



## YWAM and the status of women by Steve Goode

I was at a consultation where I heard reports from Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Iraq, and Afghanistan. I was struck by how many of those reports dealt with one aspect of justice: the treatment of women.

This issue of gender is an important issue for all of us. As a mission, we must look outwardly at global gender issues and prayerfully consider our response. We must also look inwardly at ourselves to see what issues we face regarding gender. If we are going to have authority and an anointing in serving the poor where gender issues are significant, we need to see how we are responding both individually and corporately.

First, let's look at a global statistic of the gender issue: of the one billion living in absolute poverty, women are an overwhelming majority.

How does this fact impact us as members of the Church and as a mission organization? What relevance does it have for missions today? In the book "The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History," author Rodney Stark, a non-Christian, asked a question, "How can we explain the rise of Christianity?" He says there were at least two key reasons, "One is the Christians' response to disasters and the other is the Christians' high view of women."

This is a strong statement about history coming from a non-believer. But we still need to examine what non-biblical attitudes we might hold which allow women to be oppressed and therefore give rise to the statistic above.

How do we view women? What has shaped that perspective? Our response to these questions will strongly influence the freedom women will have to fulfill their destiny and calling within YWAM.

God has spoken much in Scripture about our responsibilities as the people of God in honoring and valuing one another, showing respect, promoting each other, recognizing each other's gifts and skills and providing opportunities for those gifts to be used. This understanding is again underlined in various statements to which we as a mission subscribe, such as the Lausanne Covenant and in our own documents such as the YWAM Foundational Values and the Manila Covenant.



This was also reflected in the Jomtien Paper on gender, which comments: "Even though women were undervalued in society, Jesus showed them equal respect. He spoke to them in public, encouraged their desire to learn about the truths of God, and included them as His followers. The Apostle Paul affirmed women in leadership, and in the use of their gifts and God-given potential."

I would like for us as men to reflect for a moment. As we, men and leaders in YWAM, consider the gender issue, we need to ask ourselves some questions:

- What is the status of women in YWAM?
- Do the women at my location feel safe or free enough to share with me the challenges they face being a woman in ministry?
- How do I show respect for women at my location?
- How do I recognize women's giftings, leadership skills and calling? How many women do I have on my leadership team?
- How am I educating myself about women's issues?
- How am I impacting my church on women's issues?
- How am I shaping those whom I am training and discipling about women's issues?
- How has my culture influenced my view of women? Does that cultural influence have a Biblical basis?
- What is my response when women are mistreated in my culture?
- Within my culture, how do those without a voice speak? How can I be a statesperson for those who cannot speak for themselves?

We need to have these issues resolved clearly in our own lives and communities so that we are further empowered to support those amongst us facing serious and sustained gender injustice, such as:

- Moses Sesay of YWAM Sierra Leone speaking out on behalf of the role of women in the Sierra Leone church and missions arena or his speaking out against female circumcision amongst his people.
- Our teams formerly in Afghanistan negotiated with the Taliban about women being educated or being able to work outside the home when there are government restrictions that forbid this. Our teams saw widows who had four and five daughters with no means of livelihood.
- Gary and Helen Stephens and Chan Kit Ying are serving practically in China on behalf of the girl-child. They are a voice where there is a stigma on having a baby girl or one who is handicapped.



What is God's heart for us on the gender issue? What changes do we in YWAM need to make to reflect God's heart for the women in our mission as well as for those women who are being oppressed, who are powerless or who have no voice? I want to encourage us to hear from God afresh on these male/female issues.

by Steve Goode, YWAM's International Director for Mercy Ministries. Reprinted with permission from the International YWAMer June 1999.