

FAITH BASED INSTITUTIONS AND WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: A GENDERED ANALYSIS OF ZAOGA FIF IN BINDURA, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Whilst the economic status of women remains contested in the religious fraternity, this research paper stresses that Faith Based Institutions have been instrumental in initiating the economic empowerment of women in Zimbabwe. In that respect, the ZAOGA FIF has essentialised women economic empowerment through championing talents and other empowerment related programmes. Through talents, women are empowered to execute both formal and informal businesses from a religious background. Equally important, these talents have effected and triggered the realisation of women capabilities both at home and outside home. At home, some men have also benefited from the projects undertaken by women thereby raising the livelihood status of the family at large. In gathering information, the study successfully employed interviews and questionnaires. Secondary data sources from relevant scholarship were used in the study. For example, the immense scholarship provided by the archbishop of ZAOGA FIF, Professor E.H Guti, provided the much needed secondary information. More importantly, purposive sampling was employed to acquire information from seven key informants from the ZAOGA FIF church leadership from Bindura's seven districts. Findings of this paper indicate that the ZAOGA FIF doctrine of working using your own hands among both sexes is not just a biblical follow-up, but has also contributed much towards poverty eradication among the ZAOGA FIF women and men. As such, this paper acknowledges that issues surrounding women economic empowerment should be understood after appreciating the historical development of Talents as a church principle of empowering women, the study concludes that Faith Based institutions should not always be understood from a religious standpoint but also as vibrant institutions which empower both men and women through religious procedures hence the call for all relevant stakeholders to compliment these efforts.

Keywords: Economic Empowerment, Faith Based institutions, Talents, Sexuality.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a critical deconstruction of the belief that gender is entirely an academic discipline equated with women. In satisfying that, the article appraises on how Faith Based Institutions have essentialised development projects among both men and women. In the context of this paper, the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Forward in Faith Ministries (ZAOGA FIF) naturally re-focused its commitment towards the previously known culture of only economically empowering women through the execution of talents. In doing so, realizing the economic environment prevailing in Zimbabwe, the ZAOGA FIF through the leadership of its Archbishop, Professor E.H Guti, has

championed gender equality projects and programs. For example, both men and women are continuously equipped with entrepreneurship skills (Shumba 2015). During the course of this study, we came to the conclusion that ZAOGA FIF, as a Faith Based Institution, has appreciated and reflected gender best practices as the various skills which are taught the church members are not selective especially paying a particular focus on sexuality.

As one of the widely accepted definitions of gender, gender refers to how men and women are socialized in a particular community (American Psychological Association and National Association of School Psychologists 2015). In a number of cases, the manner in which men and women are socialized is largely dependent on the various forces of socialization and churches are one of the major forces of socialization (Haralambos and Holborn 2004). During our various interactions with both the senior and junior members of ZAOGA FIF Ministries, men and women and also through some observations, we observed that, in a number of cases, the Zimbabwean society and other societies from beyond the borders of Zimbabwe have got a serious misconception of gender, talents and economic empowerment. For instance, most of these people think that talents are mainly done by women, and, men are not part and parcel of these empowerment projects and programmes. Of course, this was the case, considering that long back in the history of ZAOGA FIF, more women were not formerly employed as compared to men, currently and interesting to note, Zimbabwe's informal sector is driven by a greater portion of women than men (Magunje 2017).

In understanding Faith Based Institutions and Women Economic Empowerment, the paper briefly used the Gender and Development Approach (GAD). This was justified as the GAD approach understands that development should be an inclusive approach which involves both sexes (Moser 1993). The fact that the GAD approach captures the various dimensions of development was the reason why the GAD approach was used as the conceptual base of analysis. Moreso, ZAOGA FIF, as a socialisation force has actually deconstructed the societal culture of discriminating women on sexual grounds, but has further involved men in the development processes (Researchers' own observation). In the process, men, being part and parcel of marriages as institutions and the church, are sometimes involved in businesses with their women as a way of comprehending and implementing the teachings of the Archbishop, Professor E.H Gutu (Shumba 2015), As such, this paper invoked the general belief of associating gender with women as indicated by the inclusion of both sexes in small to large businesses. Ultimately, this has resulted in the elevation of the livelihood status of both men and women within and outside ZAOGA FIF.

ZIMBABWE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD FORWARD IN FAITH MINISTRIES AND WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT; A BRIEF HISTORY

It would be prudent to start by acknowledging that ZAOGA FIF has clearly grown from lips to bounds as reflected by its large following. Starting from a humble background, the Archbishop of ZAOGA FIF reviewed how he was instructed by God to 'Fear not, Sin not'.....(Muyambo and Machingura 2014). This all started when he was in the bushes of Ngaone in Chipinge District (Gutu; 2011). As a Faith Based Institution, ZAOGA FIF has since been a pace-setter in teaching congregants the fundamentalities of working using their own hands (Researchers' own observation). As a personality who bears undisputable testimony to the fruits of working hard from a humble root, Professor E.H Gutu believes in the teaching of *working talents* as a sustainable panacea of eradicating poverty and at least raise the livelihoods standards of people (Gutu 2011). It is important to initially start by highlighting that, with respect to the interpretation of women economic empowerment by ZAOGA FIF, women economic empowerment should not be limited to the *working of talents*, as, within the church itself, there are also other avenues and methodologies which are used to

economically empower women. To that effect, the African Christian Business Fellowship (ACBF), as a church initiated establishment, is anchored on the idea of grooming individuals on how to

successfully start their businesses from scratch. The ACBF allows members to create synergies and in some specific circumstances seek divine intervention in their various entities (Shumba 2015).

All events related to women economic empowerment started to unfold when Ezekiel was offered money and a fleet of buses by one white man in the United Kingdom to be under his stewardship. After consulting God, on whether to transact with the white man, Ezekiel was instructed to go back to Africa-Zimbabwe and teach people to work talents (Musoni 2011). This has indeed enabled ZOAGA FIF to build all its churches, schools and now the Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU)...(Guti 2011). Talents mainly start as small enterprises that a greater portion of people start from a small starting capital. Furthermore, the spiritually gifted man always teaches his people to start businesses from a humble beginning. To him, this is the only way to go. Initially, talents were mainly commanded by women owing to the oppressive nature of the colonial era in Zimbabwe and this has seen many women who once used to be mere housewife becoming prominent business people (Musoni 2011).

Defining Women Economic Empowerment: A Gendered Overview

For purposes of this paper, women economic empowerment should be logically traced from the time the various approaches of development emerged. It is therefore germane to unfold that as early as 1970s, the various researchers on development began to focus on the gendered division of labour and the impact of development and modernization strategies on women. It should also be made categorically clear that this approach to development came into use during the United Nations Decade for women between 1975 and 1985. What made this approach unpopular was concluding that women were passive beneficiaries of development (Moyoyeta, 2004). The approach maintained that women were being left out of economic development and were significantly not benefiting from economic processes of change and development. With a passage of time, the Gender and Development approach emerged in the 1980's. As a contemporary methodology to development, the main objective of this approach is to remove disparities in economic equality between men and women (Moser 1993). Also, what makes this approach unique and indeed the best explanation of women economic empowerment is the fact that it deconstructs the idea of associating gender with women but rather emphasizes that both men and women should be equally involved in development processes and procedures. In this regard, the definitions of women economic empowerment in the succeeding sections clearly exhibit how the understanding of gender and development recognizes women economic empowerment. This is also frequently extended in light of the immense role of men in the realization of women economic empowerment.

First, empowerment, as a broad term, applying to both men and women, can be understood as referring to increasing the economic capabilities and economic standing points of individuals and communities (Musoni, 2013). This automatically translates to the fact that when individuals' capabilities are enhanced and essentialised, they are economically empowered. In this context, increased economic strength of women ultimately results in women's economic empowerment. It is also critical to mention that this economic empowerment is not only strictly anchored on increased economic growth but however several factors also come into play. To this end, economic strength is also underpinned on educational and other societal related factors. We therefore recognise that Faith Based Institutions directly and indirectly influence the economic empowerment of women. The major question answered in this paper is; how is this achieved?

Secondly, Shumba (2015) express that Women's Economic Empowerment should be understood as a transformational process associated with a sharp increase in the access to and control over economic entitlements and economic decisions. Whilst, many people from across the face of the earth, tend to believe that Less Economically Developed Countries are characterised by the dominance of men in the economic fraternity and Zimbabwe being an example, it would seem that this is no longer the case as indicated by the increase in the economic dominance of women in these countries and Pentecostal churches have played a distinguished role. This article, however, went a step further through qualifying and quantifying how Zimbabwean women, under the stewardship of the Archbishop, Professor E.H Guti, have been involved in economic development projects. In achieving this, one of the overarching questions answered in this paper was; is the ZAOGA FIF founded on patriarchal systems especially considering members' economic empowerment? All being argued, it is generally agreed that when there is equal distribution of resources and women are in a position to own the means of production, women are said to be economically empowered.

Talents and Women Economic Empowerment in ZAOGA FIF; A Brief Background and exegesis

Throughout history women have faced serious challenges under oppressive hard patriarchal systems Chitando (2010:17). To address these challenges, ZAOGA FIF founder Archbishop Ezekiel Guti introduced the system of matarenda (School of Talents) in the 1970s. Guti underscored the importance of matarenda whilst he was in Dallas, USA, attending Bible School. It is told that Guti once met a certain white preacher who asked him to work under him in return for the offer of money and buses as reward. Guti refused this worldly form of acquiring wealth (Musoni 2011). A person must not work under someone in a master-servant relationship. Instead, Archbishop Guti has always emphasised that every person must come to realise one's special talent (practical skills) in order to survive here on earth and also to work for the kingdom of God. Accordingly, whilst back in Zimbabwe, Archbishop Guti advocated and trained women to work by using their own hands for the support of their own livelihood and material support of the church. Guti taught that, God has given us hands to use and be better people (Musoni 2013).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section briefly unfolds the research design, research population and sample size, sampling techniques, data collection methods and data analysis procedures which were employed in the research.

Research population and Sample size

In this study, the targeted population consisted of both women and men who by any means confirm their membership with ZAOGA FIF, especially those who are residents of Bindura either temporarily or permanently. As individuals who are believed to have an informed background of the history of ZAOGA FIF, a few members of the church leadership such as elders and pastors also provided with handy information.

Sampling Techniques

ZAOGA FIF is stationed in 43 provinces in Zimbabwe. However, it is important to note that the provinces are not the ones which are conventionally understood in geographic terms but rather they are the architecture of the church leadership. As such, for purposes of this research, the study had a particular focus on Bindura Province which consists of Seven districts, both Urban and Rural

churches. As such, this research made use of purposive sampling to get seven respondents among women and men from these provinces. Purposive sampling was also used to gather information from members of the church leadership such as church elders and pastors. These people are believed to have an informed background on the history and strategic vision of ZAOGA FIF.

Data collection

Instruments used in the collection of primary data were interviews and observations, and secondary data was collected through documentary review such as the scholarship provided by the Archbishop of ZAOGA FIF, Professor EH Guti.

Data Analysis and interpretation

In interpreting and analysing the data, some conclusions based on the information acquired were used. This means the researchers were interpretive.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

As indicated earlier on, men and women of ZAOGA FIF community are mainly economically empowered through the work of talents. However, important results gained in this research indicate that people are not always compelled to work talents but rather, they are also involved in some business fellowship with business people of a high standing. For instance, this has been actualised by the African Christian Business Fellowship, which is a church initiative mandated to train not only members of the church but also individuals from outside the church. All the key informants of this research confidently established that, ZAOGA FIF as a faith based institution, has not only established massive strides towards the economic empowerment of women but has also recorded a path of serious learning as women themselves confirmed that they are experiencing positive growth especially in the economic fraternity.

It is germane to note from the onset that as a means of economically empowering church members, talents were initially meant to economically empower women. It was further indicated that talents were regarded as women only for the sole purpose maintaining the tradition of the church. One of the key respondents indicated that;

The fact that women constituted a greater percentage of the ZAOFA FIF population, there was need to specifically focus on this sex. However, with a change in the condition of the Zimbabwean economy and the demographic makeup of ZAOGA FIF beginning as early as 2000 there was need to include men in the work of talents. To make matters worse, some of the men started losing jobs. This empirically justifies why these talents are now being understood as talents for the family and not for women.

The above information is indeed a true indication of how development projects and initiatives should be inclusive and engage equity. The study concludes that the fact that men are also affected by some economic problems, it will not make sense to sideline them in development processes. As can be deduced from the above testimony, men also experience barriers in some aspects of development hence the need for inclusive approaches and partnerships to scale up women's economic empowerment on its women. Further, it seems there is problem of thinking that women are the only people involved in low-value added occupations that generate little economic returns.

ZAOGA FIF and Women Economic Empowered in Remote Areas in Zimbabwe

To show how ZAOGA FIF is determined in improving the livelihood status of its people whether men or women, young men or young women, its niche even extends to the marginal areas of Zimbabwe such as Muzarabani, Guruve, Kanyemba and Mukumbura. It is even argued that the influence of ZAOGA FIF which extends to empower people economically even started in these marginal areas. It should also be made categorically clear that most of these areas are poverty stricken and limited in socio-economic growth. Despite being poor, these communities have been taught and appreciated the teaching of working talents. To indicate the successfulness of working talents, women in lower Guruve started talents by collecting *masawu* from forests and selling them. To that affect, one of the respondents (interviewed, 27 March 2017) had this to say;

These women have even gained huge profits from selling *masawu*. Further, whilst the selling of *masawu* has largely been associated with the gender concept of femininity in Zimbabwe, men are also been involved in such small scale businesses. This has been necessitated by the consistent teachings of Archbishop, Professor EH Guti who stresses both men and women should at least venture into small businesses to at least sustain themselves in the current Zimbabwean economic hardships.

In light of the above statements, this study is therefore naturally compelled to appreciate the vibrant role and command of women in the economic processes of Zimbabwe. Also, to indicate how the gender terrain has refocused its attention in the socialization process, the involvement of men in the selling of *masawu* is indeed adequate evidence.

By extension, as has been alluded to earlier on, the niche of ZAOGA FIF also extends to include those remote areas such as Mukumbura. This area is the border crossing between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. It is argued that taking advantage of their closeness to Mozambique, these women get second hand goods from Mozambique at a cheaper price and sell them in Zimbabwe at a higher price hence maximizing profits. The above history indeed reflects on how the Economic progression of ZAOGA FIF should be understood from a humble background. It was in such early stages that women started to realize their full potential. The realization of one's potential is one fundamental principle of empowerment (Bush and Folger 1994). By extension, men are also being included in all the development processes taught in the church. The following section will therefore critically expose the scope and the various dimensions of women economic empowerment from a gendered standpoint. This is so because their activities have directly and indirectly posed a significant bearing on men.

Women Supplementing Husbands Monthly Net Earnings through Talents

It was indicated that within ZAOGA FIF, more men are generally involved in formal employment. Nonetheless, a greater portion of women are also engaged in formal employment. As a means of supplementing their husbands' monthly earnings, women are involved in small, medium and even large businesses. It was mainly indicated that women empowerment itself should not be restricted to individual growth and capabilities but also the ability of an individual to compliment and raise the livelihoods status of a family as an institution. One of the respondents emphasised that;

The fact that women are selling from as little as sweets and chocolates, economically means that there are returns to the family whether financial or non financial. Also, the clear fact of the matter is that when a wife is engaging in small or even large businesses she becomes less dependent on the husband and the husband will directly or indirectly appreciate the ownership

and control of some resources by the wife. Obviously, when that happens, dependence is demystified and a woman becomes economically empowered.

A closer interpretation of the above information would imply that when a woman is economically productive, she is not only significant for her husband but also for the family at large. As such, one can argue that economic empowerment also extends to mean a progression in the determination of the channelization of resources at family level.

Faith Based Institutions, Financial Management and Women Economic Empowerment

There was overwhelming clarity on the role of ZAOGA FIF in teaching members financial management related skills. To this end, it was emphasised that the church institution itself always make sure that people are taught best business practices. For example, both men and women are taught about profit maximisation. In achieving this, they are always being reminded to put God first. This is true as wealth maximisation is the main objective of financial management. More still, wealth maximisation can only be realised in the presence of savings and investment (Paramasivan and Subramanian 2016). Given the benefits of savings and investment, one of the respondents indicated that;

In making sure that members of the church are well equipped with the best financial management skills of savings and investment, the church frequently conduct talents seminars. During these seminars, members are taught on how best to keep their finances. Further, women are also taught on how best they can manage their profits. However, women are supposed to do this realising the importance of their husbands in the financial management process.

The above indication shows the grim extend to which both women and men are targeted for economic empowerment and development. From the above response, it is clear that gender as an academic and social discipline, is now being appreciated as an inclusive process which is not selective whatsoever based on sexuality. Analysing the above information ,it seems the aspect of gender has now become complex and sophisticated to the extent that society is now appreciating that family and societal businesses should be understood as a public good, which means that gender itself is now being comprehended and extended as a holistic phenomenon without any deliberate sexual exclusion or inclusion. As such, it will automatically follow that there are more benefits of including both men and women in development processes and procedures. Given the immense strides put in place by ZAOGA FIF, it is arguable to maintain that ZAOGA FIF is not limited to its core duties of spreading the gospel of salvation but it is also complimenting international efforts of eradicating poverty and ensuring gender equality. At a national level, ZAOGA FIF has proved to be complimenting the government efforts of economically empowering Zimbabweans. The government of Zimbabwe seeks to achieve this through the implementation of various policies such as Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIM ASSET).

The African Christian Business Fellowship and Women Empowerment

The African Christian Business Fellowship is a church initiated establishment that tries to bring together people who are well established in the business fraternity and those who aspire to start their own businesses. As one of the functions of this business fellowship, individuals are trained and capacitated to start their own businesses at no cost. Whilst the ACBF has no specific funding to cater for those aspiring to start their businesses, it was indicated that it can still connect you to those business people with the financial muscle on agreed terms. To reflect on its commitment on non

discrimination on religious and sexual grounds, the African Christian Business Fellowship provides business services for everyone. The ACBF even monitors the progress of your business and if need be, they give you instant advice. It was repeated that;

The African Christian Business Fellowship has immensely contributed towards the economic empowerment of women in that women derive economic knowledge and are better placed to attain business knowledge which was a nightmare way back in history. Whilst men are involved in such skills development platforms, the involvement of women on such a pronounced level indicates that women are now being recognised and there is more trust and belief in the capabilities of women in the gender terrain.

With reference to the definitions of women economic empowerment given earlier on, it is evident that ZAOGA FIF is fundamental in Zimbabwean women attaining economic adventures which are empowerment on its own. Admittedly, in fulfilment of the objectives the African Christian Business Fellowship, men are also found helping women with skills development. Such efforts reflect the dynamic nature of the gender discourses in Zimbabwe in particular. We therefore argue that such transformations are well come especially considering that employment opportunities in Zimbabwe are currently hard to come by hence a woman finding herself in some business adventures is rather a big empowerment stride. Also, given the gender inequalities that characterized Zimbabwean patriarchal society in terms of access and ownership of resources, women usually found themselves as a grouping with less economic ownership and control of resources. Amidst all the above, it is clear that Faith Based Institutions should be appraised for empower

Overall Remarks

Whilst it is not possible to exhaust all matters relating to Faith Based Institutions and Women Economic Empowerment, this paper has essentially highlighted that the ZAOGA FIF Africa has fostered the empowerment of women through employing a number of strategies and means. As one of the strategies, men and women are taught to use their own hands. Further, they are always reminded that growth is a progression which can come from small business ventures such as selling of chocolates and other small items. Whilst the empowerment strategies and means were initially targeted at women, men are all taught several survival strategies and skills. For example, through seminars which mainly happen at Provincial level, women and men, young men and young girls are all taught entrepreneurship skills. It was stressed that youths are empowered from an early stage. As such, it is apparent that ZAOGA FIF has not only transformed the economic status of women, but it has also initiated sustainable gender relations between men and women both at family level and outside the family. This is the case, especially considering the fact that, long back in the history of ZAOGA FIF Africa, the focus on empowerment was mainly on women.

However, recognising that men are also affected by economic circumstances, the economic drive of the church is now being employed on a multidimensional stance. Clearly, such strides show how the ZAOGA FIF has deconstructed gender biases related with selective developmental approaches. , such changes are a true reflection of how the society, through the assistance of Faith Based Institutions, has naturally realigned itself in including both men and women in developmental processes and procedures.

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