EFOGE - 2018 End-year report

Introduction and Background Information
As a registered faith based, non-governmental, feminist organization in Kenya working on gender justice across Africa since 2013, 2018 was a year of great achievement and impact for us/Ekklesia Foundation for Gender Education (EFOGE). We continued with the mission to secure and promote a just society where women and men, girls and boys to co-exist as equal human beings without prejudice and injustices based on gender. EFOGE’s main objective since its inception in 2013 is to engage and empower faith and community leadership, and women on gender justice and equality.

Statement of Need and Possibilities
Patriarchal power structures in the African context are deeply entrenched in cultural and religious traditions, and continue to shape and influence social institutions and millions of people, perpetuating gender injustice especially against women and girls, who are always vulnerable victims. Our goal is to aim and harness the potential impact faith leaders and faith community can have in addressing the root causes of gender injustices by developing gender-lens in unpacking patriarchal systems, structures, traditions, attitudes, perceptions, ideas, and worldviews in its ugly forms, which is significant and could serve as the tipping point needed towards a world free from gender based violence and injustices. Positive initiatives to date give evidence of this potential. However, governments, development agencies, and faith communities themselves have not fully recognized, articulated and realized this potential, and faith communities remain active resistance towards gender justice. Due to lack of adequate information and resources, faith community and faith based organizations have not sufficiently shown leadership in addressing gender injustice.

Outline/Summary of Projects/Activities Report for 2018
This report gives summary of projects/activities EFOGE accomplished in 2018, which include:

a) 2018 International Conference on “Faith and Gender”, held in Kampala, Uganda on August 23-25 with the main aim to empower faith leaders, women leaders, faith based organizations, women organizations, NGOs/civil society, among others in the African context to analyze patriarchy and its potential danger/ destruction caused on women and
girls as victims of violence, abuse and oppression, and even on men and general society.

b) 2018 Symposium/Public lectures Event on Sexuality and Reproductive Health Rights for Women and Men in the Context of Faith and Religious Community conducted at St. Michael’s and All Angels Cathedral in Bondo, Kenya on December 20th with delegates from public learning institutions, pastors and faith leaders, medical practitioners, researchers, Anglican Church Mothers Union Movement, Anglican Church Men’s Association;

c) EFOGE piloted Gender Reconciliation Empowerment Training through a contextualized training manual developed with religious and community leaders in Kigali, Rwanda.

d) Supported underage school girls and young women with interest to go back to school through education/scholarship support. These women and girls are mostly survivors of sexual/gender based violence.

e) Partnership, Networking and Collaboration

a) 2018 International Conference in Kampala, Uganda

Our New Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022 includes plans to mobilize and mentor 5,000 faith leaders across Africa as champions for gender justice and equality, and therefore planning and coordinating 2018 international conference hosted in Kampala, Uganda between August 23-25 was one of our main activities for 2018 within the plan. Conference main objectives were as follows:
1. To create awareness and advocate for gender justice and equality from a faith perspective. The target was to bring out gender injustices and inequality so rampant within the church and society in Africa, and to call for shared leadership and justice for women for equal decision making.

2. To Call an end to Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) that is common in the church and society, and that faith community would acknowledge, condemn and bring to an end Sexual Gender Based Violence/injustices against women and girls in the society. Both male and females to appreciate equal worth and dignity and to treat each other with respect.

3. For church leadership to advocate for correct interpretation and application of the Bible/sacred text for justice, peace, and mutual coexistence between women and men. Sacred texts including the Bible, Quran, Torah, etc. are widely being misinterpreted to uphold male superiority that continue to anchor male dominance and breads seeds and attitudes of violence against women and girls and creating conducive environment for poverty in the whole society.

The idea here is to challenge rampant culture of male dominance that penetrates through religious teachings, thinking and attitudes that makes women and girls vulnerable for abuse and violence simply because they are females.

- For faith and community leadership to advocate for just structures and policies both in the church and society that includes women in equal leadership and participation in socio-cultural, religious, economic and political opportunities available in the society.

This event comparatively was successful and invited a total of 106 delegates mostly faith leaders from diverse backgrounds across Africa and beyond. It was a safe space where leaders women and men, gender practitioners, students, and scholars, came together for fellowship, conversation and dialogue on how together they can end root causes of violence against women and girls. The following countries were present; Kenya (37), Uganda (50), Tanzania (1), Rwanda (7), Cameroon (2), Zimbabwe (1), Australia (1), United States (6), Canada (1), and Nigeria (1). Speakers from diverse background and experience presented both
plenary and workshop sessions that challenged delegates to take action against gender based violence and to adapt equality patterns that inspire and promote equal leadership and decision making for men and women as made in God’s image and likeness.

**Plenary and Workshop Presentations**
Speakers with wide experience and convictions on gender equality presented papers both in the plenary and workshop sessions as follows;

2. Amy Chase, USA: On Speaking and Spaces in Proverbs 31 – the Struggle to Share within Marriage
5. Hannah Rasmusen, Kenya: Saving Grace for Women – 1 Timothy 2:8-15
7. Dr. Barb Orloski, Canada: Two Problematic Passages in the Bible
10. Pastor Frank Tweheyo, Uganda: Gender and Redemption
11. Wayne Pelly, USA: Women’s Role in the Church – Considering the Whole Counsel of God.

**Impact Assessment, Case Study and Testimonies from Survivors of Sexual Violence**
EFOGE annual events always have great impact and transformation among delegates. Pre and post conference surveys for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) normally indicates higher percentage of participant with changed attitude and mindsets, motivation to take the same message back, and inspiration to join upcoming events for gender justice for continued fellowship and inspiration.

Among other surprises, one delegate from Uganda by the name Fred who attended EFOGE 2017 faith and Gender international event in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania went back and started a feminist group called “She
Learnss” to support and advocate for empowerment of young vulnerable girls in the slum areas within Kampala.

Delegates both from Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya have initiatives to start local chapters to continue with the conversation and fellowship about faith and gender justice. Another delegate, (pastor) from Kigali Rwanda also sent us a text with these encouraging words, “Hello Rev! I’m reading an article in the Mutuality Magazine of 2014 by Sandra Glahn and it’s so liberating. She quotes Luke’s 8:1-3 and 1 Timothy 5:8-16, and says a woman’s femininity is not violated if she financially supports a man...and that doesn’t undermine his manhood..."

During the event, delegates also had opportunities to hear healing testimonies from survivors of sexual and gender based violence, as they narrated and shared painful experiences, deep wounds, and steps of hope towards healing through the work and support of EFOGE. The two survivors narrated how reaching out to faith leaders has been a challenge and how they are always victimized and traumatized with response from their faith leaders. What was noted in that, majority of faith leaders lack adequate resources and skills to respond and support survivors of Sexual, domestic, and gender based violence.

Several books are reading materials/resources from our partner organizations including Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) International, Empower International Ministry, and Side By side Faith Movement for Gender were freely given to all participants to carry home. Conference plenary papers and presentations are available on our website. Click here.

To follow up on the same project and within our new strategic plan 2018-2022, EFOGE is planning another international “Faith and Gender” conference this year 2019 on the theme “Man and Woman, One in Christ: Engaging Faith Narratives for Justice and Equality” in August 21-23. Initial information is available on our website, https://www.efogeinternational.org, as more information will be update soon.

b) Symposia/Public Lectures on Sexuality & Reproductive Health Rights
As one of the leading faith based feminist organization in Kenya and across sub-Saharan Africa, EFOGE board and staff were saddened and deeply concern with reports of increasing percentage of underage school girls in Kenya getting pregnant and dropping out of schools, increase cases of new HIV infections among young girls and boys between age of 14-21, and roll backs and teachings against the use of contraceptives by some faith leaders. With these increasing threats and disempowerment of women over their sexuality, still any mention of reproductive health rights within religious circles is like resurrecting and inviting all angry gods and goddesses from their graves to come and witness the unthinkable.

However in December 20th, 2018, through deep consultation with top leadership from the Church within Siaya County, ministry of Education, ministry of Health, and County government of Siaya, EFOGE dared these forces and planned/hosted a symposium/public lectures on “Understanding Sexuality & Reproductive Health Rights for Women and Men in the Context of Faith and Religious community” as an entry point to get levels of competence and attitude over the same. We received a total of 216 delegates/participants who were head-teachers from local primary and high schools, senior pastors/faith leaders, Anglican Church Mothers Union and Men’s Association members, medical practitioners, youths from the Cathedral, among others. We carried out a pre-symposium survey which revealed to us that about 82% of pastors/faith leaders don’t understand and has never mentioned anything to do with sexual and reproductive health rights in their summons and during pastoral counseling. 76% regard sexual and reproductive health rights as odd teaching against their church/faith tradition. 64% are against sex education as this might open gateway to early sex and immorality among
youths, while 34% was for the opinion that reproductive health information and sex education should be available in schools to give healthy choices for adolescents/youths.

The following speakers led and facilitated the conversation during the symposium: The Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Otieno Wasonga – Bishop of the Anglican diocese of Maseno West and Dean of the Anglican Church of Kenya; The Rt. Rev Prof. David Kodia – Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Bondo; Prof. Esther Mombo – Researcher and Senior Lecturer from St. Paul’s University; The Reverend Pauline Wanjiru – World Council of Churches (WCC), Nairobi office; Jacqueline Osido – Ministry of Health Bondo; The Rev. Domnic Misolo – Ekklesia Foundation (EFOGE); and Maurice Oduor – National Council for Population and Development, Nairobi.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), every day in the sub Sahara Africa/developing countries, 20,000 girls under age 18 give birth. This amounts to 7.3 million births a year. And if all pregnancies are included, not just births, the number of adolescent pregnancies are much higher. When a girl becomes pregnant, her life can change radically. Her education may end and her job prospects diminish. She becomes more vulnerable to poverty and exclusion, and her health often suffers. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls.

Adolescent pregnancy is generally not the result of a deliberate choice – these girls often have little say over decisions affecting their lives. Rather, early pregnancy is a consequence of little or no access to school, information or health care.

**EFOGE Points of Engagement and Action Plan for 2019/2020**

While reproductive health rights are emotive and controversial, because of the moral, ethical and religious undertones of birth control, abortion, family planning, and sexual orientation, EFOGE board of management is seeking a clear path of engagement with religious community and other stakeholders in order to create points of entry for safer conversation and dialogue on the same. Today and the world over, reproductive health rights are emotionally and politically charged, but in the Kenyan context and many sub-Saharan Africa countries, the issue is not reproductive rights per se, but the power and wish to control female body especially their sexuality. EFOGE is willing and ready to provide safe space for faith and
community leadership to have conversation and way forward to walk along and beside vulnerable girl-child and women on the same issue.

Based on the outcome and suggestions received from the recent public lectures, EFOGE plans to pilot a unique two years program (2019/2020) with community stakeholders including faith and religious leaders, learning institutions, community women groups, and youths, among others on sexuality and reproductive health rights. More specifically, EFOGE is seeking to conduct research study on sexuality and reproductive health rights within great lakes region, including Kisii, Homabay, Siaya, Kisumu, and Migori in western part of Kenya. EFOGE shall then use the data and research finding to create awareness with community leadership and develop a contextualized empowerment training manual on sexuality and reproductive health rights as a pilot project. This project will then be rolled out/scaled up in Kenya and other sub-Saharan African Countries.