

# IFENDU HIGHLIGHTS

*Newsletter* of Ifendu for Women's Development

Volume II, December 2007

*Educating for gender equality; transforming Community;  
That all may have life and live it to the full*

## ***From the Editor's Desk***

IFE-NDU, in Igbo language, means 'the light of life,' the saving light of awareness. IFENDU envisions a new world in which women's full human identity is acknowledged both in theory and in practice; men and women are valued equally and work together harmoniously as co-equal partners; where gender equality is understood not as biological uniformity but as equal opportunities. It is providential that the Missio sponsored follow-up gender advocacy workshop for Clergy/Men and Women Religious which will be co-facilitated by the Ujamaa Centre and IFENDU teams coincides with the international day of campaign for the eradication of violence against women, 25<sup>th</sup> November. In this issue, *Ifendu Highlights* brings you news of this and other activities which continue to give rays of hope to women, men and youth.

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## **Women's Leadership Seminar in Makurdi**

Sister Rose Uchem, the executive director of Ifendu for women's Development (IFENDU), conducted a leadership seminar for young missionary women preparing to make their solemn commitment in their order, the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary. The seminar, which took place in Makurdi, lasted from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2007, explored women's authority, role and responsibility. It aimed at enabling the participants to gain a deeper understanding and to increase their capacity for a more Christ-centred leadership in the Church and world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To this end, a number of steps and processes were employed. It began with a prayerful gathering in of participants' expectations, hopes and concerns; consensus on seminar aims and objectives;

methodology, context and the content. The methodology was participative and analytical, using the 'see-judge-act' model.

Participants expressed hopes that they would leave the seminar more enlightened and better equipped for a more fulfilled life as women religious while remaining humble and humane in their interactions with people. Their concerns and fears were that the topic might not be stressful for them and that they might not discover too many surprises and shocks; also that it might not be only theory. Among their collated expectations were the following: Gain new insights into world issues and happenings around us, get a clearer understanding of women issues in the Church and in the world; increase our ability to face the new challenges before us as women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; raise practical issues concerning women in general and particularly women religious; gain insight into how to handle issues amicably and how to represent Christ in the world of today.

Participants described their context as the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, characterized by: the following: growing terrorism, world wars, increasing participation of women in governance and public life, paradigm shift in mission, a growing awareness and speaking out on women's issues such FGM, violence against women and so on; a world that is often presented negatively as ephemeral, temporal, not lasting; the body as evil, dangerous, to be avoided, escaped from, and so on. The other world is presumed to be real, lasting, good etc. souls, heaven, angels, and saints. Yet an updated/renewed vision of the world is wholistic; the human person is an integrated body/soul/spirit entity.



### **Explanation of Relevant Terms**

The content of the workshop began with explanation of some relevant terms, identification of problems and obstacles to women's creative leadership; and finally evaluation and recommendations. The meaning of some terms was explored, using associations rather than definitions. Authority involves the exercise of power in a group; entails leadership and membership; the power to act to lead a group to accomplish its mission. Authority is a positive and is different from authoritarianism and domineering which are an abuse of power. Role consists of a part played by leaders or members in a group. It entails participation, involvement. Responsibility connotes: taking up a role, active involvement; readiness and willingness to accept the consequences of one's choices and decisions.

### **Perceptions of women**

In the experience and observation of the participants, the degree of appreciation of women varies in different localities. If rated in percentages, it would be something like this. In some areas, women are appreciated because of motherhood and care. 35 % positive and 65 % negative; 65 % positive and 35 % negative; in other areas 50/50; yet in

others, 70/30; 30/70; 20/80; 80/20 and so on. On the whole it is clear that while there are positive perceptions, the major perception of women in many of our cultural areas is largely negative. This perception is carried over into the Church; where the Church is sometimes viewed as a building, sanctuary or other times, as people of God, priests/religious, and laity. The issue of roles, 'who does what?' is very important.

### **Problems and obstacles to women's leadership**

The problems and obstacles to women's exercise of leadership were identified as complex. However, the major part consists of gender issues, which include women's obstacle to themselves in the form of internalized oppression. Internalized oppression is the cumulative impact of male oppression of women on their psyche, conditioning them to act against themselves and to take this as normal and so try to stop any attempts to change this situation.

### **Root cause analysis**

All the oppressions women experience both from men and from other women can be traced to gender inequality; the fact that the male and female are not equally valued. The male is rated more highly and accorded more rights, privileges and benefits than the female. This leads to all kinds of intimidation, aggression and violence, including early marriage, marriage under pressure; wife beating; marry many wives; domestic work being left to women and girls while men/boys relax, play, and get drunk; endangering women's health; and leaving women in poverty, to say nothing of increased risk of getting infected with HIV OR being left with the burden of caring for spouse or family member living with HIV/AIDS, with no assurance of being cared for when ill. Another big obstacle to women's leadership is rigid cultures and traditions which promote male control over females and their exclusion from vital information and decision-making processes, from many benefits, activities, rights and responsibilities that make life fully human; leaving many women in illiteracy, ignorance, and lack of formal education. All these result to inferiority complex, low self-esteem and low status of women constituting a major block to women's exercise of leadership, authority, role and responsibility in the church and society.

### **Evaluation**

At the end of the seminar, the participants described their experiences as enjoyable, enriching, empowering, enlightening, and an eye-opener. Their comments included the following. "I found the mode of presentation and facilitation helpful; likewise, the reflective climate in which we shared."

### **Conclusion and recommended solutions**

The first step to solving the problem of women's low participation in leadership is to recognize that there has been a paradigm shift. Thomas Kuhn describes paradigm shift as a time when an earlier belief is no longer working, and a new one has begun to replace it, bringing with it new theories and new understandings of the underlying realities. Formerly, the image of the world was an immovable flat disc resting on the abyss of deep sea waters and supported by huge pillars. Now we know that the earth is spherical rotating on its axis while revolving on its orbit around the sun; a new piece of knowledge.

Thus, everyone must recognize and accept that the male headship model of society must give way to the equal partnership model. The male headship concept rested on the assumption of female inferiority and male superiority. This has been proved false, sinful and not in keeping with the kernel of the gospel message of Christ. The gospel image of man and women is that of equality, partnership, participation and full involvement and is counter-cultural. It means that woman is a full human being who can play her part in the governance of her society and should not be debarred from exercising her abilities to full capacity. It also means that where oppressive cultures and legislations have stunted women's leadership dispositions and abilities and confidence they should be trained to increase their capacity and readiness to assume and exercise leadership roles.

Finally, regarding the fear some people have about a possible situation of chaos if men are no longer permanently designated as leaders, it would be helpful to borrow a leaf from some ecclesiastical communities which have, to a great extent, done away with 'superiorship' models of leadership. They have adopted a participative model of leadership. In this model, the leadership post is rotated through a process of democratic elections. Decision-making is shared and is not the exclusive preserve of any one person or sub-group. This has the potential of bringing us closer to what Jesus originally envisaged when he admonished his first followers: "You know that among the gentiles their so-called rulers lord it over them and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. You must be servants of each other" (Mark 10: 41-45 paraphrased). If communities, worldwide, should adopt a leadership model of 'a partnership of equals,' it will go a long way towards reshaping the human imagination. Such a participative leadership model will recognize the equal humanity and agency of women and men. Leadership roles will be determined not by sex any more but rather by personal charisma, leadership gifts and training. A leadership model of 'a partnership of equals' will lead not only towards an inclusive vision of Church and society, but also a radical transformation of the entire human community.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING FOR IFENDU STAFF**



As one of its objectives of promoting capacity building of women, IFENDU for women's Development sent two of her staff for a 2-day training workshop on "Research Proposal Writing" organized by CiSGHAN in collaboration with Global Fund for Women at Barry Gold Hotel New Haven Enugu. The workshop, which ran from 26th-27th, July 2007, had 94 participants drawn from NGOs within Enugu State. Topics treated included logical project framework, development of project

goals and objectives, work plan, budgeting, and common short falls that are cited by the reviewers were discussed. The participants learnt that carrying out a successful development project in a professional way demands a lot of work before the implementation. They came to know tools that help in planning and evaluation.

## **156 YOUTHS SENSITIZED ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING**



Sr. Rose Uchem and her IFENDU team sensitized 156 youths on the subject of human trafficking at the invitation of the Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON) of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Maryland, Enugu as they celebrated their youth week on 21st August, 2007. The exercise aimed at empowering the youths with the knowledge of the real facts on human trafficking to enable them to safeguard themselves against being trapped. Sr. Rose in her speech enlightened the youths on the meaning, the causes, the dangers and solutions to stem the scourge.

The points highlighted ranged from the trap set by family friends and relations to sexual/economic exploitations, violation of fundamental human rights, globalization of the sex industry without borders, poverty as the root cause, greed, men's demand for sex, hypocrisy on the side

of many governments, and some experiences of victims which include low self esteem.

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participants made contributions towards the solution to the problem such government intervention by providing adequate employment opportunities in country, possession of high esteem by the youths, and modest dressing. Some also questions, which were made to them by the team group. Ngozi Ojih, MSHR, in answering one of the questions gave a live

experience of the victims in Ethiopia from where she had returned on home leave.



The training had in attendance, 156 participants (94 girls and 64 boys). They expressed their gratitude to the director and the team for the empowerment and declared that the training was highly important to correct the escalating social evil on the globe.

Sr. Rose gave the participants the addresses and phone numbers of the

National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Person and other Related Matters (NAPTIP) in case they should see any one committing or attempting to commit the said crime

## Conference of the Circle of African Women



**Theologians in Cameroon**





### The 4<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Conference of the Circle of African Women

Theologians took place 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2007, in Yaounde, Cameroon on the theme, 'Woman, the Girl-child and HIV/AIDS.' Sr. Rose Uchem, executive director of Ifendu for Women's Development, (IFENDU) was one of 250 participants the conference. The conference featured panel of African male theologians. Professor Maluleke made a presentation on the challenge of transforming masculinities. He gave personal



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testimonies of their socialization from childhood and how they picked up a sense of what it means to be a man; how that has been destructive; and their growing understanding of how all that needs to change now so as to make room for women to flourish in partnership with men. Professor Ka Mana spoke about the Barabas principle, exemplified in how Christians of great repute have continued to reject Christ and chose Barabas, by putting aside the values of inclusion for which Christ died. He spoke about the need to liberate the male desire and appealed that their female partners should help them to be liberated. In the ensuing dialogue, one of the questions addressed to the panelists was whether they would identify with a certain research finding to the effect that the brain of an average male was preoccupied with two things: food and sex; that would that be true in their lived experience? And could they be helped? The response to this was not very clear. On the whole, it was a very enriching experience to interact with ecumenical theologians from different parts of Africa as well as development partners the northern hemisphere. Among those Sr Rose met at the conference were Srs Eileen Hogan and Margaret Farley, RSM, from Yale University; Connecticut, USA; the originators of the All-Africa Sister-To-Sister Conference. She also spoke with Professor Gerard West, head of department of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies; founder and director of the Ujamaa Centre at the University of Kwa-Zulu, Natal, South Africa. The Ujamaa Centre teaches how to use bible study effectively to stop violence against women. A partnership is currently developing between IFENDU and the Ujamaa Centre as the two

teams will be co-facilitating a gender awareness trainer's workshop in Nigeria in November, 2007. Sr Rose had forwarded a paper to the CIRCLE coordinator in view of the conference and is titled: 'Sexual Ethics in a time of AIDS. Here are some excerpts. The paper grapples with some ethical dilemmas relating to HIV AND AIDS especially with regard to sexuality and people's reproductive rights. For instance, in a situation where one partner is HIV positive and the other is not (a case of a discordant couple), what can they do? How can the other partner who is HIV negative be protected from contracting the virus? How can the couple live their lives positively and most fruitfully? In many cases, a woman has not much say in what transpires between herself and her male partner. Moreover, she is caught in a double bind. On one hand, she is controlled by the pervasive social 'teaching tape;' "you must submit to your husband," which plays both in the cultural and church settings. On the other hand, the church's teaching is 'abstinence' and 'fidelity,' all this in a world where many men neither abstain nor stay faithful to their partners. In such a case what might an authentic sexual ethics be like; one that does justice to the woman as well as the man; not just the man alone? To be able to meet the ethical challenges posed by HIV and AIDS especially with regard to sexuality and people's reproductive rights, conscience formation is essential. The formation of conscience involves more than knowledge of rules. Facts, values and skills are not enough for resolving a moral dilemma. A person's moral character, who we are, as well as what and how we choose, also go into the formation of conscience. The Christian understanding of the place of sex in marriage has progressed from being solely for procreation to promoting the bond between the partners. For this reason, the challenge posed by the reality of HIV to discordant couples requires a closer look and more empathetic responses than are available at the moment. The voices of those more closely affected must be heard. If what some moral theologians say is anything to go by; that we make our decisions more out of the beliefs we live by and the habits we have formed than out of the principles we have learned; then let all the facts on all sides be provided for people and they can make informed decisions in consonance with their faith, convictions as well as their situation. Let people be facilitated toward adequate formation of their consciences so that they can make their own decisions; instead of taking over their conscience by simply issuing directives. Finally, the unequal power relations existing between women and men ought to change. The current pattern of sexual submission needs to be revised toward equality in partnership. On the basis of the equal dignity of men and women, people need to be re-educated toward a partnership of equals.

## **SEXUALITY AND GENDER AWARENESS TRAINING AT IJEBU-ODE**

A workshop on Sexuality and Gender Awareness took place at the St. Patrick's Missionaries Society (SPS) Formation Centre, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2007. It was co-facilitated by Sister Rose Uchem, MSHR, and Mrs Apollonia Obi, under the auspices of Ifendu for Women's Development (Ifendu), at the invitation of the SPS





Formation Team, represented by Fr. John Roche. In attendance were young men from different states in Nigeria in their second year of spiritual studies leading up to their seminary training for the Catholic priesthood.

The workshop objective included increasing participants' understanding of the elements of human sexuality and the practical meaning of gender equality and to discover how to foster healthier and happier relationships between men and women in the church and in the society, for a more effective ministry and witnessing to God's reign in our world. The workshop featured paper presentations, visual art gallery walk, interactive sessions, small and large group discussion sessions. Altogether four papers were presented: Human Sexuality: Distinctions Between Sex, Sexuality and Gender; and Gender Equality from A Christian Perspective – by *Sr. Rose Uchem*; Elements of Sexuality Education for Youth; and Gender Issues in Family Life – by *Mrs Apollonia Obi*. The combination of the

medical/health and psychological/theological approaches of the two facilitators made the workshop all the more enriching. The last day of the workshop featured a bible study on the story of Tamar, taken from 2 Samuel 13. This reflective bible study prayer session had such a transformative effect on the participants that by the close of the day their heightened level of awareness and sensitivity to violence against women found expression during the closing mass in a special penitential rite prepared by themselves. The young seminarians on behalf of men asked God to forgive all the violence done to women and prayed God to heal those who have been abused.



## African Studies Association (ASA)

## Annual Meeting in New York

'21st Century Africa: Evolving Conceptions Of Human Rights' was the theme of the African Studies Association 50th Anniversary Annual Meeting And Conference, held in New York, N.Y, October 18-21, 2007. The ASA conference brought together over 1,000 Africanist scholars from around the world who were interested in issues affecting Africa. It provided a good opportunity to meet international publishers who were very interested in either reprinting works already published or to consider entirely new works on African issues. The following is the abstract of Rose's paper.

As the world celebrates the two hundredth anniversary of the official abolition of slavery, it also witnesses a re-emergence of the trade in human persons in the wake of globalization. Otherwise known as human trafficking, it is predominantly women and girls who are sold for purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. It is believed that the global demand for sex for sale which fuels a gigantic global industry turns over more money each year than the total of all military budgets in the world. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the core gender and human rights issues entailed in women trafficking; that need redressed at the root level of subliminal beliefs



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about 'woman' and 'man. For instance, it questions the age-old assumption about women's functionality and seeks to move the discourse to that of human identity. Does 'woman' exist as an autonomous being in her own right; open to mutuality and equal partnership in relationships? Or does 'woman' really exist to serve 'man's' needs? The main assumption of this paper is that both the perpetrators and victims of human trafficking are perhaps unconsciously being controlled by some myths of origins that enshrine and propagate functional



and instrumentalist views about women. Meeting the challenges posed by women trafficking with urgent action at the level of human rights education and action at all levels of society will depend a great deal on the responses to these questions.

## **Ujamaa Centre collaborates with Ifendu in a Missio sponsored Joint Gender Advocacy Workshop for Clergy/Men and Women Religious**

A Gender Awareness Training of Trainers (TOT) Workshop for Clergy/Men and Women Religious has been scheduled from 24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2007 at the Daughters of Divine Love Retreat and Conference Centre (DRACC), Emene, Enugu. It is a follow-up to previous gender workshops conducted by Ifendu for Women's Development (IFENDU) with financial support from Missio Aachen. Previous programme beneficiaries include women religious leaders and lecturers, seminarians and seminary professors; pastors and other clergy with portfolios in justice and peace, social communications and the like.



Past evaluations saw participants repeatedly requesting a follow-up training and a joint session for dialogue between male and female participants. It is expected that after the workshop, participants will become better disposed, motivated and equipped to:

- Work to eliminate or reduce gender-based violence
- Rediscover the power of the good news of Christ in a fresh way
- Familiarize themselves with some official Church documents on women
- Be more gender-inclusive in their life and work
- Increase their specific knowledge of core gender issues, including HIV, and work for change



- Advocate for the implementation of one of the recommendations of the 'Consultation on Teaching Philosophy and Theology in Tertiary Institutions in Africa and Madagascar,' co-sponsored by SECAM and Missio Aachen, in Accra, Ghana, 2002: "That Gender Issues be an integral part of our theological and philosophical reflections."



The TOT is open to participants who are capable and ready to teach others or to write and publish; also seminary/university lecturers; and persons who hold congregational,

diocesan or institutional authority/leadership positions or their representatives; those willing to work jointly with others towards realizing the objectives of this workshop as stated. Eighty participants from all over Nigeria are expected at the workshop.

The workshop is being organized in collaboration with the Ujamaa Centre of the University of Kwa-Zulu, Natal, South Africa. It will be co-facilitated by the Ujamaa Centre and IFENDU teams and will feature a dialogue of male and female participants on Gender Role, Identity and Responsibility. Bafedile Maria Makgamathe and Bongzi Patricia Zengele will represent Professor Gerard West, head of department of Old



Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies; founder and director of the Ujamaa Centre at the University of Kwa-Zulu, Natal, South Africa. The Ujamaa Centre teaches how

to use bible study effectively to stop violence against women. This event will mark the beginning of collaboration between IFENDU and the Ujamaa Centre which hopefully will be a lasting and fruitful partnership.



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