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Gender Inequalities in Buha (Kigoma) and the Role of Gender Mainstreaming to Alliviate Them

Conrad John Masabo, Mr.

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Inculturation is a difficult and delicate task, since it raises the question of the Church's fidelity to the Gospel and the Apostolic Tradition amidst the constant evolution of cultures.

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Gender Inequalities in Buha (Kigoma) and the Role of Gender Mainstreaming to Alleviate Them

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Introduction

Gender can be defined as the social determined roles and relations between males and females. In this regard, these social constructed roles and relations have resulted into tremendous gender inequalities that need to be addressed anew with a different methodology or strategy. They call for critical and deliberate attention from any one who hopes to contribute towards making this world a better place for living. It attracts re-assessing of our understanding and the extent we are ready to promote and propagate for human rights, common good and social justice. The United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement for Women has observed that:

> Gender is an issue because of the fundamental differences and inequalities between women and men. These differences and inequalities may manifest themselves in different ways in specific countries or sectors but there are some broad patterns that point to questions that should always be considered.[1]

The various societies have created and promoted various elements that generate the gender inequalities through the

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[1] UNITED NATIONS, *Gender Mainstreaming an Overview*, New York: UNO Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2002, 5.

established systems such as the patriarchal system and the raising of some institutions that stand and safeguard the existing gender inequalities. In the African context, the patriarchal set up finds support in local customs, myth, and beliefs.[2] These myths have down pinned women in our communities in different forms. For example;

> Male Mythology and the gradual patriarchalization of [religion] and society have systematically justified the oppression of women… it also translates female and evil into an ontological principle. The female comes to represent the qualities of materiality, irrationality, carnality and finitude, which debase the 'manly' spirit and drag it down into sin and death.[3]

Like in many parts of the world, among other African communities, among the Waha tribe it has been learnt as well that; despite the fact that gender inequalities prevalence in traditional Buha[4], they tended to increase as the society advanced. In particular the level of gender inequalities worsened by the colonization of the area and more seriously by setting it to be one of the labor reserve areas to offer laborers in the established colonial plantation in areas like Morogoro and Tanga. During this period the level of gender inequalities among the different clans increased compared to the time before colonization. Improvements were hoped to be realized after independence, however as the independent government maintenance of the legacy perpetuated by the former colonial masters promoted for the continued gender oppression among the Waha women. It is evident that there was less attention in provision of education opportunities, provision of social services such as power, water and better transport which could have helped to make it easier for women to demand their rights. Thus instead of the independent government improving the quality of the provision of social services, to a larger extent maintained the status quo.

[2] A. TARIMO, "Gender and African Traditional Religion", *Africa Tomorrow* 2/1 (2001), 5-18; 5.

[3] Ibid., 15.

[4] Buha is used a geographical location. It is thus synonymously to Kigoma or Kiha land. But its inhabitants are known as Waha but commonly referred as Ha in English

The situation is alarming, and it calls for interventions. It is in this regard that the United Nations Organization established the Commission on the Status of Women in 1946 as a special body to deal with women issues. And it is said that the question of equality of women have been topical since then. Discrimination of women as women is the say of the day among the Ha communities. Observations by Eze, of why things have gone that way, depicts the dynamics involved in the creation of the state of affair lived by the women in Buha Communities. Eze observed as follows:

> the inequalities and marginalization of women in various societies and particularly in Africa is reinforced by two variables. These are the capitalist socio-economic organization and the various customs which have been further reinforced by colonial and religious influences.[5]

Thus on one hand "the colonial legacy, accompanied by Christianity, brought socio-cultural, religious, economic and political changes that undermined the role of women in public sphere"[6] which the women used to enjoy before the coming of colonialists. And on the other hand "the principle of succession and inheritance allowed the sons to replace his father by inheriting the land and cattle."[7]

Among the Waha things were almost the same. Tarimo almost captures what has and is happening in Buha. He suggests that:

> women could not inherit a husband's wealth. Instead, women were inherited together with the land and cattle. The principle of equality did not exist in sharing of wealth … consequently, sons started out life with more advantages than their sisters.[8]

This essay therefore sets to discuss gender inequality theories that best explain the existing gender inequalities among the Ha people living in Kigoma Region and explaining how gender mainstreaming strategy can be employed to reduce the existing

[5] As quoted by B.B. BAGILIYE, *Human Rights Overview*, Presentation in Protection Training at UNHCR Kibondo Field Office to UNHCR Kibondo Field Staff on August 27, 2007, 12.

[6] TARIMO, "Gender and African", 6.

[7] Ibid., 12.

[8] Ibid. (Inheritance of women practice in Buha is known as *Ughuchura*).

gender inequalities. To meet the demands of the task our essay will have a part giving the region profile of demographic, geographical, historical and political data. This will be followed by a part highlighting some of the existing gender inequalities among the Buha Communities, then a part discussing the selected gender inequalities theories and lastly a part devoted to expose the methodology to follow in using gender mainstreaming strategy to reduce these inequalities.

Region Profile (Demographic Data, Historical, Geographical and Political Information)

The (Wa)Ha as they have been named and referred to by the English speaking communities live in Kigoma region. Kigoma region is one of the twenty one regions of main land Tanzania. It is inhabited by a total of 1,679,109[9] people. The data is per 2002 Tanzania National Census. This number however had changed drastically in the last ten month following the voluntary and UNHCR and Ministry of Home Affairs campaigns and initiatives in advising the refugee from Burundi to repatriate to their home country Burundi following the signing of peace agreement and as the situation improved. In Kibondo district which used to have five refugee camps, today has remained with one camp which is said to close early this year. The population is thus less than what was collected in the 2002 Nation census.

The region is divided into four administrative districts: Kigoma Urban, Kigoma Rural, Kasulu and Kibondo. The Population by district is as follows: **Kigoma Urban** population is 144,852 people of which the male population is 70,630 and female population is 74,222. **Kigoma Rural** population is 490,816 people, of which the male population is 237,342 and female population is 253,474. **Kasulu** Population is 628,677 people of which the male population is 299,506, and female population is 329,171. **Kibondo** population is 414,764 people, of which the male population is 200,381 and female population is

[9] *www.tanzania.go.tz/census* (accessed on October 28, 2008).

214,383. All the data is as per Districts Census Data of 2002 national Census.

The tribe of Waha has many clans which belong to Bantu speaking and the original non Bantu speaking Waha who mostly lived in caves who were absorbed and incorporated in the Bantu speaking communities when the Bantu expanded to Buha territory.[10] Today these cave dwellers are said to be found in Burundi and some in Kigoma. They are called the Watwa or Bhayobha, Bhagesera or Bhazigabha in Kibondo, Bhayanda in Kasulu and Nyahoza and Wakiko in Kigoma. It is said also that many lived by the river banks of Malagarasi River. Most known clans total up to fifty. The capital taboos include a young man not marrying a girl belonging to his own clan; a traditional aspect normally checked before one's marriage is approved.

Kigoma region borders Rukwa region in the South, Tabora and Shinyaga regions in the East, Kagera region in the North, Burundi and Lake Tanganyika and DRC in the West. It is located in the western part of the country.

Gender Inequalities

Gender inequality is the opposite of gender equality. It suggests the lack of, missing of, or elimination of, discrimination based on gender to allow all male and female to have unequal opportunities and benefits. It also implies lack of equality of men and women human rights, legal systems and constitutions as step forward towards gender equity. To understand the gravity of the situation, the words of Mwalimu Nyerere suit to explain what is happening to women in Buha communities. He explains:

> The truth is that in the villages women work very hard. At times they work for twelve or fourteen hours. [They are the first to wake-up and last to go to bed]. They even work on Sundays and public holidays. Women who live in the villages work harder than anybody

[10] Cf. P. CHUBWA, *Waha: Historia na Maendeleo*, Tabora: TMP 1979, 13-14.

else in Tanzania. But men who live in the villages … are on leave for half of their lives.[11]

This is what actually is happening in Kigoma villages. Women are overburdened, by men. There is a lot that women undergo. The UN document on *Mainstreaming an Overview;* provides a good summary of what women in Kigoma villages are being subjected to. There are inequalities in political power, within house holds, in legal status and entitlements, division of labor and the product of labor and the domestic unpaid sector.[12] In political sphere and decision making institutions women are less represented. Almost all council of elders called ***Abhashingatahe***[13] women are hardly found. They are just left to implement what males will decide. In the house holds all the resources including the wives are the property of their husbands. Men are free to decide anything in distributing the families' resources without the advice from the wives, even in cases where women happened to be industrious men become the manager and controller of the resources. If women decide to fight to safeguard their property they will be beaten and sent back home and when the council of elders meet to decide the fate of the women the fine normally is to buy a piece of cloth and the women have to come back to their house holds to continue serving. Because of the domination of the legal system by mostly men even the laws passed to safeguard the society's fate favor men. In the division of labor women are the ones' who men employ in their farms as laborers and have no right to decide what could be the proper distribution of the produce. In his article, though not being specific to Waha, Tarimo provides what happens as follows: in farm work "men were [are] involved mostly in the initial planting and harvesting, but the daily job of tending was [is] done by wives"[14]. And in domestic which is the unpaid sector is the same in the Buha communities.

[11] J.K. NYERERE, *Freedom and Socialism: A Selection from His Writings and Speeches*, Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968, 245 (emphasis in brackets mine).

[12] Cf. UNITED NATIONS, *Gender Mainstreaming*, 5-6.

[13] A name of council of elders in Kiha language.

[14] TARIMO, "Gender and African", 11 (emphasis in brackets is mine).

No women are paid for the domestic chores or activities they do, and in most cases they are assigned to works that even prohibit them to participate into the public sphere.

But to be more concrete, firstly; women from time in memorial have been denied meaningful education. The traditional education they were provided focused on training them for domestic works ranging from cooking, nursing children, fetching water, collecting firewood and taking care of the household. When colonial education was on offer, women or girls were not allowed to join instead they were hidden by their parents; even today when a girl child does not make pass the standard seven exam or form four examination she is strongly advised to wait for the last option available for her: that is for marriage. Secondly; women in Buha were and are still denied access to land ownership and rights to own community properties. For example, when parents buy a non moveable property they often entrust the title of ownership to their boy children or male member of the society. The involvement in decision making process and holding of leadership opportunities is the third aspect in which women are not given chance to participate. The council of elders '***Abhashingantahe***' is male dominated and thus little is felt as the contribution of women in decision making. Even the former head of kingdom had a different name, while a male rule was referred to as ***Mwami***; the female rule was thus named as ***Umwamikazi*** to differentiate the two.

Fourthly, the inequality also existed in distribution of labor, time to rest and access to recreation. Apart from attending to all the domestic household chores, women in Buha are the main labor power in agriculture activities. A daily time table for women is full of activities; they are the first to wake up and the last to go to bed to rest. On the other hand men in Buha are entitled tasks like hunting, fishing, forest clearing which is said to be very risky engagement. Despite this sex-gender fused distributions of labor still men have time for recreation compared to women. In Buha village for example, a girl child's time and access to recreation diminishes with the increase of age. Unequal freedom of expression and movement make the fifth inequality. In Buha men can easily move from their areas of residence and go

to far distances something not enjoyed by women, most probably because of the domestic and household responsibilities tied with women. Men are entitled more rights to express themselves, but when women are given chances to express themselves their contributions are less considered.

Inequality in sexual life is another element. In cases of lack of children women are blackmailed to be the source of their problems and in times of giving birth to girls only women are masked the fate. If it happens the husbands are lazy; women are required to take care of the family including the husbands themselves. In time of marriage young men are required to pay dowry but women are not. The dowry paid makes the basis of the future mistreatments in the family by men who think that by paying the dowry they have purchased the women and hence can treat them as they wish. Last but not least, there is unequal access to lucrative business and right to inherit the family or society property. Men and boys are allowed, encouraged, supported required to have and own a lucrative business. In Buha women are denied such right for establishing and owning lucrative business on the ground that they will join their husbands when they got married.

Gender Theories that Best Explain the Gender Inequalities in Buha

Various gender and feminists scholars have studied different communities where gender relation exists and came up with some theories explaining why gender inequalities existing in human society. Among many theories, the theories that best explain the gender inequality among the Waha are the gender biological theories, functionalist theory on gender inequality and the conflict theory on gender inequality. This set of analytical tools can save best in explaining both the former and current gender inequalities existing in Buha villages or communities of the Kigoma region. Anyone who sets forward to study the gender inequalities among Buha villages will find these frameworks useful and helpful.

The *Gender Biological Theories* are among the micro-level theories which share the same thesis that the existing gender

inequalities are the responsibility of individuals. They maintain that each person is responsible for the inequalities done to them. They base their explanations by pointing out that men and women have different sizes in the brain mass and that out of these biological structures of brain that different people develop different traits that lead to taking various walks of life; some to more domestic chores and less intellectual demanding occupations and others to more industrious and productive occupation and more intellectual demanding engagements. These theories concur with the myth that regard women incapable of meaningful use of their brain and hence constantly need support and direction of men who are endowed with such power. This myth is common in Buha communities, and is used to justify the women gender oppression. They regard women to understand and respond to sexual desires and capable of child bearing and caring. There are even Kiha sayings that stipulates exactly how men in Buha villages assess and measure the highest intellectual abilities of women which put-off them in any developmental and analytical mental contribution. These gender theories also maintain that higher mental processes and deep thinking are for men while lower processes and less intellectual involved thinking are for women. These theories thus equate women with domestic works of caring for babies and cooking. They thus conclude that women subordination lies in the psychological and biological differences between men and women. As it had been noted earlier, in Buha villages and communities women are assigned and are much involved in domestic chores of child bearing and caring, cooking, fetching water, collecting firewood and cleaning the houses; thus by using this theories one can catch-up with the dynamics prevailing in creation of the gender inequalities among the local communities and villages of the Waha. Some pioneers of these theories are scholars like Darwin Asmov and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Functionalist Theory on Gender Inequality is another analytical tool that can best explain the gender inequalities among the communities and villages of Kigoma. It is like an extension of the gender biological theories which suggest that women are inferior and attracted to domestic works. Functionalist theory on

gender inequality too; takes its root base on the sex roles of women. It suggests that since women give birth and nurse children, it is natural that they will take care of them in other ways. Such biological roles determine natural division of labor, in which women are more involved in domestic activities such as preparing meals and maintaining homes. In the part highlighting inequalities existing in local communities and villages among the Waha these are the most noted elements of equalities which mostly down pin women to remain in the kitchen. The theory then proceeds to suggest that men are thus left to engage into breadwinning activities and other economically dominant roles. It is identified also that, in Buha it is mostly men who are allowed to start, run and own most lucrative business, an advantage that women do not enjoy: something that seems to support the theory thesis to a large extent. It is thus summarized that roles of men and women as instrumental roles and expressive roles respectively. As most of the women in Buha villages and local communities are confined to domestic activities ranging from giving birth and nursing children, collecting firewood, fetching water, preparing meals, sweeping and cleaning households, taking care of their families and guarding homes in the absence of men, has led them to be the way they are today. This is because what they do has never been considered to have commercial influential value to the local communities and thus regarding them less productive. In this regard the Functionalist theory on gender inequality is given credit in explaining how gender inequalities are today rampant among the members of various local communities and villages of Waha. Among the prominent proponents of this theory are G. Marxwell and M. Harris.

The third theory that captures well the dynamics involved in the institutionalization gender inequalities in Buha local communities and villages is the *Conflicting Theory on Gender Inequality*. It looks at the present predicaments that have blocked the various initiatives adopted to unearth the gender inequalities. It seems to wonder why gender inequalities continue to persist. It thus focuses its attention to explain why gender inequality persists, even though men and women are not tied to traditional roles as might be the case in earlier times. The theory observes

that men continue to dominate women because of their greater control over economic, political and social resources. It thus points out that this is because of the lack of initiatives by those in power to give up this control, this arrangement persists far beyond their necessity. When one speaks of women in Buha local communities and villages being oppressed and marginalized one might wonder whether there have been any changes of the social structure arrangement. The fact is that there are a lot of changes but lacking the attitude change in men's perspective on the status of women. Men in Buha local communities and villages are reluctant to transform their domination over women. They use their economic power of ownership and control of land and its products as well as the control over livestock, their political power expressed in by the role played by the council of elders who decide and direct the well being of the society. Men continue to use the oppressive cultural values and social institutions like religion to promote, continue and safeguard the women oppression in the community. For example, deprivations of women's right to own land continue. The framework in which this operates is typically like what Aquiline Tarimo in his article *'The Second Scramble for Land in Africa'* narrates:

> the rationale of denying ownership rights to women is based upon four main arguments. First, land must be inherited through a male who owns the land on behalf of the family. Second, ancestral land cannot be transferred through marriage [when a female member of a given society marries a male of another society]. Third, women are accorded to right to inherit land because it may impoverish their family. Fourth, women are always considered temporary members in family because of the possibilities of divorce and remarriage.[15]

Many changes have taken place, various initiatives done to empower and emancipate women but gender inequalities are rampant. The theory exposes that the inequalities continue because of the hegemony of men extended by control over economic, political; and social resources. It forces one to believe that the changes have been more superficial and not concrete. In

[15] A. TARIMO, "The Second Scramble for Land in Africa", *Africa Tomorrow* 3/1 (2003), 109-110 (emphasis in brackets mine).

understanding the current situation and for the meaningful study of gender inequalities in Buha local communities and villages this theory is awarded credit.

How Gender Mainstreaming Strategy Can Be Employed to Reduce the Existing Gender Inequalities in Buha

The Platform for action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, September 1995 calls for the promotion of a policy of gender mainstreaming.[16] It is a strategy coming up with the aim of re-addressing the weakness that all other reforms that were undertaken, such as Women in Development (WID) introduced in the early 1970's, Women and Development (WAD) introduced in the late 1970's, Gender and Development (GAD) introduced in 1980's and adopted officially in 1985, in addressing gender inequalities failed to address the problem. Its focus is to attain equality and equity for both men and women. Mainstreaming can be defined as "an interrelated set of ideas and development direction and organizations that make decisions about resources."[17] It focuses on institutions at all level in all spheres of life to create a world which will be friendly for each member to live and exploit his/her potentials. To make this concept known it is worth to quote Karega explanation of mainstream in length. She points out that:

> Ideas and practices within mainstream tend to reflect and reinforce each other. It is the ideas and practices in the mainstream that determine who gets what and provide a rationale for the allocation of societal resources and opportunities … mainstream means having access to society's resources including socially-valued goods, opportunities and reward such as recognition and respect, education, secure and rewarding employment, health, leisure and personal security … equal participation in influencing what is valued, in shaping development direction and choices and in distributing opportunities. The goal … is to attain gender equality and equity … is not just about equal numbers of women and men in current initiatives or structures. [But] It involves changing policies and institutions so that they actively promote gender equality and equity.[18]

[16] R.G. MWATHANGA KARERA, "Mainstreaming Gender in the Humanities and Social Science Programmes", in I.N. Kimambo, ed., *Humanities and Social Sciences in East and Central Africa: Theory and Practice*, Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 2003, 311.

[17] Ibid., 312.

The United Nations Organization is highest international organization behind the promotion and adoption of gender mainstreaming strategy through its agencies. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) agreed conclusions 1997/2 defined gender mainstreaming as: "… the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy of making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated the ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."[19] For any one who is enkindled to shine forth in working towards human equality and wish to wage war to fight against all forms of inequalities in any community and in Buha communities and villages in particular this is a non-biased strategy. But we all know that our society is a male dominated society, if we are not careful we might fail to realize our goal. The advice of Christopher Oyoo Yaye is worth noting. He comments that;

> The effectiveness of any institution (democracy [gender equality and equity] included), depends on the kind of leadership that manages its operations. An institution is simply a vessel. However good vessel might be, it cannot perform unless it has an effective captain with sufficient knowledge and skills regarding navigation.[20]

Like any other men dominated societies, men in Buha need to be ready to change their altitudes towards the status of women in their communities and villages. It is because of the fact that

[18] Ibid., 312-313 (emphasis in bracket is mine).

[19] As quoted in UNITED NATIONS, *Gender Mainstreaming*, V.

[20] C. OYOO YAYE, "Way Out of Kenya's Political Ills: The Quest for Leadership Integrity", *HAKIMANI: Jesuit Journal of Social Justice in Eastern Africa*, 02/08, (April – June 2008), 11 (emphasis in brackets mine).

gender mainstreaming strategy needs their captainship in order to make a safe voyage to reach the final destination of gender equality and equity. As that strategy needing change of altitude of both women and men; education plays a central role or is a hub for or a ground for take-off. Specifically, how gender mainstreaming strategy can be employed in reducing the existing gender inequalities; the following methodology can be adopted.

For gender mainstreaming strategy to be successfully, the equal provision of critical education which will challenge both women and men to assess themselves on how they perceive themselves. The education program should focus on both the formal and non formal education to educate all members of the society as a preparation for adoption and implementation as well as the monitoring and evaluation of the success of the mainstreaming strategy in the communities and villages of Buha. When registering students in the newly built schools those doing the selection should be well versed and informed so as to avoid creating imbalance that the former communities perpetuated and promoted. The non formal education should be critical so as to challenge the present attitudes of both women and men and should prepare them to be ready to adopt a gender perspective in any initiative taken. Men should not forget reminding women and women should not forget reminding men to be considerate in matter concerned with the education of their children so that all children to have equal access to education opportunities available.

The councilors in the local government should be gender sensitive so as to propose good local policies that aim at promoting of the welfare of both women and men. Women and men should be encouraged to contest for the available political posts and all should aim at creating a more gender balanced district council which will debate the issues of gender implication with an open and unbiased mind. In such meetings matters concerning land tenure policies should be reviewed and people should be encouraged to entitle land ownership to all children equally and not just focusing on one sex of children. Traditional customary rights to inherit that pushed backward women affairs should be challenged and all structures which formally were men dominated should adopt new structures that incorporate both men

and women in the society decision making process. This will thus propagate more gender sensitive policies. Tarimo observes that: "Venturing to new horizon in liberation of … [Buha] women today entails recovering the neglected role of women in the process of decision-making through participation in leadership functions and positions of responsibility."[21] Parents should be guardians for fare distribution of domestic activities that once were holding girls tied not to recreate and have freedom of movement in search of life opportunities. In distributing responsibilities to children they should not overburden one sex as it is commonly practiced among the communities and villages of Buha.

Last but not least, is that the government should spearhead the process as the United Nations spearheads the project of gender mainstreaming strategy world-wide. If the local communities and villages are left alone they will not succeed in fulfilling what mainstreaming strategy requires. The government has to employ village community development personnel who will be the axel for pulling the community education program and who will assist in policy analysis at the local level to open up for equal participation of all members of the society regardless of their sex or biological differences .

Conclusion

Throughout this essay it has been observed that; gender inequalities in Buha local communities and villages existed long before even the coming of colonialists, but the coming of colonialists intensified the situation by uprooting men to newly open colonial plantation as laborers thus leaving women behind with the duty of taking care of the family. More still little has been done by the independent government which has continued to marginalize the area in matters of development and infrastructures and provision of social services which could have helped in alleviated the heavy burden on women shoulders. It has highlighted some of the gender inequalities and theories that best

[21] A. TARIMO, "Gender and African", 16 (emphasis in bracket is mine).

explain the dynamics that were and are involved in their institutionalization. At last we have observed that something has to be done to the existing situation that is the adoption of gender mainstreaming strategy. It is also true that; without true and liberating education to both men and women things will not be changed for the better. Thus for proper functioning of the gender mainstreaming strategy critical education is at the centre of the move.

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Africa Tomorrow would like to give new evidence that "from the clash of ideas flashes forth truth".

For this medium of reflection is also convinced that, "Driven by the desire to discover the ultimate truth of existence, human beings seek to acquire those universal elements of knowledge which enable them to understand themselves better and to advance in their own self-realisation" (John Paul II, Fides et Ratio, 4).

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Inculturation is a difficult and delicate task, since it raises the question of the Church's fidelity to the Gospel and the Apostolic Tradition amidst the constant evolution of cultures.

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