Images of Old Age – Pictures of Ageing

The Situation of Ageing People in Germany and Tanzania

A Workshop of the United Evangelical Mission in Bukoba/Tanzania, 27.11. – 2.12.2010
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Dear readers,

»Ageing begins directly after birth,« researchers on ageing say. With this sentence the experts are propagating a new view of the last phase in our lives. Instead of reducing it to deficits and losses, the researchers state chances and potential which can become constructive in advanced years.

The demographic development – an increasing number of old and very old people will be facing comparatively few young people – confers the issue of old age an entirely new topicality. Politics, the economy and the churches are having to react to an ever-changing society and are doing this by researching the various facets of ageing at all levels. Since 1933, the Federal Government has had the situation of ageing people in Germany regularly evaluated. In 2010, the Federal Government issued its 6th report on ageing. The focus in this report is on the »Images of Ageing in Society«. The authors justify their choice of subject with the observation that »Images of ageing influence what younger people expect for their own old age and also how much confidence the elderly have«.

The images of ageing are also diverse in international context. We have experienced this at the United Evangelical Mission. This brochure documents an unusual UEM journey: in autumn 2010 four former colleagues of the UEM – all of whom are retired – travelled, together with Caroline Shedafa (UEM-Centre for Mission and Diaconia, Bethel), to Bukoba/Tanzania to meet people of the same age and to discuss the experiences and perspectives of ageing – here and there. The encounters with and visits to Tanzanian families demonstrated: there are different images of old age not only in Africa but also in Germany. Some spend their last stage of life within the family circle, in dignity and relative security; others struggle in old age with poverty and loneliness.

We would like to invite you to read the report on Bukoba and to observe the different images of growing old in Tanzania and in Germany. We would appreciate receiving e-mails of your own experiences. Do you have questions or suggestions or comments? Then we will look forward to receiving an e-mail: diaconia@vermission.org

Best wishes from the Centre for Mission and Diaconia

Your

Angelika Veddeler
Leader of Centre for Mission and Diaconia

The encounter trip was sponsored with cultural funds from the Federal Foreign Office: »WAZEE – Ageing in Germany and Tanzania«, encounter trip to Bukoba, Tanzania, 25.11. to 4.12.2010 (preparation period September to November 2010).

1 http://www.bmfsfj.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Pressestelle/Pdf-Anlagen/sechster-altenbericht
Every time I forget something, which isn’t so seldom, my 15-year-old daughter teases me saying, »You’re old, daddy!« I actually thought the same about my own father, but only when he was lying in bed ill! I grew up in a Tanzanian village where growing old is understood as an honour and a blessing. In Tanzania old or elderly people are called »mzee«, even when they are only 30, but are already an authority, or to express regard for their higher position in life. My daughter, though, grew up in a town in Tanzania and she has been immersed in the German and European culture for six years now. She doesn’t associate this sentence with the positive significance that the typical child of a Tanzanian village would connect it with. She would probably say, »Poor dear!«

Growing old in a modern society is nothing to be proud of. Even if we find friendly titles for it like »seniors«. The stigma of ageing remains. No wonder that cosmetic products which promise to prevent the signs of ageing are doing booming business. It’s not until we have become really, really old, for example if we reach our 100th birthday, that old age becomes, once again, an honourable thing.

Whether in Tanzania or in Germany ageing is a challenge. In my village there are not very many really old people. People die earlier, as life expectancy in Tanzania is about 55. Not many Tanzanians are older than 70! Of course, there are a few people who become older although they are not so healthy and strong. They die early owing to unreliable medical care and crushing poverty. In our society, where a socially financed security system is unknown, children are deemed as a pension insurance. The more children a family has the bigger the chances that someone will look after the parents in old age. Unfortunately, the system of society is currently undergoing change and many children, who could afford the care of their aged parents financially, live in cities far away from their homes. Even worse: many young people die due to tragic reasons like Aids. Their parents and children are left behind without any support at all.

But in Europe the development is different. A Swedish doctor complained once to me that the Swedish are not prepared to accept the reality of death. They literally want to live for ever! That’s why they are artificially kept alive, even when they do not realise it any more. Thanks to this advanced technology and medical health care people are living longer. However, it is not easy to become old here either. Old people suffer from loneliness and feel worthless, unless they are very, very rich! Since more and more women are having fewer and fewer children, it is becoming clear that society’s financial security systems alone will no longer be sufficient. Whether with or without money: only people can look after elderly people. It is people who do the washing, make the beds, administer medication, cook food, go shopping, unfreeze frozen goods, clean flats, drive emergency ambulances and so on. A sinking birth rate and a growing life expectancy mean that we are heading for a huge challenge.

Ageing is becoming a problem, both here and there. Old people deserve our respect and our commitment, not only individually but also in the context of society. Do we have the spiritual resources to substanti-
ate our wish for a long life? The Bible says clearly and explicitly that ageing is a blessing from God. Yes, God wants us to live forever with him in the next world, but not so quickly. The old people among us pose a challenge and faced with this challenge we have to mobilise all our inner resources in order to master this major task.

It is a pity that the mission has not involved itself primarily with the requirements of ageing people. We have committed ourselves to improving the rights of women and children and have developed many programmes for them. But the Bible clearly says that the elderly are also a vulnerable group. This chiefly applies to widows who need our special attention. And we know the biblical examples of children who used the age of their parents for their own purposes. (For example Rebecca and Jacob who manipulated Isaac. Nathan and Bathsheba deceived David in order to appoint Solomon as king et cetera.)

Diaconia is an integral part of our mutual holistic Mission. The subject of ageing is a very special part of the diaconia which calls for particular attention, as care for old people was long considered natural in many areas.

My gratitude goes to Angelika Veddeler, Head of the International Diaconia Programme, who helped us to highlight the subject ageing as a new mission field. The studies, visits, consultations and the results of the survey have shown that we are facing a major problem all over the world. In the context of our UEM partnership, every one of our members has acquired different experiences in this field. The manner in which the churches and congregations in Germany and Africa deal with the subject ageing differs in each church and is dependent on the respective social system and cultural heritage. In view of the fact that globalisation has become part of our daily lives, we can learn a lot of essential things from one another. And that is precisely the purpose of the programme which we have documented here: we want to share our experiences. In my opinion, we have to continue to focus our attention on this point in the future. On the one hand, to direct the necessary attention to this part of our mutual work. On the other hand, we should not lose sight of our aim to respond effectively to the ever-changing missionary challenge of our times.

Dr Fidon R. Mwombeki is General Secretary of the United Evangelical Mission.
Why do we need different images of ageing?
According to the perspective, the images of ageing, which each of us can contribute to the discussion, differ. The economy, society, culture and politics all look differently at people who are growing older. The position of the Federal Constitutional Court, for example, is shaped from the point of view of the vulnerable elderly person requiring protection. However, images of ageing are currently changing rapidly. Even if ageing is still very often seen from the viewpoint of the people who are deficient and in need. It is often forgotten that growing older differs in individual people: many remain very active in many ways until old age and only have serious health impairments shortly before their death. Others are already stiff, ill and inflexible even in young years. In my opinion ageing should, in general, not be referred to as a socially distinguishing feature. Do you have the impression that also the economy – after New Economy and youth craze – has revised its ageing-related images?
Actually the economy is really changing its outlook on elderly people. For example, the cosmetics and lifestyle industry will be focussing less on ›anti-ageing‹ and more on ›pro-ageing‹ and ›active ageing‹. Concerning the labour market for older workers, we rank within the OECD still last when it comes to further education for over fifty-year-olds. But the economy has recognised that it cannot ignore the elderly any more. As can be also seen in advertising, elderly people are now playing a much bigger role than years ago. In the future, retirement age – as introduced by Bismarck as protection for the ageing – will no longer be rigid and inflexible. Even today there are many elderly people who would like to work longer than is officially permitted, but are not allowed but are not allowed to or have to overcome a great number of legal obstacles. Unfortunately, the trade unions have not taken any future-oriented position in this field which reflects the complexity of the situation.

It is anticipated that owing to many discontinuous occupational biographies many elderly will be affected by poverty in old age.
According to the prognosis of the OECD, poverty in old age will also rise in Germany, yes! But seen on average it will not be as significant as feared. The group of over 65-year-olds possess a lot of economic and financial power and that – seen on average – will stay that way.

How will future generations become old compared to the generation of the ageing population today?
People will no longer be satisfied with general messages and offers of nice ›coffee parties for everyone‹. Instead they will want to see their individual needs satisfied. But this individualisation of the single person does not mean that the elderly will no longer look after their social networks. We should not underestimate how pronounced the idea of solidarity is in Germany. As a general rule: the demographic change will also have strong elements of cultural change which can lead to more solidarity and cooperation between generations.

Interview with Michael Bolk
Michael Bolk M.A. is cultural anthropologist and assistant to Prof Dr Andreas Kruse at the Institute of Gerontology, of the University of Heidelberg. One of his main points is the implementation of the »Madrid Int. Plan of Action on Ageing« (MIPAA) as well as the historical philosophical development of people and ageing-related images.

Michael Bolk
Which role will the churches take in the organisation of demographic change?
Hopefully a big one. The churches have always attached great importance to the idea that people of all ages should help to shape the public environment. Christianity is founded on a conception of man which is characterised by the acceptance and integration of the uniqueness and also the weakness of the individual – Jesus with his death on the cross is the best example. The aspect of a consciously accepted dependence and naturally that of dying has always been understood by the churches as an integral part of the human condition. And this understanding of what it means to be a human being differs positively from an understanding that often regards ageing as pathological.

How important is international comparison?
For Germany, the OECD countries in particular are an appropriate comparison group. In Africa or Asia there are many images of ageing, which are influenced by the respective culture and cannot be compared with ours. The elite of many low-income countries are too fixed on the West. This attitude disunites them from their own people and cannot, therefore, give impulses for new, adequate images of ageing in their society. An example: unlike the low-income countries, our care will be shaped, in the future, to a large extent by technical aids. This will not apply in the same way to low-income countries. Adopting too many methods from the West is not really very useful for these countries.

How good do you believe Germany is positioned in comparison to other western countries?
Very well. In Germany there is clearly a lot more being done. The demographic change will be a much greater challenge in many other western countries than here in Germany. Even now there are many well-developed political approaches, especially on local level, which rest in a sustainable and well-networked social foundation in Germany. In other countries, approaches taking into account the demographic development often focus special events and after a short time fizzle out. In Germany, in comparison to many other countries, it is different.

The dialogue was conducted by Angelika Veddeler, Caroline Shedafa, Dr Deonal Sinaga and Annette Lübbers.
In November 2010, a workshop took place in the North-Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania titled »Wazee – Ageing in Germany and Tanzania«. For one week, four Germans and nine Tanzanian participants aged between 61 and 81 discussed the situation of ageing people in their respective context. Societal, family-related, social and theological aspects were the focus of the discussions. Beforehand, both groups had, in addition to personal experiences, concerned themselves intensely with the topic »ageing« and presented a short summary of the results of their contemplations. Afterwards, the participants visited selected villages in the north-west to get an impression of the situation of ageing people in this part of Tanzania. The groups experienced the elderly and their families in entirely different socio-economic circumstances: from a rather better-off retired pastor to an old farming couple who care for orphaned grandchildren under the most difficult economic conditions. Of particular interest was the Huyawa project, exemplary for the care of ageing people, and a visit to the NGO »Kwa Wazee«. After the programme of visits, the experiences were discussed and the things in common or the differences in the situation of ageing in Germany and Tanzania identified. In conclusion the participants expressed suggestions with regard to the question: »In what form should the UEM continue to pursue the special topic of ageing and how can the concerns of the elderly be integrated into the future work of the UEM?«

List of the participants:
- Judith Bukambo, former colleague of the Aids-work in the North-Western Diocese (NWD) and the Eastern and Coastal Diocese (ECD) in Dar Es Salaam.
- Rev. Dr Wilson Niwagila, former Executive Secretary for Evangelism
- Robert Kaimukilwa, colleague of the NWD
- Caroline Shedafa, Tutor for Ecumenical Education, Centre for Mission and Diaconia
- Evangelina Kamazima, Head of the Ntoma Orphanage of the NWD
- Kezia Yofas, retired teacher
- Flora Mutayoba, retired nurse
- Bishop Samson Mushemba, former Bishop of the NWD
- Johannsen Lutabingwa, former General Secretary of the NWD
- Joas Kaijage, retired Pastor of the NWD
- Ursula Wörmann, former Head of the UEM Sisters’ Community and Executive Secretary of the Desk for Women, Youth and Children
- Ute Sattler, retired grammar school teacher
- Helmut Scholten, Deacon and former Head of an Old People’s Home
- Hans-Arnold Scholten, retired Pastor

The Workshop
Caroline Shedafa
Growing, blooming and passing on

Ursula Wörmann

Like no other image, nature illustrates the growing, developing and passing on of human beings. The first, still somewhat hesitant buds in spring, the shimmering colours of summer, the strong radiance of autumn and the grey-white shades of winter. We stand marvelling before the creative powers of our God – and before the part we take in it. We also blossom, grow – and pass on! A process which makes us aware of the fullness of life, which lets us see the strength and creativity clearly, with which we have – perhaps – shaped our lives. We grow old with the trees and have to tolerate being confronted by the limitations, fears and worries that this natural run of things set off in us. We live in the past with its manifold experiences and – gold-plated – memories and we live in the present, where we more and more often – and somehow completely – have to let go of what has naturally belonged to our life up to then: strength, energy, flexibility and health. And we think about the future, which we see – now as we are older – in a whole new light. Instead of making new and far-reaching plans, we think about the end of life: what kind of path lies before us? Will I be held when I fall? Will I be supported when I am no longer able to master my forces and am in need of help? Will I live – even when I have to die?

In psalm 90.10 it says: »The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.« In spite of this realistic appraisal, the psalm ends with the mission to remember our finiteness and become wise. A »wise« preparation of the last season of life can look different for each person. But those people rooted in faith are united by one experience: in our youth we are inclined to believe in our own strength. But when we are older we feel, instead, the supporting and maintaining power of God. And with this trust the feeling grows that every new day is a gift from God’s hand. A gift which can finally shape. We can be confident: my life has not been in vain, my days not without meaning. Something new will arise from the old life. And with this confidence I may request: Lord, may I have the right perspective so that I can see what is important and what unimportant.

»But those people rooted in faith are united by one experience: in our youth we are inclined to believe in our own strength. But when we are older we feel, instead, the supporting and maintaining power of God.«
Hans-Arnold Scholten was born in Tanzania as the son and grandson of missionaries and he himself worked from 1960 to 1968 as a missionary in the East African country. The 81-year-old lives in Bielefeld together with his second wife. His first wife died in 2004. »I cared for my wife for many years before she died in 2004. Later when I couldn’t manage alone I visited her daily in the senior citizens’ home,« the energetic pensioner remembers. »I’m very happy to have found a second partner in my late life. Maybe that’s why I don’t really worry about how and where I’d like to live when I maybe need care. I just don’t feel old enough for that«, says Hans-Arnold Scholten.

His will has been written, but he hasn’t got a living will yet. Actually, if he is really honest he does not think that the time for that has come yet. »As long as I have a responsibility, for example volunteer work in my congregation, and as long as I set myself new goals, I don’t see myself as an old man waiting for the end.« Hans-Arnold Scholten pauses for a moment, »of course, my church has made sure that I’m financially secure. I don’t have to worry that I won’t be able to pay for the rest home of my choice. And naturally I am very grateful that there will be something left to support my three children and both my grandchildren. If you compare that with the elderly in Tanzania, it is a very comfortable situation«. Has he ever talked to his children about his »last stage« on earth? »Some years ago I received the offer from my son that I could live with them. But he lives in Munich and my roots are here in my Westphalian home country«, he says thoughtfully, »I don’t think I’d like that«.

Hans-Arnold Scholten had actually closed the subject Africa many years ago. His old enthusiasm returned after his trip to the UEM workshop in Tanzania. »So much has changed there and I’m really impressed by the elderly, very strong and active personalities I met there. But there were other examples. I remember a former chief, who was almost a king in the days when I was there. Today he is about 80 and lives in a ruin. He is lonely and, nowadays, he’s not met with the same deference as he used to be.« Hans-Arnold Scholten shakes his head somewhat sadly. »The new and the old questions, which were related to this trip, will be with me for some time yet.«
The elderly in Germany – the facts

- Population: 81.8 million (December 2009)
- According to prognoses, the population will sink to 65 to 70 million by 2060.
- Currently (2009) 16.9 million people – 20.6 per cent of the population – are older than 65 – tendency: increasing.
- Almost 19 per cent of the population are under 20, slightly more than 24 per cent between 20 and 40, 31 per cent between 40 and 60 years old.
- In 2050, for every 100 persons between 20 and 65, it is expected that there will be, on the other hand, ca 60 persons, who are 65 or older.
- Life expectancy at birth is 77 years (men) and 82 years (women).
- According to prognoses, every seventh inhabitant will be 80 or older in 2060.
- Almost every fifth person (14.9 million people) lived alone in Germany in 2006. Tendency: increasing.
- Of the people living alone in 2006, 8.1 million were women and 6.8 million were men.
- In the section of the population aged 65 and over, the average monthly net income for married couples in West Germany was 2,350 euro in 2007.
- The income in 2007 for single men was 1,568 euro and for single women 1,201 euro a month.
- On average 66 per cent of the gross income of over 65-year-old people came from the statutory pension insurance and 21 per cent from other pension systems (for example company pension or other retirement pensions).
- There are 2.3 million people in need of care in Germany (in 2009), tendency: increasing.
- More than two thirds of people needing care were provided for at home.
- The number of people resident in nursing homes has, compare to 1999, increased by 27.5 percent.

Source: Federal Statistical Office, Federal Centre for Political Education, study «Old-age pensions in Germany» – Asid.)
»I’m enjoying my active time«

Annette Lübbers

Ute Sattler, who was a teacher for English and history in Bielefeld/Bethel, is accustomed to living alone. Even during her student time. »In those days, at the beginning of the sixties, it wasn’t so common to live in a shared household«, the 70-year-old says. Born in Swabia she is single and childless. Nevertheless, she is not worried about growing old. »I have never considered my life as being isolated and I love my spacious owner-occupied flat here in this green quarter«, she says. She has all her legal papers well organised. A will has been written, a living will completed. And she has already given thought to a possible nursing home. »Of course, as a single woman you consider these things. And now and again I think about where I’ll feel comfortable. But I’m still enjoying my active time. I am involved in the congregation, manage a one-world-shop, and work for the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. As long as I can rise to new challenges, intellectual ones too, I’ll stay in my flat and live as self-sufficiently as possible. Sometimes I even think that I’ll have to be carried out of here with my feet first. Every other option would have to prove that it is an improvement«, she says smiling, although she has once – pro forma of course – had a look at the Frieda v. Bodelschwingh Foundation in Bielefeld. »And if it’s absolutely necessary, I’m quite sure that my three nieces will take care of me.«

Ute Sattler receives a good pension. In comparison to many Tanzanian women, but also many women who have to live from a very low pension in Germany, she lives a luxurious life. She rather prefers to donate to a worthy project than to finance expensive voyages. But she never forgets her privileged position. »I was really impressed by the women in Tanzania. They barely have a regular income and still do as much as they can – for their family, the grandchildren for whom they are partly the only one responsible.« Ute Sattler believes that the traditional Tanzanian social system is in danger. »The picture of the functioning and sometimes balancing family clan is no longer correct. Something has to happen. But it is certainly not a good idea to adopt the system of German old people’s homes in Tanzania. Tanzanian society will have to find its own way – in more ways than one.«
Growing old in Tanzania means more than getting grey hair. Many people over 60 feel left alone after the children start to live their own lives. Many parents of the young generation became victims of the Aids pandemic, leaving numerous grandparents to care for the surviving children. Apart from that, many elderly people – particularly the poor ones – suffer because they are excluded from any decision-making processes in their communities and no-one looks after their interests.

A large proportion of the elderly people in Tanzania used to be small farmers. These people have never left their place of birth and the social systems of their villages. The second group consists of former workers who in comparison to the small farmers have normally worked away from home and return to their village when they are old. Health care is insufficient and there are no places where old people can meet, relax and have discussions. Except for a few exceptions neither group, small farmers or workers, receive any pension. Till now there has been no strategy which would contribute to improving the economic situation of elderly people or enable the elderly people who are still strong to become economically independent. In this area, the churches in particular are called upon to develop a sustainable system to support the ageing.

The elderly people, the Wazees, were traditionally respected for their wisdom and experience and were valued members of society. They often had the last decision in matters of upbringing, education and finances. They were mainly responsible for bringing up the children and taught them social rules, traditions and the history of the clan. Last but not least, it was the responsibility of the elderly people to ensure that families and clans lived in harmony. The current formal form of education and the elderly people’s lack of access to modern means of communication have created an invisible gap between the Wazees and their children and grandchildren. The young ones no longer seek the wisdom of the old ones. The role of the ageing in Tanzanian society will have to be categorically revised.
Emmanuel Niwagila and his wife Elizabeth have been lucky. From the 13 children she gave birth to, eleven – three girls and eight boys – are now grown up. Only one of their daughters lives in Kanazi, a small village near Bukoba, but once a year a council is held in their home village for all the family. Then, at last, the 90-year-old grandmother and great-grandmother has her big family – among them 45 great-grandchildren – back together again.

The reason that Emmanuel Niwagila and his wife have a good life in their small brick house is not only the responsibility of their children who support their 71-year-old parents. The parents made sure that all their children – including the girls – could go to school and learn a job. To enable this, their father Emmanuel worked hard all his life. As evangelist he supported the work of the pastors in the North-Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT/NWD), preached the Gospel, visited ill and old people and earned a small salary. At the same time he grew bananas, manioc and corn in his fields. That he, his wife and the great-grandmother can, to some extent, enjoy retirement, is due to their own, tireless commitment, because Emmanuel Niwagila receives no pension for his long-standing work as evangelist. They are particularly happy that one of their children pays for a health insurance. Although it is not enough for the hearing aid that the almost deaf great-grandmother in actual fact needs, it is sufficient for medication and for smallish health care benefits. For example, Elizabeth Niwagila suffers from high blood pressure. She neither takes medication daily nor does she go for a regular check-up as illnesses such as these are seldom diagnosed and treated appropriately. There is simply not enough medical equipment to conduct what in Germany is seen as a normal routine examination. Even electrocardiographs can only be carried out in big district hospitals – one reason why many Tanzanians seldom reach an advanced age.

Till today, the three elderly people work regularly in the fields and plough, sow and harvest. Even the great-grandmother contributes to the family income by putting the hoe over her shoulders every morning. Emmanuel Niwagila proudly shows his visitors the trees which he has planted. The three elderly people also have a household help paid by the children so that the heavy work can be seen to by someone younger. But as long as it is possible, Emmanuel Niwagila, his wife and the old great-grandmother will not sit back and take things easy.
The elderly in Tanzania – the Facts

- Population: 45 million (middle of 2010), 45 per cent younger than 15 years of age.
- Currently 3 per cent of the population is older than 64 – tendency: rising.
- Life expectation at birth; 55 years of age.
- The United Nations estimate that the number of Tanzanians who are 60 and older will treble between 2020 and 2050.
- Currently more than 60 per cent of the population group above 60 still live together with their extended family – on average between six or seven persons.
- Only 8.2 per cent live alone, about 11.4 per cent live solely with their wife or husband.
- One third of the elderly people lives under the poverty line.
- 14 per cent of those questioned for a survey (see indication of source below) explained that they always or often had not enough to eat.
- This concerns in particular elderly women outside the capital Dar es Salaam. The number of elderly women without sufficient provision is here one third higher than the national average.
- 66 per cent of the elderly people are in some form dependent on their children.
- More than 27 per cent of the elderly people stated that they earned their living with full-time work. Six per cent work at least temporarily.
- Only a little more than 4 per cent (6.9 per cent of the men and 0.6 per cent of the women) receive a pension from their former employer.
- Less than 2 per cent receive support from a non-profit organisation or from neighbours.

Source: German Foundation for World Population (DSW) and »Research on Poverty Alleviation«/REPOA, 2010 based on the data of the »Household Budget Survey« 2007
Aids in Tanzania

- About 1.4 million people are infected by the HI-Virus in Tanzania.
- In 2009, 275 people became infected daily.
- In 2008, more than 60 per cent of the people with the HIV infection were female.
- 5.7 per cent of the 15 to 49-year-old people in Tanzania are infected with the HI-Virus. 6.6 per cent of the infected are women and 4.6 per cent are men.
- 160,000 children in Tanzania are infected by the virus.

Orphans

- About 1.3 million children have become orphans due to Aids.
- Independent of the Aids problem, there are an estimated 3 million orphans in Tanzania.
- Aids orphans are significantly more afflicted by poverty, abuse and malnutrition than children who have not lost their parents.
- Less than one in ten orphans receives any kind of support, e.g. school fees.

Grandparents

- 96 per cent of the elderly people in Tanzania have no secure financial income.
- In Tanzania more than 37 per cent of all households kept by elderly people live on less than one US dollar a day.
- Grandparents, especially grandmothers, take care of more than 70 per cent of the children in particular need of protection.
- Experts see a direct connection between the Aids pandemic, the Aids orphans and the increase in children’s work in Tanzania – and not just there.

There can be no question that owing to demographic changes the church and its diaconia is going to be confronted with major challenges:

- There will be a growing number of elderly people living alone, meaning that loneliness and the need for help will increase.
- There will be an increasing number of people who have a lot of free time, but will be unable to find a satisfying role in old age.
- Due to periods of unemployment, there will also be a high risk of poverty among the elderly.
- We are currently experiencing, both in our society and also in the church, a growing economisation of all areas of life, which is increasingly excluding people from education and participation in the congregation.
- Both society and the church will be faced with major financial challenges. Fewer and fewer people will have to bear an increasing financial burden.
- Owing to the financial situation fewer and fewer full-time working people, for example pastors or deacons and deaconesses, will be active in the congregations. A state of affairs which, among others, could be at the expense of our church tradition.

It is important to establish this state of affairs. This, however, has to be followed by a big BUT: according to the Genesis the being made in God’s image is a fundamental role of mankind. (Genesis 1:1 – 27). A human is on this earth as a representative of God, to cultivate and preserve it. In the congregations, quarters and municipalities there are a large number of people, who – in relatively good health and with good occupational qualities – have dropped comparatively early out of working life. Many of these people are prepared to take over voluntary work in the congregation – for example within the scope of the children and youth work. They are looking for a responsible role, which they can develop in a self-determined, independent and creative way. But these people will have to be systematically looked for, accompanied and trained. In practice we can see that these people i.e. multipliers can, in turn, win other volunteers for a similar activity.\(^3\) In view of the challenges which are pending, the church and its diaconia have good reason to say: »Yes, yes ... it is possible!«
We call elderly people above 55 »Wazee« in Tanzania. This group of the population is an important pillar of our church work: the «Wazees» are very active in congregational life and they get involved in their church in a most dedicated way. At the same time this group is often particularly burdened – both physically and financially, as they are often the ones who carry the responsibility for the large number of orphans who have lost their parents owing to the Aids pandemic. They see that the children are educated, have health care, have shelter and other fundamental things. Because of this, the North-Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT/NWD) has intensified its work with these congregation members in the last years. It is remarkable how the staff members of the Huyawa-programme, which was founded by the ELCT/NWD, give exemplary support to affected grandparents.

Some congregations have created a special Sunday where the congregations thank the elderly for the particular gifts they bring into the congregation. They celebrate the elderly with dancing, singing, particular prayers and mutual meals. A fascinating aspect of this day is the presence of guests from ot-

»Keep watch over yourselves and all your flock«

Bishop Samson Mushemba
er congregations and religions, for example Muslim neighbours. Several congregations also invite children and relatives from other regions to this »Siku ya Wazee« – this »Day of the Elderly«.

Of course it belongs to the church tradition that the pastors and the elders regularly visit not only the sick and persons in need, but also the ageing. We consider these visits to be necessary to motivate, encourage and strengthen inactive members of the congregation.

There can be no question: irrespective of the fact that our financial means are limited, our churches will have to intensify their care of the »Wazees« in the congregations. Because it is an indispensable task of our churches to satisfy not only the spiritual, but also the physical needs of our elderly fellow human beings – inside and outside the churches. They are a substantial part of the herd which has been entrusted to us, »Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.« (Acts 20:28)
After a toilsome life – difficult years stretch in front of them

Annette Lübbers

Peaceful quietness lies over the small village of Bushasha near Bukoba. The wind rustles through the leaves of the banana plants; the midday sun blazes down out of a steel-blue sky onto the small mud huts between the tall plants. In one of the huts the 81-year-old Yoas Nyamukama and his 69-year-old wife sit on the straw covered floor. Two wobbly chairs and low small benches make up the furniture. Cooking is done over an open fire. There is no electricity in the village. Together with other villagers, the three grandchildren, eight, ten and eleven, sit round about the couple.

From under her Kanga, the traditional headscarf of the Tanzanian women, the grandmother looks seriously and strictly at the visitors. The grandchildren, who have sat down next to their grandmother, look shyly and a little insecure into the camera. The eight-year-old proudly carries the green football shirt of Didier Drogba, national football player of the Ivory Coast and super star of the English team FC Chelsea.

The three boys are being brought up by their grandparents, because from the couple’s ten children only one has survived. All the others have died – and not only from HI-Virus. A huge burden lies on the shoulders of the grandparents, who are now responsible for the little ones.

Yoas Nyamukama and his wife have worked hard all their lives on the fields. Now – in the last phase of their life – they should have had the right to some peace and rest. But after losing their children they have lost their only old-age pension. As small farmers they have never paid into any pension insurance and thus do not receive any financial support. But in spite of this negative point they have both been lucky. The organisation Huyawa – an abbreviation for »Huduma ya Watoto«, which translated means »Service for Children« – supports people who care for Aids orphans. The North-Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT/NWD) had already initiated the aid project in the 1980s. In contrast to many other Aids orphans, the three grandchildren can at least go to the nearby village school. Without the support of the church, the grandparents would be unable to meet the costs. And as long as the villagers are able to harvest cooking bananas, avocados and corn, the three orphans will not want for food.

The grandparents’ hope for a quiet, peaceful and carefree old age died together with their children. First they cared for their ill children, now they are taking care of their grandchildren. We can only assume what kind of physical and psychological burdens the grandparents are exposed to. At the moment there are no special studies which are looking into this in detail. There are many grandparents like Yoas Nyamukama and his wife and not only in Tanzania, but in all the countries south of the Sahara.
Why is an international network for the elderly needed?
Before the founding of HelpAge Germany, there was a blind spot in development cooperation. Even though a multitude of German NGOs are working on development cooperation, there are hardly any that list old age as a subject and implement it into their projects in practice as well.

What are the effects of this blind spot?
One example is that development cooperation – as well as the healthcare systems in the developing countries themselves – have thus far been strongly focused on infectious diseases such as malaria, Aids, and tuberculosis, as well as on mother-child issues. Older people often do not receive sufficient care in the healthcare systems, and in many places there are no facilities of any kind to treat age-specific diseases such as cataracts. In many countries, geriatrics does not even exist as a medical specialisation. The more that demographic transformation advances, the more important it will be to realign healthcare systems to do justice to the rising percentage of elderly people.

Should we be thinking outside the box? Or are the problems that result from demographic transformation very different in developing countries than in ours?
We know from events here in Germany that our elderly actually have very similar problems, even if these are at a very different level: financial worries, loneliness, isolation, the question of a suitable way of life or of intergenerational solidarity. In general, when we look outside we develop the ability to deal more creatively with changed situations and problems. I don't necessarily have to derive a course of action for Germany based upon what I learn in Africa or Asia.

Do you see particular challenges for churches in an ageing society?
The diaconic understanding of the church implies that the church pay special attention to the elderly as a group and approach them specifically.

This is why Caritas took up the subject of ageing in South America very early on, for example. Churches should be careful, however, not to carry on this work as a purely social measure. Church activities should always also take a mobilising approach. So far, churches are still too often defining their work in this area as aid for the needy.

*Interview conducted by Annette Lübbers.*
*The complete German interview with Michael Bünte is available on the Internet: [www.vemission.org](http://www.vemission.org)*
Social security for elderly people in Tanzania

Johannsen Lutabingwa and Caroline Shedafa

If we compare the situation of older people in Germany and Tanzania, we can discover that we have many things in common. However, there are many serious differences. The outstanding problem for older people in Tanzania consists of the lack of social security.

Germany has one of the most comprehensive and highly developed social security systems of the world. It developed, however, in an historical process, the basis of which was Bismarck’s social security system of the late 19th century. Since that time, Germany has had a system of statutory health and unemployment insurance as well as the pension insurance. A newer achievement is the statutory care insurance, which was introduced in 1995. In cases where the pension does not suffice, the social welfare benefit guarantees the basic security.

In contrast, there is very little social security for elderly people in Tanzania. The official retiring age is 60, but less than 5 per cent of this age group and older receive any pension. Social security for elderly people is dependent on their children and grandchildren and the individual provision made for their retirement age. Many of the elderly have their own houses and live mainly on the income which comes from farming activities and small businesses. In many cases they receive additional financial support from their children who have work.

But many elderly people, especially women, live in poverty. For people, who live below the poverty line, it is extremely difficult to make their own provisions for old age. They lack the financial means and their daily survival is more important than thoughts and worries about their old age.

The majority of the elderly also work beyond retirement age, mainly on their »shambas« (fields). Owing to changes in the family structure, urbanisation and HIV/AIDS, a growing number of elderly are having to take care of children. More than 70 per cent of children in particular need of protection in Tanzania are being cared for by old people. 4

Owing to increasing health problems and chronic diseases, elderly people are generally in need of more health care than younger people. In Tanzania, people above 60 are entitled to free health services at government health institutions. Unfortunately, in practice there are many shortcomings and only few elderly actually have access to free health care. As a consequence many old people do not receive adequate care, such as medical treatment for diseases like high blood pressure and diabetes or assistive devices such as reading glasses, hearing and walking aids.

So what can the solution be? In its »National Ageing Policy«, its position paper about the situation of the elderly and the necessary political measures, the Tanzanian Government ascertains that older people are a resource for the development of the country and recognises their rights to independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. 5

4 Source: HelpAge International
5 As stated in the United Nations Organization Declaration No. 46 (1990)
Tanzania is endeavouring to improve the state social security systems – one example is the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) for employees. But 82 per cent of Tanzanians live in rural areas and from their income from small farms. State social security insurance will not take effect here.

NGOs like HelpAge International and other interest groups are advocating a universal pension for people in retirement age. In the North-West of Tanzania, the »Kwa Wazee« project (»For the Elderly«) introduced such a basic pension at local levels – mainly with foreign donations. Elderly people, mainly women caring for children, receive a monthly cash payment of about 8 euro.

The Tanzanian Government is considering a nationwide introduction of a basic pension and had a feasibility study conducted by HelpAge International. The impressive results were that a monthly pension of less than 10 euro would reduce the poverty rate of old people by more than half. Not only the old people themselves but their entire families would benefit from this money. According to the study, the implementation of the universal pension would be affordable in the short and in the long term. 6

The churches can play an important role in advocating for the improvement of social security for elderly people and not only in Tanzania.

Diaconia: not a possibility, but a commitment

Interview with Helmut Scholten

Helmut Scholten is Deacon and former head of an Old People’s Home in Bielefeld-Bethel.

What motivated you to take part in the workshop?
During my time as deacon in Usambara (1967 to 1976), I tried to promote the diaconic work in my diocese by means of a first seminar. This also included the first talks about the development of the work with elderly citizens. I was really curious about how the work in Tanzania had developed in the course of the years.

Did you personally make any new, surprising experiences?
The work with the elderly in the North-Eastern Diocese, where I was active, fizzled out quickly after I left. My successor was a Tanzanian who was ‘only’ an evangelist and not a pastor. He lacked the status which he would have needed to assert himself and continue the work. I was very surprised how competent and committed our workshop participants from Tanzania were. They really organised some fantastic work.

What were your most impressive experiences during the workshop?
I was really impressed by the open, hospitable atmosphere we were able to enjoy. It was important to me not to appear as someone with a shorthand pad in my hand carrying out a kind of stocktaking. We are not the rich aunts and uncles who have the power to improve the fate of the poor. Instead, we endeavoured to appear as visitors who were really interested.

Did you have the impression that the image of ageing and the elderly in Tanzania has changed since the 60s and 70s?
Indeed it has. The young people in Tanzania are clearly more superior in many areas than the elderly. They have a better education and can easily handle modern means of communication. The seniors often complain that they don’t understand the young ones any more. And the young generation looks down pretty arrogantly on the seniors. The elderly used to be the guardians of history and experienced personalities. It’s a problem for the elderly to keep step with modern developments and this undermines their status and authority. On the other hand, the relationship between grandparents, parents and children is always individually positive or negative.

What are the differences in the perception of ageing in Germany and Tanzania?
I don’t think the differences are very serious. Here again, it depends on the individual story the old have with the young – and vice versa. When they visit Germany, Africans often get the impression that Europeans categorically put their old people into nursing care facilities. In actual fact, over 96 per cent of all the elderly are cared for at home – with the help of home care services. But the isolation of seniors here in Germany is more of a topic than in Tanzania where the elderly stay till the last within the structures of their village.

What role does the Tanzanian church play concerning the group of elderly people?
It is regrettable that only a few elderly, who have spent their lives committed to their work in the church, can exist on their pension – provided they even get one. For example I got to know a pastor and although he had paid into a pension fund, the payments were not sufficient to live on. The reason is the galloping inflation. The churches will definitely have to become more active in this field. Financial bottlenecks should not be the counter-argument. The churches will have to reconsider their priorities and use their influence to campaign for a nationwide state pension fund, which will have to be established for employees who don’t work for the churches. A lot will also have to be done in the field of the diaconic work with the elderly. Up to now, the
aids orphans were often the focus of attention. An important diaconic commitment, but not the only one.

**Which, in your opinion, are the most urgent concerns that the UEM has to handle in this field?**

I find it really important that the UEM presses ahead with the development of the pension fund. Just as important is – beginning with congregations – the introduction of structures in the diaconic work. Diaconic work should not be something which is brought in from outside and then remains a foreign substance. Diaconic work should not be a possibility, it has to be an obligation – just as obligatory as the Sunday service. Thirdly, the advocacy work has to be urgently intensified. The rights of elderly people have to be demanded and protected. In particular the rights of women. For example women have problems when it comes to claiming their inheritance, because it is still common that the man’s family claims the jointly developed assets – and obtains them. The UEM is particularly challenged in this field.

**Have the encounters changed your view of your own society and your own social environment?**

Once again, I became totally aware how thankful we can be for the achievements of our German social services. From this thankfulness, the commitment to help others – who are not in such a fortunate position – should mature.
Growing old has many different facets and how we view old age is defined very individually. This is applicable not only to Germany but also to other cultures. Starting with Tanzania – the process of highlighting these various forms of ageing intensely was a fascinating process. This is a topic which will concern us here at the United Evangelical Mission for a long time. It goes without saying that we will make the results of our »research« available to you, our readers: in addition to the documentation about the workshop in Bukoba/Tanzania the UEM is also producing a film about this fascinating topic!

In autumn 2011 we already featured on Asia. Many questions need an answer: what’s the significance of old age in Asian society? How do people age in Asia? What influence do our modern times have on the traditional perception of elderly people? This time the host of our delegation was the »Chinese Rhenish Church Hong Kong Synod« (CRC) in Hong Kong. Together with our church colleagues we focussed on the images of ageing in Asia – with specific emphasis on the living conditions in one of the largest cities in the world, whose – elderly – inhabitants have experienced a particularly eventful history.

The emerging demographic change is presenting all affected societies with particular challenges and confronting us with completely new questions. Also the churches will have to redefine their role in an ageing society at an early stage, name and perhaps pinpoint their future tasks.

With our commitment we wish to stimulate and support the dialogue between all sections of society: the church, politics, professional institutions, universities and organisations. Making everyday life worth living for the elderly without letting it become too much of a burden for young people, will only be successful if we pool our resources and transform our societies – in Germany, Africa and Asia.

The United Evangelical Mission supports a lively exchange – inside and outside the church. We have already started to generate initial projects and to build new networks. You would like to participate? Then you are very welcome to come to our seminar with the title »Images of ageing in different cultures«.

Date of seminar: 16 June 2012
Venue: The Centre for Mission and Diaconia in Bielefeld-Bethel

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