

The gendering of empowerment for Christian women in Kabwe, Zambia: a study of selected Church denominations

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the gendering of empowerment for Christian women in selected Church denominations of Kabwe town in Zambia. Christian women have been disproportionately vulnerable to misrepresentation when it comes to the allocation of leadership roles in the church and other positions of influence in society. In communities outside church circles, this uneven vulnerability between women and men is evident in the perceptions and analyses of the means of surviving the socio-economic hurdles because of differences in gendered norms, divisions of labour, resource access and power relations. In Christianity, the challenges seem to be exacerbated by the religion's belief in the patriarchal set-up which seems to place the female gender in a subordinate position in society. To explore this apparent paradox, the study drew upon a sample of 32 participants; 20 females and 12 males, purposively selected from 4 Christian church denominations within the Kabwe Urban in Zambia. These were subjected to interviews, which served as the foundation for primary data collection. The recorded transcripts of the interviews were analysed thematically for participants' perceptions of the management of socio-economic empowerment among Christian women. The primeval sexual equality, equality distorted by 'the fall', the need to break gender norms, the need for women to prove themselves worthy and the need to support women were established as emerging themes from the study. The study recommended the need for women to recognise their potential and prove themselves worthy; and the need to enforce affirmative actions to help establish the rights of women.

Keywords: Gender inequality, women empowerment, Christianity, Zambia

INTRODUCTION

This article is about the gender dynamics in managing empowerment programmes within Christian institutions. It investigates the gendering of empowerment for Christian women in selected Church denominations of Kabwe town in Zambia (henceforth referred to as Kabwe Urban).

Kabwe is the headquarters for Zambia's Central Province, and a former mining town

situated some 139 kilometres Northeast of Lusaka - Zambia's capital city. Both large and small-scale farming communities surround the town. Though Zambia is constitutionally a Christian nation, her constitution recognises the freedom of worship, a stance that accommodates other faith traditions. For instance, within Kabwe Urban, Islam has attracted a small number of followers who meet to worship at a mosque right in the centre of the town. Nevertheless, most of the urban population in Kabwe are Christians, who belong to different church denominations. The leadership of these

denominations have often engaged the donors, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the government of the Republic of Zambia through its appropriate governing structures, such as the local Council, as cooperating partners in delivering socio-economic development through empowerment programmes aimed at ameliorating socio-economic challenges people face in the communities. Among popular examples of empowerment programmes cited in Zambia today are the Community Development Fund (CDF) programme and the Joint Country Programme (JCP). While the former is a government-run programme through the local authority, the latter was founded by a consortium of three organisations namely the Christian Aid, Dan Church Aid and Norwegian Church Aid (*Christian Aid Newsletter, 2022*). The Christian community in Kabwe, like elsewhere in Zambia, are beneficiaries of these programmes through their respective church denominations.

Issues of the male-instigated gender-based barriers against women seem to cut across all institutions and disciplines. Though the contribution of government and Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) to the social, spiritual and economic development in Zambia is something that should be appreciated, the seemingly relatively marginalisation of women in the management of socio-economic empowerment programmes and activities in some of the Christian institutions remains a matter of concern. The researcher was curious about the generic concerns of gender bias against women characteristic of what seems to be a patriarchal Zambian society that seems to have not spared the Christian women in Kabwe urban when it comes to the way opportunities have been afforded to access and manage the empowerment programmes when they show up. Guided by Zimmerman's (2000) and the Islamic empowerment theories, respectively, the article is based on information from direct interviews with Christians drawn from four church denominations in Kabwe Urban, namely the Seventh-day Adventist, the Bethel Baptist, Roman Catholic and the Ebenezer

Cathedral of Pentecost, purposely selected on account of convenience.

Statement of the Problem

Even though women outscore men on most measures of religiosity (Weiss, 1996), the existing patriarchal influence in Christendom seems to render women disproportionately vulnerable to misrepresentation when it comes to the allocation of roles and responsibilities. This poses profound negative effects on attempts at improving their livelihood. The Christian Community in Zambia, and Kabwe in particular, has not been spared from this misdemeanour. In the context of the women's misrepresentation in terms of socio-economic empowerment in Kabwe, we ask: What is the root cause of the gender marginalisation against women? What are the currently existing gender intricacies among Christian women of Kabwe? And is there any immediate hope for normalcy in prospect to change the current status quo? The need to address these questions necessitated the inquiry.

THEORETICAL LOCALE

This study is anchored on two theoretical perspectives, namely:

The empowerment theory derived from Zimmerman (2000), echoed by Rogelberg (2007) and the Islamic Theory on Socio-economic Empowerment based on the Ganokendra Model and the Waqf Institution respectively. This set of theories fitted the dimensions posed by the researcher within the socio-economic context, which included religion, gender and livelihood, which were key to the study-

Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory assumes that there is a connection between individual well-being and the larger social and political environment, and suggests that people need opportunities to become active in community decision-making in order to improve their lives, organisations and communities. According to Rogelberg (2007), the Empowerment theory focuses on processes that enable participation, enhance control through shared decision making and create opportunities to learn, practice, and

increase skills. Rogelberg (2007) further explains that empowerment is examined by six interdependent dimensions: psychological, community, organisational, economic, social and cultural. Psychological empowerment enhances an individual's consciousness, belief in self-efficacy, awareness and knowledge of problems and solutions and of how individuals can address problems that harm their quality of life (p.733).

This theoretical dimension helped to bring out concepts on how to create self-confidence and the skills to acquire knowledge and skills which are critical resources for women's empowerment.

Islamic Perspectives on Socio-economic Empowerment

Islam considers empowerment as a concept shared by many disciplines and arenas: community development, psychology, education, economics, gender, and studies of social movements and organisations. Recent literature reviews of articles indicating a focus on empowerment across several scholarly and practical disciplines have demonstrated that there is no clear definition of the concept.

The Ganokendra Model

In their pursuit of empowerment of youths, Muslims have come up with a people's centre called Ganokendra. The Ganokendra is a group of people who have come together to address issues affecting people which include: literacy, gender inequality and continuing life-long education which aim at alleviating poverty and improving the quality of people's lives in general (Hachintu, 2023; Kazi, 2004; Mbolela & Hachintu, 2023). It is believed that if these issues are addressed, affected people can gain control over personal, social, economic and political forces to improve their life situation.

The programme ensured that people were involved at every stage of the design and its implementation. In organising Ganokendra, the following steps were undertaken: need assessment surveys, household surveys, resource identification surveys, and motivational campaigns. The beneficiaries of

the program especially the **women** were closely involved. The Ganokendra was organised to facilitate the improvement of the quality of life, social empowerment and economic self-reliance. The model has gained wide acceptance and coverage in Bangladesh where its beneficiary-membership has grown. Ganokendra centres have now been recognised by many development agencies as focal points for community development. UNESCO also endorsed the Ganokendra initiatives and published them in its Asia Pacific Publications in 2003.

The idea behind Muslims coming up with initiatives such as the Ganokendra in various countries was the need to finance youths without attaching interest to money given to them. These monies given to youths are meant to finance them with regard to improving their welfare in society. It is a way by which Islam empowers youths in socio-economic standing in order to produce youths with a better lifestyle. The money given to affected people is put into various projects such as opening up an entrepreneur business which can enable people to have a life that can enable them to become key stakeholders in national development. An example of how this has been worked out is found in Malaysia as can be deduced from the report in their Malaysia Islamic Finance Market Report (2015) which has outlined how Muslims support macro small medium enterprises (MSMS) and Small medium enterprises (SMES) which are forms of empowerment for youths who may not be formally employed. These institutions provide opportunities to the poor as part of achieving their IFIs socio-economic agenda. Muslims also tap additional resources for example from zakat, waqf and qard al-hassan financial instruments that are designed to provide financial assistance to the poor such as Shariah-compliant microfinance and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These initiatives serve as roles through which youths are empowered by Muslims to become independent citizens and contribute to the socio-economic development of the country.

The Waqf Institution

The Waqf (or Wakf) is a form of religious institution in Islam that has a mandate to empower youths so as to alleviate their social problems help them develop human resources and boost their social and economic empowerment. An article by Farid (2016) discusses Waqf as a religious institution in Islam, which has functional relevance as a solution to social problems. Waqf is involved in poverty alleviation, human resource development and economic empowerment of the people. The article looks at money, not only as a medium of exchange but also as a resource that can be channeled towards development in one way or another. It embraces both religious worship and economic empowerment through providing worship activities, facilitating educational activities as well as health, aid to the poor, displaced children, orphans, scholarship, progress and economic improvement as long as they do not conflict with the Shari'ah laws. Ulrika Mårtensson (2014), cited in Farid (2016) stressed that "Islam came as *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*"; that is not only to destroy the social imbalances that occur in the community but also to enhance public welfare. Islam is not only a religion that is loaded with value-normative elitists who do not have a social conscience, but the religion has integrally moral pretensions aimed at building and participating in various social and community problems (*Ibid*).

Although the Holy Quran does not directly define Waqf or make any particular reference to it, Muslims are encouraged to do charity work. According to them, Allah has promised multiple rewards for those who generously spend wealth in his path. Muslim scholars explain that since the emergence of Islam, Muslims have voluntarily given out of their wealth for the benefit of others in the form of waqf. They claim that Waqf is a dynamic institution which has existed since the early Islamic society, and provided a considerable contribution to the development and advancement of Muslim societies. Alhabshi (1991) in Budiman and Banjarmasin (2014), states that Waqf should be regarded as a fundamental economic institution which was

established for the purpose of generating economic activities whilst at the same time ensuring that the benefits accrue to certain parts of the society. In its economic sense, the waqf diverts funds and other resources from current consumption and invests them into productive and prospective assets which generate revenues for future consumption by individuals or society at large. Waqf is therefore a peculiar combination between the act of saving and the act of investment. In a nutshell, the significance of Waqf is five-fold: firstly, it enhances economic progress; secondly, it eradicates poverty. Thirdly, it restores and re-distributes income, fourthly it prevents deficit financing. Last but not least, it reduces government expenditure.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Subordination of Women

The subordination of women in contemporary societies is supported by the weight of historical and religious traditions. For example, Crook (2013: 195) asserts that in an ancient morning prayer, Orthodox Jewish men said, "Praised be God that he has not created me a Gentile; praised be God that he has not created me a woman; praised be God that he has not created me an ignorant man." In Orthodox Jewish prayer, therefore, the position of women was degraded as God was praised for not creating men as women. With regard to Christianity, it is doubtful if all Christians understand the Apostle Paul's statement to women that they should "obey" their husbands (Ephesians 5:21). Some Christians actually try to soften this chapter and verse by using alternative translations (Crook, 2013).

Crook further referred to the vow made at marriage ceremonies, where ministers ask the bride to make a promise to "obey" her husband. He says in such ceremonies, the minister asks, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" The bride's father usually responds, "I do." The bride is then handed over to the groom. This occurrence might show how women have been regarded as properties of men, and the extent to which they might be expected to obey their

husbands. In many countries, although statistics show that the number of females is slightly higher than that of males, their status still falls much lower than that of their male counterparts. This gives an indication that to a large extent, women are still marginalised socially and religiously.

Additionally, Crook (2013: 195) views women to fit in the category of minority group, where he defines the term *minority group* as “a subordinate segment of society, conscious of being a distinct group without having chosen that status and assumed to have certain physical and cultural traits by which they are identified.” Crook also assessed the images of women in terms of the roles assigned to them by the family and society in general. He observed that human beings were usually classified by age, race, ethnicity, sex, marital status, occupation and religion, among others. Conversely, individuals are expected to act in a given way. Pressure is placed on individuals to conform to societal expectations. Crook contends that “by the same token, we expect women to fit a specific profile”.

Currently, though there have been changes in the status of women in most societies, the gender stereotype has remained substantially the same. Nearly five decades ago, an American woman Deckard (1975) stated that women were stereotyped as emotional rather than logical, passive and dependent, naturally mothers and naturally subordinate to the male. The stereotype was perpetuated in the home, in schools, in television programmes and movies, in literature for children and adults, and even in the church. According to Deckard, television programmes taught children that girls played with dolls and boys played with guns, that girls could cry but boys could not, and that girls should be pretty and boys strong. Deckard (1975) adds that the programmes also taught children that women were free to work outside the home if they wished, provided they could arrange for the care of their children, and that men had to work to take care of their families. This set a pattern for home life that presumed that

housework was a woman’s province and that yard work was a man’s responsibility.

Observing that such stereotyping was as costly for men as for women, Deckard described the stereotypical male as aggressive, emotionally impassive, self-sufficient, athletic, brave in the face of danger, a natural leader, and competent at any task defined as masculine. Commenting on the pressure for men to succeed, Deckard further asserts that while to men, women are sex objects, men are frequently successful objects to women. Since career success was defined as central to masculinity, men often sacrifice all other values in pursuing it.

Another scholar Wallace (1985) outlines what she considered to be the “underlying beliefs” about gender in society. First, there were natural differences in which men were strong, decisive, competitive, and not very emotional; women, by contrast, were smaller, softer, prettier, emotional, and poorly equipped to deal with the fierce competition in the business world. Second, God gave men the right to command and women the right to be protected by men. Third, men’s characteristics pushed them into the public sphere, whereas women’s characteristics required them to concentrate on the private realm and limited their public activities to matters that were secondary, short-lived, and relatively unimportant. Fourth, work for wages was the primary responsibility of men and only a secondary responsibility of women. Fifth, Wallace (1985) asserted that romantic love was the ultimate bond between a man and a woman. To win this kind of love, women should be physically attractive and men should be strong, assertive and successful in work. Sixth, for men, education was directly related to work, being their chief role in life. For women, however, whose chief interest was marriage and the home, education aimed at providing “a set of useful and secondary relevancies”.

Even in the fading years of the twentieth century, the stereotype appeared to be the same. A study that was done in 1995 in the United States of America by the Hunter

College Women's Studies Programme, for instance, identified the following five images of women that appeared in many cultures around the world:

- i. "Frightening females," the image of women as evil, dangerous and powerful
- ii. "Venerated *madonas*," the representation of women as self-sacrificing, pure, and content
- iii. "Sex objects," the focus on women as instruments for male sexual gratification
- iv. "Earth mothers," the idea that women are closer to nature than men, and therefore consigned to a lower status
- v. "Misbegotten Man," the image that emphatically denies women a place in culture because they are neither threats, saints, sex objects nor earth mothers; they simply are not there.

While authors did not give exclusive attention to the status of women in a particular nation, they did view these images as operating in every society, the Zambian society inclusive.

Furthermore, a study by Carter (2002) on men-women relationships summarised the male-female stereotypes in words that suggest that there had been no change:

- i. Women are more in touch with their feelings; men don't know how to nurture
- ii. Men are better at handling bill-paying and finances
- iii. Women settle into long-term relationships primarily for security; men settle into long-term relationships primarily for sex.
- iv. Women, no matter how smart or successful, are expected to take on most household responsibilities
- v. The man should be in charge of making the important decisions
- vi. Women are the intuitive sex.
- vii. In the kitchen, the woman is the boss.
- viii. Men and women are from different planets.

The question to ask is "How do such images function or come into existence?" According to Crook (2013: 197), "They are the result of our effort to sort out what we see around us, to generalise about what we see going on in our society". Crook also examines certain specific passages that usually emerged in a discussion of the status of women in general and the place of women in the church in particular. He cites the first three chapters of Genesis which are often in support of the subordination of women. In the older creation account (Genesis 2:4b-25), man was created first and placed in the Garden of Eden. Then when none of the other animals that God had formed proved to be fit "helpers" for man, God made woman from one of man's ribs. Some Christians recognise, in this passage, the subordination of woman to man because the man was created first and the woman was created to be his helper. However, Crook contended that neither being second in time nor being of assistance to the other person necessarily implied subordination; he further asserted that the Biblical passage may also imply the opposite. According to Crook (2013: 207), "the real point of the Genesis creation story is seen in the climatic statement concerning the unity of the man and the woman: *Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

Simpson (2017) added his views, from the Biblical point of view to the debate on women's roles assigned to them in the church. He asserted that taken in the context of the 66 books, the Bible provided answers to the dilemma. He also asserted that the main conflict arose from the counsel of the Apostle Paul recorded in the Bible book of Ephesians. He further contended that all scripture needed to be understood in the context of what is said, who it is spoken to, and what the culture is at the time:

I do not pretend to have all the answers, but I see an equally important role for women and men in the Bible. The problem comes with the application. Many women are no longer in submission to their husbands or the church leadership. They do not show respect for their

husbands and the church elders
(<https://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/womensrole.html>).

According to Simpson, this led to division in the church: there were those who wanted to tell women to be silent and those who wanted them to participate in the church leadership. He added that the current situation where women remained silent, and men allowed it, did not mean that women could not be assigned roles in the church. On the contrary, he observed that some women held the same responsibilities in the church as the men did. Simpson (2017) further stated that evidence from history showed that many people had been saved by women and many churches had been planted by them. He contended that prophecy came forth within the church through women.

Women in Zambia: More in Numbers yet Less Empowered to Lead

Available literature speaks to the broader global historical development of gender inequality in relation to the apportioning of various roles in society, including in worship spaces. This is despite the fact that females outnumber their male counterparts in most societies in terms of population. Zambia, for instance, recorded a total of 20.29 million population in February 2023, out of which 50.7 per cent were females and 49.3 per cent were males (Digital Zambia, February 2023). There is, therefore, a consistency in statistics pointing to the fact that women in Zambia constitute the majority in terms of population, and yet they are underrepresented in top management positions (Gender Statistics Report, 2010). This prompts a question: what, then, informs the current male dominance over females in the Zambian culture? Dilli *et al* (2019) suggest that the answer to this and similar questions lay in the historical roots of gender relations, which he contends, do not change overnight. As some scholars have observed, such historical gender relations are characterised by traditional patriarchal beliefs and norms (SIDA, 2008). This viewpoint may help in understanding why some practices of gender subjugation and maltreatment were

tolerated by society at a given time, if not to date.

As an attempt to address the problem of gender inequality and the need to empower girls and women, Zambia has adopted firm legal frameworks policy on gender. The move involved revising the existing National Gender Policy in 2014 to ensure the attainment of gender equality in the development processes by redressing the existing gender subjugation and maltreatment against women and girls. Additionally, the policy provided a level playing field for men and women to actively take part in national development. As regards the legal framework, the Zambian Constitution, Amendment Act NO. 2 of 2016, confirms the equal worth of women and men and their rights to freely participate in, determine and build a sustainable political, legal, economic and social order (Ministry of Gender and Child Development, 2014).

The government initiative to revise the National Gender Policy and related legal frameworks was against the backdrop of such gender-unfriendly developments as the growing literature on lack of women's leadership in critical government institutions, including religious ones. The Higher Education Institutions, one of the nation's largest institutions, for instance, has continued to attract the attention of gender scholars on women's underrepresentation in educational leadership positions and yet they are overrepresented in the higher education sector population. According to the HEA (2020), out of a total of nine public and 54 private Universities in Zambia, there are currently only three (3) universities with female vice-Chancellors: one (1) in public university and two (2) in private universities. Such a picture demonstrates gender inequalities in higher education institutions (HEI), where males dominate over their female counterparts. Currently, Zambia has a total of nine (9) public and 54 private registered universities by the end of 2019 (HEA, 2020; Mwiya *et al.*, 2017).

Gender Concerns in the Worship Space

The gender situation in religious institutions is not different from that of other institutions, though it seems to present yet an additional concern, in that apart from outnumbering men in terms of population, women are also said to outscore men on most measures of religiosity (Weiss, 1996).

Participation of Women in Church Leadership

Not much has been documented on women's participation in Church leadership positions national wide in Zambia. The only piece of literature the study managed to locate was from Catholic Church - a study conducted by Machila and Chuulu in 2010, which does not say much about Kabwe in particular, either.

Machila and Chuulu (2010) studied women's participation in decision-making within the Catholic Dioceses in Zambia, highlighting specific doctrines and related structures in which women, men, boys and girls take part. The duo's assessment was guided by the church doctrine and social teachings which provided the basis for Diocesan Governance. The study revealed that the participation of women in Diocesan decision-making structures was not only overdue but it is significant to the realisation of the integral evangelisation by the Catholic Church in Zambia. The study provides findings on which recommendations were made for enhancing the participation of women in the Diocesan decision-making structures so as to promote equitable and democratic governance. It was noted, for instance, that gender roles and how they were perpetuated within the Dioceses were, to a large extent, symptomatic of a deeper problem. For instance, out of the ten (10) Dioceses in the Catholic Church in Zambia, it was found that only one (01) Pastoral Coordinator was a woman, in the Catholic Diocese of Monze. Though the Diocesan structures have accepted her role, the study reported that some critics had argued that she was *de facto* a "man" because she tried so hard to please the male colleagues and that she was sometimes worse than the "male Pastoral Coordinators" who were equally gender insensitive.

The study further revealed that some Dioceses indicated that participants had some positive experiences/practices on Women's participation in Dioceses, such as those that sought to promote the participation of women. Some participants indicated that the positive experiences should be seen within the "perceptions of women's roles" and within what would be acceptable by the Parish or Diocesan Bishop, but not be seen to be better than a Priest, adding that "any practices must have the Priest as a final authority in decision making".

However, the study disclosed that the Diocesan faithful; the religious and clergy were not very familiar with the national, regional and international frameworks on Gender equality and most of them did not adequately use them as reference documents to inform their actions towards gender equality. The duo were of the view that in order to ensure effective implementation of the Zambia National Policy on Gender, the 2008 SADC Protocol and African Union Optional Protocol on Gender and the MDG goal 3 which sought to enhance gender equality by 2015, the Dioceses as secondary duty bearers, should have promoted an active and visible policy of gender mainstreaming if the Diocesan structures was to attain the 50:50 representation in decision making structures by 2015. This required that the Catholic Bishops demonstrate a commitment towards gender equality by taking a key role in monitoring and assessing progress on the advancement of women. In this regard, the Dioceses as secondary duty bearers should deliberately promote an active and visible policy on gender mainstreaming. It was suggested in the affirmative action that in order to enable more women occupy leadership positions, a 50:50 approach should be adopted for every level of decision-making.

Empowering Women through the Bible

The Bible is consistent in promising encouragement and hope which women involved in empowerment programmes may utilise to

their advantage. God says that empowerment comes from him. It therefore means acknowledging that power, identity and strength come from God alone. The following are some of the scriptural readings Christians often cite:

Luke 10:19-20: “Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you. 20 But don’t rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven.”

Isaiah 41:10: Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

2 Corinthians 12:9: But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me

Isaiah 40:31: But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on Wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

Finally, in affirmation of the need to address the gender imbalance in empowering Christian women in church leadership and / or management of empowerment programmes, Ndhlovu (1999) contends that church members, regardless of their gender, need to be empowered to fully participate in all church activities. He observes that church members who have the ability to lead the church should receive sufficient training in financial and personal management. This, he says, should help to embrace any member regardless of their gender.

Literature Gap

From the literature reviewed, the initiatives taken by Islamic institutions in the theories

adopted by the current study, the global perspective on gender inequality in the participation of women in leadership, the general overview of what empowerment entails and the Biblical stance on encouraging those involved in any form of challenging enterprise, have been explored. However, there seems to be inadequate Zambian-based literature directly speaking to the experiences of Christian women. Additionally, the reviewed literature does not delve into the current gender dynamics in Islam and subsequently, it has not provided a clearly spelt out way forward in addressing the male-instigated gender challenges to take a leaf from. This study, therefore, seeks to provide the platform for bridging the information gap on what the Christian women in Zambia and Kabwe in particular, are going through.

METHODOLOGY

Two approaches were employed in this study, namely the phenomenological approach and the Desk/Literature Review. The phenomenological approach has been used to bring out the participants’ voice in their perspectives on gendering of empowerment for Christian women in Kabwe urban, based on their personal lived experiences. An interview technique was used, guided by the phenomenological catchphrase “*back to the things themselves*”. The ‘things themselves’, as phenomenologists understand the phrase, are phenomena that present themselves immediately to us as conscious human beings. Phenomenology suggests that if we lay aside, as best as we can, the prevailing understanding of the phenomena in question and revisit our immediate experience of them, possibilities for new meaning emerge for us, or we witness at least an authentication or enhancement of former meaning (Crotty,1996; Crotty,1998). The researcher, therefore, sought to pursue new meaning and/or authentication of the understanding of the gendering of empowerment for Christian women in Kabwe based on participants’ views in this regard. The research drew upon a sample of 32 participants consisting of 20 women and 12

men, purposively selected from 4 Christian church denominations within the Kabwe Urban, namely the Seventh-day Adventist, the Roman Catholic, the Ebenezer Cathedral of Pentecost and the Bethel Baptist. These were subjected to interviews, which served as the foundation for primary data collection. The recorded transcripts of the interviews were analysed thematically for participants' perceptions on the access and management of socio-economic empowerment among Christian women in Kabwe. Since the participants did not want their denominational identity to be known, the researcher observed complete anonymity on ethical grounds at all levels, including in data analysis and discussion.

In addition to the interviews, the Desk/literature review was relied upon in this study, as a supplementary source to the primary data obtained through interviews. The study, through the insights obtained from participants, unearthed the emerging five (5) major themes namely the primeval sexual equality, equality distorted by 'the fall', the need to break gender norms, the need for women to prove themselves worthy and finally, the need to support women. These constitute the subjects of discussion in this article.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The general findings of the study show that there were inequalities in the manner of accessing and managing the socio-economic programmes in churches between men and women, as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Whether Women were Accorded Equal Access in Managing Empowerment Programmes

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY
<i>Very Often</i>	0
<i>Often</i>	0
<i>Rarely</i>	27
<i>Never</i>	5
<i>Total</i>	32

Source: *Field data*

As can be seen in the table above, most of the participants said women were rarely entrusted with the responsibility of managing the socio-economic empowerment activities in the sampled churches. Five participants outrightly said women were not considered at all. However, the latter category was quick to justify that the few women who were involved were only considered to the extent that they operated under the shadows of male figures who in an actual sense indirectly managed those programmes or activities. As regards the question of why there were gender biases against women in the allocation of responsibilities to manage empowerment ventures, almost all participants cited the reasons that were in the context of the patriarchal dominance over females, derived from the Biblical justifications. Seven participants who consisted of 5 males and 2 females, added to the Biblical justification, what sounded like misogynist views or mistrust of women, such as the phrase "*a woman alone cannot perform without a man behind*" and "*if you want to fail, put the woman to be in charge*".

As regards the question of why the gender-biased perceptions against women have continued to date despite the biblical prophecy that things would change with the coming of Jesus and despite the current affirmative actions to help establish the rights of women in a civic sense, some participants blamed it to the women themselves, alleging that some women had not done enough to prove themselves worthy. Regarding the follow-up question on how far in terms of the extent to go in helping women fight the status quo, some participants expressed disapproval of what they termed the current popular tendency of merely pushing women to positions of responsibility simply to make up for numbers in gender advocacy.

The Primeval Sexual Equality

Regarding the participants' attribution of the cause for the gender-based bias against women in the allocation of responsibilities, existing literature seems to be consistent in substantiating their views. One of the works

that can be cited in this regard is that of the renowned scholar, John Stott.

On the subject of the primeval sexual equality, Stott (2006) observes that gender equality is based on creation, in Genesis 1:26-28. God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground (p.328). He contends that if we put together the divine resolve (“ Let us make man ... and let them rule...”), the divine creation (“so God created ...) and the divine blessing (“ Be fruitful...fill the earth and subdue it...”), we see that the emphasis seems to be on the fundamental truths about human beings, namely that God made them in his own image, that he made them male and female, giving them the joyful task of reproducing and that he gave them dominion over the earth and its creatures.

Stott argues that from the beginning, humanity was male and female, and men and women were equal beneficiaries both of the divine image and of the earthly rule. There is no suggestion, he says, in the text that either sex is more like God than the other, or that either sex is more responsible for the earth than the other. He further says that man and woman’s remembrance to God and their stewardship of the earth were from the beginning shared equally since both sexes were equally created by God and like God.

Stott observes further that the ‘threefold’ affirmation of God’s creation in verse 27 is not just poetic parallelism; but a deliberate emphasis which we are intended to grasp. Twice is asserted that God created man in his own image, and on the third time the reference to the divine image is replaced by the words “male and female”. He cautions that we must be careful not to speculate beyond what the text warrants. Stott sums up his argument on gender based debate on the creation story that it is clear from the first chapter of the Bible onwards that the fundamental equality of the sexes is affirmed (p.329).

Equality is Distorted by ‘The Fall’: The Cause of Gender Marginalisation

Scholars of the Bible (such as Stott) are consistent in asserting that the primeval sexual equality was, however, distorted by ‘the fall’ (literally meaning ‘as a result of sin that was committed by Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden’), which provided the basis for the subsequent male-instigated gender subjugation and female maltreatment. Stott (2006) contends that part of God’s judgment on our disobedient progenitors (Adam and Eve) was his words to the woman: “Your desires will be for your husband, and he will rule over you”. This, he says, occasioned a measure of alienation from one another that the sexes would subsequently experience. In place of the equality of the one with the other, and of the complementarity of the one to the other, there would come the rule of the one over the other. Stott emphasises, therefore, that the dominion of woman by man is due to the fall, not to the creation (*Ibid*).

The Resulting Gender Subjugation and Mistrust of Women

What we see today in terms of gender-based maltreatment and subjugation, as was evidently echoed by participants in the interview, is a trace of deep-rooted traditions.

As a result of the abuse of God’s judgment over women, men formulated an excuse to maltreat and subjugate women in ways God never intended. Examples could be cited from many cultures. Firstly, from Sura 4 of the Koran, entitled “Women”: “Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior over the other. “... As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them” (Dawood, 1956; Stott 2006). Next, consider the Eskimos. Raymond de Coccola, a Roman Catholic missionary who spent a long time interacting with Eskimo hunters narrates how he got shocked when an Eskimo male hunter used a word of a woman which was also applied to a she-wolf or a bitch. “Trained to do all manner of mean tasks”, he reflected, “the Eskimo woman is used to enduring the weakness and appetites of men, in what appears to be a master-and-slave relationship

between the hunter and his wife (Raymond de Cocola, 1973). The third example to cite is in the pornography industry, arguably a major symbol of Western decadence, in which women are made the subject of male abuse and violence (Stott 2006: 330). And lastly (but not the least), a fourth example can be drawn from Gandhi's autobiography: "A Hindu husband regards himself as lord and master of his wife, who must ever dance attendance upon him (Cape 1966:155).

Ridicule and Denunciation of Women

Ridicule and denunciation of women were among the strings of the male-instigated barriers to women's participation in empowerment project activities observed by participants. They observed that because of the prevalence of these barriers, some women who had seized the rare opportunity to participate in the empowerment programme activities either got demotivated to operate effectively or in some cases, as it were, backed up. How could women found in such circumstances be encouraged biblically? One participant suggested an intervention based on the book of **Proverbs, thus:**

*Instead of discouraging women by worsening their frustrating frantic attempts at success, we should offer them deliberately selected words of comfort and encouragement. It is said that it hits differently when someone else points out your most beautiful traits and-powerful capabilities. We should, therefore, equally empower women in their socio-economic endeavours with a reminder of how wonderfully complex they are. **Proverbs 16:24** says, "Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." (Interview with a Woman from Bethel Baptist Church, Kabwe, August 27, 2023).*

THE WAY FORWARD

In terms of the way forward, participants expressed the need to break the current gender norms with caution though, that

women needed to prove themselves worthy of doing what men were capable of.

The Need to Break the Gender Norms

There is a need to break the gender barrier and restore to women the measure of dignity lost by the fall. The Bible is consistent with what it can offer in this regard. When Jesus came, he was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4). This already should demonstrate the need to dignify her, although the Protestants are anxious to avoid the exaggerated veneration of the Virgin Mary accorded to her in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, we should also avoid the opposite extreme of failing to honour her. It was not only Jesus' born of a woman, however, that should signify the restoration of women's dignity, but also his attitude towards them. We can cite his theological discussion with someone at Jacob's well, despite the fact that she was a woman, a Samaritan and a sinner, which gave him three reasons to ignore her. It was similar to a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery: he was gentle with her and refused to condemn her (Stott, 2006).

The Need for Women to Prove Themselves Worthy

A few participants who acknowledged the low participation of women in activities of socioeconomic empowerment programmes, however, observed that some people had lost confidence in women because of what they observed as a common tendency to entrust some women with public responsibilities out of sympathy-based generosity, facilitated by the women lobby groups merely to make up for women numbers. They observed that this sometimes resulted in having incompetent women in positions of influence. Talking in reference to this observation, one participant said there was a need to demystify the notion which in her view had become popular, adding that women should take the initiative in proving themselves that they have what it takes to be equals with their male counterparts when it comes to managing the empowerment activities. She recounted:

As women, we should not be entrusted with responsibilities

simply because we want to increase statistics. I don't agree with that. If someone tells me to get there merely to increase statistics, I will be uncomfortable. If someone today comes and says we want to empower you economically because you are a woman, I will feel disrespected too. I would rather pause and tell them, No! Let me deserve the offer on merit. I would rather they say we looked at the prevailing circumstances at church or in the community and we have seen that you have met the minimum benchmarking criteria for the selection (Interview with a female educationist, Kabwe, September 28, 2023).

Another participant echoed the context of the above observation and said the debate about sympathy-based generosity for women, and the lobby for more females in positions of influence, simply to make up for numbers did not sit well with him. His opinion was to have the narratives modified, as he narrated:

I think such debates should be modified because the way they come out, is like women are appealing- literally begging to be considered in socioeconomic empowerment in order to balance up numbers even when they don't have anything to offer. Let women prove themselves. I am proud of the few women of influence who have excelled and are doing extremely well in economic enterprises, and when we read their resumes they are qualified and capable. There are some women role models out there in society. So for now, let those women who aspire to lead in socioeconomic empowerment ventures prove themselves and that would lead to a change in the narrative of women's

representation (Interview with a male participant, Kabwe, August 27, 2023).

He said that to break the status quo, we should not be seen to campaign for women's involvement in socio-economic engagements for the sake of raising statistics, but rather encourage them to work harder and have a changed mindset. "A woman should not, for instance, just be seated every day waiting and thinking that one day someone from church or elsewhere will come and pick her to increase statistics, No!" "Let women not simply be there to be counted, but to contribute significantly to society", he remarked.

A Catholic female and former leader of an educational institution who was asked for her views on the same matter recounted thus:

... not really, actually, I follow these debates so much because I have an interest as a female and a woman who has been in leadership positions before. I think it should not be a matter of making up for numbers; as women, we should work hard and compete favourably based on the same minimum set standard criteria for our male counterparts because if we are simply going to say let us make up for numbers so that people see, I think that is not right. That's why you find that in the process of trying to put people just as numbers, they don't really perform (Interview with a female participant, Kabwe, September 28, 2023).

She said if there was anything she didn't like as a leader was somebody who does not perform, regardless of whether such a one is male or female. She added that women had the potential to do what men were capable of doing and that they also had opportunities at their disposal, but one problem she said she had observed in her experience as a leader was that women 'hold back', a tendency she

said she detested. She contended that it should be the case of what women are able to do, what they have achieved and what they qualify for.

The Catholic female leader in the above quotation further said that what women needed to do was to always push themselves in order to avoid getting pity from people:

For me, I believe in working hard to get what is required so that even when I am subjected to competition, I am on the same level; I don't need to blame anyone (Ibid).

Women Need the Support

Some participants observed that the few women of influence who went against the odds in defying the forces of gender dynamics in grabbing the available socio-economic empowerment opportunities needed scriptural encouragement to prevent them from backing up, in the midst of the prevailing denunciations, ridicule and maltreatment from the patriarchal society. They cited some Bible verses as sources of inspiration to offer to such Christian women who may be engaged in empowerment projects. One participant suggested that affirmative action needed to be devised and enforced in order to encourage the selected few women of influence currently in the empowerment programmes activities so that these would be used as role models to other women in demonstrating courage and endurance, citing the following scriptural inspiration from Acts 1:8:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Interview with a Man from Ebenezer Cathedral of Pentecost, Kabwe, August 27, 2023).

Indeed, when we understand where empowerment comes from, we can lead other Christian women aspiring to take part in

socio-economic activities to a well of power that never runs dry.

Theories and Findings: The Nexus

There is a connection between the gendering of empowerment for Christian women in Kabwe and the Zimmerman and Islamic theories of empowerment that were employed respectively in this study in order to make meaning of the findings. For instance, there is a need to empower the marginalised sections of people in the Kabwe community which directly resonates with the Zimmerman (2000) theory, while the target women category echoes part of the Islamic Ganokendra Model. However, the study has unearthed a further need for addressing the dynamics of gender inequalities in entrusting people with responsibilities of management empowerment programmes, which may not necessarily fall within the fold of the two theories.

CONCLUSION

This article has discussed the gendering of empowerment for Christian women in Kabwe urban, Zambia. The findings of the study reveal the presence of gender-based inequalities against women in the management of empowerment programmes within the Christian community. An eminent question, then, arises: "Where do we attribute the root cause of the gender-based maltreatment and subjugation against women?" If it derives from the Biblical Patriarchal set-up, occasioned by 'the Fall' in Genesis Chapter One, as the findings of the current study suggest. It should be suggested, in conclusion, that we need to grasp all the subsequent elements of the text in entirety to avoid fragmented facts. One such fact to keep along is that in the Old Testament, the Prophets had already looked forward to the day of the New Covenant in which the original equality of sexes would be re-affirmed, which came to fulfilment with the coming of Jesus. Jesus laid bare the patriarchal norms upon which some Christian mindsets today base their gender-based subjugation and maltreatment of women. The study, therefore, closes with an assertion that there is no remaining recourse whatsoever, to the

mistreatment of women based on gender. Nevertheless, women should not abuse this affirmation by turning it into an excuse for relaxing and hoping to be placed in positions of influence merely to make up for numbers. They should prove themselves worthy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the author makes the following recommendations:

a) There is a need to enforce affirmative action to help establish the rights of women.

b) While appreciating the need to pull out the strings of male-instigated barriers to women's full participation in socio-economic empowerment programmes, women also need to recognise the potential they have and prove themselves worthy of what it takes men to be in the positions they aspire to be.

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