

# Women's Stories on the “Working of Talents” as Agents of Economic Transformation in South Africa

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## Abstract

In South Africa, the Forward in Faith International Ministries (FIFIM) is well known for educating its members on how to use their hands to raise their standard of living through the “working of talents.” Based on the “Matarenda Model of Entrepreneurship” described by Anderson (2018) and sometimes referred to as the “School of Talents” according to Guti (2015), this investigation uses qualitative analysis to gather information through secondary sources and oral history interviews. The study employs purposive sampling to identify participants and examine the importance of the “working of talents” in church and society through women’s experiences. It concludes that women can improve their living standards by utilising their abilities. The study strongly recommends that women in talent work should not limit themselves to achieving church goals only. They should continue to work diligently and utilise their gifts to recognise and seize opportunities that come their way, thus empowering themselves to achieve tremendous success. This study emphasises the crucial role of women in supporting churches and society in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5 and 8, which aim to alleviate poverty, empower women, and motivate them to continue their work.

**Keywords:** FIFMI; women’s stories; “work of talents;” South Africa; economic transformation



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## Introduction

The pursuit of women's empowerment through the "working of talents" is pivotal in addressing the entrenched economic disparities and gender inequities that persist in South Africa. In a country where women often face significant barriers to economic participation, cultivating entrepreneurial ventures serves as a means of personal advancement and a catalyst for broader societal change. This study focuses on the narratives of women affiliated with Forward in Faith Ministries International (FIFMI), an organisation that emphasises developing and utilising individual talents for economic empowerment. Through this lens, this study explores how the "working of talents" can inspire transformative growth and foster community resilience.

A key theoretical underpinning of this investigation is the "Matarenda Model of Entrepreneurship," which prioritises identifying and applying unique individual skills as a strategy for economic development. Additionally, the "School of Talents" concept, as proposed by Guti (2015), facilitates an environment where members are encouraged to recognise and leverage their innate abilities. By integrating these frameworks into this research, the study will reveal how women's entrepreneurial endeavours within FIFMI contribute to their economic independence and the overarching goals of poverty alleviation and gender equality, as articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 8.<sup>1</sup>

The primary objectives of this study are:

- i) To investigate the impact of FIFMI on women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurial activities.
- ii) To analyse the effectiveness of the "Matarenda Model of Entrepreneurship" in facilitating women's access to economic opportunities.
- iii) To document and describe women's personal narratives in FIFMI, illustrating their transformation journeys through cultivating their talents.

The central question guiding this research is: How does the concept of women's working talents within the framework of FIFMI contribute to their economic empowerment in South Africa? By addressing this question, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the role of faith-based organisations in fostering economic

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2 The Sustainable development goals are 17 goals that aim to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. SDG5 emphasizes achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, and SDG No. 8 emphasizes promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work. These SDGs are linked to Millennium Development Goal No.1, which calls for eradicating extreme poverty and MDG No. 3, which calls for gender equality and women empowerment.

development and gender equity, offering implications for future policy and practice in the region.

## **Historical Background of Forward in Faith Ministries International**

The Forward in Faith Ministries International (FIFMI), founded by Ezekiel Handinawangu Guti on May 12, 1960, emerged from Zimbabwe with a mission that deeply intertwined spirituality with social progress, particularly in the realms of gender equality and entrepreneurship. Beginning in Ngaone, Chipinge, the movement sought to instil a renewed faith and empower individuals, especially women, thereby addressing the prevalent gender disparities in the region.

From its inception, FIFMI emphasised the importance of women's roles both within the church and in broader society. Guti championed the belief that women possess equal potential for success and leadership alongside men. His commitment to gender equality became evident through various outreach programmes focused on empowering women and providing them with opportunities for education, skills development, and entrepreneurship. FIFMI aimed to create an inclusive environment where women could thrive and contribute significantly to their families and communities.

Under Guti's leadership, the ministry's initiatives included workshops and training sessions designed to equip women with crucial business skills, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship. This approach not only uplifted individual lives but also stimulated economic growth within communities, reinforcing the idea that faith and action could lead to transformative change. Throughout its 63 years of evangelism, FIFMI has strived to dismantle societal barriers limiting women's participation in economic activities, promoting a vision of equality and empowerment that resonates across cultural and geographic boundaries. Guti's legacy includes a body of work that reflects his advocacy for women's rights and their vital contribution to societal development, ensuring that the message of empowerment remains a cornerstone of the ministry's mission even after his passing on July 5, 2023, at the age of 100.

## **Literature Review**

Mwase (2012) describes Matarenda (The Work of Talents) as a term used in FIFMI to denote business activities rooted in religious principles while encouraging self-employment within the church community. Ezekiel Guti, the founder of FIMI, is a prominent clergy member in Africa who has seemingly benefited from the prosperity<sup>2</sup> gospel, as have many other followers. Myers (2015,116) also observed, "In Pentecostal

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2 Prosperity in FIFMI is viewed as the ability to work and amass wealth through God's obedience, which enables one to venture into businesses and work using their hands. In FIFMI, prosperity is also seen as a sign of conquering the Devil, for sometimes suffering is equated to sinning against God. In FIFMI, it is believed that those who work hard and give generously to the church and support the work of God are the most prosperous.

teachings, success is seen as a triumph over the devil and the demons responsible for poverty and other life failures.” However, Mudimeli, Muthivhi, and James (2023,200) argue that “while there is some truth to the idea of material prosperity as a blessing, the prosperity gospel prioritises prosperity at the expense of other essential values.” Furthermore, (Maxwell 2006) elucidates that the Working of Talents encourages self-reliance and diligence. He further postulates that this strong work ethic is fundamental for FIFMI women, who rarely exhibit self-doubt. Their transformation is evident in their appearance and lifestyle as they strive to live a modern and prosperous life through the Working of Talents.

The emphasis of the Working of Talents is on encouraging women to work diligently and achieve financial prosperity while discouraging idleness, as advocated in Gifford (1988, 68). It is noteworthy that while FIFM promotes the involvement of men, women, and youth in Talents, the church’s teachings specifically focus on women (Biri 2014,155). Maxwell (2006,255) also associates Talents with femininity, asserting that despite the participation of men and children, Talents primarily involve women (Tarugarira and Moyo 2020,2). According to Longwe and Clarke (1994), providing women with training opportunities is crucial for their well-being, aligning with the concept of a welfare state, where women can access training benefits to meet their basic needs, such as food. Moreover, a significant finding was that Working Talents includes ethical action and empowerment narratives to create Pentecostal congregants with collective cultural identities, ready to financially support the church’s causes (Ringson and Chereni 2020).

After considering the perspectives of various scholars, this study aligns with the insights of the reviewed scholars, emphasising the significance of talents within FIFMI. Talents are crucial in enabling the church to operate independently of external donor funds, an essential aspect of an Indigenous church. Furthermore, the utilisation of talents, as demonstrated in the stories of women examined in this study, has led to positive transformations in the lives of both men and women. Testimonies abound regarding how applying this ideology has lifted many from profound poverty to a more comfortable, middle-class lifestyle. This research aims to address a gap in the existing literature by highlighting that the use of talents not only provides financial support to the church but also contributes to women’s economic empowerment and plays a role in alleviating poverty, thereby advancing SDGs 5 and 8.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is anchored in two interrelated theories: the Matarenda Model of Entrepreneurship and the Empowerment Theory. These perspectives collectively explore the importance of the “work of talents” as agents of economic transformation and socio-cultural dynamics within the context of FIFMI in South Africa. These two theories guide the analysis in this study.

## **Matarenda Model of Entrepreneurship**

The Matarenda Model, as Anderson (2018) described, serves as a foundational theory for this research. This model emphasises the importance of identifying and harnessing individual talents and skills to foster economic growth and empowerment. It positions entrepreneurship as a pursuit of profit and a transformative process that can lead to personal and communal economic advancement. By applying this model, the study will explore how women affiliated with Forward in Faith Ministries International (FIFMI) can leverage their unique skills for economic empowerment.

Guti's (2015) concept of the School of Talents supports the theoretical underpinning of the study. This school of talents promotes an environment where individuals are encouraged to recognise and utilise their inherent talents. With conviction, Guti stated that "talents are not a mechanism for the church to extract money from people, but to empower believers to gain financial stability and overcome poverty" (Guti 2015, 6). It underscores personal growth, skill development, and collective learning within a supportive community, which is FIFMI. The School of Talents highlights that economic transformation can be achieved through collaborative efforts and shared experiences among women, fostering individual and communal progress. Tarugarira and Moyo (2020, 2) also stressed that women comprise most of the Working of Talents participants, even though men and children participate. In line with this teaching, Guti refers to the Parable of Talents in the Bible in the book of Luke 19: 11–27. This parable emphasises the importance of working hard with the little God gave to man.

By promoting gender parity, economic development, and societal advancement, FIFMI's economic empowerment strategies, exemplified by the working of talents programme and the work of talents system, show how faith-based organisations may impact society. Through the business endeavours of working talents, FIFMI women assist themselves in becoming financially independent and significantly improving their communities' socio-economic conditions while challenging patriarchal conventions and promoting female empowerment in South Africa and worldwide.

## **Empowerment Theory**

The Empowerment Theory offers a valuable framework for analysing the complexities of women's experiences within the context of FIFMI. Empowerment is conceptualised as the process through which individuals or groups attain control over the decisions and actions that shape their lives. Central to this theory is the premise that, by providing individuals with freedom, responsibilities, and the requisite resources, they can achieve elevated performance levels and enhanced life satisfaction. This framework highlights the critical components of empowerment, including autonomy, active participation, and access to essential resources. It asserts that empowerment entails the acquisition of control over one's life and the capacity to make informed choices and cultivate a sense of self-efficacy. Key empowerment indicators encompass improved performance

outcomes at the individual and group levels, increased satisfaction in occupational and personal domains, and heightened engagement in decision-making processes.

Additional indicators may include the acquisition of new skills, a boost in self-confidence, and a reduction in stress levels. This theoretical lens will facilitate an exploration of the impact of participation in talent-based initiatives on women's self-esteem, confidence, and decision-making capabilities. By investigating narratives of empowerment, the study aims to elucidate how women's economic engagement fosters a novel sense of agency and leadership within their communities.

By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the study aims to comprehensively understand how women's working talents within FIFMI contribute to their economic empowerment and societal transformation. The intersection of personal narratives, entrepreneurial initiatives, and the overarching goals of gender equality and economic development will add depth to the analysis, offering insights into the role of faith-based organisations in promoting transformative change in South Africa.

## Methodology

The study implemented a qualitative research methodology to gather data through in-depth oral interviews to better understand phenomena, experiences, and meanings. This approach was chosen to interpret phenomena through the narratives provided by the participants. According to (Terry et al. 2017,12), qualitative researchers take a person-centred, holistic perspective to comprehend the human experience without focusing on specific concepts, enabling a unique and comprehensive understanding of the participant's reality and social context. The objective of the oral narratives is to gain insights from the stories narrated by women from FIFMI on how the Working of Talents has impacted their economic transformation, establish how they perceive this ideology in their church, and obtain insight into the depth, richness, and complexity of the theology of Working of Talents within the FIFMI. According to Arifin (2018, 7), qualitative research aims to observe a phenomenon in its natural environment and interpret it using the participants' explanations.

In this study, the oral narrative method gives room for women who provide testimonials to Guti's teachings on the Working of Talents and the role of women in bringing economic transformation to the church and their families. Furthermore, it has also been used for participants to express their views on how the teaching on Working of Talents contributes to women's economic transformation and how it has rescued them from male domination to self-reliance and empowerment.

The interview samples comprised 30 participants, including the married, single, divorced, and widowed, all beneficiaries of the ministries or the empowerment programmes. They were purposely selected because their different experiences and encounters helped this study to be balanced and representative of all women involved.

This was also done to show that Guti did not empower married women only, but all types of women. The participants consulted are those who have in-depth knowledge of the subject under study. They are heedful, reflective members of the community under study, in this case, the members of the FIFMI Women's Empowerment programmes, who have the knowledge and are willing to share their knowledge.

According to Mukhopadhyay and Musengi (2012,27), employing a qualitative approach is crucial because it allows participants to share their authentic, real-life experiences. In this study, a narrative approach provided an avenue for women involved in the Working of Talent to articulate their experiences with the teachings of Guti on this ideology in bringing about economic transformation among women and the church. Furthermore, this approach enabled FIFMI members interviewed to elucidate the impact of Guti's teachings on the church's position regarding the Working of Talents and how they lead to economic development in women's lives.

## Ethical Considerations

To uphold the respondents' well-being, we obtained informed consent and voluntary participation through ethical processes (Arifin 2018). Pseudonyms were used to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality. Age variations among participants were considered. All information was provided voluntarily without fear of retribution from church officials, as the church is vigilant about sharing its information. Therefore, the researchers did not disclose the true identities of the respondents. The confidentiality of all recorded information and surveys was maintained, and relevant institutional review boards granted ethical approval. Each participant gave informed consent, acknowledging their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were consistently upheld throughout the investigation to protect the participants' identities.

## Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. After collecting all necessary data, it was subjected to thematic analysis. This analysis involves grouping interview data into themes, particularly those with similar and recurring characteristics. These themes include ideas, topics, and patterns of meaning that repeatedly emerge throughout the study (Nortjé and de Jong 2016,32). For this research, the data was grouped under the following themes:

1. Empowerment of women and poverty alleviation;
2. Working of Talents as agents of both economic and social transformation;
3. Talents as agent of gender equality;
4. Economic Empowerment Through Entrepreneurship;

5. Talents enabling women to amass property; and
6. Growth and development.

## Findings and Discussion on Women's Stories on the Working of Talents

### Empowerment of Women and Poverty Alleviation

Many women confirmed through their testimonies that the work of talents in their church has positively impacted their lives. One of the women interviewed testified that:

I thank the God of Ezekiel Guti for teaching me to work with my hands. I would be a scrape in society if it were not for him. The Working of Talents taught me how to use my hands to search for money to raise my family. Despite the death of my husband, I managed to send all my children to school by selling tomatoes, vegetables, and other items needed by women in the kitchen. With the teaching of Baba Guti, I learnt that no money is small. Every piece of money you get is equally vital in bringing economic transformation to your life (interview with Mrs X, 46 years old, 2024).

From the above narrative, we learnt that despite being widowed, many women in FIFMI can still work for their families and send their children to school. This was pioneered by the work of talents initiated by Guti at the School of Talents, where all women were taught to use their hands to earn an income. This work of talent has enabled many women, particularly those widowed, to earn a living even without their husbands' income. Considering this, Guti (2015,6) discusses that working talents are not a mechanism for the church to generate money from the believers. Still, it is a mechanism to empower believers to gain financial stability and overcome poverty. The narrative above clearly indicates how the work of talents has been used by women in FIMI to become agents of economic transformation and poverty alleviation. Once a woman can send her children to school, her life will automatically transform from poverty to modern life, primarily if the child performs well in school and gets equipped to live a contemporary lifestyle.

### Working of Talents as Agents of both Economic and Social Transformation

Moreover, other women were interviewed on how they perceive the work of talents in their church. They elucidated that:

The Working of Talents is good for us because it enables us to help the vulnerable in society. When Baba Guti taught or introduced this talent programme, many people took it with mixed feelings. Some feel that it was a form of exploitation, without knowing that the work of talents will also benefit them in raising their families and society. At first, when a target was set for Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU) talents, some people resisted, for they said we were being used to build Guti's empire that would benefit him and his children. Moreover, they describe the process as "under mambo." Those who listened and worked for ZEGU Talents, today have testimonies; after working with ZEGU Talents, the skill of working remained with most of us. In the

school of talents, we are taught life skills to raise money for free. For instance, some talented dressmakers were mentored to become perfect dressmakers; some were taught baking skills, and some were trained to manufacture detergents such as sunlight for washing dishes and detergents for toilet cleaning. In the school of talents, we are also taught the spirit of love and supporting each other. It is highly encouraged that we buy items for our fellow church members to promote the growth of small businesses, which has helped a lot. (Focus Group interview with six women, 2024).

The sentiments above point to the fact that talents were entrepreneurial avenues for women to learn various skills and be able to start their businesses and grow economically. To support this argument, one woman postulates that:

Through attending the School of Talents, I have learnt that it is a sin for a woman to sleep without counting money and the profit from your business. I knew that all rich people start from humble beginnings. We were told that through selling sweets, we could build a house and graduate from being lodgers to landlords. What was emphasised in the school of talents is that the clay pot used to cook 'mazondo' (the cow's feet) will remain shiny on their outside appearance even after the pot is washed. This was a lesson this study brought: those who work must learn to work wholeheartedly. After the set target of the church, the skill you have learnt will not depart from you, but you will leave with the skill forever for your economic growth with your family. Talents for the church were influential in bringing blessings to our small businesses. We were taught that we reap what we sow. If you sow greed and meanness, you will also reap that, but giving generously to God through the church will reap a doublefold. This philosophy worked a lot. In one analysis, most people who give to church are more blessed than those who do not (Mrs. X, 36 years, 2024).

The discussion from the story above concurs with Tsara and Mudimeli (2024), who allude that many FIFMI women are well-off in terms of dressing, how they ought to do business, and their standard of living. They further postulate that one does not need anyone to tell another that this is a FIFMI member. Guti teaches women to work hard and always use their hands to generate income. Women could finance church projects such as building Mbuya Dorcas Hospital and Ezekiel Guti University through working talents. Once a person gains a skill, it will remain with them forever and lead to improved standards of living and economic empowerment for women and society at large.

Moreover, the illustration in the above narrative also encourages women to be generous when given projects to work on for the church. Thus, from the narrative, the clay pot used for cooking *mazondo* (cow feet) will not stop shining even after it has been used for cooking and washed. This shows that those who work hard in church projects, once empowered, the anointing will not depart from them. They still use the skill for the benefit of their family. However, those who are mean, who do not want to work hard, remain poor.

## **Talents as Agent of Gender Equality**

Upon being asked about the positive change talents brought to her life as a member of FIFMI, she said:

Since I started working talents, I am no longer a tenant; I now own two properties with title deeds in my name. Working talents made me count among other women. I am no longer a beggar, but I can lend others money. Even my family knows I am always available when they want assistance. I thank Baba Guti for his education and gospel of Talents (Mrs X, 35 years, 2024).

Analysis of this narrative tells us that working talents positively changed many women. Among the changes, women now own more than two properties with title deeds in their names. Mwase (2012) commented that the work of talent made many women graduate from being lodgers to landlords and move from rural areas to urban areas. These views by Mwase and from the narrative testify that the work of talents indeed brought economic empowerment to women, for many could purchase assets such as houses and cars in their names. They are no longer used to borrowing, but instead, they are moneylenders. Guti encouraged this in his teachings when he discouraged church members from living in debt. He said living in debt is like living in prison. A Christian should live a free life, free of debt. This ability of women to own more than one property through the work of talents brought with it gender equality, for it challenges the traditional norms of men being property owners.

## **Economic Empowerment through Entrepreneurship**

The church's encouragement of venturing into small businesses is a testament to how religious institutions can play a pivotal role in economic empowerment. It emphasises the church's role in spiritual nourishment and fostering entrepreneurial spirit among its members. This intersection of religion, gender roles, and financial activities within the church community presents a unique socio-economic dynamic. It reflects on how religious teachings can influence not just personal and spiritual lives but also economic decisions and entrepreneurial pursuits, highlighting the multifaceted impact of religion on societal structures and individual behaviours. Upon being asked about the essence of working talents for the working class, she said that:

Regardless of whether one is educated or not, one must venture into a business that brings other sources of income besides the primary salary received from formal employment. She further highlights that sleeping without counting money made from a small business is a sin. Money is money; it does not tell where it came from. The emphasis was on doing business, big or small. The money from formal employment should not be used for working talents. That money should at least be used as capital to start a business. Baba Guti taught us that we must not rely on our monthly salary, which is insufficient (Mrs X, 52 years, 2024).

The discussion above shows that talent is not only for those who are unemployed but also for those who are employed and should also participate in the work of talents. According to Guti's teachings, the primary salary from formal employment is insufficient for business. Hence, one is supposed to venture into a business to substantiate the income. This will enable one to improve the standard of living. Guti teaches that a salary is not enough to earn a living, for no employer will pay sufficient money to the employees; they always ensure that you will always come back (Guti 2000). Guti's teachings also highlight the significant role of women in economic empowerment and development, both within the family and the larger church community. The emphasis on women working their talents and the discipline to save money champions women's economic independence and underscores their contribution to the socio-economic development of their communities.

### **Empowerment of Women and Poverty Alleviation**

The work of talents in FIFMI has been an agent of poverty alleviation among the members. As stated in the above narratives, many church members and people are convinced that people must use their hands to work and overcome poverty. In one sermon, Mother Eunor Guti discouraged people who display their problems on their foreheads. She said that when born again, everything should change for a Christian, including how you talk, walk, dress, and give offerings. These women confirmed that:

Work talents work as a broom that sweeps away poverty, and according to them, 'Talents was a school given to them by their father, Ezekiel Guti.' They said Guti describes the work of talents as a school designed to train women who are members of ZAOGA to be self-sufficient and develop business skills that will help generate income for their families (Guti 2000) (Focus group interview with five women, 2024).

Furthermore, the women said that:

Our church has themes throughout the year; some relate to the work of talents, such as fighting poverty with our hands. These themes have encouraged many members to work hard through the working of talents. Many church members graduated from senior lodgers to landlords; some moved from high-density to low-density suburbs. The themes enable members to possess territories in material things, including buying new cars and stands and sending their children to expensive schools (Focus Group interview with three women, 2024).

According to Chitando et al. (2017), the story above illustrates the Pentecostal concept of being brought from "nobodies" to "somebodies" (Psalms 113:8) and the thought that God is the one who removes beggars from jails and places them with kings. Many of the questioned women expressed great confidence that their lives had changed entirely, both socially and economically, because of using their talents.

## **Talents As an Agent of Gender Equality**

According to one of the critical responses:

There was a need to concentrate on women because they comprised a more significant percentage of the FIFMI community. However, there was a need to involve men in the work of talents due to changes in the current economy and the demographics of FIFMI starting in 2000. Some men began losing their jobs, which worsened the situation. This provides empirical evidence to support the notion that these skills are best suited for the family rather than women only (Mrs. X, 54 years 2024).

Although the work of talents seems to promote gender equality, this has been contested by Biri (2014), who argues that the work of talents brought about the oppression of women, for women are now breadwinners in most families. Some men have abdicated their responsibilities and are no longer fully committed to caring for their families and being providers.

Findings from the study offer a wealth of knowledge for future studies on the potential effects of religious practices and beliefs on talent development, economic empowerment, and the nuanced roles of gender in both the spiritual and professional domains. According to Guti (200,9), women are taught how to earn money at the School of Talents. Guti powerfully taught that talents were “not a mechanism for the church to extract money from people, but to empower believers to attain financial stability and overcome poverty” (Guti 2015, 6). However, this stereotype has a subtle impact on men’s resourcefulness and entrepreneurial desire because they are usually perceived as the primary breadwinners.

While Talents has garnered support from many women and is widely praised for its positive impact, some critics believe that the church’s role in advancing women’s liberation and societal transformation has been exaggerated. Some argue that despite providing women with economic opportunities, the emphasis on traditional gender roles and submission undermines the potential benefits for women. In an interview, one individual expressed the following sentiments:

Talents seem to be fading and losing their credibility because, after being taught to use our hands to sustain ourselves, we are taught to be submissive, resulting in our money being taken away by our husbands in the name of submission. Most women now do everything in the home with talents money. How am I expected to say no to my money being taken while I am taught to submit and be a good wife? I am powerless and cannot resist even if I want to (Mrs X, 28 years, 2024).

More so, the study found that by encouraging the work of talents that involve venturing into small businesses, as highlighted by some leaders interviewed, the church helps its members to succeed in business. In his teachings, Guti claimed that it is only through prayers that closed doors are opened. He stresses that talents are worked through worship; it is only through prayer that people buy products from a business (Guti 2015).

He further postulates that it is only through working talents that women have the discipline to save money and work toward the development of the church and their families.

## The Implications of the Study

By focusing on women's experiences within FIFMI, the study provides new insights into how faith-based organisations can serve as platforms for women's economic empowerment in South Africa. It highlights the significance of the "working of talents" as a practical approach to overcoming economic barriers. The study employs the "Matarenda Model of Entrepreneurship" and the "School of Talents" framework, enriching the existing literature on entrepreneurship and gender studies. It illustrates how these models can be applied in real-world contexts to facilitate economic development, thereby advancing theoretical understanding. By utilising qualitative analysis and oral history interviews, the research captures the nuanced personal narratives of women. This methodological approach adds depth to the understanding of individual experiences and the transformative potential of entrepreneurial activities within a religious context. The findings underscore the role of faith-based organisations in supporting gender equality and economic development, providing valuable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. It suggests that empowering women to utilise their talents can significantly contribute to achieving SDGs related to poverty alleviation and gender equality. Overall, this study enhances the understanding of how women's talents can be harnessed for economic transformation, providing a framework for future research and practical applications in promoting gender equity and economic resilience.

## Conclusion

Investigating women's experiences with the working of talents within the FIFMI uncovers a compelling narrative that underscores the dual themes of empowerment and economic transformation in South Africa. Through a qualitative analysis, the data reveals that these women's distinctive talents and skills are catalysts for personal development and community upliftment. The findings suggest that adopting the "Matarenda Model of Entrepreneurship" enables women to transcend traditional economic barriers, thereby facilitating their active participation in the economic milieu of their communities.

Moreover, the study advocates for an expanded focus on talent utilisation, extending beyond ecclesiastical objectives to encompass broader economic opportunities. Women are encouraged to fully embrace their capabilities, which allows them to explore and capitalise on various avenues outside the church environment. This paradigm enriches their personal lives and significantly contributes to the overarching objectives delineated in the SDGs, particularly SDG 5, which aims to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls. In conclusion, the success narratives of these women

illustrate that the working of talents extends beyond a mere ecclesiastical doctrine; instead, it serves as an essential framework through which women can achieve economic independence and effectuate social change. Therefore, policymakers and community leaders must recognise and support the potential inherent in women's talents, fostering environments conducive to their entrepreneurial endeavours. By acknowledging and investing in the skills and capabilities of women, society can advance towards a more equitable and prosperous future.

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