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## Editorial

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**Editor-in-Chief**

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This volume consists of four articles. The first two articles specifically focus on children. One of the other two articles discussed in this volume, examines the trends and challenges of maternal mortality. The last article interrogates issues pertaining to how women play out power issues in the context of powerful traditional religions as well as Christianity.

The first article entitled “Challenges and Opportunities for Child-Sensitive Social Protection Programmes in Zimbabwe”, by Chikoko and Mwapaura examines child sensitive protection programmes in Zimbabwe by focusing on opportunities and challenges. The article focuses on both formal and non-formal social protection programmes. Some of the social protection measures examined in the article include the harmonised social cash transfer programme, the assisted medical treatment orders (AMTO), the basic education assistance module (BEAM), the child supplementary feeding programme, zunde ramambo, and sarapavana. The review is based on qualitative documentary analysis. The article adopts a child rights perspective to analyse the sensitivity of the social protection programmes in Zimbabwe. The child rights perspective is mainly guided by four principles namely, in the best interest of the child, the right of a child to participation, non-discrimination and the right of a child to survival and development. In

an effort to strengthen success of child rights, the Government of Zimbabwe has enacted a number of child rights laws, such as the Children’s Act (5:06) and Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23).

The research findings suggest that the child-centeredness of the social protection programmes in Zimbabwe is severely affected by the nature and level of the challenges they face. The article concludes by lobbying and advocating for child-centred social protection programmes in Zimbabwe. In general children can be perceived as a vulnerable group that require key stakeholders and duty bearers must safeguard and protect children.

The second article entitled “Perspectives of stakeholders on the implementation of the Basic Education Assistance Module in Zimbabwe”, is presented by Joice Kanengoni and Edmarie Pretorius. The article discusses the contribution of BEAM in improving access to education in Gutu Rural District Council, Masvingo Province. The study sought to explore the perspectives of stakeholders on how the Zimbabwean BEAM enables Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) to access education. The study used a qualitative research approach and a case study design. Purposive sampling was used to select eight stakeholders who were involved with the implementation of BEAM on a local level. The method of data collection was audio-recorded face to face interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was used in the process of data collection. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study findings revealed that BEAM facilitates access to education in the Gutu District. The focus is on the education of girl children as there is high prevalence of school dropouts among girl children in Gutu District. Active participation of community members and involved stakeholders are characteristics of the BEAM implementation process. However, the inconsistent and low budgetary allocations that characterise BEAM compromise its effective implementation. To enhance the effectiveness of BEAM

an improved and consistent budgetary allocation is required. To raise awareness on BEAM community workshops on BEAM must be implemented and the establishment of feeding programmes.

Elizabeth Omolola Oyedepo presents the third article entitled “Trends and Patterns of Maternal Mortality in Nigeria: Any link with Economic Growth”? Nigeria has one of the highest maternal mortality in the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) Nigeria is the third most unsafe place in the world to procreate. Only South Sudan and Chad are worse off than Nigeria. This article assesses the trends and patterns of maternal mortality in Nigeria and seeks to determine if it has any association with economic growth. The study relied on secondary data analysis. Ordinary least squares regression was employed in the study and findings showed that a significant increase in female life expectancy ( $p < 0.01$ ) and economic growth ( $p < 0.05$ ) leads to a reduction in maternal mortality. However, an increase in female fertility rate ( $p < 0.01$ ), life time risk of maternal death ( $p < 0.01$ ) and neonatal mortality rates ( $p < 0.01$ ) significantly leads to an increase in maternal mortality in Nigeria. The paper encourages adoption of policies that will encourage economic growth. The health sector should be allocated adequate funds to enable the sector to provide facilities for quality health care delivery. More education on family planning should be made available to women of reproductive ages in Nigeria.

There is a need for more funding for the health sector so as to increase the adult female life expectancy in the country. Improved budget allocation for the health sector will help provide medical equipment and machinery, adequate drugs and skilled personnel that can aid health care delivery in Nigeria. There is the need to build more hospitals and train more health workers. Many of Nigeria’s health workers have left the country in search for greener pastures. More standard and referral hospitals need to be built to augment the already existing ones. There is also the need to organize trainings and workshops for health workers to improve their delivery ability.

Education of the girl child should be encouraged in areas in Nigeria where there exist high maternal mortality such as the north eastern part of the country. Marriages of under aged girls should also be discouraged since research has proved that increased fertility will increase chances of maternal mortality in Nigeria. There is also the need to provide more awareness and improvement on family planning services so as to reduce the fertility rate (number of births per woman). There is also a need to provide good quality antenatal, postnatal and better child care services. Improvements should also be made on emergency obstetric care for ailing women. Poverty and the economic condition of women is an important factor leading to high rates of maternal mortality in Nigeria. There is the need for policy makers to put up better policies to alleviate poverty and better policies for the improvement of the health sector. With these measures in place Nigeria's high mortality rates can be arrested.

The last article by Gilbert Tarugarira and Annah Moyo is entitled "Standing at the crossroads: An overview of reflections on paradigms of African women's inclusion and exclusion in the religion and gender relations discourse in Zimbabwe". Unlike the traditional image of women who are portrayed as passive and docile, women are seen as active agents in their construction of their religious identity and beliefs. The article presents the image of women fighters who have fought for and continue to fight for their own free space in which they can develop a sense of solidarity and autonomy.

Despite the perceived subordinate status of women sexually, politically and economically, in African traditional religion, women continue to play active and respected roles in mediating between humans and gods as priestesses, diviners and healers. This article critically analyses the patterns of women's inclusion,

exclusion and compromise within traditional and Christian religious practices. The study brings to light the struggle by women to restore their waning integrity through the religious garb. Some effort has been made to show that the creation of symbols, myths and rituals centred on women's experiences were indeed linked to attempts by women to release anger and fear and to increase a sense of power.

African traditional religion while it affirms that women's and men's relationships are fundamentally different shows also that there are many instances in which women are seen as significant players in the spiritual fraternity. For instance, Ngoshi (2009) argues that spirit possession is a way in which women could fracture the traditional boundaries that militated against their recognition. Possession in many instances enabled women to ameliorate problems associated with biological reproduction or marriage in ways antithetical to the harmony-preserving tactics of everyday life. While religion is seen as a powerful source for the subordination of women in society, it has also been an important source for the feminist movement and other social activities for the liberation of the women from male dominance. This is particularly evident where Christian religion in particular has been a powerful instrument for social change and where women's roles have provided them with opportunities for leadership and the development of organizational skills. The article shows that in both African traditional religion and Christianity, spirit possession and rituals are used to deconstruct, contest and subvert both the patriarchal and dominant discourses in religion and gender relations. In the Zimbabwean society where a dominant discourse of masculinity includes the superiority of men over women, it has been ascertained that within both traditions (African Traditional Religion and Christianity), women fought for their free space in which they could develop a sense of solidarity and autonomy.