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Authority in Pentecostal Churches in Lusaka-Zambia: A Comparative Study of Female and Male Pastors

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Abstract

This paper is a summary of a research study established to investigate the pastoral roles of female and male pastors in Pentecostal churches in Zambia from a Christian feminist perspective. Structured questionnaires, Interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guides were used. Divine calling was cited as the reason for becoming pastors by the male Pastors and the 38.7% of female pastors. The majority of female pastors (61.3%) became pastors because their spouses were pastors. Male pastors were the 'heads' and mostly made strategic and tactical decisions whilst the majority of female pastors were assistant pastors, heads of female department and mostly made operational decisions. Compared to the male pastors, pastoral qualifications were not enough to earn female pastors governing authority. The study recommends the redesigning of pastoral training curriculum to include gender equality issues, use of the Gender Parity Model of Leadership (GPML) and encouraging women to go for pastoral training.

Key Words: *Feminism, Feminist Theology, Christian Feminism, Pentecostal churches, Religious authority.*

1. Introduction: Pentecostalism has become the fastest growing segment of Christianity and has operated in Africa for most of the 20th Century (Horn, 2010). It arrived in Zambia (Northern Rhodesia then) in 1948 (Lumbe, 2008). This expansion has been attributed to prosperity messages being preached that have proved to be so appealing to Africans dealing with economic disenfranchisement during the post-independence era. In this study an inclusive definition of Pentecostal churches was adopted to mean those churches and ministries whose spirituality and practice emphasize the working of the holy spirit in church, healing, prophecy, ecstatic worship and exorcism' (Anderson, 2000:103). The main problem of this study was to investigate the pastoral roles of female and male pastors and the extent to which pastors have been influenced by Christian feminism to accept and promote equal pastoral roles among pastors in Pentecostal churches in Zambia. The subject of this research is of great importance because it is the first and pioneering study in Zambia and will contribute towards the understanding of women in church in Zambia.

1.1 Concept of Feminism and definition: According to Breines (2006), feminism, is defined as an inclusive worldwide movement to end sexism and sexist oppression by empowering women. Feminism purports that women and men should be equal politically, economically and socially.

1.1.1 Feminist theology: Feminist theology which emerged in conjunction with “women’s liberation” movement of the 1960’s, has a variety of forms. It is important to note that not all forms of the Feminist theology are Christian some are of other religions e.g. Jewish. Despite the different forms, all feminist theologians advocate for the end of the patriarchal model which has been developed and maintained in religion for over almost two thousand years (Reuther, 1993). Feminist theologians argue that religious traditions perpetuate and promote women's disadvantageous position both within the Church and in the larger society. Feminist theology reconsiders the traditions, practices, scriptures, and theologies of religions and some of the goals which include increasing the role of women among the clergy and religious authorities (Anderson, 2004). Theology feminism therefore, challenges both women and men to open their eyes to recognise the widespread workings of patriarchy and its injustices.

1.1.2 Christian Feminism: The first wave of Christian feminists emerged as a result of some Christians disputing the teachings that women were inferior to men. It holds that all people are equal before God and have equal opportunities and responsibility to use their gifts and obey their calling to the glory of God without regard to class or race. This view implies that gender in itself does not privilege or curtail a believer’s gifting or calling to any ministry in the church. According to Christian feminists, gender equality in Christian church is biblical. It considers that just as women and men are equally created in God’s image, they are equally responsible for sin, equally redeemed by Christ and equally gifted by God’s Spirit for service, therefore they are held responsible for using their God given gifts (Edwards, 2011, Scot McKnight, 2008). According to Harrison (2007) and Dagers (2001,) Christian feminism advances the equality of women and men spiritually, morally, socially and in leadership from a Christian point of view. Some of the issues addressed by this branch are women’s ordination and recognition of equal spiritual and moral abilities. Christian feminism for instance challenges the interpretation of scriptures in light of the equality of women and men. It focuses on the ordination of women and the general treatment of women in the church (Anderson and Beverley, 2004). The realisation by Christian feminists that church practices and doctrines assumed to be sex neutral may in fact be male-biased, led to a more systematic inquiry in Christianity. This feminist challenge has resulted into most Pentecostal churches and non-Pentecostal churches ordaining women. Christian feminists have said ‘The personal is the theological’ (Robinson 1986). In my view this entails that women’s experiences in religion must be understood within the broader social context using the theological analysis. In this case the personal experiences are understood as lived version of the theological reality. In the context of this study all the religious practices and culture are theologically analysed from a Christian feminist perspective.

1.2 Religious Authority: There are two types of authority that have been noted to be operating in Pentecostalism by different scholars. The two types of authority are ministering authority and ruling authority. These two types of authority have been linked to Max Weber’s typology of prophet and priest to describe the two different types of religious leaders. Weber describes a prophet as one who has authority by virtue of personal revelation and charisma, and a priest as one who has authority by virtue of his or her service in a sacred tradition. Barfoot and Sheppard (1980) were the first scholars to describe the functions of Pentecostal ministry. Prophetic functions were linked to ministering authority and priestly functions were linked to ruling authority. Pastoral and teaching fall under Prophetic function and any one (man or woman) who had a personal call can exercise this authority. These prophetic functions were legitimated because of the power of the Spirit. In contrast, women were excluded from ruling

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authority on the basis of their sex because this type of authority required one to be male (Stephenson, 2011).

2. Review of Related Literature:

2.1 Reasons for choosing and training to be pastor: According to Folarin & Afolabi (2012) in their study 'entitled 'Christ Apostolic Church Women in dialogue with 1 Corinthians 14:34-36,' conducted in Nigerian Pentecostal church, women become pastors due to divine calling. Women were motivated to pursue pastoral training for a number of reasons among which the following were noted; increased level of college educated women, the desire for personal growth and spiritual enrichment, being equipped for ministry among women as per God's calling (Carroll et al 1982, Chaves, 1997, Zikmund, et al, 1998, Phiri 2007). According to Carroll, et al, (1983), women that enrolled in the seminaries were exposed to curricula that were designed to prepare them for work in religious education or sacred music and not pastorate. Despite being admitted into the seminaries and performing exceptionally well, women found their seminary training lacking in some respects. Clergy women felt that seminary had not prepared them adequately for the sexism and loneliness they would experience in the local Parish (Zikmund, et al, 1998: 103). In the United States of America however, by 1990s feminism had a stable place in the seminaries regarding the course content as feminist perspectives on religious life. The course taken by both men and women comprised Biblical literature and church history. Elective courses focusing on women's perspective had more women taking them than men. This scenario resulted into seminary experiences that were quite different for female and male students (Carroll, et al, 1983:77-78). According to Lehman (2002) not much data is provided regarding gender in seminary admissions, curriculum choice, relations with faculty and administrators.

2.2 Pastoral roles & Attitudes: A study conducted in Tanzania by Swantz (1978), on 'Church and the changing role of Women in Tanzania' revealed that the founders' attitude towards women influenced the kind of leadership role the women were to play in that church. This meant that the degree to which women were accepted to leadership was to a large extent dependent on how the founder perceived the role of women. Another study conducted by Phiri, (1990) in Malawian Pentecostal churches, revealed that ordained women clergy were not always respected as pastors. According to studies conducted in Zambia among Non-Pentecostal churches, women's role in churches were perceived as an extension of their home life (Gender Audit Report- Zambia, 2008) and that few women clergy were in senior positions (Ryan and Thabethe, 2007).

2.3 Leadership roles: It is worth noting that Women who were the majority of converts and church-goers helped shape the early Pentecostal movement. Women wrote religious songs, edited Pentecostal papers, taught and ran Bible schools and served as pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and in other governance roles. According to Chant (1999) and Clifton (2009), the non-discriminatory outpouring of the spirit leading to women experiencing Spirit baptism, praying for revival, planting churches, travelling as evangelists, working as missionaries was manifested all over the world. Over the course of the century, the number of female clergy participating in the running of the church deteriorated, women had limited ministerial functions and access to governing authority (Ware 2009, Fatokun, 2006).

By 1920s, the freedom that women had in the early Pentecostal movement to hold more authoritative or official leadership positions declined due to a more socially conservative approach of viewing female participation as mere supportive and carrying out traditionally accepted roles (Keller & Reuther, 2006).

3. Method: In an effort to answer the research questions the study used the Descriptive Cross-Sectional study design. In this case data from the selected population was collected to help answer the research questions. The information gathered represented what was going on at that point in time. Descriptive Cross-sectional design is useful in assessing practices, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs of a population in relation to a particular issue (Olsen & Marie, 2004). Questionnaires were distributed to participants (both congregants and pastors) who showed willingness and ability to fill in the responses on their own. Focus Group Discussions with church leaders and pastors were conducted. During the Focus Group Discussions all the sessions were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. In depth interviews were conducted with church overseers and four principals of the theological institutions. In this case the researcher wrote down all the relevant responses and verified them before asking the next question. The researcher probed the emerging issues that arose from the responses. During this research, the researcher did not interfere with or contest participants' responses. The researcher therefore relied on interviewing, documenting and recording what she was able to hear and see. Purposive sampling and Respondent Driven Sampling was used to obtain samples from female and male pastors and church members. The justification for selecting purposive sampling was predicated on the logic of selecting only those respondents that would provide specific data necessary to answer the research questions in this study. The selection of respondents, particularly for the Focus Group Discussions was guided by the need to fulfil theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 61; Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 34 Miles and Huberman, 1994:27).

The justification for using Respondent Driven Sampling was that it was the best available method for conducting research with hard-to-reach population e.g. Female pastors and Female led churches. Respondent Driven Sampling is derived from studies of incentive system (Heckathorn, 1990, 1993, 1996). It assumes that those best able to access members of the hidden population are their own peers. In this technique the responded recruits others into the study. This technique of sampling population is with a contact pattern. This means that the activities that constitute membership in the population must create connections among population members. The researcher used this technique when identifying female led churches as well as female pastors which/who were hard to get. Respondent Driven Sampling ensures that different sectors of the population are adequately represented among informants.

The study area consisted of 12 Pentecostal churches situated in Lusaka the capital city of Zambia. Four (4) were Classical Pentecostal churches and eight (8) Neo- Pentecostal churches out of which 4 were female headed. The total sample size of 173 respondents took part in this study. A total of 74 pastors, 31 female pastors (out of which 4 were overseers), 43 male pastors (out of which 8 were overseers), 59 church leaders (31 females and 28 males), 4 college principals (all males) and 36 church members (22 females and 14 males). The sample size was dependent on the credibility of the respondents as well as what was obtaining at the time of this study. It is worth noting that this study was largely qualitative. Qualitative data was thematically analyzed. Data were transcribed, typed and arranged by key thematic areas corresponding to specific objectives of this study. The quantitative data was categorised and then coded. It was not feasible to use master sheets because the questionnaire involved many open-ended responses. In this case, hand compilation was more useful in order to capture the whole range of responses. The data generated was analysed using descriptive statistics.

4. Results of the Study:

3.1 Reasons for becoming a pastor: The results showed that the male Pastors and 38.7% of female pastors became pastors because of God's calling upon their lives to preach the gospel and serve His people. However; the majority of female pastors (61.3%) became pastors because their spouses were pastors. This is in contrast with the study by Folarin & Afolabi (2012) whose findings stated that divine calling motivated women to become pastors.

3.2 Training: Both female and male pastors underwent the same pastoral training at different levels (Certificate, Diploma, undergraduate and post graduate Degrees), obtained the same qualifications and were ushered into various churches to perform their pastoral duties regardless of one's gender. As opposed to Carroll, et al, (1983), who purports that women that enrolled in the seminaries were exposed to curricula that were designed to prepare them for work in religious education or sacred music and not pastorate, this study revealed that all the female pastors were exposed to curricula that prepared them for Pastorate work just as their male colleagues. In this regard there were no special courses for female and male pastors. The majority of trained pastors indicated that the training equipped them with the roles of females and males in the church i.e. that of the provision of motherhood and fatherhood respectively. The majority of female pastors (61.3%) who were pastors' wives indicated that they undertook pastoral training to fulfil the church policy that required all pastors' wives to be trained. The implications of this could be that most female pastors may not perform because they are pastors by marriage and may have less interest in doing pastoral work or even question their position. The other 38.7% of female pastors who became pastors by God's calling indicated that they trained as pastors in order to increase their knowledge and sharpen their pastorate skills. On the other hand the male pastors said they trained in order to strengthen and enhance their pastoral calling and provide effective leadership to the ministry. It was evident from this study that pastoral training did not take into account the realities of the differences in experiences of female and male pastors and how the female pastors were to handle the gender stereotypes found in the church.

3.3 Attitude: The attitude of the majority of the female and male pastors towards pastoral roles and each other was to a larger extent dependent on gender stereotypes. Whilst the majority indicated that female and male pastors were colleagues and carried the same anointing, it was clear that they performed different gender stereotyped roles. In this regard, the socially constructed expectations of being male or female had a bearing on their attitudes towards pastoral roles and each other. The highly prescribed roles of female and male pastors and how they viewed each other was to a larger extent influenced by such attitudes. The study supports Phiri's findings which revealed that even though both women and men who enrolled in theological education in Malawi obtained same qualifications, they were in some churches assigned different positions (Phiri, 1990).

Some female pastors realized how difficult it was to have the same recognition as the male pastors and argued that female and male pastors were perceived differently by the church community. While the intense attitude towards male pastors was that of the 'head' of the church, the intense attitude towards female pastors was that a 'helper' and or 'head of the female department. Such attitudes set the basis of the prescribed pastoral roles of female and male pastors in the body of Christ regardless of one's qualifications. Church members' attitudes followed the same pattern in terms of issues they felt female and male pastors could handle well. These attitudes were exhibited in the respondent's perceptions about the gender roles, consultations and working relations that existed among pastors in the church. There were similarities on the way female and male pastors viewed their roles.

3.4 Kind of decisions made and why: The kind of decisions made by female and male pastors in this study were examined in the context of the three decision categories of strategic which sets the course of an organization, tactical which refer to how things will get done and operational which are decisions those being led make every single day to make the organization run (Bauer & Erdogan 2009). A critical look at the church policies, prescribed expectations of female and male pastors, composition of the highest decision making bodies and culture surrounding these churches, showed that male pastors had more ruling authority than the female colleagues. The study revealed that the male pastors made strategic and tactical decisions while the female pastors were limited to making more of the operational decisions due to their level of involvement in decision making process of the church governance. From the analysis of the roles of female pastors and their level of authority, it was evident that while the majority of female pastors were involved in making day to day decisions in their line of operation, the majority of male pastors in Pentecostal churches were more involved in setting the course of the churches and how the churches were to run because of their ruling authority. What perpetuated leadership roles of male pastors and submissive roles of female pastors were the church policies, prescribed expectations of female and male pastors, composition of the highest decision making bodies and culture surrounding these churches. It appears the decision making processes in the church were to a larger extent influenced by the way society has socially constructed the behavior of females and male regardless of one's skills and abilities. There was an extensive use of what I term the *Acquiescence Leadership Model (ALM)* in these churches which according to this study has the following five major characteristics;

1. Guided by the socially constructed prescribed gender roles than the ability or skills one possesses.
2. Uses a 'husband – wife' model of leadership.
3. The governance structure is highly influenced by cultural ideals.
4. Reinforces socially constructed expertise (female deal with female department and males provide leadership)
5. It is rigid, highly sacred and uses rules that are perceived to be sacrosanct.

The level to which this was embraced by the church influenced the kind of decisions female and male pastors had to make in the Body of Christ. In this case, limited or unlimited authority and highly prescribed responsibilities motivated pastors to make decisions in the manner they did. During Focus Group Discussions some male pastors argued that.....

.....As the head of the church men make major decisions such as on church building, how to run the assembly. We do this because we should give direction. We are leaders as men.... Even when we are all equal in the eyes of God, women should make supportive decisions for the sake of order.....
(FGD 2013-Emmasdale- Lusaka).

The findings support Stephenson, (2011) who purported that women in Pentecostalism were excluded from ruling authority on the basis of their sex because this type of authority required one to be male. From this study such exclusion still exists in modern Pentecostalism.

5. Conclusions: The study provided insight into the female and male pastors' real experiences in as far as pastoral roles are concerned. As compared to the male pastors, pastoral qualifications were not enough to earn female pastors governing authority. Female pastors' access to full and equal religious authority remains a struggle. In this regard, this study does not support the findings by Fatokun (2006) on women and leadership in Nigerian Pentecostal churches which stated that

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 women participated freely in church leadership in neo- Pentecostal denominations than they did in Classical Pentecostal denominations. Whilst that may have been true in Nigeria at that particular time, the study found this not to be so in Zambia. The kind of Pentecostal denomination had no bearing on how female and male pastors were perceived. Therefore, it can be concluded that the extent to which pastors have been influenced by Christian feminism to accept and promote equal pastoral roles among pastors in Pentecostal churches in Zambia is very negligible.

In the light of these findings, the study recommends the use of the ‘Gender Parity Model of Leadership (GPML) for church governance in order to allow women and men of GOD be of service to the people in their quest to bring the flock to GOD. The five major features of the Gender Parity Model (GPM) are as follows;

1. It recognised one’s qualifications and abilities.
2. It uses the equality and empowerment techniques of leadership
3. The governance mechanisms are not based on gender stereotypes
4. It analyses gender roles
5. It is flexible and highly consultative

Fig 1. Acquiescence Leadership Model (ALM) being used by churches understudy

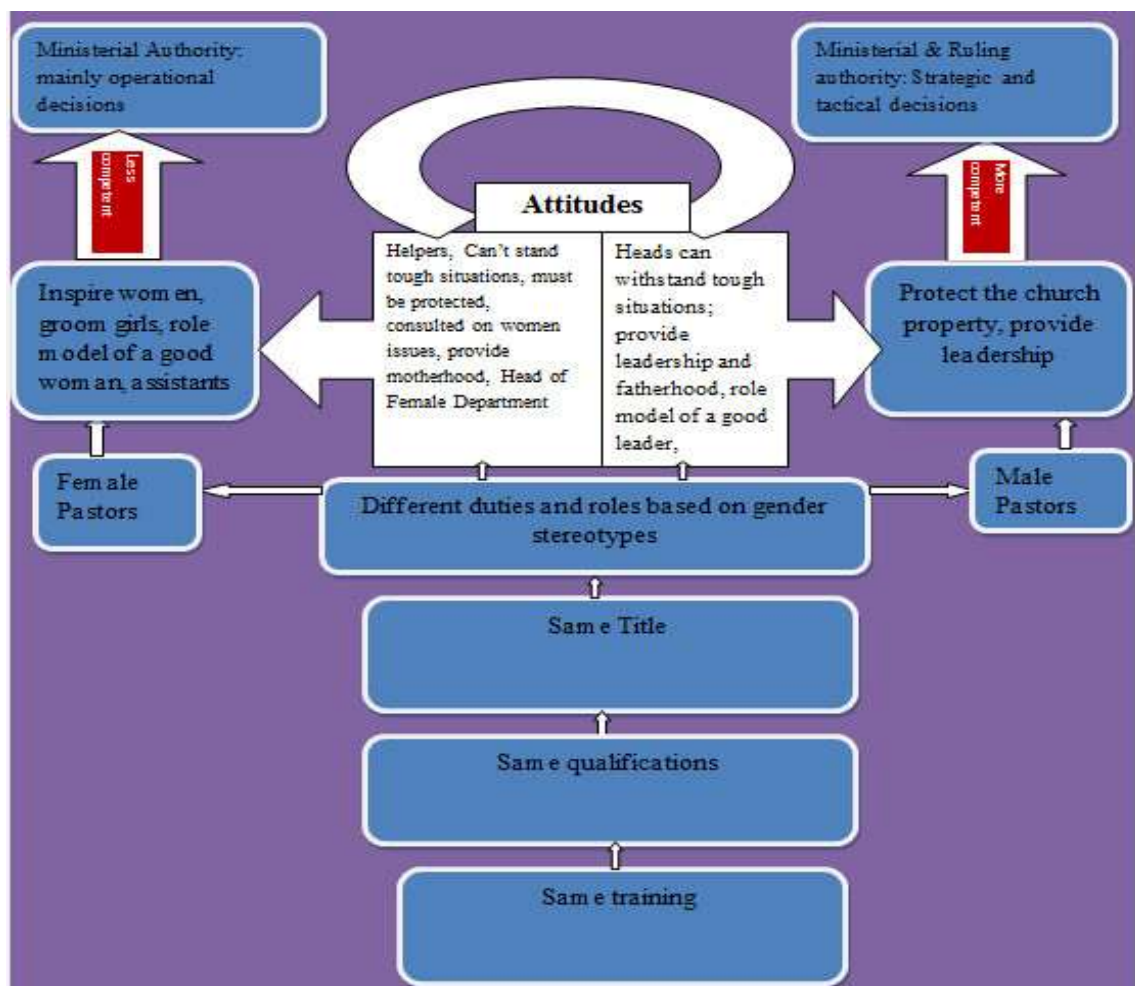
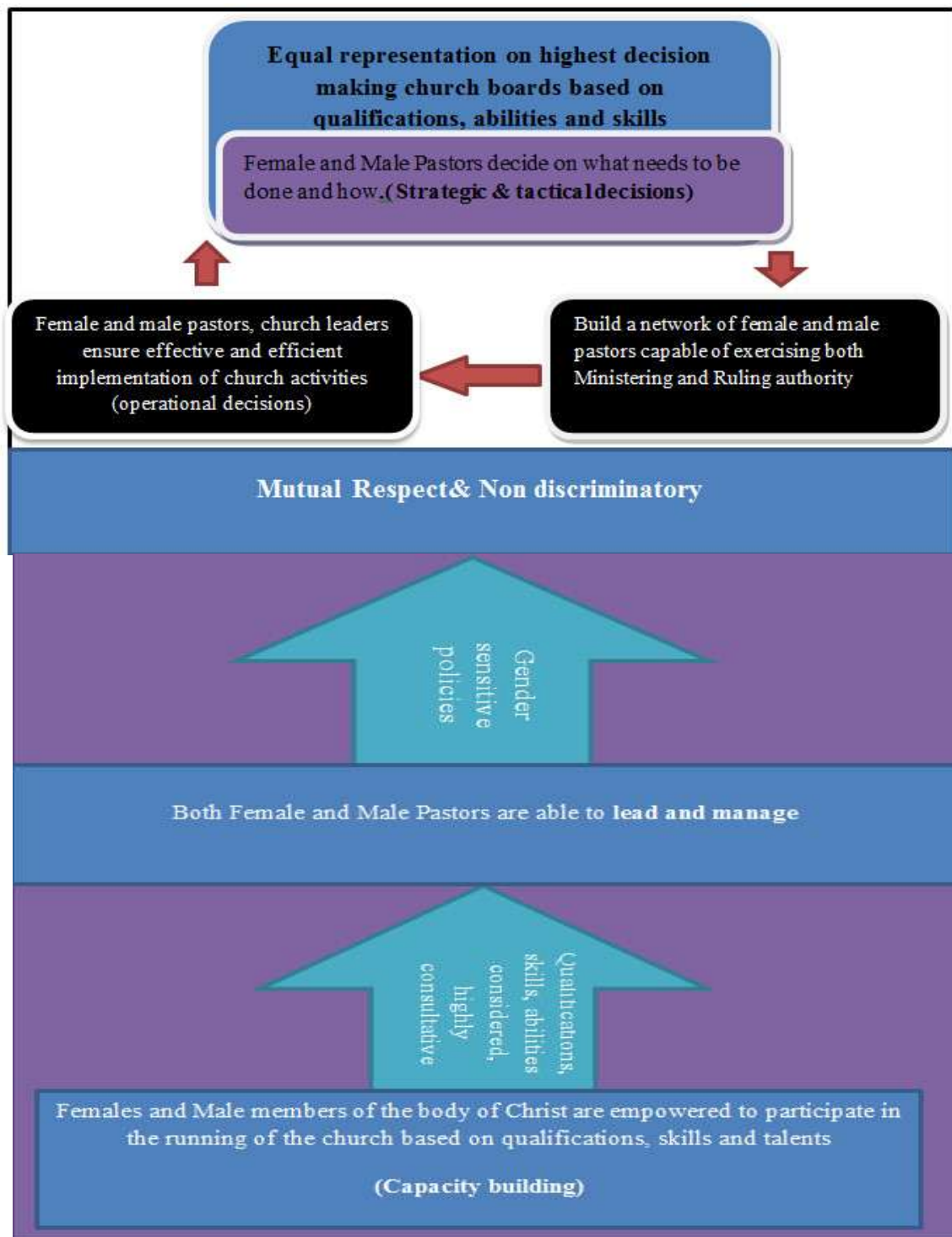


Fig2. Gender Parity Model of Leadership (GPML) as derived from the study



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