

Chapter Eight

From Exclusivism to Inclusivism: The Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ) Rules and Regulations Relating to Women

Simbarashe Munamati

BACKGROUND

The study was informed by a qualitative and instrumental case study design within the constructivist paradigm. Participants were six women and four men who are members of the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ) in Morgenster Mission where the researcher resides. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis were used to collect data from participants. The multiple data collection tools were necessary for data triangulation. Data were analyzed using the thematic content approach. Findings indicated that the participants felt that the Rules and Regulations of the RCZ have shifted from being exclusive (1891–1983) to being inclusive (1984 to date) in relation to women's participation in the church's governance structures. However, there are still few women participating in the RCZ's governance structures. The study recommends that there is need for the RCZ to come up with robust policies in their Rules and Regulations which promote extensive women inclusion in the church's structures to offer equal opportunities between men and women.

BACKGROUND

Most churches in Zimbabwe have incorporated women in their worship services and governance as exemplified by white garment churches where women function as prophets and Pentecostal churches where women are ministers of the word of God. But the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ) still has very few women as compared to men who function in the church's worship services and governance structures. Given this background, the study is necessary to establish if the RCZ Rules and Regulations offer equal opportunities between men and women in relation to church governance.

Studies have shown that there is a move towards the inclusion of women in church governance. Mapuranga (2013) in her study titled, "African Initiated Churches (AICs) as a gendered space in Harare, Zimbabwe: revisiting the role and place of women" found out that women are functioning as preachers, prophets as well as leaders in the "Masowe" churches in Harare. She, however, noted that some AICs do not allow women to lead in their churches. The United Nations 2007 report on Women in Leadership Roles shows that women are still a long way to be at par with men in relation to equal opportunities in society. Rutoro (2007) established that lay people access leadership opportunities in the RCZ as compared to the clergy. However, there is a dearth of information in Zimbabwe on the inclusion of women with specific reference to the RCZ. Table 8.1 below shows men and women in leadership of the RCZ from 1984–2016.

Table 8.1 above shows that there is an increase in the number of women who are elected to posts of deacons and elders in the RCZ church from 1984 to 2016. It has to be noted that no woman was elected to such posts from 1891 to 1983. In addition, the table shows that the percentage of women who became elders and deacons was always rising from 1984 to 2016: it was 20.66% for the period 1984–1990, 37.45% for the period 1991–2000, and it rose to 44.21% for the period 2001–2016. Although there are fewer women as compared to men, this was made possible by the shift from barring women being elected as elders and deacons as it was so during the 1891–1983 epoch to an inclusive stance which was achieved at the 1984 Synod session. The shift opened opportunities for women to be trained as ministers,

Table 8.1 Number of men and women elected as elders and deacons in the RCZ from 1984–2016

Sex	1984–1990	%	1991–2000	%	2001–2016	%
<i>Female</i>	1,302	20.66	4,500	37.45	8,400	44.21
<i>Male</i>	4,998	79.34	7,500	62.55	10,800	57.79
<i>Total</i>	6,300	100	1,2000	100	19,200	100

which saw nineteen (19) women trained to date compared to one hundred and eighty-four men (184) (RCZ Ministers Register, 2018). In the context of this study, the RCZ's Rules and Regulations should also be evaluated basing on the themes and norms of the African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030.

(RCZ Congregational Minutes, 1984–2016)

THE AFRICAN UNION AGENDA 2063

The RCZ Rules and Regulations should be evaluated on the basis of the African Union's Agenda 2063 which is a call for action and a strategic framework and road map to achieve continental development goals. The plan represents a collective effort and an opportunity for Africa to regain its power to determine its own destiny and is underpinned by the African Union (AU)'s vision to build an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa which is driven and managed by its own citizens representing a dynamic force in the international arena. Phiri and Werner (2016:1140) picked five core questions which the AU Agenda 2063 seeks to address which are: standing up to the signs of the times in 2063 retaining its values as the "the light of the world and the salt of the Earth," the role of the African churches in the unity and development of the African continent, keeping in step with the incarnation of the gospel into the African personality, how the African churches can construct and reconstruct an integral vision of development of the whole person and still remain true to the message of Christ, and how Africa can rediscover and emphasize the role of the African churches in healing, leading in prophetic service and exemplary leadership of the African people (Phiri and Werner, 2016:114-1).

THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 2030

The RCZ's women inclusion thrust is also informed by the United Nations (UN)'s Vision 2030 which is achieved through seventeen sustainable development goals. Out of the seventeen, the fifth goal, which is Gender Equality, corresponds with the RCZ's thrust. The fifth goal of the SDGs 2030 aims to achieve gender equality through empowering all women and girls in Africa. Further, the goal targets ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life, as well as adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforcing legislation for the promotion of gender equality and

empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. The study points to the RCZ achievements realized so far in relation to the SDGs with regard to the fifth goal anchored on Gender Equality. The study seeks to examine whether the RCZ is in step with this vision of the UN through the SDGs.

AFRICAN FEMINIST THEOLOGIANS AS PROPONENTS OF INCLUSIVE CHURCHES

Teresa Okure maintains that African women's theology does not aim at the exaltation of women but to establish a mutual cooperation between men and women (Okure 1993:47). This inclusive thrust is supported by Oduyoye who stresses on the bond of African societies culminating in a community-oriented focus (Oduyoye 2001:17). African women's theology appeals to women's experiences committed to the emancipation of women with gender as the analytical tool (Kasomo and Maseno 2011:157). The study intends to evaluate the RCZ Rules and Regulations in relation to women inclusion with regards to church governance.

The study is informed by the African Feminist Theology characterization and themes in its quest to evaluate the RCZ's stance that has shifted from excluding to including women in its governance as envisaged by the church's Rules and Regulations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Most churches in Zimbabwe have included women in their governance structures. The RCZ church has few women as compared to men in the RCZ governance structures. Given this background, it is therefore necessary to establish if the RCZ Rules and Regulations offer equal opportunities to women and men in relation to church governance structures. The study may provide an on-going contribution to numerous women success stories in relation to the inclusion of women in church governance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The major question which guided the study was: "What are the successes which the RCZ has achieved in relation to inclusion of women in the church's Rules and Regulations?"

This was unpacked through the following sub-questions:

- To what extent do RCZ women and men view the inclusion of women in the church's Rules and Regulations as a success story?
- What has been done by the RCZ in enhancing the inclusion of women in its worship and governance?
- Which RCZ Rules and Regulations are perceived as negatively affecting women inclusion in the church's worship and governance?
- How do RCZ women and men view the role of the RCZ in improving women inclusion in the church's worship and governance?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative case study design within a constructivist paradigm in order to explore and present the RCZ membership's perspectives on the inclusion of women in the church's worship services and governance structures. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis were picked as data collection tools. The case study approach was adopted to identify the success and failures of the RCZ Rules and Regulations in relation to women inclusion and to proffer solutions to acknowledged challenges. The case study enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants' views in their natural setting (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

The sample comprised ten (10) RCZ members who were chosen from the Morgenster RCZ Congregation where the researcher resides. Six (6) were women and four (4) were men. Four (4) of the participants were in the church's leadership structures, while six (6) are church members. The participants had been RCZ members since 1980 when the church was still excluding women in its worship services and governance structures. Purposive sampling was used to select all the ten participants as they had capacity to provide rich descriptions and details of their experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Since the introduction of women inclusive Rules and Regulations in the RCZ, no research has been specifically conducted to establish the success the RCZ has made in relation to its quest to achieve gender equality in how the church conducts its worship services as well as how the church is governed. The study was carried out in Morgenster Mission, which is the RCZ's first mission station established in 1891.

THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The researcher constructed a semi-structured questionnaire which yielded qualitative answers and an interview guide for focus group discussions. Both the interviews and the focus group interview guide solicited participants' views on success, failures, and challenges of the RCZ in relation to the inclusion of women in the church's Rules and Regulations which regulate its worship services and governance. Focus group discussions gave the researcher the opportunity to interact with participants in a manner which allowed for clarification, follow-up questions, and probing (Gray, 2009).

PROCEDURE

The researcher carried out the interviews with ten (10) participants and one focus group discussion with six (6) participants who were selected from the same group of ten interview participants. The focus group discussion lasted approximately one and half hours and it was audio-taped with the permission of the participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

Findings were presented in line with the thematic issues drawn from the four research questions. Data were translated into English, coded, and organized into themes through the use of the constant comparative mode of data analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The constant comparative approach is the analytic technique of qualitative comparing and contrasting data from numerous data sources in a bid to develop categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The constant comparative method was compatible with triangulation which was achieved through collecting data using interviews, document analysis, and focus discussion methods.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

To strive to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative data, the researcher focused on attaining credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). For most qualitative approaches, reliability is improved and guaranteed by triangulation where data is gathered. Data for this study were collected using interviews, available documents, and focus group

discussions. In order to find out how the participants would respond to these questions, similar questions were asked in both methods. Such an approach contributed towards effecting methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility of the study, thereby making the researcher confident of the research results.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permission to conduct the research was granted by the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe. Participation was voluntary. All information has been treated as confidential. In order to protect the identity of individual participants, pseudonyms were used instead of their real names. They were informed that since their involvement in the study was voluntary, they were free to withdraw any time they felt uncomfortable to continue.

RESULTS

The study sought to explore the shift of the RCZ's Rules and Regulations from being exclusive with regards to women, to being inclusive. After reading and analyzing responses from both the interviews and the focus group discussions several times, data were categorized into themes which were developed from research questions that guided the participants' narratives namely: The extent to which RCZ members view inclusiveness of the RCZ Rules and Regulations in relation to women, the RCZ Rules and Regulations which are women inclusive, the RCZ Rules and Regulations which are women exclusive, and how RCZ members view the role of the RCZ in promoting women inclusive church Rules and Regulations.

RCZ MEMBERS' VIEWS ON THE INCLUSIVITY OF RCZ RULES AND REGULATIONS IN RELATION TO WOMEN

Findings indicate that participants were of the opinion that some of the RCZ Rules and Regulations are women inclusive. The following interview responses represent what was stated by many participants:

The RCZ Rules and Regulations now accommodate women for they can now function as alders, deacons, ministers of the word and conduct Sunday services. Women can sit wherever they like in the RCZ church services (Participant 7)¹.

The RCZ is now transformed. During the early days of the church, the era of the missionaries, no woman would preach on a Sunday nor be elected as elders or deacons. This church is now a new one (Participant 5).

The same sentiments were echoed by the majority during the focus group discussion, as illustrated below:

It is now very clear that the RCZ Rules and Regulations have become women inclusive. For women can now sit wherever they like in the RCZ church buildings, they can be elected as deacons and elders. Moreso, RCZ women can be called to ministry and train as ministers. To date, the RCZ has eighteen women ministers who have graduated from its Theological College since 2007 when the church embarked on the training of women as ministers of the word (Participant 2).

The above stated responses clearly indicate that many participants felt that the current RCZ Rules and Regulations have become women inclusive. RCZ women can now function as elders and deacons, as well ministers of the Word. This is supported by the current RCZ Rules and Regulations which allow women to be trained as ministers (RCZ Constitution, Rules and Regulations, 2017 Number 59) and the RCZ Ministers' Register which had nineteen women ministers (19) against one hundred and eighty-four (184) men (RCZ Ministers Register, 2018).

RCZ RULES AND REGULATIONS WHICH ARE WOMEN INCLUSIVE

The following questionnaire responses represent what was said by many participants on RCZ Rules and Regulations which promote the inclusion of women in the church's worship services as well as its governance.

51.4. Rules and Regulations 3. Qualifications of elders and deacons.

Anyone who can be elected as a deacon/ elder must be a member of the specific congregation for one year or more) (Participant 1).

Rules and Regulations 59: Qualifications of students for the ministry

1. 106.1.1. Anyone called by the Lord.
2. 106.1.2. Anyone who is 18–50 years
3. 106.1.3. Anyone with five Ordinary Levels including English Language.
4. 106.1.4. Anyone who has been a member of the RCZ for three (3) years or more.

5. 106.1.5. Anyone who can be recommended by his/her church council as someone who has offered help in ministry.
6. 106.1.6. Anyone who has a recommendation of his/her minister of religion.
7. 106.1.7. If that person is above thirty years (30), he/she can be accepted with Ordinary Levels even without English Language, mature entry) (Participant 6).

The majority of the participants stated that the RCZ Rules and Regulations 3 and 59 clearly state that any RCZ member, either men or women, can be elected as an elder or a deacon as long as they have been in that specific congregation for one year or more. Moreso, the participants brought in the ministerial training which is based on Ordinary Level standards not on the idea of someone being man or woman. In their responses, there is also the aspect of mature entry which can be used to accept students at the theological school based on someone being above thirty (30) years coupled with Ordinary Levels without the English Language. The views were expressed as questionnaire responses as well as during the focus study group discussions (FGD) as follows:

Our church's rules and regulations now allow women to be elders, deacons as well as ministers of the word (Participant 3, Questionnaire).

In our RCZ church, we already have women ministers who have been elected as leaders of various church boards) (Participant 1, FGD).

The above vignettes show that the RCZ has clear cut Rules and Regulations which are women inclusive as evidenced by RCZ Rules and Regulations 3 and 59 provided by the participants in responding to interview questions and during focus group discussions.

RCZ RULES AND REGULATIONS WHICH ARE WOMEN EXCLUSIVE

Findings indicate that participants were of the opinion that although most parts of the RCZ Rules and Regulations were considered to be inclusive with regards to women, they appear women exclusive at the same time as illustrated below:

Rules and Regulations 3: Qualifications of elders and deacons

51.4 Anyone who can be elected as a deacon/ elder must be a member of the specific congregation for one year or more.

It seems as if the RCZ Rules and Regulations are women inclusive but at the ground men end up taking up most of the posts whilst few women are voted in (Participant 9).

Rules and Regulations 59: Qualifications of students for the ministry.

8. 106.1.1. Anyone called by the Lord.
9. 106.1.2. Anyone who is 18–50 years.
10. 106.1.3. Anyone with five Ordinary Levels including English Language.
11. 106.1.4. Anyone who has been a member of the RCZ for three (3) years or more.
12. 106.1.5. Anyone who can be recommended by his/her church council as someone who has offered help in ministry.
13. 106.1.6. Anyone who has a recommendation of his/her minister of religion.
14. 106.1.7. If that person is above thirty years (30), he/she can be accepted with Ordinary Levels even without English Language, mature entry. Although this regulations is open to both men and women, more men than women end up being trained as ministers (Participant 3).

The same sentiments were echoed by the majority during the focus group discussion as illustrated below:

RCZ Rules and Regulations are on paper but there is no system which motivates women to take up posts as elders, deacons as well as ministers of the word (Participant 4, FGD).

The above stated responses are supported by the RCZ Ministers' Register (2018) as well as the RCZ Congregational Minutes (2000–2018) which indicate that the RCZ Rules and Regulations provide a fair ground for both women and men to take up posts, there is need to motivate women to have the courage to take the available posts.

THE ROLE OF THE RCZ IN PROMOTING WOMEN INCLUSIVE CHURCH RULES AND REGULATIONS

The following responses represent what was said by many participants on the role which the RCZ can play in promoting women inclusive Rules and Regulations:

The RCZ should incorporate rules and regulations which promote women into church leadership posts (Participant 3).

The church has to create systems like the women's quota to promote the inclusion of women in the church's worship services and governance (Participant 8, FGD).

It is evident that participants were of the opinion that the RCZ church should craft new rules and regulations like the women's quota to promote greater women inclusion in its worship and governance than it used before.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to explore the shift of the RCZ Rules and Regulations from being exclusive to being inclusive with regards to women in the church's worship and governance. Results indicate that the RCZ Rules and Regulations have shifted from being exclusive (1891–1983) to being inclusive (1984 to date) with regards to women involvement in the church's worship and governance.

In a book chapter, "Women in African Christianity," Ayanga (2016), found out that the incorporation of women was the greatest innovation in evangelization (Baur, 1998). Ayanga adds that the patriarchal framework of the African society restricted women to peripheral duties in the church; such duties included cleaning church buildings, teaching Sunday school classes, and cooking, to mention a few (Phiri and Werner, 2016). Furthermore, in African initiated churches, women could be healers, prophets, and providers of pastoral care as well as caring for the poor and the vulnerable in society. During the missionary era, theological training for women was neither important nor necessary. The idea is supported by Mercy Amba Oduyoye in 2001 who noted that by 1978, there were still few women in departments of religion in public universities. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Circle) which came into existence in 1989 to be the voice of African Women at all levels of society (Phiri and Werner, 2016) has sought to address this challenge. Further, the Circle aimed at publishing theological literature written by women of Africa emanating from their culture and unique experiences.

(RCZ Ministers Register, 2018)

The RCZ has made huge strides in promoting women inclusion in the church's worship services and governance as shown by Table 8.2:

The table above shows us that, the RCZ trained no female minister from 1936–2005 but it had already trained one hundred and thirteen male ministers for that period. This was so because the church's Rules and Regulations did not allow the training of women as ministers of the Word of God. The RCZ Rules and Regulations were exclusive of women from 1936–2005 with

Table 8.2 Women and Men trained as ministers of the word in the RCZ from 1936–2018

PERIOD	1936–2005	2006–2018
Women trained as ministers	0	19
Men trained as ministers	113	71
Total	113	203

regards to them training as ministers of the word in the church. The trend, however, shifted from 2006 to date when the RCZ Rules and Regulations regarding women training as ministers of the word were changed to be inclusive of women. As shown by the table above, nineteen female ministers have passed through the church's Theological College from 2006 to date. Although their number is far below the seventy-one male ministers who trained during the same period, their number is significant. This can be as a result of the lack of a women's quota facility in the RCZ Rules and Regulations regarding the training of Ministers.

CONCLUSION

In relation to the extent to which RCZ members view inclusiveness of the RCZ Rules and Regulations in relation to women, the findings concluded that the RCZ Rules and Regulations have shifted from being exclusive regarding women as it was from 1891–1983 to being inclusive regarding women in the church governance from 1984 to date. Pointing to the RCZ Rules and Regulations which are women inclusive, the study picked two major areas namely: qualifications of deacons and elders (Rules and Regulations Number 3) and qualifications of student ministers (Rules and Regulations Number 59). Rules and Regulations for qualifications of elders and deacons suggest that anyone can be elected and Rules and Regulations for student ministers also point to anyone between the age of 18 and 50 with Ordinary Level qualifications can be accepted to train as ministers. The two Rules and Regulations include both males and females. In relation to RCZ Rules and Regulations which are women exclusive, it was noted that there is no explicit part which excludes women in relation to Rules and Regulations 3 and 59 which point to qualifications of elders and deacons, as well as qualifications of student ministers, but the findings suggested that the church should lobby for more women in training for ministry and be elected as elders and deacons. With regards to how RCZ members view the role of the RCZ in promoting women inclusive church Rules and Regulations, the findings suggest that the RCZ should craft mechanisms such as the women's quota system to promote more

women inclusion in the church's governance structures than what the status quo is offering to women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above findings and conclusions, the study recommends the following to the RCZ church to promote extensive women inclusion in the church's governance structures:

- Hold gender awareness workshops for the church leadership and members.
- Develop and implement a Gender Policy document for the church
- Adopt a gender disparity corrections instrument such as women's quota so that more women than can end up active in the church's governance than previously.

REFERENCES

- Ayanga, H.O. 2016. "Women in Christianity," in I. Phiri and D. Werner, eds., *Anthology of African Christianity*, Oxford: Regnum Books International.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2011). *Research Methods in Education* (7th Ed). London: Routledge.
- Gray, D. E. 2009. *Doing Research in the Real World* (2nd Ed). London: SAGE Publications.
- Guba, E. G. 1981. Criteria for Assessing the Trustworthiness of Naturalistic Enquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 29, 75-91.
- Kasomo, D., and Maseno, L. I. 2011. "A Critical Appraisal of African Feminist Theology," *International Journal of Current Research* 2(1), 154-162.
- Mapuranga, T. P. 2013. "AICs as a Gendered Space in Harare, Zimbabwe: Revisiting the Role and Place of Women." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp 303-317.
- McMillan, J. H., and Schumacher, S. 2010. *Research in Education: Evidence-based Enquiry* (7th Ed). New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Oduyoye, M. 2001. *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Okure, T. 1993. 'Feminist Interpretations in Africa.' In *Searching the Scriptures*. Ed. By Schussler Fiorenza, E. London: SCM Press.
- Phiri, I. A and Werner, D. Ed. 2016. *Anthology of African Christianity*. Oxford: Regnum Books International.
- Rutoro, R. 2007. Lay Leadership in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe. A Dissertation Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch University
- RCZ Congregational Minutes, 1984-2016, Masvingo.

RCZ Ministers Register, 1936–2018, Masvingo.

http://agenda2063.au.int/en/sites/default/files/agenda2063_popular_version_10-01-19ENpdf. Accessed on 25 January 2019.

<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>. Accessed on 30 January 2019.

NOTE

1. In order to safeguard confidentiality, all the study participants for this study are identified with pseudonyms.