

Causes And Manifestation Of Poverty Among The People Of Bungoma County, Kenya

Nasaba Christabel Wanyama

PhD Candidate, Masinde Muliro University of Science and
Technology, Kenya

Dr. Risper Namasaka Wepukhulu

Lecturer, Kibabii University, Kenya

Professor Ezekiel Musembe Kasiera

Lecturer, Masinde Muliro University of Science and
Technology, Kenya

Abstract: The aim of this paper was to investigate causes and manifestation of poverty in Bungoma County, Kenya. The study employed stratified simple random sampling technic to arrive at 384 (n=384) research respondents. The study used questionnaires, focused group discussions, participant observation and interview schedules as primary data collection instruments. Data analysis involved use of statistical package for social sciences, SPSS version 21 software. Descriptive statistics which included use of percentages was employed in this study. Interview schedule were used to collect qualitative information while questionnaires collected quantitative information from the respondents. Reliability of research instruments was ensured through three step measure. First, the research instrument was piloted to a group of 10 respondents from Busia County who respondent to the questionnaire and necessary corrections were done. Secondly, the instrument was supplied to 13, respondents from Kakamega County and still corrected the gray areas. In the third step, Cronbach Alpha of Coefficient of 0.836 was attained which was way above the recommended 0.7 in social sciences. On causes of poverty in Bungoma County, most respondents cited that migration of men to cities and towns in search of livelihood as a major cause of poverty. Most women have been left in the home to take care of activities which do not generate any income. Theft, robberies and lack of peace have generally contributed to poverty in Bungoma County. The people of Bungoma lack access to the information which is useful to them thus continue remaining poor. Some respondents in the interviewee group affirmed that the rich hide this information too for their own use and benefit thus making the rift between the poor and the rich too wide. Other noted lack of access to loan facilities as root cause of poverty. Politicians also corrupt their way to leadership positions hence make it difficult to get the right people who are development conscious. The findings are important to the Government of Kenya and any other interested parties.

Keywords: Poverty, Causes, Bungoma County, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

The definition of poverty given by United Nation Development Program (UNDP,1996) states that poverty is lack of productive resources, income and capacities which contribute to individual and/or group isolation, vulnerability, powerlessness, economic, political and social discrimination and participation in unsustainable livelihood. Poverty has various manifestations including hunger and malnutrition, ill

health and limited or no access to education, health care and safe residential and occupational environment.

Report by United Nation Environmental Programme, (UNEP report 2000) point out that over 2.8 billion people who happen to be more than half the population in the whole world spent less than 2 dollars per day. In addition, 20 percent of people in the world spent less than one dollar per day. The UNEP report pointed out South Asia as one with the largest number of people who are poor and spending less than one

dollar in a day while sub Saharan part of Africa had 46.3 percent which is almost half its population being poor. On literacy levels, close to one billion people are uneducated, over one billion do not have clean water, and close to one billion have food insecurity and over one third of children less than five years of age were suffering from malnutrition.

The anticipated cost of obtaining global access to basic publicly availed services and allocations to reduce income poverty is estimated to be 80 billion dollars. This amount is less than 0.5 percent of the overall global income. The findings of the report shows that the top fifth (20 per cent) of the world's people who live in the highest income countries have access to 86 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP).

The poorest counties that are bottom five have one percent. The world's three richest people have over a combined Gross Domestic Product, GDP of 48 countries in the world. (World Bank Report, 2010). In most recent years, poverty was interpreted in terms of income levels. In other words, to be poor mean your income was low. Poverty is more than income and it includes being denied access to opportunities and choices that are basic for long, creative, healthy and a descent standard of living. It also include self-esteem, possessing little money, inadequate education and dignity. At least 50 percent of world's population is poor. The state of poverty is evident in many countries whether industrialized or not and most of all, is rampant in developing economies. World Bank Report 2010).

The roots of poverty lie in a tangled web of local situations combined with national and international circumstances. It is the product of economic processes occurring at a variety of levels, as well as a range of particular social and economic conditions that appear to structure the possibilities of the individual. Since the economic crisis of the 1970s, unemployment-particularly youth unemployment has soared worldwide. In the developed world, 18 percent of the people aged 16-24 are jobless. The Middle East and North Africa have also very high youth unemployment rates estimated at 28 percent and 24 percent respectively. By contrast, only 10 percent of young people in East Asia and 9 percent in South Asia are unemployed. The world risks creating a lost generation with a global unemployment expected to reach 13 percent by 2018. Whatever the main factor underpinning high youth unemployment, income inequality undoubtedly exacerbates the problem (Project Syndicate, 2014). The way in which public resources are mobilized and spent determines the kind of impact that it has on poverty. A fair and equitable public budgetary policy can also help to promote economic growth, reduce inequality and make development more pro-poor. Bringing about improvements in the quality of life, or reducing the level of deprivation, is a function not only of the resources available but also of the economic and social priorities and policies of government. Reducing the impact of the various dimensions of poverty is possible, even at low levels of income. Government spending on health and education, in combination with other policies that promote equitable growth, is particularly important in addressing poverty. Such social provisioning policies can help to reduce the experience of deprivation and poverty; increase peoples' productive capacities and

possibilities; and reduce the amount that government must spend on dealing with the impacts of health or other crises and deprivation (MDGs, 2000; UNDP, 2000).

According to Nwanze, the president of IFAD, Africa is considered a starving and hopeless continent without adequate food security although the continent is endowed with abundance of resources. Ten years ago African nations signed the Maputo Declaration in which the African leaders committed to allocating at least 10 percent of national budget for agriculture and rural development for poverty reduction, inclusivity, and sound food security. Today, most African nations have not yet attained adequate food supplies to confront hunger and absolute poverty. It is estimated that if local resources are not well utilized, by 2030 Africa will account for 80 percent of the world's poor. The African Union has declared 2014 the food security but majority of the Africans continue to languish in poverty and hunger. The year 2015 is clocking in as the deadline of meeting the Millennium Development Goals whose goal number is to eradicate poverty and hunger (UNDP, MDGs, 2000). To acquire food security, the need to establish proper policies that encourage economic growth through rural transformation backed by local investment remains critical (Daily Nation, June 30, 2014, p. 13).

The government of Kenya has over the years initiated several anti-poverty policies. Immediately after independence, the government identified poverty, diseases and illiteracy as the major hindrance to human development (Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965). Consequently, various development plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), Participatory Poverty Assessment Reports (PPAR), National Poverty Eradication Plan (NPEP), District Focus for Rural Development (DRFD), Mid-Term Expenditure Frame Work (MTEF), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and Vision 2030 have spelt out the strategies and policies to fight poverty. The government has since established the causes, constraints and the processes that engender and entrench poverty. Despite these positive developments, poverty alleviation has remained elusive in the country.

Poor economic performance has resulted in absolute poverty whereby a large population goes without adequate food; education, health facilities, safe water and decent housing. This has been blamed on poor policy formulation, initiation, planning and implementation of poverty alleviation programs. The PPARs have broadened perceptions of the poor on the phenomenon of poverty. Studies conducted show that the poor have been excluded in formulating policies aimed at alleviating poverty. The poor have been for long reduced to passive participants in their own development; reducing their ownership of poverty alleviation programs. They are not involved in formulating the policies and identifying the specific projects that will raise the level of development. Consequently they are not adequately represented in various policy-making organs and institutions fighting poverty at the grassroots (Omiti, et al 2002).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Poverty is a social reality as presented in the background and it is clear that poverty seems a paradox in even well

developed countries for example When compared to actual rates in Canada which was twenty nine percent; Finland was thirty three percent; France-thirty nine percent; Germany-twenty nine percent; the Netherlands-thirty percent; Norway-twenty seven percent; Sweden-thirty six percent and the United Kingdom-thirty eight percent, the United States rate is low but slightly higher than that of Norway, leave alone developing countries in Africa and particularly Kenya which is assumed to have one of the best-developed economies in East Africa. Poverty alleviation in particular is a major concern for all developing countries. The need for poverty alleviation arises from its persistence despite past efforts to combat it through national development planning and special programs, bearing in mind its unbearable effects on human lives. Among the groups hardest hit by poverty are rural populations. Joseph B. Nyagwoka A Strategy for Poverty Reduction among Seventh day Adventist Members in Kenya in 2011. The study concentrated on branches in Nairobi County. In another separate study, Vanessa Onguti 2011, did another study on strategies done by City Harvest Church on eradicating Poverty in Nairobi County. Intensified education and awareness and concerted efforts are needed by all the institutions in combating poverty. The present study aimed at answering the question; what are the causes of poverty in Bungoma County Kenya?

STUDY OBJECTIVE

To determine the causes of Poverty in Bungoma County, Kenya.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the cause of poverty in Bungoma County, Kenya?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The best known and most popular biblical word for "the poor" is *'anawim*. This Hebrew word indicates a situation of social inferiority, especially oppression. However, the biblical data on the poor is much more extensive than texts dealing with the *'anawim*. Other important terms occur, among these are *'ebyon* meaning one who is poor and must beg; *dal* meaning one who is weak or feeble in both a social and physical sense; *rush* meaning one who is needy or deprived (Guinan, 1981:15-16)

The definition of poverty given by United Nation Development Program (UNDP) (1996) states that poverty is lack of productive resources, income and capacities which contribute to individual and/or group isolation, vulnerability, powerlessness, economic, political and social discrimination and participation in unsustainable livelihood. Poverty has various manifestations including hunger and malnutrition, ill health and limited or no access to education, health care and safe residential and occupational environment.

This definition on poverty by UNDP, presents those who are poor as lacking productive resources, income and capacities. However it does not indicate on one hand, the

amount of resources one needs to lack so as to be poor. Whereas it is insufficiently true that not all the poor lack productive resources, on the other hand it can be observed on the contrary that the poor can have productive resources such as fertile land, very many animals and forests abundant of trees yet remain poor. It is important to determine the level of income that constitutes poverty. In some cases, those who are poor are high producers of coffee, tea and sugar cane. However due to their vulnerability to exploitation by middle men and other organized cartels, their crop proceeds reaching them are minimal. Hence they continue languishing and entangled in the viscous circle of poverty. What amount of income should one have so as to be out of poverty circle? The definition does not specify the kind of capacities that the poor lack. Is it mental, physical or financial capacities? From this definition it can be noted that a number of factors combine in advancing poverty.

According to Appadurai (2004), the key to the environment of poverty, which causes the poor to enter into this cycle, is the poor's lack of capacities. Appadurai's idea of capacity relates to Albert Hirschman's (2012) ideas of "voice" and "exit" which are ways in which people can decline aspects of their environment; to voice displeasure and aim for change or to leave said aspect of environment. Thus, a person in poverty lacks adequate voice and exit (capacities) with which they can change their position. Appadurai specifically deals with the capacity to aspire and its role in the continuation of poverty and its environment. Aspirations are formed through social life and its interactions.

The study was guided by Structural functionalism theory. Structural functionalism, or in many contexts simply functionalism, is a broad perspective in sociology and anthropology which sets out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as "organs" that work toward the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole (Holmwood ,2005). In the most basic terms, it simply emphasizes "the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom, or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system (Lenski, 2005). For Talcott Parsons, "functionalism" came to describe a particular stage in the methodological development of social science, rather than a specific school of thought (Perey, 2005).

The functionalist approach was implicit in the thought of the original sociological positivist, Auguste Comte, who stressed the need for cohesion after the social malaise of the French Revolution. It was later presented in the work of Émile Durkheim, who developed a full theory of organic solidarity, again informed by positivism, or the quest for "social facts". Functionalism shares a history and theoretical affinity with the empirical method. Latter sociological functionalists such as Niklas Luhmann and Talcott Parsons, however, can be viewed as at least partially ant positivist (Hollywood, 2005). Whilst one may regard functionalism as a logical extension of the organic analogies for society presented by political philosophers such as Rousseau, sociology draws firmer attention to those institutions unique to industrialized capitalist

society (or modernity). Functionalism also has an anthropological basis in the work of theorists such as Marcel Mauss, Bronisław Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. It is in Radcliffe-Brown's specific usage that the prefix 'structural' emerged (Jonathan, 2005). Classical functionalist theories are defined by a tendency towards biological analogy and notions of social evolutionism: Functionalist thought, from Comte onwards, has looked particularly towards biology as the science providing the closest and most compatible model for social science. Biology has been taken to provide a guide to conceptualizing the structure and the function of social systems and to analyzing processes of evolution via mechanisms of adaptation ... functionalism strongly emphasizes the pre-eminence of the social world over its individual parts (i.e. its constituent actors, human subjects).

Durkheim proposed that most stateless, "primitive" societies, lacking strong centralized institutions, are based on an association of corporate-descent groups. Structural functionalism also took on Malinowski's argument that the basic building block of society is the nuclear family, and that the clan is an outgrowth, not vice versa. Durkheim was concerned with the question of how certain societies maintain internal stability and survive over time. He proposed that such societies tend to be segmented, with equivalent parts held together by shared values, common symbols or, as his nephew Marcel Mauss held, systems of exchanges. In modern, complicated societies, members perform very different tasks, resulting in a strong interdependence. Based on the metaphor above of an organism in which many parts function together to sustain the whole, Durkheim argued that complicated societies are held together by organic solidarity. These views were upheld by Radcliffe-Brown, who, following Comte, believed that society constitutes a separate "level" of reality, distinct from both biological and inorganic matter. Explanations of social phenomena had therefore to be constructed within this level, individuals being merely transient occupants of comparatively stable social roles.

The central concern of structural functionalism is a continuation of the Durkheimian task of explaining the apparent stability and internal cohesion needed by societies to endure over time. Societies are seen as coherent, bounded and fundamentally relational constructs that function like organisms, with their various parts (or social institutions) working together in an unconscious, quasi-automatic fashion toward achieving an overall social equilibrium. All social and cultural phenomena are therefore seen as functional in the sense of working together, and are effectively deemed to have "lives" of their own. They are primarily analyzed in terms of this function. The individual is significant not in and of himself but rather in terms of his status, his position in patterns of social relations, and the behaviors associated with his status. The social structure, then, is the network of statuses connected by associated roles. It is simplistic to equate the perspective directly with political conservatism (Elster, 1999). The tendency to emphasize "cohesive systems", however, leads functionalist theories to be contrasted with "conflict theories" which instead emphasize social problems and inequalities.

According to the World Bank (2001), poverty is a complex phenomenon. It is caused by a range of factors which

work together and result in inadequate resources. These factors include:- Worklessness; This is a major cause of poverty for example, in 2009/10, forty two percent of all families below the United Kingdom (UK) poverty line contained no working members. There are numerous reasons why people do not work. Some of these reasons are personal: many people have caring responsibilities; others suffer from a health condition or have a disability while some encounter discrimination that acts as a barrier to work.

There are also structural reasons why people do not work, for example, if the labor market does not provide enough jobs that match the skills and qualifications of unemployed people, or that are close enough to people's homes, working is not a realistic option. secondly low paid work; even when people do work this is not always a route out of poverty for example in 2009/10, 58 per cent of families below the United Kingdom poverty line contained at least one working member. Thirdly low wages, part-time work and the high costs of childcare all conspire to reduce incomes. Many low wage jobs offer no prospect of progression that is, 'low pay, low prospects'; others are insecure, providing only sporadic and unpredictable incomes that is, 'low pay, no pay'. As a result, they are often nothing more than poverty traps.

Fourthly inadequate benefits; in the United Kingdom, when people are out of work or earn insufficient amounts of money they expect the benefits and tax credit system to act as a safety net. In reality, however, benefits are set at levels that invariably leave recipients living below the poverty line. In 2009/2010, for example, it was estimated that a family with one child claiming jobseeker's allowance received only sixty five percent of the amount they required to live above the poverty line. Some other causes of poverty include changing trends in a country's economy, lack of education, high divorce rate which causes feminization of poverty, having a culture of poverty, overpopulation, epidemic diseases such as AIDS and malaria, and environmental problems such as lack of rainfall. Generally the causes of Poverty can be listed as; war, famine, disease, declining union influence, lack of education, fathers leaving the family, divorce, teenage pregnancy, domestic abuse, employment abuse, immigrant status, minority status, prejudice, physical and mental disability, loss of job, low wage rates, high medical bills, fraud, oppression, theft, disasters, fire, flood, lack of or inability to afford adequate health insurance, industrial change, apathy, greed, laziness, overpopulation inequality, dictatorship and racism.

The causes of poverty can be removed by various measures, however eliminating the most complicated underlying causes remains a challenge for both developed and developing nations. It is hard to separate the causes of poverty from the effects; there is no doubt that poverty is associated with various economic and social ills. For example overpopulation could be a cause or a side effect of poverty. Difficulty arises when a distinction is made between the proximate cause, intermediate cause, and the fundamental causes of poverty. The proximate cause is the nearest cause in the chain of causation A->B->C->D. In the example just used, the fundamental cause of D is A, and factors B and C are intermediate causes. Ultimately this study was interested in the all causes of poverty among the people of Bungoma County.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey design to generate data. Descriptive survey involved studying the situation of poverty as it was and attempted to explain why the situation is the way it is. This study used descriptive survey analysis to establish causes of poverty in Bungoma County, Kenya. According to Ssenghor, (1993), this design is also good since it facilitates quick data collection and is cheap, relative to census. In descriptive survey design, two categories of respondents were crucial namely; Informed specialists and consumers or users (Orodho, 2008). Data were collected from each sample of a population at a time to allow for thorough investigation into the causes of poverty in Bungoma County, Kenya.

Purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique in which the choice of sampling units depends on the subjective judgment of the researcher (Ogola-2005), was adopted in choice of study respondents who were subjected to Stratified sampling to ensure homogeneity of the selected sample in ensuring that samples are drawn from each region encompassed in the target population, then followed by simple random sampling technique from each group.

Questionnaire, focused observations and interview schedule were used as data collection instruments. On piloting of the instruments, Hill (1998) proposes 10 to 30 respondents to pilot study in survey research. Ten members of the community from Busia County were randomly selected for pilot testing. After pilot testing of the instrument on the proposed number of people, the researcher looked at the pattern in the feedback and used the data to revise the instrument. A test retests method on sample of at least ten respondents is adequate (Mulusa, 1988). The test retest method helps to point out deficiencies in the instruments and identifies questions that are vague. This enhances the reliability of the instruments. In this study, 15 respondents representing the two categories of respondents from Kakamega County were requested to respond to questionnaires a second time after two weeks and the correlation between the two set of scores were computed by comparing the two scores with Cronbach Alpha Reliability coefficient which ought to be more than 0.7 in social sciences (Kerlinger, 1973). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient calculated at the third stage and was found to be 0.836 making them reliable enough to be used for data collection.

IV. RESULTS

Kenya has forty seven counties. Bungoma is one of these Counties. It is found in Western Kenya. Bungoma County is a mixture of ethnic groups. It has a population of 1,375,063 (48% male, 52% female and a growth rate of 4.3% per annum) and an area of 2,069 per kilometer square (km²) with population density 453.5 per kilometer (Government of Kenya, 2009). This large population, coupled with rural unemployment has put pressure on land and other natural resources.

Bungoma County has nine constituencies namely Kabuchai, Webuye West, Tongaren, Kimilili, Webuye East, Sirisia, Kanduyi, Bumula and Mt Elgon constituencies. It has

five administrative sub Counties namely: Bungoma East, Bungoma West, Bungoma South, Bungoma North and Mt Elgon as indicated in map of Bungoma County. Bungoma County is one of the areas with high population density of 453.5 people per square kilometer (2009 census). This has put a lot of pressure on land and social amenities leading to migration to other places and towns in Kenya. Some of the people have migrated to Kitale settlement schemes and Kakamega (Alembi 2002, 64). Pressure on land has led to many of land disputes (www.bungoma.go.ke).

Less than 50% of the people have clean drinking water. This means that around half of the population is susceptible to water borne diseases such as typhoid and cholera. HIV/AIDS is emerging as a challenge to this county and though it is still shrouded in secrecy, it is already taking a big toll on actively productive population. HIV/AIDS poses a very serious threat to this county due to lack of proper information and secrecy. Taboos, superstition and stigma are still associated with known HIV/AIDS cases (Ayers, 2003). There is not enough information available on systematic statistics that can help multi-sectorial intervention in prevention and management of HIV/AIDS. Bungoma is a densely populated area with about 53% of the inhabitants living below poverty line (Ayers; 2003).

About 9% of the population in this area is rich while 38% is middle class and the poor who are above poverty line. The Bungoma population is majorly rural with Bungoma, Kimilili, Chwele and Kanduyi town standing out as the main shopping centers. Wepukhulu *et al* (2012) observe that lack of descent environment in qualitative term is paying a hidden cost. With the start of colonial rule in 1885, the area was brought into the world of capitalist economy in a dependent role as a new colonial territory developed an economy oriented towards export of agricultural produce. Colonial rule solidified ethnic identity and associated it with certain areas of the country where only those people with specific identity were supposed to reside (Maxon and Ofcansky, 2003:3, 6, 155).

Areas which do not produce prominent leaders within the government remain economically underdeveloped as key leaders concentrate in developing their areas and those of their friends using government taxes. This is corruption, oppression and exploration which leave the ignored areas in desperate state with the residents languishing in poverty. Bungoma County seem to have suffered from these evils a lot because there are not many people in Bungoma county who have featured in the government regimes since independence (1963). Those who have been and are leaders are in the opposition to the government of the day and therefore the areas where they come from are ignored and under allocated development funds.

Many people in Bungoma County combine cultivating and herding with wage labour and occupational specialization. An outlet for local people specialization is in found on numerous local markets. Some professionals work in towns and cities but keep in touch with their traditional homes where most of them get buried after death. Because of low wages and salaries, most professionals still struggle to meet their needs and wants. It is not uncommon to find a university professor who cannot afford a car. Teachers in public and private schools hardly afford a decent meal leave alone a

complete meal per day. The implication is that the people working in urban centers hardly invest in their rural homes. In fact more often than not, what they carry home when they visit during public holidays such as Christmas is far less than the quantities they carry back when they leave for their working places. Corruption is rampant both in public and private sectors of Bungoma County. The rich are getting richer at the cost of the powerless and voiceless poor who are getting poorer. This and other factors contribute towards excessive brain drain mostly to the west and other counties.

From the response, 70% of the respondents hold an opinion that women, young children and orphans are the most affected by poverty state. This was recorded from the respondents who raised concern on women and children suffering in villages whereas male adults get out of their homes to look for employment in towns. Agriculture (*obulimi*) is the main activity for the majority of the people in Bungoma County. Crops grown and produced in small quantities are maize, beans, bananas and cassava, sorghum and millet. Some farmers also keep cattle, poultry, sheep, goats and pigs at subsistence level (Alembi 2002:65, Oluoch Kasura *et al* (1999). When need arises such as payment of school fees, some are sold locally to get money to fulfill the need. When these sources fail to yield adequate supplementary income, young men and women travel to towns and cities to work for periods of time (Kaplan *et al* 1967:117). Most parts have never participated in the growing of high –value cash crops such as tea, coffee, sisal and pyrethrum.

The poor swampy soil type, lack of enough land and unpredictable weather do not permit growing of some crops to happen. Currently tourism activities are not yet fully embraced due to lack of magnificent sceneries to attract tourism. There are no mineral which can be extracted for commercial purposes in Bungoma County. Source of income are limited and this contributes to extreme material poverty. Communities in Bungoma County practice small scale peasant farming as their economic mainstay. Rapid population growth, increasing poverty under poor economic and political government at local and county level and overstretched service provisions at county and national government level are major challenges to the development of the study area. As a result a lot of the pressure is exerted on available basic facilities like health and education (Ayers, 2003)

Other activities in Bungoma County include harvesting of sand from rivers and road sides, quarrying to make ballast and brick making for construction purposes. There are commercial activities located in market place and urban centre such as Chwele, Kanduyi, Bokoli, Kimilili, Webuye and Bungoma towns. These centers are dominated by businesses like shop keeping, bars, hostels, butcheries, flourmills, bakeries, lodging, carpentry workshops, bookshops and supermarkets (Alambi 2002 :65). However, it is worth noting that most of these well stocked business belong to none locals. They are mostly owned by Asians, kikuyu, Kisii and very Bukusu. Many of the local resident people in Bungoma County do not have knowledge on how they can successfully conduct a business. This in a way, results from their poor formal education since most of them have only attended primary school. Those who go further in their studies often lack skills

in business management and eventually mismanage business and are forced to close down.

Disasters which contribute directly or indirectly to poverty in Bungoma county as a whole include lightening and heavy rains (thunderstorm), deforestation, and road accidents (government of Kenya 2001 b: 20). Havoc caused by lightening can be controlled by using lightening arrestors in public and private institutions. The interaction of the poor and environment has resulted in undesired consequences which have contributed to the worsened poverty situation in Bungoma County (government of Kenya, 1999, 15). The social and economic consequences of environmental degradation are becoming increasingly manifested in Bungoma County. As result of poverty the poor engage in activities such as poor farming, burning of charcoal, poor waste disposal, poor drainage system and poor residential units (GOK, 1999, 15). The heavy rains and lack of maintenance cause destruction of loose surface roads and bridges. Supervision of funds for roads maintenance is supposed to be intensified as most rural roads are persistently impassible. In regard to road accidents black spots should be identified and unload worthy vehicles are pulled off the road by law reinforcement officers.

The governments of Kenya both at national and local levels have been blamed for being corrupt. This corruption affects people in Bungoma County. The high government taxation combined with poor or lack of policies that protect the small scale businesses, plus the abuse of office time in terms of working hours, chronic poor management of human and environmental resources, combined with rural to urban migration collectively bring about poverty in rural areas (Stenger and Ratti, 2002; 32). Some of the indicators of poverty in Bungoma County include; low purchasing power, poor healthy, premature deaths, family conflicts and breakdown of social systems. Unlike in the past poor families in the study area live in great distress and much conflict, wife beating has increased. Divorce has become frequent partly because people do not have enough resources, children abandon their elderly parents. Adherence to cultural values has started disintegrating. All these indicate that poverty has increased at different levels (Stenger and Ratti, 2002, 33-34).

Absolute poverty is a factor to reckon with. Fifty three percent of the people of Bungoma County live below poverty line (GoK 2001 b, 18). The major causes of the high poverty incidence in the study area include lack of capital, large family sizes, or high population, uneconomical land units or lack of it, poor governance at national, County and local levels, gender inequality, lack of skills, high dependence syndrome, HIV/AIDs, idleness, laziness, alcoholism, inadequate agricultural extension services, high cost of education, poor infrastructure, lack of market for farm produce and theft of farm produce among others (GoK, 2001b, 18).

In particular the study realized that those interviewed only knew of two distinct people; the rich (*Abainda*) and the poor (*abamanani*). There is no vernacular name for the “middle class”. This indicates that the middle class is not a prominent group among the people of Bungoma County. The majority are poor of about fifty three percent. There was unanimous response that the rich are few about five to eight percent. This leaves us with a nameless middle class which the study put at

thirty eight to forty two percent. In his efforts to define who the poor in Bungoma [an interviewee] said;

The poor cannot access basic education, have small mud walled houses, cannot access medication, rely on herbs; don't use fertilizer in planting crops, have few and worn out clothes, own small pieces of land, or don't own any land at all, don't eat good meals, and are emaciated.

According to the interviewee, the poor in Bungoma lack basic needs and struggle to get them. The middle class have enough to sustain their basic needs only. The rich have excess resources far beyond what they need basically. They rich in Bungoma County are a complete opposite of the poor. The rich eat well, access education, medication, have permanent houses, clean drinking water, electricity, security in their homes and can move swiftly in their cars. They have a lot of money and employ others to work in their businesses, farms and at home. The study discovered that the relationship between the rich and poor is not good. The rich exploit the poor by not paying them well and they have acquired land, accumulated their wealth through corrupt, unjust and unfair means. This gives credibility to the views of Neo colonialism or postcolonial theory which claims that colonialism is still alive in Kenyan, even though it has taken the new form of Kenyan oppressing fellow Kenyans (Gudorf; 2002, 199-217).

Sixty five percent of the interviewees observed that the rich politicians in Bungoma manipulate the poor making them think they will be their voice once elected in the public arena. However, once they get elected, the politicians never show up until the next elections when they reappear, and they bribe voters to vote for them again. The poor cannot afford to refuse taking the money because they are desperately in need of it. This kind of manipulation leaves the Bungoma County largely undeveloped with poor infrastructure, no electricity, no clean water, poor drainage in its main towns (such as Bungoma town) and poorly distributed schools in some areas. This manipulation thus perpetuates poverty in Bungoma County.

The people of Bungoma lack access to the information which is useful to them. Some respondents in the interviewee group affirmed that the rich hide this information too for their own use and benefit. This calls for victory ministry Church to come out and sensitize the poor people of Bungoma. Money allocated to the County for disbursement to the youth and women groups (who form the bulky of the poor lot) cannot reach them because they lack basic knowledge on how to access the funds or are not informed about the funds and procedures of getting the money. This makes this lot to continue lagging in extreme poverty. The poor people need to know their rights and opportunities available for them. They need to attain better education and skills to help them think and come out of the vicious circle of poverty in which they are entangled.

V. CONCLUSION

Poverty has manifested in Bungoma County in Several ways. Land and other resources are underutilized in Bungoma County. Many youths are idle and like going to towns to do hawking and are not taught how to be independent. The elders have given up their primary role of guiding the youth on how

to become self-reliant. Young people are spoiled by parents who allow them to engage in such activities as drinking local brews and loitering or roaming freely. Our community has allowed poverty to excel. The governance and leadership corrupt their way into power is questionable. Women stay idle waiting for their husbands to fend for them.

Some respondents cited that migration of men to cities and towns in search of livelihood is a cause of poverty. Most women have been left in the home to take care of activities which do not generate any income. Theft, robberies and lack of peace have generally contributed to poverty in Bungoma County. The people of Bungoma lack access to the information which is useful to them thus continue remaining poor. Some respondents in the interviewee group affirmed that the rich hide this information too for their own use and benefit thus making the rift between the poor and the rich too wide. Other noted lack of access to loan facilities as root cause of poverty.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Elected leaders need to prioritize the issue of poverty in the county and make it one of their agenda while seeking elective positions in the county. They need to provide information to the respondents regarding access to loans for them to boost their businesses. Rural urban migration of young and productive youth should be prohibited.

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