Women, Religion and Leadership in Zimbabwe, Volume 1

An Ecofeminist Perspective

Edited by
Molly Manyonganise · Ezra Chitando ·
Sophia Chirongoma

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Editors

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Praise for *Women, Religion and Leadership in Zimbabwe, Volume 1*

"This volume clearly demonstrates that women are essential to the growth and integral development of Mother Africa. The writers use multiple examples as they describe the lived praxis of African women's leadership in varied contexts. The chapters on women's ecological leadership provide striking examples of women's initiatives for the sake of the community. Several chapters highlight the impact of Cyclone Idai's (2019) gendered impact. Although patriarchy's strong constraints continue to block women from exercising their full leadership potential, the book illustrates how African women use multiple creative ways to use their initiative and leadership skills to enhance Africa as a Green Mother."
—Prof. Susan Rakoczy, *Honorary Professor—School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics—University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

"The great exploits made by women in leadership roles in Zimbabwe are unquestionable. This book particularizes the historical events, places and demonstrates that women in Zimbabwe have played an uncontested record on ecological stewardship and other leadership roles. This brings insights into religious and cultural factors that have influenced and shaped the leadership roles of women. The significance of this book is that it challenges those who have doubted the competence of women's leadership by showing how women in leadership roles have played a significant role in managing the earth and its resources and in other spheres of life. It is a

'must read' book, for all those willing to embrace women leadership and challenge gender disparities."

—Prof. Kudzai Biri, *University of Zimbabwe, Department of Philosophy, Religion and Ethics, Zimbabwe and Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellow, Department of Katholische Theologie, Otto-Friedrich Universitat Bamberg, Germany*

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Introduction: Women, Religion and Leadership in Zimbabwe

Molly Manyonganise⬤, Ezra Chitando⬤,
and Sophia Chirongoma⬤

INTRODUCTION

"*Musha mukadzi*" (there is no home without the mother) is a Shona (a major ethnic group in Zimbabwe) proverb that underscores the centrality of women's leadership. The Ndebele (another major ethnic group in Zimbabwe) have the proverb, "*Umfazi kalankosi*" (a woman has no

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king), thereby underscoring the importance of women in society (Muwati et al., 2011: 6). Thus, although leadership is often ideologically portrayed as the preserve of men, these two proverbs destabilise this notion. Elaborating on the former, Chikwira writes, "…Musha mukadzi as a lived experience is also appropriated as a form of resistance to the dominant assumption that men are the primary providers for the family" (Chikwira, 2020: 110–111). Although it is fair to concede that the concept of *musha mukadzi* has sometimes been abused to limit women to the domestic sphere, it does have liberating potential (Manyonganise, 2015). It celebrates women's leadership abilities and reminds society of their central role in ensuring the survival and flourishing of the household.

We contend that through the practice and deployment of African hermeneutics of creative imagination (as developed by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle), see below), it is possible to stretch the concept of "*musha*" (home) to include literally every other space where communities have been, and can be, formed. Thus, "*musha*" includes worship spaces, the corporate sector, the public sector and all other spaces crying for women's leadership. No "home" or community should thrive without the mother; that is, it must grant space for women's leadership potential and talents to be exercised in full and without an apology. Similarly, because a woman "has no king," she must not have her leadership capacity constrained by any man. She must be free to explore and soar, as well as to achieve her full potential. Having women in leadership positions (in Africa and globally) is highly strategic. It can be justified by historical, legal, political, theological, ethical, economic and other factors. Thus:

> Ample evidence shows female politicians, women who occupy important positions at various levels in the government, and who have the support and political will, have been instrumental in advocating and lobbying for women's rights. (Pikramenou & Mahajan, 2019: 85)

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This volume seeks to examine the intersection among women, religion and leadership in Zimbabwe,[1] with implications for Africa and beyond. While continent-wide studies remain informative and provide a holistic view (allowing also for comparative studies and the development of typologies), country-specific studies do have some distinctive advantages. According to Nkomo and Ngambi (2009: 60), there is, "…the need to focus on the cultural, historical, political, and economic context of each country in order to fully understand the position and experience of African women in leadership and management roles." Focusing on Zimbabwe, a country that has invested in women's emancipation and leadership, while articulating a strong Pan-Africanist ideology, provides a valuable entry point into understanding the dynamics relating to women's leadership in Africa. As we shall highlight below, Zimbabwe is also characterised by radical religious pluralism, thereby facilitating an appreciation of the impact of religion on women's leadership in Africa more generally. This, however, is not to suggest that Zimbabwe can be regarded as representative of Africa as regards women's leadership, as each country has its own dynamics. Nonetheless, it is sustainable to argue that Zimbabwe is a useful entry point into the discourse.

The central contention of this volume is that while religion is well placed to promote women's leadership, there are internal factors that result in religion becoming a stumbling block to women's leadership (see for example, Mujinga, 2020; Chitando et al., 2022). Investing in appreciating how religion both promotes and frustrates women's leadership abilities and ambitions is helpful, given the critical role that women are already playing in delivering the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[2] Since women are actively steering the SDGs, the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the national development objectives, their pivotal leadership roles at various levels, including in religion (the focus of this volume), needs to be acknowledged. Religion, an

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[1] It is striking that a recent volume, *Power in Contemporary Zimbabwe* (Masitera & Sibanda 2018) does not devote a chapter to the theme of women and power. See, however, Shaw (2015) for an attempt to reflect on the complexities of reflecting on women and power in Zimbabwe.

[2] UN Women, nd., Women and Sustainable Development Goals. Nairobi: UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office. Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2322UN%20Women%20Analysis%20on%20Women%20and%20SDGs.pdf, accessed 9 November 2021.

all-pervasive social force (Paris, 1995), has an impact on women's leadership.[3] For example, while reviewing articles on religion and women's leadership in diverse contexts in a journal special issue, leadership scholars Ngunjiri and Christo-Baker (2012) make the following observation:

> A common thread evident in all these articles is that regardless of the context, i.e. religious denomination, organization, country or continent, there are numerous barriers facing women of African descent that hinder their ascent to leadership. Nevertheless, resilience and fortitude have led to some women breaking through the glass ceiling. Though conditions are improving, there is still much that can be done by individuals and organizations to remove the barriers that create or perpetuate the stained glass ceiling. (Ngunjiri & Christo-Baker, 2012: 4)

Contributors to this volume strive to both expose and explore ways of removing "the barriers that create or perpetuate the stained glass ceiling" that women encounter as they seek to rise to leadership within their faith communities, and by extension, the larger society in Zimbabwe. One of the key convictions informing the volume is that without transformative women's leadership within the faith communities in Zimbabwe (and beyond), the faith communities cannot be transformative, particularly in the quest for women's rights (Oxfam 2018). Thus, the volume seeks to achieve the following related goals, namely, to:

- Highlight the challenges and strictures posed by the "unholy trinity" of religion, culture and gender socialisation (Maluleke & Nadar, 2002) to women's opportunity for leadership within faith communities in Zimbabwe
- Illustrate the considerable strides that have been made in women's leadership in religion in Zimbabwe
- Draw lessons and insights from women's leadership within faith communities to the larger society
- Mobilise emerging male scholars of religion, theologians and others to invest in becoming passionate and effective allies to partner with women in the struggle for women's leadership and rights.

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[3] We are acutely aware of the need to remain wary of the "…simultaneous under- and over-estimation of religion" (Vuola, 2017: 3) that can characterise enquiries into religion in society.

The Context

The theme of women's leadership, that is, has become particularly topical and urgent at this historical juncture due to the devastation wrought by COVID-19 in different parts of the world (Njeru et al., 2021). Strikingly, anecdotal evidence suggested that countries that had women leaders were more effective in responding to the pandemic. Although some researchers insist on greater caution (Aldridge & Lotito, 2020), it can be argued that the general failure of male leaders suggests the need for more investment in women's leadership (Dadzie et al., 2021). In the specific case of Africa, after the late Tanzanian president, John Pombe Magufuli[4] had prioritised ideology over saving lives (reminding many of former South African President, Thabo Mbeki's earlier HIV/AIDS denialism), his successor, Samia Suluhu Hassan, came up with a more robust and, arguably, more realistic responses to the pandemic.

Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of African women's leadership in various areas of life has been on the agenda for decades now. While we have crossed some rivers, oceans lie ahead. There is a need to celebrate the gains that have been made while readying for the battles to come. Patriarchy and the masculinity of power (Phakeng, 2015) will not readily facilitate women's leadership. However, the successes achieved on, among others, the intellectual front, through such figures as Amina Amama (Okoli, 2021), in peace building (Chitando, 2020), high-level political leadership, such as by Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma at the African Union and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President of Liberia (Amina & Ibrahim, 2019), in business (Quist, 2020), and other areas.

Despite the significant steps that African women are achieving in terms of leadership in diverse fields of endeavour, it is clear that much more remains to be done. In particular, the field of religion has emerged as a major challenge. Very few women have accessed the apex of leadership in the various religions of Africa (Chitando et al., 2021; Ngunjiri, 2010), as patriarchy continues to exclude them. It is disappointing to concede that women have enjoyed greater leadership opportunities in the wider society than in religion. Yet, religion is supposed to set the pace and initiate social transformation. Religions are expected to set the pace, with the rest of the

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[4] The late Magufuli had his own strengths, particularly his insistence on building Tanzania using local resources, fighting corruption and challenging the powerful countries to respect the autonomy and territorial integrity of Africans.

community following. Thus, religions will need to redouble their efforts in terms of promoting women's spiritual leadership in Africa. They must be at the heart of the struggle against the socio-cultural, economic and political marginalisation of women (Uchem & Ngwa, 2014).

It must be underscored, however, that many of the women who have accessed leadership in the larger society have been motivated by religion. Religion does serve as social capital (Coleman, 2003). Many of the women leaders at higher levels in society have drawn inspiration from religion and have been mentored for leadership within faith communities (albeit at lower utilised religious networks to access leadership). Consequently, it is important to invest in analysing how the faith communities facilitate or frustrate women's leadership as this has implications for women's leadership in the wider space.

Our acknowledgement of the challenges facing women leaders in this volume should not be (mis)used to feed into the narrative of African women as permanently reeling from a series of misfortunes and requiring external saviours. Far from it! To begin with, the struggle for women's leadership is not the preserve of any single continent, country or context. For example, in the US, Hilary Clinton could not make it to the White House in the 2016 election and her gender identity was clearly a major factor. Further, an African country such as Rwanda is a shining example of how to turn a tragedy into a tapestry of hope, women's leadership and development (see for example, Mwambari, 2017; Mwambari et al., 2021).

The emphasis on signs and signposts of hope is borne by the fact that there has been notable progress in the global, continental and regional (the Southern African Development Community [SADC]) approaches to the theme of women's leadership. The United Nations has put the theme of gender firmly on its agenda and the active participation of civil society, for example, through the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and the emergence of a UN agency focusing on women, namely, UN Women, confirms this prioritisation. Similarly, there has been progress through the African Union, with the Maputo Protocol, as well as individual African countries, advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) (see for example, Durojaye et al., 2021). The focus on African women's holistic health lays solid ground for women's leadership.

Promises and Challenges: Religion and Women's Leadership

A longer narrative is required to do justice to the theme of women, religion and leadership in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. For the purpose of this introduction, we seek to raise a few salient points. First, and as the chapters in this volume confirm, it is critical to accept that no single and simple binding statement about how religion affects women's access to leadership is possible. For every instance where religion emerges as a stumbling block to women's leadership in Africa (for example, through proverbs or conservative interpretations of the sacred texts), there is an example where religion serves as an enabler of women's leadership, utilising the same resources. The task, therefore, is to develop and implement strategies that reduce the negative role of religion, while increasing the positive role of religion in promoting women's leadership.

Second, women's leadership is not an alien concept to Africa. This point needs to be amplified, as the negative images of Africa sustain the narrative that it is hopelessly patriarchal space where women have never had opportunities for leadership. However, history bears witness that there have always been outstanding women leaders in Africa. Prior to the colonial plunder of Africa, women led armies, governed large swathes of territories and exercised leadership at various levels, including the spiritual (see for example, Goettner-Abendroth, 2012; Steady, 2011). The iconic figure of Nehanda in Zimbabwe represents a sound embodiment of the latter (Charumbira et al., 2020). In the specific case of Zimbabwe, Indigenous African spirituality eschewed gender binaries and facilitated the active participation of women, although, admittedly, patriarchy remained active, as it does in the contemporary period (Mukonyora, 1999; Taringa, 2004). The concept of Mother Earth, namely, the association of the earth and Africa with feminine imagery (Chirongoma & Kiilu, 2022; Chirongoma & Mombo, 2021; Matholeni et al., 2020) also facilitates the acceptance of women's leadership.

Third, Zimbabwe (like other parts of Africa) is characterised by radical religious pluralism. Alongside indigenous spirituality, there is also, Christianity in its diversity, Asian religions in their plurality, Islam, Rastafari, etc. All these religions promote or constrain women's leadership, internally, as well as within the wider society. While the world's religions are largely patriarchal (Maseno & Mligo, 2019), it remains strategic to identify their potential for the liberation of all people. There is a need for creativity

in interpreting religious traditions to promote women's leadership. For example, the stigmatisation and marginalisation of single women in Pentecostalism and other religions (Biri, 2021), must be challenged to ensure that the leadership gifts of single women in Zimbabwe are embraced.

Fourth, as activists (engaged scholars) promoting women's leadership in religion and society in Zimbabwe and Africa, our engagement is not from a neutral, "merely academic" or phenomenological standpoint (see for example, Young, 2002). We seek to both understand and transform the situation in relation to women's leadership in faith communities and within society. Whereas considerable literature has been produced on women and religion in Zimbabwe, for example, there has been less appetite to interrogate the implications for women's leadership. The work that is emerging, for example, on the implications on women's access to land (Landman & Shumba, 2020), is taking the discourse towards a more promising turn. However, it remains vital to engage in the critical first step of gaining an appreciation of the current status of women within the diverse communities of faith. This offers the platform for effective activism and practical engagement for the purposes of facilitating women's leadership.

Fifth, the Circle, the most productive group of theologians on the African continent, has been consistent in challenging faith communities to facilitate women's leadership. The conviction by the Circle is that women avail a new model of leadership (see, for example, Njoroge, 2005). Indeed, contributors to this volume were inspired by the Circle theology and methodology. The Circle hermeneutical model places emphasis on African women's lived experiences. In the case of this volume, the contributors focused specifically on women's access to leadership opportunities within diverse communities of faith. After having identified African women's lived experiences, the Circle approach then employs a liberating approach, whether from reading the sacred text (mostly the Bible, but also, the Quran) (see the works of, among others, Musa W. Dube (2008) and Madipoane Masenya (2013), or from a creative interpretation of African culture (see for example, Oduyoye, 2019), to emphasise the urgency of ensuring that African women flourish. The theoretical framework guiding this volume is the Circle feminist/womanist conviction, characterising most other feminist work, that, "…women have never simply fallen victim under any religion or during any time period; they [have] functioned as actors in the spaces afforded them" (Wong, 2009: 183).

Sixth, the role of African men in general, and in theology and religious studies in Zimbabwe (and Africa) in particular, to support women's leadership in the faith sector is crucial (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2008). This volume can be seen as contributing towards the mobilisation of male scholars of religion and theology to be more deliberate in partnering with women in the quest for gender justice. Having women standing shoulder to shoulder with men, as well as working in the trenches is very beneficial to the struggle. This means going beyond using feminism in research (see for example, Chiweshe, 2018) and challenging patriarchy and its stubborn refusal to accept women's leadership. While recognising the contradictions and tensions that emerge from men who make the conscious decision to confront injustice and exclusion, we recognise the promise that emerging male theologians who support women's leadership bring to the struggle.

Women's Leadership in Religion Leading to Women's Leadership in the Community? Some Proposals

How can Zimbabwean faith communities, as well as scholars in theology and religious studies, contribute towards enhancing women's leadership? What are some of the strategies that might be implemented to mobilise faith communities to facilitate women's leadership internally and beyond? In this section, we highlight some of the major strategies that can see faith communities in Zimbabwe overtaking the public and private sectors in promoting women's leadership.

First, we consider transformative theological education as a powerful resource in empowering faith communities to embrace and promote women's leadership within the faith communities and the larger society (see for example, Classens et al., 2019; Mwaniki, 2019). While acknowledging that theological institutions and university departments of religious studies/theology are not themselves immune to sexism, patriarchy and corruption (Ayandokun, 2021), we are still convinced that they can be incubators of revolutionary actions that promote women's leadership. Religious leaders (men and women) who would have benefited from theological education that emphasises gender justice are more responsive towards women's leadership than those that would not have had access to such theological education. Further, we recommend theological

education for the whole people of God through Theological Education by Extension (TEE) to popularise awareness of women's issues.

Second, we recommend effective mentorship across generations of women leaders within faith communities and in different organisations. Having role models serves as a source of inspiration for many aspiring women leaders. When women in leadership reach out and journey with those in the early stages of their careers, strong bonds of solidarity are formed. Mcilongo and Strydom (2021) have highlighted the significance of mentorship for women in the public sector in South Africa and the insights are applicable to women in the faith sector. Many women regard mentorship as vital in enabling them to gain confidence and meet the many challenges that they face as they travel the leadership journey. Women leaders who are mentored in the faith community can build synergies with those in other sectors.

Third, we regard ecumenical and interfaith collaboration among women leaders as a very important step towards increasing the number of women leaders in the faith community and beyond. Currently, the interfaith space in Zimbabwe/Africa is dominated by men. Further, while there is a commendable interest in peacebuilding and other development initiatives, there is very limited interest in promoting women's leadership. We are of the view that ecumenical and interfaith collaboration among women leaders will facilitate mutual learning, provide support systems and amplify the collective voice in demanding leadership space for women.

Fourth, the collective action by women within faith communities should extend to networking with secular women's organisations. Here, there will be a need for effective leadership from both sides, as many secular women's organisations do not have positive experiences with the faith-based sector. They have generally experienced the male-dominated faith-based sector as ultra-conservative and frustrating in relation to women's issues. However, advances in women's leadership will be made when women are willing to build coalitions beyond faith, ideologies and other forms of difference.

Chapters in This Volume

The contributors in this volume reflect on the role of Zimbabwean women in religio-cultural leadership. This is a timely theme because the role of women in leadership has not yet received adequate scholarly attention, not only in Zimbabwe, but on the continent as well. It is this

scholarly dearth that the current volume seeks to bridge. The chapters in this volume cover various facets of Zimbabwean women's involvement in religio-cultural leadership or lack thereof. This introductory chapter is the first chapter which outlines the central goal of the volume and presents a summary of the ensuing chapters. The subsequent chapters have been arranged thematically into two interrelated sections.

Part I: Zimbabwean Women's Leadership in Ecological Conservation

In Chapter 2, Ezra Chitando engages in an expansive literature review on leadership. The chapter focuses on African women's leadership in the context of global studies on leadership. It draws attention to the key issues in the study of African women's leadership, highlighting the impediments to African women's leadership and the main theories in African women's leadership. In particular, the chapter summarises the reflections on Ubuntu and African women's leadership. It also describes some of the key areas where African women have exercised leadership, illustrating some of the emerging areas. Overall, the chapter summarises the major themes in African women's leadership, thereby rejecting the context within which the current volume is located.

Contributing to the ongoing discussions regarding the challenges caused by the looming climate change crisis, the next four chapters discuss the unique Zimbabwean women's leadership roles in ecological conservation. The chapters foreground women's contribution towards mitigating the impact of ecological devastations such as Cyclone Idai, as well as religious women's pivotal roles in economic empowerment, particularly in light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Chapter 3 which is entitled "The Leadership of Ndau women in healing the Earth utilizing religio-cultural resources: An African ecofeminist perspective," is authored by Tenson Muyambo. In this chapter, Muyambo draws from the wells of the *oikos* and ecofeminist theologies, to demonstrate how Zimbabwean women are actively engaged in healing the Earth utilising religio-cultural resources. The main goal of this chapter is to elucidate that women in general and Zimbabwean women in particular, nurture and clothe the Earth, which is usually referred to as Mother Earth. In that light, the author tenders the argument that the proliferation of women's marginalisation and exploitation in the social, economic, religious and geopolitical milieus in the world can be equated to the exploitation of the Earth. It

is an empirical study focusing on the indigenous Ndau women's contribution towards ecological preservation. One of the major findings of this study is that while women are keenly aware of the effects of their activities on other forms of nature, they cannot help it since they are not key decision-makers in their communities. Muyambo also laments the fact that although there is available literature on taboos as a resource for nature conservation, the silence of this literature on who are the custodians and implementers of the taboos is baffling. He also interrogates the fact that deep-seated patriarchal practices stereotype women as second-class citizens with no decision-making power. The chapter concludes by recommending the urgent need for promoting environmental awareness and active engagement through women's agency.

"Affirming Positive Femininities through Responsible Ecological Leadership and Stewardship in Rural Masvingo, Zimbabwe," by Amos Muyambo, is the title of Chapter 4. Cognisant of the fact that most African women continue to be marginalised in their patriarchal communities, the chapter chronicles how these oft-unsung heroines have contributed tremendously in the restructuring and conservation of the Zimbabwean society. The chapter highlights the point that for several years, Zimbabwe has been battling with economic decline, coupled with rising inflation and poverty. Muyambo proceeds to elaborate how the prevailing economic turmoil has a huge bearing on the people which consequently impinges on how the people interact with their bionetwork. It is against this backdrop that the chapter focuses on discussing the role of women in ecological stewardship. The first part of the chapter discusses the global ecological crisis, highlighting how the African continent is in the throes of the ecological crisis. Using the AICs in Zimbabwe as a case study, the chapter then proceeds to explain how African women's positive contribution to stemming the tide of the ecological crisis are an affirmation of positive femininities. Since the majority of AICs memberships in Zimbabwe are women, the chapter elucidates ways in which the women are tapping into the religio-cultural resources to exercise environmental stewardship. It lays bare how mass greening efforts are being championed by the majority of women in the rural communities of Zimbabwe. The chapter also discusses how the African resources such as culture, poetry, storytelling, rituals and ceremonies have been used in ecological stewardship, especially by women who are the vanguards of religion and culture.

In Chapter 5, with the title, "Zimbabwean Women's Leadership and Religio- Cultural Resources in Navigating Risk and Disaster Management: Some Lessons from Cyclone Idai," Mazvita Machinga reflects on how Cyclone Idai wreaked havoc on the lives of so many people in Zimbabwe, especially in Chimanimani and Chipinge. She also reaffirms the fact that natural disasters and humanitarian crises such as Cyclone Idai have a propensity for overwhelming and devastating entire communities. She outlines examples of how *communities* have been left devastated and helpless, with little access to life's necessities, such as food, clean water, shelter, and basic services. As explained by Machinga, this is the epitome of what transpired in the wake of the Cyclone Idai catastrophe and other natural disasters that have occurred in Zimbabwe. It is against this background that Machinga brings to the fore the importance for communities to have disaster risk reduction policies and strategies, to reduce existing disaster risks, and manage residual risks. Machinga proceeds to explain the fact that while both men and women are impacted by these natural disasters, the main focus of this particular chapter is to reflect upon the impact on women and the role that women play in navigating disaster risks. Additionally, she highlights lessons learnt from Cyclone Idai and how these lessons can be used to contribute to the strengthening of resilience and reduction of losses when disaster happens. The chapter also seeks to respond to the following question, "What lessons can be drawn from Cyclone Idai in terms of navigating risks and disaster management?" Information presented in this chapter was gathered during a series of collaboratively shared trauma healing and recovery workshops held in Chimanimani and Chipinge. The collaborative discussions and "constructive feedback" between the participants and facilitators, led to the identification of the various roles that women can play. The chapter highlights the unique role that women can play, looking at what happened during and after the devastation caused by Cyclone Idai. It also discusses how socio-cultural norms and role behaviors impact women's responses towards natural disasters. The chapter concludes by making an impassioned appeal for the inclusion and involvement of women in navigating risks and managing disasters.

Susan S. Dube and Sibiziwe Shumba write on, "Towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals in Zimbabwe: Christian women's leadership in Gwanda district," in Chapter 6. The chapter highlights the need for assessing how the government of Zimbabwe is faring in terms of its implementation and achievement of the SDGs. Using Gwanda district as

a case study, the chapter's main focus is to examine the contribution of Zimbabwean Christian women in achieving the SDGs as well as to explore the challenges and opportunities that they are facing. One of the goals reviewed in this chapter is SDG 13 which focuses on curtailing climate change and its impact. Dube and Shumba explicate the fact that since Christianity has such a broad membership in Zimbabwe, the main focus of discussion is anchored on Christian women in order to show how religion and culture impact the achievement of the ten SDGs which have been identified by the government of Zimbabwe as the priority national goals. The first part of the chapter presents the background of SDGs and strategies that have been adopted by the Zimbabwean government to achieve the goals. The ensuing section focuses on the biblical perspectives on women and the roles played by Christian women in attaining the afore-mentioned goals. This part of the chapter shows how the selected goals interconnect. In conclusion, the chapter outlines the challenges and opportunities for Christian women in Gwanda district pertaining their contribution towards the attainment of the SGDs in Zimbabwe, particularly in view of the difficult economic conditions prevailing in the country.

Part II: Religio-Cultural Factors Impacting Women's Leadership Roles in Zimbabwe

The next four chapters explore the religio-cultural factors relating to young women's leadership, adherents of African Indigenous Spirituality, as well as African Muslim women in leadership. Chapter 7 titled "Gender Discrepancies in Zimbabwean Religio- Cultural and Political Leadership: A Case Study of Young Christian Women in the Midlands Province" is co-authored by Sophia Chirongoma and Mpumelelo Moyo. In this chapter, the authors contend that the exclusion of women, particularly young women from key leadership and decision-making forums in almost every structure of society, remains an elusive topic in academic discourses. Hence, the authors set out to fill this gap in scholarly literature by interrogating the factors and forces precipitating young Zimbabwean women's exclusion from leadership in political, religio-cultural and decision-making forums. The overall theoretical framework adopted in this chapter is Africana womanism emphasising on African women as agents, not subjects of history. The discussion is mainly informed by the Zimbabwean National Gender Policy (NGP) 2013–2017 whose central

aim is "to achieve a gender just society where men and women enjoy equality and equity and participate as equal partners in the development process of the country." The authors' reflections in this chapter also gravitate towards the NGP's goal, "to eradicate gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development." An analysis of the data collected through an empirical study conducted in the Midlands province between July and December 2018 has led the authors to conclude that the NGP's policy goals are still far from being achieved. The empirical study was anchored upon establishing the extent to which young Christian women are participating in leadership hierarchies within the academic, economic, religious, cultural and political institutions. Particular attention was paid to the factors obstructing young Christian women from taking up key and influential leadership positions in churches, communities, political and economic arenas. The chapter concludes by advocating for the transformation of policies, values and norms in an endeavour to accommodate, embrace and encourage young Christian women to take up key leadership and decision-making positions. This conclusion is informed by the fact that barring young Christian women from leadership and decision-making positions is detrimental to the development of our churches, communities, academic, political and economic sectors.

Chapter 8, co-authored by Macloud Sipeyiye and Elijah E. N. Dube, has the title, "Of women's leadership in African Indigenous Spirituality: A Focus on the Ndau of South Eastern Zimbabwe." This chapter proposes that as Zimbabwe's Second Republic works towards realising the goal of gender justice and gender equality, there is a need for taking stock of the covert and overt means of women's exercising of leadership in African Indigenous Spirituality (AISs). It revisits the subject of women leadership in AISs through the Africana womanist lenses. The chapter combines tools from both the theoretical and empirical methods, that is, it draws insights from the fieldwork conducted among the Ndau people of south-eastern Zimbabwe as well as from the available literature on women, power and leadership in AISs. The author's main contention is that even though women in AISs would rarely occupy public leadership positions themselves, the brains behind the decision-making processes often emanate from them. This fact leads them to conclude that women in African societies rule by pulling strings behind the curtains, but when called upon or when circumstances dictated, they would rise to the occasion and perform public leadership roles. It is against this backdrop that Sipeyiye and Dube uphold the view that men are leaders by proxy as they

execute ideas from women. In their view, women wield power and influence that directs the course of events presided over by men. The authors cast this discourse in the context of the ethos behind Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 in line with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal number 5 that emphasises gender equality and the inclusion of women in all leadership structures. In conclusion, Sipeyiye and Dube recommend the mobilisation of indigenous women's leadership qualities to inspire female and male leadership in institutions and organisations today.

Chapter 9, "Shona Women's Leadership in Traditional Healing," is authored by Bernard Pindukai Humbe. In this chapter, Humbe tenders the argument that more than forty years after Zimbabwe gained political independence, there is still a growing struggle for women's social status. In response to this gendered disparity, Humbe explores the visibility of rural Shona women in traditional healing practices. Focusing on the indigenous Shona women's healing powers is mainly motivated by the fact that there is a deep-rooted cultural thrust towards traditional healing among indigenous Africans. Hence, he presents an empirical study of the Shona in Buhera while tapping into the phenomenology of religion and cultural memory to illustrate that traditional healing practices, rituals and places where the healing rituals are performed (houses of healing, sacred space, spiritual practice) is a gendered practice or work. According to him, it is through healing rituals and practices that the indigenous Shona women work out their own religiosity within the social and religious systems. He also adds that since healing has left a direct effect on the personality of the indigenous Shona women healers, the very essence of healing practices is a cultural expression of Shona spirituality. In conclusion, the chapter argues that the traditional healing of the Shona women contributes towards Zimbabwe's national treasure. As such, Humbe categorises Shona women's indigenous healing practices as a special treasure that is enshrined in beliefs, values, medicine and vernacular knowledge. Humbe therefore enthuses that the realisation of Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 should be viewed as a re-empowerment opportunity to rebuild and revive indigenous women's spiritual and cultural practices.

Conclusion

The achievement of the interlocking national, continental and global development initiatives will remain a pipe dream if there is no deliberate and effective investment in women's leadership. In particular, the faith

sector has emerged as a highly significant player in promoting women's leadership. Wrestling with how the faith sector promotes or impedes women's leadership is strategic, as it has the potential to unlock women's potential and talents. This volume contributes to the discourse and practice of women's leadership in the faith communities (and the implications beyond) by analysing the dynamics and developments in the Zimbabwean setting. We envisage that this volume will precipitate additional research and reflections on Zimbabwean (and African) women's leadership in other areas of life. Crucially, however, we are hopeful that, henceforth, women's leadership will catapult different organisations, countries and the continent on to a more promising developmental trajectory. Thus:

> Going forward, women's leadership in Africa would benefit from continued theoretical research, advocacy and discussion that embrace the complexity and diversity of African women leaders. The African Women Leaders Network, the premiere advocacy group with the mission of elevating the status of women's leadership in Africa, outlines key priorities in their fight: eradicate violence against women and girls; increase access to education; promote a women-driven care economy; and encourage young female leadership. In the words of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf: "Now is the time to recognize that developmental transformation and true peace cannot come without fundamental change in who is leading and the ways of leading."[5]

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Zimbabwean Women's Leadership in Ecological Stewardship

Theorising African Women's Leadership: An Overview

Ezra Chitando

INTRODUCTION

Like other key concepts in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the concept of leadership has been widely used, but remains controversial and heavily contested. In many senses, it is like the concept of time: many people have an idea what it is, but struggle to articulate what it is in reality. Various scholars, theorists, coaches, practitioners and others have expended considerable energy in seeking to clarify leadership. For example, the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership undertook a comprehensive review of the literature on leadership and theories of leadership development (2017). The literature review that they undertook is quite detailed, but it is clear that new definitions and

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approaches to leadership have since been (and are being) developed and published since then. More critically, the review leaves one with the realisation that no universally accepted definition of leadership exists. Earlier, Bruce E. Winston and Kathleen Patterson (2006) generated an integrative definition of leadership. While their discussion is elaborate, I will cite what I deem their most helpful characterisation of leadership at some length. Thus:

> A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives. The leader achieves this influence by humbly conveying a prophetic vision of the future in clear terms that resonates with the follower(s) beliefs and values in such a way that the follower(s) can understand and interpret the future into present-time action steps. In this process, the leader presents the prophetic vision in contrast to the present status of the organization and through the use of critical thinking skills, insight, intuition, and the use of both persuasive rhetoric and interpersonal communication including both active listening and positive discourse, facilitates and draws forth the opinions and beliefs of the followers such that the followers move through ambiguity toward clarity of understanding and shared insight that results in influencing the follower(s) to see and accept the future state of the organization as a desirable condition worth committing personal and corporate resources toward its achievement. (Winston & Patterson, 2006: 7)

Although the above characterisation of leadership can be critiqued on a number of fronts (for example, it is elaborate/expanded, focuses on organisational leadership, is prescriptive, etc.), I find it quite appealing for some strategic reasons. First, there is a religionist slant, orientation and drift in the definition. References to a prophetic vision and spiritual energy confirm this. Such a definition is valuable for a volume that focuses on women's leadership in the context of religion and spirituality in Zimbabwe. Second, the broadness of the definition allows it to cover key dimensions. Whereas a succinct definition has the advantage of specificity, it tends to leave out many relevant aspects. Thus, the preceding definition addresses pertinent issues. It speaks to the dynamic relationship between a leader and followers, with particular reference to envisioning

by the leader. Third, the definition strives for cross-cultural applicability. Although I am a firm believer in contextualisation, I also accept that leadership is a concept that transcends specific cultures (although, logically, it is expressed and experienced in particular cultural contexts). Fourth, and finally, it is gender neutral. Many definers fall into the temptation of limiting leadership to men.

Having outlined the challenges and merits of defining leadership, in the next section, this chapter outlines the major leadership theories globally. This seeks to locate the volume within the larger context of leadership. Crucially, however, I reiterate the point that the field of leadership is wide and ever-expanding. This chapter, located in a volume on religion and women's leadership in Africa, can only draw attention to the key themes in this discourse.

Theories of Leadership: A Summary

As highlighted above, there are numerous theories of leadership. In their overview of theories of leadership, Akpa et al. (2021) delineate the recurrent themes. These include, leadership being seen as a process, leadership as involving influence, leadership as occurring within a group, and, leadership as involving a common goal (2021: 274). On the other hand, Bolden et al. (2003) discuss leadership theories, showing the progression from the initial focus on the unique traits of a leader to the contemporary trends of including the qualities of followers. They summarise the following theories of leadership, namely: Great Man (leaders as exceptional people (men) born to lead), Trait (lists of qualities associated with leadership), Behavourists (focus more on what leaders actually do than their qualities), Situational (leadership as specific to the situation in which it is exercised), Contingency (identifying relevant situational variables for leadership), Transactional (highlights the relationship between leaders and followers) and, Transformational (change and the role of leaders in enabling it) (Bolden et al., 2003: 6).

Synthesising the literature relating to key dimensions of leadership, Van Wart (2013) draws attention to five themes. These are: leaders setting the pace in terms of task accomplishment through effective communication and evaluation; leaders exhibiting effective excellent human relations skills; leaders facilitating change through innovation and creativity; leaders embracing diversity (for example, minorities, ethnic groups and the changing role of women in the workplace) and, finally, leaders must lead

with integrity (Van Wart, 2013: 556). While all the themes identified by Van Wart are important, I would like to underscore the dimension of the changing role of women in the workplace, as well as leaders embracing diversity. As this chapter will demonstrate, no serious scholar of leadership can afford to ignore the significance of women's leadership. Further, due to globalisation, many communities are characterised by radical pluralism. Effective leadership requires that leaders be open to and tolerant of minorities. Further, this dimension of pluralism demands that a decisive shift be made from the dominance of Western theories of leadership. There is a need to acknowledge that there are thriving leadership theories beyond the Global North. I cite the following at considerable length to express this contention. Thus:

> Western styles and models of leadership currently dominate the leadership literature. New global and diverse perspectives of leadership can begin to include non-dominant views where collectivism, benevolence, and familial affiliations are given greater prominence. This might include an attention to different perspectives of the same phenomenon which some might find to be anathema to long-held beliefs, e.g., examining virtue in leadership from philosophical and ethical principles as opposed to empirical validation; comparing effective leadership using collective vs. individual orientations; using non-Western metaphors, such as Daoist principles, to define the process of leadership; considering how alternative construals of the self as interdependent might influence the image of leaders; collaboration as a process; leader traits as identities which are socially derived; incorporating inclusiveness and difference as goals; examining power and its relationship to altruism, dominance, and control; and communication across groups and cultures. (Chin et al., 2018: xix–xx)

Having summarised some of the key leadership theories above, one would be forgiven for thinking that the field has reached some degree of consensus on what leadership is. However, this is not the case, as researchers continue to generate new ideas. Sajjadi et al. (2014) have reflected on emerging leadership theories and styles. Alongside reviewing some of the more popular theories (contingency, transactional and transformational leadership), they also discuss servant leadership, responsible leadership, authentic leadership, charismatic and neo-charismatic leadership, ethical leadership, distributed leadership and entrepreneurial leadership. Their article confirms the fact that leadership continues to be approached from diverse angles.

It is also critical to acknowledge that there has been some investment in theorising followership. Indeed, there is a logical connection between leadership and followership. Some leadership theories, such as the transactional and transformational leadership theories, do provide insights into the nature of the relationship between leaders and their followers. Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) and, Inderjeet and Scheepers (2022), have sought to clarify the importance of followership. This emerges out of the realisation that the predispositions of followers go a long way in shaping the identity of leaders.

From the foregoing, it is clear that there have been some significant efforts in seeking to clarify leadership. Leadership has emerged as a vast area of study, with very helpful insights being generated. Cognisant of the vastness of the literature that has been published in this field, I shall draw attention to some of the recurrent and emerging themes. First, there is an ongoing reflection on the theories of leadership. These theories are supposed to provide the rubric for interpreting leadership in different societies in the world (see for example, Khan et al., 2016). Second, there is contestation on the relationship between defining leadership and theories of leadership, as well as the relationship between leadership and management (see for example, Lunenburg, 2011). Third, as highlighted above, perspectives from the Global North continue to dominate publications on leadership. Fourth, there is an emerging focus on followership. Fifth, there is a growing interest in the theme of leadership outside the Global North, including women's leadership globally (Denmark & Paludi, 2018; Ngunjiri & Madsen, 2015). It is this particular theme that I turn to when discussing African women's leadership.

African Women's Leadership

Studies on leadership have been dominated by the image of men as the purported divinely and socially sanctioned leaders. This is due to the fact that patriarchy is a global ideology that continues to influence numerous processes in the world today. Patriarchy prioritises men's interests ahead of those of women, hence the ongoing call to challenge gender norms (Lari et al., 2022). Questioning the prevailing gender norms that privilege men and restrict leadership to men provides space for conceptualising and normalising women's leadership. However, the tendency of associating leadership with men has generated major challenges for the few women who currently occupy leadership roles across Africa (and in other parts

of the world). Thus, there is a general perceived inconsistency between female gender roles and leadership roles. This leads to two forms of biases, namely, first, women are seen as less fit or acceptable for leadership positions, and, second, women's leadership is rated as less effective by peers, subordinates and top management compared to their male counterparts (Fazal et al., 2020: 3). This leads to the widely accepted maxim that women leaders have to put in much more work simply for them to be embraced as leaders. On the other hand, men in leadership positions begin from the advantage of being born male, a privilege accorded them by society. This is known as the patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1995).

In order to place African women's leadership into its proper context, it is helpful to appreciate the growth of leadership studies in Africa. Once again, there is now a significant body of literature that requires several studies to do justice to it. For the purposes of this chapter, it is helpful to highlight that there have been a number of publications that address this theme. I should hasten to add that there are two main renditions, namely, "Leadership in Africa" and, "African leadership." For some, "African Leadership" suggests that there are particular qualities and approaches to leadership as found among Africans, whereas, "Leadership in Africa" is more neutral. Unfortunately, there is almost always a negative slant when "African Leadership" is used (Nkomo, 2011). Some of the publications that provide overviews of the study of leadership in Africa include, Boulden and Kirk (2009), Kuada (2010) and, Fourie et al. (2017). The latter article is exceptionally informative on the historical development of leadership studies in Africa, with the observation that, "…the 2000s mark a decade of major developments in the field of research on leadership in Africa" (2017: 235). Combined, these publications have gone a long way in demonstrating that there have been diverse leadership styles in Africa.

One of the defining features of the growth of an academic discipline is the publication of quality journals dedicated to the field. The field of Leadership in Africa is now characterised by the publication of many competitive journals. These include (in alphabetical order), the *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies, Africa Journal of Leadership and Governance* (AJOLG), *Africa Journal of Management, South African Journal of Human Resource Management and the Young African Leaders Journal of Development* (YALJOD). These journals have contributed to the study of leadership in Africa, with an increasing focus on African women's leadership. They are complemented by efforts to

develop leadership theories that counter the perceived "failure of leadership" in Africa (see for example, Adeyemo, 2009; Rukuni, 2009) that have been undertaken in books and other publication platforms on the continent and beyond.

Thus, from the broader context of leadership in Africa, interest in women's leadership in Africa/African women's leadership has been gaining momentum (especially from the 2000s). In particular, African women scholars and activists have taken up the challenge to delink the concept of "leadership" with "men." While some researchers from the Global North are contributing to this development, I seek to underscore the fact that it is, quite rightly, African women scholars and activists who are at the forefront of research and publication on African women's leadership. This is consistent with the principle of liberation, namely, that the oppressed must be actively involved (lead) in their own liberation (Freire, 1970). Consequently, African women scholars and activists have exploded the myth that leadership is exclusively for men. They have highlighted the achievements of African women leaders, thereby confirming their leadership competence. However, they have also drawn attention to the multiple factors that prevent women from accessing leadership in Africa. I shall highlight some of the key themes in the next section.

Impediments to African Women's Leadership

African women scholars and activists have drawn attention to the challenges that women face in their leadership quest. In their review of the literature on the factors that affect women's political participation in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Mlambo and Kapingura (2019) refer to, among other issues, violent conflict, sexual violence and war; cultural and traditional norms and economic factors. While these factors have been identified with special reference to women's political participation, I will adopt them in relation to African women's leadership. However, I will rearrange them as I am convinced that cultural and traditional norms constitute the most serious impediment to African women's leadership. Thus, I shall begin by focusing on cultural and traditional norms (within which I include the religious dimensions).

Consistently, African women scholars and activists have shown how culture and religion have been deployed to deny women leadership. Thus, "I advance that culture and religion are the two main contributors to women's continued low status in Africa and form the root of the African

woman's oppression" (Hingston, 2016: 43). Although this statement singles out Africa, I contend that it applies with equal force to diverse other contexts. However, I readily concede that in Africa, culture and religion have been deployed to try and keep African women away from leadership. Men, who are responsible for facilitating and enforcing patriarchal beliefs and practices, while recruiting women and making them complicit, have played a major role in putting up barriers to women's leadership. As the gatekeepers in culture and religion, they have promoted beliefs and practices that make it difficult for women to take up leadership roles. For example, using the feminist hermeneutics of suspicion, one would be inclined to imagine that it is mostly men who are behind those African proverbs that entrench negative images of women. Many of these proverbs suggest that women are less intellectually gifted than men and that men are destined to be the leaders, with women set for perpetual followership. The same men are also at the forefront of sponsoring death-dealing interpretations of sacred texts such as the Bible, engraining negative views of women (see for example, Harris, 1984). Such gender socialisation has hampered African women's quest for leadership. In such settings, women have to work much harder than men in order for them to be accepted as leaders. Thus:

> My experience has taught me that women have to be much better than men to land top jobs, they have to work doubly hard, and this gradually becomes an albatross as more women attain executive positions, because talented women are often constructed as ambitious rivals; and gender politics harshly depicts them in patriarchal stereotypes, caricaturing their personalities to curb their influence. (Phakeng, 2015: 2)

Religion has also been used to deny women access to leadership opportunities in Africa. Following the global patriarchal trend, most leadership positions in Africa (in religion and society) are dominated by men. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) has continued to underscore the fact that religion has been used to perpetuate the marginalisation of women in leadership. As I shall highlight in a subsequent section, this has resulted in the call for African women to arise (Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 1992). African women have been developing effective strategies to counter their exclusion in the face of various myths, sayings, beliefs and practices that have been used to prevent women from accessing leadership in religion and society (see for example, Siwila et al.,

2022). Problematic interpretations of the sacred texts (in the case of African Christianity and African Islam) and ideological appeals to culture (in the case of African Indigenous/Traditional Religion) are marshalled to frustrate women who seek leadership positions. Sadly, I must concede, in some instances patriarchy recruits some women to defend its tactics, leading some critics to conclude, unfairly, that women are their worst enemies. The chief enemy of women remains patriarchy due to its oppression of women and positioning of men as its key beneficiaries (Rakoczy, 2004: 10).

Violence is another significant barrier to African women's leadership. This violence includes open violent conflict, as well as the hidden, but by no means less painful, psychological violence. As Parsitau et al. (2021) have articulated so eloquently, African women contend with violence in various spaces. Women who dare to take up leadership must budget for the diverse forms of violence that they will encounter. If it is at the workplace, they must deal with those who question their competence, as well as those who suggest that they have accessed leadership through unethical means. There is also the reality of sexual abuse of women in the workplace, which was exposed more forcefully through the #MeToo Movement (see for example, Blumell & Mulupi, 2021). If it is in the political field, they must prepare for violence against women in politics (see, for example, Krook, 2020). If they are single, they must ready themselves for all manner of abuse, including the suggestion that they are out to "steal" other women's husbands (Biri, 2021. See also Stuhlhofer, 2022). Chisanga (2022: 213) states that "…it is a fact that single mothers face discrimination, rejection and sometimes even blackmail from society." The preoccupation with an African (or, indeed, any other) woman leader's marital status and personal relationships remain an enigma, at least for me. I have never been able to fathom why this must be a factor in evaluating leadership competence. Patriarchy's double standards are exposed when men's marital status is deemed a non-issue. It is, therefore, important to address violence, including psychological violence, in order to enable more women to take up leadership positions in Africa and beyond.

Economic factors remain relevant when analysing women's marginalisation from leadership, particularly in the field of politics. Political campaigns demand financial resources and many women do not have access to money that can be used to run campaigns successfully. Cultural and religious factors have a bearing, as they do not readily support

investment in girls. It is only in the contemporary period that there are more parents and organisations supporting girls' education that more young women are found in higher and tertiary education, often outperforming their male peers. Economic factors also prevent many women from enrolling for self-enhancing courses and programmes that would make them more competitive in the workplace.

Keohane (2020) also provides valuable reflections on factors impeding women's quest for leadership, albeit from the context of the United States of America. She draws attention to women's primary responsibility for childcare and homemaking, challenges when seeking to return to work after branching out, gender stereotypes, women's fewer opportunities to be mentored, popular culture discouraging young women and the exclusion of women from political participation (Keohane, 2020: 242–244). These roadblocks apply with equal force to women in Africa, highlighting the multiple challenges that African women aspiring for leadership must overcome. O'Neil et al. (2015) identified three factors to promote or impede the leadership of women and girls. These are childhood experience and girls' leadership, individual women's formal political leadership and linking women's individual and collective leadership (2015: 2).

The quest for African women's leadership has generated various theories, as well as research highlighting the areas where African women have demonstrated their leadership skills. I now turn to these themes below.

Theories of African Women's Leadership: An Overview

Challenging the exclusive twinning of leadership with men and seeking to provide strategies for overcoming impediments to women's leadership in Africa, many researchers and activists have developed various theories of African women's leadership. Reviews of women's leadership in Africa have evoked concepts such as African feminism and postcolonial theory (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009), African(a) womanism (Dove, 1998), traditional African philosophy (Sesanti, 2016), indigenous feminism (Msila, 2021; See also, Chitando, Chirongoma and Nyakudya, forthcoming), motherhood (Steady, 2011), transformative leadership (Brown et al., 2019), complementarity (Isola & Alao, 2019) and others. Ọlọjẹde (2021) focuses on African women in the Hebrew Bible, highlighting their understated leadership and significance, while Mapuranga (2013) deployed the

concept of "bargaining with patriarchy" to examine women's leadership in African Pentecostalism.

Although each one of these theories and approaches to African women's leadership deserves to be reviewed in its own right, space considerations demand that I summarise some of their key concerns, before proceeding to a discussion of Ubuntu (although, admittedly, there is considerable overlap between these theories and Ubuntu in the context of African women's leadership). First, all the theories that have been proffered rightly put African women at the centre. Although they might differ in the concepts that they employ, they are agreed on the centrality of African women. Their principal focus and subject matter is the African woman and her right to leadership. Second, the theories acknowledge the disruptive impact of colonialism and the struggle to recover women's leadership in Africa. Again, they might differ in nuance and emphasis on the pre-colonial status of African women, but they generally confirm that the rigid gender patterns that are now dominant in Africa are the product of colonialism. Third, they express confidence in women's agency and leadership capacity and effectiveness. All the theories on African women's leadership are predicated on the conviction that apart from the historical, ethical, legal and other justification for African women's leadership, there is compelling evidence that African women (like women elsewhere) are effective leaders. Fourth, and finally, they explain the cost of excluding women from leadership in Africa. The theories are unanimous that denying leadership to African women is very expensive. Thus, they emphasise the value of embracing African women's leadership.

Despite the commonalities, there are, however, some notable differences among the theories. For example, it is now clear that some women scholars from the Global North, non-black women African scholars and African male scholars are contributing to the theme of African women's leadership. The theories are not unanimous in terms of whether or the extent to which these contributions by allies are acceptable. While African feminism generally tends to be suspicious of men, Africana womanism promotes collaboration between African men and women (Chikafa-Chipiro, 2019). Also, some theorists complain that there is a danger of generalising about "the African woman," given the diversity of women's experiences in Africa (see for example, Poltera & Schreiner, 2019). Finally, they are not united on the political project or way(s) forward, that is, they do not have a unified vision of the future of African women/the African continent.

The concept of Ubuntu (see for example, Chimuka (2015) for a competent analysis of the history and popularity of the concept. See also, Muchiri, 2011) has been utilised alongside the theories of African women's leadership outlined above in an effort to anchor African women's leadership on a more decidedly African foundation. I shall summarise the key themes relating to Ubuntu and African women's leadership due to space constraints. Ncube (2010) provides a penetrating analysis of Ubuntu as an indigenous African philosophy that challenges the hegemony of Western thought. She writes as follows:

> Ubuntu forms the core of most traditional African cultures. It embraces a spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness…. It is further described as the capacity for compassion, reciprocity, and dignity…. The hallmarks of Ubuntu are harmony and continuity. It is about understanding what it means to be connected to one another. (Ncube, 2010: 78)

While Mangena (2011) critiques Ncube's overall approach (among other reasons, he questions why she does not elaborate on why Ubuntu should supersede Western theories, as well as why she does not apply her reflections to a specific context), I am persuaded that Ncube has provided a sound analysis of Ubuntu as a viable leadership theory in Africa (and, for me, and beyond). For Ngunjiri (2016: 238), "Ubuntu provides a foundation for leadership development programming that could be more contextually and culturally relevant." She highlights how women who are guided by an Ubuntu worldview radiated spirituality, interdependence, as well as unity and building of community. In her study of women leaders in the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector in Zimbabwe, Ndlovu (2016) concluded that they combined their indigenous Ubuntu values, motherhood and Christian servant leadership. For her, this results in what she calls, "spirited Ubuntu." Thus:

> I concluded that servant leadership, motherhood, and Ubuntu values, elicit a leadership approach that is anchored in Christian faith and Ubuntu spirituality. Spirited Ubuntu leadership is a blend of servant leadership, motherhood, and Ubuntu values, and it is about communal service and having concern for others' growth, empowering others and having concern for social justice issues that affect the community at large.
>
>   Individuals who practice spirited Ubuntu leadership are those who focus on changing lives of others, ensuring that individuals focus on communal

results, and promote collectivism that moves others from dependency to self-reliance. (Ndlovu, 2016: 156)

While more examples of the application of Ubuntu in relation to African women's leadership can be provided, I am persuaded that the foregoing descriptions are indicative of the emerging trend. Scholars who have utilised Ubuntu in reflecting on African women's leadership are engaged in an anti-colonial, decolonial, retrieval, re-evaluation and reconstruction exercise (Taringa, 2019). They seek to anchor African women's leadership on an indigenous philosophy and to emphasise the ongoing relevance of Ubuntu to contemporary challenges. Whereas some critics have portrayed Ubuntu as oppressive to women (see for example, Chitando, 2008; Mangena, 2009) and others are ambivalent regarding its potential (see for example, Manyonganise, 2015), those operating from the field of African women's leadership are very positive about the value of Ubuntu. Principally, they identify the caring dimension of Ubuntu (Chisale, 2018) as being quite strategic when applied to African women's leadership. They see Ubuntu as enabling African women's effective leadership in their various spheres of influence. I turn to an overview of these areas where African women have exercised leadership below.

Daring to Lead: An Overview of the Areas of African Women's Leadership

The various theories of African women's leadership that I summarised in the preceding section have coincided with the rise of African women taking up leadership in diverse areas. Through both formal and informal leadership, African women have inserted themselves into narratives of leadership on the continent and beyond. It is, therefore, challenging when a recent publication on leadership in Africa (Obadare & Adebanwi, 2016) does not carry chapters devoted to African women's leadership. African women leaders have taken up leadership positions in different areas, including at the United Nations (UN) and its various bodies, in politics at various levels (for high-level accomplishments, see for example, Amina & Ibrahim, 2019. See also, Jonck, 2021), entrepreneurship, science and technology, and others. Although debate on the meaning of "African women's leadership" persists (see for example, Poltera, 2019), it is clear that African women have emerged as visible, effective and unapologetic leaders.

Given the earlier observation that religion and culture have remained significant obstacles to African women's leadership, it is gratifying to note that African women are making significant inroads in accessing leadership positions in organised religions such as Christianity. As Ngunjiri (2010) has highlighted with special reference to women leaders in the church in Kenya, steady progress is being achieved. In African Independent/Indigenous/Initiated Churches (AICs), African Pentecostal churches and the mainline churches, women are challenging patriarchy (Mulambya-Kabonde, 2022) and taking up leadership positions. Although the struggle continues in Islam (as it does in other religions), there is a growing acceptance of women leaders (see for example, Bano & Kambalch, 2012). Further, new and Africana religions are also giving women scope for religious experiences and opportunities for leadership (see, for example, Ashcraft-Eason, Martin & Olademo, 2010). The same religion that has been used to exclude women from religion is being reclaimed to promote women's leadership in Africa.

Space considerations prevent detailed analyses of the other areas of African women's leadership and accomplishments (see for example, Yacob-Halisa & Falola, 2021). These are located in the traditional fields (such as in education, the creatives/arts and entertainment, and sports), as well as emerging areas such as climate change, pandemics, peacebuilding, diplomacy, women with disability, and young women's leadership. In particular, there is an urgent need for researchers and activists to invest in opportunities for young African women. Africa's future will, to a very large extent, be shaped by the leadership abilities of young African women. Africa is a continent dominated by young people. As young African women are showing in climate change activism, they possess the right knowledge, energy and technical know-how to hold their own against anyone in the world. In a racist world that minimises Africans and their competence, young African women are emerging as credible and effective leaders in their own right. Overcoming numerous barriers, young African women are breaking rocks of systematic exclusion and taking up leadership positions in society.

Conclusion

Global studies on leadership are incomplete if they do not actively interact with African women's leadership. Expanding significantly through generating new data and theories, African women's leadership has emerged

as a competitive area of study. In this chapter, I have sought to locate African women's leadership within the larger context of global reflections on leadership. I have outlined the ongoing challenges relating to definitions and theories of leadership. I have highlighted the challenges relating to African women's access to leadership and summarised the dominant African women's leadership theories, including Ubuntu. I then drew attention to some of the areas in which African women have exercised effective leadership. As research into leadership training initiatives in Africa is deepened (see for example, African Leadership Initiative 2018), it remains clear that African women's leadership has been a consistent feature, straddling from the continent's illustrious long past, to the present, and into its highly promising expanded future.

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The Leadership of Ndau Women in Healing the Earth Utilising Religio-Cultural Resources: An African Ecofeminist Perspective

Tenson Muyambo

Introduction

Women in general, with particular reference to Zimbabwean women, are the leaders and vanguards of nurturing and clothing the Earth, which is commonly referred to as Mother Earth. The proliferation of women marginalisation and exploitation in the social, economic and geopolitical milieus in the world can be equated to the exploitation of the Earth. This

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scenario has left a trail of destruction to the Earth in the form of deforestation, veld fires and emission of dangerous gases into the atmosphere just to mention a few. When this happens, the people who are hardest hit are women and children. Recent fora, be they by international bodies such as the United Nations and other sister organisations like the World Health Organisation and the Southern African Development Community, are preoccupied with environmental matters. Alokwu (2009: 1) is instructive when he states, "Concern for the state of the environment is a vital issue of our time". The devastation of the environment is largely man-made and if humanity does not step up its efforts, both the environment and humanity will eventually perish. Religion, like in any other sphere of life, can be helpful here since it commands large numbers, with women in the majority (Lummis, 2004; Pivec, 2006). It is against this backdrop that this chapter utilises indigenous religion as women interface with it in their efforts to mitigate environmental challenges that threaten both human and non-human lives. The chapter underscores women's leadership in preserving nature and healing the earth.

Conceptual Framework: African Ecofeminism

The conceptual framework for this study is premised on African ecofeminism, with a special focus on women's leadership. A conceptual framework is a socially constructed set of basic values and beliefs that influence how we see ourselves and the world around us. Siwila (2014) argues that although ecofeminism is a universal concept, it can be interpreted differently according to context. For example, Third World countries have developed their own concepts of ecofeminism, which reflect ways in which issues of women and nature are perceived in their particular contexts. It is for this reason that Siwila (2014) makes use of African ecofeminism in order to address ecological concerns in the African context. Her work is a confirmation of African women's leadership in greening the earth.

The thesis here is that there is a close link between women and nature, and because of this link, women have begun to recognise the link between the oppression of women and the oppression of the Earth. This has culminated in ecofeminism. Thomson (2017) states that the term ecofeminism is a recent coinage that refers to the numerous protests that were led by women against ecological degradation. It arose in the 1980s. One of the tenets for ecofeminism that this chapter utilises is the acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of all life. The idea is that what humans do impacts

nature and everything that goes on in nature affects humans (Thompson, 2017). In other words, the theory argues that humans rely on nature for survival. Eco-feminists, therefore, fully accept their reliance on nature and call for the need to respect it. The theory further states that climate change and the destruction of the Earth hurts marginalised members of society the most, in particular women and children. In connection with this study, this entails indigenous women protesting ecological degradation by utilising religio-cultural resources in the full realisation that hurting nature inadvertently hurts humanity as well. Siwila (2014: 140) is insightful when she argues that "the fact that women are affected most by environmental problems makes them better qualified as experts on such matters and therefore places them in a position of epistemological privilege". It is against this framework that this chapter focuses on women's agency in environmental justice. Their (women) narratives are pivotal for this study.

It is, therefore, imperative for this chapter to contextualise the study by defining some key terms in the discussion as illustrated in the section below.

Definition of Key Terms

Leadership—As highlighted in Chapter 2 of this volume, there are numerous definitions of leadership. One abiding challenge has been that scholars have approached leadership from diverse disciplines, thereby giving rise to a multiplicity of definitions. Crucially, most of the available definitions of a leader tend to restrict the term to men. However, this chapter adopts a more accommodating definition of a leader. Thus, this chapter adopts the following definition that is Africa-centred; "…a leader is someone who influences individuals and groups within a community or a village. The leader helps them to establish goals, and then guide them through the whole process, allowing the community to be effective (if he or she is a good leader)" (Masango, 2002: 709).

Oikos Theology

Oikos is a Greek word meaning 'home', 'household' or 'house'. For purposes of this study, *oikos* is taken to mean the understanding that all humanity, both women and men, have the authority to participate in the rebuilding of the household and the home. It no longer refers

to a patriarchal setting where men dominate and domineer, rather it refers to the 'household of freedom' where the household or the home encompasses and embraces the Earth or cosmos (van Schalkwyk, 2019). Therefore, doing *oikos* theology is the practical realisation that there is a need for a network of relationships between community, ecology and the land (Conradie, 2007; van Schalkwyk, 2019; Warmback, 2005). In other words, the concept of *oikos* theology is humanity realising that there is a symbiotic relationship between human beings, animals and the environment. In fact, there is an interdependence between human beings and nature. Nature provides for human beings and conversely human beings must take care of nature for it to continue to provide for humanity unhindered.

This concept becomes very relevant to the contemporary Zimbabwean setting whereby the environment is at the mercy of humanity's irresponsible and destructive tendencies. *Oikos* theology, therefore, denotes the community's mission to protect the whole living community. This has to be public *oikos* theology but with women as the torchbearers given their closeness to nature in terms of exploitation and marginalisation. I borrow this Christian concept and apply it to indigenous religion for it, too, recognises the existence of the ultimate reality, the Supreme Being. *Oikos* theology, in my view and those of LenkaBula (2008) is an African philosophy that hinges on the *ubuntu* community that calls for the protection of the ecology on which poorer African communities depend for their livelihood. For the sake of this chapter, it is especially important that *oikos* theology is re-interpreted through *ubuntu*, as espoused through virtues in women, to bring *oikos* theology down to a Zimbabwean setting.

ENVIRONMENT

This term is used in this study in its generic form. It entails the complex interactions between human beings, animals, plants, water, air and all that is on the Earth. Hence, in this study the word environment refers to nature in its totality i.e., all that is found on Earth. The understanding is that all this helps human life to flourish.

WOMEN

This may look obvious. The term is used in this study to refer to the leadership and nurturing characteristic of women as mothers and wives

in their different households or homes. It refers to feminine attributes such as leading, caring, loving, soft-spoken, patience, enduring; the list is endless. It is these virtues as building blocks for a sustainable environment that the study focuses on. The argument here is that when women lead, love, care, speak out, endure and persevere, they must not be mistaken to be helpless and hopeless but that they use these virtuous attributes not only for the sake of harmonious co-existence with nature but an existence that is characterised by respect, mutuality and interdependence.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is an unprecedented 'double Earth crisis' of poverty and environmental degradation (Alokwu, 2009) and religion, in its various forms, which is supposed to articulate the needed theological paradigm seems to be in a *limbo*. Religion, mostly led and headed by men, must be informed and equipped with environmental knowledge/education for the sake of God's creation. It is astounding to realise that the depletion of the environment is going on unabated. As this double Earth crisis continues, women and children are hardest hit. African women, Zimbabwean women in particular, have played under-researched roles in leadership and defending Mother Earth. While available literature (Chemhuru & Masaka, 2010; Chigidi, 2009; Mawere & Kadenge, 2010; Mhaka, 2015; Mukoni, 2015; Ngara & Mangizvo, 2013) acknowledges the role of indigenous religion in Zimbabwe on the conservation of nature, it is conspicuously silent on the drivers of this religion. It is dumbfounding to note that most male writers seem to ignore the enormous and unparalleled role played by women in leading and ensuring that nature is protected. This study seeks, therefore, to bring to the fore the feminine voices that tend to be inconspicuous in most of the available literature. Hence, the chapter pays particular attention to women's narratives on their pilgrimage of environmental stewardship in Zimbabwe, and the lack of space women for women to do what they know best, to exercise leadership and nurture the Earth. Cognisant of the fact that upon attaining independence as a nation state more than forty years ago, the government of Zimbabwe made a commitment to redress gender imbalances, this chapter seeks to address the paucity of literature on Zimbabwean women's pivotal role in responding to the ecological crisis.

Methodology

The study adopts a participatory research approach involving interactive research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and overt observation. Macaulay (2007) cited by Kaya and Koitsiwe (2016) argues that in the past, researchers never involved the community knowledge holders in the research process. The participatory research process involves a partnership between the researcher and those being researched (Kaya & Koitsiwe, 2016). This is informed by the philosophy that research, especially on indigenous communities should treat those researched as co-producers of knowledge (Chilisa, 2012).

In this study, Ndau men and women of south-eastern Zimbabwe were actively involved in the research process. In consultation with the community leaders and women leaders in Chipinge district, 10 women and 5 men participated in the study. In this context, purposive sampling, which is a subset of a large group selected based on competence to serve a particular research purpose was adopted (Berelson, 2000). In this study, the role of women in leadership and healing the Earth using religio-cultural practices was taken seriously, especially forty years after independence. Women participants were viewed as significant participants in this study because, according to Kaya and Koitsiwe (2016), women in most communities have a very wide indigenous knowledge base on the environment because they are the ones most actively involved in household and community activities such as agriculture, food processing and security and natural resource management. The inclusion of 5 male participants comprising 3 village heads and 2 chief's advisors, was meant to give a gender inclusion perspective to the study, as well as solicit men's views on the study.

The research was predominantly qualitative. It involved direct interaction between the researcher and the knowledge holders in the research process. Qualitative research aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern that behaviour (Kaya & Koitsiwe, 2016). The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision-making, not just the what, where and when (Kaya & Koitsiwe, 2016). Qualitative research methods such as key informant interviews, focus group discussion and overt observation formed the core of the data collection methods. Key informant interviews were conducted with women leaders in the identified communities. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was done with 6 randomly selected women in the study area. This group comprised women of similar backgrounds or experiences in

the utilisation of religio-cultural resources on environmental conservation. The reason for having this homogenous FGD was to ensure that I did not mix different ages and different gender categories because it would inhibit women from expressing their views. The assumption underlying the FGD was that it would widen the range of responses and activate forgotten details of religio-cultural resources that conserve the Earth. The collected data was transcribed and translated from Ndau language into English. Interview and observation notes were typed, and a content analysis conducted.

Informed consent from the participants was obtained through the signing of the consent forms after the intention of the study was clearly explained to participants. Voluntary participation was guaranteed, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any point of the interviews should they feel that they no longer wanted to participate. The privacy and confidentiality of both the participants and data gathered were upheld by use of codes and pseudonyms in the study.

Results and Discussion

The Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents in the Ndau Community

The objective of investigating the socio-economic and demographic characteristic of the respondent community members was to describe the characteristics of the respondents in terms of their age groups, gender and marital status (Vunyingah & Kaya, 2016). The respondents' level of 'formal' education was also established. The study found out that the respondents, both female (75%) and male (68%) were of the age group 60 years and above. Interviews and the focus group discussion with this age group showed that they had a wide range of knowledge of religio-cultural resources that can be utilised to promote women's leadership and heal the Earth.

On marital statuses of the respondents, the study found out that 90% of the females and 80% of the males were married. Through the interviews and the FGD, the study found out that this category of respondents was directly involved and highly knowledgeable about the research problem.

The study probed into the educational backgrounds of the respondents. It was established that although 60% of the females and 80% of the males did not attain Ordinary Level education, however, interviews with

them indicated that they had a wide knowledge of the strategies that can be used to conserve the environment for the benefit of humanity.

The following section discusses the utilisation of indigenous Ndau religion in environmental justice by women.

African Indigenous Religion as the Source of Environmental Justice

Zimbabwean women utilise African Traditional Religion, especially its indigenous knowledge and spirituality, to exercise leadership and to protect and take care of the environment. In the African worldview, human beings exist in relation to the universe (Phiri, 1996). The multiplicity of symbols, sayings, taboos and prohibitions are generally nature oriented. Although some of these reservoirs of community wisdom tend to put women down, others are positive and promote women's leadership in conserving nature.

Zviera (Taboos)

Most women interviewed pointed to the variety of taboos and prohibitions that they utilised in the preservation of the environment. This was demonstrated by the following expressions, which represent the views of many of the female participants:

> We have many expressions in our culture that emphasise the need for the protection of nature, living and non-living. For example, among the Ndau people of Chipinge we have types of trees that are not supposed to be used as firewood. If one gets into the forest and collects such trees as firewood, they will be followed by a snake or lion. This taboo ensures that no one collects the specified trees as firewood. (Female interviewee)

This excerpt points to the idea that by prohibiting the use of such tree species for firewood, ensures the continued existence of these particular tree species. To emphasise the role of taboos in environmental conservation, Chemhuru and Masaka (2010), writing on the Shona people, state that Shona taboos are crucial in preserving the environment, protection of water sources, natural vegetation and wildlife and endangered non-human species. In the same vein, Tatira (2000) avers that the Shona people often use *zviera* (taboos) as one of the ways of teaching members of their

society. He further argues that *zviera*, among other practices, encourages conformity to societal expectations on correct human behaviour in the environment.

In Shona cosmology, herbalists are mostly women. This means that they ensure health and well-being among their communities. They lead in the provision of health. It is for this reason that one of the interviewees was very much concerned about the rate of environmental degradation that most communities are witnessing in the study era, forty years after independence. She bemoaned thus:

> Men wantonly cut down trees and hunt animals for the love of money. We no longer have herbs to heal several ailments. Men are selfish for they do not bring home the money but instead spend it on beer and women. The forests are fast turning into deserts.

Her argument was that the environment was being exploited for selfish ends, contrary to African beliefs, values and practices towards the environment. This total disregard of the environment by men flouts the African cosmology of environmental ethics that is summarised by Mkenda thus:

> Africans have a strong connection with the land not only as an economic resource, but because they regard land as home, as a place of sacrifice and offerings. When traditional African people struggled or fought for land, they were not simply struggling or fighting for it economically but for the social, moral and religious motives. (2010: 3)

This excerpt above demonstrates that in the fight for their land, the Africans appealed to their religious belief systems and way of life for they understood that their land was God-given. Lan (1985), writing from a Zimbabwean liberation struggle perspective, underscores the symbiotic relationship that existed between the Zimbabwean liberation fighters and the land. The freedom fighters had a lot of respect for the land and would not defile it by engaging in illicit behaviour such as sexual immorality.

WOMEN AS LEADERS AND PROTECTORS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Through face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion, the study participants were asked to explain what women could do to ensure that the environment is safe from further exploitation by humanity, largely

men, for their selfish ends. The women indicated that if they had more power, they would have created community environmental watch groups that would be empowered to heavily punish people who exploit the environment for selfish ends. They bemoaned that the lack of women in key leadership and decision-making positions, especially in rural communities, has led to the susceptibility of the environment to being exploited by men. Although women lead in religion and environmental conservation, they are still excluded from other strategic areas. The women's lack of decision-making powers comes from the patriarchal structure of the Ndau community whereby males yield more decision-making powers than their female counterparts. This is still happening even against the backdrop that the government of Zimbabwe has tried to put into place policies and legislations that promote gender parity. Most women in indigenous communities just like the Mother Earth are still exploited. It is in this context that Thompson (2017) discusses the connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the Earth. The argument is that the hierarchy of males over females can be equated to the hierarchy of humans over nature. Hence, criticising the hierarchy of males over females cannot be done without criticising the hierarchy of humans over nature (Ruether, 1983). It is further argued by Thompson (2017) that the destruction of the natural world is even discussed using phrases that are normally associated with violence against women, for example 'the rape of Earth'. The pronoun 'she' used to refer to Earth is also feminine. This is due to the two's reproductive nature, their acts of creation. This close affinity can be traced to many religions in the world.

The women in the FGD argued that the primary health care needs were in the hands of the women. They argued thus:

> It is us women who take care of the primary health care needs of our communities. We ensure that after collecting herbs from plants, the remaining plant is covered and protected from dying for future use. A root is taken back to the plant after use. We do not destroy it. We collect barks from trees with caution not to damage the tree.

Such submissions are indicative of the nurturing power that women possess. This is a high degree of responsibility and awareness that they would need the same root in future. Risiro et al. (2013) echo the same view when they argue that medicinal herbs should continue to survive after extraction. They further posit that it is a belief among people of Zaka

district in the Masvingo province of Zimbabwe that the ill person is not going to get cured if the plant from which the herbs are extracted is left to die. This belief ensures that traditional healers, who are more proportionally women, would not destroy the whole plant when extracting medicine from the plants. Nyota and Mapara (2010) cited in Risiro et al. (2013) share the same view when they posit that *n'anga* collect part of the plant to avoid extinction and destruction of the plants.

Moreover, the respondents in both the interviews and FDG argued that because men are in control of everything, women and nature, women's efforts to protect the environment were sometimes compromised. The women respondents' views are summarised in this excerpt:

> Our efforts to conserve the Earth come to nothing due to the high demand for firewood in cities, towns and growth points, where electricity is not only unavailable but the cost is exorbitant. Unlike in the olden days where we could report offenders to traditional leadership, offenders go scot free.

This leaves women needing to come up with new new strategies to preserve the environment. This is contrary to what used to obtain whereby women would report men to the kraal head/headmen for cutting large trees (Mukoni, 2015) and appropriate action would be taken to conserve the environment. The male participants agreed that it was men who were the major offenders; they concurred that "men are the major perpetrators of land degradation as they cut down trees for various reasons".

Women's Agricultural Activities

Interviews with the Ndau women and men indicated that women were the leading food producers. Men go to look for employment and leave women to till the land for food production. Since the women are the food producers, they ensure that certain agricultural rituals are performed to increase their produce. The study participants explained that women engaged in agricultural rituals such as brewing beer and performing rain-petitioning ceremonies. It was noted that while men participated in these rituals, it is women who are the frontline participants. They prepared the beer for the rain petitioning (*doro remakoto/mukwerera*). The male respondents admitted that although they presided over the ceremonies,

it was women who ensured that the ceremonies were successful since they are responsible for all the preparations and logistics from the start to the end. The profound question that arises from such a scenario is "why is it that women do not preside over the rituals when they are the force behind rain-petitioning ceremonies?" The answer points back to the fact that women do not have space in most African communities. They are a silenced voice as men make decisions on their behalf. Despite the forty years after independence and numerous national and international forums that are held to flatten the gender curve between men and women, Ndau women and Zimbabwean women by extension are marginalised and exploited by men in the same manner the men are mainly the ones who abuse the natural resources. This is contrary to what most literature on women and the environment indicate. Most literature concentrates on women's agency (Churchman & Altman, 1994; Dankelman & Davidson, 1988; Sachs, 2018) but this women's agency is obstructed by the challenges faced by women who try to heal the Earth. Their voices are not heard as men plunder the natural resources.

This lack of respect for women's voices, especially when it comes to environmental justice in Africa, can be explained by the observation that while women have not contributed much to climate change, it is certainly women who are first affected by the impact of climate change. The dead wood, the herbal roots and the productive nature of the Earth are intensely affected by men's decisions thereby affecting women in the final analysis. Women can no longer produce adequate food for their livelihoods, they can no longer have access to dead wood as an alternative source of fuel and they can no longer meet the primary health care needs of their communities. This can be equated to the relationship between Africa and the developed world whereby, although Africa as a continent has not contributed much to climate change, it is certainly among those areas first affected by the impact of climate change (Mwambazambi, 2010, 2011; Pongo, 2008). By the same token, although women are not contributing a lot to environmental degradation, it is they who are most affected by the effects of environmental depletion. Mukoni (2015: 77) confirms this by stating that "destruction of plants, soil, watercourses, can have serious implications for human livelihoods especially women who bear the brunt of environment degradation thereby threatening the achievement of sustainable development".

It was also noted during the interviews that whenever indigenous agricultural activities are practised, for instance intercropping, which is

mostly practised by women, whereby on the same piece of land various crops are planted side by side, the chances of soil erosion were minimal. Such indigenous farming methods guarantee that the land has enough cover, consequently, this ensured this increases good yields. Apart from protecting the land from soil erosion, intercropping is also an effective mechanism for pest control. In a study by Reiss and Chapungu (2000), intercropping was found to reduce pest damage by 80%. Although the findings from this study revealed that women play a central role in agricultural production as well as the conservation of communal land, regrettably, most rural women do not have autonomous control of the pieces of land which they till. Due to the patriarchal nature of land ownership in most Zimbabwean rural communities, most of the men in the area under study had turned the pieces of land into cash crop production, leaving women with no alternatives to protect the environment through intercropping.

Prospects and Challenges of African Indigenous women's Leadership and Agency on Environmental Justice

This section looks at what lessons can be drawn from women's experiences in order to forge ahead if environmental justice is to be realised in Zimbabwe's Second Republic. The study revealed that although all the respondents acknowledged women's leadership and agency in environmental justice in utilising religio-cultural resources, unfortunately, women are not the key decision-makers on land use. The interviews and FGD with respondents including observation showed that Ndau women possessed religio-cultural resources to heal the Earth but they lack the socio-political power to determine what ought to be done. Their marginalisation in decision-making was one of the main reasons why the exploitation of the Earth by greedy men continued with accustomed ease.

It is noteworthy that environmental degradation coincided with colonialism. The coincidence must not be taken for granted. When the settlers realised the immense power that African women yielded, they decided, through Christianity, to control or eliminate the source of African feminine power (Nyajeka, 2006 cited in Dabale, n.d.). This feminine power is dangerous. Its source is African Traditional Religions (ATRs). ATRs'

fundamental aim is striking a balance between the sacred and the material world. There is no separation between the physical and the spiritual. It is out of this truism that Dabale (n.d.) argues that environmental issues are not only physical or material but also sacred. To emphasise that colonialism decimated African feminine power and ushered in poverty and environmental degradation, Maathai (2004) cited in Dabale (n.d.) states that until the arrival of the Europeans, Africans had looked to nature for inspiration, food, beauty and spirituality. According to Maathai, Africans enjoyed a superior quality of life until sustained contact with Europeans distorted the indigenous ways of life. The exercise of feminine power in protecting the land by Zimbabwean women was evident during the liberation struggle. Dabale (n.d.) posits that Zimbabwean women were on the frontlines providing fighters with military strategies on how to conquer their opponents. They used their knowledge of the land to direct the operations and through the spirit mediums, the land and its inhabitants were protected. Through intimate familiarity with the layout of the land by women, the freedom fighters were minimally ambushed. Spirit mediums such as Mbuya Nehanda provided the freedom fighters with medicinal powers to keep them safe from harm (Daneel, 2001). Women created charms from plants they gathered in the forest to disorient European fighters, hence, the claim that the freedom fighters could suddenly disappear (*kunyangarika*) upon attack. Even on her deathbed, Mbuya Nehanda refused to convert to Christianity at the insistence of the missionaries. She instead intoned that she would come back from the dead to lead the struggle to its inevitable conclusion. This ordinary woman essentially gave up her life to protect the land entrusted to them as caretakers by their ancestors. This was no mean achievement by women in general. Sadly, at independence women could not claim back the power, hence, the helplessness that characterise their responses to environmental depletion, more that forty years after independence.

Despite the challenges that confront women in their fight for environmental justice, their African feminine power can be reinvigorated by drawing once again from ATRs. Admittedly, ATRs have been at the mercy of other exotic religions but the shadow of activism of women still abounds today. They can still draw inspiration from fellow women from other disciplines, for example, the Circle (a grouping of African Women Theologians) whose voice against all forms of women marginalisation and discrimination is loud and clear. These women can still take a cue from their Christian counterparts who formed organisations and associations

such as Ruwadzano (church women's fellowships) to make their voices to be heard in the church. In Nigeria, for example, there are a number of women movements that are meant to protect the environment against all adversaries. One example is sufficient to mention here. This is the Federation of Ogoni Women's Association (FOWA) formed in 1993 as a pressure group engaged in a range of activities such as marches, demonstrations, petitions, blockades aimed at disrupting Shell from oil extraction (Albert, 2019) that has left the land depleted and unsuitable for human livelihoods. Such women's activism underscores their leadership abilities.

These cited examples of women grouping from different backgrounds are meant to illustrate that forty years after independence in Zimbabwe, women still have the passion to heal the Earth. They need to continue to amass all that is at their disposal, be it legal, political, religious power to "free and protect their bodies and their land that are interconnected" (Dabale, n.d.). Women are realising that people in power tend not to want to give up that power. While men can be vital allies in the process of healing the Earth, they do not represent the most likely catalyst for change (Thompson, 2017). In most cases of social revolution or change, the movements or protests were started by the oppressed. Mann (2011) states that the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the Russian Revolution, even Christianity, were begun by people on the margins of society, not those in power. Marginalised women represent a powerful force and are the catalyst for the process of healing the Earth.

Towards Ndau *Oikos Theology*: Ndau women's Stewardship of the Earth

It must be noted that Ndau women's leadership and stewardship of the Earth has spiritual foundations. Their realisation that behind the Earth's material provision, there is the spiritual makes Ndau women closer to nature than their male counterparts. Yet the concept of *oikos* theology as proposed by Warmback (2005, 2007) and Conradie (2011) envisages the earth as our *oikos*, our home/household as men and women together. The earth is envisaged as a household where all are under one roof. Using the *oikos* theology and African ecofeminism is quite illuminating in that the two concepts do not only bring to the fore the need for co-existence between material and non-material (Warmback, 2005) but the realisation that the earth is our *oikos*, where there is good utilisation and management of resources which are equally shared (Kagema, 2016).

While other scholars, including Warmback (2007), Alokwu (2009), and Conradie (2011), have proposed *oikos* theology to address the challenges of poverty and environmental degradation, it is Kagema's (2016) proposed African *oikos* theology, premised on justice, unity, love, respect, sharing, hospitality, reconciliation and peace, that is instructive for this chapter's thesis. Although Ndau women feel that had it not been because of men, our *oikos* could have been much better, I further propose the need for an indigenous Ndau *oikos* theology that emphasises taking practical action by both Ndau women and men, of course with women as torchbearers, that ensures that since we are living in the same household where none is more important than the other, therefore our stewardship of the Earth should be a shared responsibility between men and women. This is an *oikos* theology whose flagship is stewardship with responsibility. This inclusive practical action ensures that Ndau women can rehabilitate the environment as informed by Ndau *oikos* theology.

Regrettably, the indigenous Ndau understanding of the *oikos,* our home/household, which implied "domestic relations of interrelatedness and interdependence, without rivalry and oppression" (Warmback, 2005: 181) among human beings themselves (men, women and children) and between human beings and other creation was decimated by the twin sisters of colonisation and Christianity such that nature is seen as inferior to humanity and that it must be exploited. The consumerism that was ushered by the Western lifestyle has left a disenfranchised sense of an *oikos* premised on a home/house without community and reconciliation, wholeness, connectedness, love, sacrifice, generosity and welcoming the stranger (Warmback, 2005). All the bickering (political, economic, social, religious, cultural) that has engulfed the world has left women and the environment at the mercy of the powerful in society, men. Yet, utilising ATR and women's leadership and agency in rebuilding the tattered *oikos* is not a far-fetched possibility. It needs the right attitudes and the acceptance by all men and women that first and foremost, they need each other and their interdependence on Earth is not debatable. This is the *oikotheology* that this chapter suggests for ensuring that women lead in healing the Earth by utilising the immediate religio-cultural resources such indigenous sayings, prohibitions and taboos.

Conclusion

Using data from the participatory research methods, the chapter discussed the various efforts Ndau women utilise to lead and heal the Earth. These range from taboos, rituals, ceremonies to practices such as returning the cut roots to their original plants after use. The study participants also echoed the fact that although women are the principal leaders and environmental freedom fighters, regrettably, they have limited space to manoeuvre. For women to effectively heal the Earth, they need to stand their ground against land violations by amassing all the options available to them. The African feminine power that was usurped from them by colonialism can be reinstated if they utilised the ATRs as a source of that power and form environmental justice movements or associations aimed at stopping environmental degradation. The chapter submits that no one can take it from women that they are, indeed, 'Zimbabwean environmental freedom fighters' though this is ashamedly missing in most of the available scholarly literature. Going forward, Zimbabwean women's leadership will remain critical in responding to the climate emergency and environmental degradation. Informed and inspired by indigenous and Christian spiritualities, women's leadership will contribute towards a rehabilitated and more nourishing Mother Earth.

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Affirming Positive Femininities Through Responsible Ecological Leadership and Stewardship in Rural Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Amos Muyambo

Introduction

This chapter focuses on rural women's leadership and contribution to ecological conservation, particularly drawing insights from the initiatives of women in African Indigenous Churches (AICs) in rural Masvingo, Zimbabwe. The chapter starts by giving a reflection on a rural woman farmer who has faithfully tilled the land and is now faced with a challenge of land use and pesticides. It then proceeds to present some background information on the ecological challenges facing Africa today, highlighting the contemporary challenges confronting many African women. This will

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be achieved through a reflection on the terms femininities and AICs. An analysis of women's ecological contribution will be presented and lastly, a summary of the key issues and a conclusion. The chapter uses data collected through self-reflections, a textual analysis, qualitative field work research on Masculinities in AICs and all this will be discussed through a gender theoretical framework lens. The chapter uses the structuralist model of gender (Gender Theoretical Framework) that recognises that gender-based violence (GBV) is rooted in inequality in gender relations which spans the private and the public spheres. Thus, "[S]tructural models of gender conceptualise gender as an overarching framework that organises social institutions and social relationships" (Chakraborty et al., 2017: 301). Steady (2014) eloquently highlights African rural women's leadership and response to the climate emergency, calling for an end to economic and ecological oppression through climate justice and gender justice. The chapter contributes towards a rethinking of leadership by focusing on household and community leadership for environmental conservation by rural women in faith communities in Zimbabwe. This is in sharp contrast to the androcentric approach to leadership that tends to focus on the "Big Men" who preside over corporations and nations.

Self-Insertion

My mother-in-law sent a note to my wife making a request for us to secure a chemical which she needed to use in her field. Being a rural woman farmer all her life, she had raised and educated her children with money from the land as a smallholder farmer. She is now a widow and in her eighties and still deeply cares about the land. However, now it is a different time and context. An economic crisis has gripped most Zimbabwean people; it is hard to put food on the table and people would rather work for food than money. I searched the chemical online and found out that it was a weed killer. I was surprised because all her life, my mother-in-law had not used such chemicals; rather she had always used the enviro-friendly method of manual labour in weeding. Labour was drawn from the local neighbourhood in a traditional cultural practice of "*nhimbe*" where people from the same neighbourhood come together to provide labour on an individual's farm. In return, the farm owner prepares food or brews *maheu*, a traditional non-alcoholic drink for them. Unfortunately, such communal solidarity is now a thing of the past in many African rural communities. Now, if one needs any kind of help,

they have to make use of *maricho* (hired labour) and pay for the extra hands. The reason why my mother-in-law was requesting us to buy this chemical for her is that she could not afford the exorbitant costs of hired labour. This is because those who avail themselves to engage in *maricho* request to be paid steep amounts so that they can also afford to pay for other basic commodities which are costing a fortune. As much as we were endeared to address my mother-in laws' request, I am also deeply aware of how pesticides and other chemicals used on the environment have caused devastating damage to ecology and they are highly discouraged by environmentalists. This experience made me to realise how the majority of rural women farmers who have been involved in contributing to the GDP of the country and food provision while using eco-friendly methods in saving ecology and yet they continue to suffer from non-recognition (Chirongoma, 2012: 136) are now being forced by circumstances to make use of harmful pesticides. It also awakened me to the harsh reality that the religio-cultural society of Zimbabwe through its colonial legacy has been male-dominated (Chitando & Biri, 2013: 36), resulting in many women remaining marginalised, even though they have been providing food to their families and contributing to the sustainable development of Zimbabwe. I have also realised that even in this state of marginalisation, women are providing strategic leadership in responding to the environmental and economic crises.

The Global Ecological Crisis and Its Impact on Africa

Recent heat waves and unstable weather patterns throughout the world are evidence that the world is in an environmental crisis. Every continent and everyone is being affected (Shepard, 2018: 34). This environmental crisis has hit the world such that a lot of never seen before harsh weather patterns have been experienced. Constant heat waves, storms, cyclones, floods and prolonged droughts are becoming constant occurrences. Already suffering from desertification and food shortages, this has hit really hard on the African continent. Having inadequate resources and limited capacity to deal with such disasters in Africa makes the ecological crisis a much bitter pill to swallow (Bafana, 2018: 26). Several states in Africa are suffering from economic decline, poor governance, civil wars and poverty. Africa, through urbanisation, migration and economic decline has had its fair share in the dilapidation of the environment

through deforestation, overfishing, stream bank cultivation and river pollution (Waruhiu, 2018: 38; Wetzels, 2018: 20).

Having to bear the consequences of the developed world's rapid globalisation that has depleted the ozone layer, resulting in these harsh weather patterns on the African continent becoming a sore thumb (Shepard, 2018: 34). With the West's continued refusal to compensate Africa in the global climate change response, Africa continues to suffer and receive handouts when these disasters strike. This scenario replayed itself in the 2019 Cyclone Idai that left Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in a state of utmost disarray. The marginalised in society, particularly women and children, are the most affected and take the most strain. Unless something is done to reduce the ozone layer depletion by the global community, the continuous droughts and ozone depletion will affect the African food supply chain, creating shortages and wars for land, water and grazing lands (Sikuka, 2019: 4; Shepard, 2018: 34). Although in most indigenous African communities ecology lies at the centre of existence as most communities place importance on ecological conservation and sustainability, unfortunately, the ecological crisis is looming large on the continent. Examples of indigenous initiatives which are ecologically friendly and mostly led by women include measured wildlife harvesting, taboos, *chisi* (a weekday set apart for resting within Zimbabwean indigenous communities) and *ngano* (stories that are pregnant with lessons on ecological preservation). A collective communal effort is seen each year whereby each household contributes towards *makanzvo* (a traditional ceremony to request rain from the ancestors). In these centres, women play a very important and leading role and the spaces are non-gendered.

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Women in African communities provide highly effective leadership in the face of the climate emergency. However, their contribution to environmental sustainability continues to be unsung and shadowed. The following citation sums it up, "women play a critical role in sustainable development. When educated and healthy, their families, communities and countries benefit. Yet gender inequalities and violence against women undermines opportunities for women and denies them the ability to fully utilize their basic human rights" (ZDHS 2010/2011; UNFPA Zimbabwe Pamphlet). Recognition of women's leadership and contribution to nation-building has not only been neglected and ignored in

Zimbabwe but elsewhere in Africa (Amadiume, 1997). This is captured by Chirongoma (2012) who contends that "the challenge to curb ecological degradation lies heavily on rural women since they are the ones primarily responsible for providing food for the family and bearing and raising children" (Chirongoma, 2012: 136). As women command the majority in religious membership and participation, their talents have not been effectively realised in leadership, as they are being limited by the system. They continue to suffer from marginalisation (Mukonyora, 2007) and gender-based violence (GBV) (Mapuranga, 2012: 58). The statistics for GBV are glaring, for instance, in Zimbabwe "about 1 in 3 women aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence, and about 1 in 4 women have experienced sexual violence, since the age of 15" (ZDHS 2010/2011; UNFPA Zimbabwe Pamphlet).

Unpaid labour performed by the majority of women, especially in rural areas, is one of the least recognised and it is not even considered when calculating the country's GDP. This unpaid labour is seen every day, as women carry loads of firewood and buckets of water, just to mention a few examples in an otherwise costly venture if other modes of transport such as cars were used. Women are also responsible for performing household tasks, caring for children and tilling the farmlands. Gardens, fishponds, poultry, and livestock take many hours a day if calculated and if all this were to be compared with their male counterparts in paid labour, this would attract a handsome salary. All this unpaid labour performed by women contributes towards establishing households and yet they are least acknowledged because they do not bring "actual cash" in households. Women were the majority in informal trading while many men were employed formally through the colonial construct of economic sustenance. Men migrated to urban areas in search of jobs where some men were involved in roles (Nkomazana, 2005: 31) that were traditionally associated with women such as working in the kitchen, serving as chefs in hotels and working in colonial employers' homes. Women contributed through maintaining vegetable gardens, selling fruits and vegetables. In so doing, they became environmental stewards as wild fruits and trees were well maintained and harvested sustainably and the environment was venerated as the giver of life. However, this has changed with the economic collapse in Zimbabwe from the 1990s whereby most men were either retrenched or retired and joined the informal sector, inadvertently driving most women to the periphery as this has become a survival of the fittest situation. The well-calculated harvesting of forests has morphed

into a destructive venture. Trees are cut to sustain the urban demand. Masculinities, through their competitive behaviour, regard women as adversaries to be overcome, thereby perpetuating the link between nature and women domination (Chirongoma, 2012: 137).

In trying to conceptualise the challenges experienced by contemporary African women, I often reflect on the two art paintings which I have kept for several years. The first one has been in my possession for 20 years and the other has been around for five years. The first painting was made by my late artist friend, Eben Gowero. It depicts a woman carrying a bundle of firewood on her head and holding a hoe in one hand. This painting aptly illustrates the life of most ordinary rural Zimbabwean women coming from a day's hard work in the fields. Unlike today where trees are indiscriminately harvested or cut down (mostly by men), in the traditional past, rural women did not cut the whole tree nor did they cut any wet branches, instead, they only collected dry twigs or branches and made a bundle of firewood for domestic use. They would leave the whole tree to grow further and that way it continued to provide them with more firewood. The other painting by ChiongLee Marange depicts a contemporary Zimbabwean scenario whereby people are queuing for basic commodities but the major attraction in the painting is a female vendor carrying a fruit and vegetable basket on her head. On her back she is carrying a baby while holding a young child clad in a university gown on the other hand. The university gown, the baby on her back and the fruit and vegetable basket show that the woman is selling in order to look after the children and also to raise some money to pay for school fees. As a child who was raised and sustained by a mother who was a devout Christian and a vendor, our mother educated us through selling fruits and vegetables. This painting profoundly relates to my experiences. It also illustrates how, through informal trading and environmental stewardship, women have been on the one hand contributing to the economy of Zimbabwe while on the other hand sustaining the environment.

Defining Positive Femininities

In order to appreciate women's leadership in ecological preservation, it is helpful to reflect on gender, albeit briefly. Although the notion of gender varies and "a person's biology cannot be the cause of a person's gender," society has sought to socialise women based on different characteristics and behaviours (Dickason, 1982: 10–30). Thus, for example:

A sex difference theorist describes a person as "feminine" e.g. if the theorist thought that the person had any or all of the following psychological traits (P-traits) gentleness, modesty, humility, supportiveness, empathy, compassionateness, tenderness, nurturance, intuitiveness, sensitivity, unselfishness. (Vetterling-Braggin, 1982: 5–6)

Some of these traits have been seen to be at play in ecological nurturance and sustainability by many African women. The above positive feminine qualities can be seen to be favourable in leadership for ecological sustainability. The world over, women are putting smiles on people's faces through their caring hands. This is one of the reasons why the AIDS home-based care initiative was very successful in African communities. The centrality of a mother's role in the Shona culture can also be illustrated by the fact that in times of agony or travail, more often than not, one hears the mutterings or a cry "*amaiwe*" (my mother) or the use of the proverb, "*kusina amai hakuendwe*" (You can not go to a place where your mother is not present). The traditional Shona culture placed the role of women as pivotal; unfortunately, this was disrupted through the colonial conquest. These qualities have been extended to the environment by many Zimbabwean women through their way of relating with nature using compassion, tenderness, unselfishness and nurturance to sustain the woodlands and rivers and support the national policies on environmental conservation. Chronicling how mothers helped in instilling ecological skills in children and the nation, Chirongoma (2012: 121) aptly describes this example of positive feminine ecological preservation in a rural area of Masvingo.

Women's Leadership for Environmental Sustainability in African Independent Churches and African Indigenous Religions in Zimbabwe

In this section, the chapter proceeds to discuss how Zimbabwean women's leadership and contributions to stemming the tide of the ecological crises are an affirmation of progressive femininities. This will be done using a case study of AICs and their mass greening efforts. But, firstly, a summary of AICs (Chitando et al., 2014) will be provided.

Celebrating 40 years of independence in Zimbabwe not only shows political-economic freedom, but a religious liberation through the works of AICs (Manyonganise, 2014). According to Obed Kealotswe, the AICs

had become the largest Christian Church in Africa by the twentieth century; this tremendous growth was made possible through their "inclusion of many aspects of African culture in their expressions of their Christian religion and its practices" (Kealotswe, 2014: 227). He argues that interest in AICs scholarship grew in the 60s and 70s, but diminished due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic that began to rock the African continent. AICs continue to grow in the Zimbabwean context, especially the Spirit-type AICs, defying globalisation and secularisation. The use of prayer meetings as a platform for healing rituals continues to be the driving force behind the growth of AICs as many Africans suffer (Mukonyora, 2007) from poverty, violence, disease, oppression and economic depression (Oborji, 2005: 207). The Churches continue to respond to the needs of the Zimbabwean people as they did in the 60s, drawing their strength and inspiration from the Bible and African culture in responding to the changing times and the needs of the Zimbabwean people (Chitando et al., 2014: 7). Additionally, the healing rituals encompass all aspects of their life in a holistic approach. The AICs use both allegory and moral interpretation of the Bible (Kealotswe, 2014: 232). Rituals and ceremonies adopted from the Biblical Old Testament and African culture play an important part in healing. The healing methods encompass both mystic and psychic experiences (Kealotswe, 2014: 233). Shona AICs were creative initiatives by Africans to contextualise Christianity, although they were influenced by Mission Churches (Daneel, 1974: 12).

Thousands of rural women farmers who are mostly AICs affiliated contributed towards making Zimbabwe the bread basket of Africa then. "Until 1992, the country was self-sufficient in grain, and a massive increase in maize production by smallholders was a post-independence success story" (https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Zimbabwe.html). Although land mostly belongs to men in Zimbabwe, in many cases, women have sustained and developed land and households on behalf of their husbands and male siblings. It is, however, unfortunate that the patriarchal tradition (Phakeng, 2015) sometimes exposes women to the vulnerability of losing the right to own the family land when their husbands die or in the event of a divorce. However, this has not deterred many women from protecting and sustaining the land. The following citation shows the unequal gender distribution and ownership of land despite most women's labour input in most rural farmlands:

Both men and women work the smallholdings in the communal areas, and women are responsible for domestic work. About 70 percent of women are smallholder farmers, compared with 35 percent of men. Commercial farmers rely on hired labor, both male and female. Only in the agricultural sector of the formal economy do women outnumber men; this includes commercial farms and agro processing activities. (https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Zimbabwe.html)

The Zimbabwean society is changing, with laws favouring gender equality. However, this is happening at a slow, laborious rate. According to a Zimbabwean cultural analysis on the division of labour by gender, the informal sector is dominated and based on feminine activities such as vending, gardening, poultry to generate income for the households (https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Zimbabwe.html). The informal sector has grown as a result of the economic decline where retrenchment has seen the influx of men into the informal sector as they are either retrenched or cannot get formal jobs. This has given rise to more women becoming "bread winners," a concept that emerges from Africa's encounter with colonialism. Women within AICs have built on the indigenous principle of women's leadership and environmental conservation as they seek the transformation of the economic fortunes of their families, communities and the nation.

Most AICs relate well to nature and the environment through holding worship in open spaces, wilderness, mountains and secluded areas (Mukonyora, 2015: 209) where ecological symbols such as stones, sand and mountains are significant in prophecies, healing rituals and they foster closeness to the spiritual world. Trees are important for the coolness and shade in worship in the blazing African sun and fires during the night vigils and healing prayers on the mountains and secluded places (*masowe*) (Mukonyora, 2007; 2015: 209). This closeness to nature makes women in AICs sensitive to the environment as the depletion of forests and pollution of rivers affects the sacrament of baptism, which is mostly done by immersion in natural flowing rivers and pools and healing waters, *mvura yemiteuro.* The AICs and members of the African indigenous religions in Masvingo integrated ecological aspects in a combined confession and Eucharist rituals in an effort to save the environment and promote afforestation programmes in the 1990s (Balcomb, 2016; Chirongoma, 2012; Daneel, 2011). This was most successful in the Masvingo and Manicaland provinces, which have the highest number of

people belonging to AICs. It is also interesting to note that in Masvingo province, the female dependence ratio is greater than men. The two religious groups that crossed boundaries in an interfaith approach to save the environment through mass greening were the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC), comprising traditional leaders, spirit mediums, war veterans or ex-combatants and common groups in the Province of Masvingo and the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC). These two religious groups worked together under the leadership of the Zimbabwe Institute of Religious Research and Conservation (ZIRRCON) which was founded by Martinus Daneel in 1984 (Balcomb, 2016; Chirongoma, 2012; Daneel, 2011).

Women in indigenous religious organisations have been creating spaces for sustainable development through structures such as women fellowship, *Ruwadzano*, and women's ecumenical fellowship, *mubatanidzwa*. These are spaces where women come together not only for spiritual growth but for comforting, teaching and empowering each other. These fellowships have contributed support for the liberation struggle, economic and political development and peace initiatives and other social crises through prayers. Matters of social injustices (Dube, 2007) and environmental sustainability have been tackled through fasting, peaceful discussions and lobbying in these ecumenical women's fellowships. The ecumenical fellowship has been one of the driving forces in one of the most successful environmental initiative in Southern Africa, ZIRRCON (Balcomb, 2016: 29; Chirongoma, 2012: 121). This tree planting and wildlife conservation project was embraced by AICs and its success and implementation owed to the many rural women who supported it. It was a contextualised mass greening project called *mafukidzanyika* (dressing the earth/earth-clothing ministry) (Balcomb, 2016: 32). The project was founded after realizing that the country was fast losing forests through overgrazing, tree cutting and urbanisation. This war of trees project resulted in the greening of most rural areas, particularly in the Masvingo and Manicaland areas, the two largest provinces in Zimbabwe (Daneel, 2011: 130).

Other provinces also implemented or borrowed the idea that saw mass greening in most rural areas of Zimbabwe where forests are the major sources of energy. The project did not only save the environment, but became a source of income to many rural women contributing to economic development and household sustenance (Chirongoma, 2012: 128). Women's groups of *mubatanidzwa* (cooperatives) opened up

dialogues for national crises such as political violence, GBV and healing not only physical illness but relationships and ecology. The use of mountains and wilderness (Mukonyora, 2015: 209) as worship and retreat centres also conscientises members to be aware of the importance of ecology. Women were involved in gully reclaiming, tree planting and mobilizing groups in self-help projects such as running some bakeries, keeping poultry, soap making and gardening (Chirongoma, 2012: 128). Another example of positive femininity can be seen in the woman founder of the Guta Ra Jehovha Church who incorporated teaching about the importance of ecology in worship and taught about human injustices on ecology through careless use of the environment (Mutambanashe, 2010: 73).

There have been other initiatives in Africa in mass greening and ecological conservation, confirming women's competent leadership. The work of Wangari Maathai of Kenya, a woman academic who single-handedly produced a green belt in the East African country, is also a significant illustration of positive femininities through ecological preservation. Her works are an inspiration, not only in Kenya, but the world over (Chirongoma, 2012: 140). The following are some of the ecological efforts by women leaders aimed towards saving the land, especially in rural areas. Examples of these efforts in ecology include contour ploughing techniques to conserve soil. Popularly known as *Nhamo yemakandiwa* (problem of contour ploughing) by many rural dwellers, this conservation project was made possible through the exertions of many rural women. This land use technique, although laborious, saved many farmlands. In the early colonial times, in an effort to the conserve land, the colonisers embarked on a mass rural drive of contour farming. Taking into consideration that most of the men were either working in urban areas or had migrated to neighbouring countries in training and preparing for the Chimurenga war or they had been exiled, this mass conservation drive was mostly run and managed by rural women. This soil conservation drive saw the rise of the then Rhodesia in food subsidy, making subsistence farming a crucial pillar for sustainable development that saw many families not surviving on it but also paying for their children's education using the money they earned from selling farm produce. The national government benefitted as it had surplus food to export. This helped in complementing what was produced by the commercial farmers. Hence, subsistence rural farming significantly contributed towards boosting the much-needed GDP, making Zimbabwe

the pride of Southern Africa in terms of food security. Women's leadership in agriculture remains key to Zimbabwe's national development agenda.

Traditional women's leadership in environmental preservation methods can also be evidenced in their support and implementation of African resources such as myths and taboos (*zvieraera)* applied to save creation (Chirongoma, 2012: 123). These techniques were used by grandmothers in the rural communities, especially inside their cooking huts as they would take time to educate families through storytelling, idioms, *zvipare*, poetry, song and in rituals and cultural ceremonies. Culture was not only a resource for ecological sustainability but it was also a resource for educating the younger generations, helping them with identity preservation, as well as being a source of entertainment. Women have also managed to lead and teach children in households on preserving creation. These children will in turn pass this knowledge to their children and others in adulthood. What makes indigenous methodologies in Shona culture effective is that nature is not viewed as another entity but a part and relational worldview of the people. The emphasis on totemic relations especially among indigenous communities is evidence of this interconnection as one is not allowed to kill or eat one's totem (Chilisa, 2012; Chirongoma, 2012: 141). As noted above, myths and taboos, known as *zvieraera*, have managed to save the indigenous woodlands in Zimbabwe and many places of Africa. This has been effectively implemented by women as they collect firewood for energy on a daily basis. It was taboo to cut a tree that is not dry, only dry branches and twigs were used for firewood and this saved many trees from being cut. Although there is pressure from the contemporary economic system where everything can be sold, Zimbabwean women's leadership and contribution to environmental sustainability continues to shine through. This leadership is enabled and nourished by a spirituality that is derived from diverse sources.

As previously noted, storytelling and poetry (Hodza & Fortune, 1979) have also been used as traditional methods of educating children of the social and moral conduct of society (Chilisa, 2012). Women in the rural areas have been teaching children about the importance of ecology through storytelling around the fireplace especially at night. In the stories, animals are personified to instill moral building and acceptance that even animals are part of the universe and play an important part in the web of human existence. Songs have also been used as both a motivation and a force for solidarity in view of the many challenges women face with the

hope for a bright future. Rituals and ceremonies play a pivotal place in the religious lives of African people and their place run through the religious and social structure of African society. These rituals are marked in life stages and ecological cycles such as rain preparations and harvests. The rituals are also performed during long drought spells or storms, including ancestral appeasing for harvests and thanksgiving.

Feminine stewardship extended beyond the religious realm to include conservation efforts, for example, implementing ecological saving through technology. Such efforts can be seen through the *Jengeta Huni* Stove in Magunje, Mashonaland West Province (Tsvere, 2012: 86). As the trees continue to dwindle from the rural areas of Zimbabwe, sustainable means of using the daily energy is called for. One of the successful discoveries was the *Jengeta huni* stove that minimises the amount of energy from firewood needed for daily households. Although this has taken away the communal evening gathering in many huts where people would sit, roast *maputi*, (dried roasted maize) and stories were being told around fires while supper is prepared, this stove has managed to save many forests. Its success was mostly the result of women's innovations as they are the ones mainly responsible for fetching firewood and preparing meals in many Zimbabwean rural households. This stove has become popular not only in rural homes but some urban homesteads. Coupled with the *Jengeta huni* stove was the traditional homemade baking stoves that use hot charcoal from *Jengeta huni* stoves. In most rural families, after the traditional staple food, *sadza* has been prepared, the burning charcoal from the fireplace will be used to prepare the traditional bread *chimodho* or *mubhakwa* to be used for the morning breakfast and some of it will be packed for the school going children as part of their packed lunch. Women's leadership is seen in creativity innovation and sensitivity towards creation.

To corroborate the women's ecological efforts and their contribution towards nation-building in Masvingo, the Zimbabwe Statistics report noted that, "Economic activity rates for Zimbabwe were higher for males than for females in all age groups" (ZimStats ICDS, 2017: 79). However, in Masvingo and Manicaland provinces, more females than males are economically active (ZimStats ICDS, 2017: 84). Masvingo province, which is the area of study, shows that more females are economically active than males and the province also has the second highest number of the rural population compared to all other provinces in the country (ZimStats ICDS, 2017: 24; Zimbabwe National Statistic Agency, 2014).

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the indigenous women's leadership and contribution towards ecological preservation and their faithful stewardship of the environment using the Karanga rural women in Masvingo. It has underscored the fact that Zimbabwean women are exercising effective leadership in a challenging context. In particular, rural women, who are often portrayed as poor, vulnerable and in need of external saviours and redeemers, are leading the struggle to preserve the environment with distinction. Although they are often marginalised and rendered invisible in most mainstream discussions on key stakeholders in environmental conservation, they are proving that leadership is not about glitz and glamour. Despite facing challenges of gender inequalities, GBV and poverty, ecological preservation remains firmly engraved in their hearts, hence, women have continued being good stewards in ecological conservation (Mapuranga, 2012: 58). As Zimbabwe strives to achieve a middle-income economy status by 2030, women's contributions, especially to food security through ecological sustainability, must not be taken for granted as their contributions are life-giving. Since food shortages are anticipated in Africa now and in the future, women's leadership and ecological stewardship must be celebrated and regenerated for a greener African continent. Efforts must be made to recognise and complement rural women's ecological efforts to save the environment. Peering into the future, Zimbabwe must take the lead in gender mainstreaming in an effort to create a gender equal society and realise a greener Africa through conserving and sustaining ecology. Mainstreaming gender will contribute towards realizing the UN efforts for zero statistics on gender-based violence and marginalisation of women and children as elaborated in SDG 5 in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2030 and particularly SDG 13, on Climate Action. Lessons for the future can be learnt from the Karanga women's ecological conservation efforts that being good stewards of the environment is rewarding and contributes to sustainable development. Such an acknowledgement will also result in ecological theological initiatives being embraced for the benefit of both current and future generations.

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CHAPTER 5

Zimbabwean Women's Leadership and Religio-Cultural Resources in Navigating Risk and Disaster Management: Some Lessons from Cyclone Idai

Mazvita Machinga

INTRODUCTION

Five days after Cyclone Idai hit Chipinge and Chimanimani in March 2019, I drove over one hundred and fifty kilometers to join others who were offering relief. As we drove along the misty roads toward a relief camp that had been set up at Skyline, I saw many women walking along the highway carrying empty sacks, and others had babies on their backs. Upon asking, I was informed that these were survivors of Cyclone Idai and they were heading to the camp to seek refuge and food. When I reached Skyline, I noticed that there were hundreds of villagers, most of

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them being women and children. Over a dozen tents had been pitched and each one of them had relief workers who were attending to the various needs of the survivors. There were tents to offer food aid, non-food items such as washing buckets, and blankets. Medical care, social services, funeral homes services, and psychological first aid were also offered in the tents. The situation was tense, you could see that people were sad, overwhelmed, and confused. Most survivors had no idea of what their fate was after the tragedy. Their homes had been swept by the ravaging waters and some homes were covered in mud. When I talked to some of these villagers, I realized that women had a formidable role to play. They were there trying to ensure that their families continue living. Some of the women had traveled five or more kilometers to be at Skyline. A month after the cyclone, women were traveling multiple times a week and long distances to access food packs and Non-Food Items (NFIs). They indicated that it was important that they seek help to support their families. They were worried and concerned as to how their destroyed shelters would be rebuilt. Half of the women I talked to were widows and heads of households. This cyclone had devastated their livelihoods. Their fields and gardens had been swept away. Most of them expressed that they wished they had known of this cyclone way ahead so that they would have acted early in a way that minimizes the harm.

This chapter therefore discusses the leadership role women could play in navigating disaster risks and increasing preparedness. While disasters come in different shapes and types, for the sake of this discussion, I will use the Cyclone Idai experiences to explore the role that women can play. The chapter is divided into four sections. Section "Cyclone Idai: A Devastating Natural Disaster That Struck Zimbabwe in March 2019" describes Cyclone Idai as a natural disaster and its impact. This was the learning field that has informed the discussion in this chapter. Section "The Vulnerability of Women" explores the role of women in navigating risks and why this is important in so far as reducing vulnerability is concerned. Section "Why and How to Engage Women in Disaster Preparedness" focuses on issues to do with engaging women in disaster preparedness and the last section discusses the impact of Shona culture in disaster management and preparedness and offers some recommendations. The chapter concludes by reiterating that more than forty years after attaining independence, it is pertinent for Zimbabwe to learn lessons from the numerous disasters that have been ravaging the country in the past so that going forward, the country can do a much better job in risk mitigation and disaster

management. It foregrounds the need to acknowledge women's leadership and talents, maintaining that these need to be harnessed to mitigate or overcome the effects of disasters.

Cyclone Idai: A Devastating Natural Disaster That Struck Zimbabwe in March 2019

As asserted by Peek (2008), "disasters can result from forces of nature, such as floods, fires, hurricanes, and earthquakes; technological accidents, such as plane crashes, oil spills, and chemical releases; or terrorism and other willful acts of violence. Disasters may be slow moving in their onset or sudden and unexpected. What these events share is their potential to cause widespread community disruption, displacement, economic loss, property damage, death and injury, and profound emotional suffering" (pp. 1–29). This is what Zimbabweans experienced in March 2019. Zimbabwe experienced torrential rainfall caused by Cyclone Idai which hit southeastern Africa on March 14 and 15, 2019. This is one of the utmost and enervating disasters that most Zimbabweans had ever experienced. On 14 March, Idai reached its peak intensity, with maximum sustained winds of 195 km/h (120 mph) and a minimum central pressure of 940 hPa (27.76 inHg). This caused high winds and heavy precipitation in Chimanimani, Chipinge, Buhera, Nyanga, Makoni, Mutare Rural, Mutasa, and parts of Mutare Urban in Manicaland, as well as Bikita, Gutu, Zaka, and Masvingo districts in Masvingo Province. Chipinge rural and urban, as well as Chimanimani districts were heavily affected than others. The incessant rainfall caused riverine and flash flooding and subsequent deaths, and destruction of livelihoods and properties.

Within a month after the disaster, an estimated 50,000 households/270,000 people were affected by flooding and landslides in Chimanimani and Chipinge. This destruction was caused by local rivers and their tributaries which had burst their banks and caused the inundation of homes and schools, causing considerable damage to property and livelihoods. Furthermore, as a result of this disaster, many people were injured, some lost their lives while others lost their homes and valuable possessions. The cyclone wiped out roads, bridges, and dams as it swept through Southeast Africa. The United Nations estimated that Cyclone Idai and subsequent flooding destroyed more than $773 million in buildings, infrastructure, and crops. More than one hundred thousand

(100,000) homes were damaged or destroyed. Hundreds of thousands were made homeless and displaced.

Environmentalists and researchers report how a combination of highly concentrated rainfall, low-lying land, poor-quality housing, and infrastructure made Cyclone Idai one of the Southern Hemisphere's deadliest storms. The debilitating impact of Cyclone Idai demonstrates the need for communities to develop better awareness and emergency preparedness tools to strengthen the local communities' resilience. This means that communities must be empowered well before the disaster strikes so that when it eventually happens, they are able to navigate the risk and manage the disaster. Hence, this chapter will explore what is needed to navigate risk and manage disaster with a focus on the leadership and role of women.

The destruction and loss of lives that happened during and after the Cyclone Idai carnage justifies why disaster awareness and preparedness matters. The devastation from Cyclone Idai could have been minimized or even prevented if communities knew how to navigate risk and manage the disaster in a timeous way. As shown in the map below, there were warning signs way before the cyclone hit Chipinge and Chimanimani. Weather forecast specialists reported that as of March 3, 2019, the tropical disturbance that would become Cyclone Idai was developing in the ocean and it was beginning to strengthen near the coast of Africa. By March 5, heavy rains and winds were detected in Malawi and Mozambique. By March 11, the storm had built up and made landfall in Beira and then eastern Zimbabwe. With adequate disaster preparedness, some saving action would have taken place as soon as these strong winds were detected. If there was preparedness, many lives and properties would have been saved. Therefore, it is important for communities to stay prepared and learn ways to navigate risks. This cyclone came as a wakeup call not only for the Zimbabwean community but other African nations to adequately prepare for disasters and to do better in managing the aftermaths of natural disasters.

An important factor to note is that in Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts, Cyclone Idai did not affect people equally; with the number of women being more than men, women were intensely affected. Because of their numbers and the ways they were impacted, women played a significant role in the recovery process. This view is also shared by Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plümper (2007: 1) in their study when they said, "Natural disasters do not affect people equally. In fact, a vulnerability

approach to disasters would suggest that inequalities in exposure and sensitivity to risk as well as inequalities in access to resources, capabilities, and opportunities systematically disadvantage certain groups of people, rendering them more vulnerable to the impact of natural disasters."

The Vulnerability of Women

According to Ears (2016), "while minority groups are disadvantaged and more vulnerable to disaster risks, women are mostly considered 'vulnerable among the vulnerable'" (p. 1). This is due to the roles they undertake and societal norms that limit women's rights. Researchers have identified several social and environmental factors that contribute to women's vulnerability during disasters. Some homes are women-headed households, some women are poor and have no resources. As a result of poverty, some women end up residing in hazard-prone regions. They may live in substandard structures or become separated from family members. Increased rates of gender-based violence and sometimes sexual exploitation may also contribute to women's physical and emotional vulnerability in the aftermath of disaster. This was noticed in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai where women reported a lack of essentials as a major concern that would expose them to exploitation by those who were distributing aid. Similarly, the vulnerability of women was identified by CARE Zimbabwe during their Rapid Gender Analysis from April 1 to 4, 2019. They conducted an analysis to identify and make sectoral recommendations responses on how to meet the different needs of women, men, boys, and girls during and after the emergency. Even though they were looking at both males and females, CARE revealed that in Zimbabwe, women and girls were mostly placed at risk due to increased workload, caring responsibility, and lack of decent accommodation. As they conducted field visits and focus group discussions in Chimanimani, Chipinge, Buhera, and Mutare Rural Districts, they were able to ascertain the impact of Cyclone Idai on women and girls. Through the focus group discussions, CARE acknowledged how women and girls were more vulnerable. With the destruction of homes and crops, women reported being overwhelmed with care responsibilities, rebuilding destroyed shelters, performing household chores, and searching for food during such difficult situations. This alone points to the need for women to be involved and be educated on risk and disaster management.

Like what was established by the Care Rapid Gender Analysis, I also noticed that after receiving their food rations, women had to ponder on where to shelter since their homes had been destroyed. As shared by Mbuya Gunda,[1] "*Mafashamu eCyclone akauya aitora mhatso yedu, ukuri kuona uchidonha, ndakada kumbomira asi ndakatozoona kuti amwe ainge avakutotorwa ndakabuda ndiitiza hwanga uri usiku* (the raging waters swept away our house, it was hard seeing the building crushing. Initially, I had decided to wait and watch how this was progressing but then I realized that others were being swept away so I had to run away, it was during the night)." It was hard for Mbuya Gunda to watch her home being destroyed. She was even hesitant to leave because she had no clue of where to go as a widow.

In addition, CARE Zimbabwe realized that in some areas women were returning to family plots during the day to try and harvest the little agricultural produce that had been salvaged from the devastation, leaving them with limited or no time to rest. It was sad to hear about some women's experiences as we conducted trauma healing workshops in Chipinge and Chimanimani. Some women reported how men had left them alone to take care of the children and now they were heading households. For instance, Makanaka, one of the survivors reported, "*ini ndaiya ndakaroorwa, mwamuna akandisiya ngega neana aienda Joni nyamashi ndotambudzika eana ake* (I was once married and my husband deserted me for Joni, and now I am alone suffering to care for his children)." When the cyclone hit, Makanaka was staying alone, she wished her husband was present so that they would have helped each other. Being alone when the cyclone hit seems to have been a burden to some women. Regardless of this, women were able to demonstrate leadership to ensure that their children and communities were protected and cared for. From this we can see that women played a profound role during and in the aftermath of a disaster. The next section will highlight women's leadership in navigating risks.

Women's Leadership in Navigating Risk

First and foremost, it is important to note that a natural disaster can occur at any time. Just like the Cyclone Idai calamity, some disasters give a

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[1] In order to protect the study participants' privacy and confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms has been adopted to refer to all the study participants cited in this chapter.

warning while others, such as earthquakes, give little or no warning. Experiences with natural disasters have shown that, many times, once a disaster happens, the time to prepare is gone. This means that communities and people will have to encounter the consequences of the disaster and ultimately work toward recovery. Thus, the best way to cope with a natural disaster is to prepare by having a plan before it strikes. This is the reason why disaster preparedness is important. As noted from my experiences with women after Cyclone Idai, I agree with Enarsson (2005), who views women as having a significant role at all stages of disaster and risk management. When disasters such as Cyclone Idai happened, women were at the frontline as responders. They took leadership in availing treasured local resources for disaster risk reduction and recovery. However, the upsetting aspect is how some communities have closed their eyes to the women's important and potential roles, thereby causing their voices to be muffled and not taken seriously. Women are usually sidelined to the margins and their potential is overlooked especially when it comes to disaster response, recovery policy, and decision-making processes. If women's voices go unheard, it means that society will lose all the profoundly valuable ideas that they can contribute.

To acknowledge the role women can play, a Global Program on Women's Resilience to Disasters (WRD) has been established. The program proposes a comprehensive package for women's resilience to disasters that focuses on rendering prevention, preparedness, and response systems and plans. It provides targeted action enabling women and girls to withstand natural hazards, recover fully from disasters, and increase their resilience to future natural hazards. Thus, gender-responsive disaster prevention, preparedness, and recovery, needs to be adopted by communities to fulfill the comprehensive disaster response package. If women participate in navigating disaster risks, this can lead to reduced vulnerability and it all begins with reinforcing the capacity of women.

Reinforcing the Capacity of Women

Reinforcing the capacity of women is the first step in empowering them to navigate disaster risks. As proclaimed by an African proverb, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation." While women have the leadership knowledge and skills, they need further capacitation on how to identify the types of disasters they are exposed to and their potential impact. They need to

be further equipped to be aware of the most common hazards in their area. Knowing this will enable them to focus on preparation plans and share the information with their loved ones. From my experience of what happened in Chipinge and Chimanimani, women can play a significant role in disaster preparedness if they are further capacitated and if they have access to resources. Women need to intensify their knowledge of the natural disasters common in their locations and what resources they need to reduce vulnerability. An understanding of navigating risk is very important in contributing to the strengthening of resilience and reduction of losses, harms, or damages. This was affirmed by participants during our trauma healing trainings in Chipinge and Chimanimani. Participants stated how the damage that happened during the cyclone could have been minimized if communities had been equipped with measures to mitigate the impact of disasters.

Minimizing the Vulnerability of Children

Minimizing vulnerabilities during natural disasters starts from household level and through educating women as stated above. This means that when it comes to navigating risk, women as key members of each household must assess the felt needs and identify those needs that can have the biggest impact on their families and communities. For example, women can assist community leaders and other relief workers with the needs of their families and communities. Women in Chipinge and Chimanimani reported that as providers for their families, they had learned the importance of structures that prevent the severe impact of natural disasters and gender-based violence (GBV). This means that women can advocate for structures that prevent and mitigate GBV and sexual exploitation way before a disaster happens. Women can also speak out in their communities so that community child protection committees are created or strengthened. During and after a disaster, children may require different forms of physical, social, mental, and emotional support and all these are roles that women are really good at. With the help of organized children protection committees, women can come up with care strategies to assist affected children. Women can team up with child protection organizations and map the best ways to protect their children from further harm. If each village has an active children protection committee, then children will be assisted through them.

Communicating Risk

An important role women can play is that of communicating risk and warning others of impending threats. Women as heads of households and having the numbers can team up and take action to help in evacuating and protecting their families before and during disaster situations. In addition, women can be important peer supporters. Women in Ngangu, the most affected residential suburb in Chimanimani, were seen visiting their colleagues who had lost their loved ones to offer the much-needed support. Jesi, whose son died during the Cyclone, narrated her ordeal as follows: "*inini ndiri kudetserwa, ngeangani angu nezvigarisano zvangu kubva pakakukurwa mwana wangu ngeCyclone. Handiziyi kuti hayi dai wasiripopi ndaiite ekudini* (I am receiving immense assistance and support from my friends and my neighbours, if it wasn't for them, I shudder to imagine how I would be coping)." She said this wiping away tears from her eyes. When I asked her what the tears were about, she quickly responded, "*Mukorore wangu, mukorore wangu, peshe pandinokarakadza ngezve cyclone ndinoona mukorore wangu eikukurwa ngemvura, asi angani angu ndiwo anondiembedzera aite hazvina ndaa, sakai hapana chekuita kutoshinga* (My son, my son every time I think about the cyclone, I see my son drowning. But my friends are always coming here to comfort me, there is no other recourse, I just have to keep trying to be strong.)".

Jesi's neighbors and friends' actions were helping in mitigating the risk of secondary trauma by offering her a safety net. This demonstrates how community connections and safety nets are important. Hence, before any disaster happens, it is important to know the contact numbers of one's neighbors and emergency services contact numbers and to maintain healthy relationships. Also, keeping an eye on the elderly and neighbors, especially the ones living with disabilities, is another aspect where women may provide leadership during a natural disaster. Such support will buffer people from sinking into depression and loneliness. The importance of social support was affirmed by Herman, when she says, "Social action offers survivors a source of power that draws upon their own initiatives, energy and resourcefulness but that magnifies these qualities far beyond their own capacities." This means that by engaging in peer support actions, women will enable others to have adaptive coping strategies. Social support assists in bringing out the best in the survivors,

and improves coping skills thereby reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience.

Basic Relief Essentials and Information Dissemination

Another role that women can play is that of organizing emergency kitchens to cook and distribute meals to those affected. They can work with relief partners so that they can own the interventions. Women can assist with preparedness by setting up and holding disaster reduction informational sessions, community-based early warning systems, and emergency response team training as was done in places like Vietnam (UN Women, 2012). Furthermore, women can unite and speak out on the disconnect that exists from national to local level practices. For instance, Zimbabwe has powerful policies that encourage the inclusion of women in developmental matters, however, sometimes these policies are not followed. Grassroots-level women can engage their parliamentarians so that their needs and challenges are recognized in times of disaster recovery, as asserted by Nyarai, "*MaMP edu anofanira kuuya mundayi echibhuwawo nesu teivabhuyira zvetinodawo, ngekuti antu havasi kudetserwa weshe, zvakaoma*. (Our Members of Parliament (MPs) should come and discuss with us so that we share our experiences, we are suffering a lot because many of us have not benefitted from any help.)" It will even be better if female parliamentarians provide leadership in formulating policies that empower women. They can do a better job in advocating since they understand women's needs better than their male counterparts. Women can also gather at spiritual-related groups to foster hope and protection. This is what they did in Ngangu village. Women gathered ecumenically, they shared and reflected upon their experiences and prayed for each other. Lastly, if access to resources and information is available, then women need to be given an opportunity to use them. This will empower them and increase their participation in disaster preparedness, response activities, offering personal and community support.

Why and How to Engage Women in Disaster Preparedness

Given how unpredictable natural disasters can be, it makes sense to be proactive in taking measures to reduce risks, protect homes and keep families safe. Every woman should know how to prepare for a natural

disaster. As stated above, women and men experience disasters differently. In Manicaland, women are 52.6% of the total population, while men are 47.4% (Zimstats, 2012). This explains why women need to be engaged in disaster preparedness. In addition, women bring unique experiences and valuable skills that would benefit disaster risk mitigation and preparedness. After the Cyclone Idai tragedy, women reported having limited livelihood options following the flooding of both their gardens and their fields. Hence, it is important to engage women in disaster preparedness since they are in the majority in terms of numbers and they are also impacted more intensely. This point was reiterated by Bradshaw who stated that:

> Women can lead preparedness and/or recovery and undertake active positions in maintaining kinship links and carrying out social requirements in the community. These strengthened social resources will help people in responding to a crisis. Women and girls mobilize survival skills acquired through stereotyped gender division of work such as cooking. (Bradshaw, 2012: 79–81)

Women need to have a disaster preparedness plan for their households. The plan should always begin with a safety plan, then connectedness. Women need to discuss with their families and with the local leaders regarding the possible safe places to go in case of a natural disaster. They should also discuss with everyone who lives with them about what to do if there is an emergency. Equipped with enough information, women will in turn educate and sensitize their children.

As part of disaster preparedness, women can lead their families and communities in disaster drills. For instance, through their church women groups, women can empower each other with disaster drills which they can go and do at home. They will simulate the circumstances of a disaster while having an opportunity to practice their responses. In their various social groups, women may learn risk communication strategies which will enable people to make informed decisions to protect themselves and their loved ones. What will be the best communication channels in the event of a disaster? During Cyclone Idai, important documents such as birth certificates and child health record cards were destroyed. Thus, women may prepare by keeping important documents safe in a waterproof container and taking a household inventory. Mothers should ensure that everyone in the household has a list of emergency contact numbers that

they can call whenever the need arises, especially in the event of having been struck by a disaster.

When children are vulnerable, communities are also more vulnerable. Children who are uninformed regarding hazards, warnings, evacuation, and other protective behaviors are likely at greater risk for death and injury when disaster strikes (Wisner, 2006). Hence, women as mothers can take time to check what their children know about disaster preparedness and fill in any information gaps. Furthermore, after disasters, when children lack a sense of routine and normalcy and are suffering physically and emotionally, women can come up with creative ways to positively occupy children. Positively occupied children will be protected from the negative after-effects of a natural disaster like Cyclone Idai. After the cyclone, I saw women taking their children to friendly corners where the children received trauma care. These were being run by Save the Children, Childline, and REPSSI organizations. Women can work hard to ensure that their children access the support services. Without the involvement of women, it is difficult, if not impossible, for family members and communities to begin the process of recovery (Fothergill & Peek, 2006). Thus, focusing on developing children's resilience will also increase the resilience of families and entire communities. Experiences from other parts of the world where disasters have happened, such as Japan, India, and South America indicate that another way of mitigating women's disaster vulnerability is to establish Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMC) that address and promote community resilience and risk reduction. During the formation of the CDMC, the focus on women's leadership to address female vulnerabilities is a key role that women can play to support each other. Lastly, women may take a lead by engaging their local authorities and emergency services and learning about their community's emergency plans, warning signals, evacuation routes, and locations of emergency shelters.

The Role and Impact of Religion and Culture

One of the factors that may inhibit women from exercising leadership in reducing the negative effects of the aftermath of a disaster is cultural norms. As asserted by Ear (2017: 6), "for women, their roles as caretakers, lesser social status, and cultural norms prohibit or limit their capabilities to participate and often leave women more exposed and vulnerable to

disaster risks." Similarly, Juran and Trivedi (2015: 4) share the same sentiments when they say, "social or cultural restrictions on women's ability to access, secure and sustain livelihoods, which are crucial for coping with and recovering from disasters put women at higher disaster risk." The above-mentioned scholars agree that there are gendered aspects of vulnerability which are associated with various factors which determine how women generally face greater risks from natural disasters than men. In most cases, women have been heard but their opinions have sometimes not been taken seriously.

In terms of Shona cultural norms and values that hinder women's participation in responding to risk mitigation and disaster management, I observed that excessive male-controlled system (patriarchy), contempt of women and communication barriers are problematic. Embedzai, one of the women who participated at the healing workshop verbalized this as follows:

> *Iripo mitemo yechindawu inorambidza kuti madzimai kuhlongana neamweni kakurutu panenge paine madhodha, amweni anoti itai mishando yepamhatso zvemishongano ngezvamadhodha, totosiiwa.* (Some of the Ndau norms and values forbid women from interacting with strangers in the public domain, especially if the outsiders are men. The general perception is that women should be confined to the domestic realm to do domestic chores. As a result, we tend to be excluded from most of the meetings and workshops, the cultural values usually stipulate that all the public gatherings are a male preserve.)

Even though Embedzai and other women attended these trainings, it was not an easy process for them. This demonstrates how patriarchy emphasizes the dominance of processes by men while women remain marginal and inferior to the process. In addition, during our three-day healing trainings in Chipinge, there is a female participant who requested that instead of having her name inscribed on the certificate of participation, her husband's name should be written in her place. She substantiated her request by explaining that she was at the workshop because her husband had granted her permission to participate. As such, in acknowledgment of the husband who had allowed her to attend the workshop, he had instructed her to collect the certificate on his behalf. We were all astounded by this. The husband's behavior may be viewed as a "command

and control" strategy that is rooted in the military model of emergency preparedness and response (Bongo & Manyena, 2015). Such kind of behavior stifles women's sense of empowerment, ownership, and engagement. My encounter with this female participant made me to realize how our patriarchal system may hinder women's progress and participation. To empower her, we issued the certificate in her name and then we encouraged the Headman to go and discuss with the husband why we had done so. When she realized that it was her name on the certificate, the woman jumped and ululated with happiness.

In addition, there is manifestation of patriarchy through men's control over women's bodies, sexuality, and control of women's "free" choices in their lives. In the aftermath of Cyclone Idai, there were reports of gender-based violence and some women were victims of sexual exploitation. Since some women were reliant on food handouts because they had lost either their land or ability to earn an income, they fell prey to ruthless men who demanded sexual favors for them to get help. Food and other necessities were used to seduce women or else they would starve. Women and girls were walking long distances to fetch clean water. Those who were directly impacted by the cyclone also lacked basic hygienic amenities in the form of menstrual hygiene pads, undergarments, and supplies of soap. This alone was a barrier that limits women and girls' ability to move ahead in the post-cyclone recovery efforts. Women will then stay at home to maintain their dignity. So, the cultural norm where men are in positions of power leads to more subordination of women, while men gain social and cultural benefits. To curb this, both men and women received trainings in protection against sexual abuse and exploitation. They also received trainings on mainstreaming gender and reducing vulnerability.

Showing contempt for women is also a hindrance to wide-ranging participation in disaster management activities. For instance, in some wards during our recovery trainings, men looked down upon women. What was even more disturbing is how women looked down upon other women. In one village ward, the male leaders suggested that since limited participants were needed for the trainings, therefore women and girls should not be allowed to attend. Instead, they propounded that only boys and males should attend. They argued that women and girls were not supposed to know any important information before men because their "real" place is at home doing chores. It was only after some sensitization meetings with them, on the importance of inclusiveness since disaster affects everyone, that women also attended. Interestingly, a year after the

Cyclone and the trainings, it is those trained women who are taking the leading positions in recovery, healing, and counseling activities. The men often justify their non-committal attitude by stating that they are too busy with other responsibilities such as working so as to earn an income for sustaining families. This affirms the saying that, "educate a woman, you educate her family: educate a girl you change her future." Disrespecting and looking down upon women can only hinder their participation. Instead, since women are in the majority in our communities, their capabilities need to be recognized and validated. Also, increasing women and girls' access to information, knowledge, and education helps to reduce gender inequality. Women themselves must also play a role in restoring their dignity, appreciating themselves, and being proud of their womanhood and motherhood. In that way, they can contribute immensely in day-to-day lives like they are doing in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai.

On another note, when it comes to communication, some Shona cultural norms discourage women from interacting with male officials and this means only men would collect food aid or other resources provided during the disaster. This means that a woman's contribution to society would only be within the scope of caregiver for her children and family. Thus, women were made to stay in the private domain while men engage. The local male leaders who were trained began to sensitize other men on the role women can play. Eventually, women were mobilized to come out of the private domain into the public arena where they could participate, hence, they were able to join trainees in their numbers and display their leadership abilities.

From the discussion above, regardless of adverse cultural norms, women were still capable of going over and above some obstacles and take a lead in healing and reconciliation activities. With the support of development and social services partners, women were able to break down the boundaries between public and private domains and they began to actively participate in the healing activities. They mobilized each other in the struggle for shared aspirations toward rebuilding and healing of their communities. Prohibitive cultural norms should not prevent women from playing exercising leadership in disaster management. In fact, it is generally believed that women's participation matters and it will likely promote female independence, health, and welfare (Yang, 2012).

In Zimbabwe, there are systems and policies that provide forums for women to discuss matters which impact them. There are organized advocacy groups which can reach out and empower women and men to treat

each other equally. Unfortunately, these policies are often modified and adapted to existing cultural norms, the outcomes of which often oppress or disadvantage women as has been highlighted above. Thus, women need to continue advocating for cultural practices and national policies that decrease their vulnerability to natural disasters. Women need to know that they cannot achieve any progress by looking down upon each other or from unfair treatment. There is a need for a collaborative and inclusive approach when it comes to disaster management. An example is what the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) did when they brought women together so as to create opportunities and to provide a safe space for them to share their experiences and to help each other on how to cope with the aftermath of the Cyclone Idai carnage. During these meetings, women were able to articulate the critical systemic issues that were keeping them vulnerable and to advocate for change. The vulnerability of women need not lead to an assumption that women are mere victims because doing so will discount women's capacities and overlook the need for their inclusion in decision-making. Thus, the ZCC and the EFZ created systems where women could be included in decision-making for the good of their communities. This was important since lack of capacity impacts negatively when disasters occur (Lukamba, 2010). Finally, while Cyclone Idai had multiple negative effects, the Zimbabwean national leadership, its citizens, and other stakeholders especially those engaged in humanitarian and relief agencies, can draw some useful lessons from it, hence the following recommendations.

Recommendations

Based on the field research conducted for this chapter and the issues discussed herein, I wish to propose the following recommendations:

1. Norms that prohibit national and local women's groups to be capacitated should not to be condoned, they must be eradicated. Concerted efforts should be made to ensure the inclusion of women in disaster risk reduction, response, and recovery committees. Disaster responses committees should include women and their voices need to be listened to, rather than just being heard.

2. Participatory and inclusive hazard profiling helps to build local preparedness and capacity, and anchors sustainable (hazard-resilient) development.
3. Disasters have long-term effects on specific social groups, especially women, children, and people living with disabilities. Building the local capacity necessary to ensure ongoing psychosocial and material support is critical for recovery. Strengthening the capacity of women after Cyclone Idai reflects this lesson.
4. Due to their indisputable effectiveness, resolute efforts are needed to work toward the formation of Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMC) that address and promote community resilience and risk reduction. Women should form a greater part of the committees so that they are able to address specific challenges confronting women and children during recovery periods. Applying this knowledge in practice would allow for wider involvement of women and would ultimately reduce risk and vulnerability.
5. Use of partners such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches enables women to access resources. Informed and sensitized women will be aware of the 'dos and don'ts' of relief, recovery, and rehabilitation. They will have knowledge of the needs of their households and communities and where to get assistance.
6. There is a need to invest in adaptive and resilience building measures with a view to protecting the most vulnerable groups, women, and children while empowering them to act responsibly.

The above recommendations will ensure that women remain a significant part of development issues. As asserted by the World Bank Report (2019: 1);

> Inclusion in disaster recovery and reconstruction is a key condition for the people's resilience. A more inclusive recovery fosters equal rights and opportunities, dignity and diversity, guaranteeing that nobody from the community is left out because of their age, gender, disability or other factors linked to ethnicity, religion, geography, economic status, political affiliation, health issues, or other life circumstances.

The statement above affirms the importance of inclusion as it makes people to have a sense of ownership of the process. This is vital for yielding positive outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter was an attempt to describe the role of women in leadership, navigating risk, and disaster preparedness. I have highlighted how disasters can result from forces of nature or human making, such as floods, fires, hurricanes, earthquakes, and accidents. I have specifically described the impact of Cyclone Idai when it struck the eastern part of Zimbabwe in March 2019. A map was used to demonstrate how communities could have been proactive as warnings were there two weeks before the cyclone. I have used what happened when Cyclone Idai hit, to discuss the role of women in leadership, disaster management, and reducing vulnerability. The examples provided showed why it is important to engage women in disaster preparedness. It was emphasized that despite gender-based vulnerabilities and disparities, women remain key agents of positive change in leadership, disaster risk reduction, and management efforts. Building the capacity of women was considered as a key factor that empowers women to navigate risk when disaster strikes. The role of religion, particularly ecumenical bodies such as the EFZ and the ZCC, as well as the impact of indigenous cultural norms was also discussed. The author of this chapter also proffered some recommendations on how to enhance women's participation in risk mitigation and disaster management. As Zimbabwe charts the way forward amidst the looming global environmental crisis, it is prudent to embrace a gender-inclusive *disaster risk* reduction policy which would enable women to also contribute and play a leading role in disaster management. Gender equality, and empowerment, will enable women to act, cope with, and respond to any disaster and humanitarian crisis situations. It is important to cultivate and support women's leadership as it facilitates effective responses to challenging developments in society.

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Towards Attaining the Sustainable Development Goals in Zimbabwe: Christian Women's Leadership in Gwanda District

Susan S. Dube and *Sibiziwe Shumba*

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the United Nations member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals were designed to serve as a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs are also tailored to address the prevailing environmental, political and economic challenges in the global village (UN Women, 2019). In tandem with the United Nation's Agenda 2030, the government of Zimbabwe has also embraced Vision 2030 in an endeavour to locally tap into and to implement the SDGs. Out of the 17 SDGs, the Zimbabwean government has prioritised 10 and these are *SDGs* 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being),

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4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 13 (climate action) and 17 (partnerships). According to UN Women (2019), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is more ambitious in envisaging the eradication of poverty, the systematic tackling of climate change and building peaceful, resilient, equitable and inclusive societies. Drawing insights from a case study conducted in Gwanda district, this chapter discusses the contribution of Zimbabwean Christian women in leading the process towards achieving the six selected SDGs and these are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 13, as well as to explore the challenges and opportunities that these Christian women are facing.

Background to the SGDs' Implementation in Zimbabwe

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a plan of action that was adopted at the United Nations Summit in 2015. The Agenda came up with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which were adopted by all United Nations member states as a universal call to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated into nature, because an action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. It is an improvement of the previous agenda, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were supposed to have been met by 2015. The MDGs focused on poverty and its alleviation, a digression from the broader conception of development which had earlier focused on enlarging the productive capacity of economies to make possible improved living standards. It was composed of 8 MDGs and 21 targets, all focused on ending extreme poverty. They were credited for reviving the interest in development issues in areas of poverty, education and health and strengthening the willingness to put more resources into aid. However, the MDGs were criticised for applying a narrowly defined view of development with very few indicators, giving them a minimalist message, which only served to distract states from previous state commitments. The MDGs employed aggregate targets which did nothing for within country inequalities but focused resources on particular goals (Fig. 6.1).

Fig. 6.1 Sustainable Development Goals (*Source* https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs)

The 2030 Agenda goes beyond poverty and covers a set of issues across three dimensions of development: economic, social and environmental. It is universal as it takes a holistic approach to address the challenges of sustainable development and it applies to all countries. This distinguishes the 2030 Agenda from the MDGs which mainly targeted developing countries only. The SDGs address key challenges such as combating climate change and achieving gender equality, not only through a stand-alone goal, but in a cross-cutting manner, therefore, capturing the interconnectedness of development concerns. The above idea is supported by the 2019 United Nations Development Programme which asserts that, "These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice among other priorities. The goals are interconnected" (United Nations, 2019). The SDGs were a result of an inclusive process with a high level of ownership from governments, unlike the MDGs which were based on the millennium declaration and developed by a number of "UN insiders". The open nature of formulating the SDGs permitted civil society organisations, UN agencies and private corporations to engage at various points in the drafting phase. The SDGs' universality acknowledges that progress on sustainable development "must draw a deeper

theoretical base" and the new goals embrace a form of institutional cosmopolitanism. Universal targets in the SDGs are grounded in the idea of global public goods; the environment, health and economic growth annulling the distinction between the developing and developed nations (High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, 2017).

The agenda of the SDGs is broader, overall and with respect to gender and potentially more transformative. It addresses many more aspects of women's lives and therefore represents a considerable advance on the MDGs. The 2030 Agenda prioritises gender equality as a stand-alone goal (SDG5) and a cross-cutting issue (United Nations, 2019). Women's empowerment and gender equality have a catalytic effect in the achievement of human development, however, the 2015 review of the Beijing platform still concluded that no country had fully achieved gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. In this light, Agenda 2030 confirms the centrality of women's leadership, equality and women's and girl's empowerment, several goals in the SDGs include at least some mention of gender under their associated targets. This is true of the goal on poverty (SDG 1), nutrition (SDG 2), education (SDG 4), water and sanitation (SDG 6), employment (SDG 8) and cities (SDG 11). Target 1.b on SDG 5 calls on countries to "…create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender sensitive development strategies…".

As noted earlier, Zimbabwe has committed itself to implement all the SGDs, with an emphasis on SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13 and 17. In this chapter, six SDGs have been chosen for closer analysis. These are SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 13. The government has put in place a clear and robust institutional framework to guide the implementation of the SGDs consisting of a steering committee to provide overall guidance and leadership to the process, a technical committee to spearhead the coordination as well as provide technical back-stopping.

The Strategies Adopted by the Zimbabwean Government to Achieve the SDGs

It is important to note that the government of Zimbabwe adopted a number of strategies to address the chosen six SDGs. The strategies applied are delineated below.

SDG 2: End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture

According to the Zimbabwe Voluntary National Review (ZVNR) of SDGs for the High-Level Political Forum of July 2017, Zimbabwe has a strong policy environment for achieving food security, and has prioritised ending hunger in its overall development. This is demonstrated by the fact that the first cluster under the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Social Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET), focuses on Food Security and Nutrition. SDG 2 is among the 10 priority goals for the country, and the first pillar of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Program (IPRSP) focuses on Agriculture Productivity, Growth and Rural Food Security. The above-noted review (ZVNR) also notes that its strategic thrust is anchored on a number of strategies and policies. These strategies and policies comprise the Food and Nutrition Security Policy (FNSP) which was launched on 16 May 2013 which "seeks to promote and ensure adequate food and nutrition security for all people at all times in Zimbabwe, particularly among the most vulnerable and in line with our cultural norms and the concept of rebuilding and maintaining family dignity" (ibid.). The National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) 2014–2018, whose objective is to implement the FNSP, is another strategy and policy. The draft comprehensive Agriculture Policy Framework (2012–2032), as well as the Zimbabwe Agricultural Investment Programme (ZAIP) (2013–2017), are the other strategies and policies adopted by the Zimbabwean government.

SDG 3: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages

The Zimbabwe Voluntary National Review (VNR) of SDGs for the High-Level Political Forum of July 2017 posits that Zimbabwe has made categorical endeavours to create an enabling policy environment to improve public health. Some of the initiatives adopted are the provision for the right to health under Section 76 of the constitution. The government of Zimbabwe has developed the National Health Strategy for Zimbabwe 2016–2020 which seeks to achieve "Equity and Quality in Health: Leaving no one behind". To achieve Goal 3, the government has come up with a robust HIV/AIDS response strategy. It is in this light that Zimbabwe pioneered innovative approaches which include mobilisation of the domestic resources through the AIDS levy to ensure sustainability.

SDG 4: Empower Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities

According to the Zimbabwe Voluntary National Review (ZVNR) of SDGs for the High-Level Political Forum of July 2017, since the attainment of independence, the government of Zimbabwe has always prioritised investments in education. This is revealed by the fact that education gets the biggest share of the National Budget. Positive efforts have been made by the government to create an enabling policy environment to improve public education. Some of the effort includes the provision on the right to education under Section 75 which entitles every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe to a basic state-funded education, including adult basic education and further education. More so, in October 2014, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education undertook an update of the curriculum review exercise. To achieve SDG 4, the government of Zimbabwe also introduced the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) initiative. This is meant to provide free education to all Advanced Level students registered for STEM-related subjects, namely Maths, Computer Science, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. The Zimbabwe Voluntary National Review (ZVNR) of SDGs for the High-Level Political Forum of July 2017 also notes that as of February 2017, there were at least 1500 students across Zimbabwe getting a free education as part of the STEM initiative. Therefore, we can assert that the Zimbabwean government has come up with strategies and policies to achieve SDG 4.

SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls

The government of Zimbabwe is dedicated to the accomplishment of gender equality and women empowerment and the constitution provides a robust legal framework for the promotion of SDG5. The Zimbabwe Voluntary National Review (ZVNR) of SDGs for the High-Level Political Forum of July 2017 posits that a number of policies and institutions have been put in place by the government. For instance, the National Gender Policy (NGP) 2017 seeks to achieve a gender just society where men and women enjoy equality and participate as equal partners in the country's development. In the same light, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) seeks to ensure gender equality as provided for in the constitution. Zimbabwe is one of the few countries that have come up with a special

electoral quota system to increase women's representation in parliament to at least 30%. Furthermore, in 2016, Zimbabwe developed the National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment to improve accountability and implementation of gender equality and women empowerment commitments in Zimbabwe.

SDG 9: Build Resilient Infrastructure, Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialisation and Foster Innovation

It is important to note that a well-developed infrastructure is vital for a well-functioning society and competitive industrial sector. The Zimbabwe Voluntary National Review (ZVNR) of SDGs for the High-Level Political Forum of July 2017 notes that building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and fostering innovation are firmly placed at the centre of the government's programme. To achieve all this, the government has launched major infrastructure projects in the areas of utilities, transportation, connectivity and industrial zones. Some of these initiatives include the rehabilitation of water and sewerage infrastructure in a number of urban centres. These include the urgent water supply and sanitation Rehabilitation Project Phase 1 in Mutare, Masvingo, Chegutu, Harare and Chitungwiza. There is also the expansion of the Kariba South power station as well as the upgrading of the Victoria Falls Airport to cater for wide-body aircraft with an expanded runway. More so, the completion of the Tokwe-Mukosi dam is a major achievement making Tokwe-Mukosi dam the country's largest inland dam. This development is expected to promote the agricultural and tourism sectors.

SDG 13: Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and Its Impacts

The Zimbabwe Voluntary National Review (ZVNR) of SDGs for the High-Level Political Forum of July 2017 also asserts that although Zimbabwe's contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions is low, it is nevertheless highly vulnerable to the risks of climate change. Zimbabwe is a signatory to the following multilateral environment agreement among others: the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the Ozone Layer; United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD). Furthermore, Zimbabwe also signed the 2016 Paris Agreement, although

it is yet to approve it. Lastly, the government of Zimbabwe launched its National Climate Change Response Strategy as one of the mitigation options for reducing greenhouse gases under the forestry sector. The National Climate Change Response Strategy provides a framework for a comprehensive and strategic approach on aspects of adaptation, mitigation, technology, financing, public education and awareness (World Food Programme, 2017). That will then help to inform the government on how to strengthen the climate and disaster management policies.

Having outlined the strategies used by the Zimbabwean government to achieve the selected six out of ten national priority SDGs, the next section examines the research methodology used to examine the role of Christian women in achieving the chosen six SDGs.

Research Methodology

In this chapter, we used a qualitative research design. The qualitative research is based on an interpretive paradigm. Interpretive approaches to research have the purpose of understanding the world of human experience (Cohen & Manion, 1994: 36). This suggests that reality is socially constructed, as propounded by Mertens (2010: 12). Creswell (2010: 38) asserts that the interpretive researcher relies on the participants' views of the situation under study and takes cognisance of the impact on the research of their own experiences. Creswell (2010: 38) goes on to say that, the interpretive researcher mostly relies on qualitative data collection methods and analysis, or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In this study, we used qualitative methods to adequately describe or interpret a situation in relation to how Christian women achieved the selected six SDGs.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants of the study. The method was useful in making sure that the researchers excluded people who did not fit the requirements of the study. A sample of one hundred participants was chosen from both Gwanda's rural and urban areas. Focus Group Discussions were conducted with the selected fifty women from Gwanda town. Using such an instrument saved money and time as compared to individual interviews. In addition to that, we were able to get comprehensive information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions on the SDGs. The other advantage was that it allowed women to discuss their thoughts freely with others.

Semi-structured interviews were used to interview fifty women from rural areas in Gwanda district. This instrument assisted us to uncover rich descriptive data on the personal experiences of the participants. Information gathered through the interviews could move the innovation process from general topics to more specific insights. The interviews were used so that the participants would stay focused on the topic under discussion. The interview results were tape recorded. The other advantage of using interviews was that we were able to interview the participants in their mother language. This created a free environment which allowed the participants to express their innermost feelings and experience.

Having outlined the research methodology, the next section examines the biblical perspectives on women since they strongly impact on the attainment of the six SDGs by the Zimbabwean government.

Biblical Perspectives on Women and Women's Leadership

A close examination shows that the Bible portrays women from two different perspectives. Firstly, we observed that there are some sections in the bible which show positive images of women and their leadership capacity. For instance, there are some women who owned some pieces of land, as shown by Numbers 36:1–13, Job 42:15 and Proverbs 31 in verse 16. This is an indication that in the attainment of the SDGs in Zimbabwe, Christian women can also play a pivotal role in trying to achieve the selected six SDGs which the Zimbabwean government is making an effort to achieve.

In addition to that, some biblical passages portray women as equal to men. For instance, Priscilla who appears to be at least the equal of her husband Aquila in their joint work as teachers in the early Christian church in Acts 18 verse 2 and Acts 18 verse 26. There is also the theology of equivalence in Christ cited in Galatians 3 verse 28 where the baptism into Christ is seen as making all humanity one whether male, female, Jew or Greek. Hence, the Bible contains selected passages which portray positive images of women.

Paradoxically, we observed that the Bible is also patriarchal in nature in the sense that there are certain passages which perpetuate the subordination and suppression of female voices. A reading of the patriarchal narratives seems to emphasise the paramount roles played by men. For instance, the stories revolve around the males like Abraham, Jacob and

Isaac. More so, there is a reiteration on the twelve tribes of Israel as if the stories are about men only.

In Christianity, the theology of subordination is based on a male headship of the order of creation (Genesis 2–3), manifested in the charismatic leadership that is associated with paternalistic notions of God—the Father. Patriarchy is thus viewed as a divinely created order and willed by God. The role and status of women is even distorted in the Creation stories when a male God first creates the man and then the woman last (Genesis 2:22). In this context, we concluded that first means superior and second means inferior. Women are portrayed as inferior to males to the extent that they are not capable of leading an independent life compared to males. They should be obedient followers of males. They cannot initiate ideas or exercise their will independently. In the patriarchal narratives, both Abraham and Isaac lied that their wives were their sisters, sacrificing the wives to save themselves. This scenario triggered us to examine how the patriarchal system and the traditional cultural practices from Christianity affected the attainment of some of the selected six SDGs which the Zimbabwean government is making efforts to achieve.

Having delineated the biblical perspectives on women, the next section of this chapter outlines the nature of six SDGs and the roles played by the Christian women.

The Roles Played by Christian Women in Gwanda District Towards Attaining the Selected Six SDGs

This section summarises how the Christian women are exercising leadership towards achieving the six selected goals in Gwanda. This has implications for women's contributions all over Zimbabwe, as well as across the African continent. The section seeks to illustrate that African women have the potential of contributing towards accomplishing these goals in different capacities throughout the continent.

SDG 2: End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture

The findings from our field research revealed that the Christian women, like many women from other backgrounds, play a leading role in securing livelihoods for their families. They make contributions everyday by bringing income to the family, ranging from an employed wage earner,

to creating jobs as entrepreneurs, as well as taking care of the family's well-being. Most Christian women in Gwanda town are either working (those residing in urban areas) or are engaged in farming activities, mostly in rural areas, thus they are significantly contributing towards the family income. However, according to UN Women (2019), only 20% of landowners globally are women. This shows that the small percentage of land owners impacts negatively on household income; as more women own their land, more income would be earned by families. Ending hunger means that all women can consume enough food with adequate nutrients.

Our study also found out that even though most Christian women in Gwanda district are involved in small-scale agriculture, however, they still own very small pieces of land. These Christian women have a limited access to land ownership. This situation is exacerbated by the patriarchal and cultural systems from the Bible. As has been noted above, the Bible is patriarchal in nature in the sense that there are certain passages which perpetuate the subordination and suppression of female voices. A close assessment of the patriarchal narratives shows that they concentrate much on the paramount roles played by men. So the question is: Does it mean that there were no women who played significant roles in those sections? In the case of Gwanda district, does this mean that the Christian women cannot have an equal access to land ownership as the men in the district? The answer is "No". It is important to note that according to UN Women (2019), women comprise an average of 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries and over 50% in parts of Asia and Africa. Resultantly, their potential to contribute towards food security remains constrained by unequal access to land and other production assets. Therefore, the Christian women in Gwanda district should be afforded an opportunity to have equal access to land ownership, just like their male counterparts.

The goal of attaining zero hunger points to achieving food security. However, food security will only be attained when all people, at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. Hence, the Christian women can help to achieve SDG 2 by engaging in farming activities on a small scale basis. Upon achieving good yields from these small-scale farming ventures, the surplus can be sold at local markets or to neighbours. This would lead to the Christian women having their own basic source of income which will result in their economic empowerment. Any form of economic empowerment enhances an individual's capacity to participate in key decision-making

forums. Mobilising the Gwanda Christian women's leadership abilities will increase their say in decision-making at the household level, community structures as well as national structures.

SDG 3: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages

We noted that the Christian women in Gwanda have a leadership role of providing alternative health care services such as herbs, traditional healing and faith healing. At times some of the Christian women in Gwanda are seen playing a paramount role of home-based care and indigenous maternal health care services as well. More so, they contribute in providing for the family and community's nutritional needs. It is important to note that Gwanda district is very popular for harvesting mopane worms popularly known as *macimbi* in Ndebele or *madora* in ChiShona. These are eaten by the families as delicious and nutritious relish and some are sold to the local community to supplement the household income. Thus, the Christian women in Gwanda are not just spectators in the achievement of SDG 3, which ensures healthy lives and promotes well-being for everyone in the country. Through their various networks, especially *manyano/ruwadzano* movements, the Christian women in Zimbabwe have committed themselves to the achievement of this goal by enhancing access to sexual and reproductive health care services. They also play a major role in providing for the family and community's nutritional needs. For example, most women indicated that they have vegetable gardens that assist their families. This shows that the Christian women play a significant role in achieving SDG 3 within the district.

SDG 4: Empower Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities

The Christian women have been challenging the influence of the patriarchal system from the Bible which seeks to perpetuate the subordination of women. In actual fact, since positive efforts have been made by the Zimbabwean government to create an enabling policy environment to improve public education, the Christian women should also grab that golden opportunity. The government of Zimbabwe's efforts even includes the provision of right to education under Section 75 which entitles every

citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe to a basic state-funded education, including adult basic education and further education. Therefore, the Christian women in Gwanda district should make an effort to capitalise on what the Zimbabwean government has done by being influenced by the biblical passages which portray women as equal to men. For instance, Priscilla appears to be at least the equal of her husband Aquila in their joint work as teachers in the early Christian church in Acts 18 verse 2 and Acts 18 verse 26.

To achieve SDG 4, the government of Zimbabwe also introduced the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) initiative. This is meant to provide free education to all Advanced Level students registered for STEM-related subjects, namely Maths, Computer Science, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. In order to help the Zimbabwean government to achieve SDG 4, we observed that in Gwanda district, both in the rural and urban communities, women's groups as well as individual women from various churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith (ZAOGA FIF) Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) and the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe pay for their children's education. In addition to this, through their formal and informal income-generating initiatives, these Christian women even sponsor their own education, their spouses' and relatives' educational needs in various schools, colleges and universities such as the National University Science and Technology, Midlands State University and Great Zimbabwe State University. Furthermore, several Christian women in Gwanda district play significant roles as teachers, lecturers or support staff in the education sector. However, the number of these Christian women who are playing such a role is lower than that of the males due to the patriarchal and cultural system that hinders them. As such, Christian women and girls should be conscientised to grab that opportunity instead of being influenced by the patriarchal system which perpetuates the subordination of women. They should capitalise on that golden opportunity, basing it on the theology of equivalence in Christ cited in Galatians 3 verse 28 where the baptism into Christ is seen as making all humanity one: male, female, Jew and Greek.

SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls

To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, the Christian women should capitalise on the Revised National Gender policy

(2017). For instance, the New National Gender Policy (2017), under the thematic area on Gender and Economic Empowerment provides for strategies to strengthen women's access to economic opportunities and to the benefits derived from the economic development of the country. The policy is targeting key economic sectors and potential sources of growth particularly in mining, agriculture, tourism and manufacturing. The policy also proposes affirmative action measures to address economic empowerment imbalances in areas where sharp disparities exist. The strategies also target vulnerable groups such as women living with disabilities, widows and children. Hence, the Christian women in Zimbabwe should capitalise on such contents of the Revised National Gender Policy (2017) to achieve SDG 5.

From our field research, we also noted that in both rural and urban setups of Gwanda district, Christian women are playing a number of leadership roles in the churches. Although they are few, there are some churches that have female pastors. There are also a sizeable number of female business personnel, women in the legal or even in education structures like schools, colleges and universities. In this light, the Christian women should make use of the Financial Inclusion Strategy developed by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ). This strategy ensures that each bank has a special window for women and enhances women's access to finance. The other stipulations of the Financial Inclusion Strategy are as follows:

- To further strengthen women's access to finance, the government of Zimbabwe has established a women's Micro-Finance Bank. The objectives of establishing the Women's Bank are to:
- Improve access to affordable capital and operational finance by women.
- Facilitate financial inclusion by decentralising the banking system so that it becomes accessible to the majority of women who reside in the rural or remote areas and are not formally employed and yet they engage in economic activities to earn a living.
- The bank will also facilitate financial inclusion by decentralising the banking system so that it becomes accessible to the majority of women who reside in the rural or remote areas and are not formally employed and yet they carry out some small-scale economic activities to earn a living.

Given such a scenario, the Christian women in Gwanda district are well placed to exploit the above highlighted strategies to strengthen their access to economic opportunities and to the benefits derived from the economic development of the country.

In addition to this, the Christian women in Gwanda district should continue to work at empowering girls and boys, women and men to live and work, in relationships that reflect Christian values of love, dignity and justice by fostering awareness of harmful gendered norms and cultural practices and unjust power relations.

The Christian women in Gwanda district should continue encouraging and supporting church leaders to take responsibility for modelling just relationships. Within their spheres of influence, they should continue promoting gender equality leading their people in challenging and ending gender-based violence in all its forms.

The Christian women are working tirelessly to transform structures that prevent women and girls from offering their gifts and talents in the church and in their communities. However, they should fully involve men and boys as well as women and girls in exploring and redefining just and equal gender relationships.

Furthermore, the Christian women should explore how liturgies, contextual Bible study and existing ministries such as preparation for baptism, confirmation and marriage can serve in the promotion of right relationships and intergenerational teaching about the God-given dignity and status of all persons.

The Christian women in Gwanda district are contributing to the call for equal representation of women in decision-making bodies, the elimination of all forms of gender-based and domestic violence. Lastly, they are insisting on upholding just relationships between women and men as a reflection of a Christian belief that women and men are equally made in the divine image.

SDG 9: Build Resilient Infrastructure, Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialisation and Foster Innovation

In line with SDG 9 we noted that in Gwanda district, the Christian women in the local church communities are recognised as credible and sustainable providers of financial support for the wider community, particularly in terms of micro-financing projects. We observed that some Christian women have even come up with innovative business

ideas, agricultural innovations and other sustainable ways of managing the resources. For instance, some of these women own some mines or farms in surrounding areas of Blanket, Vumba or Collen Bawn. In the ZAOGA FIF Church, Christ Embassy Church and Shecaniah Baptist Church in Gwanda district, some Christian women are playing an important role in coming up with innovative business ideas in line with cookery, clothing and textiles. Hence, the women are playing a significant role in achieving SDG 9.

SDG 13: Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and Its Impacts

While conducting field research in Gwanda district, we also observed that the Christian women in Zimbabwe, like other women in Zimbabwe, are not only vulnerable to climate change, but they are effective actors or agents of change. Most women involved in farming have embarked on planting drought-resistant crops as a way of adapting to the effects of climate change. It was also observed that most women are using solar energy and gas as a source of fuel. This has resulted in reduced deforestation in and around Gwanda town. Despite the effort being put, a lot still needs to be done, for instance, technological development related to climate change should take into account the Christian women's specific priorities, needs and roles and make use of their knowledge and expertise. The Christian women's involvement in the development of new technologies can ensure that they are user friendly, affordable, effective and sustainable. Financing must be flexible enough to reflect women's priorities and needs. Active participation of women in the development of funding criteria and allocation of resources for climate change initiatives is critical while gender analysis of all budget lines and financial instruments is needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As has been observed by the African women theologians, the Zimbabwean Christian women in Gwanda district should recognise that behind oppressive patriarchal structure lies an androcentric ideology that privileges masculinity as a standard of humanity. The findings emerging from our field research revealed that some of the Christian women in Gwanda district are not able to play a significant role in achieving the SDGs due

to the patriarchal and cultural systems that seem to promote the subordination of women to men. Therefore, the African women in Gwanda district should take note that the battle for achieving their full humanity as women has to be fought at an ideological level for them to achieve the selected six SDGs.

Since the Christian women's achievement of selected SDGs is affected by the patriarchal culture and cultural practices from Christianity, Christian women in Gwanda district should follow what is propounded by African women theologians, namely, that they should become the agents of their own liberation. A male black theologian, Mosala (1986: 132) says on this view, "Liberation does not fall into one's lap. It must be claimed and be protected. You cannot give me my liberty and I cannot give you yours…" Thus, the Christian women in Gwanda district should continue to fight for space and model effective leadership within their homes, churches, communities and the nation. They are already confirming the fact that they are not spectactors, but effective leaders who are contributing towards the realisation of the SDGs in their local context. Despite numerous roadblocks emerging from patriarchal ideologies, they are making a significant contribution.

Conclusion

While governments exude confidence about the impending positive impact of Agenda 2030 in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment, nevertheless the textual analysis in this chapter points to the picture that the SDGs may fail to be as transformative as envisaged, despite some clear positives. The influence of SDGs may be most significant in their ability to change the idea of development from a purely economic approach to one that includes a host of issues. The SDGs constitute an improvement with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment, however, there is no room for complacency as we move to the implementation stage. Given that gender equality is a cross-cutting development issue, unless it is addressed in a multidimensional way, it will not become a reality and not one of the SDGs will be achieved without including women and girls as equal partners. In conclusion, our field research established that most Christian women in Gwanda town are either working (those residing in urban areas) or are engaged in farming activities, mostly in rural areas, thus they are significantly contributing towards the family income. Women also play a paramount

role of providing home-based care and indigenous maternal health care services to the community for free. They contribute to catering for the family and community's nutritional needs. Although Christian women in Gwanda are still facing several challenges, however, it is apparent that women play a major role in improving the health and well-being of people in the communities. In tandem with the Agenda 2030s mantra, "leaving no one behind", the government of Zimbabwe has put in place several policies and initiatives into place to ensure that women and girls become an important cog of attaining the SDGs. Going forward, if some of the obstacles hindering women's capacity to unleash their leadership potential are properly addressed, the people of Gwanda district can go a long way towards the realisation of not only the SDGs but Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 as well.

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Religio-Cultural Factors Impacting Women's Leadership Roles in Zimbabwe

Gender Discrepancies in Zimbabwean Religio-Cultural and Political Leadership: A Case Study of Young Christian Women in the Midlands Province

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The world is not kind to women because of patriarchy. It permeates every aspect of a woman's life, and, without addressing it, no changes can come about [...] patriarchy is the biggest stumbling block for women at all levels, family, church, work and national politics.[1]

INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwean National Gender Policy (NGP) for the period 2013–2017 is underpinned by principles of gender justice, equality, integration and inclusiveness. It is hinged upon eight priority areas namely: (1) Gender, Constitutional and Legal Rights; (2) Gender and Economic Empowerment; (3) Gender, Politics and Decision-Making; (4) Gender and Health; (5) Gender, Education and Training; (6) Gender-Based Violence; (7) Gender and Environment and (8) Gender, Media and ICTS. These thematic areas form the basis for developing policy objectives and strategies (NGP, 2013). Reflecting on the NGP's commendable vision and its articulate goals aimed at confronting major gender gaps in Zimbabwe, the present study proffers that the patriarchal tradition in all sectors of Zimbabwean life has provided fertile ground for women's exclusion from leadership and decision-making forums. The chapter draws insights from the field research conducted in the Midlands province to illuminate the limited participation and exclusion of young Christian women from key leadership positions. The study's focus on young Christian women was mainly influenced by the dominance of Christianity in Zimbabwe (Makahamadze et al., 2011), as well as the quest to advocate for young women's rights in Zimbabwe due to their being constantly pushed to the periphery when it comes to choosing or appointing leaders in various sectors of life (Bergkvist & Olsson, 2013; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2017; Maphosa et al., 2015; Newsday, 2018; Research and Advocacy Unit, 2016a, 2017a; Wilson,

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2004). The Second Republic of Zimbabwe has pledged to mainstream the youth in all leadership forums as an integral aspect of transforming the country's democratic structures, hence, this chapter seeks to contribute towards the realization of this goal.

Methodology

As has been noted above, all the eight priority areas enshrined in the NGP are crucial as they provide the building blocks for the country's progress. However, for purposes of an in-depth exploration, this chapter emphasizes the following five areas, (1) Gender and Economic Empowerment; (2) Gender, Politics and Decision-Making; (3) Gender and Health; (4) Gender, Education and Training and (5) Gender-Based Violence. In essence, the discussion is anchored on evaluating the extent to which these five thematic areas enshrined in the NGP have been achieved in the light of young Christian women's experiences in the Midlands province. The qualitative study was conducted between July and December 2018. The discussion draws insights from the fieldwork conducted in the following six study sites within the Midlands province of Zimbabwe: Chief Chireya's area in Gokwe; Chief Mposi's area in Mberengwa; Chief Mugandani's area around Jena Mines in Silobela; the communities around Pakame Mission in Shurugwi, as well as the urban communities in Gweru and Shurugwi. The choice of these six study sites was influenced by the researchers' intent to compare and contrast experiences of young Christian women in urban, peri-urban and rural communities within different sectors of the Midlands province.

Drawing insights from Africana womanism as the overall theoretical framework, the study reiterates the fact that African women should be perceived as agents, not subjects of history (Hudson-Weems, 2004). The term Africana womanism was coined by Clenora Hudson-Weems. It is a theoretical framework, emerging out of the rich and old legacy of African womanhood. Africana womanism's thought and action are mainly Afrocentric and it seeks to analyse the lived realities of all women of African descent. It is keen on creating Afrocentric criteria which enable Africana women to express their experiences in an authentic way. This framework is relevant for this study as its emphasis on an authentic Afrocentric paradigm helps to unpack the gender-based dynamics confronting the young Zimbabwean women, particularly in the Midlands province. In terms of data collection, interviews were conducted with young Christian

women, church leaders, representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), politicians, traditional leaders, government officials and others to ascertain the scope of young Christian women's participation in leadership within the Midlands province. Additionally, the study seeks to foreground some of the factors impeding young Christian women's participation in leadership, as well as ascertaining conceivable techniques that can be utilized to enhance their involvement in community leadership.

In line with the researchers' own grounding in African Women's Theologies, the study employed the narrative method to gather information relating to young Christian women's leadership roles and opportunities for decision-making. A total of 45 young Christian women (aged 18–30) were selected to participate in the study in order to get the views, experiences and motivations of young women regarding their contribution in leadership or lack thereof. The data from these 45 young women was collected through structured and semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were structured in such a way that the interviews would provide in-depth information about the young women's activities. The 45 young women who participated in the study were distributed as follows, 15 from the urban areas, 15 from the peri-urban areas and 15 from the rural communities. Thus, purposive sampling was employed in order to settle for those young Christian women with substantial information regarding the matter under examination. A total of 15 men, i.e. five from each of the three categories, urban, peri-urban and rural were interviewed in order to complement the views of the young women study participants. Both structured and semi-structured interviews were utilized in collecting data from the 15 male study participants. In total, twelve focus group discussions were conducted, that is, two focus group discussions at each of the six study sites mentioned above. At each of the six study sites, one focus group discussion was conducted with young women and another one was conducted with the male study participants. The focus group discussions were conducted for two key reasons. Firstly, to compare and contrast information provided by the study participants during the personal interviews and secondly to provide a conducive environment for some of the participants to feel comfortable to share their opinions being surrounded by the other study participants whom they are familiar with. Information gathered from several informal discussions conducted with the opinion leaders whom the researchers interacted with at the six study sites has also been utilized in order to augment the

study. Evaluation reports (such as the Zimbabwean NGP and other online reports), media coverage, archival sources and pastoral letters by churches were also analysed. The researchers also embarked on content analysis to analyse the data, noting recurrent motifs and perceptions in the rejoinders and interfaces. The next section presents a synopsis of the NGP, noting how it dovetails with the international, regional and national legal and policy frameworks.

Overview of the Zimbabwean NGP and Its Nexus with the Legal and Policy Frameworks

Zimbabwe has ratified most of the fundamental conventions designed to achieve gender justice across a wide range of sectors at the international, regional and national level. The NGP is anchored on translating and delivering the provisions of these conventions. For instance, Zimbabwe is part of the following international conventions that provide for gender equality, namely, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1991); the Beijing Declaration on the Platform for Action (1995); the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR); the Equal Remuneration Convention; the Convention on Prohibition of Discrimination in Occupations, Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and the Convention on Economic, and Social and Cultural Rights (ECOSOC). As regards the regional policy framework, Zimbabwe ratified the protocol to the 2003 African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in 2008. It is also part of the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender and Equality in Africa. In 1997, Zimbabwe ratified the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Gender and Development Protocol and subsequently ratified the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development which was adopted by SADC in 2008. The protocol advocates for gender parity in all sectors and sets out 28 substantive targets for achieving gender equality by 2015. Zimbabwe also subscribes to the COMESA Gender Policy which fosters gender equality and equity at all levels of regional integration and cooperation (NGP, 2013: 2).

At the national level, Zimbabwe has made significant strides in amending and enacting legislation to advance the gender equality and equity objective. It is also significant to note that the country has passed out 17 pieces of legislation to that effect. Some of the most

significant ones include the Matrimonial Causes Act (1987); Mainte-
nance Act (1999); Administration of Estate Act (1997); Maintenance
Act (1999); Sexual Offences Act (2001), Education Act (2004), Labour
Act, [Chapter 28:01]; Criminal Law Act (2006); Domestic Violence Act
(2007). The 2004 Public Sector Gender Policy put in place Gender Focal
Points in all Ministries and parastatals and in 2012 dialogue was initi-
ated to set up a Gender Commission. Furthermore, the Constitution of
Zimbabwe adopted in 2013 is widely acknowledged for its firm commit-
ment to gender equality. The affirmative action provisions further assert
the new Constitution's resolve for gender inequality redress. The consti-
tution reaffirms earlier commitments shown by the 2005 Constitutional
Amendment # 17 which prohibited sex-based discrimination. Chapter 2
of the Constitution focuses on national objectives, it foregrounds gender
balance as one of the objectives to guide the state, all institutions and
agencies of Government. Throughout the statement of 26 national objec-
tives, equality is emphasized and where appropriate, women and girls
are specifically mentioned. The Bill of Rights in Chapter 4 of the new
Constitution avows that men and women have a right to equal treatment,
including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural
and social spheres. It expressly accords women the right to custody and
guardianship, and makes void all laws, customs, cultural practices and
traditions that infringe on the rights of women and girls. Certain sections
are further elaborated to ensure certainty in the application of these rights.
It is upon these policy and legislative frameworks as well as the prevailing
social, economic and political developments that the Zimbabwean NGP
carves a firm basis to pursue gender equality and equity.

The NGP acknowledges that from as far back as 2004, Zimbabwe
has made significant progress towards providing the legislative, plan-
ning and implementation frameworks for gender equality programming.
In this light, the NGP singles out four positive outcomes emerging
from these developments. First, increased awareness has ignited gender
mainstreaming in public programmes, particularly economic and fiscal
planning. Second, the gender gaps are closing in, for instance gender
parity has been attained in primary school enrolment and literacy. Third,
the participation of women in political decision-making has considerably
increased. Fourth, HIV and AIDS infection rates have been substantially
reduced, particularly among women (NGP, 2013: 3). The NGP celebrates
all these achievements as highly commendable, however, it bemoans the
unfortunate reality on the ground because Zimbabwe is still ranking lowly

in gender equality ranking. For instance, the 2011 Human Development Report revealed that the Gender Inequality Index (GII) was at 0.583 compared to an ideal of zero. This indicates the generally low status of women with respect to reproductive health, empowerment, access, control and ownership of economic resources and economic opportunities and participation in decision-making. The NGP also embarked on analysing the 28 substantive targets for achieving gender equality outlined in the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development accountability framework as a measuring rod to evaluate the current situation relating to progress and gaps in Zimbabwe (NGP, 2013: 3).

Having presented a synopsis of the NGP, the chapter proceeds to reflect on five aspects of the NGP which are the focus of the discussion in an endeavour to juxtapose the fieldwork findings on young Christian women's leadership opportunities in the Midlands province with the conclusions and recommendations inherent the NGP. Gender, Politics and Decision-Making will be the first to be discussed below. It will be followed by the other four complementing pillars.

Gender, Politics and Decision-Making

The NGP applauds the acknowledgement that sustainable development and good governance in Zimbabwe is dependent on women taking part in all decision-making processes. However, it bemoans the absence of a legislative framework for affirmative action to ensure the execution of gender quota systems for political parties in urban and rural councils which is the main deterrent to attaining gender parity. Furthermore, the NGP reiterates the urgent need for a strong policy grounding to effectively address several principal factors perpetuating gender disparities in candidature in the electoral process and participation in public office. These include lack of resources for the campaign process, lack of civic education, cultural perceptions, gender based violence and intimidation. The last three factors also limit the participation of girls in leadership positions at a young age. The NGP's goal is to create a supportive environment for gender parity in politics and decision-making positions and lobby for affirmative action measures in areas where sharp gender disparities exist was informed by such a status quo. It is against such a background that the NGP advocates for explicit strategies to ensure equal participation in politics and decision-making. It has also been one of the policy documents lobbying for the elimination of cultural and traditional

customs that inhibit equal participation of men and women in traditional governance and other grassroots structures.

Various scholars resonate with the views raised in the NGP. Critiquing male dominance in public institutions and peace-building initiatives, Chirenje (2011) bewails that:

> Peace building missions and efforts have been a male domain – believed to be best resolved by adult men, who are perceived to be the custodians of wisdom and political clout. […] The result is that young women are sidelined from being strategic partners in this sector. (Chirenje, 2011: 69)

Reflecting on women's movements in Zimbabwe, Eerdewijk and Mugadza (2015) echo that when it comes to holding political and public office, young women are usually pushed to the margins. Reviewing the participation of Zimbabwean women in politics, Maphosa et al. (2015) put it succinctly:

> …the discrepancy between the perceived and actual realities in relation to the participation of women in politics is not by accident but is founded on a systemic and calculated maneuver by politically dominant males to open up the political space when necessary and convenient for them. Whilst there have been some moves to bring about parity in numeric terms, there is a glass ceiling for women in terms of how far they can go up the political ladder. […] Women have been sold a political dummy where through a raft of cosmetic measures they have been given an impression that they are equals in governance yet on the other hand recent political developments reveal that gender equity in governance remains a mirage for them. (Maphosa et al., 2015: 127–128)

Debunking the myth about women's disinterest in politics and leadership, the Research and Advocacy Unit (2016a, 2016b) elucidates that:

> There is a misconception that women do not want to participate in politics either as voters or as candidates in Zimbabwe. Women generally have not participated in politics, primarily because of the violence and intimidation that is associated with African politics but also because of a lack of education, skills and experience as well as financial resources to run political campaigns. (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2016a, 2016b: 5)

In a subsequent report, the Research and Advocacy Unit (2017a, 2017b) put it across aptly:

Women's inclusion in governance structures is the key to ensuring that the Constitution is adhered to and to end gender inequality. When women are included in governance structures, they bring in their own values and concepts to politics: their priorities are different from men and this diversity is essential because it recognizes that the country is not just made up of men. (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2017a, 2017b: 3)

The recurring issues raised by the study participants during the field research in the Midlands province corroborate the foregoing scholarly views. A focus group discussion with young women from Mberengwa illuminated why there were very few or no young female candidates contesting the 30 July 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections in the following words[2]:

Whenever a young woman expresses interest in political leadership, members of the community start judging her harshly, she will be risking to be labelled as a woman of loose[3] morals. The general thinking here is that politics is a preserve for men because it involves travelling regularly which means one will not be available to shoulder the domestic chores. No man would be willing to marry nor to remain married to a woman who is too busy with political affairs to the detriment of her household responsibilities. As such, there are very few elderly women who are either widowed or who are past the child-bearing age who actively participate in political leadership here.

In response to the dearth of young women's participation in political leadership, a focus group discussion with a mixed group of elderly and young men in Silobela also bared the same sentiments:

It is an anathema for a young woman who is aspiring to get married or is already married to be seen going around the community campaigning for votes. The woman's place, whether young or old, is the domestic sphere. For them to spend time away from the homestead attending workshops

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[2] For confidentiality reasons, the identity of all the study participants has been withheld.

[3] The study participants further explained that women who are perceived as too ambitious, independent and mobile are labelled as having loose morals. This is because the cultural script is that a decent women is one who focuses on being a home maker, spending her undivided attention on developing the homestead instead of moving around and falling into the danger of being proposed to by the men she will encounter on such tours.

and conferences with male politicians whilst their partners remain at home is unthinkable. It is the men who wear the trousers[4] in this community and not the women, hence, they should leave political matters for the menfolk.

According to the study participants in all the six sites in the Midlands province, the ground is not at all levels for female participation in political leadership, let alone, young women. It is, however, interesting to note that when asked if they would vote for a female presidential candidate, the majority of the study participants responded in the affirmative although most of them went on to qualify that they would only vote for such a candidate if she proved to be capable of bringing about positive change and transformation in all the crucial sectors of their lives. The predominantly patriarchal culture imposes major barriers for young women's inclusion not only in politics, but also in other sectors of life. There are neither female village heads nor are there female chiefs in all the study sites where the field research was conducted although often times, wives can represent their husbands or a female relative such as an aunt, sister or mother can also represent their male kin in leadership and decision-making forums if they are absent. The same gender disparities pertain in the urban and peri-urban communities whereby the elected leadership such as ward councillors and members of parliament are predominantly male.

The church is also guilty as charged when it comes to gender parity in key leadership and decision-making forums. The study participants in all the study sites were drawn from a wide array of Christian denominations representing different ideologies, social classes, rural, urban and peri-urban communities. However, the overarching issue emerging from all the study sites is that all key leadership and decision-making bodies in the church are a male preserve, especially adult males. Any efforts to negotiate for the inclusion of women, especially young women, in the top hierarchy of church leadership or advocating for female ordination have been met with stiff resistance and disdain especially within the conservative circles. An elderly Gweru-based male pastor shared his ordeal of being fired from his post in the year 2011 due to his contestation of the

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[4] Wearing of trousers is equated to the masculine trait of being in charge of all key leadership and decision-making roles. McFadden (2005: 11) puts it aptly, "women who engage in politics and decision-making are often perceived by society as wanting to be like men or having loose morals".

decision to forbid women from serving as pastors reached by the newly formed church board of trustees:

> With a PhD against my name and having served for nearly thirty years as a pastor and the principal of a theological seminary run by my church, I believed that I was better placed to influence policy in a bid to embrace gender inclusiveness. Paradoxically, I was branded an enemy of the establishment when I critiqued and resisted the seminary's new mission statement crafted as follows, "dedicated and covenanted to biblically educate and train God-called men to be pastors and women to be auxiliary, spiritual leaders in other varied ministries." My protest against the exclusion of women from the ordained and pastoral ministry was anchored upon the fact that such a stance is based on a conservative interpretation of the Bible. I argued that this was akin to a selective reading of scripture in order to use it as ammunition against female empowerment.

Clearly, most denominations still have a long way to go in terms of achieving gender parity. Even though in principle some churches have opened up opportunities for female ordination, more often than not, young women are excluded from ordination. They are usually required to wait until they reach the age of forty before ordination, only after that age can they be allowed to serve as pastors or ministers. Be that as it may, in most churches, the highest leadership and decision-making positions such as being appointed as a Bishop is still a male preserve. The apparent absence of female role models from key leadership and decision-making forums is, therefore, an area needing urgent attention. It is only when young women have mentors whom they can look up to that they can be motivated and aspire to reclaim their place in the sun. Such affirmations and mentorship will equip them with tools for unshackling the chains of a predominantly patriarchal society.

Economic empowerment is also integral to uplifting young women's voices and making them visible, it is on this pillar that the discussion will now focus on below.

Gender and Economic Empowerment

Cognisant of the fact that gender disparities not only disadvantage women but also reduce the whole nation's growth potential, Zimbabwe is committed to economic empowerment that is equitable, where both

men and women participate and benefit. Unfortunately, several institutional and legal barriers continue to hamper the ability of both men and women, to formalise and grow their businesses, create jobs and enhance productivity and women continue to be more constrained in these efforts. Against this background, the NGP prescribes objectives and strategies to address these barriers deterring economic empowerment equity and hence national growth. In submitting its recommendations, the NGP is attentive to the constitutional provisions, and without prejudice, it proposes affirmative action measures to address economic empowerment imbalances in areas where sharp equity disparities exist.

Several publications concur with the NGP's recommendations pertaining to the criticality of Zimbabwean women's economic empowerment. Reeler (2014) notes that whilst Zimbabwean women comprise 52% of the population, conversely, their views and important matters affecting their lives are not accorded the gravity they deserve, particularly when it comes to political and economic issues. The Research and Advocacy Unit (2017a, 2017b: 4) tersely puts it:

> *Women's issues have always and continue to be on the back burner as Zimbabwe is a patriarchal country where decisions for and about women are made without them.*[5] However, women's social and economic contributions to the development of the country is more than half in comparison to men because of their dual responsibilities in both the productive and reproductive domain (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2017a, 2017b: 4).

ZIMSTAT (2012) avers that whilst the youth comprise 60% of Zimbabwean's population, ironically, their involvement in mainstream economic activities remains minimal. Bergkvist and Olsson (2013: 5) reiterate the pervasive gender inequalities within all sectors of life in Zimbabwe. Since women continue to be excluded from mainstream economic activities, "young women leaders have to challenge gender norms and confront negative attitudes as they are perceived as going against women's expected role in society."

The study participants in the Midlands province also concurred that whilst women carry the brunt of the burden in generating income, unfortunately, their views are often disregarded when it comes to deciding on how to utilize the income. One of the young women from Chief

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[5] Italics, added for emphasis.

Chireya's area in Gokwe expressed her disgruntlement about being denied the opportunity to make decisions on the family's income in the following words:

> When I was still under my parents care as a young girl, my father made all the financial decisions, even though we all worked together as a family to generate income especially through agricultural activities. I always looked forward to having some financial autonomy in the hope that when I get married, I would eventually have the freedom to decide on how to spend my income. Unfortunately, that was not to be. I got into a polygamous marriage at the age of 16 and I have been married for six years now. My husband never consults me nor does he consult his two other wives on how to spend the money which our family makes from the sales of the cotton produce. If we are lucky, he buys groceries and clothes for us after collecting the money from the sale of cotton, otherwise he mostly reinvests the money through increasing the livestock. Not having a say on how to spend the money that we all worked for painfully tugs at the core of my heart.

The above citation summarizes the views of most young women, especially in the rural and peri-urban sites where the study was conducted. It was constantly mentioned that since women are excluded from leadership and decision-making forums, their voices on economic matters are often muffled. This is particularly worse for young Christian women because the cultural script and the church traditions have an "unholy alliance" perpetuating their submission and subordination not only to men but also to the elderly women in society. Consequently, the young women find themselves "trapped between the rock and a hard place." Transforming power structures and inclusion of women, especially young women in decision-making on economic issues as well as opening up avenues for them to have equal access to resources were recurring themes emerging from the field research. Since being in good health is essential to qualify for leadership, below, the discussion will now turn to discuss the pillar on gender justice and health.

Gender and Health

The NGP's objective here is to improve gender sensitivity in health service delivery. Its vantage point is that prioritizing gender and health will contribute to the effective protection of the right to healthcare for the

marginalized sex and the achievement of equality in health delivery. This goal is in line with the universal recognition that gender inequalities are responsible for most of the health issues and that poor health delivery systems and HIV and AIDS impact negatively more on women than men. Whilst the NGP commends the growing commitment among stakeholders in the health sector towards improving health service delivery, its main contention, however, is that strategies to improve health delivery should be gender focused if they have to positively impact on women's lives and achieve gender equality.

Resonating with the issues raised by the NGP on the nexus between gender, health and development, UNICEF (2014) restates that:

> …equal participation of women cannot be achieved if discrimination starts at the earlier development stages of the girl. Discrimination in Zimbabwe, like in many other countries, is embedded in the religious and cultural values, beliefs and practices. Girls and young women still face a number of obstacles in accessing sexual and reproductive health services and information. (UNICEF, 2014: 10)

The UNFPA (2011) also reaffirms that:

> …young women face sexual and reproductive ill-health due to early teen-pregnancies, gender-based violence (GBV), harmful cultural and religious practices and problems accessing youth friendly health services and information. (UNFPA, 2011: 12)

Bergkvist and Olsson (2013: 8) aver that their field research in Zimbabwe revealed "a reality of young women facing serious health implications due to difficulties in exercising their SRHR."[6]

The field research in the Midlands province also affirmed that several norms and practices are hindering young women's advancement and empowerment as well as impacting heavily on their health and well-being. Whilst at the other study sites it became apparent that access to SRHR for young women and girls was a major issue, however, visiting the "waiting mothers' facility" at Chireya Mission hospital in Gokwe revealed an overwhelming and urgent need for availing SRHR services in this community. The majority of the expectant mothers who participated in the study were

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[6] This is an acronomy for Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights.

either teenagers or in their early twenties. They had either been married off by their families at a very young age or had dropped out of school and decided to get married because they perceived marriage as the best "exit passage from poverty." The plight of young women when it comes to limited choices in accessing health care facilities, particularly, maternal health care is epitomized by the story of one of the young women whom we interviewed at Chireya Mission hospital in Gokwe. She shared the following:

> I am 21 years old. I dropped out of school at the age of fourteen because my parents could not afford to pay for my education. At the age of seventeen, I decided to get married to a much older man who already had three wives. I felt that since the man has a vast expanse of fertile and productive land and owns a lot of livestock, I would have an opportunity to live a better life. Soon after getting married, I fell pregnant and I was very excited to become a mother. Unfortunately, my husband decided that I should not access regular antenatal services from the hospital because we live very far away from the hospital and so he felt that it would be time-consuming as well as being financially draining. As a result, I experienced major complications whilst delivering my first child at home under the care of a traditional birth attendant such that both the baby and I almost lost our lives. Currently, I am pregnant with my second child and because of the previous experience, my husband grudgingly availed resources for me to come and stay at the "waiting mothers' facility." Looking back, I wish I had not rushed to get married, my husband denies all his wives permission to use contraceptives because he says that it goes against our faith and our culture. I worry that my children will not have a good quality of education and they will end up being trapped in the same quagmire as I am in.

The challenges articulated by the young woman cited above summarize the recurring issues that emerged from the other study sites. Clearly, the young women and girls in the study sites were being denied fair access to education and health care facilities due to the prevailing cultural and religious traditions endorsing child marriages, polygamy and inter-generational marriages. All these factors reduce and limit girls' and young women's opportunities to access resources, consequently hindering their capacity to influence decision-making structures. Below, we turn to discuss how pervasive gender inequality in education and training impacts heavily on young women's leadership and decision-making opportunities.

Gender, Education and Training

Being a fundamental and universal human right, it is apparent that education is a pre-requisite for economic growth, human development and poverty reduction. Whilst the NGP applauds the gender parity achieved in some areas in the education sector, however, it underscores the need for keeping the momentum through addressing the factors that may reverse the status quo, especially problems that result in school dropouts. Furthermore, the NGP commends the new constitution and the economic developments for unleashing a broad spectrum of new opportunities for equal participation in the workplace, market place and governance structures. Be that as it may, the NGP also underlines that paying more attention to training and capacity building for all, particularly for women to enable them to fully take on these opportunities is vital. It also emphasizes the need for pursuing new gender-related learning and skills development priorities through modifying gender policy and strategies.

Consequently, the NGP's policy objective for this pillar is hinged upon ensuring equal access to education for boys and girls and their retention at all levels of education; and to ensure access to training opportunities for men and women to make possible their equal participation in the workplace, marketplace and in governance structures. To achieve all these objectives, the NGP proposes the following seven strategies. First, undertaking a training and capacity needs survey and support the implementation of capacity-building programmes to actualize the constitutional provision for equal participation in all social, economic and political spheres. Second, lobbying for, and supporting efforts to design and implement programmes aimed at creating an enabling environment for the retention of girls at secondary school levels particularly in rural and resettlement areas. Third, establishing mechanisms to encourage women and girls to study stereotyped science subjects and to take up training in technical courses. Fourth, promoting affirmative action aimed at encouraging enrolment and retention of females in vocational training institutions especially in male domains. Fifth, ensuring equal access to ICT by both boys and girls, and men and women. Sixth, supporting initiatives for training and skills development to achieve the objectives of women's economic empowerment and forging strategic partnerships to conduct training programmes to enhance the skills of women and girls

in entrepreneurship, business leadership, self-confidence, advocacy, negotiation skills and financial literacy. Seventh, advocating for and supporting in-service training and capacity-building programmes to prepare women to advance to positions of power in the private and public sector institutions and in political and other governance structures.

Study participants in the Midlands province unanimously agreed that "education is the key that locks and unlocks doors to leadership and decision-making forums" particularly for young women and girls. They also cited patriarchy and poverty as major barriers obstructing young women from accessing education and training. During a focus group discussion with a group of young women at an institution of higher learning in Gweru, they shared the following insights:

> Although the number of female students enrolling at tertiary institutions has considerably increased in the past few years, however, the current economic challenges impact heavily on our capacity as young women to excel in our studies. This is mainly because unlike most of our male counterparts who are not too bothered about their physical appearance, for us young women, not having enough money to buy fashionable clothes and not affording to pay for the trending hairstyle puts a dent on our self-esteem. As a result, some of us end up under-performing in class, not because we are dull but because of financial constraints. Also, when it comes to campaigning for leadership in the Students' Representative Council, one needs a considerable amount of money to produce campaigning materials to solicit for votes. As such, those of us who cannot afford to financially sponsor our campaign end up not even bothering to contest the student leadership elections because we do not wish to embarrass ourselves. Besides, very few students, including fellow female students are willing to support a female candidate who will be contesting the same post with a male colleague. Resultantly, some prospective voters end up not even making an effort to go and vote because it is almost always obvious that the male candidates will win.

The points raised by the young women cited above foreground the fact that although education is pivotal to equipping both young men and young women for leadership, apparently, young women enrolled at tertiary institutions are still grappling with numerous barriers affecting their opportunities for excellence. They are also still struggling to break the glass ceiling to enter the male-dominated student leadership structures. Since it is usually from these structures where future national

political leaders are groomed, this inadvertently sets a gender-skewed foundation in terms of the country's future political leaders.

Gender-based violence is one of the key hindrances to young women's participation in leadership and decision-making forums, it is to this pillar that we now turn.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Zimbabwe affirms that gender-based violence, in particular violence against women, constitutes one of the prime impediments to women's participation in decision-making and severely limits their ability to participate in economic and social activities. Whilst the NGP applauds such a stance, however, it contends that any efforts to eliminate GBV will continue to yield limited results if the key factors precipitating the problem remain unaddressed. Some of these key factors include inadequate services and weak institutions for addressing GBV, poor information communication systems and the predominantly patriarchal structures that restrain men from reporting incidences of abuse. In view of this, the NGP advocates for the following measures as vitally important; grounding all efforts to reduce GBV on policy provisions particularly those that aim to institute strong institutions, effective and transformative use of information and communication systems and shifting negative attitudes on GBV.

Study participants bemoaned the unconducive, violent and volatile environment prevalent in Zimbabwe's political and other decision-making forums. Young Christian women who participated in the study reiterated how the fear of being exposed to body shaming, verbal, physical and sexual violence mostly deters them from venturing into politics and restrains any aspirations to engage in key decision-making forums. Pervasive gender stereotypes at home, in the community and at church were also mentioned as an impediment for young women's active role in leadership and decision-making. In a focus group discussion with young women in Shurugwi, they highlighted the following concerns:

> Residing in a mining town which is largely populated by artisanal miners, most of whom are rowdy and violent, we live in constant fear for our safety. We do not have the freedom to dress as we please in this town. This infringement on our freedom of dressing and movement is especially worse during summer because sometimes if drunk men see us wearing mini-skirts

and sleeveless tops, they either call us sluts, toss us around or worse still if it is an isolated place, we become susceptible to being raped or being improperly touched. The physical and sexual violence is especially perpetrated against us young girls because of the myth that if an artisanal miner engages in sex with a virgin, they will have luck in their mining explorations. Our community is also notorious for the machete-wielding gangs, they do not hesitate to slash people's body parts using these machetes. They commit crime, especially sexual violence by threatening to slash their victims with the machetes. We are therefore living in perpetual fear, GBV has become the norm in our homes, schools and the whole community.

The young women also raised concerns about the volatile political spaces. Others mentioned how there are incidents of sexual violence at political rallies, during election campaigns and at some voting booths especially during parliamentary and presidential elections. Such sporadic acts of GBV in the political arena have therefore repelled most young women from even fanning political ambitions. For them, politics is synonymous with violence against women and girls.

Several scholars writing on young women in Zimbabwe concur with the foregoing concerns. Chitsike (2011) avows that:

> …the political arena is, and has always been, male dominated. Women have had to fight for inclusion to remain in political positions, and they have fought patriarchal attitudes perpetuated not only by men, but by other women who believe that a woman's place is in the home… The weak law enforcement which is not "women-friendly" has led to perpetrators not being brought to justice for crimes committed against women. (Chitsike, 2011: 160–161)

Wilson (2004: 17) puts it aptly, "…another issue facing many young women activists engaged in social justice efforts is marginalization as a result of gender discrimination and ageism." Chitsike (2011: 181) further asserts that "many women are reluctant to vote for other women to take on leadership positions as they have been socialized into believing that women are not capable to lead." To address these various concerns, the present study concurs with Wilson (2004) who proffers that:

> …although there are a growing number of young women leaders, many of them are not given the opportunity or the space to take up leadership in strategic and meaningful ways. Young women still seem to be brought in

because it is 'sexy' and they are recognized as a 'marginalized' group. Also, many young activists lack the support, the opportunities and skills. *While we often hear the rhetoric of young women as future leaders, the reality is that young women are the now and the future of the movements. Ensuring young women's rights presents a challenge that requires new energies, particularly at regional and international levels. This means that the issues of young women continue to remain on the periphery and never really become part of the mainstream agendas for social change.*[7] (Wilson, 2004: 18–19)

Based on the views raised by several scholars and the field research conducted in the Midlands province, it is apparent that holistic development and transformation for Zimbabwe will remain a pipe dream in the absence of young women and girls actively participating in leadership and decision-making forums in all sectors of life. Moving ahead into the future after the first forty years of independence, the Second Republic of Zimbabwe needs to make resolute efforts to bridge the gender and age gap in all structures of leadership.

CONCLUSION

The present study echoes the views raised by contemporary publications, it embraces the following statement issued by the Research and Advocacy Unit (2016a, 2016b) stating that:

The participation of women in the political arena in Zimbabwe continues to be at best, minimal, for a variety of reasons, including cultural and religious beliefs that dictate that structures of leadership at governance level should be confined to men. Women who enter that space are considered women of questionable character, i.e. single women and divorced women or women married to weak men who cannot keep them in check. In actual fact, the political arena—both at local council level and Parliamentary level seem fertile ground for the perpetuation of stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes. This discourages women from entering these decision making institutions and those women courageous and strong enough to do so, must be able to withstand the intense scrutiny and pressure of holding public office, particularly because they are held to higher standards than their male counterparts (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2016a, 2016b: 3–4).

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[7] Italics, added for emphasis.

The study also concurs with Wilson's (2004: 17) assertion that "although globally there are a range of forces impacting on the lives of people (especially women) and their ability to claim their 'freedoms', young women and girls in particular, experience these violations and inequalities in different ways from older women." It also finds resonance with Chirenje (2011: 69) avowing that:

> When one reflects on young people and their potential, it seems that many times, they are viewed as having limited capacities to participate and interrogate issues of conflict. Their 'involvement' ends at the most basic level such as narrating who was involved in a conflict and how they experienced the conflict. However, conflict resolution has to do with more than this and involves techniques, methodologies, negotiation and diplomacy, which the youth and young women in particular do not have given society's attitudes towards women's intellectual capacity and also young people's perceived lack of wisdom and experience. Therefore, this leads to the perceived incapacity for diplomacy and thus exclusion of young women in processes of peace building.

It seems befitting to conclude this discussion by restating the clarion call for equality raised by a consortium of African female activists in the form of a letter they penned to the world leaders whilst commemorating the International Women's Day on 8 March 2019:

> We are the women at the frontlines of the fight against gender inequality and global poverty. Every day we see the determination and dignity of girls and women facing down the toughest challenges. We see real advances and the power of people to achieve change. We won't surrender this fight, but we need you to play your part. We need genuine progress, not grand promises. We want implementation and accountability at every level – from this year's G7 summit to the Global Fund replenishment; from our African Union leaders to our community leaders. *We will be looking for your actions not your words; for funding to follow promises; and policy to turn into practice. It's both the right and the smart thing to do for everyone. To accelerate progress, men must demand change with us so that we rise united not divided. And women must have a seat at the decision-making table – because you can't change what you don't see. We're not looking for*

your sympathy, we're demanding your action. Because none of us is equal until all of us are equal.[8](*The Guardian*, 8 March, 2019: Online)

Clearly, the above clarion call speaks eloquently to the hopes and aspirations of young Zimbabwean women. Heeding such voices will ensure that young women will take up leadership roles in society more actively, confidently and effectively.

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Of Women's Leadership in African Indigenous Spirituality: A Focus on the Ndau of South Eastern Zimbabwe

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on women's leadership in African Indigenous Spiritualities (AISs). It argues that the issue of women's leadership in AISs has not been fully explored and/or critically examined. At face value, women

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are understood as holding little or no leadership roles in AISs. Scholarship is almost unanimous on this assertion. Many have sought to show how women are side-lined in leadership positions in AISs or to grapple with how women can be given some more active leadership roles in AISs (Chitakure, 2016, 2017; Coetzee, 2001; Nyanhongo, 2011; Lugira, 2009, Oduyoye, 1987). In this chapter, we depart from the traditional line of argument and advance one that maintains that women are actively involved in leadership in AISs, both visibly and invisibly. For purposes of clarity on this, we explore cases where women's leadership gains traction, especially where male leadership either falters or is inadequate. We acknowledge that in some cases, men and women come together to prop up women's leadership, this is an area that has not been given attention in previous literature on the subject. We make some occasional references to some African communities in sub-Saharan Africa, but our focus is on the Ndau people of south eastern Zimbabwe. The rationale for this approach lies in the understanding that AISs are not monolithic but they exhibit a cacophony of variants. We justify our choice of the Ndau people of south eastern Zimbabwe in a section below. We begin by engaging with the concept of 'women's leadership' so as to clarify the conceptual context of the chapter. We will then look at the women's leadership roles in the socio-economic, religio-cultural, and political spheres among the indigenous Ndau people. The chapter concludes by proffering some recommendations on how to mobilize indigenous women's leadership qualities in an endeavor to realize the goal of equitable representation of female and male leaders in institutions and organizations in the contemporary Zimbabwean society.

Theoretical Framework

The chapter is informed by a Hudson-Weems (2004) propounded Africana womanist perspective. It is a specific theory within the broader theory of Afro-centrism. Afro-centrism or Afro-centricity establishes a frame of reference wherein ideas and events are studied from the standpoint of Africans as key players, not victims (Asante, 1991: 172). The perspective contends that most, if not all of what Euro-feminists view and desire do not apply to Africana women. It posits that Africana women and Euro-feminists have different agendas owing to their divergent histories and culture and so, African women should not be swayed by the

wishes and aspirations of women of other races. In this regard, Euro-feminists deplore African women's household duties contending that they limit and confine women to less important chores. For them, the household sphere disempowers women and puts them at the mercy of men. Men are, therefore, the enemy of women. On the contrary, the Africana womanist perspective argues that women instead gain control, respect, and honor by undertaking their household responsibilities frowned at by Euro-feminists. For them, the African man and woman are never enemies, but complementary opposites. African women embody humility and modesty that make them appear passive, but could present themselves as alternative powerful public leaders when need arises, often with the support of both men and women. Africana womanism argues that mainline feminist theories do not adequately explain the image and position of especially African women, one which needs to be done in the context of African people's history and culture (Hudson-Weems, 1993, 2004).

Methodology

The chapter is both a theoretical and an empirical qualitative phenomenological study for we seek to access the meaning of women's lived experiences of the dynamics of leadership in the Ndau indigenous belief system. Data were collected through interviews with purposively selected informants and accessing available secondary sources on the Ndau people of Zimbabwe. We purposefully sampled our participants on the basis of our knowledge of the population to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research (Rakotsoane, 2012: 55). In this regard, we determined our sample sizes on the basis of theoretical saturation, that is, the point when new data no longer brought additional insights to the research question (Mack et al., 2005). We seek to reflect critically on how African Indigenous Spirituality informs women's leadership in the socio-economic, religio-cultural, and the political lives of indigenous African societies. We use the Ndau people of south eastern Zimbabwe for the reason that they are a people who have endured various hegemonies while maintaining their own local traditions. As MacGonagle (2007: 107) notes, "despite facing exclusion and incorporation during periods of intense domination, the Ndau have demonstrated an ability to alter their identities, both temporarily and permanently, in creative ways." We contend that in this whole process, women have played leading roles.

We are aware that the Ndau are independent of the Shona, but until 2013 they have been regarded as part of the Shona to the extent that they share a 70% language similarity with the four Shona broad categories of Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika, and Korekore (Sithole, 2017). When the term 'Shona' is used in this chapter, it will, therefore, be referring to all those who speak the Shona dialects in Zimbabwe including the Ndau by then.

Religion and Spirituality

In this chapter we use African Indigenous Spirituality (AIS) as opposed to African Indigenous Religions (AIRs). We concur with Nyathi (2015) who observes that the term African Indigenous Religion does not capture the spiritual aspect inherent in African Indigenous Spirituality. Our conviction is that the latter allows us more room to explore and articulate women's leadership dynamics in the African indigenous belief system than the former. 'Religion' is a western term that usually implies an organized and structured set of beliefs and practices to be distinguished from a non-religious sphere of life (Nyathi, 2015; Young, 2013: 28). The term is, "meant to imply an institutional framework within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued usually among a community of like-minded believers" (Johnston, 1994: 4). Thus, the term 'religion' creates an impression that the phenomenon is something apart from humans. It is problematic to employ the term when referring to indigenous people in general and African indigenous people in particular. This is so because indigenous people do not make a clear cut distinction between the religious and the non-religious realms. We agree with Johnston (1994: 4), who sees spirituality, on the other hand, as transcending the normal parameters of organized religion, suggesting a less bounded and at times, more far reaching scope of human evolvement. This resonates with de Gruchy & Chirongoma's (2008: 295) observation that African spirituality is an "all pervasive reality which serves to interpret society and give wholeness to the individual's life and community." Pervasiveness, as the first and foremost tenet of African spirituality, is what we deem necessary for the interpretation and conceptualization of women's leadership in the African indigenous belief system.

Concept of Women's Leadership

The concept 'women's leadership' needs to be explained because it is one that can be used in different contexts to mean different things. We concur with Poltera (2019) who posits that, "concepts such as 'women leadership' can be taken for granted … and applied in ways that are intuitively plausible at first glance, but on closer inspection require more conceptual analysis and care." Women's leadership in African contexts is an umbrella concept which denotes individual and collective leadership typically enacted and experienced by African women in African countries. Poltera (2019) argues that the concept of women's leadership, particularly in the African context is complex and open to contestation. Across African contexts, there are multifarious racial, socio-cultural, ethnic, political, and historical norms which shape power relations and inform the ways in which women can and do lead in formal and informal ways (Amadiume, 1987, 1988). It is, therefore, imperative to understand that not all women leaders are women in positions of political power or traditional leadership roles (Gasa, 2007 cited by Poltera, 2019). In a majority of cases, women influence the direction that their local community life takes even without direct political or traditional leadership powers. One of the criticisms of attempts to explore women's leadership in African context is a tendency to overlook the role that men play in promoting women's leadership, directly or indirectly. There is a need to localize leadership theories bearing in mind that the African context is not monolithic, but is characterized by complexity and diversity that impact on women's leadership in various ways. It is important to bear in mind that African cultures and contexts are distinct from western cultures and contexts that often tend to inform mainstream leadership theories. What this means is that insights from mainstream leadership theories cannot be generalized to African contexts.

The Ndau of South Eastern Zimbabwe

The Ndau live in the Eastern parts of Zimbabwe, specifically in the Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts of Manicaland Province, sprawling into the central parts of Mozambique (Dube, 2017). The Chipinge area comprises seven Ndau chiefdoms, namely Garahwa, Gwenzi, Mahenye, Mapungwana, Mupungu, Musikavanhu, and Mutema while the Chimanimani area is home to five Ndau chiefdoms that include Chikukwa,

Mutambara, Muusha, Ndima, and Ngorima (Sithole, 2017). This chapter focuses on four chiefdoms, two in Chipinge, under chiefs Mapungwana and Musikavanhu, and two in Chimanimani, under chiefs Muusha and Ngorima. These areas were chosen on the basis of the authors' familiarity with the places which enabled them to get informant consent without hassles.

The name 'Ndau' means not just a place, but a sacred geographical territory entwined with the Ndau people's sacred history. In Ndau indigenous spirituality, the land symbolizes belonging, connectedness, and continuity. It is for this reason that for the Ndau, land is priceless; it offers them an identity, a livelihood, and it is sacred because it forms a close and enduring bond between the living and the dead. To this end, the Ndau believe that they have a sacred duty to protect and work responsibly on the land and bequeath it to future generations in good shape. Needless to say, the land among the Ndau is the domain of the women where they lead as farmers and caretakers of the crucial natural resource. Ndau women also immensely contribute to the survival of Ndau indigenous spirituality through their link to the land. In acknowledging the pivotal role played by Ndau women, we make reference to their leadership during the two crucial phases in the history of the Ndau. The first phase is the Gaza-Nguni overrule that stretched from the 1830s to 1889, beginning with Soshangane and ending with his grandson, Ngungunyana. This harsh reality was to continue into the period of formal colonization under the British that spanned from 1890 to 1980.

The second phase is that of the Ndau encounter with the American Board Mission (ABM) and the South Africa General Mission (SAGM) in Chipinge and Chimanimani respectively stretching from the early 1890s (Dube, 2017). The two phases threatened to overrun Ndau spirituality through a protracted onslaught on its culture. Ndau women played a more crucial role than their male counterparts in negotiation, reproduction, and survival of the Ndau culture. In the first phase, they influenced the language and culture of the Gaza-Nguni through transmitting the same to their children in marriages with the Gaza-Nguni elite at a time men learned the language and culture of their rulers (MacGonagle, 2007: 96). As a result, a single Gaza-Nguni culture never emerged among the Ndau. In fact, there were more cross-cultural exchanges throughout this period courtesy of huge contributions by Ndau women. The second phase saw the Ndau contending once again with the SAGM and ABM missionary activities that operated within the broader context

of colonialism, bent on ushering in a total collapse of the indigenous religio-cultural and socio-economic life of the Ndau in Chimanimani and Chipinge and present them as sufferers of an identity crisis. Taringana and Nyambara (2018: 14) aver that, "the penetration of Christianity into the Ndau community engendered various forms of social stratification." There were bitter confrontations between a class of the Ndau clergy and Ndau Christian converts, commonly known as *makorwa* (converts) on one hand and the traditionalists on the other. The former advocated the advance of western religion and culture while the latter defended the indigenous religion and way of life. The traditionalist did not have access to the opportunities presented by the missionaries within the context of colonialism. The majority of traditionalist Ndau men in Chimanimani and Chipinge resorted to migrant labor as they went to work in the mines and on farms in South Africa. Women remained behind taking care of families and once again became the vanguards of the indigenous spirituality. Tevera and Zinyama (2002) state that, "almost 25% of adult Zimbabweans' parents or grandparents had worked in South Africa at some point in their lives." A male person was regarded as a man ready to marry after having emigrated to South Africa to acquire some personal wealth which would make it possible for him to pay *lobola/roora* (bride price) and to support his family. Migration to South Africa became a rite of passage for most boys and young men then. Bourdillon (1987: 53) asserts that:

> The influence of women in the rural areas has probably increased through the frequent absence of their husbands, who periodically leave home to seek wage employment, but it is probable that women always had more say in Shona society than was formally admitted. A man who publicly asserts the prerogative of men to make decisions and to control the economy, may in private regularly consult his wife on matters of importance and frequently defer to her judgement.

Although many Ndau have converted to Christianity, they have not relinquished their connection with Ndau indigenous spirituality to the extent that there are fluid boundaries between the two worldviews operating in the Ndau communities. Thus, the mission created a dual society which embodies both the western/Christian and indigenous ways of life (Taringana & Nyambara, 2018). One of the landmarks in the history of the Ndau in Zimbabwe is the recognition of the Ndau language, and by extension culture in the new constitution of Zimbabwe adopted in 2013.

The Ndau had wanted this separation for a long time. For example, they had for long lamented the imposition of a language on them, especially through the school system where Ndau children were expected to learn some Shona dialects at the expense of their own Ndau dialect then. When the Ndau make distinctions between themselves and others, they often turn to language to define the wider Ndau identity (MacGonagle, 2007: 17). This is so because language is a carrier of culture. For the Ndau, therefore, it was dehumanizing to have a language imposed on them. We attribute this pivotal historical milestone to the gallant Ndau women who have fought with tenacity as they baby-sat the Ndau culture through painful historical phases of conquest and overrule.

NDAU WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ON THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC SPHERE

Women in the Ndau society play a crucial role in ensuring a working society. They are the hub of the education of the children as they transmit the social, cultural, and moral values of the society to the children. They owe this quality to the foremothers of the Ndau society. The reconstruction of the Ndau cultural identity can never be complete without some consideration of the (leadership) role of women in the Ndau cultural encounter with the Gaza-Nguni overrule that lasted about seventy years from the 1820s to 1889 (Sithole, 2017). Ndau women played a major role in perpetuating the Ndau culture. Their presence as wives and mothers among the Nguni elite served as a transmission route of various aspects of Ndau cultural identity to children of the next generation. Thus, their contributions were most notable when marriage alliances or arrangements provided women with the opportunity to produce and reproduce the regional political order. MacGonagle (2007) posits that this social reality reveals one method the Ndau relied on to maintain continuity of cultural traits amid political overrule. Ndau women raised their children within a certain cultural and linguistic framework that shaped identity formation. This is a very important role in traditional leadership. Taiwo (2010: 229) corroborates that, "in traditional African society, the survival of the family depended very much on the woman." She plays a key role in, "the education and the teaching of children social, ethical and moral values which are part of the cultural standards for evaluating proper societal behaviour."

Ndau women also tend to assert their leadership in Ndau society through their expertise in the practice of indigenous health, especially indigenous maternal healthcare where women are the majority. Through their link with Mother Nature, women have a strong connection with their natural environment which acquaints them with a mastery of indigenous medicinal herbs and other medicinal paraphernalia that render an indispensable service to the community. Ndau indigenous women are essentially the key holders of traditional food and medicinal practice. The women health practitioners among the Ndau are highly respected and their advice is taken dearly. MacGonagle (2007: 97, 99) espouses that, "in southeast Africa today, Ndau healers continue to enjoy a reputation as the most powerful practitioners in the region." She goes on to say that women tend, "to assert their power overtly in Ndau society as influential healers and spirit mediums." They are leaders in the indigenous health delivery system who assume an integral role in the healthcare provision. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2004) recognized the services that indigenous maternal health providers render for enhancing maternal and infant health at community level.

Economically, women are the engine of the Ndau society. Since time immemorial, the Ndau are a people sustained by an agricultural economy. Women lead; they are in the forefront as farmers in Ndau rural communities. They take pride in productive hard work in order to lead decent livelihoods. Their indigenous spirituality inspires a work ethic that promotes sustainable use of natural resources for sustainable livelihoods. It also regulates their interaction with the natural resources, especially the wetlands. The EMA (2015) defines wetlands as, "areas of land that are flooded with water, either seasonal or permanently." These wetlands are grouped into three types, namely inland wetlands, coastal wetlands and man-made wetlands. Inland wetlands include marshes, ponds, lakes, fans, rivers, floodplains, and swamps. Coastal wetlands comprise mangrove, salt-water marshes, estuaries, lagoons, and coral reefs. Man-made wetlands include fishponds, salt pans, and rice paddies." In this chapter, we focus on the inland wetlands because Zimbabwe is a landlocked country.

Wetlands are called *matoro* in Ndau. The wetlands are sacred spaces since they provide habitats to aquatic life that is associated with the spirits. For example, some pools in wetlands are the abode of *njuzu* (mermaid or water spirit) and some big snakes like the python. They are the guardians of the wetlands on behalf of the spirit world. Wetlands are the domains of women. Women prepare and preside over rituals that are intended to

preserve these wetlands. Ndau women approach such places with caution and strict observance of the taboos that allow proper utilization and management of these wetlands. There is a neat synergy with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG) number 6 that calls for the need to protect wetlands and rivers. It can be noted that the Ndau women had for long taken a lead in this trajectory and their indigenous knowledge can be mobilized for a sound contribution to the achievement of SDG 6.

A proper use of wetlands can avert hunger and starvation in times of droughts or just serve as a source of supplementary foods for rural households. For example, the wetlands around Rambachena, Utido, and Murimbira pools in Chief Mapungwana, Bonyongwe village along Musirizwi River, are a source of livelihoods for the local Ndau community. The same can be said about those in the Dzingire village in Chimanimani, commonly known as the Dherudhe area, as well as those in the Machongwe area, both under Chief Muusha, and those around the Hlabiso and Muchadziya areas, under Chief Ngorima. The surplus from their harvest is ferried to urban markets around the country. The Ndau women hold that if proper conduct is observed through respecting taboos and prohibitions, the wetlands provide rich supplementary foods (Machowiro, 2019). The Ndau women cultivate yam, sweet potatoes, banana, sugarcane (grass crop), and a variety of vegetable crops that help to improve household nutrition. These types of crops also help to improve soil and water quality and prevention of soil erosion. Planting of most crops is not done by anyone anyhow, but women know members among themselves *vane nyara yendimo* (the hand of bumper harvest) (Mhlanga, 2020). These are people believed to be endowed with the gift of the spiritual world that assures good yields. As such, they are the ones who are in charge of planting most of the crop varieties mentioned above as food crops in general in line with the indigenous knowledge of the Ndau.

Agricultural activities on the wetlands in Chipinge and Chimanimani have also impacted on the livelihoods of Zimbabweans around the country as evidenced by the national outcry that followed Cyclone Idai's devastation of the two areas in question in 2019. Their wetlands are also a source of fish and other small aquatic animals that can improve nutrition especially in dry seasons only if people take what they need to survive and spare the rest for future needs. The UN SDG number 2 emphasizes the same as it calls for the mobilization of efforts that can end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable

agriculture. The Ndau partnership ethic is also applied to wild fruits and other edibles in the forest where women are the main forest food gatherers. In all these activities, men make a very awkward presence in the least occasions that they feature. But this does not mean that men do not participate in the agricultural activities on the wetlands. They provide complementary services when they are called to do so by their female counterparts. For example, the gathering, collection of organic manure, and erection of fences around the fields are men's allotted tasks. They also help with harvesting.

Ndau women in their local communities have also initiated self-help communal projects in their backyards. A good example is the road-runner chicken and goat projects organized and run by women themselves. They employ Ndau indigenous knowledge systems that increase poultry and goat production. For example, members unanimously select members of the group *vane nyara yehuku nembudzi* ('those with a hand for chickens and goats') or *gwasha rehuku nembudzi* (a spiritually endowed gift that enhances chicken and goat production) to lead the respective projects for obvious reasons of maximizing production. They would sell mature batches of their chickens and/or goats and share the proceeds for household use or when need arises (Mhlanga, 2020). Their self-organization capacity informed by an indigenous spirituality contributes to an improved social, economic, and political life of the community. Similar to what Masoga & Shokane found in the Ga-Sekororo community in Limpopo in South Africa (Poltera, 2019: 5), the Ndau women's "self-organisation contributes to building cultures of participatory decision-making in contexts where formal structures of power and influence have done little to improve lives."

The ensuing section illustrates that the leadership of Ndau women has a socio-economic basis derived from the importance accorded to women as pillars of households. They determine the social status of the community since they are largely the ones who produce the material wealth as mothers and farmers. The Ndau women provide the balance that ensures the resilience of the community even in the worst of economic hardship. As Hudson-Weems (2004: 79) notes, "societal stability depends largely on family stability and the stability of families is determined by the conditions in the home; the woman's place." What this means is that Ndau women initiatives and creativity on the socio-economic front sustain Ndau communities in an incredible way.

Ndau Women's Leadership
on the Religious and Political Spheres

Schoffeleers makes an analysis that forms the rationale for treating the religious aspect as an integral component of the political. Schoffeleers (1978: 6) argues that, "…territorial cults are by nature political since they are the religious representation of what are basically and primarily territorial and political groups, and because the boundaries between religion and politics are notoriously difficult to demarcate…" Among the Ndau, women play a central role in the territorial shrines of the chiefdoms. Generally, women held and still hold fort in religious and political matters of the Ndau society. A good example is the founding mother of the Musikavanhu chiefdom. Manley (1995: 113) posits that the rain charm which gave rise to the Musikavanhu rain cult was stolen by their founding mother, Chapo from her lover, a Rozvi chief of the Mbire group. The Musikavanhu chiefdom prides in its rainmaking powers which it owes to a woman. There is also a myth that points out that the Mazungunye Chiefdom in Bikita became famous for rainmaking powers because of an alliance by marriage with the powerful eastern rain cult of Musikavanhu in Dondo, on the Mozambican border (Manley, 1995: 111). Pfupajena had married a Ndau woman with rainmaking powers. One elder of the Mazungunye court argued that, "Pfupajena had no rain-making powers, it was his wife who had these powers" (Manley, 1995: 111). There are renowned women mediums of influential territorial spirits today that are petitioned for rains among Ndau chiefdoms.

MacGonagle (2007) concurs when she points out that although men usually held positions of political power among the Ndau, female chiefs were appointed at times. She has it that:

> Women in Ndau society tended to assert their power overtly as influential healers and spirit mediums. Empiumbecasane, the mother of Ngungunyana, the last leader of the Gaza-Nguni state, was Ndau. She exerted control over her son's decisions and over the affairs of a village. She was also the head priestess at the shrine where Ngungunyana worshipped the grave of his grandfather, Soshangane. Some of the wives of the ruler lived in distant parts of the region and helped the Gaza-Nguni king to maintain relations over a wide area.

Bourdillon (1987) corroborates that in African societies, women are known to have held very active roles in divining, healing, leading rain petitioning rituals, and seldom occupying offices such as kraal heads, village heads, and sub-chiefs, among others. He cites daughters of Manyika paramount chief who were sometimes appointed as head-women over subject territories. More commonly women could and still can hold significant sway in the government of a chiefdom by becoming a medium to a senior spirit. It has always been possible, although unusual, for a woman to hold a position of authority in Shona communities.

From the above excerpts, we draw some insight that the decisions that often run African societies are reached through a consultative process where emphasis is on participation and contribution, not whether one is a man or a woman. In other words, women in African Indigenous Religions were, and are not silent partners in the affairs of their communities. Generally, women in African societies rule by pulling strings behind the curtains, but when called upon or when circumstances dictated they would rise to the occasion and perform public leadership roles. Bourdillon (1987: 52) avers that:

> Traditions concerning the spirits are considered to be in the male domain, and the men of a community normally conduct ceremonies in honour of the spirits. Yet women do interfere when they are not satisfied with the way the men are performing their duties, and occasionally a senior woman may preside over a ceremony when the men appropriately related to the spirit are absent or reluctant to perform the necessary rituals.

Baum (2015) writing from the context of the nineteenth-century colonial Senegambia, also observed that male leadership's failure to contain or repel militarily or ritually the Portuguese and French foreign presence among the southern Diola communities from the mid-nineteenth century prompted the rise of women's religious leadership. Women assumed religious leadership and spoke up in public fora where they wielded authority over entire communities of women and men as they planned strategies of opposition. The women made their claims to direct revelation from Emitai (Supreme Being) and transformed what had been a tradition of male prophetic leaders before the colonial conquest into a predominantly female prophetic tradition throughout the twentieth century. Through the authority of their experience, the women moved beyond protest to become leaders of their communities, for men and women alike. What

we can draw from MacGonagle (2007), Bourdillon (1987), and Baum's (2015) observations is that women in the African indigenous societies provide the checks and balance on men's performance of public leadership roles. This implies that women are custodians of a model of leadership which must be executed appropriately and they closely monitor proceedings with keen interest.

Agricultural rituals provide the platform for the dramatization of the religio-political power dynamics. In the Ndau society, women conduct most agricultural rituals because they are oriented with fertility, the territory of the female gender among the Ndau and in many other African communities. For instance, the rain making, crop pest eradication, and first fruits rituals are the province of women. The threat of termites in a crop field, for example, is eliminated through a ritual performed by an elderly woman of the *Beta* (termite) totem. She brings with her to the affected spot in the field a symbolic bundle of firewood that she drops at the spot. She then leaves for home in silence without looking back nor greeting anyone along the way until she enters the kitchen (hut). The next morning the threat would have varnished (Nguwa, 2020).

Baum (2015: 63) tells of a similar ritual among the Diola of the nineteenth-century Senegambia where women and girls were responsible for conjuring away grasshoppers from rice paddies through invoking the all-powerful Emitai. The ritual concluded with libations of palm wine at the spirit shrine. Where women had no power to initiate the ritual activity, they would demand that rituals be performed at all the spirit shrines of the community. Ndau women perform the first fruits ritual for any crops before anyone consumes any of the new harvest. Women would place the boiled assortment of the ripen crops under a tree in the field and ritually present it to the spiritual world to herald the onset of the new season of harvest. The ritual is believed to be a show of respect to the spirit world and an acknowledgment and recognition of the protective role of the spirit world over the fields. Failure to perform this ritual results in the withdrawal of this protection, leaving the fields exposed to all forms of threats that include locust plagues (Salani, 2020). Munyai (2007), cited by Msila and Netshitangani (2016: 85), had the same findings among the Vhavenda of southern Zimbabwe. He explains that, "the first grains, the marula and other fruits of the New Year among the Vhavenda culture cannot be eaten before the *makhadzi* informs them." The *makhadzi* is the father's senior sister, who plays various pivotal roles in the community. Baum (2015: 64) echoes the same where he posits that among the

Diola communities, "women also performed a first fruits ritual, involving small amounts of rice offered at the Ehugna shrine before anyone ate newly harvested rice."

What this means is that women lead in agricultural rituals that are largely religious in form but having a huge bearing on the political order of the society. In the first historical phase referred to earlier on, some of the wives of Ngungunyana lived in distant parts of the region and helped the Gaza-Nguni king to maintain relations over a wide area. MacGonagle (2007: 101) points out that these "women most likely supervised agricultural production in the royal gardens of outlying areas. Thus, women served symbolically and practically as stewards of the state." This is what happens in rural Ndau communities today where men have either chosen to take a supportive role or are away due to employment-induced absence and many other factors. Thus, Msila and Netshitangani (2016) conclude that the nurturing role of women in Africa can bring forth a number of lessons for both women and men in leadership in various organizations today. Important women's leadership qualities that derive from the mothering role include caring, loving, protecting, providing, and serving. Women in African Indigenous Spirituality demonstrate traditional values of womanhood that can be mobilized to model leadership in today's institutions and/or organizations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we do not deny the argument that stresses that women are underrepresented in leadership positions in AISs. We, however, focus on a different line of thought which avows that the seeming underrepresentation in leadership is more apparent than real. If anything, we argue that women are actively involved in leadership in AISs and that they are in innumerable ways 'the brains' behind most of the decisions that are made by their male counterparts in the different leadership roles that these men play in AISs. We have also demonstrated that Ndau women have had various roles underpinned by their Ndau indigenous spirituality that show them enhancing the livelihoods of their communities. The ability of Ndau women to multitask, coupled with their strong and creative thinking, make them good leaders who could provide a model for institutional and organizational leadership today. That women can rise to public leadership

roles when the occasion demands show that women's leadership is people-oriented and abhors any exercise of leadership that prioritizes pursuance of personal ego.

In this regard, Ndau women have demonstrated tenacity and endurance as they fought, both overtly and covertly, for the maintenance of their own local traditions. They have demonstrated immense capacity in influencing the livelihoods of people through driving the socio-economic and religio-cultural activities of the Ndau society. They have not executed their roles alone but have often done that with the complementary support of their men who usually play a ceremonial leadership role. Based on the findings presented in this chapter, it is our conviction that it will be futile to envisage the realization of Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 among the Ndau if the pivotal role of Ndau women in economic development, indigenous healthcare, agricultural production, and community leadership is not accorded the vital role it deserves. In the spirit of the UN SDGs' mantra of "leaving no one behind" the rural-based Ndau women's oasis of knowledge and innovation has a high potential of motivating the realization of a number of the SDGs 2030 as has been illuminated above. We find Bourdillon's (1987: 56) observation quite befitting as a concluding remark to this chapter wherein he states that, "In modern Zimbabwe…the subtle traditional influence of women is changing into an open force for progress and change."

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Shona Women's Leadership in Traditional Healing

Bernard Pindukai Humbe

The Shona People and Their Socio-Religious Landscape

This study was carried out in the context of traditional religion in Zimbabwe. In Shona traditional religious cosmology, *Mwari* (God) and *vadzimu* (ancestors) are the *causal nexus* (centrality) of Shona humanity and well-being in Zimbabwe (Maposa & Humbe, 2012). This religion is expressed through people's beliefs, practices, ceremonies, rituals, festivals, symbols, objects, sacred places, morals, religious leaders and the revered practitioners (Mbiti, 1999: 4). So the religion is not simply thought about, but it is practiced. In the same vein, healing becomes a religious

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aspect in the Shona worldview. Traditional religion in Zimbabwe among the Shona people, largely, is ruralistic. The term rural here does not denote a sense of backwardness. Instead, it points to notions of identity whereby the Shona people have their cultural roots preserved in their indigenous life setting. This does not mean that the concept of rural is immune to modernization, especially at this time when a significant number of the Shona people now reside in urban or peri-urban areas. However, many of the Shona urban people in Zimbabwe still nurture their rural links and will, in times of crises (such as illness) turn to their rural village or extended family for healing, support and care (Maposa & Humbe, 2012).

Traditional religion in Zimbabwe is characterized by an androcentric culture. Besides patriarchy, there is also patrilineality and endogamy as key attributes of the Shona social organization. Some of the attributes and characteristics of femaleness in traditional healing are encased in women's psycho-social support. In addition, their household chores comprise: cooking and serving food for their husbands and children, providing bathing water for their husbands, laundry, fetching water, fetching fire wood, child-rearing, pottery and sweeping the yard in the morning.

Conceptual Background

The nomenclature 'traditional healing' has been met with controversy. To overcome purely abstract models of reflection of this concept, this chapter honors the insight that all knowledge is embodied in religion and context (Haardt, 2010: 163). There is a belief that African societies are dominated by traditions, which is directly opposed to western societies which are dominated by rational modernity. In the African setup, tradition and religion are intertwined, so traditional religion is a lifestyle. This lifestyle is enhanced by traditional healing. The idea of 'traditional' does not equal something inferior, irrelevant, backward, unfitting, archaic, antiquated, ancient, static, old fashioned and outdated. It means indigenous, that which is homemade or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practiced by Africans today. This is a heritage from the past, but treated not as a thing of the past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity (Awolalu, 1976). Transmission of these traditions is done orally or/and by visible demonstration. In Africa, Zimbabwe included, modifications of traditions

can happen deliberately or spontaneously as determined by the contextual situation.

Concurring with Machinga's (2011: 3) observation, generally, traditional healers come in four different types: the diviner, whose duty it is to make a diagnosis; the herbalist, who prescribes and treats ailments; the traditional midwife and the exorcist, who plays a large part in freeing people from troublesome and evil spirits. The notion of healing among the Shona is too broad and is inclusive in its use. Among the Shona, normalcy in a person's health exists when there is balance between the physical and spiritual forms of life. This is buttressed by Wood (2013) who argues that in various African thought patterns, balance is considered the norm, imbalance is understood as 'disease' when it takes the physical form and is indicative of rapture between the materials and energies that constitute their bodies and their world. The term 'healing' then comes in to signify effecting of balance or a sense of well-being which may have been temporarily diminished during the course of a person's life (Moto-Sanchez, 2016: 308). In Shona, this is known as *kurapa*. In *kurapa* one can denote that there are cultural practices dealing with people's body work, in a bid to do away with suffering or creating harmony within an individual or community. However, sometimes the Shona do not have to wait for this temporary diminishment in the case of invalids for them to effect healing. Rather, healing is performed to prevent the imbalances or just to enhance a sense of well-being and wholeness basing on the socio-cultural life experiences of the people to receive healing. The Shona normally call this practice *kurapira*. To this end, Fissell (2008: 8) proposes that healing is embedded within a larger framework of what is known as 'body work'. This concept becomes fitting in the context of this study because the one who receives healing is described as *akashandwa*, or *akashandirwa*, or *akagadzirwa* (his/her body was worked on). But this study is exploring traditional healing done by Shona women, so it is prudent to situate women's healing (and women as patients) in two interconnecting frames: work and household/family (perhaps better theorized as 'domestic healing'). Sometimes the healing is determined by circumstances. So the domestic healing occupation is varied by the day, week and especially season-not to mention stages of the life cycle (Fissell 2008: 16).

Among the Shona, healing in its mottled procedures is rounded, it embroils both the physical and spiritual components of a person's life. It explains why traditional healing in rural areas is more appealing compared

to conventional medicine because it does not sidestep their beliefs and values enshrined in the interaction of the following fundamentals: living and nonliving, natural and supernatural and the material and immaterial. Just as some activities are normally considered to be women's occupations, it may be noted that some types of knowledge also exist specifically among women. I posit that it is women's religiosity that has largely contributed to creating and promoting healing among the Shona people.

In principle, all Shona women are naturally healers. They are closely linked to nature. In today's world, the understanding that *musha mukadzi/mudzimai* (a home is anchored on the wife) among the Shona people is still strong in the context of traditional healing. *Mudzimai* derives from two Shona words *mudzi* (root) and *mai* (mother), literally meaning the root mother, or expert in roots. Among the Shona, roots are generally taken to represent traditional herbs. The life of a tree is sustained by its roots which tap underground water. Since this water is in the underworld, it is the duty of ancestral spirits to supply the roots with medicinal water which is distributed to various parts of the tree for people to use. Trees used as medicines are regarded as sacred trees. But the most important tree part is the root which directly taps the medicine from its source in the underworld. It is this root which forms part of a woman's name in Shona (*mudzimai*).

Shona Women Traditional Healers: A Gendered Cultural Conundrum

Studying the theme of Shona women and traditional healing is embroiled with numerous challenges which include the following: firstly, like any other health delivery system, the Shona traditional healing system is susceptible to abuse and to unscrupulous practitioners. In many instances, traditional healing practices are legally prohibited, worse still if it is domestic healing. The Zimbabwean National Association of Traditional Healers (ZINATHA) has therefore been established to act as a watchdog, and every traditional healer is obliged to register with the association (Machinga, 2011: 3). Second, there is paucity of written literature on domestic healing and this poses a challenge to those who want to study women and traditional healing in Zimbabwe. As a result, there is too much reliance on oral literature when dealing with traditional healing practices. Due to the absence of written records, many of the cryptic references to events, people and places in oral literature are difficult to

unravel. In certain themes like sexuality, information is found vestigial of the old system, for the oral tradition offers almost no help (Pongweni, 1996: 1). Third is the negative portrayal of traditional healing by medical practitioners. Many Zimbabweans, especially those in the media fraternity, seem to concentrate more on women and healing when the healing has not produced desired results. Consequently, they tend to sidestep all the other healing encounters which went smoothly but remain largely unremarked in the Zimbabwean traditional healing historical record. Fourth, some of the methods used by women in traditional healing are highly spiritual which cannot be scientifically comprehended. Fifth is a challenge associated with the limitedness of Shona language especially when it is sexual healing. Sixth, sometimes society perceives women superstitiously as dangerous figures in the society. This stems from the general understanding that women are associated more with witchcraft when compared to men. Also, the other aspect of their lives is linked with danger due to their monthly menstrual cycle. This mainly emerges from the fact that menstrual blood is perceived in an ambivalent manner in most traditional Shona communities. On the one hand, the process of menstruation is linked with continuity of the lineage since the process of menstruation is perceived as an indication of the woman's fertility. On the other hand, for a man to have contact with menstrual blood (particularly through engaging in sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman) is regarded as a bad omen which can cause an incurable *runyoka* (sexually transmitted infection) or impotence (Shoko, 2007). Despite the above prejudicial views on women, research has unearthed significant women's leadership roles, confirming that they are the pillars of every traditional society.

The Home: A Shona Traditional Religious Communal Prerequisite

In contemporary Zimbabwe, the Shona have a sense of owning space, especially the idea of possessing a *musha* and land for farming. The *musha* which is human-made is a source of traditional religious 'space'. While it is self-evident that traditional religion resides in various spiritual beliefs and practices, it is important to ask this question: in what ways, is traditional healing found in the very fabric of the Shona people's organizational locality (*musha*)? How does a *musha* serve both as space and place for Shona women when performing traditional healing in rural communities? The architecture expresses the Shona people's way of life,

paying particular attention to the practical and spiritual needs, and tastes. This is more particularly associated with the woman-owned traditional kitchen hut among the Shona, which is a crucial space for healing. In her guardianship, a woman has a dual role in her marital family. She is in charge of a traditional kitchen hut which provides social, psychological, medical and religious services to her marital family. Inside the kitchen hut there is a sacred place called *chikuva* (raised earthen platform) which happens to be the abode of family ancestral spirits. Hence, the woman serves as a guardian of her marital family's guardians.

In Zimbabwe, just like in other places in Africa, the traditional kitchen hut is archetypally a round construction with a cone-shaped roof. The comprehension and explication of the Shona traditional kitchen hut architecture possibly involves the simultaneous understanding of two things: the nature of the architectural artifacts themselves and the many forces that lie behind their production. The first is concerned with morphology of the traditional kitchen utensils, and secondly, how its elements determine factors of identity in traditional healing. Roundness is a pragmatic expression of the philosophy of communalism and the complementary nature of the Shona society in healing. Healing is a communal responsibility. Community is the predominant root-metaphor in African views on sickness and well-being (Saayman, 1994). The African is groomed by the community, so his/her health and well-being are conceived to be inside the community.

Then the cone-shaped roof which is perhaps one of the most important identifying characteristics of Shona traditional hut architecture. The roof has a round base and a focal point of a peak top, perhaps persuading an interpreter to draw some symbolisms. This is because most of the Shona gatherings, for example, when they visit a sick person, take place in rounds around a focal point. So the approach toward the second factor is centered on symbolisms. The total significance of a symbol may be obtained only from a consideration of how it is interpreted in every one of the ritual contexts in which it appears, for instance, with regard to its role in the total ritual system. To obtain this knowledge, one has to examine the ritual in close detail and from several standpoints (Turner, 1981: 2). An in-depth study of utensils, tools, the spaces and activities of the house was done to understand women and traditional healing (Saif-Ul-Haq, 1994: 61). They serve as traditional healing paraphernalia. In some situations, the idea of representation was quite potent in the study.

Some Dynamics of Traditional Healing Management

Traditional healing among the Shona covers a broad spectrum of issues regarding the people's health and well-being. The practices to be exposed are not necessarily new but have been observed since the immemorial past. They show that in traditional healing, the Shona women are very pragmatic and proactive. Because culture is dynamic, it is not surprising to note some fusion of indigenous customs and traditions with modernity.

The Centrality of the Hut and the Attendant Utensils/Objects

A focus on what is found inside the kitchen hut is quite imperative in the construction of the Shona woman and the traditional healing narrative. One thing which makes the traditional kitchen hut unique is its fire place. As one enters the kitchen, it is easy to notice the open heathen fire place (*choto*) located at the center of the hut. The fire place is characterized by the presence of three stones or steel tripod on which to rest earthenware or cooking utensils. It is this fireplace which makes the kitchen hut a 'fundamental sacred traditional healing space'; it leads an African into the profoundest treasures of Shona culture and the most secret rites (Kriel, 1989: 14). Important family and personal healing rituals are successfully conducted at the fire place by women. An angry mother can use *choto* to effect punishment on her child whenever she feels that the child has either become wayward or is neglecting to take care of her materially and emotionally. She will simply kneel down near the *choto*, take out her breast pointing to the *choto* and then proceeds to make a cursory utterance. The vengeance can only be pacified after payment of restitution. This shows a sacred connection between a woman and *choto*. Depending on the situation, women can perform certain rites which result in illness as an expression of their power over their children.

Preparing food and serving it to the sick is largely a feminine task and is gendered as such. In Shona societies, manufactured utility utensils like clay pots occasionally acquire ritual significance, and the clay pot is a good example. Any type of conceivable medicine is prepared in it. They are also used to prepare food and drink which is essential for the welfare of patients. But the cooking, brewing and burning is done by women. Though there are so many types of clay pots, the following are some of

the most common ones in contemporary times. There is a *pfuko* used for serving and drinking traditional beer, or the sweet unfermented sweet beer known as *mahewu*. *Mahewu* is ideal for those suffering from a sore throat having difficulties in swallowing solid foods. *Gate* is a large pot used in the fermentation process of brewing traditional beer (Ellert, 2002: 52). Beer has so many functions which point to healing especially illness which is spirit related. Among the Shona, traditional beer is regarded as an emollient in healing rituals, particularly when dealing with sickness caused by the spirits. The use of traditional beer is believed to have the capacity to attract the attention of the ancestors to whom the ritual is offered. For relish, the Shona women use a *hadyana* to cook *mufushwa une dovi* (dried vegetables mixed with peanut butter), *mutsine* (black jack) and *derere* (okra) all which have medicinal attributes in them. There is another clay pot called *chikari* at most homesteads, its name is derived from its small size, it is conveniently used for cooking thin porridge (*usvusvu*) for bed ridden patients and for boiling herbs. Lastly is *mbia*, which is shaped more like a dish and has no neck at all. It is mostly used to store burnt medicine which is used for incisions. It also stores ritualized water used to sprinkle on patients or on objects to ward off evil spirits. All these clay pots come in handy directly or indirectly in women's traditional healing rituals.

Mostly, cooking in traditional healing is done using a *mugoti* (cooking stick). Just like *mutsvairo,* (broom), *mugoti* is a woman's sacred object which must not be shared in the community. Tendai (2018) a sacred specialist deals with social problems in marriage, impotence and unemployment just to mention a few, and she uses *mugoti* to deal with these problems because it has some mystical powers. A bewitched person can be cured either by jumping a *mugoti* or by being beaten by a *mugoti*. Secret incisions cut by witches can be removed if *mugoti* is dipped into the water to be used for bathing by the victim. If a man abandons his family, the wife will approach a traditional healer with a *mugoti* which she used to cook *sadza* for her husband. The traditional healer will then medicate or perform some rituals on the *mugoti* and that intervention is believed to have an instant effect on the husband who will suddenly awaken to the realization that he must urgently return to his wife. Tendai (2018) also reiterated that *mugoti* should be always clean of the *sadza* smeared on it after cooking. This is because during the night, witches capitalize on the dirtiness of *mugoti* to bewitch the targeted members. Also, goblins feed on the *sadza* left smeared on *mugoti*. So it is difficult to do away with evil

spirits affecting a family where a *mugoti* is always left unclean. Because of its sacredness, it is not easy to find a disused *mugoti* dumped at family rubbish sites. In the event where some witches fall while they are flying on winnowing baskets, the cause of their falling is that they would have flown over a *mugoti* unknowingly.

Bota reshupa (Herbal Porridge)

Bota reshupa (herbal porridge) is one of the most important indigenous herbal foods among the Shona. Muyambo (2019) conducted research on *bota reshupa* (herbal porridge) in Chipinge area and found out that Ndau women are the custodians of this herbal porridge. *Bota reshupa* is mostly reserved for babies in places like Buhera so it is popularly known as *shupa yemwana*. The manner in which it is prepared and administered makes it herbal food. Ingredients of *shupa* are a mixture of mealie meal from grains like maize, *rapoko*, sorghum and millet, water and herbs from tree roots, barks, leaves and fruits. The herbal solution is then placed in a container like a calabash or *chigubhu* (an empty 2 liter container of Mazoe beverage) left for at least 24 hours to ferment (*kuvidza*). Once it has fermented, it produces some medicinal herb scent/smell. The fermented stuff is then poured into a pot and heated on fire. When it is ready for consumption, usually it is the nursing mother who administers it to her baby or the paternal grandmother administers it to her grandchild. The porridge has some medicinal values. It ensures that children grow up healthy. Their body's immune systems are capable of resisting attacks from diseases and infections (Muyambo, 2019).

If the need arises, *shupa* can also be consumed by grown up siblings and even elders in the family (Muyambo, 2019). When the midwives detect that the fetus is in a wrong position, the pregnant mother will be given some herbal solution prepared with Acalypha roots. The infusion is taken by mouth in *shupa* porridge (Gelfand et al., 1993: 162). Besides boosting the children's immune system, it also cures some ailments which attack children. So the elderly, sacred practitioners and experienced mothers can detect the illness affecting the children and prescribe the type of herbs to be added in *bota reshupa*.

One of the commonest types of illnesses affecting babies in rural areas is the depressed fontanel (*chipande*). The child who will be suffering from this condition will be always crying, refuses to feed and at times *unokotsora* (has a dry cough). If the situation persists, the *chipande* can

collapse and the child may eventually die (Muyambo, 2019). Among other herbs, women put Pogonarthria (squarrosa) in *shupa* to treat the suffering infants. For those suffering from constipation, *bota reshupa* (herbal porridge) is mixed with Cyperus (angolensis), *Aloe excels* and *Rumex* are vital for abdominal pains, *Lannea discolor* is well known for treating whooping cough and Ansellia cures diarrhea in infants. This diarrhea is caused by *remukaka* where the infants vomit continuously as well as passing watery and yellowish stools (Muyambo, 2019). Usually, it affects infants during the time when trees shed their leaves. It is also believed that diarrhea develops in infants when a pregnant mother continues suckling her baby. In addition to these herbs in *shupa*, when the child is ill, the mother is expected to abstain from sexual intercourse in order to protect the sick baby.

Indigenous Therapies for Pregnant Women

Pregnancy among the Shona people has a sacred significance. A pregnant woman is perceived as a meeting point between the human world and the spiritual world. No matter how modernized or educated a Shona woman is, there is always a religious component in the management of pregnancy. Once she falls pregnant, she is viewed as *murwere* (patient), so she needs healing and tender loving care till the day she delivers (*kupona*). Management of pregnancy needs assistance from specialists like *nyamukuta* (midwives) who are widely conceived to be life givers and life savers.

In contemporary Zimbabwe, the practice of abortion is so rife. It is also important to acknowledge that women are sometimes involved in administering concoctions to facilitate the termination of pregnancies. According to Chauke (2020), who is a specialist in African traditional healing practices in Chipinge, most of the herbs or medicines used to terminate pregnancy are very bitter in taste. Among them are the following, watery liquid from banana plant leaves, boiled *mutamba* roots and also boiled roots of marigold flowers. The medicine is taken in the morning, afternoon and evening and for maximum results, the dosage works well with little or no food. However, traditional midwives view abortion as totally unacceptable because it terminates human life. Mbuya Moga, a traditional healer-cum midwife in Mhondoro, emphasized that her role is to save life. In her view, human life starts at conception, so she has various ways of making sure that life is preserved from prenatal to

natal stages. She revealed that she administers herbs which prevent abortion even to those who come to her home seeking for abortion services. She explained that she cooks porridge, and adds powder from roots of Pellaea (*calomelanos*) plant for her clients to eat. According to Mbuya Moga, these herbs strengthen the pregnancy such that any attempt to abort would fail. Such rites are called *kutsigisa nhumbu* (strengthen the pregnancy). Some female traditional practitioners prescribe the use of a ritualized cloth or a belt which is wrapped around the waist or abdomen. The charm prevents the termination of the pregnancy. It also guards against evil spirits which attack pregnant mothers to cause abortion. Pregnant mothers are also given medicines prepared from anthills to deal with bad dreams, and a patient who has been exorcised drinks a medicinal solution which contains scraps of a root found inside a large terminary (Kriel, 1989: 41). Physical herbs like elephant dung or goats' manure are all used for healing a pregnant mother. In some cases, the midwives use metaphors like *mhuru* (calf) to refer to the fetus as a euphemism to guard against any evil doers knowing about the pregnancy, especially in the early stages of the pregnancy. Among the Shona, it is believed that in the early days of conception, the fetus is much more susceptible to being harmed or being terminated, particularly by those who do works of witchcraft, hence, the need for taking several precautionary measures around pregnant women.

Indigenous Remedies for Mothers and Infants

Another type of healing commonly practiced in Buhera which is done when the pregnant mother has just finished giving birth is known as *kudura* (confession). It is located within the framework of indigenous philosophy of a taboo system in the Shona society. For instance, if a pregnant mother has had some secret extra marital sexual relationships, the unchaste behavior will be openly known to her marital family when she gives birth. It is believed that the child will refuse to suckle until the mother has confessed to the extra marital sexual relationships which she had during pregnancy. The confession is important for it saves the life of the neonate. One young lady in Buhera in 2018, whose newly born baby had refused to suckle, confessed that her former boyfriend had fondled her breast when she was pregnant. Soon after the confession, the baby suckled its mother's milk. For the Shona people in Buhera, this act of fondling a pregnant married woman's breast is an out of bounds act which angers the spirits of the fetus in the womb. It is, therefore, believed

that being fondled by one who is not the baby's father contaminated or corrupted the milk. Hence, the mother's confession is a rite of purifying the spoiled milk. The breast serves to sustain the life of a baby who is an innocent creature which is strongly connected to the ancestral world. So the spiritual world sets some taboos which are meant to keep such body parts revered because of their roles.

There is some traditional healing connected to lactation. When a breastfeeding baby falls ill, the popular belief attributes the illness to the mother's behavior in the form of witchcraft activities or an adulterous relationship. In an interview with Baba Tembedzeni (2020),[1] a traditionalist, I was informed that there are some women who are not comfortable to have sexual intercourse with their husbands as long as they are breastfeeding because they are afraid that if the husband has extra marital affairs, his body fluids can have a harmful effect on the baby. On the contrary, Mai Mhodzi (2020) explained that a couple can have sexual intercourse even during the period when the wife is breastfeeding. She, however, emphasized that it is not allowed to have sexual intercourse when the child is not feeling well because the husband's sperms can contaminate the mother's milk, which can negatively affect the baby's healing potential. Furthermore, among the Shona, they also uphold the belief that the sperms of a man who is not the child's father are extremely harmful to the baby, hence, a pregnant woman or a lactating mother must not engage in sexual intercourse with a man who is not the baby's father.

Neonates are understood to be vulnerable, so the mothers and the elderly administer traditional healing to prevent the babies from falling ill, or even to cure the illness. One way to protect neonates is by using charms popularly known as *mutimwe* and *mazango*. They are ritualized charms tied around neonates' necks, waists and wrists. A *mutimwe* is usually prepared by the mother or grandmother. It acts as a protective element, especially when the child interacts with other children either on public transport or at gatherings. But the same *mutimwe* when used by sexually active women assumes a different role. It can be used as a sexual stimulant, when women tie it around their waists. It is believed that the *mutimwe* ensures maximum sexual pleasure to men.

Nursing mothers also do what is known as *kutsengura* which is a Shona ritual in which a mother chews some indigenous herbal concoctions and

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[1] For confidentiality purposes, all the names used for interview participants are pseudonyms.

applies them on the genital organs of the newly born infant in order to scale down the sexual drive of the child later in life. Another cultural method is that the mother squeezes drops of her breast milk and rubs it on the infant's genital organs. The later ritual must be cautiously applied to avoid the mother's teat getting in contact with the baby's genital organs during the process. It is believed that if such rituals are properly administered, they help in controlling the erotic desires of a person in later life experiences (Maposa & Humbe, 2012). The rationale behind these rites is to promote chaste behavior. According to Amenga-Etogo (2014: 256), in Africa, chastity is a feminine virtue, 'a woman palaver'. The whole life of a woman should be marked by chaste behavior, starting from the formative years of adolescence, marriage, widowhood and old age. Chastity makes a woman to be endowed with traditional concepts of decorum, modesty, self-service and dignity in all spheres of life. In some contexts, the parents of a girl who maintains her virginity until she gets married are rewarded with a beast called *mombe yechimanda*, it is a token of appreciation to acknowledge their role in ensuring that their daughter remained chaste till marriage. Among the Korekore, the use of *runyoka* (fencing off a married woman against stray men) is a common practice. In this light, argue that Africans have *runyoka* whose thrust is to promote morality. There are moments when widows are obliged to observe some sexual taboos especially before the *kurova guva* (bringing back/domesticating the spirit of the dead) ceremony has been performed. Breaking the taboo is called *kupisa guva* (burning the grave), which implies disrespecting/dishonoring the deceased's spirit, and it is met with some punitive measures from the spiritual world.

OTHER FEMININE DOMESTIC ITEMS AND THEIR SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Within Shona homes, a reed mat (*bonde*) is one of the women's most important possessions. It is spread on the floor to provide comfort for sick people to lie on it. The reed mat among the Shona has spiritual significance. It is made of reeds which normally grow in rivers. In the Shona traditional worldview, reeds are used to ward off evil spirits. It also protects the homestead from being struck by lightning and it also safeguards the family against any form of spiritual harm. Women sacred specialists use reeds to heal those attacked by bad spirits. So its use in these and other rituals is meant to repel evil.

Before commoditization of the dead through funeral insurance policies, a corpse was buried wrapped in a reed mat. In some rural areas, the practice is still common because of the scarcity of resources. Although with the encroaching of western and modern values, coffins are now being used to encase the dead bodies, however, in the kitchen, the coffin is placed on a reed mat. The procedure of burying a corpse is that a reed mat is spread in the grave before the coffin is lowered. During the *kurova guva* ceremony, the conferment of the name for the deceased men's ritual is performed while the elder son is seated on a reed mat.

It is also common knowledge that sexuality issues cannot be discussed openly among the Shona because of the cultural restrictions. Yet, if effective communication has to be done, the message must be transmitted in the local Shona language for the mother tongue is outstanding in terms of sensitivity and intelligibility. For instance, the Shona word for sexual intercourse is very vulgar and cannot be pronounced in public, therefore it should be avoided. However, there are other neutral words that still have the same meaning as sexual intercourse like *bonde* which denotes sharing the marital bed. Since the *bonde* (reed mat) was the one spread on the floor to cover the ground upon which the couple would sleep in the traditional society before the adoption of modern beds, the term *bonde* has therefore been adopted to euphemistically refer to the sexual intercourse which takes place therein.

While conducting field research, I also observed that every Shona homestead in rural areas has a *mutsvairo* which is regarded as another essential utensil for every woman. In their cleaning schedule, women pay attention first to the outdoor duties. Before sunrise, a woman will already be awake and her first and foremost task is to sweep the yard. It is one of the simplest rites of our Zimbabwean belief system in healing that is taken for granted. While physically, the women will be removing dirt on the yard, they will be symbolically sweeping away the evil of the night. Thus, women provide a service which removes nocturnal footprints which endanger families. In the social politics of the *muroora* (daughter-in-law), her affiliation with the broom is an integral part of the Shona woman's protocol; a symbol of her existence, responsibility, co-operation and desirability; a trait which lingers in the culture, despite all Western feminist propaganda. The sweeping she does signifies enacting spiritual and physical purity for the occupiers of the homestead. So, physical, environmental and spiritual cleanliness marked the beginning of every new day.

Mutsvairo is also used to sprinkle, douse and symbolically remove malevolent spirits which are believed to visit homesteads or attach themselves to various movable properties in the home. This process is known as *'kupumha mweya yetsvina'*. Chimbunde (2018), a sacred practitioner in Masvingo, explained that for better results, when removing malevolent spirits, the *mutsvairo* should be handled by a *muroora* (daughter-in-law) since she is still new to the spiritual entanglements within her husband's family.

When a family member passes on, the relatives sweep out any dirt in the kitchen before rituals of folding the corpse are done. If the deceased died in a hospital, the kitchen where the body will lie in state is swept before the body arrives. The sweeping is done to remove bad spirits which might have been in the house. Sweeping is one of the last rites performed when burying a deceased relative. *Varoora* (daughters-in-law) sweep the path to the grave to ensure that the deceased's way to the spiritual world is cleansed of all evil. After the body is removed from the kitchen, *varoora* will sweep the kitchen hut and the dirt on the floor is thrown in the grave and buried together with the corpse. So, when mourners come back home, they will occupy a ritually clean hut without defilement of the corpse. Hence, *mutsvairo* is the archetype symbol of purity. Then the last ritual act which is performed at the grave on the day the deceased is buried is that, relatives will sweep around the new grave using *mutsvairo* made of stems and leaves of *zumbani* (*lippia javanica*). It is a herbal plant which is believed to have some healing powers as well as having the spiritual effect to ward off evil spirits/forces which might attempt to tamper with the grave. Early in the morning, elderly members of the family will visit the grave to check if there are nocturnal footprints around the grave.

Cultural Ethics and Healing: Caregiving in Traditional Healing

There is a general belief that if a person on his/her deathbed fails to get the best care from his closest relatives, upon death, his/her spirit will avenge. In Shona conceptions, this leads to *ngozi*. As noted by Hamutyinei and Plangger (1996: 223), the Shona people often make use of the proverb: *ngozi nehama hazvisiyani* (the avenging spirit hunts/haunts its relatives). The meaning of this proverb denotes that if a person is wronged by another person with whom one is not related to, he/she will take less offense than in the case of a relative. Because the care

givers want to escape from this *ngozi*, they engage in risky behavioral practices, for example, refraining from wearing gloves so as to pacify the patient. Putting on protective clothing like gloves when giving care to the sick is interpreted as *kusema* (despising/discriminating against) the patient (Maposa & Humbe, 2012). As a result, even if the patient is suffering from an infectious disease which can be transmitted through body fluids such as the HIV related ailments or the most recent global health crisis, the COVID 19/corona virus outbreak, due to these cultural beliefs, some of the care givers will still risk getting infected by avoiding to use personal protective equipment. As a result, most women care givers become susceptible to infection which could have been avoided in the absence of the restrictive and rigid cultural prescriptions.

According to Fissell (2008: 14), if we want to understand both women's involvement in healing and how healing is on occasion gendered, we must focus on bodily care for the sick. In the rural areas, the very long periods of illness that patients experience entail massive amounts of care usually performed by women: as wives, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters and daughters. Women are at the center of care giving in traditional healing. It is therefore prudent that as a nation, we pause to remember all the Zimbabwean women who lost their lives due to care giving in the context of domestic traditional healing. There are countless heroines who administered home-based care for HIV and AIDS patients well before antiretroviral drugs had become readily available in Zimbabwe. Even in the current times where ARVs have become easily accessible, the bulk of care givers for the sick and dying are women and some of them have become infected in the process of caregiving. There are also women who have dedicated their lives as sole care givers to family members living with disabilities. Unfortunately, most of the women responsible for care giving have been pushed into oblivion.

The Use of Love Potions to Tame Men

In a marriage setup, it is believed that Shona women have a way of changing their spouses' mindset through use of traditional medicine. In Shona, there are common sayings such as: *unorwara nekuda vakadzi* (he is promiscuous), *unorwara nekeshushe mukadzi* (he is abusive). Victims and their sympathizers see the need to have the unruly behavior of such men healed. The healing is performed secretly by the wives using *mupfuhwira* (love concoction). It is food secretly mixed with some

herbs and given to the husbands for consumption in order to control their behavior. There are so many types of *mupfuhwira* but the ones that are frequently used by the Shona women in Buhera are *mupfuh-wira hweurozvi hwejongwe* (cock's brain) and *hwekambwanana* (puppy's brain). Feeding the husband with the cock's brain is believed to have an effect of taming him to behave like what a cock does with its hen, including *kuchengera* (being possessive of one's wife) while administering the puppy's brain will make the husband passive and sleepy. Hence, when the Shona say that *murume uyu akagadzirwa*, meaning 'this man was doused with a love concoction', they will be referring to the fact that there has been an unusually drastic change in the man's behavior, suggesting that he was tamed by being given a love potion. However, the effectiveness of *mupfuhwira* depends on how the ancestral spirits of the patient react. In some situations, men who have been given *mupfuhwira* die, some become sick developing big bellies, while some suffer from mental illness.

Re-empowerment of Women in Zimbabwe

From the findings emerging from the fieldwork conducted for this study, it was revealed that it is also in the rural areas where women's contribution to the health and well-being of Zimbabweans in the past is evidenced today since the women are continuing to follow the healing traditions of their elders. Zimbabweans have a tri-tier health system. They visit the traditional healers, the prophets from 'Churches of the Spirit', and western style hospitals and clinics for health and healing (Machinga, 2011: 2). It is against this background that there is need for Zimbabweans to formally embrace the complementary role of women's traditional healing activities in an already existing three-tier health system. This would ensure that their contribution is fully accredited and supported by the government. This chapter recommends re-empowerment of women which comes through remunerating their indigenous knowledge as a mode of acknowledging their contribution to health and well-being of Zimbabweans.

One of the reasons why women are so key in traditional healing is because, at a tender age, the Shona religio-socio setup places the female child within the context of marriage and its inherent notion of divided allegiance. Although she is an immediate insider of her natal family, she is fundamentally an outsider, so she is an insider-outsider. The traditional

society socializes her in acquiring indigenous domestic knowledge which will help her in her future life as a married woman and at the same time as an aunt in her natal family. Some of the knowledge systems are associated with traditional healing. Upon getting married, the status of a woman in her natal family changes to the 'outsider-insider' because she is partially transferred through exogamous marriage systems to her husband's family and clan. The end result is that a woman is an apprentice of two families with different contexts. She therefore becomes a knowledgeable product in traditional healing.

Mostly, when women engage in healing activities, they are cladded in a waist wraparound (*chijari/zambia*) and head wrap. This is the general attire appreciated in the rural communities for every woman. Besides serving as protective clothing in care giving and traditional healing chores, the attire transmits an image of a dignified woman, who is respectful of the life she is saving and the ancestral spirits whom she houses in her traditional kitchen hut. By so doing, women and their traditional healing practices become a rich repository of our country's national heritage. When examining the theme of Shona women and traditional healing, the Zimbabwean identity as an African people can be meaningfully portrayed through the following: firstly is the idea of a traditional kitchen hut. It has survived colonial pressures and western hegemony. The Zimbabwean government through its various ministries has revived the importance of the traditional kitchen hut by making it a model of African traditional culture through establishing it in primary and secondary educational institutions. In the tourism sector, the traditional kitchen is also exhibited at the Zimbabwe National Gallery as a typical architectural design of Africanism. The kitchen hut provides an ideology for indigenous people both in Zimbabwe and in diaspora to have a 'living identity' represented. There is also a code of dressing which is branded as African attire and it has pictures of the traditional kitchen hut, *choto*, clay pots and calabashes. It is worn at fashion fares, weddings and many other occasions which celebrate the traditional identity of the Zimbabwean people. Even in African Christianity, several church buildings have been constructed using the traditional kitchen hut design. It is common to see cakes designed along the traditional kitchen hut shape. What is missing is to conscientise the nation that the kitchen hut is the symbolic cathedral of African traditional healing superintended by women.

In many pictorial art forms, Shona women are seen carrying babies on their backs with a hoe in their hands walking toward bushy areas. Their

traditional healing makes up a part of the national treasure of Zimbabweans composed of a collection of beliefs and values, tools, general and local knowledge. Various experiences in post-colonial Zimbabwe have shown that the indigenous healing is in no way in opposition or contrary to common knowledge, but rather is a kind of complement to it because when it is being administered it is so natural. In fact it is 'lived healing'. They are aware that a person is regarded as both a physical and spiritual being. This then makes traditional healing mainly based on the habits, standards and behaviors existing in each society. In this light, the country's public health policies should invest in conducting research which aims at promoting and supporting gendered traditional healing. This is because in traditional healing, priority is also given to the cultural status of the society.

Conclusion

Women play substantial roles in healing in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Though their healing is done with patriarchal blessings, they have been undercounted in studies that rely upon occupational labels, but when we look at caregiving and bodywork, we can see women providing a broad range of services (Fissell, 2008: 1). In the context of domestic healing settings, they are basically responsible for the health and well-being of their communities (Muyambo, 2019: 177). This is testified in the beliefs, values, tools and local knowledge on traditional healing. Various experiences in post-colonial Zimbabwe have shown that the indigenous healing systems are in no way in opposition or contrary to scientific common knowledge, but rather is a kind of complement to it. Healing conducted by women also propels empowerment in their social status and confirms their leadership status.

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