

THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

How Traditional Gender Bias and Sexual Violence Keep Women in Poverty in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo)

Introduction

Léocadie LUSHOMBO,
Ph. D Student/
Theological Ethics/
Boston College.
Massachusetts/USA.
leolushombo@
gmail.com

There are several positive changes concerning traditional gender bias in the last decades in many countries around the world, particularly in the recognition of basic rights for women, especially in regard to education and political participation. However, some negative traditional gender norms and roles continue to perpetuate women's poverty in many diverse countries and contexts. Similarly, sexual violence against women and some legal framework that discriminates against women are among factors that keep women in poverty in countries across the globe.

This paper argues that negative traditional gender norms, sexual violence, and some laws disadvantaging women are among influential factors perpetuating women's multidimensional poverty, which includes a lack of material and psychological well-being, food security, employment, power and voice, basic education and higher level of education, and so forth. In addition, traditional gender bias constitutes one of the most influential factors explaining the low percentage of women in political positions. Addressing these factors will considerably reduce the poverty of women and consequently the feminization of poverty.

First, it is necessary to introduce an overview of the understanding of the feminization of poverty and present some stakeholders who influence it in different contexts. Second, I will examine some of the roots of women's poverty in the DR Congo particularly through the lens of negative traditional gender norms as well as through the lens massive rape used as weapon of war. Finally, I will consider some concrete and resourceful practices performed in the DR Congo in order to address these evils, including educating

illiterate women, advocating for a quota system to improve women's political participation, and restoring the physical capabilities of the women victims of rape.

Some Factors Influencing the Feminization of Poverty in the World

Victor R. Fuchs states that the "Feminization of poverty is defined as an increase in the percentage of the adult poor who are women."¹ The definition of the feminization of poverty must go beyond the low income of women and consider what Amartya Sen calls the "Capabilities"² of women and those social conditions of "unfreedom"³ that keep women in dependence and oppression. Martha Alter Chen reflects on the feminization of poverty through certain human development indicators, such as life expectancy, literacy rates, educational attainment, and political participation. She states that, since the International Women's Year encounter in 1975 to the Beijing Women's International encounter in 1995, these indicators have increased in developed countries.

For Alter, the concept of the "Feminization of poverty" comes from the difference between women and men's poverty, which is that "women bear a disproportionate share of poverty worldwide, and women shoulder an unequal burden in coping with poverty at the household level."⁴ Martha Alter Chen also states that around the world, women are more impoverished than men, as shown in the following table :

Table 2 : Achievement of Development Goals in Developing Countries (Number of Women for Every 100 Men)		
	Women	Men
Adult Literacy	71	100
Secondary School Enrolment	72	100
Labour Force Participation	58	100
Source : <i>A Commitment to the World's Women : Perspectives on Development for Beijing and Beyond</i> , ed. NoeleenHeyzer with Sushma Kapoor & Joanne Sandler, (New York : UNIFEM, 1995). 25.		

Elizabeth Johnson, referring to various United Nations statistics, explains that the recent data show that women represent half of the world population ; they provide the 2/3 of the work, but they only receive 1/10 of the world's monetary income and own only 1/100 of the world's land because 99/100 is owned by men). In addition, women constitute the 2/3 of the world's illiterate adults. Adding their dependent children,

1 Victor FUCHS, "The Feminization of Poverty ?", Cambridge, MA : National Bureau of Economic Research, May 1986, 2, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w1934.pdf>.

2 Suzanne MULLIGAN, *Confronting the Challenge : Poverty, Gender, and HIV in South Africa*, Africa in Development 4, New York, Oxford, 2010, 103.

3 *Ibid.*, 113.

4 NoeleenHEYZER et Alii., eds., *A Commitment to the World's Women: Perspectives on Development for Beijing and beyond*, New York, UNIFEM, 1995, 23.

they represent the $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world's starving people. Women are raped, battered, prostituted, sold into sexual slavery, and murdered by men to a degree that is not reciprocal. Violence against the dignity of women and domestic violence are proven facts all over the world. The latter facts are even worse in Africa. In regard to Africa, and particularly the DR Congo, these statistics are worsened by the cultural patterns that oppress women. Such cultural patterns influence women political participation and their participation in different spheres of life.

Raissa Muhutdinova confirms the United Nations Development Fund for Women's (UNIFEM) view of the feminization of poverty presented above arguing that "The notion of feminization of poverty indicates the growth in the number of women in poverty and the vulnerability of women to economic, social, cultural, legal, and political conditions."⁵ This vulnerability results from several factors, and it is manifest in different ways in different countries.

Schaffner and Kremen refer to Hilda Scott who identifies some conditions that increase the feminization of poverty regardless of the level of industrialization of a country and the political system of the country. Scott states that whether or not a country provides means such as the labor market, policies of equalization between men and women, social security, or demographic control, the following elements aggravate the feminization of poverty everywhere :

Large-scale entry of women into the labor force ; significant educational gains for women; emergence of the dual role for employed women ; occupational concentration of women in low-wage sectors of the economy ; persisting female/male earning differentials ; insufficient governmental commitment to equalization policies ; insufficient publicly supported child care ; irregular and insufficient paternal child support ; underrepresentation of women in governmental and policymaking bodies.⁶

Further, in 1995, UNIFEM named several factors that increase the phenomenon of women's poverty in developing and least developing countries (LDCs). First, women's individual skills and knowledge are not as developed as those of men due to their lower levels of education. Violence against the dignity of women and domestic violence are proven facts all over the world. The latter facts are even worse in Africa, particularly in the DR Congo because of some cultural beliefs. These cultural norms influence women representation in the political sphere. Annie Matundu and Marie-Claire Faray-Keleto illustrate this arguing that, in many poor families who

5 Raissa MUHUTDINOVA, "Feminization of Poverty", in *Encyclopedia of World Poverty*, Mehmet Odekon, ed., (Thousand Oaks, Calif : SAGE Publications, 2006). <http://knowledge.sagepub.com/view/worldpoverty/n239.xml>.

6 Gertrude S. GOLDBERG and Eleanor KREMEN, eds., *The Feminization of Poverty : Only in America ?*, Contributions in Women's Studies, no. 117, New York, Greenwood Press, 1990, 204-5.

cannot afford schools fees for all their children, the patriarchal mentality and cultural bias push girls to not complete their studies : “young girls miss up to 1 week of school per month, leaving their education to fall behind that of boys.”⁷ Moreover, according to UNESCO, gender parity is achieved in two-third of countries in the world at primary and/or secondary levels⁸ ; female pre-primary education seems to be favored in the DR Congo⁹, but such parity is far from being achieved both in primary and secondary schools¹⁰.

The DR Congo is accounted among those which have a higher percentage of female repeaters in primary school¹¹ and girls (almost 30%) are more likely to dropout the school than boys (around 22%)¹². More than 60% of boys complete their primary school while only 45% of girls complete their primary school.¹³ Similarly, the gross enrolment ratio for secondary education for boys seems the double of that of the girls¹⁴. For UNESCO these disparities are more likely due to the lack of economic means for wealthy households have a higher rate of completion of primary school than the poor ones. Also, they are higher in rural areas than in urban areas¹⁵. For UNESCO, “In general, the largest disparities among the sexes occur in countries with the lowest attendance rates. Such countries also tend to have the largest gaps between urban and rural and between rich and poor¹⁶.” I argue that the option of making boys develop their studies more than girls is also strongly influenced by traditional patriarchal gender bias. The latter may be more influential in rural areas and poor households than in urban areas and wealthy households. Yet, I hold that they are still negatively influencing both the urban areas as well as the wealthy households.

In addition to the national wealth as factor in education and participation explaining the persistence of gender disparities in the DR Congo¹⁷, I maintain that, in general, women are obstructed by traditional bias such as cultural and patriarchal beliefs that oblige them to engage in early marriage and to obey other social cultural values against their basic rights like those related to education. In the economic sphere, women are involved in the lowest productive activities even though they have demonstrated more potential and functioning capability in business. Their access to property is limited, and they are often less competitive in the market-place because of their additional occupation as mothers at home. Despite their gains, they

7 Annie MATUNDU and Marie-Claire FARAY-KELE, *Gender Inequality and Social Institutions in the DR Congo*, December 2010. <http://www.wilpfinternational.org/>, 8.

8 Edward B. FISKE, *World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education*, Paris, Unesco, 2012, 23.

9 *Ibid.*, 31.

10 *Ibid.*, 23.

11 *Ibid.*, 43.

12 *Ibid.*, 47.

13 *Ibid.*, 50.

14 *Ibid.*, 61.

15 *Ibid.*, 57.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, 13.

still account for substantial majority of adult illiterate¹⁸. Furthermore, most of the time, their work is undervalued. Finally, they face discrimination in the public sphere due to the lack of policies of inclusion and equalization¹⁹. UNESCO shows that the DR Congo is among the countries where 50% of women may be affected by the teaching and research policies favoring more men than women²⁰.

Concerning the issue of rape, the Penguin Atlas global survey shows that rape is not only a LDC issue, but a world issue. The statistics of women who live under the threat of rape in the world are worse in some countries than others. In others, such as many African countries impacted by war and violence, rape has become endemic and is used as a weapon of war. According to the *Penguin Atlas of Women in the World*, “up to 700,000 rapes are estimated to occur in the United States (US) each year. 18% of women in the US have survived a rape or attempted rape ; over 40% of rapes and assaults are by people known to the victim ; in 2001 39% of all rapes and sexual assaults were reported to the police ; about 81% of rape victims are white ; 18% are black ; 1% are other races²¹.” The numbers of reported rapes of some countries in Africa are as follows : 16,000 in Kenya, 1,000 in Addis Abeba, and a woman is raped every 83 seconds in South Africa. In Latin America, Colombia alone reports 14,200 rapes per year, and in Asia, Pakistan alone accounts for 7,000 rapes per year²². [In] Rwanda : More than 15,000 women [were] raped in the 1994 genocide. [In] Sudan : routine kidnapping of girls [is at use] to serve as sex slaves to warlord armies. In war zones, such as in the DR Congo, “Rape is going on an unimaginable scale ; tens of thousands of girls and women are raped, kidnaped and brutalized²³.” These statistics are worse when it comes out of the DR Congo where mass rape is used as weapon of war and where gender stereotypes impoverish millions of women in the DR Congo.

Some Factors increasing the Feminization of Poverty in Democratic Republic of the Congo

Rape of Women in the DR Congo, especially in Mining and War Zones

Since the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the DR Congo continues to face an armed conflict in which nearly 5 million people have lost their lives. One of the characteristics of this conflict is the mass raping and killing of women in the eastern part of the DR Congo. Even though the number of civilians rapists has been increasing for the last decades, armed groups and

18 *Ibid.*, 94.

19 HEYZER et Alii., *A Commitment to the World's Women*, 27–28.

20 FISKE, *World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education*, 99.

21 Joni SEAGER, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World.*, Penguin Books. Fourth Edition. Completed revised & updated (Brighton, BN3 AFL, UK : Myriad Editions, 2009), 58.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*, 101.

foreign armies, especially from Rwanda and Uganda, along with those from the DR Congo are among the main perpetrators using rape as weapon of war. The average number of rapes all over the country in 2009 was 5,010 in South Kivu province alone.

Dr. Denis Mukwege, the coordinator of the Panzi hospital which treats raped women in the eastern DR Congo, considers the rape of women in the DR Congo as a new pathology, which he calls “rape with extreme violence (REV).” Mukwege states that REV has increased in the eastern part of the DR Congo during the last past 10 years. For example, between November 2008 and March 2009, 1,100 rapes per month have been recorded for the Panzi hospital alone²⁴. The army groups are marked as the first perpetrators of such atrocities ; they use rape as weapon of war while pillaging mineral resources in the mining zones in the Eastern DR Congo. For example, the region of Shabunda is rich in coltan, gold, and cassiterite. The Kabare region is rich in coltan, which contains the tantalum that is used widely in electronics in the industrialized world ; the area of *Walungu* is rich in cassiterite and gold. As Mukwege and Cathy Nangini put it :

The area of the circles is proportional to the fraction of the hospital’s survivors attacked in these regions. The areas are centred around : Walungu (3,251 [33.2%]), Kabare (3,050 [31.2%]), Bukavu (1499 [15.3%]), Shabunda (951 [9.7%]), and Uvira (785 [8.0%]). A small proportion (242 [2.5%]) of cases treated at the Panzi Hospital occurred outside of South Kivu. Since data regarding the mode of transport to the hospital were not available, the map has not been corrected for transport bias²⁵.

All of the militias in these regions have been involved in mining, raping, and the using women as sex slaves. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations (OCHA), in 2010, more than 5,000 women were raped between January and August in the province of South Kivu alone²⁶. Such atrocities make women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Impact of Rape or Sexual Violence on HIV in the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu/Eastern DR Congo

The case of women survivors of rape treated in Panzi Hospital in Bukavu shows that mass rape does increase HIV infections. Mukwege argues that women in conflict-affected zones of the Eastern DR Congo can be raped by 3, 4, or 10 men at a time. This increases the probability for HIV infections and for other transmissible sexual infections for women. The *PLOSMedecine*

24 Denis MUKENGERE MUKWEGE and Cathy NANGINI, “Rape with Extreme Violence : The New Pathology in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo”, *PLoS Medicine* 6, no. 12 (December 2009).

25 *Ibid.*

26 UN WOMEN, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Progress of the World’s Women 2011-2012 : In Pursuit of Justice* (UN WOMEN, 2011).

demonstrates it in its report²⁷. As shown in the table below, 4.5% of the total number of women who were raped in the period between 1999-2006 were infected with HIV/AIDS. Given the other subsequent incidents of rape shown in the same table, one can also tell the extent to which those who are not infected with HIV after being raped become vulnerable to HIV infections. Mukwege points out the context of instability, structural violence, and vulnerability which lead to the barbarities to which mothers, children, daughters, and wives are subjected.

Table 1 : Physical health profile of n = 7,519 sexual violence survivors treated at the *Panzi* Hospital (1999–Aug 2006).Source Table 1²⁸

Clinical Sequelae to Rape	Total	%
Gynecological problems		
With	4,683	62.3
Without	2,836	37.7
Sexually transmitted infections		
Vaginal trichomonas	—	8.9
Genital infection	—	21.2
Urinary infection	—	18.2
Syphilis	—	3.0
HIV	—	4.5
Candida infection	—	14.1
No infection	—	30.1
Surgeries performed		
Fistula	1,225	29.8
Other	2,890	70.2

These consequences of rape are other factors that increase the poverty of women more than that of men in the DR Congo²⁹.

Similarly, the report of the coalition on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (“C. CEDAW”) reported that among the 500,000 rapes registered per year, 99.2 per cent of victims are women, 75% of the internally displaced persons (2,2 million of those who move from one region to another in search of security) are women. There are 40 women raped every day in South Kivu/Eastern DR Congo, and 1 out of 10 of them has been contaminated with HIV³⁰. These atrocities are sufficiently

27 Denis MUKWEGE, “No More ! Organized Rape in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Must Stop Now,” *International Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics : The Official Organ of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics* 114, no. 1 (July 2011) : 3.

28 Denis MUKENGERE MUKWEGE and Cathy NANGINI, “Rape with Extreme Violence : The New Pathology in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo.” *PLoS Medicine* 6, no. 12 (December 2009).

29 *Ibid.*

30 C. CEDEF, *Rapport Alternatif Sur La Mise En Œuvre de La Convention Sur L’élimination de Toutes Les Formes de Discrimination À L’égard Des Femmes. Examen Des Sixième et Septième Rapports Périodiques de*

documented by the United Nations agencies for women such as the United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (*UNIFEM*). All the sexual atrocities to which women are subjected, in addition to challenges related to cultures, beliefs and social representations of women, increase not only the number of women in poverty, but also impede the participation of millions of women in all sectors both public and private.

Traditional Gender Norms

Some traditional gender norms continue to play a considerable role in perpetuating women's poverty and violence against them in the DR Congo. Some advice that is often given to women is that one must endure every single assault or offense in a marriage. Women who flee domestic violence are asked to go back to their husbands and to bear their cross. For example, an adage in the *Nande* language in the northeast DR Congo explains the kind of endurance which is asked to women especially in a marriage : that a woman must endure all kinds of suffering and behave like a stick in boiling water, the expression in *Nande* for this is: "Iwahand'Omútimá ngomúko, Owákindira omovwálike." Mercy Amba Oduyoye reinforces the perception that in some African cultures bearing a burden is more acceptable for women than for men when she states that,

The social character of the self in the African worldview seems more entrenched in women than men, for while women operate always on the principle of persons-in-relation, the African man's autonomy may lead him to independent action that tends to separate him from the unit. Men override culture when it does not suit them, or are conservative when it suits them³¹.

Thus, women's liberty to override culture is more restricted than that of men, especially in the DR Congo.

Contrary to men, women are asked to endure some stereotypes which keep them in the position of marginalization and total dependence and of inferiority to men. Many other examples illustrate this phenomenon. Several maxims and sayings such as those which follow have the force of law, culturally, in the social interactions in the DR Congo. They contribute to the inferiority complex among women vis-à-vis men because they emphasize the superiority of men. They also express the degree to which socio-cultural mechanisms create and increase women's poverty and make difficult their access to positions of responsibility at familial, professional, economic, and political levels. They include,

La RDC, mars 2013.

31 Mercy AMBAODUYOYE, "Feminist Theology in African Perspective," in *Paths of African Theology*, New York, Orbis Books, 1994, 175.

- “*Mwási atongaka mbóka té*”, literally translated as : “*woman does not build a village.*”
- “*Koliá na mwási koliá na ndoki*”, – “*Eating with a woman is eating with a witch,*”
- “*Mobáli atá kó azalí mwána moké, azalí mokóló ya mwási*”, – “*A man, even the youngest, is greater than a woman.*”
- “*Mwási atá azá ná mbóngó, sókí azá ná mobáli té ezalí soucis ya mikolo na mikolo*”, this is a Congolese song which reflects the cultural perception of women who are not married. It says : “*a rich woman, even if she has money, without a man is unhappy.*”
- “*Mwási azá kaka mwási*”, that is to say “*a woman is still obliged to resort to a man to resolve problems.*”
- “*Lobóko ya mwási*”, “*lobóko ya mobáli*” – which means “*Left hand*”, “*Right hand.*” The left hand represents the hand of a woman and the right hand represents the hand of a man. The left hand is considered weaker, less useful than the right one.
- Where two out of 3 people are men in a taxi, Women are supposed to take the middle place to be protected by men.
- Parents used to say to their male children : “*She is your sister, you must protect her,*” or “*you are the leader because you are a boy*” and to the girls : “*you must serve your brother because you are a girl.*”
- “*Azá Mwási-mobáli*” which means “*she is a woman-man*”. This expression is used for women who carry major responsibilities or who do things which are considered men’s roles like building a house.
- The bible, especially some Paul’s verses, is also an instrument which is referred to often to justify much of the exclusion of women from political or public responsibilities : “*woman may not speak in the assembly ...*” ; “*Women be subject to your husbands ...*”, “*man is the head of the family.*” Almost all of the Congolese women are deeply subjected to the biblical principles, especially in small churches where biblical studies are not highly considered.

Following was the response of the coordinator of a non-governmental organization that I interviewed a couple of years ago on the importance of advocating for parity between men and women in political institutions like the parliament : “You should present the values of women, do not impose the rights of women but negotiate them showing that a woman is a person who needs to be protected.” He proposed this as the message to convey : “Protect the woman as God wants her. What if she might be your sister, or your mom, or your wife ? Look at her and listen to her”. Note that the approach here is the one of compassion toward an oppressed person and not that of recognizing the fundamental equal rights between men and women. Thus, it is considered that the public sphere is not a matter of women; it is believed that the commitment of women in politics would be an activity against nature when one refers to roles assigned to each sex socially or to what is easily socially accepted.

The cultural perception of the female as the weaker sex, beard even by the same women, also constitutes a major obstacle to any participation of women in positions of decision-making. If women consider themselves as the weaker sex, they will more unlikely be willing to think critically, even if they are educated, and they will unlikely be willing to take any risk or initiative to advocate for their rights. Women are not the only ones who consider themselves weaker; men have the same opinion. As a man in the military answered to one of my interviews in 2012 :

There are things in which men are better than women as the army and the policy. The areas reserved for women in the army are dressmaking or the administration. You will find more women in the army in these sectors. Women : if you want some sponsorship from men, seek it, it will be granted but do not ask for equality between us because we are different.

Thus, the several maxims and adages presented above are some of the many, “metaphors that reinforce patriarchal depreciation of women”³², according to Margaret A. Farley. They show that women in the DR Congo continue to languish under the weight of stereotypes which negatively influence their representation in politics and other decision-making positions, of which the existing framework does not favor women. These cultural gender norms needs to be addressed in schools, cultural journals and magazines, national and international NGOs, Medias, and in shaping policies in the DR Congo. Improving women political participation in the DR Congo is an urgent task that is incumbent on all.

Oduyoye states that, “a preoccupation with effective participation in global politico-economic structures often works against the more specific

32 Margaret A. FARLEY, *Just Love : A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York : Continuum International Pub. Group, 2006), 185.

needs of women's development or women's priorities."³³ This is the case of the DR Congo and many other countries of the Global South. With respect to political rights, women obtained the right to vote in 1967, in the DR Congo, and the first women were appointed to the Parliament in 1970. However, there were no women in Parliament in 1997. Since the second republic, followed by the regimes of political transitions of presidents Joseph Désiré Mobutu, Laurent Kabila, Joseph Kabila up to the present third republic, the representation of women in the DR Congo has remained less than or equal to 10%. The Congolese Constitution and electoral law do not require any quota to ensure the participation of women in national parliaments. There are also no constitutional or legislative quotas at the provincial or local level³⁴. There is a law against sexual violence such as rape outside marriage, but no any law protects women from domestic violence. Despite the national law against rape and the DR Congo's ratification to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the numbers of women sexually abused in the DR Congo has been increasing for the last decade.

Furthermore, article 14 of the Congolese Constitution stipulates that the state must provide the means to protect women against all forms of discrimination and ensure complete participation of women in decision-making concerning the country. It adds that the principle of parity (equal representation in terms of equal number of women and men) must be applied to both men and women in order to foster such participation. Despite the fact that article 14 sets up the foundations for equality between men and women, the abuse of women mostly in marriage even by men who are considered educated is increasing.

Some DR Congo's men are even unfaithful to their wives by taking the sisters of their wives as girlfriends. They separate themselves from their wives for years without divorcing from them and leave their wives without medical care, material, or psychological support. Such abuses are against the DR Congo's family law, but who cares? Often women who find themselves in this situation cannot complain because they cannot afford to pay a lawyer to defend them, or they are so ashamed and humiliated that they choose to keep silent. One of these men as I know has a master degree and may be working in an International NGO who advocate for respect of human rights. For this, I call especially on the national and international NGO who advocates for women's rights to select men professionals who make effort to live up the respect of women's rights. Once they have selected them, to help them respect the rights of their own wives.

33 ODUYOYE, "Feminist Theology in African Perspective," 175.

34 UN WOMEN, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2011-2012 : In Pursuit of Justice*, 60.

Considering the magnitude of the poverty of women in different forms as presented in this reflection, I would like to conclude with the words of Pope Francis who reaffirms the sacred character of women and reminds us the inviolability of their rights. He states that any violation of a person's dignity cries vengeance before God and offends God himself³⁵. Pope Francis argues that sporadic gestures of assistance are necessary but not enough. Overcoming the poverty of women demands to go beyond occasional acts of generosity in order to foster sustainable and lasting mechanisms of justice, peace, and solidarity. It is therefore urgent to act for equality of opportunities and rights between men and women in many countries of the world and particularly in the DR Congo. Literacy program are still indispensable for millions and millions of women. It is also urgent to act for women to be able to pursue high levels of education. Yet, addressing gender disparities in the DR Congo, requires that the cultural and patriarchal gender that are still dehumanizing women be deeply analyzed and addressed at different levels. Even women who have reached secondary and university levels of education are still affected by the cultural patriarchal gender biases I have listed in this paper. Dialogues about negative gender norms that keep women in the position of second class citizens in some cultures are more than necessary in order to analyze more deeply the many cultural factors that impede women's access to positions of decision-making.

All initiatives of solidarity for women in different areas are to be encouraged in order to reduce their poverty and consequently to reduce the feminization of poverty in the world. We are women of our country, but most importantly we are people of God, which means brothers and sisters no matter where we come from ; we are women of the world. This is the moment to unite our forces and to act in order to truly live as risen beings ! I strongly recommend to the churches and the government to pay attention to the cultural patriarchal gender bias that are still impoverishing women in the DR Congo. ■

35 Francis, "Evangelii Gaudium" (Vatican, 2013), 213.