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OUR VOICES

ems women's network



ENGLISH

WOMEN'S CONSULTATION IN GHANA

AFRICAN WOMEN DEALING WITH DELICATE ISSUES



Evangelical Mission in Solidarity

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Dear women, dear readers,

thank you very much for your encouraging responses to the last issue of OUR VOICES which offered insights into the International Women's Consultation in Bangalore in August 2013 with delegates from the Asian EMS churches.

This new issue in your hands - or ebook before your eyes - takes you to Abokobi, the Women's Centre of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana (PCG). This was where in April 2014 ten women leaders from different African countries and churches in close connection with the EMS met: from Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa and Ghana. Unfortunately, due to the civil war situation in South Sudan, no delegates from the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCoSS) could attend.



One highlight during the consultation in Abokobi was definitely the visit to Thalita Qumi, the Institute for Women, Culture and Religion, where we met "Auntie" Mercy Amba Oduyoye who gave us an inspiring introduction to our conference topic. As a pioneer of African women doing theology and co-founder of the "Circle of Concerned Women" she sparked our discussions on the question as to how women can become good leaders.

An important focus in Abokobi was placed on the joint celebration of devotions and church services. In all the professional exchange, we learned one thing from our Ghanaian sisters: prayer first! This was especially impressive when we were told about the enormous afflictions caused by Boko Haram being suffered in Nigeria. We commiserated in deep sympathy and under Rebecca's leadership we joined together for a special prayer of intercession. For me as a Non-African woman it was impressive to experience how much confidence our African sisters put into joint prayers and how concretely they expect good things from God.

During the consultation the women had discovered a lot of common ground coming from their African context. On our last day, after a church service at a congregation of PCG including the Lord's Supper, the question for an "African Jesus" emerged. Yet the various African EMS churches have also their very own styles and profiles. Such questions await further deliberations in which way we can speak about diversity within our fellowship. That is another challenge on the long list of "delicate issues" worth discussing in the future.

With kind regards from Stuttgart

Gabriele Mayer
 Gabriele Mayer, PhD
 EMS Women and Gender Desk
 June 2014

Spotlights from Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa

In short insights the leaders of the women's fellowships introduced challenges and strengths of women in their own country:

WOMEN IN CAMEROON

by Kinyuy Florence and Beatrice Ntuba, Women's Fellowship of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC)

"In church circles always more women are being elected elders, chair persons, and finance committee members of the congregations. In women's groups and organisations - due to their performance - women are gaining more confidence in themselves and, consequently, they are doing more. Mirroring a woman from the perspective of her functions she is a woman with many hands, for instance, she is manager of resources in her home, a nurse to her children and husband, a child bearer, a cook, a servant, cleaner, farmer, teacher, an organizer and a wife amongst others.



Many men will remarry immediately after their wife's death because they have tasted the value of a woman and can no longer stay without one. Women are like a palm tree in the earth with deep roots which remain strong. This tree produces two types of oils, the kernel oil to make

your face shine and the palm oil to make your food taste. Furthermore, there is the palm wine to cheer a man's heart. The branches serve as decoration or a broom for cleaning, the shell and the outer chaff are used for fuel and the inner chaff for animal feeding, the trunk for wood and other production. So is the woman. In her many treasures can be found if one cares to discover. She is a potential leader. She is capable of leading at all levels if only she is given the chance beginning with training."

WOMEN IN NIGERIA

by Susan Mark, Director of EYN Women's Fellowship, Church of the Brethren in Nigeria

"Women in Nigeria are strong but often overworked. They are overloaded but do not give up; when destroyed multiplied. This is simply because they are serving not humans but God who cares. Most of them are left alone with the responsibilities of caring for the family. As such they struggle with domestic work and the work outside. They do not have the right of inheritance neither from her father's property nor from her own husband's property.



Women are expected to endure suffering. Thus, they endure domestic violence for a very long time before disclosing. Women are blamed for not having children or not having sons, not men. The husband can marry another woman who will produce him a male child who will inherit him.

Slowly changes are taking place: women do not remain silent about these problems. Today they are advocating against such traditional rules. According to the legal situation, today both male and female children have equal access to education. This brought great changes for the women. Youth is growing up with a different perspective.

Women theologians are now studying the Bible to re-interpret some passages. God wants us to know our dignity and raise our voices to improve the situation."

WOMEN IN GHANA

by Victoria Northey and Rebecca Abladey, Women's Fellowship of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) The Ghanaian women introduced their context with regard to the strength and challenges of women by portraying the calabash and the light.

"Mainly women are those who invite people into their homes and make livelihood meaningful. Everywhere in Ghana women from the grassroots have the experience of pot moulding in different shades for cooking, preserving water etc. The calabash is used in serving various things and preserving well.

Light is the second symbol we as PCG women have chosen. Women are capable of leading as pathfinders and torch bearers for many others to follow and confirm the saying: "If you educate a male you educate an individual but if you educate a female, you educate a nation."

Women in Ghana are not on equal stand or level with the men due to lack of quality education. During their childhood girls do not have the same access to education as boys.



After school Abena and her girlfriends are working at the sales stall of their grandmothers. East Legon/Ghana

WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Colleen Cunningham, Elise Theunissen, Women's Fellowship of the Moravian Church in South Africa (MCSA)

The Moravian Church in South Africa has two Women's Associations with focus on younger women and with focus on older women. Focus areas are: gender justice, gender based violence, women's health, cultural marriages, virginity testing, women and land.

The Women's Association and the Department's Christian Education and welfare and Diaconics of the MCSA have embarked upon a gender Justice programme. This programme aims to equip men and women with positive parenting skills. This programme is sponsored by EMS.

Our challenges are: Violence against women and children, abuse of the aged (rape and brutal killing of elderly women in rural areas), poverty, high unemployment.

We have strong ecumenical ties both locally and globally with the following organizations: South African Council of Churches, Churches in Southern Africa, the Lutheran world federation and Evangelical Mission in Solidarity in Germany. Every year we are celebrating the World Day of Prayer and there are active local interfaith women's groups. ☺



Women in Africa between challenges and strengths

One memory of schooldays: Often we as girls got to school late and were punished for it. We ended up being late all the time because we had to do all the house chores and run errands whereas the boys always got to school early because they weren't expected to do any chores or run errands before school.

This has serious effects on the adult women; for they remain handicapped in the involvement of decision making bodies, be it political, cultural, religious and academic levels. Women are hardly given the role to play freely. This is why women representation is so limited. But they do have the potential to perform."



Women shaping leadership



Lecture by Prof. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Ghana

Many of us women live and work in situations that force us to be quiet, innocuous and to blend in if we are to survive. Survival especially for us in Africa and specifically for African women is often made dependent on not being outstanding. Hence we are socialized to a life of quietism of what has been named "grin and bear it".

In the church we are conditioned to listen without reflecting on all that is said by our leaders. We are to believe all as being "Gospel Truth." We know, theoretically, that gospel means good news, but we have not been trained to ask 'Is what is being said and advised good

news to me?' What constitutes good news?

The Bible helps us to discern what is good and acceptable to God. What may be helpful to us as we exercise leadership in our various communities?

■ Mirjam as a leader

All women are not the same, neither are all men. We are looking at women's leadership specifically from the perspective of what those who honour women's humanity will consider as acceptable leadership.

I want to do this using a biblical example that we are all familiar with but hear it differently. The woman I have in mind is Miriam, sister of Moses who showed herself a leader. After the crossing of the Red Sea she gathered the women and they sang and danced in praise and thanks to the God of the Exodus.

Much has been written about Mirjam but I want to concentrate on some of what Elaine James has compiled in the Women's Bible Commentary (Ed. Carol Newsom 1992/2012 WJK Press) titled "Miriam and her Interpreters". She begins thus: "Miriam is a prophet and leader alongside her brother Moses during the exodus and wilderness

wanderings." Tradition names her also as Aaron's sister. Miriam's initiative, boldness and intelligence, shown in her encounter with Pharaoh's daughter, joins her with the Egyptian midwives as one of the women who engineered the survival of Moses."

What we read here is that Aaron and Miriam, like the other Israelites, had reasons to grumble against Moses. Their issue, unlike the mass of the people thinking of their material needs, was ideological: a cross-ethnic marriage. Their brother Moses had married a Cushite woman. Their second issue was that of Moses' style of leadership which apparently excluded them. They raised a question concerning this non-inclusive form. They asked: "Has God spoken only to Moses?" The question was who is in a legitimate role as leader of Israel? (Num. 12:1-2)

When God heard this grumbling God punished only Miriam with a skin disease. The narrators of the story did not stop to ask why two people complained but only one was punished? They saw no problem. I have a problem with that. Miriam was quarantined for seven days outside the camp. The people waited for her and she waited with the people. She was an asset to the community. We hear no more of her until she died. When Miriam died the water in the wilderness dried up. (Exod. 15: 22-27). But at her burial God gave the water of Mara for Miriam's sake. So in Jewish tradition Miriam is associated with God's benevolence in providing water in the wilderness (Num. 20: 1-25).

In exegetical works of Early Church Fathers Mary and Miriam are often seen together. Mary in Greek is Marian. Both Miriam and Mary sing a song of triumph "praising God for overturning the powers of the world" Miriam is a leader of liturgy. One early writer, Pseudo-Philo, says 'God gave Israel water for Miriam's sake and the pillar of cloud for Aaron's sake and manner for Moses' sake'. Biblical commentaries and exegesis make more of Miriam the musician than Miriam the contender of leadership. For Jewish feminists, Miriam's well is a symbol of female fortitude and leadership. Miriam is honoured in Judaism as a prophet in her own right.

My question is: What was the definition of leadership that Aaron and Miriam were contending for?

■ Models for Leadership

Leadership is a concept that has come in for a lot of analysis and many organizations feel the need to do leadership development and to talk about leadership styles. Leadership as normally conceived is hierarchal. Leaders sit at the pinnacles of pyramids and manage a chain of command. It is the word of a leader that makes the community act or not act. Traditional political leadership belongs to kings and queens and family heads. Leaders receive service and obeisance. In our homes it is normal to say the husband/father is the leader. And when a child or wife attempts to give an opinion it is countered with the saying that a ship can have only one captain. Among the Akan, if it is the wife one often hears "anini baanu nna bon"- two pythons do not share a hole/den. But anini also means males. Men as leaders is what is accepted as the norm so normal leadership is also patriarchal with all that, that system brings with it. But here we are looking at women's leadership. What I bring to this table is the style of leadership Jesus recommends and which women theologians have been advocating for. I am referring to leadership that is liberating and empowering and can be the style of both women and men.

A leader of this gendre is one who renders humble service, New Testament Greek a *doulos*. In the New Testament Jesus is never described as a leader but as one who serves as a healer, teacher and preacher and even as a chef. He is the one who says in his own words "I am among you as one who serves." But Jesus was a leader, a person who attracted followers. "People need security and direction" so they look for those who can provide these needs. One New Testament word that describes a leader is "kybernesis", one who steers or pilots a vehicle/ship.

■ Leadership in women's theology

The leadership that women theologians advocate for is not the patriarchal, hierarchical type but leadership in the style of Jesus. In this form there can never be too many leaders. Each person leads by providing the community with a special service. Patriarchal leadership associated with wielding power and lording it over underlings and subalterns has no place in women's idea of leadership. Goal-setting and direction-seeking are done in community. Power and authority are shared as partners. The community is in the round, there are no high tables and special seats. Members take turns to lead as their abilities move them. In the vocabulary of feminists, leadership evokes "shared authority, partnership, friendship relationship mutuality, and builds community.

Patriarchal style of leadership is associated with the exercise of power and authority and so tends to generate competition because power and authority are seen as limited commodities. This is not so in the theology that women are crafting. In a community the more people are encouraged to use their gifts, the more power and authority are generated to serve the whole community. Power is not about self-promotion and self-aggrandisement, it is about building and enhancing the life of the whole community. Leadership is service that empowers and liberates, it is not power that put others under your feet to trample upon or makes you feel good because you are the hero people worship and look up to. To be in your community as one who serves is to follow the style of leadership of Jesus of Nazareth. This is the leadership all should seek and which women theologians aspire to.



Christlike leadership results in empowering people by calling them by their name. A nameless woman becomes a daughter. Nameless ones are named "the Christ". We need to note that Miriam-type outspokenness may lead to martyrdom, and that speaking the truth about the needs of others too may be costly. But if we keep silent, we perpetuate the status-qua that results in history being written by the powerful definition makers.

■ Dealing with power oriented towards the community

Power is the ability or means of accomplishing ends. Power is what enables one to live fully and freely and to feel an essential part of the community. But power over others often leads to domination and exploitation and the dehumanization of others. The power that dehumanizes is not associated with one gender. Given the opportunity both men and woman are capable of exercise this debilitating power. What we are saying here is that women theologians are advocating the power that empowers others and respects the other's humanity.

Three questions here are: 'How do we handle power and how do we deal with those in hierarchical power positions? And when we ourselves are in leadership positions, how do we comport ourselves? As long as we realize that we are not the only leaders in our community, we shall be guided to work as partners with all in the community. You have gifts and are making a contribution to the community, but so are others. When put in the chair, you are a moderator, not an autocrat. You are facilitating the process of decision-making. Not telling people what should be done. A good leader is the one who enables the development of consensus and stays with the process of implementation, monitoring evaluation and re-conceptualization so the community might move forward, shifting gears as changing situations demand.

■ Dealing with Hierarchical Power

When we have to deal with persons who have the power to determine outcomes but who do not believe in consultation, that is when we should remember the counselling Jesus "Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16). Jesus disavows the sledge-hammer approach and recommends gentle dialogue. Our session requires us to deliberate on how we are to do this when faced with delicate issues. There are no blue prints so on this we shall share our experiences and try to learn from one another. But before that let us determine what we consider as 'delicate issues' I shall provide a few of what I have personally been involved in as the initiator of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and subsequently

the Director of this Institute, concerning itself with women in religion and culture

My base line for naming delicate issues is this, all that supports the status-qua of patriarchal oppressive power that benefits only a sector of the community. They are often marked by instances of power over others. An instance we can all relate to in Africa is the relation between the maid and the madam as in Sarah and Hagar. What theologians and activists have named as 'harmful traditional practices' cover a multitude of these issues. Violence against women and girls has become an omnibus phrase to identify many of these delicate issues. The patriarchal understanding of marriage as a single issue contains many such issues as naming the woman fertility and family planning. One that I have personally paid much attention to is what I have named "disempowering language". The last on my list and most delicate is the issue of sexuality.

A community's traditions, norms, values and indeed culture are inculcated into persons from birth. We are all socialized so we do not become deviants bringing sorrow on ourselves and on the community. The honour and shame cultures of Africa demand this of parents and of the whole community. However, there is socialization that eases life for some while bringing misery to others. There is socialization that was needed for life in community of yester-years that are unnecessary or even harmful for today. The Akan drums say "mrnere resesa no na onipa nso resesa" New knowledge and new sensitivities call for review of old norms and values and the development of new ones. It is the dynamism of change which raise delicate issues. What has not been done before, what was considered taboo, what was feared or admired, may with new understanding require a shift. This shifting is bound to be uncomfortable for some and so will be resisted. In Africa all that does not support the status-qua of patriarchal power that benefits some in society becomes delicate issues. Delicate, because those who identify them risk being perceived as enemies of society. And yet if something has to be said somebody has to do it and if a task raises its head, it is a human being that has to face it. Often these situations are like the need to bell the cat, but we are not cats but humans and a critical mass can bring about changes following the leadership of one person.

■ Facing Delicate Issues

My first principle is "you are not alone" I recall Yahweh telling Elijah "there are seven thousand others who have not bowed the knee to Baal" Go in search of them. It helps to have a critical mass when facing delicate issues. Go in search of them. When the absence of women in the theological field struck me, I took steps to look for the women who have had theological education as well as those interested in seeing women in theological education. When

I found that at that time, that is 1975, there was not another African woman who had had a university education leading to an Honours degree in theology, I had mine in 1963, I did not give up and looked for those with general degrees that had theology as one of the three I found them in Ibadan (Nigeria), Makerere (Uganda) and Legon (Ghana). When I tried the seminaries to see if the churches were preparing women for the ministry, I found a few more. You cannot be the only one. You may be the one to start, but remember: "One tree does not make a forest".

■ "Leadership in the "Circle" – historical background

In the "Circle" we chose names that did not reflect traditional hierarchies. I had no designation. But I saw myself as "The Initiator". I took the initiatives that shaped the Circle. But every stage I had collaborators which include my spouse who helped me locate the theological institutions in Africa and to track down the Nigerian women's names that I found in the Registry archives of the university of Ibadan but who mean time had changed their names upon marriage. It was a Catholic priest who helped me locate the first catholic woman who in turn found the others. Some of us worked as friends and member of EAT-WOT. We were all friends and collaborators promoting different aspects of the nascent movement until the Convocation of 1989 at Accra. It was only when we decided together in Accra that we can stay together, call ourselves The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and meet in "biennial Institutes" for a seven year period, that we asked for country representatives who promote the Circle where they live. When in Nairobi 1996 we decided to be a formal organization, that was when we chose designations. What we decided for were not the traditional hierarchical labels of presidents etc. We had coordinators for the various aspects of the movement. We named our continental flag bearer General Coordinator. She was to be the African face of the Circle for the next seven years. I never had a title related to the Circle, but the Ghana culture of Auntie for women who look older than you made me Auntie Mercy which has now become my "global designation".

My second principle is to get on the table the issues that are uppermost in the minds of all around it. These are discussed and prioritized. We together search for the resources, both persons with expertise and those who want to see life-giving developments come out of our efforts on the issues. Each person chooses an area they feel comfortable and competent to handle. There are no spectators in the "Circle", we are all players. ☺



Searching for female authorities – what are their characteristics today?

Morning Devotion from South Africa: Biblical and African Women

L: A new day has dawned

ALL: Thanks be to God.

L: Let us then bring our greetings

ALL: God, we have come to greet you this morning.

L: We are your world and your people

ALL: You created us with your hands.

L: We are made in your likeness

ALL: You created us in your image.

L: We are people of your love

ALL: You created us and you created us good.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-28

*L = Leader
W = Woman*

W 1: I am Eve, the bone of your bone, and the flesh of your flesh.

W 2: I am Sarah, the woman who calls you Lord and Master.

W 3: I am Hagar, your maidservant, your unofficial wife.

W 4: I am Leah, the woman you married against your will.

W 5: I am Dinah your only daughter, who is raped by Schechem.

W 6: I am Tamar, your desperate widow who plays the sex worker.

W 7: I am Bathseba, raped and married by your king.

W 8: I am Ruth, your widow sleeping at your feet, asking for your cover.

W 9: I am Vashti, your wife killed that all women may obey their husbands.

W 10: I am the Levite's concubine, raped by the mob and cut up by my lover.

ALL: We are the broken women of the Hebrew Bible. We are the broken women in a broken world. We are women searching for our own healing.



- W 1: I am Mary, the pregnant woman with no place to go.
- W 2: I am the Samaritan woman, with five husbands and none of her own.
- W 3: I am the woman in your life, your mother.
- W 4: I am Martha, the woman who is cooking while you sit and talk.
- W 5: I am Mary, the woman who silently anoints your feet with oil.
- W 6: I am the street woman, washing your feet with my tears.
- W 7: I am the bent over woman, waiting for your healing touch.
- W 8: I am the bleeding woman, struggling to touch your garment of power..
- W 9: I am Anna, the widow praying for liberation in our church.
- W 10: I am the persistent widow in your courts, crying "Grant me justice!"
- ALL: We are the woman of the New Testament. We are the broken women in a broken world. We are women searching for our own healing.

- W 1: I am the woman in your house, I am your wife – I cook for you, I clean your house, I do your laundry. I look after your children, I go out every day to try and earn money, satisfy your sexual needs, I do what you tell me to do.
- W 2: I am the woman in your house, I am your lover, your life, your girlfriend.
- W 3: I am the woman, a grandmother, who should be resting, but has to provide and care for my five grandchildren.
- W 4: I am the woman working on your streets, I am your sex worker who you do not want to pay unless it was skin to skin.
- W 5: I am the woman in your life, with no control over my body.
- W 6: I am the woman in your home, your wife, whom you beat when I ask you to use condom – I am living with HIV.
- W 7: I am the woman in your bed, with the bruises, blue eye and broken ribs.
- W 8: I am the woman without access to Anti-retroviral, I am dying from AIDS – who will look after my children?
- W 9: I am the girl in your class, the one you offered a lift home after school, then raped.
- W10: I am the woman in your church, cooking, cleaning, clapping and dancing...
- ALL: We are the woman of the world. We are woman from Africa. And we are the Christian woman. We are the broken woman in a broken world. We are women searching healing for our own healing. Amen.



Starting the day with a devotion with typical elements of each country

Biblical Role Models – Findings

In three small groups the women were in search of role models in the Bible. They summarized their observations and findings as follows:

ESTER – overcoming boundaries of pre-determined roles

Bible text: the book of Ester

Elise Theunissen, South Africa, reports from her group:

She came from a poor family and lost her parents. Her cousins raised her. To lose one parent can be devastating and she lost both.

All young women were called when the King wanted to choose a wife. He was struck by the beauty of Ester and she was chosen as his queen.

At the same time Esters people were in danger. In this crisis time she realized:

- She was cornered and could not do anything.
- She thought about others and not only about herself..
- She knew the power of prayer and did something about it.

How did she deal with it, what did she do? She made friends with all sides. She experienced a deep inner conflict and asked herself what the right thing was to do. Ester recognized clearly the problem that the Jews could be killed. She looked for a way to find a solution. She went to the King – without having an invitation which was against the custom law.

Ester had a role model, her uncle Mordecai. In the end her decision saved a nation.



In small groups biblical texts are read under new perspectives: Kate and Rebecca from Ghana, Beatrice from Cameroon

Rahab – powerless but acting strategically

Bible text: Josuah 2: 1-6

Florence Kinyuy from Cameroon summarizes from the discussion in her group:

First of all, who is Rahab? She easily could be rejected by the society as a social misfit. Seeing Rahab from another perspective will permit us to discover strength as well as weakness. First of all, she is a woman, then a prostitute and a clever liar. She lies to the king's men that she does not know where the spies are. If we look closely, we discover that she is hospitable to strangers and clever because she succeeds to convince the men and sends them away. Rahab is knowledgeable, she is convalescent with the current issues of her time. She inquires to the spies about their God and asks for God's protection. She manages these two opposing groups of men successfully presenting herself as a good mediator, convincing and proactive. Despite the fact that she is a prostitute she is courageous enough to go beyond her boundaries and takes up other duties and renders services to people in need. Thus Rahab reveals her strength as a good communicator.

Challenges in Rahab's life story range from her involvement in prostitution, her assumed rejection from the community and wondering about her self-esteem being aware about her social marginalized role.

Seeing Rahab differently is to appreciate her for what she is and to be interested in her positive side rather than focusing only on her negativity. From her performance even in 'doing evil' she is a capable leader, a beacon of hope as she proves to be very sacrificial in managing men. She can be compared with Paul, the apostle, who after his conversion became very efficient in his ministry.

Deborah – Changing the Perspectives

Bible text: Judges: 4 + 5

Colleen Cunningham and her group come up with following observations:

What are the potentials and strengths of this woman of the Bible: Deborah?

Deborah was a judge and prophet: A woman of extraordinary knowledge, wisdom, and piety, instructed in divine knowledge by the Spirit and accustomed to interpret His will; who acquired an extensive influence, and was held in universal respect. She judged Israel as God's mouth to them; correcting abuses, and redressing grievances. By God's direction, she ordered Barak to raise an army, and engage Jabin's forces. Barak insisted much upon her presence and she promised to go with him.

Beside Deborah we also find another influential woman, Jael. Some would interpret her to be deceitful and a murderer whilst others perceive her staying true to her call as the saviour, contributing to the eventual peace.

As African women, how can we relate to Deborah in our context?

Just like Deborah and Jael, African women are born with the innate strength to be courageous amidst extreme challenges. To be steadfast, even though experiencing pain. From early age we are taught that it is in order to be both strong and weak at the same time and to be true to who we are and as Christian women to stay focused and faithful to the Gospel. ☺



Colleen from South Africa



Elise from South Africa, Victoria from Ghana

Addressing Delicate Issues

During the consultation process in Abokobi the following fields of delicate issues came up:

- › Domestic Violence
- › Situation of widows
- › Women's political involvement
- › Nigeria and Boko Haram

› REBECCA ABLADEY SHARES A PASTORAL INTERVENTION IN A SITUATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN GHANA:

A woman in her early forties calls her female pastor from the hospital, she cries, she is in pain – she suffers from domestic violence and receives currently first aid at the hospital.

The pastor urges her to take photos of her bruises, swollen eyes etc. She encourages her to go to the police station and report the occurrence.

She also visits the woman in her home and listens to her story. The pastor learns that the husband is a member of Men's ministry and goes to the church meeting on a regular basis.

The pastor calls a male Elder to go with her to the Men's group currently convening in the church.

They find the husband, call him out and inquire him. His first response: denial. Then the pastor goes to the couple's home, with the husband, and presents all the documents – telling him that the police report will bring him to trial. He wants to apologize but the woman is not willing to accept his apology.

Then both families, in particular siblings of the couple, are called .

The woman requests to have some time and distance – and moves to a hidden place, namely her daughter's house. The pastor calls the man on a regular basis.

After some weeks, the woman suggests to move in again. The pastor continues with her counseling of the couple in very concrete words: do not have sex now, first learn to talk and communicate with one another. Be respectful with each other.

After months of continuous pastoral accompaniment, the family peace seems to grow and reconciliation takes roots. ☺



】 SITUATION OF WIDOWS

by Priscilla Darkwa, National President of Women's Fellowship, Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG WF) and Kate Kodjoe, Secretary of the PCG WF. Kate's husband passed away when her youngest child was three weeks old.

"My husband dies. What am I expecting from my mother-in-law, sister-in-law and aunties-in-law? Sympathy, sympathy, sympathy! This is naturally expected.

What do I get? The initiation of much out-moded rituals.

What are these? Bathing with icy water at dawn, stones as pillows. Holding the feet of the dead body to be bathed, being left alone to sleep in the room where the dead body has been laid for one week and shaving your hair off.

Tiring search for legal advice

After the burial relatives demand cheque books, land titles, keys to the home and all other properties claiming they are taking stock. Only to turn around to tell the widow, she and her children have no share in the properties.

If the poor widow is lucky and her case is introduced to the legal system, i.e. fighting her case in the court, it takes ages for settlement. Most often all these frustrations and hurts are feared by the women.

We as women are pleading that our lawyers and judges settle issues concerning widows within short periods of time. A recent survey showed that seven widows out of ten die before their case has been settled. Education of their children often is disrupted. We are also suggesting that the church and women groups form advocacy groups where they and their children find legal advice."



What are the reasons for discrimination of widows?

During the discussion round following reasons came up:

- tradition and cultural background
- taking advantage of the situation of a weaker person
- vengeance, emotional baggage
- abuse of legal system
- gender roles / men lifted high
- questionable theology and misusing theological training
- traumatic collective experiences (apartheid, colonialism)
- lack of governance

Reasons why women keep silent:

- low self-esteem of women
- lack of education
- economic reasons
- lack of time and money to go to court

» WHY DO WE NOT FIND MORE WOMEN IN POLITICS?

by Beatrice Mbone Ntuba, President of the Women's Fellowship of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), who herself actively joined politics

The culture of Africans regards the female gender as inferior to the male gender. A woman in Africa is considered a property first to the father and then to the husband. With this back drop, it is obvious that women have problems to become a leader in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. First and foremost to climb to a leadership position like in politics one needs money for election campaigns. In our society leadership positions are often given to people who know each other. A man being in a position to nominate people to leadership positions would think of all his male friends from school. Women find it difficult to access leadership positions. Women are often intimidated by men, even at work. Men think that women have to sell themselves sexually to get to leadership positions.

Unfortunately, women themselves are not supportive of women when it comes to voting a fellow woman. Some women are dropping their political aspirations because their husband or brother is an aspirant too. Women would generally follow their husbands in their political parties, so they have no opportunity to climb.

The society thinks that the place of women is in the home, carrying out their unremunerated roles of giving birth, keeping the home, raising children, etc. Women have been forced to believe that this is where they should end.

The government gives the impression that women have to be leaders in decision making arenas but not much is done in Cameroon to make this happen. There is a lack of political will.

Almost all female ministers are only secretaries of state. Full flesh ministers (men) are at the head of the ministries that highly minimizes the influence of women. Out of the full flesh ministers in Cameroon just four are women. Women who can lead are not supported to hold certain positions.

To summarize:

- There is a lack of political will on the part of the government.
- There is too much intimidation of women by the male gender.
- Women are too poor to go in for elaborate campaigns.
- Most women who might take leadership positions do not have the necessary education.
- Women lack determination, courage and commitment...
- Some women do not believe in other women.
- As a woman leader you have to work very hard to prove yourself and others. ☹

Women in national parliaments

as of: 1. January 2014

from: Inter-Parliamentary Union

Results of the recent elections to Lower Houses, respectively parliaments

Country	Last elections	Seats	Women	% Women
South Africa	4/2009	400	179	44,8%
Germany	9/2013	631	230	36,5%
Cameroon	9/2013	180	56	31,1%
Sudan	4/2010	354	86	24,3%
Kenia	3/2013	350	67	19,1%
Ghana	12/2012	275	30	10,9%
Nigeria	4/2011	360	24	6,7%



The economic situation of women is often decisive for their opportunities to be successful during political campaigns.

EXTREMISTS IN NIGERIA



Susan Mark, Director of EYN-Women's Fellowship, shared about the situation in Nigeria. Delegates and sisters of the consultation spontaneously held an intercession prayer for the situation in this country.

Boko Haram in Nigeria – present situation and prayer concerns

The problem "Boko Haram" in Nigeria is known all over the world. Boko Haram is mostly found in Northern Nigeria, in the meantime, however, they have spread almost all over the country. Churches, Christian congregations and farms were attacked; numerous Christians killed and displaced. The group attacks government schools and banks, many students were killed. Numerous houses, shops, cars, schools and universities as well as police stations were burnt, many police and soldiers killed. Markets and army barracks were also affected. Bridges and network stations were bombed to disconnect places. Kidnapping of people, e.g. pastors, women, boys and girls happen everywhere.

Challenges caused by this situation

Travelling is difficult. Fear of Boko Haram is widely spread. There are many checking points on the way which delays travelling.

Many *schools* are closed down. Some students are transferred or cannot resume their studies.

Refugees People flee to more peaceful places. Most of them have no food, cloths and shelters and some missed family members.

Orphans and widows As a result of these acts we have more and more vulnerable people, orphans and widows. The head of the family was killed and what they had is lost or taken away.

Insecurity For fear of attacks, before going into the church, pastors and members as well are thoroughly checked. No one is trusted. Security men (police or soldier) stand guard during worship services. Worship time is shortened at some places.

"Positive" consequences - Faith and unity

The situation has greatly strengthened the faith of many Christians. They gained a deeper commitment than before despite denominational differences. For instance, Sunday is taken more seriously as the Day of the Lord: Hardly will you find Christian shops open, Christians stop their normal activities on Sundays to attend worship services. In some places the market day which was usually on Sundays is changed to another day of the week. Women have now started with house-to-house evangelism, they also speak with Muslim women when their husbands are

away. They hope to tell Muslim families about the evil of what is done to Christians, especially to their schools.

Christian schools

Almost every church is establishing schools to have their children trained as day students. Boarding schools are considered to be too dangerous as most of the evil is done at night.

There are different Christian activities:

- Peace programme to teach people how to live in peace even with your enemy
- Interfaith dialogue programme which brings different faiths into relationship
- Voluntary work of Christian youths to serve and contribute to their community

Caring for refugees

Especially the women have recognized that you cannot separate Christianity from the fate of refugees. Most of them are taken care of by Christian women. They are given food and clothing and settled in with Christian homes and communities.



Market: good place for trade relations,
high risk place for terrorist action

Peer Counseling

Inspired by the model of "Peer Counseling" by Eleonore von Rotenhan the following procedure in seven steps was quite suitable for the women's consultation in Abokobi. Upon desire we practiced this model of counseling three times.

At the beginning the roles are allocated for the counseling time (approx. 60 minutes):

Person sharing the issue (P), four to five colleagues who are consulted (C), one colleague is the facilitator (F).

1. step: seeing the problem

Describing the issue by (P), colleagues listen. They may ask – but only for clarification.

2. step: the issue "in the ears" of the colleagues

Colleagues resonate the sharing. "I heard ...". (P) listens and takes notes.

3. step: feelings and reactions

Which responses are shown by (P) during listening? She shares. Colleagues listen.

4. step: creative ideas come up

Colleagues identify with various players and use their creative imagination ... (P) listens as observer from outside.

5. step: feelings and reactions

"What did you hear from us, what was new, what touched you?" (P) responds ...

6. step: jointly looking for a solution

Joint effort to develop proposals for a next move.

7. step: feed back

Each participant shares one aspect of the issue, she herself felt touched by.



MEDITATION

by Florence Kinyuy, our youngest woman leader from Cameroon, on her feelings after learning the steps of peer counseling.

*Counseling is not a thing
for everyone.*

It is not a thing for everywhere.

It is not a thing for fast people.

*It is not a thing for very
busy people.*

It is for those who are willing.

It is for those who can sacrifice.

*It is for those who can share in
the feeling of the sufferer.*

It is for those who are patient.

It is for the dynamic.

*It is for those who respect and
love God and humankind.*

Counseling needs to be learned.

*The seven steps are very impor-
tant in managing delicate issues.*

*Hence, the process allows moves
and solutions to mature
naturally.*

*Do not hurry over moves and
solutions, understand first!*

*Do not provide quick solutions
to problems!*

*Do not work on assumptions,
no two problems are
exactly the same!*

*Hence give time and space
to each issue individually,
and above all: Be committed!*



Make compromises

NEWS from EMS Women's Network



SOUTH SUDAN

Due to the wars in South Sudan **Chantal Wullimann**, ecumenical co-worker of mission 21, is presently working in and from Nairobi. She sent us the following message: „The General Secretary of PCOSS Women's Fellowship, Elder Elizabeth Nyawok Ajak, and her deputy, Paska Aciya, are out of the

war zone and are looking forward to every kind of communication with the worldwide Christian fellowship and EMS women's network.“

Furthermore, she reports on the situation of the midwives' school, formerly in Leer/South Sudan, a project supported by EMS and congregations in Southern Germany: In Lokichoggio in Kenya, near the border to South Sudan and not far from Kakuma, a new place was found. The buildings are almost ready and the students have arrived in Kakuma, deeply grateful and longing to continue their training (Information by mission 21, Anna Wegelin). ☺

INDONESIA

Rev. Ni Luh Suriani, delegate during the women's consultation in India in August 2013 writes: „Thank you for your mail. It feels good to know that women of so many different churches are celebrating World Day of Prayer (WDP). We hope and pray that WDP again might be a source of inspiration and empowerment for many sisters. We especially pray for a blessed women's consultation in Abokobi/Ghana“. ☺



JAPAN

Our liaison woman in Japan is **Asao Mochizuku**, pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan (KYODAN). She writes: „I am so happy to be connected with EMS and the women's network. The number of female pastors in Japan is still very small but we as women can always do more. After the triple catastrophe in March 2011

we still have serious problems with radioactivity. We need your solidarity and your prayers.“ ☺

Due to space limitations we omit the map of the women's network in this issue, you will find the expanded map in new layout in the next issue here again.

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We sow the seeds of hope
We expect a harvest of love
We sow the seeds of justice
We expect a harvest of peace
We sow the seeds of compassion
We expect a harvest of solidarity
God, rain upon our efforts
The rain that transforms is from you.
We know there is something in the heavens
God, let it reach our hands ...

Mercy Amba Oduyoye

From: Heart, Mind and Tongue (A Heritage of Woven Words. 2001)



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