A Case Study of Relational Justice and Patterns of Familial Violence - Muhabura District, Uganda

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Introduction

I have always been amazed by the way the terms, ‘Justice’ and ‘Democracy’ have been used by the privileged few to gain power, fame and accumulated-wealth around themselves at the expense of the suffering, unprivileged ones.

In many cases, most of us have usually understood justice as exercising authority in the maintenance of ‘right’. But the easiest way to define it, so even the most common person understands, would be that justice is ‘fairness’. Both these definitions are found in the English dictionary. Therefore, there is no way justice can be separated from the concept and practice of development and it makes sense to the ones who would be most needy of it.

Taking the case of Muhabura, [1] we have come to believe that justice without economic empowerment will never be exercised to the level whereby the undeveloped will demand justice. This may be so because their view of livelihood will depend on the mercy of the developed few.

In our fight for justice, we have found that economic empowerment, as it relates to gender violence, is a big concern in Kisoro district and in Muhabura Diocese, in particular. It is generally agreed that democracy and good governance is a cornerstone for sustainable growth, stability, peaceful co-existence and development; elements that ‘fund’ justice.

Poverty and familial violence

Due to high levels of economic challenge, there are, equally, high levels of poverty in families and associated violence related to gender has remained a serious issue that needs to be addressed.

In Muhabura Diocese, we have seen many tragic cases, where:-

- Children have fought their parents to death in order to inherit property
- Men who believing that working is the responsibility of the wife (women who are supposed to dig the land, feed their children and their husbands), have been violent towards their wives and beat them up. Some have even killed them, because their wives have not handed over money (the wives have worked for) to them for their drinking binges
- Children have dropped out of school because of the influence of parents who want the girls to get married or help them in the fields. This increase in dropping out of school is accompanied by an increase, at the same time, of prostitution in both urban and rural areas. This has led to amplified levels of poverty in families
- Men who work and then spend all their money in bars, and when they reach home and demand food, have caused trouble, which has led to violence resulting in serious injuries and even death
- In December 2009, a young man of 17 years of age, from Kateretere parish, hit his mother in the head (she was admitted to Kisoro Hospital), for not allowing him to marry in her own house. This was because the young man had failed to build his own house
- Couples, who were officially married in church, have engaged in serious violence. This led to separation of some couples and of some men marrying other wives

It is unfortunate, as these cases were not outside the church. As a result of such issues, development is stunted, violence increases and there is no justice in many of our families.

The above mentioned problems are key indicators of the fact that injustice is a serious problem, but the culprits are incapacitated by their dependency on others and they cannot even speak out, for fear that they may lose out on the benefits.

**Strategies for Rebuilding the Community with Kingdom values**

As a Diocese, it is our responsibility to educate both the privileged and the unprivileged about gender issues in families, communities and churches. This will help to reduce poverty levels, increase incomes and bring peace and stability. It is the duty of every human being to be an advocate for justice and development. It is in the light of the above problems that we have put in place measures and strategies in our community. These can be implemented in a number of ways:-

- There is a need to go ‘back to basics’, and teach people the primary duties and roles of men and women, young and old, in order to bring about harmony in Society. Sharing of responsibilities is very important in families
- There is need to find out the causes of violence in families and look for practical solutions that are suitable to all people
- There is need for people to know how to resolve conflicts, in case they arise
- There is need to respect one another and encourage an atmosphere of dialogue
- The Diocese needs to emphasise biblical approaches to problem-solving and encourage the Bible to be used as a reference tool to bring about justice in families
• There is need to empower people economically, through general participation in economic activities that will lead people to economic emancipation

• There is need to create educational programmes for the youth in the Diocese, and train them in their roles of stimulating development and ushering in justice

• Men also need to know they have an obligation to encourage their wives and in their activities

We are doing this in conjunction with local organisations and Western organisations, both faith and non-faith based. We will continue to invite people to participate with us.

**Conclusion**

It is my understanding that God has created us for a purpose. He also provides resources so that our purpose may be fulfilled. It is part of the role of the church to ensure economic and sustainable growth, peace and stability, order and justice; for that is the reason why He came, and the reason why we are created; to live fullness of life for His glory (John 10:10).

All injustice is brought on by the selfishness and greed of a few individuals who want to own the whole world. However, they find that their lives are full of emptiness and they feel insecure. In treating others unjustly they are 'exalted' by creating fear amongst the masses. As Christians we base, and must continue, to base ourselves on Jesus' principles of preaching the Good News to people, but also of feeding them so that they do not go away hungry. Together we can empower the powerless, that they be liberated to see the love of Christ in practice, and not only in words.

**Notes**

[1] Muhabura Diocese is one of 33 Dioceses of the Anglican Province of the Church of Uganda. It was inaugurated on 14th January 1990. Muhabura Diocese covers the entire Kisoro District in the extreme corner of Western Uganda. Muhabura Diocese is about 540 kilometres from Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. It is densely populated with about 350 people per square kilometre. Muhabura Diocese borders the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) to the west, Rwanda to the south and Kabale and Kanungu districts in the East and North, respectively. See [http://dioceseofmuhabura.org/](http://dioceseofmuhabura.org/) for more information on Muhabura Diocese.

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