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The challenge of poverty

The case of Kokulinda, Tanzania

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Twelve years old Kokulinda and her two younger brothers, Tayebwa and Ngonzi, aged 10 and 8 respectively, are orphans whose poor parents died of AIDS few years ago.

The orphans' relatives are poor, too. They live in a house that is almost falling down. All go to school at the same time. Kokulinda, Tayebwa and Ngonzi are in Std.V, III and II respectively. Kokulinda is the breadwinner of the three. She carries out casual and manual labour on their small plot of the family field (Shamba) before and after school lessons. All three work on their neighbors' fields during weekends and holidays to get food and little money to buy daily necessities like soap, kerosene, salt, and sugar. They have nothing to produce and sell for accessibility to cash returns. Kokulinda looks after her younger brothers, cooks food, fetches water and cleans the house. Kokulinda must toil and work hard as a mother of the two brothers to support them and herself.

It is here where we meet a situation of a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fallen into the hands of robbers and left half dead! Who comes to his rescue? How does one behave as a "Good Samaritan"? Is it good enough one standing in a pulpit every Sunday and preach "peace be upon you" to a multitude of worshippers with empty stomachs living in misery, all types of dehumanization and abuse and want; or preach blessings of Jesus that he does not want to part with them under the state of starvation lest they die on the way? (Mathew 15:32) How does one go about it?

The church is challenged to respond to the consequences of poverty which produce deep physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual disruption in peoples' lives and well-being; and to tackle the root causes of poverty through advocacy, education, counselling and development projects. Investment in education is investing in human development, which has a multiplier effect.

We as counsellors are in difficult and problematic field. What we try to do to our best is to hear the command of Jesus Christ: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17 and John 4:1-30).

What is needed?

1. Availability

Jesus was there as the Samaritan woman came to fetch water at the well. Just to be there. The presence matters a lot. To share ideas and exchange views in a lovely and humble way, with shaking hands and hugging is not escapable. Listening, supporting, sympathizing and immediacy are indispensable by carrying out duties. Our experience is often to postpone the vacations and off-days, because they need us – a person can take up to 5 to 6 hours and some even a whole day. This includes house visitation, e.g. the patient at home. Are we available for others?

2. Acceptability

Acceptance led to intimate direct conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. To be there and let the person feel being wanted, worthy and accepted as to be able to accept his/her own situation. The fact that there are times when we have to accept the situation which can not be changed – short cuts do not help at all. We use the text of Job of the Bible: „In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong“ (Job 1:22)

3. Alleviation

Jesus tried and succeeded to have dealings with Samaritans in order to alleviate the problem of racism between the Jews and Samaritans. To be there should not be a part of the problem or prolong it. Through discussing together we try to interpret the situation with an aim of leading the client to see the possible ways which may lead to a sound recovery and permanent solution.