

From Machismo to Partnership Workshop

This workshop was organised by the World Council of Churches' Programme for Women in Church and Society (WCC-PWCS) in collaboration with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches Department of Partnership and Renewal (WARC-DPR). It took place on 13-19 September in Blantyre, Malawi. Its aim was to facilitate a conversation with Christian men, with participation of Christian women, on masculinity in the context of the call for men to be partners with women in the fight against gender disparity, discrimination and violence. This is a shifting discourse from an exclusive focus on women's empowerment towards a discourse of partnership between men and women. This workshop was posited as another step forward in the direction of the WCC's International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) in 2011.

The participants to the workshop came from the African, Asian and the Caribbean regions, and the sharing was placed in a socio-cultural and religious context. This is because the values that have underlined the shaping of men in these regions have emerged from this context. Notwithstanding the influence of globalisation, values in these regions still remain significantly connected to the local traditions and life-worlds. This reality raised the challenge to explore how men have been shaped in the past and how they are being shaped in the current globalising context. Moreover, the Malawian context was found to provide a viable context in which the sharing could be realised, given the plurality of the country's socio-cultural and religious environment and heritage.

The sharing process involved panel presentations and open floor and group discussions. While open floor discussions responded to panel presentations, group discussions were undertaken in mixed and separate male and female groups. Practically, the local context of Malawi served as a mirror for the interregional sharing. Participants could have a direct interaction with the cultures and life-worlds of the Chewa, Yao and Nguni people's of Malawi through a one day visit to the KuNgoni Centre of Culture and Art in Mua, a city located in the central part of the country.

The coming workshop report will provide a detailed account of the issues, experiences and insights that the sharing has produced. For the purpose of this debriefing, some of the issues and experiences that have been shared can be captured in the following pointers:

- Masculinity is not monolithic, because there are various forms of masculinity. Each context and experience can produce different masculinities.
- Socialisation is the major process through which masculinities are formed. This process can be direct: through teaching and life counsel in the household, clan and the larger community, and indirect: through observation of behaviours, characteristics and roles played by either gender.
- Patriarchy is the value that has dominated the shaping of men. This value is found in both matrilineal and patrilineal social fabrics, even though the latter is most globally common. Patriarchy is also a critical theological issue that the church is compelled to engage within the contemporary context(s). Churches have been complicit of gender disparity, discrimination and violence because they have failed to engage patriarchy critically.
- Patriarchy has pervaded all spheres of life from culture to social organisation, political and economic systems, institutions, theories and structures. This reality has resulted in the oppression of women in all spheres of life.

- Globalisation, modernisation and the HIV/AIDS pandemic are creating new contexts (changing contexts) to which traditional and oppressive masculinities are challenged to adapt towards gender equity and healing. Likewise, changing contexts defy the traditional and subjugated roles that women have been assigned in society, and are exposing men's fears of and ill-reactions to women's achievements.

The insights and strategy outcomes that the sharing has produced can be captured in the following pointers:

- There is a need to re-socialise men into transformative and gender sensitive masculinities.
- Churches need to revisit their theologies in order to respond to the contemporary gender crisis and to changing contexts. For this, there is a need for a re-reading of the biblical text by employing a hermeneutics of suspicion.
- There is a need to create awareness on gender justice at the different spheres of society and life through a process of [re-] humanisation.

In conclusion, the workshop provided a unique space for sharing about masculinity and gender. It enabled conversation amongst men, women, and between men and women. Participants felt encouraged and alerted to the issue of gender equity and complementarity. Thus, this workshop has served as a stepping-stone towards an ongoing process of conversation and transformation.