

# **The Response of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania to Girls' Migration from Iringa Rural Areas to Big Cities in Tanzania**

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## **Abstract**

This case study represents how the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania deals with the problem of girls migrating from rural areas to cities in Tanzania. The Iringa region is commonly known as a place where girls are recruited or sometimes trafficked to big cities for jobs like household domestics and barmaids. Some studies previously were made from social and economic perspectives, but there have been no direct studies dealing with the problem of migration from the church or done from a religious perspective. For this article the authors drew from a Master thesis written by I. Lunyamaso and supervised by F. Mahali that engaged perspectives from parents and guardians on the ease of allowing their children to migrate into cities for jobs that risked their lives. The study applied in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis from local government and church institutions. This study found that people within the church are aware of the problem of girls migrating from rural areas in Iringa, Tanzania, to big cities, but they did not have direct diaconal or pastoral responses against the negative effects

of girls' migration to big cities. This article suggests that for the church to respond to this problem, it needs to enrich its diaconal engagement with the Lutheran theological perspective of grace that guarantees the empowerment and wellness of all people regardless of their gender differences. Such a perspective will help the church to address the problem of gender parity in their communities and congregations, as well as engage in confronting injustice based on gender differences.

### **Key Words**

Migration, Rural/Urban, Mission, Diaconia, ELCT, Iringa, Gender.

### **Introduction**

The Iringa region has been in the spotlight for the migration of people before and after independence.<sup>1</sup> This background provides a clue that families in the rural areas of the Iringa District have experienced movements of people between and from different parts of the region. This trend has caught up with adolescent girls between ages 13 and 19, migrating to cities to look for jobs that will give them wages to sustain themselves and their families back home. These movements raise missiological

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Chongolo, "MARUFUKU KUTOA MA-HOUSE GIRL IRINGA". Instagram, post by Nipashetz, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cs3jpafsRwC/>. In this post it is reported that the secretary of the ruling party Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) forbids parents and guardians to allow girls to go for house girl jobs.

challenges for the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Iringa Diocese, and social, economic, and pastoral concerns for the whole community. This article about the church's response to girls' migration from Iringa rural to big cities in Tanzania was designed against this background.<sup>2</sup> In the course of girls migrating to big cities if they decide not to stay with their parents, girls face particular socio-economic and pastoral challenges to themselves and their families back home.<sup>3</sup> Some studies have been conducted to analyse the negative impact of girl's migration to big cities in Tanzania and how the church responded to this challenge.<sup>4</sup> These studies revealed the general social and economic effects of people migrating into cities without

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<sup>2</sup> The article is based on the first author's original research: Irene E. Msalilwa, "The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration from Iringa Rural to Big Cities in Tanzania: The Case of ELCT Iringa Diocese" (Master of Theology thesis, Usa River, Tanzania, Tumaini University Makumira, 2023). The second author was main supervisor for this work.

<sup>3</sup> Esther W. Dungumaro, "Consequences of Female Migration for Families in Tanzania," *African Review of Economics and Finance* 5, no. 1 (2013): 55–56.

<sup>4</sup> Dungumaro, *Consequences of Female Migration*; Milline J. Mbonile, "Migration and Structural Change in Tanzania: The Case of Makete District" (Ph.D. thesis, Liverpool, Great Britain, University of Liverpool, 1993); Cuthbert K. Omari, *Rural Women, Informal Sector, and Household Economy in Tanzania*, WIDER Working Papers (Helsinki: World Institute for Development Economics Research, 1989), 1–75; E. A. Massawe, "Rural Urban Migration: Problems and Challenges to the ELCT-Northern Diocese Karatu District" (Bachelor of Divinity thesis, Usa River, Tanzania, Makumira University College, 2003); B. Sevetu, "Youth Unemployment in ELCT-Iringa Diocese" (Master of Theology thesis, Usa River, Tanzania, Makumira University College, 2005); N. Mwakapunya, "A Hagar in Tanzania: A Study of the Situation of House Girls in Coastal Deanery: A Study from NED-ELCT" (Master of Theology thesis, Usa River, Tanzania, Tumaini University Makumira, 2019).

clearly pointing out that girls were more vulnerable than boys.

This article presents the significance of Msaliwa's research findings on the church's response to girls' migration from rural Iringa to big cities in Tanzania.<sup>5</sup> This investigation assumed that based on a missiological and diaconal agendas, the church has a role to play in the task of equipping girls with life skills that enable them to confront and become resilient against the negative effects of migrating to cities.

### **The Problem of Girls Migrating from Rural Areas to Big Cities in Tanzania**

Several factors have been identified as causes for girls migrating to big cities.<sup>6</sup> Girls migrated due to a lack of economic chances, denial of property ownership, and discrimination based on social and cultural constructs.<sup>7</sup> The study conducted in Iringa's rural areas considered push factors that lead people to migrate to other areas, such as unemployment, poverty, dense population

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<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization, *WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women: Initial Results on Prevalence, Health Outcomes and Women's Responses* (Geneva, 2005) defines adolescence age to range between the ages of 10 and 19 years, to which many countries agree, including Tanzania (WHO, Geneva). This paper, also, considers the range of adolescence between ten and 19.

<sup>6</sup> Big cities refer to urban areas with administrative and business activities. In this paper, they include but are not limited to: Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar, Mwanza, Mbeya, Arusha, and Dodoma.

<sup>7</sup> Milline J. Mbonile and Hellen A. Lihawa, "Rural-Urban Female Migration in Tanzania: A Case of Dar Es Salaam City," *Utafiti* 3, no. 2 (1996): 169.

compared to available resources, poor living conditions, and other economic, political, and social upheavals that lead to the displacement of people.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, improved living conditions that foster social justice and economic well-being attract people to stay in a place and, hence, are considered pull factors.<sup>9</sup>

African cities have been viewed as places for employment opportunities and attract many skilled and unskilled young boys and girls as a place to live.<sup>10</sup> It has been reported that many primary school leavers or those who drop out of school migrate into cities for non-farming jobs.<sup>11</sup> The given studies largely uphold economic factors as a push for many young people to go to cities, especially those with primary-level education or below.

Nevertheless, beyond economics there are other relevant aspects as well. Unemployment is one among these. Furthermore, the patriarchal system privileges men more than women on their way of migrating into cities, in general. Nevertheless, in Tanzania the majority of migrants is female. This is supported by “The United Republic of Tanzania Migration and Urbanization Report 2015: 2012 Population and Housing Census.” This report indicates that,

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<sup>8</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 16–19.

<sup>9</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Wenban-Smith, “Population Growth, Internal Migration and Urbanisation in Tanzania, 1967– 2012: Phase 2,” Final Report (London: International Growth Centre, September 2015), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Mbonile and Lihawa, *Rural-Urban Female Migration*, 173.

*“[m]igration is age and sex selective... historically, there have been more male than female migrants... This is not the case in Tanzania, because the results of 2012 PHC indicate that there were more females than males in internal migration which shows change in migration patterns by sex... The feminization of migration in Tanzania is, as has been documented also in other countries on the African continent, driven by young, unmarried women with low [level] of formal education who are recruited as maids and nannies in urban areas, as well as educated young women who come to urban areas to study and to look for a job which matches their education.”<sup>12</sup>*

Despite not having male privilege, women withdraw into migration because of systematic patriarchal abuses, e.g. forced marriages. Others fled after being stigmatised as promiscuous when they have sought support through relationships outside of wedlock.<sup>13</sup> This gendered perspective of migration is important for building a context in which the Iringa Diocese of the Evangelical

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<sup>12</sup> Director General, National Bureau of Statistics and Chief Government Statistician, “The United Republic of Tanzania Migration and Urbanization Report 2015: 2012 Population and Housing Census: Volume IV,” Migration and Urbanization Monograph (Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar, January 2015).

<sup>13</sup> George F. Masanja gives reasons of girls’ migration to cities that include “... harshness of rural life, residence in patrilocal (socio-cultural) [regions], witchcraft accusations, existence of unwanted marriage, and loss of a husband.” George F. Masanja, “Gendered Migration and the Urban Informal Sector: A Case Study of Mwanza City, Tanzania,” *Huria: Journal of the Open University of Tanzania* 12, no. 1 (2012): 179:

Lutheran Church in Tanzania responds to the challenge of girls migrating to big cities in Tanzania.

## **The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration from Iringa Rural Areas to Big Cities**

The above context presents the complexity of how the issue of girls migrating to big cities has been overshadowed by superficially comparing the economic statuses of males and females migrating into cities.<sup>14</sup> Few research studies have demonstrated girls' vulnerability is more prevalent than boys when they migrate into big cities.<sup>15</sup> This is probably the place to begin with when dealing with how the church responds to girls' migration into big cities. A brief analysis of the position of the church in dealing with this problem is presented in this part. This section also sees the church's theological and pastoral potential in addressing the problem. The crucial question is how the church has engaged in changing the recruitment and trafficking of girls for jobs in cities.

The study on the church's role in responding to the challenge of girls' migration into big cities builds its theological framework on the hope for life in abundance on earth and eschatological eternal life for all people, female and male.<sup>16</sup> It was shown in the study that the ELCT, Iringa Diocese, had introduced many documents that verify its commitment to realise this missiological and

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<sup>14</sup> Masanja, *Gendered Migration and the Urban Informal Sector*, 189–190.

<sup>15</sup> Dungumaro, *Consequences of Female Migration*, 51–56.

<sup>16</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 9.

diaconal vision.<sup>17</sup> The diocese had shown its zeal to address the social and economic challenges that youth in general face without considering the gendered plight of girls' experiences.<sup>18</sup>

It has been observed that churches in Africa have some services related to mitigating the plights of migration. Still, those services are poorly coordinated and lack a sustainable plan for responding to the problem.<sup>19</sup> It means that dealing with migrating people has not been taken seriously other than having a general view of *diakonia* to the stranger. Westerby's field study showed that many people knew what the church was supposed to do to mitigate the problem. However, as it will be reported below, the study showed that the church lacked a concrete programme for preventing the migration of at risk girls from Iringa's rural areas to big cities.

This study found that the ELCT – Iringa Diocese had documents addressing these concerns, such as: the constitution, a strategic plan, and a general mission statement for serving all humankind, leading them to achieve a prosperous life and protecting them from all

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<sup>17</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 47–48.

<sup>18</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 48.

<sup>19</sup> Rachel Westerby, "Southern African Bishops' Conference Coordinates Church Response to the Needs of Migrants and Refugees," The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), May 6, 2023, <https://www.icmc.net/2023/05/06/southern-african-bishops-conference-coordinates-church-response-to-the-needs-of-migrants-and-refugees/>. The statement of the conference says, "While we found some existing services and assistance, there was a real lack of a coordinated, sustainable Church response to the situation of refugees and migrants in South Africa."



sorts of injustices.<sup>20</sup> Within this context, other youth programmes made church leaders be aware of the problem of girls migrating from Iringa rural areas to big cities.<sup>21</sup> It was also found that families wanted their girls to migrate to big cities to look for job opportunities to earn money for themselves and their extended families. However, when seeking to mitigate the problem, church leaders identified the disadvantage of girls migrating into cities without any orientation regarding the adverse side of life in the cities, which was problematic.<sup>22</sup>

### **A Lutheran Missiological and Diaconal Approach in Addressing the Negative Impact of Girls' Migration to Big Cities**

The plausible findings of this study show that leaders of the ELCT Iringa Diocese were aware of the problem of girls migrating to cities.<sup>23</sup> However, respondents suggested only ways to mitigate the problem without indicating the gender-related injustices that were leading to the negative impact of girls' migration into cities.<sup>24</sup> Some studies mentioned above had found out that injustice experienced by girls is based on a social construct of their gender. Right from birth, girls are put in

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<sup>20</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 47–48

<sup>21</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 49

<sup>22</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 66.

<sup>24</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 66–70. There is a mention of advocacy from respondents, it but does not include how advocacy has to be conducted to prevent recruiting or trafficking girls for risky jobs in cities.

a subordinate position compared to boys and, therefore, denied equal social position, inheritance of property, and stigmatised spiritually and psychologically as subjects of men.<sup>25</sup> This situation reveals that the ELCT, in general, and the Iringa Diocese, in particular, have not implemented the gender justice policy developed by the global communion of the Lutheran World Federation.<sup>26</sup> Such lack of implementation is problematic according to the worldwide discussion on mission and diakonia. This calls for the need to think holistically when doing mission and providing services in our context without discriminating people based on their race, gender, and economic status, and without destroying God's creation in which people live for generations.<sup>27</sup>

Lutheran traditions cherish its theological lens, which acknowledges the “priesthood of all believers” as a

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<sup>25</sup> Msalilwa, *The Response of the Church to Girls' Migration*, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Elaine Neuenfeldt, ed., *Gender Justice Policy* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation - A Communion of Churches, 2013), 7–9.

<sup>27</sup> A breakthrough in the discussion about active engagement of the church in mission and diakonia has been to act from below (the context) and take seriously the agony of people suffering from injustices as a means to deal with the root causes of the problem rather than treating the symptoms or diseases, see Jack Messenger, ed., *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, Department for Mission and Development, 2004), 32–42. See also Kjell Nordstokke, ed., *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, Department for Mission and Development, 2004), 40–92.

basis of human equality before God.<sup>28</sup> According to Martin Luther, "... a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."<sup>29</sup> This thesis justifies the notion that all Christians are equal.<sup>30</sup> Luther's traditions did not wrestle with whether men were superior and women inferior.<sup>31</sup> However, Luther's logical thinking was that justification does not depend on the human construct of social customs, laws, and virtues, which makes it clear that Lutheran Christians are open to reflecting upon their attitudes towards women and marginalised people. This undertaking may contribute to strengthening Lutheran engagement in the discussion of gender inequality in global and local, public spaces.

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<sup>28</sup> Faustin Mahali, "The Relationship between Ecclesiology, Ministry, Vocation and Good Governance: A Case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania," *Africa Theological Journal* 38, no. 1 (2021): 43.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs, A. T. W. Steinhäuser, and W. A. Lambert, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 277.

<sup>30</sup> This conclusion does not mean that Luther treated men and women equally.

<sup>31</sup> Probably a blame today that Luther justified the subordination of women comes from his commentary on Galatians 3:28; Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1939), 79–80. Commenting this text Luther states, "... [w]hether a servant performs his duties well; whether those who are in authority govern wisely; whether a man marries, provides for his family, and is an honest citizen; whether a woman is chaste, obedient to her husband, and a good mother: all these advantages do not qualify a person for salvation. These virtues are commendable, of course; but they do not count points for justification. All the best laws, ceremonies, religions, and deeds of the world cannot take away sin guilt, cannot dispatch death, cannot purchase life." He seems to commend the status quo of women as being socially bound to taking care of children and being obedient to their husbands.

Today, many African theologians agree men and women are equal before God and before each other. However, a paradox is that the empowerment of women is still hindered by social obligations like family care.<sup>32</sup> A common belief is that when you empower women, then you empower the whole family. Often, however, even well-intentioned statements may hinder gender justice. Sayings like, “behind a successful man, there is a woman,” serves the purpose of degrading women instead of uplifting them. Generally, this labelling does not differ from the Lutheran theological tradition above and biblical interpretations that justify the subordination of women. Nevertheless, the Bible is also clear about the equality of humanity before God. Theological discourses shall, thus, achieve equal involvement of boys and girls, men and women, in the affairs of individual and social well-being.<sup>33</sup>

From the perspective of women theologians, the African context provides an opportunity of thinking about God, who has created gender, while God has no gender.<sup>34</sup> It is not true that African cultures and worldviews are simply and entirely patriarchal. Instead, there is the

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<sup>32</sup> Mercy A. Oduyoye, *African Women's Theologies, Spirituality, and Healing: Theological Perspectives from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, 2018 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2019), 79.

<sup>33</sup> Oduyoye, *African Women's Theologies*, 84.

<sup>34</sup> Oduyoye, *African Women's Theologies*, 140. Oduyoye, while aware of the repressive constructs of patriarchy against women, she still thinks that theological perception of God among Africans is holistic and God is not thought to be neither male nor female or in between when she says, “... [t]he gendered pronoun does not exist in many African language...God is not a sexual being and is without gender.”

chance for African feminism and/or womanism to argue for the idea that God's encounter with human beings is holistic and impartial. The systematic error of a masculine-dominated understanding of God has been culturally and semantically affirmed by an uncritical reception of Western cultures that embraced the masculine as a way of expansion of Western empires (or kingdoms). The Lutheran church, being the product of this context, has not escaped from dichotomising God into masculine-feminine categories and, hence, inculcated male-dominant Christianity, whereby the interests of women are always perceived from the perspective of male domination. It is no wonder that the respondents about the role of the church in liberating girls who are trapped in city life still favour male domination and did not consider gender disparity a pushing factor for the girls to attempt new life in cities.

It is obvious from this study that an effective approach should be developed to prevent negative movements of girls to cities. There should be a sound theology based on the Lutheran traditions that foster God's emancipation of both men and women as equally created in the image of God. To achieve this, the church, especially the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and its leadership which is still predominantly male, has to contextualize the LWF gender justice policy and interpret and contextualise the two LWF documents on mission and diakonia, and come out with workable solutions to address the problem of recruiting and trafficking of girls for sexual and economic exploitation.

The urgency of the church to respond to the challenges faced by girls who migrate to cities has to begin with empowering them with faith that fosters behaviours that nurture wellness in life.<sup>35</sup> God's empowerment of all humanity is crucial to liberating men and women from evil. This is reflected more in the *Diakonia in Context* document, where "it emphasises that women and men are made in the image of God, with equal stewardship goals, and are baptized into equal communion and energized by the Holy Spirit to be equally responsible for the whole of God's creation."<sup>36</sup> Empowerment based on human rights is not as powerful as the spiritual empowerment based on what God has provided through bestowed gifts and sacrificial action for all humans. This resonates with the predominant African religious worldview of the holistic view of God's encounter with men and women through the framework of love. Despite patriarchal elements in African primal religion, the implication can be seen that a holistic understanding of a loving God breaks through all human constructs against women.

A relevant theological perspective from Lutheran tradition is the interpretation of the third article of the Apostles' Creed, where Luther speaks of God's inclusive sanctification and providence of spiritual gifts to all Christians (implicitly all men and women).<sup>37</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup> God empowers all individual Christian men and women to carry out the mission activities of the church; Messenger, *Mission in Context*, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Nordstokke, *Diakonia in Context*, 67.

<sup>37</sup> Henry E. Jacobs, ed., *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication Society, 1911), 68–72.

understanding is that the Holy Spirit endows or imparts spiritual gifts to anyone without partiality, which results in making women feel accommodated and accepted.<sup>38</sup> So, for the Iringa Diocese to have a breakthrough in improving gender justice at the grassroots level, it may foster the understanding and work for the practical implementation of such pneumatological affirmation. All humans, including women, are provided with the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the same way as men are provided.

Having discussed the Lutheran possible contextualisation of African thinking about God and its advantage against Western Christianity enthroned with patriarchal constructs, it is obvious that this Lutheran theological lens has to be embraced today. Christian education will mainstream gender equality in its teaching to reflect God, who is impartial and empowers all men and women.

## Conclusion

First, other non-religious studies in Tanzania have provided clear results when they discovered socio-cultural aspects to be part of the problem of girls migrating to big cities. In our view, it has to be made clear that girls who migrate to cities face different challenges of gender-based discrimination than boys, therefore

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<sup>38</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Transformed, Freed, Empowered: The Spirit's Work in the Gifting and Vocation of All Believers," in *"We Believe in the Holy Spirit": Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities*, ed. Chad M. Rimmer and Cheryl M. Peterson, LWF Documentation (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2021), 201–203.

reducing the chances of their wellbeing. In this respect, well-coordinated campaigns within Lutheran congregations are needed in order to be able to meet the challenge of girls' migration into cities. In order to achieve this goal, rural and urban Lutheran dioceses and other churches must cooperate.

Second, it is a crucial discovery of this article that the Evangelical Lutheran Church— Iringa Diocese has not yet implemented the Gender justice policy and has failed to respond sufficiently to the problem of girls' migration from Iringa rural areas to big cities in Tanzania. The Lutheran idea of the justification of all human beings by grace and not by the works of customs and laws, and, furthermore, the pneumatological affirmation of the giftedness of both, males and females, must inform a way of overcoming gender-based disadvantaging of girls. Furthermore, in many ways, the Holy Spirit seems to be perceived by many African women as resonating with the genderless naming of God in some of traditional African religions. If the Lutheran Church, locally and globally, realises the contextualisation of such gender-inclusive perception in its practice, it will overcome the practice of favouring patriarchal over matriarchal social systems and accept without stereotyping that all people are equal before God.

Lastly, this study reveals that more efforts are needed to develop theological instruction that responds to the problems and vulnerability of women in society. This theology has to consider a holistic view provided by a concept of salvation in the Trinity that is impartial and



without prejudice. The action taken by Christians against discrimination of girls who may migrate to cities or elsewhere could be extended to other public spaces where women are often degraded and thought of as second-class people.

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