

# Care for the Elderly

## **The Extended Family Collapses**

AIDS is killing so many Kenyan adults in the 20-45 age group that the extended family structure, so basic to African culture, is breaking down. Once, old people were secure in the knowledge that they would end their days peacefully in the supportive family community. Now, they find themselves totally overwhelmed as they care for sick and dying children, and for orphaned grandchildren. Following the death of many younger family members, many old people feel completely isolated, and end their days alone in wretched poverty.

## **Ministry to the Senior Citizens**

The ministry to the senior citizens is one of the key Mission programs and it undertakes the task of identifying, assessing and reaching the needy and frail elderly people of age 75 years and over in the community.

IcFEM Local Transformation Units in each area have an assistant coordinator and three facilitators who work on the following:

- (a) Health, nutrition and clothing;
- (b) Social needs for housing, relationships, spiritual nourishment and recreation;
- (c) Legal needs for asset ownership, legacies and will making. These leaders work together to help to effectively address the challenges which the senior citizens face.

Research in our communities has showed that the major issues which are common and affect older people in our society are:

- (a) Poverty eradication - poverty is seen in terms of older people obtaining food, housing, clothing and bedding. The Mission is helping to repair and provide houses for those who are very frail and needy and often this is undertaken with the help of the gap/volunteer programme.
- (b) Illness - many of the elderly people are frequently sick and these people have been identified within the local community. Part of the community health program will be to run mobile clinics which will allow these elderly people to be visited regularly and treated appropriately.
- (c) Loneliness - most of the families ignore their older people. The Mission is teaching communities, families and relatives so that they are aware of their responsibility to ensure that the older people are looked after. Through the Fellowships people are identified within the community and following a report to the assistant coordinator the leaders have met with many of the older people to share the word of God with them and to help them to meet their daily and basic needs as soon as possible.

## **An example of a meeting for the older people:**

Last year the Kamukuywa Local Transformation Unit hosted a meeting for older people in their unit centre. There was a tremendous turnout and brother Tatwa shared the word of God with them, a meal was provided and some of their needs met. Seeing these people made it clear that they required both spiritual and physical nourishment as well as help with food, clothing, housing and bedding. The older people responded enthusiastically and were very happy and joyful to be looked after in this way.

In the coming months and years the Mission is praying that other Local Transformation Units will put on similar activities for the frail and needy older people so that it becomes clear how they can be helped by changes within both society and communities.

SA, Assistant Coordinator with responsibility for Ministry to Senior Citizens.