

Tool 5: Understanding human rights, gender equality and the Bible



"I came that all may have life, and have life in abundance."

John 10:10

Tool 5 contents

A short history of human rights.....	72
Human rights and gender equality as a human rights issue.....	74
A short history of the development of gender equality commitments.....	74
Human rights, gender equality and the Church	75
International human rights and gender instruments, and Biblical Christian principles.....	76
Going Deeper:.....	81
Using the SADC Protocol to review where your church stands on gender justice and equality:	81
What gains have been made through these international human and gender rights instruments, and what still needs to be done?	87
Attachment: Overview of the international human and gender rights declarations and protocols.....	88



Time to talk

- What is a human being?
- What are human rights?
- What is the word for human rights in your own language, and how are they understood in your culture?
- Give examples of human rights for men, women, boys and girls.

A short history of human rights

International human rights were first agreed on by governments of many countries across the world at the United Nations (UN) after the Second World War, because they did not want to ever allow any political leader to commit the kinds of abuses that happened in that war.

These rights were written up in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which has led to other agreements and international covenants known as Protocols.

Most governments have signed commitments to uphold these rights, and have laws to ensure all citizens' basic rights are protected and these are usually domesticated in national constitutions, laws and policies.

Rights come with **responsibilities**: people have to respect the rights of others, and behave in ways that respect other people's rights.

Governments are called upon to create and uphold laws that protect the rights of all their citizens, and ensure that all State organs act in a manner that is fair and just and upholds the dignity of all people. But different governments interpret these rights slightly differently, depending on their cultural and social belief systems.

The concept of human rights is based on the belief that all people are of equal value and dignity just because they are human beings.

No person, organisation or government should prevent someone from living in dignity, choosing a way of earning a living, spending time with whom they want, and believing in what they want.

Human rights are meant for everyone equally, no matter what their race, religion, culture, nationality, age, sex, beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, or intelligence.



Millennium Development Goal 3.
Source: United Nations

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which commit countries to work towards removing all obstacles to the development of all their citizens and address poverty, is another international agreement. Agreements like this usually contain specific targets and time frames by which the targets must be achieved. The deadline for achieving the goals of the MDGs is 2015. Many of the MDGs include ensuring equality between men and women in different aspects of life.

Human rights and gender equality as a human rights issue

"As long as women are bound by poverty and as long as they are looked down upon, human rights will lack substance." President Nelson Mandela, at the opening of the first democratic parliament of South Africa



Time to talk

- Think of the different human rights you talked about at the beginning of this session.
- In your experience, do all the people in your community and church have the same rights? Should they have?
- When you hear the term gender rights – what do you think of?
- Do you agree that there is a need to struggle for women's (and girls') rights in your own country and community? Why, or why not?

A short history of the development of gender equality commitments

Before 1979, human rights were usually defined by men and benefited men the most. They tended to focus on the violations of rights in wider society, and ignored violations in the home.

In 1979 the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was drafted and adopted by the United Nations.²⁰ It went beyond focusing on public life, and also referred to what should or should not be allowed in the home.

In 1995 the United Nations held the first world conference which culminated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that most countries across the world have signed and committed to implement. Part of the Mission statement says that the platform for action, among other things encourages governments to achieve gender equality but provides a road map for how this could be achieved.

²⁰Notes from a presentation given by Karen Stefiszyn, visiting lecturer at University of Pretoria to a meeting of South African churches in 2011.

Goal Three of the MDGs agreed on in 2000 calls for countries to work towards achieving gender equality by 2015.

However African governments felt that this did not adequately address some of the cultural and social issues and challenges peculiar to the African continent and drafted and adopted in 2005 the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa by African Union member countries.

The African Women's Protocol recognised that women in Africa do not have the same rights, access to decision making power and resources as men do. This makes it difficult for nations to really prosper and develop strong economies, but also makes life much harder for women than for men.²¹

At sub-regional, Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries elevated the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development to a more binding instrument, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development adopted in 2008. The SADC Gender Protocol set 28 clear targets to be achieved by Member States by 2015 in line with the MDGs. A successor framework Post-2015, for both the MDGs and SADC Gender Protocol are being negotiated with officials with the involvement of civil society. These international, regional and sub-regional instruments provide standards or yardsticks against which gender activists can call national governments to account as well as gauge their performance towards achieving gender equality.

Human rights, gender equality and the Church



Time to talk

- Do you think human rights and working for gender equality are important to the church? Why, or why not?
- How does your church uphold the human rights you mentioned above?
- Are there ways in which it does not uphold them equally for all its members – men and women, boys and girls? What could or should it do to change this?
- What do you think is the role of the church in relation to human rights and the ambition to achieve gender equality in society?

²¹ This was Protocol to the broader African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. http://www.achpr.org/english/_info/women_en.html

In 2013, Fr Thoman Risica, spokesperson to Pope Francis II, addressed the issue of building women's lay leadership in the church by stating:

"Pope Francis is extremely sensitive to the fact that, in making major decisions that affect people's lives -how can we do this without consulting half the human race?"

Jesus sums up the purpose of His life as to bring 'abundant life' to all. But abundant life is not something theoretical. It is practical and achievable - only if ALL people prosper and have social equality and dignity. To generalise from the Pope's assertion: Jesus came to bring abundant life to all, not just half the world's population.

International human rights and gender instruments, and Biblical Christian principles

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". It is the foundation stone of all the human rights documents that have followed it.



The late Wangari Muthaai receives an award from the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights.
www.en_wikipedia.org

Some church people say that the concept of human rights is secular and even counter-biblical. And yet, the very first creation story in Genesis affirms that all human beings are made in the image of God and have a basic dignity that is God-given. This certainly agrees with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But a number of churches worldwide have engaged with these instruments over many years. They want to understand to what extent it is the church's responsibility to adopt them in their own ministries, and whether it is their responsibility to work actively to promote them in society.

For example, after much debate ever since 1970, the Lutheran World Foundation (LWF) decided in the 1990s that the Church has to take seriously and support secular (ordinary) people's efforts to protect and promote human rights. They believe that God sides with the poor and marginalised and demands justice, fairness and compassion.

This means that God calls the Church “to stand for the rights of human beings and for a better community of nations”²², because the Church is there to serve the needs of the world and not to just spiritualise its message of salvation. The Church has to work with whatever tools are available in the world, and to understand those issues that prevent some people from being able to receive Jesus’ promise of abundant life.

The other side of human rights is human *responsibilities* -to ensure that no one’s human rights are violated by our actions, and states have a responsibility to safeguard the human rights of all their citizens. Of course this is not always the case, and human rights activists and some religious leaders have spoken out against state, institutional and individuals’ actions that undermine people’s human rights.

An example of churches working together to bring about gender transformation is the Declaration published jointly in 2009 by the Council of Churches in Zambia, The Zambian Episcopal Conference and the Evangelical Fellowship in Zambia. More than that, these church Mother Bodies managed to co-sign this declaration with the national Zambian Government. This has given it much-needed credibility and made it easier to draw in different stakeholders to take it seriously.

Another example is the Interreligious Declaration signed in 2011 by the three Christian Mother Bodies as well as the other major religions. It is not clear if this has led directly to any specific church action plans, however.

The **eight principles** underlying all of the human rights and gender equality instruments are:

1. Dignity
2. Freedom
3. Equality
4. Non- Discrimination
5. Justice
6. Participation at all levels
7. Opportunity
8. Autonomy

²²All the quotations in this paragraph are taken from Henriksen, Jan-Olav. 1998. *Theology and Human Rights: The work of the Lutheran World Federation*. In *Reformed World*, volume 48 number 3 (September 1998).



Time to talk

Answer the following questions on the eight principles:

1. For each principle, identify at least two biblical texts and/or church teachings that support it, and explain how it does that. You might want to write up a table, something like the one below. Some examples have been put in to get your thinking started.

Human Rights Principle	Scriptures that support this principle
<p>Dignity</p>	<p>Genesis 1:26-28 - <i>“And God created humankind in God’s own image; in the Image of God, God created them; male and female God created them.”</i></p> <p>Humankind are both created in the image of God, and both are given responsibility to care for the earth. This passage does not give greater importance or status to either men or women.</p> <p>Add your own examples of Bible verses and discuss them:</p>
<p>Equality</p>	<p>Ephesians 5:21 - <i>“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”</i></p> <p>Galatians 3:26-28 - <i>“...for in Jesus Christ you are all children of God through faith, ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”</i></p> <p>Add your own examples and discuss them:</p>

Human Rights Principle	Scriptures that support this principle
<p>Freedom</p>	<p>Galatians 3: <i>“You foolish Galatians! ... Did you receive the Spirit by doing works of the LAW or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?”</i></p> <p>Paul is scolding the church in Galatia for reducing religion to a set of rules, which in the end bind people and take away their freedom to worship in spirit.</p> <p>Add your own examples from the Bible and discuss them:</p>
<p>Non-discrimination</p>	<p>Gal 3:26-28 – As above.</p> <p>Deuteronomy 10:17-19 – <i>“For the Lord your God ... is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and widow, and who loves strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”</i></p> <p>Matthew 15:21-28 -Jesus is involved in a debate with a non-Jewish woman about whether Jesus’ ministry is for Jews only. He at first refuses to help her, in a way discriminating against her. But Jesus is convinced by her arguments, and does as she asks.</p> <p>The fact that he has a theological debate with a woman, or speaks in public with a woman at all (in a society where a man was seen to degrade himself if he did that) shows that he was not afraid to break social norms if they undermined someone’s dignity.</p> <p>Add your own examples and discuss them:</p>

Human Rights Principle	Scriptures that support this principle
<p>Justice</p>	<p>Numbers 27:1-11 – The daughters of Zelophe had advocated for daughters to inherit in the absence of sons. God’s response to Moses is: <i>“The daughters of Zelophe had are right....;you shall indeed... pass the inheritance of their father to them. You shall also say to the Israelites: If a man dies and has no sons, then you shall pass his inheritance onto his daughter.”</i></p> <p>John8:3-11 – The woman caught in adultery. Jesus deliberately challenges the justice of the traditional way of meting out justice to adulterous women.</p> <p>Add your own examples and discuss them:</p>
<p>Participation</p>	<p>Acts 18:18 and 26 - Priscilla was an active leader in the early church.</p> <p>John 6:10 – <i>“Make the people sit down. ... about five thousand in all”</i></p> <p>Add your own examples and discuss them:</p>
<p>Opportunity</p>	<p>John 20:17 – Mary is the first evangelist sent to spread the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection. <i>“Jesus said to Mary: Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them: ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”</i></p> <p>Add your own examples and discuss them:</p>



Human Rights Principle	Scriptures that support this principle
Autonomy	<p>Gen 1:28 – “<i>God blessed them and said to them [both]: ... fill the earth and subdue it...</i>”</p> <p>Add your own examples and discuss them:</p>

Use the following questions to guide your conversation further:

2. Looking at the principles that underlie the protocols, do you think referring to the principles might be a useful tool when working with churches around gender transformation?
3. If yes – think of some ideas about how you might present them theologically.
4. There are also Scriptures that seem to oppose some aspects of human rights. Can you think of any of them?
5. Talk about how you might address these issues.²³

Going Deeper:

Using the SADC Protocol to review where your church stands on gender justice and equality:

The following table sums up the main provisions of the SADC Protocol and lists the main targets set by SADC for its members. It is taken from a presentation to churches by Gender Links in 2012²⁴. Gender Links leads a powerful coalition of organisations that tracks country progress in

²³One important Tool is an approach to Bible Study called Contextual Bible Study. You can find out more about it and look at some of their Bible studies by going to UJAMAA's website at the University of KwaZuluNatal: www.ujamaa.ac.za. You can also read more about the question of how to read the Bible when there seem to be so many contradictions in it, on PACSA's website www.pacsa.org.za, in *Men and Masculinities Volume 3: Practical and Theological Resources*. (You can download and print this free.)

²⁴At a Norwegian Church Aid meeting with representatives of four national Councils of Churches to introduce the concept of a gender audit, Pretoria October 2012.

implementing the 28 targets of the SADC Gender Protocol. This is published in an annual Barometer.

The table below has been adapted to illustrate how provisions in the SADC Protocol can be used to ask ourselves questions about church policies and practices concerning the status, roles, rights and access to resources of men and women within their own structures and social teachings.

The first two columns summarise the articles and the targets to achieve them.

The right-hand column offers some ideas for the kinds of questions you can ask when finding out how your church is doing on the journey towards gender equality and justice.

Main provisions of the SADC Protocol	Specific targets to be achieved by 2015	Aspects of Churches and their ministries that relate to these targets
ARTICLES 1-3: PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES		
These cover definitions; general principles and objectives.	The Protocol aims to bring together existing commitments; enhance these through specific timeframes; create effective mechanisms for implementation; sharing of best practices and deepening regional integration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Does your church have a strategy and programmes that focus on improving relations between men and women and improving the lives of women, in the church and in society?</i>
ARTICLES 4 - 11: CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL RIGHTS		
This provides for all national Constitutions to support gender equality, and make sure that traditional law does too. All laws that are discriminatory to women are to be repealed. It also provides for equality in accessing justice, marriage and family rights and the rights of widows, elderly women, the girl child, women with disabilities and other socially excluded groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Enshrine gender equality and equity in their Constitutions and ensure that these are not compromised by any provisions, laws or practices.</i> ■ <i>Review, amend and or repeal all discriminatory laws.</i> ■ <i>Abolish the minority status of women, so they can own land, have bank accounts and receive inheritances.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Does your church have a gender policy?</i> ■ <i>Do your church's Constitution and doctrines promote the equality of men and women?</i> ■ <i>Are your church leaders open to reviewing these?</i>
ARTICLES 12-13: GOVERNANCE (REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION)		
This Article provides for the equal representation of women in all areas of decision-making, both public and private and suggests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Ensure that 50 percent of decision-making positions in all public and private sectors are held by women</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Are women represented at all levels of church leadership?</i> ■ <i>Does your church have:</i> ■ <i>*50% ordained women clergy;</i>

Main provisions of the SADC Protocol	Specific targets to be achieved by 2015	Aspects of Churches and their ministries that relate to these targets
<p>that this target be achieved through Constitutional and other legislative provisions, including affirmative action. It further stipulates that Member states should adopt specific legislative measures and other strategies, policies and programmes to ensure that women participate effectively in electoral processes and decision-making by, amongst others, building capacity, providing support and establishing and strengthening structures to enhance gender mainstreaming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Use of affirmative action measures if needed.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>*50% lay leaders at highest level?</i> ■ <i>What roles do men's and women's organisations play?</i> ■ <i>Is a Gender ministry / desk in place, with money and authority to make a difference?</i>
ARTICLE 14: EDUCATION AND TRAINING		
<p>This article provides for equal access to quality education and training for women and men, as well as their retention at all levels of education. It further provides for challenging stereotypes in education and eradicating gender based violence in educational institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Enact laws that promote equal access to and retention in all levels of formal and non-formal education.</i> ■ <i>Adopt and implement gender sensitive educational policies and programmes addressing gender stereotypes in education and gender-based violence, amongst others.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Does your church actively support women to get theological training?</i>
ARTICLES 15-19: PRODUCTIVE RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT, ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT		
<p>This Article provides for the equal participation of women in economic policy formulation and implementation. The article has provisions and targets on entrepreneurship, access to credit and public contracts, as well as stipulations on trade policies, equal access to property, resources and employment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Ensure equal participation by women and men in policy formulation and implementation of economic policies.</i> ■ <i>Adopt policy measures to ease the burden of the multiple roles played by women.</i> ■ <i>Adopt policies and enact laws which ensure equal access, benefits and opportunities for women and men in trade and entrepreneurship.</i> ■ <i>Review national trade and entrepreneurship policies, to make them gender responsive.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Is there a gender balance in church staff and clergy, and are their conditions of service the same?</i> ■ <i>Does your church actively support women's empowerment projects (as well as men's)?</i>

Main provisions of the SADC Protocol	Specific targets to be achieved by 2015	Aspects of Churches and their ministries that relate to these targets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Introduce affirmative action measures to ensure that women benefit equally from economic opportunities.</i> ■ <i>Review all policies and laws that determine access to, control of, and benefit from, productive resources by women.</i> ■ <i>Review, amend and enact laws and policies that ensure women and men have equal access to wage employment in all sectors of the economy.</i> 	
ARTICLES 20-25: GENDER BASED VIOLENCE		
<p>This article makes provision for the implementation of a variety of strategies and laws aimed at eliminating all forms of gender based violence, and trafficking.</p> <p>Also for the provision of a comprehensive package of treatment and care services for survivors of gender based violence. This includes the access to Post Exposure Prophylaxis to prevent HIV infection if the victim is HIV negative, and the establishment of special courts to address these cases.</p> <p>There are specific provisions on human trafficking. A section which provides for monitoring and evaluation sets targets and indicators for reducing gender based violence levels by half by 2015.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Enact and enforce legislation prohibiting all forms of gender-based violence.</i> ■ <i>Ensure that laws on gender based violence provide for the comprehensive testing, treatment and care of survivors of sexual assault.</i> ■ <i>Review and reform their criminal laws and procedures applicable to cases of sexual offences and gender based violence.</i> ■ <i>Enact and adopt specific legislative provisions to prevent human trafficking and provide holistic services to the victims.</i> ■ <i>Pass laws and regulations which define and prohibit sexual harassment in all spheres, and punish perpetrators of sexual harassment.</i> ■ <i>Adopt integrated approaches, including institutional cross sector structures, with the aim of reducing current levels of gender based violence by half by 2015.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>What are your church's teachings on gender equality and what constitutes gender based violence</i> ■ <i>Does your church make public pronouncements on GBV, the sexual abuse of women and girls for financial gain, and/or human trafficking in the community?</i> ■ <i>Does your church have counselling services available?</i> ■ <i>Do your church leaders confront perpetrators of GBV and/or sexual harassment, or are their times when they excuse it or cover it up?</i> ■ <i>What is your church's position on domestic violence? Do your leaders protect victims or support the rights of the head of the household?</i> ■ <i>Does your church have any programmes to support victims and survivors – eg safe houses, counselling, legal and solidarity support for court proceedings?</i>



Main provisions of the SADC Protocol	Specific targets to be achieved by 2015	Aspects of Churches and their ministries that relate to these targets
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Does your church have any rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators?</i>
ARTICLE 26: HEALTH		
<p>This article provides for the adoption and implementation of policies and programmes that address the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of women with specific targets for reducing the maternal mortality ratio and ensuring access to quality sexual and reproductive health services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Adopt and implement laws, policies, programmes and services to enhance gender sensitive, appropriate and affordable quality health care.</i> ■ <i>Reduce the maternal mortality ratio by 75%.</i> ■ <i>Develop and implement policies and programmes to address the mental, sexual and reproductive health needs of women and men; and</i> ■ <i>Ensure the provision of hygiene and sanitary facilities and nutritional needs of women, including women in prison.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Does your church have, or support local, women's wellness and reproductive rights and support programmes?</i> ■ <i>Does your church ever advocate for women's needs to be addressed by public health providers?</i> ■ <i>What is your church's position on controversial matters like abortion, sexual identity, and homosexuality? Do they protect the human rights of women and/or homosexuals?</i>
ARTICLE 27: HIV AND AIDS		
<p>This article covers prevention, treatment care and support in relation to HIV and AIDS.</p> <p>This includes access for HIV negative rape victims to Post Exposure Prophylaxis to prevent HIV infection from an HIV positive rapist.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Develop gender sensitive strategies to prevent new infections</i> ■ <i>Ensure universal access to HIV and AIDS treatment for infected women, men, boys and girls;</i> ■ <i>Develop and implement policies and programmes to ensure the appropriate recognition, of the work carried out by care givers, the majority of whom are women; the allocation of resources and psychological support for care-givers as well as promote the involvement of men in the care and support of People Living with Aids.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Is HIV ever talked about in sermons? What is usually the main message?</i> ■ <i>Does your church have any practical HIV programmes? Do people living with HIV lead it?</i> ■ <i>How does your church work with youth? Does it promote or ban condoms? Does it understand where youth are at?</i>

Main provisions of the SADC Protocol	Specific targets to be achieved by 2015	Aspects of Churches and their ministries that relate to these targets
ARTICLE 28: PEACE BUILDING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION		
<p>This provides for the equal representation of women in conflict resolution and peace building processes as well as the integration of a gender perspective in the resolution of conflict in the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Put in place measures to ensure that women have equal representation and participation in key decision-making positions in conflict resolution and peace building processes, in accordance with UN Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>If there is conflict in your country – how are women affected by conflict, and how do you involve women in conflict resolution?</i> ■ <i>Is there conflict between women in your congregation? Why do you think this is? Does your church help them to resolve it?</i>
ARTICLES 29 - 31: MEDIA, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION		
<p>This article provides for gender to be mainstreamed in all information, communication and media policies and laws. It calls for women's equal representation in all areas and at all levels of media work and for women and men to be given equal voice through the media. The Protocol calls for increasing programmes for, by and about women and the challenging of gender stereotypes in the media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Take measures to promote the equal representation of women in ownership of, and decision-making structures of the media, in accordance with Article 12.1 that provides for equal representation of women in decision-making positions by 2015.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Does your church use inclusive language for God's people (e.g. in sermons, pew leaflets, liturgies, hymns)? Do you have any example of a rewritten gender neutral hymn? It could be quite powerful placed alongside the original sexist one – if you can find a place for it? A Time to talk maybe?</i> ■ <i>Do your preachers ever use images of God that women can relate to (e.g. Some of Jesus' parables using more feminine images (See Tool 3)?</i>
ARTICLES 32 - 36: IMPLEMENTATION		
<p>These articles make provision for gender sensitive budgets and resource allocation; oversight of the Protocol by a Committee of Gender Ministers; development of national action plans based on the Protocol; and the collection of baseline data for monitoring and evaluation. The Protocol requires that Member states submit comprehensive reports to the Secretariat every two years indicating progress achieved in the implementation of the provisions.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Do those ministries catering for women's needs get the same budgets as others?</i> ■ <i>If you have a church gender ministry / desk</i> ■ <i>* Does it have enough budget to do its work?</i> ■ <i>*Is there someone to coordinate it?</i> ■ <i>*Is its work backed by the senior leaders in your church, so it is taken seriously?</i>

What gains have been made through these international human and gender rights instruments, and what still needs to be done?²⁵

The 2014 SADC Protocol Barometer report shows much progress has been made politically. All but 2 countries have signed the Protocol, and most have developed laws to better protect the rights of women. But still, women are subjected to extreme forms of discrimination in practice:

- Social - many women are denied their human dignity and remain in subordinate positions in their homes and their families. For example in some cultures, when a woman is widowed, she falls under the guardianship of her son whether or not he is a minor, or is forced to marry her husband's brother.
- Economic - women have also been denied the right of equality and men continue to earn more than women for the same work done. Also in many countries women cannot gain access to work which has been identified exclusively for men.²⁶ With lower earning capacities as well as the lack of contractual capacity, women are also unable to access funding, and their rights to property severely curtailed on the basis of culture and tradition. Women also conduct a lot of unpaid care work in the home.
- Political – in many countries women have been and still are denied the right to vote for or to participate in political processes that govern their lives.
- Religion – there can be no doubt that religious beliefs and precepts have been a major contributing factor and the foundation on which discrimination against women is founded.

Despite these negatives, it is encouraging that the international response has largely been positive at the highest levels of Government. This shows that things are changing, so we can celebrate that the efforts of women and activists through the centuries have begun to bear fruit.

It is now up to us as ordinary church members and leaders to translate these freedoms by drawing alongside and supporting the struggles of even the poorest and most marginalised women in our churches and communities to be protected and affirmed, and to be allowed to contribute meaningfully in church and society.



Evidence within the church shows that barriers are coming down as more women take up senior leadership positions, though we have yet to see a female archbishop. Bishop of Edmonton, Jane Alexander with the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu

Source: www.anglican.org

²⁵Taken from a presentation made by Dr Karen Stefiszyn to a gathering of South African churches to review progress made since the 2007 Churches' gender audits, in April 2011.

²⁶In South Africa, this situation has changed since 1996 and in August 2007, 21 year old, Phetego Molawa, became the first Black South African Woman Pilot. (Website BBC News 16 Aug 2007) Web 28 May 2008.

One way to begin is to work through the right-hand column of the above table, and honestly ask ourselves and our leadership the questions provided. The next step is to decide what our church, and we as its members, still need to change in order to ensure all of our members, and the people we serve in our communities, enjoy the human rights that are recognised worldwide as basic to all our dignity as created in the image of God.

Attachment: Overview of the international human and gender rights declarations and protocols

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In its own words:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)²⁷ launched by the United Nations in 1948, is 'a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member states themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.' (Preamble)

This Declaration is not a law but is a kind of Gold Standard that guides national Constitutions and other laws in order to guarantee certain rights and freedoms as well as protection by the State. It has also led historically to a number of Covenants and Treaties between the countries in the United Nations, around civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. None of these are tied to specific targets, nor is compliance monitored. But they have led to a number of Conventions and Protocols that are tied to specific targets and commitments, which are monitored. One such agreement that became well known is the one committing signatory nations to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 though shortly this document will be reviewed by 2016.

International and regional gender instruments

There are four examples of major international and regional gender instruments provided here. There are others that relate to different issues such as Human trafficking, gender based violence and HIV and AIDS (with huge gender implications) among others.

²⁷<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

CEDAW defined the violation of others on the basis of gender as:

“...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women ... of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field [irrespective of their marital status, and on a basis of equality of men and women]²⁸.”

CEDAW did not make mention gender based violence, and so on 20 December 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was adopted by the General Assembly of the UN, making this the first international human rights instrument aimed exclusively at violence against women.

According to the CEDAW document Article 5(a), all State Parties have taken appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of the behaviour of men and women, in order to eliminate prejudices and practices which are grounded in the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

The African Protocol – Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s rights, on the Rights of Women in Africa

The African Protocol on Women’s Rights translated the CEDAW Convention into specific commitments and time frames for African countries, as agreed by leaders of African countries. One of the reasons was based on the principle that the leaders recognised the crucial role of women in the preservation of African values based on the principles of equality, peace, freedom, dignity, justice, solidarity and democracy. The instrument also deals with harmful practices for example as a continent specific issue. This means all behaviour, attitudes and/or practices which negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as their right to life, health, dignity, education and physical integrity.

The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development

The instrument most for churches in Southern Africa is the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008). This is designed specifically for Southern African countries, and consists of specific commitments to be achieved by SADC countries by 2015. The principles apply even after 2015. What is important about this Protocol is that it combines key provisions from all gender specific international and continental Protocols including goal three of the MDGs on achieving gender equality into one document “almost a one stop shop”.

²⁸<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>, slightly adapted.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

This was born out of a world conference convened by the United Nations to deliberate on gender injustices in 1995. One of the aims that the church can easily relate to under the mission statement is to remove all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. This means that the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace²⁹.

Millennium Development Goal number 3 – Promote gender equality and empower women

The MDGs (2000) are special in that they set the pace in setting specific targets and a timeline, 2015 for Member States to aspire for. In order to achieve this, governments especially from the Western countries, to set aside funds to work towards achieving this goal such as the MDG 3 Fund set up by the Netherlands government. Much of the donor money set up under this fund has also supported many faith based organisations who are working on gender for example.

Notes

*Please send your feedback for this tool to
gendersa@nca.no or consultancy@pacsa.org.za*

²⁹ United Nations: last accessed 20 July 2014

