

Customs, culture and campaigns through the *Khanga*

by Nasra M. Hilal

Khanga is very popular clothing material in Africa and serves many purposes. It is made up of six pieces of cloth as big as handkerchiefs and joined into a four sided pattern. It embodies many things for the woman such as art, beauty, culture and customs as well as politics and the professions. It has enjoyed a special status in the traditional and customary ways of coastal women, but it is also part of their day to day life.

The demand, value, and prestige for *Khanga* has increased. Traditionally it is used in many different ways during death, wedding and religious ceremonies.

During weddings, the bride puts on a special design of *Khanga* as *Kisutu*. Girls and boys are given their own pairs when they reach their rites of passage (*somo*). As part of women's customs, they get their *Khanga* on the first day of their period.

In some instances two women may appear at a gathering wearing the same design of

Khanga to symbolize their friendship.

Khanga is an educational and communication tool which has brought about peace as well as emnity within the same social fabric. When women are divorced a pair of *Khanga* is left for their former husbands. The pair which is left behind is intended for the women of the next marriage.

Khanga has also been used as part of health campaigns. Designs and messages appear on the *Khanga*. It is a good medium of communication for enlightening other women because it can carry many different messages.

Source: *Sauti Ya Siti*, June 1989, TAMWA, P.O. Box 6143, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

