

Exploring the Kagera's Socio-economic Transformation and its Impact on Social Cohesion, A case of Kagera, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study explores the socio-economic factors contributing to family disintegration, focusing on the decline in agricultural productivity, the emergence of HIV and AIDS, and the drop in coffee prices as key influences. Through qualitative analysis and interviews with stakeholders in the Kagera region of Tanzania, it examines how these socio-economic challenges have affected family dynamics and cohesion. The findings reveal the significant impact of soil infertility on agricultural productivity, worsening food insecurity and creating economic hardships for farming-dependent families. Additionally, the fall in coffee prices has reduced household incomes, pushing families to prioritize individual survival over collective well-being, which has led to the emergence of street children and beggars in the region. By analysing the interplay between economic forces and family dynamics, this study offers valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to address the underlying causes of family disintegration and foster resilience in communities.

Keywords: *Family Cohesion, Family Disintegration, Beggars, Street Children*

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the intricate familial network in Tanzania's Kagera region has undergone significant changes. Historically, this area was known for its strong social structure, which relied on family ties to foster support and harmony. Within this system, the community collectively shouldered the responsibility of caring for all members, especially the vulnerable. In the early 20th century, Bronisław Malinowski highlighted the importance of social cohesion in cultural organizations, viewing it as both a cause and a result of their effective functioning (Ruhinda et al., 2022; Tylor et al., 2018).

Over the past few decades, there have been notable transformations in the complex network of familial relationships within Tanzania's Kagera region. Historically renowned for its robust social structure, this area relied heavily on familial bonds to maintain support and harmony. Within this framework, communal responsibility extended to the care of all members, particularly those most vulnerable. In the early 20th century, Bronisław Malinowski underscored the critical role of social cohesion in cultural institutions, positing it as both a catalyst and an outcome of their operational efficacy (Ruhinda et al., 2022; Tylor et al., 2018).

However, the dawn of the late 1980s and early 1990s marked a significant turning point. The once stable socio-economic landscape began to shift, influenced by a confluence of factors that would ultimately unravel the fabric of familial unity. While Kagera had long prided itself on being free from the sight of street children and beggars, the onset of economic decline and the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic ushered in an era of unprecedented challenges. In acknowledgement of the impact of HIV and AIDS on the region, (Kwesigabo, 2001), (Ksoll, 2007), asserted that Kagera Region in Tanzania, was one of the first region globally to experience a high HIV prevalence and the rise of orphans as a result of AIDS.

Moreover, the scourge of HIV/AIDS exacted a heavy toll on the very foundations of familial stability. The loss of breadwinners, coupled with the stigma and discrimination surrounding the disease, further eroded the sense of solidarity within communities. Children, often left orphaned and vulnerable, found themselves adrift in a world where the concept of family became increasingly fragmented.

The collapse of local economies, worsened by broader microeconomic shifts, placed significant strain on households already dealing with the burden of disease. This phenomenon mirrors findings in Bulgaria, as observed by Milenkova et al, (2016). They noted that the economic crisis during the transition years (1990 to the present) severely affected contemporary Bulgarian families, eroding their value system and exacerbating internal strife. Traditional family values like goodwill, support, empathy, and respect were diminished, supplanted by egocentrism, distrust, and concerns for survival.

As livelihoods faltered and resources diminished, the traditional safety nets provided by extended families began to weaken. In a study by Lwihula, G., et al, (1993), it was revealed that the number of orphaned children was rapidly increasing in Kagera, alongside challenges related to dependent elderly individuals in need of care and support. Additionally, economic activities such as tending to agricultural crops were declining due to frequent deaths and burial ceremonies, potentially leading to dependence on external sources for food and material support within the region.

Previously, orphans found solace and support within kinship networks. However, they now faced the harsh reality of abandonment and neglect. The Regional Social Welfare Officer for the Kagera region, cited by the Daily News on May 10th, 2013, highlighted the alarming increase in street children and those living in vulnerable conditions in the Kagera Region. The numbers had surged from 97,700 in 2011 to over 140,000 in the preceding year. RSWO, attributed this rise to broken marriages, poverty, and a lack of family planning, which compelled children to live on the streets from a young age before turning into beggars.

In this context, the once prevalent notion of the extended family gave way to the emergence of the nuclear family as the predominant unit of social organization. The bonds that had once bound communities together began to loosen, replaced by a pervasive sense of isolation and disintegration. Against this backdrop of socio-economic upheaval, the Kagera region serves as a poignant case study, offering valuable insights into the complex interplay between economic forces and familial dynamics. By delving into the root causes of family disintegration, this study seeks to shed light on the challenges facing communities in the wake of transformative change. Through a nuanced examination of the socio-economic factors at play, we endeavour to uncover pathways toward the restoration of familial cohesion and resilience in the face of adversity.

Family cohesion, defined as emotional ties within families, has traditionally been reinforced by extended family networks in African contexts like Tanzania. However, socio-economic changes, such as shifts in agriculture and employment, have weakened these structures. McMichael (2017) and Nkosi & Daniels (2020) note that declining agricultural output has destabilized household incomes, particularly in cash crops like coffee (Williams, 2018; Gillingham et al., 2021).

HIV/AIDS has drastically impacted family dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa, with Tanzania, especially Kagera, facing severe consequences. Kweka and Urassa (2015) highlight how the epidemic has increased the number of orphans, straining extended family units. Kakulu et al. (2020) emphasize the financial and emotional toll of losing family members. Women, who often assume caregiving roles, have faced increased burdens, intensifying gender disparities (Kwesigabo, 2001; Lwihula et al., 1993).

Kagera's economy, heavily dependent on agriculture, has been affected by falling coffee prices and soil degradation, as described by Bryceson (2010) and Ponte (2002). Food insecurity due to declining crop yields (Jayne et al., 2014) has weakened the ability of families to care for additional members, including orphans. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) have further exacerbated rural poverty, reducing government support for farmers (Abdallah & Monela, 2007), and contributing to the rise of street children and beggars.

Kagera has seen a shift from communal to nuclear family structures due to modernization and socio-economic changes. Mbugua (2013) argues that individualism has eroded traditional family support systems. The influence of Western religion has also reduced practices like levirate marriage, once essential for family stability (Mbiti, 1990). Economic hardship has further emphasized personal financial success over community welfare, weakening familial ties (Kilonzo, 2012). Religious leaders in Kagera have expressed concern over moral decline and its role in family disintegration (Magesa, 1997).

METHODOLOGY

The Study Area

Kagera, with Bukoba as its focal point, is an ideal area for studying socio-economic transformations and their impact on family disintegration. Historically, the region emphasized traditional family and clan bonds, fostering unity and social cohesion. As Tylor et al. (2018) describe, social cohesion involves the coordination and stability of relationships that benefit the group collectively. In Kagera, these bonds ensured that even orphans were cared for within the extended family network, as noted by Olsson et al. (2016). However, the decline of these traditional bonds has led to the rise of street children and beggars—phenomena previously unheard of in the region—due to weakened family and clan solidarity.

By studying Kagera, particularly Bukoba, researchers can explore the causes and effects of family disintegration in the context of evolving socio-economic conditions. Understanding the erosion of traditional bonds offers insights into the mechanisms driving these changes and their broader impacts. Additionally, this research can help policymakers develop interventions to address the root causes of disintegration and promote family resilience, contributing to social inclusion and sustainable development in the region.

The Study design

This study adopts a case study design, as described by Bryman (2006), to conduct an in-depth investigation of socio-economic transformations and their effects on family and social cohesion. Through detailed qualitative interviews and document analysis, the study aims to uncover the nuanced interactions between economic changes and family dynamics. A total of 20 respondents were selected, representing diverse backgrounds. Ten were beggars in Bukoba town, chosen to provide first-hand experiences of a phenomenon that remains relatively rare in Kagera. These individuals were found near major shops and markets.

The study also included social welfare officers from areas where begging is prevalent, who offered insights into existing initiatives addressing begging. Village elders from two villages where some beggars originate contributed perspectives on family cohesion and disintegration, highlighting factors that may lead to begging. Additionally, four religious leaders were selected for their experience in working with families in the region, providing valuable input on the societal and cultural influences affecting the rise in begging.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, conducted respectfully to encourage openness. The data was analyzed using a cross-sectional indexing approach, which organized the information into common themes across different respondent groups. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the factors driving begging and the broader social context. By incorporating diverse perspectives from beggars, social welfare officers, village elders, and religious leaders, the study aimed to identify potential interventions to address begging in the Kagera region.

FINDINGS

The study encompassed a total of twenty respondents from various backgrounds. This included ten individuals who engage in daily begging, many of whom are situated at the entrances of prominent shops and markets in Bukoba town. The objective was to understand their experiences and the factors leading them to beg, considering that begging is a recent occurrence in Kagera. Additionally, another group of respondents consisted of social welfare officers from the wards where beggars are prevalent. The aim was to gain insight into their programs and strategies for addressing this unfamiliar phenomenon within the Kagera region. The last group of the respondents were the religious leaders often play a significant role in addressing the needs of street children and beggars in their communities. Their work may involve providing shelter, food, and clothing for those in need, as well as offering emotional support and guidance. Additionally, religious leaders may advocate for policies and programs that address the root causes of homelessness and poverty, and they may collaborate with other community organizations to provide comprehensive assistance to vulnerable populations. Through their teachings and outreach efforts, religious leaders can promote compassion, empathy, and social justice, encouraging their communities to respond with kindness and generosity towards those who are marginalized or in need.

The first group of respondents were those who are working as beggars in Bukoba Municipality. One of the key respondents, aged 63 shared insightful information regarding his circumstances and reasons for engaging in begging. He narrated how he started begging.

"I started begging after falling sick with polio in class five, which left me with mobility impairment. Since 1996, begging has been my main source of income. I have no vocational skills or higher education to pursue other opportunities." (KII/Age 63/Male/Bukoba town/23 March, 2024)

Despite being impaired, the respondent above, has social responsibilities which he fulfils as he asserts:

"I have a family to support, including my wife and seven children who rely on the money I earn from begging to attend school. Despite my disability, I try to provide for them by working (begging) from Monday to Friday, earning between Tshs 6,000 and Tsh 10,000 per day." (KII/Age 63/Male/Bukoba town/23 March, 2024)

He also must provide for basic necessities such as housing, food, and clothing for himself and his family. Since he lives far from his home village, he must pay rent for the room he occupies during the weekdays, while on weekends, he reunites with his family in the village.

"I rent a room in town and occasionally visit my family in the village, located 30 kilometres away. I spend Tshs 6,000 on transportation every Saturday to be with them." (KII/Age 63/Male/Bukoba town/23 March, 2024)

The respondent emphasizes that the income he earns is utilized collectively for the family's needs. Additionally, his wife actively contributes to the family's welfare by working on the farm and overseeing household affairs while he is away in town.

"In addition to the earnings I receive from begging, my wife supplements our income by managing a banana farm. However, we do not receive any assistance from relatives". (KII/Age 63/Male/Bukoba town/23 March, 2024)

He also believes he could start a business with the right capital. He is particularly interested in opening a shoe polishing kiosk if he receives assistance from either the government or another benefactor.

"I am limited in the type of work I can do due to my disability, but I am open to opportunities such as shoe polishing or other small businesses if supported by the government or philanthropists." (KII/Age 63/Male/Bukoba town/23 March, 2024)

In response to why beggars are emerging contrary to the traditions of caring for people with disabilities and orphans within families or clans in Kagera, the respondent highlighted several contributing factors. Firstly, he identified food scarcity as a primary concern, attributing it to the depletion of soil fertility in the region. This scarcity forces families to prioritize caring for immediate members only, making it challenging to support non-working adults. He also mentions the impact of declining coffee prices, the region's main cash crop, on the standard of living and economic hardship. The diminishing income is carefully allocated to family members, eroding the sense of communal responsibility observed in the past.

"In Kagera, the breakdown of our social fabric is palpable, driven by the scarcity of food resulting from depleted soil fertility and the exorbitant cost of living due to plummeting coffee prices, leaving us grappling with the harsh realities of survival." (KII/Age 59/Male/Bukoba town/25 March, 2024)

Furthermore, the respondent blames the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS, which have left many children orphaned and unattended. The loss of manpower due to these diseases has further weakened individual economies and strained familial bonds.

"In the 1980s and early 1990s, HIV and AIDS claimed the lives of many able-bodied men and women in our families, leaving behind children to fend for themselves. This tragic loss paved the way for a generation of vulnerable youth, susceptible to the harsh realities of life on the streets and resorting to begging for survival." (KII/Age 59/Male/Bukoba town/25 March, 2024)

This narrative highlights the complex socio-economic factors influencing individuals' decisions to engage in begging and the challenges they face in supporting themselves and their families. Responses from other significant respondents included a woman who engages in begging in Bukoba municipality. She is 51 years old and a mother of two. Born with a disability that renders her unable to walk, she was raised by her parents. Unfortunately, her mother passed away after she completed seventh grade, and her father remarried. Subsequently, her father, a civil servant, was imprisoned, leaving the family under the care of her stepmother and his brother. However, her brother abandoned the family after getting married and starting his own. At that point, she was expelled by her stepmother and ended up on the streets. She began her career as a cobbler, but due to the lack of customers, she eventually transitioned to full-time begging at the entrances of major shops and restaurants.

On responding on the question about how she makes the living she asserted that:

"I earn approximately ten thousand Tanzanian Shillings per day, which I use for my daily needs such as food and transportation. I hire a motorcycle to commute between the place where I beg and my home. Additionally, I pay rent for the room I occupy. I also receive some financial support, though a peanut from my two married daughters." (KII/Age 51/Female/Bukoba town/27 March, 2024)

She also responded on the question why she was expelled from home by her step mother despite the fact that formerly there was no any problem of his staying at home. She said it was on economic reasons:

“My stepmother explained that she couldn't afford to support me at home because she struggled to provide food and other basic necessities, especially with her own young children to care for as a single mother relying on a small farm. Additionally, my relatives, including my uncles, showed little concern for our family after my father was imprisoned. They prioritized their own families' needs over ours, in contrast to the strong familial bonds that were present in the past.” (KII/Age 51/Female/Bukoba town/27 March, 2024)

Respondents also detailed the care of family members with disabilities within their households. Children born with disabilities were typically kept at home from infancy through adulthood, often remaining there until their passing. In some instances, these individuals were restricted to particular rooms where their essential needs were catered for. One respondent from Bugene village in Karagwe described a practice of containing a family member with mental health issues, allowing them the freedom to move within the home premises known locally as shamba. However, they were unable to step beyond the boundaries of their home throughout their lifetime. According to the respondent, this was enforced through the use of specific medications that regulated their movements.

“I know a family who lived next to my plot and had a member with a mental condition. They controlled his movements using medication, allowing him to only move within their property. It was surprising that at times he would chase away kids trying to steal fruits from their garden, yet he never crossed the boundaries of their family's land”. (KII/Age 67/Female/Bugene Village, Karagwe/02 March, 2024)

A number of respondents highlighted economic factors as significant contributors for the disintegration of family bond in Kagera region. Many cited dwindling personal earnings and the shift towards nuclear family structures as key reasons for the breakdown of traditional familial support systems. Additionally, the scarcity of food resulting from soil infertility, particularly affecting banana crops, emerged as a pressing concern among locals, exacerbating economic hardships.

Another respondent, aged 25, has suffered from eye impairment since the age of seven and currently works as a permanent beggar in the municipality of Bukoba. He revealed that although his parents are alive in one of the villages, they were unable to accommodate him at home when he reached maturity. Feeling harassed and burdened by his family, he resorted to leaving and begging on the streets. Despite attempts by his maternal and paternal uncles to intervene and persuade his father to keep him, his father insisted that if they believed it was easy to care for him, they should take him themselves. This marked the end of his ties with his family.

“My parents are still alive, and even my other relatives like uncles, aunts, and elder siblings who are well-off are aware of my begging activities. However, they show no concern for me. Feeling neglected within my family, I made the decision to flee to town, which led me to begin begging. I am uncertain how long this situation will persist”. (KII/Age 25/Male/Bukoba town/29 March, 2024)

Furthermore, the emergence of HIV and AIDS was identified as a critical catalyst for the increase in street children and beggars within the municipality. The devastating effects of the epidemic left numerous children orphaned and unattended, forcing them into vulnerable situations where they had to fend for themselves. As a result, the fabric of family cohesion weakened, as households struggled to cope with the socio-economic fallout of the disease.

Overall, the stories shared by respondents highlighted the complex relationship between socio-economic factors and health issues that lead to the breakdown of family ties in the region. Economic hardships, exacerbated by the effects of HIV and AIDS, have altered traditional family structures, leaving numerous individuals and children marginalized and exposed to the harsh realities of street life, as one respondent emphasized.

“HIV/AIDS has profoundly affected our family's cohesion, as it regards all extended family members as siblings. The presence of HIV/AIDS in the community has resulted in many orphans and widows, making it challenging for family members to support and care for each other”. (KII/Age 61/Male/Bukoba town/5 April, 2024)

Addressing these underlying issues requires comprehensive interventions aimed at revitalizing community support systems and mitigating the root causes of family disintegration.

Insights from four different religious leaders shed light on the complex nature of the phenomenon. These leaders emphasized several key factors contributing to the disintegration of familial bonds within the Kagera region. Firstly, the religious leaders highlighted the rise of individualism as a significant driver of family disintegration. They observed a shift away from collective responsibility and communal support towards a more individualistic mind-set. This emphasis on individual needs and aspirations has weakened the traditional ties that once bound families together, leading to increased fragmentation and isolation within communities.

Secondly, the religious leaders pointed to moral decay as a pervasive issue exacerbating family disintegration. They noted a decline in moral values and ethical standards, which has eroded the foundation of trust and mutual respect essential for cohesive familial relationships. This moral decline has manifested in various forms, including increased conflict, breakdown of communication, and neglect of familial duties. One religious leader summarises that:

"The decline in moral values and ethical standards has eroded the foundation of trust and mutual respect essential for cohesive familial relationships" (KII/Age 55/Male/Bukoba town/20 March, 2024)

Furthermore, economic decline emerged as a prominent theme in the religious leaders' responses. They highlighted the loss of soil fertility and the fall in the price of coffee as key economic factors contributing to family disintegration. The depletion of soil fertility has led to reduced agricultural productivity, exacerbating food insecurity and economic hardship for families reliant on farming. Similarly, the decline in coffee prices has diminished household incomes, forcing families to prioritize individual survival over collective well-being. Another religious leader commented:

"The loss of soil fertility and the fall in the price of coffee are among the key economic factors contributing to family disintegration". (KII/Age 47/Male/Bukoba town/23 March, 2024)

Religious institutions often find themselves in the midst of both government and community efforts to address the challenges posed by

street children and beggars, with a particular focus on the profound loss of family and social bonds. In an interview, a religious leader commented:

“As religious institutions, our programs for street children and beggars are based on our values of compassion and justice. We recognize every person's inherent dignity and worth, regardless of their circumstances, and feel it is our responsibility to provide care and assistance to those in need. Our programs seek to meet the immediate needs of street children and beggars by giving shelter, food, and clothes, as well as chances for education, skill development, and emotional support. In addition, we aim to address the root causes of homelessness and poverty through lobbying, community engagement, and collaboration with local organizations and governments. Our ultimate goal is to build a more inclusive and caring society in which everyone has the opportunity to prosper and realize their potential”. (KII/Age 47/Male/Bukoba town/23 March, 2024)

Overall, the insights provided by the religious leaders underscore the complex interplay of socio-economic and cultural factors shaping family dynamics within the Kagera region. By acknowledging the role of individualism, moral decay, and economic decline in driving family disintegration, policymakers and stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to address these root causes and promote family resilience and cohesion.

Despite religious leaders attributing moral decay and economic problems as factors contributing to the decline in family cohesion, the introduction of “*new religions*” also plays a role in this trend. The practice of levirate was historically mentioned as providing security for children whose father passed away during their infancy. In this practice, the brother of the deceased would marry the widow of his fallen brother for two primary reasons: to ensure the security of the children and their property, and to perpetuate the lineage of his deceased brother. An octogenarian respondent residing on the outskirts of Bukoba township shared insights regarding the practice of levirate and its impact on social cohesion:

“When I was still a toddler, my father passed away, leaving my mother with four other children. Shortly thereafter, my uncle married my mother and assumed full responsibility for her and my siblings. This arrangement ensured the protection of the properties left by our father, as there was now a man in the household—a principle captured in the local saying that “a house without a man is nobody’s house.” However, with the advent of Christianity, such traditions have ceased. Now, when a man dies, his widow cannot be married to her brother-in-law. Instead, relatives often

prioritize claiming and withholding the deceased's properties, thereby pushing children into destitution and potentially onto the streets".
(KII/Age 83/Male/Bukoba town/23 March, 2024)

The assertion was supported by an elderly woman respondent who underwent levirate marriage. She was married to her brother-in-law after her husband passed away. She acknowledges the tradition that safeguarded her properties and ensured the upbringing of her children with both parents, unlike if she were a single mother.

"After my husband passed away, I underwent levirate marriage and married my brother-in-law. This tradition ensured that my properties were safeguarded and my children were raised with both parents, which wouldn't have been the case if I were a single mother. It is unfortunate that this is no longer practiced due to Christianity and of course the fear of the new disease¹"(KII/Age 80/Female/Kanazi/27 March, 2024)

Economic downturns, compounded by broader microeconomic shifts, placed immense strain on households already grappling with the burden of disease. With livelihoods faltering and resources dwindling, the traditional safety nets of extended families began to fray. This erosion of familial support was particularly evident as orphans, once embraced within the fold of kinship networks, found themselves abandoned and neglected in the wake of familial hardships.

The dire impact of HIV/AIDS heightened the vulnerability of familial stability, as the loss of breadwinners, compounded by the stigma attached to the disease, weakened the bonds of solidarity within communities. As a result, children orphaned by the epidemic found themselves increasingly vulnerable, navigating a world where familial connections grew more fragmented. In response, a religious leader remarked:

"In the wake of HIV and AIDS, we witness the heart-breaking reality where countless families in Kagera lose both parents, leaving children orphaned and vulnerable, with some thrust into the role of stepchildren, their innocence overshadowed by the harshness of circumstance."
(KII/Age 55/Female/Bugene Karagwe/27 March, 2024)

In response to these challenges, the once prevalent extended family structure yielded to the emergence of the nuclear family as the

¹ New disease refers to HIV/ AIDS in Kagera context.

predominant unit of social organization. This shift underscored a pervasive sense of isolation and disintegration, as traditional community support systems gave way to individualistic survival strategies.

The regional government, represented by the Regional Social Welfare Officer, acknowledges the presence of beggars and street children, particularly in major towns like Bukoba. It also recognizes that these phenomena are relatively recent developments in the region. Traditionally, the people of Kagera had systems in place to support disabled individuals and orphans, but now some of these individuals have unfortunately become beggars and street children, respectively.

The Regional Social Welfare Officer attributes the rapid increase in beggars and street children in the region to the breakdown of families, primarily caused by social issues such as divorce, deaths often due to HIV and AIDS, moral decay, and individualism.

"The rapid increase in beggars and street children in our region can largely be attributed to the breakdown of families, driven by social issues like divorce, deaths related to HIV and AIDS, moral decay, and increasing individualism." (Regional Social Welfare Officer, 3 May, 2024)

The narratives provided by respondents underscore the complex interplay of socio-economic and health-related factors shaping family dynamics in Kagera. Addressing the root causes of family disintegration necessitates holistic interventions aimed at revitalizing community support systems and fostering resilience in the face of adversity. By understanding the complexities of these transformations, policymakers and stakeholders can chart pathways toward restoring familial cohesion and strengthening community resilience in the Kagera region.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that a combination of economic challenges and health issues has contributed to family breakdown and the rise of street children and beggars in Kagera. The drop in agricultural productivity, caused by soil infertility and falling coffee prices, has greatly reduced family incomes. These economic difficulties, along with the impact of HIV/AIDS, have weakened the traditional family support systems that once relied on extended family networks.

The stories from beggars, social welfare officers, and religious leaders suggest that families are now focusing more on individual survival rather than supporting each other as a group. This shift has led to an increase in street children and beggars because families are finding it harder to take care of members who cannot work, such as orphans and people with disabilities.

Additionally, changes in religious and cultural practices have further weakened traditional support systems. For example, levirate marriage, which once helped widows and their children by providing economic and social security, is no longer common. The study emphasizes that solutions should not only focus on improving economic conditions, such as increasing agricultural output, but also on rebuilding community support to restore family unity and resilience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the socio-economic challenges leading to family disintegration in Kagera, several steps should be taken. First, efforts to improve agricultural productivity should be prioritized. This can be achieved through providing farmers with access to better seeds, fertilizers, and training in modern farming techniques. Improving soil fertility and diversifying crops would reduce the region's dependency on coffee, thereby increasing family income and food security.

Second, economic empowerment initiatives should focus on supporting vulnerable groups such as orphans, disabled individuals, and widows. This could involve providing vocational training, financial literacy programs, and access to microloans to help families develop alternative sources of income.

Third, strengthening community-based social support systems is essential. Encouraging the revival of traditional extended family networks, alongside community outreach programs, could help provide a safety net for vulnerable members of society, especially children at risk of becoming street children.

Finally, efforts to combat the impact of HIV/AIDS must continue, including access to healthcare services, awareness campaigns, and psychosocial support for affected families. Religious and community leaders should also play an active role in promoting moral values and communal support, helping to restore the traditional solidarity that once

characterized family and social relations in Kagera. These combined efforts would foster both economic resilience and social cohesion in the region.

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