ABSTRACT

African females face poverty, sexual abuse, domestic violence and limited access to education. Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) is found in 125 countries and reaching 25 million females. YWCA was imported to assist native females by providing access to education, employment and accommodation especially in urban areas. Today services extend to prevention of HIV and AIDS, leadership training, poverty eradication, prevention of girl child abuse and domestic violence. This study sought to establish YWCA impact on women and girls attainment of leadership positions in society. The study used a qualitative research paradigm and a case study design. Data were generated through interviews and document analysis for triangulation. Sources of data included country YWCA reports, studies and strategic plans. Other sources were YWCA beneficiaries, representatives, volunteers and employees. Data were analysed through content analysis. The findings for the study are that throughout SADC region YWCA trained women and girls are accessing leadership positions, adhering to Christian principles, involved in poverty reduction activities, educated in women’s rights, involved in volunteering and environmental awareness. The study has also found that YWCA faces some challenges of patriarch. The study concludes that in SADC YWCA has positive impact on women and girls lives.

KEY WORDS: Sisterhood, Leadership, Economic Empowerment, Poverty Eradication

INTRODUCTION

The World Young Women’s Christian Association (WYWCA) is based on faith in God the almighty, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (WORLD YWCA report, 2011). YWCA’s vision is of a fully inclusive world where justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment are promoted and sustained by women’s leadership. YWCA is divided into eight regions that are Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Caribbean, Middle East, Pacific and North America. The World YWCA recognises the equal value of human beings. Since its inception World YWCA has advocated and supported volunteerism, membership, diversity, tolerance, mutual respect, integrity and responsible accountability.
The strength and solidarity of the World YWCA is inspired by the faithfulness of its leaders, past and present, whose service to humanity advances the purpose of the YWCA. YWCA was started in Great Britain in 1885 by Mrs Emma Robert and Lady Kinnaird. The world YWCA was formed in 1894 by the National Association of Great Britain and United States of America (USA), Sweden and Norway (Seymour-Jones, 1994). World YWCA cements the principles of unity based on service and faith on a global scale. Therefore YWCAs have been at the forefront of raising the status of women and young women worldwide. Today, the YWCA movement empowers women and girls to change lives and change communities in over 120 countries. This paper sought to ascertain the impact of YWCA on women and girls’ leadership development and economic empowerment in Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The issues of sisterhood and problems faced by women as well as the historical background of YWCA were reviewed.

Problems faced by women
Historically women and girls have been left out of leadership roles, excluded from education, wealth and policy making. In addition today women and girls lag behind in the use of technology (eOmega Institute, 2012). Xia (2013) asserts that women and girls around the world are victims of inequality, discrimination, violence and even the threat of death simply because they are women. According to Transvaal Conference of Seventh Day Adventists (2011) six issues facing women in Africa are: threats to health, length of workday, poverty, lack of training opportunities and leadership opportunities, abuse (domestic violence, incest, rape, battering) and illiteracy. Problems specific to women in Africa in general include but not limited to poverty, unsafe drinking water, HIV and AIDS, violence and sexual violence, education and female genital mutilation. These issues are briefly described below.

Poverty
All but two of the 30 poorest countries in the world are in Africa. Rural women are greatly affected by poverty. Men often travel to industrial areas to work while women keep the rural economy running. They are subsistence farmers and they sell produce in markets. Thirty-three per cent (33%) of people in Sub-Saharan Africa are malnourished. African women usually live without electricity, telephones or modern plumbing. When drought or floods ruin
crops the women have no source of food unless they receive intermittent food aid (World Bank report, 2009).

**Unsafe Drinking Water**

Lack of safe and clean drinking water is a problem for African women. More than 300 million people in Africa lack clean water. African women may walk up to five miles a day to fetch water. Health is endangered by micro-organisms in the water. Babies are often sickened when women must mix infant formula using the dirty water (UN Water, 2010).

**HIV/AIDS**

According to the HIV/AIDS awareness and charity organization, Avert (2007) 59 per cent (59%) of those living with HIV are female. There is a gender element to the illness among Africans. Lack of awareness or partner unwillingness to use protection endangers women. Statistics on the number of younger women contracting the illness show that in the 15-to-24-age group, 75 per cent (75%) of those with HIV/AIDS are women. Often HIV-positive women or those widowed by HIV/AIDS lose their homes due to stigmatization in the community. Pregnant and nursing women with HIV/AIDS lack access to drugs to prevent passing it to their infants (http://www.actionaid.org.uk/100032/hiv_and_aids.html?).

**Violence and Sexual Violence**

Women and girls in Africa experience the same kinds of violence and sexual violence that women in other parts of the world experience. A common weapon of war in struggles such as those in Sudan and The Democratic Republic of Congo is systematic rape. Women living in villages and refugee camps are targeted for rape. Female genital mutilation, preformed ritually in some African cultures, is a violent and dangerous practice that women can seldom prevent. Forced marriage, being sold into servitude and early marriage are also struggles some African women face (Jewkes, Dartnall and Sikweyiya, 2012).

**Education**

Two-thirds of the 40 million African children who do not attend school are girls. Only 60 per cent of girls go to primary school. The majority, 53.2 per cent, of African women are illiterate. In some countries, such as Mozambique, the illiteracy rate among women is double that of men. Many families can afford to send only one or two children to school. Often boys are sent instead of girls (eHow.com http://www.ehow.com/list_7415014_problems-women-
The United Nations Millennium Project report (2007) pinpointed some facts on education in Africa as follows:

- More than 40% of women in Africa do not have access to basic education.
- If a girl is educated for six years or more, as an adult, her prenatal care, postnatal care, and childbirth survival rates will dramatically and consistently improve.
- Educated mothers immunize their children 50% more often than mothers who are not educated.
- HIV and AIDS spreads twice as quickly among uneducated girls than among girls that have even some schooling.
- The children of women with five years of primary school education have a survival rate 40% higher than children of women with no education.

**Female Genital Mutilation**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is the process in which a woman's clitoris and labia are removed. In many cases the area is sewn shut with a little opening left for urination. Both Muslims and Christians participate in this activity. This practice is believed by some to be necessary for a girl to be ready for marriage (eHow.com http://www.ehow.com/facts_5502631_women-issues-africa.html#ixzz2S2MGkqNa). However, YWCA does not take this as a practice that enhances the dignity, joy and confidence of women and girls.

**The Concept of Sisterhood**

According to Dill (1983) the concept of sisterhood has been an important unifying force in the contemporary women’s movements. This concept has been a binding force in the struggle against male chauvinism and patriarchy. Gamble (2001) agrees with Dill (1983) in saying that sisterhood is central to the women’s movement which places stress on female solidarity and co-operation. Thus the notion of sisterhood conveys the implicit assumption that all women have certain areas of experience in common on which a sense of identification can be founded. Thus, YWCA was found on the basis of sisterhood. Sisterhood in this article is viewed as solidarity of women of different ethnicity, age, religion, political viewpoint, economic status, and marital/partnership status.

**World YWCA Context**

As of 2008 YWCA, a global women’s organization had more than 25 million members in 122 countries (http://womeninbusiness.about.co). The World YWCA responds to the
problems faced by women in the global village by promoting social, economic, cultural, religious and political rights of women and girls through advocacy and related programmes and services. The world YWCA has priority areas that are young women’s leadership, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), HIV and AIDS as well as violence against women.

Young women’s leadership programme continues to be a global priority for the World YWCA movement. The World YWCA has been at the forefront of young women’s empowerment, continually advocating for young women becoming leaders both within and outside the YWCA movement, building their confidence and encouraging peer training and sharing of experience. As young women play a central role in sustaining the work of the World YWCA, the movement has a constitutional mandate, adopted at the World YWCA Council 2007 held in Kenya, to allocate 25% of all decision-making positions to young women aged 30 years or under (YWCA Constitution, 2011).

HIV and AIDS has been the World YWCA’s priority issue for nearly two decades. In 1987 a World Council resolution on AIDS outlined issues around ignorance, awareness and prevention and stigma. The resolution resolved that “the World YWCA Council urges national YWCAs to establish programmes providing preventative health education on the subject of AIDS” (http://www.worldywca.org/Our-Priorities). In 2003, the World YWCA Council adopted a resolution on Reproductive Health and Sexuality calling on the YWCA movement to promote and work towards the provision of extensive access to quality education, resources, information, discussion and counselling for women and girls regarding their reproductive rights.

The World YWCA works in collaboration with many partner organisations and networks to advance its advocacy and programme work, including women’s networks, ecumenical, youth and international organisations, and UN agencies operating with women and young women. Therefore World YWCA 2012-2015 strategic framework provides direction on the links between accessing information, resources and services—especially sexual and reproductive health services—with prevention, care and treatment of HIV and AIDS.

The World YWCA strategy affirms that it is essential to:

1. Deliver and advocate for effective interventions, programmes and services on violence against women and sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV
2. Ensure YWCAs are safe, inclusive and empowering spaces for women in all their diversity and particularly women who are survivors of violence and women, young women and girls living with HIV

3. Advocate for the implementation of key global commitments on women, young women and girls’ rights through Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) mechanisms, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Human Rights Council and the International Conference on Population and Development, engaging the movement and partners in these processes

4. Strengthen analysis on the linkages between women’s rights, violence against women, sexual and reproductive health and HIV for effective interventions, programmes and services

Early in 2009, the World YWCA convened a consultation to strengthen the global strategy on SRHR and HIV including condom programming (World YWCA Strategic Framework 2012-2015, 2011).

The revised strategy offers four goals for the YWCA movement to focus its action:

1. Create a safe and inclusive space for women and girls;

2. Provide comprehensive prevention including comprehensive condom programming (CCP) and integrated information on SRHR, HIV and Violence against Women (VAW);

3. Develop leadership and strengthen capacity, especially with young women as champions and leaders on SRHR, HIV and an end to (VAW); and

4. Ensure documentation and quality monitoring and evaluation of YWCA programmes.

VAW has been a long standing priority for local advocacy, programmes and services across the YWCA movement. As one of the largest global women’s movements, the World YWCA has the capacity to play a crucial role in monitoring implementation of international commitments at country and local level. In almost 70 countries YWCA’s provide support for survivors of violence and those at risk of violence, as well as emergency accommodation, legal services and community education. Through YWCA work on violence against women, the movement seeks to ensure that the rights of women, young women and girls are promoted and protected through advocacy, programmes and services. The World YWCA recognises that violence affects women’s lives both in private and public spaces and needs to be tackled at multiple levels (http://www.worldywca.org/Our-Priorities/3.-Violence-Against-Women).
The World YWCA VAW key actions:

1. Strengthen analysis on the linkages between women’s rights, violence against women, sexual and reproductive health and HIV for effective interventions, programmes and services.

2. Advocate for the implementation of key global commitments on women, young women and girls' rights through CEDAW mechanisms, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Human Rights Council and International Conference on the Population and Development, engaging the movement and partners in these processes.

3. Engage with global and regional religious faith networks to advance the rights of women young women and girls and challenge harmful religious and cultural practices and norms.

The World YWCA aims to ensure women, young women and girls are able to claim their rights as empowered leaders, decision makers and change agents. This is in responds to issues affecting their lives and communities, and in this context, responding to violence in public and private spheres. It aims to mobilise women’s transformative leadership towards this end, to advocate for women’s rights and promote access to rights-based programming and services at community level, that comprehensively address VAW and sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV.

The World YWCA movement is renowned as a safe space for women, including young women, in which they are empowered to take ownership of their lives. YWCAs are therefore ideally positioned to provide safe and inclusive, non-judgmental and confidential spaces for women and girls to discuss and disclose challenges they face in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, HIV and AIDS and VAW. Safe spaces can refer to actual physical space and/or a gathering of women and girls where they feel safe to learn and disclose their sexual and reproductive health challenges. Thus YWCA through the country associations is working to solve the issues of women that are current. However, the impact of YWCAs in SADC in solving these issues has not been well documented.

YWCA in SADC

Some of the SADC countries where YWCA is active are Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. We will now look at a few selected countries YWCA histories.
South Africa

South African YWCA started in Cape Town in 1886. By 1930 there were seven YWCAs in the larger towns of South Africa. Currently there are nine YWCA regions in South Africa that are Durban Kwazulu Natal, Free State, Gauteng, Limpopo, Kwa Zulu Natal North, Nelson Mandela Metropole and Transkei (Masipa, 2012). Initially YWCA in several countries began by meeting the needs of women for housing and education. For example in South Africa YWCA has a residence that is situated in Cape Town, it is in a pleasant residential suburb, 2.5 kilometres from the City Center on the lower slopes of Table Mountain. Keeping with the standards of YWCA’s worldwide, this residence offers a safe and affordable stay for the young traveller.

Mrs Dzabala introduced Malawian women in YWCA work, and in 1998 the YWCA of Malawi was founded. In July 2003 it was affiliated to the World Body at its Assembly in Brisbane, Australia. According to YWCA Malawi, its mission statement is a ‘Christian organisation dedicated to the empowerment of women in order to achieve and maintain a progressive community’. It operates in 5 branches namely, Chikwawa, Mondiwa, Chapananga, and Malosa with its headquarters in Blantyre and a membership estimated at 272 as of June 2007. YWCA of Malawi is an ecumenical, non-partisan organisation open to women of all religions (http://www.kintera.org/atf/cf/). The members of the YWCA are mostly women in wage-earning employment, and they raise the funds for the YWCA’s programme.

Zambia

In Zambia YWCA was established in 1957. From its inception it was dedicated to empowerment of women and children. YWCA supports groups as well as individuals in their effort to make positive changes in their lives. The support given to women and girls is concentrated on the development of the whole person, body, mind and spirit. Popular in YWCA Zambia are drop in centres. The YWCA Zambia is a Christian, Nonpartisan, non-governmental membership organization dedicated to the empowerment of the community especially women and children to realize their potential as human beings with a view to contribute to a just society. YWCA envisions a peaceful and gender sensitive Zambia with opportunities for a better quality of life for all and has four programme areas: Women’s Human Rights, Economic Empowerment, Youth Programme and Organisational Capacity Development Programme.
The centres offer peer to peer counselling services and legal advice to boys and girl between ages of 17 – 25years. Some of common cases reported at these centres are: relationship problems, drug abuse, rape and child support (http://ywcayouthlskb.blogspot.com/).

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe YWCA was pioneered by Ruth Chinamano and Mrs B Parirenyatwa in the early sixties. Gary and Mitchell (1977) say that while working at Waddilove Methodist Church in Zimbabwe Institute (formerly British Methodist) Ruth Chinamano pioneered the first multi-racial YWCA in Rhodesia (Now Zimbabwe) in 1960. The core business then was to cater for the women’s and girls’ accommodation in cities especially those abused and looking for jobs. Thus YWCA during that time built hostels in Harare, Gweru and Bulawayo. These hostels are still being used to accommodate university women students at University of Zimbabwe (UZ) in Harare and National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo. The other core business at that time was to educate women in politics, basic education and family issues.

As of January 2013 Zimbabwe has about 10 000 members in 250 branches or groups spread throughout the country. About 80% of the members live in rural areas and 20% in urban areas. Thus, YWCA in Zimbabwe serves beneficiaries in six centres through vocational training, preschools and hostels (Zimbabwe YWCA brochure, 2011).

Methodology

The methods for this study were qualitative in nature, and were intended to address several different aspects of the question around the impact of YWCA in SADC. This section describes the study’s context, design, and data collection and analysis.

Setting

The settings for this study were YWCA country associations within the SADC regions. SADC is composed of fourteen countries that are Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. All the countries have YWCAs in their countries that were operating before independence and after independence.
Design
In order to understand women’s experiences in these YWCAs, a qualitative case study was employed. In a case study approach, “the investigator explores a bounded system (a case)...over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2007:73). Case study design works well in studying unique phenomena, such as the existence of organisations and their impact on the lives of members of the organisations. A case study has clear boundaries in terms of time and location and this study was limited to YWCAs over a period of 3 months (January to March 2013). Yin (2009) discusses many types of data that can be used in case studies; documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant interviews, and physical artefacts. Archival records and group documents such as meeting minutes and publications were obtained from each of the YWCAs studied. Additionally, some group members were invited to participate in individual face to face, telephone and blog interviews.

Interviews offer a venue for women to share lived experiences and their standpoints. In her chapter on using interviews in feminist research, Devault (2004: 228) argues that "what it means to talk or listen ‘as a woman’ is based on the concept of women's standpoint” and that interviews can uncover women's "multiple versions of both oppression and resistance".

Through a semi-structured interview format, YWCA members and country representatives shared their experiences in YWCA settings. A total of 15 women participated in a 15-20 minute individual interview. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewee and transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis
Narrative analysis was used as a vehicle to understand YWCAs leadership and member’s stories. Through a systematic analysis of narratives, a researcher looks to understand a person’s experience within the context of the larger socio-political environment (Reismann, 1993). One of the strengths of narrative analysis is that it allows a researcher to holistically explore a person’s identity, relationships, and emotions, all within a larger cultural and social context (Daiute& Lightfoot, 2004; Reismann, 1993). While qualitative research is not easily generalizable, narrative analysis offers an in-depth look at association members’ experiences within a larger socio-political environment of exclusion. More specifically, narrative analysis provides a vehicle for seeing members’ experiences with oppression as more than merely a description of their life experiences. Both open and axial coding (Creswell, 2007) were used
in the analysis of documents, and interview transcripts. Open coding allowed for a number of categories to emerge, including: leadership, Christian principles, poverty issues, education and training. In axial coding (Creswell, 2007) the context, intervening conditions, and consequences of these categories produced the major emergent theme in this paper. That is, while YWCAs achieved success in empowering women socially, economically and politically they still need to fight patriarchy so as to have a balanced society.

Three verification methods (Creswell, 2007) were used in this research. First, data from documents, and interview transcripts were triangulated for corroboration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, as a member of the YWCA, I was able to establish trust with participants. Third, transcripts were shared so that participants could check theirs for accuracy.

**Findings**

The purpose of this study was to establish the impact of YWCA on solving problems faced by women and girls in SADC. The findings are reported under the following themes as revealed by data collected and analysed; women and girls attainment of leadership positions; Christian principles; poverty reduction; women’s rights; concept of volunteering; environmental awareness; challenges faced by YWCA and impact of YWCA on women and girls lives.

**Women and Girls Attainment of Leadership Positions**

Data indicates that YWCAs in SADC equip women and young women for the challenges of leadership through internships; leadership training opportunities at all regional and global events. Within SADC YWCA has played a crucial role in the empowering and development of women as leaders. Some of them have achieved positions of deputy present of their countries; some have become leaders in international organisations such as YWCA. Quite a number have attained government ministerial positions. The investment of the YWCA has exposed women to leadership development that has made them to lead with gender sensitivity. The YWCA has always affirmed the importance of partnership across generations, and therefore, also encourages both formal and informal mentoring relationships. One of the participants an employee of Country A said,

I have benefited from the YWCA leadership development endeavours. From the YWCA I learnt about the importance of empowering women, about the difference that women can make in their families and communities when they have been empowered.
Another participant, a former director of YWCA in Country B, had this to say: I have seen how the change of economic circumstance of women through YWCA programmes impacts on the quality of life of their families and children.

Another participant who is a director of a YWCA in Country D said,

Because of what I gained from joining the YWCA at an early age, I have gained experience for understanding the demands of leadership that responds to the needs of the poor for many women and men in my community, nation, region and the global village. An experience of working with the poor is one of the best schools on leadership.

Data reveal that YWCA work in SADC is inspired by Christian principles and a commitment to women's full and equal participation in society. Data indicates that in SADC YWCA empower women and girls to lead social change through advocacy, training and development. Priority areas are: SRHR, HIV and AIDS, VAW, economic empowerment and environmental sustainability.

Data has shown that women in SADC who have received leadership training are excelling in what they are doing. For example, data reveal that in 2007 a Namibian Lutheran woman was among 14 AIDS activists who received a World YWCA global award for outstanding leadership in the response to HIV and AIDS in her community.

It has also been noted from data that young women within YWCA in SADC countries are exposed to international leadership through internships. It has been observed that World YWCA offers one year and short internships to further develop young women's leadership skills. The internships are intended to increase the number of globally experienced and trained leaders in the YWCA movement. Participants return to their country and regional associations to share their experiences and learning. Women candidates, between ages 22-30, from all national and local YWCAs have been trained over the years. All the interviewees hailed this program and four of the interviewees had at one time gone through the program.

Data reveal that YWCA also offer short programs that offers women and in particular young women development of advocacy skills through hands on training and participation usually in a United Nations (UN) event. The programme accepts up to four young women per year, who attend either the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York, or the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The third leadership program is the one-year programme based in Geneva, Switzerland that provides a host of leadership and skills training opportunities, including participation in UN and non-governmental organisations (NGO) events and working groups. The internship
varies each year and normally includes programme development, leadership development, advocacy, communications, and financial development. A small stipend and modest living arrangements are provided by the World YWCA. It has been noted that YWCA in SADC is doing very well in capacitating women in the critical area of leadership development.

SADC YWCA and Christian Principles

All interviewees, the YWCA representatives and the YWCA beneficiaries stressed the point that the purpose of YWCA within their countries is to promote the fellowship of Christian women and girls through various activities that aim to translate faith into action. Therefore the ultimate goal of YWCA is to improve the quality of life for all women and girls whilst strengthening the family.

Data reveal that Christian principles adhered to by World YWCA are demonstrated in SADC by observance of the Week of Prayer by all countries studied. Interviews held with the YWCA representatives and beneficiaries indicated that Week of Prayer is a tradition dating back to 1904. Each year in the month of November, the YWCA and Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) movements issue a joint call for prayer. Data indicates that during the week of prayer discussions on topics like sexual and reproductive health, rights and HIV, peace and justice, harmful traditional practices, climate change and human rights, family violence as well as prevention of violence against vulnerable groups are held. Data also indicate that prayers are held before meetings start and this is common in all countries studied. The study indicates that within SADC countries the YWCA is still grounded in Christian principles although most of the countries are not 100% Christians. Another observation from the data is that in all countries studied is that bible study is given priority in branch activities.

YWCA and Poverty Reduction

Data show that YWCA movement in SADC is renowned as a safe space for women, including young women, in which they are empowered to take ownership of their lives. YWCAs are therefore ideally positioned to provide safe and inclusive, non-judgmental and confidential spaces for women and girls to discuss and disclose challenges they face in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, HIV and AIDS and VAW. Safe spaces can refer to actual physical space and/or a gathering of women and girls where they feel safe to learn and disclose their sexual and reproductive health challenges. YWCA through its programmes is actually empowering its SADC members socially, spiritually, politically and economically.
Data reveal that in all countries studied there are income generation projects initiated and implemented by YWCA in collaboration with government and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO). Unique to YWCA Lesotho is the YWCA-Lesotho Aloe plantation project (LAPP): Under this project training is given to members living in the Makhaleng site. They are trained to implement aloe plantation; preparation of the plantation site and actual planting of the seedlings. The plant is used to manufacture cosmetics and food for animals to be used during dry seasons.

Another unique project is that of safe drinking water by YWCA Malawi. The YWCA leaders helped organize a Fresh Water Project Committee to obtain safe water for residents. They contacted the Water Board and worked with community members to implement the project. Two bore holes were drilled and two washing stations built. Both men and women were trained to clear the bush, dig ditches and install (and repair) water pipes that now bring tap water to each of the 250 homes for 2,000 people. Each household (seven to eight people) pays a small monthly fee.

**YWCA and Women’s Rights**

A human rights framework and the Millennium Development Goals guide the YWCA advocacy and services, which seek to empower women and girls and bring practical experience from the community level to national, regional and international policy makers. The movement is also guided in its work by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS, as well as the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Data reveal that World YWCA works in collaboration with many partner organisations and networks to advance its advocacy and programme work, including women’s networks, ecumenical, youth and international organisations, and UN agencies operating with women and young women.

For example World YWCA commissioned a study on cultural traditional practices in Malawi that fuel the prevalence of HIV infection in the community. The survey targeted women traditional leaders. Workshops were then organised to create awareness on HIV and AIDS, women’s rights, and to educate women in the community on their rights in relation to traditional practices.
Data reveal that through the work of YWCA one of the SADC countries has launched a three year plan to deal with issues of forced, early and child marriages. This malpractice was truly exposed as a human rights violation and a distinct form of violence against girls and young women by the work of YWCA in that particular SADC country.

**YWCA and Concept of Volunteering**

Data indicate that worldwide YWCA was found on the concept of volunteering. The participants when asked to explain how they understood the concept of volunteering they explained it as time used to help other people without being paid. Data reveal that in the countries studied hundreds of volunteers contribute their skills, time and compassion to enhance YWCA programs and initiatives. Data indicate that volunteers bring fresh ideas, develop skills, gain work experience and make new friends. It has been observed that volunteering gives the volunteers an opportunity to change lives, including their own.

**YWCA and Environmental Awareness**

Data reveal that YWCAs in SADC region encourage its members to care for the environment through maintaining their homesteads and orchards whose fruits they use when preparing fruit juices and jam. In all countries women and girls are taught making bread and scones in ways that minimise cutting trees for firewood. They are also taught environmental friendly strategies for paper recycling and water purification.

**YWCA and Challenges**

Data reveal that within some countries studied YWCA is facing challenges of patriarchy in implementing economic and social empowerment projects. Patriarchy as explained by the participants is characterised by current and historic unequal power relations between women and men whereby women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed. Participants said for a long time YWCAs programs were implemented for women and young women. However this has changed especially as YWCA tackles the problems of leadership, health issues, HIV and AIDS and economic empowerment with the need to have balance of power within communities. The policy they are taking is to involve women and men in most of the community projects especially that of environment rehabilitation, poverty reduction and economic empowerment. However they have observed that men will come in and want to lead the women and women from societal values and norms will take the back benches instead of spearheading the projects and take men as equals in decision-making positions and
in employment and industry. Male violence against women is also a key feature of patriarchy and as such YWCAs involve men in their programs in order to educate both women and men on this critical issue.

**Impact of the YWCA in SADC countries**

During its long history in SADC the YWCA has contributed to women’s and girls’ lives in a variety of ways. The YWCA has played a key role in many of the major movements in the SADC in race relations, labour union representation, and through developing and implementing empowerment programs for women. Data revealed that YWCA has impacted positively in solving the women’s and girls’ problems such as: threats to health, poverty, lack of training opportunities and leadership opportunities, abuse (domestic violence, incest, rape, battering) and illiteracy. Data reveal that women and girls through YWCA have improved their families’ livelihood.

**Discussion**

Women’s rights scholars have written about the problems faced by women and some have also written about the solutions to the problems (Agosín, 2001; Devault, 2004; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Jewkes, Dartnall and Sikweyiya, 2012). Why then discuss the issues of women problems in this study?

The improvement of women and girls lives through human rights or gender equity is a complicated issue that many international organisations including YWCA have battled with for centuries. The long road toward women leadership, women’s and poverty eradication is won in small, incremental, and long term successes. During interviews, with YWCA representatives and beneficiaries one participant lamented, "The amazing thing is that the problems of women are the same! They haven't changed over all of these years and I’m talking over 100 years!" Thus those in positions of power must constantly be reminded by women organisations such as YWCA of the discrimination of women and girls in positions of leadership and the eradication of gendered poverty. Women organisations such as YWCA’s standpoints offer a vehicle for such reminders.

In this case study, the impact of YWCA on the lives of women in the SADC has been demonstrated through tangible products such as provision of clean water, implementation of policy to eradicate practices of early and forced marriages and appointment of women in leadership positions (World YWCA report, 2011). Findings reveal that YWCA is improving women’s lives in health issues, violence against women and education as well as poverty reduction.
Conclusion

This study concludes that YWCA in SADC has had positive impact on women’s and girls’ lives. Both men and women have been involved in programs for environment rehabilitation, poverty eradication and gender equity. Many women and girls have been helped to access positions of decision making education and training. Many women and girls have been economically and politically empowered through YWCA programmes and strategies. It is also concluded that YWCA has continued to practise Christian principles and is very alive and active in SADC.

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