



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

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## 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 SDGs, 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 SDGs 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 I 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 spectators, 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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