
LIVING WITH DIGNITY

African Perspectives on

Gender Equality

EDITORS Elna Mouton Gertrude Kapuma Len Hansen Thomas Togom

EFSA

INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL & INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

LIVING WITH DIGNITY

African perspectives on gender equality

Editors

Elna Mouton, Gertrude Kapuma, Len Hansen & Thomas Togom

Living with dignity: African perspectives on gender equality

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EFSA

INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL & INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH*Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa (EFSA)*

The EFSA Institute, founded in 1990, is an independent ecumenical institute that functions as a division of the non-profitable "Cape Development Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) and Dialogue Centre Trust" (CDDC). Trustees include Dr Welile Mazamisa, Archbishop Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) Dr Thabo Makgoba, Dr André van Niekerk, Prof. Nico Koopman and Dr Renier Koegelenberg. It consists of a unique network of participating institutions: representatives of the Faculties of Theology and the Departments of Religious Studies of the Universities in the Western Cape are represented on the Board and Executive of the EFSA Institute.

Generally speaking, the EFSA Institute attempts to promote consensus between different sectors, interest groups and stakeholders on the challenges and problems facing our society. It strives to play a facilitating role by providing a platform for public debate, even of controversial issues.

Both in its structure and function there is a dialectic tension between an academic (research-based) approach and the need to address specific needs of the church and other religious communities. This tension is embedded in the main issues facing the churches in our society. In a general sense the EFSA Institute tries to focus public Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) attention (and the attention of the church or academic institutions) on specific problems in society.

Currently, the focus is on the following priorities.

Firstly, the *development role of the church* and Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) other religious communities: the eradication of poverty in South Africa; the role of religious networks in community development, in social and welfare services; and the development of community and youth leadership.

Secondly, the *healing and reconciliatory role of the church* and other religious communities: this includes a project on the role of women in the healing of our violent society; the mobilisation of the church and religious communities against crime and violence; and the breaking down of stereotypes (racism) in our society.

Thirdly, the *formation of values in the strengthening of a moral society by the church* and other religious communities: the promotion of moral values such as honesty; support for the weak; respect for life and human rights.

Fourthly, the *development of youth and community leadership*: special courses for the

development of leadership skills among our youth have been developed and are presented to support the building of a new society.

It is also significant that the EFSA Institute acts as Secretariat to the National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD), which is a Principal Recipient of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in South Africa. It is also a partner of Johns Hopkins Health and Education in South Africa (JHHESA – a USAID funded programme). It currently serves as the national secretariat of the religious sector – for the South African National Aids Council (SANAC). These priorities cannot be separated from one another, since many of the complex social issues are interrelated.

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INTRODUCTION

Continuing the NetACT journey

This collection of essays continues the journey on which NetACT (Network for Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) African Congregational Theology) set out fifteen years ago, and which eventually culminated in the publication of *Men in the Pulpit, Women in the Pew? Addressing Gender Inequality in Africa* in 2012 (Stellenbosch: SUN PReSS).

NetACT was formed in Nairobi, Kenya, in Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) February 2000, with a vision to develop transformational leadership in Africa through theological education that would meet the dire needs of congregations (in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition in sub-Saharan Africa) in bold and prophetic ways. At that stage the topic most discussed on the continent was that of HIV and AIDS, and already during its first meeting the network of theological institutions minuted the following:

“If we want to address the issue of HIV and AIDS effectively and faithfully, we will have to move from denial to truth-telling.”¹ In order to achieve this goal, members committed themselves to an ever-deepening process of trust building – through personal friendship and working together on various projects. In the first formulation of its identity, NetACT declared that it “aims at assisting participating institutions to develop congregational theology and leadership. It seeks Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) to achieve this aim (*inter alia*) through addressing the HIV and AIDS problem, especially by providing the theological, moral and spiritual undergirding to curb this pandemic.”²

This led to an ensuing “journey in discernment” for NetACT, during which it was realised that *ad hoc* attempts to address the encompassing and complex issues related to the pandemic would not necessarily lead to “a change in attitudes and deeply ingrained cultural assumptions”.³ In Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) the process, the network agreed to focus on curriculum development in theological education, and started to present workshops in Kenya, Malawi, Angola and Nigeria. Various publications resulted from these consultations, which *inter alia* contributed to the fundamental awareness that women are especially vulnerable to the disease, and that “very little in the African AIDS scenario would change if gender equality is not attained.”⁴ Therefore, ways had to be sought to engage students in discussions not only about health and gender, but also about the gender imbalance in leadership in church and society,

1 Hendriks, “Introduction”, 18-19.

2 Hendriks, “Introduction”, 19.

3 Hendriks, “Introduction”, 20.

“aiming Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) at raising awareness, encouraging critical analysis and acquainting students with theological insights from

African women's perspectives."⁵

This *Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series)* awareness lead to decisions at the NetACT Board meetings of 2011 (Limuru, Kenya) and 2012 (Worcester, South Africa) to include extended gender workshops, with (mostly male) principals and/or board members of the NetACT institutions present. A significant step was, however, taken by inviting a female staff or church members from each constituency to attend these two workshops in order to enable all members, male and female, to critically discuss engendering theological education *together*. It has been a rich and rewarding yet often complex and emotionally intense journey. The editors thus gratefully and proudly present this volume, *Living with Dignity: African Perspectives on Gender Equality*, as the fruit of these two workshops and, at the same time, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to those institutions without whose support these workshops would never have realised: the Presbyterian Church (PC)USA, Christian Reformed World Missions, Gereformeerde Zendingsbond *Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series)* (GZA), the Fondation Pour l'Aide Au Protestantisme Réformé (FAP), the Stellenbosch University Hope Project, the Commission for Witness of the Dutch Reformed Church Western and Southern Cape and the National Institute for the Deaf in South Africa. This publication reflects the contributors' passionate yearning to see every person on the continent flourish in the presence of a living God who identified with humanity by becoming flesh (John 1:14) so that all would have life in abundance (John 10:10).

Transformative potential of a (theological) curriculum

By addressing gender *Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series)* equality as a fundamental expression of human dignity and justice on our continent, this collage of nineteen essays is meant to serve as a concrete alternative to aspects of gender inequality identified in *Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series)* the first volume, *Men in the Pulpit, Women in the Pew?* Its format is particularly devised for use in the classroom, and for critical-constructive group engagement (with themes and questions for discussion at the end of each essay). It is our sincere prayer that it will also be used *Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series)* in imaginative ways by clergy and in congregations as a necessary part of adult learning programmes.

4 Hendriks, "Introduction", 21.

5 Mombo & Joziase, "From the Pew to the Pulpit", 183.

The book is divided into seven major sections. In the introductory part, *Gender Equality: An Issue of Faith and Dignity*, the two essays by Nico Koopman and Florence Matsveru/Simon Gillham set important biblical *Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series)* and theological parameters for the project as a whole. In view of the relation between the Triune God of the Bible and humankind, Koopman unequivocally argues for the equal dignity of men and women. This dignity, he continues, is expressed by the unity of God's people, also between men and women – a unity in diversity. In order to assist local churches in their quest to faithfully embody this unity, he proposes a commitment to gender *Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series)* freedom and justice as two interdependent quests. He concludes by stating: "Where the unity in diversity of women and men is betrayed, there the ecclesiastical confession of the unity in diversity of all God's children is betrayed." In their contribution, "In God's Image: A Biblical-Theological Survey of the Dignity of Women and Men", Matsveru and Gillham give a broad yet nuanced overview of the relation between God and humankind in the light of diverse scriptural witnesses throughout the history of salvation. They ultimately challenge their audience by emphasising Jesus Christ as God's

truthful redemption from gender-based violence and oppression, and as the truest expression of human dignity. Christian men and women should therefore take the lead in sharing God's light Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) with a dark world by respecting all who have been made in the image of Living with Dignity: African perspectives on gender equality (EFSA Series) God.

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