

**LWF Department for Mission and Development  
Women in Church and Society (WICAS)**

**GENDER: AN OVERVIEW**

Even though women and men are created in God's image, gender differences have been the basis on which barriers have been built to deny women's gifts within church and society and to exclude women from full participation and leadership. The whole church and the whole of society have suffered. The following areas provide approaches to the transformation of historical inequalities, from the perspective of an inclusive communion.

- Concept of Gender
- Mainstreaming Gender
- Gender and Theology
- Gender and Power
- Gender Dimension in Sustainable Development
- Positive Masculine Profile

*Links to additional information on these topics are available on the WICAS Welcome page on the LWF Web site ([www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)).*

**Concept of Gender**

For ages, humankind has been socialized into believing that the different roles and status accorded to men and women in society are determined by one's biology, i.e. sex, and that they are natural and constant and therefore not changeable. However, many roles are not restricted to one sex, and roles attributed to the sexes change with time, culture, and region. Like the inequalities that exist between classes and races, inequalities between women and men are created by historical constructs and therefore can be questioned, challenged and changed. In short, **gender** is defined by social differences between men and women. It is a learned and enforced behavior. It varies with culture and within culture. It changes over time.

**Mainstreaming Gender**

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy that aims to accelerate progress toward equality between women and men. It does this by bringing gender equality goals and women's perspectives into the center of decision-making for policy and programming. These intentional efforts are informed by studies and analysis that use the lens of gender equality to clarify choices, while mandating that both women and men participate fully in planning and making decisions. Changes in governance and practical operations are required to actively promote gender equality.

**Gender and Theology**

“The understanding of gender in society has affected our understanding of God, the Scriptures, the teaching and practices of the church and our relationship as men as women with one another. For ages people have debated the roles and functions of women and men in the home, church and

society, speculating on whether these are God-prescribed or culturally-determined.” (*Gender and the Theology of the Churches*, page 1)

The WICAS Desk convened an international consultation in 2001 with the theme, “Engendering Theological Education for Transformation,” as follow-up to the LWF Global Consultation on Re-visioning Theological Education, which met in 1999.

## **Gender and Power**

Whether young girls or adults, women are the group most affected by any form of unjust structures, conflict and economic difficulties. They are also the most vulnerable as victims of harmful cultural and traditional practices; as easy targets for rape during war; and as commercial sex workers. As homemakers and care providers, they also bear the heavy responsibility of sustaining communities even when they themselves have to deal with HIV and AIDS related illnesses.

“PositHIVe Church,” an LWI Special Issue in November 2005, includes reflections (pages 16-18) on the different challenges facing women, with regard to the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

## **Gender Dimension in Sustainable Development**

The LWF Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2000, articulate a holistic approach in addressing general principles of sustainable development as well as specific dimensions of human rights, gender, environment and communication.

The gender dimension comprises eight guiding principles, including:

- Sustainable development cannot be gender-neutral.
- Sustainable development processes require that the root causes of inequality between men and women are addressed and acted upon.
- All assessment, planning, monitoring and evaluation in development work require a gender perspective and analysis that values the work and experience of women.

These principles and additional specific commitments are applied to all LWF Project Work.

## **Positive Masculine Profile**

The LWF Tenth Assembly in 2003 made a commitment to “challenge sexual stereotypes and raise gender issues early in the life of youth, seeking to build a just community of women and men.” Positive masculine profiles are those models that show the efforts of men engaged in changing their thinking and behavior, alone or in groups, in an effort to bring in gender equality.

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