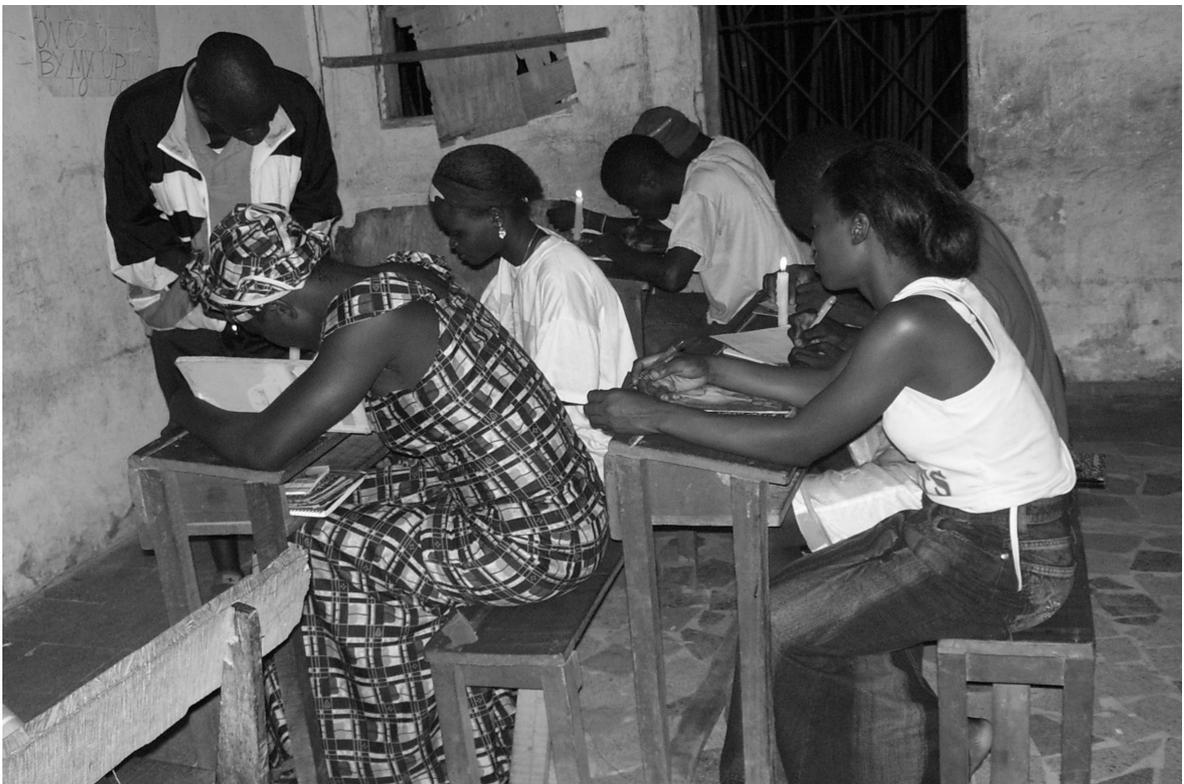


Tool 7: What can we learn from the churches' gender journeys in the five countries?



***“In transforming society, the important task is not to take power,
but to reinvent power.”***

Paulo Freire³⁵

³⁵ Paulo Freire 1985. *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*. London: Macmillan.

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Introduction and background

The 2007/8 and 2012 baseline audits that were done in South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho and Zimbabwe showed us that women were playing a very active part in church life in all these countries. It also showed that sometimes women felt that they did not have an equal role to play in the church. They felt frustrated when issues that were important to them did not seem important to the people (who were mostly men) who made decisions in their church.

Although many changes are happening in our churches, it is important for men and women to think about how to make the church a place where all people are equal in the eyes of each other, as well as in the eyes of God.

The 2013 research findings presented in Tool 6 identified the following **conditions for good progress** in the churches' journeys towards achieving gender justice.

These are useful pointers to help think through how best to improve gender justice in and amongst our churches in any country.

Often there are only a few people in a church community who think about gender, but many who agree that things are not right between men and women. This tool should help with ideas on how best to include others in understanding, challenging and changing the way that we work together as men and women in the Church.

Leadership, Vision and Action

Processes that bring about improved gender justice need to be **led from the top**. This helps to persuade people that this is important and valuable work to do, and that their church as a whole is committed to positive change.

These leaders also need to offer a **clear vision** of what needs to change, why and how they need to change, best written up in a clear **policy** or **public statement** - so people stay focused and do not end up arguing about the same old things over and over.

This **vision** has to make it clear that the struggle for gender equality is **not about individual women and men fighting for power**. It is about **changing systems** in the church that help men and women live together in harmony without one group dominating another. This is basic to the **just world** that respects the equality and dignity of all God's people, which the church is called to struggle for.

It is important that public commitments do not remain words but translate into meaningful **actions** that really help to change the quality of life and relationships for ordinary people on the ground.

Structures and systems to support the change process

Most successful gender justice programmes are led by a **gender coordinator**, who is supported openly by the senior leader of the church or organisation.

A Gender Desk also requires a mandate to **work closely with other ministries** to help people understand the links between gender and all other social issues. Examples of other ministries include HIV and Health, Social Justice, Empowerment, Youth, Sunday School, Marriage preparation, Environment, Counselling, etc.

MONITORING is important to make sure people don't forget to think about how women and men are affected by their church's decisions and its activities. This means **checking up** on how women and men are being treated, whether their voices are being heard equally and whether the church's activities and decisions are fair and promote harmony and life-giving relationships.

Successful gender workers are not afraid to stand up and **advocate for changes in policies and laws** if they are not just. This is because policies and laws make sure everyone abides by the changes in attitude and behaviour needed to live in just relationships where both women and men can feel free to be themselves and fulfill their potential.

Building a movement for change

Most successful processes **include** anyone who wants to contribute positively in any way. It does not matter how small or big their action is, or whether everyone agrees with each other's specific beliefs. Of course, this does not mean that people or organisations should be dishonest, but should be clear about what they agree on and can work together around, even if they don't agree on everything.

Successful partnerships concentrate on building **trust**, so that relationships can withstand disagreements and people can still work together. This needs everyone to be open to hearing other points of view, to be patient and wait for each other, and to be humble enough to recognise everyone's contributions even if they do not fully agree with them. A faith based organisation's gender movement is likely to influence change in gender relations faster than individuals or small groups working alone.

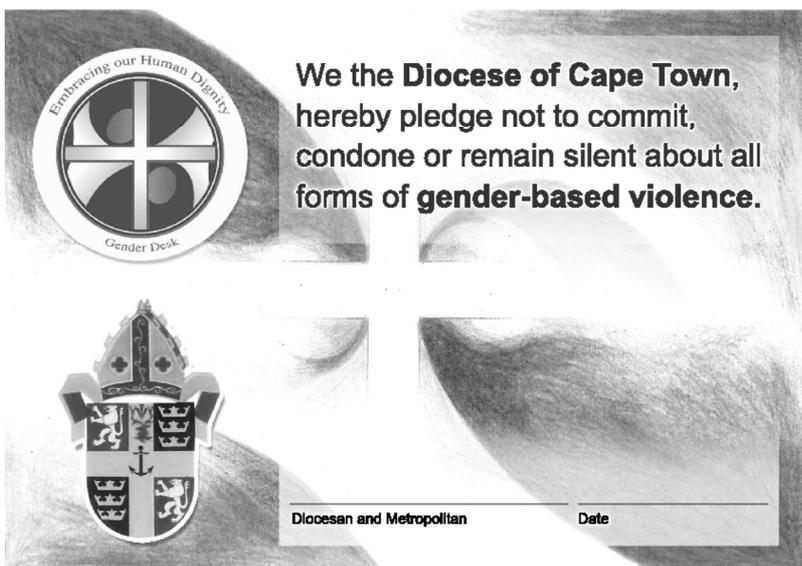
Taking one step at a time

Most **important** is to recognise that gender transformation, like any social change, is an **ongoing process of conversion**.

This means recognising that **change begins with the personal**. It means helping people to face their personal issues and struggles, to accept that others may be at different places on their journey. It also means not pretending to believe in change without it changing the way we each live our lives. One way to make space for this is to organise groups of men and groups of women that can talk in a safe space about the issues that concern them.

It also means that we have to be organised and strategic, which involves:

- being prepared to **monitor one's own progress** instead of criticising others;
- making **practical plans** by agreeing who is to be doing what, by when, and what the results should be;
- allocating **enough people** and **money** to make sure the work can be achieved;
- making sure that **senior leadership support** the process and talk about it openly, so that people take the gender transformation process seriously, and are prepared to participate in it.



Pledge by Bishops and clergy to make their voice count in reducing gender based violence in the church and in society.
Source: Anglican Diocese of Cape Town

Allowing God to renew our minds

If possible the churches and mother bodies involved should try to **agree on a single core curriculum for training** in workshops as well as formal theological education. This makes sure that people doing the work agree on the meanings of the words used and the purpose of what they are trying to do – no matter which churches they work in. It also accepts that almost all church leaders, men and women alike, have been raised to believe social and cultural norms that denigrate the value of half of God's people, and have read the Bible through this social lens.

We need to work with our church's leaders in Christian education programmes, Baptism preparation, Confirmation, Marriage, Bible Studies, Sunday Schools, Youth Groups etc. to help them to **revise all the ministries of our churches**:

- We need to look again at the **language** we use and the **stereotypes** or harmful teachings we are simply passing on without thinking;
- And then we need to **redesign** all our programmes, little by little, based on the assumption that women and men are equal, can work best in mutual and supportive relationships, and that their sex does not pre-determine what they can and can't contribute to the church or their families.

Through this process, we can develop **a new shared language and set of assumptions about men and women** and how they relate in church and society can gradually replace any harmful beliefs, sayings and practices in their cultures and communities, and build on those that are positive.



Time to talk

Case Study 1

Read the following case study shared by the Evangelical Fellowship in Zambia, and answer the questions that follow.

“During one workshop evaluation in Lusaka we noted that, at least two participants had indicated in the evaluation form that they felt it was inappropriate for one of the female facilitators from EFZ to wear trousers in front of men of God - which she in fact had done on two occasions - and they cited this as one of the things they disliked most about the whole training. This is in spite of the fact that the said trousers were formal and roomy suits. What was even more interesting is that on a closer look at the evaluation sheets, it was clear that the two complainants were in fact women.

As the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia this was a learning experience and an indication that a complete change in societal mind set and attitude on gender roles was a long way to come. That despite a whole week's training and discussions around gender equality and equity, some things had not changed at all which begs the question: What would happen if a woman pastor went to conduct a service in trousers? Would anyone even give them the time of day? Does this then prove true what is widely believed that women are indeed each other's worst critics? Are men proving more receptive to the gender equity and equality message than women?

Another lesson learnt was that while propagating the gender equality/equity message we should as much as possible try to be non-confrontational both in speech, in the mode of dress as well as in attitude as we do not want people to miss out on the point of the gender discourse while getting distracted by petty issues like our dressing.”

- What was the objection presented by some participants in the EFZ Gender training?
- What did the facilitators do with this objection? Do you agree with their reflections on what the objection might have meant?
- How will what they learnt influence their approach in the future?

- Have you ever been met with opposition to your gender work or opinions you have expressed about gender in your church?
- If yes - How did you understand the objections raised and what did you learn from this?
- Did it in any way shape the strategy, methodology or content you used later? Why? On reflection, did you do the right thing?
- What does this case study show you about the struggle for gender justice and transformation in your church or organisation?

Case Study 2

The CCZ 2011 annual report offers some insight into some of the factors that influence the speed with which gender transformation is able to be achieved, despite the powerful collaborative processes at work:

"[P]olitical, economic, social and technological dynamics are important issues which impinge on gender justice. For example [when our monitoring team met with one focal group in one of the 6 districts], it was pointed out that despite government setting up the Gender division, Chiefs and many villagers did not seem to have received the gender justice message. The rural radio reception was very poor and if anything a lot of messageshave not addressed the economic struggles of the people. Economic empowerment in this regard has played a key role. ...[B]ecause of women not owning land and other wealth assets like cattle, this was contributing to the silence of women. The low participation of women in church and community governance has had down-up and up-down effects. The traditional perceptions on women have affected their emancipation [locally and] on the national political stage."

- What are some of the obstacles to gender transformation mentioned by ZCC?
- How have they tried to solve them?
- What else could they do to make it more possible for the rural women to participate in the gender justice programme of CCZ?



Participants from the three Mother Bodies reviewing progress in September 2013

