

Broken women in a broken world

Documentation of the project of »Reading the Bible with new eyes«



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The Papuan Women Network for Human Rights presented the Women's Working Group (AG) a famous handicraft from Papua called »Noken«. It is a bag that has deep meaning, as it symbolises networking and solidarity among people in Papua.

Foreword



Irene Girsang

»Just recently fallen – and again fallen on the stairs«, an Indonesian proverb says. In Germany they say, »Misfortunes never come singly«. This could mean, for example, that someone is ill again and again. As the proverb says: It was only recently that someone fell, and now they have fallen again, in quick succession – misfortunes never come singly! This is something which widows have experienced time and again, especially in the past but today as well.

»I am now an outcast«, or »I feel humiliated because I have lost my husband«, or »We are broken women in a broken world« – you can often hear widows say something along these lines.

We, the members of the Advisory Group on Interregional Women's Programmes of the UEM, and the Officer for Interregional Women's Programmes got to know such women when we had our annual meeting in Papua in July 2011. Besides the planning of the women's work, our agenda included an encounter with 50 Papuan women.

This documentation presents the results of this encounter. Readers may see how the widows of whom the Bible tells

fared. In addition, the documentation includes personal experiences from widows coming from different countries, who attended the meeting as well. Readers are also encouraged to feel solidarity with these women.

On behalf of the Advisory Group, I would like to give special thanks to:

- Danar Sri Wijayanti, who played an important role in creating this documentation;
- Elizabeth Fry, who did the proofreading;
- and to the 50 women from the Evangelical Church in Papua (GKI) who were prepared to attend the meeting. Without them, this project would not have been possible.

It is our sincere hope that this documentation conveys a clear picture of how women perceive other women's life, especially that of widows.

We hope you enjoy reading this documentation!

Irene Girsang
Officer for Interregional Women's Programmes

1. Report of Interregional Officer for Women's Work

Meeting of the Women's Working Group (AG) and the Project »Reading the Bible with new eyes«

*By Irene Girsang,
Officer for Interregional Women's Work*

The second meeting of the working group (AG) was held in Jakarta and Papua from June 23rd to July 5th 2011. Five members of the working group (Rev. Rose Marie Ibyishaka (EPR, Ruanda), Rev. Alice Kabugumila (ELCT-NWD, Tanzania), Rev. Betty Sarewo (GKI-TP), Jayanthi David (MC-SL, Sri Lanka) and Rev. Ursula Thomé (EKiR; Germany), together with the UEM officer for interregional women's programmes gathered together to evaluate the interregional programmes that have been implemented so far and to plan future programmes. In addition, those present carried out the project of »Reading the Bible with New Eyes«.

Considering the length of the journey that had been undertaken by each member of the working group to reach Jakarta, we conducted one and a half days of activities in Jakarta before continuing the trip to Papua. The first activity was a meeting held in the office of PGI (Communion of Churches in Indonesia/CCI) Jakarta together with the General Secretary of PGI, Rev. Gomar Gultom, and the head of the Women and Children Bureau, Rev. Krisye Gosal. The meeting gave an opportunity to members of the working group to see and get closer to the work of the PGI as presented by Rev. Gomar Gultom, particularly the role of the PGI in the pluralistic society and situation in Indonesia. In addition, the members also got an insight into the networking system done by the PGI Wom-

en Bureau. Rev. Krisye Gosal also presented some programmes that have been done, are being done, and are going to be done, as well as women's issues that have become the focus of women's work in PGI.

The next activity was a meeting with some women from UEM member churches located in Jakarta. In the meeting, members of the AG had an opportunity to see women's life in the metropolitan city of Indonesia together with their various activities both the church and the community. And of course we spent plenty of time discussing and sharing experiences related to women's issues in various countries (mainly the countries the AG members come from).

After the meeting in Jakarta, the AG meeting was continued in Papua. We stayed in P3W Abepura, a place for training and empowerment of women in *Tanah Papua*. First of all, we evaluated the AG's cooperation with the officer during the previous year. Then we shared information on women's issues and women's activities in each region. After that, the officer reported on women's work in the UEM, particularly interregional programmes that have been implemented, such as the Women to Women programmes in Rwanda and Congo in 2010 and the leadership training conducted in Davao, Philippines. The AG members and the officer evaluated the programmes and together we determined the theme and place for the programmes planned for the future.



Members of the workshop

Understanding more about the life and struggle of women in Papua was one of the goals of the AG meeting. Besides meeting some women activists in Papua who are struggling for women's rights and seeing something of women's life in an isolated village, we also met some women from the grass-roots level in churches. The project »Reading the Bible with new eyes« was prepared to meet our desire to have a meeting with women in churches. We held the meeting of the AG in the morning, then we carried out the project in the afternoon and evening. We also invited ten congregations around our venue in P3W Abepura to take part in this project. Each congregation was asked to send five delegates, then we divided the participants into two groups. The story of the Unjust Judge in Luke 18 became the theme of our meeting. Each group consisted of 25 women. We did the Bible Study on the first day, then on the second day they attended a workshop prepared by AG members. The theme of the lives and struggles of widows was raised by presenting some aspects from different perspectives. The life of widows in Papua and their situation, widows who were victims of the genocide in Rwanda, widows in conflict areas in Sri Lanka, widows in Tanzania and Germany were the focus of our discussions. In the workshop, the participants were given an opportunity to reflect, either in small or large groups, on how the topic related to them personally.

From the two meetings with two different groups, we collected some opinions, stories and prayers drawn up by means of the bibliodrama method, together with some of the reflections done by participants. This is the documentation of the project which will be sent to all women's departments in the UEM member churches. This documentation can be an input for women in the UEM member churches. And it can also be one aspect of what networking methods on the Bible can be used by women.

At the end of the AG meeting, AG members and the women participating in our project prepared and led the Sunday service together, and celebrated it in the GKI church of Padang Bulan. And we chose our activities as the theme of worship.

Our discussions in the working group and in several other groups during the AG meeting went well. Both the AG members and the officer could feel the importance of this cooperation, both for the officer's work and for the work of the members of the AG. The project of »Reading the Bible with new eyes« will be taken up again in the AG meeting in 2012. The ELCT-NWD will host the meeting and the theme to be discussed is the Empowerment of Women.



Reverend Alice Kabugumila (left) and a dancer in Puai village

2. Getting closer to Women in Papua

Arriving in Papua on June 26th 2011 early in the morning, AG members and the officer were welcomed warmly by the big family of P3W (Institution for the Training and Empowerment of Women in the GKI-TP) led by Hermin Rumbrar. Then we attended the Sunday worship in the evening. Rev. Alice Kabugumila from Tanzania was invited to give the sermon, which you may read later on in this book (Helping each other by prayer, page 25). Next, P3W led us in an opening ceremony in which we experienced a creative liturgy by Rachel Tan, a volunteer from the United States. Women were asked to »fill their own vessels« by committing themselves to do something to serve God. This interesting activity can be found under »Filling the Vessels«, [page 8](#).

Besides the Bible Studies led by Rev. Ursula Thomé (Germany) on June 28th and July 1st 2011, which was enriched by a beautiful prayer from women in Africa (see pages 10 and 11), as well as the workshops on June 29th and July 2nd 2011, which you can find on page 23, we also held a meeting with the Papuan Women Network for Human Rights on June 29th 2011. In this meeting they shared some cases of human rights' violations that have been committed in Papua since 1963. One of the efforts to stop violence was the publishing of a book entitled »Stop Sudah!« This book is a documentation containing some testimonies by Papuan women who were victims of violence and human rights' violations from

1963 – 2009. Besides sharing on violence and human rights' violations, the Papuan Women Network for Human Rights also presented a famous handicraft from Papua called »Noken«. It is a bag that has deep meaning, as it symbolises networking and solidarity among people in Papua.

Then, on June 30th 2011, we had a chance to see Lake Sentani and to visit the people there. We were amazed by a welcoming dance directed by the Head of the Puai Tribe representing the hospitality they offer to newcomers. Furthermore, the head of the tribe presented a small boat to Irene Girsang, the officer, as a symbol of brotherhood.



The head of the tribe presented a small boat to Irene Girsang as a symbol of brotherhood.

After words of welcome by the head of the tribe, we went for a meeting with women in Puai village. We experienced warm hospitality from Family Deda, the hosting family that prepared »Papeda« for lunch. The meeting was organised by Mama Luni, a former elder who was also the first woman elder in the congregation. In the meeting we were amazed by the women in that village, who said humbly, »We want to be empowered. Would you please empower us by giving us some training in skills?« The P3W responded very well by cooperating with »Dora« (association for wives of lecturers) to discuss some possible activities to help these women.



Puai village: The hosting family prepared »Papeda« for lunch.

As the facilitator of the meeting with a marginalised group in Puai village, Mama Luni said in an interview that the church should embrace all strata of society. As one body in Christ, the church should remind itself that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. As the first woman elder in the church, Mama Luni has experienced the struggle since the 1980's. At that time she gave her services without any money, which she was genuinely willing to do. Comparing that time to the situation right now, she emphasised that we are now in a situation in which we don't have any financial difficulties. Therefore, it is much easier to serve people. However, the church is trapped into serving rich people only. Sometimes what the church does for widows is just to give them food instead of approaching them personally and offering pastoral counselling.

That is why she was wondering if people serve God but are trapped in a money-oriented mindset, meaning that they are willing to serve when they are given money as a fee. Further, she has realised that many pastors are in-

terested in getting a good position, but they fail to serve marginalised people. Thus marginalised people feel that they shouldn't get involved in the community. That is the problem right now, and it makes church look good on the surface, but it is actually in a bad state in its deeper structure. With regard to that problem, what she suggested is that the church should go back to God and serve all people regardless of their social and economic status, as we are one body in Christ.

Mama Luni's struggle is not hers alone, as she has fellow women church-workers in P3W such as Rev. Betty Sarewo and Hermin Rumbrar. In addition, there are women pastors in Papua whom we met on July 2nd 2011. At that meeting, women pastors said that people respect them as much as they do male pastors. Further, they don't experience any gender discrimination. It shows that women in Papua could play significant roles in the society.

In addition, the Bible Study and workshop also showed that women in Papua are active and smart. They are not only active but also critical participants, for example when Rev. Ursula asked them to discuss in pairs about widows. They came up with the idea that widows are suffering from social discrimination as they have to submit to the husband's family; the widows' opponents could be from their husband's families or women who think that widows will be attractive to their husbands. However, some widows said proudly that even though they are widows they were successful at financing their children's studies and finally got their children well educated. We should be proud of Papua for having these strong and resilient women.

We felt as if time was running out in Papua as we were to leave for our home countries on July 4th 2011. Thus, P3W held a closing service of worship for us. On that occasion, Rev. Rosemary preached about women's solidarity, in which women should help each other in a spirit of sisterhood. Then, Rev. Hermin, as the chairperson of P3W, delivered her speech on behalf of the big family of P3W in particular and GKI-TP in general; she emphasised her happiness at having the project of »Reading the Bible with new eyes« in Papua. Finally, Irene Girsang, the officer, expressed her gratitude for getting closer to women in Papua and she thanked the big family of P3W and the GKI-TP very much for their great hospitality during the event. May God bless the work of P3W to help more women in Papua to be empowered and faithful to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

3. Filling the vessels

Besides the Bible Study, another interesting activity was the opening worship, which was led by Rachel Tan, a volunteer from the United States. The worship was enriched by a drama performed by participants in the long-term course at P3W. The drama told the story from 2 Kings 4:1-7 of the Widow's Olive Oil.

It was about how Elisha performed a miracle for the widow of one of the prophets to release her from her debts. Elisha made so much oil flow from one vessel that it could fill many other vessels. According to Rachel, one of the biggest lessons we can learn from this passage is to be more like Elisha: serving all people and not ministering according to how we might be promoted or praised, but instead serving out of love and because of the need there is in the world. Further, Rachel said that Elisha's only concern was that people might know and experience God's grace and power in their lives. Thus she led us all to consider the question: »How available am I to do the same?« Further, Rachel asked us all not to limit our loving and gracious God by our lack of faith and obedience. Let us ponder whether we are also willing to believe that God can do super-abundantly above all we ask or think, in God's own timing and according to God's perfect understanding. How can we do something to help others in distress and need?

Finally, Rachel distributed pieces of paper which we should think of as vessels, and she asked everyone to fill the vessels by writing down what they can do for others, that is their commitment to God. »How can you give and help someone?« Rachel asked. The participants were so touched that they wrote their commitment on the paper that Rachel had distributed. After they had finished writing, they were asked to come to the front and hang the pieces of paper on the branch of a tree.

Here are some of the texts written by the participants:

- *When I return to my village, I will help pregnant women to wash clothes.*
- *Help the poor, share my food with an orphan street-child, give my clothes to an orphan child, get a job for those who are jobless. I'll also share my money.*
- *Help the villagers suffering from malnutrition to have healthy food.*
- *Compassion, teaching and support to encourage women and girls.*
- *I'll spend my time preaching the Gospel, building a strong communion in Christ, and serving people to get closer to God.*
- *Pray for them all, visit the sick, feed the hungry, take care of orphans, clothe those who are naked, comfort those who are mourning, preach the word of salvation to those who don't believe.*





After the service in Abepura

Another interesting activity was when Rachel led the participants to read the closing prayer she had prepared, which was taken from »Women's Link Magazine«. Here is the prayer:

*We proclaim our economic power
We are bread makers and bread winners
We affirm our responsibility to share the
earth's goods with the earth's people
To build structures of economic justice for all*

*We proclaim our spiritual power
We are healers and holy, priests and prophets
We affirm our responsibility to break bread
And lift a cup in the name of liberation*

*We proclaim our sexual power
We are moral agents who make decisions
about our bodies
We affirm our responsibility to make choices
that promise dignity and reflect love*

*We proclaim our political power
We are voters and change agents
We affirm our responsibility to influence
public policy and to build a new world,
starting with the struggling poor*

*We rejoice in our sisterhood
We strive to be a »discipleship of equals«
We commit ourselves to mutual empowerment.*

4. Opening Prayer at the Bible Study

This is a wonderful prayer created by women from Africa. The prayer was quoted by Rev. Ursula Thomé to start the Bible Study; each woman took part in reading the prayer.

Woman 1 (W 1): I am Eve, the bone of your bone, and the flesh of your flesh
W 2: I am Sarah, the woman who calls you Lord and master
W 3: I am Hagar, your maidservant, your unofficial wife
W 4: I am Leah, the woman you married against your will
W 5: I am Dinah, your only daughter who was raped by Shechem
W 6: I am Tamar, your desperate widow who acted as a sex worker
W 7: I am Ruth, the widow sleeping at your feet, asking for your cover
W 8: I am Bathsheba, raped and married by your king
W 9: I am Vashti, your wife killed so that all women may obey their husbands
W 10: I am Levi's concubine, raped by the mob and cut up by my lover

(All) **We are the broken women of the Hebrew Bible
We are the broken women in a broken world
We are women searching for our own healing**

W 11: I am Mary, the pregnant woman with no place to go
W 12: I am the Samaritan woman with five husbands and none of her own
W 13: I am Martha, the woman who does the cooking when you sit and talk
W 14: I am Mary, the woman who silently anoints your feet with oil

W 15: I am the street woman, washing your feet with my tears
W 16: I am the bent over woman, waiting for your healing touch
W 17: I am the bleeding woman, struggling to touch your garment of power
W 18: I am Anna, the widow praying for liberation in your church
W 19: I am the persistent widow in your courts, crying, »Grant me justice«
W 20: I am Jezebel, the demonised woman, blamed for all evil

(All) **We are women of the New Testament
We are broken women in a broken world
We are women searching for our own healing**

W 21: I am the woman in your home, I'm your wife
W 22: I am the woman in your house, I am your lover, your live-in girlfriend
W 23: I am the woman in your life, I'm your mother
W 24: I am a woman in your workplace, I'm your secretary
W 25: I am a woman in your streets, I am your sex worker
W 26: I am a woman working in your house with no property of my own
W 27: I am the woman in your life with no control over my body
W 28: I am the woman in your bed with a black eye and broken ribs
W 29: I am the woman raped in your house, streets, offices, and church
W 30: I am the woman in your church, cooking, cleaning, clapping and dancing

(All) **We are women of the world**
 We are African women
 And we are Christian women
 We are broken women in a broken world

Reverend Ursula Thomé (left) and Danar Sri Wijayanti (translator)



5. Bible Study

The persistent widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1–8)

UEM Advisory Group, Interregional Women's Programme meeting in 2011 in P3W, Jayapura, West Papua/Indonesia

Led by Rev. Ursula Thomé, Germany (Parish Service for Mission and Ecumenism, Evangelical Church in the Rhineland. Western Ruhr Area – www.gmoe-ruhr.de)

What kind of personal approach do you have when you think about a widow you know personally? A short time of talking (in pairs). Let us meet the widows you have in mind.

1. The Text: Luke 18:1-8

Titles: The unjust judge – the persistent widow – the assertive widow – the widow who asks for her rights – the widow who demands her rights – these titles already show us different aspects of the story and its characters.

What do we know about the situation of a widow in the time of the first Christian congregations? In New Testament times? At the time of Jesus? In Old Testament times?

1.1. Background

The gospel of Luke takes us back to the time 70 years after Christ – after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This victory by the Romans was also a spiritual crisis for the Christian congregations. Was there any hope that with the coming of Jesus the suffering and injustice would end and the new kingdom of God would begin? The presence of Jesus means that the kingdom of God has already started in the midst of our world.



Reverend Ursula Thomé (left) and Reverend Betty Sarewo

The Christian congregations lived in the **situation of Roman occupation and exploitation**. The congregations understood themselves as being part of the Jewish prophetic liberation movement in the context of the Pax Romana – the Roman domination. Luke is called the evangelist of the poor and of the women.

The time of Jesus was a time of Roman domination and oppression for the majority of the people. **The majority was poor, and slavery and violence against the poor was »normal«**. It was a patriarchal economic system of domination (economically, politically, spiritually) and violence.

The **dominant belief was that women are inferior to men** and women must always submit. A woman was seen as the property of her husband. That means that if the husband dies, the woman then becomes part of the ownership/property of his brother. She herself has no rights. She is only protected and accepted as part of the social community of her husband's family. That means she is only a kind of appendix when he dies. She has to fit into his family and be obedient and dependent. If not, she will become poor, she will lose her family's belongings (the family of her husband will take her possessions and even her children), without rights, dependent on charity.

This was not only the situation of widows, but also of other single women who had to work hard to earn their living; most of them were poor. For example Luke 15, 8-10, the parable of the lost silver coin. The woman is searching for her silver coin – the amount of money which she needs to live for a day. Or Luke 21:1-4 the poor widow's offering – two tiny coins – all she had to live on. Or Acts 9:36-43, the story of Tabitha, especially verse 39. Tabitha lived in fellowship with the widows and made shirts and coats with them (in modern lan-

guage we would say: she organised an income-generating project for the widows); when she died the women missed her very much and called Peter to help her rise from the dead. It is a story of the solidarity of women and of the strength and power of the disciples to overcome death and loss of hope. And it tells us something about the life and community of widows in the time of Luke.

And the fact that prostitutes/sex-workers were mentioned shows us that in those times women were forced to sell their bodies to get money for themselves and their children to live on.

They had to work very hard because women only earned half of a man's wages. And a lot of women were slaves of different kinds.

The word of Jesus – to care for widows and orphans – indicates how vulnerable and poor these two groups were in his time. And also in Old Testament times. They needed special care and appreciation.

Already in the first congregations this was one area of conflict – not to forget the widows.

1.2. Explanations of the text

VERSES 1 – 2: The story is told to illustrate persistent prayer and persistent action. In the second verse, both the setting of the story (in a certain city) and one of the characters (the judge) is introduced. The setting is neutral, thus lending itself to universal application. That is, it was *in a certain city* – **it could be any city or place!** Your city, my city, where such characters are to be found. Do such persons exist in your place? Verse 2 explains the character of the judge: »He neither feared God nor had respect for people.« This is asking: How will he serve people or God if he has no respect for either?

VERSE 3: The setting is repeated and another character of the story is introduced: »In that city there was a widow.«

Define a widow: culturally, economically and spiritually.

In a patriarchal society and culture a widow is a woman without a husband, without power. Her husband has died. She has lost her security and rights. She belongs to a group that is regarded as inferior to men. She is in danger of getting lost. She suffers and mourns. She is dependent on his family. Somehow it can become a desperate situation. She is seeking justice.

Do you know widows in your place? Do you know their situation and feelings? Perhaps there are widows here with us listening to the word of God, longing for justice and comfort.

The situation of the widow takes her to this judge, who respects no one. »She kept coming to the judge seeking justice« – this denotes persistence, but it may also denote desperation. She has no choice but to stand up for her rights or give up and lose everything. It also underlines the negligence of the judge.

»**Grant me justice against my opponent**«, said the persistent widow to the judge. Why was she seeking justice? What kind of justice was she seeking? Who was her opponent? The text does not tell us. However, she was a widow. Perhaps we can try to highlight the various injustices that confront widows and their many opponents.

Contextualise the text:

Who do you think are the opponents of this widow in any place?

Find examples in your context! Let us form small groups of three!

It is very important to analyse the situation and see it very clearly, so that we can find a way out with God's help and guidance.

VERSES 4 – 5: The judge ignores her. The judge who has no fear of God or respect for people.

What kind of attitude is this? How can he serve people without respecting them? Do you see such civil servants in your society and church? He is powerful, an important and influential person, a strong man who stands up for justice and rights. What can a poor widow expect from him? Is he faithful and honest? Does he have compassion on her? No, not at all.

However, the persistent widow gets through to the judge. She keeps coming to him. Can we really imagine how exhausting and difficult this was for her? She made the experience of being ignored, but she did not give up.

How does it feel to be ignored by a powerful man/civil servant?

It makes us weak, can make us depressed so that we feel worthless and a nobody. Or it can make us angry about the man's injustice and his behaviour and lead us to protest.

From where does she get the power to keep coming to him?

The strength of desperation – the strength of need and fear – the strength of God, who empowers the weak with his grace? All of those things?



Reverend Alice Kabugumila and Reverend Rose Marie Ibyishaka (middle) after the service in Abeपुरa

He granted her justice, but for the wrong reasons. He wanted to get rid of her. He was not convinced that she had a right to get justice. But he grants her justice.

VERSES 6 – 7: Jesus now gives his interpretation and opinion on such a judge.

He calls him »the unjust judge«. Why is his behaviour unacceptable and unjust?

VERSE 7 gives us the explanation: »And will not God grant justice to the chosen ones who cry to God day and night?« This is a rhetorical question that clearly expects a positive answer. That is – Yes! God will grant justice to widows and to all who cry to him day and night!

Jesus refers to God as a God who grants justice. God is a fair judge, a God of justice. And Jesus makes it clear that God sees the widow as one of the chosen ones who call upon God day and night. And here and also in other parts of the gospel it is very clear that the poor, the underprivileged, the marginalised, the oppressed – including widows – are God's chosen ones!!! This is especially important in times of HIV/Aids, where many young women become widows and are the victims of an oppressive patriarchal culture which does not accept that widows are women who have rights in church and society.

So God's attentiveness and service, God's justice, means that in all our cities and congregations we do not have any right to deny the rights of widows! It means to care for widows and to empower them to fight for their rights. To be persistent and keep coming to the judge – even if he is unjust – makes a difference in the life of a widow.

And we can imagine that it is hard work for a sad woman who needs comfort and solidarity to fight for justice on her own. And it also means understanding that in special situations we have to become very active ourselves if we want to get back something we have lost.

We do not know how she acted or talked to the judge; it would be imaginable that she was crying, weeping, shouting, keeping silent, but standing in front of him, arguing, discussing, asking, praying, ... We do not know the whole story.

What would we do in front of a judge to get what we want – i.e. justice?

How can we be encouraged to be persistent when we want to get what we need – justice and compassion?

We know that she was successful at last – she got her rights!

And Luke tells us with this story that this is the kind of prayer we should make – not giving up, but staying persistent! God will listen and grant justice to the poor and oppressed.

And to me it also encourages us women to understand that God's power empowers the weak. (2 Corinthean 12:9 »Meine Kraft ist in den Schwachen mächtig.« »My power is greatest when you are weak.«)

We can get the power and strength to fight for our concerns or needs. Some of our personal ways we have to go on our own, sometimes alone – standing up for our rights and not accepting the role of a victim and keeping quiet. For some of our ways we need the solidarity of other women and also of other men! For example, in the task of overcoming traditional gender roles which keep women in an inferior position. Even if we do not convince every (powerful) man, if we can get him moving in the direction of gender justice – even if he does so for the wrong reasons – that is a step forward. And it may help us to see ourselves with God's eyes: To see us with God's eyes as an image of God – which is what we are – female humans with rights and choices – with dignity! On a level with male humans!

Perhaps you will want to talk about your experiences in the different workshops tomorrow.

(Four workshops with different methods of learning:

1. Drama
2. Being creative by working with filo dough
3. Prayer
4. Story-telling)

To summarise I will note some questions to apply the word of God to ourselves:

1. What can we learn?

- That we fail God whenever we entertain oppression.
- That justice delayed is justice denied.
- That God cares for the marginalised and expects us to care too.
- That in many cities there are desperate widows and powerful people who neglect their duties.

2. What do we have to confess?

- That many times we have played the unjust judge.
- We have not listened to the cries of our widows.
- We have not set up services to meet the needs of widows.
- We have not been advocates for the needs of widows.



Bible Study

3. What can we be thankful for?

- For a God who cares, listens, and does justice to all widows.
- For the families that have protected their widows.
- For assertive and persistent widows who seek justice.
- For children who have supported their widowed mothers.
- For NGOs that work with and for the needs of widows.

4. What can we pray for?

- For the protection of vulnerable widows.
- For a church, government and NGOs that are supportive.
- For the promotion of cultures that protect widows.

...to apply the word of God to the congregation:

5. What can we feel?

Compassion for widows.

6. What can we be?

- A listening church and society.
- A church granting justice to widows and other marginalised persons.

7. What can we do?

- Set up legal and counselling services for dispossessed widows.
- Set up day-care centres for widows who are HIV/Aids positive.
- Carry out home-based care for sick and bedridden widows.
- Work with NGOs serving widows.
- Fight gender injustice which denies widows and other women their rights.
- Sponsor widows in income-generating projects.
- Actively oppose cultural practices that hinder the remarriage of widows.
- Actively oppose cultural practices that deny widows the right to inherit their husband's property.
- Actively oppose government rules that make widows perpetual minors to their sons.
- Revise church views about single mothers, widows and remarriage.
- Campaign for the legal protection of widows.

How can we be persistent women – empowered to stand up for human rights, for women's rights? What kind of support and help do we need?

References:

Africa Praying – A Handbook on HIV/AIDS. Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy, edited by Musa W. Dube, First Printing 2003 Yaoundé, Cameroon; Second Printing 2004, Geneva, WCC, Page: 196–200.

Widows and Widowhood, by Musa W. Dube, United Methodist Church, Botswana, New Testament Lecturer.
The Bible Study follows the structure and ideas from the chapter »Widows and Widowhood« by Musa W. Dube.

6. Workshops

There were two workshop sessions in which the women were divided into four groups.

Group 1: Drama

This group was led by Rev. Alice Kabugumila (ELCT-NWD, Tanzania). She is one of the first woman theologians in Africa and she waited for 34 years to be ordained. Talking about widows in her country, she said that many of the widows in Tanzania have difficulties, especially those who don't have any income. Therefore, the church has a programme to help widows, especially those whose husbands have died because of HIV/Aids. In addition, she encourages widows to strengthen solidarity among the widows themselves in the form of an organisation whose members are all widows. Thus, widows can share and motivate each other to earn a living.

In her sympathetic feelings for widows, Rev. Alice led the group in a discussion on how to perform the drama. Here are some of the steps taken by Rev. Alice:

1. During the orientation phase, the group made a discussion to outline the characters of the widow and the judge. The widow seems to be strong at first. She is brave enough to visit the judge as she has a concern. But she is also worried when the judge ignores her. Maybe the judge thinks that the widow is not so important; she is just wasting his time
2. During the complication phase, the group had a discussion to define the widow's problem. Alice led them to contextualise the drama in a present-day situation in which the widow has one opponent: her husband's relative who has taken possession of her. Then, to make the drama come alive, the group agreed to have other characters such as the widow's child and one of



the widow's best friends. The widow's best friend was the one who took care of her child when she went to see the judge. The climax of the drama was when the widow had a quarrel with her husband's relative and asked to be granted her right to get back to her house to live in, but the husband's relative chased her away. Then she went to the judge, but the judge ignored her. She insisted on seeing the judge again to ask for her rights.

3. In the resolution phase, the group performed a happy ending, in which the judge took pity on her after she had been there five times. The judge helped the widow, not just because she was helpless but because she was persistent enough to see him five times.

Group 2: Creativity (Handicrafts)

The group was led by Jayanthi David (MC-SL, Sri Lanka). Asked about widows in Sri Lanka, she shared that widows are crying silently, owing to the world around them. More women are becoming widows; some of them are war-widows. War widows waited until they realised that their husbands would not come home. Then they get a small amount of money which is insufficient for them to live on.

Thus the churches started a programme for widows, but it is only a short programme to empower widows to be supported. However, the financial crisis is very high. As a result, widows have no hope but to search for a better life. Since the churches have financial crises they have no money. Fortunately, rich people share their money with the widows through the church. However, the widows' suffering gets worse when they are sick. When widows are ill, their medical treatment cannot be paid for since they don't have any money. If they have a serious illness, they have to go on a waiting list to be helped by the government.

In accordance with her service for widows in Sri Lanka, Jayanthi led women to take up some activities. Two activities were covered in this group – meditation and bracelet making. She said that when people go through times of struggle, there are also psychological aspects and so by doing activities they can release their stress psychologically. The creative work also helps widows to talk about their problems and find relief in their minds.

To do meditation, the method she applied was to invite the women to meditate and then to lead them in ten minutes of prayer. Then struggles in a woman's journey through life were shared. They included the difficulties a woman faces and how she overcomes these problems with patience. After sharing, the dough made of flour was distributed to them along with a tray and they were asked to make a model of the struggles. Each woman started to think more and more about their struggles and then started to work with the dough. After making something, each of the women explained her own life story. Jayanthi did counselling with them on how they could get through the struggles together with God's help by praying.



Meditation

- The first woman described her daughter being infected with dengue fever and the struggles they confronted. She was near to death for four days; her parents prayed for her continually; even the doctors had given up, but God brought her back to life.
- The second woman described the struggle to put food on the table. She described preparing food for the family so that they could all eat together. It is the struggle she had to bear.
- The third woman came up with the struggle of building a house. It was God who was the foundation in building her house and her family throughout all struggles and hardship.
- The fourth woman is a widow who described the love she has for her children. She nurtures her children like a flower even in times of trouble or hardship. She also described the sadness of losing two of her children.
- The fifth woman was sad because of the struggles she has with her husband. But she reminds herself that it was God who made the marriage. She wants to take care of her marriage and she waits each day for God's words from the Bible, which strengthen her to go through her married life.

There were six women in the second workshops. Here is what they came up with:

- The first woman made two hearts, one was black and the other was red. She explained the struggles she underwent when she had the black heart. But she prayed and God gave her a clean and loving heart so that she allowed Jesus to work in her heart. She was happy and her struggles were over.
- The second woman made the heart's pathway she had to go through in bringing up her children. She made a path and on it she described how her family was struggling to cope with day to day life.
- The third woman told the story of how at midnight a snake came to her house and then there was a frog under her bed. It gave her sleepless nights and she explained the tears she had to go through all her life.
- The fourth woman made bowls. One was empty and the other was full. It was her struggle in life to make it full, to have a contented life.
- The fifth made a dog on her tray. She told us that she now lives with her dog and the struggle she confronted when her dog got sick. She described how she has to look after the dog. She realised that she should take care of her family as well as she looks after her sick dog.
- The sixth woman made a lighted candle and a house. She explained the struggle they go through when darkness surrounds their house. She wishes for light in her house every day. They pray for it.





Necklaces in the P3W shop

Bracelet Making

Both at the first and second workshops, all the women enjoyed making a bracelet and completing it. Some made necklaces too.

Jayanthi said that making a bracelet is good for them as it builds up concentration, passion, and alertness. The struggles they underwent while making the bracelets! They dropped the beads, threaded them on the wrong way, put the wrong colours, but after all the struggles, finally made a beautiful bracelet.

In other words, the struggles and hardship a woman goes through alone were explained and she overcame them alone, finally making a beautiful bracelet. As we go on our journey through life, we face obstacles; we may take a wrong path and there may be tears. But God makes a way and helps us in our lives to make them beautiful. He makes all things possible.



Group 3: Prayer

The group was led by Rose Marie Ibyishaka (EPR, Rwanda). Sharing about women in her country, she said that women in Rwanda are struggling in their lives because most of them are widows. Others are single mothers.

They don't have a husband because of their history in which there was genocide in 1994 against the Tutsi. The genocide happened and people are suffering from the consequences of that genocide. All Rwandese suffer from this genocide but the worst victims are women. She emphasised that many women live alone, some because they are widows. Others live alone because maybe their husbands are in prison.

Maybe they run away; they don't know where their husbands are. Women struggle with how they can bring up their children, how they can survive after this dangerous event.

Thus, her hope for Rwanda's women is that they can live in dignity and have their human rights, because if women aren't financially independent, then they won't be respected. Therefore, she thinks that women should be financially independent. She wishes men and women to be partners and live in a peaceful society with human dignity and mutual respect.

Accordingly, Rev. Rose Marie suggested to the women in the group that they should earn their own income. To run the group work, first of all she led the women to get to know each other. She made sure that all were sitting comfortably to make it easy for them to communicate. Then, after welcoming the women to the group, Rose Marie explained the task of the prayer group, which is to pray.

She started with an explanation that prayer is in the deeper side of us, to be in touch with our creator, with our environment. She also emphasised that we belong to one family and we are one body in Christ. Therefore, what we share in the women's group at church is something to keep to ourselves. After that, some empty sheets of paper were distributed to the women in the group to be filled up with prayers. After a time of silence to write the prayers, the women were invited to share what they wanted to about their prayers.

As Rose Marie had emphasised that we must keep the trust given by our fellow women by keeping silent about what they have shared, women felt free to share their problems. They not only shared each other's prayers but also shared problems they were struggling with. Responding to some problems expressed, Rev. Rose Marie did counselling on them as well as praying for them. Some women made a prayer based on the prayer they had learned in the Bible Study.

Here are some prayers from women in the 1st and 2nd workshops:

*I'm a woman in your institution,
I'm your subordinate*

*I'm a young woman you treated as your wife,
you are my sugar daddy*

*I'm a woman in your family;
I'm your sister in law*

*I'm a Papuan woman who is under the power
of a drunken husband*

*I'm an oppressed woman who gets
physical abuse from her husband*

Another woman made a prayer like a wonderful poem. Here is the prayer:

*Merciful Lord,
there are times
when women are each other's opponents.
Help us to overcome
bad feelings and fear
that the other woman will be a danger for my life.
Help us to share and
learn to be in solidarity
with other women
even if they could not
become my friends.
The other woman is what I am – a normal woman.
Help us to learn to
confront each other in
a non-violent way
so that we all have
a place to live peacefully.*

Some others wrote the prayers in several paragraphs. Here is one of the prayers:

Father, we are women taken from men's ribs and we are weak. We are often oppressed and the victims of violence. Please give us strength to cope with all the pain.

We also pray for widows in our church, in our community, and all over the world. We know that you give the widows a right, the freedom to have a family life, the freedom to choose the best thing from themselves and their children. May the Lord always protect the widows and their children; May they be granted their rights to be independent in deciding about their own lives.

We also pray for church workers. May the Lord guide them to take part in doing ministry to widows in their congregations, not only widows and their children but also orphans.

We also pray for the government as the representative of God in our region. May the government be equipped with wisdom to make a policy that helps widows, orphans, and poor people. May the Holy Spirit help the government to serve marginalised people. Amen



Group 4: Story-telling

This group was led by Rev. Betty Sarewo (GKI-TP). As soon as she finished her postgraduate master programme in Sociology and Religion from Satya Wacana University in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia, she returned to her homeland and dedicated her life to serving people in Papua. Her remarkably significant work can clearly be seen in the work of P3W (Institution for Women Training and Empowerment under the GKI-TP). Together with Rev. Hermin and other church workers, she works hard to empower women in Papua.

Leading the group, Rev. Betty encouraged them to discuss some stories about widows. The participants were free to come up with any kind of story related to widows that came to their mind. The participants were happy to share stories and later presented the stories in front of other groups in the plenary.

Here are some stories from the 1st and 2nd workshops:

It's a story about a widow with two sons. Both of them are unemployed and they always take the mother's money. When the widow is asking the elders for diaconal financial help from the congregation, they don't want to give her any money because the church took the bad attitudes of her sons into account.

It's a story about a widow with children. She is 83 years old. She is a very active member in the church. However, her children took her pension and also her house. They forced her to leave her house and she had to live in a very small place near the house. The church doesn't know how to help her.

It's a story about a widow who has only one daughter. The daughter is a pastor. She wants to marry. Her mother doesn't want her to marry, and she got sick. She had invested much money in the daughter and made it possible for the daughter to become a pastor. She is very proud of her daughter. That's why she is afraid of losing her daughter. If her daughter gets married, the husband's family gives her the dowry. Then, as she has received the dowry, the daughter belongs to another family. She can't be proud of the daughter any more.

It's an inspiring story on women's solidarity and sisterhood. It's about a poor widow from Timika. Nobody is concerned about her. The cost of living in Timika is very high and she earns a living by working from door to door as a household servant. She washes other people's clothes. Then the widow was ordered to wash the church's curtains and the pastors' gown. One day, her son was accused of making a girl pregnant. The girl is the daughter of a very powerful person in that area. Her family would send him to jail. The widow was struggling to defend her son. Seeing the problem, there is a helpful woman who supported her to fight for her rights and she succeeded. The kind-hearted woman is doing her best to defend the rights of widows. She insists that widows should be united and they deserve to have others concerned about them.

7. Helping each other with prayer



On Sunday, June 26th 2011, the officer and the Advisory Group attended Sunday Worship and Reverend Alice Kabugumila was invited to deliver the sermon on 2 Corinthians 1:8 – 11.

There were ten points covered in the sermon such as:

1. In this text Paul is mentioning two important points which we are going to meditate upon. The first point is about the result of his suffering, what came out after he had got many problems, and the second point is about his need of prayer from his fellow Christians.
2. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians when he was facing several tribulations. He had a lot of enemies because of preaching the Gospel. Many times he was opposed, he was denied – he was always in conflict with Jewish religious leaders.
3. The most extraordinary thing about this passage is that Paul did not want to speak openly about the nature of his sufferings. We don't know exactly what happened to him while he was in Asia. What we learn from his words is that something overwhelming happened to him and it was almost unbearable.
4. Maybe, for Paul, mentioning the problems was not such a big issue as reporting what he experienced through that suffering. In that case, Paul is precisely emphasising the outcome of his terrible experience.
5. He mentions that whatever terrible thing it was, it drove him back to God. There are many Christians who go away from God whenever they get problems, in times of trouble they feel that God has left them, God does not care for them anymore and so they decide to go away from God and separate themselves from the church. But for Paul, the problems and the sufferings demonstrated to him his total dependence on God. This should be quite true even for us; we usually notice who is a real friend in times of trouble. As English speaking people we have a proverb: »A friend in need is a friend indeed«, or the other way around »a friend indeed is a friend in need«. Of course nobody wants to have problems but whenever we are in difficulties and experiencing hard times, they help to show us how much we need God.
6. As a result, Paul had unshakable confidence in God. He came to realise what God could do for him. He was convinced that if God could bring him through that affliction, He could bring him through anything else, no matter how big it is.
7. When we realise what God has done and what he is doing for us then we gain confidence in him. We testify of his wonderful love to us. In this way many people come to know him through us.
8. Finally, Paul requested his fellow Christians in Corinth to pray for him. He did not demand money, food, or clothing although these were essential needs for him at that time.
9. We may have very little to give to our friends. However few of these worldly treasures we may possess, we may give our friends the priceless treasure of our prayers. We come from different countries and backgrounds. It is not easy to visit each other frequently and exchange gifts. What we need most is to pray for each other.
10. Paul used to pray much for his fellow Christians in different churches. We read this in almost all of his letters. Let us ask God to help us to find time to pray for ourselves but also time to pray for others.

Picture Gallery: The beauty of Papua



Reverend Betty Sarewo (right) with some Pastors of the GKI-TP



(from l. to r.) Danar Sri Wijayanti, Editor, Reverend Evalina Pasaribu (HKI), Jakarta, Reverend Alice Kabugumila (ELCT/NWD, Tanzania), Reverend Rose Marie Ibyishaka (EPR, Rwanda), Reverend Krisye Gosal, S.Th, Executive Secretary CCI Women's and Children Department, Jakarta, Reverend Ursula Thomé (EKiR, Germany), Irene Girsang, Officer for Interregional Women Programmes (UEM, Germany), Jayanthi David (MC-SL, Sri Lanka)



Women sharing on violence and human rights' violations in P3W, Abepura



(l.) Reverend Rose Marie Ibyishaka (EPR, Rwanda) in the prayer group



Welcoming dance in Puai village



Welcoming dance directed by the head of the Puai tribe representing the hospitality they offer to newcomers.



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