

LIVING WITH
HIV: *MY OWN
EXPERIENCE*

By Ms. Pelagia Katunzi

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The first AIDS cases in Tanzania were reported in 1983 from the Kagera Region, in the North – Western part of the country.

Traditionally, Kagera people have always depended on farming and the main crops being banana, the staple food and coffee as a cash crop. They normally intercrop banana and coffee which are perennial crops and land with such crops is traditionally intended and therefore used by same clan from one generation to the others.

2.0: MY OWN EXPERIENCE AS HIV/AIDS COUNSELOR IN THE KAGERA HIV/HBC PROJECTS UNDER THE WORLD VISION TANZANIA

I have met a number of widows who were chased away together with their children from their land just because they did not bear male children. The female children are expected to marry and or look after themselves. This land tenure system therefore lead to many young girls to end up in

prostitution or engage as house keepers, which also lead to increased cases of HIV/AIDS spread.

I have also experienced in my work as a counsellor that men whose wives die due to HIV/AIDS do not want to confess that their wives died from HIV/AIDS. And when counseled and advised not to remarry, they say a man can't live without a wife. I have also experienced seeing the widows and orphans being disadvantaged as compared to widowers.

3.0 A TRUE STORY FROM BUKOBA

“My name is Zawadi Kaatano. I am 42 years old and a mother of four daughters whom they bore three grandsons. In 1994 I went for a blood test to establish my health status after being attacked by a series of illness. The doctors told me that I had contacted the deadly HIV virus. Four years later in 1999 my beloved husband died, leaving me with four daughters.

I was the second wife to my husband. The first wife was blessed to have six children, five males and one female. According to the traditions and cultures of Kagera people, each male child was given a piece of land to own as an inheritance and was given responsibility to take care of one of his sisters. As I was having no male child I was not considered in this process of land distribution together with my children. Due to this fact I

was forced to leave my house to my fathers house and leave my children to be taken care of by their brothers. But this was not possible due to the following reasons: -

1. Their brothers were too young to be able to take care of their young sisters.
2. It was not possible to leave my children behind without any help.
3. Since most of the time I was not in good terms with the first wife, it was not possible for her to let her sons take care of my children.

My brothers welcomed me home, but with very difficult conditions. They claimed that, they only know me as their sister, but I'm no longer of the 'same blood' with them. I felt terribly bad and angry. But since I had nowhere to go, I stayed with them for only one week, then I left for a nearby town. There I met with a friend of mine whom we last met nine years ago. I managed to arrive at her place by asking several individuals on the way.

My friend welcomed me so warmly that I felt as if in home. She was living alone due to the fact that she was barren. She was kicked away by husband simply because she didn't conceive. She was earning a living through selling local brew. Through her help I

managed to engage myself in casual labor in farmers bear the town. My friend helped me also to secure a room where I stayed with my children. In the evenings (after farm work), I join my friend in selling local brews.

I brought up my kids in this kind of situation. I believe the environment we live in contributes very much to the present situation where my children are being made pregnant out of marriage. I have heard that one of my daughters was made pregnant by a married man, who cannot possibly marry her. What a hell! I found myself being a grandmother before my time, and this is only because I didn't have opportunity to inherit a piece of land.

When I started attending counseling sessions with the World Vision in Kagera, I was very much encouraged. I came to realize that there are a lot of women who were in a situation like mine, and who still struggle to live on. They are desperate and hopeless simply because the society think that they have no right to own land. Their future and that of their kids have been dashed into a crash and nobody seems to care." Concludes Zawadi Kahatano, a resident of Bukoba town in Kagera

CONCLUSION:

- I suggest that the law on land inheritance should be amended in order to march with the current level of development so that widows and orphans should also inherit it
- Also the girl children should be allowed to inherit just as the boys do.
- Both women and men should have the right to land. This means that both husband and wife should be allowed to own the land.