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26 Rallying Africa (especially African men) for HIV response

A bird's eye view of the theological work of Ezra Chitando on HIV & AIDS

Lovemore Togarasei

Abstract

That Africa has been hardest hit by the HIV pandemic is beyond doubt or debate. What Africa has done in response still needs documentation and analysis. Although AIDS related deaths have decreased significantly since the introduction of anti-retroviral therapy and its free roll out by many African governments, the pandemic remains a cause for concern and worthy of attention. HIV remains a serious health and developmental challenge. What role has Africa played over the past more than 30 years of living with HIV & AIDS? This is the question this chapter attempts to address by focusing on the work of one African man, Ezra Chitando, of the World Council of Churches and the University of Zimbabwe. Specifically, the chapter considers how, through socially engaged scholarship, he has rallied African biblical scholars, theologians, philosophers, religious studies scholars, and all other stakeholders (especially focusing on men) to respond to HIV.

Introduction

In the mid to late 1980s and while reeling under its usual problems of poverty, war, ethnic tensions, lack of clean drinking water, poor health services etc, Africa was struck by the most devastating pandemic, perhaps the worst known in history: HIV & AIDS. The words of Festus Mogae, the third post-independence President of Botswana (1998-2008), at the 2001 United Nations General Assembly, although referring to the Botswana context then, best capture the impact of this pandemic, “We are threatened with extinction... People are dying in chillingly high numbers. It is a crisis of the first magnitude” (Mogae, 2021). What Mogae said about Botswana was very true of most of the countries in sub-Saharan and particularly Southern Africa. In most of these countries, in the 1990s and early

2000s, HIV incidence rates stood at an average 20% and HIV & AIDS related complications contributed about a third of all deaths.¹ With this impact, despite the limited resources, Africa had to make urgent responses. One thing that HIV taught people was that life is not compartmentalized. HIV knew neither medical doctor, professor, bricklayer, economist nor farmer. All were infected and affected in the same manner; all were killed by it in the same manner. This non-discriminatory nature of HIV & AIDS taught humanity to mobilize against the pandemic in non-discriminatory ways. The word ‘multi-sectoral’ was employed in calling all to respond to HIV & AIDS. In its National Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS (2003-2009), the Botswana Government, for example, declared HIV & AIDS a national emergency committing itself to, “... an aggressive, comprehensive and expanded *multi-sectoral* (emphasis mine) and multi-level response to fight the epidemic and to curb its impact on society (Republic of Botswana, undated:11). The multi-sectoral approach was an acknowledgement that AIDS affects people from all sectors of life and that all are therefore invited to respond. Though a medical problem, in effect, the pandemic had social, economic, gender, religious and other accompanying and debilitating effects. Men, women, and children were called to respond. Medical doctors, traditional doctors, teachers, and farmers were called to respond. One man who responded to the duty called by HIV & AIDS was Ezra Chitando of the World Council of Churches and the University of Zimbabwe, to whom we focus our attention in this chapter. Chitando made a theological response that has continued to this day. Between 2003 and 2017, he published 10 books, 8 book chapters, 17 refereed journal articles and other monographs on HIV & AIDS.² He has conducted several workshops and presented numerous papers at conferences all over the world. Work on HIV has taken him all over the world to such countries as Botswana, Ethiopia, Canada, Mexico, Togo, Denmark, Sweden, etc. Using his publications as sources of data, this chapter gives a bird’s eye view of the works of Ezra Chitando on HIV & AIDS. Specifically, I focus on how he has rallied all, but especially men, to respond to HIV. I look at the strengths and possibly weaknesses of his call for an African response to

¹ In 2000 UNAIDS reported, “In seven countries, all in the southern cone of the continent (of Africa), at least one adult in five is living with the virus. In Botswana, a shocking 35.8% of adults are now infected with HIV, while in South Africa, 19.9% are infected, up from 12.9% just two years ago” (UNAIDS Report, 2000:9).

² We refer to a number of these publications in this paper.

HIV. An interpretive approach using thematic analysis is utilized. Data for this chapter is mainly derived from Chitando's publications between 2003 and 2017 when he focused much of his publications on HIV & AIDS. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I look at Chitando's call to the HIV & AIDS ministry. This is followed by a general bird's eye view of the themes addressed by Chitando in his works on HIV & AIDS. The third section then focuses specially on his call for transformative masculinities as a positive response to HIV & AIDS. The fourth section evaluates the call for transformative masculinities before a conclusion is offered to wrap up the chapter.

Ezra Chitando's call³ to HIV & AIDS ministry

I shall avoid considering Chitando's early life and history here. It could be a worthy cause for there is a possibility that this shaped his engagement with HIV & AIDS, gender and gender-based violence in his later life. I leave this out here since space does not permit. Be that as it may, it is important, however, to mention that Chitando holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree earned in 2002 from the University of Zimbabwe in the field of the study of religion. The title of his thesis is: *The appropriation of African Traditional Religions in African Theology: a phenomenological investigation* (Chitando, 2002). It is important to note that by the time Chitando completed his doctoral degree in 2002, he had already published significantly but in the field of the study of religion. For example, his first publication, a journal article published in 1997, was about Western approaches to the study of religion in Africa (Chitando, 1997). Other articles that followed were mainly on the phenomenology of religion.⁴ One can tell even in these early works, an inclination towards engaged scholarship and an interest in issues of the socially and politically marginalized. For example, in his third work published in 1998, Chitando had already

³ I use the term 'call' here not with its religious connotations but simply to mean involved. Musa Dube (personal communication), however, believes Chitando's involvement deserves to be called a 'call' (even in the religious sense of the term) considering the passion, commitment and scale of his work on HIV and AIDS response in Africa that is comparable to that of biblical prophets.

⁴ For example, E. Chitando, "Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Religion in Africa: a critical appraisal", *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 11:2 (1997), 1-21.

started self-introspection. A specialist in the discipline of the Phenomenology of Religion, he began asking whether this discipline was liberative or oppressive in the Zimbabwean context (Chitando, 1998). With this interest in issues of liberation and social engagement, Chitando was unlikely to avoid getting involved in the most pressing problem of his generation. Musa Dube, a contemporary of Ezra Chitando and herself a trailblazer on HIV & AIDS scholarship in Africa, tells us how difficult it was for one not to self-introspect during this age. She writes:

As I went about with business as usual, teaching the Synoptic Gospels from a feminist, narrative, historical or redactional criticism and the like, there came a point that this academic approach began to become artificial and strange even on my tongue. I began to ask myself: why am I talking about historical contexts of Jesus, redactional criticism, narrative and all this stuff and skirting the main issue in this context and the gospels; namely sickness and healing. I began to ask myself a question, which every student also had in mind; namely, if Jesus can heal this much, why can't Jesus heal us of HIV/AIDS in our nation and the world? (Dube, 2002).

It appears Ezra Chitando also started asking the same questions as he went about teaching Phenomenology of Religion. Thus in 2002, he began paying attention to the subject of HIV & AIDS in an article entitled, *AIDS education curriculum for theological colleges in Zimbabwe: an exploratory essay* (Chitando, 2002). This article came, thanks to the work of Musa Dube who helped organize the first HIV and theological education workshop in Zimbabwe at Harare Theological College early in 2002. Musa Dube was then the WCC theological consultant for the programme, Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative in Africa (later Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy) (EHAIA) for Anglophone Africa, a position that Chitando would soon inherit a year later. Chitando himself was the Local Organizing Committee chairperson for this HIV and theological education workshop. Much of the HIV & AIDS work by Ezra Chitando was published after he had assumed the position of Theology Consultant for the EHAIA.⁵ Once he accepted the call to HIV ministry, Chitando exerted

⁵ E. Chitando (personal communication) associates his 'call' with the 2003 Writers Workshop at Mokolodi (Botswana) that resulted in the publication of the book, *Africa Praying* (M.W. Dube *Africa Praying*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003) and the debates and influences of some of the writers, for example, Musa Dube, Isabel A. Phiri, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, Gideon

much of his academic efforts to HIV & AIDS work. Of the 24 books he authored, edited or co-edited between 2003 and 2017, 14 addressed the subject of HIV & AIDS and/or sexuality. Of the 115 refereed journal articles and book chapters, 26 addressed the subject of HIV & AIDS and/or sexuality.⁶ But what HIV & AIDS themes did he address?

Themes addressed by Chitando in his works on HIV & AIDS

Generally, responses to HIV & AIDS have been in the call for prevention, counseling and testing, treatment and care and support of the infected and affected. In promoting these responses, scholars and activists have addressed socio-political, economic, cultural, gender and other issues that have tended to stand in the way of fighting HIV & AIDS.⁷ Chitando addressed these and other themes we attend to in this section.

Call to mainstream HIV & AIDS in theological education

From his very first article on HIV & AIDS, Chitando's major contribution was to call people in religion to respond to the pandemic. He mainly addressed two religious institutions: theological training institutions and the church as an institution in Zimbabwe (Chitando, 2002). In 2004, Chitando took the call beyond Zimbabwe, now calling theological institutions in Africa to wake up and respond to the reality of HIV & AIDS. He identified challenges faced by theological institutions to mainstreaming HIV & AIDS education, suggesting measures to overcome them (Chitando, 2004). For Chitando, theological training institutions were strategic partners in HIV & AIDS response as they trained tomorrow's church and community leaders. In his own words, "...graduates of African theological institutions (should) become effective agents of change in the time of HIV" (Chitando, 2008:6). Calling all theological institutions to engage HIV & AIDS, Chitando believed that education should prepare learners

Byamugisha, Sarojini Nadar, who all became champions of theology/religious studies and HIV.

⁶ See references to most of these works in this paper. Most of the papers can also be found online by searching Ezra Chitando's name.

⁷ See, for example L. Togarasei, S. Mmolai & F. Nkomazana (eds.), 2011. *The Faith Sector and HIV/AIDS in Botswana: responses and challenges*, New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

to address the existential needs of their societies. With this objective in mind, Chitando mobilized African theologians to contribute chapters towards a book he would edit on mainstreaming HIV & AIDS in theological education (Chitando, 2008). This book, which can be seen as a sequel to Dube's *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, looked at the experiences of mainstreaming HIV & AIDS as well as exploring new approaches for mainstreaming HIV & AIDS into the curriculum. This call for mainstreaming HIV & AIDS into the curriculum saw several institutions in Africa not only introducing courses on HIV & AIDS but in some cases such as at St Pauls' University in Kenya, introduction of programmes on theology and HIV & AIDS.

Calling the church to act

When it comes to the church, Chitando's contribution was twofold. He addressed the church membership and the church leadership. We shall explore his address of the church membership first and then the church leadership later. In the book entitled *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 1* (Chitando, 2007a), Chitando makes theoretical explorations on the role of the African church in its response to HIV & AIDS. He begins with an overview of the church in Africa as a strategic partner in HIV & AIDS responses. A legacy of compassion, a pool of volunteers, highly motivated workers, an abiding presence in the community, credibility, membership from diverse professional backgrounds and prayer and spirituality are identified as strategic attributes of the church that make it potentially an effective partner in HIV & AIDS responses. Having noted this, Chitando remains aware of the many factors that have weakened the African church in its HIV response. It is these factors that he addressed in most of his writings as he rallied the church to a positive HIV & AIDS response. These factors include stigma and discrimination, theological rigidity, insensitivity to gender issues, negative attitudes towards sexuality, external dependency and limited experience in fundraising, monitoring, and evaluation (Chitando, 2007a). Continuing with his theoretical explorations, Chitando argues that the church should be an inclusive rather than an exclusive community. It should come up with theologies of life, theologies of hope and theologies of compassion all based on African cultural resources and philosophies such as *ubuntu/unhu/botho* (Chitando, 2007a).

Having made theoretical explorations on how the church should respond to HIV & AIDS in Africa, in *Acting in Hope: African Churches and*

HIV/AIDS 2 (2007b), Chitando looks at practical steps that the church should take to respond to HIV & AIDS. His major argument in this book is that culture should be addressed carefully for positive HIV & AIDS response. He then suggests practical steps the church should take in dealing with vulnerable groups of people such as women, children, and people with disabilities. He also suggests ways of engaging men and improving theological education for HIV & AIDS responses. Chitando's works call the church to be "AIDS competent" (Parry, 2008).

As I have mentioned above, despite addressing church membership, Chitando also devoted much attention to addressing church leadership about issues of HIV & AIDS. He calls church leaders to avoid stigmatizing sermons (Chitando, 2007c), to challenge cultural and biblical teachings that seem to drive HIV & AIDS and to be accountable to members. Chitando writes, "The greatest sermon that African church leaders could possibly preach on HIV & AIDS is by living lives that are beyond reproach, especially in issues relating to sex" (Chitando, 2007b:47). Although Chitando addresses church leaders in congregations, much of his effort is on church leaders in theological training institutions, both the trainers and the trainees. A number of his articles challenge theological institutions to mainstream HIV & AIDS into their curricula (Chitando, 2008), provide methods of integrating HIV & AIDS into the curricula (Togarasei and Chitando, 2008) and identifies areas to undertake research on religion/theology and HIV & AIDS (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2008). For him, churches can only become AIDS competent if the leadership is well trained and convinced that HIV & AIDS response is part of the mission of the church in Africa.

Calling all African religions to respond

Although much of his work addressed the Christian religion, Chitando also took seriously the fact that religion in Africa is more than just Christianity. Besides Christianity, he gives particular attention to African Traditional Religion (ATR). He also addresses Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions at home in Africa. In his article, *Disclosing Layers of Secrecy: Studying African Indigenous Religions in Contexts of HIV and AIDS* (Chitando, 2008) for example, Chitando finds ATR contributing to the devastating impact of HIV & AIDS. Elsewhere he also finds ATR contributing to gender-based violence and HIV & AIDS. (Chitando, 2007d). Although upholding African culture and identity, Chitando calls for cultural transformation in the context of HIV & AIDS. He calls upon scholars of

ATR, for example, to be ‘engaged scholars’ who teach ATR in a way that challenges certain beliefs and practices that promote the spread of HIV & AIDS.

Call for gender equity

Another theme addressed by Chitando is that of gender in the context of HIV & AIDS. Chitando has strongly challenged African societies to introspect and do away with practices that make women vulnerable to HIV & AIDS. Chitando speaks strongly for women and qualifies to be called a ‘feminist scholar’. He writes, “AIDS had the face of a young African woman... Patriarchy... leaves African women gasping for breath” (Chitando, 2007a:6). Under gender, he mainly addressed issues of masculinity and HIV & AIDS that we discuss separately below. As we will see in our discussion of his call for transformative masculinities below, Chitando largely believes that Africa can achieve gender equity if men change. He therefore suggests the use of all church and society platforms to achieve gender justice. Boys need to be caught young, the pulpit needs to be used to transform men, “youth, men’s and women’s groups should also be sensitized to the need to develop new attitudes towards manhood...,” (Chitando, 2007b:47), men need to be brought to church or to be reached with the gospel of gender equity in football grounds, are all messages that see men as the obstacles to gender justice.

Calling all to respond

Although trained as a scholar of religion, Chitando’s work has traversed his area of specialization. Like a soldier in battle who uses every available instrument to win the war, Chitando has sought to address Africans from all walks of life to use their different positions to respond to HIV & AIDS. He has called media practitioners, teachers, government officials, international aid agents and many more to respond to the challenge of HIV & AIDS. For example, concerning government officials, Chitando & Chirongoma write, “As Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers and Presidents, men have the responsibility of ensuring that adequate resources are directed towards the epidemic” (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2008:64).

Rallying African scholars to respond with a pen

Thus far, we have focused on the themes that Chitando has addressed in his response to HIV & AIDS. We need to add, however, that despite addressing these themes, Chitando has also rallied many African scholars

to address issues of HIV & AIDS. He has not only done that by challenging them in seminars and conferences but by mentoring many through co-publication. Chitando has co-edited books, co-authored articles, and/or in the process, mentored several upcoming and now established African scholars. The list is too long to exhaust but includes such scholars as Nothando Hadebe, Rosina Gabaitse, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Sophia Chirongoma, Lovemore Togarasei, Peter Nickles, Gideon Byamugisha, John Raja, Charles Klagba, Adriaan van Klinken, Anna Chitando, Angeline Madongonda, Lilly Phiri, Molly Manyonganise, Francis Machingura, Chamamah Kaunda and others.⁸ Most of these have become key contributors to and authorities in the discourse on African theology/religious studies and HIV & AIDS.⁹

The call for transformative masculinities

In the introduction to the book, *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 2*, Chitando observes, “The HIV epidemic forces African churches to conduct a patient and critical evaluation of African cultures, particularly issues relating to gender and sexuality” (Chitando, 2007b:1). Although Chitando addressed issues of gender generally for HIV & AIDS response as we have outlined above, he has paid close attention to issues of masculinity. In fact, his work on masculinities in contexts of HIV & AIDS is groundbreaking.¹⁰ This explains my decision to discuss this matter separately in this work.

Chitando’s call for transformative masculinities runs through most of his writings on HIV & AIDS and gender. His starting point for calling for transformative masculinities is that men have been privileged in religions

⁸ Space does not allow references to his co-publications but see, Chitando, E. & S. Chirongoma (eds.). *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012. Other examples are cited elsewhere in this paper.

⁹ For example, E. Chitando and Nothando Hadebe (eds.). *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians Facing HIV*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2009.

¹⁰ For example, S.F. John, L.C. Siwila & F. Settler (““Men can, should and must change!”: an analysis of Ezra Chitando’s writings on African masculinities,” *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 19:2, 155-157) describe Chitando as, “a pioneer and one of the scholars in the emerging field of religion and masculinities in Africa...,” 156.

and societies in general (Chitando, 2007a:7). Below I cite at length numerous quotations that show his strong belief that men have power and are privileged:

In most Africa cultures, patriarchy privileges men and relegates women and children to the periphery. (Chitando, 2007b:45).

Men are predominantly the doers/perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence as a result of the privileges bestowed upon them by religion, culture and the economic system (Wanjiru and Chitando, 2013).

Men have been pampered to believe that their egos must be massaged, and that they must always have things their own way (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2008:59).

The biological fact of being male places men in privileged positions (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:6).

For Chitando, this privileged position of men has created what has come to be called ‘dangerous masculinities’ (Hlatywayo, 2012) as men have used the power privilege in ways that have put women, children, and men themselves in danger of contracting HIV and dying from AIDS. Chitando, taking a leaf from studies on gender in general, argues that since gender (in this case masculinity) is socially constructed, it can be transformed into more useful forms in the context of HIV & AIDS. He takes it upon himself therefore to call for transformation of and indeed to transform dangerous masculinities. His first article on masculinities and HIV & AIDS focused on how Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches have challenged men to adopt masculinities that promote life, peace and well-being for women, children, and other men (Chitando, 2007c). Though praising Pentecostal men, Chitando calls men to do more than just caring, loving and providing for their families. He calls Pentecostal churches to encourage men to undergo HIV testing, to care for the infected and to further challenge patriarchy. For Chitando, men are the key drivers of the HIV & AIDS pandemic. By the time he began addressing men, he felt that enough attention was not being given to men as key players in HIV & AIDS response. He wrote, “We need to dwell on this theme (masculinity and HIV), as it is frequently glossed over in publications (secular or religious) on HIV in Africa” (Chitando, 2007b:40). Chitando finds African men as having an insatiable appetite for sex. He therefore addresses, among others, issues of rape, multiple concurrent sexual partnerships

practiced in the form of 'small houses', polygamy, and prostitution (Chitando, 2007b:40-45). Coupled by the cultural expectations for men to be in control, these issues result in men being the major drivers of the HIV epidemic.

Sexual and gender-based violence is another theme that Chitando addresses in relation to men and HIV in Africa (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2013). Chitando believes men are the major perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence. He argues that this is due to the privileges bestowed upon men by culture, religion and the economic systems (Wanjiru and Chitando, 2013). Having observed the negative contribution of men to HIV, Chitando calls men to partner with women and to forego those privileges that drive HIV & AIDS. He particularly calls men to be loving, caring and 'soft' (Chitando, 2007b:40). He identifies the church as a key agent in creating transformed masculinities. Thus, instead of using love potions that 'softened' men, he praises Pentecostal discourses on men that identify Jesus as the supreme men 'softener'. Chitando finds the church and religion in general better placed to play the role of transforming dangerous masculinities because, after all, he says, they are responsible for their production. He elucidates that contemporary hegemonic masculinities in Africa are a hybrid of indigenous and Western masculinities (Chitando, 2012). He therefore calls for the interrogation of indigenous, Christian and Islamic traditions in transforming masculinities for HIV & AIDS response.

Evaluation of the works

Above, we have documented how Chitando has responded to HIV & AIDS. He has done this by employing socially engaged scholarship. This is quite commendable considering that for a long time African academics have just been imitators and consumers of methods, theories and themes developed in the Western world. Chitando's work on HIV & AIDS, together with that of other scholars who have addressed this topic or other contemporary African issues, has shown the need for Africanizing the African university. He has shown the relevance of studying theology and religion in African contexts by dealing with a specific existential issue-HIV & AIDS. Chitando has shown that in contexts of Africa, one cannot afford to be simply an arm-chair scholar who is not involved in the struggles of his/her immediate community. Teaching and learning should

fully engage the economic, political, social, religious and health realities of the teacher, the learner and the community.

There is so much to applaud Chitando for and his works speak volumes about his achievements. I will therefore not belabor these positive contributions. Rather, I want to take this opportunity to make a few additional observations and contributions to his work, contributions I believe will help especially in engaging men not only on the issue of responses to HIV & AIDS, but for their day-to-day relations with women and children. To start with, I find Chitando overstating men's power¹¹ in some instances. This overstating of men's power has, in my opinion, in the past resulted in less attention being given to the needs of the boy child and men in general in gender discourses. No doubt, gender issues at some point became synonymous with women's issues while, in fact, gender studies should focus on both men and women. Yes, patriarchy gives men power and privilege, but our African societies are changing. Slowly, thanks to legislations and the effort of people like Chitando, women are gaining power and influence, especially in the public domain. Although still a far cry from our expectations, women are entering domains that used to be dominated exclusively by men.¹² Women's access to education has also resulted in a significant number of women occupying high profile jobs resulting in their economic empowerment. But, throughout his works, Chitando does not address this fact, understandably so as he focuses not on developmental issues for boys but rather on toxic and oppressive masculinities. We believe this development requires attention in contexts of HIV & AIDS as studies elsewhere have shown that when women get empowered at the expense of men, some men engage in some form of 'subterfuge' either through violence or engaging in extramarital sex to diminish the woman and bring her to 'her place' (Barker, 2005).

It is sometimes not clear what Chitando means by 'men's power' as certain powers he attributes to men today no longer rest in individuals but

¹¹ From the sum total of its use in his writings, Chitando understands power as the privilege to make decisions, to control and to rule over. We proceed with this understanding of power.

¹² For example, Africa leads the world when it comes to women's participation and representation in politics. Women make up 61% of Rwanda's parliament, Namibia (46%), South Africa (43%), and Senegal (42%) (Staley School of Leadership Studies, "Women's empowerment in Africa", 13 August 2021).

institutions.¹³ Modern laws on marriage, inheritance, children's rights etc, have significantly taken power that men traditionally had to institutions. Men's acts of violence over women, although still unacceptably higher especially in rural areas in the case of Zimbabwe, are limited by laws.¹⁴ This is the reality especially for urban men. Chitando does not quite address this as he focuses more on the traditional men than the modern men.¹⁵ With laws against marital rape,¹⁶ for example, it is difficult for some modern men to believe Chitando when he says men decide when, how and where sex should take place. My experience as a local pastor in Harare (Zimbabwe) some years ago, taught me that, due to legislations on marital rape, some married women dictate when, where and how sex should take place. Some men were complaining that their wives were 'starving' them of sex.

Further, nowadays not all men wield a lot of power even in their families. The empowerment of women (admittedly, a minority) through international and domestic policies has left some men, especially unemployed and poor men, with little to no power. Financial power these days sometimes determines who has power in the family especially when it comes to making financial decisions. While some men still want to decide how their wives' incomes should be used on the basis that there are the heads of the families, some economically empowered women resist this. This results in less economically empowered and unemployed men feeling powerless in their families. In their studies in Namibia, G. Baker and C. Ricardo (2005) found out that unemployed men generally felt powerless before their economically empowered wives. As pointed out above, such men may engage in acts that are meant to subterfuge women resulting in

¹³ One may argue that these institutions are dominated by men, but as statistics on women participation in politics, for example, show, women are slowly but surely penetrating these institutions.

¹⁴ For example, the Zimbabwe Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] (Act 14/2006) of 2006. Although this act has been found wanting especially in rural areas (E. Konyana, Domestic Violence Legislation in Zimbabwe: Probing into the security of women in rural areas, 2018, DOI:10.18820/9781928314431/22), the act has reduced the powers of men over women especially in urban areas.

¹⁵ By saying this I am not dismissing Chitando's work. Reviewers of this chapter felt that I was dismissive of Chitando's work. Let me take this opportunity to qualify that by raising these issues I do not mean that Chitando's work is shortsighted. Rather, I simply mean that work dealing with issues I enumerate here should exist alongside Chitando's work.

¹⁶ E.g. Sexual Offences Act of Zimbabwe, Act8/2001 of 2001.

the family being exposed to HIV & AIDS. Chitando's work tends to overlook this aspect as he underlines men's power over women.

Although his writings acknowledge that there is no single manhood, Chitando has tended to highlight one type of African masculinities when it comes to HIV & AIDS thereby painting all African men with one brush. As he admits in his works not related to HIV & AIDS, there are various types of masculinities in Africa as it is in the world (Chitando, 2023). I believe this position needs to be revised for a more meaningful engagement of men in the fight against HIV & AIDS.

Proposed way forward: men, power and HIV & AIDS

Above I discussed how Chitando addressed men for HIV & AIDS response. I noted that he mainly approached the subject by exposing men's weaknesses, especially through patriarchal privilege. In this section I propose that over and above that, we need to look holistically on the subject of masculinity, if we are to help men play more positive roles in HIV & AIDS response. We begin by questioning the whole idea of male power and propose that it should be interrogated to make men realize that real power lies in working closely with and not lording themselves over women, children and other men. This is because, in my opinion, male power (which R. W. Connell (1995) calls patriarchal dividend), comes with a lot of burden. I am happy that beginning with his 2016 article, Chitando has begun to question his attribution of power to men- all men. How I wish this were his position even as he addressed men and HIV & AIDS. He writes, "Being a man is not always about enjoying the privileges that come with masculinity, it is also about the burden that men carry by virtue of being men" (Chitando, 2016). Using the Karanga (a Shona dialect) construction of masculinity, Chitando is aware that real manhood is a heavy burden for men. With real manhood characterized by a strong and attractive physique, the ability to protect and provide for the family, he correctly concludes that few men achieve this status. Using examples from some 'lamentations songs' by specific Zimbabwean musicians, Chitando shows that masculinity is less about power but more about the burden of manhood in contemporary times. He, however, does not discuss the implications of this understanding of manhood for HIV & AIDS response. In my opinion, this burden of masculinity needs to be addressed as it may lead some men to take actions that expose them to HIV & AIDS when they do

not meet the dictates of hegemonic masculinities or even as a way of demonstrating hegemonic masculinities.¹⁷ Alcoholism, drug abuse and promiscuity are some of the behaviours associated with men who fail to meet hegemonic masculinity attributes.

Chitando correctly observes that masculinity is a social construction. One would therefore expect him to address the role of women in the construction and transformation of dangerous masculinities. But he tends to leave out women. History has taught us that men and women need to cooperate for gender equity. It is counterproductive to focus on the ills of one gender without analyzing the contribution of the other. This was the initial weakness of feminism in the early days of HIV & AIDS as focus was mainly on the wrongs that men did without meaningfully engaging men. In correcting this, Chitando seems to have gone to the other extreme by removing women completely from the construction of manhood. I believe women play a great role in the construction of our future men. As mothers, they raise them, nurture them, and teach them what men ought and ought not to do. I am aware though that these teachings are patriarchally informed through centuries of women's subjugation. However, instead of just lambasting men, we need to call women to resist these traditional ways of raising men and to take advantage of their nurturing nature to raise up responsible men. Women need to strongly engage in the process of transforming dangerous masculinities.

I want to end my evaluation of Chitando's view of men in his call for HIV & AIDS response by focusing on his major argument that men have power. This is a common statement which, together with Warren Farrell (1993), I would want to consider as a myth. The saying that behind a successful man is a strong woman, speaks to my conviction that men tend to have public power, but real power lies with women in their lives. The common saying among Zimbabwe men that when a man says they want to sleep over an idea they are going to consult their wife, tends to be more realistic than sarcastic. In addition, Farrell (1993) has questioned what 'power' is in relation to male power. Chitando, in his latest article referenced above, appears to question the nature of male power. Is it genuinely a form of power, or rather a burden? This inquiry aligns with similar reflections by Farrell, prompting us to explore this issue further alongside

¹⁷ See: R. Hinojosa (Doing Hegemony: Military, Men and Constructing a Hegemonic Masculinity, <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1802.179>, accessed 18 February 2023).

both scholars. Farrell (1993:40) says (and I agree with him) that societies have defined male power as “(man) feeling obligated to earn money someone else (woman) spends while we (men) die sooner.” Surely, this cannot be called power. In other contexts, such dynamics would be considered a form of slavery. Within the framework of HIV & AIDS responses, it is crucial for scholars and activists to engage men in recognizing that their current understanding of power is misguided. True power lies not in dominating women, children, and marginalized men, but in fostering collaborative relationships with them.

Conclusion

In the article, *Equipped and Ready to Serve? : Transforming Theology and Religious Studies in Africa*, (2010) Chitando asks the question that many of us teaching theology and religious studies have become familiar with, “What can one do with theology and religious studies? This is a question our students and others interested in the discipline always ask. Chitando has answered this question by suggesting the transformation of our teaching of theology and religion in a theoretical way to engaging issues that affect Africa. This is exactly what Chitando has done for the greater part of his academic life. He has called Africa to respond to HIV & AIDS using religion and theology. This chapter has therefore reviewed Ezra Chitando’s works on HIV & AIDS. Paying particular attention to his call for transformative masculinities, we have established the strengths of his calls and areas that need further reflection. There is no doubt that Chitando’s HIV & AIDS work has shown the relevance of teaching theology and religion not only for HIV & AIDS response but for engaging with existential issues affecting Africa. In a situation where our governments are asking us what our disciplines bring to the fiscus, the onus is upon us to prove, as Chitando has done by rallying all to respond to HIV & AIDS, that sponsoring the teaching of theology, religion and philosophy remains relevant even under belt-tightening national budgets.

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