Henry Mutua

# Impact of Urbanization on the Extended Family System in African Cities

## The Question of Survival or Decline of the Extended Family System: A Case Study of Akamba-Christian Families in Nairobi-Kenya

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## Table of Contents


| | |
|---|---|
| Dedication | 2 |
| Table of Contents | 3 |
| LIST OF TABLES | 6 |
| INTRODUCTION | 8 |
| The Background to the Study | 8 |
| Relevancy to the Research | 12 |
| Statement of the Problem | 14 |
| Research Questions | 15 |
| Assumptions | 15 |
| Importance of the Study | 16 |
| Limitations | 16 |
| Definitions of Terms | 17 |
| Urbanization | 17 |
| Mission Churches | 17 |
| Independent Churches | 18 |
| Extended Family System | 18 |
| The Harambee Movement | 19 |
| Summary | 19 |
| REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE | 20 |
| Theories on the Family in the City | 21 |
| Theories of the Family in Traditional African Society | 24 |
| The Traditional Understanding of the African Family | 25 |
| Its Composition | 25 |
| Its Functions | 27 |
| Summary | 34 |
| The Family among the Akamba in Traditional Society | 35 |
| The Membership of the Akamba Family | 36 |
| The Role of the Traditional Akamba Family | 37 |
| Theories of the Family in the African City | 39 |
| Urbanization in Sub-Sahara Africa | 40 |
| The Decline of the Family in the African City | 42 |
| The Survival of the Family in the African City | 44 |
| Summary | 49 |
| RESEARCH DESIGN PROCEDURE | 51 |
| Research Background | 51 |
| Field Research | 53 |
| Interviews | 53 |

Participant Observation 61
The Problem of Accessibility 62
Overview 62
THE SETTING: AN INTRODUCTION 64
The City of Nairobi 64
History of Nairobi 65
Demographic Analysis of Nairobi 66
The Population of Nairobi 67
Urbanization in Nairobi 68
Ethnic Factor in Nairobi 69
The Akamba in Nairobi 71
The Akamba People 73
Historical origin of the Akamba 73
Geography of Ukambani 74
The Institution of the Family 75
THE IMPACT OF URBANIZATION ON THE TRADITIONAL AKAMBA FAMILY 80
Forces of Change which Influence the Traditional Role of the Akamba Family 80
Economic Pressure 82
Modern Lifestyle 84
Urban Housing 86
Inter-Tribal Marriage 86
Ethnic Pluralism 87
Time Orientation 88
Education 88
Summary 88
The Impact of Urban Forces on the Role of the Traditional Akamba Family in Nairobi 89
The Need for Identity 89
*Economic Support* 95
*Enculturation* 101
Summary of Findings from Interviews 113
Conclusion 114
FAMILY CHANGE AND THE QUEST FOR SURVIVAL 116
Findings from Interviews 117
Associate Groups 117
Urban-Rural Visitation 121
Summary of Findings on Associations and Urban-Rural Visitations 125


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Conclusions 125
Findings from Participant Observations 127
*Summary of Observations* 134
Conclusions 135
Correlation of Findings from Interviews and Observations 137
Conclusions 138
The Need for Identity 139
The Need for Economic Support 141
The Need for Enculturation 142
THE QUEST FOR SURVIVAL AND THE CHURCH 146
The Response from the Church 146
The Nature of Church Leaders' Response 147
Reasons Attributed to Church's Response 148
Conclusions 150
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 155
Findings 155
Conclusion 156
The Need for Identity 157
The Need for Economic Support 158
The Need for Enculturation 159
Recommendations 161
Recommendations Related to the Key Questions 161
Recommendations Related to the Mechanisms of Adjustment 164
Implications for Evangelism and Church Planting 164
Relevant Model for Urban Ministry 166
Effective Communication of the Gospel 168
For Further Study 169
Limitations 171
APPENDIX A 172
THE AFRICA INLAND CHURCH, NAIROBI 172
APPENDIX B 174
NAIROBI AND THE DISTRICT LOCATIONS OF AKAMBA, KENYA 174
REFERENCE LIST 175

# LIST OF TABLES

1. Forces of Change which influence the traditional family among the Akamba in Nairobi.....81
2. The need for identity: A comparison between the Family in traditional society in the city.....94
3. A comparison between the family In traditional society and in the city..... 101
4. Enculturation: A comparison of the Family in Traditional and in urban society.....112
5. Observations from Five Akamba community Gatherings in Nairobi.....135
6. A co-relation of findings from interviews and Observation.....137
7. The means by which the Needs for Identity, Support And Enculturation are met.....143

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation was to asses the impact of African urbanization on the role of the traditional family as perceived among the Akamba immigrants in Nairobi, Kenya. A further purpose was to assess how the Akamba immigrants, and in particular the Christian families in Nairobi cope with the resulting changes.

Content analysis were made of field data to discover the way in which these families have adjusted to cope with the impact on the part played by the family in traditional society. Data analyzed showed that in traditional society, the family was responsible for the individual's need for identity, economic support and the enculturation of the children. However, due to urbanization and its forces of change, the traditional family was described as weak and fragmented. Hence, playing no part in ones need for identity, support and enculturation of the young generation.

But with these changes, data analyzed shows that the Akamba families function and that the individual's need for identity, support and enculturation were met through urban based institutions, ethnic-based associations, community gatherings and rural visitations, the Akamba families try to have their key needs met. In this quest for survival in the city, the study showed that the church for which the above mentioned families are members has not been helpful in meeting these concerns.

These findings, though related to one ethnic society in Kenya, should have value for the church in the African city and particular the Africa Inland Church in Nairobi. The findings are also in general sense of value to other Christian churches involved in evangelism and church planting in the African cities and perhaps in cities of developing nations. They should have value to concerned observers, missiologists, Church leaders and mission agencies seeking to understand the contemporary African urban society.

## Dedication

Dedicated to my faithful, loving wife, Alice,
and my wonderful children,
Lesly Mueni and Dick Mumo.

## Table of Contents


Dedication 2
Table of Contents 3
LIST OF TABLES 6
INTRODUCTION 8
The Background to the Study 8
Relevancy to the Research 12
Statement of the Problem 14
Research Questions 15
Assumptions 15
Importance of the Study 16
Limitations 16
Definitions of Terms 17
  Urbanization 17
  Mission Churches 17
  Independent Churches 18
  Extended Family System 18
  The Harambee Movement 19
Summary 19
REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE 20
Theories on the Family in the City 21
Theories of the Family in Traditional African Society 24
  The Traditional Understanding of the African Family 25
  Its Composition 25
  Its Functions 27
  Summary 34
The Family among the Akamba in Traditional Society 35
  The Membership of the Akamba Family 36
  The Role of the Traditional Akamba Family 37
Theories of the Family in the African City 39
  Urbanization in Sub-Sahara Africa 40
  The Decline of the Family in the African City 42
  The Survival of the Family in the African City 44
Summary 49
RESEARCH DESIGN PROCEDURE 51
Research Background 51
Field Research 53
  Interviews 53

Participant Observation 61
The Problem of Accessibility 62
Overview 62
THE SETTING: AN INTRODUCTION 64
The City of Nairobi 64
History of Nairobi 65
Demographic Analysis of Nairobi 66
The Population of Nairobi 67
Urbanization in Nairobi 68
Ethnic Factor in Nairobi 69
The Akamba in Nairobi 71
The Akamba People 73
Historical origin of the Akamba 73
Geography of Ukambani 74
The Institution of the Family 75
THE IMPACT OF URBANIZATION ON THE TRADITIONAL AKAMBA FAMILY 80
Forces of Change which Influence the Traditional Role of the Akamba Family 80
Economic Pressure 82
Modern Lifestyle 84
Urban Housing 86
Inter-Tribal Marriage 86
Ethnic Pluralism 87
Time Orientation 88
Education 88
Summary 88
The Impact of Urban Forces on the Role of the Traditional Akamba Family in Nairobi 89
The Need for Identity 89
*Economic Support* 95
*Enculturation* 101
Summary of Findings from Interviews 113
Conclusion 114
FAMILY CHANGE AND THE QUEST FOR SURVIVAL 116
Findings from Interviews 117
Associate Groups 117
Urban-Rural Visitation 121
Summary of Findings on Associations and Urban-Rural Visitations 125


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Conclusions 125
Findings from Participant Observations 127
*Summary of Observations* 134
Conclusions 135
Correlation of Findings from Interviews and Observations 137
Conclusions 138
The Need for Identity 139
The Need for Economic Support 141
The Need for Enculturation 142
THE QUEST FOR SURVIVAL AND THE CHURCH 146
The Response from the Church 146
The Nature of Church Leaders' Response 147
Reasons Attributed to Church's Response 148
Conclusions 150
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 155
Findings 155
Conclusion 156
The Need for Identity 157
The Need for Economic Support 158
The Need for Enculturation 159
Recommendations 161
Recommendations Related to the Key Questions 161
Recommendations Related to the Mechanisms of Adjustment 164
Implications for Evangelism and Church Planting 164
Relevant Model for Urban Ministry 166
Effective Communication of the Gospel 168
For Further Study 169
Limitations 171
APPENDIX A 172
THE AFRICA INLAND CHURCH, NAIROBI 172
APPENDIX B 174
NAIROBI AND THE DISTRICT LOCATIONS OF AKAMBA, KENYA 174
REFERENCE LIST 175

# LIST OF TABLES

1. Forces of Change which influence the traditional family among the Akamba in Nairobi.....81
2. The need for identity: A comparison between the Family in traditional society in the city.....94
3. A comparison between the family In traditional society and in the city..... 101
4. Enculturation: A comparison of the Family in Traditional and in urban society.....112
5. Observations from Five Akamba community Gatherings in Nairobi.....135
6. A co-relation of findings from interviews and Observation.....137
7. The means by which the Needs for Identity, Support And Enculturation are met.....143

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Praise to God for his faithfulness through it all.

CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this investigation is to assess the impact of African urbanization on the role of the traditional family among the Akamba immigrant families in Nairobi, Kenya. A further purpose is to evaluate the ways in which these families adapt in order to cope with the resulting changes. The ultimate goal is to discover the missiological implications for the urban ministry of the church, and in particular, the Africa Inland Church (AIC) which is one of the largest denominations in Kenya.

## The Background to the Study

The eruption is described by some scholars as the dominant social reality facing the church in post-independent tropical Africa. Ever since the middle of the last century, Africans by the millions, says William Bascom (1975), are migrating into the cities and town centers of Africa, south of the Sahara in particular. Bascom writes.

> In millions Africans have been moving from rural areas into the cities. The rate of urbanization has been increasing and there is no sign of decline (1975, 234).

His observation is also supported by the writings of numerous African observers, social scientists and missiologists. Among

them, Stan Downs (1989_; Aylward Shorter (1991); Timothy Monsma (1977, 79) and Anthony O'Connor (1983), just to mention a few. These scholars tell us that the rate of rural-urban migration in tropical Africa has escalated in recent years. O'Connor (1983) for example says that,

> The present rates of urbanization, in the sense of progressive increase in the proportion of the total population who live in cities and towns, are among the world's highest
> (1983, 15).

Eugene Linden (1993) quotes a survey report on population growth done by World Bank as saying that, "some of Africa's cities are growing by 1-% per year, the swiftest rate of urbanization ever recorded" (1991, 31). According to David Barrett (1988), the pace of urbanization in tropical Africa is now swifter than has been the case in advanced nations. This rapid urbanization is exactly what is happening in many African nations where it is predicted that by the year 2025, four of the world's largest cities with be found. These cities are projected to be Kinshasa, Nairobi, Lagos and Cairo, each with more than 16 million inhabitants (Downes 1989, 11).

As the growing Christian church in this continent enters into the twenty first century, this dominant social reality poses critical questions. With rapid urbanization and importation of western cultural norms, Leslie Newbigin (1986) claims, there comes a number of intriguing questions regarding the immigrant multi-ethnic societies. Take for example, the constant movement within the city and between the city and

rural homeland. This is an increasing phenomenon ever since the end of the colonial era (Muwonge 1980; Obudho 1984). Why do immigrants, in the African cities maintain that constant movement back and forth between their homelands and the city? What accounts for this increasing phenomenon which is not in keeping with the notion held by some scholars that urbanization breaks down urban-rural ties?

On the other hand, what is to be said about the immigrants' solidarity and unity in what Kenneth Little (1974) refers to as friendship associations? What is to be said about their urban loyalty in welfare associate groups such as those Marc W. Ross (1975) found among the Kenyans in Nairobi? What can be said about the urban society's involvement in community development functions, the harambee movement, crisis-oriented associate groups such as funerals which are common to the immigrant society? What are the explanations for ethnic identifications noticeable to any casual observer among the immigrants in the cities like Nairobi? What is to be said about this ongoing trend that continues to plague the urban society in tropical Africa?

To the church in the African city, and in particular the Africa Inland Church in Nairobi (Appendix A) which is the focus of this study, there are no simple answers to these complex questions. The urban Africans' financial and time commitments to these associate groups, not to mention their constant movement between city and rural homes raises many more questions than answers. Currently statistics are lacking by

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