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# **CULTURE, RELIGION AND GENDER**

**A TRAINING MANUAL FOR THE MEDIA**



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## INTRODUCTION

As part of its commitment to strengthening the voices and perspectives of women in global media coverage, Inter Press Service (IPS) is developing a series of training tools for journalists, aimed at improving both the quantity and quality of coverage of gender issues. One of these tools, a training manual on covering issues of violence against women, is already in use around the world. IPS has subsequently identified the need for a second manual, to address culture, religion and gender issues.

The words “sex” and “gender” are sometimes used interchangeably, but in fact they have different meanings. Sex refers to a person’s biological characteristics – whether a person is male or female. Gender refers to the different roles that are assigned to males and females within society, and the socially constructed relationship between men and women. In terms of traditional gender roles, women are supposed to operate within the private, domestic sphere of the home and family, while men operate in the public world of politics and economics. Women are supposed to be nurturing, passive and subservient; men are expected to be aggressive, active and dominant. These gender roles result from society’s interpretation of men and women’s biological differences. These “interpretations” of the biological differences between men and women have become accepted as normal and natural. The problem is that these roles limit the human potential of both men and women, and create fundamental inequalities within society.

**“The media is a product of society and thus it reflects the values, ideas, attitudes, culture and practices of any given society. Simultaneously, it influences and shapes society.”**

- Thenjiwe Mtintso, speaking at the Southern Africa Gender in Media Workshop, 2001.

Gender inequality refers to an imbalance of power between men and women in society. This is reflected in the fact that women have less political power than men, less economic clout, they have less say within the community, and are subjected to gender-based violence both inside and outside the home. Around the world, women carry a double burden of paid labour and unpaid reproductive work in the home, and in almost every society, women are the poorest of the poor. Within religion and culture, this inequality is evident in the fact that men overwhelmingly dominate in the highest levels of the hierarchy in these sectors.

Religion and culture as powerful institutions within society play a major role in shaping gender roles and perpetuating gender inequality and are powerful institutions within society. Furthermore, gender relations within the religious and cultural communities are a reflection of gender relations within broader society. However, media practitioners often find it difficult to make the link between women’s position in religion and culture, and women’s position in society. For example, in religion as in the workplace or in politics, men dominate in decision-making positions and women are found in supportive and caring roles. While there are exceptions

to this, the challenge to ensure gender equality in religion and culture remains a big one. In this regard, the media has a critical role to play in challenging inequality and highlighting areas of best practice. Religion has an extremely powerful influence over people's lives. In particular, it impacts on gender relations and consequently on how women are treated in society and the home. Religion is often used to deny women their fundamental human rights. Some religions do not allow women to occupy decision-making positions, with the result that women are unable to participate in and influence civil and political life. These issues need to be factored into media coverage. The media is often guilty of ignoring these links in its coverage of religions.

## **THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

The media is part of society, and like the rest of society, men have historically dominated it. While women have made significant inroads into the media in the past few decades, there are still very few women in decision-making positions. Women working in the media often encounter a difficult working environment, with a lack of childcare facilities, pay inequalities between men and women, and high levels of sexual harassment. Ultimately, these dynamics affect and impact on how the media interprets and reflects on issues of the broader society.

In terms of the inclusion of the voices and perspectives of women in all issues of media coverage, the picture is equally bleak. In 1995, an international survey showed that women formed only 17% of all news subjects. In 2000, the Global Media Monitoring Project repeated the study, and surveyed how often and in what way women are represented in the media. In the five years between the two studies, there had been a great deal of activity around gender issues in the media, including the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which commits governments to addressing issues of women in the media. Despite this, the Global Media Monitoring Project 2000 found that the coverage of women had risen just 18% - only a 1% improvement in five years!

The study also found that when women were represented, they were portrayed in a stereotypical manner. Women were shown in a limited number of roles: as victims of violence, as sex objects, or as dutiful mothers, wives and daughters, with no identity beyond their male relatives. Men, on the other hand, were shown in a wide variety of different roles, from powerful decision-makers to the proverbial "man on the street". However, men were very rarely shown as caregivers and nurturers. These stereotypes are drawn from the gender roles ascribed to men and women in society, but are reinforced by their constant use in the media.

The media, with its ability to reach into millions of homes, is a powerful force in shaping attitudes. It can either be used to maintain the inequalities in society, or be used to challenge them. Rather than being completely objective and impartial, the media is shaped by the society. Media practitioners come with their own set of beliefs and biases, which influence their views and reporting. But these views have a major influence on the public as they accept the world they see reflected in the media as reality. Media practitioners need to be aware of the power they wield in shaping public opinion, and take care that their own beliefs and opinions are not presented as "the truth".

Around the world, societies face the challenges of adapting to the harsh realities of the global economy. In many “developing” nations, people are seeking to establish their own identities and heal the damage to the social fabric inflicted by colonial regimes. This situation also provides the unique opportunity for people to create a society based on human rights and equality, which draws on the positive elements of tradition, and discards harmful and discriminatory practices. The media has a vital role to play in this process.

This training manual is to assist the media in covering the often complex and sensitive debates around gender, culture and religion.

The manual is divided into three sections:

**Section One** places the issues of gender, culture and religion within the current social, economic and political context.

**Section Two** provides an introduction to covering issues of religion, culture and tradition, and their impact on women’s ability to access their basic human rights.

**Section Three** addresses some of the major issues around gender, culture and religion, and provides guidelines and suggestions for news coverage.



## **SECTION ONE**

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# **RELIGION, CULTURE AND THE GLOBAL CONTEXT**



## RELIGION, CULTURE AND THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

### OBJECTIVES

- ① **To create an understanding of the global context within which religion and culture operate.**
- ② **To make a link between globalisation, religion, culture and gender.**
- ③ **To reflect on how globalisation, accompanied by religion and culture can create and perpetuate gender inequalities.**
- ④ **To reflect on the role of the media in highlighting good practices and challenging inequalities within this context.**

The present-day global political economy has its roots in the colonial systems of exploitation. While the market economy and new technologies are rapidly changing the nature of international relations, the old patterns of wealth flowing from the “developing” South to the industrialised North remain largely in place. While it is true that globalisation has created new opportunities, it is important to examine who is accessing these opportunities, and who is losing out in the era of global competition.

Globalisation has the effect of allowing the wealthy to accumulate more wealth, while poorer countries are further marginalised. “The train of globalisation picks up more speed every day, and fewer and fewer passengers can travel on it. After every stop, the ticket is more expensive.”<sup>1</sup>

The “feminisation of poverty” is another feature of globalisation. Women in both the North and South are at a disadvantage, with women in “developing” countries being exploited for cheap labour, while in industrialised nations, industries which have traditionally employed large numbers of women, shed jobs, or relocate factories to regions with cheaper labour and less stringent labour legislation. Even where women are not direct participants in the global economy, it impacts on their lives. For example, subsistence farming is often the sole means of support for rural women, but these women’s livelihoods are now threatened with environmental collapse, caused by unsustainable exploitation of natural resources by large transnational companies.

**“When white people came to South Africa, they had the Bible, and we had the land. But now we find that they have the land, and we have the Bible”<sup>2</sup>**

In addition to this, “developing” nations are under a great deal of pressure to adopt structural adjustment programmes, in order to access international financial aid. The cuts in government social spending demanded by these programmes means that states are increasingly unable to provide adequately for services such as social welfare, education, and health care. Cuts in social spending have a particular impact on women, because, as caregivers to children, the elderly and the ill, women have to carry an additional burden when the state no longer provides support and services.

The inability of governments to deliver social services also creates an increasing reliance on religious and cultural institutions that provide care and services. Furthermore, the world has also seen a resurgence of conservative and fundamentalist religious movements. As rapid

<sup>1</sup> Dr Robert Savio, in Inter Press Service. 1999. Globalisation, Democracy and Human Rights in Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Roxanne Jordaan, cited by Walker, B. 1998. “Christianity, Development, and Women’s Liberation”.

social and economic change place additional stresses on communities, more and more people are turning to tradition and religion as solutions to their problems. Religion and tradition are thus gaining increasing power within many states. Religion and culture provide hope to those living in poverty and oppression and within this context – it can either be a force for social change, or for conservatism and resistance to change.

Of course, according to modern ideas of democracy, there is supposed to be a clear division between religious institutions, and the secular (non-religious) state. In practice, however, government policy is always informed by culture and religious beliefs to some extent, even in the established democracies of the “developed” world. For example, George W. Bush (as one of the first acts of his presidency), stopped aid to USA-based agencies involved in reproductive health care work in “developing nations”, which offer abortions as part of their services. This decision was based on religious and moral sentiment within the USA, which is opposed to giving women the right to choose to have abortions.

Throughout the world, religion and culture have an impact on development. Many colonial regimes used a “divide and rule” strategy, in terms of which, cultural, religious and ethnic differences were emphasised, and conflict between communities heightened. Many of these conflicts are still being played out today, with a great deal of importance placed on ethnic and religious identity. This creates additional difficulties in addressing socio-economic imbalances between men and women, as communities close ranks and reject what they perceive as “outside” influences.

Consequently, human rights for all become very difficult to enforce, as religious and cultural interests take precedence over the right to equality for some sectors of the society. On the one hand, governments are failing to deliver on socio-economic rights such as health, housing and welfare, and are allowing transnationals to violate workers’ rights in the hope of attracting international investment. On the other hand, increasingly powerful cultural and religious groups are encouraging the idea that concepts such as gender equality are foreign imports, incompatible with traditional values.

This highlights the need for the media to play a vital role in revealing the links between globalisation and human rights violations. Within this context, it should also expose and challenge human rights abuses committed in the name of religion and which perpetuate gender inequalities. An IPS seminar on globalisation and human rights produced the following recommendations for media practitioners:

- The media needs to inform itself on the globalisation process, and be able to explain the various components of the global economy.
- In order to challenge the practices of transnational corporations, the media needs to understand how these companies operate.
- The media has a responsibility to provide the public with accurate information on issues around globalisation, thus allowing them to make more meaningful choices.
- The media should form networks with other organisations in civil society, which are committed to foster democracy and a culture of human rights.
- The media should seek stories that provide a human face to issues of globalisation.

This training manual will examine the importance of looking for “lost” and “hidden” stories: issues which should be covered by the media, but which are glossed over or neglected. An awareness of gender issues can be used to shine a new and different light on all stories covered by the media, and reveal new angles and new stories.

## EXERCISE 1

### RELIGION, CULTURE AND THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

**MATERIALS:** Magic markers, flip chart paper, sticky stuff

**TIME:** 20 Minutes

**AIMS:** To assist participants to understand how globalisation affects gender equality within communities

To assist participants to make the link between globalisation and religion and culture, and how these impact on the achievement of gender equality

To assist the media to develop ideas on how to cover globalisation and gender.

**STEP 1:** Divide the participants into pairs.

Each pair is to read through the Case Study, Religion, Witchcraft and Beans. They should then answer the following questions:

1. What impact has Globalisation had on the rights of Kenyan women to cultivate family gardens?
2. What role has religion and culture played within this context?
3. Choose one of the examples from your discussion as pairs. Write the first two paragraphs of the story (for a newspaper/radio/news agency)

**STEP 2:** The pairs are to discuss and list examples of similar situations indicating the impact of globalisation in their own countries. What kind of gender-sensitive interventions can be made in such instances?

**STEP 3:** Participants to present their responses to the questions above.

## CASE STUDY

Real-life Example: Religion, Witchcraft and Beans

Issues of globalisation, religion, culture and gender relations can sometimes overlap in surprising ways. For instance, in rural communities in Kenya, women have traditionally cultivated vegetables in family gardens, in order to supplement the family's food supply.

But, Kenya has the ideal climate for cultivating exotic vegetable crops for the European market, and in recent years, men are placing increasing pressure on women to cultivate commercially successful crops, such as French beans, on land previously used for the family gardens. Since vegetable farming is seen as "women's work", women are expected to provide the intensive labour needed to produce the beans, while the profits become part of the household income controlled by men.

This has created a further imbalance of power between men and women in these rural communities, with women losing a resource over which they had traditionally held control. Tensions between men and women, particularly between married couples, are increasing in these villages.

As a result of their increased marginalisation, many women have turned to evangelical Christianity as a source of comfort. At the same time, there has been a resurgence in traditional witchcraft practices, with many women trying to control their male relatives through the use of potions. In some cases, the same women who seek reassurance in church by day attempt to poison their husbands with potions by night. Without an understanding of the ways in which new economic development and traditional inequalities are combining to undermine these women, their actions simply appear bizarre and unreasonable.



## **SECTION TWO**

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# **RELIGION, CULTURE AND HUMAN RIGHTS**



## RELIGION, CULTURE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### SECTION TWO

#### OBJECTIVES

- ① **To have a working definition of religion and culture.**
- ② **To reflect on the rights to equality and religion and culture within a human rights framework.**
- ③ **To create an understanding of how religion and culture could be interpreted and used to perpetuate gender inequalities.**
- ④ **To reflect on the role of the media in reporting on religion and culture within a gender context.**

### Under the Palaver Tree

(or "A School for Idle Men") by Obododimma Oha<sup>3</sup>

Under the palaver tree sit five HOLY men,  
Sharing their time  
Between gossip and counting of prayer beads.

Each man tells  
How he has done his sacred duty  
By making his wife afraid:  
Some blows or strokes of the cane sometimes,  
Some sermon about how  
A woman can go to Paradise  
ONLY IF her husband loves her;  
Or how, on one special occasion,  
He had experimentally uttered:  
"I divorce you!"  
"I divorce you!"  
"I divor...!"  
Some two and a half times,  
Making her pass water.

Each man nods his head,  
And files away a new strategy  
To use when he gets home from SCHOOL  
Tonight.

<sup>3</sup> Dr Obododimma Oha is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, but currently on leave-of-absence at the Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis, Sénégal. He has published papers in several international journals including *Mosaic*, *Africa*, *Mattoid*, *American Drama*, *African Anthropology*, *Journal of Communication and Language Arts*, *Context*, *African Study Monographs*, and *Philosophy and Social Action*. He has also contributed chapters to critical anthologies. A poet and playwright, he teaches Stylistics and Discourse Analysis.



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SECTION TWO

## **RELIGION**

# 1

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## RELIGION

### DEFINITION

**Religion** is a system of faith and worship, which provides adherents with meaning and purpose in their lives. It is one of the major institutions in society, with almost every human civilisation producing a system of religious belief. Religions may or may not include a belief in a supreme being, but all are concerned with the transcendent, the spiritual, and with aspects of life beyond the physical world.

Major religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism are practised throughout the world, but there are also numerous minor religious groups, and indigenous religions particular to specific regions. Within each organised religion, one generally finds a large number of different denominations, sects, and cults, each with their own interpretations, beliefs and practices.

**Theology** refers to religious study, or an academic discourse on religion.

### GENDER ISSUES

Religion, tradition and culture are often used to justify women's subordinate position in society. In all the world's major religions, religious texts have been interpreted to reinforce the power of men in society. Recently, there has been a rise in conservative or fundamentalist religious movements, often associated with conservative nationalism or right-wing politics. These movements are generally opposed to the concept of gender equality. Their attitudes towards gender issues include: a belief that women's proper place is in the home; opposition to reproductive rights; blaming women for the "decline in moral values"; vilifying women who step outside traditional roles; and active homophobia.

**"It is extremely unjust that women are excluded from ordination simply on the grounds of their gender roles or their sex: i.e. being female and there is no biblical backing for that whatsoever. It is based on tradition..."<sup>4</sup>**

In most religions, women are the majority of believers, but it is men who claim to hold the positions of authority and have the rights, including the authority to interpret religious texts. In many religions, women have historically not held leadership positions, and, in some where women have held leadership positions in the past, they are now denied the same leadership position today. Some religions still bar women from holding leadership positions.

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<sup>4</sup> Tris Fresen, in *The Other Voices Workbook*. 2000. World Conference on Religion and Peace SA.

**And the believers men and women and are protecting friends  
one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong,...  
(Q 971)**

For millions of women around the world, religion is a source of identity, belonging, and comfort in times of hardship, but paradoxically, it is often a force, which encourages them to accept violence and oppression as part of life, and discourages potentially positive social change.

Beyond exclusion from religious leadership, women are often excluded from other aspects of religious life and worship:

**“...I have a very strong memory of this as a child, of going down to the men’s section and kissing the Torah, being allowed to touch it as a six- or seven-year-old, and then at the age of twelve or thirteen, when I became a Bat mitzvah I was not allowed down there anymore...The Torah became something that I saw at a distance...”<sup>5</sup>**

**“Though I grew up going to the mosque, it was always in a space set aside for women. As a child, as a young girl, I didn’t question that, then I began to read the Scriptures myself, and began to think of the prophetic model. And then I started asking: “Why then am I relegated to a gallery, or even to a dungeon sometimes?” And I have prayed in some very strange places in mosques – upstairs and downstairs – in dark, damp places.”<sup>6</sup>**

Religious texts are often interpreted and used as a justification for gender discrimination. These arguments are persuasive, because the texts are considered sacred, and hold divine authority for believers. However, most lay people are not aware that many authoritative texts are in fact the result of a process of selection, and thus reflect views of those making the selection. Almost all religious texts have been subject to numerous interpretations, reinterpretations and translations, and therefore may be influenced by the viewpoints of the (usually male) religious scholars making the interpretations. These scholars are in turn informed by the norms and values of their societies and their own perceptions about what the status quo should be. The interpretation of many texts is still subject to debate and revision by theologians today.

It is also important to note that while different interpretations come up from time to time, the text remains the same. For example Q 4 vs 3 says:

“If ye fear that ye shall not deal justly with the orphans marry women of your choice two three or four , but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly {with them} then one that your right hand possess. That will be more justly to prevent you from doing injustice”

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<sup>5</sup> Adina Oskowitz, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Moefidah Jaffer, *ibid.*

This has been interpreted and formulated into law by some Muslim countries to mean preference for monogamy {Tunisia, Turkey} yet others {Pakistan, Bangladesh} have set up panels to determine terms for polygamy if need be. The general status quo has always been that a Muslim man has the freewill to marry up to four wives without restriction even though in most cases it is not favourable to women.

According to Dr Musa Shoman-Dube<sup>7</sup> of the University of Botswana, the male model that pervades heaven is used to reinforce and maintain the gendered relations of our world. Thus when examining the first book of Timothy in the New Testament, we find that it draws directly from the story of Eden to justify the subordination of women in the church. It reads:

“I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” (Timothy 2:12-16) (Life Application Bible)

On the other hand, Genesis (1:27-31) states the following:

“So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female, blessed them and said have many children so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds and all the wild animals. I have provided every kind of grain and all kinds of fruit for you ...”

Shoman-Dube believes such a story

**“gives us windows of hope in reconstructing gender. This version shows us that gender justice is biblical.”**

In this regard, the following could be noted about this story:

- Both man and woman were created from God’s image;
- They were both blessed and given leadership over the earth and;
- They were both given access to property.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, the Quran emphasises gender justice as seen in Quran 4 verse 1:

“O humankind reverence your guardian-lord who created you from a single person created of like nature its mate and from them twain scattered {like seed} countless men and women.

However, even the most patriarchal religious traditions have produced strong and influential women. Alternative interpretations of religious text, for example, feminist interpretations and liberation theology, are being used to challenge inequality and injustice in society. Increasingly, women are claiming, or reclaiming, their space in religion.

## **MEDIA ISSUES**

The media generally tends to view religion as untouchable and inherently good, or avoids covering issues of religion on the grounds that they are too controversial and at times conservative. At the same time, religious organisations often view the media with scepticism, they see the media as an agent of the secular world, and expect hostility and a lack of understanding from journalists. As a result, there is limited coverage of religion in the everyday news.

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<sup>7</sup> “The Impact of Religion and Culture on Gender: Christianity, AIR and Gender”, paper presented at an Inter Press Service training workshop for journalists on how to report on culture, religion and gender. July 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

This coverage is in line with the status quo, usually showing men in leadership positions, while religious women are either portrayed as the faceless faithful, or are conspicuous by their absence. As in general media coverage of women, the portrayal of women in religious contexts tends to be stereotyped: women as victims of religious persecution or oppression, women as selfless charity workers, or women as entertainers, such as gospel music singers.

There is also a tendency for the media to simplify issues around religion, and treat religious groups as if they were completely homogenous. Alternative viewpoints within religious communities are ignored, and women (and men) who are working towards gender justice within religious institutions receive very little media attention. The media's reluctance to deal critically with religion contributes to maintaining the status quo: the religious elite have the opportunity to air their views without being challenged, and debates taking place around religion, equality and human rights do not reach the public. In this regard, there is little or no interrogation of the balance between the right to equality and freedom of religion within a human rights framework, and no challenge of the gender inequalities perpetuated in the name of religion.

Coverage of religious women very seldom includes a gendered understanding of women's complex experiences of religious beliefs and practices, which give them a sense of personal meaning and social belonging, while at the same time conflicting with the modern ideals of universal human rights and gender equality. Where the media does deal with gender and religion, it focuses on women's victimisation by religion, but very rarely portrays the struggles of women to resist oppression. One of the major "missing stories" around religion is the active role many women are playing in transforming their religion and their communities.

## **CHALLENGING GENDER INJUSTICE**

### **The Life of Shamima Shaikh**

Shamima Shaikh was a South African activist, who used her life, and her death, to challenge religious conventions that oppress women. A devout Muslim, she refused to accept the marginalisation of women during worship, and was active in a number of progressive Muslim organisations. She also challenged male domination in her personal capacity, and when women were excluded from a full mosque, she led a group of women to reoccupy their space. On one occasion, when she and other women were prevented from entering a mosque, they stood outside and prayed in the pouring rain. Eventually, frustrated with the segregation of men and women in mosques, she and a group of like-minded Muslims founded an alternative congregation, which practiced principles of gender equality and justice. Disapproving conservatives referred to her as "that mad Shaikh woman".

When she was diagnosed with cancer, Shamima Shaikh faced her illness with the same courage, gentleness and sense of humour that she had shown in confronting other challenges. At her funeral in 1998, a female friend led the prayers, in accordance with her last wishes. Later, at the mosque, men and women mourned together, with many women entering the downstairs area of the mosque for the first time in their lives. At the funeral, her husband, Na'eem Jinah prayed, "If this be madness, God, give us all the courage to be mad."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> From Esack, F. 1999. *On Being a Muslim*.

**EXERCISE 2****RELIGION**

**MATERIALS:** Copies of handouts A,B; FLIP CHART, magic markers

**TIME:** 45 minutes

**AIM:** To examine how religion may be interpreted and used to perpetuate or challenge gender inequalities;

To examine how media perceptions and bias can influence reporting on religion and gender;

To assess the extent to which media reporting reflects current societal views on religion and gender.

**STEP 1:** Break the participants into small groups of three or four. Each of the groups is to go through the handouts A and B

**STEP 2:** Each of the groups to: Examine the quotes from the two religious texts as well as the two articles that follow and answer the following questions:

1. What do the religious texts (article A) have in common? What do they say about the position of women in society?
2. Do these texts (A) condone or encourage gender violence? Why?
3. In the article entitled Hotline for Heaven, (article B), there is a growing following around a Nigerian, 'black Jesus'. Can you conceive of a movement around a 'woman Jesus'?
4. How has the media been used to perpetuate the subordinate position of women?
5. In what ways have your own religious beliefs influenced the way in which you have covered issues of religion and gender?

**STEP 3:** The groups to make presentations of their responses and to discuss these.

---

## RELIGION

### CHRISTIANITY

The bible says: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church . . . therefore as the Church is subject to Christ so let wives be subject to husbands in everything."

**Ephesians 5 verses 22 - 24**

### ISLAM

The Koran states: "Men have authority over women because Allah has made one superior to the other. Good women are obedient. They guard the unseen parts because Allah has guarded them. As for those whom you fear disobedient, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them."

**Quran 4,34**

### LEADERSHIP

Women are by and large absent from leadership positions in religious organisations. In the Roman Catholic Church the controversy regarding women priests is still raging. In other churches, such as the Anglican church, the ordination of women has led to rifts in the church.

# HOTLINE TO HEAVEN

BY ALEX DUVAL SMITH

God is a Nigerian. This has been known for some time by many of the 100-million souls of Africa's most populous country. Now, in the ultimate confidence trick, his embodiment has come to Lagos.

Thousands of pilgrims from the world over are flocking to see Pastor Temitope Balogun Joshua. Embodying Britain recently, at TB Joshua's slum church, were 28 visitors who were given white plastic VIP seats at the side of the altar, and filmed by the pastor's personal cameramen.

Sitting on the left and right of the pasty-white group, in an area equal to two football fields were 800 Nigerians on wooden benches. They were captivated by the live scenes of happy-clappy whites relayed to them on overhead screens.

"This is a poor turnout," said Gina Faccioponti, a 44-year-old teacher from Stoke-on-Trent, on her second visit. "You want to come on the last Wednesday in the month, for the 24-hour service. Then there are tens of thousands of people and the road is completely blocked outside from 4a.m. They come to see the miracles – we have seen miracles here!" she said.

Foremost among the miracles is an alleged cure for AIDS. But, the previous day in the "emergency section", set at a hygienic distance from the main seating area, were about 400 people, each given a sheet of A3 paper bearing the name of an ailment – "leg poison", "blocked vagina", "swollen belly" and the obligatory "HIV/AIDS". A host of "cancers" was represented.

So powerful is TB Joshua's influence that most Lagosians choose to keep an open mind about his Synagogue Church



Pilgrims flock to see 'miracles' of Nigerian man of God

of All Nations. This is a nation where economic decline and military coups have taught people that anything is possible.

Further afield, TB Joshua has a growing following. Two hundred people from a US Pentecostal group are expected soon, and there are regular visitors from churches in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Botswana's high commissioner to Nigeria has been seen in the front row.

Hundreds of South Africans have already made the journey, including the late Springbok rugby player Wium Basson, who went to his grave with cancer. Basson had gone to Lagos to be healed, but Joshua, after keeping him waiting for most of the week, passed him by, explaining later that God had not spoken to him in connection with Basson's ailment.

Many South Africans, mainly Afrikaans-speaking Christians, still believe in the miracles of TB Joshua. Afrikaans newspapers in South Africa have carried reports of Joshua believers coming back from Nigeria with "holy water" which he has blessed and which they place in containers in their

churches so the miracles can continue. One report said a pastor from the Free State had returned from Nigeria with a photocopy of TB Joshua's palm and was in turn photocopying that image and distributing it to further "divine healing".

TB Joshua's interpretation of illness is as broad as his extrapolation of biblical messages. The Synagogue's magazine, filled with gruesome photographs of ailments, runs a story about a man "healed of leg cancer caused by a dog bite". When he gets to work in his two-tone suit, he is as confident with his radio microphone as Jerry Springer. His mumbled sentences invariably peak on words like "sin", "evil spirit", "curse" and "salvation".

He does not touch those he "heals" but flicks his hand with intensity while looking for approval from the camera lenses and from the whites.

The "healed" are top-notch extras who stop at nothing to show that the pain, as promised, has disappeared. There is much leaping, running and stripping off of clothes.

As the economy has declined, Lagos's poor districts have been filled with signs

inviting people to worship. Many demand payment on entry. But TB Joshua is cleverer than most: he doesn't openly solicit contributions and even pays some people to come.

Most serious is the false hope TB Joshua gives people with HIV, said Professor Ibiroinke Akinsete, head of Nigeria's National Action Committee on AIDS. "He's a charlatan. We asked him to document his cases, arguing that if he can help Nigerians we would like to know," she said.

At Lagos University Teaching Hospital, head of haematology Dr Sulaimon Akanmu despairs. "Eighty per cent of Nigerians in need of therapy cannot afford it," he said. "So they visit churches or traditional healers, many of whom exploit them."

Akanmu has had much indirect contact with TB Joshua. "I recall a patient of mine, now deceased, who came to me with HIV and renal failure. He insisted on going to the man, though I advised against it. The Synagogue sent him back with the message that they needed a written referral. They wanted to use my name.

"The next time I saw him, he was comatose. He said TB Joshua had cured him of HIV but could not help with the renal failure. It was clear to me that he had AIDS and I did the Capillus test in front of him, so that he could see that he was positive. This is a scam," he said.

TB Joshua will not be drawn on the subject. He no longer gives interviews to journalists – at least not to me. For three days I went to the Synagogue and sat through interminable videos. But the Holy Spirit did not instruct The Man of God to speak to me.

**EXERCISE 3****RELIGION**

**MATERIALS:** One newspaper clipping

**TIME:** 20 minutes

Read the article in plenary and answer the following question:

1. Does “Scriptures under Scrutiny” (D) convey the message that religion justifies gender injustice, or is it just the way that religion is interpreted?

## SCRIPTURES UNDER SCRUTINY

Don't blame religion for gender discrimination, argues FARID ESACK

Religious communities have an enormous amount to answer for and a huge responsibility in addressing gender discrimination. As a social force, few elements are as powerful as religion in sustaining social attitudes.

It connects us to the mysterious and the transcendent and provides us with "answers" to that which cannot be answered (Relax, if it does not make any sense to you now; in your next life or the hereafter, things will become clearer). Besides, if God has spoken who are you and I to backchat?

One must, however, be careful when one speaks of "religious community" or even of any particular religious community, given the array of diversity within these groups.

It is, of course, true that every society and every socioeconomic or racial strata within that society is characterised by gender injustice: rich and poor, black and white, Brahmins and Harijans. Like the many men who led and suffered for Africa's struggle for political liberation but who never understood the comprehensiveness of liberation, women activists also face that challenge.

How many a women's activist is there not who continues to believe that youth are there to be seen and not heard, that old mamas have just nuisance value, that Jews are just about making money or that only Christians will attain salvation, that the bomb that went off probably had a Muslim stamp on it?

Whatever else the religious faithful may want to believe, religion is also a social construct. We thus cannot "blame" religion for crimes of violence against women as if there is something called religion that fell from the sky and exists outside of the daily lives of people.

It is a bit like the newspaper headline "Lust kills woman". Besides reducing the rawness of the violence to a crime of passion — a more acceptable emotion — the title also drew attention away from the fact that it was a real man who killed his partner. To argue that religion oppresses or liberates women is to do exactly the same thing — remove the responsibility for oppression or liberation from the hands of men and women.

Religious people committed to gender justice are under an obligation to call upon women for forgiveness. There is much in all our traditions that fosters and sustains images of women and practices by men which serve to deny women their full worth as human

beings created by God and as carriers of the spirit of God.

Contemporary Jews cannot just walk away from the prayer of Rabbi Yehuda, a second century Jewish luminary: "Blessed be God that he has not made me a Gentile. Blessed be God that he has not made me a woman. Blessed be God that he has not made me a wild pig."

Alas! If it could only have been confined to the second century. Most orthodox Jewish males continue to include it in their daily prayers. And the more "enlightened ones" offer various explanations as to why we should not really read into the prayer what we read into it.

In most traditions, scripture is acknowledged to be the product of males who lived in societies dominated by males. Where they are not believed to be the production of men but as being revealed from somewhere beyond, men were invariably the recipients of that scripture. Viewed outside of their socio-historical contexts, these scriptures clearly lend themselves to being very useful tools for violence against women. A few examples:

The Koran, believed by Muslims to be the direct word of God, declares: "Men are the protectors and maintainers of/over women, because God has preferred some of them over others, and because they support them from their means. As to those women on whose part you fear (ill conduct/disobedience), admonish them, refuse to share their beds and beat them, but if they return again to obedience seek not means against them. (And the "more enlightened ones" point out that the "beating should only be a last resort whereas before Islam it was a first resort, that it should be with a toothbrush, or a handkerchief and should not leave any permanent marks.)

In the Torah, the last of the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God states: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's. (Exodus 22:31)"

Besides the interesting possibility of coveting a manservant and the implicit endorsement of male-male sexuality as long as he does not belong to your neighbour, we see how women are portrayed as the personal property of men. Women are regarded as more valuable than an ox and an ass, but lower than the house.

The Manusmrti, the famous work on Hindu Law by Manu, states: "By a girl, by a young woman or even an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood, a female must be subjected to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord [husband] is dead, to her sons: a woman must never be independent. Though destitute of virtue or seeking leisure (elsewhere) or devoid of good qualities (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife."

Finally, in the New Testament we are told: "For a man ought not to cover his head since it is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (1 Cor. 11:7). As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in a church. (1 Cor. 14)."

Whatever else it may be at the end of life or thereafter, religion is at the end of the day a social tool of liberation or oppression. Perhaps the most vivid example of this is the apartheid era in South Africa, where Christianity was used as a justification for oppression by the state, with some politicians advancing theological arguments for racial oppression. At the same time, however, the church — well, some sections of some of it — was used as a rallying point for the struggle against apartheid.

Similarly, religion can be used to argue that women are inferior to men. However, different sections from the same scriptures can be interpreted to send a message of justice and equality for all people. It is important to reflect the fact that religions are not homogenous and that there are many different ideas and interpretations among believers of the same faith.

In the context of their times, the personal examples of the founders of various faiths were exemplary in encouraging a sense of gender justice and compassion towards all victims of oppression, including women. Despite this, religious community life, with few exceptions, is deeply rooted in various forms of gender injustice, ranging from explicit misogyny to paternalism under the guise of kindness.



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SECTION TWO

## **CULTURE & TRADITION**

# 2

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## CULTURE AND TRADITION

### DEFINITION

**Culture** is a complex phenomenon, in terms of which people both form and express their sense of identity. Although religion and culture are two separate concepts, there is a great deal of over-lap between them. Traditional cultural practices have often found their way into religious systems, while religious beliefs influence the cultural life of communities.

Within a human rights framework, the right to culture as a human right, as with freedom of religion, is balanced against other universal rights such as the rights to equality and dignity. Furthermore, the right to culture cannot be used as an excuse to discriminate. For example, violence against women cannot be condoned purely on the basis that it is an acceptable cultural practice.

**“It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide”**

- Mahatma Gandhi

Although culture is often seen as set in stone, it can in fact be very flexible, and while culture and tradition provide continuity with the past, they also change and adapt to meet and reflect changing social conditions. Culture is, or should be dynamic.

### GENDER ISSUES

Patriarchy, which literally means “rule by the father”, refers to a system where men hold more social, economic and political power than women, and exercise authority over women both in the home and in the public sphere. Most cultures in the world today are based on a patriarchal system of power. Culture is thus more than just ideas, practices, and expressions such as the arts: it dictates who in society has access to and control over resources and political power. Tradition, culture and religion provide a set of social rules, which are used to ensure that men and women conform to their prescribed gender roles and do not challenge the male-dominated order.

**A good wife, an injured leg and a pair of torn trousers stay at home.**

- Traditional saying from The Netherlands.

In most nations around the world, there is a long tradition of women resisting domination and demanding their rights, a tradition which is still reflected in many myths and legends. This is often done in a context where women believe in their culture but challenge inequalities that may arise due to the interpretation of certain cultural practices. It is therefore incorrect to assume that where women do challenge discriminatory practices within culture, that they are rejecting it, or that gender equality and culture are mutually exclusive.

Even now, women attempting to preserve their traditions continue to face obstacles, as illustrated by the experiences of a group of aboriginal Australian women who attempted to win protection for their sacred sites. The women refused to disclose the basis for the site's sacred nature, on the basis that the knowledge was secret and sacred, and could not be shared with men. The authorities refused to give recognition to the site, and were dismissive of this "women's secret business".

## **MEDIA ISSUES**

As with religion, the media often appears to regard tradition and culture as untouchable. Moreover, media practitioners are often unaware of how their own cultural backgrounds and beliefs influence their understanding of issues around custom and tradition.

Where culture and tradition are criticised, women are once again presented as victims, creating the impression of women and culture as mutually exclusive. They are seldom asked to give their experiences of culture, and are treated as passive objects, rather than active participants in the cultural life of their societies.

It is important for societies to address the fact that some traditions and cultural practices are intrinsically harmful and discriminatory. For example, medical research has proven that female genital mutilation (FGM) is harmful to the health of women who are subjected to it. This is in addition to the fact that it discriminates against and is a form of oppression because it is done to satisfy the sexual needs of men, and is almost never voluntary. On the other hand, FGM also raises other complex gender questions because it is an act performed by women. The media can play a constructive role in this process by providing a forum for debate and information sharing.

For example, there are numerous very topical and newsworthy issues around tradition, culture and gender, which could benefit from increased media attention. These include:

- There is a disturbing tendency for some unscrupulous traditional healers to exploit the HIV / AIDS pandemic by selling bogus "traditional" cures to people. The media has an important role to play in refuting myths about HIV, and exposing those who abuse the institution of traditional medicine.
  
- Witchcraft allegations lead to the stigmatisation, banishing and murder of innocent persons. Women, as a marginalised social group, are particularly vulnerable to these allegations. Media attention often focuses on the sensational aspects of such cases, but responsible reporting could play a constructive role in raising awareness of these problems, and showing that witch-hunts have more to do with social dynamics than 'black magic'.

**EXERCISE 4****CULTURE**

**MATERIALS:** Flip charts, metacards and markers

**TIME:** 45 minutes

**Aim:** To examine how culture may be interpreted and used to perpetuate or challenge gender inequalities.

To examine how media perceptions and bias can influence reporting on culture and gender.

To assess the extent to which media reporting reflects current societal views on culture and gender.

To examine the negative and positive aspects of culture.

**STEP 1:** Break the participants into groups of five and above.

Ask each group to list some cultural and religious practices in their community that are different for women and men. Then pick a few of the examples given and ask the questions listed below:

1. Who is imposing the practice (for example, family, father, mother, government, religious authority, dominant ethnic or religious group?)
2. Why is the practice being imposed (for example, to protect women, to promote the economic interests of someone, to prevent a group from competing for jobs, etc)?
3. Who is benefiting from the practice?
4. Who is losing from the practice? If someone is losing from the practice, what are the reasons that he or she continues to lose from the practice?
5. What human rights are being violated by the practice?

One of the persons in each group to present their findings in plenary.

**STEP 2:** In the same small groups, ask participants to:

- Identify and list positive aspects of their culture with respect to women.
- Discuss whether these aspects support or promote women's human rights?
- One person from the group is to make the presentation of their findings.

Exercise adapted from: Local Action, Global Change –" Learning About the Human Rights of Women and Girls", by Julie Mertus, Nancy Flowers and Mallika Dutt – published by UNIFEM and the Centre for Women's Global Leadership, 1999

**EXERCISE 5****CULTURE**

**MATERIALS:** Three handouts

**TIME:** 45 minutes

**AIM:** To assist journalists identify gender and culture issues, and to guide them in pursuing them as stories.

**STEP 1:** Examine the quote by South African constitutional court judge Albie Sachs (A); the sayings about men and women from different countries around the world (B), as well as the letters to the editor concerning gender equality by two men from Botswana and South Africa (C).

1. Do you agree with Justice Sachs (A) that patriarchy cuts across all cultures and ethnic groups? Why?
2. What do the sayings (B) tell us about accepted norms and perceptions regarding men and women in society?
3. In the two letters (C) to the press, how are culture and tradition used to justify the oppression of women?

**STEP 2:** Half of the group to focus on the article 'Equality is fine but' and the other half to focus on the article 'African Culture is being undermined'.

4. Imagine your editor has tasked you with following up and writing an article to bring out people's views on the article 'Equality is fine but.' List down the people you would interview and the specific angle you would pursue. Give your reasons for selecting these people.
5. You have been tasked with following up on the sentiments expressed in the article, "African Culture is being undermined'. Explain the angle you would pursue and the reasons for pursuing this angle. Which people would you interview and why?

**During plenary, the group should discuss the questions:**

1. In what way has the media covered issues of culture and tradition in your country? What has been the impact of this type of coverage?
2. Are culture and tradition static? Can they change and are they changing? Cite some examples.

## ALBIE SACHS, JUDGE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

It is a sad fact that one of the few profoundly non racial institutions in South Africa is patriarchy.

Amongst the multiple chauvinisms which abound in our country, the male version rears itself with special equal vigour in communities. Indeed, it is so firmly rooted that it is frequently given a cultural halo and identified with the customs and personalities of different communities.

Thus to challenge patriarchy, to dispute the idea that men should be dominant figures in the family and society, is to be seen not as fighting against the male privilege but as attempting to destroy African tradition or subvert Afrikaaner ideals or undermine civilized and decent British values.

Men are exhorted to express their manhood as powerfully as possible, which some do by joining the police or the army or vigilante groups and seeing how many youths they can shoot, whip, teargas, club or knife, or how many houses they can burn down or bulldoze, or how many people they can torture into helplessness.

Patriarchy brutalizes men and neutralizes women across the colour line

## PROVERBS AND SAYINGS ABOUT WOMEN

### 'ONE WHO APPLIES PROVERBS GETS WHAT'S/HE WANTS' (SHONA)

Proverbs are perceived to embody truth in different communities. They may confirm societal norms and values but may also serve to perpetuate societal stereotypes.

Given the powerful status of proverbs, the following proverbs are a severe challenge to women worldwide.

- **Woman, the source of all evil. (Benin, Senegal)**
- **A good wife, an injured leg and a pair of torn trousers stay at home. (Netherlands/Spain)**
- **Virtuous is the girl who suffers and dies without a sound. (India)**
- **Never marry a woman with bigger feet than your own. (Sena, Mozambique, Malawi)**
- **A woman can't become a man. (Burkina Faso)**
- **Virility gone, one might as well be a woman. ( Rundi, Burundi)**
- **Two men cannot live in the same house. (Rundi, Burundi)**
- **The hen knows when it's morning, but she looks at the mouth of the cock. (Ashanti, Ghana)**
- **A woman and an invalid man are the same. (Gikuyu, Kenya)**
- **A woman's intelligence is that of a child (Benin, Senegal)**
- **If a man is not obeyed by his wife, he must beat her thwack! (KiSwahili, East Africa)**

## EQUALITY IS FINE, BUT . . .

**W**e all view the world in different ways. I am one of those people who really support equality in Botswana as well as in the whole universe. Nevertheless I tend to feel very frightened because I really anticipate some bad things associated with it.

I am tempted to say that equality is very important here in Botswana especially as many families are headed by women.

Women should not be denied the chance to hold high positions at work. They need to hold well paid jobs so that they can support their families.

There is rational behind equality, though I think we cannot be 100% equal. I am

surprised that there are some people who argue that women can handle anything that their male counterparts can handle. This is not true and we must not mislead our womenfolk into believing it.

Women have to raise children and if we employ them in the army to do the same work as men we will be misdirecting ourselves. The army means the security of the nation. It does not need any chances. It needs a constantly active staff.

If it happens that women are employed, they should be deployed to do clerical work and should not be engaged in combat activities.

I imagine what could happen to the country if it is attacked at the time when women have gone for



### Can women cope?

maternity leave. The country would suffer greatly. I strongly support equality but not in the army.

What I am saying in this article is that we should be careful about the extent to which equality can be practiced.

I love women and I would like to see them getting justice. I would like to see them more empowered but this must be done with an open mind.

**By COLLEN TUBEGO**  
Goo-Sekgweng

## AFRICAN CULTURE IS BEING UNDERMINED

I am looking at what is going on in this so-called new South Africa. Our children who attend multiracial schools are taught by non-Africans, especially whites.

The education our children receive from these schools makes them despise African culture and glorify Western norms. I feel strongly about this – to the point of refusing to take my child to these schools.

The medium of instruction is English. That means our children lose touch with their languages and with their culture.

There are unpleasant connotations attached to the use of English. People of all races have come to associate English with status, wealth and a superiority complex. It is the language of the successful, as the saying goes.

Strange colonial thought patterns have emerged around the issue. People have come to measure one's intelligence in terms of how one speaks English. The more articulate you are in English, the more intelligent. This is sheer

nonsense.

People who reason this way are brainwashed and lost. I have met professors who are very articulate but mediocre in their thinking capacity. In the same vein I have met street sweepers who are highly intelligent.

There is nothing that displeases me like hearing a black child speaking with a white accent and aping white mannerisms.

What this means is that his/her mind has been emptied of African culture and identity.

Western ways of looking at things in life take control of the mind. Slowly the child is alienated from his or her culture, without him or her being aware of it.

In view of momentous challenges ahead, we also need to look at our women, especially after the all-women international conference in Beijing a few years ago.

African women must be viewed as potential partners in the process of

nurturing a nation.

I am sad to say that women have let us down. Each time they interact with their white counterparts, their minds imbibe western thinking while they (Africans) in turn, fail to promote the African perspectives of life.

Is it surprising then to see our women wearing wigs that resemble white people's hair? They also speak and hold their cigarettes like white women.

While I had no quarrel with women attending the Beijing conference, I have serious misgivings about our women being manipulated by the wave of a summit. I fully support our women and subscribe to their constitutional rights as individuals.

But I hate the content of a campaign that is essentially intended to destroy the African family, its roots and religion.

**JACOB MAMABOLO**  
Rustenburg



SECTION TWO

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## **HUMAN RIGHTS**

# 3

## HUMAN RIGHTS

### DEFINITION

The concept of universal human rights has its roots in many ancient traditions, such as the Southern African philosophy of 'Ubuntu', (tolerance and respect for human dignity). But the international human rights movement has really gained momentum since the Universal Declaration on Human Rights was adopted in 1948, as a reaction to the atrocities of World War II.

**Human rights** are internationally agreed standards, which govern the relationship between states and individuals, between persons, and between social groups. Human rights are an intrinsic part of democracy, and have been at the heart of liberation struggles around the world.

**“Once and for all we need to commit ourselves to the concept that women’s rights are not factional or sectional privileges, bestowed on the few by the whim of the few. They are human rights. In a society in which the rights and potential of women are constrained, no man can be truly free. He may have power, but he will not have freedom.”**

– Mary Robinson, High Commissioner, UN Human Rights Commission.

There are various classes of human rights:

**Civil rights, or blue rights, (first generation rights)**, deal with people’s rights as citizens, and are concerned with ensuring that the state does not abuse its power of individuals. Civil rights include the right to equality, the right to vote, the right to freedom of movement, and freedom of expression. Feminist scholars however have argued that in countries where there are dual systems of law (i.e. civil and customary law) women’s experiences of exercising their civil rights is extremely negative. It becomes clear that the notion of citizenship for women is no more than a paper right, as customary legal practices are given preference over civil law in most cases.

**Socio-economic rights, or red rights (second generation rights)**, deals with the state’s responsibility to provide basic services and uphold human dignity. These rights include the right to education, the right to basic health care, and the right to social welfare.

**Environmental, or green rights (third generation rights)**, is gaining increasing recognition. Green rights involve the right of communities to live in an environment that is safe and not harmful to their health. They include the right to clean air and water.

Most of the world’s nations are signatories to the Universal Declaration, and other international human rights instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights; and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

## **GENDER ISSUES**

All the basic rights enshrined in the various instruments apply equally to women and to men. In addition to this formal equality, there is recognition of the fact that women face specific forms of discrimination, which need to be addressed by gender-specific instruments such as CEDAW.

However, while many nations have adopted the international conventions, including CEDAW, and enacted national legislation enshrining women's rights as human rights, there is often a major gap between law and government policy, or between policy and implementation. The rights remain on paper, instead of becoming a reality in women's everyday lives.

## **MEDIA ISSUES**

The media's right to freedom of expression derives from the concept of universal human rights, and the link between these rights and a democratic society. The reason why the media is given the right to freedom of expression is because it is expected to perform a watchdog function, and guard against abuse of power by the State, civil society and the private sector. The media thus has more than a role to play in addressing issues of human rights – it has a duty. Furthermore, the media should challenge and question discrimination and inequality within this human rights context. Sadly, this is lacking as more often than not media coverage of gender inequality perpetuates rather than challenges stereotypes resulting from discrimination and inequality.

By adopting a human rights approach to issues of religion, tradition and culture, the media can evaluate whether certain customs and practices violate men and women's basic rights, and provide the public with critical insight into the ways in which religion and culture can either strengthen or undermine a democratic society.

Of course, there can be conflict between human rights, such as between the right to equality and the right to religious freedom. When covering these stories (such as the current debate around whether women should have the right to be ordained as priests), media practitioners need to be aware how rights should be balanced against each other, and understand the implications of violating one right in order to enforce another.

**“Proposition: That the new world order should oppose the apartheid of gender as vigorously as the apartheid of race...The abhorrence with which the world rightly regarded apartheid is an abhorrence born of the simple moral proposition that a people's rights and opportunities – where they live, what education and health services they receive, what job they can do, what income they earn, what legal standing they have – should not depend on whether they are born black or white. Yet, it seems that the world is prepared to accept with none of the breadth and depth of opposition that has been seen during the apartheid years, that all this can depend on the accident of being born male or female.”<sup>10</sup>**

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<sup>10</sup> UNICEF: The State of the World's Children, cited in Ashworth, G. 1992. *Women and Human Rights*.

**EXERCISE 6.1****HUMAN RIGHTS (RELIGION)**

**MATERIALS:** Case Study: Sect leader detains girl on 'God's orders'

**TIME:** 45 minutes

**AIM:** To examine how religion may be interpreted and used to perpetuate or challenge gender inequalities.

To examine how media perceptions and bias can influence reporting on religion and gender.

To assess the extent to which media reporting reflects current societal views on religion and gender.

**STEP 1:** Break the participants into pairs. The pairs are to discuss the following questions for presentation of the salient points in plenary.

1. Looking at the article, Sect leader detains girl on 'God's orders', would you say that it is significant that the sect leader detains a girl and not a boy on 'God's orders'? Why?
2. Can you conceive of the latter?
3. What does this article say about the potential of religion both to promote and transgress human rights?
4. What does this article say about the position of women within the church?
5. How do you feel about the way the woman is portrayed in this article? How could this article have improved the portrayal of women?
6. What is the role of the media with regard to the promotion and transgression of human rights?
7. Is it possible to have a human rights based approach to reporting? Why?
8. Is gender justice fully accommodated in such an approach? If yes, how?

## SECT LEADER DETAINS GIRL ON 'GOD'S ORDERS'

By NATION Reporter

A pastor with an Akorino sect in Mob is detaining a two-year-old girl he wants to "set aside" for the church mission when she grows up.

The child's mother, Mrs Hannah Wambui Mungai, who is an Akorino evangelist, said in Nakuru that she left her three children under the care of the pastor's wife when she and other members of the Akorino went for a preaching mission in West Pokot three weeks ago.

On her return to Mob, the pastor surrendered two of the children, aged six and three-and-a-half years, but detained Sarah Wanjiku.

Mrs. Mungai said she did not report the matter to the police in Mob because members of her sect do not believe in challenging a "man of God" once he has invoked the name of the Holy Spirit.

"He declared that the Holy Spirit had ordered him to keep the girl so that she can grow up by the altar," said Mrs Mungai. "Our faith forbids us to take people to court but I have come to the Press because I cannot bear this suffering any longer."

She said that the pastor had handed over the child to some adherents of the church who have hidden her in Nakuru town.

Mrs Mungai does not know the name of the Akorino sect the pastor heads but she said members wore red turbans and carried walking sticks.

She wears a white turban and said her sect is known as *Kanitha wa Anabji na Atumwo* (the Church of Prophets and Apostles). "He said that the child must stay with him or else something bad would befall her, but I do not believe that God is involved in this. No one has a right to take another person's child and claim that he is acting on God's instructions."

Police in Mob said no one had reported the matter to them, but promised to take appropriate action once they received a complaint.

The woman, who has now left Mob for Eldoret to join her husband, also an Akorino member, said the saga was threatening her marriage.

"My husband is blaming me for giving away the child and has told me that I should not go home without her," she said.

**EXERCISE 6.2****HUMAN RIGHTS**

**MATERIALS:** Story entitled: Egypt tries 52 men suspected of being gay  
Pens, papers

**TIME:** 20 minutes

Break the group into pairs and ask each pair to answer the following questions within the context of their own countries:

1. Does the article reflect a human rights perspective? Discuss
2. What rights do gay people have in your country?
3. In what way can a human rights framework accommodate the rights of gay people and the right to freedom of religion?
4. How has the media coverage of gay issues reflected a human rights perspective?
5. What kind of linkages can be made in the treatment of the rights of gay people and those of women?

## EGYPT TRIES 52 MEN SUSPECTED OF BEING GAY

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR

In a high-profile crackdown on suspected homosexual activity that has been condemned by some legal activists and human rights groups, 52 men were charged today in a state security court with engaging in immoral acts or religious offenses.

The accused were by far the largest group of men put on trial at once in Egypt for suspected homosexual acts, and the courtroom, far too small to contain the defendants, their guards, some three dozen lawyers, scores of family members and journalists, was near pandemonium.

When the prosecutor read out the charge that most of the defendants were accused of 'practicing debauchery with men,' the defendants cried out almost in unison: "It did not happen! This is injustice!" All pleaded not guilty.

The sensational trial is part of a pattern of what gay Egyptians call stepped up harassment of any homosexual activity in the last 8 to 10 months, much of it related to the Internet. Many believe that the government has acted to try to stamp out what was becoming an increasingly open and vocal gay community.

Homosexuality is not specifically outlawed in Egypt, and lawyers and international human rights groups accused the government of President Hosni Mubarak of circumventing the regular judicial system and its appeal process to bring a dubious case to trial.

They noted that the largely misdemeanor charges of obscene behavior had been brought before the Emergency State Security Court, part of the special emergency laws established decades ago to protect against threats to national security and extended repeatedly ever since.

"What is very troubling is the use of these emergency or military or extraordinary procedures for a case that in a democratic state really ought to be dealt with in a normal judicial process," said Hany Megally, the Middle East director of Human Rights Watch.

The same laws have been used to try Islamic activists seeking to overthrow the government and a prominent advocate for democratic reform. There is no appeal unless the president intervenes.

Two of the men were charged today with religious offenses — they include contempt for religion, falsely interpreting the Koran and exploiting Islam to promote deviant ideas — which could get them five years in jail. The morals charge leveled against the rest carries a maximum of three years.

Lawyers and human rights groups said the accused had undergone humiliating medical examinations in prison to determine whether they had recently engaged in anal intercourse. In addition, they said, the men were apparently beaten until they confessed to having a preference for homosexual acts.

Lawyers said they believed that the government's case was weak because such moral charges usually require witnesses.

"It is a typical government attitude, to create from nothing cases to keep people busy talking and distract them from more pressing problems like poverty, corruption and unemployment," said Maha Youssef of the Hisham Mubarak Center for Human Rights, which is defending several of the men.

The defendants, handcuffed and dressed in white T-shirts and pants, occupied one entire side of the stifling room. They first bellowed separately, then chanted in unison, that they did not want their pictures taken, sobbing or hiding their faces with scraps of newspaper or plastic bags whenever a flash popped.

Several of their relatives screamed, slapped their own cheeks and then beat photographers, while one prisoner had what guards called an epileptic seizure and had to be carted from the room.

The prosecution, yelling above the din, did not present any evidence against the accused before the judge delayed the next hearing until Aug. 15. The accused have been held without bail for more than two months.

Many of the men were arrested on May 11 when the state security police raided the Queen Boat, a Nile riverboat discotheque moored in the upscale Zamalek neighborhood in front of the Marriott Hotel.

The police built a sensational case against the men in the press, releasing their names and details about some of their jobs, like the director of a department at a well-known medical school. The reports hinted that the men had taken part in Satanic rituals and in a pornographic film to be released over the Internet. Those accusations later disappeared.

“It is a way of sending a signal to the rest of the community that if you try to be more public about your behavior, you run the risk of being arrested and convicted,” Mr. Megally said.

Sometimes the vice squad logged on to matchmaking services that advertised men seeking men, answered the announcements in Egypt and then arrested the men who turned up for a rendezvous. In one case a student in

the United States planning to attend the American University in Cairo in the fall posted a notice on a gay bulletin board asking if he would have to spend the year in celibacy. The Egyptian student who responded saying there was a gay community here was arrested.

Since then the 20 or so gay chat rooms where Egyptians used to talk about their problems or cruise have virtually shut down, and even those outside the country carry warnings. “Egyptian state security police may be monitoring you!” reads one.

Being openly gay is not seen as a human rights issue here, and there is virtually no public sympathy for the defendants.

Dr. Abd al-Moaty Bayoumy, dean of theology at Al Azhar University,

noted that Islamic law considers homosexuality a worse offense than adultery and is punishable by death.

“We consider it strange how the laws of Western civilization are not alert to the danger of this crime, but encourage it in the name of freedom,” he said.

Even the directors of some local human rights organizations defended the government. “No one has the right to be queer, because this goes against nature,” said Muhammad Zari of the Human Rights Center for the Assistance of Prisoners.

“Even if Egypt permitted such practices, which is not the case and never will be,” he said, “the society will never accept it, because it violates our religion, our beliefs.”



## **SECTION THREE**

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**COVERING ISSUES  
RELATED TO GENDER,  
RELIGION AND CULTURE**



## **COVERING ISSUES RELATED TO GENDER, RELIGION AND CULTURE**

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### SECTION THREE

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- ① **To create awareness of the link between gender related issues and religion and culture.**
- ② **To examine specific issues related to gender, religion and culture.**
- ③ **To examine media coverage and reporting on issues related to gender, religion and culture.**
- ④ **To highlight best practices with regard to coverage on gender, religion and culture.**



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SECTION THREE

**SEXUAL AND  
REPRODUCTIVE  
RIGHTS**

# 1

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

### INTRODUCTION

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights is based on twelve rights which are grounded in core international human rights instruments, and additional rights that IPPF believes are implied by them. It represents IPPF's response to the challenge of applying internationally agreed human rights language to sexual and reproductive health and rights issues. By drawing on relevant extracts from international human rights treaties, the Charter demonstrates the legitimacy of sexual and reproductive rights as key human rights issues. Since these treaties have the status of international law, states that have ratified them have entered into legally binding obligations to honour them within the legislative frameworks of their own countries. The Charter has been designed as a tool to help NGOs to hold governments accountable for promises they have made in upholding human rights in general, and sexual and reproductive rights in particular.<sup>11</sup>

**“The major problem with looking at issues of women and sexual rights is that sexuality and reproductive capacity (fertility) is often conflated. In patriarchal societies this is a deliberate conflation. This conflation naturalises the division of labour around production and sexuality. The reproductive function of women results in women having primary responsibility for childcare... Reproductive rights and sexual rights touch on issues of economic claims and entitlements. ..The biological, natural sciences discourse on reproduction is directly linked to cultural, political and legal claims that men make over children as property. Wives and daughters are critical sources of property for men and the State.”<sup>12</sup>**

### DEFINITIONS

In patriarchal societies, women's sexual and reproductive rights are often considered to be one and the same thing. This is because women's reproductive capacity is viewed as their defining characteristic, while sexual enjoyment is seen as the preserve of men. Sexual and reproductive rights are in fact two separate issues, although there is an area of over-lap between them. Both are concerned with a person's control over their own physical integrity.

Sexual and reproductive rights are included in international conventions such as CEDAW, the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and the Plan of Action which emerged from the International Conference on Population and Development.

<sup>11</sup> International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), *Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights*. <http://www.ippf.org/charter/summary.htm>. 2001.

<sup>12</sup> McFadden, P. "Reproductive rights for African women – Media perspectives", paper presented at an Inter Press Service training workshop for journalists on how to report gender, religion and culture. November 2000.

## **REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

- The rights of couples and individuals to freely and responsibly decide the number, spacing and timing of their children.
- The right to have the information, education and means to make the above decisions.
- The right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.
- The right to make decisions free from discrimination, coercion and violence.

## **SEXUAL RIGHTS**

- The right of all people to make free and responsible decisions about all aspects of their own sexuality, including protecting and promoting their reproductive and sexual health.
- The right of men and women to be free from discrimination, coercion and violence in their sexual lives, and when making sexual decisions.
- The right to expect and demand equality, full consent, mutual respect and shared responsibility in all sexual relationships.

## **GENDER ISSUES**

The following are just a few of the issues that exist around gender equality, and reproductive and sexual rights.

### **Contraception**

Internationally, policies on population and development have changed focus from control and coercion to a rights based approach. In some instances, conflict exists between religious teachings on contraception and women's right to control over their own reproductive functions.

### **Abortion**

Religion is often used to deprive women of control over their own bodies. For example, various media, including CNN quoted the Pope advising women in Bosnia who had been raped during the atrocities of "ethnic cleansing" and genocide that they had a duty to bear children which had been conceived as a result of these rapes.

More than one third of all pregnancies – 80 million each year - are unwanted or mis-timed. Unwanted pregnancies occur for many reasons, the most common of which is non-use or incorrect use of contraceptives, or contraceptive failure. A pregnancy may also be unwanted because the woman has been sexually coerced or raped, because of physical or mental health problems, because she lacks the resources to raise and support a child, or because of other reasons.

### **The Control of Female Sexuality**

Patriarchal institutions are generally very concerned with controlling women's sexuality and their reproductive functions. Often, different standards of behaviour are applied to heterosexual men and women, in terms of which heterosexual men are supposed to be concerned with sexual enjoyment, while women are supposed to repress their sexuality and focus on childbearing. In the case of homosexual men and lesbian women however, there is often the belief that homosexuality is deviant behaviour and that it needs to be controlled.

For both men and women, sexual rights means the right to have control over one's body, the right to physical integrity, and the ability to make meaningful choices about one's own sexuality

and sexual activity. In many religious traditions, female sexuality is depicted as a source of evil and a temptation to men, thus requiring control by society. The control of male sexuality is not treated in the same manner, and men who transgress religious and cultural norms may in fact blame women for leading them into temptation.

### **HIV / AIDS**

While women (particularly sex workers) are often viewed as responsible for the spread of HIV, the fact is that women, who are in a weak socio-economic position, are not able to insist on the use of condoms, or to insist on monogamy from partners. Women are often economically dependent on men, and under social pressure to behave in a submissive manner. On the other hand, men, particularly young men, are under a great deal of pressure from society to prove their masculinity by having multiple sexual partners and engaging in risky behaviour. Cultural beliefs about HIV / AIDS (for example, the belief that HIV is caused by witchcraft, or that it can be cured by traditional medicine or by having sex with a virgin) also have an impact both on the spread of the virus, and on violence against women.

### **MEDIA ISSUES**

The media often adopts a moralistic approach to issues around sexuality and reproductive rights. A good illustration is a newspaper article entitled “Womb Murders”, which recently appeared in a Kenyan newspaper. While the headline reinforced the editorial tone that women who seek abortions are immoral, the content of the article clearly demonstrated that the women concerned had based the decision to terminate their pregnancies on a variety of very valid social, economic and personal issues.

It is common wisdom that in the media, sex sells. There is therefore always the temptation for media practitioners to treat stories on reproductive and sexual rights in a sensational manner, and sell the story by shocking and titillating the audience. However, responsible reporting on reproductive and sexual rights could make for equally good journalism, and provide the public with more balanced information on the issues.

Stories could include information on the law at present (e.g. is abortion legal in your country?); the impact of the legislation (how many back-street abortions are performed? How many women die as a result of back-street abortions?); a comparison with international law (is your country a signatory to CEDAW? What does CEDAW say about reproductive rights?); the opinions of government or religious authorities, balanced with the opinions of reproductive rights activists; and the experiences of ordinary women – bearing in mind that ethical standards, such as respecting the dignity and confidentiality of news subjects should be adhered to at all times.

**EXERCISE 7****SEXUAL RIGHTS**

**MATERIALS:** Papers, pens

**TIME:** 60 minutes

**AIMS:** To raise journalists' awareness to the existence of laws that aim to curb sexual discrimination

To broaden the scope of coverage on issues of women's sexual rights.

**STEP 1:** In small groups of about 4, write what you understand by the term 'sexual rights. In those same groups, write up a law aimed at protecting the sexual rights of women. This law should be as specific as possible. Decide in your group whether this should be local law, national law or international law or all three.

**STEP 2:** Distribute copies of the ICPD and CEDAW and ask the groups to read the sections on sexual rights.

**STEP 3:** Ask the groups to compare their own laws with the provisions of CEDAW and ICPD. Answer the following questions:

1. Are there any similarities? Highlight these.
2. In what ways do CEDAW and ICPD weaken or strengthen your own law?
3. Looking at your own law, would you change it? Give your reasons.
4. What changes/additions would you make to ICPD and CEDAW?

**STEP 4:** The group to write the first two paragraphs of a story to publicise this new law.

**For the Facilitator**

The Facilitator may benefit from accessing the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights on <http://www.ippf.org/charter/summary.htm.2001> . This could be useful in explaining this section of the manual.

*Adopted from Local Action, Global Change, published by UNIFEM and the Center for Women's Leadership*

**EXERCISE 7.1****SEXUAL RIGHTS**

- MATERIALS:** Newspaper articles:
- a) Sparks fly as negotiations progress
  - b) Painful birth pangs for the Platform
  - c) Uneasy bedfellows fight sexual rights
  - d) Promiscuity is the problem, says Pope's Envoy
  - e) A question of right choices
  - f) Herbs in treating sexual weakness

**TIME:** 30 minutes

- AIMS:** To highlight the role of the church in shaping sexual rights thinking.  
To instill critical thinking among participants of their coverage of gender and religion.  
To analyze the position of women vis-à-vis sexual rights.

Examine the first four articles (A, B, C and D) from coverage of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the follow up to the Beijing Plus Five Conference; the opinion piece in the Daily Nation, a newspaper in Kenya (E), and the piece in the Daily Nation on herbs for treating sexual weaknesses in women (F).

1. What do the Beijing articles (A, B, C and D) tell us about the role that the Catholic Church and Moslem faith have played in shaping thinking around sexual rights?
2. Why, according to article E ("A question of rights choices"), are sexual rights integral to women's rights?
3. Article F ("Herbs in treating sexual weaknesses") suggests considerable preoccupation in our society with male dysfunction and conversely with enhancing male sexual satisfaction. Why does the same not apply to women?
4. List 3 positive and 3 negative aspects of media reporting on the issues of sexual rights in the articles (A, B, C, D, E, and F).

# SPARKS FLY AS NEGOTIATIONS PROGRESS

**By Colleen Lowe  
Morna**

As women activists yesterday celebrated a provisional agreement that would guarantee women's "sexual rights," Islamic countries threatened to reverse their position on the issue if countries insist on equal inheritance laws for boys and girls.

Moslem countries say they cannot agree to equal inheritance rights since males in their societies bear heavier financial responsibilities after a bereavement.

Various smaller working groups were continuing meetings late into the night in a bid to break the inheritance deadlock and prevent its linkage to the sexual rights issue.

"A threat is a threat and we have to take it seriously," said an NGO activist who fought hard for the language on human rights relating to sexuality in paragraph 97. "Much will depend now on who pushes where, how hard, and on what."

The paragraph has been viewed as a major victory because it is the one part of the document that goes beyond agreements reached at the Cairo Population Conference.

The Cairo conference broke new ground in

defining reproductive health, sexual health and reproductive rights. But no agreement could be reached on sexual rights, notes Gita Sen of DAWN — Development Alternative for Women in a New Era.

Yesterday, Working Group I agreed that "Human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence."

The paragraph also affirms "equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relationships and reproduction."

The fact that the paragraph refers to sexuality as a human right, rather than to "sexual rights", is a "semantic, rather than substantive issue," Sen said.

Barbara Klugman, a health policy expert and member of the South African delegation, said sexual rights are "about the integrity of the body. What we are saying here is that no one other than a woman can make

decisions about her body other than herself."

Agreement was also reached on the controversial paragraph 107 k, which asks governments to "consider reviewing laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abortions." However, it will be preceded by the qualifier that abortion should never be used as a form of contraception.

Calling the agreements "a very major step forward," Sen told an NGO briefing that these principles "could be used in national contexts to move legislation and policies forward."

However, many hurdles must still be overcome before these ideas can be made a matter of international principle. The Holy See said it failed to express itself on the two paragraphs in the main committee, which adjourned early yesterday due to translation problems.

A spokesperson for the Vatican hinted that it would oppose the idea of sexual rights, saying the conference "is not mandated to create new human rights."

Islamic countries

including Iran, Sudan, Jordan, Yemen, Libya and Iraq, and Catholic countries such as Malta, Venezuela and Argentina have made it clear they still view sexual rights as occurring only within marriage and does not include the right to an abortion. Fresh problems arose yesterday afternoon when Working Group 1 went on to review the section on the girl child.

Islamic countries objected to a measure designed to redress discrimination against girl children. The paragraph calls for governments to "enact, as appropriate, and enforce legislation that would guarantee equal succession and inheritance rights of children, regardless of sex."

Islamic countries oppose equal inheritance for girls and boys.

For many other countries, equal inheritance is a non-negotiable issue. But Moslem countries warned that if a compromise is not reached on this issue, they will re-open debates on sexual rights in the health chapter.

*IN THE FINAL HOURS:*

## PAINFUL BIRTH PANGS FOR THE PLATFORM

By Colleen Lowe Moma

The Platform for Action was finally adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women last night amid a torrent of reservations by the Holy See and conservative Catholic and Muslim countries.

The Vatican led the attack on the Platform for Action by refusing to join the consensus on the entire health section, which it said concentrated unduly on reproductive issues.

It repeated its reservations made at the Cairo population conference, to the terms reproductive health, sexual health, and reproductive rights. The Vatican also annexed a definition of the word "gender" to clarify that it means only male or female.

Along with several Muslim and Catholic countries, the Holy See expressed a reservation to paragraphs which establish the principle of sexuality as a human right.

Mary Ann Glendon, head of the Vatican delegation, criticised the conference for attempting to create new human rights by tampering with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In their reservations to the document, Islamic countries clarified that for them, sexual rights only apply within marriage and that they had not agreed to anything that could be construed as condoning abortion.

Several stressed that the Platform for Action would be interpreted strictly according to Sharia law, especially in the matter of inheritance rights for girls.

At press time, nearly a fifth of the UN's 185 members had expressed one reservation or the other with the Platform for Action.

But Patricia Licuanan, chairperson of the main committee, argued that the platform is a "solid and historic document," noting that the reservations only related to a few specific areas. These were similar in number and nature to those made at the Cairo conference, and had come from the expected sources, she said.

"The reservations have to be seen in the context of the period in which the conference is taking place," the exhausted but exhilarated Licuanan noted during a quick break from the late evening plenary session.

Licuanan said that the heated tenor of the conference actually reflects women's progress.

"The women's movement has made incredible advances. At the same time, there has been a conservative backlash. The reason why we have had these battles is that there are many men who feel very threatened," she said.

What had been encouraging, Licuanan contended, is the number of

Catholics and Muslims who have 'taken on the task of interpreting religious dogma, of showing that religion in its truest sense is gender neutral.'

While some hoped for gains had not occurred, Licuanan said "there are certain issues you just have to keep putting on the table; this is how change eventually comes about."

She cited the unprecedented hour-long debate on sexual orientation in the early hours of Friday morning. While it was clear that agreement would not be reached on the issue, the fact that it had been openly confronted was historic in itself.

As bleary eyed delegates carried on in the plenary, the corridors were alive with activists making last minute efforts to catch the limelight.

On one level of the Beijing International Conference Centre, lesbians held forth, while Yemeni women downstairs put forward their views through hoods with only a slit for their eyes.

And Iraqi delegates were peeved when UN Security guards prevented them from holding an impromptu press conference on the devastating effects of economic sanctions on women and children.

# UNEASY BEDFELLOWS FIGHT SEXUAL RIGHTS

BY FERIAL HAFFAJEE

An unholy alliance was struck yesterday at the Beijing +5 UN conference between the American religious right and some African government representatives who oppose a move to enshrine gay rights in the conference outcome document.

Their partnership was forged at an explosive sexual rights meeting, where a Nigerian Member of Parliament told a meeting of pro-gay rights activists: "Lesbianism is not what women in this conference should be discussing. How can you be talking about lesbianism in Nigeria... rubbish?" MP Adeyemi Janet Febisola then stormed out of the meeting, which was held to highlight the conference attack on sexual orientation rights.

Ugandan Minister of State for Gender Jane Kuka also said that lesbianism was rare in Uganda. "What is this

thing they [lesbians] do?" she enquired of the meeting. "There are other issues we should be tackling, like poverty. Also, there are many men around and we should persuade young women to look at them."

Febisola pledged her support to a leaflet distributed at the UN meeting by the right-wing pro-family coalition of 60 organisations, which oppose gay and reproductive rights.

The group, some of whom are formally represented at the post-Beijing summit, are trying to win support from developing countries. Their pamphlet charged: "If the West would stop pushing homosexual and abortion 'rights' on unwilling countries, the document would be done."

It also alleged that sexual rights activists from the West were "blaming" developing countries for holding up

the document. "We ought to be focusing on the real issues like the homeless or the feminisation of poverty," said Susan Roylance of the United Families International, a member of the right-wing coalition. "That's what African countries want to do. But the sexual and reproductive rights agenda is being pushed by the EU and the JUSCANZ countries," she said.

The war of words erupted because reproductive and sexual rights have again emerged as the key hurdle during the Beijing +5 conference currently underway to assess progress since the last world conference on women. Amnesty International yesterday charged that a separate unholy alliance at the conference was evident between the Holy See and six countries where religious influences were strong.

# PROMISCUITY IS THE PROBLEM, SAYS POPE'S ENVOY

By Colleen Lowe Morna

The Pope's first woman envoy yesterday launched an attack on "irresponsible sexual behaviour," which she claimed is a major source of suffering, disease and poverty for women.

In a carefully worded, but pointed address, Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon faulted the draft Platform for Action for "not being bold enough in acknowledging the threat to women's health arising from widespread attitudes of sexual permissiveness."

The document, added Glendon, "likewise refrains from challenging societies which have abdicated their responsibility to attempt to change, at their very roots, irresponsible attitudes and behaviours".

Wary conference organisers, eager to prevent the Vatican from dominating the Fourth World Conference on Women as it did last year's population conference in Cairo, were quick to challenge the criticism.

"Permissiveness is not a gender issue," retorted Patricia Licuanan, chair of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and of the main negotiating committee in Beijing. "We should zero in here on areas where women are being discriminated

against, not on matters which are gender neutral."

The main committee yesterday split into two working groups that immediately began to debate human rights and reproductive issues - the two most controversial topics at the conference. The committees hope to reach agreement on the matters as early as possible in the proceedings.

While emphasising the importance of women's education and economic empowerment, Glendon showed little sign of backing down from the Vatican's position on issues like promoting motherhood and opposing abortion.

The fear of reinforcing "stereotypes concerning the role of women" should not prevent delegates from addressing the challenges of "those millions of women who dedicate themselves to motherhood", she said.

And all who are genuinely committed to the advancement of women, Glendon added, "must offer a woman or a girl who is pregnant, frightened and alone a better alternative than the destruction of her own child."

The Vatican's Press Director Joaquim Navarro-Valls, who took on the world's media at the population

conference last year, said that his delegation would not try to undo the agreements reached in Cairo.

But he maintained that others were renegeing on these agreements by bracketing text on parental consent in matters relating to adolescents' sexual health.

He said the Vatican will also challenge sections on the Global Platform for Action which refer to sexual orientation. He said he expected developing countries to support the Church's position on this issue.

However, the Vatican has now agreed to stop its campaign against the use of the word —gender. Earlier, it had objected to the word arguing that it might imply acceptance of homosexuality, but a "contact group" found that there are no hidden meanings to the term.

The Vatican delegation, which consists of 14 women and six men, is the first ever to have a majority of women members. Navarro-Valls was quick to counter any suggestion that such a trend might one day lead to women bishops in the Catholic church.

"That is not a matter of human rights or discrimination because it is preordained," he said.

## A QUESTION OF RIGHT CHOICES

**RECOGNISING SEXUAL RIGHTS IS KEY TO PREVENTING VIOLENCE, COERCION AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION, SAYS ESTHER NAGAWA**

**R**ose Madu, who works in the Federal Department of Health in Lagos, Nigeria, on learning about sexual and reproductive rights said: "In my country, all sexual and reproductive rights are violated, particularly those of women. I did not even know that such rights existed."

Sexual rights embrace basic human rights and include full respect for the physical integrity of the human body, the right to the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health, the right to necessary information and services, with full respect for confidentiality, and the right to make decisions concerning sexuality and reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

In most cases worldwide, the desire to limit the family size is more than just a personal preference, it's a matter of life and death. Freedom to reproduce is not well established, and the option to choose non-motherhood or non-fatherhood remains restricted. Although reproductive freedom is often considered to be primarily a women's issue, men who wish to take responsibility for their fertility are often denied opportunities to choose and determine when to become fathers.

Recognising sexual rights will help ensure that women and girls are not subjected to unwanted sexual relations, including unwanted pregnancy and childbearing.

It will also protect women and girls from physical, sexual and psychological violence in the community or work place. This includes sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation, and rape.

Recognising these rights will ensure women are not subjected to coercive or unsafe contraceptive services and coercive or unsafe abortion or to physical, sexual and psychological violence in the home, including marital rape, battering, imprisonment, and incest.

They will also be protected from unwanted medical interventions or bodily mutilations, including female genital mutilation, discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS as well as systematic rape as a weapon of war.

The rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health is based on existing international human rights agreements and recognises sexual and reproductive health rights as important ends in themselves.

The International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 urged countries to "eliminate inequalities between men and women as soon as possible by eliminating all practices that discriminate against women; assisting women to establish and realize their rights, including those that relate to reproductive and sexual health".

Reproductive rights include the right of couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children, and to have information, education and means to do so.

Couples also have the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health; and make decisions about reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

Sexual rights include the right of all people to decide freely and

responsibly on all aspects of their sexuality and to expect and demand equality, full consent, mutual respect and shared responsibility in sexual relations.

Despite improvement in health care provision, reproductive health indicators such as maternal mortality and morbidity rates are still high. The maternal mortality rate is currently estimated at 650/100,000.

For women, the right to life implies safe motherhood, freedom to use modern contraceptives and ability to avoid high-risk pregnancies (too early, too late, too close, too many). They also need freedom from violence as they choose to exercise this right.

The right to liberty and security of person recognises that, for example, no person should be subjected to female genital cutting and other mutilations, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation or forced abortion.

The right to liberty also guarantees freedom from sexual harassment and sexual abuse. Many young women and schoolgirls are still subjected to sexual harassment and abuse.

The right to be free from torture and ill treatment encompasses the protection of all women, men and young people from violence, sexual exploitation and abuse.

All people are entitled to the right to sexual and reproductive information. Youth as well as the rural poor have a right to information that concerns their sexual and reproductive health, how their bodies function and where to seek services. We violate this right, especially for the youth when we withhold vital information and insist that they are not ready for it. The high rate of adolescent pregnancies and unsafe abortions are testimony to the fact that the youth are more than ready for sexual activity and

hence have the right to sexual and reproductive health information.

The most violated right, especially for women, is the right to equity and freedom from all forms of discrimination in one's sexual and reproductive life. This right allows women to choose to be sexually active or not. Many women are forced to engage in sex against their will. Examples of this are young girls who are forced into sex for economic gains. The right to have sex that is mutually consensual covers issues of marital and date rape. Unfortunately, many of our lawmakers do not believe that these acts are a violation of rights. Many women do not know that they have the right to prosecute their abusers even if it is their husbands.

Abuse of this right has negative consequences that might last a lifetime. It damages self-esteem and self-image.

The right to choose one's sexual partner without discrimination is violated in communities where children are forced to marry only people of the same tribe, race, religion, and economic status.

The sexual and reproductive rights of women are further jeopardised owing to imbalances in genders. There are communities where a woman is taught never to say "no" to a spouse's sexual advances regardless of whether she feels like it, ready for it or even desires it. This is a violation of the woman's rights.

The government, women's or non-governmental organisations should join hands and work towards ensuring that people know what sexual and reproductive rights are and how they can access them.

# HERBS IN TREATING SEXUAL WEAKNESS

By JAMES NJOROGE

In our African society sex is a taboo topic in public. Worse still, if having a sexual weakness.

Unfortunately, research indicates 30 percent of men worldwide have sexual performance weakness in one way or the other. This is as a result of several factors among them being the food we eat, fatigue, stress, lifestyle for example drug addiction and some chronic diseases including STDs and diabetes.

It has been established that in several cases, men who overwork, especially in developed countries where people work for more than 12 hours, suffer sexual weaknesses.

In an attempt to fight this serious problem, researchers in America, Europe, Africa, Australia and Asia have been looking for a remedy or cure for performance related problems. Among the recent discoveries is Viagra.

Viagra's discovery was a relief especially to people in western countries where fatigue and stress due to long working hours affects men's sexual performance.

Viagra works through improving blood flow to the penis during sexual stimulation, penile nerve endings and endothelial, cells release nitric oxide. This activates a certain enzyme (guanylate cyclase). Viagra needs strict precaution to the users.

In Asia, herbal based sexual stimulants have been used from ancient times to treat impotence. About

98 per cent of herbs used for treating impotence worldwide are located here. Some of these aphrodisiacs in use include Tentex, Stamina, Thirty Plus and Stamforte.

In Africa, where polygamy was associated with wealth and power, men were (and still are) using herbs to improve their vigour and vitality. These were taken with soup and other preparations.

Ashwagadha (*Withania Somnifera*), Ghola Shinda, Gulvel Satwa, Keshaar Gokharu Puran Chadrodaya Rasa and Rasa —sindhoor are used especially by the young and middle aged people to enjoy a close warm relationship with their partners. They are highly recommended as aphrodisiacs.

The heart — shaped root of Korean Gingseng is arguably the most popular herb in Asia and Africa. It is believed to have great power over impotence and waning sexual power. It is believed to improve vigour and vitality.

Traditionally, its heart - shape, is believed to symbolise relationship or love.

Africans have remained big users of herbal drugs to treat sexual performance related problems. Several such herbs have been identified in East Africa with exemplary results.

*Myricoides* found in Kenya, which is used in combination with several other herbs.

*James Njoroge is a researcher at the Institute of Herbs Treatment, Kenyatta National Hospital.*

**EXERCISE 8****CONTRACEPTION**

**MATERIALS:** Case studies using two articles (A and B) on religious attitudes towards contraception.

**TIME:** 20 minutes

**AIM: To examine and highlight the role of the church in influencing attitudes towards contraception and contraceptive use.**

Examine the two articles (A and B) on religious attitudes towards contraception and answer the following questions:

1. Why has the church been so ambivalent about condom use, even in the era of HIV/AIDS?
2. Article B (“Catholic bishop says yes to condoms”) suggests that there is likely to be a considerable backlash within the Catholic Church to the notion of condom use. Is this the beginning of a change of attitude? Discuss the role that the media can play in this circumstance?
3. Do you think the introduction and use of the female condom will have an effect on how women are viewed in society? Why?
4. There is considerable talk about the female condom as a possible alternative to contraception. Is this a solution that is more likely to find favour with the church? Why?
5. In what ways can the media help bring issues of contraception onto the national agendas of their governments?

## ATTITUDES OF CHURCHES TOWARDS CONDOM USE

### (d) The Methodist Church

According to Rev. O. E. Mere, there is no official position of the church in Botswana regarding the use of condoms by Christians. The stand of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa, which includes Botswana, looks at the question of the use of condoms from the perspective of situational ethics.

The question raised is what is the current situation. The focus is on the following three points. The first point consists of the Biblical view of sex before marriage. In this regard the church teaches that unmarried people should abstain completely.

But the prevailing situation is that people are exposed to pornographic material on TV and other media. To counteract this state of affairs, the church holds that as the media has commercialised pornography and other sexual material, the church too should widely publicise its teaching on sexual morals.

The second point consists of sex within marriage. In this context the church holds that sex outside marriage is condemned on the basis of 2 Sam 11: 11 where Yahweh condemned David because of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife.

The church emphasises that one should be faithful and stick to one partner in which case the use of condoms for preventing sexually transmitted diseases does not arise. The third point consists of marriage in the African context where in some societies it is socially and legally permitted for a man to have several wives. The stand of the church is that in an African context where polygamy is legally and socially sanctioned, the polygamist must be faithful to all his wives.

In short, the church is not concerned with the number of wives a person has but with faithfulness and commitment.

The church emphasises faithfulness and fairness to the partners in a marriage context, whether monogamous or polygamous.

The church leadership is of the view that condoms are not safe and HIV/AIDS does not only spread through sexual intercourse but also through other means such as blood transfusion. But most important of all, condoms might incite a person to look for a sexual partner while a condom does not provide complete protection. The church therefore places its emphasis on teaching and educating people on good moral sexual behaviour rather than on recommending the use of condoms.

### (e) The Lutheran Church

The official position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) is that the church does not oppose the distribution and use of condoms. The church stresses that education must come first.

What is meant by education is that people must be taught and made aware of the dangers of AIDS. Although one can get infected through the use of contaminated needles or coming into contact with blood that has already been infected and although unborn children may be infected by their mothers, the main way of spreading HIV/AIDS is by sexual intercourse. Bishop Nthuping put it this way:

We maintain that sex should happen in the context of marriage. So we are against sex outside marriage.

If some people have to use condoms they should use them in the context of marriage. By distributing condoms to people who are not married one is encouraging a loose life where people will have sex with anybody.

The danger is that people, who have never had sex before, if given condoms, would want to test how they work. So we as the Lutheran Church teach people self-control. By this we mean that people who are not married should control their sexual behaviour.

A person cannot die if he/she does not have sex. We teach our members that one man must have one wife and one woman must have one husband.

Bishop John Robinson of the Lutheran Evangelical Church in Botswana expressed to me another view on the use of condoms by Christians.

According to Bishop Robinson, the official position of the church on the use of condoms is based on the understanding that sin is a reality and that we cannot wish it away.

The church takes seriously the fact that it deals with fallen humanity, which is totally corrupt. Human beings are sinful for as long as they remain in this world.

The position of the church is based on Pauline theology. Paul writing to his followers in Corinth noted I wish that all were as I myself am.

"But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry.

"For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Cor. 7:7-9). In this context the church holds the view that condoms should not be used outside marriage but if an unmarried Christian feels that he/she is stumbling, as one struggles in the path of Christ, he may in that case use condoms.

The church holds the view that condoms should be used under the guidance of a pastoral counsellor or clinical practitioner.

And where possible unmarried couples must be guided together with the view towards

getting married.

This is what the church would prefer if ultimately. This is the ideal situation.

### (f) The Dutch Reformed Church in Botswana

According to Rev. Cloete, there is no official position in the Dutch Reformed Church in Botswana regarding the use of condoms. However, in the various seminars, workshops and conferences that the church has organised since the outbreak of the HIV/AIDS pandemic the church leadership has encouraged its unmarried members to abstain completely as one of the most effective ways of combating the epidemic.

The church advises its unmarried members to seek for themselves suitable marriage partners who would be faithful to them. The church wants its people to live a life of purity in accordance with the will of God. The church tries to help young people to develop healthy relationships with members of the opposite sex. Young people are encouraged to develop normal relationships in the pattern of the life of Jesus.

They must court in the Christian way in preparation for their marriage. The church leadership, however, admits that despite this teaching young boys go on to make young girls pregnant.

The church leadership is of the view that married couples should not use condoms in the family. But in certain circumstances if one partner was unfaithful to the other then the use of condoms would be preferred in order to protect the life of the faithful partner.

### (g) Apostolic Faith Mission of Africa in Botswana

The official position of the Apostolic Faith Mission allows only married people to use condoms on the understanding that married couples have conjugal rights to each other that are sanctioned by the Church.

The church, however, does not allow born again Christians to use condoms outside marriage. This is because sex outside marriage is considered immoral and unacceptable.

The church has no problems with the use of condoms as contraceptives within marriage. Again if one partner in the marriage was infected with HIV/AIDS, the church would accept the use of condoms to protect the life of the unaffected partner. The church has no problems for non-Christians' use of condoms but the church would not advocate the use of condoms generally. Pastor Johannes Kwarapi pointed out to me that the church emphasises that a Christian must be born again.

.....continued on next page

The church of the born again Christians does not use condoms. He noted that those who may be living with HIV/AIDS in the church may have contracted the virus before they became born again and joined the church.

He further observed that the enemy number one of Botswana society is not HIV/AIDS but sin. If Botswana society is to destroy AIDS it has to destroy sin first.

The first thing is for people to change their sexual behaviour before they can consider the idea of using condoms.

God will never change his behaviour. People should stay away from sex. The use of condoms would compromise God's stand. The Church is God's representative on earth; therefore it cannot compromise God's stand.

The Bible says that the wages of sin is death, therefore, everybody who indulges himself/herself in sexual sin should know that the end result is death.

People should know that the best way to avoid HIV/AIDS is God's way, which is to abstain from sex (unmarried people) and be faithful to one's partner (married people). The law of God and the law of the land cannot allow a person to steal because he or she is hungry. In the same manner a person cannot be allowed to use condoms, because he/she is desperate to have pre-marital or extra-marital sex.

#### **(h) Assemblies of God Church in Botswana**

The position of the Assemblies of God Church in regard to the use of condoms by Christians is not documented. The general view, however, is that condoms should not be used by Christians because of the moral implications.

The churches' position is that unmarried Christians must abstain from pre-marital sex and those who are married must always be faithful to their partners.

And this is because both pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships are considered immoral on the basis of the teaching of the Bible.

Having said this, however, the church takes cognisance of the fact, that human beings live in a fallen environment under the throes of Satan.

This is evidenced by the fact that though the church preaches abstinence and faithfulness to one's wife or husband, few

people practise this teaching rigorously.

People have rendered a deaf ear to the ethical teachings of the church, hence the number of people in Botswana who are infected by HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In view of this situation, the church is of the view that any person married or unmarried, who knows that he/she is HIV positive should be advised to use condoms in order to minimize the spread of HIV/AIDS to those who have not yet been infected by this scourge.

#### **(i) Seventh Day Adventists**

The official position of the church worldwide is that unmarried people should abstain from sex completely. This is a philosophy that finds its roots in the Bible. It is also in harmony with God's will. For this reason the Seventh Day Adventist Church condemns entirely the use of condoms outside marriage.

The idea is that sex should only be conducted by married people. Condoms therefore cannot be supplied to unmarried people because it would be at odds with God's revealed purpose.

However, having said this, the church does not deny that individuals within the Seventh Day Adventist Church go on condomising as individuals.

The church leadership makes a distinction between what is known as "the church position" and "individual practice". The church does not legislate for individual or private behaviour.

However, it is the church position that unmarried Christians should abstain from sex and that those who are married must stick to their partners.

This position is taken on the understanding that God never justifies human shortcomings in relation to his standing orders on moral issues.

According to Pastor A. Mpofo, when God said, 'You shall not steal' there was no provision made that in certain circumstances a person can steal because he/she is hungry. Everyone must abide by the standards set by God.

Pastor Mpofo pointed out to me that at present no research has been conducted to support the view that those people who use condoms are safe. People who use condoms may still be risking their lives.

For example, people who use condoms

may take it for granted that they are safe to have sex with whosoever they please and in the process may make mistakes that can eventually lead to the contraction of HIV/AIDS.

Pastor Mpofo noted with concern that those who advocate that Christians should use condoms are campaigning for life preservation at the expense of Christian morality. Pastor Mpofo observed that the church teaches that people should abstain and be faithful to one's partner on the understanding that God himself will give them the grace and the strength to abstain.

It is believed that with the power of prayer all things are possible. Pastor Mpofo, however, admitted that though the Church teaches that people should abstain, nothing has been put in place to enable people to get away from sex and live up to the standards set by the church.

#### **(j) St. Michael Apostolic Church**

Finally, Bishop Peterson Bothong of St. Michael Apostolic Church has noted that there is no African Independent Church view as such regarding the use of condoms by Christians.

The prevailing view is that people should first marry and after marriage can have sex within marriage; pre-marital and extramarital sexual relationships compromise Christian ethics. According to Bishop Bothong, condoms have been heavily commercialised with slogans such as condomise and you shall stay alive.

This commercialization encourages people to commit adultery and fornication. Distribution of condoms in schools is despicable because it encourages young people, even those who are not very aware about sex, to experiment with them.

The church holds the view that it must be stated specifically that condoms should not be used. Christians must stand together and speak with one voice.

Bishop Bothong observed that when people have condoms in their pockets and cars they are reminded constantly that they can have sex; quite often too they do not use them or use them improperly.

When a person uses a condom he is committing sin, which cannot be condoned.

# CATHOLIC BISHOP SAYS YES TO CONDOMS

**CARMEL RICKARD**

A CATHOLIC bishop wants his church to allow the use of condoms in a desperate bid to halt AIDS deaths.

The proposal is likely to cause an uproar in the Catholic Church, which has been implacably opposed to the use of condoms, believing that they interfere with the creation of life.

But Bishop Kevin Dowling of Rustenburg, North West, who is investigating a possible new policy on combating HIV-AIDS on behalf of his fellow SA bishops, is now proposing that the church's total ban on condoms be lifted.

If accepted at their meeting later this month, a document containing the policy bombshell will be published as an official pastoral statement on HIV-AIDS by the bishops of Southern Africa.

Explaining his support for the document, now in the post to all the bishops for consideration before their July 24 meeting, Dowling said AIDS was killing so many people that he felt he could not "duck the issue" of condoms.

Dowling's comments follow the recent UN Special Assembly debate on AIDS at which Mozambique Prime Minister Pascoal Mocumbi explained that abstinence was not always a solution to the spread of AIDS. He

added that all parents should talk frankly about sex with their children, and "provide them with information, communication skills and, yes, condoms".

The draft to be considered by the bishops restates the traditional Catholic view that sex should take place only within marriage, but adds that condoms should be seen in the context that many people do not accept this value.

Dowling said the church should challenge such people to act responsibly by not infecting themselves and by "not transmitting death".

He said the statement would seek to give the "full picture", spelling out the failure rate of condoms and the fact that their use raised many sensitive cultural difficulties.

But he added that the AIDS crisis posed "stark choices" for many people.

When a husband was infected and the couple took no steps to prevent the wife becoming infected as well, both could die, leaving their children orphaned. The "greater good" required that the mother "continue to live", Dowling argued.

He said he had become aware of the reality of HIV-AIDS through his work with the people on platinum

mines and informal settlements around Rustenburg.

"Every week I am with people dying in their huts and shacks, mothers and emaciated babies. I am with them all the time.

"I have seen women forced into sexual liaisons for economic reasons, literally thrown into the street by their partners when it was discovered that they were infected."

According to statistics from the local Catholic clinic, the only one in the area, the infection rate there is now about 50%.

Dowling shares responsibility for coordinating the bishops' AIDS office, a national portfolio which has exposed him to the extent of the suffering caused by AIDS throughout Southern Africa.

"I do not expect what we have said in the draft to get universal approval among the bishops. It will be contentious," Dowling said.

He added that there was a perception among many that the Catholic Church's response to AIDS was a simple ban on condoms and insistence on abstinence. People were unaware that the church ran the largest network of AIDS programmes after the government.

**EXERCISE 9**

**ABORTION**

**MATERIALS:** Markers, papers, pens,

**TIME:** 45 minutes

**AIMS:** To discuss and highlight the role of culture and religion in determining women’s rights to abortion.

**STEP 1:** Put the table below up on a flipchart. Break the participants into small groups of about 5 people and ask each group to fill out the two empty columns looking at ‘*who decides*’ and the *factors that influence* that decision.

Issue	Who decides	Influencing factors
Whether to have children		
Whether to have sex		
When to have sex		
Whether or not to abort a pregnancy		
Whether or not to use a condom		
The type of contraception to use		

**Answer the following questions:**

What trend emerges in the table?

What does it say about women’s control over their own bodies?

At the end of this session, the groups should present their findings in plenary.

**STEP 2.** Still in those small groups, ask each person to share with the group an instance when a superior, whether within the home, workplace or elsewhere exerted *power over* them. Then they are to answer the following questions:

1. How did they feel? How did they react?
2. What have been some of the results of the exertion of power over women’s reproductive rights?
3. How does the media perpetuate the belief of men’s right to control women’s reproductive rights?

Did you know that: Reproductive Rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly on the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and the means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. *Paragraph 19 of Beijing Platform for Action.*

**STEP 3:** Participants to report back in plenary.

**ABORTION**

Examine the three articles on abortion (A, B and C).

1. Do the views in article A (“Womb murders”) reflect societal views on abortion? Explain.
2. Why has the church been so opposed to abortion, as reflected in article C (“ My rejection of the Abortion Bill is not personal – Bishop Setlalekgosi”)?
3. To what extent is the denial of access to abortion driven by cultural and religious beliefs or is it driven by the desire to exert control over women’s reproductive rights?
4. What argument does South Africa’s former Minister of Health, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma put forward for the Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Bill that was adopted in South Africa (article B)?
5. Is there a difference between the media coverage of abortion in articles A and C, as compared with article B? Why?

# WOMB MURDERS

## WHY WOMEN TERMINATE PREGNANCIES

By Everlyn Kwamboka

"I have a big problem, I just don't know what to do. See, I am two months pregnant and my boyfriend cannot stand it," said the writer when she visited a clinic in Nairobi to abort her fictitious pregnancy.

To her surprise, the receptionist-cum-cashier told her not to worry since that was a 20 minutes job at a cost of only Sh3,000. "Don't worry, I will arrange for you because my mother is a nurse here. You give me your real names for confidential use in case of an emergency, plus Sh100 for registration," said the receptionist.

Although abortion is a criminal offence in Kenya, a good number of doctors and nurses plus even traditional medicinemen are known to be making big fortunes from performing it. In Africa alone, 30 per cent of the 40 million pregnancies occurring each year are unplanned and 12 per cent end in abortion.

According to Dr Peter Murithi of Masaba Clinic based along River Road in Nairobi, most of the girls who undergo abortion are between 18 and 24 of age.

"Women in this age group don't know exactly what they want. Most of them are in college and want to settle down immediately after they clear college but then, they are not sure of what their boyfriends will say and that is why the majority go for abortions immediately they discover that they are pregnant," he said.

Throughout the world, the reasons women give for deciding to end an unplanned pregnancy are similar. In Kenya, women decide to have an abortion because they are too young or too poor to raise a child, estranged from or on uneasy terms with their sexual partner or are trying to finish school.

"Women come with different reasons as to why they would like to have an abortion. They are very wise. The majority come with reasons related to the event of the time," he said.

When asked to explain what he meant by the event of the time, Dr Murithi had this to say: "You see, during the bomb blast, many women came saying that their husbands or boyfriends had died and they did not see how they could continue to have the babies. After riots some women came a few weeks later saying that they were raped and they know it is legal to terminate a pregnancy from rape".

According to the chief executive and chairman of Reproductive Health Services, Dr John Nyamu, the word abortion has a stigma in most people's minds yet it can either be spontaneous or induced. It only becomes unacceptable and illegal when it is done without medical indication and if done in a clandestine manner.

### Safe Abortions

"The safest abortions are those performed early in pregnancy, the first trimester. This is because by this time, the foetus has not formed at all. When it is performed, it is just like a woman having her normal monthly periods," said Dr Murithi.

When asked how long it can take to abort a one month pregnancy, Dr Murithi said: "A one month pregnancy takes only ten minutes and the patient won't feel any pain though we give medicine to reduce pains and to clear off any infection."

"A manual vacuum aspiration equipment or electric vacuum apparatus is used to terminate pregnancy during the first trimester," said Dr Nyamu.

Many times, young girls who get pregnant use crude methods to terminate the pregnancy which is very risky to their lives and also

to the foetus. Some go to medicinemen who perform clandestine abortions. For instance, some lay abortion practitioners use prolonged and hard massage to manipulate the pregnant woman's uterus.

Women seeking the help of the lay drink concoctions of caustic substances or local bitter herbs. "Medicinemen go as far as using guava leaves, mango, pineapple, cassava stem and many other crude items.

A female doctor (name withheld) in one of the clinics in Nairobi said that some girls try terminating pregnancies by themselves which is very risky. She said she has seen cases whereby some girls come with objects such as biropens in the uterus. "One girl came in a bad condition sometime last year. She had used a very crude method - she used a pressure pump that is normally used to add pressure on bicycle tyres, to pump air into the uterus," she said.

"At one time, a patient was brought in a very serious condition. A quack doctor had tried performing an abortion on her but during the process, something went wrong and the so-called doctor panicked and left the metal currette that he was using to scrap the lining of the uterus to evacuate its contents," said Dr Murithi.

Many women have died because of this clandestine abortions that are carried out by quacks within the country. This takes us back to 1985, when a former watchman of Gatundu Divisional Hospital who procured a school girl's abortion was sent to jail for one day by the High Court. Many other women have died but the illegal process still goes on.

"Abortion complications before six hours include perforation of the uterus and injury to abdominal organs.

Death can result from severe bleeding or can be drug-related," says Dr Nyamu.

Some of the women who undergo abortion develop complications such as chronic pelvic pain, amenorrhoea and psychological trauma. "One of the essential elements in therapeutic pregnancy is to confirm that a woman has carefully considered her decision to have a termination on her own free will, has understandable information about the procedure expected, side-effects, recovery and follow-up care for complications," says Dr Nyamu.

### Trauma

"Abortion breaks up many homes because of the psychological traumas more especially if the man forces the woman to do it. Other women are haunted the rest of their lives more so, if they become infertile due to blocked tubes and then they cannot have a baby," says Dr Murithi.

When asked whether abortion should be legalized or not, Dr Murithi said that it should be legalized, especially for the handicapped. "How do you expect a mentally-ill person to carry a pregnancy and have the child? It is quite obvious that an imbecile or a moron cannot take care of a child," he said.

As for Dr Nyamu, termination of a pregnancy can be done if at all the baby's life is in danger, if it is confirmed by a psychiatrist that the mother's life is in danger, if the mother has a medical disease such as high blood pressure, diabetes, severe cardiac disease and also heart failure.

The procuring of premature delivery so as to destroy offspring has been a subject of a controversial debate the world over. May religious leaders have condemned abortion, arguing that to kill an unborn baby undermines basic human and religious values, and is morally wrong.

# WOMEN'S RIGHTS UPHELD

**The Termination of Pregnancy Bill fulfils the government's obligation to provide health care for all. Writes Health Minister NKOSAZANA ZUMA**

**O**ur new democracy is once again confronted by one of society's most fundamental issues – how to deal with the termination of pregnancy, something which occurs everyday among women of all races and classes.

A hospital-based study by the Medical Research Council last year estimated that 44 686 women had incomplete abortions every year. Of these 425 died, the equivalent of a jumbo jet crashing and killing all its passengers, and most of them poor and with limited access to family planning and inadequate support systems for unwanted children. Meanwhile, 2 463 women had access to the safe and legal termination of pregnancy, most of them white and from the higher socio-economic orders.

Whenever this subject is debated, groups approach it from many angles – religious, moral, health and women's rights. As a minister of health, doctor, woman and a Catholic I can't help but reflect on all these aspects.

This government was elected with a simple message – "Let us build a better life for all". The question we should therefore pose is, will the Termination of Pregnancy Bill change the lives of women for the better? The answer is a very clear "yes!" It's natural for any pregnant woman to want to continue with a pregnancy to full term. For her to arrive at a decision to terminate requires a lot of soul-searching, with all cultural, religious and social beliefs coming in to play.

If, despite her moral and religious imperatives, she decides on termination, the Department of Health has a moral obligation to ensure that

such termination does not put her life in danger.

It is therefore irrelevant how a minister of health feels about termination of pregnancy as the decision to do so should not reside with the minister but the woman concerned. What the Bill seeks to do is to ensure that the woman is not criminalized for taking such a decision and that her life is not endangered.

The Bill does not interfere with those who believe that termination of pregnancy is immoral, and allows them to exercise their choice against having an abortion. Each individual is able to exercise her choice without imposing it on others.

Concerns are being raised regarding the consent of the partner or, in the case of a minor, a parent. No doubt, most women who have a reasonable relationship with their partner will discuss and even agree on the need for a termination. This Bill does not in any way interfere with these discussions. However, it does ensure that the partner will not have the power of veto and allows a woman the right to exercise her choice even if it is different from her partner's.

If a minor has a relationship with her parents that allows her to discuss such matters openly with them she will surely obtain their support and consent. But this is an ideal scenario and this world is far from ideal for many children.

Children are abused physically and sexually or have a relationship that makes it impossible to discuss such matters with their parents. It is therefore important to have a law that will allow a minor to exercise her

choice either way. She should neither be forced to terminate nor to carry a pregnancy to term and the Bill allows for counseling before and after a termination to provide her with support.

The Department of Health is creating an environment which allows women to exercise choice even before they fall pregnant. Together with the Department of Education, we are introducing life skills education into the curriculum as early as primary school. Our objective is to encourage young boys and girls to delay sexual activity and to make informed choices once they become sexually active.

We have a responsibility to transform our values in a way that minimizes unwanted pregnancies. Children should be allowed to be children, but premature sexual activity and resultant pregnancy imposes adult responsibilities on them. We should strive for "children by choice and not by chance".

It is my view that the Bill strikes a balance between the rights of health-care providers who may not wish to perform the termination of pregnancy, their professional obligations towards the patient, and the woman's right to information.

Health-care providers have a duty to act in the best interest of the patient and an obligation to act in a manner that does not expose patients to courses of actions that may be detrimental to their health. Therefore, they have an obligation to refer the patient to those who will provide a safe environment and the necessary health care.

## MY REJECTION OF THE 'ABORTION' BILL IS NOT PERSONAL

– BISHOP SETLALEKGOSI

**W**ith the dust over abortion settling down, MOKAEDI'S Grace Mosinyi interviewed Bishop Boniface Setlalekgosi of the Roman Catholic Church, the man who criticized the Penal Code Amendment Bill right, left and centre. Setlalekgosi seems to stand by his words.

"My rejection of the Bill is not simply personal, it arises from SeTswana tradition, God's law as can be seen in Psalm 139:13 which will certainly fall under the fifth Commandment "Thou shalt not kill."

The Church, according to the Bishop, is against abortion (termination of pregnancy) as it always recognizes the unborn child as a human being with his or her right to life. "On this right all other human rights are based."

Bishop Setlalekgosi says he is totally against abortion in all circumstances.

"Even with all that has been put forward by the government we still hold to the right of the unborn child to life. In the case of rape the aggressor is not the child in the womb but the rapist, the same applies to cases of incest. Abortion will not protect the woman or girl from future cases of rape or incest. Also, an "abnormal" child has the same right to life as any other child or adult," he said.

In the case of a mother's life being at risk, all efforts must be made to save the life of both the mother and child-who has the right to choose who shall live, both have equal rights to life, says Bishop Setlalekgosi.

The much criticized Bill, which sought to legalise abortion under specific circumstances is yet to be signed by the President of Botswana. It was highly criticized by churches in Botswana.

The Chairman of the Ministers Fraternal, Reverend Kgoro F. Mokobi said the Church has done much to let the government know where it stands concerning this issue and "we have become so emotive that we have now given up, we cannot force them. But we've given them our advice."

Rev. Mokobi accuses the government for not sufficiently consulting people about legalizing abortion.

The Botswana Christian Council's Social Concerns Committee Moderator Ms Priscilla Monyai was earlier quoted as saying that if the government should not solve problems, then the women's wombs should not be blamed.

She said "by going ahead, the government was destroying the national ethic of the preservation of life and that by passing the Bill into law, then the country would be swamped by a string of unending problems."

**EXERCISE 10****HIV/AIDS**

**MATERIALS:** Three newspaper clippings — A,B and C

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**AIM:** To begin the discussion on HIV/AIDS and relate this to the personal level in an effort to spur alternative thinking on the way the media can cover issues of HIV/AIDS for change.

**STEP 1:** Musical Chairs<sup>13</sup>.

Arrange the participants in two concentric circles, with each participant on the inside circle facing a participant on the outside circle. The facilitator will read out a question, which each pair should speak to each other about for five minutes. At the end of each question, the people on the outer circle rotate one place to the right to face a new partner. This process should be repeated with each question.

**STEP 2:** At the end of the questions, in plenary, the participants should highlight the issues arising from the above exercise.

**Suggested Questions:**

- What first comes to mind when you think of HIV/AIDS?
- In what way has HIV/AIDS affected the lives of the female members of your immediate and extended family — your mother, grandmother, sister, and sister in law? In what way has HIV/AIDS affected the lives of the male members of your family – your father, grandfather, uncles, brothers in law? Describe the roles that they play around HIV/AIDS.
- Looking at the four articles, A, B, C, and D and using your own life experience as a basis, describe the way in which the media reinforces the cultural roles of women and men in the area of HIV/AIDS
- Based on your reading of the articles and on your own experiences, list down the ways in which religion and culture affect the position of women and men living with HIV/AIDS.
- What do you think is the role of culture and religion in curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS?
- What kind of discussions do the people in your family/community have around HIV/AIDS? Do you feel these issues tackle the real reasons for the continuing spread of the disease?
- Discuss the ways the media can integrate issues of culture and religion into their reporting of these issues.

Note to the facilitator: The questions can be adopted to suit the particular training situation/ environment. Furthermore, the facilitator can select which questions best suit his/her training.

<sup>13</sup> Adopted from Local Action, Global Change, published by UNIFEM and The Center for Women's Global Leadership (1999)

# “CIRCUMCISE ALL WOMAN, AND BEAT AIDS”

By Aipheus Siebane

NZHELELE - The well-known president of Mbofho Traditional Healers, Maine Neluvhola, is in the centre of controversy after making a call to have all the women circumcised in order to beat the HIV/AIDS disease.

Mr Neluvhola stressed during a telephonic interview that female circumcision remains the only way to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. According to him, the spread of the virus is gaining momentum because communities have abandoned their cultural rituals such as the primitive female circumcision and adopted western beliefs.

He stressed that in days gone by, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) were almost unheard of because the people were “clean”.

Mrs Mashudu Madadzhe, the coordinator at the Centre for Positive Care in Thohoyandou, slammed Mr. Neluvhola’s statement in the strongest terms. She said it is such statements that sow more confusion in the minds of society. She likened his call to the misleading belief that left scores of young girls abused by HIV/AIDS infected men. Countless young

children, some as old as a few months, were victimised by HIV/AIDS infected men who raped them following instructions from traditional doctors that the disease could be shed by having sexual intercourse with small children, she said,

“Instead of curing, the disease was extended to innocent children, completely wiping out their chance of ever leading their lives to the full”, Mrs. Madadzhe commented in dismay. She further emphasised that female circumcision was being scorned at and condemned by the rest of world. It was viewed as gross abuse to women because of how that it was applied and what it was meant for. Women Rights Organizations and the clergy came up very strongly against the practice after realizing that it was meant to diminish the desire in women. They viewed the removal of the mutilation female clitoris as sheer mutilation of the woman’s sexual organs and not a way to stop her from developing uncontrollable sexual desires.

There were also media reports of women who fled their countries to seek refuge in places where the ritual was

not practised.

Mrs Madadzhe further commented that if the woman who is circumcised is already HIV positive, then she could encounter full blown AIDS. “The chances are that she can bleed without stopping or the wound inflicted in her private parts can worsen and not heal because of her weak immune system”, she explained.

Mrs Madadzhe was full of praise for Mr J Mathivha, the president of the Congress of Traditional healers of South Africa (COTHOSA). She echoed his statement during the Condom Week celebrations at the Thohoyandou Show Grounds some weeks ago. She said she was greatly impressed when he admitted that AIDS cannot be cured but only the symptoms of diseases can be brought under control.

Mrs Madadzhe called for people to stop being misled by people who have little or no thorough knowledge at all of the HIV/AIDS threat.

Reliable sources disclosed that the number of local people who are dying of AIDS is on the increase. The same applies to those who are infected everyday.

## MORE EASTERN CAPE GIRLS RAPED BY HIV CARRIERS SEEKING BOGUS 'VIRGIN CURE'

BY MIKE EARL-TAYLOR

A shocking trend in which two Grahamstown girls under the age of 11 were allegedly raped by HIV-infected men seeking the "virgin cure" has sparked an AIDS-awareness campaign in 11 of the town's primary schools.

Police this week confirmed that the campaign was launched after a local survey conducted with the help of community anticrime forums had linked a sudden increase in the number of girls reported to have been raped in the mistaken belief that raping a virgin would cure AIDS.

The survey found that 43 percent of rape victims of the 30 reported rapes, from April to June in the Grahamstown area, are between the ages of three and 11.

Leading East London demographer Dr Rob Shell said that region, which covers Port Elizabeth and its environs, had seen an increase in the number of girls aged five to 14 who have tested HIV positive.

Dr Shell, who is the director of the population research unit at Rhodes University's East London campus, said

### Aids-awareness project launched in Grahamstown Primary School

the "virgin cure" phenomenon in the province was seen during an epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases in 1947 when soldiers returning from the Second World War caused an outbreak of sexually transmitted diseases.

Dr Mark Welman, Rhodes University director of the MTN Centre for the Study of the prevention of Crime, said: "I think it is an alarming possibility that needs to be researched.

"It suggests the emergence of a new type of rapist who is willing to put the life of a child at risk to serve their own interests. What must be combated is the misinformation handed out to HIV sufferers. There must be an awareness campaign directed in particular to people with HIV/AIDS who would either seek traditional or Western methods of treatment for the disease.

"This category of child-rapist would constitute a very small minority and one has to guard against the possibility of public anger being directed against HIV sufferers in general."

Dr Shell, who is the author of a seminal 1998 academic paper entitled HIV Transmission Vectors in the Eastern Cape, has been tracking "virgin cohort HIV-positives" in the five to 15 age group since 1988. He said the number of such infections was growing.

"Since 1988 we have tracked them as a growing percentage of all HIV-positive cases. "They are still a relatively small group but the significant thing is that they are growing as a percentage.

"These HIV-positive girls fall outside the national HIV surveillance system of antenatal clinics, which only test pregnant women.

"This virgin cure is actually an old myth and we have evidence from Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that men infected with venereal disease such as gonorrhoea and syphilis sought cures by having sex with virgins."

In the Eastern Cape the virgin cure can be dated back to 1947 when there was an STD epidemic. Dr Shell said the problem was worse during the HIV epidemic because HIV counselors told people with AIDS there was no cure. "Some of these HIV-positive people

go to traditional leaders who in some cases give them this old advice."

Grahamstown police spokesperson Sergeant Milanda Coetzer said that of 30 rapes reported in Grahamstown from April to June, 11 were committed against children. Grahamstown station commander Superintendent Ronald Koll said: "Of all reported incidents of rape in the last three months, 43 percent involved minor children."

"We came to the discovery that young girls between three and 11 are being raped and the suspects believed they would be cleansed of HIV-related diseases if they slept with virgins. "Suspicion that the rapes were linked to the belief came when two men were charged with raping two girls aged seven and eight.

"They confirmed this suspicion. They told investigating officers the reason for having sex with young children was that they knew the girls were virgins.

"HIV-infected suspects would only target these young age groups as older girls were less likely to be sexually inactive."

Sergeant Coetzer said: "When we address the children in the schools we emphasise that they are not supposed to be alone with strange men or women.

"With girls and boys we use a swimming costume as a guide to areas of their bodies covered by the costume which are wrong for someone else to touch or fondle.

"We also tell them to report any touching by an adult as soon as possible either to their parents, teachers, police or any responsible adult. I always tell the children it does not matter how friendly someone is, if they feel uncomfortable they must tell someone."

# SCHOOLKIDS IN VIRGINITY TEST

## TEACHERS PRESENT CERTIFICATES TO 'PURE' PUPILS IN CLASSROOM

### WAR ON AIDS AND UNWANTED PREGNANCIES

**PREGA GOVENDER**

**H**UNDREDS of children in a remote rural community are undergoing virginity tests to help stem the dangers of promiscuity.

Their examiners, two teachers appointed by parents, have so far tested more than 3 000 boys and girls including some as young as six — at eight schools in Osizweni, in northern Kwazulu Natal.

Pupils who pass the examinations conducted with the blessing of the province's education department are presented with certificates.

One of the examiners, Siphso Malinga, said he used several methods to test boys for virginity.

The boys were asked to urinate without using their hands over a thin piece of wire strung a metre off the ground.

Those who managed passed, those who missed failed. The backs of their knees and foreskins were also examined.

"If the foreskin is hard, the boy is pure," Malinga said, adding that an indentation behind the knee was a sign of sexual activity.

The girls are examined by a woman teacher, Thabile Ngcobo, to see if their hymens are intact.

At some of the schools, the examinations have been carried out every three months. Teachers said they promoted AIDS awareness, prevented pregnancies and revived Zulu tradition, which frowned on sex before



**VIRTUE PARADE: Schoolgirls at Osizweni, where pupils as young as six are being examined**

marriage. Pupils who fail are encouraged to read and take part in exercise and sporting activities to keep their minds off sex. No one is forced to take the tests but prizes, including watches and plastic tumblers, are presented to reluctant schoolboys to encourage them to get involved. One 24-year-old teacher, eager to lead by example, agreed to undergo the virginity test herself — and passed.

She has now earned a new-found respect among her students, who privately refer to her as "Miss Virgin".

According to the testers, the school with the highest number of virgins is Qhubimfundo Junior Primary. Of its 747 pupils, 500 have passed the test.

Schools faring less well include Sesiwabonga High School, with only 400 virgins among more than 1,000 pupils, and Qophumlando Senior Primary, with 250 virgins among 840 pupils. "Of the 3,000 boys I have tested, about 1,350 were found to be virgins," Malinga said.

"We encourage our boys to stay indoors at night and take charge of duties at home. They are encouraged to write poetry, become studious and take part in sport. In this way they are kept occupied and forget about sex," he said.

Ngcobo said parents and the local education superintendent had endorsed their efforts in trying to stem the spread of AIDS and unwanted pregnancies. "There have been times when I have used the school stock room," she said. The acting principal of Qhubimfundo Junior Primary School, Sizakele Malinga, said she supported the virginity tests. "I don't mind them using school time or the school premises. After all, it is for a good cause."

The teacher who undertook the test to set an example to her pupils, Philisiwe Hlatshwayo, said she was excited when it was announced in school assembly that she was a virgin. "My pupils have been inspired by the example I am setting. My certificate is

prominently displayed at my home for all to see. It means a lot to me," she said. Hlatshwayo, who is unmarried, said she would be handing the certificate to her husband on their wedding night.

"The certificate will be the best wedding present he will receive," she said. Fourteen-year-old Thami Mdluli of Qophumlando Senior Primary School said he was proud to be a virgin. The Grade 7 pupil said he wanted to remain pure because he was afraid of getting AIDS.

"I have two certificates so far and I do not feel at all embarrassed about taking the test. "Of the 28 boys in my class, 20 are virgins."

Twenty-year-old Nelisue Msimango, a pupil at Thembalenhia High, said that, of the 15 girls in her class, only she and a friend were virgins.

"I have no lust for sex. My certificate is framed and it hangs from my bedroom wall. I really treasure it," she said.

The education department's superintendent for the Osizweni West region, Thoko Mlaba, said she fully supported the tests in the light of the AIDS epidemic and the high rate of teenage pregnancies. "The teachers are doing an excellent job and I would like to compliment them. The children are also enthusiastic.

"I have no problem with the teachers carrying out the tests at school as long as it is not done during teaching time," she said.

**EXERCISE 11****SENSATIONAL REPORTING ON SEX AND RELIGION**

**MATERIALS:** Two Newspaper clippings

**TIME:** 20 MINUTES

**AIMS:** To highlight and discuss instances of sensational reporting on HIV/AIDS to increase sensitivity on this issue.

In plenary, the participants are to read through the two newspaper articles (Pastor preaches the gospel on sex and Preacher's wife caught in the Act) and to discuss the following questions.

1. What kind of gender stereotypes, if any, are perpetuated in the two articles?
2. In article B ("Pastor preaches the gospel on sex"), is the reporting reflecting a case of enlightenment by a religious practitioner or one of sensationalism? What do you think the effect on the general public is likely to be?
3. What image does article B portray of the pastor's wife? Why?
4. Would you have written article B in the same way? If not, how would you have reported on it?
5. Would you say that these two articles were 'scoops'? Justify your answer.
6. What has been the impact of sensationalizing issues of religion, culture and sex on women?

# PASTOR PREACHES THE GOSPEL ON SEX

**'I want my wife to be a respectable and dignified woman but when we get in the bedroom, she has to be a bitch,' says man of God**

**M**EET Agrippa Khathide, the X-rated pastor whose sexy Bible-bash-sermons are putting the bounce back into the bedroom.

Khathide, a veteran pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission church whose members include Frank Chikane, Director-General in the Presidency, is raising eyebrows with his message that sex belongs to God, not the devil — and that it should be lots of fun.

The 43-year-old married father of five has released on tape an "Adults Only" sermon containing his views, including the idea that it is a man's duty to satisfy his wife in bed.

"The spiritual purpose of the album is to [put] sex into its rightful place. Sex is God's property. We are redeeming it. It doesn't belong to the devil," Khathide said this week at his home in Tembisa on the East Rand where he is a pastor at the township's AFM church.

"In a rude way, I am saying women should be taken as equals in sex. A man as the head of the family is there for the woman, and not the other way round. A man has to satisfy his wife's needs including the sexual ones. I sleep with my wife until she's satisfied," says Khathide, who has been married to wife Malefic for 22 years.

His tape recording tackles subjects like wives using their husbands' penises as toys for fun; premature ejaculation and weak erections, all against the 'backdrop of "amens" and Biblical quotations.

Khathide, who is also a part time theology lecturer, says he practises what he preaches.

"I want my wife to be a respectable and dignified woman but when we get in the bedroom, she has to be a bitch."

Malefu says she rates her husband's bedroom performance at 9.1 out of 10. "You can't say he doesn't practise what he preaches; not with five children."

Her husband bases his arguments on the Bible's account of Adam and Eve who were naked in the presence of the Lord.



**MAN'S DUTY:** Agrippa Khathide's wife gives him '9.1 out of 10' for sexual performance.



**Agrippa Khathide and wife Malefu**

"It is possible that God visited them and found them having sex because they were both naked," he says.

"The human body is capable of pleasure. As a Godly person you don't have to view pleasure as demonic."

Khathide is confident that his sermons are just what sex-troubled married couples need.

"Those who have spoken to me say some form of healing has come into their marriages. People are overjoyed that these things can be spoken about in public without shame."

Fellow pastors have also spoken out in support of Khathide, although some have admitted to being a bit shocked.

AFM pastor Vusi Radebe of Leondale, also on the East Rand, thinks

Khathide's message gives "a new dimension in breaking traditional barriers, leading to openness in sex".

But he confesses that when he first heard the sermons he could not believe the content. "I had to pinch myself because it sounded scary."

Radebe, who is also a marriage counsellor, says he has gained from listening to Khathide's sermons. "I talk freely with my wife about sex. The whole thing is fun."

Malehlohonolo Khambule, a former teacher, also approves of Khathide's message.

"The tapes can teach people who have been exposed to marital sex at an early age but don't have much knowledge."

However, renowned actor and gospel music producer, Tshepo Nzimande finds the tape offensive: "According to our culture and morals, the content is a bit heavy. It is direct and to the point in an uncomfortable way."

Khathide says it was difficult deciding to go public with his explicit sermons. "I've agonised over my image and the thought of being seen as X-rated."

## KHATHIDE'S 10 TIPS TO A STEAMIER SEX LIFE

- ADVENTURE, innovation and experiment: "There is not one style for sex in the Bible."
- Mutual fulfilment in sex: "Don't leave your wife in Hammanskraal when you promised to take her to Pietersburg."
- Openness: He recommends "playing" with your partner. "Let her rate your sexual performance and you do the same."
- Pleasure: He says certain body parts are made for sexual pleasure.
- Woman initiating: "Wear sexy, revealing lingerie. Be a bitch in bed"
- Faithfulness: "Have sex with your wife only. Don't go out of your marriage."
- Fun and artistic: "Sex is art. Have fun, play around."
- Being naked in God's presence: "Adam and Eve were naked in the presence of the Lord and were never shy. Do the same."
- Sexuality and spirituality go together: "Who said sexuality and spirituality should be separated?"
- Maital love and sex go together: "There is no marriage without sex."

# PREACHER'S WIFE CAUGHT IN THE ACT

By Chedza Simon

**T**he wife of a well known Francistown priest spilled her sex secrets to a crowd of stunned elders.

Confessing to elders who attempted to reconcile the estranged couple, Goeditswe Kaisara's wife, Ponatshego revealed her adulterous deeds which she had kept hidden away from her husband in her diary.

She revealed that she had sex with two men from Kaisara's church who were also his employees at his money lending business in Kasane.

Ponatshego also told the shocked elders that she slept with another member of the church, a friend of Kaisara who once stayed at their house.

"We had sex in our living room while Kaisara was in the bedroom too ill to get up. But I am sorry for what I did. I was never a Christian like my husband and I thought he was not going to know. And nobody can be hurt by what they don't know," she said.

## Faithful

When the elders asked her to suggest the best way for her marital problems to be solved she said: "I will become a born again Christian, it will help me to be faithful to my husband."

The 31-year-old preacher said he was tired of trying to guide his mischievous wife to avoid giving in to temptations of having sex with other men.

He said: "She degraded me by having sex with my two employees while I was away on a trip. When I arrived back I had sex with her although the Holy Spirit warned me against it. She infected me with a sexually transmitted disease."

"What really saddens me, however, is that when I was sick she humiliated me by having sex with a brother from church in my living room. I treated this guy like my real brother. I had given him accommodation when he needed it. They took advantage of my kindness and betrayed me. It hurts," said the distraught man of God.

Kaisara revealed that after he was cured of the sexually transmitted disease he lost his temper and assaulted his cheating wife.

"That was when she told me all the dirty things she had done in my absence."

He said even though the Bible said God hates divorce he had made up his mind to rid himself of Ponatshego because Matthew 5 verse 32 allowed him to divorce for unfaithfulness.

"Besides, this woman was not in love with me when we married. She accepted my proposal because she was pregnant. She realized she needed the financial support for the baby and I did not want to sin against God by abandoning her and my own baby."

Anger blazing in his eyes Kaisara said: As for the two devils who destroyed my marriage, I sent a messenger to call their parents. I want them to hear what their children have done." Pastor Kaisara said he is planning to sue the two men who slept with his wife.



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SECTION THREE

## **CUSTOMARY LAW**

## **2** **CUSTOMARY LAW**

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### **DEFINITION**

Indigenous systems of law are based on custom and tradition. In many parts of the world, customary law is based on a pre-literate tradition, handed down from generation to generation. While almost all legal systems include an element of customary law (for example, much of European common law is based on Germanic customary law), the term is usually applied to systems of law other than those based on the Western legal tradition.

In the countries with a colonial history, what is referred to as “customary law” is often traditional law, as codified by colonial authorities, who often distorted it in accordance with their own biases.

There are many different versions of customary law, and there may be many different interpretations of the same system of customary law. It is therefore important that journalists avoid reporting on customary law as if it is homogeneous, within a country as well as across different countries and cultures.

### **GENDER ISSUES**

In many countries, a system of civil law runs parallel to indigenous and religious systems of customary law. Customary law often applies in matters concerned with family law, and thus has a great deal of impact on women’s everyday lives, as it deals with issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody.

The duality of legal systems in some countries, where both civil and customary law exist side by side, hinders the implementation of international human rights instruments like CEDAW. This is because these instruments are civil law instruments, which cannot be codified into customary law. Furthermore, where customary law is practiced in a way which marginalises or discriminates against women as equal citizens, it is highly unlikely that human rights principles such as the right to equality and the provisions of other international instruments will be considered.

### **Dispute resolution**

Custom often dictates that disputes within families should be resolved through family structures, often a council of elderly relatives. In patriarchal societies, there is a long tradition of domestic violence being treated as belonging to the private, rather than public sphere, and thus a matter to be resolved within the family, rather than through the criminal justice system. These family forums are often biased against women, with women who complain of abuse being advised to accept it as dutiful wives.

### **Succession**

In terms of customary law, women are commonly excluded from inheriting property and titles. Women are thus excluded from positions of traditional leadership, and from direct ownership of property. In terms of these customary legal systems, women have access to resources only through their male relatives. The theory is that, despite being placed in a

subordinate position, women will not suffer, because their male kin will support them. In reality, women and children are placed in situations of extreme financial deprivation when relationships break down, or the male breadwinner dies, and remaining male relatives are unable or unwilling to support them.

**“It is said in the Hindu tradition: as a woman, you are brought up by your father; when you get married, you are handed into the care of your husband; and when your husband passes on, you are taken care of by your son. There is no autonomy at any stage in a woman’s life.”**

#### **Ownership of property/land**

Some forms of customary law make it impossible for women to inherit land in their own right, and may prevent them from owning land at all. This has a negative effect on women’s equality as economic dependence on men is at the heart of gender-based oppression, with women’s lack of socio-economic power leaving them vulnerable to other forms of abuse and exploitation.

There are also instances of traditional laws and practices becoming abused and distorted in modern times. For example, the custom of a bride-price or lobola – still observed in Southern African nations - was originally paid to the bride’s family in cattle and had a great deal of symbolic value. The cattle were a symbol of the newly forged bond between the bride and groom’s families, and a portion of them were kept aside to provide for the bride and her children, should the marriage end. However, today lobola is paid in cash, a practice that leads to women being treated as a commodity. It also gives rise to the belief that a man has bought his wife, and now owns her, giving him the right to abuse her.

#### **MEDIA ISSUES**

The media often deals with customary law uncritically. Very little attention is given to the history of customary legal systems, with the media accepting the concept of customary law as static and immutable.

Where gender equality activists challenge customary law, they may be portrayed as undermining tradition, custom, and the family. The media needs to give careful thought to where it positions itself in such debates. Using a human rights perspective as a point of departure may be useful in avoiding the over-simplification of issues around customary law and gender equality.

**Universality:** Universality means governments and communities should uphold certain moral and ethical values that cut across all regions of the world.

**EXERCISE 12****CUSTOMARY LAW AND GENDER EQUALITY**

**MATERIALS:** Newspaper clippings

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**AIM: To interrogate the universality of human rights within the cultural context.**

**STEP 1:** Examine the three articles (A, B and C) on the Magaya vs Magaya case in Zimbabwe, and the general article (D) on human rights entitled “ Answering to men from cradle to grave” and answer the following questions:

1. What did the case say about the status and legal guarantees of women where customary law exists side by side with modern and codified legal systems (articles A, B and C)?
2. What does the attitude of the judiciary reflect both in the case and following the protest about the role of the judiciary in perpetuating gender injustice (articles A, B and C)?
3. What does article D say about the reality of women's rights in Africa?

**Report back in plenary**

**STEP 2:** Break the group into pairs. Each pair to identify one aspect of customary law from their country and answer the following questions.

1. Who imposed the customary law? [men, women, the state, community, religious groups, cultural groups etc]
2. Who ensures its implementation? [men, women, the state, community, religious groups, cultural groups etc]
3. Who benefits from the customary law? [men, women, the state, community, religious groups, cultural groups etc]
4. In what way do they benefit?
5. Who loses from this customary practice?
6. In what way do they lose?
7. Identify the human rights being violated through this customary law. Are the rights that are violated by the customary law protected under any other legal statutes or conventions the country has signed? Discuss.
8. Discuss your responses within the context of power and control. What do the responses say about customary law?
9. Identify countries with similar laws to the one above. Do you think the imbalances that this customary law imposes can be readdressed through law? Explain.

# ZIMBABWE WOMEN PROTEST A LOSS OF RIGHTS

Mercedes Sayagues

Women activists in Harare are on the warpath after the Zimbabwe Supreme Court recently used customary law to disinherit a woman.

Angry women marched through downtown Harare last week to the court, where they delivered a written complaint about rulings that diminish women's rights.

The marchers bore colourful placards, some of which read: "We will not accept customary legalized tyranny"; "Discrimination against women is not compulsory in African society"; and "Are we going backwards into the year 2000?"

Venia Magaya (52), the eldest child of her father's senior wife, was made heir to his estate by a community court. Her younger half-brother, son of their father's second wife, appealed to a magistrate's court and won.

In July 1997 he kicked Venia out of the house in Mabvuku where she had lived with her parents until their death. She now lives in a shack in a neighbour's backyard.

Rita Makarau, a lawyer and MP, appealed on behalf of Magaya to the Supreme Court and lost.

The court ruled that, under customary law, only men can inherit and all family members are subordinate to the male head of the family; that the Legal Age of Majority Act, drafted in 1982 to ensure equality, does not apply to customary law; and that Section 23 of the Zimbabwe Constitution allows discrimination against women as "the nature of African society".

The ruling applies only to the estates

of people who died before November 1 1997, when a law guaranteeing equality between male and female heirs was passed. It will, however, apply to a number of cases yet to be heard.

More alarmingly, it has opened the door for customary law to erode legal gains made by Zimbabwean women over the years.

Lawyers unhappy with the ruling argue that the concept of customary law is vague since every ethnic group has its own; that the court is reinstating discrimination against women that the Legal Age of Majority Act was meant to erase; and that Zimbabwe has signed international conventions on equality between men and women.

However, Pearson Nherere, a respected lawyer with a solid human rights record, says: "The decision is not palatable or desirable according to human rights, but it is correct according to jurisprudence."

He adds that the Act was ill-conceived and ill-defined. "We are in a confused situation," says Nherere. He suggests lobbying Parliament to change the laws, not the Supreme Court.

This feeds into a debate on the role of the judiciary in promoting human rights: should it be an activist Bench that promotes human rights or one that upholds the law and leaves law-making to the legislature?

Conversely, ask women activists, should the Supreme Court become the custodian of customary law at the



expense of being the custodian of women's rights? And whose customary law is this anyway?

Yet this ruling was hardly a bolt from the blue. In recent judgments, the Supreme Court has narrowed the application of equality among men and women under customary law.

Most troubling in one recent ruling is that, instead of confining itself to that case, the court reversed previous judgments that upheld the Legal Age of Majority Act, stating they were wrong.

This alters jurisprudence. Lawyers cannot refer any longer to progressive judgments regarding women's rights issued by courts in the mid-1980s.

"With all due respect to the court, its thinking is unclear, muddled and confusing," says law lecturer Welshman Ncube. He believes that eventually the Supreme Court will have to reverse its decision and declare this judgment wrong.

Women activists, lulled into a false sense of security after the Act was passed, are now on the warpath.

"This is a clarion call to action, to make sure that in the new Constitution there are no ambiguities and no exceptions on equality," says Thoko Matshe, of Zimbabwe's Women Resource Network.

# SUPREME COURT HITS OUT AT WOMEN

**Vincent Kahiya**

The Supreme Court has hit back at women's organizations which criticized a recent judgement in which the court of appeal ruled that a woman could not be granted heirship to her father's estate as long as the deceased was survived by a son.

The Supreme Court has accused the organizations of contemptuous behaviour following a barrage of criticism from the women.

In a stinging reply to the criticism the court said the allegations which had been leveled against it were "gratuitously insulting" to the judges.

Since the publication of the controversial *Magaya vs Magaya* judgement delivered by Justice Mucsheteere two months ago, women's groups have launched scathing attacks on the judgement, which they say is ultra vires existing laws meant to liberate women from past injustices.

Last month, seven women's groups wrote a formal letter to Justice Mucsheteere criticizing the court's handling of the *Magaya vs Magaya* case.

The Supreme Court responded to the criticism on May 26 through a letter addressed to each one of the groups and signed by acting assistant registrar P Nyepereyi, warning the women of the consequences of continued criticism of the upper court.

"No action will be taken on this occasion, but a formal warning must be issued that registered legal practitioners especially, but others as well, who indulge in gratuitous and unfounded insults to the judiciary, and in public demonstrations, will be dealt with under laws of contempt of court," said Nyepereyi.

The reaction by the Supreme Court flies in the face of an invitation by Chief Justice Anthony Gubbay a few years ago for the public to comment on High Court and Supreme Court decisions provided they were couched in reasonable terms.

However, other legal practitioners said the women

had gone too far in berating the Supreme Court.

Human rights lawyer Kevin Laue said by attacking the Supreme Court, the women "had fired at the wrong target".

"I am not sure what the women wanted to achieve by writing directly to Justice Mucsheteere . . . Criticism of judgements should be firm but restrained and should not degenerate into personal attacks," said Laue.

The groups, Women's Action Group, Musasa Project, Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association, Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre Network, Women in Law in Southern Africa, Women and Law in Development in Africa, and Young Women's Christian Association, argued that the judgement effectively undermined the authority of parliament by repealing the Legal Age of Majority Act passed in 1982.

"It has set a very retrogressive precedent in erasing progress made in advancing the status and rights of women in independent Zimbabwe," a statement signed by the women said.

They argued that the judgement had heightened contradictions in Zimbabwe's own internal laws and had negated the country's international legal obligations.

They said Zimbabwe had ratified three international charters, namely the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

"We therefore strongly recommend that the selection of judges should go beyond their current ability in legal technical skills but should consider their knowledge of current and strategic needs of society," reads the letter from the women.

## MAGAYA RULING IS A STEP BACKWARD

By Rudo Gaizanwa

Now that the lurch of the country back into the dark ages has gained momentum, it is necessary for all democrats and patriots to gear up for the long struggle ahead. In case people have not been reading, listening or understanding what is happening to them, it is important to go back to basics and explain what the momentous events have been that have sparked this train of thought. A lot of ink has been spilt about the destruction of the economy, the erosion of human rights and the general degeneration of the country into chaos. The recent Magaya ruling, coming in tandem with the economic and political retreat into right wing, chaotic and destructive thinking and behaviour should ring alarm bells in the whole nation.

What is the Magaya ruling? It is a recent Supreme Court ruling that says that women and, by implication, younger men, under customary law, were not entitled to a wide array of rights relating to inheritance of property decision making over children and other affairs of their patrilineages. These norms of a customary law applicable in strictly peasant societies, are now dragged into the Zimbabwe of 1999 and applied as if we are still in 1899. Therefore, all the laws that confer majority on women and young men at 18 can now be overturned by a sleight of hand whereby the provisions of gerontocratic rules in peasant societies will be hauled out of the archives selectively in order to discipline those sections of the community that are a thorn in the flesh of older males in our society.

Mind you, this rule of the madharas is pretty obvious to any one who cares to look at our political and economic system. Nobody under 60 has much of a say politically in rural and urban Zimbabwe. Those under 70 who happen to have money must allow the gerontocrats to pick their pockets in order to keep the peace and buy protection. Anybody who wants to be a patriarch must also bend their knees and suck up to the gerontocrats. You can say so what? This is all happening in a country where 60 per cent of the population is under 50. Why are we tolerating this? It is because the gerontocrats buy off sections of the population and give them a piece of the pie to keep them quiet. If the women make noise, you choose some elderly ones and thrust useless titles and offices on them to shut up the whole lot of them. If the poor men make noise, you buy off a few chiefs and invite them to the Parliament a few times a year. If rich men

make noise, you appoint them on a few boards and forums or a ministry in which they can talk as much as they like and you pay them no attention!

However, young men and women have not proved so easy to pacify. Already, there was evidence of revolt from men who are aspiring or already have become patriarchs and gerontocrats, who needed women and young men to lord it over. They tried to get the Legal Age of Majority Act repealed or amended and that did not work. However, their sentiments have carried the day because the Supreme Court has now given them, through a dusted up interpretation of customary, what they could not get through informed consent by the populace. All those demonstrating young men and women in the colleges and universities, the non-governmental organisations must have caused alarm and despondency amongst the elderly men. All the women claiming maintenance, refusing to be inherited or to be deprived of property by promiscuous husbands and their relatives must have scared the pants off our patriarchs. (Not that our patriarchs like to keep their pants on if they can help it!)

The prospect of dealing with wives, girlfriends, over eighteen children on the basis of mutual respect rankled many patriarchs who long for the bad old days where they could impregnate women and cast them off together with their children at will, dominate and run the lives of their sons and daughters of whatever age and generally have uncontested authority over everybody except other elderly men. The Magaya ruling is reinforcing those longings and giving patriarchs who are also not democrats, the ability to bring back terror into the conduct of everyday life in families. As it is, some universities tried to get parents to discipline their sons and daughters who are over 18 for protests against misrule, corruption and irresponsibility. These institutions do not involve parents in fund-raising for these institutions that are in dire economic straits. It is obvious that parental authority is selectively used, for undemocratic purposes in the same way that customary law is dragged up when some elderly men want to stop others from insisting on being accorded their human rights.

Lest you also protest that the courts only interpret the law as it stands, it is notable that judges differ on their interpretation of the law depending on their social, political and personal circumstances. Some judges

support the party of the day and others not.

Some judges have no wives or husbands and others have one spouse or more. Some judges have children and others not and some judges are blacks and others white.

Some judges are authoritarian in their personal and legal conduct and others are not. They all have different emotional, social and personal investment in customary law, the government of the day and so forth. In other words, judges are people too, sometimes human, fallible, kind, irascible, misogynist and compassionate by turns or disposition. They too are influenced by their society, culture, political and economic circumstances. During Justice Dumbutshena's days, progressive judgments on customary law were possible but not now when he and others who thought like him or were influenced by him in a collegial manner, can no longer make those progressive judgements. The bench has changed with the social, economic and political times and the Magaya ruling is evidence of that.

Every government tries, as far as possible, to load the bench with pliable judges. Sometimes it is possible and other times not. Some judges turn out to be more independent and less pliable than expected. Others may become more establishment-oriented than expected. Remember Bush and a black man called Clarence Thomas? Clarence Thomas was not the most distinguished black lawyer in the USA, but he was the kind of black man the Bush regime could stomach.

Therefore he was appointed to the Supreme Court because Bush needed to beef up his credentials as a non-racist president and to pacify the disadvantaged black population of the USA. The courts and the human beings who run them, are not immune from the concerns of the day and it is up to all the democrats and patriots in Zimbabwe to support initiatives to pull back Zimbabwe from the archaic dark ages that it is now in. The demonstration/protest march by patriotic and concerned women, men and children at the Supreme Court on Thursday, 13th May, signals a progressive move to thwart the accelerated regression of Zimbabwe into legally sanctioned authoritarianism. They deserve the support of all the democratic media organisations and individuals in Zimbabwe. This must also serve notice to the legal fraternity that gender and age-based justice issues are part of the struggle for human rights in Zimbabwe.

# ANSWERING TO MEN FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

By Stella Mukanya,  
WILDAF

In many African countries, women are still regarded as second-class citizens, minors, junior males and the property of their husbands. Even in countries where there is progressive legislation, the executive and/or judiciary sustain actions and rulings that discriminate against women. In instances where laws and constitutions are progressive, societal attitudes and behaviour remain the same.

Six African countries had not ratified CEDAW as of 1999, 46 had ratified, one signed and seven had ratified with reservations. All these reservations relate to the basic principles of the convention, such as non-discrimination against women and family laws. There have been positive developments such as the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which now allows groups of people to lodge complaints.

There is also the Additional Protocol on Women's Rights to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which is a progressive, far-reaching document. The draft has been accepted by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and will be passed on to the OAU for further discussion and adoption.

Violence against women in Africa is on the increase. Femicides, acid attacks,

ritual murders, gang rapes, abduction, girl-child slavery, ritual rapes, military sexual slavery, cultism in tertiary institutions, trafficking in



women and girls, are all new and old trends. Women in Africa still remain vulnerable to harmful traditional practices and traditions, many of which expose them to risk of HIV/AIDS, which has been devastating the continent.

There are now universal standards which provide a framework for human rights, liberty and freedom, which African governments have committed themselves to in many international conventions and agreements. There is, therefore, no excuse for the continued discrimination against women and violations of their human rights.

There has been some progress in getting violence against women on the agendas of some African governments.

There is a violence against women addendum to the SADC Gender Declaration, which requires periodic reporting to the SADC

liberty and freedom that African governments have endorsed in many international conventions and agreements.

WILDAF has been involved in initiating programmes which bring women's rights and advocacy groups together at national, subregional, pan-African and international levels in various forums. It has provided member organisations and individuals with information on development and strategies in the area of women's rights in Africa and elsewhere. It has equipped members with various skills necessary to enhance the effectiveness of their programmes at all levels.

There has been an increasing awareness of women's rights in Africa owing to the work that women's rights organisations have been doing over the past decade. The number of organisations that have legal rights awareness programmes has grown as a result of the training and skills development.

At country level the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence between November 25 and December 10, is gaining profile. UNIFEM has worked through African networks to launch their Africa campaign on violence against women.

Heads of State. There are now laws on violence against women in countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Senegal and Mozambique.

However, the Global Platform for Action has provided more strategies on violence against women. African NGOs have used these through research, advocacy, campaigns (such as the 16 Days of Activism), shelters, legal aid, training and monitoring implementation of laws.

There has been a backlash in countries such as Zimbabwe (inheritance laws) and Nigeria, with one state implementing Sharia laws and others planning to follow suit.

There are now universal standards which provide a framework for human rights,

**EXERCISE 14****ARRANGED MARRIAGES**

**MATERIALS:** Five Newspaper clippings

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**AIM: To stimulate debate about arranged marriages and human rights.**

Certain societies view women and girls as resources over which men and society in general have power and control. This would mean that women are placed among other resources that include tractors, land, a house, draught power, pots etc.

Certain cultural practices reinforce the perception of women as mere resources that can be utilized and then discarded. Included in this is the perception that women do not control their own bodies. These include practices such as arranged marriages and the payment of bride price. Yet Article 16 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that marriage shall be entered into with the full consent of the intending spouses.

Examine the articles on arranged marriages (A, B, C, D and E), discuss and answer the following questions in small groups.

1. In what ways do arranged marriages reinforce the inferior status of women?
2. Are these practices compatible with the constitution and other laws in your country?
3. What additional twists do article A ("Women marrying fellow women") and article E ("Married to a ghost") raise with regard to arranged marriages?
4. What does it imply when women are made to marry ghosts, are exchanged for favours, and married by other women to fulfil societal expectations?
5. Give examples of similar instances in your country.
6. Does the media in your country still cover these issues? How do they do this?

## WOMEN MARRYING FELLOW WOMEN

Craving for heirs that sustain a tradition

By Kwamboka Ovaro

Maria Kemunto has been married twice to women.

Maria was identified for marriage to a fellow woman the first time in 1963. As in the case of a normal marriage, 12 young men went to her home to propose and discuss dowry.

The woman Maria was to marry, Faustine Kerubo, and her husband Machine Ongaki, had had six daughters. The dowry from their first daughter helped Ongaki to marry a second wife but tragedy soon struck and the wife died.

When the dowry from their third daughter came, the couple decided to get a daughter-in-law to bear children for them since Kerubo felt that she had no chance of getting a baby boy.

"My father asked me to marry then because many of my siblings had died and he wanted the dowry to marry another wife," says 53-year-old Maria. "I did not see a problem with being married to a woman because it was a normal practice and I respected my parents' wish," she adds.

She went to Ongaki's home after a dowry of 14 animals was paid and adopted his name. Ongaki's daughters accepted her immediately as their sister-in-law and gave her the support she needed. A family man was also identified to get children with her.

She got three daughters. Her third pregnancy was difficult, resulting in the removal of the uterus.

She was in a dilemma. Her parents-in-law had died and she didn't know what to do. When her last daughter got married, she called her sisters-in-law (Ongaki's daughters) for a meeting. They agreed that she should follow in the footsteps of her mother-in-law and get herself a daughter-in-law to bear children.

Once more, a search for the



"Happy couple": Maria Kemunto (left) and Jennifer-Nyaboke.

right woman began. In 1987, she "married" Jennifer Nyaboke who already had five children – three daughters and two sons.

"Jennifer is my daughter," says a beaming Maria as she plays with the youngest addition to the family, two-year-old Geoffrey Mokaya. "And I am going to be a great-grandmother again!" Jennifer's first daughter is married with two children. Her son has a wife who is expectant

Jennifer has nothing but praises for her new home. "I didn't know what I would have done with all these children! Where would I have got land to give them? I am very happy. And the fact that I have no problem with my mother-in-law (Maria) makes me happier," says a content Jennifer.

Everyone is happy because Ongaki and Kerubo's lineage will live on through this cultural arrangement.

Several kilometres from Maria's home, another woman resorted to the Abagusii tradition of marrying a fellow woman to fill a house emptied by marriage.

She had given birth to four daughters and they were all married. Her husband, William Kenanda, had several sons with his other two wives.

Traditionally, among the Abagusii, land was subdivided

among wives as polygamy was the norm. Kerubo looked at the vast land that she now owned, which would now not go to anyone from her line, and resolved to find an heir for her house.

The Abagusii culture allows a married woman without children or with only daughters to "marry" a young woman to beget the sons. The children become the woman's grandchildren and take her husband's name.

The young woman married is not a co-wife but a daughter-in-law. A cousin or a respectful clansman can get children with this young woman.

The search for a "wife" for Kerubo identified Birita (Frida) Nyakerario. Customary marriage procedures were followed and the bond was sealed when dowry was paid and Birita, then 18, came to her new home in 1970.

Thomas Ogoro, a son to Victoria Bwari, Kerubo's co-wife, was chosen to sire children with Birita. They have six, three sons and three daughters.

When Kerubo died a few years ago, she was a happy woman. Her land was not desolate as she had feared but cultivated and teeming with all sorts of crops. There was noise and plenty of love from her daughter-in-law and her

grandchildren.

During her burial, her grandsons dug the grave and threw the first soil on the lowered coffin. This is the pride of the community to be buried by their sons and grandsons as it is a sign of continuity of one's lineage.

But it does not always work. When the mother and daughter are unable to accommodate each other, it becomes hard to live together as a family. That is why mama Bilia Nyakerario's efforts to get a daughter-in-law have been fruitless and she fears for tomorrow.

She did not get any child and the women she "marries" run off almost as soon as they come. For the past six years, it has been like a game. She gets a woman who stays for a few months before leaving.

"What is wrong with me?" mourns the desperate elderly woman. "My days on earth are becoming fewer and fewer, yet I haven't had a chance to see a grandchild. This is a curse!"

But Ombongi a neighbour, says Nyakerario's problem is drunkenness. "After she has taken her share of drink, she shouts at the woman and becomes obscene. As a mother-in-law she should show respect to the daughter and guide her. But since she is unable they will always come and go."

## TRINIDAD BRUTAL RESPONSES TO DYING TRADITIONS

By Avian Joseph

Indroutee Ramsaroop was 13 years old and pregnant when she married a man 18 years her senior. Soon after their marriage, her new husband, Hardeo, turned violent, battering and sometimes threatening to kill her.

The seven year marriage came to its bitter end in March when Hardeo Ramsaroop hacked his wife, 20, and three of their four children to death, then hung himself from a mangrove tree at a Hindu cremation site.

There have been five similar cases of men killing their wives, then themselves, in Trinidad over the last several years. In 1993, a prominent management consultant killed his wife and three daughters before turning the gun on himself.

But the Ramsaroop killings touched a nerve within the public, focusing attention on the social upheaval that has occurred here as a result of the structural adjustment programme imposed by the IMF in 1988.

The high unemployment and cuts in social welfare have fed widespread feelings of alienation and frustration, which are feeding a wave of violence and suicides, particularly among men.

According to Trinidad's Central Statistics office, between 150 and 170 people have killed themselves every year since 1988. Prior to that, the number of suicides was between 100 and 120 per year. Suicide is

considered an important indicator of social alienation.

Now, with a slogan of "Let Indroutee be the Last," community leaders are launching a multi-pronged effort to try to address the problems they feel contributed to Ramsaroop's bloody deaths.

Some are lobbying the government to raise the age when a girl can legally marry from 14 to 16. An organisation known as Lifeline is developing programmes to help men find healthy ways of releasing anger without hurting themselves or others.

The government has also announced the creation of a domestic violence unit to offer counselling and guidance to women who are abused by their husbands.

For some feminist leaders, the Ramsaroop case reflects an attitude towards women that allows domestic violence to proliferate unchecked.

"Women are seen as the property of the men in our society. Therefore, a certain degree of domestic violence is acceptable," says Thelma Henderson, of the Caribbean Association For Feminist Research and Action.

Before her death, Indroutee Ramsaroop had been beaten many times by her husband. She had reported the abuse both to her family and to police. Yet her mother continued to send her back to her husband.

"Instead of helping women to get

out of a violent relationship, there is a tendency to prefer reconciliation," Henderson says.

Partly influenced by Western ideas of individualism and partly in response to intense economic pressure, many Trinidadian women have begun seeking greater economic independence and freedom from their large extended families. But when men's expectations of their families are not met, they often respond by lashing out violently.

"Men feel terrified because their last bastion of control is being removed. They become increasingly violent in an effort to control the situation," Henderson says.

A group known as Women Working for Social Progress is trying to develop strategies for coping with the incidences of family violence.

Lifeline, a support group for people who have attempted suicide, has also launched a programme in 600 schools to give young boys an opportunity to express feelings of rage through essays, role-play and discussion, before their frustration turns into acts of violence, says Lucy Gabriel, director of Lifeline.

Donald Beaumont, a member of the group Men Against Violence Against Women, says that men fail to appreciate the women in their lives.

"It is not about power but non-appreciation of the other half," he says.

# WHY SOFIA DOESN'T MISS HOME AT ALL

By Njoki Karuoya

In the vast, semi-arid yet remote expanse of Kajiado district, the drought bit deeply into the Maasai communities, prompting desperate measures.

A herdsman urgently needed pasture for his dying livestock and after walking many kilometres searching for the precious commodity, he came across a private field with green pasture. He begged for it, and the owner finally agreed to let in his livestock, but on one condition — that he give him his 11-year-old daughter as a wife.

This is how Sofia, shocked at the news, found herself with a husband. And at that very tender age, Sofia's life changed dramatically.

From an innocent girl helping her mother around the house, Sofia became a fugitive among her own people. In her desperate attempts to escape this cruel hand of fate that was denying her the God-given right to enjoy her childhood, Sofia took off.

"I ran away from home, got to the road and hitch hiked a lift to Kajiado town," recalled Sofia, whose struggle to reach safety unravels like scenes from an action movie.

"When I reached the Christian Children's Fund centre, there was no one and I was forced to look for a boma nearby to sleep in. I went again the following morning to no success, so I looked for the chiefs camp," she recounted.

As she narrates this, young Sofia, now aged 12 and currently a student at AIC Girls Primary School in Kajiado, broke down into tears, her memories too bitter.

At the chiefs camp, no help was available and she once again had to think hard. She says: "I told people my story and they brought me to this school," she says.

Sofia was recounting her tale in a celebration at the school to honour the increasing number of rescued girls at the school.

Sadly, Sofia's case is not unique among the Maasai community. Three years ago, 13-year-old Naataosim Mako was forced to run away from home after her father came in with the news of her impending marriage.

"My father does not believe in educating girls but I was determined to go to school," she recalled. Naataosim sought refuge at her grandmother's home, but it wasn't long before her father traced her whereabouts and forcibly removed her from there.

"He brought elders to our home to resolve the issue and they all agreed that I should obey my father's wishes and move to my husband's home," she said.

For two days, Naataosim lived with her husband, praying and waiting for the right opportunity to run away again. This time round, she ran away to school, but her father soon caught up with her again and forcibly returned her to her husband.

On her third escape attempt, Naataosim was lucky. "I ran away to my uncle's and asked him to help me. He brought me back to school."

This time round, the father's attempt to remove her from school failed, but not without a bitter struggle. "He insulted the school's administrators, fought my uncle and cursed me. He called me a prostitute because I was going to school," she recalled.

It took the intervention of the police and the school's administration to keep Naataosim in school.

To date, AIC Girls boarding primary is accommodating 110 girls saved from such tragic circumstances.

"In fact, I'm not popular in Kajiado," said Mrs

Priscilla Nangurai, the school's headmistress. "As a Maasai, I'm supposed to understand and support the culture, but since I'm seen as going against culture, this is a taboo."

By advocating girl-child education, Mrs Nangurai has irked Maasai elders who are not amused by her intervention.

"I have learnt to become patient. It is unheard of for a woman to speak to a man about serious issues. When I approach them to discuss girl-child education, they turn their backs on me. I have learnt to insist on talking to them because I know they hear me."

Despite major problems facing the Maasai community, changing the people's culture and age-old ways of life is almost impossible. "In the past few years, drought and poverty have caused untold suffering among the Maasai. Their livestock are dying, and they have no food for their families. Yet they do not want to venture into other forms of livelihood, such as agriculture," said Mrs Nangurai.

The hunger and overriding poverty has deepened their need for livestock and money, and their desperation can be measured by the increasing number of young girls, some as young as nine years old, being given away for marriage in exchange for pasture, food and cattle.

The problems facing the Maasai girls are myriad. "The parents do not believe in educating girls," says Ms Phoebe Mollle, the co-ordinator of the district Women's Lobby Group, and the Kajiado County Council district women's organiser.

As a young girl, Ms Mollle was lucky to have parents who appreciated the importance of education and it is this deserving opportunity that she wishes to extend to the Maasai girl-child.

"I want to improve the lifestyles of the girls. I want them to have better opportunities, to pursue careers like medicine, teaching, etc, and live in decent houses with piped water," she said.

However, her efforts to have the Maasai girl educated and saved from Female Genital Mutilation and early marriage continue to receive a lot of opposition, particularly from the men.

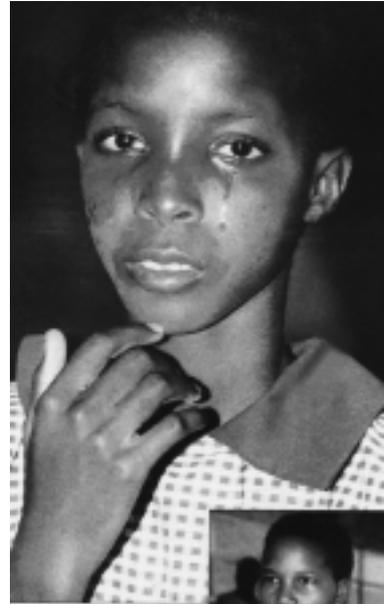
"Even some of the councillors and other local leaders oppose what we do, but this is because it is them who are marrying these young girls," she added.

Out in the field, Ms Mollle has encountered several cases of child abuse all in the name of a husband's conjugal rights.

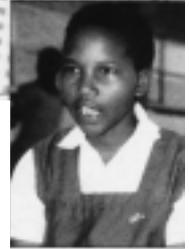
"We recently rescued a girl who was seriously beaten by her husband and we had to take her to hospital for treatment. We also found another girl who was married off to a man infected with a venereal disease and by the time we discovered her, she was full of sores. She is currently under treatment," she said.

The rescued girls at the AIC Girls primary school come wounded, hurt and confused. "To cope with their reality, we offer counselling and guidance at the school. We have even started a programme for training teachers and parents alike to deal with the girls," says Mrs Nangurai.

Once funded by the African Inland Church, the school was started in 1959 by missionaries who saw it fit to make it a boarding school due to the nomadic lifestyle of the Maasai. Initially intended for girls from the Maasai community, the school, now under government administration, has attracted girls from all over the country.



Above: Sofia Toti, 13, sheds tears as she narrates her ordeal. She was married off in exchange for pasture. Inset: Naataosim Mako, 13, whose father removed her from school to marry her off.



Owing to the condition under which the girls were rescued from their homes, not many want to go back to their homes during school holidays. "The girls live here, and we are lucky that YWCA recently agreed to sponsor activities which these girls can engage in during the holidays," says Mrs Nangurai.

The entry of sponsors such as CCF, World Vision and SADEP is slowly helping to alleviate the burden of sustaining the rescued girls in the school, but it is not enough.

"We still have to feed and accommodate them during the holidays, and with no income during that time, it is hard," she said. Other problems include the purchase of uniforms, shoes and books for the girls.

Ms Mollle and Mrs Nangurai realise that a lot of work still needs to be done in order to change the attitude of the people.

"We regularly carry out sensitisation workshops around the district," said Ms Mollle. In addition, Mrs Nangurai takes every opportunity to speak with Maasai women and lobby against female circumcision and early marriage.

"In the Maasai culture, once a girl is circumcised, she is believed to be mature and ready for marriage yet the girls could be only 10 years old," she said.

Mrs Nangurai became actively involved in rescuing the girl-child five years ago. "It was very difficult at the beginning. The parents of these girls would come to the school and forcibly take them away. Some even used to drag the girls out through the windows. However, these incidences have reduced since we erected a fence around the school," she said.

To many of these girls, becoming a teacher is their ultimate goal. "I want to also help other girls like they did," said Naataosim.

# TOO YOUNG TO MARRY

By Gakuu Mathenge

**The two girls are among the few lucky ones to have been rescued from forced child marriages.**

They are barely old enough to play far away from the watchful eyes of adults. Yet these girls had been married off to old men.

Thirteen-year-old Somkor Lendir and Janet Cheronno were plucked out of school and married off by their parents.

But Lendir, a class seven pupil at the Dol Dol primary school in Laikipia district, and Janet, also a class seven pupil in Abothuguchi primary school, Meru Central district are lucky to have been saved from this bond. Fate landed them at the Nanyuki Children's Home, where they have been given another chance to study.

"Hapa ni kuzuri. Nataka kukaa shule na kusoma. (This is a better place. I want to remain in school and learn)," says Lendir.

Lendir tells of how her little brother reported to her a discussion he overheard from her father and some elders in December last year. The core of the discussion was a 30-year-old suitor who had requested to marry her. Her father had accepted the offer.

"I did not want to get married. I wrote a letter to our head teacher telling him of the arrangements. I said I wanted to remain in school," she recalls.

After receiving the letter, the headteacher of the IL-Digiri primary school, sent a delegation of elders to the girl's father. The elders reported that the father had abandoned the plan.

"I was initially happy to hear that. I was alarmed later to see some men bring three cows to my father. Although no one had told me what was happening, I realised they were talking about marriage. Later, my father and the man told me that I would continue attending school but I would go to live with the man until I get pregnant."

She was taken to the man's house but ran back home after a few days.

This arrangement was designed to fool anyone who would be opposed to the marriage and it would be too late to reverse the marriage if the girl fell pregnant.

Lendir's only arsenal was writing a string of letters to her teachers about every step her father took and every piece of information

she came across about his intentions and plans.

She, however, said she knew her mother did not support the marriage but she was helpless and could not go against her father.

She finally knew she had succeeded when one day she saw officials of the Christian Fund for

Children and the Aged (CECA, which promotes education of the girl child among the conservative Maasai of Mukogodo, Laikipia district) in the company of administration police officers who questioned her father and arrested him after he became hostile.

"Since Lendir's father had lied to elders and the headmaster about abandoning the marriage plans, we found we could not trust him any more," says Mr Arthur Kamiru, programme manager of the CFCA.

He says it was decided by teachers and the programme that Lendir be removed from her home until the father returned the dowry to demonstrate he had abandoned the marriage plans. He has not yet done so.

She was returned to school but transferred to the DolDol boarding primary school to enable her to attend school without disturbance.

During school holidays, she is accommodated at the Nanyuki destitute home, whose administrator, Ms Helen Gathogo, says she has significantly recovered from the trauma she suffered during the ordeal.

"She used to be very quiet and withdrawn, but after continuous counselling, she has showed a lot of progress" she said.

Her friend, Janet Cheronno, was a pupil at the Lol-Daiga primary school, when her mother passed away, leaving her under the care of her father.

Though a local NGO, Compassion International, had enrolled her in its child education sponsorship programme, her father found her a "suitor" and married her off.

They involved the Laikipia education



**Rescued: Thirteen-year-old Somkor Lendir and Janet Cheronno had been married off by their parents.**

department which had the father arrested and questioned early this year over the matter.

Like Lendir, she was also transferred to the Abothuguchi boarding primary school in Meru.

During holidays, the Kenya Child Welfare Society accommodates her at its Nanyuki Children's Home.

Government officials in Laikipia district are implicated in both abetting gross violations of child rights and apparent sabotage of rescue efforts.

**I was alarmed later to see some men bring three cows to my father**

A teacher at the Dol Dol primary school, Mrs Nancy Tausi, says it still pains her to recall the administration in Mukogodo failed to assist a child marriage involving a class five girl last year.

"She was 11. As the teacher in charge of counselling in the school, I reported the marriage to the education office and the administration whom we expected to stop it.

When the case reached the DC's office, we don't know what transpired." The girl was married to an administration police officer, now attached to Nanyuki chiefs camp

The chairman of the Nanyuki DEB primary school, Mr Kassim Gikonyo, accused the administration of laxity in protecting children. A class six orphaned girl was married off by a local chief last year from this school.

"The chief was the girl's guardian and the marriage offended many people. No action was taken against the official despite repeated protests by the school to the DC's and the district education office," says Mr Gikonyo.

# MARRIED TO A GHOST

By Joyce Jenje-Makwenda

Jesika, 22, sits in her family's home in Mutoko, Zimbabwe, holding her two-year-old daughter on her lap. She is barely able to conceal her grief during a discussion of her marriage.

"There is nothing that she can do," says her mother, Takazvida, who would like to help her, but claims she cannot. Then, in a low voice that I can barely hear amid the tears, Jesika utters some of the few words that she will say to me: "There is nothing I can do."

Even compared with marriages involving extreme physical and mental violence, Jesika's situation is particularly cruel. She is married to a ghost. The extraordinary union, designed to appease an avenging spirit, is not uncommon among the Matoko, who live near the border with Mozambique.

The story of Jesika's marriage begins with a series of deaths in her family. Her father died 20 years ago during Zimbabwe's struggle for independence; her uncle was murdered and a car ran over her grandfather. Anxious to identify the cause of their misfortune, the family conducted a bira, a night-time ritual in which spirits are called upon through dancing and the playing of a mbira (thumb piano).

During the ceremony, the spirit of a man named Jabulani is said to have spoken through Jesika's aunt. Jabulani, who came from Mozambique to work for Jesika's family, was reportedly killed brutally by his employers. In Matoko culture, explained an uncle, Taisekwa, it was not uncommon for employers to kill a servant who reached marriageable age but remained single, lest he fall in love with their wives or their daughters.

Jesika's family was convinced that Jabulani's spirit had cursed them in revenge for his inability to procreate. The only solution, they believed, was to give him a wife who would bear him children. "Human blood should be replaced with human blood, and the children he did not have should be born as he wished," said Taisekwa.

Jesika was chosen since she was a close relative of those killed and also suffered a mental illness believed to be part of Jabulani's curse. Jesika's family offered



a dowry of nine cows and a delegation travelled to Mozambique. None of Jabulani's relatives were found and she was given most of the cows to provide for herself and any offspring.

She was permitted to choose a man to father her children. But the potential surrogate father — a young man named Tapiwa — had to first seek Jabulani's permission in a special ceremony to avoid being charged with adultery. Since Jesika is married to someone else, Tapiwa has no claim to his biological daughter.

I ask Jesika what she wants. "I want to go back to school and take a dress-making course," Jesika says. Jesika's family objects, believing the more contact she has with the outside world, the greater the chances she will flee.

The family is haunted by what happened to an aunt who fled to Harare to escape the ghost marriage. The woman died mysteriously. "Maybe her aunt died of natural causes," I suggest. "It was the avenging spirits," insists Takazvida.

Another aunt, Winnie, ran off to work as a housemaid in Harare. "I don't know how that one managed to do it. But the problem is that she is now an outcast in the family, and you never know when one day misfortune will follow her," said Takazvida.

I find Winnie, who seems to be doing well. "I would rather die than spend all my life in a walking prison," said Winnie.

"I did not see those deaths come to an end because I was given away, and yet I was supposed to stay with this ghost husband forever."

When I contact Anna, another aunt, she tells me that Jesika has separated from Tapiwa and is in love with another man. She would like to be set free. But another relative would have to take her place and begin the process again. "There is nothing she can do!" Anna says.

## In Zimbabwe:

A research project carried out by the Musasa project in the Midlands province found that:

- 1 in 4 women were subjected to various assaults by their husbands or partners.
- 1 in 4 women were forced to have sex by their partners.
- 1 in 12 women were assaulted with dangerous weapons.
- 1 in 25 women were assaulted while pregnant.
- 1 in 4 women were prevented from seeing family or friends.
- 1 in 6 women were prevented from getting a job or going to work.
- 1 in 6 were subjected to emotional abuse by their husbands bringing girlfriends home.

**EXERCISE 14****PROPERTY GRABBING**

**MATERIALS:** Three articles from Zimbabwe (A), Namibia (B) and Zambia (C).

**TIME:** 30 minutes

**AIMS:** To highlight the connection between culture and women's human rights violations.

Break the trainees into three groups. Group one will focus on the article: 'House Row, Woman dumped in the open'; Group two on the article 'Persecution of widows still persists'; and Group three to focus on 'Local courts fan injustice'. Each group should answer the questions allocated to them below.

**Group 1.**

Read the article entitled "House Row, Woman dumped in the open" and answer the following:

1. What does the article reflect regarding the attitude of the media towards property grabbing?
2. How could the media bring about a more enlightened understanding of the problem?
3. Highlight the weaknesses of the article in terms of the way it was covered.
4. What do you see as the role of women's human rights groups?
5. Given the tendency for cultural/customary law to predominate over formal legal law, what do you see as the recourse for women such as Mrs Musengi?
6. Discuss the angle you would take on this story, if you were asked to write it. Justify your decision.

**Group 2.**

Read the article entitled "Persecution of widows persists" and answer the following:

1. What voices/opinions could have enriched this article?
2. How could the media bring about a more enlightened understanding of the problem?
3. What do you see as the role of women's rights/advocacy groups?
4. Given the tendency for cultural/customary law to predominate over formal legal law, what do you see as the recourse for women in this predicament?
5. Discuss the angle you would take on this story if you were asked to write it. Justify your decision.

**Group 3.**

Look at the article 'Local courts fan injustice' and answer the questions that follow:

1. What voices/opinions could have enriched this article?
2. What does this reflect about media coverage of property grabbing and women's human rights issues?
3. How could the media bring about a more enlightened understanding of the problem?
4. What do you see as the role of women's rights/advocacy groups?
5. Given the tendency for cultural/customary law to predominate over formal legal law, what do you see as the recourse for women whose property has been grabbed?
6. Discuss the angle you would take on this story, if you were asked to write it. Justify your decision.

Each of the groups should give a report back in plenary.

**Notes for the facilitator:**

The facilitator can pick up salient points on media coverage trends from the presentation for wrapping up. These can be related to other declarations such as Article 17 of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights (1948).

## HOUSE ROW: WOMAN DUMPED IN THE OPEN

**Herald Reporter**

**T**he Harare woman who alleges that her husband sold the family home without her knowledge was yesterday dumped in the open with her four children by the Deputy Sheriff.

Mrs Dainah Musengi's property was dumped outside the gates of her former Highlands home despite her repeated pleas to the eviction team to spare her the ultimate embarrassment.

The title deeds to the house were in her husband's name and so only his signature was needed for a legal agreement of sale. While the couple live apart they are not formally separated. The house was bought after the couple were married and both had to submit their salary slips to get the mortgage.

She had tried to block the sale through the High Court until the whole question of accommodation and maintenance for herself and her children had been sorted out. But she lost after her lawyer, she

said, missed the hearing. She has appealed to the Supreme Court.

Neighbours and friends who became aware of her plight after reading yesterday's issue of The Herald, watched helplessly as the eviction team went about its business.

Representatives of the new owners, a local business concern, who witnessed the incident, desperately tried to stop journalists from taking pictures of the eviction.

"I am not refusing to move out of the house but I demand a fair hearing. I should also get a share from the sale of the house in recognition of the role I played in maintaining the mortgage since 1993."

Late yesterday afternoon, Mrs Musengi was making frantic efforts to get legal assistance so that she could move back into the house. She even went to the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs.

# PERSECUTION OF WIDOWS PERSISTS

**Oswald Shivute**

A young mother and her two children have been left homeless after relatives destroyed their house following the death of the woman's husband.

As a result Elizabeth Shigwedha (31) from Ondugu Village in the Omusati region and her two children, Akwenye and Namanghono Akwenye, had to seek refuge with friends.

Their house was destroyed by Shigwedha's mother-in-law and sister-in-laws. They also allegedly torched the bush fence around the family's mahangu field, uprooted the mahangu and took some of the family's clothes.

Shigwedha told The Namibian that her husband, Vaino Tiranus Akwenye Namwele, the son of Helvi Shapaka, died on November 20 last year.

Shapaka ordered Shigwedha and her two sons to leave their house, saying it should now become the property of one of her other children 'because it is the property of my son'. Shigwedha then sought the assistance of King Josia Shikongo Taapopi who in turn convened a meeting of the Uukwaluudhi Traditional Council of Headmen (UTCH).

"After they heard my complaint, they told me that Shapaka and her daughters had no right to chase me out from that house as it belongs to me and my children, according to the new traditional arrangements," she recounted.

She was given a letter by the UTCH to give to her village headman, Shivute

Ntoni, in which he was informed that Shigwedha and her children had the right to continue staying in her late husbands' homestead.

However, Shivute did not want to accept the letter or the order from the King's Traditional Council. He said Shigwedha had to pay N\$550 for the homestead and the mahangu field.

A friend helped the widow with the N\$550, but when she went to Shivute to pay he refused to accept the money.

Shigwedha approached the Traditional Council again and was told to hand over the money to them. They noted that even if Shivute had accepted the N\$550, he would have had to come to them to pay it into the Council's fund.

She duly paid the money on December 1, 2000. Apparently on December 8, one of the sisters-in-law, Maria Iyambo, paid N\$550 to Shivute for the same homestead and land. When Shivute took the money to the Council he allegedly said the money was for another portion of land.

On December 25, Shapaka, Albertina Benjamin and Sara Nongeni went to Shigwedha, showed her their receipt and told her she had to move out.

Shigwedha in turn showed them her receipt.

Nonetheless, the harassment continued. The Council called in Shapaka and her children (Iyambo and others) to point out that they had not paid for Shigwedha's homestead but

for another piece of land and that they should leave Shigwedha and her sons alone.

Undeterred, Shapaka and her children went to Shigwedha's house and demolished it.

Shapaka and her children apparently ignored a subsequent request, on January 9, to go and see the King's Council.

On the instructions of the Council, the case was then reported to the Ministry of Lands at Outapi.

The Police investigated and on January 22 the Council ordered Shapaka and her children to stop molesting Shigwedha and to rebuild the widow's homestead before January 26.

The Shapaka group was not happy with the directive and that same evening Shigwedha's bush fence was torched.

A formal charge has been lodged with the Police at Tsandi.

Nkolo John, the Assistant Land Use Planner, confirmed to The Namibian that the case had been referred to the Police.

He revealed that they were dealing with a number of similar cases in which elderly women were terrorising their daughter-in-laws and chasing them away from their homesteads.

In August last year Josephina Ilende's homestead was completely destroyed by her late husband's sisters and brothers. The case is still pending.

# LOCAL COURTS FAN INJUSTICE

**By Juliet Chibuta**

ZAMBIAN local courts are still subjecting people, especially women, to harsh Zambian customs which allow property grabbing, 10 years after the Intestate Succession Act was enacted.

This is because some local court justices are still not aware of the Intestate Succession Act, the law enacted to protect people from such harsh customary laws.

Acting registrar of the High Court Evans Hamaundu said recently during the launching of the Local Courts' Guide To Intestate Succession booklet, that some local court justices, especially those based in the rural areas were still using customary law in the disposition of intestate cases.

He said apart from those in the urban, some few justices in rural areas who are aware of the Intestate Act do not understand it and prefer using the customary law instead.

Mr Hamaundu said whereas the Intestate Act favours the widow and children on the distribution of the deceased's estate, the Customary Law favours the relatives of the deceased especially when it is the husband who has died.

"At one time I spoke to some local court justices in Kasama about the Intestate Act. They said they did not know the law. When I explained, they said they would have difficulties in

accepting it because it was against the Zambian custom, he said.

Mr Hamaundu said the Local Courts' Guide To Intestate Succession booklet published by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) says:

"Local courts deal with more intestate cases than any other court so the booklet will be of great help because it will help justices to understand the law regarding the Act."

YWCA vice president Marv Malumo said about 15 000 booklets have been published and 9,000 would be distributed in all local courts in the country.

Mrs Malumo said YWCA was compelled to publish the book after learning that the highest number of cases dealt with at the Drop In Centre were related to property grabbing and succession cases.

Apart from explaining the legalities of the Intestate Act, the booklet guides local court justices on the appointment of administrators, the most highly disputable issue encountered in handling succession cases.

The book also discusses other laws relating to the Intestate Act usually used by subordinate courts and gives guidance on which institutions people should go to if they are faced with property grabbing.



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SECTION THREE

**HARMFUL CULTURAL  
PRACTICES**

# 3

## HARMFUL CULTURAL PRACTICES

### **Virtuous is the girl who suffers and dies without a sound**

– Traditional saying, India.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

### **DEFINITION**

In terms of CEDAW, **violence against women** is defined as violence directed towards women specifically because they are women, which results in physical, sexual or psychological harm (and includes threats of such harm). Women are subjected to gender-based violence much more frequently than men, because of the imbalance of social and economic power between men and women.

### **Gender-based violence**

This is any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering based on the gender of a person, but usually it refers to women and girls. It includes threats, coercion, deprivation of liberty, deprivation of the right to work, to earn income, sexual or mental rape, stalking or traditional practices, whether occurring in public or private life.

### **Some Types of Violence Against Women:**

- Sexual harassment
- Rape
- Domestic violence
- Witch killings
- Sexual serial murders
- Intimate femicide (murder of a woman by a husband / boyfriend)
- Trafficking in women
- Female genital mutilation

### **GENDER ISSUES:**

There is a complex relationship between culture, religion and violence against women. Religion and tradition are often used to justify gender-based violence, and such violence is used as a means of ensuring control over women's bodies and sexuality. Examples of this type of violence include domestic violence, and violence against women who do not adhere to cultural and religious norms, such as a dress code.

Religion and tradition may be employed to condone violence against women, such as proverbs or religious sayings that suggest that a man has a duty to beat his wife in order to keep her virtuous. These teachings are also used to present violence against women as an inevitable part of life. In many cultures, elderly women advise young women that a woman's life consists

of suffering, and that a virtuous woman accepts violence, abuse and exploitation by her husband and male relatives.

Religious images of women as a source of temptation are sometimes used to justify rape. For example, in Muslim countries which adhere to a strict dress code for women, women who do not adhere to such a dress code are ostracized and blamed for any form of violence which might befall them.

However, religion has also been effectively used to mobilise against gender-based violence, and many non-governmental organisations which provide assistance and shelter to abused women, or lobby against such violence have been founded by religious institutions. For example, many religious groups provide counseling and support services for women who survive violence, and religious sermons are also used as tools to preach against the abuse of women and girls. Furthermore, religious institutions are building relationships and coalitions with other societal organizations and institutions to lobby against and create awareness about violence against women.

## **MEDIA ISSUES**

The following guidelines can help the media in reporting on issues of violence against women involving aspects of religion and culture:

- Avoid using a tone or language that suggests that women are to blame for violence directed against them.
- Consult a number of sources, including organisations which lobby against gender-based violence, and survivors of violence themselves.
- Avoid stereotyping specific religious groups (for example, portraying all Muslim men as abusive and Muslim women as victims).
- Instead of portraying women as victims, look for other angles, such as successful initiatives to combat violence against women, and women who step beyond traditional roles prescribed by culture and religion.

## **FEMALE INFANTICIDE**

### **DEFINITION**

Female infanticide is the intentional killing of baby girls, due to a cultural preference for boys. The practice has existed in many societies since ancient times, and is currently still a major issue in many nations, particularly in Asia.

The babies are either killed straight after birth, or are intentionally neglected, causing their death. Since the development of tests that can accurately establish the sex of the foetus, sex-specific abortions have increased, particularly in societies with a tradition of female infanticide.

It is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on prevalence of female infanticide, but in any normal human population, there will be a balance of men and women, with a slightly higher number of women, due to biological factors such as the longevity of women. In countries where female infanticide remains unchecked, populations show a significant higher proportion of boys than girls being born and surviving into adulthood. These “missing women” in the population are an indication of what some activists refer to as “gendercide” – the deliberate extermination of one sex.

## **GENDER ISSUES**

Female infanticide is one of the most brutal expressions of the low status of women in patriarchal societies.

In many societies, boys are seen as an asset to the family, whereas girls are seen as a liability. This is linked to the patriarchal family structure, and to the dowry system. Whereas boys are seen as continuing the family line, girls are viewed as “belonging” to another family after marriage, creating resentment of the costs spent on raising girl children. Where fathers are required to pay a dowry to the groom’s family, this creates an additional financial burden associated with daughters.

## **MEDIA ISSUES**

Those involved in actually killing the babies (whether actively, or indirectly by withholding adequate nutrition and medical care) are often women, and often the mother of the child. While it is easy for the media to demonise such women, coverage that focuses on the societal pressures that cause women to kill their own children would be more useful.

Often, news stories do not give enough attention to the cultural issues that underlie the practice, particularly the fact that the preference for boy children is rooted in the lack of value accorded to women in society.

There is a tendency for the western media to ascribe female infanticide in China to the government’s “one child” policy, whereas female infanticide is in fact an ancient practice, and the underlying cause is the low status of women in traditional Chinese society.

As with all harmful cultural practices, the situation is a complex one, with governments putting in place policy to prevent female infanticide, while the practice continues largely unchecked through collusion by communities and local officials.

The media could make a positive contribution by monitoring whether governments are doing enough to change the status of women and girl-children in society; challenging prejudices against daughters; and working to change attitudes to practices such as the dowry system. Giving women access to socio-economic opportunities will help families to value women as productive members of societies, and will give women more choice in terms of their own reproductive functions, allowing them to resist family and community pressure to get rid of girl-children.

Researchers recommend that: “The principle of equality between men and women should be more widely promoted through the news media to change the attitude of son preference and improve the awareness of the general public on the issue”.

## **“HONOUR” KILLINGS AND FEMICIDE**

### **DEFINITION**

Femicide is the murder of a woman, specifically because she is a woman. There are many forms of femicide, including rape and murder and serial killings. However, the most common form of femicide is intimate femicide, where a woman is killed by her male partner. Femicide also takes the form of dowry murders, where a woman is killed because she does not bring enough bride-wealth with her when she marries; and witch-killings, where women are pointed

out as witches, and used as scapegoats for community misfortunes and frustrations. Femicide is linked to cultural concepts of male ownership of women, and the lower value accorded to women's lives.

"Honour" killings are a form of femicide, whereby a woman is killed because of her actual or perceived immoral behaviour, usually by relatives (often her husband or her father), who believe that she has damaged the honour of the family. There is a high incidence of "honour" killings in Muslim countries. However, the killings are not permitted in terms of Islamic law, and are in fact rooted in ancient tribal custom. Indeed, "honour" killings occur in countries as diverse as Brazil, Egypt, Italy, Uganda, and in many other nations where women are perceived not as individuals, but as vessels for honour of the family.

Reasons given for "honour" killings include infidelity or suspicion of infidelity; refusing to enter into an arranged marriage; marrying against her parent's wishes; seeking a divorce; speaking to other men; or "allowing herself to be raped".

In many countries where "honour" killings are common, the state tacitly condones the practice by either failing to prosecute the killers, or by imposing light sentences.

#### **REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE**

- Samia Imran

Samia Imran, a 28-year-old woman from Pakistan, was in the offices of her lawyer, Hina Jilani, who she had approached to assist her in obtaining a divorce from her abusive husband. Despite the abuse that Samia had endured, her own family was violently opposed to a divorce, which they felt would taint their family honour. When Samia's mother entered the office, accompanied by a man, Samia rose to greet her. The man with her mother drew a gun, and shot her once in the head, and then again as she fell to the ground. Samia's mother left the room with the killer. "She never even bothered to look whether the girl was dead," says Hina Jilani.

Samia's murder caused an outcry in Pakistani society, but rather than condemning the killer and those who planned the murder, politicians and the clergy called for Hina Jilani and her partner to be put to death for assisting women to obtain divorces.

#### **GENDER ISSUES**

"Honour" killings are directly related to the concept that women are the property of their male relatives. A woman is viewed as either pure, or as contaminated, which then reflects upon the honour of her male family members. In many cases, once a woman is considered dirty and defiled, it makes no difference whether or not she was a willing participant in the "crime". She must be destroyed in order to remove the stain on the family honour.

As with other harmful cultural practices, "honour" killings are indicative of a society in which men dominate, and women have a subordinate socio-economic status. A woman derives status from her relationship to men, and is judged in terms of how she performs in the roles of daughter, sister, wife and mother. A woman's life literally has less value than a man's honour.

## **MEDIA ISSUES**

News coverage of femicide and “honour” killings sometimes implies that the woman was in some way responsible for her own murder, as with headlines such as “Cheating Wife Killed”.

However, it is also problematic and simplistic to demonise the killers. “Honour” killings stem from broader social issues, such as patriarchal power structures within family and society, gender roles, and the standards of behaviour applied to men and women. Ibrahim, a young man who murdered his sister because she had married a man from another religion, stated that, “She is my sister – my flesh and blood – I am a human being. I didn’t want to kill her...They [the community] pushed me to make this decision”.

Samia Imran’s mother was also faced with the impossible decision between collaborating in the murder of the daughter or violating social codes and her own belief system.

## **FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION**

### **DEFINITION**

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is an ancient practice, common in over 30 African and Middle Eastern countries. It is a cultural practice, not a religious requirement. FGM involves the entire or partial removal of a woman or girl’s external genitals. In some cases the resulting wound and the vagina are sewn shut, leaving just a tiny opening. FGM also includes other mutilation of the genitals, such as piercing, burning or stretching the external genitals. The mutilation is usually performed on girls between the ages of two and 15 years. It is commonly performed without anesthetic, using unsterilised instruments such as razor blades, knives or pieces of glass.

FGM is usually a coming-of-age ritual, and the fact that there are so few other ceremonies and opportunities for recognition of young girls gives FGM a disproportionate significance in the lives of these girls.

Women who have been subjected to FGM cannot experience a normal sex life, and develop a number of serious health problems. It is an indication of the strength of women that they are able to survive, adapt, and lead normal lives after this mutilation.

### **Consequences of Female Genital Mutilation:**

- Bleeding, shock and infection after the excision, sometimes resulting in death.
- Psychological problems stemming from the ordeal and its aftermath.
- Problems during childbirth, which can endanger the lives of both the mother and the baby.
- Problems with menstruation and urination, including pain, retention of fluids and chronic infections.
- Sexual intercourse that is painful or impossible.
- Infertility.
- Other health problems such as ruptures in the vagina during intercourse.

## **GENDER ISSUES**

Although those performing FGM argue that the practice keeps women clean and aids childbirth, these are myths. The real purpose of the procedure is to control women’s sexuality and prevent them from experiencing any sexual pleasure – a privilege that is said to belong solely to men.

The gendered dynamics of FGM are more pronounced than in many other forms of violence against women because the act of FGM is carried out by other women. Some of the arguments as to why they do this include the fact that they believe that it is an integral part of their culture to carry out FGM, in order to ensure that the needs of men, who are the heads of the community are kept happy and satisfied. Also, some elderly women may carry out FGM as a form of income in communities which are often characterized by poverty and high unemployment rates.

Despite the severe psychological and medical problems caused by FGM, the practice continues, often perpetuated by elderly women, because families fear that uncircumcised girls will not find husbands.

FGM is illegal in most countries, but legislation is often not enforced. Village women's initiatives to stop FGM have more impact than legislation alone. These campaigns include education, support for mothers and girls who refuse FGM, and replacing FGM with positive, non-violent coming-of-age ceremonies. It is also important to note that the biggest advocates against FGM are women who used to perform the practice, and who are intimately familiar with the consequences of it.

## **MEDIA ISSUES**

FGM has been brought to many other nations around the world by immigrants and asylum seekers, who, finding themselves isolated and subject to hostility and racism, are often determined to maintain their culture and traditions.

### **Media reports on the practice should follow these guidelines:**

- Provide accurate explanations and use correct terminology. FGM is sometimes referred to as “female circumcision”, however, this is misleading, as the trauma and damage caused by FGM cannot be compared to male circumcision. Circumcised men are still able to enjoy normal sexual intercourse.
- FGM is an easy issue to sensationalise. While coverage that focuses on gruesome details might make for a good story, coverage which provides the public with accurate information on the practice, details efforts to challenge this custom, and informs women and girls of their rights and where they can go for assistance, can make for an equally good story, and will contribute to the eradication of FGM.
- Avoid representing women who have been subject to FGM as passive victims.
- Avoid secondary victimisation of women and girls who have been subject to FGM: Protect their identity and human dignity.
- Use language and facts that do not portray the practice as “primitive” or as a practice which is practiced by “inferior” people. Therefore avoid the language of “superiority” when reporting on FGM.

**EXERCISE 15****TRADITION, RELIGION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**MATERIALS:** Three newspaper clippings

**TIME:** 30 Minutes

**AIMS:** To interrogate the attitude of traditional and religious leaders towards women and women's rights.

To analyse the way the media reinforces negative cultural and religious beliefs towards women.

Break the group into small groups of about 5 people each. Each of the groups should focus on a different clipping. The group should answer the following questions and then report back in plenary. In their discussions, the groups should also consider the type of headline they will use in order to attract readers' attention.

1. What does the article suggest about the attitude of traditional and religious figures towards women?
2. Based on the article, in what ways are women's human rights violated?
3. Is this conveyed in the language, context and sources provided by the story?
4. Discuss and note down how this story could be improved to make it:
  - a) More informative (new)
  - b) More educational
  - c) Spur debate and policy changes among policy-makers and legislators

## WIDOW INHERITORS MEET THEIR MATCH

CLAY MUGANDA

Monica is not a popular name in some circles of Ukwala in Siaya District.

Among the more traditional of the menfolk, Monica is not just a woman's name. It represents a flood sweeping away the stilts of tradition from under their society.

St Monica Women's Group, an anti-widow inheritance advocacy association, is also threatening the livelihood of a rare type of professional.

"We have no choice but to turn back to our *shambas* as these people have cut off our source of livelihood," laments Jack Adero, a widow inheritor.

Adero, 57 and unmarried, used to get paid for his services before the Monica group came into being. His duties then entailed loko ot (building a ceremonial hut for the widow) and spending a night with her in the newly-built hut.

The *jotero* or professional widow inheritors, can demand up to Sh15,000, plus cattle, to cleanse a widow.

Among the Luo, who predominantly occupy the area, it is taboo for an un-inherited widow to enter anyone's homestead. If she does, she is not allowed to enter any of the houses in the compound.

Should a widow die before being inherited, her brothers-in-law are barred by custom from digging her grave. They are also barred from building another dwelling for her should the one her husband left her collapse. These beliefs bar close relatives from helping widows who choose not to be inherited.

Most *jotero* sponge on well-to-do widows. Adero admits that *jotero* take advantage of this ritual to pitch camp in the widow's homestead at her expense. Thus their resentment for Monica.

The group has been filling the void left by relatives who desert uninhabited widows for fear of offending custom and tradition.

"Had it not been for Monica, I could have perished during the *El Nina* rains," says Agnes Abonyo, the group's co-chairman. "My husband left me in a crumbling hut as our resources had been spent on his medication. My brothers-in-law regarded me as an outcast after I refused to be inherited and would not come to my rescue," she says.

The group built a hut for her.

Monica, which was initially associated with older widows when it started off with 15 members, is now attracting young [Christian] widows and even men. Of the 254 members, 68 are male.

Mary Amollo, the group's chairman, says membership is open to Christians, and not necessarily widows.

"Surprisingly, men started joining as time went by," says Amollo. "This has increased the membership to include widowers who also dislike the cleansing rituals they go through when they lose their wives," she adds.

Initially, widows were ridiculed by traditionalists, but the group has defied all the odds to step in and help members protect their property and stave off harassment from 'professional' inheritors.

Bertha Anyango, 62, confesses that she joined Monica because she could not stand the idea of another man in her life.

"Some of these inheritors are drunks and spread malicious rumours about one's family when their demands are not met," says the grandmother of four. She was widowed in 1996.

Monica's efforts in curbing widow inheritance have curtailed inheritors' behaviour of reaping where they did not sow, says Charles Odhiambo, a Busia-based policeman whose father died early this month. He says: "As much as I would not like to interfere with my mother's life, I will not stand any good-for-nothing old man trying to interfere with her life just because she is widowed."

But it has not been smooth sailing for Monica. Some of the group's fiercest critics have been women whose daughters-in-law joined Monica. They accuse the Monica women of brainwashing young widows in order to get their unmarried brothers to marry them. Supporters of inheritance say the group is responsible for the runaway spread of HIV/AIDS in the region.

"It is better to be inherited and infect one person than to refuse and keep a string of boyfriends who could all end up getting infected," observes Owiti Luoland, a professional inheritor who was expelled from the division.

Owiti earned the Luoland name because of his widow-inheritance exploits in distant areas when Monica's clout made Ukwala a *jotero-free* area.

With its continued popularity, Monica now admits even couples as members. Membership is free, but during the weekly meeting-cum-prayer sessions, each member contributes at least Sh20 for a rainy day.

"Considering the level of poverty here, we cannot peg the amount higher as most of our

members are either unemployed or are only petty traders," says Sabina Odipo, the group's treasurer.

One in every two people in Siaya cannot afford a meal a day, according to the *First Report on Poverty in Kenya*. More than half of the women are absolutely poor.

The district has a large number of female-headed households and most women are illiterate. Because of cultural inhibitions, women cannot make important decisions. Their participation in big business ventures is greatly hampered, further worsening their poverty.

Odipo says that despite all the hardships they could face, the group has to stay because "widow inheritance has been abused and has no place in the modern society and in the era of HIV/AIDS. We are trying to prevent the spread of the scourge by encouraging young widows to join us and shun the *jotero*," she adds.

"Widow inheritance involving sexual acts is very risky in the district, where the HIV-prevalence is higher than the national average," warns Tom Onyango, the Siaya District AIDS and STD Coordinator.

One in every three people in Siaya is believed to be infected with HIV, according to statistics at the local district hospital.

Onyango says that even when widows consent to be inherited for cultural reasons, inheritors still insist on sexual relations.

Luo women, says a two-year study by Kenya Oral Literature Association and Interlink Rural Information Service, feel that widow inheritance is largely responsible for the escalating spread of HIV/AIDS. As a cultural practice, it has been compromised by the increase in sexually transmitted infections and has therefore outlived its usefulness.

The study says that widows view their economic situation as tragic since they cannot provide adequate care, food, clothing and school fees for their children as they should only be inherited if the sole aim is providing a solution to their economic hardship.

The widow inheritors hardly fit in the 13.1 per cent bracket of rural men who know about HIV/AIDS and have never been tested. The 1998 *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey* states that in Nyanza Province, 63.3 per cent of the men know about condoms while only 16.7 per cent are willing to pay (a maximum of Sh5) for them.

## WIDOW WHO DOES THINGS HER WAY WINS REPRIEVE TO LEAVE HOME

By Tefo Mothibeli

For nearly a year, widow Elizabeth Tumane of Mononono village, outside Rustenburg, could not leave her home.

As she stepped out of her gate for the first time yesterday, she breathed a sigh of relief.

For the past 11 months the Jehovah's Witness has been under virtual house arrest because she refused to abide by a traditional tribal custom which states that she sprinkle *mogaga* (a herb) on her pathways whenever she leaves home, until the end of a year-long mourning period for her dead husband. She has consistently refused, arguing that the practice was at odds with her Christian belief.

Tumane has been shunned by neighbours and confined to her house because the villagers believe that, by refusing to practise the ritual, she would cause their livestock to become infertile.

With the assistance of the South African Human Rights Commission,

Tumane brought an urgent action against Chief John Pilane and the tribal authority in her area, arguing that fundamental rights had been violated when she was prevented from leaving her house.

In a groundbreaking move in the Mmabatho High Court yesterday, lawyers acting for Pilane, of the Bakgatla-baKgalefa tribal authority made an interim undertaking committing their client to relax all the restrictions on Tumane.

The chief also undertook to ensure that the frail 57-year-old mother of two would not be threatened, assaulted or evicted from the village and would be allowed to exercise her religious freedom without any hindrance until the resumption of the case on September 17, when the tribal authority will respond to Tumane's charges.

The undertaking was made an order of the court.

Although this latest development

may mean only a brief respite from trouble, Tumane intends making the most of it.

"I am thrilled that God has finally heard my prayers. I am going to use the time to attend our services to praise His glorious name," she said.

She added: "At last I can draw water from a communal tap which is about 200m away from my house, go to the shops, and go to the clinic when I need medical attention."

In spite of all the hardships she has had to endure, Tumane said she does not hold a grudge.

"I am not in a win-or-lose game against the chief or any of my fellow residents. I desperately wish that I can live in peace in the area.

"I want to be myself and also let other people live their lives the way they see fit. I want to praise my Lord in peace," she said.

# GOING BACK TO THE PAST CAN HEAL THE FUTURE

**BY Colleen Lowe Morna and Zohra Khan**

Wracked by an increase in violent crimes against women and children, the community of Alexandra township in Johannesburg is going back to its roots to seek the guidance of the ancestors in fighting one of South Africa's most rampant, yet under-reported human rights violations.

On November 25, commemorated globally as the International Day of No Violence Against Women, Adapt, an Alexandra-based NGO concerned with domestic violence, led a ceremony that ran from the graveyard to the police station and on to its premises at the Oliver Tambo Centre in a bid to rediscover traditional values that may help in combating the scourge.

"I always say that to drive safely you have to keep your eye on the rear-view mirror," says Kgalushi Koka of the Kara Heritage Institute who led the ceremony "Let us revisit the past and see if we can come up with solutions for Members of Adapt outside the Alexandra police station as part of a ceremony to rediscover traditional values that may affect the future."

From tomorrow until December 15, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) will hold a major regional conference in Lesotho at which governments will be called on to account for what they have done to meet their commitments to eradicating violence against women and children, as contained in SADC's Declaration on Gender and Development.

In South Africa the new Domestic Violence Act came into operation in December 1999. It provides for men, women and children in abusive domestic relationships to obtain

protection from the law. It offers a broad definition of abuse that includes verbal, physical, psychological, emotional and economic forms of abuse, and allows a victim to bring an interdict preventing any of these. The act also states that a man can be convicted of raping his wife and spells out the duties of the police and other law enforcement officials when assisting survivors/victims of domestic violence.

Yet statistically South Africa still has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world. Despite a progressive constitution and Bill of Rights that guarantees women protection under the law, women continue to be beaten, raped and harassed. Violence against women and children remains one of the major threats to South Africa's fledgling democracy. Gender violence affects all women irrespective of race, class, location, religion and other constructs.

There are many forms of violence against women. These include sexual and domestic violence and femicide, as well as violence related to custom and culture (for example female genital mutilation, virginity testing, witchcraft violence). HIV/AIDS has added a frightening new dimension to this scourge, as coercive sex is a major means by which the disease is spread.

Violence against women is an enormous burden to the state. The indirect cost (in the form of law enforcement, health services and loss of production) is extremely high. It also impacts negatively on South Africa's socioeconomic development.

How can traditional values help? Koka, whose Kara Heritage Institute studies African religions, concedes that it is simplistic to romanticise the past. "There was violence against women

and children then, but not on the scale we see today", he says.

There may have been more balance between social forces in the past, but at what cost, especially to women who in all South African cultures have occupied an inferior position? Several studies suggest that contrary to the popular belief that men engage in sexual offences because they cannot control their sexual urges, they do so as a show and exertion of power.

Koka argues that in the traditional African religion the intersection of Ntu, the female principle, and Ra, the male principle, produces Thau Thau, which is wisdom—to create balance, stability, harmony and happiness in marriage. Thau Thau is equally shared. It does not encompass a notion of inferiority or superiority.

It is this principle that Koka lauds to the youth of Alexandra as they dance around a fire in the cemetery in a ceremony rich in symbolism. Fire, he says, symbolises God the creator, the source of energy. Those dancing around the fire are like planets, taking energy from the sun. The three stones around the fire are the three dimensions of time—the past, the present, the future. When they finish dancing, the young men and women plant trees and water them as symbols of new life.

One of the young male volunteers wears a T-shirt with a big hand imprint on the back. It reads: "Surely your hands can do better than to kill a woman." He is a pioneer of a new era and a new tradition.

**Colleen Lowe Morna and Zohra Khan work for Gender Links, specialising in gender media and development issues.**

**EXERCISE 16****INFANTICIDE**

**MATERIALS:** Case study on infanticide (A)

Newspaper article entitled: Population: China found wanting on Gender Discrimination (B)

**TIME:** 20 minutes

**AIM:** To increase understanding of infanticide and thereby stimulate thinking on alternative ways of reporting on it by the media.

Read the article on infanticide (A) and the story on China (B) and answer the following questions

1. What do you understand by infanticide and how prevalent is it?
2. Why is it there is no mass outrage expressed on deaths from infanticide?
3. Do you think the reasons given for carrying out infanticide justify the practice? Why?
4. What role has the State played in encouraging infanticide in the countries being studied?
5. What are the commercial dimensions of infanticide and what are the implications of these dimensions?
6. What do you see as the role of the media with regards to preventing infanticide?

## CASE STUDY: FEMALE INFANTICIDE

**Focus:** (1) India (2) China

### Summary

The phenomenon of female infanticide is as old as many cultures, and has likely accounted for millions of gender-selective deaths throughout history. It remains a critical concern in a number of "Third World" countries today, notably the two most populous countries on earth, China and India. In all cases, specifically female infanticide reflects the low status accorded to women in most parts of the world; it is arguably the most brutal and destructive manifestation of the anti-female bias that pervades "patriarchal" societies. It is closely linked to the phenomena of sex-selective abortion, which targets female fetuses almost exclusively, and neglect of girl children.

### The background

"Female infanticide is the intentional killing of baby girls due to the preference for male babies and from the low value associated with the birth of females." (Marina Porras, "Female Infanticide and Foeticide".) It should be seen as a subset of the broader phenomenon of infanticide, which has also targeted the physically or mentally handicapped, and infant males (alongside infant females or, occasionally, on a gender-selective basis). As with **maternal mortality**, some would dispute the assigning of infanticide or female infanticide to the category of "genocide" or, as here, "gendercide." Nonetheless, the argument advanced in the maternal mortality case-study holds true in this case as well: governments and other actors can be just as guilty of mass killing by neglect or tacit encouragement, as by direct murder. R.J. Rummel buttresses this view, referring to infanticide as another type of government killing whose victims may total millions ... In many cultures, government permitted, if not encouraged, the killing of handicapped or female infants or otherwise unwanted children. In the Greece of 200 B.C., for example, the murder of female infants was so common that among 6,000 families living in Delphi no more than 1 percent had two daughters. Among 79 families, nearly as many had one child as two. Among all there were only 28 daughters to 118 sons.... But classical Greece was not unusual. In eighty-four societies spanning the Renaissance to our time, "defective" children have been killed in one-third of them. In India, for example, because of Hindu beliefs and the rigid caste system, young girls were murdered as a matter of course. When demographic statistics were first collected in the nineteenth century, it was discovered that in "some villages, no girl babies were found at all; in a total of thirty others, there were 343 boys to 54 girls. ... [I]n Bombay, the number of girls alive in 1834 was 603."

Rummel adds: "Instances of infanticide ... are usually singular events; they do not happen en masse. But the accumulation of such officially sanctioned or demanded murders comprises, in effect, serial massacre. Since such practices were so pervasive in some cultures, I suspect that the death toll from infanticide must exceed that from mass sacrifice and perhaps even outright mass murder." (Rummel, *Death by Government*, pp. 65-66.)

### Focus (1): India

As John-Thor Dahlburg points out, "in rural India, the centuries-old practice of female infanticide can still be considered a wise course of action." (Dahlburg, "Where killing baby girls 'is no big sin,'" *The Los Angeles Times* [in *The Toronto Star*, February 28, 1994.]) According to census statistics, "From 972 females for every 1,000 males in 1901 ... the gender imbalance has tilted to 929 females per 1,000 males. ... In the nearly 300 poor hamlets of the Usilampatti

area of Tamil Nadu [state], as many as 196 girls died under suspicious circumstances [in 1993] ... Some were fed dry, unhulled rice that punctured their windpipes, or were made to swallow poisonous powdered fertilizer. Others were smothered with a wet towel, strangled or allowed to starve to death." Dahlburg profiles one disturbing case from Tamil Nadu: Lakshmi already had one daughter, so when she gave birth to a second girl, she killed her. For the three days of her second child's short life, Lakshmi admits, she refused to nurse her. To silence the infant's famished cries, the impoverished village woman squeezed the milky sap from an oleander shrub, mixed it with castor oil, and forced the poisonous potion down the newborn's throat. The baby bled from the nose, then died soon afterward. Female neighbors buried her in a small hole near Lakshmi's square thatched hut of sunbaked mud. They sympathized with Lakshmi, and in the same circumstances, some would probably have done what she did. For despite the risk of execution by hanging and about 16 months of a much-ballyhooed government scheme to assist families with daughters, in some hamlets of ... Tamil Nadu, murdering girls is still sometimes believed to be a wiser course than raising them. "A daughter is always liabilities. How can I bring up a second?" Lakshmi, 28, answered firmly when asked by a visitor how she could have taken her own child's life eight years ago. "Instead of her suffering the way I do, I thought it was better to get rid of her." (All quotes from Dahlburg, "Where killing baby girls 'is no big sin'.")

A study of Tamil Nadu by the Community Service Guild of Madras similarly found that "female infanticide is rampant" in the state, though only among Hindu (rather than Moslem or Christian) families. "Of the 1,250 families covered by the study, 740 had only one girl child and 249 agreed directly that they had done away with the unwanted girl child. More than 213 of the families had more than one male child whereas half the respondents had only one daughter." (Malavika Karlekar, "The girl child in India: does she have any rights?," *Canadian Woman Studies*, March 1995.)

The bias against females in India is related to the fact that "Sons are called upon to provide the income; they are the ones who do most of the work in the fields. In this way sons are looked to as a type of insurance. With this perspective, it becomes clearer that the high value given to males decreases the value given to females." (Marina Porras, "Female Infanticide and Foeticide".) The problem is also intimately tied to the institution of **dowry**, in which the family of a prospective bride must pay enormous sums of money to the family in which the woman will live after marriage. Though formally outlawed, the institution is still pervasive. "The combination of dowry and wedding expenses usually add up to more than a million rupees ([US] \\\\$35,000). In India the average civil servant earns about 100,000 rupees (\$3,500) a year. Given these figures combined with the low status of women, it seems not so illogical that the poorer Indian families would want only male children." (Porras, "Female Infanticide and Foeticide".) Murders of women whose families are deemed to have paid insufficient dowry have become increasingly common, and receive separate **case-study treatment** on this site.

India is also the heartland of sex-selective abortion. Amniocentesis was introduced in 1974 "to ascertain birth defects in a sample population," but "was quickly appropriated by medical entrepreneurs. A spate of sex-selective abortions followed." (Karlekar, "The girl child in India.") Karlekar points out that "those women who undergo sex determination tests and abort on knowing that the foetus is female

are actively taking a decision against equality and the right to life for girls. In many cases, of course, the women are not independent agents but merely victims of a dominant family ideology based on preference for male children.”

John Thor-Dahlburg notes that “In Jaipur, capital of the western state of Rajasthan, prenatal sex determination tests result in an estimated 3,500 abortions of female fetuses annually,” according to a medical-college study. (Dahlburg, “Where killing baby girls ‘is no big sin’.”) Most strikingly, according to UNICEF, “A report from Bombay in 1984 on abortions after prenatal sex determination stated that 7,999 out of 8,000 of the aborted fetuses were females. Sex determination has become a lucrative business.” (Zeng Yi *et al.*, “Causes and Implications of the Recent Increase in the Reported Sex Ratio at Birth in China,” *Population and Development Review*, 19: 2 [June 1993], p. 297.)

Deficits in nutrition and health-care also overwhelmingly target female children. Karlekar cites research indicat[ing] a definite bias in feeding boys milk and milk products and eggs ... In Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh [states], it is usual for girls and women to eat less than men and boys and to have their meal after the men and boys had finished eating. Greater mobility outside the home provides boys with the opportunity to eat sweets and fruit from saved-up pocket money or from money given to buy articles for food consumption. In case of illness, it is usually boys who have preference in health care. ... More is spent on clothing for boys than for girls[,] which also affects morbidity. (Karlekar, “The girl child in India.”)

Sunita Kishor reports “another disturbing finding,” namely “that, despite the increased ability to command essential food and medical resources associated with development, female children [in India] do not improve their survival chances relative to male children with gains in development. Relatively high levels of agricultural development decrease the life chances of females while the males’ life chances are unaffected; urbanization increases the life chances of males more than females. ... Clearly, gender-based discrimination in the allocation of resources persists and even increases, even when availability of resources is not a constraint.” (Kishor, “May God Give Sons to All’: Gender and Child Mortality in India,” *American Sociological Review*, 58: 2 [April 1993], p. 262.)

Indian state governments have sometimes taken measures to diminish the slaughter of infant girls and abortions of female fetuses. “The leaders of Tamil Nadu are holding out a tempting carrot to couples in the state with one or two daughters and no sons: if one parent undergoes sterilization, the government will give the family [U.S.] \$160 in aid per child. The money will be paid in instalments as the girl goes through school. She will also get a small gold ring and on her 20th birthday, a lump sum of \$650 to serve as her dowry or defray the expenses of higher education. Four thousand families enrolled in the first year,” with 6,000 to 8,000 expected to join annually (as of 1994) (Dahlburg, “Where killing baby girls ‘is no big sin’.”) Such programs have, however, barely begun to address the scale of the catastrophe.

## Focus (2): China

“A tradition of infanticide and abandonment, especially of females, existed in China before the foundation of the People’s Republic in 1949,” note Zeng *et al.* (“Causes and Implications,” p. 294.) According to Ansley J. Coale and Judith Banister, “A missionary (and naturalist) observer in [China in] the late nineteenth century interviewed 40 women over age 50 who reported having borne 183 sons and 175 daughters, of whom 126 sons but only 53 daughters survived to age 10; by their account, the women had destroyed 78

of their daughters.” (Coale and Banister, “Five Decades of Missing Females in China,” *Demography*, 31: 3 [August 1994], p.472.)

According to Zeng *et al.*, “The practice was largely forsaken in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.” (Zeng *et al.*, “Causes and Implications,” p. 294.) Coale and Banister likewise acknowledge a “decline of excess female mortality after the establishment of the People’s Republic ... assisted by the action of a strong government, which tried to modify this custom as well as other traditional practices that it viewed as harmful.” (Coale and Banister, “Five Decades,” p. 472.) But the number of “missing” women showed a sharp upward trend in the 1980s, linked by almost all scholars to the “one-child policy” introduced by the Chinese government in 1979 to control spiralling population growth. Couples are penalized by wage-cuts and reduced access to social services when children are born “outside the plan.” Johansson and Nygren found that while “sex ratios [were] generally within or fairly near the expected range of 105 to 106 boys per 100 girls for live births within the plan ... they are, in contrast, clearly far above normal for children born outside the plan, even as high as 115 to 118 for 1984-87. That the phenomenon of missing girls in China in the 1980s is related to the government’s population policy is thus conclusively shown.” (Sten Johansson and Ola Nygren, “The Missing Girls of China: A New Demographic Account,” *Population and Development Review*, 17 1 [March 1991], pp. 40-41.)

The Chinese government appeared to recognize the linkage by allowing families in rural areas (where anti-female bias is stronger) a second child if the first was a girl. Nonetheless, in September 1997, the World Health Organization’s Regional Committee for the Western Pacific issued a report claiming that “more than 50 million women were estimated to be ‘missing’ in China because of the institutionalized killing and neglect of girls due to Beijing’s population control program that limits parents to one child.” (See Joseph Farah, “Cover-up of China’s gender-cide”, Western Journalism Center/ Free Republic, September 29, 1997. Farah referred to gendercide as the biggest single holocaust in human history.)

According to Peter Stockland, “Years of population engineering, including virtual extermination of ‘surplus’ baby girls, has created a nightmarish imbalance in China’s male and female populations.” (Stockland, “China’s baby-slaughter overlooked,” *The Calgary Sun*, June 11, 1997.) In 1999, Jonathan Manthorpe reported a study by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, claiming that “the imbalance between the sexes is now so distorted that there are 111 million men in China – more than three times the population of Canada – who will not be able to find a wife.” As a result, the kidnapping and slave-trading of women has increased: “Since 1990, say official Chinese figures, 64,000 women – 8,000 a year on average – have been rescued by authorities from forced ‘marriages’. The number who have not been saved can only be guessed at. ... The thirst for women is so acute that the slave trader gangs are even reaching outside China to find merchandise. There are regular reports of women being abducted in such places as northern Vietnam to feed the demand in China.” (Jonathan Manthorpe, “China battles slave trading in women: Female infanticide fuels a brisk trade in wives,” *The Vancouver Sun*, January 11, 1999.)

Since the first allegations of widespread female infanticide in China connected to the government’s “one-child” policy, controversy has raged over the number of deaths that can be ascribed to infanticide as opposed to other causes. Zeng *et al.* argued in 1993 that “underreporting of female births, an increase in prenatal sex identification by ultrasound and other diagnostic methods for the illegal purpose of gender-specific birth control, and [only] very low-

level incidence of female infanticide are the causes of the increase in the reported sex ratio at birth in China.” (Zeng *et al.*, “Causes and Implications,” p.285.) They add: “Underreporting of female births accounts for about 43 percent to 75 percent of the difference between the reported sex ratio at birth during the second half of the 1980s and the normal value of the true sex ratio at birth” (p. 289). The authors contended that “sex-differential underreporting of births and induced abortion after prenatal sex determination together explain almost all of the increase in the reported sex ratio at birth during the late 1980s,” and thus “the omission ... of victims of female infanticide cannot be a significant factor.” Moreover, “Both the social and administrative structure and the close bond among neighbors in China make it difficult to conceal a serious crime such as infanticide,” while additionally “Infanticide is not a cost-effective method of sex selection. The psychological and moral costs are so high that people are unlikely to take such a step except under extreme circumstances” (p. 295). They stress, however, that “even small numbers of cases of female infanticide, abandonment, and neglect are a serious violation of the fundamental human rights of women and children” (p. 296).

In a similar vein, in April 2000, *The New York Times* reported that “many ‘illegal’ children are born in secret, their births never officially registered.” And “as more women move around the country to work, it is increasingly hard to monitor pregnancies ... Unannounced spot checks by the State Statistics Bureau have discovered undercounts of up to 40 percent in some villages, Chinese demographers say.” (See Elisabeth Rosenthal, “China’s Widely Flouted One-Child Policy Undercuts Its Census”, *The New York Times*, April 14, 2000.)

Johansson and Nygren attracted considerable notice with a somewhat different claim: “that adoptions (which often go unreported) account for a large proportion of the missing girls. ... If adopted children are added to the live births ... the sex ratio at birth becomes much closer to normal for most years in the 1980s. ... Adding the adopted children to live births reduces the number of missing girls by about half.” (Johansson and Nygren, “The Missing Girls of China, pp. 43, 46.) They add (p. 50): that female infanticide does occur on some scale is evidenced by reports in the Chinese press, but the available statistical evidence does not help us to determine whether it takes place on a large or a small scale.”

Even if millions of Chinese infant girls are unregistered rather than directly murdered, however, the pattern of discrimination is one that will severely reduce their opportunities in life. “If parents do hide the birth of a baby girl, she will go unregistered and therefore will not have any legal existence. The child may have difficulty receiving medical attention, going to school, and [accessing] other state services.” (Porras, “Female Infanticide and Foeticide”.)

Likewise, if a Chinese infant girl is turned over for adoption rather than being killed, she risks being placed in one of the notorious “Dying Rooms” unveiled in a British TV documentary. Chinese state orphanages have come in for heavy criticism as a result of the degrading and unsanitary conditions that usually pervade them. In one orphanage, documentary producer Brian Woods found that “every single baby ... was a girl, and as we moved on this pattern was repeated. The only boys were mentally or physically disabled. 95% of the babies we saw were able-bodied girls. We also discovered that, although they are described as orphans, very few of them actually are; the overwhelming majority do have parents, but their parents have abandoned them, simply because they were born the wrong

sex.” Woods estimated that “up to a million baby girls every year” were victims of this “mass desertion,” deriving from “the complex collision of [China’s] notorious One Child Policy and its traditional preference for sons.” (See Brian Woods, “The Dying Rooms Trust”.)

The phenomenon of neglect of girl children is also dramatically evident in China. According to the World Health Organization, “In many cases, mothers are more likely to bring their male children to health centers – particularly to private physicians – and they may be treated at an earlier stage of disease than girls.” (Cited in Farah, “Cover-up of China’s gender-cide”.)

The Chinese government has taken some energetic steps to combat the practice of female infanticide and sex-selective abortion of female fetuses. It “has employed the Marriage Law and Women’s Protection Law which both prohibit female infanticide. The Women’s Protection Law also prohibits discrimination against ‘women who give birth to female babies.’ ... The Maternal Health Care Law of 1994 ‘strictly prohibits’ the use of technology to identify the gender of a fetus.” However, “although the government has outlawed the use of ultrasound machines, physicians continue to use them to determine the gender of fetuses, especially in rural areas.” (Porras, “Female Infanticide and Foeticide”.)

#### **How many die?**

Gendercide Watch is aware of no overall statistics on the numbers of girls who die annually from infanticide. Calculations are further clouded by the unreliability and ambiguity of much of the data. Nonetheless, a minimum estimate would place the casualties in the hundreds of thousands, especially when one takes into consideration that the phenomenon is most prevalent in the world’s two most populous countries. Sex-selective abortions likely account for an even higher number of “missing” girls.

#### **Who is responsible?**

As already noted, female infanticide reflects the low status accorded to woman in many societies around the world. The burden of taking a woman into the family accounts for the high dowry rates in India which, in turn, have led to an epidemic female infanticide. Typical also is China, where culture dictates that when a girl marries she leaves her family and becomes part of her husband’s family. For this reason Chinese peasants have for many centuries wanted a son to ensure there is someone to look after them in their old age – having a boy child is the best pension a Chinese peasant can get. Baby girls are even called “maggots in the rice” ... (“The Dying Rooms Trust”)

Infanticide is a crime overwhelmingly committed by women, both in the Third and First Worlds. (This contrasts markedly with “infanticide in nonhuman primates,” which “is carried out primarily by migrant males who are unrelated to the infant or its parents and is a manifestation of reproductive competition among males.” [Glenn Hausfater, “Infanticide: Comparative and Evolutionary Perspectives,” *Current Anthropology*, 25: 4 (1984), p. 501.] It also serves as a reminder that gendercide may be implemented by those of the same gender.) In India, according to John-Thor Dahlburg, “many births take place in isolated villages, with only female friends and the midwife present. If a child dies, the women can always blame natural causes.” (Dahlburg, “Where killing baby girls ‘is no big sin’.”) In the United States, “every year hundreds of women commit neonaticide [the killing of newborns] ... Prosecutors sometimes don’t prosecute; juries rarely convict; those found guilty almost never go to jail. Barbara Kirwin, a forensic psychologist, reports that in nearly 300 cases of women

charged with neonaticide in the United States and Britain, no woman spent more than a night in jail.” Much of “the leniency shown to neonaticidal mothers” reflects the fact that they are standardly “young, poor, unmarried and socially isolated,” although it is notable that similar leniency is rarely extended to young, poor, and socially isolated male murderers. (Steven Pinker, “Why They Kill Their Newborns”, *The New York Times*, November 2, 1997.)

A number of strategies have been proposed and implemented to try to address the problem of female infanticide, along with the related phenomena of sex-selective abortion and abandonment and neglect of girl children. Zeng *et al's* prescriptions for Chinese policymakers can easily be generalized to other countries where female infanticide is rife: The principle of equality between men and women should be more widely promoted through the news media to change the attitude of son preference and improve the awareness of the general public

on this issue; the principle should also be reflected in specific social and economic policies to protect the basic rights of women and children, especially female children.

...Government regulations prohibiting the use of prenatal sex identification techniques for non-medical purposes should be strictly enforced, and violators should be punished accordingly. The laws that punish people who commit infanticide, abandonment, and neglect of female children, and the laws and regulations on the protection of women and children[,] should be strictly enforced. The campaigns to protect women and children from being kidnapped or sold into servitude should be effectively strengthened. Family planning programs should focus on effective public education, good counseling and service delivery, and the fully voluntary participation of the community and individuals to increase contraceptive prevalence, reduce unplanned pregnancies, and minimize the need for an induced abortion. (Zeng, *et al.*, p. 298.)

## **POPULATION: CHINA FOUND WANTING ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION**

**By Ihsan Bouabid**

NEW YORK, Feb. 5 (IPS) - China continues to discriminate against women in its approach to population control, rather than focusing on the targets set in 1994 at the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, according to Chinese activists.

In a document presented to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) the Human Rights in China (HRIC) organisation underlines the fact that Beijing's control of the media prohibits any open reporting on discrimination against women with regard to population policies.

For instance no one in China reports on anyone breaking the law on the prohibition of infanticide, sex selective abortions and abandonment of female infants, which has resulted in the "disappearance" of tens of millions of girls, says Yu Piug of HRIC, one of the authors of the report.

Currently, the sex ratio in China, a nation of more than one billion, is 120 males to 100 females. In most countries, women form a higher percentage of the population.

Piug also underlines the grim fact that China has the fourth highest rate of suicide of all the countries which provide data on the issue to the World Health Organization (WHO), and rural suicide rates are three times urban rates.

Worse, WHO statistics show that China is the only country in the world where higher rates of suicide are reported for women than for men: with 21 per cent of the world's women, it has 56 per cent of the world's female suicide.

Although Piug commends the Chinese government for enacting the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests and other laws protecting women's rights, the Women's Law does not contain a definition of "discrimination."

As the population policy remains a priority, the pursuit of demographic goals has overridden the needs and interests of women and girls, and has led to the use of physical violence, coercive measure and abuse by officials, civil servants and even medical workers, according to the HRIC document.

In 1979, the Chinese government launched the "One child per couple policy" which stipulated couples had to apply for birth permits before starting a pregnancy. In some rural areas, and those of minority populations, couples were allowed two children, especially if the first born was a girl, but a third is still forbidden.

After having the permitted number of children, women are required to use contraceptive devices or be sterilized. Furthermore, unauthorized pregnancies are terminated and after having an "out-of-plan child", one spouse must be sterilized - very often the woman.

In the early 1990s, China enforced its population control policy as well as evaluating the performance of population planning personnel in order to achieve targets on birth quotas across the nation.

Failure to ensure the number of births within set quotas resulted in demotion or loss of bonuses. Likewise individuals and families who broke the population planning rules encountered loss of jobs, confiscation of property and even the demolition of their houses.

In order to meet the rigid quotas, Chinese women have been subjected to forced abortions, sterilization and forced insertion of intra-uterine devices (IUDs), said HRIC.

Girls particularly have been threatened by sex-selective abortions, infanticide, neglect, non-registration at birth and abandonment despite the fact such practice is officially banned in China.

“High officials are blaming the lower level of civil servants for all the abuses but this is an accommodating manner to explain the many forms of violence against women in my country. China’s civil servants are standing on the heads of people,” said Chu Hailan, a relative of HRIC president Liu Qing.

For Chu Hailan, the most pressing need in China is the education of the rural population and the fight against the sex traffic in girls and women.

Dissidents and human rights organizations have been urging the government to appoint an independent commission to investigate the causes of the unbalanced sex ratio and to formulate recommendations for changes in official policies. Such a commission should report its findings to the public to initiate an open debate on the issue, Piug told IPS.

The government, however, has remained silent on the abuses of civil servants in implementing the “One Child Policy” and population policies in general, despite the release of the HRIC document.

Piug explained that the document is based on information received from women activists, academics and journalists in China who were not allowed to participate in the process of discussing and preparing the government’s report.

Some members of the anti-discrimination U.N. committee acknowledged that the Chinese authorities had a hard task controlling population because of challenges stemming from the economic transition and the size of the Chinese population which totals 1.2 billion.

Such challenges resulted from the economic reforms and their impact on Chinese women, associated with illiteracy, unemployment, trafficking of women and girls and the huge gap in development between rural and urban areas.

The U.N. body noted the absence of laws in the field of domestic violence and of shelters for the victims of such abuse, as well as the absence of protection in private enterprises for women who particularly were vulnerable to exploitation as a result of the new economic reforms.

According to CEDAW experts, the land ownership legislation looked appropriate but the de facto situation was disturbing because rural women had no right to own the land.

On the population policy, they listed as a serious problem the fact that women had been the sole targets of contraceptive measures and of reproductive abuse “in the name of family planning.” They also mentioned that male participation should become a central focus of family planning programs.

Qin Huasun, China’s Permanent Representative at the United Nations, said that abandoning female babies was a “historical legacy in Chinese society” that still existed “for many reasons” in some areas.

But he maintained the government had set up a complete delivery and birth registration system, to upgrade children’s social welfare institutions, and to do everything possible to help eligible families to adopt children and set up lawful adoption channels.

The Beijing government also had publicized the idea of equality between men and women and the equal value of boys and girls, Qin said.

Aida Gonzalez (Mexico), the CEDAW chairwoman, said that while much had been achieved in the area of mother-child health, very little had been done in China to protect women’s health, beyond their maternal functions.

She stressed that the issue was not the protection of women but their empowerment. Gonzalez suggested that the Chinese authorities should adopt a holistic approach.

“It seems that women must pay a disproportionately high price for the country’s development,” said another expert pointing out that it was extremely disappointing that China’s vast economic power - its gross domestic product (GDP) had grown nearly 9 percent.



**EXERCISE 17****HONOUR KILLINGS****MATERIALS:** Paper, pen, newspaper clippings**TIME:** 30 minutes**AIM:** To increase understanding and appreciation of the term honour killings.  
To create awareness of the human rights dimensions of honour killings.**STEP 1:** In small groups of about 5 people, the participants should answer the following questions: Each of the participants is to be given a piece of paper. On each card, they are to write what they understand by 'honour' killings.

The facilitator should collect all the responses and pin them up throughout the workshop room. The facilitator to give participants the opportunity to walk through the gallery, looking at each other's responses.

The facilitator can then lecture on the term honour killings to provide wider and common understanding of the term, as well as its human rights dimensions.

**STEP 2:** What are the gender consequences of this practice?

The participants should use the table below to answer this question. Firstly, they should add other institutions/persons contributing to the growth of the practice, if any are missing.

<b>Persons/institutions contributing to growth in honour killings</b>	<b>Ways in which they contribute to honour killings</b>	<b>Ways in which they gain/benefit from 'honour' killings</b>
The State		
The Police		
Judiciary		
Father		
Mother		
Community		
Elders		
Schools		
Husbands/men		
Media		

What human rights are violated by 'honour' killings?

**STEP 3:** In groups of three, read through the newspaper clippings provided and answer the following questions.

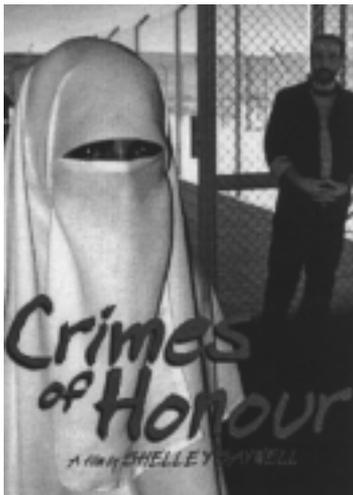
1. What struck you about the articles?
2. How well reported is the issue of honour killings?
3. Whose honour is being protected in these articles?
4. What new /original dimensions can the media add to its reporting of 'honour' killings?
5. How can the media draw attention to the gendered implication of it?
6. How do blood feuds differ from honour killings?
7. What gender issues can you deduce from the practice of blood feuds?

## “HONOUR” KILLINGS OF WOMEN

### Summary

Honour killings of women can be defined as acts of murder in which “a woman is killed for her actual or perceived immoral behavior.” (Yasmeen Hassan, “The Fate of Pakistani Women,” *International Herald Tribune*, May 25, 1999.) Such “immoral behavior” may take the form of marital infidelity, refusing to submit to an arranged marriage, demanding a divorce, flirting with or receiving phone calls from men, failing to serve a meal on time, or grotesquely “allowing herself” to be raped. In the Turkish province of Sanliurfa, one young woman’s “throat was slit in the town square because a love ballad was dedicated to her over the radio.” (Pelin Turgut, “‘Honour’ Killings Still Plague Turkish Province,” *The Toronto Star*, May 14, 1998.)

Most “honour” killings of women occur in Muslim countries, the focus of this case study; but it is worth noting that no sanction for such murders is granted in Islamic religion or law. And the phenomenon is in any case a global one. According to Stephanie Nebehay, such killings “have been reported in Bangladesh, Britain, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey and Uganda.” Afghanistan, where the practice is condoned under the rule of the fundamentalist Taliban movement, can be added to the list, along with Iraq and Iran. (Nebehay, “‘Honor Killings’ of Women Said on Rise Worldwide,” Reuters dispatch, April 7, 2000.)



### Focus (1): Pakistan

Pakistan, where ‘honour killings are known as karo-kari, is probably the country where such atrocities are most pervasive. Estimating the scale of the phenomenon there, as elsewhere, is made more difficult not only by the problems of data collection in predominantly rural countries, but by the extent to which community members and political authorities collaborate in covering up the atrocities. According to Yasmeen Hassan, author of *The Haven Becomes Hell: A Study of Domestic Violence in Pakistan*, “The concepts of women as property and honor are so deeply entrenched in the social, political and economic fabric of Pakistan that the government, for the most part, ignores the daily occurrences of women being killed and maimed by their families.” (Hassan, “The Fate of Pakistani Women.”) Frequently, women murdered in “honour” killings are recorded as having committed suicide or died in accidents.

One of the most notorious “honour” killings of recent years occurred in April 1999, when Samia Imran, a young married woman, “was shot in the office of a lawyer helping her to seek a divorce which her family could never countenance.” According to Suzanne Goldenberg, Samia, 28, arrived at the Lahore law offices of Hina Jilani and Asma Jahangir, who are sisters, on April 6. She had engaged Jilani a few days earlier, because she wanted a divorce from her violent husband. Samia settled on a chair across the desk from the lawyer. Sultana, Samia’s mother, entered five minutes later with a male companion. Samia half-rose in greeting. The man, Habib-ur-Rhemna, grabbed Samia and put a pistol to her head. The first bullet entered near Samia’s eye and she fell. “There was no scream. There was dead silence. I don’t even think she knew what was happening,” Jilani said. The killer stood over Samia’s body, and fired again. Jilani reached for the alarm button as the gunman and Sultana left. “She never even bothered to look whether the girl was dead.”

The aftermath of the murder was equally revealing: “Members of Pakistan’s upper house demanded punishment for the two women [lawyers] and none of Pakistan’s political leaders condemned the attack.

... The clergy in Peshawar want the lawyers to be put to death” for trying to help Imran. (Suzanne Goldenberg, “A Question of Honor,” *The Guardian* (UK), May 27, 1999.)

According to Goldenberg, “Those who kill for honour [in Pakistan] are almost never punished. In the rare instances that cases reach the courts, the killers are sentenced to just two or three years. Hana Jilani [the Lahore lawyer who witnessed Samia Imran’s murder] has collected 150 case studies and in only eight did the judges reject the argument the women were killed for honour. All the other [perpetrators] were let off, or given reduced sentences.” (Goldenberg, “A Question of Honor.”)

A human-rights report published in March 1999 stated that honor” killings took the lives of 888 women in the single province of Punjab in 1998 (Hessian, “The Fate of Pakistani). Similar figures were recorded for 1999. In Sindh province, some 300 women died in 1997, according to Pakistan’s independent Human Rights Commission. (Goldenberg, “A Question of Honour.”) It is unknown how many women are maimed or disfigured for life in attacks that fall short of murder. Pamela Constable describes one such case: Zahida Perveen’s head is shrouded in a white cotton veil, which she self-consciously tightens every few moments. But when she reaches down to her baby daughter, the veil falls away to reveal the face of one of Pakistan’s most horrific social ills, broadly known as “honour” crimes. Perveen’s eyes are empty sockets of unseeing flesh, her earlobes have been sliced off, and her nose is a gaping, reddened stump of bone. Sixteen months ago, her husband, in a fit of rage over her alleged affair with a brother-in-law, bound her hands and feet and slashed her with a razor and knife. She was three months pregnant at the time. “He came home from the mosque and accused me of having a bad character,” the tiny, 32-year-old woman murmured as she awaited a court hearing ... “I told him it was not true, but he didn’t believe me. He caught me and tied me up, and then he started cutting my face. He never said a word except, “This is your last night.” (Constable, “The Price of ‘Honour’,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), May 22, 2000.)



Perveen’s husband stated in court at “What I did was wrong, but I am satisfied. I did it for my honour and prestige.” Often burning or scarring acid are the preferred weapons to the men committing such crimes. ‘The Progressive Women’s association, which assists attack victims, tracked 3,560 women who were hospitalized after being attacked at home with fire, gasoline acid between 1994 and 1999,” according to Constable. About half the victims died. Lawyer and women’s activist Nahida Mahbooba Elahi states that “We deal with these cases every day, but I have seen very few convictions. The men say the wife didn’t obey their orders, or was having relations with someone else. The police often say it is a domestic matter and refuse to pursue the case. Some judges even justify it and do not consider it murder.” (Constable, “The Price of ‘Honour.’”) Such crimes

are also rife in Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, where some 2,200 women are disfigured every year in acid attacks by jealous or estranged men. (Ellen Goodman, “How Long before We Take the Honor out of Killing?” *The Washington Post* [in the *Guardian Weekly*, April 6-12, 2000.]

In August 1999, an international furore erupted when the Pakistani Senate rejected a resolution by former Prime Minister Benazhir Butto to condemn “honour” killings in the country. (See Zaffer Abbas, “Pakistan Fails to Condemn ‘Honour’ Killings”, *BBC Online*, August 3, 1999.) In April 2000, the head of the Pakistani military regime, General Pervez Musharraf, pledged that his government would take strong measures to curb “honour” killings. “Such acts do not find a place in our religion or law,” Musharraf stated. “Killing in the name of honour is murder, and it will be treated as such.” Most observers were skeptical, however, that Musharraf’s words would be followed up by committed actions. (See “Honour Killings Now Seen As Murder”, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (from *The Telegraph* (UK)), April 24, 2000.)

While the victims of Pakistani “honour” killings are overwhelmingly female, tradition dictates that males involved in the “crimes” should face death as well. But the accused women are standardly killed first, giving men a chance to flee retribution. Moreover, targeted men can escape death by paying compensation to the family of the female victim, leading to an “honour killing industry” involving

tribes people, police and tribal mediators,” which “provides many opportunities to make money, [or] obtain a woman in compensation,” according to Amnesty International. The organization also states: “Reports abound about men who have killed other men in murders not connected with honour issues who then kill a woman of their own family ... to camouflage the initial murder as an honour killing.” (Amnesty International, “Pakistan: Honour Killings of Girls and Women”, September 1999.)

[**Note:** For more information on “honour” killings in Pakistan, contact the International Network for the Rights of Female Victims in Pakistan, P.O. Box 17202, Louisville, KY 40217, USA; e-mail: [inrfvvp@inrfvvp.org](mailto:inrfvvp@inrfvvp.org).]



**A poster condemning “honour” killings, produced by Kurdish Women Action Against Honour Killing**

### **Focus (2): Jordan**

In Jordan, “honour” killings are sanctioned by law. According to Article 340 of the criminal code, “A husband or a close blood relative who kills a woman caught in a situation highly suspicious of adultery will be totally exempt from sentence.” Article 98, meanwhile, guarantees a lighter sentence for male killers of female relatives who have committed an “act which is illicit in the eyes of the perpetrator.” Julian Borger notes that “in practice, once a murder has been judged an ‘honour killing,’ the usual sentence is from three months to one year.” (Julian Borger, “In Cold Blood,” *Manchester Guardian Weekly*,

Jordan Honour Killings,” Agence France-Presse dispatch, July 31, 1999; the perpetrators included a 19-year-old man, Hussein Suleiman, who ‘was accused of driving three times over his six-month-pregnant unmarried sister in a pick-up truck, despite her denials of immoral behaviour and pleas for help.’) Ironically, as Borger notes, this legislation is “the result of Western influence in the Middle East,” having arisen “out of a fusion between Egyptian tribal custom and the Napoleonic Code in 1810, after the French legions took Cairo.” (Borger, “In Cold Blood.”)

In a particularly tragic case in 1994, a handicapped 18-year-old girl, who had already served six months in jail (!) for becoming pregnant out of wedlock, was killed by her 17-year-old brother. A neighbour was quoted as saying the family seemed relaxed, happy and satisfied after announcing the news that she was killed ...“ (Rana Hussein, “18-year-old killed for ‘family honor,’” *The Jordan Times*, September 19, 1994.) *Manchester Guardian Weekly* reporter Julian Borger described another typical case in 1997:

One morning this summer, Rania Arafat’s two aunts came to take her for a walk. They told their 21-year-old niece they had arranged a secret meeting with her boyfriend. She strolled with them through Gwiesmeh, a poor suburb where Amman’s concrete sprawl peters out into desert. When the three women reached a patch of open land, the aunts suddenly stepped aside, leaving Arafat standing alone. She was shot four times in the back of the head at close range and once in the forehead. The gunman was her 17-year-old brother, Rami. ... Arafat’s crime was to refuse an arranged marriage and elope with her Iraqi boyfriend. Rami is in jail, but is unlikely to be sentenced to more than a few months, especially as he is a minor, which is almost certainly why he was given the role of executioner. (Borger, “In Cold Blood.”)



The *Jordan Times* estimated in 1994 that between 28 and 60 Jordanian women — the difference between official police figures and commonly-cited estimates of the actual number — die in “honour” killings every year. (Rana Hussein, “Murder in the Name of Honour,” October 6-7, 1994.) The death-toll may even run into the hundreds, more women in perpetual hiding, tearful for their lives.

One positive sign is the staunch opposition to the practice displayed by the regime of King Abdullah II, who took power after the death of his father King Hussein in 1999. “The king has backed legislation to put honor killings on a par with other murders and has encouraged public support to change the law.

The fact that the royal palace has taken such a stance has translated into tougher sentencing and investigations of honor killings by the courts and police. The king’s support has also encouraged activist groups to speak out more strongly against honor killings.” (Stephen Franklin, “Jordan Begins to Punish Practice of ‘Honor Killings’”, *The Chicago Tribune*, September 1, 2000.)

Such efforts continue to encounter staunch resistance from conservative elements, however. In early February 2000, the Jordanian parliament “took only three minutes to reject a draft law calling for the cancellation of Article 340.” The country’s leading political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), denounced the draft law as an effort to “destroy our Islamic, social and family values, by stripping the man from his humanity, [and] not allowing him to get angry when he is surprised by [i.e., surprises] his wife committing adultery.” Ten days later, in an unprecedented action, some 5,000 protesters flooded the streets of Amman demanding the repeal of the penal code provision allowing “honour” killings. The protesters included “Prince Ali, who is King Abdullah’s brother and his personal guard, as well as Prince Gazi, the king’s advisor for tribal affairs.”



**Focus (3): Palestine/Israel**

“Honour” killings are also regularly reported in the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the Canadian women’s magazine *Chatelaine*, Sally Armstrong described the fate of one victim:

Flirting was a costly mistake for Samera. She was only 15 years old when her neighbours in Salfet, a small Palestinian town on the West Bank, saw her chatting with a young man without a male chaperone. Her family’s honour was at stake; a marriage was quickly arranged. By 16, she had a child. Five years later, when she could stand the bogus marriage no longer, she bolted. In a place where gossip is traded like hard currency, and a girl’s chastity is as public as her name, Samera’s actions were considered akin to making a date with the devil. According to the gossips, she went from man to man as she moved from place to place. Finally, last July [1999], her family caught up with her. A few days later she was found stuffed down a well. Her neck had been broken. Her father told the coroner she’d committed suicide. But everyone on the grapevine knew that Samera was a victim of honour killing, murdered by her own family because her actions brought dishonour to their name. Here in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority law allows honour killing. Samera’s parents are walking the streets of their neighbourhood with their heads held high, relieved that the family honour has been restored. (Armstrong, “Honour’s Victims”, *Chatelaine*, March 2000.)

Twenty-two other women died in the Palestinian territories in the same year as Samera. The killings often spill over into neighbouring Israel, as with the killing of “40-year-old Ittihaj Hassoon” near Haifa in 1995:

On Oct. 16, 1995, ... Hassoon got out of a car with her younger brother on a main street of Daliat al Carmel, a small Israeli Druze village ... Over 10 years before, Ittihaj had committed the unpardonable sin of marrying a non-Druze man. Now, after luring her back to her home village with promises that all was forgiven and her safety assured, her brother finally had the chance to publicly cleanse the blot on the family name with the spilling of her blood. In broad daylight in front of witnesses, he pulled out a knife and began to stab her. The witnesses quickly swelled to a crowd of more than 100 villagers who—approving, urging him on—chanted, ululated, danced in the street. Within minutes, Hassoon lay dead on the ground while the crowd cheered her killer, “Hero, hero! You are a real man!” (Suzanne Zima, “When Brothers Kill Sisters,” *The Gazette* [Montreal], April 17, 1999. See also Walter Rodgers, “Honor Killings A Brutal Tribal Custom”, *CNN World News*, December 7, 1995)

According to Zima, “Ibrahim had agonized over his decision: ‘She is my sister - my flesh and blood — I am a human being. I didn’t want to kill her. I didn’t want to be in this situation. They [community members] push[ed] me to make this decision. I know what they expect from me. If I do this, they look at me like a hero, a clean guy, a real man. If I don’t kill my sister, the people would look at me like I am a small person.’”

### **Who is responsible?**

“Honour” killings of women (and occasionally their male “partners in crime”) reflect longstanding patriarchal-tribal traditions. In a “bizarre duality,” women are viewed “on the one hand as fragile creatures who need protection and on the other as evil Jezebels from whom society needs protection.” Patriarchal tradition “casts the male as the sole protector of the female so he must have total control of her. If his protection is violated, he loses honour because either he failed to protect her or he failed to bring her up correctly.” (Armstrong, “Honour’s Victims.”) Clearly, the vulnerability of women around the world to this type of violence will only be reduced when these patriarchal mindsets are challenged and effectively confronted.

As many of the examples cited in this case study indicate, state authorities frequently ignore their obligation to prosecute “honour” killings. They should be viewed as “co-conspirators” in such crimes, and held accountable by organizations such as the United Nations.

The typical “honour” killer is a man, usually the father, husband, or brother of the victim. Frequently teenage brothers are selected by their family or community to be the executioners, because their sentences will generally be lighter than those handed down to adults (as was the case with the killing of Rania Arafat in Jordan, cited above). “Talking and writing about this atrocity is a good start,” wrote Marina Sanchez-Rashid in a letter to *The Jordan Times*, “but I believe that action to start treating and judging the men who commit these crimes as the first degree murderers that they are, as well as to protect the victims as they deserve to be protected, is needed as soon as possible.” (Quoted in Patrick Goodenough, “Middle East Women Campaign Against ‘Family Honor’ Killings,” *Conservative News Service*, March 8, 1999.)

As with witch-hunts, however, “honour” killings also need to be viewed from a broader societal perspective; they derive from expectations of female behaviour that are held and perpetuated by men and women alike. Women’s role has often been underappreciated. Occasionally, they participate directly in the killings. More frequently, they play a leading role in preparing the ground. In Palestine, for example, the anthropologist Ilsa Glaser has noted that women acted as instigators and collaborators in these murders, unleashing a torrent of gossip that spurred the accusations.” (Quoted in *The Calgary Herald*, April 20, 2000.) Jordanian women running for parliament have also been “reluctant to break the taboo” on condemning and prosecuting “honour” killings; one told the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* that “This is our tradition. We do not want to encourage women who break up the family.” (Borger, “In Cold Blood.”) In the Ramle district of Israel, police commander Yifrach Duchovey lamented his inability to secure the cooperation of community members in investigating “honour” killings: “Even other women — the mothers — won’t cooperate with us. Sometimes the women cooperate with the men who commit the murders. ... A woman may think it is OK — maybe she thinks the victim deserves it” (Quoted in Zima, “When Brothers Kill Sisters.”)

## **BLOOD FEUDS**

### **Summary**

The institution of the “blood feud is the little-known but highly-destructive male counterpart to honour killings of women. Every year, at least a thousand men and boys die in blood-feud killings in Albania alone; the lives of tens of thousands more are spent in isolation and perpetual fear. Women and girls are virtually never targeted.

#### **Focus (4): The Balkans**

The Balkans, along with the Caucasus region, Sicily, and Corsica, are the areas where the “blood feud” still holds greatest sway’ today. (In the past, the institution was also prominent in Scotland -- and in the U.S. region of Appalachia, as with the famous feud between the Hatfields and McCoys.)

The institution of the blood feud is most virulent in the *malësi* (mountain regions) of northern Albania, spilling over into the territory that is today the Yugoslav province of **Kosovo**. The institution has its roots in the *Kanun* (canon) of Lek Dukagjin, a legal code compiled in the fifteenth century that enshrined “many customary practices which went back much further into the past,” according to Noel Malcolm. Malcolm writes that:

The importance of the *Kanun* to the ordinary life of the Albanians of Kosovo and the Mëlesi can hardly be exaggerated. One leading scholar has summed up the basic principles of the *Kanun* as follows. *The foundation of it all is the principle of personal honour. Next comes the equality of persons. From these flows a third principle, the freedom of each to act in accordance with his own honour, within the limits of the law, without being subject to another’s command. And the fourth principle is the word of honour, the besë ... which creates a situation of inviolable trust. Gjeçov’s version of the Kanun [“the fullest and most authoritative text”] decrees: “An offence to honour is not paid for with property, but by spilling of blood or a magnanimous pardon.” And it specifies the ways of dishonouring a man, of which the most important are calling him a liar in front of other men; insulting his wife; taking his weapons; or violating his hospitality. ... This was very much a man’s world. ... Women had their honour, but it existed through, and was defended by, men. (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* [London: Papermac, 1998], pp. 18-19.)*

The blood feud was the result of perceived violation of this code of “honour.” It is one of the most archaic features of northern Albanian society, notes Malcolm. “...What lies at the heart of the blood-feud is a concept alien to the modern mind, and more easily learned about from the plays of Aeschylus than from the works of modern sociologists: the aim is not punishment of a murderer, but satisfaction of the blood of the person murdered — or, initially, satisfaction of one’s own honour when it has been polluted. If retribution were the real aim, then only those personally responsible for the original crime or insult would be potential targets; but instead, honour is cleansed by killing any male member of the family of the original offender, and the spilt blood of that victim then cries out to its own family for purification.” The blood feud granted blanket exemption to females, the killing of whom was seen as a profound violation of a *man’s* personal honour. “The strongest taboo of all concerned the murder of women, and any woman could walk through raging gunfire in the knowledge that she would never be shot at.” (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, pp. 19-20.)

In his study of the blood-feud in the Yugoslav province of Montenegro, Christopher Boehm gives a vivid picture of the surreal lengths to which this gender-selectivity is carried:

In the old days, women were free to come and go as they chose under feuding conditions, since taking their blood did nothing to help the blood score and also counted as a dishonor, morally speaking. Thus, their normal daily activities could continue. But men were sorely pressed when it came to doing any work other than herding, which allowed them to stay under cover with a rifle ready at all times. In 1965 [at the time of field research] it was for this reason that women still did so much of the heavier work in the fields, so I was told by the slightly apologetic Montenegrin “male chauvinists,” who viewed this as a once-necessary custom formed in an earlier era.... Whatever might happen to the men during a feud, the women were always free to keep the household economy going because the rules of feuding were taken so seriously by the opposing party.

With respect to the sanctity of women, it was even possible for them to enter directly into combat during the first stage of a feud, when the killer’s clan shut itself in and the victim’s clan attacked the fortified stone farmhouse, which had loopholes [for firing rifles everywhere]. With no fear of being harmed, women could carry straw and firebrands up to the house to try to burn it. Also, women of a

besieged house could go outside at night carrying torches, to light up the enemy so that their own men could shoot at them. This exemplifies the strength of these particular rules: to shoot a woman was a source of shame (*sramota*) for the entire clan. (Boehm, *Blood Revenge: The Anthropology of Feuding in Montenegro and Other Tribal Societies* [Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984], pp. 111-12.)

The death-toll exacted by the blood feud has historically been heavy for Balkans men. "At the end of the Ottoman period it was estimated that 19 percent of all adult male deaths in the Malësi were blood-feud murders, and that in an area of Western Kosovo with 50,000 inhabitants, 600 died in these feuds every year." (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, p. 20.) In Albania, the feuds gave rise to another enduring institution: the "sworn virgin," women who "cut their hair short, wear trousers and drink fiery local brandy with the men." According to Julius Strauss, "The tradition of the sworn virgins was born of necessity in this barren land racked by war, blood feuds and intense poverty. In times past when the male line of a family was wiped out, such a virgin was entitled to take over as the head of the family." (Strauss, "The Virgins Who Blood feuds generally declined in the Balkans after the Second World War, as the authoritarian rulers of Albania (Enver Hoxha) and Yugoslavia (Josip Broz Tito) clamped down on practices that were seen as a legacy of the feudal past. In Albania, however, the blood feud has returned with — one might say — a vengeance. It has also spread from the traditional heartland of the Malësi to Tirana, the capital, and to the south of the country.

The origins of the current blood-feud crisis in Albania date to the collapse of the communist regime in 1991, and the weakness of the quasi-democratic government that replaced it. From 1992 to 1996, "press reports in Tirana" spoke of "more than 5,000 murders linked to vendettas in the past four years." (Branko Jolis, "Honour Killing Makes a Comeback," *The Guardian* [UK], August 14, 1996.) It is worth noting that this rate of approximately 1,250 men killed in blood feuds annually is slightly greater than the number of known "honour" killings of women in Pakistan — in a country with about 1/35th of the population. Estimates of fatalities are made difficult by the fact that many blood-feud murders go unreported. As one Albanian clan leader told *The New York Times*, "People don't want to report killings to the police because then the accused would be protected by the state in prison instead of being available to kill." (Jane Perlez, "Blood Feuds Draining a Fierce Corner of Albania," *The New York Times*, April 15, 1998.)

In March 1997, the post-communist regime was rocked by "the collapse of enormous, government-endorsed pyramid investment schemes. The public looted army weapons depots as furious investors clashed with security forces. Roughly 1 million firearms are said to be in circulation in a Balkan nation of only 3.2 million." (Michael J. Jordan, "In Albania, A Return to 'Eye for Eye'", *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 7, 1997.) Between 1,600 and 5,000 Albanians died in the ensuing six months, and "revenge killings skyrocketed." (Perlez, "Blood Feuds.") In 1998, Gjin Mekshi, a leader of the Committee of Blood Reconciliation in the town of Shkoder, stated that "In some families there are no men left," although "So far no women have been killed." (Owen Bowcott, "Thousands of Albanian Children in Hiding to Escape Blood Feuds," *The Guardian* [UK], September 30, 1998)

In addition to the thousands killed, tens of thousands of men live in fear and seclusion as a result of the blood feuds. Mihaela Rodina cites estimates by Albanian non-governmental organizations that "the men of some 25,000 families in northern Albania live thus, never going out of the house for fear of being victims of ... feuding. The women, who are unaffected by the kanun, are left alone to provide for the family's needs." (Rodina, "Blood Code Rules in Northern Albania," Agence France-Presse dispatch, June 30, 1999.) In 1997, *The Christian Science Monitor* interviewed one man in Shkoder who "ha[d] been homebound for six years ... The man says he dreams of escaping with a visa to America. 'This is actually worse than prison,' he says, standing in his fenced-in garden. 'At least in prison I'd know that one day I could get out.'" Even school-age boys must remain cloistered: "up to 6,000 children [were] said to be hiding" in 1998. (Bowcott, "Thousands of Albanian Children.")

The resurgence of the blood feud has led Gjin Mekshi and others to join forces in an attempt to reconcile feuding families. "The Committee of Blood Reconciliation has 3,000 members in Albania and is pressing the government to accept its arbitrations as part of the legal process. 'I have a good reputation and my

father was a man of good reputation, too,' says Mr. Mekshi. 'I am approached to arrange truces by those who are in hiding and dare not go out during the day. When we agree a deal, we sanctify the arrangement with a procession led by the local priest.' (Bowcott, "Thousands of Albanian Children.") Albanian Radio reported in August 2000 that "Seven hundred and fifty-six blood feuds have been reconciled, allowing the people involved to put an end to self-confinement at home. (BBC Worldwide Monitoring August 10 2000.) In neighbouring Kosovo, a similar campaign was mounted in the 1990s by Anton Çetta. (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, p. 20.) Nonetheless, according to Deutsche Presse-Agentur, the success of such campaigns has been "only limited." ("Albanian Blood Feuds Affect 210,000," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, March 11, 2000.) "The feuds have very deep roots," said Perlat Ramgaj, mayor of the town of Koplik. "They're ingrained on our souls, and in this period of transition people feel free to do just about anything." (Quoted in Helena Smith, "Lost Land Where Vengeance is Written in Blood," *The Guardian* [UK], February 12, 1995.)

## **WOMAN SLAIN TO “CLEANSE FAMILY**

**AMMAN, Tuesday**

Police have arrested a 25-year-old man who allegedly killed his married sister “to cleanse his family’s honour” because she had had sexual relations with a man before she married him, the Jordan Times reported today.

Ms Sharifeh Yusef was stabbed repeatedly by her brother on Saturday, after which the man turned himself over to police, the newspaper said, quoting official sources.

According to the sources, the victim had developed a relationship with a man and become pregnant, after which the two married and had a baby girl.

The victim’s brother, who had been in jail at the time, serving a two-year sentence for theft, told the authorities shortly after his arrest that he had planned to kill the woman as soon as he was released.

He was released 10 days ago and eventually found her in the town of Gor al-Safi, where she had moved.

Her death brings to two the number of Jordanian women killed in Jordan each year in such incidents, which are the target of a national campaign against judicial leniency against those charged with such crimes.

In 1999, the Jordanian parliament voted down a bill that would have nullified a statute exempting such murderers from the heaviest penalties of the law, including death. (AFP)

### For the facilitator

The Facilitator should put up this definition of stereotypes as a guide for the participants.

**Stereotypes** are unfounded beliefs that often are related to the abilities, personalities, and behavioural practices of one group of people by the other. The belief says something about the personality as well as the capabilities of the people in question.

To assist this process, the facilitator can take participants through an exercise whereby they (the participants) identify common stereotypes from their own countries/regions etc. This can assist them in identifying the stereotypes in the clippings.

## EXERCISE 18

### FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

**MATERIALS:** Newspaper clippings

**TIME:** 20 MINUTES

**AIM:** To interrogate media coverage of female genital mutilation and come up with strategies for new coverage ideas that can bring about change.  
To come to an understanding of the term 'female genital mutilation'.

**STEP 1:** In small buzz pairs

Read the articles on FGM and then answer the following questions:

1. What do you understand by female genital mutilation and how prevalent is it?
2. Why is it almost impossible to eradicate female genital mutilation?
3. What is your assessment of the 'Alternative rite to female circumcision' that is said to be spreading in Kenya? Does this resolve the problem and can it be considered elsewhere as an option?
4. What issue does this alternative not address that is fundamental to the rights of women?
5. Why is female circumcision considered to be a problem while male circumcision is not?
6. What role can the media play in cases where legislation makes it illegal to carry out FGM but the practice is still being conducted?

**STEP 2:** Focusing on the media coverage

*Millions of women and girls continue to live in fear and ignorance of their own bodies and life-giving functions.*

The above is one of the stereotypes created and perpetuated by the media on women. In the same buzz pairs, the participants should:

1. Identify and list other stereotypes in the articles.
2. What do these stereotypes say about women?
3. List down the people/groups responsible for perpetuating these stereotypes.
4. What has been the effect of these stereotypes on
  - a) the perception of women
  - b) the role of women in the decision-making process
  - c) development

Discuss the reasons why the media has been responsible for creating its own set of stereotypes about women. These stereotypes have become clichés that the media use over and over. The participants should report back in plenary.

# RAISING DAUGHTERS AWARE

## WHAT IS FGM/FC/FGC?

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) defined FGM as all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons.

### **The World Health Organization also classified FGM into four types:**

- Type I. Excision of the prepuce (Note: less common), with or without excision of part or all of the clitoris (Note: More common).
- Type II. Excision of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora.
- Type III. Excision of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching/narrowing of the vaginal opening (infibulation).
- Type IV. Unclassified: this includes pricking, piercing or incising of the clitoris and/or labia; stretching of the clitoris and/or labia cauterization by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissue.

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### **General, basic introduction for those completely unfamiliar with Female Genital Mutilation**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision, or female genital cutting, has been practiced for several thousand years in almost 30 African and Middle Eastern nations. It is also practiced, to a lesser extent, in parts of Asia. It varies in degree, ranging from cuts around the clitoris (rare), to (more commonly) the entire removal of the clitoris, the removal of the clitoris and labia minora, or the removal of the clitoris and entire labias, with the resulting wound stitched shut. In this last form, infibulation, the opening left is generally no larger than a match head, leaving an insufficient opening for the passage of urine and menses. Severe physical and psychological health consequences can result from both the initial ordeal, and its aftermath. In many instances, FGM is performed in unsterile surroundings with the girl forcibly restrained and cut with rudimentary instruments (razor blade, knife, glass, etc), although it is sometimes performed in a medicalized setting, particularly in large cities. The age at which a girl is subjected to this ranges from seven days old to young adulthood. Most commonly, it is performed between 2 and 15 years of age.

The resulting scarring and damage caused by this practice creates difficulty in both the woman's daily life, as well as during childbirth, as scar tissue is not as flexible as normal tissue and often creates prolonged childbirth, causing potential harm to both mother and child. Other side effects include painful menses, blocked urination, chronic and/or acute infections, painful or impossible intercourse, infertility, fibroids, fistula, and ruptures into the urethra or rectum during sexual intercourse. It also often results in added challenges for health providers performing routine pelvic examinations, due to discomfort for the patient. In some cases, a normal examination may be very difficult due to acute sensitivity or too restricted a vaginal opening. Women being strong, many adapt and live basically happy and healthy lives, in spite of the assault to the body. This is, however, not a reason to condone the practice, which is performed on young girls, prior to the age of consent, and most often by force.

The male equivalent, of even the least severe form of FGM, would be the complete cutting off of the entire head of the penis. In addition, sexual mores for males are comparatively lax, their social freedoms and opportunities more vast.

While evidence of FGM can be found on Egyptian mummies dating back several thousand years, the specific origin of FGM is obscured by time, but, most often the historic reasons cited are marital fidelity, controlling the woman's sex drive, preventing lesbianism, ensuring paternity, "calming" her personality, and hygiene. It is commonly considered an important rite of passage. In some regions, a celebration is associated with the event, but in many areas, there is no particular ceremony, gifts or ritual. FGM is practiced by Muslims, Christians, Jews and animists alike. In many cultures, sexual pleasure is considered to be "for men," and the reward for women is babies. Overall attitudes can vary greatly between the various FGM practicing ethnic groups and cultures. Within some ethnic groups, adolescent sex is permitted, even encouraged, until circumcision is performed and "adult" responsibilities commence. (For more discussion on Muslim's women's perspective on FGM, please visit: <http://www.mwllusa.org>)

For parents, reasons for adhering to the practice range from fear for the daughter's marriageability and honor, to conformity and insistence by older relatives and the community. It must be understood that most parents feel strongly that having their daughter circumcised was healthy and in her best interests. It must be further understood that, for many women who have undergone FGM, it was an important rite of passage in their lives, and one which – endured with dignity, as their mothers and great-grandmothers before them—conferred enhanced social, adult status. In cultures where the opportunities for women to be so honored, celebrated and recognized are few, "circumcision" (an inaccurate term) becomes disproportionately significant, in spite of the pain it brings.

Western culture certainly has its own historic practices, incongruous to the social and medical standards we purport to uphold today: bleeding patients, burning women at the stake after (often) sexual tortures used to extract "confessions," committing outspoken women to mental asylums, chastity devices and performing routine hysterectomies and clitoridectomies to "calm" women. "Traditional" practices that are dangerous or burdensome to women are present in nearly every culture on every continent.

FGM is illegal in most Western, and, now, in many African nations, although laws often go unenforced and FGM is still practiced, either "underground" in private homes or clinics, or by sending unsuspecting girls back to the parent's home country, often under the auspices of a family vacation, to be "circumcised." FGM is being practiced in the U.S. At this time, physicians, other health care providers, social workers, teachers and counselors, police and prosecutors, are largely unprepared to assist effectively women and girls affected by FGM or seeking to avoid FGM. Many young women are experiencing serious health problems due to their infibulation or excisions. Often their parents are reluctant (or totally refuse) to seek medical care for them. Health providers must be prepared to help these young women, while protecting their anonymity and being aware of the strict family dynamics still important to them. Many have few resources of their own.

Other young women or girls experience symptoms which may potentially be misdiagnosed as learning problems, cognitive disorders, chemical imbalance, mental illnesses, or behavior disorders, while their FGM is left unknown or unaddressed.

Health providers who interview patients with FGM often do not ask the correct questions. Often a woman is asked, "Are you having any problems?" The answer is frequently, 'no', as many women have little to compare with, having undergone FGM at a young age. Direct, specific questions in the manner of "how long," "how much," etc, are advisable. The health provider should also not assume that the patient knows everything about her body, how it functions, and what may have been removed. Many women were very young when the procedure was performed, and again, have little to compare themselves with. (For specific protocols on taking such a patient's medical history, please see marked articles in the Medicine section.)

In cases where a translator is required, it is advisable to select one not directly related to the patient. Some women are not able to, or not comfortable, describing their wishes and health complaints in the presence of other family members, and may, in fact, depend on the health provider to advocate for them to a husband, parent, or other family decision maker, as to any medical necessities (e.g. deinfibulation, other surgeries). Translation services, however, must be introduced as a 'matter of policy,' and in a way which does not offend the woman or her family.

Another ironic problem for FGM affected women and girls is the new awareness of FGM. This "awareness" can put them under embarrassing scrutiny and cause difficulties with their classmates, who often harass, rather than support. This is also a very private and personal issue, and one few affected women wish to discuss, a fact often obscured in much of western thinking.

Others have forgotten that this is an African women's issue and have cut the women themselves out of the decision making and advocacy process. The fact that affected women may also be refugees who have suffered war, civil unrest, deprivation, loss and displacement, is also too often forgotten. Often immigrants are appalled at what they witness of western culture, both in the media and in their daily lives. Often it makes them more determined than ever to keep their old traditions and insure the chastity of their daughters.

The preceding paragraphs are a very, very general overview for health providers of what FGM is; for more detailed and complete information, one must visit the various sections (Medicine, Law, Cultural Links, Economics, etc.) linked on our main index page: <http://www.fgm.org>. RDA was founded to provide a basic medical, legal and advocacy service,

as well as to provide a friendly, accessible network among health and education professionals, organizations and affected women. This is not an issue which can be easily encapsulated or explained. Many other issues are interwoven with it (lack of political, economic, social, educational opportunities and representation, regional conflicts, (etc), and any serious inquiry into FGM and women and girl's right to refuse FGM, must take all those interwoven issues into consideration).

Below are some links to various source articles discussing in more detail the technical definitions of FGM. Again, treatment, advocacy and protocol issues are discussed in detail on the remainder of the Rising Daughters Aware web site see: index page or go directly to: Medicine or Law. All of the articles are available free of charge, for immediate print out or download.

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To assist with the RDA health professionals education project, write: Director*

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# TWO MILLION FEMALES AT RISK OF BEING MUTILATED

By Florence Bamanyaki

## Nairobi

The biological facts of reproduction are as intriguing as ever. Millions of women and girls continue to live in fear and ignorance of their own bodies and life giving functions. Every year about two million females are at risk of being mutilated, says a recent World Health Organisation report. Globally, between 85 and 115 million women and girls have undergone Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The pain is simply excruciating! There is the risk of death from excessive bleeding or from tetanus or from other infections. There are even risks in child-birth on account of the scar from operation.

Many people from societies in which the practice does not exist can only express horror at the details of the operation. Those who have been through the operation speak of the trauma of the whole experience and how they would not want to inflict such misery on their own daughters.

This operation otherwise seen as sheer misery is none other but female circumcision (excision, clitoridectomy, infibulation) - give it any name, but the fact remains, according to women's rights activists and medical personnel, it is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

They argue that when external genitals are normal, there can be no reasons, medical, moral or aesthetic for removing all or any of them.

John Kanga, a history teacher in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, says it is wrong to fully discredit the cultural reasons for female circumcision because "these women, though uneducated, are highly intelligent, creative individuals who are just as aware of the inevitability of social change".

There are men who favour female circumcision, saying it ensures the elimination of the sexual urge and preservation of chastity in women. But then, one wonders why there is never any need to curb the sexual urge in men!

Finda Mbriwa (not her real name), a Kenyan Somali, who has undergone circumcision and says she can perform the operation by the virtue of her age and experience as an elder, defends the practice, saying it is a rite of passage from childhood to womanhood and that it is directly linked to fertility.

But one interesting argument Mbriwa puts across is that if a baby's head touched the clitoris during childbirth, it would die. The question is, says who?

The biological facts of reproduction continue to be the best kept secrets in many parts of Africa, often distorted by damaging myths, taboos and fears that threaten and debase the lives and dignity of women. The failure to learn about the natural biological process of giving life or how a baby is made, are still the cause of great suffering, pain and tragedy - quite needlessly.

One, Christine, from Kenya's Maasai community where female circumcision is practiced widely, says she feels "more of a woman" and that she is respected in her society as a full-grown woman.

Well, it is often difficult, even impossible for those who do not belong to a given culture, to fully appreciate the implications as well as the significance of aspects of that culture, and understand why even enlightened members of that society choose to conform against the judgement that female circumcision is obviously a painful and dangerous experience.

Jane Auko, a sales girl in Nairobi is disturbed by the argument that female circumcision is meant to preserve chastity in women. Obviously irritated, she asks why women should on the overall continue to succumb to the whims of men who are naturally the decision-makers in matters pertaining to culture and traditional practices under which female circumcision falls.

One would imagine the pangs of childbirth alone would suffice the ability to endure pain and the qualification of "being a woman".

A mid-wife at one of Kenya's leading hospitals says that the female external reproductive organs are "normal, healthy organs" and each has its own function to perform either during sexual relations, labour, child-birth and post partum, therefore none of them is a mistake.

Talk about reproduction, millions of women and girls continue to live in fear and ignorance of their own bodies and life giving functions. A recent World Health

Organization (WHO) report indicates that every year about 2 million females are at risk of being mutilated.

Globally, between 85 and 115 million women and girls have undergone FGM. The report says that Sierra Leone and Liberia still widely incorporate female circumcision in their secret societies.

A research carried out in Kenya by the Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) revealed that the practice is still emphasized among the Kisii, Maasai, Samburu and Meru communities. Up to nearly 50 percent of the women in this East African state are circumcised.

A programme officer for PATH, Samson Radeny, says that even the educated, including medical personnel are involved in the practice.

Radeny says that parents send their daughters to the village at the age of seven for circumcision whether they are in school or not. He notes that some tribes like the Kikuyu had abandoned the practice.

This is because the Church stepped in with threats to excommunicate those Christians involved in the practice. PATH is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to offering technical assistance in improving the reproductive health of women. The programme has been very active in anti-female circumcision campaigns.

Explaining the medical dangers of female circumcision, Gerald Aine, a private practicing gynecologist, says after

the operation, the external reproductive organs heal with a scar which consists of fibrous, non-elastic tissues which do not yield during childbirth, thus making labour prolonged and sometimes obstructed.

According to Aine, during this period, referred to as the second stage of labour, the head of the baby is already in the vagina, but the opening of the birth canal is closed by the unyielding scar tissue of circumcision.

Aine says the constant prolonged grinding of the baby's head on the mother's urinary bladder on top and the rectum behind causes fistula (uncontrollable passing out of urine and faeces). This is not bed wetting which occurs in boys and girls up to the age of nine to ten years.

Aine adds that fistula is common in adolescent girls and it is extremely difficult for some of these women to give birth to a normal child if the fistula is not repaired. If by chance they become pregnant, urine poisons the foetus causing frequent miscarriages.

"But not all circumcised women end up with fistula," stresses Aine. But many still wonder why womanhood training including family education, sex education and child rearing should not be continued and made the most valuable aspects of female initiation.

One would imagine the pangs of childbirth alone would suffice the ability to endure pain and the qualification of "being a woman".

# FGM: A WOMAN'S AGONY, CIRCUMCISER'S DELIGHT

By **Daniel Benno Msangya**

## **Nairobi, Kenya**

Female genital mutilation is a deeply rooted harmful traditional rite practised in many parts of Africa where it is commonly referred to as female circumcision. In Tanzania, for example, it is commonly practised in ten regions while in such countries as Eritrea, the practice is even more widespread. But what are its social justifications?

According to the Gogo ethnic group in Central Tanzania, the largest and most populous East African country, female circumcision is considered to enhance the cultural values of the communities practising it.

“(The practice) is highly regarded as a rite of passage for girls into womanhood, grooming and training of cultural values that maintain domestic stability within the community,” explains Nyangadule Kodi, a 78-year-old woman circumciser and resident of Mundemu Village in Dodoma Rural District.

The traditional circumciser further explains that a girl who is not circumcised has no right to associate with her age mates and has diminished prospects for getting a husband, a traumatising situation indeed.

The circumciser or *muhunga* (in Gogo language) uses a knife they call *icheto* to operate a group of girls ranging between five to twenty years in age depending on the situation.

The operation takes about 15 to 20 minutes depending on the sharpness of the *muhunga*, says Nyangadule, adding that female circumcision among the Gogo is conducted by praise songs eulogising the parts removed, “and for the recognition of the bravery of the girls submitting themselves to the ritual.”

The songs are expected to serve as an encouragement for the young girls waiting for their turn to be circumcised to remain courageous and get ready for the act, says Nyangadule.

The utmost evidence of beauty in a woman is the fact that she is circumcised. Some men fear social sanctions that could be imposed on them by their respective communities should they marry uncircumcised women. “They had to

keep that a secret and find out immediately how they can get their spouses to be circumcised,” emphasises Nyangadule.

The Gogo believe that female circumcision promotes social and political cohesion. This can be examined through the circumcision ceremonies - the participation of different people from various clans, the way they socialise and familiarise, “this brings about social solidarity among themselves and it integrates the circumcised girl to her relatives and society at large,” said a Councillor of Mnadani Ward in Dodoma Town, Sara Mwenge, in an exclusive interview with AANA.

The Gogo community maintain that if female circumcision is eradicated, part of their culture would likewise be eradicated leaving their society bereft of purpose and with nothing to look forward to.

The Gogo demand that the eradication of female circumcision may lead to disharmony and constant conflict within the community, “this is expected to result from absence of specific norms and values they have to bear in mind,” explains Sara Mwenge.

Many old women such as Nyangadule still maintain that they would not allow their male relatives to marry uncircumcised women because such women are “not polite and are over-sexed”.

The Gogo people perform clitoridectomy, a type of genital mutilation which is practised by various ethnic groups in Africa. According to medical experts it involves the removal of the whole clitoris.

In Gogo rituals, the young girls are operated on outside their homes especially under the mountain or near bushes and rivers.

The Gogo have their perception on the clitoris. “They consider this part as dirty and it is therefore to be removed from the women’s genital areas,” says Nyangadule. The Gogo believe that due to its dirtiness, it causes a disease known as *lawa lawa* or *peremende* (others call it *tamtam*), an irritation within a woman’s genital organs.

continued next page...

But according to professional explanations by gynaecologists, the disease is due to the fact that the female genital organ is so folded that it requires a continuous washing. "Failure to maintain cleanliness causes irritation in the inner parts of female organs," says Dr Zainabu Chaula, a senior medical expert in Dodoma Regional Government Hospital.

According to Chaula, about 600,000 women and girls in Dodoma Region are affected by FGM. Worse still they undergo this compulsive traditional ritual without anaesthetic application to diminish the pain.

The doctor says the girls are usually subjected to torture as they experience severe bleeding, shock, infection, painful intercourse, blockage of menstruation and tearing of tissues and haemorrhaging during childbirth. Others die due to FGM, notes Chaula.

Over 20 countries in Africa perform FGM. But outside the continent, FGM and other forms of female circumcision are performed in mainly the Arab and Middle East countries.

Among those who practise FGM in Tanzania are the Masaai, Iraqw (Mbulu) and Barbaig of Arusha region, the Gogo, Rangi and Sandawi of Dodoma region, the Chaga and Pare of Kilimanjaro region, the Mwera Yao and Makua of Lindi and Mtwara regions.

The others include the Kurya, Ikizu, Simbiti, Rieny, Ugu, Bakabwa, Kine, Natta, Zanaki, Kiroba and Tatiro of Mara region and Nyaturu of Singida region. Other regions include Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, Tanga and Iringa.

In countries like Eritrea FGM is a ritual which confers social acceptability and integration upon the female. The practice is performed on about 99 percent of the eligible females.

"Without it people become estranged from their own kith and kin and they may lose their right to contribute to or participate in the community life of their homeland, to own property, to vote or to be voted for," explains Azenagosh Ghebreselasie, medical expert in the Ministry of Health from Eritrea who visited Dodoma recently on a study tour.

The culture causes many significant effects to the majority of populations in Africa and it affects the physical, mental and social life of the women and girls as well as the socio-economic development of the country.

According to Ghebreselasie, Eritrea has one of the highest levels of maternal mortality which is 999 per 100,000 live births. FGM causes 90 percent of the problem because it may lead to trauma to surrounding tissues.

Experts say the vulva of a young girl is very small and there is a tendency for someone who is unskilled in the anatomy and physiology of the area, to cut too much, thereby injuring other nearby tissues such as muscles, the urethra and the rectum. These would have their own attendant complications particularly during delivering of a baby.

However, the effort made by Tanzania government to eradicate FGM has, in effect, intensified the risks. Parents fear the government. They instead authorise secret rituals that cause serious health problems as most of them are now circumcised in their early ages or in infancy.

# WORLD AGAINST FGM

**By Favour Okereke**

## **Lagos, Nigeria**

Female circumcision is alive and well but a global effort to eradicate this traditional practice is gathering momentum.

Annetee Onabanjo, 45, a banker married at 20, was divorced three years later. Her first two children were stillborn.

The root of Onabanjo's problems dated back to when she was circumcised at the age of 13 by a traditional birth attendant who injured her. This resulted in an infection and "growth" in her body. She underwent surgery to remove the growth but it hardly helped.

Her real problem started when she married and found she had severe pains during intercourse. After six months of marriage, the husband started to lose interest in her.

"But I don't blame him. I never enjoyed sex because it was always very painful. Tell me who will not, after a non stop difficulty in penetrating the wife?" She asked rhetorically.

Onabanjo had difficulties during labour. It was prolonged. Her first and second sons were stillborn.

"The doctor explained to my husband that the skin of vulva and vaginal canal is normally soft and elastic to enable it expand easily during child birth to allow the baby come out without difficulty. And that the removal of these from my body has made the area dense and hard because of scarring, hence the predicament I found myself," she said. The marriage ended.

Onabanjo is a victim of female circumcision, now called female genital mutilation, FGM. She is one among thousands of women in a similar situation. Zarah Mohammed, 26, a civil servant, is another victim. Mohammed was circumcised at nine. She too had problems of sexual intercourse with her husband.

"That has been the bane of my marriage and motherhood. I never enjoyed any sexual relationship with my husband due to pains and at times bleeding during intercourse. Of course, this has forced me to stop child bearing even though I have only two daughters. All this because of the traditional nonsense," she said.

She has promised to protect her daughters from female genital mutilation.

Grace Osarewan, 50, business woman and mother of three girls, was circumcised at 16. But she supports female circumcision. "Circumcision is absolutely necessary. You know the clitoris which is the object of circumcision grows bigger the older the girl gets. And being the erectile part of her body, it makes her promiscuous. Actually, this is what our forefathers wanted to avoid by practising female circumcision. Our grandfathers handed down this tradition to us. I have already circumcised my three daughters and I will make sure my grand children are circumcised. I won't mind those who join the whiteman to destroy our culture," she said.

Yomi Oguntunga, a consultant and family physician, Holy Trinity Hospital, Ikeja told Newswatch:

"Some women have gynaecological problems because of circumcision. It can also cause acute and chronic pelvic inflammation emanating from infection at the time of circumcision. Also, when the fallopian tubes are blocked due to infections and inflammation, the woman automatically becomes infertile."

FGM is practised in many states of Nigeria. Girls from south-west and south-south are not eligible to marry until they are circumcised. But the majority of the Igbo communities of the south-east circumcise their daughters within seven days after birth.

Linda Osarenren, information officer, Inter-African Committee, IAC, sees the practice as unjust to women. She argues: "The main reason why they do it is that they don't want a woman to enjoy sexual relation because they feel if she enjoys it, they cannot guarantee she would be faithful to her husband. Again, it is not true. So, why should they deny a woman a fundamental right. Not just a reproductive health (right) but sexual health?"

Funke Bogunjoko, a doctor and primary healthcare adviser to World Health Organisation, WHO, in Lagos is working towards the eradication of the practice. She told Newswatch that it was based on the global concern for the practice that WHO regional committee for Africa adopted resolution

AFRIRC 43/R6 which ordered the regional officers to accelerate routine collection of data on female genital mutilation, September 1993. She said that this was further reinforced during the 47th World Health Assembly of May 1994. Bogunjoko said that the assembly adopted resolution WHA 47.10 which urged member states to establish national policies towards abolishing FGM and other harmful practices.

A national baseline survey conducted in Nigeria two years ago to ascertain the extent of FGM in the country showed that one in every four Nigerian women between 15-49 years old were circumcised.

The survey revealed that FGM was most prevalent among the Yoruba people of the south-west with Osun State recording 98.7 percent; Oyo State followed with 96.8 percent. Other states were Cross River, 95.4; Delta 93.1; Ondo 91.4; and Imo, 82.4 percent. The practice was generally low in the North.

FGM is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. The practice is universal. A WHO report says that "most of the girls and women who have undergone genital mutilation live in 26 African countries, although some live in Asia. They are also increasingly found in Europe, Australia, Canada and USA, primarily among immigrants from Africa and South-Western Asia."

The report reveals that more than 130 million girls and women in Africa have undergone some kind of female genital mutilation. According to the reports of Efua Dorkenoo in the book *Female Genital Mutilation, the Practice and its Prevention*, 1994, the percentage of FGM practice in Africa is highest in Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia, Mali, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and the Gambia. And the lowest are Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda.

FGM is practised in more than 20 sub-Saharan countries, and among some religious sects in Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Oman, South Yemen and the United Arab Emirate.

The United States Centre for Disease Control estimated that more than 150,000 women and girls of African origin living in the US have been or are at risk of being genitally mutilated.

WHO wants all this to stop. It has intensified efforts to force governments to legislate against it. Bogunjoko regrets that not much has been achieved in that respect as only five states, namely Edo, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa, and Ogun States have legislated against it.

Osarenren told Newswatch that IAC had done a lot to stop FGM by sensitising and creating awareness on a regular basis since 1985. "We have done a lot. We are old in the game since 1985. We started with sensitisation, creating awareness on a regular basis by talking to the policy makers and government officials at the state level, to local government chairmen to involve policy makers at the local government level, and the Christian segment of the community, traditional leaders, opinion leaders, market women at the community level."

She said that IAC has also spoken to religious bodies to educate them that God did not ordain female genital mutilation. The campaign, she said, has similarly been taken to girls in schools, grandmothers and mothers in different communities.

In addition, Osarenren said the organisation has started talking to men as well. "We find men would tell you it is women's business. But we know in this African society, Nigeria is highly patriarchal. When a man talks, the woman would listen. If a father takes his seat and tells his wife, you dare not circumcise my new born baby girl, the woman will not. So we are now doing a specialised information package for men only, organising seminars for them so that we become partners in this eradication business. All these are geared towards total elimination of FGM in Nigeria," she said.

Osarenren said that traditional birth attendants stick to FGM because it is their source of livelihood.

She said that some of their converts in Ogun State confessed that "in addition to charging as much as N800 per child to be circumcised, they keep the clitoris and sell it as love portion to some people who want charm for promotion, good luck, marriage and success."

But Osarenren is not happy that instead of getting encouragement from the victims, men and government, they have always received denial, resistance and hypocrisy. "The men condemn us and say that we have collected money from the whites to destroy their culture," Osarenren said. She is however, optimistic that if the federal government passes into law the bill outlawing female circumcision in Nigeria, IAC Nigeria and all other organisations who had joined in the fight against FGM would have succeeded.

Kola Osundairo, a lawyer told Newswatch that nobody could be prosecuted for carrying out female circumcision because there is no law in Nigeria against it.

Edo State house of assembly has passed a bill criminalising it. The bill has since been signed into law No 4, of 1999. Newswatch investigation revealed that some highly placed individuals from the

state are mounting pressure to stop the bill becoming law. A motion to repeal the law has even been sent to the house by Omoh Tsatsaku Ojior, a US-based University lecturer. Ojior wrote Edo House of Assembly for the repealing of the "Female Circumcision and Genital mutilation law," September last year arguing that such law "stands to insult and intimidate the intellect, consciousness and understanding of the meaning of marital and family of the traditionalists of Edo land and its people including the entire Nigerian traditionalists."

He accused Esohe Jacobs and Elizabeth Ighodaro, representatives of Egor local government constituency and Oredo II constituency respectively who introduced the bill to the house as "victims of unholy and offensive propaganda of foreign forces they know nothing about."

He explained that unlike in western cultures, "female circumcision is the actual rite of passage from girl-hood to becoming a married woman, among the Etsako people of Edo land." He said it is the wedding rite and even the wedding itself and not the ring invented by the European culture that modern couples wear nowadays.

Ojior insisted that the fore-bearers who invented the rite of female circumcision in Edo knew what the present generation didn't know. "The promiscuity, laxity and lack of self comportment which seem to be associated with the non-circumcised females, compared with the highly respected African women of yesterday stands to warn us, as these are a clear evidence of moral ineptitude, and indiscipline," he said.

Index on censorship, reported last year that as at June 1998, about 29 villages in Senegal had outlawed FGM.

The US campaign against the practice started in 1980, when five cases of FGM among pregnant immigrant women in San Jose, California, became public. Thus, a law against FGM was promptly passed in California to stop the abuse.

Even in the whole of US today, FGM is an adequate ground for granting asylum. A case in point was that of one Togolese, Fauziya Kasinga, 20, who lived in Philadelphia. The US Immigration and Naturalisation Service stood by her when a Philadelphia judge told her that her story of FGM was unbelievable and insufficient for granting her political asylum. Kasinga was later granted an asylum.

US government has taken the battle against FGM beyond its borders. Its representatives on financial institutions like the World Bank are required to refuse to give loans to governments that are not carrying out programmes to eradicate FGM.

The parents of a three-month old girl who died as a result of circumcision carried out on her were charged with criminal negligence and given suspended sentences in France in 1982. Since then France has prosecuted parents of more than 30 families for genitally mutilating their daughters in the last ten to 15 years.

## GENITAL MUTILATION STILL A NIGHTMARE FOR MANY AFRICAN SISTERS

Female genital mutilation is still a major health problem among the Sabinu people of eastern Uganda, in spite of concerted efforts by the Uganda government, donors and community leaders to combat the practice.

Statistics compiled by the Family Planning Association of Uganda and the Reproductive, Educative and Community Health Programme (Reach) show the trend is far from declining.

The findings have been described by government officials as surprising.

The statistics were compiled by surveying women between 14 and 30 years old in the district of Kapchorwa, 480km east of the capital Kampala.

They were circumcised between December 1998 and January 1999.

This district is populated by the Sabinu – the only ethnic group in Uganda that practices female genital mutilation, in the belief that it reduces promiscuity among married women.

The practice involves cutting off the clitoris of the woman, as well as parts of the lips of the vagina.

The whole area is then stitched up to narrow the passage.

The rituals, which are carried out once every two years, were last carried out in December 1998 and will again be done in December 2000.

In Tingey County, Kapchorwa district, it was found that 193 out of a total of 5 762 girls (3,3 percent) had been circumcised, while in Kween country the study found that 473 girls had been circumcised out of 3, 027 (13,5 percent).

“The findings are surprising and indicate the problem is far from over.

“It could even be getting worse so we must redouble efforts to fight it,” says Charles Opio, the government resident district commissioner.

The government, through a local group called the Sebei Elders’ Association has in

**Despite the efforts of anti-female circumcision groups and government officials, traditionalists in eastern Uganda continue to subject young women to the painful and unhygienic ‘operation’**

the last two years intensified a campaign to end the practice. Cases are believed to have dropped by about 40 percent since 1996.

Female genital mutilation is practiced in 27 of the 53 member states of Africa. In some countries more than 90 percent of females have undergone genital mutilation.

The World Health Organisation estimates that about 100 million women in Africa today have gone through some type of genital mutilation.

In Uganda it is done using crude implements such as sharpened pieces of metal or knives.

The circumcisers are mainly old women who have been locally trained to cut the girls.

“They are very experienced in the job and have done it for many years,” says Joseph Chepsikor, a community leader in the district.

Before the girls are circumcised they go through several rituals and receive gifts.

They are taught to believe that no man can marry them unless they are “initiated through circumcision”.

For days before the ceremony, the young girls roam the villages visiting relatives, who console them and offer them gifts. The ritual itself is carried out early in the morning.

The girl is made to lie on her back on a mat in the compound of the home and told to open her legs wide. The “surgeon” approaches and kneels between her legs. She pulls the clitoris until it is elongated before cutting it.

After cutting it, the “surgeon” rubs some locally concocted herbal medicine into the wound.

The girl, who is expected not to cry, gets

up and walks to a nearby shelter, where she will stay for months while the wound heals.

Crying during circumcision is a sign of cowardice and is believed to bring bad luck to the family.

“I was circumcised when I was about 13. I thought if I did not do it, nobody would marry me. They used one knife for several girls. Today I cannot allow my daughters to do it because, among other problems, it exposes one to the risk of HIV/AIDS,” says Jane Chelimo, a nurse involved in the Reach programme.

The mother of four says she has had difficult childbirths because of damage done to her reproductive system.

The crusade against the practice gained momentum in 1996, when Jane Francis Kuka was appointed Minister of State for Gender and Community Development. Since her appointment, she has been outspoken against the practice and mobilized local women in Kapchorwa to speak out against what was regarded as a cultural practice.

“I refused to be circumcised and everybody thought I would never be married. But I am happily married with children,” says the minister, who was recognized by the United Nations in 1997 for her efforts in combating female genital mutilation.

She has also been at the forefront of mobilizing girls in schools to reject the practice. As a result of her efforts, as well as those of the Reach programme, the Family Planning Association, the Elders’ Association and government, 150 schoolgirls wrote to the United Nations secretary-general in 1997, requesting help to save them from the practice.

In response, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) chief, Nafis Sadik promised help to strengthen the fight against the practice.

Despite the gains, strong opposition still exists among the traditionalists in the district.

Opio says extra effort is being made to convince the traditionalists that female genital mutilation is a harmful practice – Sapa-IPS.

# RIGHTS-LIBERIA/ UN: FIGHTING HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

**By Attes Johnson**

MONROVIA, Apr 20 (IPS) - UN agencies in Liberia have begun to tackle the growing cases of the abduction and forceful initiation of persons into traditional societies through harmful practices like the female genital mutilation (fgm).

Over the past few months, over a dozen cases of forced initiation involving more than 50 children and adults have been reported in various parts of Liberia including the capital, Monrovia.

In one instance in February, two teenage boys from Monrovia's Save Our Souls (SOS) Children's Village, who had gone to visit relatives in the central Liberian town of Kakata were seized by the traditional "Devil", as the practitioners are known in Liberia, and forcefully initiated into the "poro" society.

Efforts by the SOS Children's Village to secure their release, failed, as the children were reported to have been "eaten by the Devil".

In another instance in early March, the Criminal Court in Monrovia ordered the immediate release of 10 persons, who had been seized by the "Devil".

It all started when three Mandingo girls — whose ethnic group does not subscribe to the harmful traditional practices — were abducted by the rival Femal ethnic group.

Seven elderly Mandingo women sent to negotiate their release were also chained and threatened with forced initiation, prompting their relatives to institute legal proceedings to secure their release.

The various ethnic groups in Lofa County, bordering Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, who indulge in the harmful traditional practices, have often clashed with the Mandingos.

In one such incident, two persons were killed and several others injured during a clash between Mandingos and members of the Lorma ethnic group.

"Besides posing a threat to individuals, the activities of the traditional 'Devil' have also often disrupted traffic and commercial activities in towns and major highways across the country," says a member of the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFLL).

A case in point was an incident that occurred in November last year when the traditional "Devil" ambushed and abducted four trucks transporting passengers and unprocessed rubber.

Both the goods and passengers were seized during the raid along the Monrovia/Kakata highway at evening, according to a police officer in Kakata, about 32 kilometres west of Monrovia.

Elizabert Moyounor, an AFLL official urged “the government to pass a legislation to halt the growing cases of harmful traditional practices in Liberia.”

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children’s Fund (Unicef) and the World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social welfare, have begun consultations to end the practice.

“The effort is bound to prove an uphill task, considering the extent to which these traditional practices have become entrenched in Liberia,” says Philip N. Wesseh, Managing Editor of the ‘Independent Inquirer’ newspaper.

Not only are top government officials, like legislators, ministers and judges, members of the tradition societies, but also President Charles Taylor, has been made chief of the “zoes” (head of the traditional societies).

The U.S. State Department Human Rights report on Liberia, released on Feb 26, shows that prior to the civil war (1989-1997), 50 percent of women in rural Liberia between the ages of eight and 18 had been subjected to FGM.

But social workers in Liberia estimate that more than 90 percent of rural women in that age group have undergone the practice.

The UN agencies, in collaboration with the AFLL, say they will lobby influential female legislators and judges to fight the scourge.

Liberia’s five human rights organisations have assured AFLL that they will lobby parliament to pass a legislation against the practice.

Of late, much attention has been drawn to harmful traditional practices, which violate the human rights of women and girls, putting them at risk of irreversible hazards to their health and well-being and perpetuates violence against them.

The UN says up to 130 million girls and women worldwide, especially in Africa, have undergone some form of FGM, in which the female clitoris is removed.

# ZAMBIAN WOMEN SUCCUMB TO GENITAL MUTILATION

By Juliet Chibuta  
and Kezia Mumba

CASES of genital mutilation, once considered rare among Zambian women, are now surfacing at an alarming rate at various hospitals.

Some gynaecologists and obstetricians at the University Teaching Hospital (UTH) say though genital mutilation is considered illegal, the number of circumcised women appearing at labour wards in the country's health institutions is increasing.

The gynaecologists and obstetricians said they are witnessing almost all levels of circumcision. Level one is where the clitoris has been removed, level two where the clitoris and the labia have been sliced and level three where every thing is cut off except for a small hole left for menstrual purposes.

The doctors said history records of the majority of these circumcised women appearing at hospitals, indicate that most of them are Zambians married to foreigners who come from countries where women are subjected to genital mutilation.

"Some women happen to be children born to these foreigners," the doctors said.

The doctors said they were concerned about the emergence of genital mutilation in Zambia, which posed a risk to the health of women.

"Most of these women have very serious complications when giving

birth and many end up dying," the doctors said.

The doctors said there is nothing they can do because their duty ends at helping the women deliver safely, a case they say is rare among circumcised women.

"Authorities should do something about this cruel practice. The sad thing about it is that women opt to be circumcised voluntarily because they do not want to lose their marriages or 'friendships' to these foreigners who give them a lot of money," they said.

Meanwhile, a Somali supermodel, Waris Dirie, has been appointed United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) special ambassador for the elimination of female genital mutilation (FGM) because of her personal experience of the ordeal.

Ms. Dirie, who was born into a nomadic family, survived the practice, which kills hundreds of women every year. She felt the pain of losing a younger sister and two cousins who died in the process. And just before she could be married off at a tender age of 13 to an elderly man, she ran away from home and eventually found her way to London.

According to a UNFPA report, *Populi*, it was while in London after some success as a fashion model that she gained courage to share her ordeal with the public and thereafter decided to dedicate her energies to ending FGM

and improving the status of women.

Dirie was appointed special ambassador in 1997 to support UNFPA and national programmes to eradicate FGM. She has also written a book entitled *Desert Flower, The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad* in which she narrates her experience. "When I imagine more little girls going through what I went through, it breaks my heart and makes me angry" she says, adding: "With great pride, I accepted UNFPA's offer to become a special ambassador and to join it's fight. I will return to Africa to tell my story and speak out against this crime".

In her campaign, she talked to United States senators and representatives and told them of her encounter with FGM as a Somali child, who was cut in a practice that has claimed many lives.

During her long visit to the United States, she met Representative John Cooksey of Louisiana, a doctor who has worked in Africa and supports efforts of eradicating the practice. She addressed press conferences in which she called the attention of UNFPA's cooperation with NGOs to eradicate the practice.

*Populi* further says that as of press time, there were bills in Congress to give UNFPA \$25 million and \$35 million for fiscal years 2000 and 2001, respectively.

## FMG KILLS MANY CHILDREN IN TANZANIA

By **PUDENCIANA TEMBA**

Peter Mlundi (51), a resident of Majengo Street in Singida town, is in deep agony. He has been living in this sorrowful state for the past two years, and is not sure as to when he will recover from it.

Mlundi, a mason, found himself in this stress after the death of his six and a half years old daughter, Bertha. She died of complications resulting from a circumcision operation conducted on her.

"What makes me so sad is not the death of my daughter, but the cause of her death and more, the suffering she was subjected to, which were all imposed on her without her consent," said the weeping father.

Narrating the ordeal to a team of journalists from the local media sent by TAMWA to Singida region to write on development issues and traditional practices and beliefs harmful to the health of women and children. Mr Mlundi said the operation was conducted on the girl while she was two years old.

He said, "his wife colluded with her relatives and a traditional practitioner to carry out the operation on the child, while she was on leave. They did not seek permission or inform him of the act.

"I came to learn of the problem at a very late stage when my daughter was about to die. The doctor at the hospital told me of the causing factor of my daughter's suffering," he said and added:

"I almost fainted when the doctor said my daughter would not recover

because the operation was so severe and irreparable," he said wiping out tears.

The Singida regional hospital doctor, Aubrey Mushi, confirmed the incident saying the girl was taken to the hospital by her father and police while in a critical condition.

He said after a thorough examination, it was established that it was the excision kind of circumcision that was conducted on her.

Dr Mushi who is in charge of the gynaecology department at the hospital said the circumcision involved the removal of prepuce with all labia minora.

He said that since the operation was carried out while the girl was so young, some veins were cut in the process, causing paralysis and brain damage.

"By the time she died, the girl could not talk or walk. Before the operation she was a bright and lovely girl," lamented the father.

Following the incident, the mother of the late Bertha, Lucia Augustino, who is alleged to have facilitated the circumcision, is in custody awaiting charges related to the death.

Bertha's case is just a tip of the iceberg, as there are several incidents of FGM among children and babies which have been reported in Arusha, Dodoma and Singida regions.

FGM reports amongst toddlers and babies have been in the media of late especially after the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act, 1998 which among others bars circumcision of children and women.

The Singida regional social welfare officer, Ms Zuhura Karya, told journalists recently in the region that FGM was carried out on babies to conceal the crime.

"People are fearing to be sent to court over FGM hence they have decided to operate on the girls just after birth or within two months after birth," she said.

She said the practice was common among Wagogo, Wanyaturu and Taturu tribes in Singida rural areas on belief that uncircumcised women were incomplete and do not deserve a marriage.

Since the law has made it difficult to fulfil their deep rooted traditional norm, she said, the parents, particularly mothers and grandmothers, were performing the ritual on innocent babies. This serves the purpose of escaping the long arm of law, as well as avoiding possible resistance from the girls when they are grown ups.

Ms Karya said some enlightened girls and mothers were sometimes opposed to the practice but tricks of different sorts were used particularly by the grandparents to ensure that the ritual was performed.

She cited a case of a woman from Msimihi village, Llongero division, Singida Rural District who left her six months baby girl with her grandmother to go to fetch water from a well. When she returned home she found her daughter crying while bleeding profusely. She was circumcised by her grandmother.

## CULTURAL VALUES CONTRIBUTE TO FEMALE CIRCUMCISION IN SINGIDA

**The circumcision of females in Tanzania is still a problem despite concerted efforts to eradicate it. Business Times Reporter ROIDA ANDUSAMILE, who recently visited Singida Region, gives the details.**

"I am proud of being a circumcised woman; a 'clean' woman with dignity," said 27 year old Anna Lameck.

Anna is among many women interviewed in Singida region who seemed to see no harm in what is referred to as female genital mutilations (FGM) in enlightened circles. Ostensibly, this attitude is born of the fact that the practice is part of a culture inherited from their ancestors.

The Wa-Nyaturu, wa-Mmburu, Barbaig, wa-Gogo and wa-Taturu are among the tribes in central Tanzania that are still involved in such 'cultural' practices.

Zuhura Karya, a senior social welfare officer in the regional administration, told Business Times that statistics for the period 1997 to June 1999, some 16,966 out of 42,627 women who attended clinic in the region were circumcised.

She believes that the number must be higher, as not all the women in the rural areas give birth in hospitals and health centres - thereby escaping the statistics net.

According to Karya, the trend

shows that, surprisingly, it is the women in the region who insist on undergoing circumcision; the menfolk are indifferent to it, and seem not to bother - or be bothered - by the practical.

She says that since the Sexual Offences Act started to operate in 1998, women in Singida region are now undergoing circumcision in utter secrecy. The practice is a punishable offence under the new law.

One recent development is that the perpetrators have resorted to a new modus operandus, a method of operation, whereby baby girls aged between one day and 6 months are being circumcised as a way of concealing the practice: they are too young to know or complain about what is going on - or report/testify on the perpetration!

Swahiba Kilingo, the Manyoni community development officer, told Business Times that the authorities in the district have a big role to play in ensuring that female genital mutilation is eradicated.

Kilingo says women in the district tend to take other women

who remain uncircumcised as being the source of various diseases which attack their children, or even attack the uncircumcised women themselves.

When girl-children develop rashes in their genital parts (locally known as Lawalawa), or babies are attacked by diarrhoea, the tradition-minded women take this to be the result of their not having been circumcised.

However, Doctor Herbert Bhwana, the regional medical officer, said that rashes and diarrhoea have nothing to do with circumcision. The two diseases are caused by other factors: rashes are normally caused by improperly washed genital parts, and putting on dirty clothes. Diarrhoea is caused by ingesting dirty foods.

To make matters worse, Kilingo said, the people who carry out the operation of circumcision are not willing to stop their activities, on account of the fact that they earn a lot of money for their job.

The district authorities are doing their best to educate the 'circumcisers' on the adverse nature of their work, and discourage them from such activity. One way of doing this is to virtually 'read them the Riot Act', enlightening them on the Sexual Offences Act, and the penalties provided there under.

## **FEMALE RITE PERFORMED 'IN SECRET'**

**By SILAS NTHIGA**

Female genital mutilation is being carried out secretly in government health institutions and private clinics in Embu District, a seminar was told yesterday.

Participants at the AIDS seminar complained that some health personnel were carrying out the rite with impunity, frustrating campaigns to eradicate it.

A public health officer, Mrs Peris Nyaga, said female circumcision was rampant in mushrooming illegal clinics in the district and asked the concerned authorities to act against those promoting it.

The practice is particularly rampant in Manyatta, Runyenjes and Nembure divisions.

The seminar at Karingari market is aimed at updating health personnel on latest developments on the AIDS pandemic and equipping them with skills to deal with those suffering from the disease.

Embu medical officer of health, Dr Nicholas Muraguri, said any government health personnel promoting the practice would be sacked.

He said investigations would be carried out to establish the personnel carrying out the practice.

Nurses and clinical officers are said to be the culprits.

Dr Muraguri asked parliament to enact laws criminalising female circumcision.

He said the rite was partly to blame for the spread of AIDS.

The medic accused religious organisations of stigmatising AIDS sufferers.

He said this had frustrated government's efforts to intensify home based care for the sufferers.

## **CHANGED OUTLOOK ON CIRCUMCISION OF WOMEN IN SUDAN**

Khartoum, Nov 11 (IPS): A few years ago, it would have been unthinkable for an uncircumcised Muslim girl to find a husband in Sudan.

All that is changing now. Last week Samia Hassan and Ahbal Omer al Hussien became the first Muslim women in Sudan to publicly get married without having to undergo circumcision.

"I'm impressed that two young university graduates have accepted to marry uncircumcised girls," says 18-year-old Mona who attended the ceremony.

"We consider this marriage a miracle because in the past no man would have accepted an uncircumcised girl as a wife," says Mona who has been circumcised.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a common practice in Sudan. UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 82 per cent of Sudanese women have been circumcised.

"FGM is performed on girls between five and eight years of age. A highly institutionalised custom, FGM is considered not only essential by the majority of those who practise it but also a real part of women's status, similar to the status acquired when one is married," says Amna S Badri of the Babiker Badri Scientific Association, a non-government organisation (NGO) which campaigns against the practice.

In a recent paper published by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Badri says, "FGM is viewed as a natural part of a woman's life cycle which cannot be eliminated."

In Sudan, the most common form of female genital mutilation is Sunna, a practice which ranges from the removal of the foreskin of the clitoris to its complete excision.

As a result of these campaigns, UNICEF's analysis shows a decrease of 10 per cent in the prevalence of FGM in Sudan.

# ALTERNATIVE RITE TO FEMALE CIRCUMCISION SPREADING IN KENYA

**By Malik Stan Reaves**

A growing number of rural Kenyan families are turning to an alternative to the rite of female circumcision for their daughters.

The new rite is known as 'Ntanira na Mugambo' or 'Circumcision Through Words'. It uses a week-long program of counseling, capped by community celebration and affirmation, in place of the widely criticized practice also known as female genital mutilation (FGM). Next month, residents of some 13 villages in central Kenya will celebrate the fourth installment of this increasingly popular alternative rite of passage for young females.

The first Circumcision Through Words occurred in August 1996, when 30 families in the tiny village of Gatunga, not far from Mount Kenya, ushered their daughters through the new program. Some 50 families participated in the program in December followed by 70 families this past August.

Circumcision Through Words grows out of collaborations between rural families and the Kenyan national women's group, Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO), which is committed to ending FGM in Kenya.

It follows years of research and discussion with villagers by MYWO field workers with the close cooperation of the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), a nonprofit, nongovernmental, international organization which seeks to improve the health of women and children. Headquartered in Seattle, PATH has served as technical facilitator for MYWO's FGM program, providing the methodologies and other inputs to help carry it forward.

FGM is practiced in about half of the rural districts of Kenya, part of a larger international population of more than 100 million women who are believed to be subject to varying forms of FGM across Africa and parts of western and southern Asia.

FGM is generally grouped into three categories: incision, the cutting of the hood of the clitoris; excision, the cutting of the clitoris and all or part of the labia minora; and infibulation, the removal of the clitoris, the adjacent labia (majora and minora), and the sewing of the scraped sides of the vulva across the vagina, except for a small opening.

In rural areas, circumcision rites are usually carried out by traditional practitioners using crude instruments and little or no anesthetics. Urban dwellers and the more affluent are more likely to seek out professional health care providers.

While in some cultures the circumcised include infants a few days old, most of the affected girls are between the ages of 4 and 12, according to a statement announcing a UN joint plan of action against FGM.

The health consequences of FGM can range from serious to deadly. "Short-term complications include severe pain, shock, hemorrhage, urine retention, ulceration of the genital region and injury to adjacent tissue," according to the UN release. "Hemorrhage and infection can cause death. Long-term complications include cysts and abscesses, keloid scar formation, damage to the urethra resulting in urinary incontinence, dyspareunia (painful sexual intercourse), sexual dysfunction, urinary tract infection, infertility and childbirth complications."

Yet female circumcision encompasses more than the practice itself. It is often deeply entrenched in the culture, wrapped in a complex shroud of assumptions, taboos, and beliefs that impact or a woman's social status and personal identity.

Indeed, it seems the central defining achievement of Circumcision Through Words is not that it saves young women from the dangers of FGM, but that it captures the cultural significance of female circumcision while doing away with the dangerous practice itself.

“People think of the traditions as themselves,” said Leah Muuya of MYWO. “They see themselves in their traditions. They see they are being themselves because they have been able to fulfill some of the initiations,” said Muuya in “Secret and Sacred,” a MYWO-produced videotape, distributed by PATH, which explores the personal dangers and harmful social results of FGM. The tape explains that female circumcision has traditionally signaled when a young woman is ready for the responsibilities of adulthood.

In answer to that, Circumcision Through Words brings the young candidates together for a week of seclusion during which they learn traditional teachings about their coming roles as women, parents, and adults in the community, as well as more modern messages about personal health, reproductive issues, hygiene, communications skills, self-esteem, and dealing with peer pressure.

The week is capped by a community celebration of song, dancing, and feasting which affirms the girls and their new place in the community. Indeed, after witnessing the community’s response to the first celebration, MYWO Chair Zipporah Kittony said she was “overjoyed” and believed it was a critical achievement in their efforts to eradicate FGM.

The original proponents of the new rite have since incorporated and are seeking support from international donors in order to continue and expand their efforts. Indeed, it was such broad-based cooperation that led to the effort’s creation in the first place.

In addition to the initiative of the local population, the development of Circumcision Through Words is rooted in cooperation between the national women’s group and PATH. Under MYWO’s direction, the groups conducted surveys in 1990 and 1991 that examined the dimensions of FGM in four districts of central Kenya. Funding came from several international donors including the Ford Foundation, the Moriah Fund, Population Action International (PAI)/Wallace Global Fund, Public Welfare Foundation, and Save the Children - Canada.

MYWO and PATH have also developed public awareness campaigns that spread information on the harmful effects of female genital mutilation. According to Dr. Asha Mohamud, a PATH Senior Program Officer focusing on FGM, the two organizations agree that information, education, and public discussion are more effective tools against FGM than direct, prohibitive action.

That became clear recently after Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi declared his intent to abolish the practice. “It led to a terrific backlash,” she said, including circumcisions in the middle of the night and a rush to circumcise girls at a younger-than-usual age, in an effort to beat the ban.

Accompanying this Kenyan initiative is an international effort to increase global pressure on the issue. In April of this year, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the UN Population Fund announced a joint plan to significantly curb female genital mutilation over the next decade and completely eliminate the practice within three generations.

Many governments have outlawed the practice in their own territories, including the United States in September of last year, while they seek strategies to manage the problem. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is working through the Centers for Disease Control and the Immigration and Naturalization Service with a host of non-governmental organizations to develop the means to help thousands of African females at risk within its borders. However, such efforts are complicated by criticism from some within the African community who see such actions as racist and intrusions upon African cultural practices.

Efforts like Circumcision Through Words offer a promising approach to resolving this controversial issue, at least within practicing communities, said Dr. Mohamud, since there are many people who would like to end the practice yet are not able to face the social ostracism that would entail. Yet, despite the continuing successes of Circumcision Through Words, proponents of traditional circumcision are still numerous in these communities.

“You cannot change culture overnight,” said Peter Kali, District Officer in the Gatunga area of Kenya, during the recent celebration.

## **WITCHCRAFT**

### **DEFINITION**

**Witchcraft** is defined as the power to exert supernatural harm upon another person or his possessions, that power depending upon inherent evil qualities in the evil person (witch) himself/herself. (Witchcraft and Development J.L.Brain: )

Brain argues that witches are believed to be naturally evil and anti-social as part of their genetic makeup. They differ from sorcerers in that they have achieved their evil powers by study. Most witches are believed to be women.

**Sorcery** refers to the use of physical objects and substances to do harm to others. It is a very potent form of witchcraft and its practitioners are mostly men. Men become sorcerers by training (i.e. by choice and achievement). Witchcraft, on the other hand is the use of supernatural powers and invisible forces to do harm to others. It is practiced mostly by women. In many societies this is said to be an innate force. In Zimbabwe there is the belief that many women inherit this from their matriarchal or other female forebears. Somehow it is said that women cannot refuse to inherit this force because if they do, then the forebearers get angry and reign terror on the intended 'heiress'.

These definitions denote power differences between men and women, which are congruent with gender differences. Men are the most visible human beings in our society and hence they use a visible and tangible form of witchcraft. Women on the other hand, are invisible, second class citizens who have no public voice and hence they use an invisible form of witchcraft. Likewise, to say that women's type of witchcraft is ascribed, is to say that women cannot escape being witches as long as there is witchcraft in their families. This also goes hand in hand with the notion that women's feminine traits are 'inborn' denying the role of socialization. These definitions emphasize women as linked to symbols like 'nature' and men to 'nurture'. This emphasizes that women cannot be trusted because nature is wild, untamed and unpredictable. Nurture, on the other hand, is a human creation and is within human control. (Mate, R., Women and Witchcraft, a paper, June 1996)

**EXERCISE 19****WITCHCRAFT**

**MATERIALS:** Paper and pen; newspaper articles

**TIME:** 20 minutes

**AIM: To create discussion on witchcraft and thereby raise understanding on the practice.**

Read the attached articles. In small groups of about 5 people, the participants should answer these questions:

1. Does witchcraft really exist?
2. What are some of the reasons that cause women to be branded witches?
3. What is it that people believe about witches?
4. What are the differences in connotation across cultures between witches and wizards?
5. How does this affect women and men differently?
6. How does the justice system collaborate in witchcraft violence?
7. In what ways are women's rights violated in the newspaper articles?
8. How does reporting on witchcraft by the media impact on society's understanding of witchcraft?

## NEEDED: PUBLIC EDUCATION TO END SLAUGHTER OF THE ELDERLY

**By Joyce Mkinga**  
recently in Shinyanga

Sixty-eight-year-old Rehema Maganga of Shinyanga has narrowly escaped death at the hands of her own children. They suspected her to be a witch.

"It was midnight when my two children Wandu and Maduhu chased me away from my home on allegations that I was bewitching my grand daughters and sons. They bundled me into the wheel-barrow and dumped me in Shinyanga town," she narrates.

"I'll never go back to my home village because I know they will kill me," she explains, adding: "I thank good Samaritans for bringing me to Shinyanga Regional Hospital."

Rehema is not the only elderly woman in Shinyanga who has abandoned her own home for fear of being killed by the unknown night murderers on allegations of practicing sorcery.

Elderly women in the region are on the run, not as criminals escaping arrest, but as innocent people who want to save their lives. Most of them wander daily in the dry, dusty regional capital where nobody cares about their welfare.

According to research done by the Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), more than 100 elderly women in Shinyanga town are leading miserable lives after fleeing from their rural homes escaping deaths at the hands of hired murderers.

The poor elderly women are running away from a hostile environment to seek refuge and security in urban centres.

However, in Shinyanga town, the aged live in the open or in train wagons.

Fear of crime limits their mobility and criminal elements target them for sexual abuse.

Shinyanga Regional Commissioner, Lt Gen. Tumainieli Kiwelu, says a misconception that elderly women cause misfortunes and even deaths still holds sway among rural communities though the government and non-governmental organizations have tried their best to change people's beliefs.

Elderly people have been rejected by their own families on allegations that they are witches.

"I think more education and sensitization is badly needed so that people know that what they are doing was a violation of human rights," Kiwelu says.

A number of elderly women have fled their homes after seeing their peers being murdered by thugs at the behest of their own relatives.

TAMWA Director Leila Sheikh says helpless elderly women need immediate help from the government and the general public. Most of the victims suffer from alienation from their families and communities. They have no option for survival except turning into beggars in the town where nobody cares about their welfare.

"It is absurd that the elderly who should be respected, loved and taken care of by the society are being rejected by everybody including their own relatives," says Leila.

Surprisingly, Shinyanga town residents are not saddened by the steady flow of destitute women from the villages. They are aware of the situation, but instead of responding to the needs of these women, they

probably think the trend would reverse itself.

"These people are like that and the situation changes during rainy seasons when the number of elderly women increases," says James Peter, a student at Shycom Secondary School.

"The elderly move to Shinyanga during the rainy season when there is an outbreak of diseases such as cholera caused by dirty water. During that time of the year many children die. All the deaths are associated with witchcraft."

He says nobody would even dare to assist the wandering elderly women because witchcraft beliefs are also rampant in Shinyanga town as well.

A suspected witch in Shinyanga automatically becomes an enemy of everyone in the society and hence doesn't deserve any help, says Peter.

"Nobody is confident over these women because much as there are some who are being wrongly suspected, there are those who are real witches," he says.

Currently TAMWA has embarked on a human rights public sensitization programme to make Shinyanga residents aware of the consequences of slaughtering elderly women.

"Shinyanga people need to be educated through both modern and traditional media so that they understand that elderly people are human beings who have the right to live," says Leila.

Because of the aged women from rural areas, it has been reported that agricultural production has declined in several villages for lack of farmers.

# RIGHTS-INDIA: WOMEN BRANDED AS WITCHES TO SETTLE PERSONAL SCORES

By Sweta Kushry

PATNA, India, Feb 22 (IPS) - Neepudi and her three daughters Agaramanao Devi (10), Malati (8) and Lalita (6) and two sons Kuldip (4) and Dilip (2) were axed to death in Mandwa village of Palamau district, in eastern India's Bihar state.

They were killed by Mohar Shah who accused Neepudi of being a witch and responsible for the death of his daughter-in-law. The incident took place in September 1997.

Later it transpired that Shah had his eye on the land she owned and succeeded in his plan to wipe out the entire family because she was a woman.

The then Deputy Commissioner of West Singhbhum, Amit Khare, submitted a special report in which he mentions the cold-blooded killing of the family. He cites another instance of a family that was similarly killed for property.

The victims were Sohraj Munda (60), his wife Jaitadi (55) and four sons and two daughters. Enquiries revealed that Sohrai Munda wanted to own the family's 16 kusum trees, valuable for its sap, 'lac', and had quite deliberately spread a rumour that Jaitadi was a witch.

These are not the isolated cases. Violence against women is a part of rural life in the state, resorted to by upper castes to keep the socially disadvantaged under economic and social subjugation and to inflict political "lessons".

In some areas of rural Bihar, while rape is resorted to by owners and the police to crush dissent within the community, in the tribal areas of south Bihar, women are labelled witches as a cover for exploitative social arrangements.

The state government in Bihar outlawed the practice of labelling women as witches last July. The new law, Dayn Pratha Patishedh Vidheyak, 1999, also takes a very serious view of anyone assisting in trying to identify or instigate others to identify a woman as a witch.

Since large parts of the tribal districts are inaccessible by road, the district administration, and sometimes even non-governmental organisations, have not reached the interior villages.

In the absence of modern health care, people depend on the 'ojhas' for remedies for minor and serious ailments. In exchange the 'ojhas' take locally-brewed liquor, goats or hens.

High incidence of witchcraft related atrocities are reported from the inaccessible areas where literacy rates and health care facilities are poor.

Lack of awareness, superstition about health and diseases further complicate the problems for the poor tribals, who are left completely at the mercy of their village headmen.

The victims are exploited and tortured by the village headman and the 'ojhas' or spirit diviners with extraordinary powers, who investigations show work hand-in-hand to teach victims a lesson or usurp their property.

Women have been stripped and beaten up in public by the 'ojhas' to force them to submit to the will of men they have dared to oppose. They are "tortured" in many different ways.

The forms of violence perpetrated include having to eat their own excreta in some cases. Recently the Free Legal Aid Committee which has been fighting against this evil in south Bihar brought some of the victims to a seminar in the state capital, Patna.

Kunti narrated how she was made to eat her faeces by the 'ojhas'. She was charged with killing the son of another tribal, while Parul, 20, was raped by three people in her house in 1995 following a land dispute between her father and their neighbour.

When two of the neighbour's children died from an illness, the villagers accused Parul of being a witch. Police officer Khare reveals in his report that there was no truth to the claim, and the motive behind Parul's rape was only to grab the family's property or settle personal scores.

Among illiterate villagers their blind faith in 'ojhas' and unscrupulous village practitioners has defied attempts to reform.

Time and again the gullible villagers have joined in the crime. The Legal Aid Committee confirms at least 8 women were killed in Singhbhum in 1998. Police reports corroborate the death of 357 so-called witches in the four tribal districts of Singhbhum, Palamau, Ranchi and Lohardaga between 1990 and 1996.

Calcutta-based sociologist Dr Pashupati Halder, an authority on tribal practices, says 'ojhas' who people believe are possessed with divine power or 'Jan guru' are common in the tribal belts of eastern India.

'Ojhas' brand women as witches in exchange for money or other gifts from the powerful and vested interests in the village. Their claim is never challenged. Often the village headman is also part of the conspiracy, and puts his stamp of approval.

Village 'ojhas' live luxurious lives, and they have confessed that their primary interest is to earn money for which they use their power to exorcise evil spirits. There are also occasions when their own interests comes first.

In one such incident, Malati had to face the wrath of an 'ojha' simply because she refused to have sex with him. She was set upon by the 'ojha' and his henchmen who raped and then killed her in a village in Lohardaga.

# THREE SO-CALLED WITCHES SPEAK OF THEIR ORDEALS

By LUCAS LUKUMBO

A warm reception is accorded by the residents to a new comer in Shinyanga, where their old women are experiencing a terrible life.

Just make a short walk in one of the streets in the township. You will surely be amazed to witness old women prowling the streets in search of food.

These are not the beggars we use to brush shoulders with in Dar es Salaam. They are old women who have taken refuge to the streets from their families for fear of being hacked to death after being mistaken for witches.

Regional statistics reveal that about 300 elderly women are being lynched year in year out in the region.

I had a chance of interviewing three of the many alleged witches who had come to a three-day seminar organized by the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) to narrate their bitter experiences.

One of them, Anna Zengo, who estimated her age to be 60, said she formerly lived in Mshikamano village in Shinyanga District.

Her troubled life started when she separated with her husband in Isaka village in Kahama District.

Her woes are traced to the suspicions her own children harboured about her, believing that she was practicing witchcraft. They were living harmoniously with their father instead. In that way she was left without proper support and later shifted to Mshikamano area to lead the miserable life for fear that her children might hire bandits to kill her as is normally the case in the region.

"I have lost contact with all my children," she lamented. She said such a miserable life made people in Mshikamano believe that she was a witch.

She said traditional security guards known in Shinyanga Region as *Sungusungu*, ordered her to leave the village, believing also that she was a witch. She took refuge in Shinyanga township where she is still leading a deplorable life.

Another so-called witch, Rebeka Luhanwa (78), is currently staying at Mshikamano village in Shinyanga District

after being forced to leave Busendo village after her sister-in-law committed suicide when members of her family suspected her of being a witch.

She said other sisters-in-law accused her of being responsible for the incident.

She had to leave the village for fear of being lynched by family members. Now she is living a pauper's life in the streets of Shinyanga.

The third alleged witch was Minja Sayi (70). She resides at Mshikamano village in the region.

She makes ends meet by sifting rice pulp thrown by owners of milling machines and selling it to get money for food.

She was picked by *Sungusungu* and branded the leader of all the witches in her area in Kitangili village where she once lived.

She said one day a group of *Sungusungu* guards went to her and delivered to her a message to the effect that a previous day's meeting of the traditional army had found out that she was the ring leader of the witches in the area, and ruled that she must be taken to task.

She said the *Sungusungu* emissary told her to give him a 1,800 shillings-bribe so that she could "be allowed to continue living" as she might be lynched by killers.

She said she reported the threats to the police who searched for the "emissary" but he has never been found ever since.

What amazed me even more is why should victims of witchcraft death threats only be women? What does history say about witchcraft and women? I kept asking myself.

The answers to those questions were given to me by a Shinyanga-based sociologist. Mr Joseph Mihangwa, who has conducted research on the phenomenon.

He says more often elderly women are suspected of practicing witchcraft than men, saying that such women's age range is about 50 years.

He says it is true that women have more knowledge of traditional medicine than men from early age. During old age, he says, women's ability to know the traditional medicine was derived from the

fact that at times, they feared that they might be killed by their male counterparts. They ran to the nearby forests to hide.

"In the forest she fed on roots. She treated herself with herbs. This is how women became masters of traditional medicine more than their aggressors – the men," Mr Mihangwa said, but quickly added that a traditional healer should not be mistaken for a witch.

"Discrimination on women continues to date. While a male using herbs to treat people is called a traditional healer, a female counterpart is normally called a witch," he says.

The community also thinks that old women's mastery of traditional medicine cannot be used for peaceful purposes but only for destroying others.

"The negative attitude is maintained so that women could be seen as destructive human beings and in no way could help others," he says.

He says, for example, that one of the conditionalities for being a witch, people in Shinyanga think, is for one to possess blood-shot eyes.

"This is nonsense because the red eyes are a result of the old women's use of fuel wood for their cooking," he says, adding "some women, for lack of firewood, even use cow dung as their source of energy. What do you expect?"

He says lack of an alternative belief system for the Shinyanga residents is another reason for perpetuation of the killings of older women.

Lack of spiritual nourishment to many people who do not belong to any religion is a contributing factor to the spate of killings, the sociologist says adding that nearly 49.5 per cent of the Shinyanga residents are not affiliated to any religion. Most of them, he says, consult the soothsayers for their treatment.

He also revealed that out of 50.5 per cent of the Shinyanga residents who belong to either Christianity or Islam, 3.5 per cent consult traditional healers for solving their health problems.

"These include graduates who are supposed to be agents of change in their communities. This shows how difficult it will be to stop the killings in Shinyanga," he notes.

# WITCHCRAFT KILLINGS: GOVERNMENT HAS NOT BEEN DOING ENOUGH

By Joyce Mkinga,  
Shinyanga

Witchcraft killings have continued unabated over the years in the Lake Zone regions ostensibly because the Government has not been doing enough to fight the vice, a senior administrative official has stated.

Speaking to journalist who are in a tour of the region yesterday the Shinyanga Regional Cooperative Union (SHIRECU) Administrative Manager, Mr Joseph Mihengwa, said this was the feeling of the *wananchi* in the affected areas and beyond.

He noted that there has been very little follow-up by the state organs with regard to efforts to end the primitive culture that has seen many innocent old women killed on suspicion that they were bewitching other people.

The SHIRECU official was presenting a paper on *Problems of Killings of Old Women in Shinyanga Region*, on the second day of the three-day seminar being organized by the Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), being held at the SHIRECU conference hall.

"It is widely viewed that the

Government is giving up in this war, while old women continue to be murdered with each passing day due to witchcraft and superstitious beliefs," he noted with concern.

Over the past 25 years, he said, killings of presumed witches have been allowed to continue and now the practice is taken as a normal way of life in Shinyanga villages, said the co-operative union chief.

"Who is more powerful than the Government in this country? If the State was doing anything, how come the people in the region keep on swearing with impunity that witches will never be allowed to live amongst good people?" he queried.

He revealed to the astonished seminar participants that the motto in rural areas was: "A witch must be killed." Ironically, he noted, those who support the perpetuation of the primitive practice argue that they are on the right as per the Bible which, they purport, spells out that witches must die.

Mihengwa pointed out the police and courts of law which would have been front-line fighters against the vice

are totally absent in the villages where these killings take place openly. The killers often go scot free.

He said that experience has shown that before the TAMWA's on-going campaigns, the government in the region was shying away and never ready to speak about the problem. "The Government's silence was part of the problem," he noted.

Mr Mihengwa pointed out that even the figures being released by authorities differ from one source to another, which shows that nobody was "making a close follow up of what is going on."

Mr Mihengwa observed that annual figures of killings of old women on witchcraft beliefs in the region were not less than 300, but many of the incidents are not reported anywhere.

The Unionist called in the Government to improve social services especially water and primary health care for women and children who are mostly affected with diseases leading to their deaths.

"When one dies, that's the time people start to associate death to witchcraft beliefs."

## OVER 180 SUSPECTED WITCHES KILLED IN SHINYANGA REGION

OVER 180 old persons in Shinyanga region were murdered on suspicion of witchcraft between 1997 and August this year, the Shinyanga Regional Police Commander (RPC), Wolfgang Gumbu, said yesterday.

Gumbu said 187 people were victimized, 168 of whom were old women and 19 old men, adding that the killings were on the increase, mostly targeting old women.

The RPC was leading a discussion on age violence at a seminar organized by the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) in Shinyanga town.

According to statistics issued by the RPC, 80 old people were killed in 1997, whereby 76 of them were women; in 1998 and 1999, the number of murdered women was 43 and 49. The statistics also showed that Shinyanga district was leading in the number of cases.

In 1997, for instance, Shinyanga had 31 cases, Bariadi 29 and Kahama 6. In 1998 Shinyanga district also led with 19 cases, followed by Bariadi (14), Bukombe (6), Maswa (5), Meatu (4) and Kahama (3).

Up to August this year, Shinyanga had 19 cases, Bariadi 18, Kahama 6, Bukombe 6, Meatu 5 and Maswa 2.

However, the RPC said there was need for the relevant authorities and the

society at large to arrest the alarmingly increasing killings.

Giving reasons for the increase, Gumbu said recently a good number of murder suspects were released for lack of enough evidence to prosecute them.

He said most of the people were not disposed to giving supporting testimony for convicting the suspected murders for fear of revenge from culprits or their relatives

## GOVT URGED TO SCREEN TRADITIONAL HEALERS

The government should identify fake traditional healers in society in order to avoid issuing licences to those who instigate superstitious beliefs, which lead to killings of innocent old persons suspected of witchcraft, a Dar es Salaam-based traditional healer has said.

Nuru Nhangachalloh, who attended the just ended seminar on age violence organised by the Tanzania Media Women's Association ((TAMWA) in Shinyanga, told participants that the society was full of fake traditional doctors.

She said the government was to blame for issuing licences without prior scrutiny to establish bona fide healers.

Nhangachalloh was responding to a call by some participants that the government should ban traditional healers who, through soothsaying, instigated the murders of innocent old women in society.

She said relevant authorities had been blamed for haphazardly issuing licences to people who were not qualified traditional healers, most of whom

ended up taking patients and the public for a ride through soothsaying.

Nhangachalloh, who is the Dar es Salaam Association of Traditional Healers chairperson, proposed that the government should consult the association in order to identify fake healers before issuing licences.

She argued that banning them was not easy as they were yet to be identified, and that it was possible for the authorities to mistakenly ban legitimate ones.

She said true healers never deceived or indulged themselves in evil practices

that degenerated into public fear, as they abide by their ethical standards.

Meanwhile, journalists said on Thursday in Dar es Salaam that the government should commit itself to wiping out the atrocious killings by constructing enough police posts in most affected areas while working out long-term measures to curb the crime.

The suggestion was made at a meeting convened by TAMWA to share experiences of the just ended seminar and to find out ways of helping to solve the problem.

## WITCHCRAFT KILLINGS: GOVERNMENT SLAPS BAN ON SOOTHSAYERS

By Joyce Mkinga in Shinyanga

Soothsayers have been banned from practicing their craft in Shinyanga by regional authorities in a move aimed at bringing to an end the primitive culture that has seen many innocent old women being killed on suspicion of being witches.

The Shinyanga Regional Commissioner, General Tumainiel Kiwelu said here yesterday that already the Government in the region has started instituting several measures geared to curb witch killings. These, he said, included banning from practice a number of false diviners whose major occupation has been to name the alleged elderly witches who would be ruthlessly killed.

Gen. Kiwelu said the Government has vowed to bring to an end the activities of fake soothsayers who are the main cause behind the killings of innocent senior aged female citizens in this part of the country.

Opening a three-day seminar being organized and sponsored by TAMWA the Regional Commissioner told over 30 participants that the Government in collaboration with registered traditional healers has prepared a list of the bogus diviners who have been prohibited from operating in the region.

The Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA) is on the forefront of fighting the vice against old women in the Lake Zone regions of Mwanza and Shinyanga which have been orchestrated by the dubious witchhunters for over 25 years.

The seminar being held at Shinyanga Regional Cooperative Union (SHIRECU) hall has brought together Members of Parliament, government leaders in the region, traditional healers and journalists from electronic and print media.

Kiwelu further called for more cooperation between registered traditional healers and Government leaders to combat the problem which

has been on the increase in the region despite the education campaigns being waged by different NGO's on the problem.

He revealed to reporters, "What happens is that a diviner picks on some hapless old woman he claims to be a witch. The person or people who believe it is the alleged witch who had been the cause of their problems of one nature or another hire a killer to finish her off, on that basis."

"We know for sure that, traditional leaders still wield a lot of power in villages and therefore can play a great role in the effort to bring to an end this abhorable practice," he stated.

He said the Central Government alone cannot eradicate the problem which is well rooted in most of the villages in the lake zone.

Gen Kiwelu further called for cooperation between police officers in the Lake Zone because some of the killer bands operate across district borders.

Witchcraft killings in the Lake Zone came to the fore from as far back as 1975 when some people were killed during police interrogation at Kigoto in Mwanza, leading to the resignation of Ministers who headed Home Affairs and Security portfolios.

According to the available statistics more than 180 old women were killed in Shinyanga Region between June 1997 and August 1999.

The RC sadly noted the problem has been further muddled by the fact that most of the accused taken to court are being released because of lack of evidence on grounds that most of the killings take place at night when everybody else in the village except the killers is fast asleep.

The regional boss commended the efforts being taken by TAMWA to sensitise people on the problem with the aim of eradicating the inhuman practice in the region.

## **SOCIAL SCIENTISTS CHALLENGED TO STUDY WITCHCRAFT KILLINGS**

SOCIAL scientists have been challenged to investigate into real problems leading to age violence in society and come out with long-term solutions for curbing the atrocious killings of elderly men and women currently rampant in various regions in the country.

The challenge was given by the Regional Police Commander for Shinyanga region, Wolfgang Gumbu, when leading a discussion at the just-ended seminar organised by the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) on age violence in Shinyanga town.

Gumbu said there was need for the society to address the issues from a scientific point of view instead of relying on traditional approaches mainly attributing the killings to superstition and illiteracy.

The RPC was reacting to a contention by some participants that the main causes of the killings were illiteracy and paganism among the majority of the population.

Earlier, a researcher with TAMWA, Joseph Mihangwa, told the participants that about 50 per cent of the population in Shinyanga were illiterate, in which case they were also superstitious.

He said many elderly people were murdered by the young generation that suspected them of bewitching them even in cases that required only a basic

education to identify the problem

Those supporting Mihangwa included a councillor with the Shinyanga town council, Andrew Minzi, a legislator for Bariadi East, Danhi Makanga and the District Commissioner for Bariadi, Cleoplace Lugaimukamu.

Coincidentally, they said that it was necessary for the government and religious institutions to commit themselves in creating a literate and God-fearing population that would not indulge in brutal killings.

Though conceding to the fact that illiteracy and superstition were main causes of the killings in the region, Gumbu argued that records showed that even some regions renowned for better backgrounds in education and religion were not exempted in cases of murdering elderly people.

He cited Kagera, Mbeya and Iringa as regions with a literate and religious population, but which also had alarming cases of murdering elderly people for various reasons. According to the RPC, regions with such cases of murder were Shinyanga (50), Mbeya (32), Iringa (32), Kageri (24) and Tabora (20).

"It is surprising that some of these regions are better placed in terms of education and religion than many other regions particularly those along the Coast", said Gumbu.

## WITCH—HUNTING ON THE INCREASE IN RURAL VILLAGES

By Gumisai Mutume

Mdabazi Phakula (58) is lucky to be alive having escaped a burning hut which was set alight by the smoldering emotions of her neighbours.

Phakula recalls the events of one morning in January 1997 with an intensity that belies the anger and deep loss she feels at having been labelled a witch and seeing the hut she slept in with three children burn to the ground.

She is a survivor of the wrath of the witch-cleansers in her little village called Gavaza, on the outskirts of Tzaneen in South Africa's largely rural Northern Province. The reality of existence in these areas is that if the community suspects you are a witch, if you are disliked, or if you appear to be richer than those around you, chances are you can be labelled a witch, and burnt or stoned to death or evicted.

Before Phakula's huts were burnt, the village had earlier concluded a witch hunt to establish the killers of two local boys who died mysteriously. Although no conclusive evidence pointed in her direction, she became the target and Phakula says she does not know why.

"The witchcraft they are talking about I do not know," she says. "I am a traditional healer, I heal people."

"I feel my life is still in danger," she says. "The two huts burned down with all my belongings and all my muti (medicine)... as a traditional healer I was making a living supporting four children."

In a written affidavit to the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE), she says she has been to court seven times to try and get a conviction of the three youths accused, but since 1997, the case has continuously been remanded. "I was told by the lawyer that they (the suspects) were writing their examinations and had no time for court."

The CGE is a statutory body created to monitor forms of gender discrimination in South Africa. It has investigated witchcraft violence.

What happened to Phakula is not confined to the marginalised rural backwaters of the Northern Province. It is part of a larger national phenomenon so wide spread it is baffling lawmakers and human rights activists.

In South Africa's remote rural areas, there is a strong belief that witchcraft exists. Government and police reports on the phenomenon attribute it largely to poverty lack of education, political and economic power.

Stories of people who are able to command

lightning bolts to strike an enemy or of jealous neighbours who put spells on people abound.

While the existence of witchcraft remains an issue for debate, what has raised concern and growing disapproval in South Africa is witch-hunting. The dimension to this, according to CGE, is that it is women who are mainly targeted and they are subjected to horrendous methods of torture and death, such as being burnt, using a tyre around their neck, known as 'necklacing'.

Between 1994 and 1995, police say 97 women and 46 men were killed in the Northern Province as a result of witchcraft accusations. Over the same period, witchcraft violence saw more than 164 recorded cases of people being uprooted from their villages and forced to settle in areas of safety away from persecution. However, many cases go unrecorded.

"In general the community is responsible for the killings of witches, but the youth who are called comrades are in the fore-front," says a report on Ritual Murders in the Northern Province.

"One of the reasons why the youth are easily used by adults and political organisations is that they know that such juvenile offenders would be treated lightly by the courts..."

The CGE has recommended the adoption of a national plan of action for eradicating the scourge, which is often poorly investigated by the police.

On the South African law books is the Witchcraft Suppression Act, passed in 1957. This Act has largely fallen short of effectively dealing with accusations of witchcraft, because it basically denies the existence of witchcraft.

"Because there is no effective law which deals with witchcraft, there is no legal recourse for those who sincerely believe they have been bewitched," says Raxon Ndlovhu, president of the Northern Transvaal Traditional Healers Association. "The police cannot do much and this does not satisfy the complainant and he takes further action."

"Witchcraft does exist, but one cannot prove it," says Ndlovhu. "Magic is very difficult to explain. In the past, there were traditional healers who could protect people from witchcraft. Now, the western system, the church, has destroyed our culture saying it is the devil's thing."

The conflict between the modern and traditional systems clash not only in the day to day lives of the rural people, but also in the legal system - traditional courts agree

witchcraft exists, but formal courts do not.

In the past, when a witch was tried and convicted by traditional courts, ostracism was the mildest form of punishment. In some instances, witches were ordered to leave and their houses were destroyed, others were beaten up and in some cases, others were "cured". Only rarely were they killed.

Traditional courts in South Africa still try witches, although they are not legally permitted to do so.

"Witch hunts have been happening since before we were born," says Somi Maluleke, chairperson of the Northern Province Network on Violence Against Women. "Now the trend has changed. It is the youth who are playing an active part and sometimes, it is politically motivated. This started when political calls were made that 'we will use a match and a tyre to get rid of the enemy'."

Apartheid politics played itself out well in the rural areas of South Africa pitting supporters and beneficiaries of the system against those opposed to it. In order to politicise the people, some of the liberation movements chose to use witchcraft.

One of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence in the Northern Province is that since traditional healers (mongomas) play an active part in pointing out witches for elimination, prosecution of those who do will reduce the rate of witchcraft violence.

But it is the youth who perpetrate the violence, and some of them now realise that this has been the wrong path. "The youth must be well informed that through this witch hunt and witchcraft accusations, many families, including children who are the country's future leaders are left in poverty," says a statement by the Zanhoma Youth Development Project - a grouping of former perpetrators of witchcraft violence that have converted and now seek to spread the gospel against it.

"We want to educate our people that in most cases, deaths and illnesses which people are accused of causing through witchcraft are not witchcraft related, but they are natural deaths and illnesses, e.g. AIDS, TB, cancer, etc."

The Northern Province is home to more than five million people and is one of the poorest of South Africa's nine provinces. "There is a lot of damage that has been done. Some have lost a lot of property and it has left serious psychological damage even on the perpetrators," says Maluleke. "How do we repair the damage?"

## 'WITCHES' DO NOT WANT FREEDOM

By Edward Ameyibor

GAMBAGA, Ghana - More than 100 women branded as "witches" by their communities, recently were set free from a camp where many have lived for most of their adult lives.

However, instead of stepping out and enjoying their new freedom, the women, ranging in age between 30 and 75, have refused to go home.

"We will not go anywhere. We are safe here," says Assana, who is more than 70 and is the leader of the women. She has been at the witches' village in Gambaga for more than 30 years after being chased out of her some home village "for being responsible for the death of a child."

Assana came to Gambaga, because the Rana (chief) is reported to have powers to cleanse anybody with "such evil powers."

"You can see I am not preventing any of them from leaving. I did not go for them. They came to seek refuge under my power and I welcomed them," says Chief Gombagarana Wuni.

Gambaga has for over 100 years been the refuge for women declared witches by their communities in the northern regions of Ghana and parts of neighbouring Burkina Faso.

These women are accused of causing death, the impotence of their husbands, and some have even been blamed for outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, meningitis, measles, and tuberculosis.

To escape being beaten to death by their communities - a

traditional form of punishment often meted out to women who are declared witches - the 'women come to Gambaga on their own or they are brought by relatives.'

During the Cerebral Spinal Meningitis (CSM) outbreak two years ago, for example, five elderly women were beaten to death by youth who accused them of using witchcraft to cause the disease.

This incident prompted President Jerry Rawlings to warn of dire consequences for perpetrators of such barbaric acts."

Ghana's Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Welfare, Ama Benyiwa-Doe, has said that although the government can stop the practice of women being labelled as witches by law, "we want: to use education and persuasion to end the practice".

Such traditional practices as only accusing women of witchcraft, she added, are an abuse of women's human rights.

Rights groups, like the International Federation of Women Lawyers also have called for an end to the practice.

While the Ghanaian media has portrayed Gombagarana as a "super witch catcher who has the women under his spell and working in his fields", he has denied the accusations and claims that he only "bewitches" the women. "I inherited this power from my father, who got it from his own father, who were all chiefs," Gombagarana Wuni says.

Chief Von Salifu, regional head of the Commission on Arts and Culture says there are many "witches" homes in northern Ghana.

Gambaga and Bimbilla, near the eastern border with Togo, are the two largest ones.

He adds that the women in Gambaga are not held against their will. "They sought refuge with him (the Chief) from all over the north, including Burkina Faso. That has been the tradition before Chief Wuni was born"

But he also says that "Ghanaians must guard against maltreating the weakest in society by declaring them witches or wizards."

Ghana Presbyterian Church has worked for years with the women in the "witches" communes teaching them income-generating activities like ton spinning, soap and bead making. Many of them also sell firewood. Other churches, Anglican and Apostolic, among others, also provide clothing and food for the women.

According to members of the Presbyterian Church who work in the area, the women are free to move in Gambaga town and some of the younger women have even married men from the area. A church official, who, declined to be named, says that the women are afraid to return to their communities, because people still hold grudges against them.

One woman, Aiyeshetu who returned home from Gambaga, came back with one of her ears

cut off. "She was told it was a warning. Next time she returns, the other ear will go off," says a church official.

"Because of this, the women are afraid... We have to educate the people, increase the number of people in school, evangelise among them, so that they will know that diseases are not caused by witchcraft."

"The situation seeds some kind of shuttle diplomacy. The people in the villages where the women came from must be convinced they are harmless and the women must feel safe to return," says the church official. "We cannot use force or legislation and with God on our side, we shall get many of the women home safely."

Ghana's northern region has a literacy rate of only 10 percent and officials admit publicly that the majority of the people still follow traditional practices and have little awareness of health and other issues.

Some of the women say they miss their families and would like to go back home, but the church official says, for now, this "is a delicate matter. You need a lot of patience and education on both sides. But the example of Aiyeshetu, is a big setback".

Emmanuel Arongo, the Anglican Bishop of Tamale (in the North), says the whole practice is "wrong, unjust and unfair" to women and must be stopped. But the Gombagarana says, "when they stop coming I will stop giving them refuge."

## WITCHES EMERGE FROM THE BROOM CLOSET

Wiccans launch own church in bid to gain recognition

BY ZANELE MNGADI

**T**he recent inauguration of the South African chapter of the Aquarian Tabernacle Church — which services a branch of paganism known as Wicca — has heralded the emergence from the broom cupboard of a religion many stereotype as evil.

Many unenlightened people associate paganism and Wicca with the dark, the perversion of Christianity and the occult.

But Wiccans, some of whom network within the Pagan Federation of SA, are now comfortable in a society which guarantees freedom of religion. They believe now is the time to break down the stereotypes and worship in public.

Although not recognised officially as a religion, Wiccans argue that their beliefs are about enhancing the power of positive thinking.

“We believe by focusing our will and intent, we will be able to bring about small changes in our immediate environment,” said the Reverend Norman “Stormdancer” Geldenhuys.

While only about 50 people attended the recent inauguration of the church at a private home in Johannesburg, the Wiccans, who have been practising for about two decades in South Africa, claim that 50, 000 people follow the religion in South Africa.

“Our places of worship are found

in nature, not in artificial structures wrought by man. We worship in the solitude of gardens, the spires and cathedrals of mountains, the beauty of our shade-dappled glades. Any part of the great Mother becomes our temple, or shrine, as we see it. No clarion calls our faithful to worship. “The warmth of the sun, the whisper of the breeze on our bodies and the impelling glow of the majestic full moon are reminders enough,” is how they describe their religious beliefs. Are the stereotypes valid? Perhaps, the Wiccans concede. They do practise witchcraft and they use herbs and magic. But, they say, they use these to enhance themselves and ensure that opportunities open up for them.

“Over the years we have been persecuted because Christians believe that other religions are of the devil’s nature. But now that the new constitution acknowledges the freedom of religion, we are encouraged to come out,” Geldenhuys said.

Reverend Donna “Darkwolf” Vos, the first South African to go public about being a Wiccan in 1996, has been a witch for 10 years.

Vos said she practises witchcraft by attuning herself with the seasons. “When the season changes there is a celebration during which I use magic rituals to align myself to the coming season.”

Asked if they practise witchcraft on other people, Vos said:

“Wicca has one ‘rede’ which states ‘an it harm none, do as ye will’. This means that as long as you harm nothing, not even yourself, you can do anything.”

Geldenhuys said not all Wiccans practise witchcraft. When it is used, witchcraft is targeted at enhancing individuals and it is not used for evil.

“If a person is looking for a job, for instance, we would use herbs to enhance his or her confidence. We do not do magic which will give an unfair advantage.”

Although the religion has been criticised widely, Geldenhuys said it has been largely ignored by other religions in South Africa something that suits him.

“Personally, I am not keen to get into ugly debates with other religious leaders. I just want people to accept Wicca as a religion that adds value to the people who follow it.”

Geldenhuys said it was decided to formally launch the church because followers wish to be considered a formal organization.

“We want to be given credibility. We want marriages and other activities that we do, like passing over (when somebody dies), to be recognized.”



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SECTION THREE

## **RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM**

# 4

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## RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

### DEFINITION

**Religious fundamentalism** is defined as a religious movement with the militant desire to protect itself against the perceived onslaught of modern culture. While ‘fundamentalism’ has been primarily associated with Islam, it is not exclusive to one religion. For the media, a more useful definition of fundamentalism is: A “fundamentalist” is anyone who imposes a way of thought, expression, action or behaviour using coercive methods.<sup>14</sup>

### GENDER ISSUES

Fundamentalist movements are largely concerned with control of women’s behaviour and sexuality. This control of women is used as a means of ensuring social cohesion. Rigid gender roles are enforced, and community solidarity is reinforced by calling on men to defend the honour of “their” women from outsiders.

Fundamentalist movements seek to protect patriarchal systems of power. Men within these movements often prevent women from accessing religious knowledge, and suppress religious texts and interpretations that deal with women’s rights, such as the right to education.

In fact, rather than being concerned with the fundamentals of religion, fundamentalism tends to concentrate on particular interpretations of religious texts, rather than the texts themselves. For example, Islamic fundamentalists often condone “honour” killings, although there is in fact no sanction for such killings in Muslim religious law (refer to earlier exercise (17) and newspaper clippings on ‘honour killings’).

In Christianity, fundamentalism manifests in many ways.

The “fundamentalist” Christians in the United States, soon after the September 11 attacks on Washington, D.C. and New York, cited feminists as among those who were partly to blame for what had happened in America. Televangelist Jerry Falwell said: “The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, We make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make an alternative lifestyle, the American Civil Liberties Union, People for the American Way – all of them who have tried to secularize America – I point the finger in their face and say, ‘you helped this happen.’”<sup>15</sup>

### MEDIA ISSUES

Issues of religious fundamentalism have a tendency to bring out religious biases in media practitioners. Journalists or media organisations often portray fundamentalism in other religions as something irrational and threatening, while fundamentalism within their own religious group is condoned as a righteous force upholding cultural or family values.

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Muslim Women and the Latitudes of Freedom’, by Luisa Isabel Alvarez de Toledo, IPS Columnist Service, February 2002

<sup>15</sup> The Datalounge, [www.datalounge.com/datalounge](http://www.datalounge.com/datalounge)

In the media, women are depicted as 'victims' of fundamentalism, and news coverage seldom delves into the more complex reality of women's participation in fundamentalist movements.

One of the most common images of women and religion is veiled women, presented as the passive victims, but these women's voices are never heard in the media. Their opinions are not sought, and instead we usually have a man speaking on their behalf, either telling us about the abuse they suffer, or justifying religious practices in terms of defending women's honour and dignity. While it may be difficult to interview women in these societies, there are ways of bringing women's voices to the fore.

## EXERCISE 20

### RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

**MATERIALS:** Articles on religious fundamentalism

**TIME:** 45 minutes

**AIM:** To examine the impact of religious fundamentalism on the rights of women

**STEP 1:** Breaking down terms

Each participant is to define/explain the following terms:

- Religious fundamentalism
- Sharia law

The facilitator can then draw out the meaning from the group using the definitions supplied by the group.

**STEP 2:** Read through the two articles and answer the following questions.

1. What do religious fundamentalists have in common?
2. What are the gender issues within religious fundamentalism?
3. Can religious fundamentalism and gender equality be reconciled? If 'yes' how? If 'no' why not?
4. Does media reporting on the issue reflect an understanding of gender issues within this context?
5. In what way does Alice Lakwena (article A) break with or reinforce gender stereotypes?

#### Note to the facilitator

It is imperative for the participants to have a common understanding of the terms Religious fundamentalism and Sharia law as this will allow proper discussions to take place. Examples could be drawn of religious fundamentalism in other religions, for example Christianity. The facilitator could use a participatory method of drawing out the definition whereby the participants are asked to write their own meanings on cards. These cards are posted on a wall. The facilitator uses these cards to draw out the meaning.

These examples could come from the group.

Furthermore, there is need to discuss in detail the impact of religious fundamentalism on gender rights and gender equality.

## VISIT TO ALICE LAKWENA'S HUMBLE ABODE

### Twenty years after her rag-tag movement put the fear of God in Museveni's formidable army, the fiery sect leader is a spent force — holed up in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp

By KEN OPALA

Alice Lakwena strides her homestead like a colossus. Her lieutenants — some of them with a string of university degrees to their names — religiously trail the footsteps of this class two drop-out, awed at every step she takes, every word she utters.

Her expressions are well-thought out and her English is near perfect, save for the unmistakable Acholi accent.

She cringes at the sight of notebooks and news cameras, but quickly regains her composure to vigorously proclaim:

"I can bomb Uganda now if I want to, from where I am. Now. Just like this!" She stamps her feet on the ground then stabs at the air as if possessed.

'Prophetess' Alice Abwong' at Lakwena shot to international prominence in the late 1980s when her forces of the Holy Spirit Movement tormented President Yoweri Museveni's formidable military machine.

She now lives a forlorn life amongst 130,000 other refugees from Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan in the bleak and desolate refugee camps of northern Kenya. The Dadaab complex 300km north of Nairobi is actually a conglomeration of three refugee camps — Ifo, Hagadera and Dagahaley.

Lakwena is accommodated at Ifo, a 28sq km camp with a population of 47,700.

The life of this 41-year old, who now survives on handouts, reads like Hollywood material. If born in the west, Lakwena would probably have made a fortune on the movie rights to her story. A modern day Joan of Arc in the darkest Africa!

A barefoot, barely literate girl, she convinced grown men to follow her into battle on the promise that a concoction of oil and flour smeared on their bodies would turn enemy bullets into water. The 20,000-plus strong army fought Museveni's vaunted National Resistance Army to a near standstill, starting off in Lakwena's Kitgum home area in eastern Uganda on a 800km blitzkrieg that threatened to take the important town of Jinja on Lake Victoria.

Even now, a decade after her insurgency finally petered out, few can fathom what drove Lakwena in her war against Museveni's "evil regime" as she calls it.

Perhaps a little history could be an eye-opener. Uganda seems to have room for all



sorts of mystics who attract fanatical followers ready to lay down their lives. Even after Lawkena, Uganda is still plagued by a similar insurgency of Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army, which ravages the north.

And only last year, the country attracted international attention when a self-proclaimed Prophetess, Credonia Mwerinda, co-authored the mass slaughter of more than 1,000 adherents of her Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God cult.

It might, therefore, not be difficult to understand what makes the Lakwenas of this world tick. "I am not a politician; I am a prophet who is inspired to bring good to the world by alleviating the suffering of my people," she told the *Nation* a fortnight ago.

She scorns at cynics who link her to voodoo and accuse her of leading her followers, many of them Acholi tribespeople, into the slaughter house.

"Alice is my name, Lakwena is the spirit. In fact, Lakwena is a man. It is a 'he'. I did not practice witchcraft but I was following his orders — to fulfil the words of God," she says without batting an eyelid.

But why were you defeated? "The boys became indiscipline."

Were they revolting against you? "No, they were disobeying the spirit. They were looting and indulging in sex." Her ragtag movement forbade sex and demanded blind loyalty to her. Faithful disciples included Prof Isaac Ojok, a former Education Minister in ousted President Milton Obote's government, and Col Kenneth Kilama, a commander in the army of Gen Tito Okello, Obote's short-lived successor.

Museveni's NRA rode triumphantly into the capital Kampala as Okello's forces fled in disarray in 1986. They quickly pacified most of the country, only to encounter shortly afterwards the most unlikely rebellion — a ragtag army with no discernable aim going into battle with bare hands under the command of some previously unheard-off prophetess.

The frustration was telling. In November 1987, Museveni was promising to either kill or capture Lakwena "in the next few weeks".

He dismissed her as a mere "nuisance with a psychiatric problem" who had polarised the nation. "You cannot chase her and capture her like a chicken. We must crush them and that is our line."

Even more graphic was the NRA's Commander Kajabago Karushoke. He described Lakwena not as a human being but as a "biological substance" which had to be obliterated.

When the NRA finally overran her base two years later, Lakwena had already fled. At the refugee camp, she remains unrepentant, and still spouts a religious credo that leaves non-believers mystified. She says she is Christian, but also claims to possess an "Islam spirit".

She claims her Bible was handed to her at age 26 when "I ascended to heaven and was given the powers to heal before I was returned to earth in the company of three angels". Now Kenyan authorities have confiscated the "Bible", she says. Perhaps her only consolation is that she has erected an altar in her house where she prays and "summons" Lakwena, the holy spirit.

Though still combative, she is in a Catch 22 situation: While her government is not in a hurry to welcome her, she fears she could be tried for crimes if she returned.

"My hands are clean, I have never killed anybody." But Ugandan authorities are hardly convinced.

She continues: "Once I get back home, I will use water from Murchison Falls to cure diseases such as AIDS. "The blind will see, the deaf will hear and the lame will walk." Whatever she believes, however, she is a spent force and her movement is in tatters.

Perhaps what remains is her philosophy. To win a cause, you have to "blend the Bible and the gun", she says confidently.

"It comes automatically if you have the will and the spirit."

## BATTLE LINES DRAWN BETWEEN ACTIVISTS AND FUNDAMENTALISTS

By Colleen Lowe Morna

Women's activists are bracing for a final showdown with religious fundamentalists as the Fourth World Conference on Women gets underway here today.

As a bottom line they say the conference should not backtrack on agreements reached at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, and the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo last year (1994).

"We are going to have to fight something of a battle to hang onto the gains we made in Cairo, as the Vatican and conservative Muslim countries seek to reopen this debate," notes Gita Sen of the Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN).

"It is a well known fact that the right watch the left organise and then organise better," says Rachel Kyte, senior policy analyst with the US based-International Women's Health Coalition.

The decision in Vienna to unequivocally regard women's rights as human rights is one that has been critical in countering negative practices against women in Moslem countries, adds Sultana Kamal, a lawyer with Ain-Q-Salist Kendra (ASK) a Bangladeshi NGO concerned with women's rights. On this issue, "there can't be any exceptions, brackets, parenthesis, anything," she says.

The NGO representatives are among the almost 30,000 who gathered here last week for the NGO Forum, and are now turning their attention to lobbying the official conference which kicks off with a colourful ceremony this morning, and official speeches this afternoon.

Some 1960 NGO representatives are accredited to the official conference. As of the weekend, 2893 delegates from 178 countries had been accredited.

Signs suggest that the Vatican and conservative countries such as Ecuador, Argentina, Guatemala,

Honduras and Malta, as well as conservative Muslim countries such as Iran and Sudan, will again seek to grab headlines at the conference, the biggest in the UN's history.

After compromises reached in Cairo, the Vatican has reopened the debate on the terms "reproductive health" and reproductive rights" in the draft Platform of Action considered at the Preparatory Conference in New York in March. The Vatican sees these terms as code words for abortion.

In references to women's rights as human rights, the Vatican has sought to insert the word "universal." This is seen by women activists as an attempt to modify rights applying to women to those that are only universally accepted.

Several Islamic governments have attempted to replace the word "equality" in the Platform for Action with "equity." The latter is far stronger in legal terms.

In an unprecedented debate at the preparatory conference, the Vatican and Muslim countries raised objections to the word "gender." They argued that the term encompassed homosexuality. A contact group established after the debate will recommend to the Beijing conference that the term, which is commonly used in international documents, be retained.

A letter of apology by the Pope for the negative role the Church may have played in subordinating women in June sparked an outcry among more radical women's groups.

It contains such lines as appreciation for "women who, with a heroic love for the child they have conceived, proceed with a pregnancy resulting from the injustice of rape."

In a move that has met with mixed response, the Vatican has appointed Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon as its representative at the conference. A staunch Catholic, Glendon also has a reputation for being smart, diplomatic and persuasive.

Glendon is expected to take a tough line on abortion, but may take a softer



line on some of the other issues the Vatican has been objecting to at the conference. "At least she's a woman, and at least she's not a nun," says a UN staffer.

The Catholics for a Free Choice, who have been organising several workshops at the NGO Forum, have written off the choice of representative as a public relations gimmick on the part of the Pope.

Several fundamentalist Muslim groups have condemned the conference, putting pressure on the delegations of these countries as they gather here to tread a fine line between them and more liberal forces.

Jad ull-Haq Ali Jad ul-Haq of the Sharif Islamic Research Academy at the University of Cairo told a local news agency that the conference sought to "transform the human being into a monster that is neither male nor female."

There have been several demonstrations against the conference in Pakistan. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will be one of the key note speakers at the opening ceremony. She is likely to argue that the root of women's problems in Muslim countries is tradition, rather than anything intrinsic to Islam.

UN Secretary General for the Conference Gertrude Mongella is anxious that the conference not be sidetracked by conservative forces. She wants it to focus on the broader issues of poverty, education, health, political and economic empowerment – and the means for achieving these.



## **SECTION FOUR**

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# **GENERAL GUIDELINES AND IDEAS FOR COVERAGE**



## GUIDELINES FOR COVERAGE

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### SECTION FOUR

These guidelines have been adapted from the Gender Guidelines for Coverage developed by Inter Press Service (IPS).

### GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING ON RELIGION AND CULTURE

#### INCLUDE:

- More than one perspective.
- More than just the views of men.
- More than just the views of those in powerful positions, or those considered experts.
- More than just the views of adults.
- More than just the traditional gender identities.

#### AVOID:

- Making generalisations such as “in terms of customary law”, which imply that there is only one customary legal system; or “according to tradition”, which implies, once again, that there is only one form of tradition, and that it is fixed and cannot be challenged.
- Concentrating on sensational issues such as female genital mutilation and “honour” killings, while ignoring the broader context of oppression of women.
- Stereotyping one particular religious group as oppressive to women – this is inaccurate, as within one religion there may be numerous different interpretations, ideas and traditions, and one religion may contain everything from fundamentalism to very progressive beliefs.

### GUIDELINES FOR THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN

#### INCLUDE:

- Portrayals of women that challenge existing stereotypes, such as women in leadership positions.
- The voices of women who are usually “invisible” in the media, such as rural women, women with disabilities and women from marginalised ethnic and social groups.
- Descriptions of women as individuals in their own right, not as, for example, “wife of the minister” or “mother of three”.
- Stories that show men and women co-operating to build a just society, rather than constantly portraying gender relations as a conflict between men and women.
- Questions about why women are excluded from certain roles.

**AVOID:**

- Only portraying women in stereotyped roles such as “the good mother” and “the evil temptress”.
- Treating successful women as honorary men or astonishing exceptions.
- Concentrating on women’s physical appearance when it is not relevant to the story. If it would be inappropriate to mention a man’s hairstyle or clothing, then it is equally inappropriate for a woman.
- Sensationalised stories featuring women who have stepped outside of traditional roles and committed acts considered to be deviant.

**GUIDELINES FOR SOURCING****INCLUDE:**

- Ordinary women as sources. The opinion of the “man in the street” is often used as a news source. Do not assume that the woman on the street shares the same opinion.
- Women as experts. Experts quoted in stories are usually men, but there are often many women qualified to give an expert opinion, and who may also be able to give a different perspective.
- Marginalised voices. The powerful elite are over-used as a source of information. In addition to the official version, find out how the issue affects the most marginalised members of society, such as working-class women.

**AVOID:**

- Tokenism – relying on one sex for the majority of views and then using a single, token quote from the other sex.
- Assuming that one woman speaks for all women. Women are a diverse group.

**GUIDELINES FOR LANGUAGE****USE:**

- Inclusive language – use “humankind” instead of “mankind”.
- Empowering language – for example, speak about “survivors” of violence, rather than “victims”.
- Clear, plain language – technical jargon or euphemisms will confuse the public and further mystify issues which are in dire need of demystification.

**AVOID:**

- Sexist language, such as “dumb blonde” and “the weaker sex”, which is based on derogatory stereotypes.
- Judgmental language, such as “cheating wife killed”, which implies that women are to blame for violence.
- Language that stereotypes men and women according to traditional gender roles – statements such as “men are aggressive” and “women are caring”.
- Inappropriate language that trivialises serious issues. For example, in a recent newspaper article, the headline “Dirty Demon Ridder: Lusty Priest jailed for 40 Years” undermined a very serious story about a priest who abused his position of authority and raped young women in his congregation.

## GUIDELINES FOR USING DATA AND STATISTICS

- Very often, official statistics are not broken down in terms of gender. This lack of gender-disaggregated data may conceal the fact that a particular issue affects men and women in different ways. For example, statistics on “honour killings” may be hidden among general statistics on murder.
- The media has a useful role to play in highlighting the lack of gender-disaggregated statistics and question why such data is not being collected.
- Governments often under-report sensitive issues, which they feel may reflect negatively on the country, or are perceived as contrary to culture and religion. For example, in many countries, statistics on abortion are inaccurate because officials believe that “abortion is against our culture, and does not happen in this country.” Governments may also under-report practices such as female genital mutilation for fear of international disapproval.
- National and international non-governmental organisations are a useful source for gender-disaggregated data, and alternative analyses of official statistics.

### EXERCISE 21

#### STORY IDEAS

1. Based on this overview, list at least 5 story ideas on gender, culture and religion that you would like to pursue?
2. For each, list potential sources of information.
3. How will you make sure that you build a gender perspective into your stories, while including the voices of those most affected?
4. What kind of impact would you seek from your coverage?



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## **APPENDIXES**

## APPENDIX 1

### REFERENCES

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- Wichterich, C. 2000.** The Globalized Woman. Zed Books: London.
- Women's Feature Service. 1998.** Perspectives of Participants: Women, Religion and the Media: Searching for New Interpretations. Background Document for the Conference on Women, Religion and the Media, 18 – 20 September 1998, Leiden, Netherlands.

**APPENDIX 2:**

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**WEBSITES**

**Catholics for a Free Choice**

<http://www.cath4choice.org>

**Gendercide Watch**

<http://www.gendercide.org>

**Muslim Women's League**

<http://www.mwlusa.org>

**One World**

<http://www.oneworld.org>

**Religious Tolerance**

<http://www.religioustolerance.org>

**Rising Daughters Aware**

<http://www.fgm.org>

**UNIFEM Arab Women Connect Project**

<http://www.arabwomenconnect.org>

**Women 3rd World**

<http://www.women3rdworld.about.com>

### APPENDIX 3:

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## RECOMMENDED READING

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)

International Conference on Population and Development, Platform for Action(1994)

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Video Conference: A world free of violence against women: produced by UNIFEM

Possessing the secret Joy – Alice Walker

Women and witchcraft, a paper by Rekopnatswe Mate, June 1996

Witchcraft and Development, a paper by J.L Brain, ICPD Cairo Platform for Action

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Roxanne Jordaan, cited by Walker, B. 1998. "Christianity, Development, and Women's Liberation".

<sup>2</sup> Dr Robert Savio, in Inter Press Service. 1999. Globalisation, Democracy and Human Rights in Africa.

<sup>3</sup> Dr Obododimma Oha is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, but currently on leave-of-absence at the Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis, Sénégal. He has published papers in several international journals including Mosaic, Africa, Mattoid, American Drama, African Anthropology, Journal of Communication and Language Arts, Context, African Study Monographs, and Philosophy and Social Action. He has also contributed chapters to critical anthologies. A poet and playwright, he teaches Stylistics and Discourse Analysis.

<sup>4</sup> Tris Fresen, in *The Other Voices Workbook*. 2000. World Conference on Religion and Peace SA.

<sup>5</sup> Adina Oskowitz, *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> Moefidah Jaffer, *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> "The Impact of Religion and Culture on Gender: Christianity, AIR and Gender", paper presented at an Inter Press Service training workshop for journalists on how to report on Culture, Religion and Gender. July 2001.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> From Esack, F. 1999. *On Being a Muslim*.

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF: The State of the World's Children, cited in Ashworth, G. 1992. Women and Human Rights.

<sup>11</sup> McFadden, P. "Reproductive rights for African women – Media perspectives", paper presented at an Inter Press Service training workshop for journalists on how to report gender, religion and culture. November 2000.

<sup>12</sup> International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), *Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights*. <http://www.ippf.org/charter/summary.htm>. 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Adopted from Local Action, Global Change, published by UNIFEM and The Center for Women's Global Leadership (1999)

<sup>14</sup> 'Muslim Women and the Latitudes of Freedom', by Luisa Isabel Alvarez de Toledo, IPS Columnist Service, February 2002

<sup>15</sup> The Datalounge, [www.datalounge.com/datalounge](http://www.datalounge.com/datalounge)