

Gender Discrepancies in Zimbabwean Religio-Cultural and Political Leadership: A Case Study of Young Christian Women in the Midlands Province.

Sophia Chirongoma & Mpumelelo Moyo

Abstract

The exclusion of women, particularly young women from key leadership and decision-making forums in almost every structure of society remains an elusive topic in academic discourses. This chapter seeks to address this lacuna in scholarly literature by interrogating the factors and forces precipitating young Zimbabwean women's exclusion from leadership in political, religio-cultural and decision-making forums. The study's vantage point is the Zimbabwean National Gender Policy (NGP) 2013–2017 whose central aim is “to achieve a gender just society where men and women enjoy equality and equity and participate as equal partners in the development process of the country.” This is summed up in the NGP's goal, “to eradicate gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development.” Reflecting on the field research conducted in the Midlands province between July and December 2018, the present study contends that the NGP's policy goals are still far from being achieved. Undertaking this study was also stirred by the fact that although there is a vast amount of literature on the inclusion or omission of women from leadership positions in general (Fletcher, *The Leadership Quarterly* 15:647–661, 2004; Elliott and Stead, *Women's leadership*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; Nkomo and Ngambi, *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 4:49–68, 2009; Zungura 2013; Maphosa et.al 2015; Mhlanga, 2016), however, it appears as if there is a missing gap in interrogating specific factors hindering young women's participation in leadership. The study therefore seeks to establish the role of young Christian women (18–30 years old) in leadership. It is a qualitative study involving interviews with young Christian women, students at academic institutions, employed and unemployed youth. The main focus of the interviews was anchored on establishing the extent to which young Christian women are participating in leadership hierarchies within the academic, economic, religious, cultural and political institutions. Particular attention was paid to the factors obstructing young Christian women from taking up key and influential leadership positions in churches, communities and political and economic arenas. The study's overall theoretical framework is Africana womanism, emphasizing African women as agents, not subjects of history. It concludes by advocating for the transformation of policies, values and norms in an endeavour to accommodate, embrace and encourage young Christian women to take up key leadership and decision-making positions. This conclusion is informed by the fact that barring young Christian women from leadership and decision-making positions is detrimental to the development of our churches, communities, academic, political and economic sectors.

Keywords: Culture, Decision-Making, Exclusion, Inclusion, Leadership, Participation, Patriarchy, Religion, Transformation, Young Christian Women, Zimbabwe.

