthy upbringing and development.

As can be seen from the above references, objectives of child-labour policies have been changing with time. For example, the ILO's intials convention on the employment of children, *the Minimum Age Convention*, was not quite explicit on child-labour. It simply indicates that the priority for children aged below 14 years lies in school attendance, and that any work children might undertake should be carried outside of the school hours. At its very first session in 1950s, the ILO Committee which was mandated to examine social issues about labour in plantations, addressed itself to the issues of child-labour. The committee adopted a resolution concerning hours of work, weekly rest and holidays, stating, *inter alia* that:

Hours of work for children under 14 years of age should be regulated with a view of protecting their health and, in any case, should not be more than six per day. The employment of children under 12 years of age should be prohibited.

At its Tenth Session, in 1994 the Committee adopted a resolution concerning child-labour on plantations. The resolution called for more support on activities on child-labour in plantations. This resolution is enshrined in the *Minimum Age Convention* which limits itself to physical and moral hazards inherent in exploitative work situations as far as children are concerned. It also sets the ultimate objective as the total abolition of child-labour by progressively raising of minimum age for admission to employment. It should be noted that the convention is flexible in that it allows the countries with insufficiently developed economies, educational and administrative facilities to initially specify a minimum age of 12 to 14 years for light work (UNICEF, 1997).

Although the *Minimum Age Convention* of 1973 confines itself to mental, physical and moral dangers, other international agreements on child-labour define the proscribed dangers more broadly. However, the Convention provides both general and specific guidelines on when, where and under what conditions children may or may not work and on the types of policies the member countries should adopt to eliminate child-labour. The Minimum Age Convention has become the international standard of reference, and is observed, in whole or in part, even by many countries who are not its signatories.

The World Declaration of the Rights of the Child prohibits any work that encroaches on the health, mental and moral development of the child. Contrary to the ILO's convention, the declaration does not give any provision for

countries with underdeveloped facilities to allow child-labour (UNICEF, 1997).

In fact, the declaration is more inclusive of the list of empirically observable physical and psychosocial work hazards discussed in chapter four.

Having examined the child-labour policies and programmes that apply in Kenya, we will later assess their effectiveness or ineffectiveness in chapter five. This examination will enable us to underpin the essence of combating child-labour. It will further enable us to come up with suitable methods for prevention and elimination of child-labour in Embu.

1.9 Area and Scope of Study

This is a case study aimed at collecting qualitative data in Embu district (see Annex I). The choice of the district was based on the fact that this is one of the areas with prevalent cases of child-labour (E.D.D.P., 1997/2001; Kenya, Economic Survey, 1991). Furthermore, most of the reports on child-labour largely focus on urban, or peri-urban centers and on vast coffee or tea plantations, such as ones found in Kiambu, Kericho and Thika. Available literature on Embu district is scanty, hence the need to carry out this study to provide documentation on child-labour in the district.

Embu district is divided into five administrative divisions, namely, Manyatta, Central division, Runyenjes, Kyeni and Nemburi. The researcher focussed on child-labour activities in Manyatta and the Central division. The two divisions provided an excellent field laboratory for the study since cases of child-labour were quite severe.

1.10 Research Methodology

1.10.1 Collection of data

Two research instruments facilitated collection of data required for this study. These were:

1.10.2 Library Research

Initial research in libraries at Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi, Hekima College and United States International University - Africa, laid the basis for draft of this proposal. Published and unpublished material, especially on child-labour were reviewed. Further review focused on local dailies, periodicals, bulletins and official reports on child-labour.

1.10.3 Field Research

This encompassed observation and interviews. These were carried out as follows:

1.10.3.1 Observation

The researcher visited some farms, factories and market centers to observe issues of interest to this study. This provided first-hand information on child-labour activities in those sectors. Documentation of these sessions was through taking notes, photographs and tape recording. In addition the researcher made use of observation check-list to gather some information on labour activities of employed children. The check-list appeared as shown in annex IV.

1.10.3.2 Interviews

Interview guides and questionnaires were used to conduct the interviews (cf. annex III). The researcher conducted oral interviews on the informants approached personally. They were conducted in Kiambu, Kiswahili or English languages as appropriate.

1.10.4 Sampling Procedures

From the selected area of study, which included Manyatta and Central division, the study employed purposive sampling technique to select two locations which had high cases of child-labour. In the two divisions, there are five locations. One location from each division was sampled out, giving a total of two locations. It was assumed that the information gathered from the two locations as a locale would suffice for the data required from the district.

The following categories of informants were interviewed:-

1.10.4.1 The Elders

The study employed simple random sampling technique to select eight elders from each location. A total of sixteen elders were interviewed. The number was an adequate representation of the wealth of knowledge of all the elders in the area of study. The elders yielded adequate data on the indigenous aspects of the work in relation to upbringing of children.

1.10.4.2 Church Leaders

The three predominant churches in Embu district considered for sampling were the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church of Kenya (A.C.K) and the National Independent Church of Africa (N.I.C.A.). Using purposive sampling technique, two parishes from each of the three predominant denominations were selected in each of the two locations. A total of twelve parish leaders were interviewed. These are the interlocutors of Christianity and so, the researcher hoped to get the content of what they teach on child-labour, the attention they give to children and what strategies their institution could undertake to be more effective in eliminating child-labour.

1.10.4.3 The Head and Class-teachers

Using simple random sampling method, four primary schools were selected to get the teachers considered for this study. Preference was given to primary schools due to the fact that most children drop out of schools at this level. A total of nine teachers were interviewed in each school. They were interviewed because they interact with pupils and their parents. Therefore, they are in a better position to know reasons for children dropping out of schools.

1.10.4.4 Parents or Guardians of Children

Among this category, the study employed purposive sampling technique to get parents or guardians who might or might not have employed children. They were interviewed on the methods they use to impart socio-religious values on their children. They were also questioned on their general attitude towards the employment of children. Moreover, they provided useful data on how child-labour could be curbed. In this contact, some of the factors that lead to employment of children were also explored. A total of twenty parents, ten from each of the two selected locations were interviewed.

1.10.4.5 Employers of Children.

During the pilot survey, the researcher established a rapport with some potential informants. These promised to link up the researcher to other potential informants. Thus a kind of snowball approach was already set. However, this approach had a theoretical weakness. It amounted to interviewing people of similar view points given that an informant connected us to his or her close friend.

To rectify this weakness, snowball linkages were broken after a series of informants. The next informant would then be selected randomly, thus leading to yet another snowball approach. Eight employers from each of the two selected locations were interviewed. The sample size sufficed

for the data on child-labour analysis. This also indicated the employers opt to employ children.

1.10.4.6 Child Labourers

In the process of contacting the employers of children, the researcher had an opportunity to meet some labourers for interview. An attempt was made to interview children who work in the streets of Embu town. This sample comprised children who have been brought up in Embu. The assumption was that they are victims of modern social changes and so the researcher could be able to note the areas of conflict between their values and the established moral values of the community. They would provide useful data as to why they generally engage in waged employment. A total of fifty child-labourers were interviewed.

1.10.4.7 Government Officials

Among this category the study employed purposive sampling technique. The District Children Officer (D.C.O.), District Labour Officer (D.L.O.), in charge of Child-Labour Unit (C.L.U.), and chiefs in charge of the two locations were interviewed. Their selection was based on the fact that they are in a good position to explain the intervention measures the government and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), are using to combat child-labour in the district. Chiefs are the government agents closest to the people. They interact with children, parents or guardians,

and children employers. Therefore, they have first-hand information on child labour in their areas of jurisdiction.

1.11 Data Analysis, Interpretation and Presentation

Prior to the end of the field work, attempts were made to compare the objectives of the study with the data that was collected. This move enabled the researcher to identify some gaps which might have been forgotten or overlooked. The move minimised the cost of the study because the researcher was able to revisit the study area to gather more data for bridging the gaps.

After completing the field work, interviews recorded in tapes were transcribed into index cards. Those in vernacular languages were translated into English. The primary data were incorporated into the secondary data. The resultant data were categorized according to different themes following the objectives of the study. Through this categorization, the chapters were organized.

In presenting the data, qualitative a methods of data analysis were employed. Photographs were used to back up the data related to them. After interpreting the data, the objectives of the study were compared with the findings, and then conclusions were drawn. This gave the basis for presenting suggestions and recommendations on the task at hand.

1.12 Problems Encountered During the Study

Most of the informants had high suspicion towards the researcher and his assistants. Such informants were mainly employers of children, parents of employed children and child-labourers. The main fear was that we could be labour inspectors or police officers carrying out surreptitious research about child-labour while masquerading as University scholars.

The selected area of study was rather wide. The research was carried out during the rainy season, and so there were transportation problems. This inconvenienced us in that we could not travel to many places to gather the data. More often than not, we had to walk for long distances through slipperly and hilly paths and roads. This made us to spend more time than expected in the field so as to get in touch with the intended informants.

Some informants adamantly refused to be interviewed, while others did not allow us to take notes. Rather they wanted a casual discussion. Taking of photographs was hardly allowed by some informants. Some accepted to be taken photographs on condition that they are paid or given tip. In such cases, taking of photographs was done surreptitiously.

The researcher was faced with financial constraints given that he is self sponsored. We had to hire a taxi to get us to certain places where *matatus* (public service vehicles) were non-existent. Some informants preferred

to give information as they sipped some tea in a hotel or cafe. Some elders would give information if and only if they were bought some tobacco snuff (*mbaki*) or traditional brew (*muratina*). Such staff, they claimed, would spin their memory and so be able to give accurate information. All in all, we always found a suitable way of dealing with such contingencies.

CHAPTER TWO : THE BASIS OF RELIGION AND WORK AMONG THE AEMBU

2.1 Introduction

The word **religion** does not exist among the Aembu vocabulary. Religion is life rather than a concept (Akiiki, 1999). The Aembu have common cultural experience that are clearly religious. Their religious experience is not recorded in holy books. It is however, encoded in the memory of the people and is repeatedly expressed through their traditional rituals, values, attitudes, practices, symbols and myths. These serve as templates for the living religion. They shape and keep the religion alive among a people in their respective historico-cultural terms. This idea is further emphasized by Mbiti (1969) when he notes:

Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it... Religion is the strongest element in traditional background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking of the people concerned.

He further adds:

Because religion permeates all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to a funeral ceremony...

Work in the Embu indigeous community was done in a religious context. The divinity was involved before any work was done. People asked for blessing in all the work that would be done. For instance, before a virgin land was cleared,

special sacrifices were offered to God, and the ancestors to ask for blessing. The ritual sacrifices were officiated by religious specialists like the diviners, medicine-man, priests and elders.

In this chapter, a summary of the cardinal themes which constitute an integral and pervasive component of the Aembu's religious beliefs and practices is presented. It is our hope that this feat will bring to the fore the essence of religion in the community.

2.2 The Concept of God

The Aembu belief in one God (*Ngai*) the creator and sustainer of all things. He is the Supreme Being. They address *Ngai* directly with a great variety of names. These names reflect the conception of *Ngai* as an inscrutable power. *Ngai* is the most prominent name for the divinity. Other names for *Ngai* include *Mwene-Njeru* (the owner of the sun), *Mwene-Njiru* (the owner of rain), *Mwene-Nyaga* (the owner of brightness), *Mwene-vinya* (the most powerful).

As noted, the Aembu have various symbols and rich metaphors which directly indicate directly their religious experiences. By use of such symbols and metaphors they are able to express their religious consciousness in concrete and philosophical concepts. The various connotations of *Ngai* suggest the extent to which the authentic religious experience of the Aembu is reflected throughout their culture. *Ngai* is always present among the people through their historical sojourn.

Ngai is perceived as possessing unique attributes. These attributes are both eternal and intrinsic, and are expressed in various ways. An analysis of prayers and sacrifices will perhaps provide us with a vantage point for appreciating those attributes. In prayers *Ngai* is addressed as very wise; as the one who knows all things. He is addressed as the one who dwells in the sky. At the same time, *Ngai* is always present in times of need. Although he dwells in the sky, *Ngai*, is believed to have temporary abodes on earth, where he is readily available during the times of need. These temporary abodes include mountains, under certain enormous trees, in caves or groves. As far as the mountains are concerned, the Aembu believed that *Ngai* rested on *Kiri nyaga*, (Mountain of brightness). As already noted, *Nyaga* means light or brightness. Therefore *Kiri nyaga* means the mountain or place which possesses light or brightness. *Ngai* would rest on *Kiri nyaga* in his mission of inspecting his creation. The Aembu would always pray or offer sacrifices facing *Kiri nyaga* (Njiri; O.I., 14/12/98).

During the crisis of life especially death, the deceased person was buried while lying on his or her back, with the head pointing towards *Kiri nyaga*.

Presumably, the face was looking towards the place where *Ngai* dwells.

As for trees, *Ngai* rested under the *Mugumo* tree, or *ficus sycamorus*. There were other trees which the Aembu believed were *Ngai's* favourite resting place. One major feature of such trees was that they were usually enormous, and evergreen. More details about these trees is given in chapter three.

That *Ngai* as all powerful is a concept that is seen in mundane realities such as thunder and lightning. The two phenomena are associated with rain. During the thunderstorms, *Ngai* is believed to be doing various gymnastics in readiness to

combat the devil or *Ngoma* (the evil being). The concept of *Ngoma* is a reality in the minds of the Aembu. This is based on the argument that if there is *Ngai*, the perfect Being, the opposite of this Being does exist. The lightning is the symbol of *Ngai's* striking sword. The lightning symbolises *Ngai's* force or power against his arch enemy, *Ngoma*.

Various anthropomorphic images, both masculine and feminine occur more often than not in the prayers. The Aembu maintain that *Ngai* is neither male nor female. This is further qualified by the fact that the gender for the term *Ngai* is either masculine or feminine depending on the intonation. However, it should be noted that in this strictly patriarchal society, God is addressed more frequently in the masculine gender. This is based on the analogy of the officiating role of men elders in the community. The masculine gender provides the reverential connotation about the elders as having a quasi-priestly role of intercession. Their formal prayers are considered to be particularly efficacious. For example, Njamwitha and Njagi (I.O., 17/12/98), illustrated this efficacy when they hinted how the ritual prayers of the venerable elders, or patriarchs brought rain during times of drought. They even hinted about some episodes whereby some people were cured after prayerful sacrificing and anointing by the hands of these venerable patriarchs.

Ngai has no father, mother, brothers, sisters or any other kin. He is a force that was not created. In fact, anyone who publicly questioned about *Ngai's* origin or operations was considered as an anathema to the community. *Ngai* was believed to have no beginning or end, and he did his work in solitude. Thus he was viewed as all powerful. His power is perceived in practical terms. For example,

the Aembu address *Ngai as Mwene vinya wuonthe* (the all-powerfull being) in every beginning of prayers. In light of specific male function of protecting the community against external attacks, *Ngai* is seen as a strong and steady guardian; the one who oversees, embraces and cares for all. With such a perception, the Aembu would, for example, call *Ngai, fafa* (father), *Muvecani* (the provider) or *Mwivoko wetu* (our hope).

The special term for *Ngai as Mwene Njiru* (the owner of the rain) has an originating function. Rain produces water, which is a symbol of life and regeneration,cleasing, peace and satisfaction. Rain sustains the vegetation without which people, animals and all the living things could not survive (Muceke; O.I., 17/12/98). The Aembu are basically agriculturalists and therefore entirely depended on land for their livelihood. Land provides them the material needs of life, without which the religious and social needs would not be satisfied. These needs could not be satisfied without adequate rain. Rain was therefore viewed as quite indispensable for human life. With such adequate and respectable symbols and metaphors describing *Ngai*, the Aembu depicted their deep rooted value for religion.

As already mentioned, *Ngai* had official resting places. In spite of this fact, *Ngai* is not visible to mortal eyes. He is believed to be far and beyond the reach of humankind. The Aembu think that *Ngai* has permanent abode in the sky (*iguru*). But paradoxically, *Ngai* is quite near to his creation. During the crisis of their lives, the Aembu invariably call upon *Ngai* for spiritual assistance. In many acts of worship, they acknowledge *Ngai* to be near and approachable. As such, he is manifest in natural phenomena and objects.

2.3 The Meaning and Value of Work

In our day to day conversations, we normally use the term work. Despite the usage of this term it is not easy to get its definition. Different scientific disciplines give different definitions for work. Generally, work may be defined as any application of energy or effort to achieve a particular aim, goal or purpose. When a person works, he or she is trying to bring about some changes. The change may affect the social, religious, political, economic or cultural realms. Therefore, work is a central reality to human existence. That is why perhaps a human being is described as "a working creature". Therefore, work is natural to human beings.

Work is a social activity. The work that an individual does has a social character. The Aembu had collective mode of working. For instance, when an individual or a family was engaged in a certain work, the help of friends or neighbours was sought for in order to expedite the work. One would go round the village soliciting help from friends. The help could be physical, that is, actively helping. For instance one would help in providing food or drink to the workers. This kind of *esprit de corps* found expression in the adage: "*Murimi umwe ndecuragia ikumbi* (one farmer cannot fill up a granary).

The concept of team work spirit was quite essential in that a task which would take much time to complete, took only a short time. Moreover the spirit was indispensable especially in such a community where the idea of paid labour was remote and vague in people's minds. The significance of team work system is further underscored by Kenyatta (1938:78) when he writes:

Mutual help guided by the rules of give and take plays a significant part. In every branch of work, reciprocity is the fundamental principle governing the relationship between man and his neighbours, and also between various groups or clans and the tribe. If a man after having been asked to give his service absents himself without a good reason, especially when his neighbour has urgent work, such as building a hut or a cattle Kraal, which has to be completed in one day, the result will be that the defaulter will find himself socially boycotted for his individualistic attitude.

The Aembu concept of work is based on values such as mutual responsibility, religious and social customs governing the behaviour of the people, and the availability of resources. These values were inculcated from childhood. There was no time which was set apart to teach or impart such values. Each individual knew what was expected of him or her, and should one fail, severe punishment would be administered. Children were brought up in such a way as to accept each other as brothers and sisters. They would perform the tasks together.

Mwaniki (1973:73), notes this practice among the Aembu when he writes:

This type of *Harambee* living was learnt naturally as one grew. That is why the children were encouraged to play together and depended on each other in many cases, for they were reminded that, "*Kaigania aturire mukuva*", or he who was self-reliant lacked awl, used only for piercing holes when sewing calabashes or other basket-work articles.

It has been noted elsewhere that the Aembu lived in an integrated community. Every activity or aspect of life was perceived as having some religious value. It was hard to make a clear cut distinction between the religious and secular aspects of life. Generally, every aspect of work had some religious significance. For example, before virgin land would be cultivated, special sacrifice would be offered to God and the ancestors to bless it. The ceremony of offering sacrifice would be officiated by religious specialists such as the ritual elders, diviners and

mediums. In addition, as a person cultivated land, he or she would sing songs to beseech *Ngai* to bless the work.

Having underscored the meaning and the value of work the next feat will be to identify the two major occasions when religious aspect of work featured prominently.

2.4 The Planting Ceremony

This was an occasion that was crucial in the community. Elders, men, women and children were involved. The ceremony was conducted before the onset of the first rain, a period known as *Muratho*. The ritual elders were the key officials on this occasion.

The ceremony involved securing of some seeds of various major crops to be planted on that season. They would include; pulses like cow peas (*mbumbu*), beans (*mboco*), and pigeon peas (*Njavi*), and other grains such as maize, millet and sorghum. Also involved was the ritual slaughtering of a sacrificial animal. In such a crucial ceremony, the usual choice of the animal was a lamb or a goat of one colour, without blemish (Ntharano, and Kiatha; O.I., 24/12/98).

This ritual slaughtering differed in a number of ways from the usual killing of an animal for food. In the first place, the ritual slaughtering was done with a sacrificial knife. Secondly, ritual killing suggested that death was somehow a way to new life and its continuation. This was reminiscent of the imagery of the seed that must die in the ground as a precondition for the production of a new

and more abundance life. Thirdly no part of the animal would be thrown away as waste. The blood and stomach contents or *tatha* would be mixed with the selected seeds and stored overnight in a special container. By staying overnight the seeds would absorb the blood and liquid in the stomach contents. The meat of the sacrificial animal was roasted and consumed by the ritual leaders. The bone of the sacrificial animal were burnt to ashes in the sacrificial fire.

The roasting of the meat was done in a special way. Many sticks were selected to make a roasting grill. Their thickness were equal to that of a standard digging sticks (*miro*). Two sticks would be selected from the roasting grill. Their selection was based on their resistance to get burned by the sacrificial fire. It is from these sticks that the ritual digging sticks (*miro*), would be made. *Miro* (plural), were the major tools for farming. They would be used in planting or even in seed-bed preparations (Kigamba and Wambiro; O.I. 26/12/98).

Early in the morning, the elders accompanied by a few children and women who were past child-bearing age would carry the ritual seeds and *miro* to the field for planting. These people were not allowed to utter a word to anyone or even do any other activity. It was customary among the Aembu that the first actions or utterances in a morning would have a profound effects on a day's success. For that reason, the Aembu clearly ensured that whoever one met in the morning, or talked to, would not be an agent of bad omen (Munyari, O.I. 16/12/98). On getting to the field, the party would recite prayers facing *Kiri nyaga*. During the prayers, the elders would raise their hands, one of them highly holding the *kiondo* (basket), containing the ritual seeds. The blood of the

sacrificial lamb would be sprinkled into the field using a cow's fly-whisk as a kind of aspergillum.

After the recitation and sprinkling, the few children and women around were aligned in front of the officiating elders. Some spittle from the elders was given to them. The elders would take water with their mouths, and throw it with force to the party. Among the Aembu, the act of blessing frequently entailed, together with invocations, some modest ritual gestures such as spray of spittle. Blessing through invocations accompanied by spittle were quite efficacious because people acknowledged that they had divine concurrence. It is noteworthy that the spittle was accompanied by words which were believed to have a power or *Nommo* (Jahn, 1961). This power was known to have reinforcing effect to a human being. Thus a human being could be weakened or strengthened through *Nommo*. This is an underlying concept behind curses among the Aembu.

Spittle gave life and force to words and gestures. When accompanied with words, spittle accomplished what was intended to be achieved. This symbolic act of spittle came from the inner depths of venerated patriarchs, who themselves were blessed by *Ngai* with long life and fecundity. These patriarchs were closer to all the Aembu who lived before, especially those deceased progenitors who wisely guided the people of the community. The wetness given by spittle and sprinkling of blood symbolised fertility, life, and fruitfulness. To enhance similar wetness, the elders invoked *Ngai* to bring forth abundance of rain, fertility, high yield, and health to the crops.

Having blessed the present party, the elders handed over the ritual seeds to women and children. They were ritually planted using the ritual digging sticks, *miro*. The underlying reason of having children and women taking part in ritual planting is that these were the people usually engaged in agricultural activities in the community. Elderly women of past child bearing age were considered pure (Ndwiga; O.I., 16/12/98). Children were held to be on the transition of development. They were considered to be clean of any evil or immoral acts, which might render the ritual ineffective. Further, they were considered as unspoilt, and basic human creatures from which youth and adults have drifted on their ways in life.

When everything was done, the party returned to their homestead. Immediately after their arrival, a horn (*coro*), was blown. *Coro* was meant to officially announce the commencing of planting season in people's respective fields. It also notified the people that the planting ceremony had been over.

Nowadays, the ceremony is not observed due to the changes the community has undergone. The reasons for the discontinuity will be explained the next chapter.

2.5 Harvesting Ceremony

Harvesting was the biggest and busiest activity after planting. People normally helped one another in this task. It was common to see adults, and children forming working squads. Before the crops fully ripened, people were usually occupied in repairing or making granaries (*Makumbi*), or grain stores (*miruru*). Most of this work was done by men and the male children. The most crucial

requirement in every village was construction of a special grain store (*mururu*). It was specially reserved for, *Ngai*, who had to be profusely thanked for a bountiful harvest.

When everything was set for the harvesting activity, the venerated patriarchs or elders met with the community religious specialists such as the diviners, seers, medicine-men and mediums. This council of specialists would decide on the most appropriate way of giving thanks to *Mwene Njiru*. They would decide on the type, colour, and size of the animal to be sacrificed. For example, if majority of the maize and bean grains had many colours, they would decide that a goat of many colours be sacrificed. The criteria of deciding the desired colour, and type of the sacrificial animal was complex, and was based on the laws of chance (Kamwagire; O.I., 12/12/98). The complexity of the choice was also based on the fact that many religious specialists were involved, of which each gives a pertinent and relevant option. Therefore any choice depended entirely on the concensus of these specialists.

The next decision would be to identify the most suitable day for sacrificing the selected ritual animal. Here again, the selection of the day was based on the agreement of the specialists. On the material day the ritual elders led the sacrificial animal to the foot of a *mugumo* tree. It was under this tree that the sacrifice was offered. The sacrificial victim was laid supine, with the head pointing *Kiri nyaga*, where *Mwene Njiru* dwelt. The animal was slaughtered by an elder using a ritual knife. After the skinning was done, the meat was roasted and eaten by the present religious specialists. The remains, such as bones, were burnt to ashes. Where available, sweet smelling plants were added to the

burning grass, giving fragrance to the rising smoke. This was a kind of incense that would reach in the sky to *Ngai*. The sacrifice was a thanks-giving feast, celebrating not only *Ngai's* generosity, but also the welfare, unity and survival of the Aembu. A person's journey in life was characterised by a series of transitions through precarious conditions of life. Therefore, *Mwene Njiru's* immense gift of high yields enabled the Aembu to live in abundance and happiness. They had enough to feed on, including their livestock, and so to a great extent had a good measure of security. (Wanyaga, and Cianjue; O.I., 26/12/98).

Meanwhile, the skin of the sacrificial animal was cut into several small ribbons. They were later distributed to the women of the village in order to be sewn in their baskets (*ciondo*). *Ciondo* were used by women for harvesting grains. The significance of the ribbon was that it ritually imparted the blessings to the harvesting instruments (Muthanje; O.I., 20/12/98). *Ciondo* were agents of sustenance to a family. Even when women went into fields or distant lands searching for food, they would use these *ciondo*.

When the crops were fully ripe, some few grains were harvested using *ciondo*, and then taken to special grain store (*Mururu*). This was a thanks-giving gesture which was aimed at symbolising the generosity of the Aembu. It also symbolised the reciprocal action of *Ngai's* benevolence. *Ngai* had given abundance of rain and harvest to the people. He had to be thanked profusely by the special gift of first fruits of the season. Further the gesture symbolised the Aembu customary principle of give and take. It was customary that a needy

person should pay homage to the benefactor. Doing otherwise was considered as a show of ingratitude and greed.

When all the families in the village had deposited their first grains in the *Mururu*, the ritual council of elders would meet to perform yet another ceremony. The ceremony was meant to ritually open the *miruru* to get contents. All the grains were either cooked, roasted or ground into flour to make gruel of beer called *Marua*. The preparations were done at village elder's homestead. In each village was the leading elder who officiated in such ceremonies. After all was set, the ritual leaders partook of the feast. This feast was called "the feast of tasting the maiden crops of the season", (*Kuronja maketha*). In their eating and drinking, the ritual elders demonstrated that *Ngai* had provided them with abundance of life and sustenance. This also showed that what the villagers had given to *Ngai* was clean, potable and edible.

The foregoing discussion underscores what the Aembu religious experience entailed. An analysis of their religious experiences, various ceremonies and festivals provides a vantage point for appreciating the religious aspect of work. *Ngai* was believed to be involved in all economic activities because he provided the necessary requirements. The community ensured that those who did not keep abreast with the religious requirements were heavily punished. Sometimes such people would be banished from the community.

We have seen how the community actively took part in various ritual sacrifices, ceremonies and festivals. The gesture underlines the importance of keeping continuity of the community's religious pervasiveness. This had to be enkindled

in the children, acknowledging the fact that they were the community's posterity. Therefore, from early age, a child was acquainted with the religious themes which would form the content of his or her future life.

Having established the concept of God among the Aembu, as well as the religious significance of various ceremonies, the next feat will examine the methods of imparting socio-religious values to children through work. These methods were many and varied. For that reason the methods that will be explained below include: corporate living, mutual social responsibility, imitation, and performance of work.

2.6 Methods of Imparting Socio-religious Values

2.6.1 Corporate Living

In Embu indigenous community much emphasis was laid on communal living. It was customary to have the houses of a single village or hamlet built in such a way as to form a semi-circle. There was a fence around the village, which signified that a whole extended family dwelt therein. The houses faced the centre of the compound, and towards the main entrance into the village. Men's hut (*garu*) were built near the main entrance. *Garu* was the meeting place for men, where they could warm themselves on the fire as they discussed issues affecting their village. They would also meet in *garu* to get advice from their elders, or to educate their children (young boys) or even to hear and settle disputes between the members of the community (Weru; O.I., 3/1/99).

It was customary to have children of one family or village interacting freely with the children of neighbouring families or villages. Sometimes their parents would send their children to live for some days, months or seasons with distant relatives or neighbours. Once there these children were not regarded as visitors or strangers, but as members of those families. When children lived and shared their joy together, they also learnt to sacrifice their wills and to give in to the wishes and desires of others. They also developed a sense of empathy. This enabled them to share each other's happiness, problems and misfortunes as well as material things (Murangiri; O.I., 6/1/99).

More often than not, children were encouraged and in some cases directed to invite their friends, especially from neighbouring families or villages for meals, plays, songs and dances. In such a gathering, children learnt to live corporately. They also learnt that whoever led a solitary life was a sorcerer. This found expression in the adage: *Mutura wenga ni morogi* (he who leads a solitary life is a sorcerer), and other similar sayings (Njamura; O.I., 15/12/98).

Moreover, they came to learn that mutual good should take precedence over individual good, social concensus over personal desire, interdependence over independence, and corporateness over solitude. Children were made to understand that there is more prestige and blessing from *Ngai* in putting into consideration the welfare of the other than in making oneself rich and prosperous at the expense of others. This latter attitude was often associated with sorcerers.

2.6.2 Mutual Social Responsibility

Mutual social responsibility was a virtue that was highly emphasized. Through mutual social responsibility, children underscored the essence of kinship system. The family was the basic unit as far as the kinship system was concerned. Therefore when children of one family learnt to live together in harmony, the concept of mutual social responsibility was inculcated.

Children of various families or villages formed working squads during cultivation, planting and harvesting. They would move from family to family, or village to village accomplishing the tasks at hand. This working system was known as *Rutua*. It operated in such a way that by the end of the season, each participant was helped by the working squad. The system was very crucial in that children came to learn to live corporately. They learnt that should one village or part of the community face any misfortune, the other members of the community would come to their aid. This ideal was based on the fact that no one was immune to misfortunes. This found expression in the words: today is me, tomorrow will be you (*Umunthi ninie, ruciu niwe*) (Mucomba, and Wanjagi; O.I., 7/1/99).

Mutual responsibility was further demonstrated in children helping the older members of the community. For example, young girls would help in fetching firewood and water as well as cooking food for their grandparents. It was a social obligation for the young people to help the aged. The failure to do this was socially condemned.

2.6.3 Observation and Imitation

Children enjoy playing and doing things in imitation of their elders. The activities they do together lead to healthy development for adult life. They are in fact rehearsing the activities which will be part and parcel of their adult life. On one hand, the boys would play the roles of men and behave in similar way as the elders do in the community. On the other hand, the girls would take to playing the roles of women in the community. Therefore when one grew beyond childhood, the father would take charge of the boy's education while the mother would take charge of the girls' education. This type of education took the form of observation and imitation of various tasks. For example, when an adult was working in the field with children, the latter would learn the necessary values and skills very quickly. Observation and imitation were abilities that were revered. Njogu (O.I., 21/12/98), thus asserted that if children were able to learn by themselves what they observed from their elders, in reality, it was *Ngai* who taught them. He further added that *Ngai* endowed children with the aptitude to learn through observation and imitation.

While working in the *shamba*, the father took the responsibility of teaching boys various things. He would make a digging stick (*moro*) for the boy to imitate him with while weeding. The boy would observe how his father was handling the *moro*, and slowly learn to handle his miniature *moro*. Eventually, the boy become an aspiring farmer. He also learnt that before clearing virgin land, planting or harvesting, certain sacrifices had to be made. Girls were taught by their mothers about house work, nursing babies and other domestic chores. She would also teach them on matters pertaining to farming (Kariuki

and Weria; O.I., 10/1/99). Thus, from early age, a child was acquainted with all the religious themes or gestures that would mould him or her into a socially and morally upright member of the society. The themes or gestures were presented in such a simple mode as to be easily learnt. They were not to be explicitly taught but were simply to be lived. A child was thus brought up in an environment that was characterised by various feasts, rituals and gesture that would become part and parcel of life.

2.6.4 Performing Tasks

We have seen that children worked under the supervision of their elders. They would help in tasks related to the economic life of the community. Laziness was strongly discouraged while diligence was highly emphasized and even revered. Sometimes children were left to work on their own, without being closely supervised by adults. In this way, children learnt to work independently for the betterment of all. They were socialized in such a way that they underscored their obligation to work diligently. They would get the feeling that they were indispensable, and that their effective contribution to domestic economy was taken into account.

Due to progressive acquaintance in participating in tasks, children learnt the rule of reciprocity and responsibility. By the time they were on the threshold of adulthood children were already initiated into most crucial and realistic tasks. As the adage goes, etiquette is like a law; therefore when a child got acquainted with the obligation to work, they did not need any authority from the adults. They set about their work with a lot of good will, joy and concern for doing

well. They even became quite initiative and innovative. Through volunteering to work, a missionary spirit was inculcated in children. They learnt to sacrifice their efforts for the cause of others, and thus learnt to be providers and sources of sustenance in the community. They thus became people to be counted on, with complete liberty to amuse themselves or do whatever they deemed necessary on condition that they promote the welfare of others.

2.7 Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, we would rightly assert that the main objective of tasks among children was not aimed at exploiting them. Rather every task was aimed at teaching, imparting or enforcing some important values on children. The fundamental concept of corporation in the community underscored the need to inculcate moral values to children. Children are the future of the community, while their parents and elders are the custodians of moral values. The latter are vested with the responsibility of good nurturing of their children, so that from the earliest years, children get into the mainstream of virtuous life.

Since work was viewed from a religious perspective, any task that a child took part in was meant to lead a child from mere conformity to rules to an interest for virtuous actions. Work was generally aimed at making a child feel a call for mutual concern. It was also aimed at leading a child away from the feeling that he or she was subject to forces beyond control. This sentiment is expressed by Durkheim (1893):

When one [child] notices that everyone around him always behaves in the same way in the same circumstances, he considers it impossible to behave otherwise.

Therefore, the socio-religious values that community inculcates in children proceeds from the fact that other people exist and that one should take note of their existence. This idea finds expression in Mbiti (1969), when he writes:

I am, because we are; and since
we are, therefore I am.

CHAPTER THREE : THE PLACE AND ROLE OF CHILDREN IN THE EMBU COMMUNITY

3.1 Introduction

As it became evident in Chapter One, children occupied a very central place in the Embu indigenous community. Although some traditional customs and values which promoted the well-being of children ideally persist, most of them have really been transformed or discarded. The Embu community, like many other communities in Kenya, has undergone a transformation which has weakened or destroyed some of the positive traditional beliefs and practices. This transformation has been brought about by rapid socio-economic, religious and cultural changes in the community.

In this Chapter, we endeavour to bring to light the importance of children among the Aembu. We also analyse the rites of childhood and their significance and eventually examine how their motif can be used to enforce, enrich, edify or even revivify the moral and religious insights among the Aembu today. By bringing to the fore the fundamental aspects of the Aembu's attitudes and values for children from the indigenous perspective, we are able to underscore the essence of combating child labour today. It is noteworthy that in an African mind, the preoccupation with the past event is almost incorruptible. Given the cultural significance of childhood, and the accompanying rites among the Aembu, the knowledge of the past can be of practical value in the present.

Such knowledge may provide the people with a fresh awareness of their own history, cultural values and wisdom as they grapple with the precarious status of the work-imperilled children.

Finally, we evaluate the traditional attitudes towards the child, and child-centred values that are hitherto upheld by the community.

3.2 Importance of Children to the Embu Community

The Embu Community always placed a high value on children. Many traditional songs, proverbs, lullabies, maxims, myths, legends and genealogies attest to this. Moreover a lot of time and resources were devoted to their well-being. This expressed the desire to have children and the love the community had for them. It would be opportune to examine the reasons why children were highly valued in the indigenous Embu Community.

The birth of the first child to a married couple ensured the completeness of a family. It ensured stability of the marital relationship. Furthermore, it made the new couple be given a special name that reflected their role as parents. Thus, it was customary to call such individuals *Ithe kana nyina wa ng'ania* (the father or the mother of so and so). Such designation meant that they were henceforth given the responsibility of caring for any child, let alone theirs. The parents also achieved a special status in the community. Such status acknowledged their vertical mobility in terms of sharing in the continuity of the community. They became sharers in the perpetuation of life in the community (Wakio and Wambura; I.O., 12/1/99). This status of parenthood was a living symbol of

vitality, abundance and prosperity in life. The birth of children to a family was a constant reminder that life continues and that the family and the community at large perpetuate themselves.

Warfare between communities, disease epidemics, old age and accidents occasionally killed thousands of people. The community would replace such people through the birth of children. In the Embu indigenous community, there were no insurance policies, social security funds or special institutions for the old and the sick. For that matter offspring were entrusted with the care of the aged and the sick. Offspring would provide the needed care and support their parents in later life. It was a curse, a sort of sacrilege to neglect or mistreat the aged or the sick people. Every effort was made by the offspring to create comfort for such people.

Children were a source of social and emotional satisfaction in the family. They created joy and happiness to their parents and the community at large. Those homes with children were more cheerful than those without children. Kagendo; O.I., 14/1/99, expressed this sentiment when they concurred that whenever they saw children dancing, singing, and playing around, their hearts throbbed and beamed with blessedness and pleasure. They further, hinted that such playful children reminded them of their past golden youth.

A child was a confirmation of the alliance that was ritually arrived at between different lineages at the time of a marriage between two of their members. Failure to bring forth children would lead to nullification of such an alliance. Therefore a child was the foundation of any bonds of consanguinity in families.

He or she was connecting between the members of the husband's and wife's families. In this way, the husband's and the wife's family regarded each other as *Athoni* (in-laws). It is noteworthy that any marriage in the Embu indigenous community involved exchange of gifts and paying of dowry by the prospective husband to the bride's family. In this connection the birth of the first child was a proof that the exchange of gifts or paying of dowry was successful and fruitful. Failure to have children was an indication that any transaction done prior to marriage was a total failure (Kithinji and Gakoru; O.I., 14/1/99). Therefore, without children any matrimonial bond lost its significance, and this could lead to the dissolution of the relationship.

African ontology rests essentially on the idea of force (Tempels, 1939).

According to African traditional values, every being in the universe has a rank or status. Therefore, all beings are arranged according to their ontological status. The importance attached to status makes the African to be very conscious of his or her rank no matter how low it may be. This is because a rank has power.

In order for a man to be linked and participate in ontological hierarchy, he must have a family. Marriage is therefore very important, since it is the only way man is able to perpetuate life. In line with the ontological view, the arrival of a child into the world served as a way of strengthening the ontological status of the parents. Strengthening the life force of a being was a very important value in the Embu community. Every person cherished to be strengthened through words, deeds, working, singing, dancing or even playing. The greatest privilege that parents enjoyed was maintaining a higher ontological status by begetting children. Parents enjoyed partial immortality through their off-springs, who

kept them in living memory through many generations. This status made the parents enjoy the prerogatives attached to the ancestral state. Thus among the Aembu, any adult who had no children was considered anathema to the community. He or she extinguished the flame of vital force.

Through the child, the parents, and by extension the community, were joined to the past and the future generations of the social group. Begetting children was the only way in which life was perpetuated. As Mbiti (1973:43) puts it:

You become immortal in and through your children, even if you die eventually... you are rekindled in your children. Through procreation you beat death, you bring together the three dimensions of time: past, present and future...

The naming of a child after a dead person demonstrated that the person has come to life. The death of a person and the birth of a child are connected in the naming of the latter after the former. Among the Aembu, the belief in immortality was expressed in phrases such as *Mutiga iri* (the beloved dead). The desire for immortality made members of community scorn any childless person. Such a person was considered as working to extinguish the flame of life. He or she was derogatively called *Irandi* (a rover) or if the person dies he would be called *Mwimwa ni iri* (the unbeloved). Such persons were forever forgotten by the living. This is because their lives were viewed as reaching dead end.

On the socio-economic level, children served as economic assets to the family. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why the Aembu favoured the idea of having as many children as possible. According to my informants, traditionally, the Aembu disliked the idea of having small families. A large family had socio-economic implications, especially where the land was plenty. Economically, the Aembu were farmers as well as pastoralists. Therefore, a numerous progeny

was able to cultivate large tracts of land, keep a big herd of cattle, and acquire wealth through the exchange of the agricultural and livestock products.

Socially, a large progeny served as a means of promoting the social status of the parents, which was achieved through off-springs perpetuating the family by getting married when they matured. It should be noted that by getting and staying married, the individual fulfilled himself or herself and consequently the family fulfilled itself. Through the family relationships the oneness of life was realized. Generally, each person within the family got his/her status raised by begetting children.

From the spiritual perspective, the Aembu concept of a child was not merely a young bipedal, which we encounter daily, but an irruption and manifestation of the sacred. A child could not be reduced to what is earthly or even be explained in terms of the intercourse of the biological, environmental and cultural influences. By his or her very nature, the child surpassed all these abstract definitions and concepts. The child was viewed not only as a human being, but also as a super-natural being. In other words, the child was a mediating force between the earth and the beyond, between the living and the dead. At the time of birth a child gained access into the world of the living. Sometimes this child could be named after a dead ancestor, thereby serving as a link between the living and the dead. As could be noted from the information given by Wanyaga (O.I., 27/12/98), being born on earth meant leaving behind the spiritual world. The sojourn involved a change of one's state of being. At the end of earthly life, the converse was true; that is, to die here meant leaving the earth and being

born in the spiritual world. Thus human life was seen to obey a cyclical principle (Erny, 1981).

The Aembu maintained that a child was born with a unique personality. Mveta (O.I., 26/12/98), reiterated this when she noted: "That is why neonates are born with clenched fists, as if tightly holding something. What they actually hold are their potentialities." She further notes that a child was an epiphany or an ambassador from the world of divinity to the world of humanity. This made a child an especially important person in the Embu community. One can therefore understand why a pregnant woman occupied a unique and privileged position in the Embu indigenous community.

What we can make out of this observation about the importance of children in the Embu indigenous community is that a child was an indispensable and irreplaceable entity for the continuity of life in the community. The community acquired from children its power of continuity, and the dynamic link between the earth and the beyond. At the core of the social structure are parents, who, by the virtue of their fertility, sustain and perpetuate life in the community. Thus, taking children as our focal point, we can see progressive passage from one stage of life to another. We see that they generally pass from a stage of childhood to that of adulthood, before assuming the role and status of parents. With the onset of menopause, parents are naturally deprived of reproductive function, thereby becoming elders of the community. Finally, when these elders die they, assume the status of ancestors, in which context, the birth of a child is a clear indication of rejuvenation of the lost procreative function of parents.

An examination of the place and role of children in the current Embu community establishes the validity of the aforementioned importance of children in the indigenous Embu community. Nowadays children form an integral part of the community. Consequently everyone is supposed to ensure that they acquire values and skills that are beneficial to their future roles as leaders. In line with this fact, a lot of resources have been directed towards the moulding of future leaders. In the Embu community, the spirit of *Harambee* (collective responsibility) thrives. Members of the community come together, either at family or community level, to contribute funds to put up schools, health centres, and other social amenities. On certain occasions some members of the community come in concert to raise funds to educate one of the children whose parents are unable to support.

The government of Kenya, in conjunction with the non-government and community based organisations has already put up some institutions for child care. In Embu district, there are such institutions; this will be seen in the forth chapter. The prevalence of such institutions explains the concern on children. Some of the institutions are sponsored by churches. This is perhaps a clear indication that the community recognizes the fact that a child is an embodiment of a spiritual entity, and that human life is sacred. In this regard, the Catholic Bishops' in Kenya pronounced the importance of children, (Arinze, 1981:98):

In promoting the welfare of children there are many elements in traditions that can be of great assistance. These are part of [our] cultural heritage that should not be lost. Children are seen as a gift from God. They are a sign of God's blessing, a blessing that is received with gratitude and treasured in love. They are a joy to their parents and a welcome gift to the community in which they are born.

Looking at marital relationship today, one realizes that children occupy a very central place. Children are taken to be the seal of marriages. That is perhaps why so many couples experience frustrations if they are not blessed with a child. The barrenness of a woman or the impotence of a man has a social stigma. A couple that is incapable of begetting children draws a lot of attention in the community. This can easily lead to divorce, or even extra marital relations. A lot of agitation and anxiety may come from the members of the husband's and wife's family. Such a predicament can be very disturbing to the affected individuals. The couple may thus spend a lot of time, energy and resources to establish the reason behind their infertility. They may even go to fortune-tellers or medicine-men to have their problems solved. Sometimes they would take recourse to ancestors, who are known to have some influence on fecundity among the Aembu. On some other occasions, if the problem involves the wife, the husband would resort to practising polygamy or concubinage.

3.3 Rites Accompanying Childhood

Childhood is a very special period in human life. It is one of the periods that is marked by certain kinds of rites of passage. Moreover, any individual entering into the world is first someone's child. Then, through a series of rites of passage, the individual becomes fully integrated into the community. Given the cultural significance of the rites of passage among the Aembu, it is important to examine thoroughly all the rites accompanying childhood. Let us here define the term "Rites of Passage". This term was first coined by Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957); he saw the life of an individual as a series of passages from one stage to another, or from one occupation to another. Along with this view, the

life of any individual tends to be governed by various changes and transitions that are characterised by periods of accelerated growth and stagnation, as well as forward leaps, interspersed with some long and short moments of apparent inertia. Thus human life is seen to resemble nature, which is governed by such periodic movement. According to Gennep, human progression from one group or occupation to another is usually accompanied by special acts that are enveloped in ceremonies and rituals. He further points out that when activities associated with such rituals are thoroughly examined in terms of their order, form and content, it is possible to distinguish three major phases: separation, transition, and incorporation. An examination of the rites accompanying childhood in the Embu community will exhibit a characteristic of the three-fold classification.

According to Kanya and Muthathai (O.I., 29/12/98), in almost all the major stages of biological maturation of the child, even before conception there were special rites performed. Though these rites differed in form and content, and from one clan to another, they underscored the vitality of providing blessing and peace needed by the recipient, indeed by all the participants, as they confronted the precarious successive passages of life. Moreover, the celebration of such rites served as a constant reminder to the participants, and the community at large, of their historicity and cultural embeddedness. Such rites taught the members of the community that they were not merely biological products, but cultural creatures who, by their very nature, symbolize the identity and continuity of the whole of the Embu community.

In these rites the divinity was invoked to keep a close watch over the individual and the participants so that they could achieve the goals they were called to pursue. Thus, these rites were invariably performed during the following periods:

- * Before conception in order to call forth fecundity in the couple. Such rites were called fecundity or fertility rites.
- * During pregnancy in order to appease God, the Spirits, ancestors, and other relations to ensure the safety of the foetus and that of the prospective mother.
- * At birth to thank and placate God and the Spirits so that they would bless the mother and the child.
- * At the cutting of the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord is the channel through which the child is nourished by the mother in the womb. At birth the child passes from the maternal womb to the universe of the family and community life. The cutting of the umbilical cord symbolically severed the relationship which hitherto bound the child to the mother. This demonstrated that the child had begun taking part in solid nourishment of the adults.
- * When the baby was able to sit, stand and walk. This period signified the child could get away from its mother and enter into contact with the immediate environment. This was the beginning of taking part in the life career of a child.

- * During the teething. This rite was meant to appease God and the spirits so that teething was not abnormal. Teething was considered abnormal when it began on the upper jaw. In that case such a child was thrown away since he was an omen to the community.
- * At weaning which signified that time had come when the child began to participate in the tasks of the family as well as observing the customs and manners of the clan, and the community as a whole.
- * Finally, with the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics. This showed that a person was capable of procreating which was the most crucial social function. For the sake of brevity in delineating the above rites, we have opted to categorise them into four broad categories, namely: Fecundity Rites, Birth Rites, Naming Rites, and Career Rites. Any rites performed prior or even beyond the above categories will be considered as being out of the scope of this study. We now here below examine each of these.

3.3.1 Fecundity Rites

Fecundity was a deep rooted value among the Aembu. In their grappling with day today subsistence economy, the Aembu acknowledged that fecundity was the most obvious key not only to wealth and security, but also to human survival. The dominant social value in the traditional Aembu families was children who were healthy, diligent and well-behaved. As we have already mentioned, every new born was seen as a joyful sign of divine blessing upon the

whole community. The creator, *Mwenenyaga* or *Ngai* enabled the couple to share his creative power through fecundity.

The fecundity rite was known as *Gwaikua*. The term *Gwaikua* is derived from Kiambu verb, *Gwaika* which means to help someone to put something on his or her back, shoulder or any other part of the body for portage. Therefore, *Gwaikua* means the act of assisting an individual to carry something. In this context, *Gwaikua* was a rite meant to reverently ask *Mwene nyaga* to bless the newly wedded couple with a child. During the rite, it was common to hear the woman constantly chanting "*Ngai, nirakuvoya uciari*" (God, I earnestly beg motherhood/parenthood) (Gitiri and Wanjiru; O.I., 15/1/99)

Gwaikua was always accompanied by solemn invocations, festivity, multiple blessing and ritual slaughtering of an animal. The sacrificial animal was normally a goat of one colour and without blemish. The oneness of the colour of the sacrificial victim indicated the solemnity and purity of the ritual. The invocations, or incantation and acclamations during the ritual slaughtering indicated that the death of the sacrificial victim would give rise to a new life. The pouring of the victim's blood on earth was meant to appease *Ngai* and the ancestors to provide a new and abundant life to the new couple. The victims flesh would nourish the participants, thus invigorating them to pray for the anticipated new life and its continuation. Kanyange (O.I., 15/12/98), asserted that there was no doubt among the participants in this ritual that *Mwenenyaga* would respond positively to their plea. She added that there was a deep sense of trust and hope that many children would be born into the newly created union.

She firmly stated that it was unbelievable that such invocations, chants and prayers were not heard high on the mountains and above the clouds.

During the ritual, the women and the few men present continued chanting prayers. The meat of the sacrificial animal was eaten by all as men partook the beer. Before drinking the beer men first offered libations by sprinkling some amount of beer in all directions using a cow's whisk, or a branch of *mugumo* tree as a kind of aspergillum. The sprinkling was done by an elder who was past child-fathering age. Such age of the elder implies that he was pure of any evils that could affect the success of the ritual. Such old people commanded a lot of respect. They were believed to be nearer to the ancestors. As the elder sprinkled the beer into every direction, he would chant "*Icukia Mwenenyaga, na utuviana nyingi*" (take God, and give us many children). As Wanja (O.I. 15/12/98) puts it, the attire and the prayerful way of begging for fertility helped to keep at bay any evil forces that were known to bring futility to ceremonies. She reiterates that the participants were doing what their fore fathers did in the same holy place from the time immemorial.

The site of this ritual was beneath an important ceremonial tree. Among the Aembu, the *Mukuu* and the *Mugumo* trees were widely regarded as the sacred abodes of ancestral spirits. These trees grow vastly on a variety of soils, making dignified shady and stumpy trees. That is why it was almost mandatory to find either or both of these trees in every homestead. (Kaunju, and Gacore; O.I., 16/1/99).

The choice of *Mukuu* and *Mugumo* tree as sacred is merely mysterious than coincidental. In the first place, both trees fall under the genus *Ficus* or the fig tree, the former being *Ficus sycomorus*, and the latter *Ficus Thonningii*. In the second place, there are numerous references to the fig tree in the Holy Bible. In the Old Testament, the book of Micah, refers to the fig tree:

(...) but they shall sit every man under (...) fig tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken (Micah 4:4; New International Version)

In the New Testament, Jesus used the fig tree in his teaching about the Kingdom of God. The Gospel according to Saint Luke thus states:

And he told them a parable. Look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is close at hand (Luke 21:29-31; New International Version).

It is noteworthy that the *Ficus sycomorus* is the sycamore tree referred to in the scriptures. It is also the Biblical sycamore of Egypt and Middle East which is readily identified by its rough, rounded leaves and yellow bark (Gachathi, 1989).

Thirdly, the *Ficus Thonningii* and *Ficus sycomorus* produce some clean milky juice which is used to relieve toothache. Their succulent barks are extracted and boiled to make medicine which is, used to treat liver troubles as well as diarrhoea. The leaves of these trees are palatable to browsing animals. *Ficus sycomorus* produces creamy juice when cut. Their juice can be applied on skin ulcers as medicine (Noad and Birnie, 1989).

If, in spite of this solemn rite, children were not forthcoming, this was taken to be the greatest catastrophe' that could befall a couple. To rectify this problem, arrangements were made to consult *mundu mugo* (a diviner). The *mundu mugo* would perform certain rituals called *Kuringa mbugu* (to mix magical pebbles). In performing this ritual the causes of barrenness or infecundity as well as the possible remedy were sought. *Kuringa mbugu* would also reveal whether *Ngai*, spirit or ancestors were displeased by some behaviour of certain members of the family. The rite would further reveal whether someone was behind this misfortune by letting out some malevolent forces to torment the couple. One of the most famous *Mundu mugo* was known as Gacogo. He lived in a place called Kyeni. He was renowned in matters pertaining to fecundity and body maladies (Kubuta; O.I., 18/1/99).

More often than not, prayers, sacrifices and divination proved futile. For that matter other alternatives were sought. For example, on one hand, the couple could be separated for a certain period. In the meantime, the woman was allowed to have sexual intercourse with another man, perhaps a kinsman of the husband. If such a man was able to "open the womb" of the woman, then it was tentatively concluded that the problem was incumbent in her lawful husband. It was eventually confirmed that the lawful husband was impotent, if after reunification they could not bring forth more children. In that case, arrangements were made to allow the woman to choose a kinsman from the husband's lineage with whom she could get children. Although the children did not biologically belong to the legal husband, they belonged to him socially and customarily (Ndegwa and Cianjoka; O.I. 20/1/99).

On the other hand, marriage would be dissolved and the woman allowed to remarry. If the wife could not conceive by another man, conclusion would be drawn that she was infertile. Therefore, divorce would be allowed: Otherwise if the wife consented, the husband would marry another wife. By play of words, it would be said that the wife has married a woman to assist her to beget children. Fecundity was, therefore, highly treasured and even adored by the Aembu such that the adults who died without leaving behind a progeny were not ceremonially buried. Their corpses were hardly touched by anyone, especially pregnant women. By touching such a person, it was believed that one could contract barrenness or impotence. As witnessed by Njoguri (O.I.,22/12/ 98) such people were rolled with sticks into some evil forest or into a grave.

3.3.2 Birth Rites

3.3.2.1. Pregnancy

The realization by a newly married woman that she was expecting a baby was a momentous occasion in her life. The woman first informed her husband before even informing any other member of her family. The couple was relieved of any worry that they may have had in case children would not be forthcoming.

Through the first pregnancy, the couple got a new status of being indispensable instruments of perpetuating life in the community. The first pregnancy was also an assurance that the dowry gift and prices given during the time of marriage negotiations were not wasted.

Very often, after finding that the woman was expectant, the community took measure to ensure her protection from any kind of dangers (Muthanje; O.I., 21/1/99). If need be she would wear some protective charms as directed by the diviner. A pregnant woman was treated with great care and delicateness. There was a public condemnation of any one who abused, harassed, battered or did any kind of demeaning act to an expectant woman. Such a person was normally heavily fined, or if proved notorious, either ostracised from the community or banished from social functions. However, an expectant woman was not allowed to provoke the anger of others, and she was not allowed to freely interact with other people either Kagendo; O.I., 21/1/99). She was expected to behave well towards God, divine hypostases, ancestors, kith and kin and the entire community. Failure to observe certain regulations could lead to worse experiences such as abortion, delayed or abnormal delivery, or still birth. Even close relatives, especially the parents of the couple were not allowed to misbehave or make certain utterances.

Generally, African values and morality are based on the principle that in every person, there is the vital power that is given by God. In addition to the ordinary vital force human beings have the *Nommo*, force or the of the word (Horton, 1970). Among the Aembu, such a postulate does exist. They believe that a person can cause a fortune or misfortune to occur by use of the vital force through the power of the *Nommo*. A person can awaken the sleeping or frozen vital forces in living organisms, including the unborn, fellow men and women. This explains the reason why certain utterances were heavily condemned by the Aembu.

Throughout the gestation period, the prospective mother was under prohibition of certain acts. She was not allowed to eat certain viands, or drink certain drinks. For example, it was taboo for her to eat eggs, meat of a trapped animal, drink beer, drink herbal medicine, take snuff, do hardwork, and coming into contact with some animals or barren women. She was also not allowed to have sexual intercourse with her husband during the latter months of pregnancy.

Ciarunji (O.I. 18/12/98), revealed that sometimes the mother-to-be would wear some charms or amulates in order to obtain protection from malevolent forces.

In case of any complications during the gestation period, *Muraguri* (a medicine-man) would be consulted. He was a specialist in some gynecological issues. As already mentioned the medicine-man would perform *Kuringa mbugu*. This rite involved mixing of stone and bone pebbles of different sizes, shapes and colours in a gourd called *Mwano*. The latter was usually carried in a bag called *Mboro*, along with other medical paraphernalia collectively known as *Mithega*. During the rite of *Kuringa mbugu*, the *Muraguri* vigorously shook the *Mwano* as he solemnly and constantly chanted some magical formulae. He then poured pebble (*Mbugu*) and *Mithega* on a goat skin. These substances formed a certain "pattern" from which, through his esoteric knowledge, he would be able to tell the cause of the complications. Then he would issue orders, injunctions or the course of curing the malady (Karugu; O.I., 21/1/99).

From what we know, pregnancy normally lasts for about nine calendar months. However, among the Aembu, the calculation of the period was done in a different manner. The years were calculated in terms of seasons, for instance a

rainy season was taken to be a year. Therefore, in the Embu indigenous community, pregnancy period lasted for about ten seasons.

3.3.2.2 Birth

The birth of a child was the greatest event in the life of the community. According to Cianthua (O.I., 22/12/98), it was only in begetting children that one proved that he or she was a man or woman in the community. The birth of the first child was especially important to the whole community because it changed the status of the members within the progeny of the couple. For example, the husband was changed to a father, the wife into a mother, the fathers of the couple into grandfathers, the mothers of the couple into grandmothers, the brothers and sisters into uncles and aunts respectively, and so on. That is why there were celebrations and jubilation in the entire extended household, and village whenever a child was born.

In every village there were experienced women who acted as midwives. Usually, birth took place in one of the couple's households. Informants revealed that normally it was the mother of the husband who directed all the midwifery activities that took place in the homestead. If she was not present, a close relative such as the aunt to the husband took over the responsibility. The woman in labour was expected to endure the experience bravely. She normally lied down during the delivery. Before marriage, girls were trained for this occasion during puberty. Kina (O.I., 28/12/98), admitted that during puberty, the girl was given instructions that cowardice during delivery could kill the child. Further, crying at this occasion was a disgrace to her mother, to the in-laws, as

well as to the entire feminine world. By crying she could be hated by her husband; and if, by any chance, the child died, she could be divorced. Men, unmarried women, and children were not allowed to be near when labour was in progress. Even married women who had not given birth at all were barred from being near the birth place.

There was great rejoicing as soon as a healthy and a bouncing baby was born. The women around gave a cry of victory or the ululation as soon as the neonate made its first cry. These ululations were known as *Ngemi*; they were meant to alert the village members that a new member of the community had arrived. *Ngemi* also served to acknowledge a success in the test of morality, courage, and womanhood to the new mother, the husband, and the entire community. Moreover, *Ngemi* served to alert the community on the sex of the neonate. Five *Ngemi* were made for the baby-boy, while four *Ngemi* for the baby-girl (Gakii; O.I., 22/1/99).

In some cases, infanticide, or throwing away of children in the evil forest or bushes, was practised. Infanticide was done in cases of deformed children (such were considered "monsters"), in cases of twins or triplets, and if baby cried in the birth process. One of the twins, or triplets, (the one found healthier), was let to live, while the other was killed. It should be noted that this was secretly done in such a way that only those who assisted in the birth would know about such infanticide. Throwing away of infants occurred in situations where a child was born with teeth; or if during the first dentition, the teeth from the upper jaw appeared before those of the lower jaw; or if during delivery, the legs first appeared. Such children were held as heralds of misfortune to the community.

After the act of infanticide, prayers, sacrifices and other purification rites took place. By killing the child, it was believed that the child would be sacrificed to the spirits who had influenced its birth as a way of warning the community of an impending calamity (Mukami and Wamwongoro; O.I. 23/1/99). It is noteworthy that the act of infanticide was done by the midwives.

The disposal of the umbilical cord was done in a respectable manner. It was usually cut using the sharp edge of a sorghum stalk, then tied with some banana fibres. The sorghum stalk and banana fibres symbolised sustenance and fertility or abundance of life. Sorghum porridge (*ucuru*) and chewed roasted bananas (*tutu*) were common food of the baby. The umbilical cord and the placenta were kept close to the wall at the back of the house, where the mother and her child were enclosed. They were to come out of the house during the rite of escorting the baby or *igongona ria kuumagaria mwana*. This rite is later explained in this chapter. It was just before this rite that the umbilical cord and the placenta were buried into the uncultivated field as a symbol of fertility. The burial also symbolised the unification of the new born with ancestors, whose role was to ensure the continuation of the life circle. The soil was a symbol of generation, unification and sustenance. It supported crops and plants on which people and animals depended for their sustenance. During the taking of oaths, one would lick the soil and swear the oath.

Following the birth there were rituals performed for the purpose of purification and protection of the child. It was generally held that the birth gave some congenital impurity to the mother. This ritual was essential in that it prepared the mother for successive births. Without the ritual, it was believed that there

would be some obstacles in the perpetuation of life. The ritual also put an end to the retreat the mother and the child had. It thus signified their accession to a new status. For the child, the ritual was performed to ensure continued protection right from the start of the long journey in life. The ritual was performed also to appease the powers of the beyond to bring fortune and success to this inchoate being, in its career. The child was thus committed to *Mwene nyaga* for care and safety. This ritual called *kuumirua*, was performed by a local *muraguri* (medicine-man) in order to strengthen the life force.

3.3.3 Naming Rite

Among the Aembu, the naming process was a significant ritual that was performed with a solemn ceremony and celebration. The ritual bound together people of different generations, progeny and lineage (see below, page 86). It was also a confirmation of people's powerful and pervasive sense of belonging to one another in the unity of the community and an occasion to give social identity to the child. Before a neonate was named, it was referred to as a "thing" because it had no social identity. Men, children and other members of the community except mothers were not allowed to touch such an inchoate being. If it happened to die, it would be thrown into presumed "evil" forest or bushes, and could not be mourned by the public.

The conferring of and celebrating these names provided the people with awareness of their culture. The names of the new-borns in the community were predetermined according to a comprehensive scheme. It was not just a question of guessing a name, but of carefully considering, detecting and determining the

right name capable of identifying and defining the personality of a child. In case the people involved in the rite made a mistake of conferring a wrong name, the child would either fall sick and die, or cry incessantly (Ciumwari, O.I., 28/12/98). The incessant cry or sickness on the new born implied that the latter was either wrongly identified or placed on the wrong designation and as such the naming process had to be revised.

As already mentioned, the naming ritual promoted the kinship relationship within the community. The Embu community was patrilineal. In this regard, the first born male was named after his paternal grandfather. The second born male was named after his maternal grandfather, while the third born male perpetuated the name of his own father's eldest brother. The forth male child was named after his mother's first brother. The fifth male child got the name of his father's second brother, and the six boy continued the name of his mother's second brother, and so on. As pertains to the daughters, a similar parallel pattern as that of the sons was followed, i.e., the first born female was named after her father's mother, the second daughter after her mother's mother, and so on (Nyawira; O.I., 24/1/99).

This naming system illustrated the wisdom of imparting traditional social cohesion and, therefore, historicity to the subsequent generations. It also symbolized biological continuity and identity in the whole ethnic group. That is why cases of child abuse and neglect were hardly found. Given the cultural significance of this rite, child welfare was inevitable in the community. Each child had a unique connection with another person within the lineage. The one whose name was perpetuated in a child was expected to be a model human

being for that child, i.e., a caring relative, an educator. Even when the parents were physically far from the child, they would be close to him or her through the people connected to the child through the naming system. This implied that the essential responsibility of educating, safe-guarding and protecting of children against malevolent actions was incumbent on the whole lineage. The system of naming sought to forestall and neutralize attitudes or situations that could have been inimical to moral uprightness of the child.

Sometimes getting the right name for a new born was not quite easy. Often the *murathi* (soothsayer) would be consulted. He or she would thoroughly compare the new-born with the mother in order to find out whether it has similarities, characteristics or traits of any kinsman, dead or alive. The mother would be called to narrate any premonitions or dreams she might have in relation to her kinsmen or ancestors. Such occurrence would be of great assistance to the *murathi*. They would bring to light all significant coincidences which might affirm in one way or other the right identity for the new-born (Wangai; O.I.25/1/99).

In some cases, a name was given after taking into consideration the prevailing circumstances at the time of birth of the child. If the birth occurred at night or daytime, the child might be named to reflect the time. For example, the name *Nduma* or *Cianduma* denoted that a boy or girl was born at night. The name *Muthenya*, or *Weru* reflected that the birth took place at daytime. Sometimes a birth would take place when the mother was on a journey. A child born on such occasion was given a name denoting a traveller, a wanderer, or a stranger or even the road. For example, such a child would be called *Rugendo* or *Kagendo*,

Mucangi or Njeri, Mugeni or Kageni, Mucira or Wanjira, according to gender.

If the birth took place during a certain event of historical importance, such as during a heavy rain season, invasion by enemies, outbreak of famine or drought, epidemics or even the coming of the aliens in Embu, the name would be given to reflect such incidence (Kanyaru; O.I., 26/1/99).

There were names which expressed the religious feelings of the community.

The underlying idea was to express the essence of the people's spiritual attachment with regard to all the dimensions of life. The traditional social order dictated that anyone in the community, or proceeding from it, should be in good terms with the divine. Consequently, one can affirm that to be non-religious was absent in the minds of the Aembu. Naming a new-born in accordance to such a theme showed the extent to which the community complied with divine intervention. It was a way of communicating that one agreed to place the child under the divine patronage. On this note, Maitha (O.I., 28/12/98), asserts, that a child was *Mwenenyaga's* signature that life must continue. Examples of names which reflected this theme include Mumbi, Ngai, Murunguma, etc.

The habits or career of the parents right before the child was born could be considered in the naming process. For instance, if a child's father was a hunter, and, therefore, trapped or killed a certain animal just before or after the birth of the child, the neonate would be named after the animal. My own name Namu, denotes that a certain close relative had trapped a male deer during the time of my birth. If a new born exhibited too much anger, say by crying incessantly, it would be called *Muriria* or *Wambu*. Or if a newborn child babbled excessively, it was predicted that he would be very talkative, and so, it would be named

Kamwaria or Mwaria, and so on depending on the sex of child. My great-grandfather's name, Kamwaria was derived in this manner.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the above custom of naming is that, in the naming, the community strived to establish a rapport with benevolent invisible powers. Even before the birth of a child, the parents, especially the mother, had to have recourse to divine intervention in order to get some guidance or admonition on the proper name of the child. It is also noteworthy that apart from the parents and women, other entities were involved in naming, namely, the ancestors, benevolent spirits, and divine hypostases. Further, the name of the newborn defined the parameters of its personality, individuality, identity, as well as the function in the communal realms. Naming also aimed at allowing the newborn to integrate itself into the earthly existence of the hitherto living generation.

3.3.4 Career Rite

Career rite was the rite of escorting the baby, i.e., *Igongona ria Kuumagaria mwana*. It was performed after the period of seclusion which lasted for four days if the child was a girl, or five days if it was a boy. During seclusion, only close women relatives, and the birth attendants or midwives were allowed to visit the house where the mother and her child were kept. During this period, the whole extended kinship had to observe certain obligations. For example, the father of the child was forbidden to "visit" any homes apart from those of close relatives. He was not allowed to go hunting in the bushes or woods, or even go to herd the livestock. No member of the family was allowed to bath in the river.

Moreover, no one in the village was allowed to fetch fire from one homestead to another, or from house to house. Further, women in the whole village were not allowed to clean or sweep their houses. Any singing, dancing, screaming or whistling was proscribed (Mutitu; O.I., 26/1/99).

In a nutshell, the normal life in the village came to a halt only to commence when the rite was over. This extra-ordinary halt symbolized the preparation for the beginning of a new rhythm of life. The birth and, therefore, integration of a child into the community meant that there was spatial and numerical preponderance of members of the community. This brought about a new impetus in the hitherto rhythm of life. The seclusion symbolised the concept of death and resurrection. That is, there was an element of discontinuation of the former state of life and resurgence of a new and vigorous state of life.

At the end of the retreat there was a shaving ceremony for the mother and the child. This ceremony involved the shaving of mother's and child hair. It was an act of symbolizing the transition from the former status of their life and accession to a new social status. As Mbiti (1969:115), points out:

The hair represents her pregnancy, but now this is over, old hair must be shaved off to give way to new hair, the symbol of new life. She is now a person, ready for another child to come into her womb, and thus allow the stream of life to continue flowing. The hair is the symbolic connection between the mother and the child; the shaving indicated that the child now belongs not only to her but also to the entire body of relatives, neighbours and other members of the society. She has no more claims over the child as exclusively her own: the child is now "scattered" like her shaven hair, having a hundred mothers, a hundred fathers, a hundred brothers, and hundreds of relatives....

Throughout the seclusion period the mother and other close relatives kept vigilance on the development of the child, and wondered whether he or she

would cling, accept or adapt to the new type of life which would be offered to him or her, or whether the child would be a passing phenomenon. Will he or she be capable of becoming a full member of the community to which birth has destined him or her? Will the spirits accept this marginal being whom the community will soon give a social dimension? Such fears, notwithstanding, prompted a sacrifice to appease the supernatural powers. A goat of one colour was sacrificed. The oneness of the colour symbolized the purity of the sacrifice. Prayers would be said, and the role of the "living dead" was acknowledged since the child was also attached to them. There was also the drinking of beer and gruel whose aim was to drink to the health and fertility of the child and its mother.

At this stage, the *igongona ria kuumagaria mwana* would take place. The rite involved taking the child outside, perhaps to the field, to the crossroads or any significant place of social life. It aimed at defining the child's career, and conferring a defined status during the successive stages of social development. At each stage of social life, the community held that one progressed from childhood to adulthood. This progression was commensurate with one's physical and intellectual development. As Gatavi, (O.I., 27/1/99) revealed, the Aembu took the child to be more than a *tabula rasa*. Rather, the newborn was viewed as an inchoate being or personality that one can identify. They believed that a child came into the world with his or her personality. We must stress here that, although the concept of *tabula rasa* was not explicit among the Aembu, it was intimately bound up within their philosophy. This concept was animated and even amplified through the career rite.

For the boys, the *igongona ria kuumagaria mwana* involved presenting the baby with miniature bows and arrows. As mentioned elsewhere, the mother took the baby out of the homestead, perhaps on one of the paths leading to the forest. While she was walking along, she would meet an elderly man ready to present the baby with miniature bow and arrows. The man would place the model of bows and arrows in the baby's right hand. As he did this, he would utter some words such as *Mwana urokura wega* (child may you grow up well). The mother would eventually take the models home. They would be hanged in the house where the baby and the mother resided. These models would later be used by the child to practice archery as he herded the livestock in the pastures (Wambura; O.I., 27/1/99).

In case of a girl-child, the mother would take the baby to the path leading to the forest or bushes. It was pre-arranged that she would meet an elderly woman coming from the bushes on a chore of collecting firewood. The woman normally carried a model of a bundle of firewood, which she presented to the baby. The presentation involved placing the miniature bundle on the left hand side of the girl. The woman would then chant the similar words uttered for the baby-boy, after which the mother would carry the model home. The bundle would be hanged on the rafters of the kitchen to await cooking with the girl at later age when she was mature to undertake domestic chores.

It is imperative to elucidate some salient features inherent in this rite. The involvement of elders is a notable feature in this rite. These elders were of the senior age-groups, and so they were considered to be experienced, wiser and holier than other members of the community. Having lived a long and fruitful

life, their elders were apt to be closer to and more esteemed by *Mwene nyaga*. They were representatives for the whole community in that they were closer to all their progenitors and even to *Ngai*. The Embu community was politically gerontocratic. The respect, awe and fear these venerable patriarchs commanded in their very nature derived from their proximity to *Ngai* and the entire Embu community. The act of presenting the models, together with invocations entailed symbolic imparting of the vital life force to the inchoate being. The presenting of the models coupled with the invocations was an efficacious symbol of imparting *wathi* (hunting magic) and *rwaiyia* (sustenance and nursing spirit) to the baby boy and the baby girl, respectively (Wangiri; O.I., 28/1/99). Such symbolic imparting of *wathi* and *rwaiyia* came from the esteemed elders, who were blessed by *mwene nyaga* with fecundity and longevity. The placing of the models in the particular hands depending on the sex of the child had important implications. In the first place, the right hand was the symbol for man, and the left hand for a woman. Secondly, the placing of such models on the baby's hand implied that the divinity would bless the child to successfully achieve his or her career.

A second rite known as 'the second birth' or *Guciarwa kairi* was performed. (Wangari, Ibid) Sometimes, this rite could be called *Guciarwa ringi* (literally, to be born again) or *Guciarirwa mburi* (to be born of a goat). The rite took place at the age of between four to six years. The rite was quite essential in that it saw the onset of a child's life career in the community. It also effected the first integration into the social functions, first, by conferring on a child a specific status and identity, and second, by inscribing him or her in the community register. The child thus became a *bona fide* person vested with the right to

participate in the appropriate life of the community. From the age six to ten years, the child was considered to be on the threshold of puberty stage and so supposed to be in a liminal garb. He or she was forbidden to wear the clothing of the adults (*mithuru* and *njuri* for women, and *Ithiri* or *Igori* for men). The child would wear *muthithe* (for males) or *Ng'athi* (for females). Children were not allowed to drink beer, and the female children were not allowed to sit in front of adult males. They were also not allowed to get married at this stage.

During the rite, the child was placed between its mother's legs, and then bound together by goats intestines. On this occasion, the mother lied on her back, with her head orientated towards *Kiri nyaga*. This was the traditional delivery position of women, presumably the head pointing the place where *mwene nyaga* dwelt. The intestines would be cut with a sharp piece of sorghum stalk (*Rathiru*) stalk, and suddenly the child began to imitate the cry of a neonate. The women around then gave some loud *Ngemi* (ulutations), five for the boy and four for the girl to announce the success of this ritual (Ciangondi; O.I., 28/1/99).

In this rite, a number of themes were brought to the fore. First, the theme of sexuality was emphasized. The child was taught precise rules that governed its life. After the rite, the child was ready to enter the stage of circumcision, which essentially incorporated one into adulthood. Second the theme of knowledge was also enhanced. The child thus passed from the state of being ignorant to the one of having knowledge. He or she ceased to be a passive member of the community and became an active member of the corporate ethnic group. Third, the theme of death and resurrection was demonstrated. By ending babyhood and

opening adulthood, the child underwent a social transformation that relinquished from it the state of inactivity and rendered it active. The child thus, crossed the bridge and embarked on a road that led to adulthood, and then to elderhood. Finally, the theme of sacredness of life career was brought forward. It is noteworthy that the rite took place under the *Mugumo* tree. At the end of this rite, the child was at liberty to undertake the most effective and realistic tasks and responsibilities. He or she felt that he or she was indispensable and had the duty of contributing to the domestic economy. The child thus came to realise that sacrificing one's will and energy for others was an essential virtue that brought one to closer relationship with *Ngai*. Knowing that one's career was a call or a vocation from *Mwene nyaga* was quite significant for such a child.

We have seen how conception, pregnancy, birth and the entire childhood were perceived to be religious ceremonies by the Aembu. In all these stages the parents and to a great extent the child were exposed to an atmosphere filled with religious feats, attitudes and values. As the child grappled with the precarious nature of life, the divinity was invoked to shower immense blessing on it. His or her physical life was an affirmation by *Ngai* that life must never cease.

3.4 Breakdown of Traditional Values About Children

The traditional values about children, like many other African customs, have been adversely affected by changes in the community. Before attempting to analyse some of the factors that bring about these changes, we would like to make two observations. First, nowhere in the Embu community can one find indigenous values and lifestyles in pure state, entirely free from foreign influence. The external influence that affect the community at varying levels and degrees are contingent upon modern lifestyle. Second, nowhere in the Embu community can one find completely modern lifestyle, without some traces of indigenous values and lifestyle. Even in the urban environment or in the most modernized setting, it is always possible to find some traces of traditional values and customs.

The elements of traditional values are, more often than not, rife during the values phases of human life such as birth, naming, marriage, and death ceremonies. For example, the Aembu naming system today reflects a radical continuity and identity with the African culture. At baptism people are given Christian names alongside African names. African names such as Kariuki and Njoki are cultural reminders to the community that ancestors bearing the names were also members of the corporate Embu community. They symbolise the flesh and blood continuity within the ethnic group. They also indicate perpetuation of life in the community.

In marriage, the traditional custom of presenting the dowry and exchange of gifts is still practised by the Aembu. This practice shows some elements of

continuity of the indigenous customs, values and practices. Even in funeral rites and ceremonies, there are practices whose purpose is to remind us that the African traditions linger in the modern culture. For example, a corpse is placed on its back in the casket, and then buried with the head oriented towards *Kiri nyaga*. This was traditionally the mortuary position for all deceased persons. Perhaps, the specific orientation of the deceased served to acknowledge the place where the Aembu originated, that is the "grove of *Mwene Ndega*."

The gradual acceptance of new values and ways of life, and the disenchantment with the old ways has had profound impact on the place and role of children in the Embu Community. As already mentioned, the breakdown of the indigenous values and lifestyles is not uniform; some of the values and lifestyles are quite resistant to the new forces of change. Those that are influenced by the new forces of change breakdown due to the fact that the traditional institutions which promoted their existence have been replaced by utterly modern institutions. Others are resistant to change because they are deep-rooted in the minds of the people. These express the culture of the people, or, simply, ways of doing things pertaining to a people. In a nutshell, the former are essentially an expression of a system of ideas, or thoughts and for that matter, are vulnerable to any contingent changes. This vulnerability has made them lose much of their relevance, which is essentially a system of attitudes and norms, which touch the personality more profoundly.

The fact that these values and lifestyles are deeply entrenched makes it hard for the Aembu to adjust or even adopt the cultures of a people in a foreign geographical and cultural setting. Even if they are compelled by some

circumstances to adjust to new lifestyles, they do not completely abandon their culture. An individual, therefore, gets plunged into two worlds: the traditional environment which served to mould the mind and character, and the modern environment which by far has not yet acquired any firmness as to gain control over an individual.

The traditional mode of life has become blurred, and the motivations underlying the adoption of modern lifestyle also remain blurred. The gap between the two environments is seemingly going deeper, thereby separating them. Each environment reflects a different system, basically divergent in its structure content and orientation. This difference not only creates tension between the two cultures but also weakens each culture. In this case, there is neither coherence nor consistency among the cultures. Therefore, children nowadays receive only traces of the past culture. Let us examine some of the forces that have necessitated the changes.

3.5 Forces of Change

3.5.1 Economy

The new economic system has forced many relatives within an family setting to discard their responsibilities. Low income, coupled with the rising cash demands for food, health, education, clothing and other necessities, force an individual to be self centred. For that matter, parents are forced to limit their progeny. Raising a big family is no longer held as a privilege but rather an increase in problems. Unlike the traditional African social belief that many

children were a source of prestige, in the modern society, this concept no longer holds.

The idea of collective responsibility for children, which existed in the African traditional society, no longer thrives. This concept has been undermined by some socio-economic factors. Economic independence on issues related to education, health, subsistence and the general custody of children serve to break the traditional solidarity, giving way to individualism. The traditional sense of corporateness, which promoted the "We" attitude, is constantly disintegrating, succumbing to the "I" attitude in the modern society. Such a situation facilitates the neglect and abuse of children. Those from poor families may be forced to forego some basic needs, thereby making them yield to any form of exploitation to help them meet their basic needs.

It is from this perspective that child labour comes into existence.

3.5.2 Urbanisation

Urbanisation has enhanced the rise of new codes of ethics and morality. It is noteworthy that in the indigeneous Embu community, there existed some codes of which served as the basis for ethnic cohesiveness. It is evident that the traditional lifestyle is giving way to a modern and urbanised lifestyle with its attendant set of morals and ethics.

The kinship ties which enforced ethnic solidarity have lost their power to the urban setting. In the urbanised society, an individual is locked in a universe of

his or her own. The issues of corporate living and collective responsibility are quite secondary or even obsolete. Whereas in the traditional society the individuals were joined together through kinship bonds, in the urban set-up, people are joined by professional ethics, trade unions, religious movements, associations, clubs, games and sports. The concept of social corporateness is defined with regard to such relationships. In such an individualistic society, communal child centred values cannot be upheld. The fact that in the urban setting one is in the midst of people from different ethnic backgrounds, and therefore, with different creeds and/ or affiliations makes the idea of collective responsibility for children be overlooked.

3.5.3 Politics

The Embu community, like other communities in Kenya, is experiencing a rapid transformation in political spheres. This fact has profound effects on the traditional family system. The traditional concept of collective responsibility regarding children has been highly politicised. Nowadays, couples can legally struggle among themselves on issues pertaining to custody, care and maintenance of their children. This means that a court ruling can sever the relationship between a child and its parents.

In this way, politics is seen as a vehicle for dividing and even dissolving the cordial relations which could be in existence in the families. In such circumstances, children become victims of the wrangles in a family and in the long run may be left to look after themselves. In the course of eking out a

living, they may end up in work situations that are not auspicious for their entire development.

3.5.4 Modern Religion

This institution has defined a new bond of relationship between the adherents. This bond transcends and even overlooks the kinship ties in a community. Taking Christianity as case in point, we should mention that this religion has undermined the tradition social order. Christianity has enhanced divisions within the society and this has distorted the essential social matrices of humankind. It has promoted some individualistic norms and practices, thus fostering the attitude of "each for him-or herself and God for us all." For example, in the concept of salvation, an individual claims that Jesus is his or her personal saviour, and that one is ready to forsake his or her family for Jesus' sake. This concept has been misunderstood and even misused by so many people. Instead of promoting a sense of togetherness, this idea promotes discrimination in that a Christian feels comfortable only in the company of fellow Christian. It becomes a question of conformity to Christianity for unity, other than unity in the diversity of faith. Such a concept is not congenial to African religious values and practices. It is specifically anti-African and generally devoid of African socialism. In a nutshell, it enhances schisms in the society, undermines the African religious and moral values, wipes out African traditions, and widens the gap between individuals, thereby promoting poor social intercourse.

The Aembu were a religious people to such an extent that, in the indigenous social order, to be non-religious was inconceivable. Religion was part and parcel of life in the community. There were no religious schisms as we have today. The family was the basic constitution which introduced a child to the concept and practice of religion. Anyone within the family was tied to religion by timeless bonds.

3.5.5 Modern Culture

The traditional culture was compatible with the traditional social institutions. These institutions powerfully served to sustain the integrity of indigenous cultural values and social structures. Nowadays, the traditional institutions have been quite undermined. The community has become divided, becoming progressively vulnerable to both foreign manipulation and the emergence of individualism among its members. This creates an aura of disrespect of traditional cultures. People have come to believe that being “modern” means doing away with African traditions and imitating foreign ways. Although some African cultures have proven to be resistant to changes, they have suffered significant foreign impact.

Modern culture has not been deeply entrenched in African communities. What we have are traces of both traditional and foreign cultures. An individual becomes alien to both the traditional and modern lifestyle. The authority which the elders and parents exercise under the traditional morality and ethics are questioned and even under-rated by the younger generations. In the same vein, the traditional concept of extended family and its attendant values and customs

has changed. Modern lifestyle is characterised by individualism, mass production, economic exploitation, and cut-throat competition; there is a tendency of having a small family, and, in some cases, procreation is not given importance in marriage. Sometimes, marriage is not viewed as a social obligation to an individual. Given such a situation, the concept of communal welfare of children cannot be well maintained.

3.6 Conclusion

The foregoing information is a brief account of the significance of children to the Aembu. The account suggests that the community placed a high value on its children. We have seen that childhood was a period that was abundantly characterised by rituals and festivals. The richness and underlying intentions in the rites and feasts was conveyed variously by the use of symbols and gestures. In these rites, religion, as a cardinal component of culture, massively served to keep at bay any inimical situations to a child. *Igongona ria kuumagaria mwana*, was *ipso facto* a way of demonstrating that work was socio-religious in nature.

Also presented are some of the dynamic force that serve to disrupt the traditional social set up, and this has a domino effect on the status of children and the community at large. It is noteworthy that these forces are not free of alien influences. Given that the forces are rife in the present Embu community, they have, and probably will continue to have, a significant impact on physical and psycho-social integrity of affected children. In order to ascertain in more details what this may entail, the next chapter presents a genuine case of one particular form of child abuse and neglect, namely, child labour. The chapter

CHAPTER FOUR : PREVALENCE AND CAUSES OF CHILD-LABOUR IN EMBU DISTRICT

4.1 Introduction

Before embarking on this subject, it is useful to start by bringing to the light the fundamental aspects of child- labour. In this regard we need to underscore the nature, magnitude and distribution of child-labour in the district. In order to facilitate this broad perspective, the chapter outlines the principle criterion for identifying child labour, its categories and underlying causes. After identifying the existing harzadous labour and the categories of children currently or potentially engaged in it, we shall then present the risks these children are likely to, or actually face.

4.2 Understanding Child-Labour

The term child-labour conjures up a particular image. We see children toiling in farms, factories, plantations, and generally in harder and more harzadous jobs. In reality, children do a variety of work in divergent conditions. This work takes place along a continuum. This continuum spans from work that is beneficial, to the one that is intolerable. It is important to make a distinction between the two categories of work, so that we may be able to underscore where child-labour falls. At one end of the continuum, the work is beneficial,

thus promoting or enhancing a child's physical, cognitive, spiritual, moral and social development, such work does not interfere with a child's schooling, rest or recreation. For instance, children do a lot of work for the family. Most families expect their children to help in the household in preparing food, fetching water, collecting firewood, herding animals, caring for young siblings, or working in the fields. This work is beneficial in that children learn at a reasonable age to participate in house chores, subsistence food growing, and income generating. Moreover, they derive a sense of self worth from working within their families.

At the other end of the continuum, the work is clearly destructive or exploitative. For instance, work for the family may demand too much of children, requiring them to labour for long hours that keep them from school, and take great a toll on their developing bodies. No one would concur that exploitation of children, for example, as prostitutes so as to get some income is acceptable. The same can be said about "bonded child-labour" or "debt peonage", i.e., the term used in this work to mean virtual enslavement of children to repay debts incurred by their parents or grandparents. This also applies to commercial agriculture, street hawking and begging, and other industries notorious for the dire health and safety of child-labourers. Harzadous work is outrightly intolerable for all children.

Thus, the principle criterion for determining when work constitutes a peril is the impact of work on a child's development. Therefore, child-labour encompasses too many hours spent working, full time work at too early age, work that causes undue physical, social and psychological stress. Child-labour

also entails work and life on the street in bad conditions, inadequate pay for work done, work that hampers access to formal education and work that undermines children dignity and self-esteem, and work that is detrimental to full social and psychological development.

4.3 The Invisibility of Child Labourers

One of the major obstacles that face any interested person or group of persons in combating child-labour is that exploited children are not readily visible. For example, a study by the International Labour Organisation (1989) revealed that child-labourers remain in agriculture, domestic service and urban informal sector because they are most hidden from public scrutiny. The study further observed that the abuse of children through labour largely depends on the invisibility of the victims. Employers often enclose their child-workers in a tight veil of secrecy and isolation. For that matter, required attention is not keenly focused to such victims. It is quite paradoxical to realise that street traders, who may not necessarily be children, are easily noted. They receive so much attention than do perhaps child-labourers. The reason for their attention is based on the fact that they are perceived to be in the wrong place at the wrong time since they do not possess trade licenses and other credentials (Musyoka; O.I. 20/11/98).

Child-labourers in the rural areas are obscure because of social-cultural milieu. This factor comes into play when most working children, especially those in domestic and agricultural sectors, are perceived as being prepared for social tasks. Instead of their labour being viewed as sheer exploitation, it is accepted

as part of their socialization process aimed at providing them with training needed to undertake future responsibilities (Nthama; O.I., 29/1/99). While toiling away in farms, plantations and households, child-labourers are typically on private property, residences or enterprises, and usually invisible to both public and official scrutiny.

Moreover, the accessibility of rural areas by labour inspectors, individuals interested in child-labour issues and media reporters is cited as a problem. This is due to the fact that the areas are far from the interior, and driving to such areas is cumbersome due to rough roads that are often impassable. Furthermore, the agencies concerned with the plight of child-labourers are concentrated in urban or peri-urban areas, and so have limited or hardly any contact with rural lifestyles.

In combating child-labour and its attendant problems, we must give priority to unveiling the bonds that are invisible. We must also enlighten the society about the dangers that the victims face or are likely to face (Kangangi, O.I., 14/12/98). Perhaps the greatest handicap in eliminating child-labour is the failure by the community, and the government to view child-labourers as a disadvantaged group. The view of child-labour as a disadvantaged group, coupled with a frank recognition of child-labour hazards may help to arrest or even reduce the abuse of child-labourers.

4.4 Extent and Characteristics of Child-Labour

4.4.1 Child-Labour in Commercial Agriculture

Commercial agriculture is of critical importance in Embu district with respect to employment. The extent of child- labour in agriculture within the district is not known with any degree of precision. However, results from our research indicate that the bulk of economically active children is to be found mainly in the agricultural sector. These children often work under exploitative and abusive conditions, precarious to their health.

The study revealed that the supply of working children is made by poor families due to the need of supplementary income. Such income is made through monthly or weekly wages for the work done by children outside their families. The burden of high expenditures required to attend school, coupled with the likely loss of income brought to households by children combine to make life too difficult for poor families. Murangiri (O.I., 29/1/99) points out that there is a strong correlation between low level of development in the country, and persistence of child-labour in the district. This could be explained by the high enrolment and drop-out rates in the primary schools that were selected for the study.

Most of the child labourers interviewed preferred difficult working situations to going to school. It is obvious that when schooling is not attractive to children, many will tend to prefer the income generating work-place. It was quite paradoxical to note that while the school should help to provide a solution to

child-labour problems, it is however, more often than not a major cause of the problem. Boredom and discouragement with school were cited as some of the frequent reasons for dropping out of school and going to work.

Other common causes of school desertion noted include perceived irrelevance of the curriculum, poor methods of instruction (especially for schools in rural areas), disregard for the needs of children attending a school, and authoritarianism in the learning process. Instead of spending unproductive hours in classrooms that don't meet the basic goals of education, children opt to utilize such hours in wage employment.

The feeling that education is useless was also cited by the working children who had deserted schools. They claimed that literacy could not improve their lives, give them better economic opportunities, and even, if it did, their parents are too poor to purchase the materials they need. In such circumstances, they and their parents eventually agree that education is not useful and that they could better spend their time working for pay.

In Embu district, there are very many children, between the ages of 6 and 14 years, who either have no schooling at all or have dropped out of school. Most of these children are engaged in work of one typed or other, which would earn them some money. There are also children who attend school and work on part-time basis. In most cases, they work early in the morning before school hours, and again after school. Some work during school holidays and weekends, while others work during normal school hours. Those who never attend school usually

wake up very early in the morning to begin their busy day. These are either employed on monthly basis or on piece-work or task-wage basis per day (Njeru; O.I., 29/1/99).

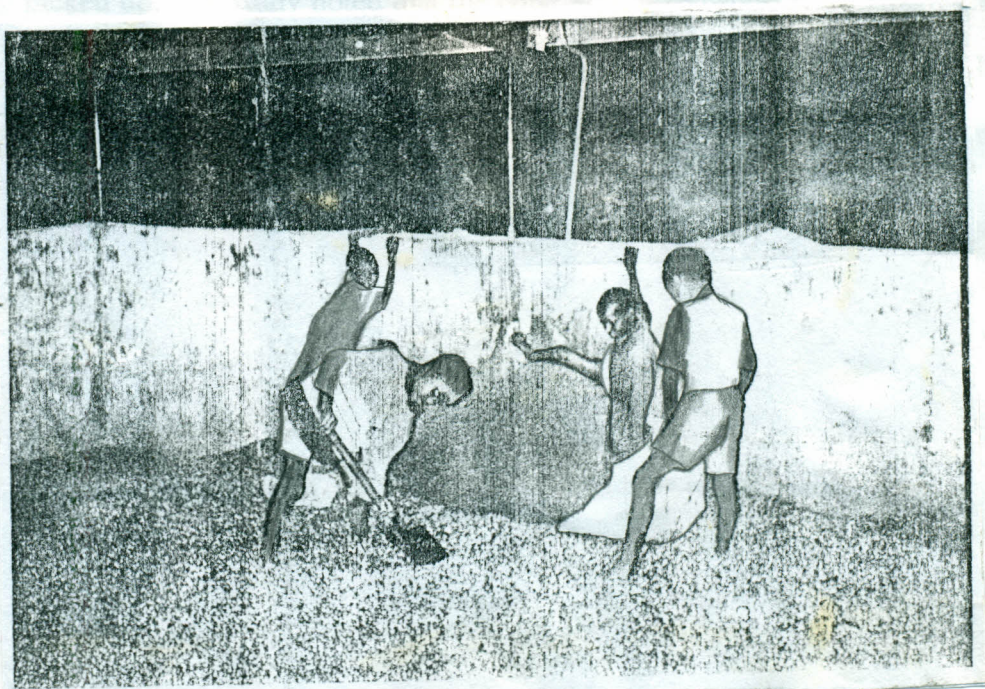


Plate 1

Children working in a coffee factory. Such children are paid fifteen Kenya shillings at the end of the work. Such a pay reflects the extent of child abuse in labour market.

Apart from working hours, much time is spent going to and from work especially with regard to child casual workers who do not live in agricultural premises. It was noted that some casual child-labourers are provided with some transport by their employers, while a bulk of others walk to and from work places. Those who use their employers' pick-ups must wake up very early in the morning to reach the central collection point where they are picked up between 5.00 a.m. and 6.00 a.m. One informant who did not want to be named confessed:

One can hear the hooting of pick-ups, perhaps alerting the young casual workers that they should hurry up, lest they miss the chance!

They are usually transported to the nearby district of Kirinyaga. Later in the day, between 6.00 am to 7.00 p.m. they are dropped off at the place they were picked up. The study noted that the condition of transport in an open pick-up exposes these children to intense cold. This exposure coupled with long hours of working, make the victims complain of exhaustion and sickness at the end of the working day.

The study also revealed diverse activities and working environments for child-labourers on a variety of agricultural premises. On the coffee *Shambas*, various children between age 5 to 15 years were interviewed. About 60 per cent of all children interviewed were both working and attending school, while about 40 per cent were not attending school. In most *Shambas*, the owners reported that children are permitted to work only on weekends in order to allow them attend school during the week-days.

We could not get reliable information on wage levels. This could be partly because the employers, and sometimes children themselves, were reluctant to disclose such information. However, there was clear indication that nearly all child labourers were paid low wages. Some children were working full time, while others work part time. Those working part time were mainly the ones attending school. They were mainly withdrawn from schools during the busy work period.

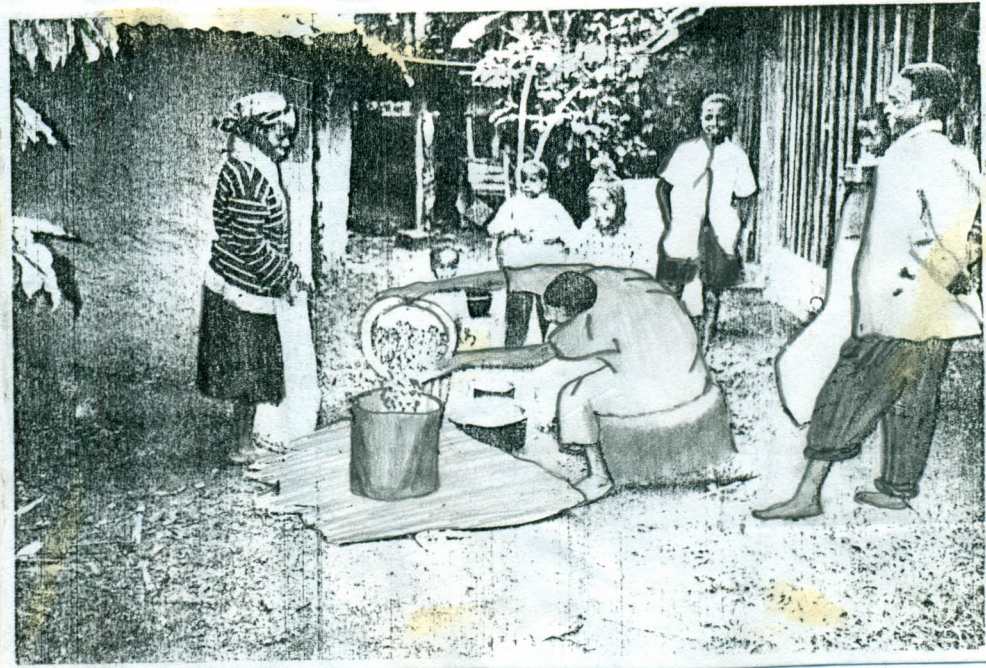


Plate II

At the end of the picking up time, the amount of coffee picked up by each child has to be measured in order to know the sum of money to be paid. A *debe* (20 litres can) is paid twenty shillings. On an average a child-labourer hardly picks an amount that can fill three *debes*.

On tea farms and plantations children of about ten to fifteen years were found engaged in labour activities. Among the child-labourers interviewed, 25 per cent were school drop-outs, 50 per cent were both working and attending schools, while 25 per cent had never attended school. As regards the 50 per cent, it was noted that such children worked to make enough income to keep them in school. Schooling entails considerable costs which are quite exorbitant

for impoverished families. Those children who lack the needed stationery and uniforms are simply expelled from school. When the family is able, once in a while, to purchase the required items, children would go back to school. Sometimes children work to raise money to pay for their own educational expenses. Some other children work to raise money to sustain the educational needs of their brothers and sisters. In this way child-labour becomes the rule rather than the exception. (Nyaga; O.I., 29/1/99)

Those who never attend school (25 per cent), are victims of economic and cultural circumstances of their families. Those parents interviewed in this study expressed the need for children to work in order to maximize their family income. In some families, it was noted that even though the parents were economically able to meet the educational expenses of their children, they nevertheless chose to put more of their children to work in order to realize a higher economic status. By so doing, children are forced to work, thereby getting deprived of education opportunity and good health. Similarly, it was confirmed that some parents are already convinced that there is no use sending their children to school, based on the fact that their employment prospects are not particularly bright. Consequently, parents prefer their children to learn some skills than receive formal education.

The largest tea plantation in Embu district is the Nyayo Tea Zone which stretches for 160 hectares. The plantation was started in 1986. In our study area, that is Ndunduri location, the Zone covers 101 hectares.



Plate III

At the tea buying centre. These children have been plucking tea the whole day. For additional payment they have opted to ferry the tea leaves to the buying centre, and help in the sorting.

A casual observation of the workers in this plantation reveals that child-labour is a common phenomenon. Although the official corporation regulations and policies restrict the employment of children, it was noted that more often than not, child-labourers are recruited by the supervisors. Most of the child-labourers interviewed admitted that at one time or another, they had worked in

the Zone. Some parents and teachers who sought anonymity, revealed that temporary child-labour is used particularly during the peak picking season. By contrast, the supervisors hardly admitted that they employed children. They argued that it would be in contravention of the company rules and regulations to engage labour from any child. They further claimed that there are no provisions for child-labourers in the already existing contractual arrangements. The question remains: How then do the child-labourers find their way to the plantation?

The study confirmed that the use of such child-workers is not simply a question of demand. The problem is tied to the piece-work or task-work. This is the amount of work that one is supposed to accomplish in order to be paid the standard wage. Therefore, children accompanied their parents to the plantations so that they may help to increase their parents' output, and hence their income. The study noted that children are equally employed on the peasant farms. They are paid the same or even lower rates than as the adult workers. One employer who did not want to be named had this to say:

... The demand for child-workers is high because children are proportionately paid much less than adults for the same task, prove to be more co-operative and submissive than adults, and may display greater skills in some tasks than adults...

These factors, perhaps, appeal to some employers to use children. In addition to the reasons cited above for the demand of child-labour, the study disclosed that most employers hire children because their turn-up is good. They have no family or other commitments or role conflicts as the adults have. Another employer who preferred anonymity, had this to say about child tea pickers:

... This work actually requires juveniles because of its dexterity. A juvenile efficiently co-ordinates the hands and eyes, and is therefore more easily trained as a plucker. He or she cannot be compared to an adult who has never plucked before or even one who was never trained during his or her earlier years... juvenile labour will continue to be in high demand in these tea farms...

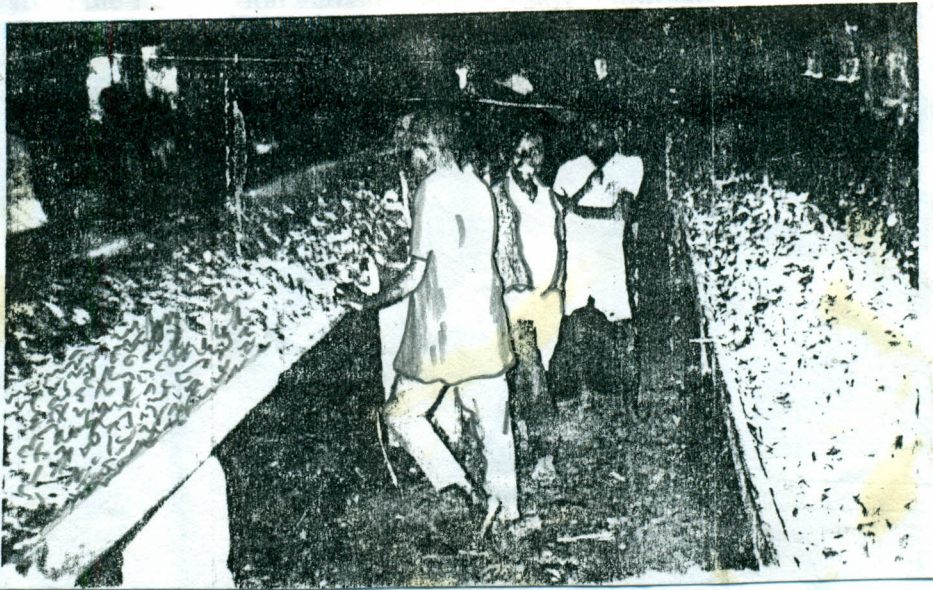


Plate IV

Child labourers are in high demand since they are more co-operative than adults. They seem to be enjoying the work they do, and are quite submissive.

Other employers contend that employment of children is a mutual support system. In this regard children are supposed to provide some labour in return for the satisfaction and basic needs provided by the employers.

4.4.2 Child-labour in Domestic Services

Many children work under exploitative and abusive conditions as domestic servants. Young children work as maids, houseboys, and baby-minders. These children perform arduous work under conditions of isolation, for excessively long hours, and under severe physical and mental stress. As can be surmised from the information gathered in this study, child labourers remain ubiquitous and familiar in many urban, and even rural households; they are taken for granted, and the possible hazards inherent in their work situations are ignored. The beneficiaries of child-labour are unaware of the short and long term consequences of the situation.

Exploitation of children as domestic servants is being done in the open. Apparently, nobody seems to care about this activity. Children, hardly in their teens, often in un-kept clothes, can be seen in some rural and urban households. These children, who should be in school, are seen looking after other children in a household. Their presence is typically justified by their employers as a form of social service in which they are provided shelter, care and even education. Most employers argue that these children are from poor families. Therefore, they are giving them a better deal in life. Otherwise, such children would be destitutes. Instead of giving them the promised better deals, these children are made to work like chattels in their employers households. Their parents, quite cognizant of the difficulties faced by their children decide to ignore them. They only come to mind their children when the latter faces grievous injury or even death (Wanjiru, O.I., 23/12/98).

Another form of child-labour in domestic service more widely spread in Embu district within families is what may be called family bondage or debt peonage. In this category, children are forced to provide their labour in order to off-set a loan or other financial obligations incurred by their family. The lenders are often the employers. They manipulate the situation in such a way that it is difficult or even impossible for the family to pay off the debt. This action essentially ensures that there is indefinite supply of free labour for the exploiters. In this way, a family remains bonded for a long time (Kanguru; O.I., 29/1/99).



Plate V

A girl child labourer prepares vegetables. Many girls toil in obscurity in private homes behind closed doors as domestic workers. Their living and work conditions are very poor.



Plate VI

A girl carries a bowl full of mango fruits to the market centre. The mangoes in the bowl are expected to earn twenty shillings.

In another situation, the study revealed a form of child-labour whereby impoverished parents "donate" their children to well-to-do relatives or friends. Such children are supposed to work in-exchange for their up-keep. The basic assumption is that these children are better provided for as unpaid labourers in an affluent house than they could be in their impoverished households. After

being taken away from their ancestral homes, these children remain utterly at the mercy of their masters. This experience reduces a child victim into a property, which is quite demeaning and destructive to their entire development. It was noted that the upkeepers of these work-imperilled children tend to treat them as slaves, without due regard to their childhood needs and characteristics.

4.4.3 Child-labour in the Street

Of all the occupations in which children are engaged, the occupation of eking out a living in the streets is the most dehumanizing, and has a social stigma. As can be gathered from the study, street children are aged from three to sixteen years. They include those children who live and work in the street full time, enjoying little or no contact with their parents. Those children are expected to work in order to support themselves or their parents and siblings.

The data gathered from this study established that children who work on the streets often come from slums and squatter settlements, where poverty and precarious family situations are common, and where safe places to play do not exist. Most street children came from very poor single parent households, most of which are too large to the extent such that their mothers do not have enough resources to support them. Their parents either are unemployed, or are engaged in unstable, unreliable and even illicit income generating activities. These include unlicensed hawking, begging, brewing and selling illicit liquor, and prostitution. These are illegal activities. Therefore their parents, more often than not, are arrested by the police. Apart from losing their wares and enterprises, they occasionally end up in jail.

Like their parents, working street children also undertake illegal activities and suffer constant harassment from the society and authorities. Their harassment results from the fact that they seem to remain the concern of only the Child Welfare Society (Muriithi; O.I, 23/12/98). He adds that the vast majority of people see these street children as a nuisance instead of making an effort to help them. Street activities include prostitution, begging, hawking and vending wares, rag-picking or collection of paper from garbages, operating as touts in public service vehicles, and shoe-shining. Sometimes, they engage in illegal activities such as theft, pick-pocketing and drug trafficking. The nature of their work and environment is the most unhygienic, dangerous, demeaning and destructive to their self-worth. Even a casual look at their physique and attire reveals the extent of abuse and deprivation.



Plate VII

A stoic smile!

This boy carries a basket of tea leaves to the collection point. Such a boy should have been in school. However, he has to work in the plantation so as to make extra money which the family badly needs.

The study gathered much anecdotal evidence that child prostitution and sexual abuse is rampant among child-labourer. While the majority of such children are in twelve the age bracket of twelve to sixteen years younger children are also involved. Most of these children are originally from the outskirts of Embu town, which are among the most economically depressed within Embu municipality. They typically start out in street trades such as shoe-shining, selling cigarettes, candies or flowers, begging and other hawking activities. They are later enticed into prostitution by their fellow children already engaged in the trade. Moreover, their parents are more likely to encourage children in

prostitution as a means of enhancing family income. In order to get more pimps soliciting them, these children opt to live in places notoriously known for such activities (Mwangangi; O.I., 30/1/99). This explains the rise of slums in Embu town. Such slums include Shauri Yako, Majengo and Dallas. In this context, therefore, child prostitution is clearly viewed as a form of child-labour.

Data on children working in the streets of Embu township is sparse. It is derived primarily from press reports, which tend to be surreptitious, focusing on sensational issues (Kinyanjui; O.I., 25/11/98) In spite of such moves to obtain concrete documentation that is beyond refute, the problem is escalating. It was noted that one cannot tackle the problem of street children without tackling the problems of their parents and the hardships faced by the communities they come from. Parents are usually the ones who introduce their children into economic activities. These parents are often not fully cognizant of the hazards involved in certain occupations and working conditions. This could be explained by the form of bonded child-labour where as mentioned previously, children are forced to work by their parents. Parents assert that their children must work if they wish to enjoy the privilege of living with them for care. If they do not work, the children risk being evicted from the households.

4.5 Vulnerability Factors of Child-Labourers

Children are exposed to all kinds of hazards in any inimical work situation. In considering the vulnerability factors of child-workers, it is necessary to make a brief consideration to adult workers in the same occupation. This will show a clear contrast between the child and the adult labour. By doing so, we will be

able to single out various tangible threats inherent in each occupation, and, thereby, underscore their effects on children. This implies that we have to give due regard to physical health and safety requirements in each occupation. For example, tea pluckers may be required to wear protective gloves, coffee farmers may be required to wear protective clothing while spraying the plants with certain chemicals, and chefs may be periodically examined for warning symptoms of an impending occupational disease.

Any work hazards that affect adult labourers often affect child-labourers even more. For instance, carrying heavy loads, exposure to harsh climate and adopting unnatural sitting or standing posture at work can permanently distort, stunt or even disable children in their formative years. The effects on children may be more severe than on the adults. A research conducted by World Health Organisation (W.H.O) (1987) revealed that because of their tender ages, children are considerably more vulnerable to work place health hazards. Children suffer more readily from chemical hazards, cold and radiation than adults. They are more vulnerable to thermal stress and environmental temperature changes, and have less resistance to diseases. They are also more susceptible to toxic chemical smell and contact, and, when exposed to them for a long time, the probability of them developing fatal diseases is greater than that of adults having the same exposure.

In addition, children are more vulnerable to psychological and physical abuse than adults. For example, the study noted that children are subjected to some harassment and torture by their foremen. Small and powerless to defend themselves, child labourers are exposed to a long saga of physical and sexual

abuse, harassment and even bullying. Sometimes they go without enough food, clothing or pay. More often than not, they eat food left-overs, wear discarded clothes, and go without wages. It was also noted that the children of the employers also attack these child-labourers.

The moral development of child-labourers can be severely endangered by conditions that may not appear to constitute a peril to adult-labourers. Furthermore, child-labourers are more likely to suffer occupational injuries than adults. This is because children are easily affected by fatigue, starvation, shock from chameleons that are kept in the coffee farms to eat pests, and other in hazardous work situations. Added to these is the fact that when children are tired and hungry they tend to be inattentive. Worse still, they may have insufficient knowledge of work place processes, and inability to handle tools and machinery that are designed for adults.

The study noted that gender differences have a bearing in child vulnerability to work hazards. This is because some kinds of work tend to be performed mostly by girls and others by boys. Boys tend to predominate farm work, construction, work and parking, while girls are most common in domestic service, and these occupations differ significantly on the basis of gender. As could be gathered from the observation check-list on child-labour analysis, girls work longer hours than boys. The analysis reflects their concentration in household tasks, either in individual homes or elsewhere. Perhaps this could be one of the reasons why girls receive less schooling than boys.

Another reason pertains to cultural predisposition. The African culture is discriminating against the female children. Some parents prefer educating boys while girls are left to concentrate on domestic chores. One parent, the mother of child-labourers had this say:

All my girls work as maids. I do not see the reason why I should waste my time and money on sending my daughters to school, where she will learn nothing of use. Too much schooling will only give girls anti-social ideas, and they will become riotous wives when they are married...

Such children are usually given away to be employed by some relatives or friends who enslave them to domestic work. These children are denied their true childhood by being forced into early adulthood and its attendant responsibilities. They forego the essential processes of maturation and this impairs their social, intellectual and physical developments.

Girl child-labourers are also much more vulnerable than boy child-labourers in sexual abuse and its consequences. Such consequences include social rejection, psychological trauma, and early unwanted parenthood. On the other hand, boys are typically susceptible to injuries resulting from handling tools and grappling with skills which are unsuitable for their age, and stage of physical and mental development. We acknowledge that the data on gender differences on work was inadequate because the major thrust of the study was not on gender issues on child labour. However, there is enough reason to speculate that, for a combination of reasons, girls may be more exposed than boys to significant work related hazards.

A good diagnosis of vulnerability of child-labourers to certain work hazards should go beyond the relatively limited concept of vulnerability as applied to adult. It should be expanded to entail the developmental aspects of childhood.

This implies that in enquiring about child-labour, the concept of vulnerability should be child-centred. It should focus not only on immediate or short-term consequences of the problem, but also on the fact that children have special characteristics and needs that must be taken into account. In order to address the issue of child development which can be endangered due to vulnerability to work hazards, we will consider the following dimensions:

- (a) **Physical Development**, includes co-ordination of limbs, strength, stability, hearing, vision, smelling, and overall physical health that is essential for survival and contribution into adulthood.
- (b) **Moral Development**, includes emotional virtues such as self-esteem, empathy, family affiliation, love, mutual social responsibility, and acceptance. They further include capacities such as sense of corporateness, ability to identify and function within a social group, distinction of right from wrong, respect for human life and property, respect for laws customs, and traditions of the society. Such virtues and capacities are needed by an individual in order to live in harmony within a social context. They form the necessary bedrock for foundation and maintenance of sense of corporateness in an individual.
- (c) **Cognitive Development**, including all knowledge and skills required to lead a reasonably prosperous and respectable life. These entail literacy, numeracy, vocational skills and basic cultural knowledge.

Having made an overview of dimensions of integrated development, we shall attempt to examine various work hazards and their effects on child-labourers. This will help us to understand how children are generally affected by the work they do, and pave way for underscoring the parameters for judging work situations that place their lives in a peril. For the sake of brevity in articulation, we examine the aforementioned dimensions of child development under two broad categories: physical and psychosocial work hazards.

4.5.1 Physical Work Hazards

Children working in commercial agriculture are exposed to long hours of work, extreme weather conditions, heavy workloads, inappropriate use and handling of agro-chemicals and tools, insect and snake bites, harassment by employers, as well as shock from threats of eerie creatures like frogs, chameleons, praying mantis, green mambas, etc. Many other examples could be cited, most of which are obvious in areas where they occur. The prevalent risks from such inappropriate work situations pose danger to normal child health and physical development. Bruises after picking tea for a long time, frequent fever due to long working hours in harsh climate, back pains for long periods of bending, severe fever from cold and the choking smell from chemicals, attendant neurological complications, distorted or weakened bodies, and increased vulnerability to diseases, are common results of children participating in occupations and conditions inimical to their tender ages.

Children working as cooks or chefs are exposed to high temperatures, with little or no ventilation. They work for ten to fourteen hours a day, the same as adults, but are paid meagre wages. There are no facilities for first aid or medical treatment, let alone the aprons. The study noted that accidents in such work places do occur. These include injuries from burns or cuts from cutleries, inhaling toxic fumes such as charcoal dust, carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide and other air pollutants. Within a few years, most of these child-labourers begin to suffer from diseases of respiratory tract. These include asthma, acute or chronic bronchitis, tuberculosis, pneumonia, lung cancer, influenza (sweating sickness), emphysema, and even whooping cough. Besides the respiratory problems, children labourers develop skin diseases because their bodies are exposed to extreme heat and sweating. Their eye-sights get ruined from looking into such blinding flames as in the furnace, and there is always the danger of fainting from dehydration due to heat and exhaustion.

As regards street children the nature of their environment is the most demeaning, dangerous, traumatic and unhygienic. Even a casual look at their physique and attire reveals the nature and extent of poverty and deprivation. Children hardly in their teens tagged in oversized tattered clothes can be seen all over the streets of Embu township. They are usually seen carrying loads of food and other items from the trash cans or refuse heaps. These children make their livelihood by picking up used waste papers, plastics, rags, bottles, tins, metal pieces, discarded and broken containers from waste bins, streets, garbage heaps, which they sell to a nearby retailer for recycling industries. Others else their living by begging at busy street intersections.

Yet others are seen hanging precariously on refuse collection vehicles on way to the major dumping site. Such children are a relief to the garbage collectors because, while raking through garbage dumps in their efforts to search for valuable items and edibles, they end up off-loading the mess off the vehicles. The rewards for this work is the kind of edibles they fish out from the trash. Many illnesses arise from this occupation. Carrying heavy loads under their arms or on their shoulders and back adversely affects their primary and secondary growth. This also includes the long-term physical weakness and deformations caused by the heavy loads they carry, as well as the awkward postures inherent in carrying them. Exposure to extreme weather conditions may cause sunstroke, pneumonia, influenza, and other ailments. Added to these hazards is the lure of eating food thrown away in dustbins, left-overs in packets, tins or bottles. This kind of food generally become source of digestive disorders and poisoning. It can also lead to serious ailments like cholera, typhoid, amoebic dysentery, and worm infections. While collecting waste materials, these children usually receive cuts, minor wounds and scratches on their hands and barefeet, which may develop into festering wounds. Such children become susceptible to tetanus. They even do not care to observe cleanliness which makes them develop skin diseases like ulcers and scabies.

Since most of the symptoms of the hazards named above may take years to appear, they may not be easily recognised by uninformed employers, parents and even the public. However, it is useful to think of such hazards in terms of those which are occupational specific, and those which are general. For example, high temperatures, open-flames and toxic fumes are specific to cookery. Other hazards such as subjection to hostile climate, cuts and bruises

from sharp objects, poor ventilation, harassment by employers, starvation and frequent fever are general hazards arising not from specific occupations but from uncaring management.

It was noted that even though the risks arising from specific occupations could be reduced through safety precautions, it is hard to make such places safe for children without making major changes in equipments. Most equipments are well suited for adults and not for children. Children using such equipments are faced with difficulties, which lead to some occupational hazards. On the other hand, the work risks, inherent in general occupations, could be easily eliminated without modifications in the technology involved. Most employers do not care to put into consideration the necessity of creating healthy working conditions of their child-labourers. The ignorance regarding the correctability of these work risks by the employers strongly suggest a cynical exploitative ploy of child-labourers.

Other physical hazards are such as poor sanitation, long working hours, fatigue, starvation, inattention, poor working environment, exposure to loud noise, and proximity to dangerous machines and tools. These conditions are created by human beings and so can be easily remedied. Such conditions are decidedly contrary to the ideals of compassion, mutual social responsibility and righteousness that most the Aembu uphold and cherish.

4.5.2 Psychosocial Work Hazards

Traditionally, the participation of children in economically productive activities within the context of the family was one of the most common and useful ways in which children were socialized into a particular social and cultural milieu. It was widely observed that when parents, relatives or elderly people apportion and oversee work with affection, sensitivity and care to their children's needs, it can build a sense of efficacy and high self esteem in the child who performs it. Children like to feel that they are cared for, loved and useful. The study noted that children were engaged in labour activities in order to contribute to their families' economic well-being. This implies that when handled correctly, children can make a valuable contribution to their families. In this regard, light work serves as a stimulating activity that children need in order to form bright and balanced personalities.

Kenya's educational curriculum is designed to prepare and equip children to be happy and useful members of the society (Ayot and Patel, 1992). To achieve this end, children in school are allowed to participate in sports, manual work, spontaneous play and in open social interaction among themselves and between benevolent adults. Education is, therefore, an essential tool, not only for providing the required skills for employment, but also for equipping a child with a sense of mutual social responsibility, as well as positive disposition to the world of work. It thus guides the child in retaining good aspects of their traditional cultural heritage that are essential for cultural integrity, and in keeping with the needs of the modern society. Suffice it to say that under the

right conditions, work can be an important vehicle for a healthy mental and social stimulation.

A child's work becomes exploitative or abusive when it encroaches on his or her entire development. When such work is divorced from links to the family and its support system, it can have devastating effects of the social and psychological development of a child. Above all it becomes exploitative when a child is denied the right to be a child, with no time to play or to socialize with peers. Such children are usually victims of stunted social and psychological development.

More often than not, child labourers are alienated from their families. This fritters away their chance of developing essential moral values and skills needed to improve their prospects as adults. While they spend most of their time working as employees, they forego some formal education opportunities. The study indicated that work interferes with education in the following ways:

(i) Work for children attending school:

Working both early in the morning before school hours and after school leaves children exhausted. Sometimes they do not have enough energy to attend school regularly and, if they do, they cannot have effective concentration in learning activities.

(ii) Intermittent withdrawal from school:

Some children attend school regularly, but are withdrawn from school during peak seasons when much labour is needed. This is especially in occupations that are seasonal like tea and coffee picking.

(iii) Full Time Occupation:

Other children work full time and thus cannot attend school. Their labour occupies so much time that they are left with little or no time to attend school.

(iv) Unfavorable environment:

Some occupations in which children are engaged expose them to an environment which undermines their value of education. This phenomenon especially is especially a characteristic of the street workers.

(v) Exploitative employers:

Child-labourers are often mistreated by their employers. Instead of understanding some of their incapacities as being caused by their age and inexperience, the employers force these children to work like chattels. The children are thus unquestionably and psychologically traumatized, and cannot concentrate on school work.

The data on child-labour broadly confirm that child-labourers exhibit a sense of insecurity which manifests itself in rebellious, aggressive and violent outbursts against individuals. By way of example, it was noted that the greatest problem in gathering some information about child-labour lies not only on making

contact with children, but also in creating a congenial atmosphere for interviews. Many of them have faced violence and abuse from adults as well as from their employers and peers. This has made them to virtually trust nobody. They also tend to be aware that, due to their tender age, they are socially and officially viewed as delinquents, and at worst a social menace. Hence their response to love is totally unnatural and mechanical. Some hardly believe in loving or in being loved by any adult. This makes them exhibit a cold, callous and unsympathetic attitude. Fear anxiety and guilt complexes cripple their cognitive health and social well-being. The total lack of parental concern and absence of any provision for basic needs create a deep sense of psychological and social insecurity. This further hampers the socio-religious aspects of their personality.

Children working in the streets lead a life which is marked by the absence of parental control as well as sound recreation. Hence they are at liberty to indulge in various illegal activities. They also develop their own form of recreation like gambling, sniffing glue or petrol, drinking illicit liquor, taking drugs or hallucinogens, prostitution and viewing movies that are unsuitable for their age as often as possible. Momentary joys, excitement and thrills, self-destroying acts, false sense of adventure, indulgence in criminal activities, and other effects of bad acts, render them into being social misfits and unproductive individuals. Medically, such bad activities pose a health hazard since they can cause excessive fatigue, venereal diseases, depression and withdrawal, mental problems like paranoid schizophrenia, damage of mucous membranes, etc.



Plate VIII

A street boy sleeping. Nobody cares to know whether he is sick or hungry. The vast majority of people are turning their heads the other way when they meet with one of their own children in the streets of Embu township.

The categories of child labourers who worked as house helps casual labourers in farms showed common characters. The study noted that they were withdrawn, exhibited regressive behaviour, premature ageing, depression and inferiority complex. Consequently, they claimed to be tired, bored and felt worthless.

They were indifferent, introverted, and developed a fatalistic attitude to life. We should mention here that these effects are not based on any scientific study of health problems since that is out of the scope of this work. What we have brought to the fore are only descriptive accounts that were noted.

Long hours of strenuous and hazardous work have a stultifying effect on child-labourers. Such work narrows down their aspirations in life, stunts their

innovative potentialities and often cripples them emotionally. If attentive help and care is not forthcoming, then the community will be saddled with many generations of these categories of members. What kind of an adult can be expected from these child- labourers who have never learnt to love? Will their children be any better than they? What kind of personalities will be the children who have more often than not been victims of harassment and abuse in the work place? What nature of socio-religious attitudes and values of work will they pass on to their posterity? As mentioned elsewhere, children of any society are one of the major resources. Therefore, there is need to harness this resource which is in fact an important vehicle to national development.

4.5. Conclusion

The foregoing notes and observations are merely a summary of what is happening to work-imperilled children in various parts of Embu district. Much about why and how child-labourers remain shut away from public and official scrutiny has been brought to the fore. Since children in harzadous work tend to be invisible, the society has apparently resisted to perceive them as being at risk. In that case child-labour issue has been dismissed as a matter of "out of sight out of mind." Indeed, the failure to address the issue of child labour lies not only on their being invisible, but also on their being invisible to the right people who would take care and action.

This chapter has articulated a complete diagnosis of child-labour situation in Embu district. It has identified and located the children exposed to work situations inimical to their entire development. This venture has brought to the

fore some essential information about the nature, magnitude, dynamics and distribution of the problem. In so doing, we have given a hitherto situational analysis which will provide an accurate basis of advancing succinct suggestions and recommendations. This will be discussed in more details in Chapter Six.

A detailed information on how and why children enter and perform their work, the work situations under which they are engaged, and how they are handled and remunerated, has been brought to the fore. This generic information has nevertheless addressed some of the most vexing questions, for example, how can one distinguish the kind of work that is injurious to the child from the one that could be regarded as of social value to children? What are the parameters of assessing the work situation that is inimical to children? How can we tell whether certain body complications of some child workers are contingent upon effects of child-labour? How did traditional religion help to protect the child from abuse. As can be gathered from the foregoing notes, questions of this sort actually have no universal answers. They are subjective to reasoning along the cultural experiences, and customs and values of a given community.

The next chapter presents an account of action against child-labour in Embu district. In this feat the best approaches that could protect children from work situations that are detrimental to their intellectual, physical, social and moral development, are presented.

CHAPTER FIVE : MOBILISING THE SOCIETY

AGAINST CHILD-LABOUR

5.1 Introduction

The problem of child-labour needs to be attacked not as an isolated evil, but as a social catastrophe that calls for urgency if the government and the civil society are willing to achieve faster national development. In deciding the main approaches, it is imperative to include the community in general because the struggle against child-labour is quite a big task to be handled by the government alone. It is also imperative that the key actors involved in the effort realize the importance of children to their families and the entire nation. Moreover, the actors need to be aware that without the co-operation of child victims and their parents, the struggle against child-labour will never be won.

On this point, the International Labour Organisation observes:

If victory in the long and difficult fight against child-labour is to be won, it is important that a national programme of action should aim at reaching and involving:

- parents and gaurdians
- communities
- non-governmental organisations
- employees and workers, and their organisations, and
- the government in general, and those agencies concerned with working children in particular.

(International Labour Organisation, 1992, p.58).

In this chapter, we will assess the role of contemporary religious institutions in combating child-labour in Embu district. We will further assess the approaches that are used to combat child-labour in the district.

5.2 Role of Contemporary Religious Institutions in Ending Child-labour

The primary role of the church is the preaching of the gospel. Along with this, there is also great opportunity for the church leaders, together with the government officials to explain and motivate citizens to act responsibly in matters pertaining to economic development in order that they may raise their socio-economic status. The following quotation brings home the role of the church in the society:

The church can never be neutral in the society; it is either for or against its silence on vital issue of poverty and human anguish is a clear indication of its pre-occupation with the oppressive system... silence is acquiescence and acceptance is collaboration (Ana, 1979:78).

The persistence of child-labour in the society is a clear indication that something is terribly wrong, and therefore preventive measures are imperative. How does church feature in this matter? The church becomes involved because it is a social institution that is primarily concerned with the welfare of its members. Historically, the church has frequently identified itself with the oppressed in the society. In many instances, the church has provided channels for redressing the plight of the oppressed.

Today, one of the major responsibilities of the church is to help its members to understand what Christian values are, and how they relate to the social process. In Kenya, Christians constitute the bulk of the total population. Therefore, the church, through its social ministry should have ways of meeting the needs of the society in order for people to fulfill themselves in the community. This role becomes even more important and imperative when it is appreciated that churches are challenged to teach and discover ways through which their members will respond to and practice Biblical faith. In the Old Testament, God's righteousness is seen in terms of defence of the poor, the oppressed and the needy:

See the fast that pleases me: to break the fetters of injustice... to set the oppressed free. Fast by sharing your food with the hungry, bring to your house the unsheltered needy, cloth the man you see naked, and do not turn away from your own kin (Isaiah 58:6-7; Christian Community Bible).

This message brings home the society's obligation to cater for the needy children. If the church remains silent on the issue of child-labour, it is a clear indication of its collaboration with the system of exploiting children in the labour market. Christian community ought to be concerned with enhancing the abundance of life through bringing about full human development. Human being is the crown of God's creation, and has been given power to subdue nature to his service. Paradoxically human beings have subdued nature with recklessness, and consequently development egoistic tendencies that makes a person exploit the others.

In order to live according to God's will, with regard to having abundance of life through full human development, it is necessary to start from the grassroot level. The church is one institution that comes handy because it is perhaps the

only organisation which is based at the grassroot level in the society, and whose leaders serve the bulk of the population each day. The church has a great opportunity for reaching and educating people on issues affecting society (Okullu, 1982: 27).

The above sentiments may serve as the basis for the action that the churches ought to undertake in order to effectively combat child-labour in Embu district. The study observed that religious institutions are quite instrumental in social development activities in Embu district. The churches are actively initiating development projects, as well as promoting the government's plan for development in the district. For instance, the Catholic church has set up a children's home to cater children in especially difficult circumstances. Although this move may be curative through aiding the abused children, it does not address the problem at its grassroot. That is, it does not tackle the root cause of the problem by destroying the structures that enhance the persistence of exploiting children.

In order for the church to contribute greatly in combating child-labour, there is a dire need to create awareness in the community about the squalid reality of child-labour. This will awaken the indignation of the public. The church leaders ought to make their congregation aware of their duty to protect children from inimical work situations. This awareness raising should also be made to all the leaders of the churches as well. It was noted that some church leaders are not aware of the perils of child-labour. Once this awareness has been achieved it would be easier to reach out to the children who are trapped in inimical work situation. This study noted that most child-labourers wanted to leave their work,

but could not do so because their parents or other circumstances forced them to remain there. Just how crucial the role of the parents and the employers is to a successful elimination of child-labour becomes more evident when we find an extreme dependence on the employers by the child-labourers and their families. The study revealed that some children and their families are deeply threatened by the possibility of losing the employment and the highly paternalistic relationship it entails.

The study noted that it is usually the families who introduce their children to economic activities and support them in that engagement. The study further revealed that the parents of these families are not fully cognizant of the hazards entailed in certain occupational and working situations. A good example is given by majority of child-labourers who are found in rural areas, especially in the agricultural sector. Their parents are quite ignorant of the possible dangers inherent in handling and using certain tools, instruments and chemicals.

A parent who sought anonymity revealed that a child-labourer in a coffee farm almost died out of mishandling a chemical which contained cyanide. Therefore if parents and gaurdians are to fulfill their role as the caretakers of their children, they have to be thoroughly informed about the dangers of child-labour. It is only the church that is best suited to inform the members of community about the dangers of child-labour.

Another extremely important group which is mostly over looked on the issues pertaining to child-labour is the child-labourers themselves. Child-labourers have first hand information about exploitative realities of child-labour. As could be surmised from the study, most of these young labourers are quite ignorant of

what they indulge into when they first enter the labour market. Moreover, they are quite unaware of the dangers they are likely to encounter. They realise that their occupation is not any rewarding when it is too late. In such circumstances they only have to toe the line since they have no other option (Njeru, Kariuki, Mugendi, Njeri and Kanini, O.I. 16/12/98). Such children need to be furnished with concrete and factual information about the impending dangers of getting employed. Such information need to be passed to them in form and language that is easily understood. For example, in the children and youth programmes, the churches can include in their objectives some aspects of combating child-labour. The Catholic Church, for example, through its Children-Help-Children (C.H.C.) programme has achieved this objective. The Baptist Church, has also a programme of providing children with cheap educational facilities so as to cater for the children who otherwise would have dropped out of school.

The churches can also produce posters and literature on the sordid conditions of child-labour. Such materials can either be posted in strategic places like in the churches and public offices, or freely distributed to primary schools. Such literature could have immense social impact if they portray the humaneness of these young labourers, and denounce the barbarity of the practice. Cartoons depicting child-labourers and the conditions under which they toil may arouse public sentiment against child-labour. Such pictures and episodes could be a means by which child-labourers would grasp the reality of their abuse in the labour market.

Churches should also respond to child-exploitation by producing radio and television broadcasts, bioscopes, theatric performances, newspapers and magazines. Such a move will demonstrate that the churches are on alert and will therefore mobilise their members to protest against oppressive practices. Such media can reveal news items that have profound shock effect on the public, and which focus on inhumane working conditions faced by children in particular work place. Such revelations can also arouse public sympathy to the problem, and thereby stimulate the social concern and outrage needed to redress the problem (Nyaga, O.I., 22/12/98).

Through such efforts, the churches can make the invisible visible. By exposing the human rights abuse and the extent of the economic exploitation of children, the churches would help fostering the need to protect children from abuse. In addition, the churches could cause quite a furore by exposing the ills which are quite severe but remain unreported due to lack of press and speech freedom. In such a case churches could provide the necessary information by virtue of accessibility a wide audience.

Religious institutions can be particularly effective when they work in collaboration with the community and the non-governmental organisations. The churches could receive the information that is required from their members and then provide suitable channels through which information could reach a large section of the population.

Churches could be more educative especially in explaining the origins and the trend of a problem. They can serve as basis for probing and explaining the present situation and, therefore, assist the government policy planners to come up with solutions. In short, churches can serve to create important public awareness mobilize the community on issues pertaining to the inimical child-labour conditions.

Acknowledging the fact that not all people have access to library facilities for various reasons, it is opportune to avail information in simple and clear ways that most local people will understand. In this regard the churches can use photography to make the society perceive and grasp the squalid reality of child-labour. Factual pictures are authentic proof for unveiling to the public the harsh reality of child-labour. Photography could take the form of still or moving pictures, explaining more than what words can do. In this way the churches could play a crucial role in combating harzadous child-work situations.

Through the Comminity Based Organisations (C.B.O.s), the churches can educate the public about the barbarity of the practice of employing children. This initial move can begin from the grass-roots, that is, through Small Christian Comunities (S.C.C.s). Through the S.C.C.s, people can be able to point out which work is detrimental to a child's well being and recommend that which is beneficial for children. Such organisations may also help in training and supporting some cadres who would enforce the need of protecting children against sordid work situations. These church organisations can take a more active role in helping and monitoring the conditions under which children work.

If any effort from government labour inspection services could be forthcoming, it would help to promote the churches' initiatives.

Furthermore, under the auspices of the church organisations academics can conduct revealing studies of children working in informal sectors, in streets, in domestic service, and in other home based settings. This could be done, either openly, without hiding their identity and purpose, or surreptitiously, under the umbrella of the churches so as to have access to the information needed (Kamau, O.I., 22/12/98). Whatever the approach, the purpose would be to obtain accurate and consistent information that is beyond refute.

5.3 Approaches to Combating Child-labour in Embu District

Child-labour is largely a result of poverty, and is often associated with low economic growth. It has been attributed to high rate of adult unemployment. On that note, the best way to deal with child-labour is to stimulate rapid and far reaching economic growth that will create ample job opportunities for adults. Undoubtedly, this move will render child-labour superfluous. While acknowledging the challenges regarding the practicability and feasibility of this measure, it does not necessarily follow that rapid economic growth is an indispensable precondition for starting to combat child-labour. Economic prosperity may take a long time span during which many young lives could be wasted. Most officials who were interviewed noted that while rapid economic growth can be one of the cures for child-labour problems, there is however, an urgent need to come up with interim interventions. Such interventions are required as acceptable levels of economic prosperity are achieved.

From 27th to 30th August, 1996, a technical workshop on Child-labour was held in Tanzania. The workshop was attended by 35 participants, of whom 19 were delegates from government, employers, and workers' organisations from various countries including, Kenya. It was organised by the International Labour Organisation (I.L.O.), under its International Programme on the Elimination of Child-labour (I.P.E.C.) programme. The main objective of the workshop was to elaborate a programme on practical and feasible priority measures to:

- i) remove children from hazardous and exploitative tasks,
- ii) improve working conditions of children,
- iii) ultimately eliminate such forms of employment.

The results of the workshop were incorporated in the programme of action on child-labour. The programme was expected to be operational throughout the participating countries.

With that in mind, the fight against child-labour in Embu district should be waged at several fronts and using a variety of approaches. The first step in the fight should start with outlining the basic procedures involved. By so doing, it becomes easier to formulate a comprehensive approach to combating child labour (Wachira; O.I., 12/12/98). The institutions concerned with the plight of children in Embu district have developed various approaches. Generally, these approaches could be grouped into two broad categories, namely, Rehabilitative and Preventive approaches.

5.3.1 Rehabilitative Approaches

These can be defined as those options which are addressed to children who are already in the labour market. Basically, these options aim at providing child-labourers with certain services that are intended to protect them from the dangers they face. Whilst they cannot change the social milieu of the child-labourer, they can to a greater extent reduce its pernicious effects on children.

5.3.2 Preventive Approaches

These options may be defined as those that are directed towards attacking the underlying causes of child-labour. They aim at destroying the "factories" that manufacture child-labour. Basically, they are structural and are addressed to the social and economic conditions in community. They are generally long term in nature and include some basic policies, legislations and programmes that are intended to bring about a conducive atmosphere to young workers.

It is noteworthy that both rehabilitative and preventive approaches have similar roles. This is because, they complement each other when operating to end the compromising situation of child-labourers. Moreover, they both provide the ability to destroy the structures of child-labour by directly tackling the problem of the children already caught up in it. In the section below, we evaluate the general approaches that are taken to imprint in the minds of people the sordid reality of child-labour in Embu district.

5.3.3. Discouragement of Children From Entering the Labour Market

According to the information from the District Children's Office, much effort has been expended on discouraging child participation in the labour market. This study noted that children either went to look for work or were forced by their families to do so. This being the case, the only remedy is to make education compulsory up to a certain level. Education has to be free so that every child will be well catered for. Though such a strategy ideally persist in Embu district, it has not been practical. It presupposes a firm political and financial commitment in order to provide the necessary framework for its implementation. When this is achieved, the societal commitment it will be easier.

5.3.4. Enforcing and Monitoring of Labour Legislation

If proper enforcement of legislation on child-labour and exploitation is not undertaken, child-labour will be an open and unfettered phenomenon. As mentioned elsewhere, since children are vulnerable, they have to be protected from situations that are rapacious and predatory to them. The I.L.O. (1996) state that strategy for ending child-labour should take several approaches, which include:

- i) use of national legal system to interpret and enforce child-labour laws through courts.

- ii) ratification of the relevant I.L.O. Conventions pertaining to minimum working conditions.
- iii) setting maximum hours for child workers at a level that is significantly lower than the standard applicable to adult workers. In this regard, night work should be prohibited for children.
- iv) setting adequate rest periods and meal breaks for children.
- v) children doing the same work as adults should receive at least the same remuneration as adults do.
- vi) Where employers make use of task work scheme for adults, legislation must provide that the latter are solely responsible for ensuring that children are not used to increase the labour out-put of a worker.
- vii) employers should provide safe and reliable transport to child workers. The availability of transport is expected to be to and from the place of work. Moreover, the place of work should be a reasonable distance from children's residence.
- viii) introduction of occupational safety and health measures. These include provision of protective gears that are suitable to the child. The employers should ensure that child workers use them. They should also guard against employing children to hazardous tasks such as working with dangerous machines or handling poisonous chemicals.

Admittedly, the proper functioning of such strategy is contingent upon a firm commitment by the community, adequate resources, and competent administration. When these factors are present, the battle of ending child-labour will be won. However, as in the case of Embu district, such factors for combating child-labour are hardly present.

5.3.5. Community Mobilisation and Awareness Campaign

Even with the best of intentions, the task of curbing child-labour in Embu district cannot be left to technical solutions or the administration fiat. Although the state wields considerable power to combat child-labour, it can only succeed if it is backed by the public opinion. Such a forceful public opinion about child-labour can come from the religious institutions. The churches can support and work with individuals or organisations who are concerned about the welfare of children. Although several churches are doing this work, their output does not meet the need. For instance, the Catholic Church runs rehabilitation centres for street children in Embu town. This move has not made significant impact on the number of street children in Embu township. The unfulfilled needs of work-imperilled children urgently places a great burden and responsibility upon the church and the society.

Religious institutions are better placed to create awareness among people to consider it a moral obligation to cater for the needy children, regardless of their custody, care or maintenance. The strategy of community mobilisation and raising of public awareness is an attempt aimed at reaching all sections of the society through national and local campaigns. For example, the Catholic Church

has given special emphasis to Children-Help-Children (C.H.C.) programme. Through the print media, the Church has produced literature and posters depicting the importance of children. Posters have been displayed in various offices and public places. Nevertheless, we should mention that these materials are not developed in such a way that they incorporate both modern and traditional methods of caring the children. Also, noteworthy is that awareness raising and information programmes are not well developed to reach all the target groups. This is due to financial constraints inherent in developing such materials. There is need for the government to reinforce the churches' move by providing suitable budgetary support and administrative attention.

Based on the experience of the I.L.O. through I.P.E.C., no project, even for direct assistance to working children, can be successful without suitable public awareness raising component. In this regard, the core message of any public awareness raising campaign should be:

... every society has the moral duty and obligation to recognize, promote and protect the right of children, including the right to education, and to grow up in conditions of freedom; all human beings irrespective of their economic, social and political status, are equal before the law; education for all children aged 15 and under is an investment with higher returns than employment (I.L.O., 1992. p.75)

5.3.6 Provision of Formal Education and Training

Education is the basic need and a basic right of all children. The development of intellectual skills is the most essential investment that the society can make in their children. Therefore, to deny this investment to children by virtue of their having to work is to marginalize them for life, and to weaken the future potential of the community and the country at large, given that children are

society's future potential. As noted elsewhere, participation of children in the work place interferes with their formal education.

In countries where education is compulsory and where attendance and enrolment are effectively enforced, children are no longer available for work (Weiner, 1991). It is largely through formal education that children are given opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes which will prepare them for productive and remunerative work for self-reliance.

In Embu district some churches have realised this fact, and therefore put some efforts to promote the education of some children. Some churches have built vocational training schools in which children who cannot continue with primary school education due to lack of funds, could join. This move is very crucial in alleviating child-labour.

Just how preventive this approach is can be understood when some parents expressed their views on educating their children in primary schools. Many parents who were interviewed argued that educating their children would lead to increased unemployment, social and political disorder. They would therefore, waste their time and money in seeing to it that their children are educated. Instead of wasting such resources, these parents argue, children from poor families should learn to work with their "hands" rather than with their "heads". Essential skills, they further argue, are more readily acquired by early entry into labour force than by attending school.

In the area under study, schools have been established within reasonable distances from the homes with children. Most of these schools are sponsored by churches. This factor has created suitable conditions for all children to attend school. In spite of this factor, education of children is hampered by poverty in families. Therefore, the study notes that provision of compulsory education for all children, irrespective of their origin, socio-economic status and sex should be highly reaffirmed. The owners of plantations, commercial farms, and industries should actually contribute to the construction and support of schools in their areas since they are financially well off. Moreover, information on specific needs and problems of the working children should be part of the curriculum in primary schools, and should also be introduced in the training of teachers. This information can be contained in the Christian Religious Education (C.R.E.) syllabus.

5.3.7 Prohibition of Employers from Employing Children

In Kenya, child-labour laws are traditionally enforced through a general system of labour inspection. The system is manned by specialists working in the Ministry of labour and Manpower Development, or their affiliates. The system deals with a lot of issues concerning well-being of the workers. More often than not child-labour does not receive so much attention because of various reasons including:

- i) The Labour Division, which is in charge of labour inspection, is poorly equipped and under-staffed (Maina; O.I., 20/12/98). It was noted that the Division has no accurate and reliable statistics on child-labour with which to

work. The division is aware of the overall active involvement in combating child-labour, and also complains of lack of support from employers and the public. These deficiencies were some of the factors hampering inspection and prosecution.

ii) The labour inspectors who try to protect children from labour exploitation usually encounter a difficult and ambiguous positions (Mwaura; O.I., 30/1/99). Consider, for example, a situation where labour inspectors are supposed to prohibit child-labour when the socially mandated alternatives for the child and the parents are not available. In such circumstances, the vexing question faced by the labour inspector is: "*What should I do when the legal proscription of work of children conflicts with the essential survival strategies of these children, and their poor households?*" Faced with such a dilemma, the conscientious inspectors may choose to maintain the status quo rather than make the already bad conditions for the children worse.

iii) The availability of inspection facilities is often cited as an issue affecting elimination of child-labour. While the labour inspectors may enter work premises as they find it necessary, the Employment Act does not confer on them the power to ransack such premises (Njeru, O.I., 20/12/98). This requires a search warrant which has to be obtained by the police through court proceeding. The procedures involved here are often so complex and sometimes intimidating that they discourage the labour authorities to act accordingly. Coupled with the this problem is the fact that even though labour inspectors may be willing to operate, transport may be very scarce. This makes it impossible to monitor

agriculture, informal sectors, and all other places which harbour most child labourers.

iv) Exploitative child employers have greater economic power, influence and access to lawyers and other facilities when accused of breaking the labour laws. The labour inspectors, on the contrary, are rarely highly ranking to be able to render the powers of the said employers ineffective. Moreover, the inspectors usually have low technical training, and are therefore, inadequately prepared to handle the complex cases of child-labour. They are subject to pressures from the beneficiaries of child-labour (Wanjiku and Chamuiru; O.I., 30/1/99). In such a situation, they may easily succumb to the employers' whims, either through an intimidation or a tip. In a nutshell, both inefficiency and corruption of labour inspection services are formidable obstacles in ending child-labour.

v) The attitude of the employers and parents or gaurdians towards labour inspectors is important. It was noted that the labour inspectors interested in the enforcement of child laws operate within unfavourable socio-economic and socio-cultural environments. Employers hate the inspectors entering into their premises because they rob them of cheap and docile labourers. Parents, on the other hand, attach great economic value to child-labourers as an important and indispensable source of family income. They further claim that child-labour is not an abuse at all (Makame, Marigu, Rwamba and Wanyangi O.I. 20/12/98). Rather it is a form of noviciate for the challenging and industrious life awaiting a child. However, children themselves want to work and resist being removed from their work environment. This factor is perhaps the single most inhibiting obstacle to child-labour prohibition.

That hinted, it must be recognised that a potentially powerful approach to combat child-labour is to link up the inspection service with the churches' initiatives. This can be accomplished by increasing attention to education on child rights and community mobilisation functions. This can be easily done by church leaders, Small Christian Communities (S.C.C.S.) and other groups concerned with the rights of children in collaboration with the government. We should mention here that, of all the human institutions, the religious ones stand a better opportunity to demand a just society. It is the institution of the church, through its vast networks, which should play a leading role in attacking any practice or any economic, social or cultural structure which oppresses children.

The need to remove children from serious dangers is immediate and not negotiable. Whatever the factors hampering the combat of child-labour, the fact that child-labour is detrimental to the entire development of a child should be given the highest priority. The following recommendations from the I.L.O., (1992: 7-8) is helpful in attacking the problem of child-labour:

... a comprehensive national programme aimed at effective enforcement will include the following components:

- * establishment of a mechanism - a national authority or task force especially mandated to promote, facilitate and ensure effective enforcement;
- * strengthening the judiciary;
- * imposition of penalties to deter violation of national law;
- * adverse publicity of convicted violators;
- * provision of free legal aid to employed children
- * conducting an aggressive public awareness campaign;
- * extensive training and information dissemination activities such as seminars, workshops, and conferences for all groups concerned, including religious groups, judiciary and parliamentarians; and

* provision of rehabilitation and counselling services.

5.3.8 Carrying Out Research

This is a crucial approach that can provide information for use either in the planning or implementation of child-labour laws and regulations. The groups or individuals concerned with child-labour are suited to gather such information. Research should be undertaken to determine the nature, extent, cause and impact of child-labour in various sectors of the economy (Karuguti; O.I.;30/1/99). Different regions have different characteristics of child-labour. In this regard, therefore, such research may provide suitable information and direction for designing child-labour programmes in specific areas. It would also give some criteria for assessing the performance of the on-going child-labour programmes, or for identifying gaps as well as strengths for mobilising more resources.

5.5 Conclusion

We have put forward and assessed the role of religious institutions in exposing and mobilising the society against child-labour. The assumption is that if religious institutions are recognised and given due attention as we have explained, any battle to put an end to child-labour will be won. This would be beneficial to Kenya, in general, and Embu district, in particular. It is the role of churches to initiate development that seeks to promote the abundance of life.

Once this initiative begins to operate, the government and the Non-

Governmental Organisations (N.G.O.s) concerned with social development could come to reinforce the projects already begun. Thus, the fight against child-labour can be won through collaboration of religious institutions and the parties concerned with the plight of child-labourers. There is a need for the government to put forward child-labour bill that will complement the churches initiatives as well as the international laws and regulations on child-labour. Such a move will actually end the child-labour problem in Kenya as a whole.

Various approaches to combat child exploitation in the labour market have been articulated. These approaches are either rehabilitative or preventive. Generally, they operate to ensure that child-workers are not exposed to work situations that are inimical to their entire development. It is noted from the foregoing analysis that some approaches ideally exist in Embu district, while others operate in such a feeble manner. Yet others are remote and vague in the minds of the people under this study. It is noteworthy that if proper implementation of those approaches is done, particularly in the Embu district, and generally in Kenya, child-labour would not remain an unfettered phenomenon. The foregoing strategies can provide a basis for designing a comprehensive and a multifaceted approach to child-labour.

CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of the Study

The cardinal aim of this study was to collect qualitative data on socio-religious aspects of child-labour in Embu district. There were a number of reasons which prompted us to capitalize on child-labour in the Embu community. First, Embu community is predominantly rural. Most of the studies on child-labour issues tend to focus on urban areas and major plantations in Kenya. The study gives some insights that child-labour phenomenon is also rife in rural and peri-urban settings. Second, the study would provide a document that would be not only useful to parents or policy makers in the district, but also in the country. Third, the study incorporates the African traditional values on work as far as the molding of a child was concerned. African heritage has been displaced and replaced by foreign values and lifestyles. The study thus reminisces, and provides resilience and continuity of abundant life of the African people. Fourth, the social identity, cohesion and continuity of any community depends upon the strength of its traditions and symbol system. These contain and communicate a community's customs, values, perceptions, goals and viewpoints. In this regard, the study attempted to highlight those aspects of our culture that may be used to redress some current social disorders.

In order to have the study achieve its objectives, the social structure and anomie theory was adopted. The postulate on which this theory is based is that the abuse of children in the labour market is rooted in disintegration of social structures that enhanced a conducive atmosphere for the catering of children. The absence of such social structures leads to a state of anomie or normlessness in the community.

Chapter two examined the basis of religion and work among the Aembu. It has been explained that in Embu community religion permeated in all the departments of life so fully that it was not possible to make a clear cut demarcation between the sacred and secular, or the spiritual and the material avenues of life. It was noted that the word religion does not exist in the Aembu's vocabulary. Religious experiences are expressed through traditional rituals, beliefs, practices, symbols and myths. We have underlined how every task was aimed at teaching, imparting or inculcating important social values on children.

In chapter three, the place and role of children in the Embu community has been assessed. The chapter brings to the fore the place and role of children in the traditional setting and in the modern setting. Among the Africans, the pre-occupation with the past is almost incorruptible. In this regard, the past has a practical value to the present. Therefore the study attempts to revivify the traditional child-centred values in a bid to redress the plight of child-labourers today.

It has been noted that the Embu indigenous community placed a high value on children. This can be testified by the beliefs and practices that were child-centred. To the Aembu a child was not merely a bipedal physical creature that we meet daily. A child could not be explained in terms of the biological, environmental and cultural intercourse. He or she was seen as an epiphany or ambassador from the world of divinity to the world of humanity. A child was viewed as an irruption and manifestation of the sacred. That is why childhood was held to be a very special period that was marked with various rites. Such rites were performed before conception as fecundity rites, during pregnancy, at birth, at the cutting of umbilical cord, when the baby was able to sit, stand and walk, during the first and second dentition, at the weaning period, and during the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics. Such rites marked the corridors of life, such that a passage from one corridor to another called for a rite.

Children form an integral part of society. They are held as one of the society's important asset. Therefore a lot of resources have been devoted to the maintenance of this human asset. In the marital relationships, children are held as the seal of marriage. We could rightly assert that the traditional values on children still persist. This finds expressions when the community comes into concert over helping the needy children. However, this practice is not quite efficient given that most members of the community are experiencing economic hardships. Suffice it to say that most of the indigenous values and customs on children have been eroded by modern values and lifestyles. That is why child abuse and exploitation are nowadays on the increase.

Chapter four presents the account of prevalence and causes of child-labour in the Embu community. One of the major draw-backs that has made child-labour quite persistent is that exploited children are invisible to public and official scrutiny. Once in the working place, they are taken by people to be in private property and so any possible problems that may arise from the work they do, are simply ignored. Moreover, their work is viewed by many people as part of training and socialization process. The consumers of child-labour also seem not to care about the consequences of their activities. In fact most of the employers maintain that they are only being too mindful of the plight of these disadvantaged young ones. They stress that they are giving a form of social service to child-labourers through caring, sheltering and feeding them.

It was noted that children are forced to work in order to provide for the survival and sustenance of their families. This form of labour has been referred to as family bondage or debt peonage. A family may remain bonded for a long time. Such a family feels comfortable to "donate" their children to the well-to-do people in exchange of some little money.

The study noted that gender differences have some influence on child-labour. Girls were noted to work for longer hours than boys. The major reason for this phenomenon is rooted in cultural stereotypes. Girls' roles in the society are seen in terms of household tasks. Most parents prefer educating boys to girls because the latter would end up being married to another household. Female child-labourers were found to be more vulnerable to work hazards than their male counterparts.

Child-labour places the life of its victim in a peril. More often than not work separates children from their families, thereby limiting their chances to acquire essential skills needed for their survival as adults. Many physical and psycho-social hazards result from this kind of work. Such hazards do not augur well for a child's entire development. They actually stunt a child's potentialities and reduce him or her into a social misfit.

There is an alarming rate of increase in child-labour situations in Embu district.

Chapter five assesses some of the initiatives that have been undertaken to combat child-labour. Kenya is a signatory to some of the international agreements that aim to stamp out child-labour. However, this fact has not helped to eliminate child-labour in the country. This implies that the main approaches in combating child-labour are inadequate. The study has thus attempted to examine the roles and approaches of religious institutions in eliminating child-labour. If the churches are recognized and given due attention by the policy makers, then the battle to stamp out child-labour will be won. There is also a need to implement the child-labour bill so that it complements the existing international laws and regulations on child-labour.

6.2 Recommendations

In the traditional African society, children were the responsibility of everyone. The society ensured that children were well catered for since they were a great human resource. In the world of work, children were moulded into morally upright members of the society. Certain values that formed the bedrock of moral uprightness were imparted through work. Children were rarely abused or exploited through work. There is a need to revive and strengthen the traditional child-centred values in order to curb the abuse, neglect and exploitation of children.

It has already been pointed out that child-labour laws are traditionally enforced through the system of labour inspection which is generally manned by the specialists working in the Ministry of Labour and Manpower Development, or their affiliates. Further, we have seen how weak are the enforcement mechanisms, and how difficult it is to put them into practice. Enforcement mechanism are difficult to implement in rural informal sectors, whereby commercial and subsistence agriculture, small businesses such as kiosks and hotels, street trading, domestic service and home-based work are found. Since child-labour is more common in agriculture, domestic service and the informal sector, this implies that a sizeable number of child-labourers work where child-labour law enforcement is virtually absent. This study recommends that the scope of enforcing laws on child-labour should be expanded to offer protection to children who engage in the labour market as family helpers in the rural areas.

Children-labour undermines the formal education of the victim. Nowadays education is needed to equip an individual with fundamental skills necessary for success in life. Lack of formal education is damaging to the victim because his or her prosperity in life greatly accrues to intellectual competence, commencing from basic literacy, and ability to think critically. Education alone cannot reduce child-labour problems. It has to be complemented by a child-labour policy. Education may reinforce child-labour policy by keeping most children from the work force. In a nutshell, the obvious implication is that national child-labour and educational policies should be co-ordinated.

The Education for All (EFA) campaign, which is a joint venture of the international agencies, provides that by the year 2000, 80 per cent of all the worlds children shall receive basic education (UNESCO, 1996). The question is, what of the remaining 20 per cent? Perhaps this is likely to be the working children who are now out of school. How can we have universal education where there are no adequate schools, the cost of schools is too high for the very poor, the mode of instruction is so poor that attendance is considered a waste of time, or where impoverished children feel that they must work hard for their survival, leaving little or no time for attending school? In such circumstances, the government's obligation is to subsidize education expenses for poor families. The government does this on a limited scale, often by offering scholarships. The main problem is that the government does not have sufficient funds to cater for the large bulk of the children from poor families. Moreover, the task of deciding who truly qualifies for scholarships is not easy because it is sometimes liable to political manipulation. Perhaps one way round to achieving

universal education is to come up with free education policy up to a certain level, say up to primary level.

It is well known that majority of working children are school drop-outs. While in school, educators rarely prepare to sensitise children on the hazards inherent in child-labour activities. The Ministry of Education could help to protect children against inimical work situation by including few subjects on child-labour issues in the primary schools curricula. This can be designed to fit in the already existing national curriculum without any distortion in order to accomodate it. This move can help children perceive schooling as clearly useful to their lives.

Working children need to be educated about work related hazards. They need first hand information about the long term health effects caused by exposure to certain dangerous work situation or about the psycho-socio stunting that may accrue from the isolation, exploitation and abuse they are likely to face.

Religious insitutions, in collaboration with the N.G.O.s and other parties interested with the rights of child, are especially well suited to help children understand dangers of child-labour. Even if the programmes may be unable to remove children from the undesirable work situations, they could at least provide them with advice on how to defend themselves better. They may enlighten them on how to reduce the risk of being cheated by their employers, which is a major problem.

In examinging the issue of child-labour, we have noted that there were some traditions, customs, and values which were instrumental in safeguarding the

status and welfare of a child. In traditional African society, the concept of an individual was submerged in the group philosophical consciousness which found expression in the words, *I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am*. Furthermore, there were some traditions which placed children in adult roles. For instance, among the Aembu, there existed the joking relationship between children and their grandparents. In this relationship, grandchildren considered themselves as “wives” or “husbands” of either grandparent. A grandmother considered herself a “wife” of his grandson, and in many respects save sexual matters, treated him as a “husband”. The same case applied to a grandfather and his grand-daughter. This was a socially constructed relationship which helped to defuse child abuse and neglect. If a child had troubles of whatever nature, the grandparents would intervene in the name of saving a “spouse”. Children were also freer to talk to their grandparents than to any other persons in case of any hardships.

The reciprocal relationship that existed between the child and society in African traditional society is an important point to understand as a prelude to redressing the plight of child-labourers today. In other words, the relevance of African traditional values and customs regarding children need to be taken into consideration in combating child-labour today. It is the role of the church to join forces with relevant authorities to condemn the practice of employing children and thus create new opportunities to cater for the already work-imperilled children. The church has a great opportunity for reaching a large section of the society. It is perhaps the only institution that is best suited for the task of ensuring that the traditional communal pattern of life is revitalized so as to cater for the needy children.

Some churches in Embu district do much to cater for the destitute children, but the point which is being made here is that some of this destitution can be prevented by revivifying and implementing the traditional concept of mutual social responsibility. On this regard, there is need to underline that certain roles, duties and behaviours are expected of a child, while the society is expected to fullfill some roles in relation to suitable growth and development a child. There is also need for some sensitization process and awareness creation at the community level on some of the traditions, customs and cultural values that are perceived as helpful in combating child-labour today.

6.3 Areas for Further Research

1. There is a growing concern over the issue of drug abuse among children in various communities. The effects of drug abuse among children could have devastating effects nowadays considering that children are a society's major human resource. The socio-religious aspects of drug abuse among children in Kenyan communities could be a subject of further research.
2. Gender issue in child-labour did not feature prominently in this study. In almost every household of well to-do people, there is a maid who is normally a girl child. There is more growing orientation of female children to labour activities than male children. The reasons and effects of such orientation could be a issue that calls for investigation.

3. The study has focused on the abuse, neglect and exploitation of children in the labour market. It has brought to the fore the rights and needs of young persons. On the same note we need to think about the physically disadvantaged young persons, who are not able to ensure a normal life for themselves. The UN General Assembly proclaimed declaration of the rights of disabled persons in 1975. Some of its provisions can lead to a searching examination about how we think of, and approach people who have been disabled, through no fault of their own. As scholars of African religion we need to underscore the vitality and abundance of life in the indigenous society. We need to carry out some inquiry about how the traditional aspects on respect of human life could enhance the caring of the physical disadvantaged young members of the society.
4. The study noted that some working children also attended school. They work on part-time basis, usually early in the morning before the school hours, after school, during the weekends, and over the holidays. These children have to work in order to get money to meet the school expenses. Although several prominent people today went through similar experiences, such educational conditions have nowadays contributed to poor performance in the part of the victims. A study needs to be conducted to come up with strategies of containing the above imperative.

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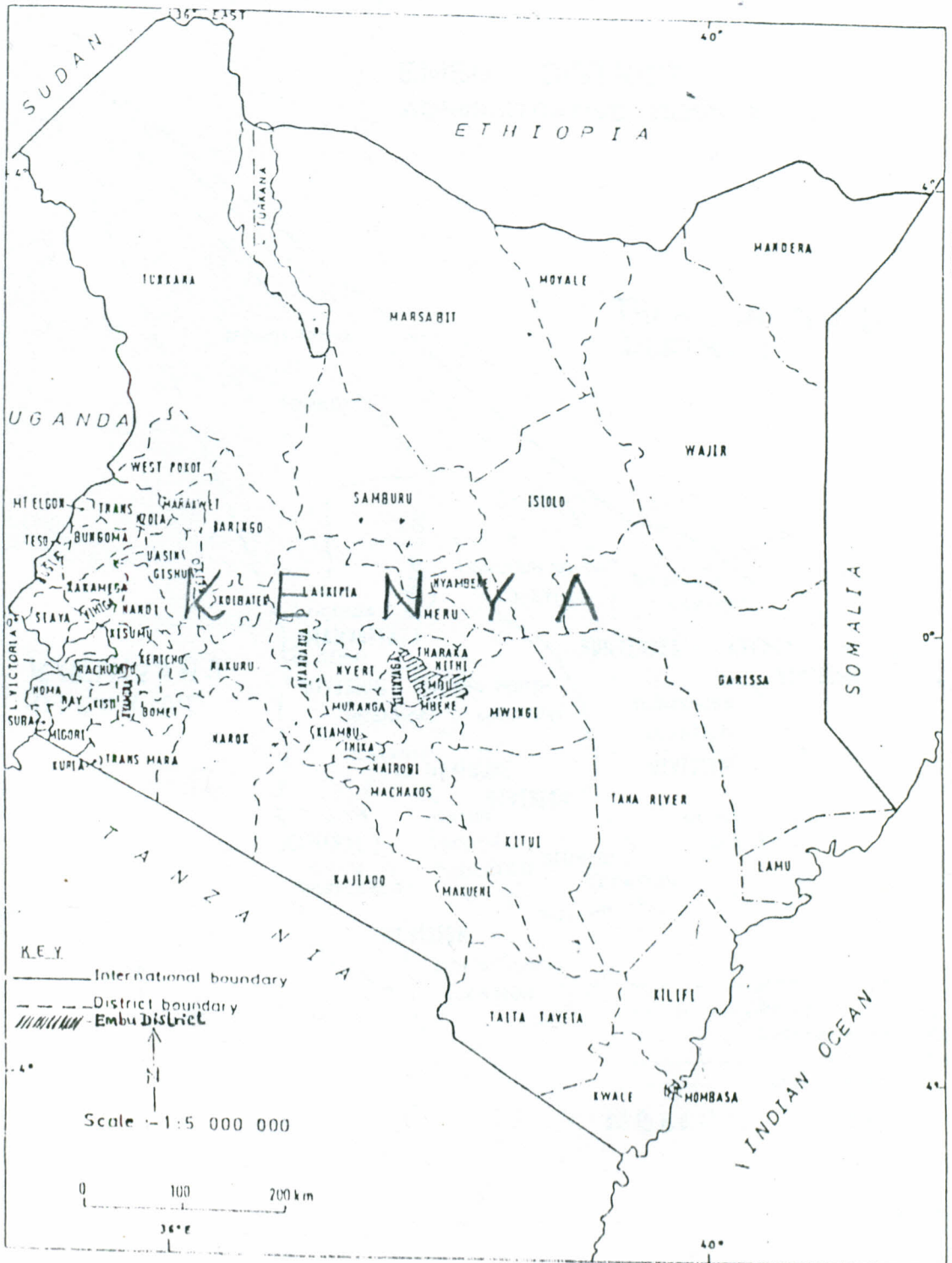
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ANNEX I: MAPS

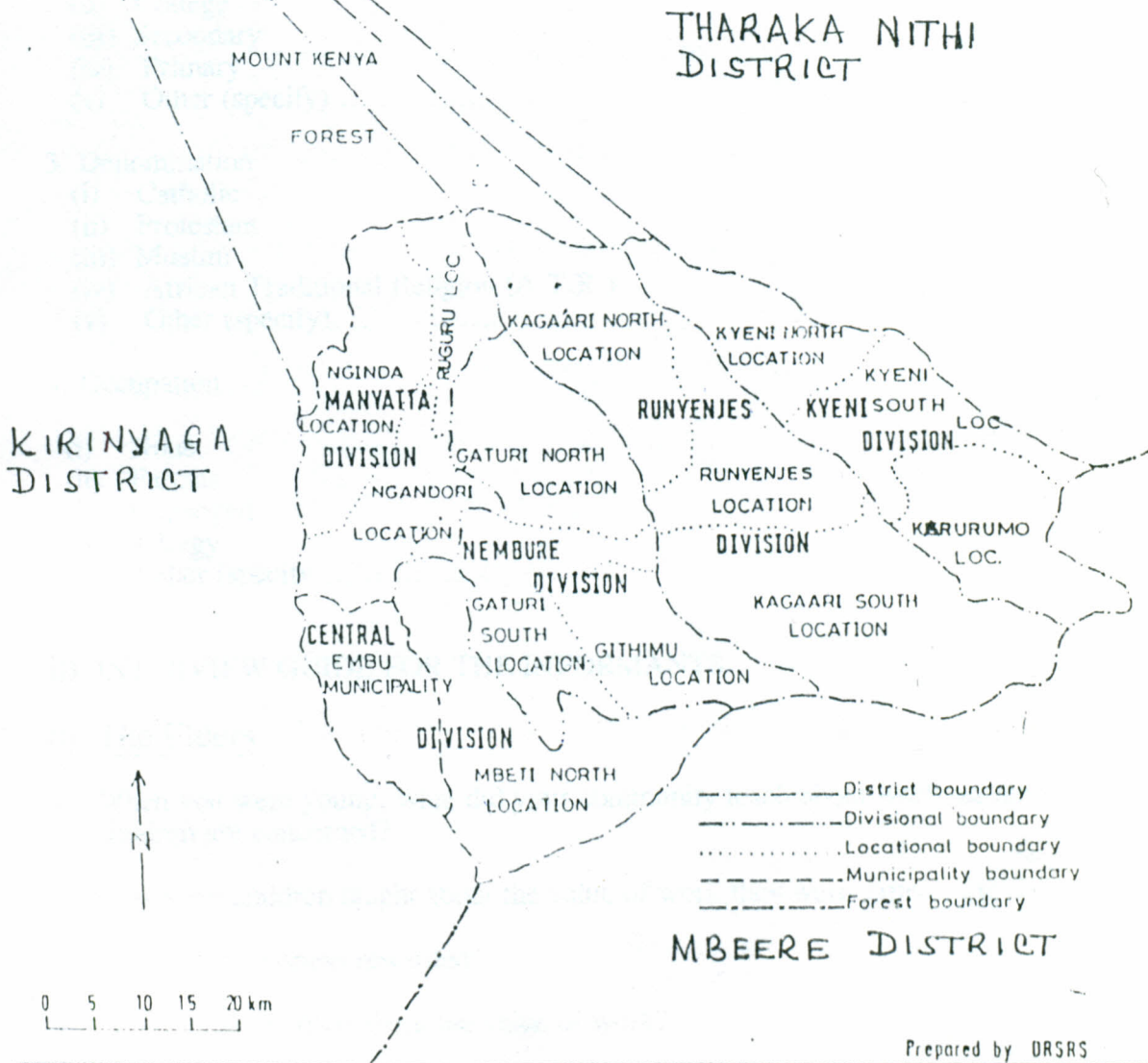
I) MAP OF KENYA : LOCATION OF EMBU DISTRICT



Source: Embu District Development Plan: 1999-2000

II) MAP OF EMBU DISTRICT

EMBU DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES



Source: Embu District Development Plan: 1999-2000

ANNEX II: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

I) GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Personal Data

1. (a) Name (optional).....
- (b) Age.....
- (c) Sex (i) Male..... (ii) Female.....

2. Highest education level

- (i) University
- (ii) College
- (iii) Secondary
- (iv) Primary
- (v) Other (specify).....

3. Denomination

- (i) Catholic
- (ii) Protestant
- (iii) Muslim
- (iv) African Traditional Religion (A.T.R.)
- (v) Other (specify).....

4. Occupation

- (i) None
- (ii) Farmer
- (iii) Employed
- (iv) Clergy
- (v) Other (specify).....

II) INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE INFORMANTS

(i) The Elders

1. When you were young, what did your community teach about work, as far as children are concerned?
2. How were children taught about the value of work they were expected to do?
3. Was industriousness rewarded?
4. Who taught children about the value of work?
5. What did you teach your children about values of work as far as traditions of Embu were concerned?

Discuss: If what he/she taught daughters was different from sons or vice versa and how?

6. Were there some proverbs, stories, songs, riddles, that the children were taught as far as the value of work was concerned?

Can you remember some or any of the above?

7. Are you still teaching your children the same values of work in the same manner as in the past?

Discuss: If yes, which are the values or if no, what has gone wrong?

8. Are there some changes on the value of work among children in today's society? Explain.
9. How useful are children to their parents or the community?
10. Were there cases of child abuse and neglect in the past?
(Probe: If there were some, how common or uncommon; if none, what were the reason?)
11. Are you aware of child exploitation today? If yes, comment briefly on the issue.

(ii) The Church Leaders

1. For how long have you served in this position?
2. What is the importance of work among children?
3. Are you aware of child-labour in this diocese?
(a) Yes (b) No

If yes, comment about it.

4. Does your church acknowledge the government's programme of action for children in especially difficult circumstances (C.E.D.C.)?
(a) Yes (b) No

If yes, comment about it.
If no, explain the reason.

5. Are there organized church programmes that could help eliminate child-labour?
(a) Yes (b) No
6. What are the effects of child-labour in the community?
7. How is this applicable to work among children?

8. Does the church and the Bible teach about child exploitation?
9. In your opinion, what are the causes of child-labour in Embu today?
10. Are there African indigenous methods that the church can incorporate into its techniques to prevent child-labour?

(a) Yes (b) No

Comment briefly on your answer.

(iii) The Head and Class-Teachers

1. (a) How many pupils or students, on average drop out of school annually?
(b) What are the major causes of dropping out of schools?
(c) How many have come back to resume studies?
2. What happens to those children who drop out of school?
3. How are they considered by the community?
4. Should such children be employed at any rate?
5. Comment briefly on child-labour in Embu today.
6. What is the Ministry of Education doing to prevent high rate of school drop-outs?

(Probe: The effectiveness of any move to prevent the above).

7. Can you suggest ways in which the Ministry could be more effective in preventing drop-outs in schools?
8. What are the factors leading to child-labour in this community?
9. Are there some programmes within the district for creating awareness among the people on dangers of child-labour? Explain.

(Probe: How is the school facilitating the programme?)

10. Are there bursary schemes for children in especially difficult circumstances (C.E.D.C.)? Give reasons for your answer.

(Probe: If any, how adequate for the needy?)

11. Are you aware of indigenous methods that could be appropriate for prevention of child-labour today?

If yes, describe them.

(iv) Parents or Guardians

1. Do you have any employed child or children?
If yes,
 - (i) How many?..... Sex: Male..... Female.....
 - (ii) Of what age?
 - (iii) Nature of employment
 - (iv) Monthly salary
 - (v) Reason for employment
2. (a) What do you think is the importance of formal education for children?
(b) What level of education would you want your children to attain? Why?
3. (a) How do you think work affects the moral of children?
(b) Should children be employed for income outside their families? Explain.
4. What causes child-labour in your community?
(Probe: Major and minor causes)
5. What are the effects of child-labour to your community?
6. Comment briefly on the following:
 - (a) Salary paid to child-labourers
 - (b) Working conditions of children
 - (c) Health of the child-workers
 - (d) Working hours of the child-labourers
 - (e) Moral development of child-labourers
7. Have you ever come across any programmes teaching the community about the dangers of child-labour?

If yes, describe what you have seen.
8. Whose duty is it to teach the employed children about the morals of the community?

Explain your views.
9. Are you aware of any indigenous methods that could be appropriate to prevent child-labour in Embu today?

If yes, describe them.

(v) Employers of Children

1. For how long have you been employing children?
2. How do you get children to employ?
3. What are the advantages of employing child labourers rather than adult labourers?

4. How much money do you pay the child labourer per month?
5. Is the payment in cash or in kind? Briefly explain.
6. Comment on the following regarding child labourers.
 - (a) Salary
 - (b) Medical care
 - (c) Attitude of their parents towards their employment
7. Describe the relationship between you and the child-labourers.
8. In your opinion, how good or bad is child-labour:
 - (a) to the individual?
 - (b) to the community at large?
9. Do you think child-labour is generally accepted in this area? Explain.
10. Any other comments regarding child-labour in your community.

(vi) Child-Labourers

1. Why are you not in school?
2. Are both of you parents alive?
3. How old were you when you first got employed?
4. Did you have any permission from your parents or guardian to get employed?
Explain.
5. In how many places have you been employed?
6. (a) What is the kind of work you do? (Refer to the observation check- list)
(b) For how long have you been working?
(c) Are you overworked? Explain
7. (a) What is your pay?
(b) How do you spend it?
(c) Is it fair? Explain
8. Do you face any hardships in your present employment? If yes, describe them.
9. How are you treated by:
 - (a) Your employer?
 - (b) Your parents?
 - (c) Peers?
 - (d) Other members of the community?
10. Are your parents aware of your being employed here? If no, why?

11. Would you wish to go to school for (more) education? Explain.
12. suggest ways of improving your work conditions.
13. If you get sick, who looks after you?

(vii) Government Officials

1. For how long have you worked in this area?
2. Is child-labour common in this are? Explain.
3. what are (a) the cause of child-labour?
(b) the consequences of child-labour?
4. How do people in your location view child-labour?
5. Who is in charge of the plight of children in especially difficult circumstances (C.E.D.C) in Embu district?
6. Are there programmes within this area geared towards the plight of child-laboures?
7. If yes,
(a) Which are they?
(b) Who facilitates them?
(c) How effective do you think they are?
8. Comment briefly on the situation of child-labour in embu in relation to the
right
of the child vis-a-vis the law of Kenya.
9. What disciplinary measures are taken against those who employ or exploit children?
10. Do the people in this area take the above legislation seriously?
11. What could be done to improve the state of child labourers?
12. What steps would you suggest to the following institutions in curbing the problem of child-labour in Embu today?
(a) Schools
(b) Churches
13. Are there any indigenous mechanism that the government considers relevant in the prevention of child-labour today? If yes, describe them.

ANNEX III OBSERVATION CHECK LIST: CHILD LABOUR ANALYSIS

Date.....

Location.....

Division.....

[illegible]