

Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa



Women Consultation on PROCURA; what it is and what it stands for



8th – 10th July 2012 Jumuia Conference and Country Home Limuru, Kenya

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1.0 Introduction

In anticipation to the coming of the conference on the consultation of the PROCMURA what it is and what it stands for, PROCMURA brought together women alumni of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations who arrived two days earlier than their male counterparts at Jumuia Conference and County Home Limuru Kenya.

This early arrival was with the sole purpose; to bring them to an understanding of What PROCMURA is and what it stands for. Another objective was to develop a resource pool of persons who understand and are able to represent PROCMURA well in their respective countries.

The women's Programme in PROCMURA was also to be highlighted as one of the major programs that PROCMURA is involved in, and as one of its arms of operation. This would in turn necessitate an extension of PROCMURA's activities even at grassroots levels in the countries that PROCMURA operates and still keeping in contact with the central office for further consultations. The resource pool of persons developed would represent PROCMURA well in their different countries at every position each of them will be serving. The women will also be able to engage constructively with PROCMURA's principles as well as philosophies on women issues at international women gatherings.

Special emphasis was placed on the need for women to be involved with PROCMURA activities in their own countries and establish links among themselves so as to work for the common good of the continent. The conference highlighted the intricacies involved in PROCMURA's programmes and the complexities that continue to be witnessed in the same breadth.

This two days event not only allowed for the linking up of former class mates but also coming to terms with the reality of women in Christian Muslim Relations in East Africa and the Indian Ocean areas. The conference for the first time gave Christian women scholars in Islam and Christian-Muslim relations the opportunity to gather together and exchange ideas and experiences. One could see that it was a rare opportunity accorded to them by PROCMURA.

PROCMURA and the alumni give thanks to the Church of Sweden who specifically provided funds to make the conference become a reality. Together our hope remains that women will be able to get involved fully in their areas of work. That they will find a chance to represent PROCMURA well in their endeavour to propagate what PROCMURA is and stands for.

2.0 DAY ONE

2.1 Morning Devotion



Prof. Esther Mombo, leading in morning devotion

The devotion was led by Prof. Esther Mombo of St. Paul's University and her reflection was on Matthew 15:21-28. Based on the text she was looking at current contextual images in terms of relations between Christians and Muslims. Before giving her reflexion, Prof. Mombo requested participants to echo their current perception of Christian-Muslim Relations. As such, the Kenyan participants said that there is a perception of a conflicting relationships between Christian and Muslim but at the same time a chock out of the fact that after the Garissa¹ bombing, Muslim men were the ones ensuring security around the churches on the Sunday that followed the bomb attack. The Tanzanian participants based on the burning of churches in Zanzibar described the relations between Christians and Muslims in their country as being conflicting.

Coming back to the text, Prof Mombo pointed to the fact that Jesus went to the enemy's territory looking for a comfort zone with the understanding that no one knows him there. But to his great surprise, not only was he known but a woman came to meet him demanding for assistance.

Prof. Mombo also stressed on the fact that the woman was from another ethnic group and as such was not supposed to get closer to Jesus let alone Jesus receiving her.

Prof Mombo identified from the text three important characters then pointed out the characteristics of each one.

i. Main characters of the text

- a- The Woman: No information is being given about the woman's identity and status. She was
- A woman of determination
 - She knew the difference between her and Jesus and knew everything concerning him; was therefore knowledgeable
 - A woman of persistence

¹ Garissa is a city in the North Eastern Province of Kenya bordering Somalia. On Sunday 1st July 2012 there was an attack in two churches in the city that left 14 people dead and 66 injured.

- A woman of faith
- A woman of love (She brought her daughter in the presence of men, strange men; not for her own sake, but for the need of the daughter)
- Very patient and for a while provoked, dialogue with Jesus in his own terms
- Tactful and pointed out to Jesus his global ministry.

b- Jesus: He was

- In the gentiles territory, and according to her he went there to rest
- Quiet and listened to the woman
- Not very polite in responding to the woman
- Provocative to the woman
- In any case his goal was achieved
- Conceded to the woman's request for not only did he heal the seek child but also healed the woman's psychologically and re-affirm her.
- Acceptance of the woman

c- The Disciples

- They seem to be aware as to why Jesus was going there.
- They seem to be fast at reacting to the woman's request before Jesus does.
- They were however quiet when Jesus takes to the woman.

ii. Lessons

Prof. Mombo explained that three main issues are in play when it comes to the context of the scene. There is an intercultural/religious or faith context, a gender context and a context of learning.

She however stressed that what ever the case may be, it should be observed that the Gentile men were not treated the same way when they approached Jesus. Hence the question what is our attitude toward people of other faith/culture: is it an attitude of interfaith?



Rev. Ted Mwambila (right) and Ms Veronica Mtaita ; two PROCMURA Executive Committee members who were present at the Consultation

She then listed some attitudes that we tend to exhibit in various circumstances as follows:

- Attitudes showing that we as Christians are superior over the others;
- Attitude showing lack of respect;
- Attitude showing an unwillingness to accommodate the other.

In the occurrence of these attitudes, the question is: are we willing to let go of such conduct and deal with the others as equal? We should note that Jesus responded to the woman as equal to any other person. The woman in the story could be any of us that are calling out for positive action. As we come together as women in faith, we need to share all our challenges because stories of women in the church are not getting better but rather more challenging. Prof Mombo concluded that the story of the woman is a story of affirmation, hope and determination.

2.1 Roll Call and Introduction



Ms. Merseline Mula Mwaikuni introducing herself

After the morning devotion, the Women and Education Programme Coordinator, Rev. Angèle Dogbé proceeded with the Roll Call and Introduction. She asked participants to introduce themselves with a stress on the year of completion.

The participants introduced themselves and the 12 women that have successfully completed or are yet to complete but have nevertheless completed the ICMR (Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation) taught course gave their aspiration and what they hope to achieve in the field of Christian-Muslim relations in their various locations.

2.2 Key Note Address by the General Adviser

Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah, General Adviser of PROCMURA gave the key note address in which he set the pace of the consultation. Dr. Mbillah expressed gratitude to the women for availing themselves for the consultation.

Concerning the consultation, Dr. Mbillah explained that the St Paul's ICMR programme was started in order to help PROCMURA to create a pool of resource persons that will assist with the implementation of programmes at country as well as grassroots level. However, since the ICMR programme started, this has not been effective because after graduating, the students return to either their normal activities or are used by their churches in a completely different field.



Rev. Dr Johnson Mbillah responding to participants after making his presentation

The Central Office under the recommendation of the General Council felt that it was about time that all the graduates in ICMR are sensitised on the importance of their study and together look for the way forward for collaboration with PROCMURA.

However, since PROCMURA is an organisation that has its own principles and ideologies, it is paramount that the graduates are made to be knowledgeable about PROCMURA.

As such, the consultation was organised in order to get reconnected as people that are knowledgeable on matters of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation and also let them have a proper and deeper understanding of the organisation so as to be able to validly represent it where ever, when ever.

2.3 Focus on the Women's Programme

A presentation of the Women's Programme was made by the Programme Coordinator, Rev. Angèle Dogbé to give the women an idea about the women's programme activities and challenges. As such, Rev. Dogbé articulated her presentation around four main points. She gave a brief historical overview of the Programme, elaborated on its focuses shedding some light on the issues being addressed by the Programme and lastly highlighted the challenges.

The presentation demonstrated that the Women's Programme is part and parcel of the organisation right from its inception; the organisation's founding fathers had concerns on the fact that women issues in Christian-Muslim relations needed to be addressed by the women themselves. Rev. Dogbé also stressed that when it was started the Women's Programme went through some serious difficulties yet survived the test of time.

The presenter elaborated on the focus and issues that are addressed by the Women's Programme among Christian women and among Christian and Muslim women; among such issues include HIV/AIDS, peace-building and Female Genital Mutilation(FGM).

As regards the challenges, Rev. Dogbé pointed out three main challenges that should be urgently addressed for the welfare of the Women's Programme. Those are financial deficit, lack of interest in PROCMURA core business by partners and lack of women resource persons.

Rev. Dogbé concluded her presentation by appreciating the fact that there are Christian women at National and the grassroots levels that are very committed in PROCMURA's cause and as such very active. She however recommended that more women needed to be trained even at the level of certificate so as to assist in the implementation of the Programme's activities at the grassroots levels.



Rev. Angèle Dogbé making a presentation on the Women's Programme

2.4 Group Discussions and Reports

After the presentation, participants were divided into two groups to discuss and report on the following questions:

1. Identify issues of **particular** concern to Christian women in your area and discuss how you can collaborate to attend to them?
2. Identify issues of **common** concern to women in your area and discuss how you can collaborate with your Muslim counterparts to attend to them?
3. What are the issues that cause friction between Christians and Muslims in your area and what can be done about them?

Subsequent to the discussions speakers from the two groups reported the followings:

GROUP 1

Question one

Issues of particular concern to Christian women in Christian-Muslim relations

- Economic issues:
Women are economically disempowered because
 - Resource ownership (culturally, women cannot own land for example)
 - Need permission from men to own properties
 - Level of education is very low
- Political issues:
 - Women are excluded from political leadership.
 - It is difficult for the society to accept women leadership.
 - Women are challenged by fellow women due to psychological mind set or cultural orientation of women accepting men as leaders
 - Women despise women politicians
- Religious issues
 - Uncertainty
 - Theological education is believed to be a preserve for men
 - After training, men are utilised while women are not



Participants in group discussions

- Socio-cultural issues:
 - Psychology of the society on women

Question two

Issues of common concern to Christian and Muslim women in Christian-Muslim relations

- Economic issues:
 - Muslim women are better placed in terms of inheritance and ownership theoretically. However, in practise both (Christian and Muslim women) are oppressed
- Political issues:
 - Both (Christian and Muslim women) are excluded in leadership based on misinterpretation of verses in the holy books. The misinterpretation is informed by cultural context.
- Socio-cultural issues:
 - Both (Christian and Muslim women) face the same dilemma such as
 - HIV/AIDS
 - FGM
 - Early marriage
 - Violence against women

Question three

Issues that create friction between Christian and Muslim women are

- Religious intolerance
- Negative attitudes towards the other religion
- Lack of knowledge about the other faith/religion
- External influence
- Human trafficking
- Cultural factors
 - Interfaith marriage
 - Lack of information about religion with regard to marriage



Ms. Catherine Khamunga Mushira presenting the group report

Suggestions

- There is need to provide awareness programmes to the two faith communities about the other.
- Christians and Muslims need to realise that they are both Africans to avoid negative solidarity so as to stop fighting proxy wars.

- Faith based organisations and government to provide job opportunities to avoid being lured into being slaves or terrorist groups.

GROUP 2

Question one

- Patriarchal system
- Religious education
- The woman as the first teacher no longer there
- Death – men dying fighting in Somalia
- Recruitment of young men to Al-Shabaab
- Drugs
- Child labour

Question two

- Intermarriages between Christians and Muslims
- Funeral services and mixed faith in families
- Inheritance especially with property

Question three

- Faith (stereo type and misunderstanding)
- Dress code
- Public utilities (Wash rooms, and water collection points..)
- Language used between the two are very derogative
- Resources

Suggestions

- There is need to offer friendly forum for faith engagement at grassroots levels.
- Each context should be looked into and issues that are identified addressed accordingly.
- Make use of the ‘merry go round²’ practice to create awareness
- Faith forums to be set up

2.5 There is need to find ways to use respectful language.

² Women get together to contribute for each other towards a common course

2.6 General Issues on Christian-Muslim Relations



Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah making a presentation on general issues on Christian-Muslim relations

The General Adviser, Dr. Johnson Mbillah explained to participants that Africa has become a very pronounced multi-faith continent; and that considering the fact that in Africa, religion plays a pivotal role in determining the actions and inactions of the people, it is paramount that adherents of the two religious group work together towards the creation of a sustainable peaceful environment.

Dr. Mbillah further pointed to the fact that according to an independent source, Christians and Muslims form 89.2% of the African population; and as such, in the contemporary situation it makes no sense to refer to Christianity and Islam as Western and Arab religions respectively, except in matters of history; for they have become Africa's religion.

Based on the above mentioned observations, there are issues that should be taken seriously in order to maintain peace in the continent. Thus, among other issues, the General Adviser elaborated on the universality of Christianity and Islam; The question of identity; the question of politics; religio-cultural discourse and religious extremism.

The presentation raised vivid discussions in which participants sought to have deeper understanding of the issues that were raised. After the discussion, participant paused for a health break.

2.7 Sharing by Participants on their Lives after Study

After the tea break participants reconvened to the conference hall for a session of sharing. All participants shared on what their lives have been like after the ICMR study. From the sharing, it came out clear that some are involved in teaching in Universities, Institutions or Colleges. Others went back to their routine work as parish pastors while some are managing project/programmes that deal with interfaith issues.

It was however observed that most of the participants are neither involved in academic works nor doing things in line with their area of study.

After the sharing, the General Adviser encouraged the participants to find a way to keep what they have studied alive either through reading or diapraxis. It was said that there was to be up to date with the actual understanding and interpretation of issues as they relate to Christian and Muslim relations/dialogues globally, regionally, as well as at country level. That will keep them away from outdated ideas

The day was closed with a word of prayer by Ms. Veronica Mtaita, Executive member, representing East and Southern Africa Women.

3.0 DAY TWO

3.1 Morning devotion



Mrs Florence Iminza leading in morning devotion

The day started with a morning devotion led by Mrs. Florence Iminza. The reflection was based on Acts 16:16-19 and was titled “The insignificant rendered significant”

In her interpretation of the text, Mrs Iminza explained that the passage read demonstrates that women tend to be looked at negatively even if there is something good in them. She elucidated more saying that the girl in the text has a spirit of divination which according to her was a good gift from God. Yet, that was not seen. The girl in the text was seen as a profit making machine for her masters. Florence further stressed that even the Apostle Paul missed the point. Because instead of seeing the testimony of the young girl as an

amplifier of the Gospel; he rather got annoyed and casted the spirit away, her company is discomfoting!

Florence clarified that the point of her reflection is that the slave girl (insignificant fellow) has find her way into the Gospel, with her story well articulated; hence rendered significant.

Ms. Iminza concluded that likewise, Christian-Muslim Relations has been rendered insignificant, and as people who study Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations and are working in that particular field; we need to render it significant.

3.2 Emerging Issues for Women on Women in Christian-Muslim Relations



Participants in session

Rev. Angèle Dogbé presented the topic on the Emerging issues on women in Christian-Muslim Relations. She explained that for centuries, Christians and Muslims have had cordial relations living along side one another in changing

circumstances. Angèle then elucidated that since Africa has started becoming a pronounced

multi-faith society, the religious landscape of the continent has changed. As such, according to Rev. Dogbé, circumstances which years ago would have been dealt with in harmony and understanding are now generating disharmony, violence and even conflicts.

Thus, Angèle observed that as a non-negligible entity, it could arguably be said that in every society, religion has a public role to play by providing the basis for good governance, justice and sustainable development. Unfortunately, it has rather been observed that religion has been misused hence creating division and conflict.

The speaker then pointed out that, one needs to understand that there are emerging issues which need to be dealt with, and among other issues, she mentioned Islamic banking, the impact of religious globalisation and the struggle around limited natural resources for a growing population with growing demand due to climate change.

While concluding, Rev. Dogbé acknowledged the fact that her paper might not cover all emerging issues that need to be addressed. And so she called on participants to identify other emerging issues in relations to women in Christian-Muslim Relations and apply the pattern used in her presentation to address them together with their Muslim counterparts.

3.3 Engaging with CORAT Africa



Rev. Dr. Japhet Ndhlovu providing guidelines during the evaluation exercise.

For the past five years, PROCMURA has been operating under a five-year strategic plan that is due for evaluation this year so as to pave the way for a new strategic plan that will take the organisation through the next five years. The evaluative exercise is to be conducted by CORAT Africa, and it was Rev. Dr. Japhet Ndhlovu and Mr. David Oburu that came from CORAT to conduct the session.

Dr. Ndhlovu started by introducing CORAT Africa to the participants and said that 'The Christian Organisation Research and Advocacy Trust for Africa' (CORAT Africa) is a Pan-African non-profit Christian organisation that is aimed at promoting stewardship, integrity, leadership development and accountability in churches and church-related organisations in Africa. CORAT has also other courses for institutions and individuals and does

Research & Consultancy as well as a lot of evaluation even in churches.

He then explained to participants the process of the evaluation exercise which was made up of questions for individual and group work.

On the questionnaires, participants were to comment on the external context of PROCMURA, the extent to which the organisation's mission statement has been achieved; the review of its 6 strategies and on the future of the organisation.

In the group work, four groups were formed and each group was to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the organisation and comment on them.

3.4 Engaging Dr. John Chesworth



Dr. John Chesworth giving his overview

John Chesworth was among the pioneers in the formation of the St. Paul University ICMR programme in collaboration with PROCMURA. In that capacity, he was a lecturer in the programme at St. Paul University, and most of the students that came for the consultations are his former students.

He spoke to the student about the importance of engaging in further study as well as continuing with the academic work even if the domain where they find themselves in terms of work has nothing to do with their line of study.

He also shared with them information leading to resource materials as well as those that will require them to do some research in particular subject related to Christian-Muslims relations/dialogue/encounter or other burning issues in Islam; the *Sharia* debate in a given country for example.

3.5 Engaging Rev. Willem Jansen



Rev. Willem Jansen making a presentation on the pilot project which was started in Eastleigh

Rev. Willem Jansen is a Lecturer at St. Paul University in the department of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. He made a presentation on a Pilot Project Titled: "From Discursive Dialogue to Interreligious Diapraxis" with a subtitle saying: "Towards a Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Eastleigh (CCMRE), Nairobi, Kenya.

The project which is a practical arm of the St. Paul University ICMR (Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations) programme seeks to supplement the theoretical study with a more practical approach of interreligious dialogue and the reflection on this diapraxis. The project entails a Training Centre in Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya with the aim of enabling ICMR students to become scholars as well as practitioners.

Rev. Willem outlined the project Mission, Vision and Objectives; among the objectives are the following:

- To achieve a better understanding of dialogue between Christians and Muslims and its necessary socio-political conditions;

- To recognise and overcome stereotypes
- To demonstrate that in spite of historical, cultural and political diversity, scholars, adult educators, students and visitors/guests can learn a great deal from each other in the implementation process of the centre.
- To generate resources for research in the field of intercultural studies such as publications, audio and visual materials.

To conclude his presentation, Rev. Willem showed a video on the CCMRE in which some of the activities of the centre are carried out.

3.6 Way Forward and Evaluation

3.6.1 Way forward

As way forward, participants suggested that there should be a number of follow up on what has been done by individuals as well as by PROCMURA.

Individual should implement that which they have learnt in their various areas, in congregations, teaching places (colleges/University), and women's group so as to foster positive tolerance, acceptance of the other and interest on matters of interfaith among their people. It will also be another way of implementing PROCMURA's programmes at the grassroots level.

PROCMURA should request participants to give a report on what they have been doing at least every 6 months after this; give tasks to individuals who are willing; call for prayer meetings for Christian and Muslim leaders especially now that some of the countries are approaching the period of general election. As follow up, participants also requested that PROCMURA should create contact lines within the resource pool group so as to allow sharing of information among them; and organise short courses on ICMR for women at country or grassroots levels which will involve participants as main lecturers. In addition, PROCMURA should connect the participants with parishes across the continent where knowledge in ICMR is a key factor for parish work and create a good database development on who is doing what, where and when. Finally, participants suggested that such meeting should be held at least every year.

3.6.2 Evaluation

For the evaluation of the session, an evaluation form was given to the women to fill in. The questions on the form were on general comments about the conference; relevance of the topics; the communication aspect; the venue and participant expectation.

General comments: In general, all participants appreciated the workshop which they qualified as timely, challenging and very helpful.

Relevance of topics: Participants commented that since the purpose of the conference was to let the women who have study ICMR and have a better knowledge of PROCMURA, the topics were well packaged and well presented. The facilitators were available for any questions that the participants had. Other participants pointed out that it would have been better if some other topics on current turbulences in Christian-Muslim relations were included such as peace building, conflict resolution and terrorism, and called on a Muslim lady to come and facilitate such topics.

Venue: The accommodation was rated by all participants as good apart from the fact that the place was extremely cold, especially at night. All participants appreciated the food in terms of quality, taste and presentation. The conference hall was good and comfortable; however, arrangement should have been made to have the conference room warm up.

Expectations: Most of the participants' expectations were met. They look forward to concrete achievements in terms of utilising the women that have studied ICMR. They however stressed that the time for the conference was too short hence no time for the participants during sharing time.

4.0 CONCLUSION

As earlier mentioned by almost all participants, it was about time that this conference is organised in order to find some helping hands for the Women's Programme. In this report, it could be seen that women are in a patriarchal system in the church and this is affecting them; and the fact that they have studied ICMR is not making any difference. However if more effort is put by having church leaders involved in PROCMURA's activities it will help go a long way.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS



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