

African women, religion and COVID-19: The bedrock of Sipiwe Chisvo's periphery-centre leadership ascendance

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Although women are the centre of African society, not much scholarly attention has been given to these conduits of human development in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. The stories of individual women have never formed part of Methodist historiography, ecclesiology, or theology. Methodist scholars exercised this pigeonholing even though women contribute to the life and mission of the church in a formidable way. Moreover, the ministers' wives who are the leaders of the women's movement that has the majority of church membership in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe have also not received scholarly attention despite how they have dedicated their lives to supporting their husband's ministry. As a result, lay members of the women's movement would not be expected to be celebrated as most Methodist scholars are male ministers who have never celebrated the work of their wives. This article was motivated by the appointment of Mrs. Sipiwe Chisvo, an ordinary member of the Women's Fellowship from the low-density suburb of Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe to be the first black President of the World Federation of the Methodist and Uniting Church Women in 2022. Chisvo actively participated in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe's interventions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and presumably, this contributed towards her visibility and recognition in the international arena.

Contribution: Although African women often remain in the peripheries of culture, Sipiwe Chisvo is an example of a religious African woman who gave hope to the hopeless people during COVID-19 and this role contributed immensely to her appointment as the president of the World Federation of the Methodist and Uniting Church Women. With this identity, Chisvo represents selfless services rendered by African women to communities during pandemics and these services do not go unnoticed.

Keywords: African women; bedrock; COVID-19; Leadership ascendance; periphery-centre; Sipiwe Chisvo.

Introduction

Titles of scholarly articles mean different things to different people. According to the University of Vermont Library (2022), the title of an article provides a succinct description of the content of that article. Each word is carefully chosen to convey the most important information in the smallest package possible for example, the title of this article, brings together African women, religion, and COVID-19 into discourse. Firstly, the title acknowledges the contribution of religious African women during pandemics and how they use this identity to contribute to the stability of societies. Secondly, the topic synergises the identity of religious African women from marginalised societies and how they use religion to defy history to redefine their destinies. Thirdly, the topic demonstrates that the periphery-centre model empowers African women to use religion to redirect their future. The topic also presents Sipiwe Chisvo as a model of African religious women who contributed to the vulnerable people during the COVID-19 pandemic, a role that arguably contributed to her recognition to be selected as the first black woman to lead over 3500000 million women of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women or just the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW) from 71 countries.¹

1. See World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, 2022, Sipiwe Chisvo World President, Southern, and East Africa Area – Zimbabwe, The methodist Church in Zimbabwe, viewed 24 May 2023, from <https://wfmucw.org/about/world-officers>.

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Periphery-centre conceptual framework

Unlike the commonly used centre-periphery model in social sciences (McKenzie 1977), this article employs periphery-centre to explain the theological movement of people from the margins to the centre of society. The centre-periphery model suggests that the global economy is characterised by a structured relationship between economic centres, which by using military, political, and trade power, extract an economic surplus from the subordinate peripheral countries (Scott 2014). The centre-periphery (or core-periphery) model is a spatial metaphor that describes and attempts to explain the structural relationship between the advanced or metropolitan 'centre' and a less-developed 'periphery', either within a particular country or (more commonly) as applied to the relationship between capitalist and developing societies (Scott 2014). The centre-periphery model presents the inequalities of the worldwide unequal distribution of the social sciences (Klein 2010).

Given the economic power that the centre-periphery model stands for, the periphery-centre will be used to explain the impact of religion that moves people from below to lead from the front. The periphery-centre framework will also be used to argue how Sipiwe Chisvo manoeuvred the religious terrain as an African woman from the ghetto during COVID-19 to be recognised as a world leader.

The word ghetto was deliberately chosen in this article for not denigrating the sociological background of Sipiwe Chisvo but to explain the mighty act of God that does not consider the historical past or present of individuals assigned or given tasks. Periphery-centre will also be applied to Canaan Banana's theology according to the ghetto. Banana (1991:xi) used the term ghetto to describe how the people from the underside resonate with their God do defy social barriers to demonstrate their identity against all odds. Banana mentioned that: 'my theology originates from the ghetto. It emanates from mundane situations of crises, incertitude, an inchoate life and futility, all caused by individualism' (Banana 1991:xi). Banana's theology comes from the ghetto – a street name for substandard suburbs created for Africans (as opposed to suburbs) by the colonial system characterised by overcrowding and general deprivation of environments. In the ghetto, 'the wealth of the one group and the poverty of the other are correlative' (Gunda 2012:131). In a ghetto, the former becomes richer by impoverishing the latter. The periphery-centre framework explains Banana's assertion that God does not wait for those in the ghetto to go to the low-density suburbs to speak with them. Rather God speaks with people wherever they are, hence, their experiences are central to their understanding of God (Banana 1990). This conviction is what makes the periphery-centre unique for this article especially as we navigate how Sipiwe Chisvo transcended from the low density of Chitungwiza to the heart of Methodist women's leadership in the world.

Identity of Sipiwe Chisvo

The stories of Sipiwe Chisvo were collected from three sources, namely a purposive interview conducted by the author with her, and her biography written by Rosemary Mlambo and literature on women in the Methodist Church.

Sipiwe Chisvo's early life

Sipiwe Chisvo was born on 15 November 1957 in Highfield Township, Harare, and was bred in the same suburb (Mlambo 2023). Sipiwe was the fourth child in a family of nine children born to Frederick Musarurwa and Easther Sarudzayi Choto. She attended her education at Waddilove Methodist Primary Boarding School and later moved to All Souls Mission for her secondary education (Mlambo 2023). After completing secondary education, she enrolled in a Counselling Certificate course with Connect. She diversified her studies by pursuing a Cake Icing and Flower Arranging Course with Harare Polytechnic College. The last course was a tool to empower her to start her own cake-baking business for different functions. Sipiwe got married to Godfrey Chisvo on 29 June 1974 and their marriage was solemnised by Rev. James Dabengwa at New Highfield Methodist Church. Godfrey and Sipiwe were blessed with five children, ten grandchildren, and two great-granddaughters (Chisvo Online interview with Mujinga 05 May 2023).

Sipiwe Chisvo's Church life

Mrs. Chisvo is motivated by Luke 2:40, which says: 'And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And God's favour was upon Him' (Chisvo Online interview with Mujinga 05 May 2023). This biblical verse is central to her life as it explains how she survived in the ghetto area and yet she survived this harsh world because of the wisdom she was given by God. During an interview with the author, Mrs. Chisvo narrated:

I am proud to be a Methodist and I thank my parents for instilling in me the Methodist faith at a very tender age, I grew up with that faith from Sunday School.' (Mrs. Chisvo)

This faith was cultivated by the biblical verse of her choice where the growth of children is not possible according to their mighty but is filled with the Holy Spirit (Chisvo Online Interview with Mujinga 05 May 2023).

In 1967, at the age of 10, Sipiwe encountered an event that defined her destiny. She proffers that:

[M]y mother was a Ruwadzano and Manyano Chairwoman at New Highfield Methodist Church; she went with me to their Women's Annual Convention in Zvimba Rural Area at Chikaka Primary School. She took me with her so that I could assist her in taking care of my sibling while she attended meetings. I was standing close to the crowd of Ruwadzano and Manyano women with my little sister on my back. When the Ruwadzano and Manyano Committee started, I saw Society Secretaries presenting reports to the Committee. Most of them were young mothers and they were smartly dressed in Ruwadzano and Manyano uniform – red blouse and belt, black skirts, white collar, and hat.

The way they presented their reports and how they articulated questions asked by Committee members and how the Ruwadzano and Manyano Committee was clapping hands in appreciation of the confidence and commitment demonstrated by most of these young women instilled in me the zeal for a future life in the organisation. I was a passive member in the meeting where I was rightfully not a member, I said to myself, 'When I grow up and get married, I want to be a Ruwadzano and Manyano Secretary like these women and read reports in front of many women like what they are doing.' (Mrs. Chisvo)

Sipiwe was baptised at New Highfield Methodist Church on 16 February 1958 by Rev. Rastie Mnyama. She was later confirmed as a full member of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ). She then stopped going to church leading to her being reconfirmed in 1980 by Rev. Lamuel Mubaira. She was later bloused as a full member of Ruwadzano and Manyano (see Mujinga 2023) by Mrs. Florence Mubaira in 1982. Her dream of being the Ruwadzano and Manyano Secretary came true in 1983 when she was elected to that position at Seke 'A' Methodist Society in Chitungwiza Circuit. In 1986, she was elected the Chitungwiza Circuit Secretary while she was working with Mrs. Mary Mukandi and later Circuit Treasurer during the time of Mrs. Esnath Ndebele. Her capability to lead was observed by Harare District and she was elected District Ruwadzano and Manyano Secretary. In 2000, she was elected Connexional Ruwadzano and Manyano Treasurer: a term she served up to 2005 (Chisvo Online Interview with Mujinga 05 May 2023)

Mrs. Chisvo also served as Secretary for the Chitungwiza Women's Fraternal Fellowship for 6 years. In addition, she also served as Church Steward (Gosa) at the Nyatsime Society. Moreover, she served as the Circuit Steward for Chitungwiza East in 2013–2017: a position she is proud of because, through her leadership, the circuit managed to build two manse (parsonages and/or ministers houses). In addition, Mrs. Chisvo is also a local preacher who was commissioned in 1993. Chisvo mentioned that 'By accepting the call to serve, I managed to overcome fear with the help of my faith, I learnt great humility' (Chisvo Online Interview with Mujinga 05 May 2023). As this article is concerned about her role in the WFMUCW where she is a leader, it is prudent to appreciate the identity and purpose of the organisation first.

Identity of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

According to the Federation's website,² the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (formerly World Federation of Methodist Women) was established on 26 June 1939 in Pasadena, CA, USA. The movement was established as a fellowship of officially recognised groups of Methodist, United, and Uniting Church Women organised in units from

2. See World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, 2022, Sipuwe Chisvo World President, Southern, and East Africa Area - Zimbabwe, The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, viewed 24 May 2023, from <https://wfmucw.org/about/world-officers>.

the respective participating nations to affirm its purpose with the motto – 'to know Christ and to make him known' (Global Civil Society Database 2016).

Sipiwe Chisvo's journey to the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

Mrs. Chisvo's journey to the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW) started when she was the Connexional Ruwadzano and Manyano Treasurer. As a treasurer, she had an opportunity to join the four women from the MCZ who were attending the WFMUCW Assembly in Loughborough, England in 2001. The team comprised Mrs. Cynthia Pozzo chairperson of the Women's Association and Outgoing Area President of Southern and East Africa Area, Mrs. Sipuwe Chisvo from Chitungwiza Circuit, Mrs. Callista Mukarakate from Mabelreign Circuit, and Mrs. Anna Mwadiwa³. After the Assembly, Mrs. Pozzo was elected the Vice President of the WFMUCW for 2001–2006 (Mlambo 2023). Chisvo proudly shared that:

'Having been inspired by the Assembly theme of 2001–2006 "Go in faith and share God's healing grace," I came back and shared the sisterhood news with other women. I took advantage of my leadership in the Connexional Committee to push the agenda of the WFMUCW and inform my fellow sisters in the Methodist Church about this great worldwide sisterhood. I was then invited by Mrs. Greater Nhwatiwa President of Ruwadzano in the United Methodist Church to share with the women leaders in their Episcopate about the Assembly and my vision for Zimbabwe on WFMUCW given that in the MCZ women had started meeting in Harare under the federation banner. I also shared with African Methodist Church women in Zimbabwe and the response was positive. The three churches then agreed to meet as a Federation in Zimbabwe once a year.' (Mrs. Chisvo)

In 2004 Mrs. Chisvo attended an Area Seminar in Cape Town with Mrs. Elizabeth Goredema and Mrs. Cynthia Pozzo. It was at this meeting that she was elected Southern and East Africa Area Vice President 2006–2011 (Mlambo 2023). After the Cape Town appointment, Cynthia Pozzo, Violet Matani, and Sipuwe Chisvo intensified the robust self-funded campaign for women to join the Women's Federation. Their zeal saw the women travelling to Bulawayo, Gweru, Masvingo, Mutare, and Marondera. The enterprise was not easy as evidenced by some resistance they faced. Mrs. Chisvo mentioned that 'Some women received the message of the global sisterhood with joy and others derogatively referred to the Assembly as "*Musangano wa Mai Chisvo*" [it is the meeting for Mrs. Chisvo]'

3. The four women were drawn from the Women's Fellowship. The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe has two women groups namely the Women's Association established in 1939 and the Ruwadzano and Manyano established in 1920 (see Mujinga 2017:128-137 and Mujinga 2023). The two female organisations meet once a quarter under the name of Women's Fellowship to present one report on the work being done by women in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. The Women's Fellowship was formed in 1987 following the World Federation World Assembly that was held in Kenya Nairobi, the two organisations were pressured to come together and become one group in the Federation. In 1987 under the leadership of Mrs. Gladys Chirisa-President Ruwadzano and Manyano and Mrs. Muriel Johnson -President of the Women's Association, the two groups met at Resthaven for a weekend of fellowship and prayer and the Women's Fellowship was launched. The Women's Fellowship is the one affiliated with the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women. The Women's Fellowship is chaired by the wife of the head of the Church who is always the Ruwadzano and Manyano President and is deputised by the President of the Women's Association who is always a layperson. The two Presidents are the delegates to the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe Annual Conference (see MCZ 2022) Deed of the Church Orders and Standing Orders- (Delegates to Conference).

(Chisvo Online Interview with Mujinga 05 May 2023). With all the negative comments that the team received, they persisted with the World Federation sisterhood campaign.

The 13th World Assembly was held in Houston, America from 29th August to 03rd September 2016. Mrs. Chisvo was appointed Southern and East Africa Area President being deputised by Mrs. Patricia Mapani from the United Methodist Church Sunday Mail (2016). Her election was a testimony of the impact of the sisterhood mobilisation that she had done among women of Methodist families in Zimbabwe. Over 200 women from the MCZ, the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, and the Africa Methodist Episcopal Church attended the 13th Assembly. It was towards the end of her term of office as the Southern Africa and East Area President in 2021 that the WFMUCW executive met in Hong Kong to prepare for the 14th Assembly. The World Assembly was also supposed to nominate the next World President and it was at the Hong Kong meeting that Mrs. Chisvo started the pilgrimage to move from the periphery drawing towards the centre. There were consultations from individuals to persuade her to avail herself of the post of World President that was going to be vacant in 2021. The first person to consult her was the Sitting World President Judd Alison. Chisvo narrated the discussion with Alison verbatim:

'Alison approached me and said, "You can be the next World President because it's time that the leadership goes to Africa" I said to her, It is not possible because I do not think that I am educated enough to lead the World Federation. Alison convinced me by mentioning that, "no one knows that you are not educated because your reports are always the best in the nine areas. You can do it because we have been observing you."' (Mrs. Chisvo)

Another member of the World Federation Ann Connan from Australia also affirmed her capability to lead as she said:

'In you, we see God-given leadership skills and you are such a godly woman who can be the next president.' (Mrs. Chisvo)

The then Federation Secretary Mrs. Mataiva Robertson from New Zealand also vouched her confidence that Mrs. Chisvo could lead and be a good leader.

The nominations of the President of the WFMUCW were opened in October 2021 and in November of the same year, she received nomination forms from three areas for her signature accepting the nomination for the 2022 elections. The Executive Meeting agreed to forward her name to the Assembly that was going to sit in August 2022. Unfortunately, the World Federation failed to gather physically for their Assembly because of COVID-19 that affected the whole world. Elections were conducted online, and she was voted to be the first black WFMUCW president for 2022–2026 not only as a black woman but from Africa since the inception of the organisation in the past 84 years.

Throughout her period with the World Federation, Mrs. Chisvo managed to attend the following area and World Assemblies.

Area seminars

- 2004: Cape Town South Africa
- 2009: Harare International Conference Centre, Harare Zimbabwe
- 2014: Cape Town South Africa
- 2019: Nairobi Kenya

World assemblies

- 2001: Loughborough England
- 2006: Jeju Island South Korea
- 2011: Johannesburg South Africa
- 2016: Houston Texas USA
- 2022: Virtually and she was elected World President 2022–2026

Mrs. Chisvo was not a newcomer in the WFMUCW, but she had already taken strides in moving from the edges of social life to be among those women who define life from their privileged social, political, and economic positions.

African women, religion and COVID-19: The bedrock of Sipiwe Chisvo's periphery-centre leadership ascendance

The appointment of Sipiwe Chisvo as the first black President for the WFMUCW from Africa was not only driven by her being a religious African woman from the ghetto but was also influenced by her contribution during COVID-19. The CIVICUS Global Alliance Monitor listed four critical areas where the pandemic was a challenge to women and girls in Zimbabwe in particular:

First, the pandemic had a disproportionate impact on women and girls, because of Zimbabwe's capitalist-centred response to containing the virus. Lockdown regulations entirely shut down the informal sector, in which 65 percent of the Zimbabwean population is employed, restricting all movement except for formally registered employees who could present letters on their company letterheads, and of course frontline workers. Second, the prolonged lockdowns that followed found most survivors of gender-based violence [GBV] and those at risk of it locked up with the perpetrators of violence. Third, the prolonged shutdown of schools created a productive gap among young women and induced extreme poverty. Fourth, the shift to online tools for learning purposes, along with a lack of smart devices, data poverty, and the unavailability of internet connections, left a huge proportion of students out of education, particularly in rural areas. (CIVICUS Global Alliance Monitor 2022)

As discussed earlier, the impact of COVID-19 was also evident in the virtual attendance of the WFMUCW Assembly that was due in 2022. Although the nomination of Mrs. Chisvo was done in November 2021, the appointment was confirmed in August 2022 during the peak of the COVID-19 era. What makes this period unique for Sipiwe Chisvo is that for the first time, the World Federation attended virtually and appointed a woman from the ghettos of Africa to lead the world organisation.

Although Chisvo arose from the ghetto, her self-esteem exhibited that of a goal-getter who continuously sets and consistently accomplishes her specific goals (Chisvo Online Interview with Mujinga 05 May 2023). Chisvo's appointment is explained by the periphery-centre model where people from the underside can identify their potentiality in the context of some individuals who are privileged by their history. For example, when she was appointed as Southern and East Africa Area President she exclaimed 'My sister, you will not believe this. I was appointed in front of other women who were highly academic, some of them with a PhD qualification – but I was appointed to that role' (Mlambo 2023). Chisvo's statement speaks volumes about how people from the margins can ride from their religiosity to break the stigma fence.

It can also be argued that apart from accepting that she was an African woman who knew her limitations, her religiosity pushed her to the frontiers where she discovered her new self in particular during the COVID-19 lockdown. This self-identity might also have been propelled by Banana's theology according to the ghetto especially when Banana (1990) describes how God works with those in the peripheries of the ghetto. Banana (1990:ix) wrote:

The Gospel according to the ghetto, is an attempt to affirm the liberating hand of God ... It affirms the need for the ghetto masses to become co-partners with God in His divine mission of moral, economic, political and social revolution. (Gunda 2012:137)

This position of self-identity according to Banana is the mission in which Christians are called to partake and this mission should not be compromised (Banana 1990:xiv). For this article, Banana's Gospel according to the Ghetto is the engine that propelled Sipiwe Chisvo to dissect from the periphery to the centre as a religious African woman. This trajectory was given meaning by her contribution to feeding vulnerable people during the most difficult time in the history of the second decade of the 1st century.

As argued earlier, the 14th World Assembly was conducted online and for the Assembly of that magnitude, to be held virtually, it was not an easy exercise as it involved a lot of learning during the new normal period. The period also pushed the term of officers of the Federation leaders with a year, this resulted in Mrs. Chisvo leading the Southern and East Africa Area up to 2022. During the COVID-19 lockdown, Mrs. Chisvo opened a soup kitchen at Nyatsime Methodist Church with the help of her family based in the United Kingdom, which also runs Southern African Women's Affairs, and the Aids Refugees Organisation were major funders of the programme (Kachiko 2020). The soup kitchen was feeding between 260 and 330 people a week with most of the beneficiaries being children, the elderly, widows, and divorcees. The programme was also supported by some members of Ruwadzano and Manyano women who were volunteering to prepare the meals (Kachiko 2020). Some of the people who were the beneficiaries of the soup kitchen were coming from informal sectors:

'During the humanitarian crisis, I would share the pictures of the beneficiaries and the women who were assisting me with the World President who in turn posted the photographs on the WFMUCW Facebook page almost every week. The humanitarian gesture impressed many members of the Federation some of whom sent me comments of appreciation. I was however heartbroken to dishearten the less privileged people whom I had given hope because the lockdown affected the funding and the soup kitchen unfortunately closed.' (Mrs. Chisvo)

Many actors assisted the victims of COVID-19. For example, CIVICUS Global Alliance provided services to people who reported cases of infection, putting out online campaigns, mobilising solidarity, providing information materials for COVID-19 awareness and prevention, and providing sanitizers and masks at vegetable markets to ensure that the informal sector would remain open (CIVICUS Global Alliance 2022). Part of the Chitungwiza area suffered double tragedy as some families were affected and infected by COVID-19 and the demolitions of their informal sector, which was challenged by the Chitungwiza Residence Trust and some activists who held protests even though they knew they would get arrested. This situation also presented Mrs. Chisvo as a champion of humanitarianism because she has the heart of a religious African woman even during risky pandemics. Chisvo's generosity in feeding the desperate ghetto people also speaks of her religiosity as an African woman during pandemics. In her acceptance speech, Mrs. Chisvo confessed that:

'It was a humbling and an honour as I was raised in Chitungwiza's high-density town to be elected World President of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women. I will be leading 3.7 million members in 71 countries in 9 geographical locations in the next four years. It can only be because of His grace and mercy. As the President, I desire to inspire people from all backgrounds to never look down upon themselves.' (Mrs. Chisvo)

Her role in journeying with the vulnerable during the moment of deepest need demonstrates the resilience of African women to be there for their families in whatever circumstances and this explains the Shona adage *musha mukadzi* [the home is a woman].

'Her personality always remains impeccable. However, for me, her greatest gift is that she is a consistent, loyal, honest, passionate, and reliable woman. It appears that she is appointed to these high positions because people already know of her work, tenacity, focus, and consistency.' (Mlambo)

Mrs. Chisvo's periphery-centre experience reminds African scholars that scholarly attention is demanded to relive the stories of African women as pinnacles of African society as sisters, mothers, caretakers, and life-givers of all generations and conduits of human development. This point is also supported by a Kenyan theologian Philomena Mwaura who argues that one of the most common refrains about the church in Africa is that it is majority female and the church in Africa has a feminine face and owes much of its tremendous growth to the agency of women (Zurlo 2022).

Typical of a religious African woman who always wants to see the best in others, Mrs. Chisvo also recommended Rev Ellen Chimowa in 2011 to be elected as Helen Kim Scholar and she attended the 12th World Assembly Young Women leadership Course, which is organised a week before the assembly with all expenses paid for by the Assembly. Rev. Ellen Chimowa got this opportunity when she was serving in the rural Nenguwo Circuit. In 2017 Mrs. Chisvo also recommended that Mrs. Ester Chanakira the wife of Rev. Gift Chanakira who was serving in the remote mission in Muzarabani Circuit to be a recipient of the Federation Bossey Scholarship, which saw her going to Switzerland to study a course of her choice. In 2022, Mrs. Chisvo also nominated Yeukai Mbangani, the former Youth President of the MCZ to receive the Helen Kim students for 2022–2026 together with Nyashadzashe Nemacha from the United Methodist Church. The two attended leadership programmes in Brazil.

The recommendation of a minister and a minister's wife from the rural areas to train for leadership at the international level resonates well with Mrs. Chisvo's zeal to have those religious African women push from the periphery to the centre where they do not regret being religious African women. The recommendation of Yeukai and Nyashadzashe to take leadership courses for youth also happened during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as such Chisvo's unselfish conduct was illuminated even during the pandemic period.

Conclusion

To conclude this article, it cannot be denied that the religiosity of African women plays a significant role that propels them to move from the periphery of the underside of the human history. The religiosity also empowers African women to retell their stories by supporting communities in different times of life including during pandemics. This article found out that, although the background of Sipiwe Chisvo is defined by life in the ghetto, Banana's theology of the gospel according to the ghetto gave her the conviction that although the ghetto defines the periphery of life, it should not define the destiny of individuals. Periphery-centre framework also assisted Mrs. Chisvo to rediscover her potential and the potential of other women who hail from the margins of life. Her appointment as the first black African woman to lead the World Federation can best be explained by her quest to dissect from the periphery. In addition, her contribution during COVID-19 by providing food to the vulnerable people of the community presents her as a woman who is convinced that those who are better privileged in the margins should demonstrate their religiosity by doing what Jesus could have done for the poor. This article presents lessons to Methodist scholars that the time has come to celebrate the achievement of women who might have redefined the lives of the communities representing the church. Lastly, African women's stories demand African scholars to listen and

document the heritage of sisters, mothers, caretakers, and life-givers of all generations and conduits of human development who have no writing skill but have an oratory gift to tell their stories, lest they die with their treasure.

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Author's contributions

M.M. the sole author of this research article.

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is for this article's results, findings, and content.

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