AFRIGO

Encouraging the Church in world mission

Volume 5, Issue 1

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WOMEN: THEIR VITAL IMPACT IN AFRICAN MISSIONS

Cover: Reaching South Sudan's women at a price

Former island girl leads the way in Madagascar

How one Somali woman disciples

Volume 5, Issue 1

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AFRIGO is a publication aimed at raising awareness, mobilising, training and inspiring churches and individuals in Africa towards global mission.

Editor: Mercy Kambura Mate **Design:** Pilgrim Communications

Cover photo: Adrian Butcher

The views expressed in the various features in this magazine are not necessarily those of the publisher.

Stock photos are occasionally used. Pseudonyms are used when there are security concerns.

It is my privilege to introduce this issue of AfriGO, which highlights African women in missions. In the following pages you will be introduced to some of Africa's most intrepid female missionaries. They are proclaiming the gospel in heart, word and deed, with courage and effectiveness, where Christ is not yet known!

God's calling of women into missions is not limited to one kind of woman. As you will read, He calls younger and older women, married and single women, women who are raising children, and women with every type of gift, skill and talent imaginable.

Women, the God who has called us has also promised to equip us to do what He has called us to do. As we read in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." God has already paved the road before us. So when we face our challenges, let us remember that Jesus will meet us there.

That said, there are true difficulties and hardships on the mission field. Becoming aware of the unique challenges women missionaries face shows us how to support them and how to prepare newcomers.

One of the great challenges for women missionaries, including me, is our identity. Sometimes there is a feeling of loss of identity, of not knowing where we belong. We know we do not belong to the host culture, but we also no longer fully belong in our own culture. In a sense, a woman loses her belonging to both her home culture and her adopted culture. This is when we must learn to live out our identity in Christ.

Men, I want to applaud you for taking time to read this issue. You could be reading or doing something else, but you are giving time to listen and learn from women — your sisters, wives, mothers, and daughters. By doing this, you are choosing to emulate Jesus; you are reflecting God because God values us.

The story of the woman with the alabaster jar of perfume in Luke 7 is told wherever the gospel is preached all over the world! Jesus accepted her worship though no one else thought she was worthy. Jesus revealed his risen self at the tomb firstly to women, whose testimony was not even valuable in court in that culture. His resurrection is a central doctrine and proof of the Christian faith, put first into the mouths of women.

God has filled the scriptures with women's names and stories throughout the Old and New Testaments — Sarah, Naomi, Ruth, Phoebe, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Martha. The special place He puts women in history is mirrored in the special place He puts women in missions. Therefore, our stories, our struggles, our solutions are very much part of His Story — History!

God has called women to the mission field to be his very voice, his very hands and his very heart. So, let's honour the role of African women in missions, and let us be intentional to establish mission teams and support systems that will allow women to flourish in their calling through the Holy Spirit's strength.

Dr. Joanna Bogunjoko, from Nigeria, served as a medical missionary at Galmi Hospital in Niger. Today she ministers alongside her husband Joshua, a surgeon, in his role as the International Director of the mission agency, SIM. They have two children whom they raised on the mission field.

PHOTO: ADRIAN BUTCHER

HERE I AM SEND ME

BY MERCY KAMBURA

Tibarek Wondimu serves biscuits and tea with a beautiful smile. Her kids linger nearby, laughing and demanding cookies. She's particularly happy today because her husband arrived in the morning from South Sudan.

Our picture of Tibarek is 'a gentle and quiet spirit,' but behind her calm demeanor is a seasoned missionary who's turning the world upside down by reaching out to the women of South Sudan.

Her commitment has come at a hefty price.

She says, "I love God. I want to serve God. I have a desire to share the good news."

When Tibarek and her husband Yacob Aga felt God's call to be missionaries, she did what she believed is the very backbone of missions – she prayed. And she asked for prayer from family and friends.

God opened doors for them to join SIM, and the newlyweds packed their bags for South Sudan to work among the Dinka and the Shilluk.

Bearing the heat, diseases and a brick wall of a language barrier, they served God among the Dinka. For four years, they taught the Bible, discipled, baptised and planted churches. They built a hospital, a school and boreholes for the village. They catered to the physical and spiritual needs of the Dinka in Atar, a remote village along the Upper Nile.

> God made me see that He can use us — women. He can give us strength and ideas if we rely on him.

Though trials should come

Then one night, disaster swept into camp. Years' worth of work, pain, tears and toil burned to the ground in a raid from a neighbouring ethnic group.

Tibarek and Yacob escaped narrowly. They evacuated to Yabus, a village at the border of Ethiopia and South Sudan. Despite the trauma and deep sorrow for the destroyed work, they continued ministering to the Sudanese for six months. One evening, Yacob complained he wasn't feeling well. The following morning, cerebral malaria took him home to glory.

Heartbroken, Tibarek returned to Ethiopia with her husband's body. Yacob Aga was the first Ethiopian missionary to die on foreign soil.

The cross before, the world behind

Tibarek went on to enroll in a mission school in Ethiopia. God brought to her a godly man named Getachew Tsegaye, and together they returned to South Sudan. At their new base

in Doro, 160,000 households were settled into four refugee camps, hosting 19 different tribes.

In 2013, they established a church under a tree for the Jumjum people.

Tibarek immersed herself in discipling eight women under that tree. She brewed Ethiopian coffee and helped do their hair, blending in with the community. As the group grew, so did her belly. Soon, she left for maternity leave.

Co-worker Asule Angami from North East India took over the discipleship group. When Tibarek returned, Asule had multiplied the group from 8 to 35 women!

Burun group

Next, Tibarek reached out to women from the Burun tribe that practices Islam mixed with traditionalism. Tibarek and Getachew planted a church in the community.

Preaching was unacceptable, so Tibarek started using the Bible as a tool to teach the alphabet to women, since the majority are illiterate. She also taught skills such as crocheting. As they worked, the women listened to the audio Bible. The group started to grow.

In 2016, with rising insecurity and now with two children, she had to leave again. She handed the group over to Sarah, a Sudanese woman whom she had discipled. Today, the group is going strong under Sarah's leading.

Godly leaders such as Tibarek of Ethiopia, Asule of North East India and Sarah of South Sudan—each one discipled by someone in her own past—know that when women meet in groups like this, transformation happens.

Fields are white and harvest's waiting

Tibarek and the children relocated to Nairobi, Kenya, while her husband continues travelling to South Sudan to minister. But relocating was not a ticket to stop spreading the gospel.

Tibarek now befriends South Sudanese women in Nairobi, conducting weekly Bible study and prayer. She also attends a South Sudanese church and teaches twice a month.

She says, "I would initially think I'm not doing much; I was just following my husband. But the Lord opened my eyes and I realized I can also play a bigger role. God made me see that He can use us — women. He can give us strength and ideas if we rely on him."

When Getachew speaks of his wife's mission work, his face lights up. He's clearly a proud husband.

"If we're not praying, we can't get success or fruit for our labour," says Tibarek. "We need power and strength, and that comes from prayer."

Adversity has pushed her out of comfort zones and out of difficult mission assignments.

As a missionary, she has also experienced nearly every status a woman can have — married and single, not having children and having them. She maintains that ministry is right where you find yourself at the moment.

"I'm a wife and mother. My family is also my ministry. But while I'm here, there's so much I can do. I can pray. I'm lucky I have a good husband who's supporting me in every way."

Getachew agrees with her. He says, "Women were the first witnesses and preachers about Jesus' resurrection. The prayer group in Mark's mother's house was made up of women. Even in the mission field, women are more receptive to the gospel, and they, in turn, preach to their husbands. We need women to reach women where men can't."

Tibarek (far right) with her women's discipleship group in South Sudan.

A CROWN OF BEAUTY
IN THE HAND OF THE LORD

Women have a role in God's mission. In fact, women have comprised two thirds of the worldwide missionary force, shining like strings of gems threaded through two centuries of modern missions history. As such, they have been called the "guardians of the great commission", and the "backbone of the missionary effort." The Dictionary of African Christian Biography (dacb.org) shares some of their stories.

It takes more than one gem to adorn a crown and more than one pearl to make a necklace. Community is key not only about surviving, but thriving, in mission.

Missionary Grace Setor

First, think about who will care for you!

Before a woman follows God's leading into mission, choosing the right agency is important. Every organisation does not offer adequate training and good care for missionaries. So, do your research. Does the agency help their most valuable resource – people – thrive amidst challenges? The goal is not to avoid risks, but to enable a missionary to walk through trials resiliently. Choose well, as your agency will be one of your new communities!

Bond with your new communities

Ghanaian missionary Grace Setor has served with SIM in Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi and now the USA. Life in Malawi was very different from Ghana. But her diverse mission team was a new family, helping the Setors shop for food, choose a school, find a car and understand a new medical system, especially since their child had asthma.

After a break-in attempt on the Setor's home, the SIM team made it more secure. "In Malawi we were all there for each other," said Grace. That is the kind of mission group to look for!

Grace was involved in church work and recruited for Sunday schools. Her advice to any female missionary is: **develop skills** to contribute to your team, **listen well** to everyone, and **spend time** with local women. Be available, break the ice and discipline yourself to really hear them.

"Women want to talk and eagerly seize the opportunity to meet in groups. Learn their language and allow them to share about daily problems. If you gain their trust, they will consult you as 'Mama Pastor' and be open to your teaching." Grace came to a meeting with a basketful of lemons to teach women how to use them as a personal cleanser and deodorant when they couldn't buy those items.

Grace counsels to hold to John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." "Make this your goal," says Grace, "It will allow you to become the type of missionary through whom Jesus can love others."

Suzanne Kouassi serves with SIM in Coté d'Ivoire.

Keys to acceptance in new communities

"*Cultural challenges that a female missionary will meet depend not only on the destination she goes to (for example, Canada, Vietnam or Morocco offer vastly differing cultures), but also on the nature of the home area she is from,*" says Brigitte Marcellin, anthropologist and retired SIM missionary from Senegal and France who served in Niger and Quebec. Know where you come from and how it has shaped you. Learn where you are going and the differences you can expect.

"In most countries," says Brigitte, "a foreigner is not expected to adopt all the customs. What is to be avoided is outward 'pretense' without inwardly valuing the people. Of course, local people will be happy to see you wear their clothes sometimes — but what really matters is whether you love them." Brigitte's advice is, "Be yourself with love; do not conform externally while lacking love."

Married women's communities

If you are married, consider the basis of your call. Did you receive it directly from the Lord or through following your husband? Either way, be convinced that God is leading you

both. Otherwise, when things become difficult, you may be tempted to blame your husband. If you both have assurance, then you can face challenges together, trusting God.

Build a strong marriage based on mutual respect, open communication and non-accusatory conflict resolution. Grace Setor's son couldn't bond with his relatives far away, but Grace's good marriage became even better as she and her husband raised Isaac, shared ministry and faced trials together.

Grace Setor (cetre) while serving in Malawi.

Learn the language well; it is key to understanding culture and making friends. Mother, even if you must leave small children in others' care, diligently study the language! It will reward you. Then, model a Christian family through motherhood and ministry, explaining fluently how Jesus makes marriage and child-raising different.

Also, consider ministry outside the home, however small. It will give you visits to look forward to, purpose to carry you through trying days; and opportunities to listen, learn from and edify others.

Mutually supportive couples plan well. A missionary husband stayed home with their five children one evening a week so his wife could fellowship with other women. Other couples trade "babysitting." One couple cares for both families' children so the other couple can spend quality time together.

Single women's communities

"A single woman needs to be qualified in a profession that will justify her presence and status in a foreign country, especially in cultures that consider that a woman should be married and protected," says Brigitte Marcellin. To avoid embarrassment, learn the rules for relating to the opposite sex in your new culture.

Suzanne Kouassi, long-time SIM missionary, points out that while a single or divorced woman can participate in most church ministries, roles of authority are often reserved for married women. A single woman, alternatively, has space in her home, schedule and heart for relationships with people of all ages. Scripture says, "more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband" (Is. 54:1, Gal. 4:27).

While community is often God's way of taking care of us, Suzanne reminds us that "God is with us in our single state. He is our friend, the first one we turn to for help in every situation."

> It takes more than one gem to adorn a crown and more than one pearl to make a necklace.

God has created us to shine as gems for Him and He chooses to mount us in settings: marriage for some, but for all, our organisations, our church at home and on the field, our ministry communities. He polishes us through challenges and grows us through his body, the diadem He is perfecting, so that we can reflect him to those living and dying without Christ. Stay close to Christ; bond with communities; grow through challenges, thrive and shine!

Marie-Angèle Balandele is editor of AfriGO's sister publication Allons-y ! She has been a missionary for 38 years with Mid-Africa Ministry and SIM.

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[1] *Ruth Tucker, 1988*
[2] *Stan Guthrie, "A woman's place in missions" Evangelical Missions Quarterly, July 2000, p. 356.*
[3] *"Women Ministering", Christianity Today, April 8, 1996*

For our male readers:

Pastor's wife Jill Briscoe says to men, *"The opportunities we have are yours to make, because women are not now in a position to make those choices… I have seen many men who are very prominent speak up for women. My husband wrote an article for Moody [publisher] on women's gifts and how we must not bury our talents – as in the parable. He asked in the article, "What would happen if we buried somebody else's talent?" And then he talked about how he did not want to stand before God and hear God say: "You buried your wife's talent, or your daughter's." And so he began to see his responsibility as head of our home as making sure we were equal. You should have seen the letters he got from women thanking him for affirming them – for using his influence to encourage their gifting."*

ALL HANDS ON DECK

A meme has been doing the rounds on social media. It's a man and woman at the starting point of a race. The man's track is clear, while the woman's track is cluttered with hurdles she must jump over – babies, a heap of laundry, a washing machine and ironing board – yet she's supposed to run and complete the race.

While external pressures on a woman in missions are many, they can be manoeuverable by strategic changes in routine, location and household help.

However, there's one silent obstacle that many women face, and few get to talk about. It is the internal fear of inadequacy. *Who? Me? Really, Lord?*

Yes, you too.

Nosa Tukura is a woman and leader at the heart of missions and mobilisation. She has met innumerable women in ministry and leadership who face this fear. She is passionate about helping African women achieve their God-given roles.

AfriGO Managing Editor Mercy Kambura spoke with Nosa.

What are your roles in missions?

I'm a physicist by training. I serve as Deputy International Director for resource mobilisation in the Nigeria-based Mission Supporters League (MSL) that I pioneered with my husband. MSL encourages working professionals to participate fully in missions.

I also serve with Movement for African Nationals Initiative (MANI) as the Executive Coordinator of the African Women in Missions Network (AWIMN).

I am passionate to help women see themselves as God intended them to be, not as the world defines them.

Is the fear of inadequacy common?

I have met many women in leadership and ministry who are hurting and disillusioned. During the recent Global Mobilisation Conference 2019 in Brazil, I spoke with a woman who was hurting because her leadership was not respected.

Reading a self-help book does not address the deeply buried source of fear of inadequacy which, sadly, affects most women in ministry and leadership.

In my part of the world, there's a general misunderstanding of a woman's role and her call. A leader once rebuked my husband for letting me 'represent him' at an international conference. I had attended in my own capacity as a female leader in ministry.

How do you see things through God's lenses?

My freedom and encouragement come from Genesis 26-27, where God commissioned both man and woman. That gives me the confidence to do what I do. The main thing the Lord taught me was not to let anyone define me. I had to learn who I am from God's Word.

God deliberately created the woman in his image and likeness as Ezer ('helper' in English, and the same word used to describe God). A woman is a strong helper, not a weakling. Together with men, we make a God-designed, formidable alliance that makes Satan shiver.

Churches must look beyond their cultural views of women and read the Bible in an unbiased manner. God plans to use male and female alike; the work will not be finished by less than 50 per cent of the church. We need "all hands on deck" to fulfill the Great Commission.

Women's gifts are to be identified and nurtured to enrich the body of Christ. Opportunities to use their gifts go beyond cultural and religious limitations. Women are full participants in God's mission, not add-ons or appendices.

How do you connect with other women to find strength for your journey?

There are numerous ways women can bond to train, encourage and educate one another about missions and overcoming challenges.

The AWIMN is a strategic network emphasising the mobilisation of women to play their role in the Great Commission. We encourage women to go to the least-reached peoples worldwide. Women are also encouraged to partner and relate with women's networks in Africa. As the Executive Coordinator of AWIMN, I seek to empower them to discover their role in God's missional purpose and facilitate a process of radical transformation.

There is also a WhatsApp group being formed for women in ministry, so they can have real-time contact with one another.

A request to join can be sent on WhatsApp 0805 7553 778.

The Business and Professional Women International (BPW) develops the business, professional and leadership potential of women through advocacy, education, mentoring, networking, skill-building, and economic empowerment.

I have been enriched as a person and my skills as a leader have been honed by the Christian Women for Excellence and Empowerment of Nigerian Society (CWEENS) and the Global Leadership Summit of Willowcreek Church in Chicago, USA. I encourage women to seek them out.

Seeing women embrace their role and overcome cultural and religious constraints is my greatest reward. In a way, we all are "unschooled, ordinary (women)..." but we're working with Jesus.

Mrs. Nosa Tukura

Africa Inland Mission's Madagascar team, led by Rosina Ferdinard

CALLED: ROSINA FERDINAND

From child of the island to mission leader of the island, Rosina Ferdinand has walked a path of faithfulness. But she did not always know where it would take her.

Rosina was raised on the island of Nosybe off the coast of Madagascar, in a family that worshiped their ancestors. Her people are the Sakalava, and very few Sakalava are Christians.

Rosina came to know Jesus in her teens. Later, near the end of her studies, the university promised her a teaching position, an offer that assured her family she would support them and pay back their investment in her. However, God had other plans.

Within the same month, three different ministry opportunities were offered her: to work with Radio FEBA, to direct a large Christian school, and to serve in university student ministry with IFES. Overwhelmed, she said, "Lord, you want me to work in your field. Tell me what to do." He revealed the path clearly: full-time student ministry.

A huge conflict arose with her mother about her choice to decline the university job, especially since her father had passed away. Rosina says, "I was so misunderstood, and was under a huge amount of pressure from my family, because even though I tried to help and did my best, it was never enough."

Rosina served in student ministry for 12 years. During all that time, her family and others could not understand her choice, nor why she had not married or had children. Despite the hurt, her heart remained for her people who were bound by ancestor worship.

In the village, Rosina's mother continued as a spirit medium and became possessed by the spirit of their dead king. But through God's providence, her mother turned to Christ. Greatly dismayed and believing the kingdom of their ancestors was broken, the villagers put a death curse on her mother. But she lived many more years to the age of 76.

Eventually, God sent Rosina to All Nations Christian College in the UK. She says, "Going to the UK was a challenge… but I knew with all my heart that it was the door God had opened for me." God helped her overcome the obstacle of the English language.

While there, a local church with a prayer focus on the Sakalava people invited her to visit, then promised to support her when she returned to minister to her people.

After 24 years in student ministry, Rosina went on to lead a team of foreigners working among the Sakalava. Today she serves as the Madagascar country director for Africa Inland Mission (AIM), leading all the Western and local missionaries. However, she still lives and ministers among the Sakalava. "God loves my people," she says. "He wants to raise up Sakalava people to believe in him and to be set free from the bondage of the fear of the ancestors. The Lord has put me here to oversee the work of raising up Sakalava believers and Malagasy believers for mission. It is quite amazing to me that the Lord put me right back in the middle of my people."

Though she ended up where she began on the island of Nosybe, the mercy of the Lord has taken her on quite a journey, equipping her for every good work and placing her in positions to lead others.

Watch her video: https://bit.ly/2w5iGbm.

GO! NEWS OF AFRICA'S MOBILISING CHURCH

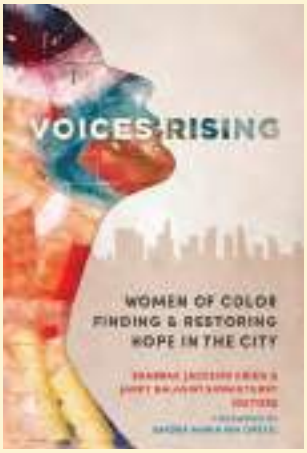
African Women in Missions Network

The African Women in Missions Network (AWIMN) is a strategic network of MANI (www.maniafrica.com) that emphasises the mobilisation of women to realise the strategic role they play in the Great Commission. It was envisioned at the first MANI Consultation held in 2006 in Nairobi, Kenya, and became a reality in April 2013. It is led by Nosayaba Tukura of Nigeria. Contact the network at awimnetwork@gmail.com to join.

Iran: Women at the heart of church growth

Iran is not a nation we would associate with church growth, let alone a nation where women could be key to such growth. Yet the Holy Spirit is using women in this Islamic context in unforeseen ways. Read this article from Dr. Mojdeh Shirvanian of Elam Ministries in which she identifies three ways Iranian women are centre stage in their nation's house church movement: https://bit.ly/2VXnlHr

Voices Rising: Women of Color Finding and Restoring Hope in the City



Voices Rising was recommended to AfriGO by one of its writers, Beauty Gunda Ndoro of Zimbabwe, and we are very glad it was. This collection of stories of women ministering in urban contexts around the world is deeply touching emotionally and spiritually.

Each woman shares how she came to missions, the challenges and joys she has faced, and what God is teaching her. Readers will find encouragement in the stories and seeing how the women persevered. This book is not just for women; our brothers will greatly benefit to hear their sisters' stories.

Available on Amazon as an e-book: https://amzn.to/2In3gCl

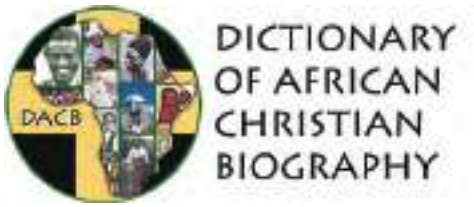
Conference on Women in Evangelism

The Lausanne Women in Evangelism Network will host a conference from 22-27 April 2020 in Orlando, Florida (US). The event seeks to create a bridge between the women of the East and the West and to help women overcome their fears and leave their comfort zones in pursuit of God's calling. Register at www.voiceofthesilent.org

New website for AfriGO!

AfriGO magazine has just launched its new website: www.afrigo.org. The site offers additional resources, training and stories to our readers. There are tabs dedicated to equipping pastors, their churches, new missionaries, and active missionaries. Please check it out! Reach us at info@afrigo.org to let us know what you think of the site.

The Movement for African National Initiatives (MANI) has released details of their once every five years event. It will take place in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, from March 8-12, 2021. Visit www.maniafrica.com/mani-events/.



Women's focus in the DACB

The Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB) offers a new index just for women. See the biographies of African women who have helped spread the Gospel across the continent. See if influential women you know are featured. If not, submit an article!

https://dacb.org/projects/women/

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Are there topics you would like AfriGO to cover? Let us hear from you! We welcome your input in order to make the magazine relevant and empowering. Send your questions and ideas to info@afrigo.org.

WOMAN TO WOMAN:
HOW SOCIAL MEDIA ENABLES DISCIPLESHIP AMONG SOME OF THE WORLD'S LEAST-REACHED WOMEN

BY MERCY KAMBURA

Today, a Somali woman living in Ethiopia can simultaneously disciple women in Djibouti, Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands, regularly hosting virtual Bible studies and prayer meetings. Some women gather weekly at a home with good Internet connection to be taught by her.

Over time, Kawser Omar has built a network with Somali Christian women in Europe, North America, and the Horn of Africa.

But Kawser was not always a Christ follower.

Born into a strict Muslim family in Ethiopia, she moved with relatives to Djibouti after secondary school. In Djibouti, the dreams started.

In the first strange dream, a baby spoke to her, *"I am the way, the life and the truth; follow me and I will give you peace."* She felt that peace.

After several nights came another dream – a hand with a beautiful, diamond cross in the middle, beaming with light. The voice said he had chosen her and wanted her to believe in him, follow him and never deny him in front of people! Again, she felt great peace.

She narrated her dream to a neighbour's Ethiopian maid who was a Christian. The maid knew what the dream meant but was terrified to be caught evangelising and deported. She sent Kawser to an Ethiopian Protestant church in Djibouti. Kawser dressed up one Friday as if she were visiting the mosque, but went to the church instead. People she met there explained the dream and discipled her for a year; then she was baptised.

Telling relatives she had found a mosque in another part of town, every Friday she went to her new church home.

One day, Kawser stepped out of the church into the bright sunlight; her fears sprung to life in full colour. There stood about ten relatives! Someone had told on her.

She remembered the words of Jesus in the dream: *"I have chosen you, never deny me in front of people."* So, she told the truth, *"I am a Christian."*

Religious leaders and family members pressured her to apostatise, tried to exorcise demons, beat her, imprisoned and starved her. She stood her ground. Fearing a family conflict with her parents in Ethiopia, her relatives stopped short of killing her. Instead, they disowned and threw her out with injuries and the clothes on her back. Ethiopian Christian refugees like herself helped her recover.

Today, she's able to identify with Somali women who become Christians. In Somalia, they may be killed, but in the diaspora, persecution is mostly inflicted by discrimination, intimidation and severe isolation. Personal technologies carry the gospel safely and privately into the homes and ears of listeners.

To supplement one-on-one discipling, Kawser always encourages women to find a local church for physical, psychological and spiritual support and to replace the community they've lost.

Kawser Omar and husband Abdi Duale are the first Somali members of SIM, a mission agency that has reached out to Somalis for nearly 80 years. The couple recently relocated from Belgium to Ethiopia. She produces programs for radio broadcast Codka Nolosha Cusub ('The Voice of New Life' in English), reaching Somalis in 20 countries, and makes Christian memes for the website. She and her husband also established two Christian websites and YouTube channels.

PRAY

- For wisdom and patience from God as Kawser disciples women.
- For God's protection for her and the women from physical and mental persecution.
- For God to provide for these ladies and the children they raise alone especially in places where there is no institutional support.
- For churches to welcome these women into their midst.

VISIT

- www.noloshacusub.net
- www.somalicwomen.org
- www.somalibelievers.com
- www.facebook.com/SomaliChristianWomen/

PHOTO: MEHDI SEPEHRI

PEOPLE GROUPS: Hidden Women

Across Africa, there are hundreds of thousands of women who, besides immediate family, only interact with other women. *Purdah*, taken from the Persian word for "curtain," is the practice of separating women from the outside world.

It is usually associated with Islam and is practiced in various parts of North and West Africa. Restrictions normally begin at time of puberty or marriage, and women may only leave the house in the company of a male relative, to protect the honour of their husbands or fathers.

They keep house, watch TV, and care for their children. Most have never heard the Gospel and have no way to hear it unless they are visited by Christian women.

A Christian worker in North Africa explains to AfriGO: "They call and wait and wish for visitors, and I am able to visit them because I have freedom that their other women friends don't have - I can go visit! We talk about children, and love, and hair, and food, and struggles, and thoughts, and God." Through these friendships the love of the Son can be shared.

Another housebound group are the mothers of children with disabilities. Their husbands might be working or have left them due to financial tensions and stresses often related to these children. It is very difficult to use public transportation, so the majority of these women sit at home, caring for their children with disabilities as best as they know how.

Some more liberal husbands allow women to go out, but they may only associate with other women, only occasionally, and only in places considered sheltered from outside influence.

Other groups of women who need other women to reach them are women in prison, women who work to rescue prostitutes or trafficking victims.

Women of God, rise up to help your sisters!

At a Glance

- Purdah has been practiced since ancient times and today is associated with Islam and Hinduism.
- Women under purdah receive their information about the outside world from visits from other women, radio, TV and male relatives.
- Restrictions on women become barriers to girls receiving education. As a result, North African countries such as Egypt and Morocco have higher illiteracy rates for women than countries with similar economies.

Ask God to

- Relieve the isolation of these women and lead them to the ONE who can be a constant companion.
- Expose the truth, through the TV and the visits of Christian women.
- For courage, love and protection for Christian women befriending hidden women.
- Protection for women who decide to follow Christ and for the salvation of their male relatives.

SIM By Prayer

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