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Master Thesis in Diakonia and Christian Social Practice

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“Women, use your talents!”

How does the Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy (Malagasy Lutheran Church) through the “Use Your Talents” project empower women?

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Abstract

The FLM UYT project aims a sustainable development in Madagascar through promoting and supporting grassroots initiative, emphasizing on the use of the talents of church members in the local community. The purpose of this thesis is to gain an understanding of the impact of an emphasis on gender equality and women empowerment in the work of UYT at national level and particularly in two synods in the south of Madagascar: Ambovombe Androy and Betioky Atsimo. Interviews and surveys were conducted in field to collect data. After analyzing the data, the results reveals that despite the fact that UYT, as a practical diakonia, at the same time lift up people dignity, give them opportunity to not only participate in God's mission but in serving its community but also cement the oppressive gender roles and social system.

Key words: south of Madagascar, use of talents, women empowerment, diakonia

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List of abbreviations

ANELF	Alliance Nationale des Églises Luthériennes de France
AROPA	Support to Farmers' Professional Organizations and Agricultural Services Project
BN	Bintansnemda former Digni
Danmission	Danish mission
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
FANILO	Fampandrosoana Anivon'ny Loterana or Development department of FLM
FLM	Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy or Malagasy Lutheran Church
INSTAT	National Institute of Statistics in Madagascar
KMSL	Komity Mpiandraikitra ny Synoda Lehibe or the executive committee of FLM
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
NMS	Norwegian Missionary Society
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SIK	Centre for Intercultural Communication in Stavanger Norway
SL	Synoda Lehibe or the general assembly of FLM
SPAA	Synodam-Paritany Ambovombe Androy or Ambovombe Androy Regional Synod
SPBA	Synodam-Paritany Betioky Atsimo or South Betioky Regional Synod
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UYT	Use Your Talents project
WCC	World Council of Churches
WEGE	Women Empowerment and Gender Equality

Chapter 1:

“People call me “Madame Miralenta¹” (gender equality)” the woman from a rural village in the Ambovombe Androy region, south of Madagascar recalled with a smile. She is a community worker and raising awareness on gender equality is part of her work.

In an area where all aspects of life are still so imprinted by a male-dominated culture, this title surprises. Why this title? How did she get it? What does “miralenta” mean for this woman and for these people? How is its meaning related to their lives?

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to my thesis. I will give general information about the topic, the reason for choosing this subject, its relation to other research and the limitation of the study.

This research is about the church work on empowerment of women through a development project. In this paper, I plan to describe and analyze “Use Your Talents” (UYT), a project of the Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy (FLM), which has a gender empowerment component. This project was combined with a program called “Women Empowerment and Gender Equality” (WEGE) which objective was to improve and increase the focus of UYT on gender. The work on empowerment is considered here as part of the church’s diaconal work.

1.2 Personal motivation

I worked for the FLM Head Office for exactly seven years and have been one of the managers for the WEGE program on the national level for three years. I learned a lot from that experience and understood the importance of being one of the privileged young women to have an overview of the situation and life of the church. My aspiration covers several areas: to bring understanding and analysis of what the church has done so far on gender empowerment, the potential of the WEGE, how to improve it, to help the church see its potential in its work and mission for the poor and have sustainable actions and projects in that perspective. I also wonder if this program through UYT will be a means not only for women to participate in development work but also to get access to more important leadership positions within the church.

¹ “Miralenta” is the Malagasy term used to designate gender equality

The recollection of some passages from books in my studies' curriculum and topic discussed in some lectures kept my attention and reminded me of the work of UYT. They confirmed that women empowerment is part of diakonia. One example from LWF's handbook "Diakonia in context" says "Diakonia as development work [...] should always be aimed at empowering people" (2009:79).

I attended also a researcher's seminar on "Religion and Development – Nordic Perspectives on Involvement in Africa" in which religion, development and gender were at the agenda. Through this seminar, I got the opportunity to get in touch with other researchers who have similar interest in empowerment and the work of the church in Africa. The seminar helped me to define the focus in my research and to choose the research methods. Prior to my field research, I talked with the responsible of WEGE program in Norway and of the UYT project in Madagascar about my research project and they offered me to assist in finding relevant documentation. They expressed that the outcome of the project would be of great relevance for the evaluation of the UYT project and the further development of women empowerment programs in the Malagasy context.

1.3 Brief review on existing research

Empirical materials on women's empowerment for development particularly related to the role of the church in this endeavor are few. Below, the work of four authors will be presented briefly as they are more or less related to this research. First, Ramamonjisoa writes about empowerment of women and democracy in Madagascar (1993) in relation to their participation in socio-economic and particularly political life. Her work has neither a specific actor/target people, nor, like in other international literature, an apparent link with the role of the church. She writes about the political and religious power of women in Madagascar as a myth and suggests undertaking a gender analysis before planning any action or choosing a strategy of empowerment of women. Secondly Nordstokke is also the author of an article about empowerment in the context of ecumenical diakonia, but in general terms, not with a focus on women (2012). His understanding of empowerment comes from the reading of the Bible. Thirdly, Skjortnes is now writing about the role of the church in development work which has a gender perspective (2012). In her work,

she emphasizes the possible ambiguous role of the church as both changing and cementing gender role patterns. She also brings to attention the two perceptions of the relationship between women and men which is either complement or equal. Providing equal access to resources and opportunity for women and men, according to her, should be on the church's agenda. The fourth writer, Solofoniaina, in his dissertation, argues for gender equality to be a key for FLM's development, its financial independence (2012). He bases his arguments on some biblical interpretations, the human rights and Luther's idea of the priesthood of all believers. One of his main discussions is the unequal spiritual leadership between women and men.

1.4 Research problem

This research is about what the Church is doing towards women's empowerment. FLM church members are composed in majority of women and the Church women's association is one of the very active groups in the Church. Thus compared to their numbers, the proportion of women in position of leadership is insignificant. Considering the actual situation of the Church, within the decision-making body, women are few and the members of the board, the official authority, are all men and a majority of pastors. It should be noted that FLM does not ordain women. In addition, gender in the UYT project document is presented as a challenge (2007:6). It does not give any explanation on why gender equality is a challenge for the project. However in my understanding, this means that women may have a lower participation in development projects, which in turn appears to be problematic for their outcome.

1.5 Goal of the paper

UYT fosters the participation of all church members in the development works while WEGE lifts up the importance of women's participation. Thus, as women are not used to having leadership positions or taking active part in planning and making decisions for development work, my aim is to look for areas of life in society and the church where women do and have the potential to participate and develop. UYT talks about the use of talents, but it is not clear what kind of talents or how to use them. With regards to gender, does UYT make a difference between the talents of women and men? If yes, do women have specific talents and how does UYT deal with that difference? This paper also intends to find the motivation of the Church in working on gender issues and the role of the leaders in UYT's work.

My aim in this project is for the benefit of the church, the UYT project and the WEGE program and their work. Through an analysis and discussion of the UYT project in this specific context, I hope to contribute to its evaluation and development. My hope is that this research will add to current knowledge on gender empowerment and development in Madagascar and especially within the church, since the church plays an important role in bringing change and gender equality at a local level and in society in general. Thereby, I want to contribute to determine the effectiveness of the UYT and WEGE approach.

1.6 Scope of the study

The UYT project covers the whole of Madagascar. There may be cultural variations in different areas of the country, which may in turn affect the outcome of the project, therefore, because of time limitations; I will only focus my research on one area of Madagascar: the south. My research will be mainly constituted of collection of data and analysis. It has no aim to change the UYT project or the organization of the church. This paper also has no political purpose and no aspiration for a theological debate over women's ordination. However, I expect to make some recommendations.

1.7 Understanding of terms

The definition and meaning of the term "empowerment" as well as "development" are still discussed in much literature. However, in this paper "development" is drawn from what the South Commission wrote (1990:10-11):

"Development is a process which enables human beings to realize their potential, build self-confidence, and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment [...] frees people from the fear of want and exploitation [...] a process of growth, a movement essentially springing from within the society that is developing [...] be an effort of, by and for the people"

and is understood as an ongoing action that leads to the fulfillment of human beings.

"Gender", in line with the WEGE program's idea, is to be understood as the collaboration between women and men in development work and "empowerment" understanding is from

Duflo's working paper, meaning "improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development—in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation" (2011:3). In another word, women empowerment is an instrument and an outcome of activities, methods and work that open access to women to the components of development.

1.8 Outline

The body of this paper will be composed of five chapters. Chapter 2 contains the methodology used for the research. How the research was done and with which techniques and procedures and why I choose a certain techniques? It is the description of the research I have undertaken. Chapter 3 presents the context of the study, the background information. Chapter 4 covers the theories. Chapter 5 describes the findings. Chapter 6 contains the analysis chapter where the findings are interpreted in relation to the theories. Chapter 7 concludes my thesis with the summary of the analysis and the answers of the research questions.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In this chapter I indicate the methodological approach used in my research. I explain the reason why I chose a particular method for my project. Then I present the process of data collection and some of the challenges I experienced during my field trip.

2.1 Choice of method

My research field is very complex. It involves people on a grassroots level and on a leadership level. It refers to a specific context: women in the FLM. There is a very limited amount of empirical research on this topic, and only very limited access to data. Meanwhile, there is a focus on women empowerment in the Malagasy context through different programs which are often established or financed through external actors, like DIGNI. In order to explore how one of these programs, the UYT, functions, which challenges are met, and how it can be improved, I chose a composed methodological approach:

Three methods are given to social researchers to help them investigate a social phenomenon: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. While quantitative method works with statistic and mathematic techniques yielding its data on a large number of sample, qualitative as an exploring research make use of words and information from a small number of sample. Mixed method as its name indicates use both qualitative and quantitative methods. A qualitative procedure implies that the researcher collects data in the “natural setting” of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell 2009). And the researcher has various methods to collect data: from interviews, observations and documents (ibid).

The reflection on the involvement of FLM in WEGE program while its practice expressing its theology, confirmed by a culture of male domination are in opposition guided my research question. The question that I will try to answer in my thesis is:

How does the FLM through the project UYT empower women?

This question leads to other questions: what is UYT about? What are its goals? What is its method? What does the work of UYT do to women? What kind of empowerment are we talking about? Do women feel empowered? Is the life of women improving? Does the leader want the

empowerment of women? What are the roles of the leaders in the UYT project or in the empowerment of women?

Answers for these questions will be found in the context and the presentation of the data chapter. From this reflection, which method fits the research?

Qualitative method is suitable for this research which nature is an approach to find the meaning of social phenomenon, (ibid). Thus this paper will describe how the Church is working and how this work affected women. Since the UYT project is relatively new because it started from 2008, it is maybe too early to talk about an evaluation research (Chambliss, Schutt 2010). The approaches for data collection were one-on-one and focus group interviews, answering of a questionnaire in a paper or on the internet, through church and community/village meetings (see below). Interviews and questionnaire were conducted with open-ended questions. The sampling units are at the same time an individual unit and a group unit as both the individuals and the groups are the source of data and the focus of conclusions of this paper (Creswell 2009). As this project focuses on empowerment, the philosophical worldview applied will be the advocacy/participatory approach (ibid). Case study is the strategies of inquiry selected since it “explores in depth a program” (ibid). This research is a cross-sectional research design since the data were collected at one point in time (Chambliss, Schutt 2010). After the selection of method, the area of the research needed to be defined.

2.2 Choice of research area

Prior to the fieldwork, I elaborated a questionnaire guide (Annex) and made an attempt to identify the setting in which I carried out my research and the informants. At first I thought to go in one of two synods in the South of Madagascar (map in Annex) because the ethnic groups in that area particularly the Tandroy ethnic group are considered to be “extremely patriarchal” (Raharinjanahary et Rasoarinoro 2000) which means a very strong male-dominated system. I did not visit all the Synods because of the limited time for my research. The issue that may arise from my choice is the impossibility of generalization of the finding to the whole church or the whole project. The women from the south also may not represent the other Christian women because of their different subculture, level of education and their life in the rural area. The economic situation (income, productivity, type of work), level of education and the climate/the agricultural

condition may also differ in different parts of the country. Nevertheless, the interviews have given an interesting picture of the situation of women in this specific context, which from my experience and personal background in Madagascar has a large degree of similarity with the situation of women in other rural parts of the country. Thus I wanted to see if the church through its work is making a difference particularly in that region. Following the advice of the project manager, I went both in Ambovombe Androy (Ambovombe Androy Regional Synod SPAA) and Ejeda (South Betioky Regional Synod SPBA) where the FANILO (FLM development department) coordinators live as the regional coordinator in Ambovombe Androy is in close collaboration with an association working on gender and the one in Ejeda is a woman.

2.3 Choice of informants

Three persons, the project manager and the two coordinators, are my key informants. A key informant according to Chambliss and Schutt (2010) “is an insider who is willing and able to provide a field researcher with superior access and information, including answers to questions that arise in the course of the research”. This means that the person is within the chosen setting of the fieldwork and has relevant knowledge on the subject in question in the research.

In regards to the informants, they were chosen mainly because of their involvement in the project or a direct or indirect role in the empowerment of women. They were composed of the UYT project manager, the FANILO national coordinator and the two Synods coordinators, the leaders who are members of the decision-making body of the church and women member and not-member of the church. The issue of generalizability also arises with the survey of leaders. Even if they came from different areas of Madagascar, they may be leaders in that area but are originally from other area which means they were born and raised up outside the place they are actually ministering. The leaders were not sampled since they were not chosen among other leaders. The questionnaires were sent for them to fill up while they were having a meeting in a center outside of the capital. 9 questionnaires out of 40 were filled which implies that not all who were present in the meeting filled it. I wrote an email to the head of the Church – who became “the gatekeeper”, the person in a field setting who can grant researchers access to the setting (Chambliss, Schutt 2010) - and to the UYT project manager ahead of time about my research. I also informed them before my departure to Madagascar about people I wanted to meet and talk

with. I was compelled to have a survey online as the head of the church answered that he will be on meeting the week I intended to meet him. The responsible of FANILO was busy preparing a meeting so he answered my question by email. When I was in Madagascar, the project manager told me that he was busy but he accepted to have an interview when occasion occurred. So we did the interview two times in two days. Apart from that I also had a focus group interview with 5 women. While I was in the field, I depended mostly to my two key informants on two things: to direct me to other informants and to help me with or my informants in “translating” of the language. In my entire interview, I used a non-probability sampling method (ibid).

Another gatekeeper is the fokontany’s president, the local territorial entity’s chief. According to custom, a meeting even gathering women cannot be held without his² assent and his and men’s presence.

2.4 Interviews and questionnaire

The fieldwork was carried out in Madagascar as the data collection methods require the research to be on site. All interviews and questionnaire were in Malagasy. They were videotaped then transcribed and translated. They were conducted in Antananarivo from 14th-17th January, in Ambovombe Androy from 22th-24th January and in Ejeda from 26th-29th January 2013. See the list below.

² The masculine possessive pronoun is used here as we are in an area with a male-dominated culture

Figure 1: List of data collection methods and informants

Collecting data methods	Informants' connection to Church and UYT	Type of information	Number of women	Number of men	Total number of informants or attendance³
Questionnaire	Church's leaders, members of KMSL (Komity Mpiandraikitra ny Synoda Lehibe), the executive committee and FANILO national coordinator	Role in UYT	2		
Individual interviews	UYT project manager and FANILO synod coordinators	UYT in general	1	2	3
	"Coached" by UYT and church members	Impact of UYT in their own and other people's life	9	4	13
Focus group interview	Church members in Ambovombe Androy	Impact of UYT in their own and other people's life	5		5

³ The total number of the attendance in the community meetings is a rough approximation as the number of the respondents was not officially registered. This total is the sum of the number of the attendance comprises of women, men and children or young people.

3 church meetings	Church members and leaders	Impact of UYT in the life of the church, the members and their community	Ekonka: 10 North Manakaralahy: 25 Ejeda: 25	3 28 10	20 (with babies) 70 (with children) 50 (with teenagers)
2 village meetings	Christians and villagers	Understanding of what the Church is doing in their community	Sakanay : 15 Matave: 15	7 30	30 (with children) 70 (with children)

Apart from the interviews, observation was another method used. I spend time with the coordinators watching them doing their work and observing the women in their own setting. For example, the coordinator in SPBA used the opportunity of the church and village meetings to encourage women to participate in a cultivation of leafy green vegetables. Women and men sat separately in specific location under the tamarind tree in accordance with the tradition. Women only speak when the leader ask them to.



Figure 2: Village meeting in Sakanay

2.5 Literature and available research sources

The process of data collection involves also the use of literature to frame the problem at the beginning of the research (Creswell 2009). I refer to documents on women empowerment in general as well as in churches and UYT and WEGE reports and project document. The examination of existing documents allowed me for example to know the level of women participation in development work. In relation to diaconal studies, I also consulted literature from the curriculum focusing on diakonia as empowerment. It helps me to relate my research to my studies. During my field research period, I collected documents about UYT and WEGE which are English and other documents which are either in Malagasy or French. Documents were gathered such as activity reports, project document, project review reports and thesis. These documents are important sources for analysis and discussion of my data in the thesis.

2.6 Validity and reliability

As a researcher, my role is to gather information and to create my own questionnaire (Creswell 2009). In all settings of my research, I started to present myself as a student researcher but some of my informants particularly in the synods didn't understand, and confound me to someone who will bring a solution, have a project with subvention and help or come to teach and train. This misunderstanding in a way comes from the fact that my key informants presented me as a person coming from the central office. Bias in my research in fact come from my former experience and responsibility in FLM, my knowledge about the church and how it works, my relationship with the people I interviewed. My conviction in the importance of women participation in leadership and decision-making body and the fact that I am a woman may also have bias on my project. In relation to the ethic of researcher: I'm not conducting a research on behalf of FLM or any other organization even if it is the one who sent me here in Norway. There is no pressure or control over the findings and the results, no contractual obligations.

2.7 Gender related obstacles and challenges

Other issues that may impact the validity of the findings are the presence of men and leaders during the church and village meetings and the use of video-recorder. First with the presence of men, there is difference between the church and the village meeting. In the church meetings, all who were present were Christians and they have certain knowledge about the work of FANILO. In the regular meeting of the congregation, the pastor was present while in the other two, requested meetings for the purpose of my research, the president of the church and other men were also present. The women were active in responding to my questions except with the presence of the pastor, at the beginning, the women waited for the pastor to encourage them to talk. In the two villages, with Christians and not-Christians present, the men speak first. In the Ejeda area, where the Mahafaly ethnic lives, gathering people require the information and presence of the chief of the village. Normally, when one wants to do something in the village, the men decide, even concerning women and although the women are not present in the meeting. But for the purpose of my study, both men and women were there. In one village, some women responded to my questions, while in the other village, I hardly got any answer. Secondly the use of video-recorder caused some challenges. In my introduction to the interviews, I also mentioned that I use a video-recorder for my personal use and maybe for the UYT project. My aim was to

get as much information as I could and to be faithful in my transcription of the conversation as the interviews and survey were all in Malagasy. Some people before and after the interview wondered if they gave the right answers. This indicated that they want to give a satisfying answer rather than an honest answer. Most of the people felt intimidated by the camera. Sometimes, some people asked me to give them the questions for them to reflect on the answer. Consequently, I spend time explaining them the topic of my research and my role and clarified for them that they just should tell me about their life and what they know.

Various challenges met during my field work such as unavailability of the person (having meetings or busy with other works) also made me change plan and approach. The long time spent for traveling because of bad road, bad weather, and no transportation or broken bus constituted also another challenge was. The insecurity also hindered me from going alone. I also faced various confusing situations. For example during a village meeting, I was stumped at the cry of a woman who recounted about her despair, as the husband had left her, one of her child was sick and she was left alone. Remark, I didn't promise or offer monetary or other rewards for participating in the interview. However I was told about other forms of appreciation for gathering people such as snack and juice and some people at the end of the meetings for interview, alluded to things they expected to get. Apart from that, the south of Madagascar has a semi-arid weather and the rain had fallen during my stay. People usually take advantage of the rain to work in the field and gathering people is problematic.

Some of the challenges can be related directly to my topic, since the situation of women and the hard life conditions cause difficulties for the research. In a way, these challenges also can be related to the need of women empowerment, especially in the rural areas. Other challenges which influenced on my research work arose due to the overall conditions of life in one of the poorest countries in the world, Madagascar. Apart from that, the certainty of a correct explanation of the outcome of UYT project constitutes a challenge since the research did not measure the impact of time in it (Chambliss, Schutt 2010).

Chapter 3: Context

This chapter provides the research background that prompted my research survey.

3.1 Facts about Madagascar and women's situation

The Malagasy population is more than 20 million in 2011 according to the “National Institute of Statistics in Madagascar” (INSTAT 2012). This population is composed of eighteen ethnic groups who speak their own dialects which are more or less similar to the Malagasy official language (ELCA 2013). Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world (World Bank 2012), and more than 70% of its population lives in the rural area where poverty reigns (INSTAT 2012). Most of the poor people are women (UNDP 2012) who constitute almost half of the population in Madagascar (INSTAT 2012). More than half of the Malagasy people practice a traditional religion; the other half is composed, in majority, of Christian and a minority of Muslim (Ramamonjisoa 1993:121).

Regarding the law, the Malagasy Constitution gives the same status for women and men: for example, both may inherit their parents and spouse; the possessions of the couple are divided into two equal shares in an eventual breakup of marriage; and in some case of marital issue the law provides ways to protect women from husbands' violence and abuse. Yet discrimination of women continues to exist in some situations (OECD iLibrary 2010). These differences in equality are determined by the culture of the ethnic group and of the region, which do not allow for a generalization of the situation of women in Madagascar (Taloha 13 2000). For instance, according to my informants in the Mahafaly ethnic group in the south of Madagascar, in a case of separation of the spouses or death of the husband, women are almost left empty-handed since she may only bring the house commodity. The husband's family and his children inherit, and the woman returns to her family or is taken care of by her children. In the case of women in the South-West of Madagascar, women are supposed to own cattle, but according to Raharinjanahary and Rasoarinaivo, this ownership is just “symbolic and nominal” (2000). Or, like in other African countries, in some parts of Madagascar women are also bread-winners (Towen 1996). They assure the subsistence of their family, meaning the provision of daily staple food (Ramamonjisoa 1993) and products through farming, crafts and trade. They work in the fields, do the household chores and take care of their husbands, children and, if necessary, also support the extended

family both economically and socially (Skjortnes 2000). These women are illiterate or were barely schooled as they get married at a very young age (Skjortnes, Zachariassen 2009).

3.2 Facts about the Malagasy Lutheran Church (FLM) and women in the Church

FLM (the Church) is said to be “one of the largest Lutheran churches in the world” as its membership is approximately 3,000,000 people and it forms “the third largest denomination in Madagascar” (ELCA 2013). FLM has celebrated its 140th anniversary as an independent church. FLM reaches and works in all parts of the country. It is a well-organized church led by a president in collaboration with an executive board. This board is elected by a general assembly (Synoda Lehibe SL) which is the highest decision-making body of the Church. Between two general assemblies, an executive committee, the KMSL is in charge of current affairs and decides on urgent matters. The Church is structured into synods, 23 in all, under which are united districts, parishes and congregations. As witness to society and a “continuation and expansion of the missionaries’ work” (WCC 2013), FLM carries out social, development and evangelism works with various activities such as healing ministry, health care programs, schools, special schools for disabled children and for farming, seminaries and Bible school for women. The Church collaborates with its mission partners comprising NMS, ELCA, Danmission, ANELF, and it is a member of the LWF and WCC. Financial assistance from these partners is now decreasing and FLM is working towards its self-reliance. The Church also has various associations, with an executive board in each level of the Church structure, which include women, men, youth, Blue Cross, scout, Sunday school, and the revival movement (ELCA 2013).

As I said earlier in this paper, women form the majority of church members, and the women’s association is a very active association with training programs and various activities in all levels of the Church structure. This association made the most important local financial contribution to the church. FLM does not ordain women, however “theologically trained women serve in a variety of ministries at all levels of the church” (ibid). This is to say, that theologian women and other educated women occupy important positions within the Church administration and works. In the constitution of FLM, there is no specific focus on women. I was told that the Church while amending its constitution and bylaws is now introducing some changes on gender issues. In my

opinion, the Church is rather theologically conservative as its teachings/theology and liturgy have not evolved much over the past thousand years.

FLM has a “vision” (FLM 2007), a development policy (UYT 2007) with a holistic dimension which aims to reach “the people in their daily life and bring them to Jesus” (WCC 2013). The aim of this policy is two-fold: firstly, the sustainability of the works of the Church as it refers to self-reliance, transparency in management, good working conditions and the importance of partnership, and secondly, the spiritual and socio-economic development of people (FLM 2007). However, it has no specific focus on women. The Church also has an organizational structure for development called FANILO. This structure is composed a committee at each level of the church with a national and synods’ coordinators. The role of the coordinators and committee is to ensure that development work is on the agenda of the church and part of its activities (UYT 2007).

3.3 Facts about UYT and WEGE

UYT is a national FLM running project in collaboration with NMS. The first phase of the project was from 2008 to 2012 (UYT 2007). From 2013, UYT will be combined with a “Leadership training project” and both will be under one project called “MLC empowerment program” (UYT 2012). The project is funded through Digni (UYT 2007), a Norwegian “umbrella organization controlling and coordinating the development work of 19 mission and faith-based organizations (Digni 2013). The revision of the project document of UYT and the formulation of the new project document were conceived and formulated by the project manager in collaboration with an expert designated by NMS, a person from SIK – Centre for Intercultural Communication⁴ (UYT 2010). Probably the first UYT document was created in the same way. The project manager is the only paid worker of the project.

According to the project manager and from a general remark about the project document, the project has no precise target group or concrete planned result apart from the fact that UYT is a grassroots level project. Besides neither specific development activities nor technical action are stated in the UYT project document. The outcome depends totally on the grassroots and the

⁴ SIK is a Norwegian center that offers its services to “improve communication and cooperation in international and multicultural contexts” (SIK 2013)

impact of the project is immeasurable. However the final aim is development of people, the community, the church and the country. And the way to development is the use of talents of people particularly of the Christians. Thus the term “talents” was not clearly defined in the document but was elaborated and listed from the understanding of the trained people during the project manager sensitization sessions. Talents encompass five areas which are health, communication, production, education and other subjects. The theology and biblical foundation for UYT were also elaborated throughout the project according to the project manager.

The project UYT is built upon the church organizational structure FANILO (UYT 2007). This project is one of the instruments, tools the church use to implement and achieve its vision. It is an approach to development work (SIK 2013). The two last points of this main vision refer to good works and human development and the church depends on Christians’ accountability and the use of their talents to achieve its goal (FLM 2007). UYT’s aim is to “systematize” the discussion and the implementation of development work in all level of the church particularly at the congregation level through a regular meeting of a FANILO development committee (UYT 2007). UYT works through that development body and FANILO synod coordinators to sensitize and support development initiative from the grassroots (ibid). In order to do so, the project manager and the FANILO national coordinator train and sensitize the synod coordinators, pastors and other church workers, lay leaders from the national and synod’s associations on how the church may capitalize on and use the talents of the Christians (UYT 2012). Apart from the project manager and the national coordinator of FANILO which are fulltime workers, all other people working for development within the church are volunteers (UYT 2007). Volunteering is the basis of UYT and its development works rest on the local human resources and the network (SIK 2013) of people and organizations that the grassroots exploit for the purpose of development (UYT 2007). Nevertheless, the FANILO synod coordinators and some districts get materials such as computer (UYT 2009) and bicycle and financial support for their activities and prizes for the most efficient coordinator as a motivation (UYT 2011).

For the sustainability of development work, the national as well as the local FANILO try to raise funds for instance through taking some percentage from the benefit of their project(s) or from other income-generating activities (UYT 2012). Experiment sites and exhibitions were also tools

for sensitization and launching the project and its works (ibid). Through UYT, the church was able to create or assist people to find works (ibid). UYT has an individual and community approach. According to the two informants synods coordinator they contact those who have talents personally and sensitize and support them to use their talents. And from my observation, they gather the community or the church members in meeting to present development projects and possible income generating activities. In the UYT project document in 2007, gender is mentioned as a challenge and it gives some solution to meet this challenge through the collaboration of UYT with the women association to support women to participate in development work and the sensitization of women and the church to recruit and elect women in all level of organizational development structure.

The WEGE, a competence building program was combined to UYT for the purpose of increasing the gender focus of the UYT project and to learn and share experiences with other international development projects which have a gender focus. The program was developed and suggested by Digni (BN/Digni 2007). Two persons from FLM were responsible of the program for three years (2008-2010) and they planned the “gender components of the program” (Zachariassen 2012) which means they planned activities that increase awareness on gender issue within the UYT project. They also created a team in which they collaborated with the leaders of the church youth and women national association (FLM Project 2008). One of the activities of FLM WEGE was the awareness rising on gender issues and WEGE training of the church’s members of the KMSL and the FANILO Synods coordinators (FLM Project 2008). The cooperation and support of the church leaders were important in implementing WEGE as their view influences both the church’s vision in general and its members. A person appointed by the synod called “WEGE Antenna”, was also trained to represent WEGE in the synods and be a WEGE trainer. The latter was supposed to collaborate with the synod coordinators in spreading “WEGE philosophy” (FLM Project 2009). During the third year of the program, all the work was delegated totally to both the antenna and the coordinators and they planned themselves the WEGE activities (FLM Project 2010).

WEGE is an answer to UYT challenge on gender as it worked on sensitization and awareness rising on gender issues in the national and synod level (ibid). The aims of WEGE in line with

those of UYT are poverty reduction, sustainable development and particularly the improvement of women and children's life (BN/Digni 2007).

Chapter 4: Theory

In this chapter I will write about the key concepts of this paper that will be applied in the analysis chapter. UYT's principle is that by using their talents voluntarily, people would develop themselves and others. Many authors and international organizations argue that sustainable development implies empowerment of people and particularly women (Duflo 2011). The UNFPA states that, "women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all" (2013). In addition, according to the UNDP, women's empowerment closely related to gender equality is, more than human rights, a necessary passage to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development (2013). In that perspective, UYT is a tool to empower women. This idea will guide my construction of theory. The first theory is about diakonia and the second is on women empowerment. The theory of diakonia explains the reason why the church is concerned about promoting women's empowerment. The theory of empowerment will be used to see if women are empowered through the work of UYT.

4.1 Theory on diakonia

In this paper, diakonia is understood as a "responsible service of the Gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people" (WCC mentioned in LWF 2009:40). It is a service offered by the Church or Christians, as a witness to the world, rooted in God's word, focused on people and related to the local context. Diakonia is unconditional, even when carried out by the church, and as development work, it aimed at empowering people. With the project UYT, the concern is on sustainable development. The needs of people may range from having sufficient food, to access to education, better health, and other elements that allow for dignified living conditions. Sustainability is not only concerned about present needs, but also those in the future (ibid:77).

4.1.1 Diakonia value and dignify people

Diakonia has a specific focus on empowering the marginalized, both men and women. The LWF considers empowerment as one of the most important elements of the objectives of diaconal work. (ibid:43). Empowerment is a process by which of being dignified and of becoming a subject of one's life and in relation to others (Nordstokke 2012). It gives a person the ability "to assume responsibility for her or his own life and civic participation" (LWF 2009:41). It follows

Jesus's model. According to LWF, diakonia is an integral part of Jesus's messianic mission (LWF 2009:25). This principle is taken from Mark 10:45 where Jesus talked about the reason of his coming: to serve and to save. Jesus's diakonia encompasses affirmation and defense of human dignity, invitation, inclusion and empowerment of people to participate in his mission (ibid). Empowerment should be experienced as an expression of solidarity, of working together (Nordstokke 2012). This aspect of empowerment is confirmed in Jesus's promise of everlasting presence (Matthew 28:20), and in Liberating diakonia, empowerment is related to the promise of Pentecost: the disciples were transformed from fearful followers to daring witnesses (Nordstokke 2011:). Nordstokke also argues that the goal of empowerment "is not self-realization, as autonomous rational beings but self-esteem activated and energized in dignified relations with others" (2012). This means that empowerment is personal, at an individual level, but also affects the community: it addresses the question of power, not aiming to control or dominate, but to share responsibility and equality. Human dignity and equality is based on the "Christian understanding of women and men as created in God's image" (LWF 2009:94). Empowerment of women and gender equality also recognize God-given dignity. The church in its "proclamation and service should take form of both denouncement and announcement". The church has the responsibility to denounces injustice and unjust "structures and ideas" and at the same time to announce the good news of human dignity and values based on God's word, and the "capacities of the excluded" (Nordstokke 2011). Human dignity and values are also related to human rights.

4.1.2 Diakonia: instrument of inclusion and participation

So as a church, FLM should empower women through its activities. Women are important partners in the kingdom of God to fulfill God's word. They form the majority of church membership in Madagascar so they should be included in all aspects of the work of the church. Diaconal activities such as UYT might be "a method of work that would empower the powerless" (Nordstokke 2011) and use the principle of inclusiveness. It might be an instrument of what the church is called to be. The church is called to participate in God's mission: to invite, include and empower Christians to be a witness. Thus the individual also has that vocation. In "Liberating Diakonia", diakonia is presented as "an expression of Christian service in a secular world and [...] a vision of church for others" (ibid). Diaconal development work favors working methods that prioritize inclusiveness and processes of empowering people for participation (LWF 2009).

Where mechanisms of exclusion silence people and deny their human dignity, diaconal praxis should be the sign and instruments of inclusion (Nordstokke 2011).

4.1.3 Diaconal work organization

According to Nordstokke, current diaconal work is characterized by its organization which is from the local congregation (2011:44). It is more flexible, and is open to new challenges. It also creates space for volunteers who are in cooperation with professionals (ibid). Nevertheless, it is more communitarian activities than individual approach. Instead of having every work “planned, functional and for a specific purpose”, changes also occur on how the work is funded and carried out (Nordstokke 2011:). The participation and support of the leaders in the process of empowerment in equipping people to take up their call to serve is important (LWF 2009). They are the ones who play the role of facilitator, animator and enabler (Nordstokke 2011). In the words of the Church of Norway, caring ministry expressed through loving neighbor is one mandate of the church (2007)

In brief, the empowerment work of the church aims then at lifting up people’s dignity, to include Christians in God’s mission and to serve the community in a flexible and open way.

4.2 Theory on empowerment

“African growth and development agenda can only succeed if the continent is able to draw on all its resources and talents, and if women are able to participate fully in economic, social and political life” (OECD iLibrary 2010). In order to attain that full participation, women have to go through empowerment. As mentioned earlier in this paper, women’s empowerment is understood as the change in women’s ability to access to the elements of development (Duflo 2011). The concept women empowerment has two or three aspects or dimensions: increased capacity, increased income, increase participation and these points constitutes the angles from which the findings will be looked at.

4.2.1 Increase in capacity

The improvement of women’s knowledge/ability/capacity is an important aspect of women empowerment. Low personal identity is a barrier to progress while increase of women’s self-

esteem helps them to raise their voice and participate in community activities. “Strong cultural pressures on women cause them to devalue themselves, to see themselves as having secondary status, to be passive and dependent in their thinking, language and behavior ... secondary in ability” (Sully, Green 2011). This means that if the society is more supportive to women, and sees in them more than instruments for procreation and the caretakers of the household, women would have a more affirmative self-assessment which will also prompt them to take action and be more independent.

According to Duflo, education is an instrument which enables women to have access on leadership positions at all levels of society (2011). She thinks that when girls are educated, the outcomes for their children and the community would change. She further says that education has the potentiality to improve “women’s understanding of how to raise children, and manage their homes”. In addition to Sully and Green’s influence of society’s culture on women’s behavior, Duflo also correlates their “education, earnings, or political participation [...] with her family, or community background” (2011).

4.2.3 Increase of income

The majority of the rural population in Madagascar lives on subsistence farming and it is possible that the monetary income of a person or the household may be lower compared to those in the city (Willis 2005:11) with a higher employment opportunities. In the process of development, women’s income may also increase through their participation to income-generating activities. Duflo believes that women’s investments are conducive to development (2011)

4.2.3 Increased participation

Participation of women in public discussion, decision-making meeting, and even political debate is sign of empowerment. Women have access to development when they are part of those who decide. Preparing women in leadership or increasing the number of women for leadership is one way to measure women empowerment.

Accepting women in leadership means that society, the community or an organization address issues such as male-dominated structures and cultures and promote working relationships

between men and women that are mutually supportive and respectful (Sully, Green 2011). This positive working relationship also requires that women are assisted and supported actively and practically by both male as well as female leaders to participate along with men in question and discussion during meetings (ibid). Having women as role models is for instance one of these methods. Women in leadership also call for favorable environments for women participation (Duflo 2011). This requires the identification and rectification of power imbalances (UNFPA 2013). Women need more autonomy to manage their own lives.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter contains the presentation of the data collected during the fieldwork. I structured it as follows: responses from the UYT manager and the FANILO coordinators about how do they work, the role of the leaders in UYT, responses from the individual interview, the focus group, the churches and the villages meetings on the work in the congregation and in the society and challenges.

The subdivisions titles emerged from the questions asked during the interviews or in the survey.

5.1 UYT manager, FANILO National Coordinator and Synods' Coordinators

5.1.1 Understanding of the term “talents”,

Based on Psalm 24.1, “talents” in the UYT project means all human God-given resources, whether material possessions, like pens or oxen, or knowledge. As a response to the call in Matthew 25.14-30, each individual Christians should “multiply” his or her talents. Each person has one or more talents but what makes Christians distinct from non-Christians is that they use their talents or make their talents available for both their personal development and wellbeing and that of their fellow beings, and by doing so draw people to Jesus.

Answering the question whether there are specific talents that women have, the UYT project manager said “women were given the particular talents of reproduction through pregnancy and giving birth”. He also argued that in his opinion, in the parable of the talents, those who used and multiplied their talents were women and the one who buried it was a man. He explained that men always bargain or want some allowance for a job while women are more willing. He further said that talent is always good but can be used in a positive or a harmful way.

“Talents” refer to professions or activities related to five areas: health, communication, education, production and crossover themes. Within a congregation, Christians may have a various different talents and these may also vary from church to church. Consequently, the impact as well as the target people and the activities at the grassroots level of the UYT project are not predefined. The development work starts from what people have as possessions or knowledge otherwise the intervention or request may be inappropriate. The philosophy of development, in the project

manager's opinion begins with small and simple activities and grows through experience. The project manager does not work directly with the people at the grassroots level; he is working through the FANILO synod coordinators and the development committees at each level of the church who motivate, teach and support Christians to use their talents within or outside the church for the well-being of their community. The initial step is that these coordinators and committees, together with the pastors and the leaders of the church associations were trained in ways to use the talents of the church members. All of these people should collaborate in motivating and supporting Christians to use their talents.

Most of the time, the work done by using talents is free, done voluntarily or low paid if ever rewarded. A dressmaking class offered by the church is an example of UYT. FLM has never organized such courses before. The FANILO coordinators are elected but work voluntarily. From my fieldwork, I observed that the FANILO synod coordinators are the ones who work closely with people at the grassroots level, particularly with the villages near their respective homes. In doing so, they create a network of people. As the coordinator in Ambovombe stated: "You cannot do all the work. I count on the collaboration of other people". He added that he trained, gave counsel and supervised or coached people individually. He is also collaborating with other organizations such as the Ampela mitraoke⁵ association working on gender equality, the Bible society, AROPA (Support to Farmers' Professional Organizations and Agricultural Services Project) and other such bodies.⁶ While in Ejeda, the coordinator used the villages or church meetings for my interviews to motivate people to participate in small income-generating projects. However, the two synod coordinators remarked that trips to villages and churches are expensive and the synods do not have funds to cover the costs. Both of them also raised the issue of the lack of funds which limits their action. For example, they talked about the success that broadcasting programs would have, but which are impossible to produce because of lack of funds.⁷

⁵ The president of Ampela mitraoke is the synod's coordinator's wife. He said that he is the one who encouraged his wife to create the association and he is her adviser. The association is for the couple part of FANILO's activities. These latter are reported in the FANILO synod's annual report.

⁶ Ambovombe FANILO coordinator had worked for other development project of the Church since 1988.

⁷ Both Ambovombe Androy and Ejeda have local radio broadcasting channel.

The project manager explained that UYT was created in order to give a sense of responsibility or ownership of the development work to the church. The FANILO national coordinator said that, in fact, UYT is an approach to development. The idea behind the creation of UYT is to use the organizational development FANILO to develop Christians, their community, their church and Madagascar. The basis of UYT is sustainable development.

5.1.2 What does the work do for women?

According to the project manager, UYT is not a special project for women; it intended to be for all men and women alike who have talents. He continued that women are the most diligent to use their talents theologically and socially. From experience, he said that women use their talents more than men even if they are given the same talents. The difference, he argued, is: “men tend to occupy some positions like leadership, while women are more experienced in other work, for instance caring for hygiene”. However, the project manager underlined, women are able to execute the same tasks but in a slower pace. He further commented that “Men are good at thinking but women at implementing. Men stop at thinking while women get results”. The Ambovombe coordinator has a different opinion, stating that “Women are very good, they are smart. But the deeply rooted [inferiority] ideology needs to be eradicated. Even working with a computer, women have the capacity; filling a form, supervising a road construction, they know. From here they are trained before working in the field. In the field they master the work”.

For the success of development work, both men and women have to collaborate together in all phases of the project: planning, making decisions and implementing. Examples given from the synods’ coordinator are various income-generating activities such as basketry, green leaf vegetables farming and poultry breeding. FANILO provide the materials or tools, such as seeds or syringes for vaccination, and agricultural techniques training, or other related practical advice, for instance ways to create an association or the advantage of being part of a bigger organization like AROPA in Ambovombe which buys the peasants’ products. These activities are considered by people in the south of Madagascar as unimportant activities and most of them are carried out by women. However, according to the coordinator in Ambovombe, now some men are also growing green leaf vegetables because they have seen that it generates income. Most of the volunteers, and even the users of the UYT project, are women. An example is in Ambovombe,

where the literacy program was established in various congregations with the collaboration of the Bible society, and the majority of the teachers as well as the attendees are women.

In meetings where decisions were made, women are now starting to give their opinion whereas in the past they tended to just nod and remain silent. The number of women elected in the decision-making bodies at all levels of the church structure also increased, not only because of the work of UYT, the project manager remarked, but also “today’s life and changes in society require transformation”. Accountant positions are always given to women because they have the right talents and they are honest with money. Another impact of the work of UYT, according to the project manager is the fact that the FLM women’s association recently applied for leadership training for its leaders. Their reasons for applying were to assure election of women by women, and to ensure the necessary ability and self-confidence to lead and take the position of leadership. One particular method UYT uses to prepare or encourage women to take the position of leadership, is to create small groups of five women each with the same talent, and which one of the women leads. Taking responsibility does not only mean being motivated to act, but also requires training and supervision. In Ambovombe for example, according to the coordinator, one village is prosperous because he supervised a very active woman. This woman started to lead basketry activities with the women in her village and with the assistance of the coordinator diversified their work with tree planting, creation of association in which women worked together and share income, and other things.

The project manager commented however, that UYT is about talent not about gender equality. He added that equality should be in the structure, in the decision-making body, while the use of talents is at the grassroots level. Every Christian is motivated to use their talents, but women are more eager to volunteer. When women use their talents to initiate action, such as carrying out poultry vaccination which they never did before in Marolambo, the project manager considered it as one step to empowerment, to be more independent and stronger.

All these various activities, according to the Ambovombe coordinator, aim at a balanced income between the husband and wife. His method is “always call for women. We prioritize women to be a chief storekeeper for example. Men have to give way”.

5.1.3 Challenges for women to use their talents

In general, both the UYT project manager and the coordinator in Ambovombe agreed that women have no problem in using their talents. The project manager argued, however, that it is the attitude of women towards themselves or other women that hinders them from taking the leadership position. He illustrated that in an election of a church committee, even if there are just a few men, they are all often elected first. He reasoned that women prefer to vote for men for positions of leadership. The coordinator in Ejeda argued that women do not want to be leaders because of the Malagasy tradition. She added that women as well as men think that leading is not a woman's role, or that she does not have the ability for such a position. The Ambovombe coordinator mentioned that men are jealous of their position of leadership, because "for them it is a question of honor". Both in Ambovombe and Ejeda, the tradition also require that only men lead. The Ambovombe coordinator remarked though that when it is a decision from a higher authority, meaning the woman is appointed to a position of leadership by the government for example, then men accept reluctantly.

Illiteracy is another challenge for women, said the national coordinator, and it is the reason for women's inferiority complex. In accordance with that idea, the Ambovombe coordinator emphasized that all development work should start with a literacy program. The FANILO national coordinator remarked that FLM has only one center where women may participate fully in development work. A further challenge is that of violence against women.

Both synod coordinators agree that the challenges in the south of Madagascar are linked to various reasons such as poverty (no regular income, no tools or instruments, no funds) and unstable weather (the south has an arid or sub-arid climate, and rain is scarce which causes continuous drought). Even if a woman generates some money from her activities, she invests it in food, clothes, children's tuition fees, all for the wellbeing of her family. Some men, because of jealousy, take their wife's income and do not allow her to manage or have her own money. As result, women are unable to buy seeds or the material for their crafts. However, in the opinion of both the UYT project manager and the Ambovombe coordinator, women are more honest and

better at managing money than men. The coordinator also remarked that he had never heard about women mismanaging funds.

5.1.4 What is the teaching of the Church about the place and the role of women?

According to the FANILO National Coordinator, the Church has no precise or written teaching or doctrine on the role of women within the church but what is evident is the practice of the church. He said that the majority of the church members are composed of women and the women's association is the strongest association of the Church. He added that women are much more active and dynamic than men. He stated that in all the work of the church, particularly evangelization, which is the foundation of the church, there are many women volunteers. Thus, he continued, women have an important place within the church: the church has no choice, and proceeding with gender equality is an obligatory route.

5.2 Leaders

The following subdivisions were drawn from the questionnaire

5.2.1 Understanding of the terms “talents” and “gender equality”

Talent is a gift from God related to a person's knowledge and skills, received from birth or learned. Four respondents answered that women have no special talent, while one respondent mentioned that mothering is a special talent.

For the question on gender equality, most of the leaders' answers were related to women in leadership and women responsible in the church or in society. One respondent emphasized though that “the man is the head of woman and this is how men love them as Jesus loves the Church”. Another respondent understood gender equality as equal respect.

5.2.2 What does UYT do for women?

Women are helped to establish small income generating projects such as poultry breeding and handcrafts. With men, they also attend literacy classes. Using their talents helps women to take responsibility and increase their capacity for action and knowledge. Continuous training and supervised activity helps women to grow in their self-confidence and courage to participate in decision-making and implementing of work within the Church and society. If a woman's talents

develop, she will be able to take positions of leadership. According to the FLM president, for many years, women have had a very active role in society and what the church is doing now is to increase that involvement into all areas of life. The aim of UYT project is the improvement of all people's [women included] life, and their economic well-being in particular.

5.2.3 Role of leaders in implementing gender perspective

According to the president of FLM, effort is now made to amend FLM bylaws taking the gender perspective into consideration, so that both the youth and women have a place on different committees at each level of the church structure. The leaders have the responsibility to remind church members about gender equality in order to give women openly the opportunity to be part of the decision-making body and leadership positions. One synod president answered that he ensured that women are involved at all levels of the church and he accepted the need to collaborate with women. Another stated that he had to "support women to be able to decide, to have self-esteem, train women to have know-how and help them to take responsibility", and yet another "to trust women and their abilities, elect women and give them suitable positions". Another leader answered that he will convince the members and the committees at all levels of the church to involve women, and the synod to follow-up the implementation of that policy of gender equality.

5.2.4 Challenges for women to use talents or to be leaders

One challenge is the outdated tradition and ideology which considers women as "fragile objects". This tradition also limits women's role and action in society and such practice has an impact, even in the church. Fear, shame and an inferiority complex also frame women's activities. Deficiency in experiences and education are also mentioned as challenges. Regarding the position of leadership, my informants have two distinct opinions: there are those who support women in leadership totally, or with restrictions, and those who oppose. Both those for and against related the position of leadership to the ordination of women. Some argued that women leadership rests on the vision of the leaders, the decision of the committee, or the organization of the church. This means that women leaders are accepted if the leaders, those with power and usually men, agreed. Bible passages such as Genesis 3.16 and Ephesians 5.22-25 lead. Another informant stated that

the church does not fully use the talents of women because it does not realize that such talents are on of its assets.

5.2.5 Teaching of the church on the role of women within the church

One respondent stated that the Constitution of the Church gives equal standing to men and women before God's call. Another respondent argued that for women to use their talents in church, "this latter should be impartial in its teaching as the Bible is impartial and give women the corresponding statutes and values of human beings as from the time of creation". A woman respondent remarked that "The church theology and teaching on gender equality is flawless but its application is inadequate" and she raised the question of women ordination. Another person said that the application of gender equality is now in progress and he observed that "bringing change is a challenging task".

5.3 Focus group

5.3.1 Understanding of the terms "talents" and "gender equality"

For my respondents, talents are what a person does for a living or what they are good at. These talents may be learned or from birth. The examples they gave were teaching, basket-making, weaving or embroidery, baking, farming and so on. Most of them agreed that there are no specific talents for women but some of the works such as basketry and weaving are not done by men in the south of Madagascar because that is the tradition.

Gender equality for the participants of the focus group is about equal rights of men and women: no one is superior or inferior. One woman said "Here, men is always up and women inferior", using her hands to show the scale. She related gender equality to the difference in a husband's and a wife's chores in the household and in the field, the husband managing the couple's income and his authority over their possessions.

5.3.2 What does UYT do for women?

In Ambovombe Androy, the FANILO coordinator encouraged women in some churches or rural villages to get together and work on basketry.

He also trained people in rural villages to plant-trees for forest gardening. Another woman said that a pastor taught during a synod's meeting how to plant the morenga tree, and talked about all its assets: as a plant used for food and to improve children's nutrition as it has a high level of protein, the flower used for medicine, and the grains as a natural water purifier or ground for oil. Fenolily also trained women to grow green vegetables and provides for seeds.

Women were able to attend literacy classes with the help of FANILO. One of my informants said that Fenolily and his wife asked her to teach in a literacy program and she did it for free, without food and even under the heat of the sun, walking for 12km to teach, because she saw the women's need for literacy. She added that women were willing to learn how to write and read because of the coordinator's awareness raising on development work emphasized the importance of literacy knowledge and the women wanted to participate in the development activities. Another informant's work is providing cheap clean water in the rural villages. She said that FANILO provided an ox cart and oxen for some churches. Now women do not need to go far to fetch water.

One of the respondents who run a day center for orphans also said that she was supported by FANILO. The coordinator helped her with advice, for example, creating activities or training that will help the orphans for their future or allow them to have a means of subsistence. "One of the orphans is now living as an embroider", she stated.

Women were also trained in leadership and gender equality. One of my informants explained that she made an announcement in the rural commune where she is from that this year, 2013, she will run for the mayor's position. She thinks that young and educated women seeing that she, an old woman, has the courage to run for mayor, will not be afraid in the future to stand and defy men and show that women are also intelligent and knowledgeable. She wanted to be a "model of courage" even if, she said, she may not be elected.

5.3.3 Challenges

Most of my respondents agreed that encouraging women to unite for work of development is difficult in the Ambovombe area. They explained that there are many challenges, for example,

people make their cooperation in development work conditional upon receiving financial benefits or other compensation in kind; most people are not willing to volunteer in development work. Women also use their talents but they are sometimes discouraged because there is no market for the good they produce. Other challenges they mentioned are a difficult life and the effects of poverty. As a further example, my respondents also pointed out that sometimes, a woman does not even own a chicken, or if she breeds chickens, she has no authority or control what happens to the egg. They added that women are not able to inherit land; all possessions belong to men. “You have to beg your husband, ask for money to buy water, soap or oil lamp” said a woman. When asked about their reaction to women’s lack of ownership, one woman replied “We do nothing! We fold our arms”. Nevertheless, another woman said she wishes that FANILO would train and help her breed laying hens. She said “Eggs are expensive, just with the value of one egg, you may buy one bucket of water”.

All of my informants also emphasized that the climate in the south is unfavorable for agriculture. They said that even if women grow vegetables, they wither or die. One of them suggested that FANILO should carry out their plan to build catch basins for rainwater for each rural village. Another problem that my informants discussed is the ownership of FANILO department and its materials. One of them said that in her congregation, the pastor told her that FANILO, the oxen and the ox cart from FANILO belong to him. Thus according to my informant, there is no development work in her congregation and even, she added, the synod coordinator has no control on its resources. She added that previously a literacy program was started in her congregation but it had since stopped.

The next challenge according to the group is illiteracy of girls and young women. They said that in the countryside, girls have to get married at the age of 12 whether they like it or not. Even if they are successful with their studies, they are taken by their parents from school to be exchanged with oxen. Sometimes neither girls nor boys are sent to school: the boy guards the cattle and helps with weeding of the field; that is the tradition.

Concerning women in leadership, one of the respondents commented, “with Ampela Mitraoke and in church we were trained every year [in leadership]. We all know about that, but even if we

want to be a leader, we do not have resources. We stay at home because we have anything to share with others. We remain the leader of the household.”

Regarding gender issues, my informants said that even if gender equality is preached in church, men do not accept that idea. Their ideas were divided because some said they know what gender equality is about and others said they do not. One of the respondents said that some men do not allow their wives to attend training on gender equality because they are afraid that their wives may become intelligent, gain knowledge and learn what they have to do consequently they will trample on their husbands or will not care for them. Another informant said that gender equality started with the fight of the ordination of women. Now even if it has another meaning, she added, men just focus on the idea of ordination and ignore its other features. She commented that, from what she saw on television, people in the center of Madagascar are more open and understand better, gender equality. She said, sadly, “women and men are equal there, not here”. Men in the south according to my informants do not want a woman to lead. They argued: “The woman will not have any rights in front of men if she governs”. One of the respondents related that she was elected as president of her fokontany, but because she is a woman and a stranger from another ethnic group, she was not allowed to take the position but was put on the committee. She recounted that “They [those who are powerful or have authority in the village] said “We will never be ruled by a woman””. Another respondent denied that there are other women who were elected president of the fokontany; according to this woman the reason is that the population of the fokontany is composed of one ethnic group not mixed⁸. She concluded “men should be revered in our society”. On the other hand, my respondents said that if a woman is appointed by the central government to occupy the position of leader, then men are compelled to accept.

In my respondents’ opinion, women have a very limited opportunity to use their talents. They said if the woman is known from her work then she will have opportunity, she is free. She needs, however, people’s support and advice. They also added “Sometimes, we [women] are not confident that we are capable”. In the case of the woman who will run for mayor, she said sometimes, women criticize and underestimate one another.

⁸ The ethnic group of Ambovombe Androy is the Tandroy.

5.4 Individual interviews

5.4.1 Understanding of the term talents and gender equality

The response from my informants varied on what “talents” refers to, but most of them agreed that women and men have the same talents. What hinders men to do what women are doing, in their opinion, is tradition. For instance, basketry and weaving are women’s activities and decision-making is the men’s role. Women are also good in the management of the family income, a man asserted.

With regards to gender equality, a woman in Ambovombe emphasized that this is something they practice, requiring a high percentage of women to participate in decision-making and implementation of a development project without explaining. She said “when we go in the country side, we do not use the term “gender equality”, we just apply it. For example a development project requires 70 members, then we said to the village inhabitants “for this project we need 50 women”. And men complained ... and we explained “because that is the requirement of the donors. The reason for that is, women use all of their income for her household while men spend their income for their personal purpose”, and men recognized that this is true”. She added that if one spends time explaining the term, people will misinterpret it or the discussion will never end. The other respondent in Ambovombe recalled with smile, though, that people in her area called her “Madame Miralenta” (gender equality) as she is the one who raised awareness about it.

5.4.2 What does UYT do for women?

One of my informants from Ejeda told me that the synod coordinator spoke of a project that will need people like her who are skilled in sewing and she said she accepted but the project has not started yet.

Two other women from Ambovombe said that their current accomplishment were possible because of the advice and support from the FANILO coordinator. One of them is leading a village association and the other a regional association. The group leader from the village said that the assistance of the coordinator helped her, women and men in her village to create and

legalize their association, expand their activities from basketry and weaving to ironwork, vegetable and corn farming, improvement of food security, tree planting and other activities. She recalled “I was the only person courageous enough to stand, fill out a form that X organization gave during an information meeting about how our village can get a support from them”. Her village was one of the few villages that got a positive answer from that organization and from that time she became the leader of groups of women in her village working on basketry and weaving and she hold now the designation of an animator or a community worker. She added that the groups were created depending on the knowledge and skills of the villagers, the one who has talents teach the others. The leader of the regional association declared that she is now able to motivate many women to participate in development work and to establish gender perspective as a method of work in most of these projects in the rural villages. She added that as a result of her awareness raising work, some men now allow their wives to manage their own money and even encourage them to use it for their own activities. Both of these women claimed that they have gained the respect of the local authority, the men. They said that they worked hard on convincing them and they had to show that their ideas and activities are “for the welfare of the population, and are not intended to break the tradition”.

According to another informant, the presence of women in the church develops the church. Most of my informants said that the church is the place where women are freer to use their talents, to give their opinion and participate in taking decisions. As examples, women are often elected in the position of treasurer of the church and they are also members of the church committee.

5.4.3 Challenges

Women cannot decide alone on household wealth. Referring to the rural women in the south, most of my respondents said that women depend on their husbands, fathers or brothers for everything, including personal possessions. One respondent commented sadly that “women are suffering” because of that dependence. Another informant shared with frustration about a time when a group of women organized local public manifestations like marching on the 8th of March, on women’s day and other events but first they had to ask the approval of the local authorities on what they are all allowed to do.

One challenge that all my informants mentioned is the tradition in the south. In the rural area where tradition still rules, women are not allowed to participate or even attend a public discussion or decision. According to one informant, “women, and their opinion, are treated as if they were children”. Usually, a respondent remarked, women are not part of the local community body but may be part of the official department.

Most of the respondents however emphasized that the situation is different in church: “Women may participate; they may preach, do various activities, and can be part of the church committee”. However a man observed “but she cannot be a pastor. That is the law”.

Another challenge is also the continuous drought and poverty.

5.5 Church meetings

5.5.1 Understanding of the term talents and gender equality

The understanding of church members on talents is related to spiritual gift and they also think that it is related to what a person do for living. Examples given were playing music or singing, cooking, basketry, farming and so on. Most of the participants in the church meetings said that there are no distinctive talents for women but in the south, women are more skilled in weaving and basketry and men are not allow doing it according to the tradition. They also agreed that women are good in managing money.

At the church meeting, gender equality is also understood as equal rights.

5.5.2 What does UYT do for women?

Women in Ekonka congregation were urged to create a group of women working on basketry. The women said that they know that the association is good for them and it represents another source of income for them. One woman added “the benefit we get from our products provides us with our contribution to the church”. A man in Manakaralahy commented that FANILO will be helpful for the church financially. He added that this department will “nurture” the church and he likes the vision of FANILO because, he argued “it will support the congregation with its various financial responsibilities”.

FANILO also gave the congregation of Ekonka oxen and an ox cart to supply their village with clean water.

Apart from that, the congregation in Ekonka now has two literacy teachers and they have literacy classes in the church building. The women were also helped with the gift of school supplies for pupils.

The Christians from Ekonka, particularly the women, liked the idea of gender equality which they understood as a couple giving each other mutual help. A woman recounted that most women like her have a lot of work at home and in the field. Their husbands just work in the field and care for the cattle, and leave all the household chores to their wives. In addition, she said, the women are tired from giving birth and caring for 10 to 15 children. So for her, gender equality in her household is much welcomed.

According to the pastor of North Manakaralahy congregation, women are those who stand and work for development.

5.5.3 Challenges

The problems of women are, according to the Christians in Ekonka the inexistence of seeds, or the raw material for their crafts such as the dye-stuff and the fibers for basketry, the thread and the fabric for embroidery. Besides, they said that the market is not sure and they do not know people or organizations that can give orders for their products. Some of the women from the two congregations said that the small amount of money earned from their crafts is not enough to buy materials because they invest the money for the church contribution, family food, children's tuition, clothes and soap. A woman from Manakaralahy said that they do not have a regular income consequently they do not have savings to invest in the basketry or weaving works. They also pointed out that the men kept for themselves money from the sale of cattle because the proceeds of the sale belong to them.

The women and men in both congregations also stated that their means of subsistence is mainly farming and declared that their work, as well as the crops, depends on the rain. Thus some Christians in Manakarahy argued that if the church motivate them to grow vegetables, they not only need seed but also a dam⁹ or a well. According to one man, the church actually has a project of vegetable farming but the work is delayed because of the lack of rain. A woman in Ekonka said that despite all the challenges, they cannot leave their ancestral land as they know no other place.

Low level of education and lack of skills may also hinder development work even if the person is willing. For instance, the congregation in Ekonka is now building a new church, and according to the construction workers the foundation of the church is asymmetric because the church members built it without consulting an expert.

Regarding women in leadership position, according to the pastor of the congregation in Manakarahy, women are very few or inexistent on the church committee because the women bring the local tradition in the church. He said that they have an inferiority complex. Most of the church members agreed that local tradition¹⁰ does not permit women to decide or even to be present in meetings, even to discuss matters concerning women. They said that women are not even allowed to stand before a man, they have to bow down. Despite the fact that women may have a good idea, no one implements it because it comes from a woman. Women are classified as children. This tradition is difficult to change, argued the pastor, because it has been passed down from generation to generation. In addition, the pastor and another man argued that women in the south are not as educated as women in the highlands. Another fact that consolidates the tradition the pastor continued, is polygamy; amongst non-Christians, men have 5 to 10 wives and these women compete to please and support one man. Men are highly valued and honored. If a man helps his wife with the household chores, he will be ridiculed by the family and society and he thinks that helping her has brought him low. The church president in Ekonka said that when a

⁹ The Linta River flows nearby.

¹⁰ Here, they refer to the tradition of the Mahafaly ethnic group.

couple goes to or from the field, men carry paddles and women are in charge of the children and the load, and added that that is the way local society organized the roles of men and women.

Apart from that, the practice and meaning of gender equality were questioned by both women and men in Manakaralahy. An informant in Ejeda wondered if this equality means women instead of men are the one who marry not given to marriage. The Christians in Manakaralahy argued that if men and women are equal, then their possessions such as cattle, poultry and income should be added together and both will then have an equal right on them. However, one woman presumed that if she gave her husband the earning from her poultry breeding, she could not be sure that her husband would give her money if, for example, she wanted to help her family. She hypothesized that the husband also may be suspicious that if he allowed his wife to have rights to the cattle, she may spend all the money to help her family. Another woman also said that the joy and assurance of a woman are her children, if she has any; following the tradition, in case of separation, the woman returns to her family empty-handed, even if she worked hard in farming and caring for her husband. If the couple had children, the man will keep them and give them some cattle and the woman will depend on her children. Two men from Ekonka and Manakaralahy said that a woman is the pillar of the household and the household belongs to the woman. The husband may help, that is not taboo, but if she relies on men to care for the household, one respondent from Manakaraly assumed that the household will die. A woman then questioned “Why are you [Christian] men not helping your wives?” A lively discussion with opposite opinions followed another woman’s statement that even Christian men still kept the tradition and are not helping their wives. However, some people were of the opinion that some men have changed. According to another man, like Christianity, gender perspective comes from abroad, mostly western ideas, and if it is not an official obligation, people in the south will not follow it. With gender equality, opined another respondent, there is a need to redefine the role of men and women.

5.6 Village meetings

5.6.1 Understanding of the term “talents” and “gender equality”

People from the two villages I visited had the same idea on talents. They think that it is related to their occupation and means of subsistence namely farming, breeding and basket making. Women in Matave noted that in addition to their work in the field, helping their husband with farming,

they also plucked up sweet potatoes, cook and take care of their children. The men from Matave said that men do not know about looking after the household. They also added that, in agreement with the tradition, some work is destined for men or women only; for example, women are forbidden to milk, men do not weave or make baskets. However, the inhabitants of Sakanahy remarked that there is nothing one may not know without learning. So for them, weaving and basket-making are not women's special talents but are just assigned to them by the tradition. In the two villages, the term gender equality is not known or understood. In Matave, one man said that for them "lenta¹¹" means the ox neck or place where the yoke is placed.

5.6.2 What does UYT do for women?

In Matave as well as in Sakanahy, the synod coordinator informed the whole villages that if they are willing, women specifically may participate in a green vegetable farming project. A person in Matave said that she heard about the success of a nearby village which is running the same project, and commented that this activity will be a source of income for them. The village already has a drinking fountain, and they think that this drinking fountain will help them. For the people in Sakanahy, women were enthusiastic to participate in the project but were worried about watering. They will be provided with seeds and technical instructions. The coordinator also motivated women as well as men on the importance of men assisting their wives in the chores of the households and her work in general. She also informed them that if they need any kind of assistance or advice, people from the villages may contact her.

5.6.3 Challenges

With regard to the farming project, the only challenge raised by a woman in Sakanahy is the lack of water; agriculture in the south depends on rain. The village has one hand-dug well and its wall started to collapse and sand is filling the well's bottom, so she thought that it may not be enough for the villagers' daily need and for watering the green vegetable farm. They also said that for the weaving and basketry activities, their issue is the lack of tools, the material. In Matave, the worry a man raised was any action that is against tradition.

¹¹ The word "miralenta" meaning gender equality is composed of two words: "mira" which means equal and "lenta" which means value. In the local dialect, "lenta" has another meaning.

Chapter 6: Data analysis

In this chapter, I will try to show the kind of empowerment I discuss in this paper, and to prove or refute that UYT empowers women through theories of diakonia and empowerment and arguments from literature.

6.1 Lifting up people's dignity

Lifting up dignity of people is one dimension of Jesus's Diakonia (LWF 2009:26). Defending the dignity of each human being is necessary for diakonia (ibid:41) and for a sustainable development (ibid:77) as, according to Luther and referred to by Solofoniaina, "all believers share the same dignity" for service (2012:32).

Development work performed by the church, similar to UYT, a project for community development, is considered as diakonia (LWF 2009:52). In some literature, development is comprised of what is called "international diakonia" when churches or missions from the western world assist in development work in the southern hemisphere (LWF 2009:52; Haugen 2007). As diakonia, and following Jesus' example, the act of lifting up people's dignity should be one aspect of UYT. In "Diakonia in context", diaconal work aims at empowering people to participate in processes of transformation (LWF 2009:71). The term "development" according to the South Commission, means a process of growth, of change of society, from a life of fear and exploitation to a life of realization with self-confidence, dignity and fulfillment (South Commission 1990:10-11). Even Myers preferred to use "transformational development" in his book "Walking with the Poor", rather than just "development" (1999). This kind of empowerment is equal to what Rowlands referred to as "power from within", a power that makes an individual "truly human", with acceptance and respect of self and others at the same level (1997:13). This confirms Nordstokke's idea of empowerment as personal, acting as a subject, but also relational, experienced in solidarity (2012). When people support each other and work together, with respect, in accordance with LWF's view, diaconal work not only empowers people but reconciles them (2009).

Dignity, according to LWF, is a "basic element in Christian understanding of human beings: that every person is created in God's image and given unrestricted dignity" (2009:94). Myers

considers human dignity as a person's worth with a restored relationship with God (2008:115) and, perhaps, with all humans. Dignity, from Haugen's view, is a starting point in Diakonia (2007:163) and the Church of Norway presented it as one of the basic values of diakonia (2007:13). The UYT manager, when talking about talents, cited Psalm 24.1 which LWF (2009:24), through its writer, used to indicate that Christians' faith in God the Creator implies acknowledgment of the "dignity and profound quality of what is created". Thus unintentionally UYT, through its manager, is conveying the idea of a person's dignity. This idea of God's image was also used by the FLM WEGE team as a biblical basis for gender equality training (Ralivao 2008). Lolona, when writing about the role of Christian women in the Malagasy society, related gender equality to human rights and human beings created in God's image (1995:62).

The Ambovombe coordinator referred to women as "very good and smart", seeing them as capable and intelligent as men; this view, in my opinion, dignifies and values women. It fully recognizes women's contributions, and is one characteristic of empowerment (Verma 2009:237). According to the UYT manager, talents are God's gift to all, women included, and Christians, women as well as men, are equally called to use their talents for their personal and community development. The writer of "Diakonia in context", referring to Paul's teaching that gifts, can be equated with talents, valued different gifts, even the smallest (LWF 2009:27) This equality before God, in my opinion, indicate value to human dignity. It is in accordance with what Nordstokke said "announce the dignity of the lowly, the religious values of the condemned, and the capacities of the excluded" (2011:38). This means all human being are equal before God independent of their cast, classes, position in the society, wealth or whatever look people have on a person. One of the FLM leaders also acknowledged the importance of impartiality and the equal value of men and women linked to Creation in the Church's teaching. Dignity is also displayed when the leaders or the UYT workers valued action or characteristics of women, such as honesty and ability at managing money, and when they recognized that "women have an important place within the church".

Women in the focus group also said that they were trained in gender equality and they understood that they are equal to men, not inferior. Reinforced by the leadership training in the Church, gender equality inspired some of them to take courage to run for office, which is part of their

“civic participation” (LWF 2009:41). In relation to gender equality, these women talked about rights, however, none of them considered holding an office as their right. Nevertheless, their courage also shows their transformation out of empowerment. The fact that they knew their value was uplifting to their morale. This supports, in my view, Verma’s assertion that a woman can break “free of the inferiority complex imprinted on her since early childhood” (2009:246). The two respondents testified about their self-confidence and showed that women have the “right to live a dignified life with freedom and justice” (ibid). Their self-image changed “from one of subordination and subjugation to one of self-esteem, confidence and equality” (ibid:244). They did not want to remain a simple and silent executant, but they wanted to be part of those who decide and lead and influence the future of other women and girls. However, these women also spoke about their powerlessness to apply what they had learned. They explained this lack in application with the lack of material or gifts to share. In their opinion, leadership training should go along with the provision of sufficient materials which will enable them to implement the leadership skills they have learned. Thus supporting women to build self-trust is important, but in these women’s view, practical assistance for funds or equipment is also needed.

When the Church raises awareness on equality through UYT or other bodies in the Church, the inferiority complex of women or superiority complex of men in general and the power relations are questioned. This training is what Nordstokke called “ways of promoting human values” when writing about prophetic diakonia (2011:27). However, in the South of Madagascar, the church or the UYT project did not seem deeply question these superiority or inferiority complexes and power relations. This may be illustrated by the statements of the pastor in Manakaralahy and the Ambovombe’s coordinator. The pastor held that women still bring their inferiority complex into the church and prefer men to lead, while the coordinator argued that when one works in villages, one has to respect local traditions and that the development work is not aiming to change the tradition which gives men all authority and power. In doing so, the coordinator does not denounce unjust structures and even it seems that the pastor did not either with unjust ideas. Thus responsibility is shared but inequality remains. This attitude towards local traditions may also demonstrate that these two men, like the people in the south of Madagascar, view the relationship between women and men as complementary as Skjortnes mentioned in her paper (2012). Consequently conforming with the local traditions seems logical.

Two women informants interviewed individually stated that the local authority and, surely, the population showed them respect because of what they were doing in the villages. These two people were supported by the FANILO synod coordinator in their work. Respect, in my opinion, reflects dignified relations these women have with others (Nordstokke 2012:193). Yet not all women share that privilege of men's respect, especially outside the church when the majority is not Christian.

Most of my respondents, leaders as well as church members in Ambovombe Androy and Ejeda, agreed that women both participate actively in church and volunteer for the development work initiated by the church. LWF would call their participation "a visible expression of the dignity of all God's people" (2009:31).

6.2 Instrument of inclusion and participation

Jesus's diakonia is also told to encompass inclusion and empowerment of people to participate in his messianic mission (LWF 2009:25). Both UYT workers and some of the leaders recognized that success of development work depends on the inclusion of women in all phases of the project. If we consider the amendment of FLM's bylaws, the Church and its leaders seems to be in favor of, and are working for, the inclusion of women and youth on different church committees. Some of the leaders appeared to be supportive and talked about putting in place some practical intervention for women inclusion. This backs up LWF's idea of "concrete help to women and men through training and organizing" and constitutes the "environments and policies [that] secure equality in participation and leadership" (ibid:67). Women and even church leaders though explained the important participation of women in the church activities as women's willingness and tendency to be active. This means that both women and church leaders attributed women's voluntary work to women's nature. The question that arises is: are they subordinate or full participants.

Through the UYT project, participation in development work is open to all Christians who were all given talents, and the manager stated that women are the most diligent at using their talents. The inclusive nature of the UYT may be expressed in the response of one of the informants

saying that women are freer to use their talents in church and in opposition of the reality in the local villages; they are also eligible to be a member of the church committee. Despite this, women's work in church is limited because the first position of leadership in the church is still held by a man, the pastor. In addition, some leaders, as well as the FLM as a whole, still believe firmly that administering the sacrament is not for women. Skjortens (2012:3) in her work even argued that the church is "cementing existing gender patterns". She also states that the training for women in the church matches the role attributed to women in society, and does not challenge society's patriarchal structure with the division of labor between women and men. This method of "cementing existing gender patterns" seemed also to be true for UYT. The development work created through UYT, particularly in the south of Madagascar, follows the kind of works attributed to women only such as basketry, weaving, and poultry breeding and green leaf vegetable farming. I admit that these activities contributed to the increase of women's income. However, these women did not acquire new skills which may enable them to take part in decision-making. In the same way, Kabeer comments that the improvement of women's economic welfare does not necessarily empower women (2001).

In response to Nordstokke's questions about the possibility for diaconal workers and thinkers to develop methods of accompaniment (2012:195), empowerment with UYT project might be an example of "an expression of solidarity, working with and working from". Development work is started at the grassroots' level, within the congregation, and Christians from the congregation or the development coordinators use their talents or make them available for their community.

Inclusiveness in Christian community and work is related to Holy Communion and the work of the Holy Spirit (LWF 2009:26). God shares his power with people for them to participate in his mission (ibid:32). Women's access to leadership served as an indication of church inclusiveness (ibid:31). Solofoniaina, citing Kanyoro (2012:35), said that "the participation of women in the different ministries of the church is something that empowers them; and when women are empowered so is the whole community".

6.3 Serve the community in a flexible and open way

Service for and with the community also displays empowerment and Musa considers the local church as “the primary development agent” (2012:1). According to LWF (2009:37) Christians are empowered to do good with and for others. This suggests that doing something good is not simply as a result of the initiative of Christians. Rather, their services seem to be performed out of empowerment, supernatural work or possibly the result of preparation, training and support from other people. Furthermore, while discussing empowerment, Nordstokke also refers to a “mutual empowerment of the [church] members” (2012:190). This means that empowerment results from the Christians supporting and helping one another and their community to have their voice in decision-making and to be able to run activities. When leaders are supporting, encouraging and creating some sort of gender policy for women’s involvement in all the Church’s work, I think it is also part of mutual empowerment. An example of mutual empowerment is the story of the woman who is leading and encouraging women and men in her village to create and expand income-generating activities for the village’s benefit. Empowerment in that case can also be understood as “power with” [someone] when power comes from the unity and collaboration of individuals to solve a problem (Rowlands 1997:13). In the same way, Willis thinks empowerment is from within, from the individuals and groups not from the intervention of a third party like NGOs (2011:112). In fact, if we apply LWF’s idea of empowerment in the UYT project’s context, talents are Christians’ power and Christians were given talents to share and to enjoy with others. The activities of UYT depend on these talents and the work of the volunteers. Thus, the initiated projects are not governed by external sponsors’ ideas, working method or funds limitations and according to Musa, the work of the volunteers added to the local church ability to generate funds make its programs more sustainable (2012:2). Willis also states that NGOs or the external sponsors can only create the conditions for empowerment but it is up to the individual to take and use the opportunities offered to them (2005:113). An example she gave is the literacy program. Two of my respondents were part of literacy program as teachers, and in both their cases UYT plays the role of NGO. One of these literacy teachers said that women attended literacy classes because they wanted to participate in and benefit from the development activities in their communities.

The UYT, according to the manager, aims at supporting Christians “to make their talents available for their personal development, wellbeing and those of their fellows and by doing so draw people to Jesus”. This sharing of gifts [talents] for the wellbeing of others according to Myers is a Christian’s vocation (1999:115). The motivation for development work is like of Jesus’ diakonia’s love and solidarity (Nordstokke 2011:50). This means that Christians follow Jesus’ examples and take care not only of the physical needs of their community but also of their “spiritual welfare” as Myers said (1999:115). Diakonia is a response to social challenges or need (Nordstokke 2011:31) as it is concerned with the development and wellbeing of the people in the grassroots. Besides, UYT is also a new approach to development the Church is implementing. The project manager said that this new way of working is for the Church to assume more responsibility, indicating in a way that the Church is not the responsible for its actual development projects, as most probably the projects’ sponsors and initiators are its foreign partners. With these development projects, the congregations, included in what the project manager made reference to as the Church, are far from having the sense of ownership. Instead of the top-down way of working as the owner and initiator of development projects and activities, the Church, compelled also probably by the decrease of grant from its partners and of their forthcoming withdrawal as a result of the global economic crisis, is now promoting initiatives from below. In other words, the church’s development committee and the FANILO coordinator train and motivate church members in the congregation, and even people outside FLM, for that entrepreneurial approach to development work. This way of working may be related to the idea of the Church as the entity in which Christians are empowered through baptism and transformed to serve by the Holy Communion (ibid:26). Various development work and income- generating activities initiated through UYT are implemented with all the people in the village and not just limited to church members. This organization of development work starting with the local congregations characterizes actual diaconal work (ibid:44). UYT project depends mainly on volunteers as the project manager is the only paid worker and volunteers are considered important partners in diaconal work (LWF 2009:69). Supporting Nordstokke’s statement, UYT volunteers are also working in cooperation with professional (2011:44) workers of the Church and even people outside the Church, have the possibility to work together with other NGOs or professional development organizations depending on the initiated project’s requirements. This openness to other organizations outside the Church constitutes an opportunity for UYT, in case

the kind of project that the congregation initiated is not related to any of the Church project(s) in the area. It shows the flexibility and dependence of UYT regarding the choice of partnership.

6.4 Increase in capacity

Empowerment is also about increased capacity to lead or to take responsibility and self-confidence. Leading associations and daring to initiate actions that might be controversial to the local community, such as having a woman run for a local administrative position, displays self-confidence. At the same time, an enterprising woman gains the respect of all the people in their community. While some men and women respondents attributed the low number of women in leadership and participation in decision-making bodies to women's lack of self-confidence, the project manager claimed that where there was participation in decision-making bodies there was a corresponding increase in women's self-confidence. However, the story of the woman elected as an administrative leader in her local community who the powerful men of her locality managed to replace with a man, indicates another challenge to UYT. These men ignored the result of the election not because of her lack of self-confidence or her inability to lead, but because of the tradition that men are not led by women. According to the coordinator in Ambovombe, this in fact can be attributed to men's protection of their honor and, indirectly, of their power. One of the responsibilities of the development committee was to survey Christians' talents; I believe this committee should also survey the church members' and maybe also the community's needs for the efficacy and relevance of the local development initiative. Both the survey of talents and the networking combined with the survey of needs will be, in my opinion, an asset for UYT.

The UYT project has techniques which increase the leading capacity of women, for example, by gathering a small group of women with the same talent and by personal coaching. According to the UYT project manager, the Church's women's association was applying for leadership training, which supports Nordstokke's statement that occupying the position of leadership for women is a possible choice and can be acquired (2011:122). LWF also considers this self-choice as true empowerment. One of my respondents is an example of a woman's choice to be a leader whose leadership responsibility then increased as she said she started with leading a basket-making group and is now a community worker; a leader who emerged and gained "the respect of

the community” (Myers 1999:172). However, some women believe that simply providing the opportunity and training for leadership are not enough. For them, leadership actions are not just encouragement words in meetings; they should be accompanied with materials, with concrete objects to share that improve women’s lives. Self-financing of local projects might be one of the weaknesses of UYT in that case, as some of the respondents complained about insufficient funds to sustain the income-generating activities which in turn limited UYT actions.

Women’s ability also increases when they perform activities they never did before such as vaccinating, using new technologies, becoming literate, and, as one woman said, “when they know what they need and what to do”. Carr said that gaining access to knowledge is empowerment (2003:19) and increasing self-efficacy as well as developing skills of action is one of its four sub-processes (ibid:11). This is the same as what LWF calls “building of citizenship”, when UYT builds the knowledge and skills of women and trains them “to participate in organized activities” in the community (2009:61). LWF further states that “true empowerment” equips an individual or a group of people with the necessary skills for transforming their community (ibid). Yet, even if my respondent said that women have knowledge, it seems that they are not transforming their community as far as the male-dominated culture is concerned.

6.5 Increase in income

Women recognized that the various income-generating activities like basketry, embroidery, breeding laying hens or growing green leaf vegetables helped them with family expenses and with their contribution to the Church. This women’s way of investing their money is considered by Duflo as “conducive to development” (2011:1065). In addition, the nutrition of their families also improved. To Carr, “the access to and control over resources” like money are part of empowerment (2003:9). However, the women said that in some cases, the husband did not allow the wife to manage her income and these activities would have no impact within the family or on the woman’s life. Thus the increase of income does not necessarily lead to change in control of resources. In such cases, this husband’s appropriation of the money shows women’s powerlessness according to Duflo (ibid:1066). Yet it seems that these kinds of attitude were challenged indirectly by the practice of gender equality in development work. One of my respondents stated that she had to explain to the men why her association required a high

involvement of women in their project. She said that following her explanation the men agreed that women invest their money for the good of their family, unlike them. Some men, seeing the success of the project, also allowed and even encouraged their wives to invest their income in the income-generating activities.

6.6 Increased participation

One of UYT approaches is participative, as church members are encouraged to use their talents and work voluntarily in development activities. According to Myers, participation is empowering but it “needs to be learned” (1999:149). A community development method has a participatory and an integrated approach, according to LWF; it should encompass “as many sectors as possible” (2009:62) and a sustainable development focused on community assets (ibid:78). Compared to diakonia, UYT, which is aiming at sustainable development, does not only “build alliances with all people of good will” (ibid:64), who are the volunteers, but also with private and public organizations.

As mentioned earlier, active participation of women in Church committees increased according to the project manager. As a result of the requirement of the donors and also the working method of some associations related to UYT that “prioritize women”, as the coordinator in Ambovombe stated, the involvement of women in local development projects also grew. This means that their work and responsibility were increase but not necessarily their power.

Some leaders also explained that they are working on, and will support, women’s participation in all areas of the Church’s activities. According to the FLM’s president, the Constitution of the Church is now undergoing some amendments that are in favor of gender perspective.

Most of my respondents said that the Church is a place where women are more “free” to act. According to some of them, the local tradition exercises its influence less in the Church, especially when the majority of its members are from other ethnic groups. However, with regards to positions of leadership, the pastor in Manakaralahy argued that women still bring the culture, meaning the traditional gender-constructed roles, into the Church way of working. Nevertheless,

at a national level, according to the project manager, the church's women's association applied recently for leadership training, preparing women for leadership.

Women also have a sense of being able to act, to cause things to happen in development projects and activities which were not aimed at "breaking the tradition", as two women leaders' local associations said. With UYT, the majority of volunteers who use their talents are women and, according to LWF, that high engagement of women is quite common in diaconal work which provides a space for women "both in the church and in society" (2009:66).

Women also organized public events but still had to obtain the local administration's approval. In addition, powerful local men intervene to prevent women from taking on positions of power, for example, the elected woman president of fokontany was unable to keep her position; it appeared as if no-one claimed the woman's victory, or contested the men's actions, but everyone accepted the arrangement that another man should take the position because men do not want women to rule them. Gender equality is applied to increase women's involvement in the various committees of the Church or in development activities. None of my respondents, though, considered or mentioned inequality of participation as an injustice, and the structure that supports men's leadership seems unchallenged. In most responses, poverty comes from deficiency of crops and seeds, lack of funds and education but is not attributed to the structure in society.

6.7 Various reflections

From my point of view, UYT, and it seems that even the Church, does not use a method of work which openly challenges the structure that supports inequalities. This means that either WEGE was not well understood or as one of my respondents said, gender equality is applied imperceptibly. In fact, the use of talents is too general and too ambitious as this project wants to encompass all kinds of talents, yet has no precise written methodology or procedures on how to use talents, neither does it have accompanying measures for dealing with the eventual impact of using people's talents or the potential challenges. However, UYT does have an advantage where there is a lack of gender equality in both Church and society; it is useful to focus on the development of talents in general (not gender specific) in order to get the support of the majority of people, even if they have different views on women's empowerment. I recognize that working

at the grassroots' level is one of UYT's strength, as "talents" involve personal knowledge and material possessions, and local activities are based on and expanded from these. Working at the grassroots' level is one of the diaconal values. UYT is not a donor-driven project, but mutuality-driven as people are asked if they would like to participate in a certain project independently of the donors' ideology and planned results. Yet, women's presence in the project's planning does not imply that their role and power changes or they are empowered.

Nevertheless, I sometimes felt during my field work that western ideas for development, and perhaps those of the UYT project, do not necessarily correspond to the aspirations of the people I met. I also believe that, like in diakonia, reading the context with an interdisciplinary approach (LWF 2009:12) is appropriate, even for a local development initiative.

Even if UYT is called a grassroots project, in my opinion it is in fact a top-down project as the idea to create the project stems from the initiative of the FLM, at the top of the decision-making chain, and is not an inspiration of the local church members. Though the effect of the project in the Church is not plainly mentioned in the UYT document project, the answers from some of my respondents connecting it to their financial contribution to the Church lead us to believe that its aim is not only the well-being of the people but also of the Church itself.

As opportunity, there is a general development in society concerning women's role, a holistic ministry through UYT. However in practice, though church leaders support women's empowerment at national and sub-national level, at local level its application or implementation is different. At national and synod's level, the number of women in church committees is increasing which may be attributed to the influence of the leaders who are in favor of gender equality. While at local level, pastors as well as Christians seems to comply with the local prevailing tradition.

The culture, tradition and theology are threats to UYT as this latter does not challenge oppressing structures. Zachariassen stated "religious leaders ... are not always receptive towards the concept of gender equality" (2012). In a community where the majority is not Christian, and the custom define the social system, UYT volunteers may follow the local rule for fear of confrontation or

denial of access. The involvement of women in UYT does not necessarily mean that they are empowered. Another threat to UYT is also the fact that some pastors, according to the coordinator in Ambovombe, seemed mostly concerned about spiritual needs rather than holistic ones. Yet the support of the official authority is important particularly with a “western” perspective like gender empowerment.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This chapter will conclude the analysis throughout the thesis.

This paper has given an account of the different impacts of UYT's work for development on women at national and subnational level and particularly on women from Ambovombe Androy and Ejeda, South of Madagascar.

The purpose of the current study was to determine the way the Church through UYT is empowering women. It is now possible to state that UYT as a diaconal work conveyed human dignity and allowed both Christians as well as community villagers to participate in its activities and support mutually. This study also has shown that though women may improve her capacity, have access to resources and be involved in various development activities, the power relations in the community may remain unchallenged. This leads to think that not all changes in women's life necessarily mean that they are empowered.

The present study provides additional evidence with respect to the cementing role of the church in gender issues.

The most important limitation of this study lies in the fact that it was carried out in two synods among 22 and the local gender views are inappropriate to other areas. Thus the findings might not be transferable to other synods or the whole Church. What is now needed is a cross-national study involving at least some representative of the synods or ethnic groups.

This information can be used to develop targeted interventions aimed at supporting initiative from the local congregation and at empowering women.

Annexes

Here you will find the questionnaire guide, the list of people I interviewed personally and those who completed a questionnaire, and a map which shows the place I carried out my field work.

I. Questionnaire guide

This is what I wrote in the questionnaire guide

The purpose of the investigation is to know the way the “Use your talents” project and the “Women empowerment and gender equality” program empower women in the FLM church.

The concepts of the topic to be investigated are the women’s talents, how they are used and what the future role of women in church will be?

The interview is intended to last half an hour maximum.

Questionnaire:

What do you think of the project UYT and WEGE?

What “talents” is?

What is the aim of the project for women? Is it empowerment in general or for position of leadership?

Is it needed? How?

Is this project useful? Why?

What talents do women have?

Which ones do they use in church?

What does the church think of equality? (biblical, theological/ ecclesiological)

Does the church have a written document about that?

What are the challenges for women to use their talents in church?

What are the opportunities for them to use their talents?

How are the talents of women developed?

Do you feel women are encouraged to use their talents?

In what way do women use their talents?

For what do they use their talents?

What talents do women want to develop?

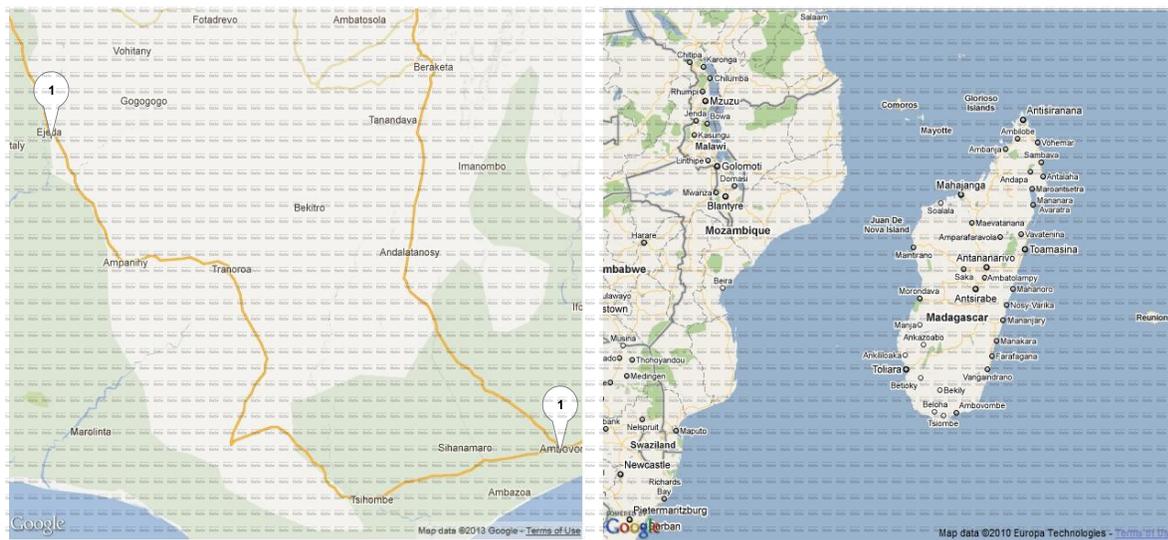
Does the leader want the development of women?

Assuming that women are empowered through development work, what will be the role of women in the church in the future?

What kind of development do you want the women to have? Give specific example.

How far do you think the place of women in the church or/and in leadership should be?

II. Map (drawn from Smart Draw)



Ambovombe Androy and Ejeda (marked with a bubble with the number 1 in the first map), the two places I visited from the two Synods in the South of Madagascar

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