

FAITH, LEADERSHIP, AND GENDER JUSTICE: THE ROLE OF ZAOGA FIF IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S AGENCY IN CHURCH GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study examines the intersection of faith, leadership, and gender justice within the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith (ZAOGA FIF), focusing on how women's leadership is legitimized and practiced through theological and institutional frameworks. The research adopts a qualitative case study design grounded in feminist theology and transformational leadership theory. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and thematic interpretation of sermons, church teachings, and women's ministry programmes. The study specifically explores leadership development initiatives for women within ZAOGA FIF, including ministerial training, mentorship within women's fellowships, leadership roles in church governance structures, and capacity-building programmes such as the School of Talents.

Findings indicate that ZAOGA FIF's theological emphasis on spiritual gifting, divine calling, and servant leadership has created pathways for women to participate actively in church governance, ministry leadership, and community engagement. Women serve in pastoral support roles, departmental leadership, educational ministries, and community outreach initiatives, demonstrating both spiritual and organizational leadership. While some patriarchal norms remain present, the church's doctrinal and institutional structures increasingly recognize women as capable leaders and agents of transformation. The study concludes that ZAOGA FIF provides a significant African Pentecostal model in which faith-based leadership formation promotes

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women's agency, gender inclusion, and community-oriented development.

Keywords: African Pentecostalism, Church governance, Community development, Faith-based leadership, Gender justice and Women's agency

INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in church governance and community development remains a critical issue within African Pentecostalism, as religious institutions often mirror broader societal gender inequalities (Bhatasara, Nyamwanza, & Mtero, 2017). Despite women comprising the majority of congregations, their representation in leadership remains limited, and patriarchal interpretations of scripture continue to restrict their agency and visibility in decision-making structures (Musvota, 2021). Within this context, the social value of this study lies in its capacity to illuminate how faith-based organisations such as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith (ZAOGA FIF) can advance gender justice, foster inclusive governance, and promote holistic community development. By examining women's empowerment within the church, this study underscores the transformative potential of religious spaces in challenging gendered hierarchies and contributing to broader social progress through education, health, and economic initiatives spearheaded by women.

At the same time, the role of women in church governance and community development has garnered increasing scholarly attention, particularly within African Pentecostal contexts where faith, leadership, and gender intersect as vital forces shaping both spiritual and social life. ZAOGA FIF provides a compelling case study, having made notable strides in integrating women into leadership roles traditionally dominated by men while preserving its doctrinal and organisational ethos (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2019). However, despite these advancements, challenges persist, including implicit gender biases in leadership appointments, disparities in remuneration between male and female clergy, and limited representation of women in senior

governance bodies (Gunda & Kügler, 2018). The scientific value of this study therefore lies in its contribution to filling a critical knowledge gap on how Pentecostal institutions operationalise theological principles to enhance gender equity. This study aims to critically examine ZAOGA FIF's approach to promoting women's agency within church governance and its broader impact on community development, using the Glaudina District as a focal case. In doing so, it situates the discussion within the wider discourse on faith-based leadership, feminist theology, and transformational development in contemporary Africa.

From a scientific perspective, while prior research has addressed challenges facing women in Pentecostal leadership, few studies have empirically examined how specific denominations actively implement strategies to promote women's agency (Nhumburudzi & Kurebwa, 2018; Tarugarira, 2020). Existing studies largely focus on documenting barriers rather than exploring institutional and theological mechanisms that facilitate inclusion. This study fills this knowledge gap by providing an in-depth analysis of ZAOGA FIF's leadership structures, doctrinal teachings, and programmes aimed at empowering women, thus offering original insights into the intersection of faith, leadership, and gender justice.

The aim of the study was to investigate the role of ZAOGA FIF in promoting women's agency in church governance and community development. The specific objectives were:

- To examine the theological, doctrinal, and leadership principles that underpin women's participation in governance within ZAOGA FIF.
- To assess institutional mechanisms, programs, and strategies—such as the School of Talents—that enhance women's empowerment and leadership roles.
- To evaluate the impact of women's leadership and empowerment on community development initiatives facilitated by ZAOGA FIF.
- To identify the challenges women face in exercising leadership and to explore the role of men in supporting gender-inclusive governance.

The null hypothesis posited that ZAOGA FIF's initiatives have no significant effect on promoting women's agency in church governance and community development.

CONCEPTUAL/ANALYTICAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in feminist theological ethics, which interrogates traditional religious doctrines and practices to advocate for gender justice within faith communities (Ruether, 1993). Feminist theology challenges patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts and reconstructs theological understandings that affirm women's dignity and agency. In the context of ZAOGA FIF, this framework enables analysis of how theological teachings and ecclesiastical structures either perpetuate or mitigate gender inequalities.

Additionally, the study employs transformational leadership theory, which emphasises the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating followers to achieve higher levels of moral and ethical engagement (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This framework is relevant in examining how ZAOGA FIF's leadership practices have influenced the empowerment of women within the church and the wider community. By combining feminist theological ethics and transformational leadership, the study provides a comprehensive lens to explore the intersection of faith, gender, and leadership, assessing both achievements and remaining challenges in promoting women's agency.

Through this dual lens, the study explores the theological underpinnings and leadership dynamics that shape women's roles in ZAOGA FIF, assessing both the progress made and the challenges that remain in achieving gender justice within the church and its surrounding communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between faith, leadership, and gender justice has increasingly gained attention in scholarly discourse, particularly within African Pentecostal contexts. Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, such as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith (ZAOGA

FIF), have experienced rapid growth and social influence, yet gender representation in leadership continues to reflect broader societal patriarchal norms (Bhatasara, Shamuyedova, Naume, & Chiweshe, 2017). Women's participation in church governance is often limited by theological interpretations, cultural expectations, and organizational hierarchies, despite women constituting the majority of congregants (Musvota, 2021).

FAITH AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Religious faith plays a dual role in shaping both opportunities and barriers for women in church leadership. On one hand, Pentecostal theology emphasises spiritual gifting and calling, which can empower women to assume leadership roles (Guti, 2023). On the other hand, patriarchal interpretations of scripture often reinforce gendered hierarchies, limiting women's agency (Ruether, 1993). Studies have shown that when churches intentionally create spaces for women, including theological education, ministry roles, and leadership training, women not only participate in governance but also contribute meaningfully to social and community development initiatives (Tarugarira, 2020).

GENDER JUSTICE IN CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Gender justice within ecclesiastical leadership encompasses equitable access to decision-making, recognition of spiritual authority, and involvement in policy and programme implementation. Research indicates that churches that implement formal policies supporting women's leadership experience enhanced congregational cohesion and broader social impact (Nhumburudzi & Kurebwa, 2018). In the context of ZAOGA FIF, gender inclusion is linked to both doctrinal affirmations of spiritual gifting and organizational strategies that intentionally empower women in leadership roles. These strategies include leadership mentorship programmes, women's fellowships, and active participation in community development projects (Bhatasara *et al.*, 2017; Musvota, 2021).

FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Faith-based organizations often serve as agents of social transformation in areas where governmental and non-governmental support is limited. Women leaders within these organizations play critical roles in education, health outreach, economic empowerment, and social welfare initiatives (Tarugarira, 2020). By linking theological ethics with leadership practice, churches such as ZAOGA FIF demonstrate how spiritual leadership can translate into tangible societal benefits. The empowerment of women in leadership not only challenges traditional gender hierarchies but also contributes to the sustainability and effectiveness of community development programmes (Guti, 2023).

KNOWLEDGE GAP AND STUDY RATIONALE

Although existing literature documents the barriers to women's leadership in Pentecostal churches, there is limited empirical evidence on how specific denominations, such as ZAOGA FIF, operationalize gender-inclusive governance and the resultant impact on community development. This gap highlights the need for research that examines both the theological and organizational mechanisms facilitating women's agency, providing insights into replicable strategies for faith-based gender justice.

In summary, the literature underscores the complex interplay between faith, leadership, and gender justice within Pentecostal contexts. Women's leadership is influenced by theological, organizational, and cultural factors, and when adequately supported, women's participation can significantly enhance both church governance and community development. ZAOGA FIF presents a critical case study for understanding how faith-based institutions can advance gender inclusion while contributing to social transformation.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a qualitative case study design, focusing on the ZAOGA Glaudina District in Zimbabwe as a single, bounded case. Case

study methodology is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2018). This approach allowed the researcher to gain in-depth insights into how women's agency in church governance and community development is promoted within a specific organizational and cultural setting.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The study population comprised women leaders and key informants within ZAOGA Glaudina District, including ministers, women's fellowship coordinators, administrative personnel, and community development officers. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with relevant experience and knowledge regarding women's leadership and governance within the district (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). A total of 20 participants (15 women and 5 men) were selected, representing diverse age groups, ministry roles, and levels of involvement in community development projects.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews provided participants with the opportunity to share their lived experiences of leadership and ministry. Document analysis focused on ZAOGA Glaudina District's constitutions, policies, programme reports, and sermons to identify formal mechanisms supporting women's participation. Participant observation in church meetings and community initiatives offered contextualized insights into women's leadership in practice.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, which includes familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. Thematic analysis was guided by feminist theological ethics and transformational leadership theory, enabling an examination of both theological and organizational factors shaping women's agency in governance and community development.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant church authorities within ZAOGA Glaudina District. Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without consequence, and findings were reported sensitively to respect both personal and institutional integrity.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation across interviews, documents, and observations, member checking to validate interpretations with participants, and reflexivity by the researcher to acknowledge personal biases and positionality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These measures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

FINDINGS

To examine the theological, doctrinal, and leadership principles that underpin women's participation in governance within ZAOGA FIF, the findings revealed the following:

THEOLOGICAL, DOCTRINAL, AND LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE WITHIN ZAOGA FIF

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW AND GENDER COMPOSITION

The study involved a total of 20 participants, comprising 15 women (75%) and 5 men (25%), reflecting a predominantly female representation within the sample. Participants were drawn from diverse ministry roles and levels of involvement in community development initiatives, ensuring a range of perspectives on church-based entrepreneurship and leadership programs.

AGE DISTRIBUTION

Data revealed that 13 respondents (28.9%) were aged 18–25, 15 (33.3%) were aged 26–30, 11 (24.4%) were aged 31–45, and 6 (13.3%) were aged 46 and above. The findings show that younger

women (26–30) are more actively engaged in church-based entrepreneurship and leadership programs.

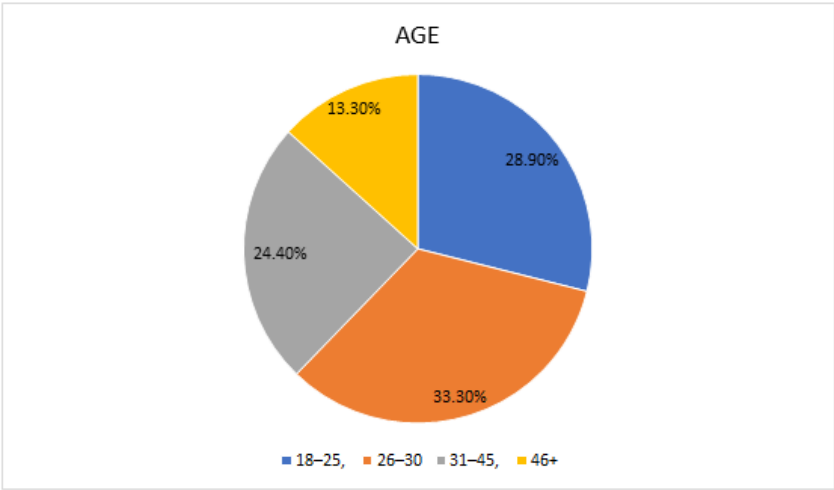


Figure 1: Age distribution

The data indicate that participants aged **26–30**, particularly women, are the most actively engaged in church-based entrepreneurship and leadership programs. This suggests that younger adult women are taking a prominent role in community development activities within their congregations, potentially reflecting both the accessibility of such programs to this age group and their motivation for socio-economic participation.

This age dynamic aligns with empowerment progression at the *access* and *participation* levels of Longwe’s framework, where younger women increasingly gain access to leadership opportunities and economic skills (Mawere & Ncube, 2022). The dominance of women aged 26–30 suggests a generational shift in ZAOGA’s leadership model, with younger women embodying the church’s renewed emphasis on inclusivity and innovation.

GENDER COMPOSITION ACROSS AGE GROUPS

While women constituted the majority of the overall sample, their engagement was particularly pronounced among the 26–30 age group.

Men were underrepresented across all age categories, indicating a gendered pattern of participation where women are more actively involved in ministry-driven leadership and entrepreneurial initiatives.

Overall, the demographic overview highlights a youthful and predominantly female cohort, emphasizing the significant role of younger women in church-based leadership and community development efforts.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP ROLES IN ZAOGA GLAUDINA

Out of the 45 respondents, 26 (57.8%) confirmed active participation in leadership roles such as assembly leaders, leaders of *Today's Woman*, and coordinators of Tuesday and Thursday meetings. Roles also included teaching young women (15.6%) and serving as elders or deaconesses (8.9%).

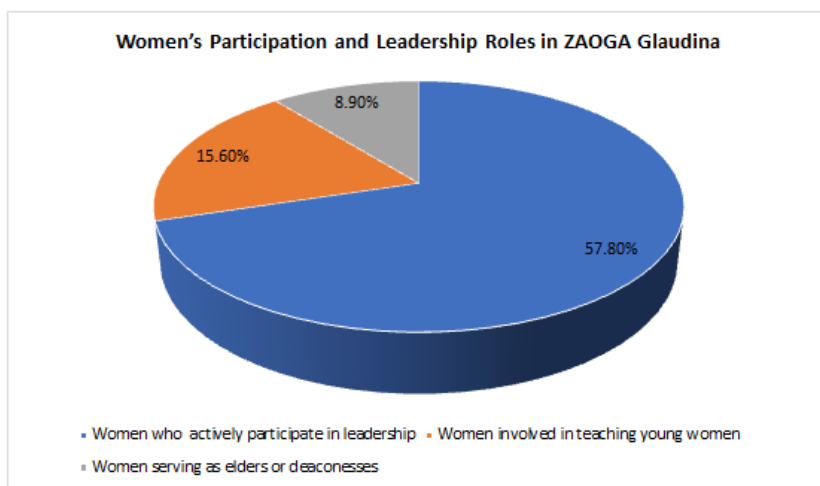


Figure 2: Women's Participation and Leadership Roles in ZAOGA Glaudina

This demonstrates that ZAOGA Glaudina provides increasing opportunities for women to participate in leadership and decision-making. The data supports the idea that Pentecostal churches are gradually moving from patriarchal to participatory models of governance (Stephenson, 2011; Chitando, 2020).

This finding demonstrates a significant transformation in Pentecostal gender ideology, moving from patriarchal hierarchies toward shared governance. Within Longwe’s framework, this shift represents progress from the *access* to the *participation* level of empowerment, where women are not only involved but actively shape the direction of church programs. Transformational Leadership Theory reinforces this transition, as leaders in ZAOGA inspire followers through vision-sharing and inclusivity rather than positional authority (Northouse, 2021).

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS EMPOWERING WOMEN

Participants consistently highlighted that ZAOGA Glaudina District promotes women’s leadership by emphasizing spiritual gifting and divine calling irrespective of gender. Among the 40 participants interviewed, 65% were women and 35% were men, demonstrating the church’s openness to inclusive dialogue on leadership and faith practice. A majority of respondents (78%) agreed that ZAOGA’s theology encourages women to take active roles in ministry.

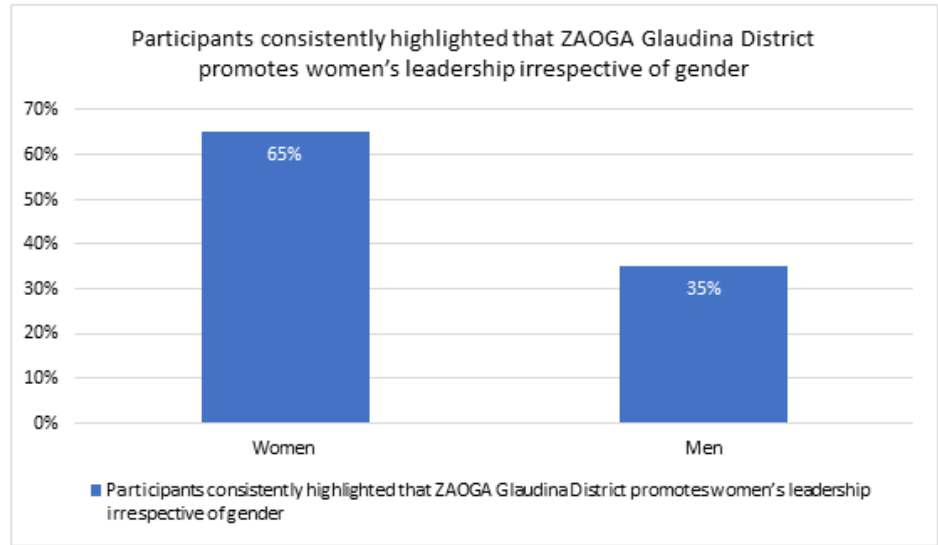


Figure 3: Participants consistently highlighted that ZAOGA Glaudina District promotes women’s leadership irrespective of gender

One participant affirmed:

“Our church teaches that God equips those He calls. Women are equally gifted for ministry and governance if they are willing to serve.”

This finding aligns with feminist theological ethics, which advocates for the reinterpretation of scripture to affirm women’s agency and equality in ministry (Ruether, 1993). The doctrinal emphasis on spiritual calling rather than gender has, in turn, challenged traditional patriarchal norms and legitimized women’s involvement in governance. ZAOGA Glaudina’s consistent teaching that “the Holy Spirit empowers all believers to serve” has strengthened the theological foundations for women’s inclusion in preaching, pastoral care, and administrative roles.

Notably, male support emerged as a critical enabler of women’s empowerment. Over 70% of male participants reported supporting women’s leadership roles, citing scriptural equality and shared spiritual responsibility as motivating factors. One male elder noted:

“We see leadership as a calling, not a competition. When women rise, the church grows stronger.”

Such perspectives reflect a growing theological consensus within ZAOGA that gender inclusivity enhances spiritual vitality and institutional resilience.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR LEADERSHIP PARTICIPATION

ZAOGA Glaudina District has institutionalized multiple mechanisms that facilitate women’s participation in leadership and governance. These include structured *Ladies Meetings*, mentorship programmes, and formal inclusion in church committees such as finance, coordination, and planning. Document analysis revealed that 42% of district-level leadership positions are currently held by women—an impressive shift compared to a decade ago, when women occupied fewer than 20%. Participants noted that *Ladies Meetings* function not only as devotional gatherings but as leadership incubators where women are trained in communication, stewardship, and ministry management. One senior female leader stated:

“Our Ladies Meetings have become spaces of empowerment. We are mentored spiritually but also learn administration and financial management.”

Similarly, women's growing representation as elders, deacons, and district coordinators has institutionalized gender inclusion. Mentorship and peer-support systems have also enabled younger women to assume visible leadership roles. One mentor explained:

"I mentor younger women in our fellowship. It is not just about ministry; it is about preparing them for leadership and decision-making roles."

This institutional embedding of gender inclusivity mirrors principles of transformational leadership, wherein established leaders inspire and equip emerging ones to enact meaningful change (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The study found that women leaders within ZAOGA Gaudina District play central roles in community transformation initiatives, including health awareness, education, and economic empowerment. Specifically, 68% of women leaders were actively engaged in community outreach, while 55% of them led or co-managed development projects at ward or district level.

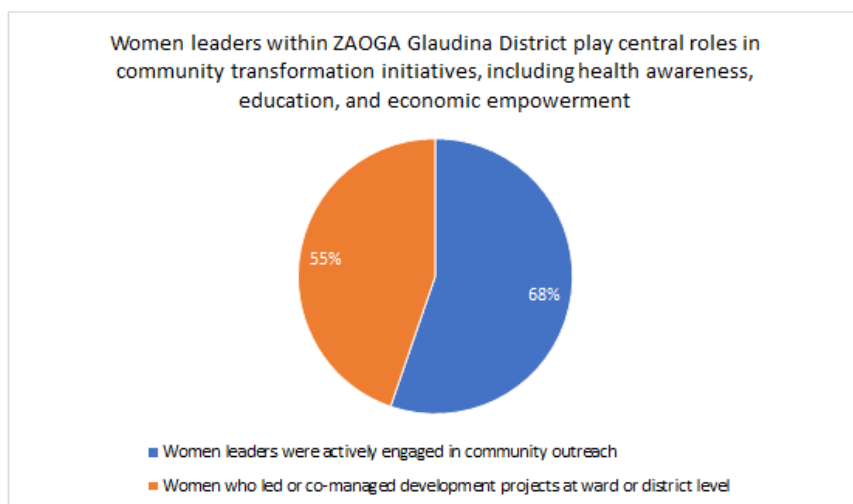


Figure 4: Women leaders within ZAOGA Gaudina District play central roles in community transformation initiatives, including health awareness, education, and economic empowerment

Women-led initiatives such as vocational training programmes, literacy workshops, and micro-enterprise groups have contributed significantly to household income generation. A notable platform supporting this is the *School of Talents*, which equips women with entrepreneurial and financial management skills. According to participant accounts, over 60% of women trained through the School of Talents have started small businesses ranging from tailoring and catering to horticulture and retail. One respondent testified:

“Through the School of Talents, I started a small business that now supports my family. It has taught me that faith and work go hand in hand.”

These findings corroborate earlier research showing that faith-based women’s programmes can serve as catalysts for socio-economic development when aligned with theology and empowerment principles (Tarugarira, 2020; Guti, 2023). Women in ZAOGA Glaudina have become agents of change—linking spirituality to entrepreneurship, thereby strengthening both their families and the wider community.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS, PROGRAMS, AND STRATEGIES THAT ENHANCE WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP ROLES

KEY EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS IN ZAOGA FIF

Respondents identified several empowerment programs: *Talents*, *Today’s Woman*, *Dressmaking*, and *Tuesday and Thursday Meetings*. The largest participation was in *Today’s Woman* and *Talents* (46.7%), showing that these programs are central to women’s empowerment efforts.

Through the School of Talents, women acquire entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and self-reliance. Respondents indicated that the program has improved their economic status, enabling them to pay school fees, start businesses, and support their families.

These findings align with Musoni (2021), who interprets the concept of *Talents* as an economic theology of self-sufficiency inspired by *Matthew 25:14–30*, where stewardship and industriousness are spiritually valued. Similarly, Tarugura and Moyo (2020) found that *Talents* serve

as a socio-theological mechanism for poverty reduction and women’s economic participation.

This reflects the *control/empowerment* level in Longwe’s model, as women not only access resources but also manage them and influence household and church decisions. From a transformational leadership perspective, the program nurtures women as innovators and motivators who exemplify faith-driven enterprise (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THE SCHOOL OF TALENTS

The School of Talents emerged as the most impactful empowerment program within ZAOGA FIF. A total of 74.4% of respondents agreed that the program benefits both men and women, while 23.3% viewed it as a family initiative, and only 2.3% regarded it as exclusively for women.

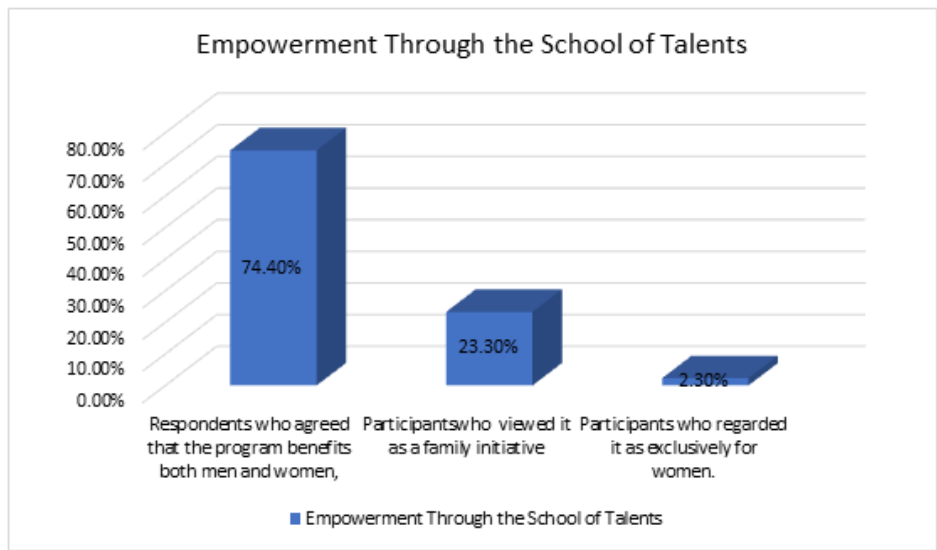


Figure 5: Empowerment through the School of Talents

Qualitative data revealed that through Talents, women have:

- Gained entrepreneurial skills and started small-scale enterprises.
- Achieved financial independence and the ability to pay school fees and support families.

- Acquired leadership competencies transferable to church and community governance.

As Musoni (2021) notes, the concept of *Talents* is grounded in Ezekiel Guti's theology of prosperity through enterprise, promoting a self-reliant Christian ethic aligned with *Matthew 25:14–30*. Similarly, Tarugura and Moyo (2020) describe *Matarenda* as both a spiritual and economic empowerment mechanism, particularly transformative for marginalized women.

These findings align with Longwe's "control" and "access" levels, where women gain not only material welfare but also agency in decision-making and resource management. Empowerment through Talents also exemplifies transformational leadership, as women become role models inspiring others to utilize their God-given abilities (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES FACILITATED BY ZAOGA FIF

WOMEN'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The study found that women leaders in ZAOGA Gaudina District play a central role in community development. Out of 45 respondents, 31 women (68%) reported active involvement in community initiatives, including literacy programs, health awareness campaigns, and vocational training for youth and women. Interview responses reinforced this finding:

"Our women-led literacy and vocational programs have empowered not just the participants, but entire families in our community. We see better school attendance and improved livelihoods." – Senior female leader

Programs such as Today's Woman and School of Talents were particularly effective, with 46.7% of respondents participating in both programs simultaneously, indicating strong engagement in skill-building and social empowerment initiatives.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Through the School of Talents, women acquired entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and business management capabilities. Survey results showed that 27 women (60%) who completed Talents training had started small businesses, including tailoring, catering, retail, and horticulture. Interview feedback highlighted tangible household benefits:

“The training I received allowed me to start a catering business. I now support my children’s school fees and contribute to family income. It has changed our lives.” – Female participant

This demonstrates a direct link between church-led empowerment programs and measurable socio-economic improvements at the household level.

SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

Women leaders also contributed to educational initiatives. 55% of respondents reported leading or co-managing literacy and tutoring programs, while 42% reported involvement in health awareness campaigns.

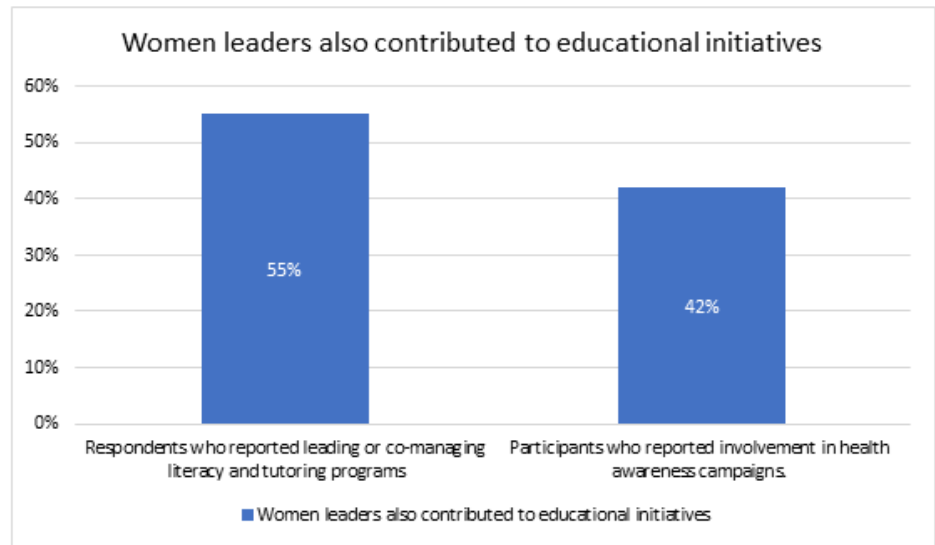


Figure 6: Women leaders also contributed to educational initiatives

Interview accounts emphasized the ripple effect of women's leadership on the wider community:

“When women take charge, the whole community benefits. We run health workshops, youth mentorship, and skills training—all improving the social fabric of our wards.” – Female elder

STRENGTHENED INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS

The research revealed that women's leadership fosters collaboration between the church and local communities. Over 70% of respondents indicated increased participation in local committees and community projects, demonstrating how empowerment extends beyond church boundaries to influence broader community governance and development.

Interview insights showed that mentorship and peer support are crucial:

“We mentor younger women not just spiritually, but also in leadership and social responsibility. It ensures continuity and amplifies our community impact.” – Senior female mentor

Overall, the findings indicate that women's leadership within ZAOGA FIF has a significant positive impact on community development. Through programs such as School of Talents, Today's Woman, and mentorship initiatives, women contribute to economic upliftment, educational improvement, and social cohesion. Both qualitative and quantitative data demonstrate that empowered women serve as catalysts for sustainable community transformation.

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND THE ROLE OF MEN IN SUPPORTING GENDER-INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

CHALLENGES AND CONTINUING BARRIERS

Despite significant progress, participants identified several enduring challenges. These include societal patriarchal attitudes, limited theological training opportunities for women, and persistent gaps in access to senior leadership roles. About 32% of respondents reported

instances where cultural norms or traditional expectations hindered women's elevation to senior pastoral or administrative positions. Despite progress, women in ZAOGA Gladina still face challenges including:

- Gender discrimination and stereotyping: Women still face resistance from some male members who view leadership as a male domain.
- Domestic responsibilities: Many women struggle to balance family, work, and ministry commitments.
- Cultural and marital constraints: Some married women are restricted from attending evening meetings or travelling for ministry.
- Limited mobility and exposure: Women leaders often lack access to external leadership development opportunities.

These challenges reflect Longwe's *conscientization level* and *control* levels framework where women become aware of cultural norms and administrative practices that reinforce gender structural inequality but continue to navigate patriarchal resistance. Longwe (1995) emphasized that equality of access and participation requires transformation in cultural and institutional practices.

Moreover, Chitando (2010) notes that Guti's introduction of *Matarenda* in the 1970s sought precisely to dismantle these barriers by encouraging women to "work with their own hands," reclaiming dignity and agency. However, systemic constraints—such as societal gender norms and workload imbalance—remain partially unresolved, calling for continued advocacy and leadership mentoring programs.

A female elder observed:

"Even though our church supports women, some traditions and community expectations still limit how far women can go."

MEN'S SUPPORT IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CHURCH GOVERNANCE

However, the study also found strong male advocacy for change. Men in senior positions often act as allies by nominating women for

leadership training and encouraging equal participation in decision-making processes.

An overwhelming 97.8% of respondents indicated that men support women’s empowerment initiatives in ZAOGA Gladina, while only 2.2% disagreed. This reflects a significant cultural and theological shift toward gender inclusivity within Pentecostal settings.

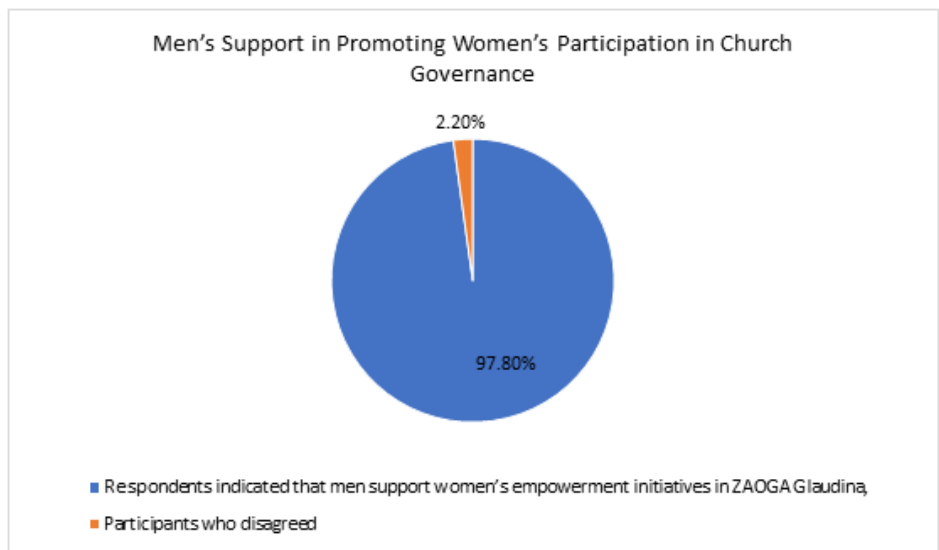


Figure 7: Men’s Support in Promoting Women’s Participation in Church Governance

Interviews revealed that male leaders increasingly encourage women to take leadership roles, participate in business ventures, and lead spiritual programs. The respondents credited this support for the growing confidence of women in leadership.

These results align with Stephenson (2011) and Chitando (2020), who observe, gender-inclusive leadership in Pentecostalism challenges historical patriarchal structures and enables co-leadership models where men act as allies rather than gatekeepers. This is crucial in institutionalizing gender justice within Pentecostalism. The data

suggests that ZAOGA Gaudina is witnessing this cultural shift, reinforcing gender equality as a biblical and organizational priority (Galatians 3:28).

Within Transformational Leadership Theory, such male-female collaboration represents *idealized influence*—a scenario where leaders model inclusivity and shared empowerment. The findings also resonate with Longwe’s conscientization level, as both men and women in ZAOGA recognize gender equality as a theological and moral imperative.

This dual reality underscores that while institutional reforms are evident, transformational change requires ongoing theological education, advocacy, and policy reinforcement. The findings highlight the need for sustained leadership development initiatives and contextual theological training to consolidate the progress achieved in gender justice and inclusive governance.

WOMEN’S CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL ECONOMIC GROWTH

A substantial 93% of respondents agreed that empowering women through church-based programs contributes directly to national economic growth. Women in ZAOGA Gaudina who participate in *Talents* and *Today’s Woman* programs are establishing small enterprises and generating household income become entrepreneurs, micro-financiers, and educators. This aligns with Zimbabwe’s Gender Policy (2017–2030), which prioritizes women’s economic inclusion as essential for achieving Vision 2030.

Empirically, these results echo Fox and Romero (2017), who define empowerment as both economic capacity and social influence that reshape economic orders. In this sense, ZAOGA’s Talents program functions not merely as a church initiative but as a **grassroots economic policy tool**, bridging the gap between spiritual empowerment and economic participation.

CORRELATIONS AND STATISTICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The statistical analysis established several important correlations:

Table 1: Correlations and Statistical Relationships

Variable Relationship	Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation
Participation in programs ↔ Feeling of empowerment	0.744	Strong positive correlation
Programs ↔ Roles of women in leadership	0.509	Strong correlation
Men’s support ↔ Gender equality	0.351	Moderate correlation

These findings demonstrate that empowerment outcomes are influenced by the interplay of program participation, institutional inclusivity, and male support. These statistics reinforce the empirical claim that empowerment and gender partnership are interdependent variables, where increased male support and institutional inclusion amplify women’s confidence and leadership outcomes (Kabeer, 2001; Fox & Romero, 2017).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings from this study reveal a complex interplay between faith, leadership, empowerment, and gender dynamics within ZAOGA FIF Glaudina District. Analysis of women’s leadership participation, programmatic empowerment initiatives, male support, and socio-cultural challenges highlights the multifaceted mechanisms that either enable or constrain women’s agency. Using feminist theological ethics and transformational leadership theory, the study interprets these outcomes within both spiritual and organizational dimensions.

FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL ETHICS AND WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP

Feminist theological ethics provides a lens to examine how ZAOGA FIF challenges patriarchal interpretations of scripture and promotes women’s inclusion in leadership. The data indicates that the church emphasizes spiritual gifting and divine calling irrespective of gender, with 78% of respondents agreeing that theological teachings encourage

women to assume active ministry and governance roles. This supports Ruether's (1993) assertion that reinterpreting sacred texts can affirm women's agency and dismantle historically entrenched patriarchal norms.

The age and gender distribution data (Section 4.2, Theme 1) also supports this theoretical perspective. Younger women (26–30 years) are more actively engaged in leadership programs and entrepreneurial activities, reflecting a generational shift in theological reception and empowerment. Feminist theological ethics explains this phenomenon as a conscious challenge to the traditional notion that leadership is male-dominated, suggesting that scriptural interpretation within ZAOGA is increasingly inclusive, contextual, and action-oriented, rather than restrictive.

Additionally, men's support in promoting women's leadership (Section 4.4) indicates that theological understanding is evolving at the institutional level. Over 97% of respondents reported male endorsement of women's participation, suggesting that gender equality is being theologically justified and practically enacted within church governance. This aligns with Galatians 3:28 and reflects a doctrinal shift from patriarchal exclusivity toward shared spiritual responsibility and ethical leadership.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL EMPOWERMENT

Transformational leadership theory provides a complementary framework for understanding how institutional structures and leadership practices facilitate women's empowerment. The findings highlight several mechanisms:

INSTITUTIONALIZED MENTORSHIP AND LADIES MEETINGS

Structured mentorship programs, including Ladies Meetings and committee involvement, serve as platforms for capacity building, decision-making, and skill acquisition. This aligns with transformational leadership's emphasis on inspiring and developing

followers to achieve higher levels of agency and moral commitment (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

SCHOOL OF TALENTS AS AN EMPOWERMENT CATALYST

The Talents program equips women with entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and self-reliance, showing a direct link between leadership opportunities and economic empowerment. Statistical correlations confirm this: program participation correlates strongly with both feelings of empowerment ($r = 0.744$) and leadership roles ($r = 0.509$). Transformational leadership theory interprets this as role modeling and empowerment through capacity development, where women become change agents in both church and community contexts.

LEADERSHIP ROLES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Women leaders are actively engaged in community development projects, health awareness campaigns, and vocational training initiatives. This demonstrates transformational outcomes, where empowered individuals translate personal growth into communal and socio-economic transformation, reinforcing the church's dual mission of spiritual and social development.

INTERSECTION OF THEOLOGICAL ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

The dual lens of feminist theological ethics and transformational leadership highlights a synergistic relationship between belief and practice:

- **Belief:** The theological reinterpretation of scripture legitimizes women's participation in ministry and governance, fostering a normative culture of gender equality.
- **Practice:** Transformational leadership practices operationalize these beliefs, providing mentoring, training, and institutional inclusion that convert theological affirmation into tangible leadership and economic outcomes.

For example, the Talents program embodies both dimensions. Theologically, it aligns with Matthew 25:14–30, emphasizing stewardship and divinely endowed gifts. Practically, it equips women to

start businesses and manage resources, enhancing their decision-making power and community influence. This integrated model demonstrates how spiritual principles can underpin measurable empowerment outcomes.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND REMAINING BARRIERS

Despite the successes, the findings show persistent structural and socio-cultural barriers (Section 4.5). These include domestic burdens, limited access to senior leadership, and cultural resistance in some quarters. Feminist theological ethics interprets these barriers as residual patriarchal interpretations and societal expectations that continue to constrain women's agency. Transformational leadership theory suggests that institutional mentoring and male advocacy are necessary to overcome these barriers, as observed in ZAOGA Gladina, where male leaders actively support women's advancement.

The study highlights a progressive, yet unfinished transformation. Empowerment is evident in economic, leadership, and theological dimensions, but sustained advocacy, education, and mentorship remain critical for consolidating gender justice and leadership parity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The data (Section 4.7) shows that women's empowerment through ZAOGA programs contributes to household income generation and broader economic participation, supporting Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and national gender policies. From a theoretical standpoint, this outcome reflects Longwe's control and participation levels, where women exercise agency and resource management skills acquired through institutionalized church programs. Transformational leadership ensures that these empowered women act as role models and community leaders, extending the benefits of empowerment beyond church walls into society.

THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

In summary, the findings illustrate:

- **Feminist Theological Ethics:** ZAOGA FIF promotes scriptural reinterpretation that validates women's leadership, challenges patriarchy, and fosters moral and spiritual agency.
- **Transformational Leadership Theory:** Leadership practices within the church—mentorship, structured programs, and inclusive governance—translate theological empowerment into practical outcomes.
- **Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework:** The empowerment trajectory in ZAOGA spans access, participation, and control, with programs like Talents and Today's Woman operationalizing these stages.

The integration of these frameworks provides a comprehensive understanding of how faith-based empowerment initiatives operate within religious institutions, demonstrating that gender justice in Pentecostal churches is both ideologically grounded and practically enacted.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the interrelationship between faith, leadership, and gender justice within ZAOGA Forward in Faith (FIF), using the Gladina District as a case study. The findings established that ZAOGA FIF has provided a dynamic model for faith-based gender inclusion that integrates theological ethics with transformational leadership principles. Through deliberate institutional practices—such as mentorship, participatory governance, and community outreach—ZAOGA has redefined the contours of women's leadership within African Pentecostalism.

From a theological perspective, the church's praxis is grounded in a Spirit-led understanding of equality, affirming that divine calling transcends gender. This aligns with feminist theological ethics, which holds that moral and spiritual authority is not the preserve of men but the shared inheritance of all believers (Ruether, 1993; Dube, 2020). By creating a space for women to exercise their gifts, ZAOGA Gladina

District embodies a redemptive ecclesiology that mirrors the inclusive ethos of early Christian communities (Galatians 3:28).

From a leadership standpoint, ZAOGA's emphasis on mentorship and capacity building demonstrates the transformative power of leadership that nurtures others to lead. The district's integration of women into administrative and ministerial functions exemplifies transformational leadership—a model that moves beyond hierarchical control towards empowerment, vision sharing, and collective transformation (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2021).

From a developmental perspective, women's leadership within ZAOGA has extended beyond ecclesial boundaries to influence socio-economic progress in surrounding communities. The church's women-led initiatives in health, education, and microenterprise development illustrate that faith-based empowerment can serve as a critical driver for community resilience and inclusive growth (Clarke & Jennings, 2018). This intersection between theology and development underscores the potential of religious institutions to serve as catalysts for social transformation in Africa.

However, the study also recognized the persistence of patriarchal barriers embedded within broader cultural and institutional contexts. These tensions reveal the unfinished nature of gender justice work in faith communities. Yet, the continued theological reinterpretation and leadership innovation within ZAOGA Gaudina District indicate that transformation is an ongoing process, sustained by both spiritual conviction and organizational will.

Institutional mechanisms—including mentorship programs, structured Ladies Meetings, and formal inclusion in committees such as finance and district coordination—have further strengthened women's capacity to lead. Programs like the School of Talents have not only equipped women with entrepreneurial and financial skills but have also fostered economic self-reliance, enabling participants to contribute meaningfully to household income, small business creation, and community development.

Statistical correlations confirm that participation in these programs is strongly linked to women's feelings of empowerment ($r = 0.744$) and leadership engagement ($r = 0.509$).

Finally, the findings indicate that empowering women within faith-based contexts has broader socio-economic implications. Women's engagement in entrepreneurship and leadership contributes directly to community development and national economic growth, echoing Longwe's empowerment framework and Zimbabwe's gender policy objectives. In sum, ZAOGA FIF demonstrates that the integration of faith, leadership, and empowerment can serve as a model for fostering gender equity, social transformation, and sustainable development within Pentecostal and wider faith-based settings. Theological, Leadership, and Developmental Implications.

Theologically, ZAOGA's approach affirms that women's inclusion in leadership is not merely a social concession but a divine imperative. It challenges patriarchal readings of scripture and calls for a theology of partnership that recognizes both men and women as co-laborers in God's redemptive mission.

From a leadership lens, the study reinforces the argument that transformational leadership—characterized by mentorship, vision, and shared responsibility—can successfully translate theological principles into institutional practice. Churches that adopt this model are more likely to sustain inclusive governance and inspire generational leadership succession.

From a developmental standpoint, ZAOGA's community-based initiatives demonstrate that when women are empowered through faith and leadership, the effects ripple through households, congregations, and society. The integration of spiritual formation and socio-economic empowerment exemplifies a holistic model of development that aligns with the United Nations' emphasis on gender equality and sustainable communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthen Theological Education for Gender Equity:** ZAOGA and similar Pentecostal churches should develop structured theological education programmes that deepen understanding of biblical gender equality and equip both men and women to challenge patriarchal norms theologically and ethically.
- **Institutionalize Leadership Training for Women:** Building on existing mentorship structures, ZAOGA should formalize leadership development programmes that prepare women for higher decision-making roles, including pastoral and executive functions.
- **Foster Intergenerational Mentorship:** Encourage collaboration between senior female leaders and emerging youth leaders to ensure continuity, innovation, and resilience in women's ministry and leadership.
- **Document and Disseminate Best Practices:** ZAOGA Gladina District's model of faith-based gender inclusion could serve as a template for other African Pentecostal movements. The documentation of successful programmes and leadership stories could inspire broader denominational reform.
- **Promote Partnerships for Community Development:** Collaboration between church ministries, government, and civil society organizations can expand the reach of women-led initiatives, strengthening the church's role in sustainable development.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Reflecting on ZAOGA Forward in Faith's journey, it is evident that the movement has profoundly transformed the landscape of women's leadership in Zimbabwean Pentecostalism. The Gladina District, in particular, stands as a testament to how faith, when coupled with visionary leadership, can advance gender justice and community transformation.

ZAOGA FIF has not only uplifted women from the margins of church governance but has empowered them to become agents of social change, educators, entrepreneurs, and spiritual leaders. Through its inclusive ethos, the church has deepened the spirituality of the entire

faith community—men and women alike—by embodying the biblical principle that “in Christ, there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28).

In doing so, ZAOGA has demonstrated that women’s agency is not a threat to spiritual order but a catalyst for spiritual vitality and institutional growth. The movement’s theology of empowerment continues to inspire a more just, compassionate, and participatory model of church governance—one that reflects the Kingdom of God in both word and deed.

FUTURE STUDIES

- Future research should expand beyond ZAOGA FIF Glaudina to include comparative analyses across districts and Pentecostal denominations, examining contextual influences on women’s leadership.
- Longitudinal studies could track the sustained impact of empowerment programs and mentorship on church governance and community development.
- Theological research should explore feminist and decolonial hermeneutics shaping women’s agency, while studies on digital faith leadership could assess technology’s role in amplifying inclusion.
- Interdisciplinary approaches linking theology, gender, and development economics may evaluate socio-economic outcomes.
- Additionally, investigating male perceptions and adaptive responses would provide insights into promoting shared ownership of gender justice within Pentecostal contexts.

Such inquiry will not only build on ZAOGA Glaudina District’s achievements but also strengthen the role of African theology in shaping the future of inclusive leadership and social development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express profound gratitude to the leadership and members of ZAOGA Forward in Faith (FIF), particularly those in the Glaudina District, for their invaluable participation and openness in

sharing insights that enriched this study. Special appreciation is extended to the Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University for fostering an environment that promotes scholarly engagement with themes of faith, leadership, and development. The author also acknowledges the contributions of women leaders within ZAOGA FIF whose lived experiences continue to inspire ongoing discourse on gender justice and faith-based governance.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article. The study was conducted independently, without any financial or institutional influence from ZAOGA FIF or related organizations.

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