

The Lutheran World Federation Gender Justice Policy – implementation process in member churches

The Lutheran World Federation is committed to being inclusive and enabling the full and equitable participation of women and men in church life and society, and in its decision-making structures, processes, activities and programs. The LWF Gender Justice Policy (GJP), approved by the LWF Council in 2013, is a tool to enhance the communion's journey towards inclusiveness. Now a year on, this report gives examples of good practice and highlights the progress that has been made by member churches in putting the empowerment of women and gender justice at the core of their parishes, congregations and structures.

Evangelical Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) – Gender Justice in Practice

Rev. Elitha Moyo, coordinator of the Evangelical Church in Zimbabwe's (ELCZ) Gender Justice Project, which was based on the LWF's document, said several gender awareness training workshops for pastors and bishops were held in her dioceses since the adoption of the LWF Gender Justice Policy. The ELCZ has also opposed violence against women through Bible studies and at church meetings. The GJP, as a whole, has helped guide and direct the ELCZ in promoting the participation of women and equality, Moyo said.

"Ordained female pastors have been posted to big and challenging parishes," Moyo said. "One female pastor contested the post of bishop. Although she wasn't successful, the fact that she reached the finals was a major achievement for us."

Many challenges, however, remain for women both at the national church level and in Zimbabwe's political and social arenas.

"Though faith based organizations in Zimbabwe have mostly pursued policies that are meant to address gender imbalances, very few have put this into practice," she added. "For example, the umbrella body representing churches, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, has only one female bishop at the top of its leadership. Most female pastors are at the lower level of the hierarchy."

Church of Norway - Gender Justice Principles Reflect Strategic Plans

The National Council of the Church of Norway has adapted its strategic plans from 2009 to 2014 to include aspects of LWF policy in this area.

"The work of the LWF and WCC on gender equality has been very important for the Church of Norway. We who work in this field look to the ecumenical organizations for inspiration and support. We find it, therefore, inspiring to receive the GJP from the LWF," said WICAS coordinator Synnove Hinnaland Stendal. "Since the GJP is a gift from LWF, the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations has been more involved in the revising of the Norwegian strategy plan than it otherwise might have been. This has been mutually very fruitful and we hope to follow up by working closer together when the revised plan is implemented in the various parts of the church."

“Formally understood, there is full gender equality within the Church of Norway. The situation, now, however, is more subtle than it was in the years of the ‘Ecumenical Decade 1988-1998 Churches in Solidarity with Women,’ for instance. It is not easy to point out areas where gender injustice is very clearly demonstrated. This does not mean that male dominance in the church has ended,” Hinnaland Stendal said. “In spite of systematic work for gender inclusive language in liturgy for years, the recently revised liturgy of the Church of Norway hardly makes a difference in this respect.”

“It is important that the church as a whole is reminded of the importance of gender justice and equality so that it more actively can support these values. The GJP is such a reminder,” she added. “The approach in GJP is not a new one in the Norwegian setting. The methodology is a good one and one that we in some way or other, especially in earlier periods, have employed. We hope that GJP also will strengthen the implementation of the plan we now are revising. The GJP offers some helpful tools to be used on the national, regional and local level.”

LFD Brazil – LWF Gender Justice Policy as a Tool for its Processes and Policy

At the Lutheran Foundation of Diaconia (LFD) in Brazil, the GJP “has been used as a source for elaborating the LFD’s own policy and also in staff training and in seminars and workshops carried out by the LFD,” said LWF Council member Cibele Kuss. The LWF GJP has been “thoroughly read and studied,” and its methodology involved “a historical process of reflection, showing that the gender policy did not arise artificially, suddenly, but as an organic process.”

“In the forthcoming PMA meeting in July, there will be a proposal that gender justice becomes an LFD program of integrated actions in management, capacity building and advocacy,” she added.

In Brazil, “one of the major, perhaps the biggest challenge in confronting gender injustice and violence against women is directly related with the cultural Brazilian perception that such violence is understood as acceptable,” Kuss said. It is regarded “as something inherent to the society’s culture and to the relationships between men and women.”

The LWF and LFD policies “give inspiration and enhance the process of raising awareness and dialogue about the life of people in congregations, parishes, and on all platforms of governance,” she said. “Both policies approach the challenge of overcoming violence, and that is a principle that brings about specific initiatives in church life and also gives impulses for projects and strategic partnerships, which can be supported and followed up in the LFD realm.”