

## **Religion and Gender: Emancipatory Tools for Development in Zambia**

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### **Abstract**

Religion and Christianity in particular has a history of integrating its mission of evangelisation to addressing social concerns and contributing to development. Using case study, the current article discusses religion and gender as emancipatory tools for development in Zambia, with specific reference to Lusaka District. As posited by Jun (2008) researchers and participants are purposive beings who have experiences and can interpret the meaning of existence and relationships in a social world. With this philosophy, the article uses qualitative methods to gain deeper insight into the experiences of adherents to four churches namely, Seventh Day Adventist, Catholic, Evangelical Church of Zambia, and Pentecostal Holiness Churches in Lusaka District. The sample comprised four religious leaders, 16 adherents of the churches and five officials from women activist organisations. There was a total of 25 participants. All the participants were selected purposively by virtue of

their position and belonging to a church or women's organisation. The objectives were to establish perceptions of Christians towards religion, gender and development; to examine the role played by the church in gender and development and to ascertain women involvement in the church. The main finding was that no meaningful development could be realized without including women as they were important individuals in society. Churches should, therefore, delegate *decision-making responsibilities not only to men but also women.*

**Key words:** religion, gender, christianity, development, emancipation

## **Background**

Religion and gender have for a long time been rated as non-factors in many developmental discussions. Often times, partners are told to leave their religion or bracket their faiths if they want to take part in developmental forums. The two phenomenon are strongly perceived to have less, if not nothing, to do with the development of any society. There has been a gap between religious, gender and developmental issues. Additionally, many studies (Okechukwu, 2012; Eghosa and Rotimi, 2005 and Robert and Rachel 2003), have cast more attention on how religion hinders developmental efforts than on how it can support development. The term development is a multi-dimensional concept and can be referred to as the improvement of the full human life in every aspect, in the context of the community (Chanda, 1999). Thus, development is not just an economic term, but it encompasses the whole person in an integral and

sustainable manner. Development also has different dimensions and the focus in this article is not only the economic dimension of development but also the general improvement of human welfare in the society.

Contrary to the assumption that religion, gender and development are three concepts which are at great odds, religion and gender are critical and complex factors any developmental agenda has to put into consideration in order to be successful. Religion plays a vital role in shaping cultural, social, economic and political norms of any society. For example, religion may influence the gender roles of a given society. Furthermore, gender roles and the status of women and men are deeply tied to the manner in which religious texts may discourage women from taking leading roles in activities that might change their lives and society at large. Through texts such as women ought to be submissive to their husbands as heads of families, religion may instill and legitimise the position held by men about women on this subject. This attitude makes women feel helpless as they live non industrious and innovative lives.

In addition, religious laws are regarded to be sacred and they are respected so much that it is hard, if not impossible, for the clergy to revise them so as to be in harmony with prevailing economic and modernisation processes. For example, Women for Women International (2003) document reported that throughout the Middle East, secular laws were adopted in all aspects of governance except those related to the family code. Religious laws like the sharia law were maintained only to regulate the private or the family code. So despite the changes in the economic and social reality of Middle Eastern women, for instance in terms of their mobilisation to work in the labor force, religious laws continued to regulate family codes that included marriage, divorce, inheritance and other aspects directly affecting women. Thus, after

working all her life and contributing her income to her family, upon divorce a woman would only get her delayed dowry that is accorded to her by sharia law and nothing of the family's accumulation to which she may have contributed (Women for Women International, 2003). Compounding the problem, religious law is interpreted strictly from a perspective of male privilege, in a manner often more restrictive than actually exercised in Islamic history. Women in this case find themselves losing on both ends; they can neither enjoy the freedom brought about by modernization nor the protection dictated by religious traditions.

Tyndale (2011) forwarded that the effects of religion on humankind are double-sided. He observed that religion could work for the good of mankind and society and that the opposite is also true. For instance, religious ideals, among other ideals, provide a haven of sorts for women through its glorification of traditional roles, in response to economic insecurity and the unattainable demands of modernization and globalisation. At the same time, religion may offer teachings that are anti-gender.

So in Zambia, a Christian Nation in which the majority of the people are Christians, religion might perpetuate religious myths related to human origin and 'female evil' which rationalize and legitimize the subordination of women under traditional and indigenous policies, reinforcing gender bias. In this case religion is used as a tool for gender marginalisation as opposed to gender emancipation. In view of this Tyndale (2011) lamented that if development is to flourish without any hindrance by gender issues, religion is the custodian of the solution. However, positive and gender subsidiary religious teachings can be used in developmental issues. In Zambia, studies have shown that gender friendly religious teachings have got the power to motivate women apply themselves towards work (Phiri, 2008

and Ziwa, 2017). Teachings such as women ought to be industrious and hardworking found in Christianity (Proverbs 31) do not only provide a haven of all sorts for women but also encourage them to discover the potential that reside in them.

It is the view of this article that reinterpreting religious teachings, practices, doctrines, ethos and myths in light of other cultural myths and scientific principles has the potential to reshape the consciousness of many Zambian and other societies on gender equality. In this sense, religious mythology becomes an important force in instilling respect for women and ending practices that demean and disenfranchise women. Unlike the approach of exhausting all efforts on discussing anti-gender religious teachings, it is worth to think otherwise and discuss how best the same or other religious teachings can be used to legitimize gender equality in Zambian communities and achieve development for all. It is from this background that this article investigated the perceptions of Christians in Zambia, with reference to Lusaka District, on religion and gender as emancipation tools for development. Lusaka was chosen as the area of study because it is the capital city and there were many churches and non-governmental organisations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitute a bold, visionary, and universal agenda for an interconnected global community. Gender equality is an overarching and foundational element of all of the Goals, and one that will require unprecedented social transformation to be fully realised. The religions of the world, embodying a rich heritage of values, teachings, and symbols, represent one of the most powerful cultural and motivational resources for the achievement of this transformation. As such, the articulation of the ideal of gender equality from within the frameworks of the world's diverse religious and faith traditions will

be central to the universal achievement of the SDGs. It is imperative, then, to deepen and broaden the engagement with faith movements, organisations, and initiatives that are challenging patriarchal norms and advancing narratives of gender equality rooted in the ideals of faith and human rights.

On several occasions religion has been rated as non-instrumental in many developmental discussions. The impact of religion on development is seemingly not considered in most circular discourses and implementation of developmental programs. This can be witnessed in the report given by the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (IPaRD) Secretariat at the 60th session of the United Nations (UN) Women Commission on the Status of Women in New York in 2015. It was reported that for more than 60 years, faiths have been ignored in the developmental world as it is often said, 'leave your faith outside if you want to negotiate development with us' (UN Women, 2016: 3). Consequently, most initiatives and strategies which have aimed at developing societies have barely yielded quality returns. This is in harmony with Stackhouse quoted in Ogbonnaya (2011) who asserted that the neglect of religion as an ordering, uniting and dividing factor in a number of influential interpretations of globalisation and development is a major cause of misunderstanding and a studied blindness regarding what is going on in the world. Since religions may not be utilized in most circular discourse regarding development there is a gap that exists between the two parties existing under one domain. In Zambia, however, religion has been influential in many spheres of life, socially and politically. Nevertheless the influence of religion and gender as emancipation tools for development might still leave much to be desired. Hence, the need for the current article.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this article is to explore how religion and gender could be used as emancipatory tools for development in Zambia.

## Theoretical Framework

Theories have been submitted regarding the influence of religion on gender. One such proponent is George H Mead. In his theory called “role taking” Mead (1934) theorized that the process of gender identity development begins very early in childhood. The members of the child’s primary group such as parents and siblings play an important role in the socialisation of the child. Children learn through imitation. This act of imitation through role taking forms the basis of the socialization process. Children further develop the necessary skills of role taking through social interaction. Mead visualized role taking as a three step process involving imitation, play and organized games.

He explained that during the first three years of age, children lack a sense of self and gender identity. Consequently, they can only imitate the actions of others. Young children most often imitate the gestures and actions of family members and others in their immediate environment. By the time children reach school age, they begin to take part in organised games. This stage requires internalising the norms, values, attitudes and beliefs that prevail in the family, community and society at large. Thus, through role taking individuals develop a sense of gender identity.

According to Mead, the self consists of two related parts, the ‘I’ and ‘Me’. The ‘I’ is the unsocialised spontaneous and self centred component of human personality and self-identity. The ‘Me’ is that part of our identity that is aware of the expectations and attitudes of society, our socialised self. The internalisation of values takes place through identification with adult models. Identification is where the child learns by imitation, play and organised games.

The theory by Mead suggests that religion affects gender identity. The theory has it that at an early stage in life, humans develop a sense of identity and role taking with special reference to norms, values and beliefs of the society. The fact that religion is the key custodian of

each society's norms, values and beliefs (Half, 2003), it is then logical to put it that Mead's theory holds religion to be a factor in gender identity. This assertion is in line with Oakley (1973) who defined gender as religiously, socially and culturally conditioned roles of men and women. Since religion and culture are closely intertwined, they both play a major role in the gender roles assigned to men and women.

In Zambia gender roles and its characteristics have undergone many recent adjustments and changes in response to development, as is the case in other countries globally. This has been due to technological advancements which have influenced religious, social and economic groups positively and negatively. This has led to massive economic and social changes in all parts of the world. It is worth stating that changes in gender roles and relations may meet resistance, particularly in the form of religion. Religiously described roles for men and women are regarded to be sacred and do not change even when the prevailing situation demands so. With this understanding in mind, it has been argued by various scholars (Ogbonnaya, 2011; Marshall, 2007) that religion and gender should be used as emancipatory tools if ideal development is to be attained in all countries, Zambia inclusive.

Mead's role taking theory has been adopted in that in Zambia religious people usually learn the beliefs and practices of the people that surround them be it parents, guardians or others they interact with. Though one knows that society expects him or her to change, a religious leader's beliefs are held as fundamental truths to such an extent that it might not be possible to change and allow women to take up leadership positions in the development process. There is need for the adult models to be open to religion and gender modification so that adherents might develop values (such as respect for the individual) which are inclusive of women participation in the development process, in the family, community and society at large.



## Literature Review

During the early 1940's there was a general assumption that developmental benefits for men were as good as for women. As such, most developmental forums and studies were marked by a notable silence on the distinctive roles that women broadly played in the process of social and economic development. For example, literature (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, 2008) on the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference where the Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were agreed upon showed graphically the dominance of men.

This picture has changed dramatically, with most observers tracing the breaking point to the early 1970s. Currently, development institutions rely on strategic frameworks that highlight their attention to gender in combating poverty. For many institutions, gender is an almost universally acknowledged element in development strategies in education, health, environment, microfinance and to community development. Most development institutions count significant numbers of women among their staff and leadership cohorts. This paradigm shift has been accompanied by increased scholarly work on gender and development. Scholars (Frampton, 2007 and Ester 2000) have realized that equality between women and men is central to meeting the goals of developmental work through social change. As such, most researchers have resorted into taking a sharper look towards the matter at hand particularly through the lens of women, faith, and development, because they pose fundamental questions about the shape of future societies and what constitutes equity in the contemporary world.

At the heart of the transformation is the understanding of gender equality as a right intrinsic in itself and an appreciation that women's rights are an important benchmark for a successful society. It is widely understood that the roles that women play in societies have a marked impact on future generations. Mary

Robinson who served, among other positions, as the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner, articulated more on this subject. She observed that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was clear and unambiguous in affirming the equal rights of men and women in all spheres (Robinson, 2008). Robinson goes ahead by quoting article 2 of the declaration which states that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. But it is a sad reality today that in many parts of the world women's situations are far from equal. The obvious material gaps include food, water, health and education which are intricately tied to the religious, civil and political gaps. Robinson concluded that nothing was more important to bridging these gaps than strong leadership combined with the scrutiny and understanding of religious teachings. Thus, in order for any nation to be developed, there is need for men and women to take up leadership positions in different institutions.

The discourse on religion and gender may seem to be separate from development but that is not actually the case. Frampton (2007) asserted that religious norms, especially when combined with cultural norms, determined women participation in developmental and decision making processes. These included male oriented norms and structures that mitigated women's public participation and cultural patterns that opposed women's participation in public life. In her case study on women's participation in Sierra Leone's 2007 Elections, Frampton (2007) noticed that women could not fully participate (both as voters and as candidates) due to religious and cultural norms.

With Sierra Leone's 2007 national elections on the horizon, Frampton developed a strategy to better engage women and encourage them to actively participate in the upcoming elections. Supported by a consortium of international donors, the strategy had several different aspects. It included an aspect of challenging perceptions

and stereotypes that limited women's participation; building the capacity of key women who could influence others, including journalists and civil society leaders; and mobilising a national civic and voter education campaign to ensure that women and other citizens were informed about how to vote and make choices about leadership. The tools used included radio programming, television, training, community forums, civil society mobilisation, and alliance-building.

Frampton's study showed that women listened to radio programmes more when they heard women's voices. It was also found that female journalists had greater access than male journalists, to women for interviews and discussions on radio programmes. Women who were engaged on radio and television discussions to talk about their opinions on elections were very afraid to do so. Many told journalists that they had to seek permission from their husbands first as heads of families; others simply pointed out that it was unscriptural for women to speak their minds at the expense of men, for the shoulder would never be above the head.

The findings in the above study showed that encouraging women participation in social and political development should start with engaging them in facilitating various developmental programmes. When women discover that fellow women spearhead various programmes, they boldly fight against stereotypes that hinder them from realizing their potential in development. This calls for traditional, government and religious leader's willingness to break out all traditional silos and explore common ground and action in order to meet ground-breaking innovation, and encounter likely allies. Women should be given leading roles, both in government and religious circles, if universal development is to be attained.

Frampton's study did not interact with religious leaders and women adherents to different churches to gather their views on how religion and gender could be used emancipatory tools for development. In the current

study, the researchers found it necessary to engage Christian religious leaders as they were the ones who could interpret the Bible for the emancipation of women and for their involvement in the developmental agenda both in the church and society.

In view of Frampton's recommendation stated above, Ester (2000) forwarded that leaders in the developing world could learn from the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) guidelines to its international church of 66.7 million people. The guidelines stated that no significant meeting of a church body could take place without 40 per cent of women being present and that the first 40 per cent of every LWF education dollar was to be allocated to girls, with the remainder split equally. There was still gender imbalance as more men than women were present at meetings. Women should be in the leadership positions of the churches so that they could be influential in the formulation of guidelines and in developmental processes.

Despite a clear headed understanding by scholars on how religious beliefs and institutions affect women and how women engage with religion in all its dimensions, it is striking how little of the developmental work about women touches on questions of religious organisations or beliefs, except in a negative way. In contrast, Gudorf (2006) reminded the 21<sup>st</sup> century scholarship that women's experiences in religions were as diverse as the religious traditions themselves. Common themes such as the lack of female leadership within most religious organisations, the lack of female role models, and the debate surrounding women's innate differences from men emerge for all of the major faiths. Gudorf also mentioned particular points of contention including domestic violence and female genital mutilation, to be at the centre of religion versus development discussions.

In Zambia, female genital mutilation may not be part of the Zambian culture. The Zambian government has taken strides by introducing the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs and appointing a female

as its Minister. However, women are still marginalized in the political arena, in some Christian religious groups and in development.

According to Gudorf, religions, as part of culture, are dynamic and diverse, not static or monolithic. Religions help within each culture to explain what is valuable, prioritise values, restrain behaviour, and bind communities through ritual in shared identities. Sacred texts touching on the nature of women differ widely but most highlight the importance of women and their function in society as wives and mothers, under the protection and control of men. Women are defined in terms of their physical differences from men. The leadership of men is another general theme in sacred texts, with various reasons given, including God's preference, women's punishment for the original sin of the first parents, Adam and Eve, and the common notion that women need to be protected from predation by "other" men, as well as from their own feminine irrationality and hyper-emotionality.

Gudorf (2007) further argues that if religion is to contribute positively towards development, there is need to turn a blind eye on the inferiority perception on women found in the scriptures and focus on scriptures in which women performed leading roles. Gudorf suggests accounts like that of Rebecca, Deborah, Judith and other independent women who exercised sound judgment on behalf of all people as recorded by the Jewish scriptures. Accounts of specific women in Christianity who worked as prophets, apostles, deacons and heads of churches further serve as good examples to emulate. Such accounts have the power to inspire women to root out stereotypes that exist in communities and help them participate fully in developmental processes. The suggestion by Gudorf is in harmony with Duff (2008) who asserted that just as the faith community had so often perpetuated discrimination against women, so can it be a powerful force for changing traditional and culturally determined practices.

Gudorf's study is different from the current study in that he focused on the examples of women stated in the Bible. He did not interact with the religious leaders to get their views on how religion and gender could be used for development.

The recognition of the indispensability of religion in the development discourse has given rise to changes of attitudes leading to a series of dialogue between religion and various agencies concerned with the promotion of sustainable development. Due to this change of attitude and approach on the implementation of developmental projects, studies (Ogbonnaya, 2013; Ziwa, 2017) have shown that developmental agencies are able to record success on the set objectives. As reported by Ogbonnaya (2013), within the context of the food and energy crisis of the 1970's, major world religions met at the Interreligious Peace Colloquium on Food and Energy in 1978 and declared food and energy as basic human rights. They issued a statement urging structural changes in world societies in order to alleviate hunger and malnutrition. Lessons learnt from that conference bring to the fore the complexity of such simple acts of charity like feeding the hungry as well as the interdependency of the basic organs of society for the realization of integral development: technological, economic, ideological and political will, religious and cultural values for world peace.

Furthermore, the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) set up in 1998 continued the dialogue of religion and development agencies such as the World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund, IMF (Tsele, 2001). The result of such dialogue has been an emphasis on 'integral development', that is, development that is not merely economic but one that includes the political, social, cultural, economic, technological as well as the spiritual aspects of human life. During his survey in Ghana on the prerequisites towards the achievements of the

Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), Tydale (2002) learnt that institutions appreciated the position of faith-based groups. Various institutions acknowledged that economic developmental programmes would not be sustainable, even within their own terms of reference, unless they incorporated the spiritual dimension of life. Tydale's findings are in harmony with the comment by Wolfensohn, former President of the World Bank. As quoted in Ogbonnaya (2011), Wolfensohn lamented that religion was an omnipresent and seamless part of daily life, taking an infinite variety of forms that are part of the distinctive quality of each community. It influences areas regarded as vital for successful development, such as gender equality. In simple terms, Wolfensohn confirms that religion is an important driver of change, just as it is at times a break to progress.

In religion, faith is the driving force that acts for any believer. With faith people are motivated to act towards various issues in an extraordinary manner of which without it they would not survive social pressures. In her study on Pentecostalism and the Morality of Money in the Copperbelt Province of Zambia, Haynes (2012) learnt that those who took the preaching message seriously were more prosperous than those who did not. The Pentecostal Christians acknowledged that it was their divine duty to pursue wealth.

Haynes' findings are related to those of the study by Ziwa (2017) titled "Community Based Theological Education for Social Transformation among Women in Zambia". She equally learnt that women could apply themselves towards work in order to change their lives for the betterment of their families and communities. Ziwa reported that women participated fully in income generating activities of Chongwe District which included digging building-sand for sale. The motivating factor behind women participating in such works was reported to be scriptural lessons learnt from various denominations (Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), Roman Catholic and United Church of Zambia (UCZ)). Women

acknowledged their appreciation of Bible based lessons such as; women should be industrious and hardworking as recorded in Proverbs 31 among many others (Ziwa, 2017).

The studies discussed above are justifiable as they all point to the view that if meaningful development is to be fulfilled, it has to be incorporated with religion. This is also in line with role taking theory as religious truth claims can only be acquired through other people or reading religious books that instill knowledge of the beliefs, practices and values to the listeners. Using this hypothesis, the study made it an objective to gather views from Christians on how they incorporated religion and gender as emancipatory tools for development.

## **Methodology**

The study used case study design to collect data from four religious leaders. Data was also collected from 16 adherents of the four churches included in the study and from five members of NGOs involved in supporting women in various ways. The total number of participants was 25. The participants involved in this study included four church leaders and four female church members from each of the four Christian denominations namely, Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), Catholic Church, Pentecostal Holiness and Evangelical Church of Zambia (ECZ). The study also involved one official from each of the five non-governmental women organisations namely, Women for Change (WFC), Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), National Women's Lobby Group (NWLG), Women's League (WL) and Graduate Women Zambia (GWZ). Data was gathered through interviews. Fed with needed information, the researchers grouped the information into themes which were analysed so as to forward suggestions on how religion and its teachings could be used as an emancipation tools for development in Zambia.



## **Ethical Considerations**

One of the researchers carried out interviews to participants after they were informed about the reasons for the study and they showed willingness to participate by signing a consent form. The researchers did not involve any participants who were not willing to be involved in the study. Additionally, the names of the participants were withheld.

## **Findings**

### *Perceptions on Gender and Development*

All the participants expressed their understanding and views on gender and development. Religious leaders and members described gender as both men and women having equal power while others indicated that gender was doing things together regardless of sex. Similarly, the female organisations (YWCA, WFC, NWLG, GWZ and WL) involved in this study gave the same understanding of gender.

With regard to the question on whether gender was a factor in development, participants responded in the affirmative and gave varying reasons. For example, the Pentecostal Christian participants stated that God gave both men and women the same Holy Spirit; as such both were essential beings in development. Others argued that in their churches women were often in the majority and that most of them were widows who took care of their families. Hence, there was need to incorporate women in development projects. Women organization representatives based their arguments on the premise that without considering gender, no universal and sustainable development might be achieved. Participants went ahead by suggesting how women should be considered in developmental discourse. One of the participants from the WFC indicated that women needed to be considered during social change forums especially by having them as facilitators of such initiatives.

In line with this suggestion of entrusting women with spearheading responsibilities, an Evangelical Church of Zambia elder echoed, “Everyone on earth has gone through the caring hands of a woman as such women should be given leading roles in caring for development programmes”.

### *The Role Played by the Church on Gender and Development*

Participants gave various suggestions on how churches could inspire women to take part in development activities. The suggestions included the need by the church leaders to organize gender related seminars meant to educate church members, in particular women, on gender and development issues; churches should work as role models by involving women in their decision-making processes. Women could be assigned positions such as church executive committee members; church leaders should have the right perception of women, remembering that God created every human (whether male or female) in His own image. Furthermore, a female Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church participant suggested that women through their groups like the “Dorcus Mothers” needed to be trained in various trades like tailoring among other skills-based trades.

Apart from suggesting what ought to be done by churches to inspire women take part in development, participants reported what their churches did on the same matter. The Pentecostal holiness participants confirmed that every month a seminar was arranged for women. At these seminars hard work was emphasised, and laziness was discouraged. For the ECZ denomination, women met every Tuesday to learn about how they could participate in various programmes of the church and the society at large. With regard to the Catholic Church, participants indicated that every year development agencies were invited to the parishes to educate women on various developmental issues. Issues like how women could have a good perception of development

programmes and lessons on how to borrow money from lending institutions and start businesses, among others, were discussed. Similarly, the SDA members reported that through the Dorcus Mothers, women were taught survival skills they could use when faced with economic and social hardships. The women were also made aware of global issues such as climate change, migration and human trafficking.

“Being aware of these issues, we work towards initiating developmental projects meant to counter the challenges faced during the implementation stages,” said one of the Dorcas members.

Participants further pointed out the religious teachings which discouraged women to take part in development activities and how the same teachings should be re-interpreted so that women could take part in all development activities within the church and society. For example, among mainline Christian denominations some doctrines did not allow women to take up leading roles due to their biological nature. This was in line with what is stated in I Corinthians 14: 34-35, among other scriptures:

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

This was so because the church was considered a holy place which women could defile. This teaching completely forbids women from taking part in anything in the church as outlined in the Old Testament (Leviticus 15: 19-23, 31). The Catholic Church and SDA participants suggested that if women were to be allowed to fully participate in development within the church, the doctrine should be revisited. Additionally, ECZ participants lamented that both men and women should be considered responsible for the original sin.

“This might help to mitigate the gender bias prevailing in some Christian denominations in Zambia,” concluded one of the participants.

With regard to women involvement in leadership positions, the study established that for the SDA only male members of the church were appointed as congregation executive body members. Female members occupied positions such as chairperson, secretary and treasurer of the Dorcas Mothers. For the Catholics, at parish level women were involved as part of parish executive members. They took part in the running of the affairs of the parish and other small Christian communities affiliated to the parish. In the ECZ, apart from adopting women as part of the church executive committee, women were also given an opportunity to run the affairs of the church once in a year. This form of administration was also found to be prevailing among Pentecostal Holiness Christians. Among all congregations the researchers visited, Pentecostal Holiness had the highest number of females serving as executive committee members. The findings are shown in the tables below:

## Women Involvement in the Church

*Table 1.1*

<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Highest office</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> highest office</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> highest office</b>
SDA	Admin elder	Body of elders	Union oversees
Person occupying office	Male only	Male only	Male only

The table above shows how women are involved at congregation level among SDA Christians. As observed in this table women are not found anywhere on the hierarchy of authority. For one to occupy the positions outlined above one must meet standards such as, male member of a church, conversant and knowledgeable about the 28 SDA doctrines, literate and in possession of the church manual, faithful and ordained.

*Table 1.2*

Denomination	Highest office	2 <sup>nd</sup> highest office	3 <sup>rd</sup> highest office
Catholic Church	Parish chairperson	Parish executive	Council leaders
Person occupying office	Male or Female	Male and Female	Male or Female

From the table above, both male and female members stand equal chance of occupying the offices outlined at parish level of the Catholic Church. One is capable of occupying the offices above if he/she is a baptized member of the church, receives all sacraments, not a polygamist, literate and has love for people.

*Table 1.3*

Denomination	Highest office	2 <sup>nd</sup> highest office	3 <sup>rd</sup> highest office
ECZ	Leading elder	Departmental elders	Executive committee
Person occupying office	Male only	Male only	Male and Female

The table above shows the order of authority and how women are involved at congregation level among ECZ Christians. As shown in the Table 1.3, women involvement starts at the third office of authority. For one to occupy the first or second positions of hierarchy he must meet standards such as trustworthy, fine works, irreprehensible, a husband of one wife, moderate in habits, sound in mind, orderly, hospitable, qualified to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but reasonable, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, a man presiding over his own household in a fine manner and having his children in subjection with all seriousness. Any married woman who is regular in attending church meetings qualifies to be part of the church executive committee.

*Table 1.4*

Denomination	Highest office	2 <sup>nd</sup> highest office	3 <sup>rd</sup> highest office
Pentecostal Holiness	Minister in charge	Deputy minister	Secretary
Person occupying office	Male or Female	Male or female	Male or Female

The table above summarises the order of authority among Pentecostal Holiness Christians and how women are involved in positions of authority. Both male and female members of the church stand equal chance of occupying the offices outlined above. A Pentecostal member qualifies for any of the positions if he or she demonstrates to have a Calling and is able to read and write.

## Discussion

### *Perceptions on Gender and Development*

From the findings, the study established that Christians understood the concept of gender and its impact on development. Without involvement of women, no meaningful development can be realized because women are important individuals in society. As submitted by the National Women Lobby Group (NWLG) participant, women were at the centre of community welfare. As such, involving them in developmental processes is unquestionable. If the churches and, indeed, the Zambian government and other development agencies are to implement developmental programmes fully, they should engage women. They should do so not by involving politicians but the church should orient women on the need to take part in the development programmes of the nation. Unlike politicians, the church leadership should legitimate change and motivate citizens, women in particular, to respond to change positively. This idea brings in the issue of role taking among humans which is often influenced by religion and other factors as Mead (1934) put it. It is often religion which justifies a role

one has to take. This is what Mead asserted that humans develop a sense of identity and role taking with special reference to norms, values and beliefs of the society.

## **The Role Played by the Church on Gender and Development**

Since religion plays an integral part in the development of humans, it should take a leading role in inspiring women to take part in development. Through its teachings and administration, the church can make the need for change legitimate and help communities attain sustainable development. It is no wonder the participants involved in the study gave ways in which the church could inspire women recognise the need to involve themselves in developmental activities. Churches, as role models, should appoint women into leadership positions such as church elders, secretaries and pastors. This is what the ECZ Christians reported to have done in their church administration. Selected women were chosen as part of the church executive committee. As confirmed by one ECZ woman, such form of administration accorded women an opportunity to contribute to the running of the church whilst putting in perspective their rights within the church and society. This form of administration was also practiced by the Lutheran church administration. As emphasized by Ester (2000), no significant meeting of Lutheran church body took place without 40 per cent of women being present.

As further informed by participants in this study, the church can also intervene by having specific teachings on gender and development. This means that as preachers prepare sermons, they need to think outside the box and consider how best they may incorporate prevailing global and modern issues in their preaching. Church

leaders should learn from the Catholic Church leaders who invited development organisations to educate women on the need to have positive attitudes to social and economic. In a similar manner, women organisations should be formed and be linked to non-governmental organisations like YWCA, WFC, and NWLG, among many others. As observed by the YWCA participant, this alternative had potential of not only improving women's lives but also providing suitable environment for women to wrestle against the widespread GBV cases. So linking women who belong to different denominations to the various women organisations can expedite and mitigate the negative attitudes people hold against women.

Furthermore, churches have the power to re-interpret Bible teachings which have for a long time disenfranchised women's rights. Teachings such as women should not preach in the church because of their biological make up, have had an impact on their ability to contribute positively towards development. Instead of perceiving women as asserts to be cared for by men, women should be treated as equal to the male flock. In the Christian scriptures, there is seemingly nothing special about men which should give them a lot of privileges at the expense of women.

Alternatively, churches should continue to encourage women to emulate the good examples of women who lived in Bible times, and take leading roles in various aspects (Duff, 2008). For example, there was Deborah, a prophetess and judge during the days of the Israelites, Mary the mother of Jesus, Miriam, the sister to Moses, who offered needed support to his brother whilst in Egypt and during Israelite's transition to the Promised Land. These accounts can help women to realize their importance in society and endeavour to defend their social and economic rights as well as maintain positive attitudes to life's pressures. This is what Frampton



(2007), witnessed during his case study on women's participation in Sierra Leone's 2007 Elections. During radio and door to door sensitization of women on the need to participate in elections, it was noticed that women listened to the radio more upon hearing a woman's voice.

### **Lessons for other Church Leaders**

The study established that some churches in Zambia played a role in preventing gender from being an obstacle to developmental efforts. Religion and gender served as emancipatory tools for development not only in the church but nation at large. Churches were fundamental in ensuring that women helped in accelerating change in society. They did this by endeavouring to pay attention to specific teachings which were derogatory to the position of women in the church and society. For example, women are in most churches held responsible for what is often called "original sin" because it is a female (Eve) who first gave in to Satan's intrusion. Church leaders need to understand that prior to Eve's encounter with Satan, God had already pronounced man and woman as one body. As such, just as it is logical to pronounce a body defiled when a single part of it is defective, it is also logical to conclude that both men and women are sinners. This argument is related to that of Gudorf (2006) who advised religions to handle with care scriptures which instilled inferiority complex in women. The above opinions suggests that just as the faith community has so often perpetuated discrimination against women, in the same manner, religion may be a powerful force for changing traditional and culturally practices (Duff, 2008). Since religion is closely related to the everyday activities of the Zambian citizens, empowering women in the church is an important facet to empowering them for national development. Pentecostal Holiness Christians serve as

a good example other churches in Zambia, and indeed other countries in Africa, could emulate.

## **Conclusion**

Undeniably, studies of relatively this nature have been done before in Zambia by different researchers, institutions and organisations. However, the concern has much been on how churches and their anti-gender teachings hinder development. Not much attention has been cast on how religion, in this case churches, and gender could be used as emancipatory tools for development, especially by first mitigating the gender issues that persisted within the church. Studies that focused on how anti-gender Christian teachings hindered development partly contributed to the perceived negative relationship between religion, gender and development. This article has brought to the fore suggestions on how myths, ethos and practices of the church should be reinterpreted in order to strike a balance between religion, gender and development. The article has further shown that religion and gender could be emancipatory tools for development if women are involved in the leadership and developmental processes in the church and nation at large.

It is worth noting that despite international calls on the need for gender equality in facilitating social and economic transformation, gender still remains a hindrance to development. As discussed in this article, gender inequality has for a long time been sustained in churches. This is true since as religion provides personal identity in society, it also describes roles to be taken by individual men and women. One takes up a role with special reference to his or her faith. This confirms the validity of Mead's theory on role taking among humans. He asserted that humans develop a sense of identity with particular reference to norms, values and beliefs of the

society. So since religion is the key custodian of each society's norms, values and beliefs, it is in a similar manner a factor on gender identity and role taking. Thus, religion and gender could be emancipatory tools for development, especially in Zambia a nation whose populace is mainly Christian.

It is also worth acknowledging that religion and gender as tools for development should start with churches recognizing the importance of women as participants not observers in the leadership hierarchy. Churches in Zambia have the power of not only legitimizing change but also influencing society's key stakeholders, such as organisations led by women and politicians, to accelerate change. The notion that religion and gender are emancipatory tools for development should not be undermined, or taken as a hind-sight, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when development demands collective effort. This calls for all Christian religious leaders reinterpreting and reviewing Biblical texts which completely forbid women from taking part in leadership positions. It also calls for churches in Zambia to emulate Pentecostal Holiness religious leaders who involve both male and female members of the church to have equal chance of occupying leadership positions as long as they have a Calling and can read and write.

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