

# Introduction

*Method Kilaini*

Auxiliary Bishop of Dar es Salaam

THE AFRICAN FORUM FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING (AFCAST) is a diverse group of Catholics who strive to popularise and contextualise this teaching by strengthening the capacity of those involved in developing and implementing it at all levels of the church and society. We envision a more just, peaceful and humane African society that is guided by Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and where Gospel values are promoted and celebrated.

In an effort to explore, promote and popularise CST, one of our strategies is to hold a workshop, conference or public seminar twice annually on a current social problem within a host country in Southern and Eastern Africa.

In preparation for the workshop held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in November 2005, a small questionnaire was sent to 11 advocacy, non-governmental and church organisations in Tanzania to seek their opinion on a pertinent topic. The consensus among the groups was that one important and current problem was violence against women. They felt the church did not give the subject enough priority and needed to be sensitised on this issue. Thus, AFCAST agreed and began preparing for our workshop, “Women in Conflict Resolution, Violence Against Women.”

The workshop was well attended by representatives from a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Prominent among them were the Tanzania Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA), Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA) and Tanzania Gender Network Programme (TGNP). Among church organisations were Christian Professionals of Tanzania (CPT), Tanzania Catholic Women Association (WAWATA), Tanzania Laity Council, Women in Development (WID) and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference.

This booklet documents the workshop’s presentations. Maria Kashonda, a professional advocate and member of several of the above organisations, gives the keynote address, focusing on strengths and weaknesses within Tanzanian law regarding women and domestic violence. She lobbies for “a unified law on domestic relations, advocating restorative justice rather than punitive justice in abuse cases.” She closes with several recommendations of ways to end the violence and support those who suffer from it.

Following Kashonda, Pete Henriot, SJ, focuses on the specific issue of the trafficking of women in Zambia. Approaching the situation from the lens of the pastoral circle, he asks the questions, “What is happening?” “Why is it happening?” “What does it mean?” and “What is the response?” Henriot’s simple yet poignant analysis not only enlightens us on human trafficking in Zambia, but also gives members of the church and civil society a practical methodology for analysing and responding to current social realities.

Next, Sr Specioza Kabahuma of the Catholic Secretariat in Uganda speaks of the violence experienced by women in Uganda and then shares responses from the local and universal church regarding violence against women. She concludes that the church has not given enough attention to this serious issue, acknowledging that “[i]f the church remains silent rather than defend the rights and dignity of all human beings alike, the cycle of violence against women may continue for generations.” Her remarks call for the involvement of women in conflict resolution on a local, national and international scale.

Reporting on the situation in Kenya, Elias Omondi Opongo, SJ, helps broaden the discussion by addressing the need for women and men to move beyond conflict resolution when addressing violence and marginalisation by focusing on conflict transformation. To Opongo, the solution lies in addressing the root causes and providing the opportunity “for women to be active participants not only in the institution of just structures but also in the development of skills that contribute to

national economic growth.” Only then will Kenya experience a sustainable end to violence against women.

Turning to Malawi, Dr Gerard Chigona shares the impact of neoliberalism on the status of women. By his assessment, “the current economic, political, religious and cultural imperatives tend to legitimise violence against women.” He shares a rather positive view of the progress made in ending violence and empowering women while acknowledging that entrenched injustice affects generations and requires an “investment of time and resources.”

One element of the workshop this booklet could not capture was the heated discussion that followed presentations, raising questions such as: What has the church done to influence policy on violence in society especially in Africa? How do we accept the dignity of the human person as a church? What is the role of the church in responding to domestic violence? Above all, why has the church in its social teaching not seriously addressed issues pertaining to women, especially violence against women?

The workshop fostered continued cooperation between church organs and NGOs in advocating for an end to violence against women. Church members concluded that they had more to learn and needed to be further sensitised on the issue. Lobbyists who before were considered women’s liberation radicals are now seen more positively by church members and males in the NGO sector. Through the workshop, lobbyists discovered the richness of Catholic Social Teaching which they can use in their advocacy. In these ways, the workshop achieved its goal of being a catalyst for change and popularising CST.

Likewise, we hope that this small booklet will encourage discussions and actions within your own communities whether at home, work, church or beyond regarding women, violence and conflict resolution.