ENGENDERED CURRICULA IN AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES.

PRESENTED AT THE “GENDER EQUALITY WORKSHOP”: ORGANIZED BY NETACT, EFSA AND THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY, STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY.

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ABSTRACT.
The consequences about gender issues are enormous agenda in the global world. In the context of gender injustices, oppression, discrimination and traditional marginalization which causes
suffering to millions of women, men and children in African society, gender sensitive curriculum has to be addressed. This paper addresses the need of inclusive engendered curriculum, strategies to implement it and examine obstacles that may hinder the process. Seminary institutions are strongest force in shaping theological students’ social and whole life who in turn will transform the societal ideologies on gender issues. Thus gender interests come to focus when the church and community is at intensive care.

I. INTRODUCTION

When we talk of student empowerment in terms of gender issues in relation to community service, this idea is directed to education. Really education and not just learning is the most liberating factor. In this context education can and must aim at individual transformation to enhance social action that changes status quo. Gender transformation takes place when students learn to use their own intellect to take control of their lives. It begins with understanding identity of self, attitude and recognition that individuals are shaped by their experiences within a given social set up, gender, ethnic group or other social defined identities. These realizations begin the process of empowerment, as a wise saying goes “those who learn acquire knowledge and those who have knowledge are liberated”.

This paper has examined briefly theological education in Africa narrowing to Reformed Church of East Africa and explanation of gender in general. It also describes strategies for implementing engendered curriculum and obstacles on may face along the process.

The purpose of gender inclusive curriculum.

- Inclusive gender curriculum aims at educating both male and female theologan students for comprehensive range of pastoral responsibilities and skills by deepening understanding of the life of the church for on going contemporary issues. The students are shaped to understand cultural realities, practices, customs, norms, beliefs among others that mitigate gender imbalance within the society they are going to serve.

- Several trends and forces are affecting the unity of the body of Jesus Christ such as gender violence, discrimination in regard to leadership and from exploitative structures, unequal participation, sexism ideologies, gender injustices among others. The main purpose of engendered curriculum is to achieve both education and theological goals that considers the changed and changing context of the church and society at large.

- The curricula help students to pursue theological reflection on their context,
circumstances and education for practical theological outreach. Therefore gender sensitive curriculum seeks to give direction and shape academic professional and individuals’ spiritual formation with view to facilitating renewal in the church and effecting transformation of societies’ needs to take these contextualization challenges into account. Students should be conscious of gender issues in regard to hermeneutic exegeses and life application.

- Theological education is the central preparation of church’s calling ministry to serve both God and humanity. The overall task is to support and renew the church in its mission. Theological training in a seminary context is a dimension of the broader education ministry of the church and the service rendered to the recipients.

- Theological education content is closely related to the church teaching and preaching ministry. It should not only aim at imparting knowledge but go beyond intellectual stimulation to address issues of the time, analyzing them, responding, committing and empowering theological students to facilitate constructive changes in the life and work of theological community and the church. Hence it has to bring coherence, consistence and insight to church’s teaching ministry.

I. OBJECTIVES.

1. To explain Theological education in Africa.
2. To unfold gender ideology.
3. To discuss the strategies for implementing gender curriculum.
4. To examine challenges encountering implementation process.

II. METHODOLOGY.

I am presenting this paper on behalf of Reformed Institute for Theological Training as one of the staff instructors. This paper does not attempt to develop curriculum for teaching gender syllabus instead it seeks to shade light on the African curriculum, gender perception, examining strategies that can enhance teaching gender in African theological seminaries and obstacles one may encounter in the process. This paper is more of qualitative research where I consulted literature and integrated in the perspective of Reformed Church of East Africa context.
1. THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA.

The nature of theological curriculum in Africa differs from institution to institution depending on contextualization upheld. The general content of curriculum taught in several theological institutions in Africa reflects the sevenfold division of subjects that includes: Biblical studies, theology & philosophy, ecclesiastical history, Religion & Missiology, Practical and Pastoral studies and Ethics (Galgalo & Mombo, 2002). This is traditional inherited curricula as the institutions adopted from Western theological model. The training has not geared to the African cultural challenges thus the theological students are not fully prepared according to their context and culture to tackle the current gender issues as faced by the community they are ushered in to serve. According to Parratt (2002), he postulates that studying theology involves a sense of discovering for ourselves, what Christ means to us, and expressing the meaning in terms of our language, culture and context. The students’ learning experiences gained at theological institution portrays the caliber of personality the church is producing and commissioning to serve the society.

The Theological Education in the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA) began around 1946 by training of Evangelists and later on began to train ministers at around 1995 (Van Zyl, 2001). Training of African Evangelists and church ministers was a preparation of Africans to take over the leadership from expatriates and spread the gospel among their own people. The curriculum was conditioned that should be in agreement with school of Evangelists at “Dingaanstat” in South Africa (Van Zyl, 2001). The syllabus consisted of: biblical studies, Systematic Theology, Christian ethics, pastoral studies and church history subjects.

The Reformed Institute for Theological Training (RITT) offers a three years diploma in theology and one practical year. After completing the course the candidate is recommended by presbytery council for ordination (men) but for ladies they stay waiting for women ordination debate if it will be agreed upon women consideration in ordained ministry or other opportunities that do not necessarily need ordination qualification. Also the institution offers a one year course for training Evangelists for the purpose of church extension. The Evangelists are not ordained instead are commissioned to discharge their duties (RCEA constitution, article 4 subsection 4, 2010). So far some female students have enrolled as Evangelist but the challenge is that none of them has been commissioned.
2. TO UNFOLD GENDER IDEOLOGY.

Gender as distinguished from sex, does not refer to biological differences between women and men but the different roles and characteristics that are attributed to them by the society (Kibera & Kinokoti, 2007). These roles are historically and culturally determined. Ideology here refers to sets of beliefs about women and men that cannot be approved either by facts or not (wachege, 1992). Thus an ideology is constructed that aims to create differences based on gender, an ideology that subtly permeates society in ways that limits these. There has been misunderstanding of gender issues as women want to overtake males’ responsibilities. In Kenya, in the past gender was negatively interpreted that women want to become men. This is the attitude which some adult people hold so dearly. Social role theory proposes that the social structure is the underlying force for the gender differences and sex-differentiated behavior is driven by the division of labor between two sexes within a society (Myers, 1987). Division of labor creates gender roles, which in turn, lead to gendered social behavior. Thus gender roles are socially constructed and propagated.

Some researchers who are masculine inclined argue that women’s personal and domestic cores contribute to lower rank jobs compared to men (Kamau, 2009). This is assumption said by those representing women voice. Women are very organized in regard to their duties. This gender stereotyping has impacted negatively on women’s career aspiration. Women may perceive themselves as incapable of taking a career that is looked upon as man’s choice. According to Kamau (2009) postulates that, “women tend to have difficulty in developing an authoritative voice and may be modest about their own achievements and knowledge”. The above mention stereotype diminishes women’s accomplishment and achievement as a way of being discouraged.

3. THE STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING GENDER CURRICULUM.

3.1 Female Education.

Generally in Kenya, in the last two decades there has been progress in the female enrollment in schools, tertiary colleges and universities has improved much comparing the past years. According to Kibera (2007), gender gap in secondary schools enrolment and performance, has affected female education in higher learning institutions. Male students continue to dominate in
tertiary colleges and universities.

“Through the efforts of the public and private sectors, enrolments increased accordingly from 59,195 students in 2000/1 to 91,541 in 2005/5. However, the transition rate from secondary to university level is still very low at 12%. Enrolment in public universities is characterized by wide gender disparities in favour of males. In 2004, female students made up only 36.2% of the total enrolment.

Table 4: Public Universities Enrolment including part time by sex, 2000-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>17260</td>
<td>33,444</td>
<td>50704</td>
<td>34.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/02</td>
<td>23,040</td>
<td>39,637</td>
<td>62677</td>
<td>36.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>24,957</td>
<td>46,875</td>
<td>71832</td>
<td>34.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04</td>
<td>25,462</td>
<td>47,088</td>
<td>72,550</td>
<td>35.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/05</td>
<td>28,097</td>
<td>53,394</td>
<td>81,491</td>
<td>34.5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.afdb.org/kenya](http://www.afdb.org/kenya)

The gender gaps widens further in theological education where the numbers of girls are particularly low in class and institution management. The first pioneer woman in the RCEA church to study theology was the late Rose Barmasai through St. Paul’s university. It was a divine conviction from God and her commitment in serving Might God made her to aspire for more knowledge about God. She eventually enrolled for bachelor of divinity degree at St. Paul’s Theological College and graduated in 1990. After graduation, she was employed by RCEA church to coordinate spiritual and family affairs of women. It was during this time that Rose raised the issue of women ordination and involvement in church leadership in the synod for the first time. For the three years in the women office, she became more vocal for championing women participation in leadership where she mobilized both urban and rural women to wake up and voice loudly. In 1993 she went for further studies in the University of Edinburgh in England for masters of theology and development. On return from studies, she was given a job in National Council of Churches of Kenya to coordinate peace and reconciliation program in North-Rift Region. In October 1999 she went to rest with the Lord.

Contrary to the church policy as stated in the RCEA constitution(1963), states that those called to serve in the office of a minister and an Evangelist “must be biologically male”, RITT enrolled the first female student (Jane Barkiben) to undertake diploma in theology studies in 1992 and graduated in 1995 (Van zyl, 2001). After graduation she was deployed at Plateau Mission Hospital to work as spiritual chaplain. Basing on the effort and work of these two pioneer ladies
raised a concern about women ministry in the Reformed Church of East Africa and was an eye opener to more female students’ to be admitted to both RITT and St. Paul’s University. In 1998 admissions of 15 students among them were three females (Dorcas, Peris and Beatrice) (Van Zyl, 2001). Since then, RITT has been consistently enrolling female students, at least in every admission year. Currently there are eight female students at RITT, more than twenty have graduated. Most of them have attained bachelor of divinity degree from St. Paul University, while others are still pursuing degree program. Those graduated already with masters’ degree are about three and those anticipating to graduating with master’s degree in different disciplines are about five. Two have been employed by the church in the departments. While some are on practical attachment in different parishes. Others are featuring nowhere instead staying at home to nurture their children and husbands waiting for the church to have mercy on them while the outgoing are hassling life in the world of career and job opportunity. Despite decades of efforts to attract more women to theological institutions, still there are few female students enrollment. Male increases the academic intake in seminaries through provision of full scholarship and support from the congregations they come from whereas female suffer an actual decline due to lack of financial support to advance academic studies. In fact, the number of female students joining institution is declining or remaining constant instead of increasing. Compared with other demanding fields of study, theology attracts a tiny percentage of women. The fact is that there really are far fewer women studying theology in Reformed Church of East Africa in particular. The graduated female theologians are left without posting anywhere within the church. They become discouraged and frustrated. When other females observe that, they definitely decline to enter in a calling ministry. If the already trained female theologians are absorbed within church ministry, it could be one way of motivating those interested in the same career.

3.2 Gender Policy and mainstreaming.

When we look at the society at large and the role of women in public sphere is vastly improving and gender advocacy is well strategized. The Kenyan national machinery for coordinating gender mainstreaming is the Division of Gender within the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services (MGSC&SS). The National Policy on Gender and Development 2000 provides
the framework for the state to address gender imbalances and inequality. The government has also established a National Commission for Gender and Development in 2004 to research on gender injustice across the country (Republic of Kenya, 2007).

Gender issues have been largely ignored in church policy dialogue. The church structure of representation in dialogue virtually ensures women exclusion. You realize that very few have attained the senior decision making position to represent in the academic forum and synodical forums and discussion. In most cases women are brought in the dialogue to discuss women specific issues such as spiritual matters, women seminars/ fellowship and children concerned issues that teach moral virtues. The structure of developing agenda and policy dialogue is generally dealt at a high synodical level which is male dominated (RCEA Constitution, 2011). The RCEA synod is made up of twelve or eleven representatives from each presbytery. Among them, there is a woman representative and one either a deacon or deaconess. In most cases a deacon will take the chance because they are used to leadership (RCEA constitution, 2010).

Currently, RCEA has ten presbyteries. When we do rough calculation, you will find that women delegates at synod level will be less than 15. In such scenario their voice will be trifle.

Since the Kenyan government has put in place mechanism to champion gender issues, the church would have been in the forefront through prophetic message against gender injustices within the learning institutions and in their church structures in regard to leadership. The church has not shown the good will to gender issues. It is about two decades since genders issues became global agenda and concern but some churches have been silent.

3.3 Leadership and decision making,

The Reformed Church of Kenya acknowledges the word of God and practice Presbyterian governance whereby its leadership is invested in the courts of the church (RCEA constitution, 2010). These courts includes; local church council, parish council, presbytery council and general synod being the Supreme Court. Several local churches make up a parish; several parishes make up a presbytery thus several presbyteries form a general synod. These courts are in charge of making significant decisions in regard to church leadership. A woman will feature in these courts as women representative or as a deaconess. For instance, at presbytery level you find that there will be only one woman representative or two out of twelve council members (RCEA constitution, 2011, pg25). The RCEA synod is made up of 120 delegates from ten presbyteries.
Among these delegates women participants are always less than ten. The synod discussion will be very much male dominated. The women voice is stifled.
Even though women form more than half the population of RCEA, they are grossly under-represented in leadership and decision-making. With only 0.1% women are involved in church structure leadership. These number shows that women have little opportunity to impact the decision process related to issues like; formulation of new rules, church dogma, women ordination debate among others. The challenge still remains that women be included in leadership as equal partners in the church structure as from local congregation to national synod.

3.4 Generating interest
Get female students interested in theology either in high school or in college before they choose a major career. They need supportive teachers and family, but most of all they need role models. The theological teachers can themselves be the role models, and they can teach students about successful female theologians. When it comes to generating interest in the field, male lecturers have just as much responsibility as their female counterparts. Attracting women to theological studies is not the sole responsibility of the few female faculty members. Those women are likely already spending all their extra time mentoring their female students. However male lecturers should be partners with female to encourage and motivate the female students to study theology.

3.5 Inclusive Classroom Curriculum.
Engendered curriculum will encouraging women to take theology in class but what can a teacher do to help those students enjoy the class and do well? The answer is in the curriculum, A gender-inclusive curriculum is one that has been consciously designed to enrich the learning experience of all students. One way is to teach a variety of theological applications. Too often theological curriculum is crafted with an overuse of masculine stereotypes and examples. Some studies show women enjoy working collaboratively, so assigning group projects can get them engaged and sharing gendered issues together can improve individual perception. Another way to help retain female students through graduation is to encourage them to join women association like the Chapter of Concerned Women Theologians.
3.6 Training
Empowerment and training of both male and female should be identified as an effective instrument to raise gender awareness and equip the institutional staff on gender issues. Developing training modules that are uniformly used basing on ecclesiastical training methodology of its own (Johan, 1995). This training will raise awareness and build expertise on gender issues. This training will provide tool for practical knowledge for policy making. Such training must focus on changing attitudes, values and fears that deny and are inhibitors to action and this can be a strategy to change behavior. Gender training thus enables policy makers to dismantle seeming gender-neutral practices and transforming them to meet the demands of women as well as men.

3.7 Research.
Research across the world has played an important role in making gender issues visible and it continues to be a critical strategy (Johan, 1995). Data generated by research have powerful evidence on women’s central role in policy analysis, education, economic development, women violence, gender and leadership. Research unfolds a wealth of information over past or present events. The research should be encouraged to be carried within the institution and the community at large. The institution staff and students can engage comprehensively on research work. The findings will be a wheel invention of the gaps to be filled on gender issues.

3.8 Special project.
There should be special projects for women in partnership with male counterpart as one of the initial operating strategy to reaching women and linking them with development resources. Thus the project will facilitate women’s voice, autonomy and empowerment. All these can take place in the institution, church congregation and the community at large. It is a strategy for advocacy that works hand in hand with the seminary institution to promote gender issues.

3.9 Policy Dialogue
Gender issues have been largely ignored in church policy dialogue. The church structure of representation in dialogue virtually ensures women exclusion. You realize that very few have attained the senior decision making position to represent in the academic forum and synodical
sittings and discussion. In most cases women are brought in the dialogue to discuss women specific issues such as spiritual matters, women seminars/ fellowship and children concerned issues that teach moral virtues. The structure of developing agenda and policy dialogue is generally dealt at a high synodical level which is male dominated (RCEA Constitution, 2011). The RCEA synod is made up of twelve or eleven representatives from each presbytery. Among them, there is a woman representative and one either a deacon or deaconess. In most cases a deacon will take the chance because they are used to leadership (RCEA constitution, 2010). Currently, RCEA has ten presbyteries. When we do rough calculation, you will find that women delegates at synod level will be less than 15. In such scenario their voice will be trifle.

The government of Kenya we can say it has done a lot in regard to gender balancing. The Constitution of Kenya provides in section 70 that every person in Kenya is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, whatever his/her race, tribe, place of origin, residence, political opinions, colour, creed or sex. Section 82 (1) of the Constitution provides that no law shall make any provision that is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect.

**3.10 Personnel mainstreaming.**

Successful integration and mainstreaming of women staff in the seminary institutions will register women’s participation and enrollment (case study, Mombo, 2011). Women’s number in teaching management remains low in most seminaries RITT in particular. For example at RITT currently we have about ten teaching staff among whom two are females.

For the seminary institutions to be fully supporting or improve affirmative action, should follow systematic approach of including women’s share and setting target for each gender category of job opportunities (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Unfortunate, women have dominated in the low ranks as volunteers, casuals and junior expertise. However, when women are empowered academically, socially and economically to the required standard, they are potential managers to contribute towards development of the country.

**3. CHALLENGES FACING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ENGENDERED CURRICULUM.**

There might be several reasons why seminary institutions have been reluctant to implement gender inclusive curriculum. Some of these reasons are based on the fundamental purposes
established by church sponsored. Others have to do with stereotype attitudes toward women in the society.

4.1 Ecclesiastical

The church is the most powerful organ to influential theological seminaries. It can impact the institution negatively or positively depending on their dogmatic beliefs and practices. The patriarchal church where it is male dominated, excludes, subordinates and exploits many women. Religious fundamentalism has strict adherence to doctrinal conformity based on patriarchal ideology. Such conservative influences are likely to hinder gender plans in the seminary institutions.

4.2 Literature

Theology students do not get exposure to literature that talks about gender issues. There is minimal literature on feminism theology and few literatures written by women in most of seminary institutions. In some seminary libraries you may find in vain literature on feminist theology. This is a problem that may affect the implementation of engendered curriculum. The professors may not find resources for teaching and even scarcity of lecturers who will teach gender willingly and effectively without self biasness.

4.3 Lack of good will.

Another challenge facing the implementation of gender teaching in some of African seminaries is lack of good will from top leadership management and the church. Most of seminaries have been entrusted with academic freedom and autonomy which gives them rights of teaching freely and setting curriculum to the standard set by Ministry of Education. Thus whether the institution adheres to the appeal of including gender in teaching curriculum, there is no system of compelling it. The patriarchal structure, organization and practices we experience in our seminaries remain rigid and there exists gender blindness.

5. CONCLUSION

The seminary institutions are prophetic institutions that ought to challenge church structures and systems that contribute to gender vulnerability in the society. The central theme of theological education is to propagate God’s mission through social formation and understanding the mission
of the church in the world. Theological education should be a bonding and blending together of the text and the context, a transformative interaction between guidance from the Word of God. The seminary institutions are prophetic institutions that ought to challenge church structures and systems that contribute to gender vulnerability in the society. They should revise their curriculum here and there to address the current needs of the society.

Theological students have to be equipped to face the contextual challenges and work within effectively. Looking at the gender disparity injustices, you realize that theological education has done almost little in equipping theological students to address gender issues in the community. Whereas attempts are being made to achieve engendered curricula in African seminaries, there is still no legislation requiring them to do so. Without proper legislation and good will from the institutions and the church it would not be easy to realize the good intention of this conference of NetAct. The church vision of equipping ministers, leaders, scholars and all people of God should be committed to creative discernment of the time and active participation in God’s liberative mission in the world at large and Africa in particular.

Reference.

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KENYA COUNTRY GENDER PROFILE. ( 2007). Human Development Department (OSHD)