

## **Circumcision Project – Background 2006**

There are vast differences between different tribes in Kenya; some do not circumcise at all and others do not have the elaborate and expensive Luhya rituals. When asked about circumcision a Kikuyu man expressed surprise that the Luhya still "wasted money" that way and "No wonder they are so poor" was his comment. All the men involved in the Circumcision Project are themselves Luhyas and know exactly what is involved. Teams go out into the Community discussing circumcision in gatherings with Chiefs, Village Elders, Pastors and opinion leaders. Only men do this.

The economics of the exercise were in the 2004 Mission newspaper. In 2006 the sensitisation meetings found that the cost of a traditional circumcision ranges from 40000/- to 75000/-, which is one or two years school fees. One man who brought his boys to the project in 2004 commented that his bulls were now safe and another man went to roof his house with the money saved.

This area is known for poverty and the Mission is aiming to accelerate community transformation. Some remarkable results have been seen and anything sustainable which lifts people up from the depths of poverty is welcome.

The morality of traditional circumcision is another story. A Primary Head teacher told the Mission that in the January following Circumcision, on average 20 girls were sent away from her school pregnant. When the first project was undertaken in Kimilili in 2002, there were NO pregnancies in her school in the following January. The distress caused to committed Christian girls at Circumcision time is very great.

As part of the Circumcision Project there is a "passing out" ceremony at the end of the school term following the Circumcision.

The local Vicar, himself a Luhya, was asked about circumcision and this was his response.

### **CIRCUMCISION IN KENYA**

By Rev. Julius Wamukota Okumu

This is a common practice among Bantus in Kenya but the Nilotics do not practice it i.e. Luos and Tesos.

Circumcision was normally done when harvesting has been done and during even years. They believed odd years are years of misfortune and therefore things to do with celebration could not be done. Normally it was done in August or later up to December.

- The celebration starts on the day before the circumcision and ends on the day it is done.
- It included calling most relatives from both sides, which could take up to two weeks. The boy moves around with bells and a group of other children and adults accompanying him. They make a lot of noise and sometimes the boy is smeared with white mud.
- For the Bukusus, an uncle from the mother's side, was to kill an animal the day before circumcision and when the boy arrives in his home another is killed.

- Then singing, celebrating, eating and drinking is done throughout the night. There is a lot of immorality which is encouraged by the songs which are sung. Very early next morning the boy is smeared with river mud all over his the body and on arrival home he is circumcised.
- Later on there is another expensive celebration when the boys are declared men and told to go and prove their manhood. They are told every female is “an open door” unless the lady is married.

The Kikuyu tradition was almost the same but they were affected more during early 1950's during the “Mau Mau emergency”. Most of them were arrested and put in camps so that they could not live a normal family life during the “emergency”. They lived under pressure and because of this poor life and they could no longer celebrate. After the “emergency” they concentrated on building up their economy and since the hospitals offered alternatives to circumcise the boys the Kikuyus looked at it and accepted it as a cheaper alternative and never went back to the traditional way again.

This was a big transformation for the Kikuyus. They are now considered the richest tribe and are often good businessmen with a much higher standard of living than the Luhya. They laugh at the Luhya as still being in poverty due to expensive traditions.