

Women's Unpaid And Invisible Work In The Context Of Community Volunteerism In South African Faith Communities

By

LERATO THELMA MSWELI

2026

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements forthe degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(Theology and Development)

At the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics College of Humanities

Supervisors:

Prof. Federico Settler
&
Prof Maheshvari Naidu

DECLARATION

I, LERATO THELMA MSWELI, declare that:

1. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated is my original research.

2. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree, or examination at any other university.

3. This dissertation does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs, or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

4. This dissertation does not contain any other person's writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources havebeen quoted, then:

- Their words have been re-written, but the general information attributed tothem has been referenced.
- Where there are exact words that have been used, their writings have beenplaced inside quotation marks, or indented and referenced.

5. This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source detailed in the dissertation andin the reference section.

.....



.....

LERATO THELMA MSWELI (219088514)

DATE.....



.....



.....

SUPERVISOR: PROF. F Settler

CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF. M Naidu

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Thamelina Nkosi, and my mother, Nomsa Nkosi.

I dedicate this work to two women whose lives were shaped by labour, endurance, and resistance. Long before I encountered feminist theory, I encountered feminism in practice through you, through the discipline of your work, the ethics of your care, and the dignity with which you carried responsibility in a world that rarely named such labour as worthy of recognition.

You did not have the language or tools of formal feminism, yet you embodied its deepest commitments: to survival, to justice, and to the sustaining of life under conditions of constraint.

I write, therefore, as Lerato kaNomsa kaThamelina, shaped by a lineage of women whose strength made my scholarship possible. This dissertation stands as a third-generation articulation of that inheritance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was made possible through the support and generosity of many individuals and institutions to whom I am deeply grateful.

I begin by giving thanks to God, whose sustaining grace carried me through the intellectual and personal demands of this doctoral journey.

I extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Federico Settler, for his rigorous scholarship, thoughtful guidance, and unwavering commitment to my development as a researcher. His mentorship shaped this project in significant ways. I am equally grateful to my co-supervisors, Professor Maheshvari Naidu and Professor Torsten Meireis, for their critical engagement and valuable interdisciplinary perspectives, which strengthened both the theoretical and methodological foundations of this study.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the International Research Training Group (IRTG) and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) for their generous financial support, without which this research would not have been possible. I also thank the Union Bible Institute (UBI) for providing accommodation and support during key phases of this project.

I am indebted to the women who participated in this study and shared their time, experiences, and insights with me. This work is grounded in their lives and narratives.

My deepest thanks and appreciation go to my mother, Nomsa Nkosi, and to my husband, Siphesihle Msweli, for their steadfast love, sacrifices, and encouragement throughout this journey.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late grandmother, Thamelina Nkosi, and to my mother, whose lives and labour first inspired my scholarly interest in the gendered nature of work.

ACRONYMS

AFTOW	African Feminist Theology of Work
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AWT	African Women's Theology
GAD	Gender and Development
ITVW	Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work
KZNCC	KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council
NVivo	Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QSR NVivo)
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SRT	Social Reproduction Theory
TOW	Theology of Work
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION II
DEDICATION III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS IV
ACRONYMS V
LIST OF FIGURES XI
LIST OF TABLES XII
ABSTRACT XIII
Chapter 1 Ngibone – to See and Be Seen 1
1.1. Introduction 1
1.2. Key Terms as Used in This Study 4
1.3. Significance of Unpaid Work 6
1.4. Research Problem 8
1.5. Method and Theory 11
1.6. Significance of the Study 13
1.7. Scope and Limitations of the Study 14
1.8. Overview of the Central Argument and Key Findings 16
1.9. Conclusion and Dissertation Structure 17
Chapter 2 Sinayo Lento Yokunakekela – The Gendered Logic of Care 20
2.1. Introduction 20
2.2. Historical Evolution of Unpaid Work and Volunteerism 22
2.3. Conceptualising Unpaid, Care and Volunteering Work 26
2.3.1. Care Work 27
2.3.2. Caregiving: 28
2.3.3. Formal Volunteerism 30
2.3.4. Informal Volunteerism and Community-Making Work 31
2.4. Gender and the Invisibility of Unpaid Care and Volunteering Work 32
2.4.1. The Gendered Invisibility of Unpaid Labour 32
2.4.2. Social Reproduction and the Care Economy 35
2.4.3. Affective and Spiritual Dimensions of Care Work 36
2.5. Faith-Based Volunteerism in African Contexts 38
2.5.1. The Church as Site of Labour and Community-Making 38
2.5.2. African Women's Theological Voices and Resistance 39
2.5.3. Ubuntu, Communal Ethics, and Gendered Care Burdens 41

2.6. Power Dynamics in Religious Communities 43
2.6.1. Gender Hierarchies and Theological Legitimation 44
2.6.2. Negotiating Authority and Recognition 45
2.6.3. Reproduction and Resistance 46
2.7. Conceptual Gaps and Contributions of This Study 47
2.7.1. Silences in the Volunteerism Literature 47
2.7.2. Economic Valuation and Measurement Challenges 48
2.7.3. Denominational Variation and Institutional Analysis 49
2.7.4. Intersectional Analysis and Decolonial Frameworks 49
2.7.5. The Spiritualisation of Labour and Theological Critique 50
2.8. Conclusion: Toward an African Feminist Theology of Work 50
Chapter 3 Ukuhlangana – Meeting, Meaning, and Method 53
3.1. Introduction 53
3.2. Gender and Development Theories 54
3.3. Social Reproduction Theory 56
3.4. Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work 57
3.5. Theology of Work 60
3.6. African Women's Theology 62
3.7. Constructing An African Feminist Theology of Work Framework 63
3.8. Methodology 69
3.9. The Ethics of Ukuhlangana 74
3.10. Use of Digital and AI-Assisted Tools 80
3.11. Data Analysis 81
3.12. Limitations and Reflections 84
3.13. Conclusion 86
Chapter 4 Bayangi Bona – Now They See Me 87
4.1. Introduction 87
4.2. Demographic Profile of Volunteers 88
4.2.1. Gender Imbalance Among Volunteers 88
4.2.2. Majority of Volunteers are Younger to Middle-aged Adults 89
4.2.3. Majority of Volunteers are from eThekwini 90
4.3. Faith-Based Demographics of Volunteers 92
4.3.1. The Majority of Volunteers Belong to Non-mainstream Faith Traditions 92
4.3.2. Long-term Church Membership is Common Among Volunteers 94
4.3.3. High Level of Engagement in Church Activities Among Volunteers 95
4.4. Volunteering Patterns and Experience 96
4.4.1. The Majority of Volunteers are Currently Involved in Volunteer Work 96

4.4.2. Majority of Volunteers Show Long-term Commitment to Volunteering 98
4.4.3. Majority of Volunteers Frequently Participate in Volunteer Activities.....99
4.4.4. The Diverse Range of Activities Volunteers Engage In.....100
4.4.5. Commitment of Volunteers to Multiple Types of Volunteering Activities 101
4.4.6. Breakdown of Diverse Range of Activities Volunteers Engage In 103
4.5. Motivational Factors for Volunteering 105
4.5.1. Faith Influences Volunteering Decisions.....106
4.5.2. Culture Influences Volunteering Decisions.....107
4.5.3. Church Membership Duration Correlates with Volunteering Engagement 108
4.5.4. Church Attendance Correlates with Volunteering Engagement.....109
4.5.5. Volunteering Frequencies Vary by Church Participation Levels 111
4.5.6. Higher Faith Influence is Associated with More Frequent Volunteering..113
4.5.7. Cultural Influence is Associated with More Frequent Volunteering 114
4.5.8. Faith Influences Volunteering Decisions Across Different Activities 115
4.5.9. Culture Influences Volunteering Decisions Across Different Activities...116
4.5.10. Engagement Levels in Various Volunteering Types Across Faith Traditions 117
4.5.11. Community/Culture and Faith Influences Volunteering Decisions Correlation 118
4.6. Conclusion 120
Chapter 5 Vuk'Uzenzele – Women Doing It By Themselves.....122
5.1. Introduction.....122
5.2. Participants Profiling 123
5.3. Balancing Volunteerism and Daily Life 127
5.3.1. Juggling Paid Work and Volunteer Work.....129
5.3.2. Balancing Family and Volunteer Work 132
5.3.3. Volunteerism and Personal Safety 138
5.4. Organic and Parochial Volunteerism 139
5.4.1. Locally Embedded Volunteerism 140
5.4.2. Women-led Initiatives.....143
5.4.3. Local Volunteerism As a Critique of Formal Volunteerism.....145
5.5. Volunteer work as a Social Safety Net 148
5.5.1. Filling Gaps in State and NGO Support 149
5.5.2. Volunteering As Advocacy.....152
5.5.3. Survival-driven Volunteerism.....154
5.6. Motivations for Volunteering 156

5.6.1. Love and Passion for the Work 156
5.6.2. Personal Experiences and Testimonies 158
5.6.3. Seeing Change and Being Seen 160
5.6.4. Work Experience and Survival 162
5.7. Conclusion 166
Chapter 6 Ngomusa Izandla Ziyovuna – Sowing, Serving, and Sustaining 168
6.1. Introduction 168
Section 1: Ubunzima Bezandla – The Burdened Hands 169
6.2. Gendered Division of Labour 169
6.2.1. Women Expected to Do Care Work 169
6.2.2. Men Take Leadership, Visible Roles 171
6.2.3. Household Labour Patterns are Reproduced in Public Volunteering 173
6.3. Gendered Access and Power 174
6.3.1. Male Dominance in Decision-making 174
6.3.2. Sexual Harassment and Power Abuse 176
6.3.3. Men Credited for Women's Work 177
6.3.4. Women Pushed Out of Paid Opportunities 178
6.4. Religion Entrenches the Invisibility of Gendered Labour 180
6.4.1. Care Work Spiritualised As Divine Duty 181
6.4.2. Submission Through Caregiving Roles 183
Section 2: Izandla EZibusisekileyo – The Blessed Hands 184
6.5. Volunteerism as Spiritual Currency – Ngizoyivunela 184
6.5.1. Serving Others As Worship 185
6.5.2. Calling, Endurance, and Sanctified Suffering 187
6.5.3. Spiritual Currency and Deferred Reward 188
6.5.4. Religious Identity over Material Compensation 191
6.6. Volunteerism As Mutual Aid – Izandla Ziyagezana 193
6.6.1. "Ubuntu" Moral Obligation to Uplift Others 193
6.6.2. "Izandla Ziyagezana" Collective Responsibility 194
6.6.3. "Indlela Ibuzwa Kwaba Phambili" Intergenerational Knowledge 196
6.7. Volunteerism as Social Network – Ukubambana 198
6.7.1. Churches As Organising Hubs 198
6.7.2. Limited Institutional Support (Space, not Funds) 200
6.7.3. Volunteers As Church Outreach Agents 201
6.7.4. Peer Encouragement Sustains Long-term Engagement 202
6.8. Volunteerism as Lived Theology – Ukuphila Ngokwenkolo 203
6.8.1. Faith Through Everyday Practice 204

6.8.2. Moral Authority Without Institutional Power....206
6.8.3. Living Christ Through Care and Service....208
6.8.4. Faith As Public Witness....211
6.9. Conclusion....215
Chapter 7 Bayangiphilisa – They Give Me Life....216
7.1. Introduction....216
7.2. Key Findings of the Study....217
7.2.1. Gendered Volunteerism as a Lived and Relational Practice....217
7.2.2. Informal Volunteerism as Community Infrastructure....218
7.2.3. Faith as Resource and Constraint in Women's Labour....219
7.2.4. Unpaid Labour as Lived Theology....220
7.3. Contributions of the Study....221
7.3.1. Empirical Contributions....221
7.3.2. Theoretical Contributions....222
7.3.3. Methodological Contributions....224
7.4. Implications....226
7.4.1. Implications for Theology and Theological Education....226
7.4.2. Implications for Churches and Faith Communities....227
7.4.3. Implications for Development Policy and Practice....228
7.5. Beyond This Study: Intentionally Incomplete and Future Directions....229
7.6. Closing Reflections: "There Is Still So Much to Be Done"....231
References....233
Appendix 2: Recruitment Materials....249
Appendix 3: Data Collection Instruments....251
Appendix 4: Consent forms....268
Appendix 5: Sample Anonymised Transcripts....275

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework – An African Feminist Theology of Work 67
Figure 2: Gender distribution of volunteers. 89
Figure 3: Age distribution of volunteers. 90
Figure 4: Location distribution of volunteers. 91
Figure 5: Faith tradition distribution of volunteers. 93
Figure 6: Church membership duration among volunteers. 94
Figure 7: Church participation frequency among volunteers. 95
Figure 8: Volunteering work involvement among volunteers. 97
Figure 9: Duration of volunteering work among volunteers. 98
Figure 10: Volunteering frequency among volunteers. 99
Figure 11: Counts of volunteering activities among volunteers. 101
Figure 12: Respondents' involvement in types of volunteering work. 102
Figure 13 -A, B, C and D Breakdown of Diverse Range of Activities.....103
Figure 14: Scale of faith influence in volunteering decisions among volunteers. 106
Figure 15: Scale of community/culture influence in volunteering decisions among volunteers. 107
Figure 16 A and B: Involvement rates by church membership and type of volunteering work among volunteers. 108
Figure 17 A and B: Involvement rates by church participation and type of volunteering work among volunteers. 110
Figure 18 A and B: Volunteering frequency by church participation among volunteers. 112
Figure 19: Trends between volunteering frequency and faith in volunteering decision. 113
Figure 20: Trends between volunteering frequency and community/culture in volunteering decision. 114
Figure 21:Trends between types of volunteering work and faith in volunteering decision. 115
Figure 22:Trends between types of volunteering work and culture in volunteering decision. 116
Figure 23 A and B: Involvement rates by faith tradition and type of volunteering work among volunteers. 117

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2: Faith and Culture Scale Statistics: 119
Table 3: Faith and Culture Score Distribution: 119
Table 4: Participants Profiling 127

ABSTRACT

Women's unpaid labour sustains households, churches, and communities across South Africa, yet this work remains systematically undervalued within economic policy, development discourse, and theological reflection. While feminist economics has established unpaid labour as central to social reproduction and the Theology of Work has reflected extensively on vocation and labour, the lived realities of informal, faith-based community work performed by Black women remain under-theorised and largely invisible. This study examines the gendered nature of unpaid work and community-making labour among faith-based volunteers in urban Black communities in KwaZulu-Natal. It asks how women navigate volunteerism, how such work reproduces or contests gendered inequalities, and what theological and cultural resources sustain their ongoing labour.

The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, combining a survey of 105 participants in Durban and Pietermaritzburg with in-depth narrative interviews with twelve women engaged in caregiving, food provision, church maintenance, and community support. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through thematic analysis and reflexive interpretation. The analysis is guided by an original theoretical framework termed an African Feminist Theology of Work, which synthesises Gender and Development theory, Social Reproduction Theory, sociological theories of volunteering, the Theology of Work, and African Women's Theology. This framework conceptualises unpaid labour as simultaneously economic, social, and theological, and as a form of community-making work rooted in faith, survival, and relational obligation.

The findings demonstrate that informal volunteerism functions as a primary system of social protection in contexts of poverty and limited state support, while remaining profoundly feminised and moralised through religious discourse. Faith emerges as ambivalent: it sustains women's participation by offering meaning and dignity, yet also legitimises unequal gendered expectations that normalise exhaustion and invisibility. The study contributes empirically by documenting informal faith-based volunteerism in urban South African communities, theoretically by developing an African Feminist Theology of Work, and methodologically by demonstrating the value of narrative theology within mixed-methods research. It argues that recognising women's unpaid labour as community-making work is essential for advancing gender justice, re-theologising labour, and rethinking development and social policy in African faith contexts

CHAPTER 1

NGIBONE
– TO SEE AND BE SEEN

1.1. Introduction

When we think about unpaid work, our minds often default to activities that are performed by women within the private sphere of the home; we think about tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving that are immediately recognised as unpaid labour (King, 2020). However, this narrow lens fails to capture the vast scope of unpaid work that extends into public spaces and community life. The literature often categorises unpaid work into three main types: domestic work, care work, and volunteerism (Perold and Graham, 2017; Oosthuizen, 2018; Faronbi et al., 2019; Asi and Williams, 2020; Nackerdien and Yu, 2021). Yet, even within these categories, there is a tendency to overlook the nuanced contributions that are often invisible within unpaid work in community settings.

Raised by a mother, a pastor's daughter, my early years were immersed in the traditions of faith and community service. My mother and her sisters often recalled growing up in the mission house, where they cleaned the church, arranged programmes, and visited the sick and elderly to lend a hand. At the centre of these traditions stood my grandmother, who, beyond church duties, founded support groups for women facing poverty or marital breakdown and led a sewing club that produced school jerseys for local children. Every Sunday, she ensured my grandfather, the pastor, was spiritually and practically prepared, from preparing his clothes and meals to arranging his sermon notes. Her contributions extended beyond Sundays; weekdays filled their home with congregants, and community members visited the pastor's home for counsel and prayer. My mother and her sisters ensured these guests were fed, the spaces were tidy, and everyone was welcomed warmly. Despite having two brothers, these responsibilities were not distributed equally among the siblings, with the majority falling on the women in the family.

As I grew older and became involved in church ministries and faith-based organisations, I witnessed how these patterns persisted. Women were often tasked with cleaning, organising

soup kitchens, planning events, maintaining parks, organising children's clubs, distributing food parcels, and tending community gardens. Yet, like my mother and grandmother, these women rarely saw their efforts as 'real' work. It was simply part of their faith and commitment to God's mission. Reflecting on these experiences, I began to question the gendered dynamics of volunteering within faith communities. My introspection deepened during my master's research, which critiqued the advancing field of Theology of Work through an African feminist lens. I highlighted how this field often overlooks the unpaid labour performed by women, thereby perpetuating gender inequality (Nkosi, 2021). This realisation motivated me to explore further the intersection of gender, faith, and volunteerism, examining how these dynamics shape the narratives of women like my mother and grandmother.

It became apparent as I read scholarship about unpaid work that when the concept of volunteerism is introduced, it is frequently framed within Western paradigms. This framing emphasises formal, organised activities facilitated by institutions such as charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and community outreach programmes (Russell, 2016). These models typically focus on structured acts of giving, where resources are redistributed from those with economic or social privilege to those without. However, this framing fails to capture the lived realities of informal volunteerism as it occurs in communities shaped by poverty and shared struggles (Compion, 2016). In South Africa, where inequality remains among the highest globally (World Bank, 2022), informal volunteerism plays a critical role in addressing gaps left by formal systems of support.

The stories, drawn from the lived experiences of participants in this study, demonstrate the significance of unpaid work in South African communities. Yet, countless similar stories remain untold and unrecognised, even within the very communities they work in. This prevalent invisibility raises a critical question: Why did my mother and grandmother, and so many others like them, not see themselves as workers in the context of their unpaid, invisible contributions?

The literature on volunteerism, particularly within faith-based contexts, offers some insights. Dominant attitudes about what constitutes work often devalue labour within the private sphere, especially when performed by women (Fisseha et al., 2021; Parry and Gordon, 2021; Gordon, 2021). These attitudes are shaped not only by societal gender norms but also by religious beliefs and values that reinforce traditional gender roles (Marie, 2012b; Asi and Williams, 2020). This

devaluation is not only a social issue but also a theological one. Both cultural norms and religious teachings contribute to shaping ideas about gender roles, which often results in the underappreciation of women's contributions in faith communities. Situated in the discipline of Theology and Development, this study finds it crucial to examine how these theological understandings of work, gender roles, and development contribute to the invisibility of such labour.

Through this PhD research, inspired by the stories and experiences of women who dedicate their time to unpaid community-making activities, I aim to shed light on the contours of unpaid care work and community-making within South African faith communities. This study seeks to challenge the norms that render this labour invisible, both in society and within theological frameworks, and to contribute to a deeper understanding of how these crucial contributions can be more fully recognised and valued. This dissertation takes a narrative approach, both methodologically and theoretically. I write not only *about* women's stories but *through* them, allowing their voices, idioms, and experiences to shape the texture of this research. Storytelling is thus not decorative; it is epistemological. It reflects a commitment to the feminist theological principle that knowledge emerges from lived experience and that theology itself is embedded in the everyday (Kanyoro, 2001; Oduyoye, 2001b). Narrative becomes the means through which invisible work is seen, named, and interpreted. This choice also reflects the African feminist theological conviction that women's lives are texts of theology (Kanyoro, 2001; Nyengele, 2004). By foregrounding these stories, I aim to re-theologise work through the lives of those whose labour sustains communities but rarely finds recognition in theological doctrine or development policies. In this sense, the narrative approach is both method and critique: it challenges the institutional silencing of women's labour while proposing story as a legitimate site of theological reflection.

Throughout this dissertation, I use terms such as *unpaid work*, *care work*, *volunteering work*, *informal volunteering*, *community-making work*, and *invisible labour*, sometimes interchangeably. This is not an inconsistency; it is a reflection. In practice, these boundaries were often blurred in the field. Women did not differentiate between caregiving, volunteering, and faith service. As one participant noted in passing, "We just help where there is need." Their linguistic choices mirrored lived realities: unpaid work was continuous, not categorical. Rather than treat these terms as fixed or mutually exclusive, I approach them as fluid and intersecting contours that illuminate different dimensions of women's unpaid work. In keeping with this

approach, the titles and subheadings of subsequent chapters are drawn deliberately from participants' own language and conceptual framings. These expressions emerged inductively from the field as women narrated their work in ways that resisted neat scholarly classification. To render these experiences solely through established academic categories would risk domesticating indigenous, African, and lived religious expressions of work into narrow and inadequate analytical terms. This dissertation, therefore, allows participants' words to shape not only the analysis, but also the conceptual architecture of the text

This interpretive stance is supported by a long line of feminist scholarship that critiques binary distinctions between productive and reproductive, paid and unpaid, formal and informal labour (Elson, 1999; Moser, 2012; Federici, 2020). Feminist economists such as Folbre (2018) and Budlender (2010) emphasise that unpaid work, whether caregiving, household management, or community volunteering, cannot be neatly compartmentalised. Similarly, sociologists like Compion (2016) and Russell (2016) show that in African contexts, informal volunteerism often overlaps with care and kinship obligations, thereby challenging Western categories of altruism and charity. In theology, this same fluidity has been recognised by Marie (2012a), Olojede (2014) and, Chisale (2018) who argue that women's unpaid work within faith communities is simultaneously spiritual and social, collapsing the distinction between ministry, care, and labour. These scholars affirm that language itself struggles to capture the complexity of women's work when that work is driven by both faith and survival.

1.2. Key Terms as Used in This Study

Following the traditions discussed above, my dissertation deliberately resists the urge to impose conceptual order. Rather than forcing women's labour into fixed categories, it traces the contours, the shifting and intersecting lines, through which faith, gender, and care meet. The aim is not to stabilise meaning but to reveal how meaning moves, how women's everyday negotiations of unpaid work generate their own theological insight. To map this terrain of women's unpaid labour within South African faith communities, the study employs eight interrelated terms. These are not presented as rigid definitions but as contours that overlap, blur, and sometimes merge. Each term captures a particular dimension of women's work while remaining connected to the others. The conceptual relationships among these terms are outlined below and will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 2.

Unpaid work: - refers to labour performed without financial compensation, including domestic tasks, caregiving, and voluntary activities that sustain households and communities (OECD, 2011; ILO, 2019). In this study, unpaid work is approached not only as an economic category but as gendered, relational, and spiritually inspired labour that upholds social life while remaining outside market valuation (Budlender, 2012; Makhulu, 2012).

Invisible work: - denotes socially necessary labour that remains unrecognised or undervalued in policy, theology, or public discourse. While it overlaps with unpaid work, the term highlights processes of erasure, how women's contributions are made unseen through institutional, cultural, or religious norms (Hatton, 2017; Murtola and Vallelly, 2023).

Care work: - encompasses both paid and unpaid tasks that meet others' physical, emotional, and social needs, including feeding, cleaning, teaching, and nursing. Feminist economists position care work as foundational to social reproduction and human well-being, yet it remains naturalised as women's responsibility and undervalued within labour policy and economic frameworks (Folbre, 2014a; Razavi, 2011; Elson, 1999).

Caregiving work: - is a more intensive and sustained form of unpaid care. It involves providing physical and emotional support to children, the sick, the elderly, or people living with disabilities (Akintola, 2008a; England, 2005). Distinguished by its constancy, relational depth, and emotional weight, caregiving is often framed as a moral or spiritual calling rather than labour, which further reinforces its invisibility (Folbre, 2014b; Himmelweit, 2007).

Volunteering work: - describes non-compulsory, unpaid activity performed for the benefit of others or the broader community. Global literature tends to define volunteering as organised civic participation, usually coordinated through NGOs, churches, or state programmes (Volunteer Activities Survey, 2018). In practice, volunteering is deeply gendered, frequently reproducing private-sphere care roles within public settings (Tiessen et al., 2021).

Formal volunteering: - refers to structured participation within recognised organisations such as churches, NGOs, or government programmes. These roles are institutionally coordinated, with defined tasks and schedules. Yet, even in these settings, women's volunteering often mirrors domestic caregiving roles, remaining unpaid and moralised as "service" rather than acknowledged as labour (Cavaliere, 2018; Kabugi, 2004).

Informal volunteering: - captures unpaid acts of help or service that arise spontaneously within families, congregations, and neighbourhoods. Rooted in Ubuntu ethics and collective survival, informal volunteering fills the gaps left by absent welfare systems and embodies relational, faith-driven responsibility (Akintola, 2010a; Metz, 2013; Russell, 2016). These activities are often not named as "volunteering," yet they form much of the social infrastructure that sustains communities.

Community-making work: - builds on Boserup's (1970) distinction between productive and reproductive labour, expanded by Moser (2012) to show how women's reproductive roles routinely move beyond the household, and further deepened through Marie's (2012) theological reading of women's work. The term refers to unpaid or voluntary activities that originate in the private sphere, such as feeding, caregiving, cleaning, and organising, but extend into public and faith-based life to sustain community well-being. These activities retain the same gendered patterns as household labour and remain structurally undervalued, even as they become essential to the moral, social, and spiritual life of communities (Friedemann-Sánchez and Griffin, 2011).

1.3. Significance of Unpaid Work

Unpaid and invisible work, especially in the context of community volunteerism by individuals who selflessly contribute to the well-being of their communities, plays a significant role globally (Chung et al., 2019). This universally shared commitment transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, resonating across nations and societies (Jackson and Adarlo, 2016). It is crucial to recognise that in the South African context, the contours of unpaid work, care work, invisible work and volunteering work take on unique shades, influenced by the rich history, traditions, and religious foundations that define these communities (Grönlund et al., 2011; Marie, 2012a; Adeyem et al., 2016; Rwafa, 2016; Luria et al., 2017). In South Africa, 41.7% of informal workers are recorded to rely on family members, particularly grandmothers, to care for their children (Horwood et al., 2019). Volunteer Activities Survey (VAS 2018) recorded that not only do women perform unpaid work more than men in South Africa, but also that 11.4% of these women do this kind of work to fulfil religious obligations. While 64.3% do it for a cause they believe in. These statistics are mirrored in my own survey of 105

respondents across Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and surrounding areas, where the vast majority of participants were women active in faith-based volunteering.

Volunteering has increased in South Africa over the last two decades, as the country's new democracy struggles to provide services while also ensuring its people's economic and social inclusion (VAS 2018). The idea that volunteering has the potential to strengthen social and economic institutions and thus contribute to social cohesion is driving the interest. Volunteering promotes mutual responsibility among communities as a form of social capital as a result of networks formed through mutual goals (Seabe, 2014). However, most development policies are targeted at generating pathways to and through economic growth, or compensating care for those who fall through the social provision net. The emphasis on paid labour participation makes invisible the prevalence of unpaid and community-making work, yet the demand for it remains unchanged (Friedemann-Sánchez and Griffin, 2011).

Unpaid work has gained a lot of attention from feminist scholars since it is largely performed by women (Bahn et al., 2020). Feminists have critiqued unpaid care work for perpetuating gender inequality (Fisseha et al., 2021; Parry and Gordon, 2021; Gordon, 2021), the risk in which it puts women who do care and community-making work (Benfante et al., 2020; Toffanin, 2021) and they have also argued that religious and cultural ideas often adversely influence the nature and poor recognition of unpaid work (Marie, 2012b; Asi and Williams, 2020). Feminist scholars have long argued that unpaid labour is central to social reproduction, even though it lies outside wage relations (Moser, 2012; Folbre, 2014a; Elson, 1999). In South Africa, Budlender (2010) and Oosthuizen (2018) shows that women shoulder the overwhelming burden of this work, while Dugarova (2020) Bahn et al. (2020) emphasising that gendered expectations naturalise it as women's duty rather than shared responsibility.

Within faith communities, the lines between service and spirituality often blur: what might elsewhere be called volunteering becomes a form of ministry or a calling. This convergence of care, faith, and community deepens the social value of women's contributions but simultaneously reinforces their invisibility. Religion thus plays a paradoxical role. On one hand, it provides moral motivation and a sense of purpose for unpaid work. On the other hand, it can sanctify inequality by framing women's service as obedience rather than labour (Marie, 2012a; Olojede, 2014; Chisale, 2018). The Theology of Work (TOW) tradition, with its focus on vocation, ethics, and paid employment, seldom accounts for these unremunerated acts of

faith. Yet as scholars such as Le Bruyns (n.y), Williams and Bentley (2016), and Rae (2019) remind us, theology has the capacity to affirm work in all its forms. What remains absent is a gender-aware theological reflection that recognises unpaid, faith-based labour as real and redemptive work.

This study, therefore, argues that the significance of unpaid work lies not only in its economic or social contribution but also in its theological meaning**.** By interpreting women's unpaid, faith-based labour as community-making work, this dissertation seeks to re-centre theology within the ordinary–where women's unpaid work, rather than institutions, holds communities together. Recognising this work as both a spiritual and a structural challenge, dominant definitions of labour expand the scope of TOW and affirm the value of women's invisible contributions to South Africa's moral and communal life.

1.4. Research Problem

Although work has long been recognised in the Theology of Work and unpaid labour firmly established within feminist economics, its full complexity within African faith communities remains under-examined. In South Africa, women perform extensive unpaid labour in homes, churches, and neighbourhoods–feeding, caring, organising, cleaning, teaching, visiting, and offering emotional and spiritual support. Yet much of this labour is not seen as work by the women who perform it, nor is it captured by existing theoretical, economic, or policy frameworks. The problem underlying this invisibility can be understood across three interconnected layers: terminology, methodology, and measurement.

First, language itself obscures women's labour. Although the term "volunteer" has religious and military origins "service" and has been traced from the biblical Hebrew from a word meaning "to give willingly," it only gained prominence in the twentieth century (Aleksandra Maria, 2019). In African countries, particularly South Africa, there is no specific term for volunteering; however, the practice has been present in collectivist cultures. Volunteering has been expressed through phrases like 'Umtu ngu mtu nga bantu', which emphasises the value of community over the individual (Hustinx et al., 2010; Seabe, 2014). Many Black South African women, therefore, do not identify their unpaid labour as "volunteering," because this term is culturally foreign, historically Western, and out of sync with local moral vocabularies.

As a result, the very language used in academic, economic, and theological discourse fails to capture how women understand, perform, and narrate their labour.

Second, dominant research tools and theories render African women's labour invisible by design. The absence of an African perspective in existing voluntarism theories makes the West the standard (Compion, 2016), as methodologies for data collection in Africa were developed for European, American, and Australian contexts (Russell, 2016). Research on voluntarism in Africa is limited to home-based care provided by women to people living with HIV, and formal volunteering is the focus of most studies. Thus, existing practices and participation in voluntary work in Africa are obscured and narrowed (Akintola, 2008b; Makina, 2009; Shargie, 2017; Biru et al., 2015; Simmonds et al., 2021). As Tanzarn (2024) argued, conventional research methods are not neutral; they can be actively harmful when they erase African women's experiences. Tools such as labour surveys and structured questionnaires rely on categories tied to cash income and formal employment. When asked, "Do you work?" a woman who spends sixteen hours a day sustaining her household, congregation, and neighbourhood will answer "No," because her labour falls outside the methodological imagination of the survey. Her work becomes uncounted, untheorised, and institutionally invisible.

Third, the systems used to quantify volunteerism reproduce these erasures. Research in South Africa overwhelmingly focuses on formal volunteering, which is easier to track, regulate, and statistically capture. Informal volunteering is far more prevalent but harder to measure. Without tools designed to capture responsibilities embedded in kinship, faith networks, and Ubuntu-based moral economies, the scale and significance of women's unpaid community labour remain obscured (Chadwick and Fadel, 2020). Russell (2016) argues, a genuinely global understanding of volunteerism requires endogenous measurement tools grounded in local realities rather than Western templates.

These three layers demonstrate that much of the unpaid labour performed by Black South African women in faith communities is structurally and conceptually obscured. The very systems meant to classify, record, or theorise labour are ill-equipped to recognise the survival-driven, relational, and faith-based work that sustains many communities. As a result, women's contributions disappear from academic literature, labour datasets, theological reflection, and policy frameworks, reproducing their invisibility across multiple domains. This dissertation responds to these gaps by shifting the analytical lens from rigid categories of "volunteering,"

"care," or "unpaid work" toward the contours of women's labour–its movement between the private and public spheres. It seeks to understand not only *what* women do, but *how* they navigate, negotiate, and make meaning of this labour within faith communities shaped by inequality, gender norms, and moral expectations. It is from within this conceptual and methodological problem-space that the main research question emerges:

What might we learn about the gendered nature of unpaid work and community-making work among faith-based volunteers in South Africa by examining the contours of care/volunteerism in urban Black faith communities?

- Sub-questions:
    1. How do women of faith navigate the volunteerism terrain in South Africa?
    2. In what ways might volunteerism and contours of care perpetuate gender injustices among and within South African faith communities?
    3. What theological or cultural resources do people draw on to sustain themselves/their volunteerism, and care work within their communities?
- Objectives:
    1. To examine the contours of volunteerism in urban Black faith communities in South Africa.
    2. To determine whether volunteerism and the contours of care perpetuate gender injustice or create opportunities for new power relations within South African faith communities.
    3. To construct a gendered Theology of Work that makes unpaid and invisible work visible.

In confronting the limitations of terminology, methodology, and measurement, the question directly addresses the core issue: that the forms of unpaid, faith-based, community-making work performed by women cannot be adequately understood through existing frameworks. Instead, they require approaches attentive to gender, culture, and theology–approaches that allow the work to be *seen*.

1.5. Method and Theory

Methodology

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, combining the strengths of lived experiences captured through qualitative data with the generalisable insights provided by quantitative data (Goundar, 2012). A sequential explanatory mixed-method design was used, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected independently and in sequence. In this design, quantitative data were collected and analysed first, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Findings from the qualitative phase were then used to explain and provide a more comprehensive contextualisation of the findings and interpretations drawn from the quantitative phase (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2023). The approach reflects my conviction that women's unpaid labour cannot be understood through numbers alone; it must also be heard and interpreted through story. A mixed-methods design, therefore, allowed me to map the larger landscape of faith-based volunteerism while also engaging the lived meanings and motivations that animate it. Guided by feminist and narrative commitments, the research unfolds in two phases.

Phase One – Quantitative Mapping:
An online survey distributed across interdenominational church networks in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and surrounding areas gathered 105 responses over three months. The questionnaire explored demographics, volunteering patterns, and motivations for service. This phase addressed the first sub-question: How do women of faith navigate the volunteerism terrain?

Phase Two – Qualitative Interpretation:
From the survey pool, twelve women aged 25–65 were selected for in-depth interviews. They represented diverse church traditions and community roles, teachers, caregivers, coordinators, and health volunteers. The interviews explored their daily routines, motivations, challenges, and the theological or cultural resources that sustained them. These conversations answered the second and third sub-questions: In what ways might volunteerism and care perpetuate gender injustice? And what theological or cultural resources sustain women's unpaid work?

Triangulation was used to integrate findings from both phases. Quantitative data were statistically summarised to establish trends; qualitative data were thematically analysed to

uncover meanings. Points of convergence strengthened validity, while divergences offered new insight. This dialogue between numbers and narratives enabled a more holistic account of unpaid work in faith communities. As a Black South African Christian woman**,** I occupy a dual position in this research: both insider and outsider. I share the religious and cultural worlds of my participants, yet I approach their stories as a scholar seeking to interpret them critically. This reflexive awareness shaped every stage of the study, from data collection to analysis, and is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws together insights from Gender and Development (GAD), Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), Wilson and Musick's Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work (ITVW), the TOW, and African Women's Theology (AWT). Each contributes a layer to the analytical lens through which unpaid, faith-based labour is examined.

1. GAD situates unpaid work within structures of inequality, showing how development processes depend on but rarely remunerate women's care. It emphasises empowerment through recognition and redistribution (Moser, 2012; Dugarova, 2020).
2. SRT explains how the daily and generational labour of care sustains the economic and moral order. It names unpaid work as the hidden infrastructure of society (Bhattacharya, 2017).
3. Wilson and Musick's (1997) ITVW distinguishes between formal and informal volunteering, linking participation to social, human, and religious capital. I extend this theory by incorporating *Izandla Ziyagezana*, following Seabe and Burger (2022), who expanded it by using Ubuntu as a form of cultural capital, reflecting African communal ethics of care and reciprocity.
4. TOW provides a theological vocabulary for reflecting on human labour, but has historically centred on paid employment. This study re-theologises TOW by foregrounding unpaid, gendered work as a locus of divine calling.
5. AWT challenges patriarchal readings of scripture and insists that women's lived experiences are sources of theological knowledge (Kanyoro, 2001; Nyengele, 2004; Olojede, 2018). It affirms storytelling as a theological method and the body as a site of revelation.

Together, these frameworks form an African Feminist Theology of Work (AFTOW) lens. GAD and SRT explain why women's unpaid labour is structurally invisible; ITVW and Izandla Ziyagezana describe how it operates socially; TOW and AWT interpret what it means spiritually. This synthesis enables the dissertation to treat women's unpaid work as simultaneously economic, social, and theological, a form of community-making labour that reveals both constraint and survival.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This dissertation makes a fourfold contribution, empirical, theoretical, methodological, and practical, to the fields of theology, gender studies, and development. At its core lies a conviction that the invisible labour of women in faith communities is the moral economy of survival**.** Recognising, naming, and theologising that labour is both an academic and a theological task.

Empirically, this study renders visible a form of labour that has been largely undocumented in South Africa: informal, faith-based volunteerism performed by Black Christian women in urban communities. By combining survey data from 105 participants with narrative interviews from twelve women, the study offers one of the few mixed-method insights into unpaid community-making work in the region. These women's stories reveal the relational, spiritual, and emotional infrastructure that keeps neighbourhoods functioning when formal systems falter. Their experiences expand existing understandings of who volunteers, why they volunteer, and what counts as work.

Theoretically, the dissertation integrates frameworks rarely placed in dialogue: GAD, SRT, Wilson and Musick's ITVW contextualised through *Izandla Ziyagezana***,** and the dual theological traditions of TOW and AWT**.** This synthesis produces an African Feminist Theology of Work**,** one that recognises unpaid, faith-based labour as both social reproduction and spiritual vocation. It reframes the household, church, and community as interconnected spaces of theological meaning rather than separate domains of "private" or "public" activity. In doing so, it contributes to global debates on the ethics of care, the invisibility of reproductive labour, and the contextualisation of theology in everyday life.

Methodologically, the research demonstrates how narrative and quantitative approaches can speak to one another. The sequential explanatory design maps broad patterns of volunteerism while the narrative interviews uncover the emotions, beliefs, and relationships behind those patterns. The study also models storytelling as a theological method, affirming that the interpretation of lived experience is itself a form of theorising. This approach bridges the disciplinary divides between sociology and theology, offering a framework for future feminist research in African contexts where boundaries between faith, culture, and survival are fluid.

Practically, the findings invite churches, NGOs, and policymakers to re-value and resource unpaid labour by highlighting the need for theological education that names care and community service as work worthy of recognition, support, and equitable sharing. Within congregations, these insights encourage a more inclusive theology of vocation, one that honours women's leadership and challenges the hierarchies that confine them to service without status. For policy actors, the research underscores the importance of integrating unpaid and informal work into local development planning.

1.7. Scope and Limitations of the Study

Scope of the Study

This research is situated within KwaZulu-Natal, focusing on the urban centres of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, where the women who participated in this study live and work. The province provides a rich context for studying unpaid and faith-based community work. According to the Volunteer Activities Survey (VAS, 2018), KwaZulu-Natal records one of the highest rates of volunteer activity in South Africa, much of it carried out by women through church-related initiatives. The study intersects the fields of Theology and Development, gender studies, and feminist economics, engaging in theoretical debates within these fields. Participants were Black South African women aged 25–65, all of whom identified as people of faith actively engaged in their communities. Their activities encompassed four categories of unpaid labour:

- ***Care work*:** caring for children, the elderly, the sick, and the vulnerable.
- ***Feeding schemes*:** organising and distributing food to households or church members in need.
- ***Cleaning and maintenance projects*:** ensuring the upkeep of shared spaces such as church buildings, halls, and community centres.

- ***Educational and extra mural support*:** running reading clubs, tutoring children, or mentoring youth.

By framing these activities as community-making work, the study highlights how women's unpaid labour shapes social cohesion and spiritual belonging in ways that transcend economic definition. While the study is geographically and demographically specific, its implications reach beyond KwaZulu-Natal. The patterns, meanings, and motivations that emerge are reflective of broader dynamics within South Africa and across many African faith communities where women's unpaid work forms the moral and social infrastructure of communal life.

Limitations of the Study

While this dissertation offers new insight into unpaid, informal, and faith-based community-making work, several limitations must be acknowledged**.** First, the study is context-specific. All participants were drawn from urban and peri-urban Black faith communities in Pietermaritzburg and Durban. These contexts, shaped by unique histories of migration, inequality, and religious diversity, cannot be assumed to represent all South African provinces or rural settings. The findings, therefore, reflect depth rather than national generalisability. Second, the sample reflects women who were already active in church-based networks. Women who do unpaid work but are not connected to congregations, such as informal traders caring for neighbours or secular community organisers, are not included. This narrows the scope to faith-based forms of care and volunteerism, which limits comparisons with non-faith contexts. Third, the mixed-methods design privileges women who have access to digital tools. The online survey required internet access and literacy, unintentionally excluding women in deeper poverty or those who rely solely on feature phones. Although the qualitative phase was compensated for through in-person interviews, the initial sampling frame may have missed voices on the furthest margins.

Fourth, informal volunteerism is difficult to measure by design. Acts of service such as feeding neighbours, sharing food parcels, offering emotional support, or accompanying people to clinics are often spontaneous and undocumented. While the study traces these patterns through stories and thematic analysis, it cannot estimate their full scale or economic value. Finally, theological meaning-making is interpretive. The dissertation reads women's narratives through

the lenses of AWT, SRT, and GAD. Other scholars might interpret the same stories through different theological or sociological frameworks, producing alternative insights.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a strong and grounded account of unpaid community-making work within South African faith communities and provides a foundation for future research that can broaden and deepen these findings.

1.8. Overview of the Central Argument and Key Findings

The central argument of this dissertation is that unpaid labour, especially as carried out by women in African faith communities, is not just economic or social work; it is gendered, has a religious aspect, and is meaningful because this work is not simply what women do but is where they live out their faith, build community, and sometimes resist injustice. The invisibility of this labour is not accidental; it is shaped by gendered, cultural, theological, and structural systems that continue to undervalue care work and informal community roles.

The findings that support this argument are drawn from both the survey and interview phases of this study. Quantitatively, volunteering within these faith communities is overwhelmingly carried out by women, and its patterns are shaped by religious affiliation, church involvement, and cultural expectation as much as by individual choice. Qualitatively, women described their unpaid work through the language of calling, grace, and discipleship rather than obligation, framing volunteering as an extension of faith rather than as work requiring recognition or compensation. Yet these same women also spoke of exhaustion, financial sacrifice, and limited institutional support, revealing a tension between the theological meaning women make of their labour and its material cost. This study develops an African Feminist Theology of Work (AFTOW) to hold this tension rather than resolve it prematurely. AFTOW argues that recognising unpaid work theologically requires three interconnected moves: recovering its sacredness, which development discourse tends to overlook; recognising it as a legitimate and life-giving site of community-making; and re-theologising how faith communities assign value to work in the first place. This framework challenges both secular and church spaces to see unpaid work as essential, not peripheral, and calls for its recovery, recognition, and re-theologising in equal measure.

1.9. Conclusion and Dissertation Structure

This first chapter, *Ngibone* – To See and Be Seen, opened by situating the study within the broader concerns of visibility and recognition. It calls us to see or to notice the often overlooked work of Black women in South African faith communities by tracing how women's unpaid and invisible labour within South African faith communities is both a social necessity and a theological neglect. The chapter introduced the research problem, questions, and objectives, while also explaining the significance of unpaid labour in faith-based and cultural contexts. This chapter also provides an overview of the research methodology and theoretical frameworks that guide the study. This dissertation is structured around seven chapters, each titled using isiZulu phrases drawn from the words and lived experiences of the women who participated in this study. These phrases serve as conceptual anchors, guiding the dissertation through an African feminist narrative arc that moves from seeing and understanding, to navigating and sustaining, and ultimately to recognising the life-giving value of unpaid work.

Chapter Two, *Sinayo Lento Yokunakekela* – The Gendered Logic of Care, offers an integrative literature review. It examines the gendered dynamics of unpaid work, care, and volunteerism in South Africa, and brings these into dialogue with feminist economics theories and theological reflections on care as labour, responsibility, and moral practice. The phrase *sinayo lento yokunakekela* (we have this thing to care) captures how care is both culturally assigned and naturalised as women's responsibility. This chapter identifies key debates, conceptual gaps, and limitations in current research across gender studies, theology, and development studies, setting the scholarly foundation for this study's unique contribution. This chapter argues that existing scholarship, while valuable, has largely overlooked the theological and faith-based dimensions of gendered unpaid labour in the South African context, establishing the conceptual gap this dissertation addresses.

Chapter Three, *Ukuhlangana* – Meeting, Meaning, and Method, lays out the theoretical and methodological choices of the study. *Ukuhlangana* (meeting) speaks to the research encounters, with participants, with theory, and with the field itself. It explores the frameworks that guide the research and also explains the mixed-methods, sequential explanatory design employed, including survey and interview strategies, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and measures to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. This chapter argues that a sequential mixed-methods design, read through the African Feminist Theology of

Work developed here, offers an appropriate way of capturing both the scale and the lived meaning of unpaid work within these communities.

Chapter Four, *Bayangi Bona* – Now They See Me, presents the quantitative findings mapping the gendered patterns of volunteerism in urban Black faith communities. *Bayangi bona* (they see me) represents the moment when previously invisible labour becomes visible and acknowledged. The chapter provides a demographic profile of the survey participants and uses descriptive statistics to illustrate trends in faith-based volunteerism. Through this data, we begin to see not just who volunteers, but how unpaid work quietly exists through women's daily lives. This chapter demonstrates, through the survey data, that volunteering in these communities is overwhelmingly gendered and shaped by religious and cultural expectations rather than by individual choice alone.

Chapter Five, *Vuk' Uzenzele* – Women Doing It for Themselve*s*, offers the first layer of qualitative analysis. This chapter shows how women navigate unpaid work within their communities. *Vuk'uzenzele* (wake up and do it yourself) captures the agency, self-reliance, and collective resilience of women who engage in community work despite systemic gendered constraints. The chapter presents key themes from in-depth interviews, highlighting strategies of resistance, negotiation, and redefinition. It also integrates and contrasts the qualitative themes with the survey data, offering a deeper analysis. This chapter argues that women experience and narrate their unpaid work not simply as volunteerism but as an expression of faith, calling, and community responsibility, even as that same labour exposes them to exhaustion and unequal burden.

Chapter Six, *Ngomusa Izandla Ziyovuna* – Sowing, Serving, and Sustaining, deepens the analysis by focusing on the theological and cultural resources that sustain women's unpaid labour. The first section, *Ubunzima Bezandla* (the burden of hands), explores how volunteerism reproduces gendered injustices, while the second section, *Izandla Ezibusisekileyo* (the blessed hands), shifts attention to the cultural and theological resources that sustain women's volunteerism despite these inequalities. In doing so, the chapter theorises *Izandla Ziyagezana* as an embodied extension of Ubuntu ethics of care. Together, these sections capture the central tension of women's volunteerism: the same hands that carry the burden of inequality are also the hands that sow, serve, and sustain life. This chapter argues that women's unpaid work

constitutes a form of lived theology, and that the very theological resources which sustain this labour also, at times, normalise the conditions that make such endurance necessary.

Chapter Seven, *Bayangiphilisa* – They Give Me Life, concludes the dissertation by drawing together the empirical, theoretical, and theological insights. *Bayangiphilisa* (they give me life) shifts the gaze from the burdens of unpaid labour to the sustenance, belonging, and deep meaning it provides. The chapter reflects on the implications for gender justice, theological education, and development policy, and proposes pathways for re-theologising unpaid work in South African faith communities. This chapter argues that recognising, valuing, and re-theologising unpaid work is not only a matter of gender justice but a theological imperative for faith communities committed to human flourishing.

CHAPTER 2

SINAYO LENTO YOKUNAKEKELA
– THE GENDERED LOGIC OF CARE

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the gendered logic of care by conducting an integrative literature review that situates unpaid and invisible work within broader scholarly, theological, and sociological conversations. Rooted in the belief that *sinayo lento yokunakekela*[1] is not just descriptive but diagnostic, this chapter seeks to understand how care has been historically framed, the ways in which it is racialised and feminised, and how it functions in informal volunteerism, particularly in Black South African Christian contexts. An integrative approach, as described by Torraco (2005) and Cronin and George (2023), is suited to this study because it allows for the synthesis of insights across multiple disciplines, including sociology, theology, gender studies, and development studies, as necessary for this research. This interdisciplinary approach also makes it possible to identify conceptual gaps, tensions, and silences within the literature (Torraco, 2005; Cronin and George, 2023). Given that unpaid work in this context is shaped by intersecting dynamics of faith, gender, race, and class, an integrative review is especially appropriate for engaging this kind of complex and multi-layered phenomenon.

The phenomenon explored in this dissertation, termed *informal volunteerism*, sits at the intersection of unpaid labour, caregiving, and community-making. While there is a growing academic interest in volunteerism globally (Musick and Wilson, 2007; Chus, 2014; Manchego, 2019), much of it is based on formal, Western models that don't fully capture the kind of organic, relational, and gendered forms of unpaid work that sustain life in many African communities (Patel et al., 2007; Russell, 2016). This leaves little room to understand the day-to-day, unpaid work done by Black Christian women, which contributes to keeping churches and communities afloat but whose efforts are rarely seen as labour at all. I use the language of *unpaid* and *invisible* work intentionally. These terms allow me to engage feminist, theological,

[1] *"Sinayo lento yokunakekela"*–we have this thing of caring. (Buhle)
These words were spoken by the participant as both burden and blessing. A cultural ethic. A spiritual calling. A gendered expectation. For many Black Christian women, care is not simply something they do but it is something they are expected to embody.

and sociological critiques that question why certain kinds of work are recognised, compensated, and celebrated, while others, especially those done by women, in the home, or in the name of God, are naturalised, spiritualised, or undervalued (Marie, 2012a; Tronto, 2020) I also use the term *informal* to highlight a particular kind of volunteerism that does not come through formal organisations, contracts, or development programmes, but emerges organically from cultural expectations, relational duty, and religious conviction.

This chapter is organised thematically, with each section exploring a different dimension of the literature that informs my study, often pulling from different disciplines such as feminist theory, African theology, cultural sociology, development studies, and volunteerism research to provide a layered reading of the problem. In doing so, I centre the work of South African and broader African scholars, whose work speaks most directly to the socio-political contexts that shape the lives of the women in my study. Where local scholarship is limited or still developing, I extend the scope to include scholars from the Global South and global feminist contributions, especially where they offer concepts or critiques that resonate with the lived realities I am trying to describe.

Throughout this review, I position myself not only as a researcher but also as a Black South African woman who has witnessed, and at times participated in, the very forms of unpaid work this chapter seeks to name and examine. As a decolonial feminist scholar, I am committed to liberatory research practices that make visible the lives, voices, and spiritual convictions of those too often marginalised in academic discourse. The objective of this review is therefore not only to engage critically with the literature but also to disrupt dominant paradigms that render women's unpaid labour peripheral, incidental, or inevitable.

The chapter begins by providing a historical overview of unpaid and voluntary work and conceptualising volunteerism, with particular attention to the distinctions between formal and informal modes of volunteerism. It then moves into discussions of gendered unpaid work, faith-based volunteerism, African women's theological interventions, and the power dynamics at play within faith communities. The chapter concludes by identifying the conceptual gaps that this dissertation seeks to address.

2.2. Historical Evolution of Unpaid Work and Volunteerism

The historical development of unpaid work and volunteerism has received growing scholarly attention across development studies, sociology, economics and gender studies. Yet, despite the expanding literature, there is little agreement on where the history of volunteerism should begin. Much of this uncertainty arises because the practices associated with volunteerism are far older than the language used to describe them. As Wilson (2000), Rochester et al. (2010) and Hustinx et al. (2010) observe, people have cared for neighbours, supported vulnerable households and contributed their labour to the well-being of their communities long before these activities were recognised as "volunteerism." Patel et al. (2007) make a similar observation in the South African context, arguing that while volunteerism has become increasingly institutionalised in recent decades, its roots lie in much older traditions of mutual aid and collective responsibility. The historical question, therefore, is not simply when volunteerism emerged, but how different societies have understood, organised and valued unpaid work over time. Tracing this evolution provides an important foundation for understanding why unpaid work continues to occupy such an ambiguous place within contemporary debates on development, gender and faith communities.

As the literature has evolved, so too have the questions scholars ask about unpaid work. Earlier studies were largely concerned with explaining why people volunteered, often interpreting volunteerism as an expression of altruism, civic participation and social responsibility (Wilson & Musick, 1997; Wilson, 2000; Rochester et al., 2010). More recent scholarship, however, paints a far more complex picture. Feminist economists, development scholars and gender scholars have challenged the assumption that all unpaid work is freely chosen or motivated solely by altruism. Instead, they argue that much of what is described as volunteerism also constitutes unpaid reproductive labour that sustains households, communities and institutions while remaining largely invisible within economic systems and public policy (Molyneux, 1979; Folbre, 1994; Elson, 1999; Razavi, 2007; Budlender, 2011; Fraser, 2016; Haddad, 2004). Contemporary scholarship has shifted from asking why individuals volunteer to asking whose labour continues to be labelled voluntary and why that labour remains undervalued despite its central role in sustaining society.

These debates take on particular significance within South Africa, where unpaid work has developed within a society profoundly shaped by colonialism, apartheid and democratic

transition. Patel et al. (2007) argue that contemporary patterns of voluntary action cannot be understood apart from the country's history of racial inequality, fragmented welfare systems and uneven development. Everatt (2005) similarly contends that volunteerism in South Africa reflects far more than charitable giving; it represents a complex intersection of civic participation, religious commitment, historical necessity and community resilience. These studies suggest that the meaning of unpaid work has never remained static. What began as reciprocal communal responsibility within indigenous societies was later reinterpreted through missionary Christianity, reshaped by apartheid's racialised political economy, and subsequently reframed within post-apartheid development discourse. The existing literature, therefore, reminds us that volunteerism is not a fixed concept but one whose meaning has continually shifted alongside changing political, economic and religious realities.

Much of the literature traces the origins of unpaid work to indigenous African systems of communal reciprocity. Before colonialism, reciprocal labour was woven into the fabric of everyday life rather than separated into distinct categories of economic activity or voluntary service. Scholars such as Mbiti (1969), Nussbaum (2003), Mkhize (2008) and Metz (2011) describe communities in which caring for vulnerable people, supporting bereaved families, cultivating communal fields and assisting during times of hardship were understood as collective responsibilities embedded within kinship networks and the philosophy of Ubuntu. These practices were not regarded as charitable acts performed by exceptional individuals. Rather, they reflected an ethic of mutual obligation through which communities sustained social cohesion and collective well-being. At the same time, the literature cautions against romanticising these communal arrangements. Mkhize (2008), for example, observes that reciprocal systems were already characterised by a gendered division of labour in which women carried primary responsibility for the daily work of care, while men's responsibilities were more commonly associated with public or episodic communal activities. These early patterns of caregiving would prove remarkably resilient, reappearing in different forms throughout South Africa's subsequent history.

The arrival of colonialism did not erase these indigenous systems of reciprocity; instead, it reshaped them in significant ways. Scholars such as Comaroff and Comaroff (2008; 2009) and Elphick (2012) argue that colonial administration and missionary Christianity introduced new institutional structures through which unpaid labour was organised and interpreted. Mission stations depended heavily on the unpaid or minimally remunerated labour of African converts,

particularly women, who served as teachers, nurses, caregivers, evangelists and domestic workers (Gaitskell, 1990; Haddad, 2004). Yet this work was seldom recognised as productive labour. Instead, it was framed through theological language that emphasised sacrifice, obedience, vocation and Christian service. In effect, religious commitment became one of the principal ways through which women's unpaid labour was both encouraged and legitimised, even as its economic significance remained largely unacknowledged.

The literature pays particular attention to the emergence of women's church organisations, especially the manyano, within South African Christianity. Gaitskell (1990) and Haddad (2004) describe these organisations as occupying a deeply paradoxical position. On the one hand, they reinforced gendered expectations by institutionalising women's responsibility for the caring work of the church. On the other hand, they created spaces in which women exercised leadership, nurtured one another's faith and developed forms of theological agency that were often unavailable elsewhere. Rather than viewing these organisations as either wholly oppressive or wholly liberating, the literature presents them as sites where empowerment and constraint existed simultaneously. This tension remains central to contemporary African feminist theological scholarship and echoes many of the experiences shared by participants later in this study.

A different picture emerges during the apartheid period. As racial segregation deepened and access to state welfare became increasingly unequal, churches, burial societies, neighbourhood associations and extended family networks assumed responsibilities that the state either could not or would not fulfil (Walker, 1990; Walker, 1991; Cock, 1989; Hassim, 2006). Under these conditions, unpaid work became far more than voluntary service; it became an essential mechanism of community survival. Black women, in particular, absorbed the social costs of apartheid by caring for the sick, supporting orphaned children, organising food assistance, maintaining burial societies and sustaining everyday community life despite widespread poverty and political exclusion (Walker, 1991; Hassim, 2006; Budlender, 2011). Looking back, it becomes difficult to draw a clear line between survival and volunteerism because, for many communities, the two were inseparable.

It is also during this period that the scholarly conversation begins to change. Earlier accounts often celebrated community self-help as evidence of resilience and solidarity. More recent feminist scholarship offers a more critical reading, arguing that such narratives risk obscuring

the structural inequalities upon which this resilience depended (Cock, 1989; Hassim, 2006; Budlender, 2011). What development discourse would later describe as volunteerism was, for many women, neither optional nor separate from the ordinary work of sustaining families and communities. This shift in interpretation is significant because it reminds us that the history of unpaid work is not simply a history of changing practices; it is equally a history of changing ways of seeing and naming those practices.

The democratic transition after 1994 introduced another important chapter in both policy and scholarship. The rapid growth of civil society organisations, together with legislative reforms such as the Nonprofit Organisations Act (1997), contributed to the formalisation and professionalisation of volunteer work through registered organisations and development programmes (Habib & Taylor, 1999; Swilling & Russell, 2002; Patel et al., 2007). At the same time, international bodies such as the International Labour Organisation (2019), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011) and the United Nations Volunteers (2018) encouraged governments to measure volunteer work and recognise its contribution to economic development. Yet scholars caution that this formal picture captures only part of the story. Russell (2016) and Patel et al. (2007) argue that much of South Africa's unpaid work continues to occur beyond formal organisations, embedded instead within households, neighbourhoods and faith communities where care remains relational, informal and largely unremunerated. Consequently, contemporary scholarship has become increasingly concerned not only with documenting volunteer participation but also with understanding why these historically significant forms of labour continue to receive limited economic, social and theological recognition.

This body of literature demonstrates that unpaid work has never been merely an economic activity or simply an expression of altruism. Across different historical periods, it has functioned as a social, cultural and theological practice through which communities have sustained themselves in the face of changing political and economic realities. Although the language used to describe such work has shifted, from communal obligation and Christian service to civic participation and volunteerism, the gendered character of care has remained remarkably consistent. It is within this historical continuity, and within the enduring invisibility of women's labour, that the present study is situated. The following section, therefore, turns to the conceptual debates surrounding unpaid work, volunteerism and care work that emerge from this historical trajectory.

2.3. Conceptualising Unpaid, Care and Volunteering Work

Unpaid work is often defined as labour performed without financial compensation (ILO, 2019; OECD, 2011). However, such a simple definition fails to capture the full weight and complexity of the kinds of work that many women in communities like mine perform daily. This economic framing conceals a complex terrain of social, cultural, and gendered practices. Across disciplines, unpaid work is commonly described in policy and economic terms and is typically located outside the formal economy, encompassing domestic labour, care work, and voluntary activities that contribute to household survival and community well-being (Budlender, 2011; Razavi, 2011). Yet, the ways in which unpaid labour is framed, and whose work is made visible within these framings, vary significantly depending on disciplinary focus, geographic context, and ideological positioning.

The OECD (2011) defines unpaid work as the production of goods and services for household or communal consumption that fall outside formal market transactions. While this economic definition is useful for statistical measurement, it has been critiqued for its narrowness, reducing human relationships to economic outputs and failing to capture the relational and cultural meanings of unpaid labour, particularly in Global South contexts (Budlender, 2008; Esquivel, 2014). Budlender (2012) attempts to broaden this framing through her analysis of time-use studies, distinguishing between unpaid self-care and care work performed for others, including housework, caregiving, and volunteering. However, even her expanded definition continues to lean heavily on the logic of economic contribution, risking the exclusion of the spiritual, emotional, and communal dimensions that shape unpaid labour in African settings. Building further on these critiques, Skinner and Rogan (2019) distinguish unpaid work from informal work, noting that while informal work occurs within the market but remains unregulated, unpaid work lies entirely outside the sphere of monetary exchange. This distinction is critical for my study as it provides conceptual pathways to understand community-based care and religious labour that materially and socially sustain communities, yet often remain excluded from wage-based and policy frameworks.

In contrast to these predominantly economic framings, Makhulu (2012) draws from African feminist and cultural perspectives to argue that unpaid work in South Africa cannot simply be understood through the absence of financial remuneration. Rather, it must be seen as a

culturally and spiritually embedded practice shaped by moral obligation, gendered expectations, and communal responsibility, realities often invisible within market-driven definitions. Recent studies, such as Hatton (2017), have built on this argument by framing unpaid labour as work essential to social reproduction, yet systematically excluded from structures of recognition and compensation. Similarly Murtola and Vallelly (2023) describes unpaid labour as "socially necessary labour that remains invisible in market-based economies." These scholars move the conversation beyond the binary of paid versus unpaid, highlighting the structural mechanisms that render particular forms of labour, especially those performed by women, unseen and unvalued.

In this study, I build on these critical perspectives by approaching unpaid work not as a residual economic category, but as a socially and theologically significant form of labour. Rather than defining unpaid labour solely through the absence of monetary compensation, I conceptualise it as a set of gendered, relational, and culturally meaningful practices that sustain families, congregations, and communities. This framing creates space to explore care work and caregiving not as isolated domestic tasks, but as core expressions of unpaid labour embedded in the everyday life of faith communities.

2.3.1. Care Work

Within the broader category of unpaid work, care work stands out as one of the most visible yet paradoxically invisible forms of labour. It encompasses the daily tasks that maintain households and sustain the well-being of others. Scholars such as Folbre (2014a) and Razavi (2011) have underscored the centrality of care work in the processes of social reproduction, even as this work remains naturalised as women's responsibility and largely excluded from economic and labour policy frameworks. Friedemann-Sánchez and Griffin (2011) argue that a significant portion of unpaid work consists of care work, yet caregiving must be distinguished as a more intensive subset of this category. While both are integral to maintaining households and communities, caregiving demands a different level of emotional and physical investment. Their work extends social health frameworks to analyse the specific dimensions of caregiving and its intersection with health, economy, and gendered labour practices.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2019) defines care work as labour that meets the physical, psychological, and social needs of others, whether paid or unpaid. Within this

framing, some aspects of care work, such as domestic work and nursing, are formally recognised and compensated within labour markets. However, scholars such as Elson (1999) and Sharma and Singh (2025) note that the majority of care work, particularly in the Global South, remains unpaid, unaccounted for, and confined to the private sphere. These daily acts of survival, cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare, are essential to sustaining the formal economy but are structurally devalued because they are framed as natural extensions of women's domestic roles. Folbre (2014a) emphasises that care work is foundational to the functioning of capitalist economies. Without the unpaid labour of feeding, nurturing, and educating, the formal labour market itself would falter. Yet despite this essential role, care work continues to be rendered invisible, both statistically and ideologically. Feminist economists such as Elson (1999); Sharma and Singh (2025) have long argued that this invisibility stems from its deep association with women's "natural" domesticity, rather than being recognised as skilled and socially necessary labour. Asi and Williams (2020) add that even when women enter the formal workforce, they often carry a "double burden" of paid employment alongside domestic responsibilities, thereby reinforcing systemic gender inequalities.

In the South African context, these burdens are further compounded by structural inequality and communal expectations. Care work frequently extends beyond the nuclear family to encompass broader kinship networks and neighbourhood support systems. Grounded in the philosophy of Ubuntu, care is understood not merely as a household responsibility but as a shared moral ethic embedded in community life (Waghid and Smeyers, 2012; Metz, 2013). Akintola (2010b) documents how grandmothers, aunts, and older siblings often assume unpaid domestic roles that sustain multiple households, particularly in low-income urban and rural areas where state services are absent or inadequate. These practices reflect both cultural values and material realities, underscoring how the unpaid care economy fills critical gaps left by formal institutions.

2.3.2. Caregiving:

While care work typically involves routine, task-based domestic responsibilities, caregiving refers to a more sustained and intimate form of unpaid labour. Caregiving encompasses the physical, emotional, and interpersonal support offered to individuals who are unable to care for themselves due to illness, age, disability, or other forms of vulnerability (England, 2005; Akintola, 2008b). Unlike general household tasks, caregiving is marked by its immediacy,

unpredictability, and intensive emotional labour. It demands not only time and physical effort but also significant psychological resilience, often stretching caregivers beyond scheduled duties into constant vigilance, presence, and emotional support. Feminist scholars emphasise that while caregiving is socially expected, it is institutionally unsupported (Elson, 1999; Himmelweit, 2007). Unlike care work, which can often be compartmentalised into distinct tasks, caregiving is ongoing and relational. Folbre (2014b) describes caregiving as emotionally intensive and morally saturated labour, requiring caregivers to invest in ways that often strain their health, emotional well-being, income security, and personal autonomy. Despite its centrality to the reproduction of society, caregiving remains largely absent from national labour statistics, development plans, and policy frameworks, reflecting a broader structural undervaluation of relational labour typically performed by women (Himmelweit, 2007).

In the South African context, the gendered dynamics of caregiving have been made particularly visible through public health crises, notably the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Akintola (2008a) documents how women, particularly in low-income communities, stepped in to care for sick relatives, orphaned children, and neighbours without institutional support or financial compensation. This caregiving labour is shaped by complex intersections of gender norms, cultural imperatives, and religious convictions. As Akintola (2010b) shows many women frame their caregiving not only as a familial duty but also as a spiritual calling or a form of Christian service. This moral and religious framing further legitimises their labour, even as it reinforces its invisibility and unpaid nature. The economic consequences of unpaid caregiving are far-reaching. Posel (2025) in her quantitative analysis argues that women who assume long-term caregiving responsibilities often withdraw from formal employment or education, this perpetuates cycles of poverty and economic vulnerability. Feminist economists Bahn et al. (2020) and Harcourt (2023) argue that this reflects not merely individual sacrifices, but systemic failures to recognise and support caregiving as essential labour. As such, caregiving must be understood not only as an extension of care work but as a distinct form of unpaid labour.

This conceptualisation is critical for understanding how caregiving practices extend beyond private households into community spaces, often through informal forms of volunteerism that blend spiritual, cultural, and social responsibilities. It is to this trajectory–how caregiving moves into broader communal realms–that I now turn.

2.3.3. Formal Volunteerism

Volunteerism, particularly in African contexts, often presents as an extension of caregiving practices. In the literature, this form of unpaid labour is sometimes described as "secondary caregiving" by Akintola (2010b), distinguishing it from primary, household-based caregiving. Secondary caregiving encompasses unpaid acts of support provided to extended kin, neighbours, or broader community members, including providing meals, visiting the sick, mentoring youth, and organising church-based welfare activities. Though not always labelled as "volunteering" in formal terms, such practices function as essential infrastructures of care and community support.

Mainstream global literature often portrays volunteerism as a formal act of civic engagement, structured and organised through NGOs, government initiatives, or religious institutions Volunteer Activities Survey (2018). Within this framework, secondary caregiving is frequently situated as unpaid care for non-family members in public spaces. However, as Tiessen et al. (2021) argue, even formal volunteerism heavily relies on gendered expectations that mirror private caregiving roles. Women are disproportionately assigned care-oriented and relational volunteer tasks, often celebrated as "empowering" while remaining unpaid and unrecognised as legitimate labour. Faith-based volunteering, too, is deeply gendered. Kabugi (2004) examines how Catholic women in Kenya participate in parish-led initiatives focused on health outreach, poverty alleviation, and empowerment. Although these initiatives are formally organised, the labour remains unpaid and spiritually framed as "service unto God" rather than labour deserving of material recognition. Similarly Cavaliere (2018) critiques the romanticisation of religious volunteerism, especially when performed by women, arguing that moral narratives of selflessness and virtue obscure the emotional, physical, and economic costs borne by volunteers.

Even within structured settings, volunteering reproduces what Niehof and Wahlen (2017) and Dean (2022) terms a "gendered moral economy of care," where women's unpaid labour sustains faith communities, public life, and civic infrastructures, while remaining largely invisible in institutional and policy narratives. Folbre (2014b) refer to this dynamic as a "gendered economy of care," where women's invisible work underpins the functioning of communities without corresponding support or recognition. Yet, much of the scholarship on volunteerism remains silent on informal, relational, and community-driven forms of service

that occur outside formal structures. In many African settings, particularly in economically marginalised and religious communities, informal volunteerism is not the exception but the norm. It arises organically from everyday relationships, communal values, and religious obligations, and is critical to survival in contexts where formal social services are absent.

2.3.4. Informal Volunteerism and Community-Making Work

Informal volunteerism refers to unpaid acts of support and service that emerge outside structured organisations, arising organically through communal relationships, moral economies, and religious values. Unlike formal volunteering, informal volunteerism is spontaneous, relational, and deeply embedded in local networks (Einolf et al., 2016; Saunders, 2020). It covers a wide range of activities like cooking for church events, organising burial societies, mentoring young people, visiting the sick, all performed without contracts, formal recognition, or expectation of material reward. These acts are often described not as "volunteering" per se, but as "helping," "serving," or "doing God's work" (Saunders, 2020; Dean, 2022). Despite their significance to community survival and resilience, informal volunteer activities remain largely invisible in scholarly debates and policy frameworks. Johnsen (2013) and Russell (2016) argue that dominant research on volunteerism privileges formal, measurable, Western models of civic participation, creating a conceptual hierarchy that sidelines informal, feminised, and faith-based practices, especially in the Global South. Although some typologies, such as those developed by the United Nations Volunteers such as Chus (2014) and Manchego (2019), attempt to include informal volunteering, they often fall short of capturing the relational depth, survival imperatives, and moral economies underpinning such work in African communities. Informal volunteerism in these settings is not simply a matter of altruism; it is often a response to systemic neglect, social crises, and the collapse or inadequacy of formal welfare systems (Kabugi, 2004; Chilongozi, 2022).

Kabugi (2004) and Chilongozi (2022) show that grassroots women's networks in faith communities take on unpaid volunteer roles not because they have surplus time or resources, but because the survival of their communities depends on it. These unpaid acts of service form vital civic infrastructures, bridging the gaps left by absent or inaccessible formal support structures. Yet, because this labour is spiritualised and moralised, framed as a "calling" or "ministry" rather than as skilled work, it remains systematically devalued (Cavaliere, 2018; Tiessen et al., 2021). In the South African context, informal volunteerism is tied to Ubuntu

ethics, gendered expectations, and Christian religious values. Akintola (2010b) and Metz (2013) illustrate how caregiving and volunteering practices in township churches and community groups are grounded in collective responsibility and moral obligation. These practices create a parallel civic infrastructure, one that is neither state-led nor NGO-driven, but rooted in local moral worlds and everyday survival strategies. Informal volunteerism, then, must be understood as community-making work: unpaid, relational labour that sustains not only individuals but entire social worlds. Recognising and theorising this work is crucial for shifting dominant paradigms of volunteerism, care, and citizenship, especially in contexts where women's unpaid contributions are foundational to collective well-being yet remain invisible.

2.4. Gender and the Invisibility of Unpaid Care and Volunteering Work

Unpaid work is fundamentally gendered, rendered invisible by dominant economic and social frameworks, and deeply embedded within structural, cultural, and theological systems (Folbre, 2001; Posel, 2025; Marie, 2012). Drawing on feminist economics, African gender scholarship, and faith-based perspectives, as ground to interrogate the normative assumptions that exclude unpaid work from definitions of labour and value. The subsections that follow unpack key debates around invisibility, social reproduction, the multiple burdens borne by women, and the affective and spiritual dimensions of care and volunteerism, particularly within faith-based and community contexts.

2.4.1. The Gendered Invisibility of Unpaid Labour

Feminist critiques have long contested the erasure of unpaid work from mainstream economic frameworks. Central to these critiques is the argument that dominant models of productivity, especially those underpinning neoclassical economics, treat the household as a site of consumption rather than production, thereby excluding unpaid care, domestic work, and volunteerism from formal accounts of labour (Folbre, 2001; Budlender, 2008). Nancy Folbre (1994) asserts that the economy is "gender-blind but not gender-neutral," because it systematically relies on and devalues the labour that women disproportionately perform outside waged employment. In the South African context, Debbie Budlender's (2008, 2010) pioneering work with time-use surveys has revealed the extent to which women, particularly Black women, shoulder the majority of unpaid labour within households and communities. Budlender demonstrates that such labour, though foundational to the functioning of society and the

economy, remains unaccounted for in GDP calculations, budget allocations, and labour protections. This invisibility is not accidental but structural, rooted in colonial-capitalist logics that extract value while erasing the labouring bodies that sustain life and community. Building on Budlender's quantitative work, South African feminist scholars have demonstrated how the invisibility of unpaid care work is maintained through intersecting systems of gender, race, and class that have their roots in colonial and apartheid labour regimes (Marindi & Batisai, 2024; Cohen, 2022).

The structural mechanisms that render unpaid care work invisible operate at multiple levels. First, state withdrawal from social provisioning, scholars writing on post-apartheid welfare reforms note how the gradual retreat of the state from social support has shifted care responsibilities from public institutions onto unpaid household and community labour, making these costs invisible in budgetary and productivity metrics (Swanson & Carreon, 2024; Akintola, 2008). This informalisation of care is particularly acute in low-income Black communities where formal welfare services are inadequate or non-existent. Second, policy cost calculations that promote home-based care as a cheaper alternative to institutional care systematically omit the unpaid time and resources supplied by women, thereby producing misleading assessments of cost-effectiveness (Akintola, 2008; Marindi & Batisai, 2024). These economic frameworks treat women's time as having zero opportunity cost, effectively subsidising health and social care systems through the exploitation of unpaid female labour.

Ideologically, the invisibility of unpaid care work is maintained through gendered norms that prescribe caregiving as women's moral duty rather than economic contribution (Swartz & Colvin, 2015; Naidu & Sliep, 2012). These norms are reinforced by religious and cultural discourses that frame caregiving as an expression of communal motherhood and spiritual virtue (Swartz & Colvin, 2015; Musili, 2024). Within Christian communities, theological narratives of service, sacrifice, and stewardship legitimise unpaid caregiving as spiritual labour, thereby reducing pressure to remunerate or formalise it. Musili (2024) demonstrates in her analysis of women in the Nomiya Church in Kenya, biblical texts such as Proverbs 31 are mobilised to glorify women's charitable work while simultaneously obscuring demands for economic recognition and redistribution.

The South African context is shaped by additional historical complications. Racialised labour markets and apartheid legacies that confined Black women to low-paid, precarious, or unpaid

care roles while limiting access to formal employment alternatives, thereby embedding social reproduction costs in households rather than in state or market institutions (Swanson & Carreon, 2024; Cohen, 2022). Even when Black women enter formal employment, they continue to carry what Cohen (2022) terms the "precarity of subsistence," a condition in which wages rarely secure independence because women remain responsible for the ongoing work of social reproduction. Contemporary NGO and donor-driven programmes sometimes formalise care work, yet scholars show that they often rely heavily on unpaid community carers while remunerating only those in leadership or administrative roles, thereby reinforcing existing hierarchies between paid (externally funded) roles and unpaid community labour (Swartz & Colvin, 2015).

A broader African feminist literature reinforces these concerns. In their systematic review of African feminist care research, Del Villar-Toribio and colleagues (2022) identify three central themes that help explain this invisibility: a crisis of social reproduction under neoliberal capitalism, Afro-communitarian care responses rooted in Ubuntu and communal values, and the dominance of women as unpaid carers in HIV and other care contexts. Their work reveals that the invisibility of unpaid care work in African contexts is not simply a matter of inadequate measurement but reflects deeper structural contradictions in how care is valued, organised, and sustained. As they argue, African feminist scholarship reframes care as both economically foundational and politically marginalised, requiring attention to state retrenchment, racialised labour markets, gendered norms, and religious legitimations (del Villar-Toribio et al., 2022).

What emerges from this literature is a recognition that the invisibility of unpaid care work is sustained through a combination of structural, ideological, and historical forces. Economic frameworks often fail to register this work. Cultural and religious narratives naturalise it as part of women's identity (Marie, 2012a). Racialised histories of labour position Black women at the centre of care economies with few alternatives. The literature, therefore, calls for shifts not only in how unpaid work is counted, but in how it is understood. Care needs to be recognised as essential labour that underpins social and economic life, and not as a quiet, gendered obligation that disappears into the background of everyday community survival.

2.4.2. Social Reproduction and the Care Economy

Social reproduction theory provides a critical framework for understanding why unpaid care work remains systematically devalued and invisibilised. Feminist scholars such as Tithi Bhattacharya (2017), Nancy Fraser (2016), and earlier by Silvia Federici (2012), describe social reproduction theory as the processes through which the labour force is produced and maintained across generations, including the daily and generational work of feeding, nurturing, educating, and caring for people. This work is predominantly performed by women and largely unpaid. In South Africa, SRT helps explain how Black women hold together households and communities in the face of unemployment, migration, illness, and state withdrawal, sustaining both households and workplaces (Swanson & Carreon, 2024; Cohen, 2022). Swanson and Carreon (2024) and Cohen (2022) show how the crisis of social reproduction is experienced acutely by women who must navigate the gap between inadequate formal welfare provision and the survival needs of their families and communities. Swanson and Carreon (2024) argue that this crisis is not merely a household problem but a structural feature of how neoliberal capitalism externalises the costs of reproducing labour power onto unpaid female labour, particularly in racialised and economically marginalised communities.

The empirical reality of this crisis is evident in the multiple burdens borne by Black South African women. Existing literature consistently documents that women combine unpaid domestic and care responsibilities with paid or informal income-generating work and community or faith-based volunteering, producing what scholars describe as a "double burden" or "triple burden" (Cohen, 2022; Marindi & Batisai, 2024; Posel, 2025). Cohen's (2022) study of South African nurses illustrates this by showing that even professional women with formal employment face household dependency networks that convert their wages into precarious survival, as they are expected to support extended family members and take on caregiving responsibilities. This demonstrates that entry into paid work does not eliminate social reproduction responsibilities; rather, it adds another layer of labour to women's already extensive unpaid work.

For women engaged in informal market work, the burdens are even more acute. These women perform both paid survivalist work and unpaid social reproductive labour, often experiencing what might be termed "reverse social reproductive labour," where women in marginal paid roles reproduce similar unpaid demands onto other women in their networks (Naidu et al.,

2012). The intersection of race and class is central to understanding who bears these burdens most intensely. Unemployed or low-paid Black women most commonly provide intensive informal and unpaid care in both rural and urban South Africa, particularly in contexts where migration patterns and health crises such as HIV/AIDS and multimorbidity increase dependency ratios (Matina et al., 2025; van Pinxteren et al., 2024).

The implications for measurement and policy are significant. Akintola (2008) argues, time-use and cost studies must incorporate opportunity costs, distributed caregiving networks, and the relational ethics of care to avoid underestimating the economic contribution of unpaid labour. Current policy frameworks that promote home-based care as cost-effective fail to account for the unpaid time, emotional labour, and material resources that women contribute, thereby producing misleading calculations that subsidise public health systems through the exploitation of women's unpaid work. Brear et al.'s (2024) study of informal caregiving networks in rural South Africa demonstrates the complexity of these arrangements, showing how care is distributed across kin and neighbours according to conceptualisations of "good care" that are shaped by material realities, relational obligations, and moral imperatives. Their work underscores the need for research and policy frameworks that recognise care as relationally embedded, ethically complex, and economically valuable labour.

2.4.3. Affective and Spiritual Dimensions of Care Work

Beyond the physical tasks and time commitments involved in unpaid care work, there is also a dimension that is often overlooked in economic analyses: the affective and spiritual labour that caregivers perform. This includes the emotional support, hope-bearing practices, and spiritual meaning-making that sustain both caregivers and care recipients. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for grasping why women continue to perform intensive unpaid labour and how religious frameworks enable and constrain women's agency. The idea of affective labour emerges from the work of theorists such as Michael Hardt (1999) and Arlie Hochschild (1983), who describe the emotional work involved in sustaining relationships and managing the feelings of others. In the context of care work, this includes providing comfort, maintaining hope, managing grief, and sustaining relationships under difficult circumstances. Swartz and Colvin's (2015) ethnographic study of community health workers in South Africa reveals how emotional labour forms an integral part of caregiving practices. They document how caregivers describe their work as being "in our veins," using metaphors of blood and kinship to express

how care is experienced as both a natural extension of self and a moral imperative. Yet this naturalisation of care as intrinsic to women's being obscures the intensive emotional work involved and the toll it takes on caregivers' own well-being.

The spiritual dimensions of care work are particularly salient in faith-based contexts. For many Black South African women, unpaid caregiving and community service are framed as expressions of Christian faith as "ministry," "calling," or "service unto God" (Musili, 2024; Naidu & Sliep, 2012). This religious framing serves multiple functions. On one hand, it provides caregivers with a sense of purpose, dignity, and spiritual reward that can sustain them through difficult work. Naidu and Sliep's (2012) study of home-based care volunteers in KwaZulu-Natal shows how women construct positive identities through their volunteer work, claiming public recognition and social status in contexts where other forms of economic and social value are inaccessible to them. On the other hand, the spiritualisation of unpaid labour can obscure its economic value and legitimise its exploitation. When care work is framed as a spiritual calling or religious duty, demands for compensation or recognition can be construed as inappropriate or even sinful. Musili's (2024) analysis of women in the Nomiya Church demonstrates how theological interpretations of biblical texts glorify women's charitable work while simultaneously foreclosing conversations about economic justice and redistribution. This "gendered glorification of charitable work," as she terms it, creates a moral economy in which women's unpaid labour is celebrated but not compensated.

Cavaliere (2018) and Tiessen et al. (2021) critique the romanticisation of religious volunteerism, particularly when performed by women, arguing that moral narratives of selflessness and virtue obscure the emotional, physical, and economic costs borne by volunteers. Their work highlights the need for analyses that take into account both the spiritual meanings that women attach to their labour and the material consequences of performing that labour without adequate support or recognition. Brear et al.'s (2024) study, that conceptualise "good care" in rural South Africa, provides insight into how caregivers describe good care as frequent, reciprocal, and hope-bearing, showing that caregivers sometimes override care recipients' autonomy in what they perceive as the recipients' best interests, revealing the moral complexity and power dynamics embedded in care relationships. These findings underscore the need for frameworks that recognise care as morally saturated, emotionally intensive, and spiritually meaningful labour, rather than reducing it to a set of instrumental tasks. This requires holding in tension the genuine agency and spiritual fulfilment that women may experience

through faith-based service with the structural exploitation and gendered inequality that such service often reproduces.

2.5. Faith-Based Volunteerism in African Contexts

Having established the gendered, racialised, and spiritualised nature of unpaid care work, I now turn specifically to faith-based volunteerism in African Christian communities by examining how unpaid labour is organised, justified, and performed within religious institutions, with particular attention to the ways in which Black South African women navigate church hierarchies, construct theological agency, and engage in community-making work through faith-based practices.

2.5.1. The Church as Site of Labour and Community-Making

Churches in Black South African communities function not only as sites of worship but in contexts where state services are inadequate and formal welfare systems are inaccessible, churches often fill the gap, providing food assistance, home-based care, youth programmes, burial societies, and other forms of social support (Haddad, 2000; Naicker, 2021). This work is performed predominantly by women, through both formal church structures, such as women's auxiliaries and prayer groups, and informal networks of care and mutual aid. Haddad (2000), in her foundational work on African women's theologies of survival, documents how Black South African women in faith communities construct practical theologies that make sense of their unpaid labour as part of collective survival strategies. These "survival theologies" emerge from the lived experiences of poor women who navigate material hardship, social marginalisation, and health crises through faith-based practices and networks. Haddad's (2004) ethnographic research in Vulindlela, KwaZulu-Natal, reveals how women's prayer groups (Manyanos), Bible study circles, and church auxiliaries become spaces where women articulate their needs, pool resources, and develop forms of mutual support that sustain both individuals and communities.

These church-based practices constitute what might be termed community-making work. This work includes organising church events, preparing meals for funerals and celebrations, visiting the sick and bereaved, mentoring youth, fundraising for church projects, and providing

practical support to community members in crisis. Naicker's (2021) study of urban community food gardens in Pietermaritzburg provides a contemporary example of how Black South African women engage in community-making work through faith-based initiatives. Using AWT and Oikos theology as analytical frameworks, Naicker (2021) demonstrates how women's cooperative food production is simultaneously an economic survival strategy and a form of spiritual resistance. The gardens create spaces for solidarity, skill-sharing, and collective action while also producing food and income for participants. Importantly, Naicker (2021) shows how women draw on theological resources to articulate the meaning and value of their work, framing it as stewardship of creation and as participation in God's work of sustaining life.

The material and social functions of women's church groups are multifaceted. These groups provide practical support (food, money, labour) during times of crisis, create opportunities for leadership and public voice that may be unavailable in other domains, offer spaces for collective processing of grief and trauma, and enable women to pool resources and negotiate with church leadership and external organisations (Haddad, 2000; Naicker, 2021). Yet the church as a site of labour is also a site of hierarchy, exploitation, and gendered inequality. While women perform the majority of unpaid work that sustains congregational life, leadership positions and decision-making authority often remain in male hands. Women's labour is celebrated as service and ministry but rarely compensated or recognised as legitimate work deserving of material reward. This gendered division of labour within churches reproduces broader societal patterns in which women's care work and community service are naturalised as extensions of femininity and spirituality rather than valued as skilled labour.

2.5.2. African Women's Theological Voices and Resistance

Within patriarchal church structures and the exploitation of women's unpaid labour, African women theologians have developed meaningful critiques and alternative theological visions. This body of scholarship, often termed African Women's Theology or African Feminist Theology, centres the lived experiences and spiritual insights of Black African women and challenges dominant theological interpretations that legitimise women's subordination and unpaid service. Haddad's (2000) concept of "survival theologies" is foundational to this literature. She argues that poor Black South African women construct working theologies from their everyday experiences of navigating poverty, illness, violence, and social marginalisation.

These theologies are not abstract doctrinal systems but practical frameworks that make sense of suffering, sustain hope, and guide collective action. They emerge from women's prayer groups, Bible study circles, and church spaces where women interpret scripture, share testimonies, and develop theological understandings that centre their own needs and experiences.

Importantly, Haddad (2000) shows that these survival theologies are both sites of subjugation and resistance. On one hand, women may internalise theological narratives that glorify suffering, sacrifice, and submission, thereby legitimising their own exploitation. Biblical texts such as Proverbs 31 (the "virtuous woman"), Ephesians 5 (wives submit to husbands), and narratives of female biblical figures who serve and sacrifice are often mobilised to reinforce gendered expectations of unpaid labour and domestic submission. On the other hand, women also develop counter-readings that emphasise biblical themes of justice, liberation, and dignity. They draw on stories of women in scripture who challenge authority, exercise leadership, and claim their own agency, figures such as the Syrophoenician (or Canaanite) woman, Mary Magdalene, and the women who supported Jesus' ministry.

Musili's (2024) recent work on women in the Nomiya Church in Kenya extends this analysis, demonstrating how women themselves contest the "gendered glorification of charitable work." She shows that while church teachings valorise women's unpaid service through literal readings of biblical texts, women are increasingly articulating critiques that demand recognition and redistribution. This theological resistance takes various forms: challenging male leaders' interpretations of scripture, creating women-only spaces for alternative theological reflection, and linking their unpaid church labour to broader conversations about gender justice and economic rights. Du Plessis's (2014) study of "Mamas Africa" in South African society examines how older women in faith communities articulate their service through theological frameworks of love and practical theology. These women describe their community work as expressions of Christian love (agape) that respond to material needs and create spaces of belonging and care. Yet du Plessis also notes the ambivalence in their narratives, the tension between finding meaning and purpose in service and experiencing exhaustion and lack of recognition. This ambivalence reflects the complex ways in which women negotiate theological frameworks that both enable and constrain their agency.

Within this broader landscape, Marie's (2012) contribution is particularly significant for developing a gendered Theology of Work. Her case study of Indian Christian women in Pietermaritzburg expands theological debates by examining both paid and unpaid labour through a gendered lens. Marie argues that Christian understandings of work have often privileged formal, paid employment associated with men while overlooking the extensive unpaid labour that women perform. She demonstrates how theological narratives about vocation, calling, and service frequently reinforce these distinctions by positioning men's work as economically productive and women's work as morally or spiritually valuable but materially unacknowledged. By foregrounding women's experiences, Marie calls for a re-theologisation of work that recognises unpaid labour as dignified, skilled, and essential to community well-being. Her work provides an early articulation of themes that more recent African feminist theologians continue to develop.

While Nkosi's (2021) contribution extends this conversation by offering an African feminist theological critique of the TOW. Nkosi argues that the dominant formulations of TOW have been shaped by patriarchal assumptions that position men as formal workers and women as natural caregivers. She contends that this framework obscures the complex realities of women's paid and unpaid labour and fails to address the systemic inequalities that structure women's work. Nkosi (2021) emphasises the need for a theology that not only acknowledges women's contributions but also interrogates the gendered norms that confine them to undervalued forms of service.

These scholars reveal how African women's theological voices disrupt dominant patriarchal interpretations and offer more life-giving alternatives. Their work shows that women do not simply inhabit church structures; they reinterpret, contest, and transform them. Through survival theologies, embodied practices, counter-readings of scripture, and emerging gendered theologies of work, African women theologians highlight how unpaid labour can be understood not only as service but as a site of theologising, communal agency, and resistance.

2.5.3. Ubuntu, Communal Ethics, and Gendered Care Burdens

Ubuntu philosophy provides a cultural framework for understanding unpaid care work in African contexts. Often translated as "I am because we are," Ubuntu articulates a relational

ontology that emphasises interdependence, communal responsibility, and the ethical obligations that arise from our interconnectedness (Chisale, 2018). Ubuntu is frequently invoked to explain and justify the extensive unpaid labour that women perform for extended family, neighbours, and community members. Chisale (2018) warns that Ubuntu, as commonly invoked, often masks the gendered realities of care by presenting women's labour as natural, expected, and morally required. Her work urges a deconstruction of the gendered assumptions hidden within Ubuntu discourse, showing how appeals to communal ethics can simultaneously inspire compassion and reproduce unequal burdens.

African feminist scholars have engaged Ubuntu philosophy in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. Some scholars, such as Cornell and van Marle (2015), argue for an "Ubuntu feminism" that reclaims relational ontologies as resources for challenging individualistic liberal frameworks and articulating alternative visions of care, justice, and human flourishing. They suggest that Ubuntu's emphasis on interdependence and communal responsibility can provide normative grounds for demanding that care be recognised as a collective responsibility rather than an individual (female) burden. From this perspective, Ubuntu feminism refuses both the liberal individualism that privatises care and the patriarchal communitarianism that exploits women's labour in the name of tradition. Diouf, Dyer, and Gilbert's (2023) articulation of "our Ubuntu" represents a Black feminist turn that centres Black women's embodied experiences and creative practices of care. They argue that Ubuntu must be retrieved and reinterpreted through Black feminist lenses that make visible the ways in which women have sustained communities through care work, often without recognition or reciprocity. Their work emphasises the need to insert Black women's voices and bodies into scholarly and institutional spaces, challenging the erasure of women's contributions to Ubuntu-based practices of care and community-making.

However, other scholars offer critical perspectives on Ubuntu, highlighting tensions between communal ideals and gendered realities. Kihuha's (2023) analysis argues that conventional appropriations of Ubuntu often ignore how women are devalued within communal systems, treating women's care labour as natural and obligatory while denying women full personhood and decision-making authority. She calls for a retrieval of African cultural resources that affirms women's humanity and supports their claims to material justice, rather than simply invoking Ubuntu to morally obligate women to provide care. Venter, Petersen, and Hoffman's (2024) empirical study of older Black South African women's perceptions of long-term care

reveals the complex ways in which Ubuntu shapes care expectations and practices. Their research shows that while Ubuntu ideals emphasise communal responsibility for elder care, socio-economic changes, including urbanisation, migration, and unemployment, mean that these obligations often fall disproportionately on female relatives who lack the resources to provide adequate care. This produces what they term "care overload," in which women experience moral pressure to provide care according to Ubuntu principles even when doing so compromises their own health and economic security.

Du Plessis's (2019) work on gendered human security in South Africa examines what Ubuntu feminism can offer in contexts where women bear disproportionate care burdens. She argues that Ubuntu must be reconceptualised not as automatic duty but as a normative language for demanding reciprocal care and structural support from state and civil society institutions. From this perspective, Ubuntu feminism challenges both the state's withdrawal from social provisioning and patriarchal family structures that exploit women's labour, insisting that communal responsibility means collective investment in care infrastructure rather than reliance on unpaid female labour.

What emerges from this literature is recognition that Ubuntu is a contested and multivalent concept that can be mobilised both to justify women's unpaid care burdens and to demand more equitable distributions of care responsibility. African feminist engagements with Ubuntu refuse simplistic invocations of tradition and instead insist on critical appropriations that centre women's experiences, challenge patriarchal interpretations, and articulate visions of care that are both communal and just.

2.6. Power Dynamics in Religious Communities

The invisibility of women's unpaid labour in faith communities cannot be understood apart from the power structures that produce and sustain it. While earlier sections have traced how unpaid work is gendered, racialised, and often spiritualised, the focus here is on how religious communities themselves organise, distribute, and justify power along gendered lines. Churches, apart from being spaces of worship and spiritual formation, are also social institutions with hierarchies, governance systems, financial structures, and interpretive frameworks that shape who has authority, whose labour is valued, and whose voices carry weight (Kanyoro, 2002; Phiri, 2004; Nadar, 2009). Scholars such as Oduyoye (2001), Phiri

(2004) and Nadar (2009) document how churches across denominational lines reproduce patterns of male authority that exclude women from formal leadership, theological decision-making and institutional power, even while women form the majority of congregants and perform much of the church's unpaid work. Kanyoro (2002) describes this contradiction as the "missing voice" of women in African Christianity: women's material contributions are central to church life, yet their perspectives and interests remain marginal at the level of doctrine, policy and governance.

2.6.1. Gender Hierarchies and Theological Legitimation

A consistent theme in the literature is that gender hierarchies in African churches are actively sustained through theological narratives. Across a range of traditions, men are positioned as divinely appointed leaders and women as helpers and supporters. This is frequently justified through particular readings of texts such as Genesis 2–3, 1 Corinthians 14, Ephesians 5 and 1 Timothy 2, which are interpreted to endorse male headship in both household and church (Landman, 1994; Phiri, 2004; Nadar, 2009; Nkosi, 2021). In the South African context, these interpretations were reinforced by missionary forms of Christianity that imported Victorian ideals of domesticity, associating Christian "civilisation" with strict gender roles in which men lead, and women nurture (Gaitskell, 1990; Landman, 1994).

Oduyoye (2001) describes this as a "double patriarchy," churches inherit patriarchal patterns from both indigenous cultures and colonial Christian traditions. In many African Independent Churches, mainline denominations and Pentecostal movements, senior offices such as bishop, pastor, prophet, and elder remain overwhelmingly male, while women are clustered in auxiliary roles and informal ministries (Phiri and Nadar, 2006a; Moyo, 2004; Biri, 2012). Even in denominations that have formally opened ordination to women, such as the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, women clergy continue to encounter what Nadar (2009) calls "stained-glass ceilings", facing subtle but persistent barriers to promotion, strategic appointments and decision-making spaces.

Preaching, liturgy and church discipline all play a role in maintaining these hierarchies. Phiri (2004) and Kanyoro (2002) show how theological language about submission, service, and "God's order" is integrated into sermons, Bible studies and congregational practices, so that male leadership and women's unpaid work come to appear natural, inevitable and divinely

endorsed. Theologies of work also participate in this pattern. As Marie (2012) and Nkosi (2021) argue, Christian teaching has often treated men's paid labour as the primary site of vocation, while framing women's unpaid labour as an expression of love, sacrifice or calling rather than work that warrants recognition and recompense. In this way, theology functions as a mechanism of labour control, shaping who leads, who serves and how that service is understood.

2.6.2. Negotiating Authority and Recognition

Despite these hierarchies, women are not simply acted upon by church structures. A significant body of scholarship shows how women use the spaces and roles available to them to negotiate forms of authority, recognition and spiritual legitimacy, even while remaining excluded from formal leadership. One way this occurs is through the construction of auxiliary structures such as Manyanos, women's guilds and prayer unions (Haddad, 2000). Gaitskell's (1990, 2005) work on Black Methodist women's Manyanos in South Africa illustrates this complexity. These organisations, often founded under missionary influence, promoted ideals of domesticity, respectability and obedience, yet they also created strong networks of spiritual community, mutual aid and leadership among women. Within the Manyano, women organised meetings, managed funds, decided on projects and offered pastoral care to one another, effectively building what Molapo (2015) calls a "church within a church." Phiri (2004) and others note similar dynamics in AICs and mainline denominations, where women's groups function as semi-autonomous spaces of spiritual formation and practical organisation, even as they remain formally accountable to male-dominated church hierarchies.

Economic practices are a crucial dimension of this negotiation. Studies from Zimbabwe, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa show that women are central to church fundraising and financial support. They raise money through tithes, offerings, catering, sewing, flea market and special collections, and they often give sacrificially from already stretched household budgets (Phiri, 2004; Mapuranga, 2013; Biri, 2012; Akintola, 2010b; Molapo, 2015). Yet control over church finances usually resides with male leaders and councils, who make decisions about salaries, building projects and expenditure. Women's economic contributions thus give them moral leverage and a basis for claiming recognition, but do not automatically translate into shared financial governance. At the level of everyday identity, Naidu and Sliep's (2012) study of home-based care volunteers in KwaZulu-Natal and Swartz and Colvin's (2015) work on

community health workers show how women use volunteer roles to construct public selves marked by respect, competence and spiritual maturity. They speak of care "in our veins" while also expressing hope that their voluntary work may open pathways to training, employment or material support. This ambivalence reflects the constrained conditions in which many women live. Unpaid work is both a site of exploitation and one of the few avenues available to gain visibility, respect and a degree of informal authority in church and community life.

Uniforms and embodied practices also play a role in negotiating authority. Bvuma (2025) shows how manyano and AIC uniforms function as symbols of belonging, discipline and spiritual status. Wearing the uniform signals membership in a collective body that commands respect within the congregation. It can also give women a sense of dignity and presence that complicates their formal marginality. Through these practices, women carve out forms of recognition and influence that do not necessarily overturn patriarchal structures but do stretch their boundaries.

2.6.3. Reproduction and Resistance

The relationship between women's unpaid faith-based labour and patriarchal power is not straightforward. On one hand, this labour reproduces and stabilises church structures that confine women to "service" roles. On the other hand, it generates spaces, relationships and resources that women can use to question, rework or quietly resist those very structures. Naicker's (2021) study of urban community food gardens organised through church networks in Pietermaritzburg captures this tension clearly. Women frame the gardens using theological language of stewardship and service, which aligns with existing expectations of Christian womanhood. Yet the gardens also provide food, modest income and a sense of collective agency, allowing women to address poverty and food insecurity on their own terms. The same faith-based labour that appears to confirm traditional roles becomes a platform for practical resistance and alternative forms of community-making.

African feminist theologians draw attention to similar dynamics at the level of belief and doctrine. Through the work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, scholars such as Oduyoye (2001), Phiri (2004), Kanyoro (2002) and Nadar (2009) show how women use their marginal positions within churches to develop theological critiques of patriarchy, re-read scripture from women's perspectives and articulate visions of community that include

mutuality, justice and shared responsibility. Nadar (2009) describes this as "prophetic witness": women speak out against sexist practices and interpretations, sometimes at great personal cost, insisting that faithfulness to the gospel demands gender justice. The literature on African feminist care research similarly cautions against flattening women's experiences into simple binaries of victimhood or heroism. Del Villar-Toribio et al. (2022) argue that African women navigate constrained circumstances with a mix of compliance, creativity and resistance, drawing on religious and cultural resources in ways that are both enabling and limiting. In church settings, this often means that the same unpaid labour that sustains patriarchal institutions also sustains women's networks of solidarity, their theological imaginations and their capacity to survive and organise.

Seen in this light, women's unpaid work in religious communities is deeply implicated in the reproduction of gendered power, yet it is also a site where alternative possibilities are nurtured. The literature suggests that any serious account of unpaid labour in faith communities must therefore hold together both sides of this dialectic: women's labour underwrites church life and, at the same time, creates the conditions for imagining and practising more just forms of community.

2.7. Conceptual Gaps and Contributions of This Study

Having reviewed literature across multiple disciplines and themes, I now turn to identifying the conceptual gaps that this dissertation seeks to address. While there is substantial scholarship on unpaid care work, faith-based volunteerism, and gender in African contexts, significant silences and limitations remain, particularly regarding informal volunteerism in Black South African Christian communities.

2.7.1. Silences in the Volunteerism Literature

The global literature on volunteerism remains dominated by formal, Western models that privilege organised, measurable forms of civic participation typically mediated through NGOs, government programmes, or established religious institutions (Chus, 2014; Manchego, 2019). These frameworks struggle to capture the organic, relational, and culturally embedded forms of unpaid work that sustain many African communities. As Johnsen (2013) and Russell (2016) argue, this creates a conceptual hierarchy that sidelines informal, feminised, and faith-based practices, particularly in Global South contexts. Even when informal volunteerism is

acknowledged, it is often treated as a residual category–what remains after formal volunteering has been accounted for, rather than as a distinct phenomenon with its own logics, motivations, and social functions. This marginalisation reflects broader Western biases in development and civil society literature that privilege formal institutions, written contracts, and bureaucratic organisation over informal networks, oral agreements, and relational obligations.

In the South African context specifically, there is limited systematic research on how informal volunteerism operates within faith communities, how it is distributed across different denominations (AICs, mainline Protestant, Catholic, Pentecostal), and how it intersects with other forms of unpaid labour such as household care work and income-generating activities. While studies of home-based care volunteers (Akintola, 2008, 2010; Naidu & Sliep, 2012) provide valuable insights, these typically focus on health-related care work rather than the broader range of community-making activities that women perform through church networks.

2.7.2. Economic Valuation and Measurement Challenges

A second major gap concerns the economic valuation of church-based unpaid labour. While feminist economists have developed sophisticated methods for valuing unpaid domestic work through time-use studies and shadow wage calculations (Budlender, 2008, 2010; Folbre, 2014), these methods have rarely been applied systematically to faith-based volunteerism. As a result, the economic contribution of women's unpaid church work remains largely unquantified and therefore invisible in policy discussions and resource allocation decisions. Akintola's (2008) critique of home-based care cost-effectiveness studies is instructive here. She demonstrates that policy analyses promoting home-based care as cheaper than institutional care systematically omit the unpaid time and resources that caregivers (predominantly women) contribute. This produces misleading cost-benefit calculations that effectively subsidise health systems through the exploitation of unpaid female labour. Similar dynamics likely operate in relation to church-based social services, food distribution, youth programmes, elder care, and community development, but have not been adequately researched or documented.

The methodological challenges are significant. Church-based unpaid work is often sporadic and event-driven (preparing for funerals, organising holiday programmes, responding to crises) rather than routine and scheduled, making it difficult to capture through standard time-use surveys. It also involves extensive emotional and spiritual labour that cannot be easily

quantified. Nevertheless, the absence of economic valuation contributes to the continued invisibility and devaluation of this work.

2.7.3. Denominational Variation and Institutional Analysis

A third gap is the lack of systematic comparative research across different denominational contexts. The limited literature available suggests that patterns of women's unpaid labour vary significantly across church types. African Independent Churches (AICs), for example, often have strong women's guilds and prayer unions with distinct theological and ritual practices shaped by African cultural frameworks, whereas in some Pentecostal churches, women's roles may be more restricted to behind-the-scenes support work. Mainline Protestant and Catholic churches have formal women's auxiliaries with long institutional histories, including the well-known Methodist *Manyano*, which provide women with organisational space, leadership opportunities, and community networks. Yet we lack comprehensive studies that map these variations and analyse how different theological traditions, governance structures, and historical trajectories shape the organisation and valuation of women's unpaid labour.

This denominational gap is particularly significant given the diversity of Christianity in South Africa and the different ways in which colonial and apartheid histories shaped various church traditions. AICs, which emerged partly in resistance to colonial missionary Christianity, may have different gender dynamics than historically white mainline churches that are now predominantly Black. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, which have grown rapidly since the 1980s, bring yet another set of theological emphases and organisational forms. Understanding how informal volunteerism operates across these contexts requires comparative institutional analysis that is currently lacking.

2.7.4. Intersectional Analysis and Decolonial Frameworks

While feminist scholarship has established the gendered nature of unpaid care work, and African feminist work has highlighted the importance of race and colonial history, there remains a need for more sustained intersectional analysis that examines how gender, race, class, age, and religious identity simultaneously shape experiences of unpaid labour in faith communities. As Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (2000) have argued, these systems of oppression operate not additively but intersectionally, producing distinct experiences that cannot be understood by examining each dimension in isolation.

Moreover, there is a need for explicitly decolonial approaches that centre Black South African women's knowledge, experiences, and theoretical contributions rather than applying Western feminist or development frameworks to African contexts. While scholars such as Haddad (2000), Akintola (2008, 2010), and others have made significant contributions, their work is often marginalised within mainstream development and volunteerism literature, which continues to privilege Northern scholars and theoretical frameworks. A decolonial approach requires not only citing African scholars but also allowing African women's experiences and analyses to fundamentally shape the research questions, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks employed.

2.7.5. The Spiritualisation of Labour and Theological Critique

Finally, while some scholars (Musili, 2024; Haddad, 2000; Marie, 2012; Nkosi, 2021) have begun to analyse how religious discourses transform unpaid work into "calling" or "ministry," this remains an underdeveloped area of inquiry. More research is needed on the specific theological narratives, biblical interpretations, and spiritual practices through which unpaid labour is legitimised and made meaningful in different church contexts. This includes examining how concepts such as servanthood, stewardship, sacrifice, and spiritual gifts are mobilised in ways that both enable women's agency and constrain their claims to material recognition and economic justice. Equally important is research that documents and amplifies the counter-theologies and resistant readings that women develop. If, as Haddad argues, poor Black South African women construct survival theologies that make sense of their experiences and guide collective action, then these theologies deserve serious engagement as intellectual and spiritual resources that can inform both academic understanding and practical interventions.

2.8. Conclusion: Toward an African Feminist Theology of Work

This integrative review has brought together a wide and interdisciplinary body of scholarship, feminist economic theory, social reproduction studies, African gender research, African Women's Theology, Ubuntu ethics, and volunteerism literature to build a grounded understanding of unpaid care and volunteerism within Black South African Christian communities. Across these strands of scholarship, several insights have emerged providing the conceptual foundation for the analysis that follows.

A central thread running through the literature is that unpaid care work and informal volunteerism occupy a far more significant position in social life than mainstream economic or theological discourses acknowledge. These forms of labour sustain households, churches, and communities, yet they remain largely invisible within dominant frameworks of value. Their invisibility is not incidental. It is produced through entrenched ideological, economic, and historical mechanisms that render women's labour "natural," spiritually framed, or outside the boundaries of what counts as work. Any effort to take this labour seriously, therefore, requires a shift in how value is conceptualised and in whose labour is recognised within economic, social, and theological narratives.

The literature also makes clear that unpaid labour in South Africa is profoundly shaped by gender and race. Black women continue to shoulder disproportionate care responsibilities because of long-standing inequalities rooted in colonial dispossession, apartheid labour systems, and patriarchal religious traditions. These structures intersect with theological narratives that cast caregiving as an expression of womanhood, virtue, or spiritual calling, further entrenching expectations that women will give their time, labour, and emotional energy without recognition or reward. Such narratives offer moral coherence to systems that rely on unequal distributions of labour, even as they obscure the political and economic forces that shape those distributions.

This review has also highlighted that women's unpaid labour cannot be understood solely through the lens of exploitation. It is equally a site of agency, creativity, and communal strength. Women draw on theological resources, Ubuntu values, and collective practices to make sense of their labour, to build networks of support, and at times to contest or reinterpret the very structures that constrain them. These practices do not erase the inequalities women face, but they do reveal women's capacity to act within and against the limits of their contexts. The affective and spiritual dimensions of care work are central here: faith provides women with purpose and dignity, even as it is used by churches to justify and spiritualise their unpaid labour. Holding these tensions together is essential for any nuanced account of women's experiences. The review also draws attention to important gaps in existing scholarship, revealing that there is relatively limited research on informal volunteerism within everyday faith community life, on the economic value generated through church-based unpaid labour, and on explicitly decolonial approaches that prioritise Black South African women's

knowledge. Much of the existing literature remains shaped by Western theoretical priorities or focuses on formal, NGO-led volunteerism rather than the day-to-day community-making work that takes place within local churches.

This dissertation responds to these gaps by placing the lived experiences of Black South African Christian women at the centre of its inquiry. Through a decolonial feminist methodological approach and drawing on African women's theological frameworks, the study investigates how women understand and sustain their unpaid labour, how they navigate cultural and theological expectations, and what possibilities exist for recognition, redistribution, and transformation.

The concept of *sinayo lento yokunakekela*–we have that thing to take care, offers both a descriptive anchor and a critical provocation. It captures the ordinary, taken-for-granted labour that structures women's daily lives, and it also interrupts that ordinariness by asking deeper questions. Why does this "thing" persist? Who benefits from it? And what would it take to remake these relationships of care in ways that honour, rather than exploit, women's contributions? These questions orient the empirical chapters that follow and reflect the broader commitments of African feminist and decolonial theological scholarship: to highlight the unseen, challenge the unjust, and imagine new forms of community in which women's labour is recognised, valued, and shared.

CHAPTER 3
UKUHLANGANA[2]
– MEETING, MEANING, AND METHOD

3.1. Introduction

It was a Tuesday morning; I had taken a taxi from Pietermaritzburg to Durban, a distance of over 80 kilometres, to meet five women, trying to maximise the time I had in Durban. I couldn't afford to make the trip for just one interview. I had spoken to each of them over the phone, and I had introduced myself during the calls, explaining that I was a researcher doing a study on volunteering and community-making work, but I didn't know their names. The survey from which they had been selected didn't ask for personal information, just a phone number or email. That was part of the problem. I had five numbers, five women, and no faces. What I didn't expect was the anxiety that came with this uncertainty. As much as some participants were scared to meet up with me, worried this might be a scam, or worse, a human trafficking trick, I was also scared. I was fixing to meet with strangers who knew I was a woman; they knew where I would be, and at what time, and I had no idea who they were. For all I knew, I could be walking into a setup. We had agreed to meet at Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), a public restaurant in the city centre that felt neutral, familiar, and, most importantly, safe for everyone.

So here I was sitting alone in KFC, eyes flicking between the time on my phone and the entrance. I kept glancing up every time a woman walked in, hoping to recognise her from the brief profile pic on WhatsApp, or hoping she would call me at the entrance and, by seeing me pick up my phone, confirm if I was who she was looking for. Every time a woman came in, I straightened up, smiled slightly, and waited to see if she would make her way toward me. But time and again, I was met with cautious looks as they passed to order a breakfast wrap or coffee, and leave. Next woman, same story. Still, I waited, hopeful, with my notebook ready, voice recorder on the table, waiting to see the invisible. *How did I get here?* not just geographically, but intellectually, methodologically and ethically.

[2] Ukuhlangana: "meeting" or "encounter" speaks to the human, intellectual, and spiritual encounters that shaped this research, from meeting participants in everyday spaces to engaging with theoretical frameworks that brings light to unpaid work.

From Theory to Framework

The journey to that Tuesday morning in Durban began long before I boarded a taxi or dialled a participant's number. It began with questions I could not ignore, questions that arose not only from literature, but from observation and personal experience. I witnessed, especially among Black women, a kind of relentless, everyday giving: organising church events, running soup kitchens, caring for children, cooking for funerals, and counselling neighbours. These acts were constant, committed, and unpaid. They were often not framed as "volunteering," because they looked nothing like the structured, Western-centric models of volunteerism celebrated in NGOs and textbooks. And yet, these acts kept communities alive. The central question of this study emerged from this tension: how do women in South African faith communities experience and navigate the gendered nature of unpaid volunteer work, particularly in forms that blur the boundaries between care, religious service, and survival? To answer this, I needed a framework that could hold two things together: the lived realities of women's unpaid work in South African faith communities, and the analytical clarity required to name, critique, and reimagine that work within broader structures of gender, theology, and development. Since no single theory could offer this on its own, I began with Gender and Development theories.

3.2. Gender and Development Theories

Because this research is gendered in its nature and it's under the discipline of Theology and Development, I started looking at Gender and Development (GAD) along with earlier ideas like Women in Development (WID) and Women and Development (WAD) to help trace how women's work has been understood in development over time (Haddad, 2004). These frameworks emerged in response to the exclusion of women's labour, especially unpaid work, which was often ignored or undervalued in development policies and projects, with each phase showing how thinking about women's contributions has slowly shifted, from simply adding women into the picture, to asking deeper questions about the systems and power structures that continue to sideline their work (Haddad, 2000).

The WID approach, which was very prominent from the 1970s, sought to make women visible within existing development frameworks by integrating them into economic activities such as formal employment and income generation projects (Rathgeber, 1990; Haddad, 2004; Basiliere, 2016). Even though this was a good initiative but the WID often left patriarchal structures unchallenged, failing to interrogate the unequal gender relations underpinning labour

hierarchies. This is the gap that the WAD intended to fill, influenced by Marxist and dependency theories. WAD argued that women's subordination was structurally embedded within global capitalism and development processes (Boserup, 1970; Haddad, 2004). However, WAD still struggled to account for agency, intersectionality, and the specificity of women's experiences in differing cultural and religious contexts. This led to the shift to GAD, which brought a more relational understanding, focusing not only on women but on the social construction of gender and the power dynamics between men and women. GAD theorists argued that unpaid work, particularly care work, was not taken into consideration in development yet central to its functioning (Kabeer, 1994; Vavrus and Richey, 2003). This framework moved the debate from "adding women" to development, toward analysing how development processes themselves are gendered.

A useful tool within the GAD tradition is Caroline Moser's (1993) Triple Role Framework, which distinguishes between three types of labour typically undertaken by women in the Global South: productive (paid work), reproductive (unpaid work), and community-making work (unpaid volunteering for community benefit). Moser's framework is valuable because it provides a vocabulary for naming labour that is often rendered invisible, particularly community-making work, which is central to this study. In faith-based contexts, much of the unpaid work done by women, such as organising funerals, feeding vulnerable families, or cleaning parks, falls under this third category (Marie, 2012a). The women who perform these activities often understand them as religious service or cultural duty rather than as labour (Marie, 2012a). Moser's framework allows for the recognition of this work as part of broader development processes, even though it may not be formally recognised, remunerated, or documented (Moser, 2012). However, Moser's analysis, while useful, does not fully capture the religious motivations, cultural embeddedness, or emotional complexities involved in faith-based volunteer labour. The category of "community-making work" still risks abstraction unless grounded in the lived experiences of women who are performing it within particular social and religious settings.

Gender and Development theory makes two essential contributions to this study. First, it legitimises unpaid labour as a site of inquiry and analysis. Second, through Moser's framework, it categorises the types of labour that are often carried out under the banner of faith-based volunteerism. However, GAD has its own limits; it focuses on gender and work in ways that feel quite global and secular. It tends to assume that labour is either economic or political,

without really speaking to the religious and cultural spaces where many African women live and work, leaving religious meanings and motivations outside the analytic frame. Moreover, while GAD speaks to gender, it does not always adequately address how culture, faith, and survival are entangled in women's unpaid labour in African contexts. The limitations of GAD and Moser's model open up the need for further theoretical expansion. This study engages GAD not as a totalising explanation but as a crucial starting point, one that can be deepened by African Feminist Theology, the sociology of volunteering, and Theology of Work. The unpaid work performed by back women of faith is not only "community-making work" in a development sense, but also faith-based care work, survival labour, and often prophetic resistance to gendered injustice. GAD provides the conceptual starting point that AWT and theological critiques of labour can build on.

3.3. Social Reproduction Theory

While GAD theory helps us recognise the broad categories of women's unpaid labour, SRT seek to bring us closer to the everyday realities of how that labour sustains life, socially, economically, and spiritually. Social reproduction refers to the array of activities, largely carried out by women, that are necessary for the maintenance and continuation of human life, including child-rearing, elder care, emotional support, and community sustenance (Guérin et al., 2021). It is able to name the invisible foundation on which formal economies and public life rest. In this study, SRT serves as a critical lens for understanding how unpaid, gendered labour, often faith-based and community-focused, is not marginal to society, but foundational to it**.** In many Black South African communities, women's faith-based volunteerism is not supplementary; it is what allows community structures to function.

SRT emerged in Marxist feminist debates in the 1970s and 1980s, initially as a critique of how traditional Marxist theory focused solely on production in the capitalist economy, excluding the domestic and unpaid work performed mostly by women (Hirway, 2015; Folbre, 2018). Contemporary scholars have since expanded it to include affective, emotional, and communal labour that does not neatly fit within the binary of "work" and "non-work" (Pupo and Duffy, 2012; Fraser, 2016). This theory is especially useful for this research because it provides a structural explanation for the persistence of unpaid labour**,** while also naming the gendered division of labour that assigns care and social maintenance to women. Furthermore, SRT insists that we do not view these acts of care as natural extensions of femininity or motherhood, but

as labour, that is essential, unremunerated, and often exploited. In the context of South African faith communities, SRT allows us to recognise activities such as preparing meals for a bereaved family, counselling church members, or raising grandchildren in the absence of parents due to migration or illness, as part of a reproductive economy that holds communities together. These actions are rarely acknowledged as economic contributions or professional skills, but without them, survival, let alone development, is impossible (Folbre, 2018; Leszczyńska, 2019).

Yet, while SRT is useful in exposing the economic and gendered dimensions of unpaid labour, it too has its blind spots like GAD, it often treats religion and faith as marginal or irrelevant to the labour it analyses, also the language of "reproduction" can sometimes feel technical or mechanical, failing to capture the sacredness and communal ethics that shape how unpaid work is experienced in African religious settings. This is where African Women's Theology can bridge the gap in social reproduction theory in the context of this study. Where SRT provides a structural critique, naming systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and gendered labour exploitation, African feminist theological thought injects lived experiences and context. The two can work together: SRT names the labour, AWT names the person behind it, their faith, their struggles, and their hope. Moreover, SRT deepens Moser's "triple role" by offering a theoretical vocabulary for why the reproductive and community roles are consistently devalued**,** even though they are critical to survival. This aligns with the broader aim of this study: not only to describe unpaid labour but to re-theorise it as religious and cultural.

This study, therefore, builds on SRT by adding a religious layer**.** It argues that in African faith-based contexts, unpaid labour is not just about reproducing life biologically or socially; it also reproduces faith and community values. Therefore, this study takes SRT forward by integrating it with African religious epistemologies and theological meaning-making. It proposes that unpaid labour must be understood not just as survival labour, but as communal care work**,** deeply rooted in religion, culture and gender.

3.4. Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work

Having first explored unpaid work through a gendered lens within feminist debates, I then shifted focus to sociological understandings of unpaid labour. This study argues that unpaid work is not only gendered but is also shaped by broader societal norms and contributes significantly to the well-being of communities. In this regard, I turned to Wilson and Musick

(1997) ITVW, which recognises both structured (formal) and relational (informal) volunteer work as forms of unpaid labour, yet it clearly distinguishes the two. Within the sociological theories, volunteering is commonly framed as a form of pro-social behaviour, linked to both individual motivations and structural opportunities. Wilson and Musick's (1997) ITVW remains particularly influential in this regard. Their "resource model" locates volunteerism at the intersection of four key forms of capital and suggests that volunteering is more likely when individuals have access to human capital (skills and education), social capital (networks and trust), cultural capital (shared values and norms), and religious capital (spiritual commitment). This model holds that individuals are more likely to volunteer if they possess the time, resources, and social embeddedness to do so (Musick and Wilson, 2007; Seabe and Burger, 2022).

The model's intersecting capitals can predict patterns of participation in both formal and informal voluntary work. In the context of South Africa, this theory becomes especially important because much of the volunteering occurs in informal spaces such as church communities, burial societies, stokvels, and neighbourhood support networks, where formal metrics of volunteering fail to capture the full scope of participation (Russell, 2016). While helpful in distinguishing between formal and informal volunteering, such accounts are frequently rooted in Euro-American contexts that prioritise individual agency, organisational affiliation, and civic engagement. As a result, they struggle to explain the deep, communal, and often survival-driven forms of unpaid labour seen in many African settings, particularly among Black women of faith. In the South African context, where historical inequalities have left many communities structurally disadvantaged, the notion that volunteering stems from surplus time or leisure becomes not only inaccurate but exclusionary. The women in this study, many of whom engage in extensive unpaid work within churches and neighbourhoods, do so not from surplus but from a sense of necessity, duty, and faith. As a result, mainstream sociological theories of volunteering, while useful for differentiating forms of voluntary action, remain limited in their ability to account for the gendered, religious, and cultural dimensions of such labour.

Wilson and Musick's model, though useful, treats gender, race, and class as external variables, factors that shape patterns of volunteering but are not structurally interrogated within the theory (Musick and Wilson, 2007; Seabe and Burger, 2022). This presents a major limitation, especially in contexts like South Africa, where gendered and racialised inequalities are not

incidental but foundational. Who volunteers, how they volunteer, and how that labour is valued cannot be understood outside of histories of colonisation, apartheid, patriarchal religious norms, and the feminisation of care (Budlender, 2011). Another issue that existed in this theory when applied to the South African context was the lack of consideration of how volunteering is embedded in community ontologies, especially those shaped by Ubuntu, where one's identity is tied to the well-being of others. This gap was addressed by Seabe and Burger (2022), who introduced Ubuntu as cultural capital, arguing that volunteering in African contexts is frequently shaped by communal worldviews, interdependence, and relational responsibility, rather than individual altruism.

In conversation with AWT, this framing deepens. While Ubuntu provides the ontological base for communal responsibility, African women theologians, such as Kanyoro (2001), Oduyoye (2001a) and Dube (2016) remind us that communalism itself can be gendered; women often carry the emotional, spiritual, and practical burdens of communal care while men are more often positioned as formal leaders or decision-makers. Thus, Ubuntu as cultural capital must be read critically, not only as a strength of African value systems, but also as a potential site of gendered exploitation when the same cultural systems that encourage solidarity can also normalise gendered labour hierarchies. Furthermore, Wilson and Musick's concept of religious capital tends to position faith as merely a variable that increases participation rates. What is often missed is that faith is not just a motivator; it is a meaning-making practice. For the women in this study, volunteering is not something they do on the side; it is central to how they express their spirituality, live out their faith, and understand their place in the world.

This study, therefore, expands Wilson and Musick's theory of volunteering in three ways. First, by drawing on African conceptions of community and spirituality, it shifts the frame from volunteering as individual behaviour to volunteering as collective, faith-driven action. Second, by integrating African Feminist Theology, it highlights how communal expectations can reinforce gendered hierarchies, demanding critical reflection on who benefits from unpaid work. Third, it foregrounds faith not merely as a motivator, but as a meaning-making practice, deeply intertwined with identity (culture), theology (religion), and survival. In this way, sociological theories of volunteering are not abandoned but reinterpreted through a feminist African theological lens, in order to better reflect the lived experiences of Black South African women whose unpaid work sustains not only households and churches, but the entire communities.

3.5. Theology of Work

Since this study holds that unpaid work is shaped not only by culture and societal norms but also by religious values and theological beliefs, I turned next to explore the theological framing of work, focusing on the TOW as a lens for understanding how faith communities define, value, and organise both paid and unpaid labour. TOW is deeply rooted in how Christian traditions, both globally and locally, have framed work as a calling and duty (Ruffner, 2013). It has long been a contested field, tracing a lineage from the Protestant work ethic to contemporary Christian reflections on vocation, productivity, and dignity (Ruffner, 2013; Szemerei, 2017). At its core, TOW asks what work is, why it matters, and how it relates to divine purpose. Classical Protestant TOW, most notably from Martin Luther and later developed in Calvinist traditions, elevates the notion of work as a calling (vocatio), suggesting that all forms of labour, when done in faith, have intrinsic value (Volf, 2001; Alsdorf, 2014; Ostring, 2014). This tradition challenged the sacred, secular divide by affirming all work in the world as part of divine service, not just priesthood, but farming, teaching, and trade could be understood as godly work.

This framing of work is helpful for this study because by challenging the sacred and secular divide, it provides a framework for recognising all forms of labour, including unpaid, informal, and care work, as meaningful, sacred, and spiritually significant, allowing the study to move beyond economic and gendered analyses toward a theological valuation of women's unpaid community-making work in faith-based spaces. This theological perspective also has the potential to challenge traditional hierarchies that place formal employment, preaching, and leadership at the top while relegating unpaid care work to the margins. However, such theologies have significant limitations, particularly in the context of African women's unpaid volunteer labour. First, the traditional TOW tends to universalise work experiences while overlooking the gendered, racialised, and classed realities of who works, under what conditions, and for what recognition. Second, the very notion of "work" is narrowly defined, usually as paid, formal, and public, thereby excluding the domestic, community, and caregiving labour that sustains life. In this way, traditional theologies of work participate in what feminist theologians like Golder (2011), Moyo (2012) and more recently, Marie (2012) and Nkosi (2021) have named as the invisibilisation of women's work in both church and society. By positioning unpaid labour as a calling, women's work becomes something they are not only

willing but compelled to do, even when the demands are high and the support structures are thin. Faith communities may inadvertently perpetuate these patterns by celebrating women's service without addressing the systemic burdens placed on them

For example, in African contexts, labour such as cooking for church events, counselling members, or organising outreach is often framed as ministry or servanthood, rather than recognised as real work. This framing can sanctify exploitation, masking gendered inequalities under the language of humility, calling, and sacrifice (Le Bruyns, 2005; Mtata, 2011). Thus, while TOW holds potential for reclaiming dignity in work, it also requires deconstruction and reconstruction to become a liberative resource for those whose labour is undervalued. Bringing this into conversation with AWT, we see that TOW must be redefined not only in terms of vocation, but also in terms of justice and recognition. Where traditional TOW focuses on the dignity of work in a general sense, AWT pushes us to ask: what does work mean for women, in their own cultural, religious, and everyday realities? It forces us to look closely at the conditions under which women work, how that work is valued (or not), and whether that work is life-affirming or further burdens. Similarly, where GAD theory introduces the reproductive and community roles often excluded from economic measures of labour, AWT and a reimagined TOW insist that these roles are also theologically significant and deserve space in theological reflection.

This study contributes to this reimagining by re-theologising unpaid labour through the lens of communal care and agency. It does not discard TOW entirely, but rather interrogates its silences, especially its failure to engage unpaid, faith-based labour performed by women. In doing so, it draws on scholars like Forster (2014) and Moyo (2012), who argue for a TOW that is contextual, ethical, and critical of power. It also responds to Mtata's (2011) insistence that theology must engage with economic and social realities, particularly those that marginalise women under the guise of religious service. Moreover, this study expands the TOW by attending to the ambivalence women often feel in these roles, simultaneously empowered and exploited, seen and unseen. While traditional theologies of work provide a language of dignity and calling, they often fail to ask: who gets to work, whose work counts, and whose work is blessed? By integrating TOW with African feminist theologies, GAD theory, and sociological insights on volunteering, this study moves towards a construction of a theological framework that is both theologically grounded while remaining critically attentive to issues of gender, power, and social structure.

3.6. African Women's Theology

In response to the limitations of dominant social science theories of work, and in continuity with the gendered re-readings of voluntarism, this study turns to AWT, which emerged in response to both the male-dominated tendencies of African Theology and the Eurocentrism of Western feminist theology. Rooted in the lived experiences of African women, AWT offers a liberative and contextually grounded theological approach that centres survival, community, embodiment, and justice (Kanyoro, 2001; Oduyoye, 2001a; Dube, 2016). It is not merely a theology about women, but a theology from women, one that uses their everyday struggles as valid theological texts. From fetching water to feeding families, from leading prayer meetings to managing funerals, African women's daily unpaid labour becomes the site of theological reflection, resistance, and transformation.

This body of work contributes a crucial dimension to the framework of this study by offering a theological language through which unpaid work can be interpreted and several key methodologies that can be employed. Through its narrative theology, which affirms women's experiences as sacred texts, women's testimonies of service, sacrifice, exhaustion, joy, and frustration will not merely be data points but theological resources through which God is revealed and known (Dube, 2016). By employing a gender analysis we can be able to interrogate the power relations that sustain gendered divisions of labour in both faith and development spaces, this tool allows us to examine how social, cultural, religious, and political structures uphold the exploitation of women's unpaid work, it also makes visible the ideologies that naturalise women's labour as service or submission, rather than as work with theological and social value (Zainga, 2013). Applying AWT's Double Hermeneutics makes interpreting both scripture and culture possible, this involves critiquing biblical and African cultural practices that reinforce oppressive norms around women's work, while also retrieving liberative traditions that affirm women's dignity, agency, and sacred labour (Phiri and Nadar, 2010) AWT's Prophetic Discourse opens space for both critique and imagination: critique of unjust systems that exploit women's unpaid labour, and theological imagination that envisions alternatives (Zainga, 2013).

In relation to GAD theories, AWT adds spiritual and narrative depth to the gendered analysis of unpaid work. Where GAD and Moser's triple role framework name the reproductive and

community roles of women as undervalued in development discourse, AWT brings theological imagination to these same roles (Moser, 2012). It sees in them not just economic utility but a spiritual significance that is too often erased in development frameworks. Moreover, AWT challenges both the development theory and the male-centredness of classical theology, advocating for an epistemology grounded in the lives and voices of African women themselves. Similarly, when read alongside sociological theories of volunteering, AWT offers a critique of how even supposedly neutral categories like "volunteerism" can obscure deeply gendered spiritual economies (Wilson, 2012; Seabe, 2014). Faith communities often depend on women's unpaid service under the guise of calling or servanthood, yet fail to recognise this as a form of labour worthy of protection, redistribution, or theological revaluation. AWT makes this invisibilised economy visible, insisting that any theological or developmental intervention that does not attend to women's unpaid work is partial at best, and complicit at worst.

This study builds on AWT by integrating it not only as a theological critique but as a framework for re-theologising labour. Women's unpaid work in churches and communities is approached as a site of contestation, a place where theology and gender injustice meet, but also where new visions of justice, dignity, and communal care are born. In this sense, AWT fuels a "prophetic re-imagination" of unpaid work: one that does not only analyse and expose injustice, but also reclaims women's work as theologically significant, socially foundational, and worthy of reparation. AWT can fill the gap left by volunteering theories and gender frameworks by foregrounding faith as epistemology, women's experience as a theological resource, and care work as a spiritual and political praxis. It makes it possible to move beyond critique and toward an African Feminist Theology of Work that is gender-just, contextually rooted, and communally oriented.

3.7. Constructing An African Feminist Theology of Work Framework

Having traced the history, relevance and limitations of each contributing theory, Gender and Development, Sociological Theories of Volunteering, Social Reproduction, Theology of Work, and African Women's Theology (Moser, 2012; Wilson, 2012; Fraser, 2016; Phiri and Nadar, 2010; Volf, 2001), I decided to synthesise them into a cohesive theoretical framework tailored to the context of this study. This framework, which I term the African Feminist Theology of Work (AFTOW), emerges from the intersection of theology, gender studies, sociology, and development. The framework responds to the previous bodies of knowledge which have

provided useful tools for analysing labour and gendered inequalities but remained insufficient in capturing the religious and cultural dimensions that shape unpaid work within African settings (Le Bruyns, 2005; Tronto, 2020). In constructing an African Feminist Theology of Work, I am responding to my third research objective: to attempt to construct a gendered Theology of Work that makes unpaid and invisible work visible. This framework is grounded in African women's experiences, feminist critique, and the everyday practices of faith-based communities (Oduyoye, 2001a; Phiri and Nadar, 2010). It is not a universal claim but a contextual offering, one that invites further conversation, expansion, and action.

The core argument of AFTOW is that unpaid labour, especially as carried out by women in African contexts, is not just economic or social work; it is gendered, has a religious aspect and is meaningful because this work is not simply what women do but it is where they live out their faith, build community, and sometimes resist injustice (Haddad, 2000; Marie, 2012a). The invisibility of this labour is not accidental; it is shaped by gendered, cultural, theological, and structural systems that continue to undervalue care work and informal community roles. This framework challenges both secular and church spaces to see unpaid work as essential, not peripheral. The framework calls for recovery, recognition, and re-theologising as it seeks to recover the sacredness of unpaid work often ignored in development, to recognise unpaid labour as a valid and life-giving site of community-making, and to re-theologise how work is valued within faith communities. It does not romanticise unpaid work; it holds the sacredness and the injustice in tension, naming unpaid work as both a place of faith and a site of gendered exploitation (Le Bruyns, 2005; Tronto, 2020). The framework's main argument is to make unpaid work visible, is to make the sacred visible, it is to see God in kitchens, in fields, in church committees, in neighbourhood projects, in caregiving, in labours that sustain life, and to commit to theological reflection that honours this work.

Based on this reasoning, the framework engages existing theories and models of work discussed earlier, using them as essential building blocks while directly responding to their limitations. It draws from the GAD approach, adopting its gender analysis that highlights the marginalisation of women's work in development discourse, but moves beyond GAD's lack of theological and cultural framing (Boserup, 1970; Kabeer, 1994; Moser, 2012; Basiliere, 2016). It also builds on SRT, which has been instrumental in exposing the hidden labour structures that sustain both economies and social systems, but remains limited by its lack of theological engagement, an important lens for understanding faith-based volunteerism in African contexts

(Fraser, 2016; Guérin et al., 2021). The framework makes use of Wilson and Musick's ITVW, appreciating its sociological lens that helps explain the predictors and motivations for volunteering, while remaining critical of its limited attention to faith-based motivations and the cultural nuances that shape informal volunteerism (Wilson, 2012; Seabe and Burger, 2022). Additionally, TOW is used as a pathway for theologising labour, but this framework challenges TOW's androcentric focus on paid, formal employment and its neglect of unpaid labour's theological significance (Volf, 2001; Theology of Work Project, 2014; Ostring, 2016). Lastly, it adopts AWT to centre women's lived experiences and provide meaning-making tools, while recognising that unpaid labour remains under-theorised within AWT's broader theological contributions (Oduyoye, 2001a; Nyengele, 2004; Adonis, 2017).

Building on these theoretical foundations, the AFTOW framework identifies key determinants that shape how unpaid labour is experienced, valued, and understood within African faith-based contexts. These contextual inputs or determinants respond directly to the gaps identified in the existing theories and are the core forces that shape how unpaid work is performed, valued, and either celebrated or overlooked. They include:

- *Gender roles,* which are socially constructed expectations that typically assign unpaid labour to women (Miranda, 2011).
- *Unpaid labour,* which is essential for the survival of households and communities, yet remains persistently undervalued and unrecognised (Leszczyńska, 2019).
- *Religious capital,* refers to the faith-based motivations, obligations, and resources that draw women into volunteerism and care work (Wilson, 2012; Seabe, 2014).
- *Cultural expectations,* which prescribe gendered responsibilities and shape participation in community life (Rwafa, 2016).

These forces do not operate in isolation; they interact in complex ways to influence women's unpaid work. Mediating these influences are key moderators:

- *Community norms,* which establish whether unpaid labour is expected, affirmed, or simply taken for granted (Chisale, 2018).
- *Faith-based values,* which shape how women understand their labour, often framing unpaid work as sacred, sacrificial, or divinely mandated (Marie, 2012a).
- *Theological meaning-making,* which helps women make sense of their unpaid work, sometimes experiencing it as empowering and fulfilling, while at other times wrestling

with the tension between spiritual purpose and exploitative gendered expectations (Haddad, 2004; Kabugi, 2004; Kgatle, 2019).

The framework also outlines the key processes and praxis that are essential for affirming unpaid work and disrupting the gendered assumptions that keep it invisible. These processes include:

- *Meaning-making and theologising,* where women reframe their unpaid work as spiritually significant on their own terms, challenging narratives that treat care work as an expected gender role. This process affirms dignity without assuming obligation (Masenya, 2004).
- *Resistance strategies,* where women push back against gendered structures through community organising, storytelling, and prophetic activism that challenge the status quo (Stichter and Parpart, 2019; Chisale, 2020).
- *Re-interpreting scripture and tradition,* where women question patriarchal theological readings and propose liberating interpretations that centre the value of their unpaid contributions (Masenya, 2004).

These processes are not theoretical; they show up in the everyday lives of women through negotiation, resilience, creativity, and theological innovation within their faith communities. The outcomes this framework aims to advance are fourfold:

1. The visibility of unpaid work
2. Recognition
3. Gender justice
4. Theological transformation.

Together, these outcomes reflect the framework's deeper goal: to move unpaid work from the margins to the centre of both theological reflection and social value systems. By making this labour visible and affirming its significance, the framework invites a rethinking of how work is defined, recognised, and honoured within both the church and society. Figure 1 below visually represents this conceptual framework, mapping the contributing theories, the key variables, the mediating influences, the central processes, and the anticipated outcomes that give shape to an African Feminist Theology of Work.

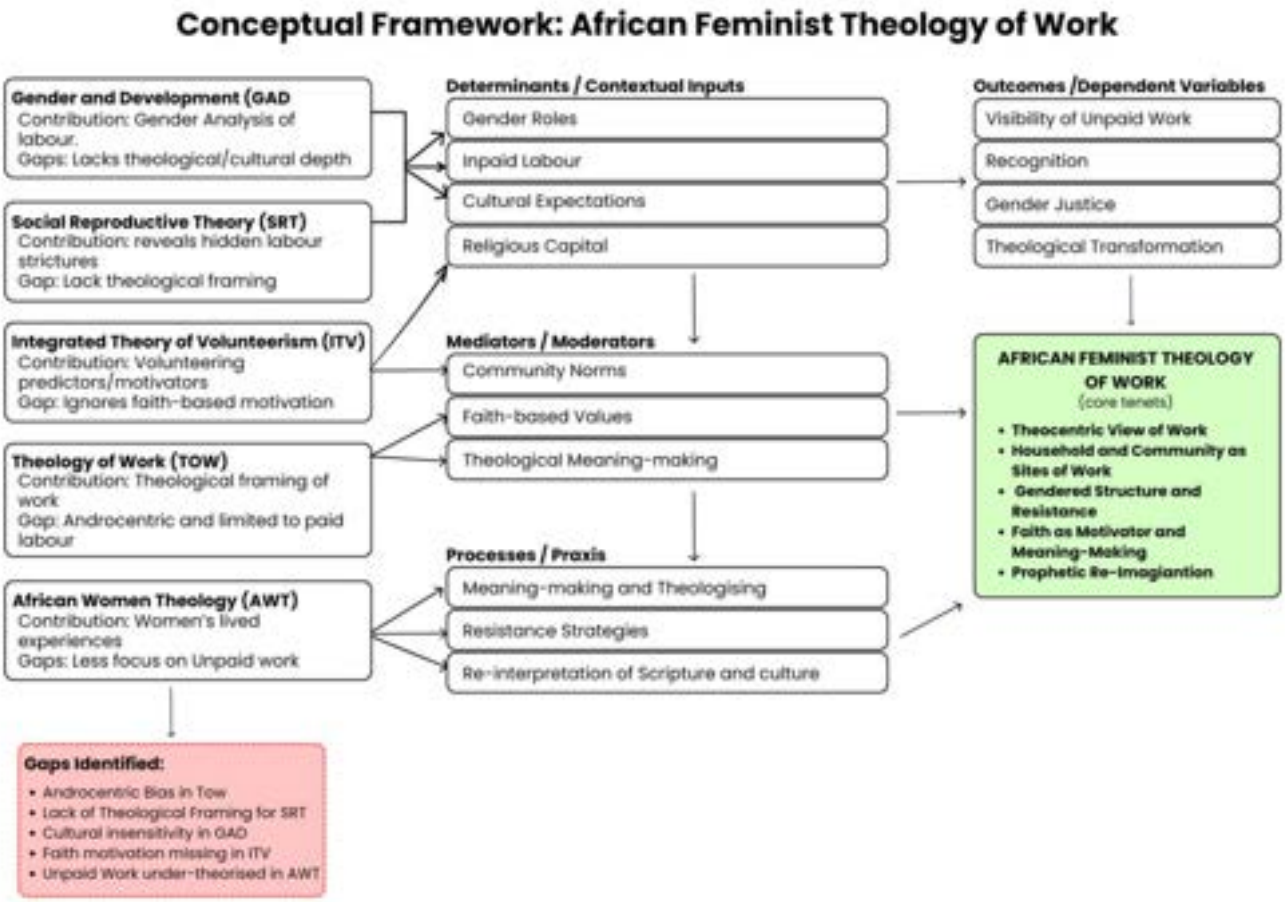


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework – An African Feminist Theology of Work

The AFTOW framework stands on five interconnected tenets that collectively reimagine unpaid work as sacred, valuable, and theologically significant. This framework is both analytical and transformative, providing a lens for understanding unpaid labour while offering a pathway for social and theological revaluation.

1. A Theocentric View of Work

The first tenet affirms that work, particularly unpaid work, holds sacred value beyond its economic function. Drawing from Ubuntu philosophy, Izandla Ziyagezana, a philosophy contributed by the field, AWT, and the literature on informal volunteerism, this tenet reframes labour as life-giving, relational, and spiritually meaningful (Chilisa, 2012; Ayanga, 2016; Patel et al., 2007). Acts of caregiving, community cleaning, feeding schemes, and neighbourhood organising are not marginal; they are central to community life and sacred in their own right.

Work is seen not only as an economic contribution but as part of sustaining life, where the home, the street, the church, and even WhatsApp groups are valid, sacred sites of labour.

2. The Household and Community as Valid Sites of Work

Building on the first tenet, the second foregrounds the importance of the household and the community as legitimate spaces of meaningful work. This directly challenges market-driven models that privilege formal, paid employment. Within African contexts, work does not begin and end at the workplace; it happens in homes, funeral committees, soup kitchens, and care circles (Russell, 2016). Ubuntu's ethic of interconnectedness, umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (Chisale, 2018), and *Izandla Ziyagezana* can affirm that community spaces are essential locations of work and theological activity. This tenet positions unpaid labour in these settings as indispensable and deserving of communal recognition and shared responsibility.

3. Gendered Structures and Resistance

The third tenet addresses the systemic forces that render unpaid work invisible and disproportionately assign it to women (Folbre, 2006; Ferrant et al., 2014; Folbre, 2018). Borrowing from GAD theory, Moser's triple role framework, and African feminist critiques, this tenet highlights the ways gendered, cultural, and theological structures shape who works, who gets recognised, and who is overlooked (Moser, 2012; Ayanga, 2016). Importantly, this tenet does not just diagnose inequality, it centres women's everyday resistance, whether through storytelling, faith-driven organising, or prophetic theological re-interpretation. It names the ways women push back against the gendered burden of unpaid labour and fight for shared responsibility, visibility, and justice.

4. Faith as Motivator and Meaning-Making

The fourth tenet recognises faith not simply as a motivator but as a system that shapes how unpaid work is experienced, valued, and understood. Many women in this study described their labour as divinely inspired, a calling, or an act of sacrificial love. Drawing on and expanding Wilson and Musick's concept of religious capital, this tenet foregrounds the theological resources that sustain unpaid work (Wilson and Musick, 1997; Wilson, 2012). However, this theologising is held critically; while faith can dignify labour, it can also entrench harmful gender expectations when churches celebrate women's service but ignore the systems that demand their overwork (Haddad, 2004; Kabugi, 2004; Adeyem et al., 2016). This pillar invites

a nuanced, reflexive engagement with faith, as a source of empowerment and, at times, a source of exploitation.

5. Prophetic Re-imagination

The final tenet is forward-looking. It calls theologians, churches, communities, and development practitioners to reimagine the value of unpaid work. It builds on the liberative visions of AWT, which demand that we move beyond description to transformation (Oduyoye, 2001a; Phiri, 2005; Ayanga, 2016). This tenet envisions alternative structures that fully recognise unpaid labour, revisiting theological teachings, reshaping church practices, and influencing policy to honour care work as central, not supplementary. Prophetic re-imagination pushes for collective action to make unpaid work visible, valued, and more equitably shared.

In constructing an African Feminist Theology of Work, I have sought to develop a contextually grounded and theologically meaningful framework that both captures and critiques the gendered dynamics of unpaid labour within South African faith communities. Having established this conceptual foundation, the next step is to investigate how these theoretical insights manifest in everyday life. The following section outlines the research design and methodology employed to explore these dynamics, to gather both the breadth and depth of women's experiences, and to engage directly with the voices that are so often unheard in theological and development discourses.

3.8. Methodology

An AFTOW, which provides the conceptual grounding for this study, also shapes the research design and methodology in substantive ways. Rather than treating theory and method as separate entities, this study sees them as co-constitutive, each informing and reinforcing the other (Hesse-Biber, 2010). AFTOW necessitates a methodology capable of both capturing the scope of unpaid work and engaging with its layered meanings. This study, therefore, adopts a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2023). The decision to use mixed-methods was guided by the need to map the phenomenon broadly through quantitative methods and then explore its theological, cultural, and emotional textures through qualitative inquiry, combining the strengths of quantitative method, which excel in measuring and mapping phenomena, with those of qualitative methods, which can help

name and describe the phenomenon through the voices of those who experience it (Goundar, 2012). The study began with a survey with the aim to collect key demographics that map the field broadly, establishing patterns of volunteering, demographic factors, and key trends, and then followed up with in-depth interviews to capture the lived experience of unpaid care work. In this study, the data collection happened in two phases:

Quantitative Phase

The first phase responded to the research sub-question one: *How do women of faith navigate the volunteerism terrain in South Africa? The* data collection involved the administration of a structured survey found in Appendix 3A, 3B and 3C, which was guided by the framework's emphasis on *visibility*. One of the central tenets of AFTOW is that unpaid work remains invisible not by accident but through systemic patterns of neglect, both theological and developmental (Budlender and Lund, 2011; Kretzschmar, 2012; Tronto, 2020). The survey thus functioned as a visibility tool, allowing the research to document patterns of unpaid volunteerism, establish demographic trends, and surface key determinants such as gender roles, religious affiliation, and forms of care work. These inputs, as theorised in the conceptual framework, are not neutral; instead, they are shaped by gendered expectations, religious capital, and cultural norms, which the survey was designed to track across a wider sample (Musick and Wilson, 2007; Moser, 2012).

The structured survey was shared online on my social media platforms and those of friends and colleagues. The original idea was to share the survey through the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council (KZNCC), an interdenominational organisation with a membership of at least 300 member churches and church-based organisations across the 11 districts (KZNCC, 2025). Following several meetings with the director and the marketing manager of KZNCC, I obtained a letter from them, signed by both parties, outlining an agreement to assist me in distributing the survey. In exchange, I offered my time and that of my husband to contribute to their social media department, where we would assist in branding their social media posts and some of their website-related materials. Despite these efforts and the signed agreement, the organisation failed to fulfil its agreement and did not distribute the survey through their website, Facebook page, and WhatsApp groups. After a number of follow-ups and considering the time required to complete my project, I decided to distribute the survey through my personal social media platform. Leveraging my position as an alumnus of a theological college where a significant

number of KZNCC member churches' pastors and leaders graduated, this positioned me within the same network, helping me gain access to KZNCC's membership. I personally reached out to some of its membership who are also my friends and colleagues, requesting that they post the survey advert (Appendix 2A) on their Facebook pages, church pages, and WhatsApp groups to ensure that it reaches the original targeted group. The survey advertisement that they posted included a link and a QR code that directed individuals to a Google form (Appendix 3C) where they could respond to a series of multiple-choice questions.

The individuals requested to assist in distributing the survey were informed that the survey advertisement and link should be shared with women residing in Pietermaritzburg and its surrounding areas (uMsunduzi) and Durban and its surrounding areas (eThekwini). Even when the survey advertisement was shared on my Facebook account, it was filtered to target women within these specified areas. The age filter was set to 20 years to 65 years, the gender filter to women, and the location filter to Pietermaritzburg and Durban. Although the study selection criteria extend beyond location, gender and age, including religion and race (specifically, Black women of faith (Christian)), these options are not made available on public platforms for non-discriminatory reasons. The survey distribution period was three months from October 17, 2023, to January 2024. At the conclusion of this period, a total of 105 individuals had responded to the survey. The survey questionnaire was structured into four sections. The initial section was designed to collect demographic information, including gender, age, and location. The subsequent section focused on religious or faith demographics, encompassing details such as faith tradition, church membership duration, and church attendance frequency. The third section collected volunteering demographics, including volunteering involvement, duration, frequency, nature, and motivation. The final section sought consent for potential interviews and gathered contact information.

The online survey was conducted in two languages: English and isiZulu. Participants were provided with the option to select their preferred language. The responses from the online survey were automatically saved on a Google spreadsheet, which I subsequently accessed and cleaned up (Ridzuan and Zainon, 2019).

Qualitative Phase

The second phase was in-depth semi-structured interviews, responding to the research sub-questions 2. In what ways might volunteerism and contours of care perpetuate gender injustices among and within South African faith communities? and 3. What theological or cultural resources do people draw on to sustain their volunteerism and care work within their communities? This phase responded to the framework's deeper interest in meaning-making. Since the quantitative phase focused on the 'what' and 'how often' of unpaid work, the qualitative phase was concerned with the 'why' and 'how it feels' (Phiri and Nadar, 2010; Tronto, 2020). Here, AFTOW's insistence on theological meaning-making, faith as a motivator, and resistance strategies came to the fore. Interviews were intentionally designed to explore how women interpret their unpaid labour (Haddad, 2004; Rakoczy, 2004; Phiri, 2005). The choice to centre women's voices through qualitative inquiry reflects the African feminist commitment to privileging subjugated knowledges and honouring lived experience as theological and epistemological resources (Oduyoye, 2001a; Phiri and Nadar, 2010; Ayanga, 2016).

From the survey respondents, 20 women were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews, of which 17 eventually took part, and only 12 gave consent for their interviews to be used for the study. These women were selected using a semi-maximum variation strategy to ensure diversity (Patton, 2002). I use the term "semi" to indicate that while the intention was to capture a wide range of experiences, the strategy was applied flexibly, guided not by strict adherence to sampling protocols, but by participants' availability and willingness to participate. This approach intentionally sought women whose backgrounds varied across key dimensions such as age, denominational affiliation, type and frequency of volunteer involvement. The aim was not statistical generalisation but rather to explore the similarities and differences in how unpaid care work is experienced, understood, and negotiated by Black women in South African faith communities. By including a range of voices, the study was better positioned to identify both recurring themes and unique insights that reflect the complex and contextually grounded realities of unpaid care labour.

Participants were contacted via email or WhatsApp using details provided in the final section of the survey, and interviews were held either in person or via Zoom, depending on the participant's preference and access. For the participants in Pietermaritzburg, the meeting

location was chosen by them, ranging from their workplaces to restaurants and their homes. In Durban, the meeting place was KFC. For those outside Pietermaritzburg and Durban, Zoom was used as the meeting platform (Woodfield, 2017). The interview questions guide (Appendix 3D) was carefully structured to reflect the tenets of the AFTOW framework, with each question designed to draw insights into the gendered, theological, cultural, and communal dimensions of unpaid volunteer work. Each question was open-ended and exploratory, allowing participants to narrate their experiences in their own words while offering rich data aligned with the framework's priorities (Palinkas et al., 2015). The question guide began by inviting participants to describe their volunteering journeys, including the types of work they do and their motivations. This addressed AFTOW's focus on *faith as a motivator* and *religious capital* (Rakoczy, 2004; Wilson, 2012). Participants were then asked how they balanced volunteer responsibilities with family and work, helping to surface the dynamics of *gendered burdens* and *resistance strategies* (Moser, 2012; Tronto, 2020).

Specific questions explored whether participants had faced gender-based inequalities and how they responded, aligning with AFTOW's tenet on *gendered structures and resistance* (Phiri & Nadar, 2010; Oduyoye, 2001). Further, questions about the kinds of work typically done by men versus women helped probe cultural norms and the reinforcement or disruption of *traditional gender roles*. Participants were also asked how their cultural and religious beliefs shaped their approach to volunteering, and whether they viewed their work as contributing to a more just or more unequal society, thus engaging AFTOW's call for *theological meaning-making* and *critical reflection* (Haddad, 2004; Phiri, 2007; Budlender and Lund, 2011). The guide concluded by exploring meaningful or memorable experiences, the impact of volunteerism on community well-being, resources that sustain this labour, and participants' views on how gender equity might be enhanced in faith-based volunteer spaces. Together, these questions allowed for a deep exploration of how unpaid labour is interpreted, navigated, and resisted by South African Black women of faith, centring their voices as theological and epistemological resources.

Interviews were conducted primarily in isiZulu and English, with participants naturally code-switching depending on comfort and topic. Each interview session lasted between 45 and 75 minutes; interviews were conducted over a period of three months, from May 2024 to July 2024. All interviews were recorded with permission from the participants using my phone audio recorder. For the interviews in English, I used the help of Otter.ai to transcribe, and those

in isiZulu were transcribed and translated into English manually with the help of my assistant translator, who specialises in isiZulu translation, following the process of cross-language transcription to preserve meaning and reflect cultural nuance (Squires, 2009). An informed consent document (Appendix 4A and 4B) was shared with each participant at the beginning of the interview, detailing the purpose of the study, the use of pseudonyms, and their right to withdraw at any point.

Although participant observation is frequently used in qualitative research to understand everyday practices within their natural settings, it was not employed in this study. The primary aim of the qualitative phase was to understand how women interpreted and made meaning of their experiences of unpaid volunteer work, rather than to document the performance of volunteer activities themselves. Semi-structured interviews were therefore considered the most appropriate method because they enabled participants to reflect on their motivations, experiences, beliefs and theological understandings in their own words. Furthermore, much of the volunteer work examined in this study occurred across multiple faith communities, at different times and in diverse contexts, making prolonged participant observation beyond the scope of this research. The combination of survey data and in-depth interviews was therefore considered sufficient to address the research questions while remaining consistent with the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design adopted in this study.

3.9. The Ethics of Ukuhlangana

Ethics in this research is not just a matter of institutional clearance; it is an ongoing, relational, and context-sensitive practice, especially when working with Black women in faith communities, many of whom are marginalised, overburdened, and often invisible in both public policy and theological discourse, which meant that the ethical stakes were both personal and political. Following Chilisa's (2012) principle of relational accountability, I approached ethics as a commitment not only to informed consent but to mutual care, voice, and justice. These women were not simply mere data sources; they were co-constructors of knowledge whose stories and insights shape not only this research but also broader theological understandings of unpaid work, faith, and care, and my responsibility was to honour the depth of what they shared.

The use of mixed methods required layered ethical reflection, particularly during the qualitative phase. After the interviews, participants were no longer anonymous to me. We spoke on

WhatsApp, exchanged voice notes, followed each other on social media, and, in many cases, met face-to-face in public or semi-private spaces. As Laryeafio and Ogbewe (2023) note that ensuring privacy and ethical boundaries within digital communication platforms is essential, particularly in research involving women whose voices are often marginalised or misrepresented. Some of these meetings were carefully negotiated and held in restaurants, but others involved more risk. One interview was conducted at a participant's home; she had sent me a location pin to her home in a township I had never been to. I took an Uber and found her handwashing clothes outside after returning from her morning of unpaid work. We sat outside and spoke while hanging up clothes together. Another participant invited me to pick her up and drive to a nearby mall for the interview. She redirected me several times over the phone as I drove through her unfamiliar neighbourhood. But later admitted that she had misdirected me at first, because she was afraid I might not be who I said I was. In these moments, trust was mutual and fragile; we were both taking a risk. Such moments reflect what Harvey (2018) and Montgomery (2020) describe as "mutual vulnerability", a necessary ethical awareness in qualitative interviews where researchers and participants alike navigate complex dynamics of trust, exposure, and power. These encounters were not just logistically difficult; they embodied *ukuhlangana* –a deeply relational act of meeting, underscoring how much vulnerability exists on both sides of a research encounter.

To build that trust, I developed strategies that helped us identify each other in public: updating my WhatsApp status with a photo of what I was wearing and how I had styled my hair on the day of the interview, keeping my student card visible, and greeting each participant with respect. I often opened with *ngiyabonga ukuhlangana nawe* or *ngiyabonga ukuvuma ukuthi sihlangane,* meaning thank you for allowing me to meet with you, an expression of gratitude and honour for the encounter. These were not just greetings; they were what Chilisa (2012) describes as relational rituals of recognition that set the tone for respectful engagement.

Recruitment and Reciprocity

Recruitment also posed significant ethical challenges. The survey was advertised on social media, which created visibility but also misunderstanding. Some thought it was a job advert, or assumed that participation would lead to funding for their volunteer projects. Others believed that the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) involvement meant that institutional resources were on offer. This was not an unreasonable assumption. In many communities, UKZN is seen

as a resourceful, well-connected institution (Bawa and Pouris, 2023). Its association with the research added representative weight. It was emotionally taxing to manage participants' expectations, especially because these hopes are reflections of how under-resourced women's unpaid work is (Budlender and Lund, 2011; Esquivel, 2014). Some women were leading impactful community projects with no support. I had to clarify that no payment or sponsorship would follow, and yet still honour their willingness to speak. While I could not provide money, I offered my skills instead, helping some participants with their social media pages, proposal writing, or digital content design, or video editing support where appropriate. This kind of reciprocity was relational, not transactional (Chilisa, 2012). It didn't balance the scale, but it was a gesture of *ukuhlangana*–meeting each other with something more than extraction.

Access was also shaped by institutional networks. My connection to the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council (KZNCC) was to enable broader survey reach, but came at a relational cost. In return for their help in distributing the survey, I offered unpaid support to their media department. This informal exchange of services was not part of a formal agreement, but rather a practical and relational negotiation built on mutual need. Such reciprocity raises important questions about labour, expectation, and academic access. As Vertesi and Dourish (2011) note that ethical research demands recognition of the broader political economy within which data is gathered. While I was grateful for their willingness to support the study, I could not ignore the irony that my own unpaid work, offered in exchange for access, mirrored the very unpaid labour I was studying among my participants. These tensions made it clear that research ethics must move beyond abstract declarations of avoiding harm and confront the ethics of academic access, after all, research happens in economies of time, trust, and relational negotiation, not just theory.

Confidentiality and Consent in Context

One of the most ethical responsibilities I carried was to protect and amplify voices without appropriation. This required what Jackson and Mazzei (2009) calls an "ethics of entanglement," where voice is not extracted but honoured in its complexity, contradiction, and vulnerability. Many women shared personal and vulnerable stories. They critiqued husbands, community ward leaders, church leaders, pastors and religious structures. There were moments when some cried during the interview, and moments when we just sat in silence. One admitted she feared speaking critically about volunteering might make her appear ungrateful to God,

and another said she had never thought of her volunteering as "work" until we spoke. These were not just interviews; they were moments of theological reflection, grief, venting and sometimes revelation (Pillow, 2003). The consent process had to be handled with equal care. Consent forms were available in both isiZulu and English, and I would often read them aloud while participants followed along. I encouraged questions, code-switched for clarity, and as Laryeafio and Ogbewe (2023) highlight that ongoing consent respects the evolving comfort levels of participants and upholds the principle of voluntary participation in research. I emphasised that consent was ongoing, and they could withdraw at any point. Some participants did exactly that. Of the 17 interviews I conducted, five later asked that their data not be used. This was difficult, especially because their stories were rich and powerful, but I honoured their decisions. Protecting trust mattered more than preserving data.

Confidentiality in this study proved challenging. Participants often shared information that could easily identify others, using the names of individuals they were referring to. I anonymised all names and sometimes even removed the names of towns, churches, or organisations to prevent potential recognition. Using "my pastor's wife," "the woman who runs the soup kitchen," "our youth coordinator" instead. Yet I also wanted to preserve meaning, especially when participants critiqued the structures around them. As highlighted by Harvey (2018), the challenge lies in protecting anonymity without stripping stories of their critical depth. To address this, I grouped quotes thematically, allowing their insights to shine through while protecting individual identities. This approach aligns with decolonial feminist ethics that prioritise community protection alongside the amplification of marginalised voices (Chilisa, 2012; Pillow, 2003)

Faith, Fatigue, and Feminist Tensions

Another subtle but important ethical tension was the contrast between what women do and how they make sense of it. Participants spoke with joy about their volunteering work, preparing meals, running support groups, visiting and helping the sick, but when asked to reflect on gender roles, power dynamics, or theological justifications for their unpaid work, the energy shifted, many hesitated, and others expressed confusion or discomfort. This revealed what feminist theologian Letty Russell (1985) refers to as the *hermeneutics of suspicion*, where theology, rather than enabling reflection, sometimes restricts it, especially for women whose spiritual formation has not included critical tools for questioning gendered norms. This gap

between practice and theory, between embodied care and constrained critique, was not a flaw in the data; it was the data. As Denbow and Watson (n.d) suggest that ethical feminist research must pay attention not only to what is said, but to what is difficult to say, especially in sacred or gendered contexts.

My ethical stance was also shaped by the emotional and spiritual weight of what was shared. There were interviews where I cried alongside participants, times when I sat in silence as they processed painful memories, and moments when I left feeling deeply unsettled, especially after hearing stories of exploitation by pastors or neglect by institutional churches. This layered response reflects what Tronto (2020) defines as an "ethics of care," which includes attentiveness, responsibility, and responsiveness to others' vulnerability. In this context, it meant honouring both the fatigue and the faith that women expressed, as well as the critique and the commitment. Holding space for this emotional and theological ambivalence, where participants could say both "This work is a blessing" and "This work is too much", was central to my ethical position. As Pillow (2003) argues, embracing discomfort and contradiction is a necessary part of ethical qualitative research. I did not try to resolve these tensions, but rather to dwell in them, recognising that complexity is not an obstacle to knowledge but a source of it. This ethics of care guided how I listened, how I wrote, and how I now continue to carry these stories forward.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Every research project begins not only with a question, but with a researcher. I did not enter this study as a neutral observer; I came as a Black South African woman, a scholar, a theologian, a person raised and shaped by faith communities, and someone who has served in church committees, led prayer meetings, cooked for funerals, and coordinated women's ministry events, all without pay. I am not an outsider looking in; I understand, from within, the language of *"service to God"*, the silent assumptions about gender roles, and the emotional weight that unpaid faith-based labour can carry. Such insider knowledge can be a powerful research asset, allowing for cultural fluency and authentic rapport with participants (Merriam et al., 2001; Sultana, 2007). This positionality gave me both access and responsibility. On the one hand, I shared language, cultural codes, and often religious references with my participants. I knew when to bring scripture into a conversation, when to nod quietly, when to wait for the right moment to ask a harder question. I could speak isiZulu or switch into English when

needed. I could hold space for both praise and protest. On the other hand, the insider status demands rigorous reflexivity; I had to be mindful of what I assumed I already understood and to remain open to being surprised, even disrupted, by what participants shared. As Pillow (2003) reminds us, reflexivity is not about erasing subjectivity but about engaging it critically, being open to surprise, discomfort, and disruption. I had to make space for participants to shape the narrative, even when their experiences complicated my own assumptions or theological frameworks.

Reflexivity meant acknowledging how my multiple identities shaped the research encounter. I was a young Black woman academic with ties to a university and with a visible digital presence as an academic coach and content creator. This meant I was both insider and outsider, familiar but also formal, someone with access to academic spaces that participants often admired or feared. These shifting roles affected how participants related to me. Some saw me as a sister, others as a professional, and still others as a potential gatekeeper to institutional support. These multiple roles demanded ethical sensitivity, not just in what I did, but in how I listened, interpreted, and wrote (Chilisa, 2012). Participants trusted me not only with their critiques but with their hopes. Being reflexive also meant wrestling with discomfort. There were times when I felt complicit in the very systems I was critiquing; I carried guilt when participants expressed hopes for funding, employment, or visibility that I could not fulfil. I struggled with the unequal power dynamics inherent in research, where their unpaid labour, pain, and insight would strengthen my dissertation, but not necessarily their daily lives. Also, I acknowledge that doing these interviews was too unpaid work. These moments highlighted the extractive risk of qualitative research, where participants' narratives enrich academic outputs but do not always lead to tangible change in their lives (Smith, 2021).

But perhaps the most significant reflexive challenge was how to write. I did not want to speak for the women in this study; I wanted to create space for their voices to speak with mine. That meant resisting the temptation to over-interpret, to flatten complexity, or to tidy their contradictions. It meant allowing a participant to say, "This is God's calling" and then, a few minutes later, "Sometimes I wish I could just stop." These tensions are not inconsistencies; they are the lived theology of women navigating faith, work, gender, and survival. They are what Lawless (2011) calls "performed knowing," where lived theology resists neat categorisation. This dissertation is shaped by that reflexive journey. It is not a neutral account.

It is a textured, vulnerable, and imperfect attempt to listen well, analyse carefully, and write ethically.

My positionality is not a bias to be corrected; it is a lens that I have made visible so that the readers can understand not just what was found but how it was found and by whom. In what follows, I describe how I worked with the data produced through this process, analysing both survey responses and interview transcripts to surface patterns, themes, and stories that reveal the textures of unpaid care and faith-based labour[3] in South African faith communities.

3.10. Use of Digital and AI-Assisted Tools

In keeping with the ethical commitments to transparency and accountability outlined in this chapter, I want to be clear about how digital and AI-assisted tools were used in this research. The quantitative survey data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), with Microsoft Excel used for data cleaning, descriptive summaries, and the production of charts and figures. The qualitative interview data were coded and analysed using NVivo. During the later stages of qualitative analysis, I made limited use of generative AI tools, most notably the ChatGPT data analysis plug-in, to assist with organising existing codes into coherent thematic groupings and with structuring the presentation of themes across chapters. I also used AI-assisted language tools, such as ChatGPT, QuillBot, and Grammarly, to refine language, enhance clarity, and improve readability. These tools were not used to generate empirical data, conduct analysis, interpret findings, or develop theoretical arguments.

All conceptualisation, critical interpretation, theoretical framing, analytical decisions, and meaning-making processes were my own. The use of digital and AI-assisted tools did not replace scholarly judgement, reflexive engagement or critical thinking but functioned as technical supports while maintaining academic integrity.

[3] The term "faith-based" is used in this dissertation in conversation with existing scholarship, where it functions as a recognised and familiar descriptor, particularly in relation to faith-based organisations and practices. Participants' accounts, however, suggest that much of the voluntary and community-making work discussed here is more accurately described as faith-inspired rather than institutionally faith-based. In many cases, women's engagement in unpaid and informal volunteer work was not located within formal church structures or organised programmes, but was motivated, sustained, and interpreted through personal faith, spiritual conviction, and religiously informed moral imaginaries. The use of "faith-based" in this dissertation therefore reflects a strategic engagement with established scholarly language, while remaining attentive to the lived, diffuse, and non-institutional expressions of faith articulated by participants.

3.11. Data Analysis

The process of analysing data in this study is interpretive, shaped by the complexity of the research questions and the voices of the women who shared their lives with me. Drawing on the AFTOW framework, I approached both the survey data and interview transcripts as testimonies, fragments of lived theologies that reveal how Black South African women navigate the sacred, emotional, and political terrain of unpaid faith-based labour. My goal was not just to organise data into themes, but to uncover patterns, to surface the theological and cultural meanings embedded in participants' words, and to hold space for contradiction and complexity.

Mapping the Terrain, Trends and Tensions

The quantitative analysis began with the survey that generated 105 responses from participants across Durban and Pietermaritzburg. To prepare the data for analysis, I manually merged responses submitted in isiZulu Google spreadsheet and English Google spreadsheet into a single Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to clean the dataset and produce charts for each survey question. I further cross-referenced responses using a paid AI-assisted analysis tool, which helped identify key statistical relationships. While this tool was not used for final interpretations, it served as a helpful thinking companion, offering alternative framings, language, and hypotheses to test against my own developing interpretations.

Microsoft Excel and SPSS were also used to generate descriptive statistics and charts that helped visualise patterns across dimensions such as age, gender, faith tradition, duration and frequency of volunteering, and types of unpaid work (e.g., feeding schemes, hospital visits, media support). A particularly useful strategy was creating comparison charts, for example, plotting frequency of volunteering against motivation, or faith tradition against type of work. These revealed patterns, such as the dominance of long-term, weekly faith-based volunteerism, and a high level of perceived religious and cultural motivation. Most respondents rated faith and culture as extremely important motivators (8–10 on a 10-point scale). However, when asked to articulate specific religious or cultural resources they drew upon in the interview, many struggled to name them, an interpretive gap that became a point of theological reflection.

One limitation emerged around the "faith tradition" variable. Many participants selected "other" rather than choosing from the options provided (Protestant, Pentecostal, Catholic, etc.). In interviews, it became clear that these "other" responses often referred to branches of Protestantism or Charismatic Pentecostal churches that did not neatly fit existing categories. This revealed the fluidity of religious identity and the need for more context-sensitive categories when studying African Christianities.

Listening for Language, Layers, and Lived Theology

The qualitative phase consisted of 17 interviews, 12 of which were transcribed and analysed after five participants later withdrew consent. Of the 12, four interviews were conducted in English and transcribed using Otter.ai, with manual editing. The remaining interviews featured a rich mixture of isiZulu, English, and frequent code-switching. These required manual transcription and translation, carefully retaining key indigenous terms such as *Izandla Ziyagezana* (one hand washes the other), *indlela ibuzwa kwaba phambili* (the way forward is asked from those who walked it), *ukunikela* (sacrifice/offering), and *vuk' uzenzele* (do it yourself). These expressions were not only linguistic features, but they also reveal the vocabulary women used to frame their work. NVivo software was used to code the data in three cycles: initial coding, pattern coding, and theory-informed coding. Codes emerged from participants' own words and were clustered into themes aligned to the study's three research sub-questions. Examples include "emotional burden," "divine calling," "lack of support," and "serving with love." Some of the most recurrent themes emerged from metaphors and phrases such as *Izandla Ziyagezana* (hands wash each other), *ngizoyivunela* (I will harvest/reap), and *bayangiphilisa* (they give me life). These became core to understanding the ways women articulate the interplay between care, community, and divine purpose.

The AFTOW framework guided the interpretation of these themes. I treated the interviews as sites of theological production. In doing so, I followed the lead of scholars like Oduyoye (2001) and Nadar (2009), who show how African women theologise through story, struggle, and spiritual practice. The contradictions, such as describing unpaid work as both a "blessing" and "too much", were coded not as inconsistencies, but as evidence of what Le Roux (2019) terms "complicated complicities," where women simultaneously resist and reinforce gendered religious norms.

Integration of Mixed-Methods

I used triangulation to integrate the survey and interview data, initially as a strategy to explain patterns emerging in the quantitative dataset. However, as the analysis progressed, triangulation also became a means of surfacing contradictions and silences, moments where what participants ticked in the survey and what they said in the interview revealed different dimensions of meaning. These discords were not dismissed; instead, they were treated as data, consistent with what African feminist scholars describe as the interpretive richness of contradiction (Le Roux, 2019; Nadar, 2009). Quantitative patterns, such as the high number of long-term volunteers among older, unemployed women, gained depth through stories of ubizo (calling), umusa (grace), and survival. Likewise, the statistically significant presence of younger women in volunteering roles was explained in interviews as linked to aspirations for employment. This mirrors Creswell and Plano Clark (2023) insight that triangulation in qualitative inquiry is not only about confirmation but about expanding meaning through context and emotion. In some cases, triangulation clarified survey gaps, such as the common selection of "Other" under faith tradition, which was revealed in interviews to reflect complex denominational identities, often Charismatic or Evangelical, but not easily captured by standard categories (Sperber and Hern, 2018)

Practically, I used NVivo to trace how interview themes overlapped with and explained specific survey trends. I clustered quotations under the thematic nodes, then referenced charts and statistics, such as those related to frequency, motivation, or type of volunteering within each thematic cluster, to visually support the interpretive claims being made. This allowed me to use the survey as a structural overview and the interviews as textured expansions of that structure. As (Patton, 2014) notes, triangulation strengthens research not by eliminating bias, but by embracing "multiple ways of seeing." By drawing connections across datasets, between what was ticked on a survey form and what was spoken softly or with emotion in an interview, I was able to attend to the fragmented, intuitive, and embodied theologies that shape women's labour. These theologies are not always systematic or verbalised but are lived and enacted through service, care, and survival. As Oduyoye (2001) reminds us, AWT is not born in lecture halls but in kitchens, prayer meetings, burial societies, and community gatherings. Through triangulation, I created space for these everyday theologies to be heard in their full complexity, even when they emerged in tension or contradiction.

3.12. Limitations and Reflections

This chapter has presented the methodological foundations of the study, grounded in African feminist theological inquiry and centred on the lived experiences of Black South African women engaged in unpaid faith-based labour. However, all research is shaped by constraints, practical, epistemological, and ethical. This section reflects on the limits that shaped how knowledge was produced, interpreted, and narrated in this study.

Sampling and Access Limitations

The final sample, 105 survey participants and 12 in-depth interviewees, provided rich qualitative and quantitative insights, but the study does not claim representativeness. The women who participated in the survey self-selected based on willingness and availability, and interviewees were further narrowed by accessibility, scheduling constraints, and safety concerns. Despite using a semi-maximum variation sampling strategy to ensure diversity across location, age, and type of unpaid work, the pool ultimately reflected those who felt comfortable responding to a university-linked invitation and who trusted the process enough to participate. Some potential participants declined out of suspicion, others withdrew consent post-interview, and a few misunderstood the purpose of the study, believing it to be linked to employment or funding. Moreover, digital recruitment strategies, primarily through WhatsApp and social media, may have unintentionally excluded older or technologically disconnected women, despite their historical centrality in volunteer ministries. This introduces a generational bias that must be acknowledged.

Language, Translation, and Interpretation

Interviews conducted in isiZulu, English, or a mixture of both raised unavoidable challenges of translation and linguistic loyalty. While I am fluent in isiZulu and use code-switching to build relationships, translating religious and cultural metaphors into English risks flattening their theological depth. Terms such as *umusa* (grace), *ubizo* (calling), and *ukuzinikela* (self-sacrifice) carry theological meanings that exceed Western academic categories. As scholars of decolonial research remind us, translation is never neutral; it is shaped by power, interpretation, and epistemic assumptions (Chilisa, 2012; Nyengele, 2004). I attempted to retain original terms where possible, using footnotes or contextual explanation, but I acknowledge the limitations inherent in this practice.

The Limits of Categorisation

The use of NVivo and Excel offered useful ways to manage, organise, and compare data; however, coding always risks reducing complexity into categories. Many of the participants' stories resisted clean classification; their emotions were layered, their reflections often contradictory, sharing experiences of joy and frustration, divine purpose and emotional exhaustion in a single narrative. Even though I treated these contradictions as data, every decision to label a segment of text, to group codes, or to generate charts is a choice, and one that inevitably shapes interpretation. I attempted to mitigate this by staying close to the narrative, revisiting transcripts repeatedly, and remaining guided by the theological and sociological questions at the heart of the study. But I also recognise that the research is partial; it offers one reading, rooted in my positionality, my training, and my questions, of a set of experiences that are far more expansive than what can be contained in any dissertation.

Faith Categories and Survey Oversights

One important limitation of the survey emerged around the "faith tradition" question. Participants were asked to select from a list of categories: Charismatic, Protestant, Pentecostal, Catholic, Evangelical, Independent Christian, and Other. A significant number selected "Other", even though in follow-up interviews, it became clear that several of these respondents belonged to churches that could arguably fall under one of the listed categories. For instance, some described attending Pentecostal or Evangelical churches but resisted those labels, preferring instead localised or non-denominational descriptors such as "Bible-believing," "Spirit-filled," or simply "my church." This pattern revealed a limitation not in the range of options provided, but in the survey's design, which did not include a follow-up prompt inviting participants to explain what they meant by "Other." This omission foreclosed the possibility of exploring how women themselves define their spiritual belonging, and how this self-definition may shape their motivations and meanings attached to unpaid work. As Meyer (2004) and Bompani (2015) argue, African Christian identity is rarely reducible to fixed denominational lines; it is fluid, experiential, and often grounded in practice and personal encounter rather than doctrine.

Not creating space for participants to self-describe their religious identity contradicts the broader feminist and decolonial commitments of this study, particularly its emphasis on voice, meaning-making, and epistemic justice. Including an open-ended option would have allowed

for a richer understanding of the intersections between faith identity, theological imagination, and voluntary care work. This oversight reminds us how easily academic categories can flatten lived complexity, especially in religious contexts where belonging is relational and affective.

3.13. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical and methodological foundations that guide this study. Drawing on the AFTOW, it positioned unpaid labour as an analytical and theological entry point for understanding how faith, gender, and survival intersect in African women's lives. AFTOW provides a lens through which everyday acts of service and care are recognised as forms of work, moral, social, and spiritual, without predetermining how they will later be interpreted in the data. The research employed a mixed-methods design within an interpretive paradigm, combining quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews. This approach allows the study to capture both the scope of women's unpaid participation and the meanings they attach to it, while respecting the complexity of lived experience. The design reflects a broader African feminist commitment to relational accountability, reflexivity, and voice, principles that treat participants as knowledge holders rather than subjects of study.

By integrating insights from Wilson and Musick's (1999) integrated theory of volunteerism and SRT, the study situates unpaid work within overlapping social, cultural, and economic fields. These theoretical choices frame the inquiry but do not predetermine its outcomes; instead, they provide tools for later interpretation of both the quantitative and qualitative data. Together, the theoretical and methodological frameworks establish the groundwork for the analysis that follows. The next chapter turns to the survey findings, presenting the statistical contours of unpaid volunteerism in faith communities. It maps who volunteers, how often, and under what conditions–offering the first empirical glimpse of the patterns that the subsequent qualitative chapters explore in depth.

CHAPTER 4

BAYANGI BONA
– NOW THEY SEE ME

"I used to go every day. Then I stopped because it was too much. That's when the principal called me 'Where are you?' That's when I realised: bayangi bona." Buhle

4.1. Introduction

This moment captures a recurring reality in the lives of women volunteers: unpaid work often remains unseen until its absence disrupts the daily flow of community life. *Bayangi Bona–now they see me*–speaks to the politics of visibility that surround women's unpaid labour. It highlights how their work is silently expected, rarely acknowledged, and only recognised when it is withdrawn. This chapter takes up the task of making this unpaid and invisible work visible by presenting quantitative findings of the study. Drawing on the survey I conducted to examine the gendered nature of unpaid and invisible work, as well as community-making work among faith-based volunteers in South Africa. This survey helps to map out the volunteerism terrain and the contours of care in urban Black faith communities, answering the first sub-question: "How do women of faith navigate the volunteerism terrain?" Although numerous studies explore unpaid work and volunteerism, few investigate the gendered nature of volunteerism within faith communities, the complex relationship between religion and volunteering, and the role of culture in shaping volunteering. The survey aimed to address this gap by collecting detailed demographic data and insights into the intersection of gender, faith, and culture in the context of unpaid and invisible work.

Based on the existing literature, particularly Friedemann-Sánchez and Griffin (2011), 91% of volunteers in South Africa are women and mostly from or linked with a religious organisation. Russell (2016) contends that the conventional methods used by developed countries to measure volunteering in Africa mainly capture activities similar to those typically found in developed economies. It is more challenging to measure volunteering activities that take place outside the formal economy and cannot be obtained through formal data collection methods. The Volunteer Activities Survey (VAS 2018) profiles a volunteer in South Africa as likely to be Black, a woman between the ages of 40-45, with lower levels of education, and unemployed. I

hypothesised that the volunteerism terrain in South Africa is informal, has complex layers of care work and is gendered. I directed my initial focus towards the first aim of my research: To examine the contours of volunteerism in urban Black faith communities in South Africa.

To this aim, the survey targeted individuals in Pietermaritzburg (uMsunduzi), Durban (eThekwini) and surrounding areas. The survey had three main sections: Section 1 about Gender, Age and location demographics, Section 2 about Faith and Cultural demographics and Section 3 about Volunteering work and experience. An online questionnaire (Appendix 3C) was distributed via my website and social media platforms, as well as those of friends and colleagues, collecting responses over a three-month period. The survey received responses from 105 individuals, capturing a wide range of demographic and volunteering-related data points. The data collected is presented in this chapter thematically, using descriptive statistics and charts to illustrate trends. Through this data, we begin to see not only who volunteers, but how unpaid work quietly threads itself through the everyday lives of women in faith communities.

4.2. Demographic Profile of Volunteers

This section presents the demographic profile of survey participants by exploring key social variables such as gender, age, and location. These variables help to map out the social context in which informal care and volunteering work happen. The demographic information also provides a baseline understanding of who participates in unpaid, faith-based volunteerism in the context of this study. Where appropriate, these findings are discussed alongside existing literature to situate the study within broader patterns reported in South Africa, rather than to imply statistical generalisation beyond the study sample.

4.2.1. Gender Imbalance Among Volunteers

The first demographic variable explored was gender. The first question the survey asked in Section 1 was: “What is your gender?” I reasoned that if 91% of volunteers in South Africa are women, as suggested by Friedemann-Sánchez and Griffin (2011), then gender dynamics play a crucial role in volunteerism. To confirm this, I focused on the demographic composition of volunteers, specifically examining gender distribution (Figure 2).

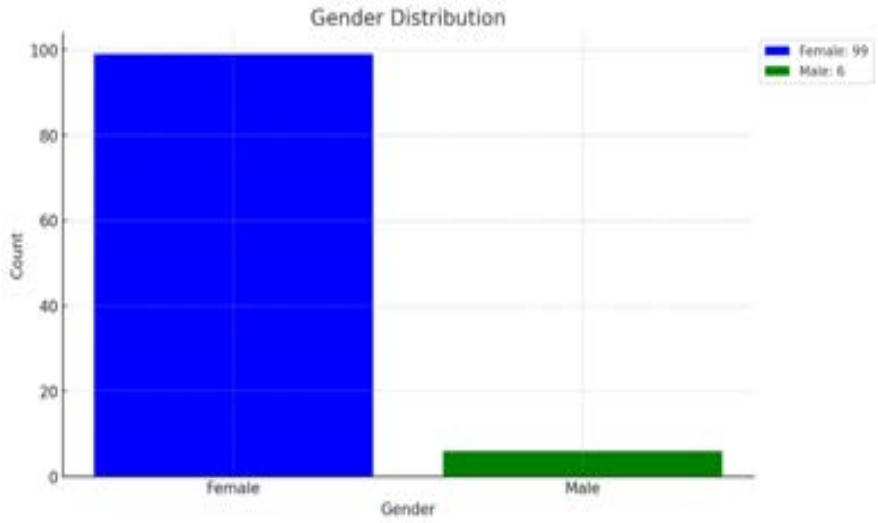


Figure 2: Gender distribution of volunteers.

The data indicate a significant gender imbalance among participants, with 99 females (94%) and only 6 males (5.7%) participating in the survey.

This data indicates that there is a significantly high rate of participation in unpaid and invisible work by women within this study. These findings support the argument that volunteerism and unpaid work are gendered; this aligns with the key focus of this study and confirms the literature that shows women dominate volunteer activities, especially in the context of unpaid and invisible work (Friedemann-Sánchez & Griffin, 2011). The gender distribution presented here may reflect broader societal norms and expectations around traditional gender roles, which likely affect who participates in unpaid work and even who responds to surveys about volunteerism. Understanding these gendered patterns provides a foundation to explore other demographic characteristics, like age distribution, to further contextualise the volunteerism landscape.

4.2.2. Majority of Volunteers are Younger to Middle-aged Adults

Next, the survey asked: "What is your age?" Age is an exogenous variable in the unpaid work literature. As previously mentioned, it is thought that a volunteer in South Africa is likely to be between the ages of 40-45 (Survey, 2018); thus, the expected response rate could be readily hypothesised. To explore this, I examined the age distribution of volunteers. Results obtained from the survey revealed that the majority of volunteers who participated in the survey are

younger to middle-aged adults, predominantly in the 25-35 age range (39%) and the 36-45 age range (30%). Older age categories are less represented (Figure 3).

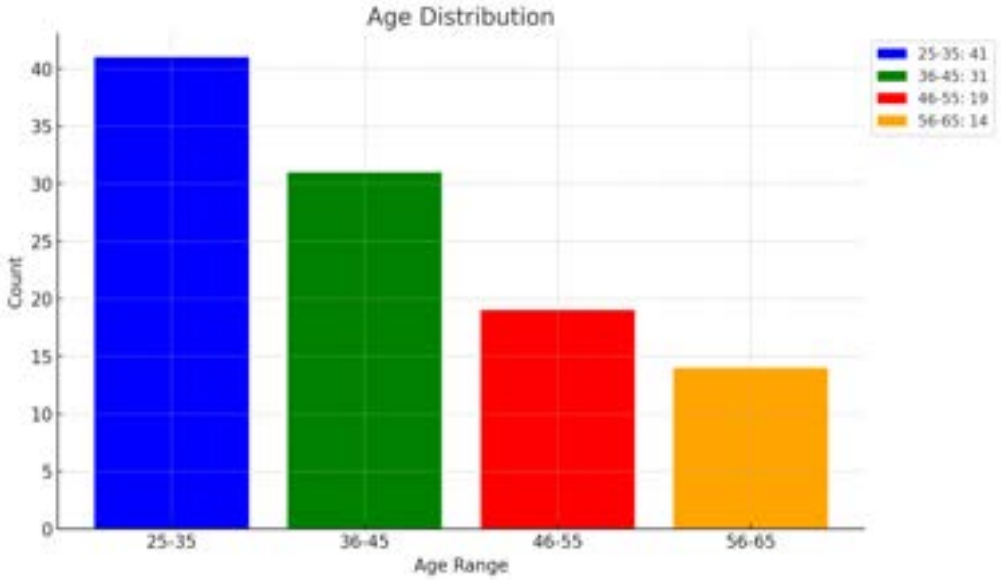


Figure 3: Age distribution of volunteers.

The data indicates that the majority of volunteers fall within the 25-35 age range (41 respondents, 39%), followed by the 36-45 age range (31 respondents, 30%). There are fewer volunteers in the older age categories, with 19 (18%) in the 46-55 age range and 14 (13%) in the 56-65 age range.

This age distribution suggests that younger to middle-aged adults are more engaged in volunteer activities within the surveyed community. This may reflect the demographic composition of the active workforce and volunteer base in the region or possibly be due to fewer familial or professional commitments among these age groups. Since the survey was distributed online, this method may have influenced the age range of respondents, skewing the sample towards younger participants. Having focused on age and gender as key aspects of volunteer demographics, it raises the question about whether geographic location may also influence the nature and extent of volunteer activities.

4.2.3. Majority of Volunteers are from eThekwini

Understanding where volunteers are located provides important context for interpreting how unpaid work unfolds across different urban and peri-urban spaces. In a country marked by spatial and economic inequality like South Africa, geographic location often influences both

the availability of volunteer opportunities and the demand for unpaid work (Compion, 2016). To evaluate the geographic distribution of the study sample, the survey included the question: "Where do you reside?" This question aimed to determine the concentration of volunteers in specific urban areas within KwaZulu-Natal. I would expect to see a higher engagement in eThekwini, as existing studies suggest that urban areas with higher population densities often have greater demands for volunteer support (Compion 2016, VAS 2018). As expected, the results show that the majority of volunteers reside in eThekwini, with 55% respondents (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Location distribution of volunteers.

The majority of volunteers are from eThekwini (58 respondents, 55%), followed by Msunduzi (28 respondents, 27%), and a smaller group from other locations (19 respondents, 18%).

This data indicates a significant concentration of volunteers in eThekwini compared to uMsunduzi and other areas. The higher representation of volunteers from eThekwini may therefore be associated with factors such as its larger population size, greater socio-economic challenges, or stronger community networks that facilitate volunteerism. eThekwini's higher participation may highlight the effectiveness of local volunteer initiatives and the presence of more opportunities or needs for volunteer services in this region.

The demographic profile of the volunteers who participated in this study provides important context for understanding the extent and nature of unpaid volunteer work examined in the

sections that follow. The predominance of women, the concentration of respondents within the younger and middle-aged categories, and the strong representation from eThekwini suggest that unpaid faith-based volunteerism in this study is largely undertaken by economically active women living in urban communities. These demographic characteristics provide an important backdrop for interpreting the frequency, duration and diversity of volunteer activities presented later in this chapter and are explored in greater depth through the qualitative findings in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.3. Faith-Based Demographics of Volunteers

In South African communities, religion is not just personal belief; it structures everyday life, including social norms and responsibilities. For women, especially, churches are spaces where unpaid care work and volunteerism are modelled, expected, and spiritually affirmed (Boya, 2022). In these contexts, volunteering is often seen as part of one's religious identity, not as a voluntary or extra act. This section presents data about respondents' faith tradition, length of church membership, and frequency of church participation, which help us measure participants' religious embeddedness, helping us see if there are connections between long church membership and or high frequency church participation and volunteerism.

4.3.1. The Majority of Volunteers Belong to Non-mainstream Faith Traditions

With this study focusing on the intersection of gender, faith, and culture in unpaid and invisible work, I decided not to dwell too much on gender dynamics, which have been well-studied by feminists such as Fisseha et al. (2021), Parry and Gordon (2021), and Gordon (2021) but to rather focus more on faith aspect of the study which has been less explored. In this regard, the first question asked by the survey in Section 2 was: "What is your faith tradition?" to determine the denominational diversity within the volunteer group and how this might impact their volunteering activities. The results indicate a diverse range of faith traditions among the volunteers who participated in this study, with a significant proportion identifying with "Other" faith traditions, 46% as reflected in Figure 5.

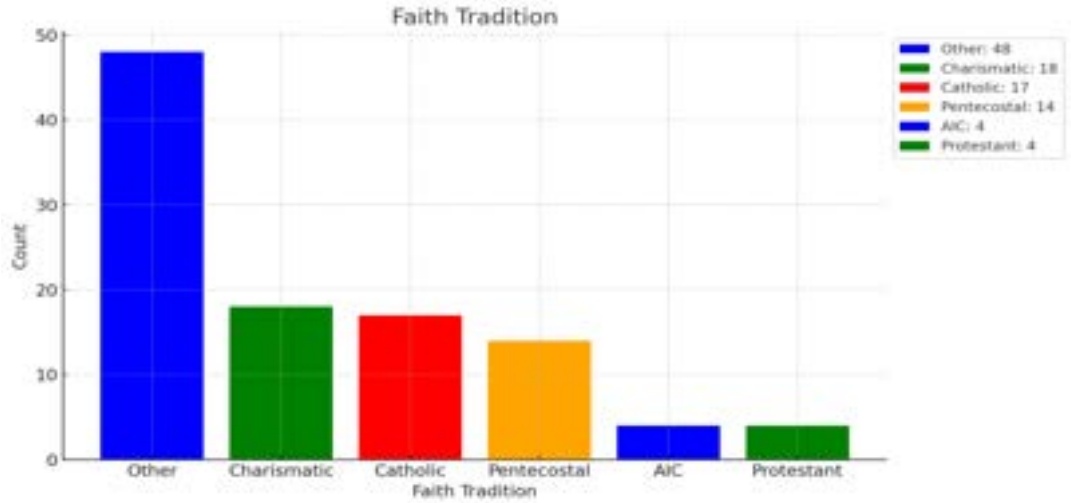


Figure 5: Faith tradition distribution of volunteers.

The data indicate that the largest group of volunteers identifies with "Other" faith traditions, accounting for 48 individuals (46%). This is followed by Charismatic (18 individuals, 17%), Catholic (17 individuals, 16%), and Pentecostal (14 individuals, 13%). Smaller groups include those from AIC and Protestant traditions, each with 4 individuals (4%).

This distribution challenges the dominant frameworks used in much of the scholarship on faith-based volunteerism in South Africa. Existing literature tends to focus on mainline denominations such as Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic churches, often assuming that these institutions are the primary sites of organised volunteering (Madondo, 2009; Seabe, 2014; Boya, 2022). However, the findings of this study suggest a more complex and fluid reality. Many participants may technically belong to one of the provided denominational categories, yet they do not identify with those institutional labels. This disconnect indicates that religious identity is not always doctrinally or denominationally fixed but is often lived in relational and localised ways that resist neat classification. As Mtata (2011) notes, African faith expressions are frequently embedded in community life and shaped by cultural-spiritual practices that extend beyond the formal boundaries of church structures. Understanding the faith tradition distribution helps contextualise the motivations and values that drive volunteerism, paving the way for an exploration of church membership duration and its impact on volunteer engagement.

4.3.2. Long-term Church Membership is Common Among Volunteers

Religious affiliation and enduring church membership have long been recognised as key determinants of volunteer participation, particularly within faith-based contexts (Wilson & Musick, 1997; Hustinx et al., 2010). To explore this relationship more closely, the survey included a question probing the length of church membership: "How long is your church membership?" This question was not merely about institutional belonging; it was intended to act as a proxy for measuring degrees of religious embeddedness and potential exposure to volunteer opportunities that emerge through relational and regular religious practices in faith communities.

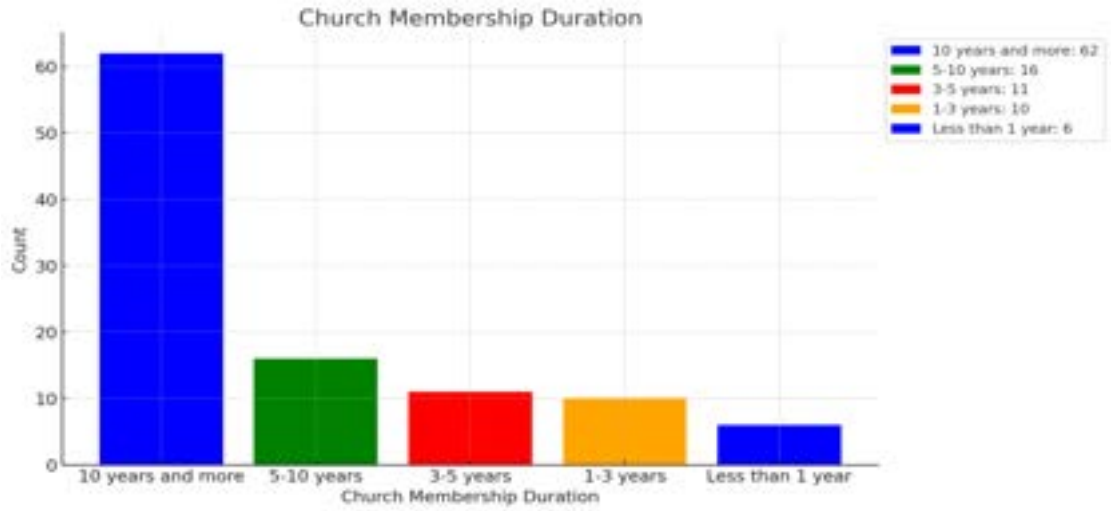


Figure 6: Church membership duration among volunteers.

The data indicate that the majority of volunteers have been church members for 10 years or more, accounting for 62 individuals (59%). This is followed by those with 5-10 years of membership (16 individuals, 15%), 3-5 years (11 individuals, 10%), 1-3 years (10 individuals, 10%), and less than 1 year (6 individuals, 6%).

The significance of this finding lies in how it repositions religious institutions as more than spiritual anchors; they function as socio-relational ecosystems where unpaid labour is cultivated through continuity, trust, and participation in church activities and gatherings. As Compion (2016) notes, faith-based volunteerism often does not emerge through formal recruitment drives, but rather through long-standing relational networks that are forged over time. This observation becomes particularly important when viewed through a gendered lens. Many of the women in this study have been shaped by years, sometimes decades, of relational exposure to care work framed as spiritual service.

4.3.3. High Level of Engagement in Church Activities Among Volunteers

Beyond formal affiliation, the frequency with which individuals participate in church activities offers a more textured understanding of how religious life shapes patterns of volunteerism. Previous research suggests that regular engagement in religious practices is closely associated with heightened civic and communal participation, particularly in contexts where churches function not only as sites of worship but also as hubs of social organisation and moral formation (Haddad, 2000; Masenya, 2003; Seabe, 2014). In order to explore this further, the survey included the question: "How regular is your church participation?"

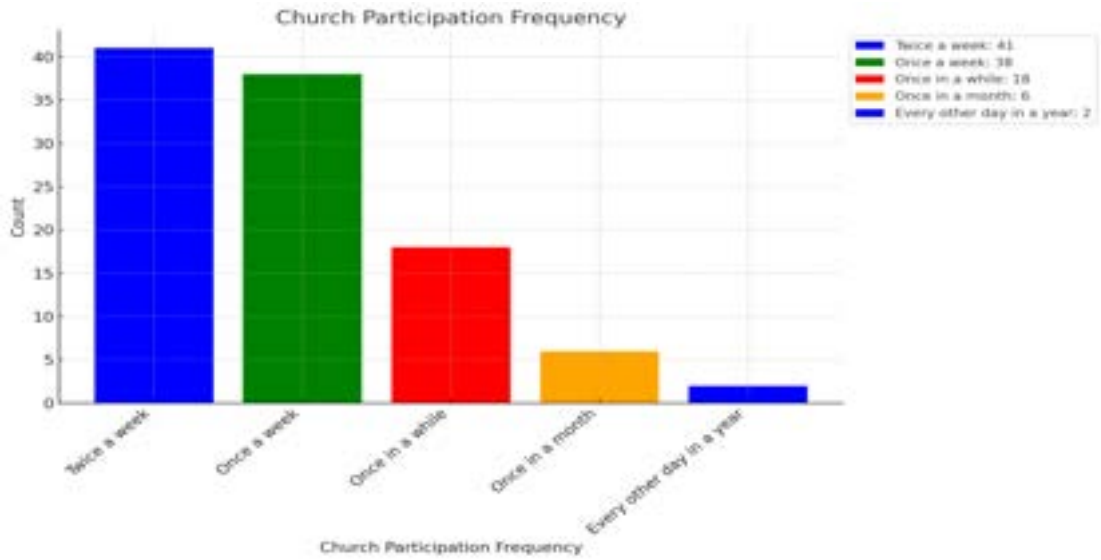


Figure 7: Church participation frequency among volunteers.

The data indicate that the majority of volunteers participate in church activities twice a week (41 individuals, 39%), followed closely by those who participate once a week (38 individuals, 36%). Other participation frequencies include once in a while (18 individuals, 17%), once in a month (6 individuals, 6%), and every other day in a year (2 individuals, 2%).

The high level of engagement in church activities among volunteers' distribution suggests that most volunteers in this study are not passive congregants but are actively embedded in the everyday life of the faith community. Their regular presence within church spaces indicates a continuity of participation that is likely to cultivate both a religious ethic of service and a relational sense of accountability. As Wilson and Musick (1997) argue, such habitual involvement can generate what they term "religious capital" and "cultural capital for care", a moral and social orientation that predisposes individuals toward volunteerism. This is particularly resonant in the South African context, where churches, as discussed before, often

serve dual roles as spiritual sanctuaries and social infrastructures, especially in under-resourced urban communities (Compion, 2016; Seabe and Burger, 2017).

4.4. Volunteering Patterns and Experience

This section presents data related to the scope and forms of unpaid volunteer work performed by survey respondents. While earlier sections explored who is doing this work and in what religious contexts, the focus here shifts to the nature of participation itself: whether respondents are currently involved in volunteering, how long they have been involved, how frequently they volunteer, and the types of unpaid activities they perform. The data also captures how many different forms of volunteering each respondent engages in, offering insight into the intensity and multidimensionality of their roles. These questions are important because they begin to trace the shape and texture of informal volunteerism, not as a single act, but as ongoing work that takes place across time, settings, and responsibilities. Therefore, the subsections that follow describe the participation patterns reported by the women in this study, setting the groundwork for a more thematic and narrative analysis in Chapter 5.

4.4.1. The Majority of Volunteers are Currently Involved in Volunteer Work

Moving from faith, I turned my attention to the nature of volunteering work women do. Understanding whether unpaid work is a current or past activity for respondents offers insight into sustained engagement and episodic participation, which gives a baseline for understanding the continuity and sustainability of unpaid work within communities. According to Wilson and Musick (1997), volunteering tends to be a patterned form of behaviour, especially when rooted in meaningful settings such as faith communities or strong relational networks. Individuals who have volunteered in the past are more likely to return to it, particularly when service is framed as a moral responsibility or gendered expectation (Hustinx et al., 2010; Friedemann-Sánchez & Griffin, 2011). To explore this dynamic, the survey included the question: “Do you do volunteering work?” with response options ranging from “Yes, presently,” “Yes, in the past (months to 1 year),” “Yes, way in the past (2–3 years),” to “Never.” This question aimed to assess whether volunteerism among respondents is a current activity or part of a broader pattern of episodic participation.

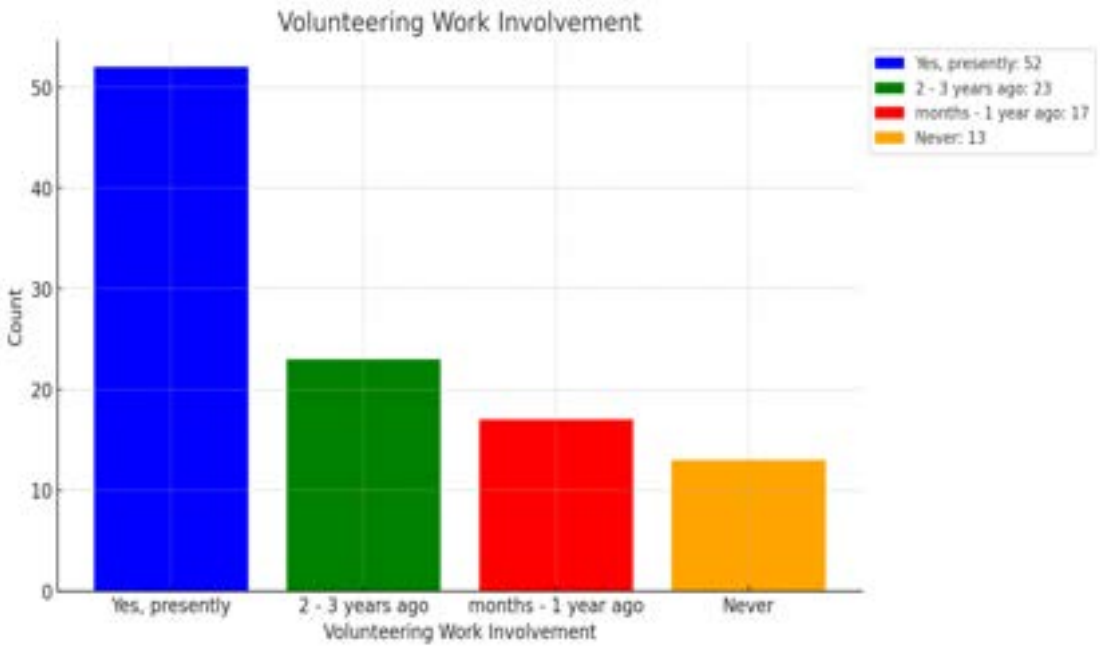


Figure 8: Volunteering work involvement among volunteers.

The data indicate that the majority of volunteers are currently involved in volunteering work, accounting for 52 individuals (50%). This is followed by those who volunteered way in the past (2-3 years ago) with 23 individuals (22%), those who volunteered in the past (months to 1 year ago) with 17 individuals (16%), and those who have never volunteered with 13 individuals (12%).

These results reflect a strong current commitment to unpaid work among respondents. Notably, even those who are not currently volunteering report previous involvement, suggesting that participation in unpaid care and community work is not a once-off act but a recurring feature of life within these faith communities. Whether formally organised through church structures or informally taken up in response to communal needs, unpaid work appears to be a consistent and expected part of spiritual and social life.

4.4.2. Majority of Volunteers Show Long-term Commitment to Volunteering

Apart from whether one is currently volunteering, the length of time individuals have engaged in unpaid work offers further insight into the lifespan of their volunteering commitments. In the South African context, where formal employment opportunities are often limited, and community needs remain urgent, informal volunteering can become a long-term response to systemic gaps. Previous research highlights how many women, in the absence of formal job opportunities, take up unpaid roles within their faith communities not only to remain active, but to meet persistent communal demands (Lund, 2010; Budlender and Lund, 2011). Volunteering, in this context, is not a short-term act; rather, it frequently stretches over years. With this in mind, the survey included the question: "How long have you been involved in volunteering work?", aiming to trace the lifespan and depth of commitment involved in respondents' unpaid labour.



Figure 9: Duration of volunteering work among volunteers.

The data indicate that the largest group of volunteers has been involved in volunteering work for more than 5 years, accounting for 31 individuals (34%). This is followed by those who have volunteered for months up to 1 year (25 individuals, 27%), 2-3 years (19 individuals, 21%), and 3-5 years (17 individuals, 18%).

The pattern of long-term engagement, with over half of the participants reporting that they have volunteered for more than three years, aligns with existing literature that suggests women's unpaid work tends to be sustained over time, often due to ongoing community needs or limited

access to formal employment (Budlender & Lund, 2011). While the second-largest group reported volunteering for a shorter period, ranging from a few months to one year, this does not necessarily indicate weaker engagement. Rather, it may reflect shifts in care responsibilities or transitions between different forms of unpaid work. As noted in Sub-section 4.3.1, many individuals who have volunteered in the past are likely to do so again. This suggests that those currently reporting shorter durations may have engaged in various volunteering roles over time, with the most recent one shaping their current response.

4.4.3. Majority of Volunteers Frequently Participate in Volunteer Activities

While duration speaks to how long one has been involved in volunteerism, frequency reveals how much time and energy unpaid work consumes in a given week or month. For many women, informal volunteering happens not only over long stretches of time but with remarkable regularity, mirroring the structure of formal labour, even as it remains unpaid. Scholars such as Meier zu Selhausen and Weisdorf (2016) and Budlender & Lund (2011) have drawn attention to this unpaid labour load, noting how it is often invisible but continuous. Volunteering, in such cases, becomes a form of "shadow work", recurrent, expected, and integrated into the weekly structure of women's lives. The next question asked by the survey: "How often do you/ did you volunteer?" was aimed at capturing how frequently respondents engage in volunteer activities, offering a glimpse into the labour intensity of their unpaid roles.



Figure 10: Volunteering frequency among volunteers.

The data indicate that the highest frequency of volunteering is twice a week, involving 32 individuals (35%). This is followed by volunteers who participate every other day, accounting

for 28 individuals (30%). Other frequencies include once a month (17 individuals, 19%) and once a week (15 individuals, 16%).

These findings suggest that unpaid work is not just sustained over years, but it is also demanding in the short term. For many, volunteering requires consistent physical and emotional labour, performed week after week. The frequency of this involvement points to a reality in which unpaid care work is not simply supplementary; it often resembles a second job, structured around communal obligation and spiritual calling.

4.4.4. The Diverse Range of Activities Volunteers Engage In

As the first objective of this study focuses on examining the contours of volunteerism, the survey moved beyond duration and frequency to capture the specific types of activities respondents are engaged in. This helped reveal the breadth and complexity of tasks that fall under the umbrella of informal volunteerism. Prior research has shown that women's unpaid labour in these settings often mirrors the responsibilities of formal caregiving roles (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Meier zu Selhausen, 2015).

I had hypothesised that in urban South Africa, informal volunteering is layered with activities typically associated with gendered expectations, making women more likely to perform them. To explore this, the survey included a multiple-choice question: "What kind of volunteering activities do you do?" Participants could select all applicable categories, including care work, cleaning projects, feeding schemes, and educational extra mural activities. By documenting this range, the section begins to show that unpaid work is not only repetitive and sustained, but also multidimensional, combining emotional labour with practical service, and reflecting the layered responsibilities women carry within their communities.

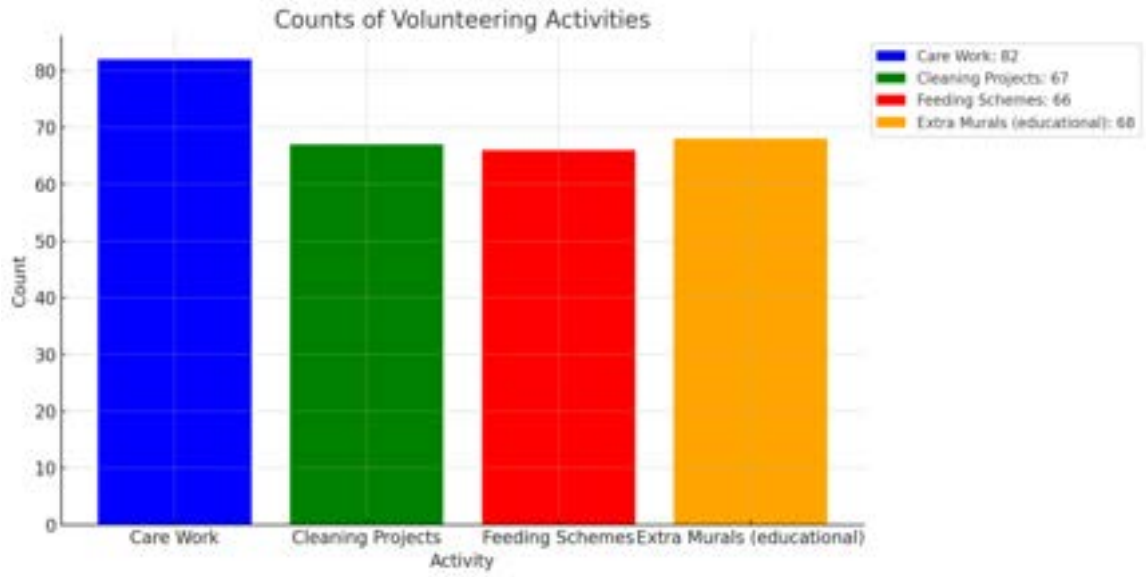


Figure 11: Counts of volunteering activities among volunteers.

The data indicate that the most common volunteering activity is care work, involving 82 individuals (30%). This is followed by extra murals (educational) with 68 individuals (24%), cleaning projects with 67 individuals (24%), and feeding schemes with 66 individuals (23%).

This distribution highlights the diverse range of activities volunteers are engaged in, with particularly high involvement in care work, underscoring the community's emphasis on supporting those in need. As literature on gender and unpaid work suggests, this kind of labour is deeply feminised, rooted in long-standing social expectations that women will assume responsibilities of nurturing, feeding, and educating others (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Parry & Gordon, 2021). Through documenting the variety of tasks performed in these categories, this section begins to trace the layered and often invisible structure of unpaid community-making work in urban, faith-based settings. The data also reveal that many respondents are involved in more than one type of activity, moving fluidly between caregiving, cleaning, teaching, and food provision, patterns that will be further explored in Figure 11 (Section 4.3.5).

4.4.5. Commitment of Volunteers to Multiple Types of Volunteering Activities

Following the previous section on the types of volunteering activities, I sought to understand the extent to which individuals are involved in more than one kind of unpaid work. Looking at (Figure 11), I worked with the hypothesis that in many South African communities, especially among women, unpaid work does not take the form of a single, defined task. Rather, women often move between multiple roles–caregiver, cook, cleaner, and teacher–sometimes within the

same week, or even within a single day. To test this, I examined the survey data to see whether respondents selected activities across different categories.

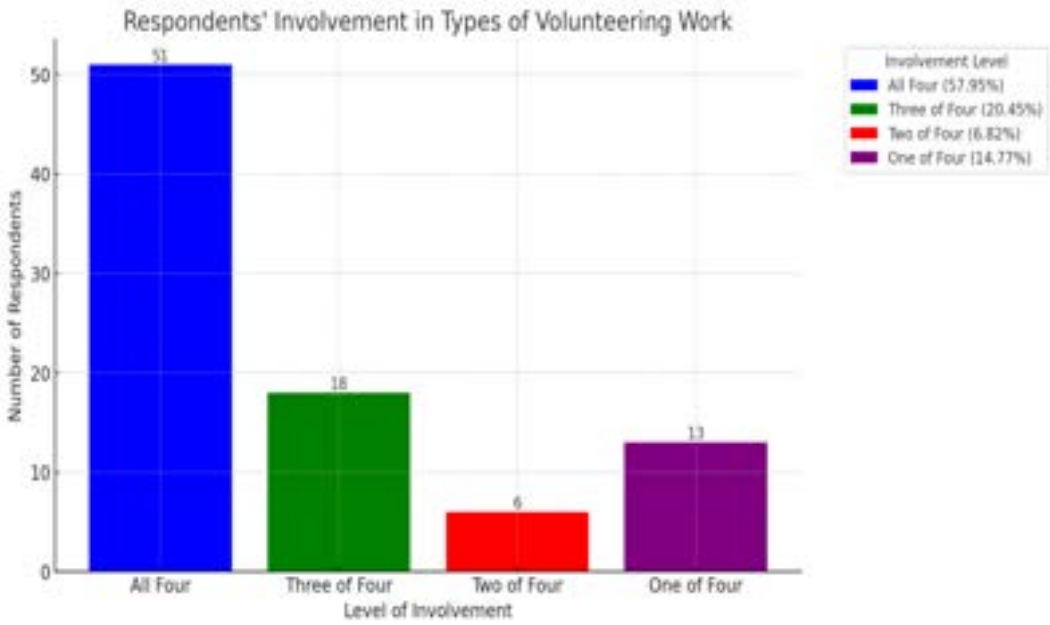


Figure 12: Respondents' involvement in types of volunteering work.

The data shows that the majority of respondents are involved in all four types of volunteering work, accounting for 51 individuals (58%). This is followed by those involved in three out of four types, with 18 individuals (20%); those involved in two out of four types, with 6 individuals (7%); and those involved in one out of four types, with 13 individuals (15%).

These findings reinforce the view that unpaid work in faith-based communities is not only widespread but also layered and interconnected. Rather than performing isolated tasks, women often carry multiple responsibilities at once, reflecting the multidimensional and demanding nature of informal volunteerism. This confirms what other studies have noted about the overlapping structure of women's unpaid care work in contexts of poverty and religious duty (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Meier zu Selhausen, 2015).

4.4.6. Breakdown of a Diverse Range of Activities Volunteers Engage In

Having established the wide range and overlap of volunteering roles in the previous sections, this part offers a more detailed view into the specific subcategories of unpaid work. Each of the four primary types, care work, cleaning projects, feeding schemes, and educational extra mural activities, contains its own layered responsibilities. These breakdowns help to map the complexity of informal volunteerism and the types of needs that communities are responding to. Although informal, these tasks closely resemble professional caregiving, teaching, food distribution, and sanitation roles, further illustrating the intensity and scope of unpaid labour performed by women in faith communities. The following four figures present the detailed distribution of activities within each main category

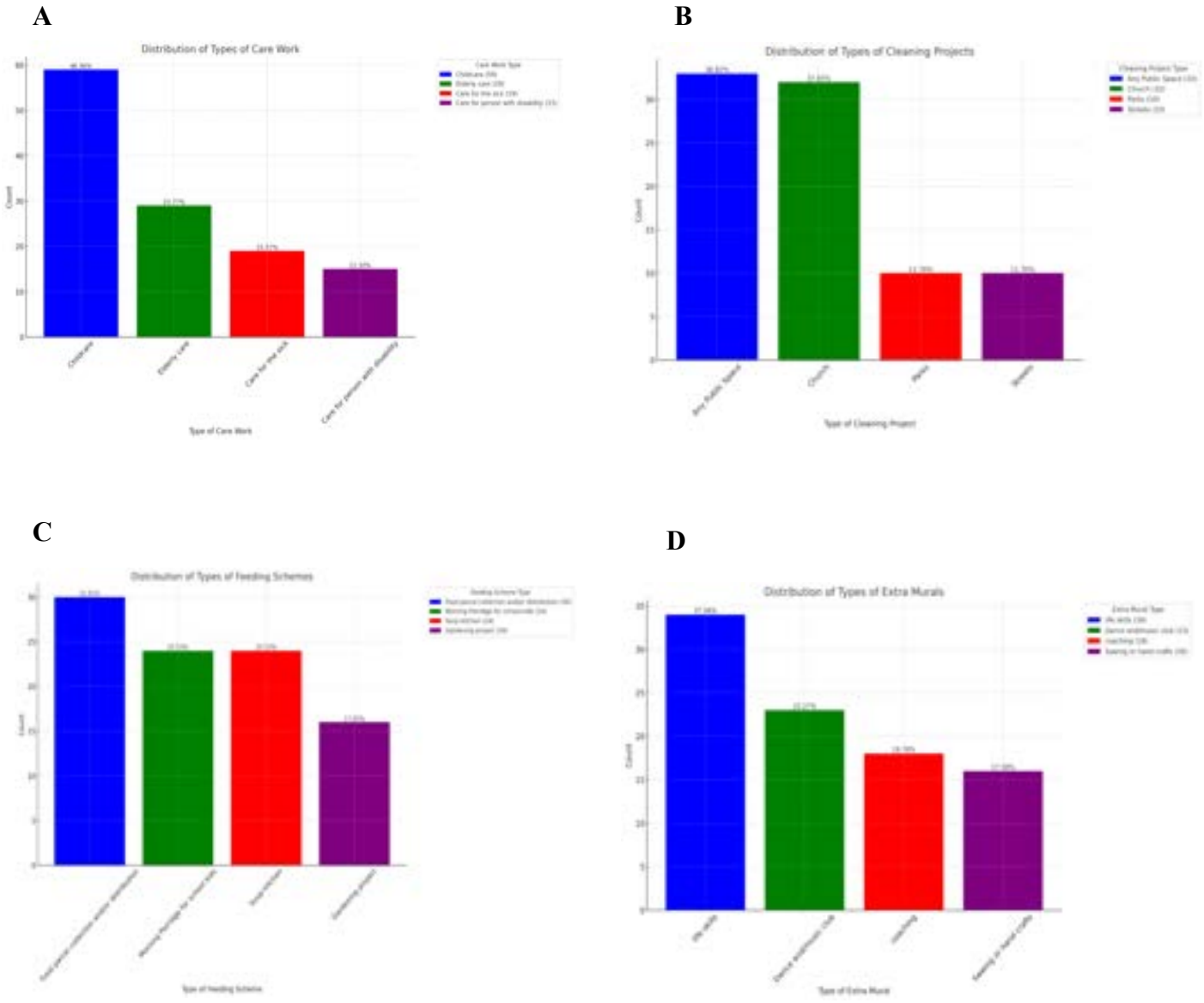


Figure 13 -A, B, C and D Breakdown of Diverse Range of Activities

Figure 13-A: Distribution of types of care work among volunteers.

The data shows that the most common type of care work is childcare, involving 59 individuals (48%). This is followed by elderly care with 29 individuals (24%), care for the sick with 19 individuals (16%), and care for persons with disabilities with 15 individuals (12%). This data illustrates the significant emphasis on childcare within volunteer activities, highlighting both the pressing needs of the community and the capacities of women who step in to meet them. This pattern reveals how care for children is often prioritised in contexts where families, schools, or public health systems are under strain, and it reflects the central role that informal volunteering plays in sustaining everyday life.

Figure 13-B: Distribution of types of cleaning projects among volunteers.

The data shows that the most common type of cleaning project is cleaning any public space, involving 33 individuals (39%). This is closely followed by church cleaning projects with 32 individuals (38%). Cleaning parks and streets are equally represented, each with 10 individuals (12%). This distribution reflects the community's emphasis on maintaining public and communal spaces through volunteer efforts. These tasks, such as sweeping streets, cleaning church yards, or tidying shared facilities, may appear mundane, but they carry deep social and symbolic significance. In under-resourced urban areas, where municipal services are often irregular or absent, such efforts become acts of collective care and responsibility. By keeping communal environments clean and dignified, volunteers not only contribute to public health but also affirm the value of shared space and neighbourly solidarity. These findings demonstrate how volunteers extend care beyond people to places, recognising that healthy, dignified environments are central to community well-being.

Figure 13-C: Distribution of types of feeding schemes among volunteers.

The data shows that the most common type of feeding scheme is food parcel collection and/or distribution, involving 30 individuals (32%). This is followed by morning porridge for school kids and soup kitchens, each with 24 individuals (26%). Gardening projects are also significant, involving 16 individuals (17%). The findings reveal a wide engagement in feeding-related activities, with food parcel distribution, school porridge, and soup kitchens all playing significant roles. Volunteers are clearly responding to ongoing food insecurity, addressing hunger not only through direct meal provision but also through more sustainable strategies like community gardening. These efforts blur the lines between relief and development work,

meeting immediate needs while building longer-term resilience. The prominence of feeding schemes also echoes the historical role of women in food provisioning as an act of both survival and social care.

Figure 13-D: Distribution of types of extra murals among volunteers.

The data show that the most common type of extra murals activity is life skills, involving 34 individuals (37%). This is followed by dance and music clubs with 23 individuals (25%), coaching with 18 individuals (20%), and sawing or handcrafts with 16 individuals (18%). This distribution highlights the creative and educational dimensions of unpaid work, with life skills training, dance, music, coaching, and crafts forming a key part of volunteers' efforts. These extra mural activities speak to a broader vision of community transformation, one that goes beyond crisis response and moves toward youth development, empowerment, and healing. Volunteers in this space are not only caregivers but mentors and cultural workers, facilitating safe and imaginative spaces for children and young people to grow. Their work reflects a commitment to shaping the future from the ground up.

Taken together, Figures 12A through 12D offer a layered picture of unpaid work as it unfolds in urban faith communities. They highlight how this work is frequent, varied, and often simultaneously performed across multiple domains such as care, nourishment, cleaning, and teaching, revealing the extent to which volunteers, particularly women, become the invisible infrastructure of community life. Far from isolated acts of service, these contributions are part of a broader ecosystem of care that supports those who are most vulnerable. As we turn to the next section, the question emerges: what motivates this sustained commitment to unpaid labour?

4.5. Motivational Factors for Volunteering

While much of this chapter has focused on what volunteers do and how often they do it, this section turns to the why, exploring the motivations that sustain unpaid labour in faith communities. In contexts where volunteers receive little to no formal compensation, their commitment is often grounded in a mix of personal conviction, religious obligations, and cultural values, meaning volunteering in these contexts is not just simply an act of service, but it is entangled with broader narratives of what it means to be a faithful and responsible member of one's faith and community. Existing literature has shown that informal volunteerism,

especially among women, is rarely detached from context. Rather, it is shaped by the theological values promoted within congregations, the social roles assigned through culture, and the moral expectations that circulate through everyday religious life (Marie, 2012; Compion, 2016; Hustinx et al., 2010). This section presents descriptive data on the motivational and relational forces that inform unpaid work, focusing particularly on the influence of faith, culture, and the degree of embeddedness in church life. These patterns help to map the symbolic and institutional terrain in which informal volunteerism is both encouraged and sustained.

4.5.1. Faith Influences Volunteering Decisions

Existing research points to religion as a motivator for sustained unpaid work, particularly among women, who are part of religious-rich settings (Friedemann-Sánchez & Griffin, 2011; Hustinx et al., 2010; Adeyem et al., 2016). To better understand the role of faith in shaping respondents' motivations, the survey included a question asking participants to rate the influence of their faith on their decision to volunteer, using a scale from 1 (not at all influential) to 10 (extremely influential). This question aimed to quantify the degree to which spiritual conviction drives unpaid community work in faith-based settings.

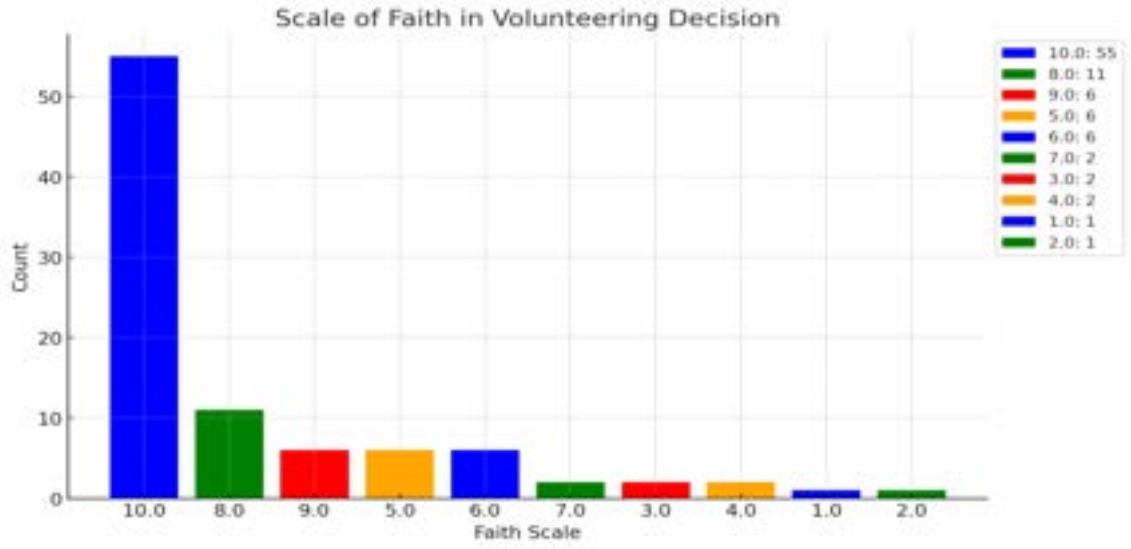


Figure 14: Scale of faith influence in volunteering decisions among volunteers.

The data show that the highest rating of 10.0 was given by 55 individuals (59.78%), indicating a strong influence of faith in their decision to volunteer. Other significant ratings include 8.0 by 11 individuals (11.96%), and equal ratings of 9.0, 5.0, and 6.0 each by 6 individuals (6.52%). Lower ratings include 7.0, 3.0, and 4.0 each by 2 individuals (2.17%), and 1.0 and 2.0 each by 1 individual (1.09%). This distribution underscores the significant role that faith plays in

motivating individuals to engage in volunteering activities. The strong clustering around the highest rating suggests that for many respondents, volunteering is not merely a social or moral obligation, but a deeply spiritual practice. Faith, in this context, functions as both a personal conviction and a communal value that sustains unpaid labour over time.

4.5.2. Culture Influences Volunteering Decisions

Together with religion, culture and community belonging are said to be one of the motivators for volunteering by feminist scholars like Rwafa (2016), Grönlund et al. (2011) and Luria et al. (2017), arguing that religion and culture entrust care roles to women, which confines them to unpaid work. To explore this, the survey asked respondents to rate the extent to which their sense of community and culture influenced their decision to volunteer, using the same 1-10

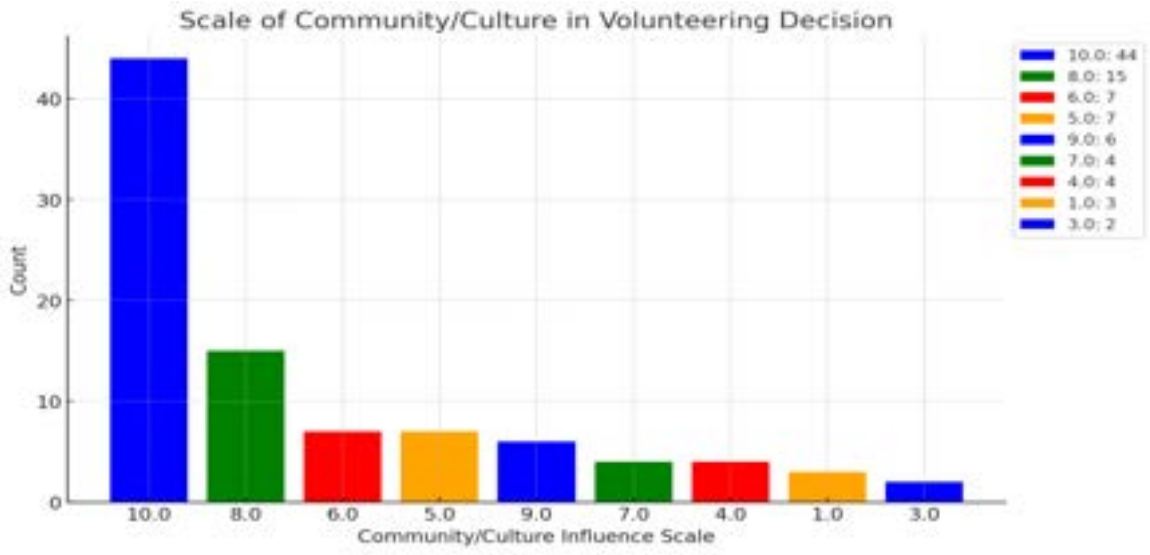


Figure 15: Scale of community/culture influence in volunteering decisions among volunteers.

scale.

The data show that the highest rating of 10.0 was given by 44 individuals (47.83%), indicating a strong influence of community and culture in their decision to volunteer. Other significant ratings include 8.0 by 15 individuals (16.30%), 6.0 and 5.0 each by 7 individuals (7.61%), 9.0 by 6 individuals (6.52%), 7.0 and 4.0 each by 4 individuals (4.35%), 1.0 by 3 individuals (3.26%), and 3.0 by 2 individuals (2.17%). This distribution confirms what existing studies assert about the critical role community and cultural values play in motivating individuals to engage in volunteering activities. With nearly half of the respondents selecting the highest score, it becomes clear that unpaid work is not only spiritually driven but also deeply social. This data confirms the key argument of this study that for many women, volunteering is

embedded in a sense of collective responsibility, where cultural norms and relational ties reinforce participation as both expected and meaningful.

4.5.3. Church Membership Duration Correlates with Volunteering Engagement

Referring to the data that show a relationship in church membership duration and volunteering participation (Figure 6) raised questions about how religious embeddedness may influence the type and extent of unpaid work. To explore this, looking deeper into the survey data, I examined the relationship between church membership duration and involvement in different volunteering activities. Figures 16-A and 16-B present this data by comparing the length of church membership with involvement in care work, cleaning, feeding schemes, and extra mural activities.

A



B

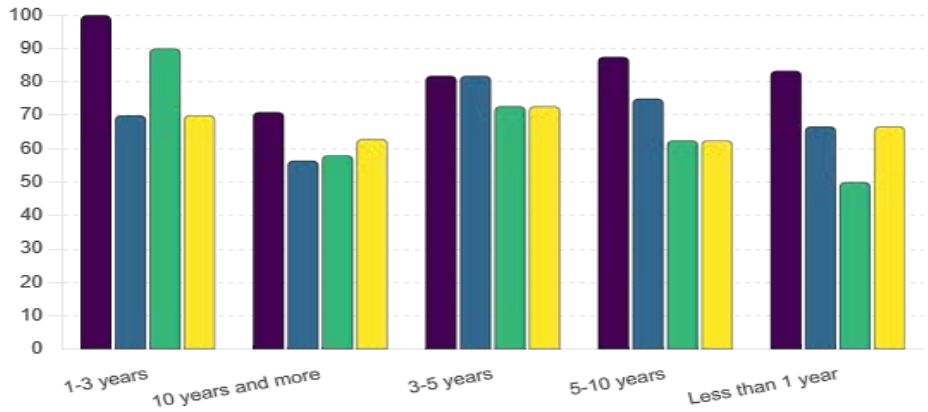


Figure 16 A and B

Figures 16-A and 16-B: Involvement rates by church membership and type of volunteering work among volunteers.

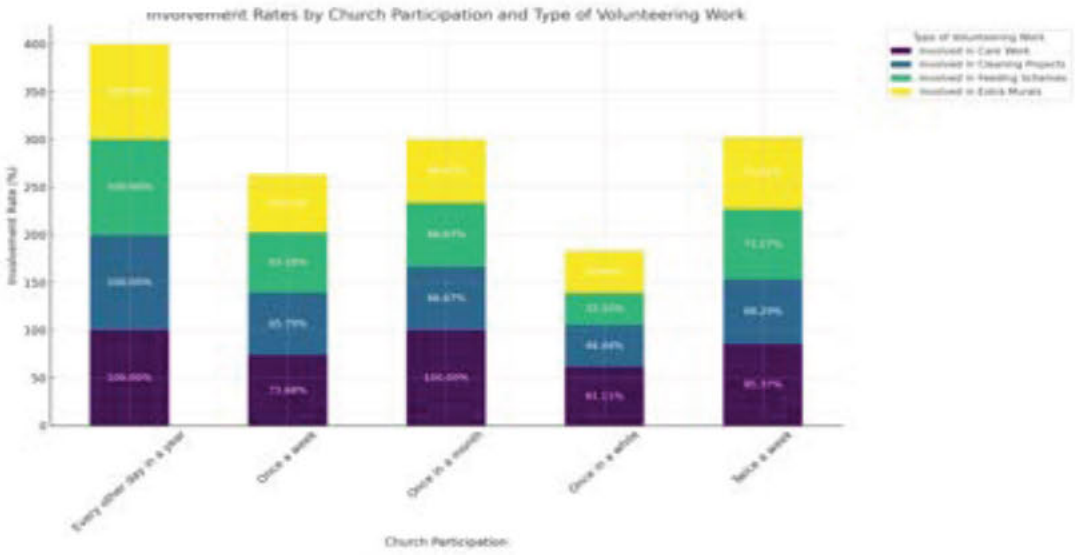
The data show varying involvement rates based on the duration of church membership. For those with 1-3 years of membership, the involvement rates are 100% in care work, 70 % in cleaning projects, 90% in feeding schemes, and 70% in extra murals. Volunteers with 10 years or more of membership show 71% involvement in care work, 56 % in cleaning projects, 58.06% in feeding schemes, and 63% in extra murals. Those with 3-5 years of membership have equal involvement rates of 81.82% in care work and cleaning projects, 74% in feeding schemes, and 72% in extra murals. Volunteers with 5-10 years of membership show 88% involvement in care work, 75% in cleaning projects, 63% in feeding schemes, and 63% in extra murals. Those with less than 1 year of membership have 83.33% involvement in care work, 67% in cleaning projects, 50% in feeding schemes, and 67% in extra murals.

While all membership groups report notable involvement, there are some patterns worth highlighting. Volunteers with mid-range membership (3–10 years) tend to show consistently high involvement across all activity types, suggesting a peak period of engagement once individuals are more established in the faith community. Interestingly, even those with less than one year of membership report high participation rates, possibly reflecting early convictions or strong recruitment practices. Meanwhile, slightly lower involvement among those with 10+ years of membership may indicate shifting capacities or life stage transitions. Overall, the data suggest that volunteering is not simply a product of longevity in the church but a process influenced by belonging, opportunity, and the evolving patterns of community life.

4.5.4. Church Attendance Correlates with Volunteering Engagement

Building on the relationship between church membership and volunteering, I also explored how the frequency of church participation shapes involvement in unpaid work. Figure 6 records that regular church participation is connected to a high level of engagement in volunteering activities, this sparked curiosity about whether more active churchgoers are also more involved in various types of volunteer roles. Figures 17-A and 17-B present this data across care work, cleaning projects, feeding schemes, and extra mural activities.

A



B

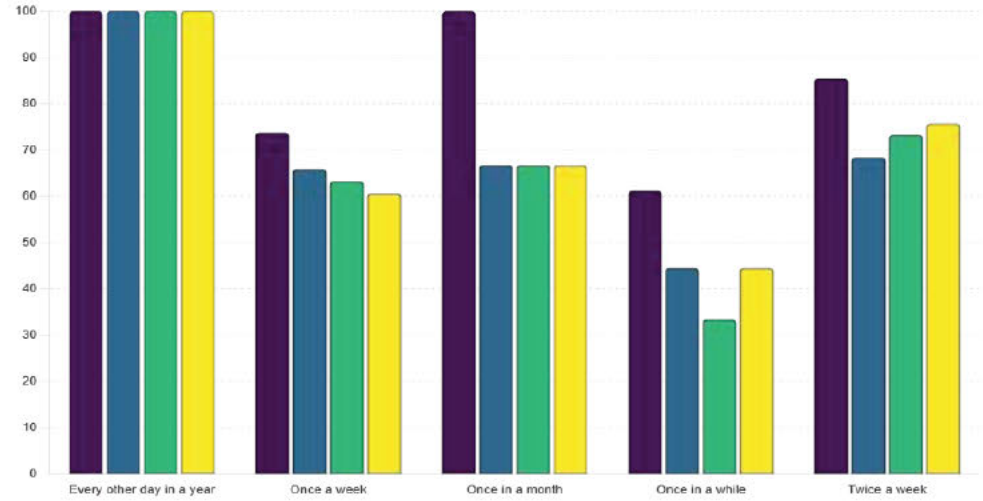


Figure 17 A and B

Figures 17-A and 17-B: Involvement rates by church participation and type of volunteering work among volunteers.

The data indicate varying involvement rates based on the frequency of church participation. For those participating every other day in a year, involvement is 100% across all types of volunteering work. Volunteers participating once a week show 74% involvement in care work, 66% in cleaning projects, 63. % in feeding schemes, and 61% in extra murals. Those participating once a month have equal involvement rates of 67% across care work, cleaning projects, feeding schemes, and extra murals. Volunteers participating once in a while have 61% involvement in care work, 44% in cleaning projects, 33% in feeding schemes, and 44% in extra

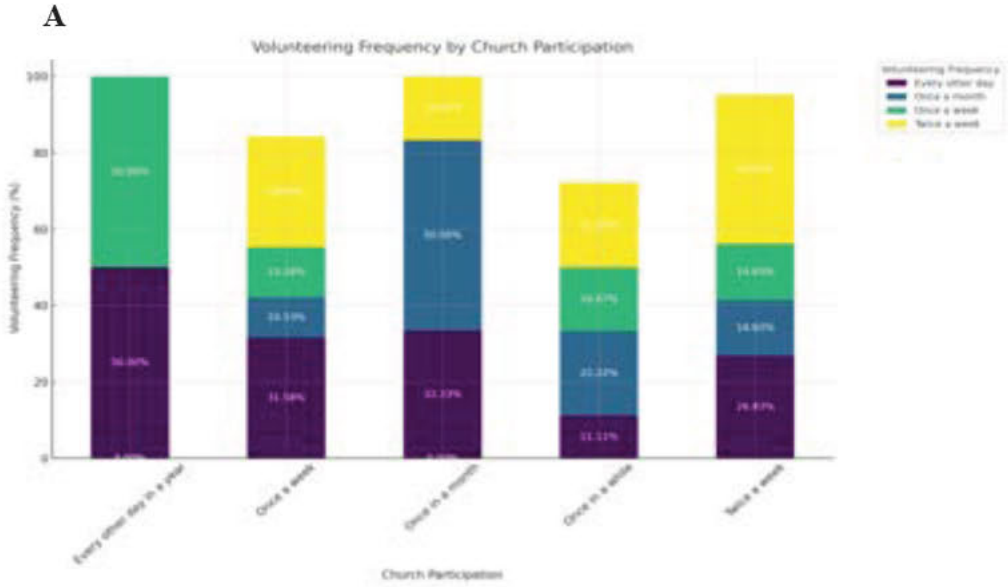
murals. Those participating twice a week show 85% involvement in care work, 68% in cleaning projects, 73% in feeding schemes, and 76% in extra murals.

The findings demonstrate a clear correlation between the frequency of church attendance and the level of engagement in unpaid work. Those participating most frequently, such as every other day or twice a week, report the highest levels of involvement across all activity types. This suggests that the more integrated individuals are in the church life, the more likely they are to take on multiple forms of volunteer labour. Conversely, lower participation rates are observed among those who attend only once in a while, especially in roles like feeding schemes and cleaning projects. These patterns reinforce the idea that regular church participation does not only shape belief, but also structures how and where people offer their time, care, and labour within the community.

4.5.5. Volunteering Frequencies Vary by Church Participation Levels

To deepen the analysis of religious embeddedness and volunteerism, Figures 16 and 17, I also explored how church participation influences not just the types of unpaid work but also the frequency with which respondents volunteer. This dimension aimed to assess whether more active participation in church life corresponds with more regular involvement in volunteering activities. Figures 18-A and 18-B present this data by comparing how often individuals volunteer across different levels of church participation.

A



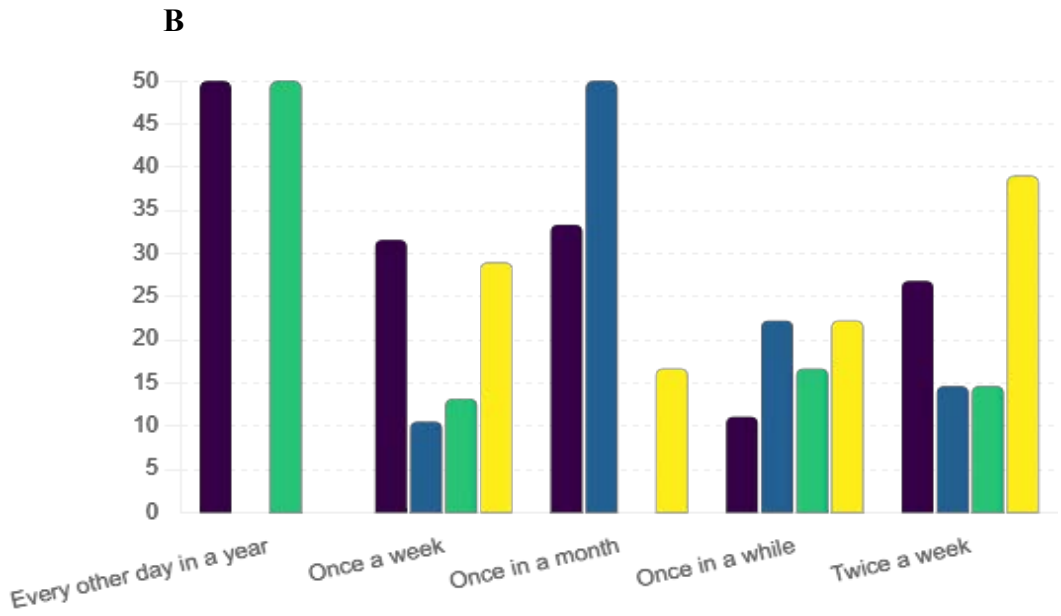


Figure 18 A and B Volunteering frequency by church participation among volunteers.

The data indicate different frequencies of volunteering based on church participation. For those participating every other day in a year, the involvement rates are 50% for every other day and 50% for once a week. Volunteers participating once a week show 32% involvement for every other day, 11% for once a month, 13% for once a week, and 29% for twice a week. Those participating once a month have involvement rates of 33 % for every other day, 50 % for once a month, and 17% for twice a week. Volunteers participating once in a while have 11% involvement for every other day, 22% for once a month, 22% for once a week, and 22% for twice a week. Those participating twice a week show 27% involvement for every other day, 15% for once a month, 15% for once a week, and 39 % for twice a week.

The findings reveal that individuals who participate in church more frequently also tend to volunteer more often. For example, those attending church every other day or twice a week report higher rates of volunteering at similar or increased frequencies. This suggests a reinforcing relationship between religious involvement and volunteering, where regular presence in the faith community creates both more opportunities and stronger expectations to volunteer. In contrast, respondents who attend church less frequently, such as once a month or once in a while, report more sporadic patterns of volunteering. These findings affirm that sustained church participation is not only a spiritual practice but also a structural context that shapes the patterns and regularity of unpaid community labour.

4.5.6. Higher Faith Influence is Associated with More Frequent Volunteering

To explore the relationship between volunteering frequency and respondents' perceptions of faith as a motivation for volunteering, I compared the average faith influence scores across different levels of volunteering frequency. This analysis sought to determine whether respondents who volunteered more frequently also tended to report stronger faith-related motivations. Figure 19 presents the average faith influence scores across different volunteering frequencies.

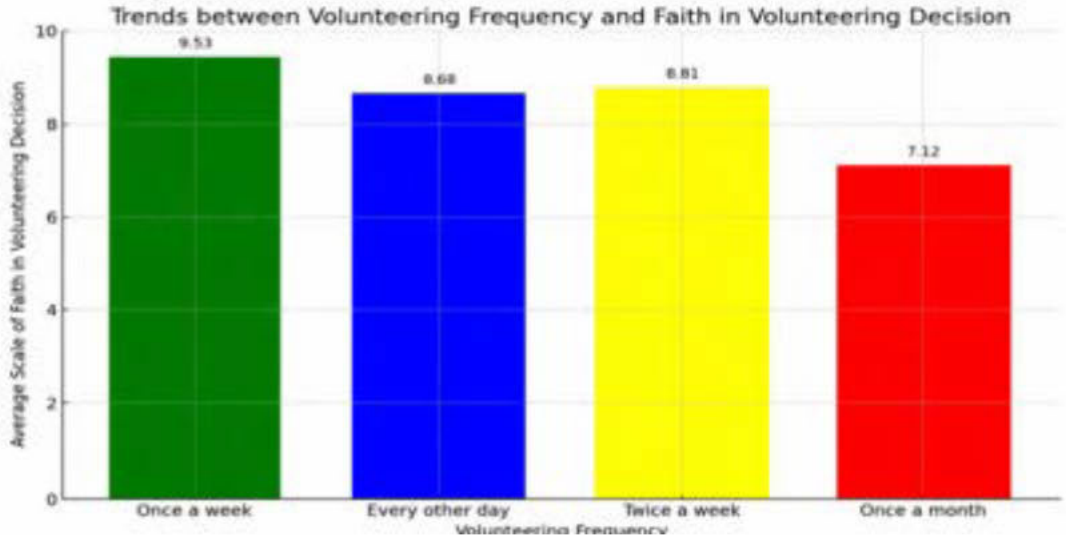


Figure 19: Trends between volunteering frequency and faith in volunteering decision.

The data show that respondents across all volunteering frequencies reported relatively high faith influence scores. Respondents who volunteered once a week reported the highest average faith influence score (91%), followed by those who volunteered twice a week and every other day (both at 81%). Respondents who volunteered once a month reported the lowest average score (70%).

The results indicate that respondents who volunteered more frequently generally reported higher faith influence scores than those who volunteered less frequently. Although the differences should be interpreted descriptively rather than as evidence of statistically significant relationships, the overall pattern suggests that faith was consistently identified as an important influence across all levels of volunteering frequency. However, these survey findings do not explain how respondents understood or experienced faith as a motivation for volunteering. This question is explored in greater depth in the qualitative findings presented in Chapters Five and Six.

4.5.7. Cultural Influence is Associated with More Frequent Volunteering

After examining the relationship between faith and volunteering frequency, I explored respondents' perceptions of community and cultural influence on volunteer participation. This analysis sought to determine whether respondents who volunteered more frequently also tended to report stronger community and cultural influences on their decision to volunteer. Figure 20 presents the average community and cultural influence scores across different volunteering frequencies.

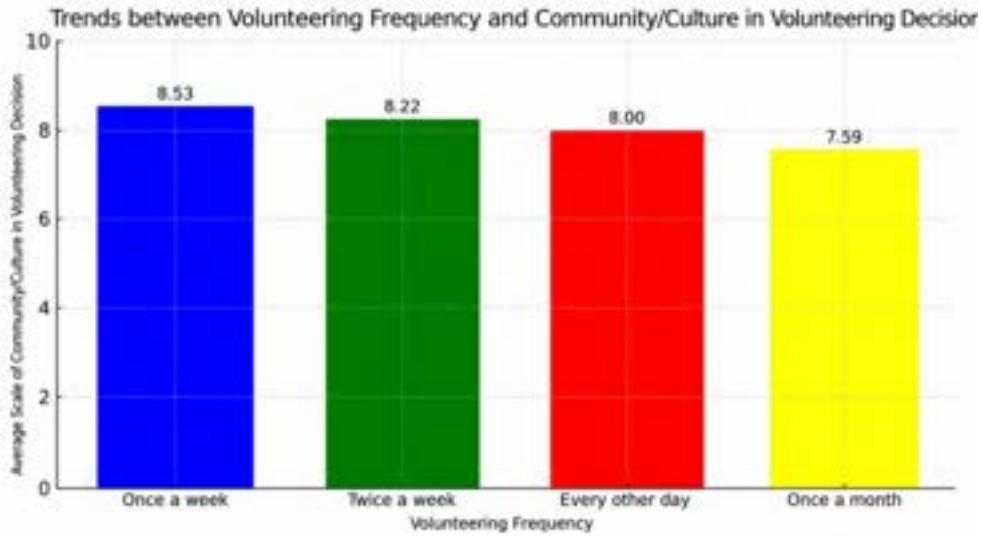


Figure 20: Trends between volunteering frequency and community/culture in volunteering decision.

The data indicate that respondents across all volunteering frequencies reported relatively high community and cultural influence scores. Respondents who volunteered once a week reported the highest average community/cultural influence score (81%), followed closely by those who volunteered twice a week (80%) and every other day (80%). Respondents who volunteered once a month reported the lowest average score (71%).

Overall, respondents who volunteered more frequently tended to report higher community and cultural influence scores than those who volunteered less frequently. Although these differences should be interpreted descriptively, the pattern suggests that respondents consistently regarded community and cultural values as important influences on their volunteering decisions across all levels of participation. However, the survey data do not explain how respondents understood these community and cultural influences or how they shaped their decisions to volunteer. These questions are explored in greater depth in Chapters Five and Six, where participants describe the role of communal responsibility, Ubuntu, reciprocity and gendered expectations of care in motivating unpaid volunteer work.

4.5.8. Faith Influences Volunteering Decisions Across Different Activities

Next, I explored whether respondents who participated in different types of volunteer activities reported different levels of faith influence. To do this, I compared the average faith influence scores across four key activity areas: care work, cleaning projects, feeding schemes and extra-mural initiatives. This analysis sought to determine whether respondents who engaged in particular forms of unpaid labour reported stronger faith-related motivations than others. Figure 21 presents the average faith influence scores by type of volunteering activity.

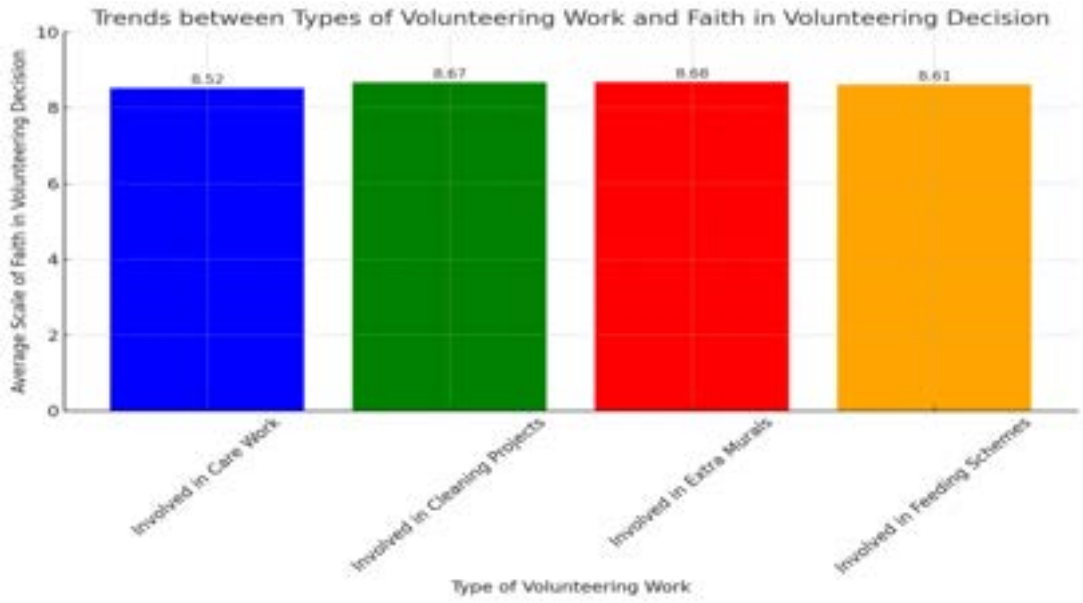


Figure 21:Trends between types of volunteering work and faith in volunteering decision.

The data illustrate the average faith influence scores across four categories of volunteer work. Scores ranged from 8.52 to 8.68, indicating very little variation between care work, cleaning projects, feeding schemes and extra-mural activities.

The findings indicate that respondents consistently reported faith as an important influence across all forms of unpaid volunteer work examined in this study. The similarity of the average scores suggests that respondents regarded faith as an important influence regardless of the specific volunteer activity they performed. The survey, therefore, establishes the consistency of respondents' reported faith influence across different forms of volunteer work, while the qualitative findings presented in Chapters Five and Six provide a richer understanding of how participants interpreted and experienced this influence in their everyday lives.

4.5.9. Culture Influences Volunteering Decisions Across Different Activities

Consistent with the preceding analyses, community and cultural values emerged as important influences on respondents' decisions to volunteer. To explore whether these influences varied across different forms of unpaid work, I compared the average community and cultural influence scores for four categories of volunteer activity: care work, cleaning projects, feeding schemes and extra-mural programmes. Figure 22 presents the average influence scores for each activity category.

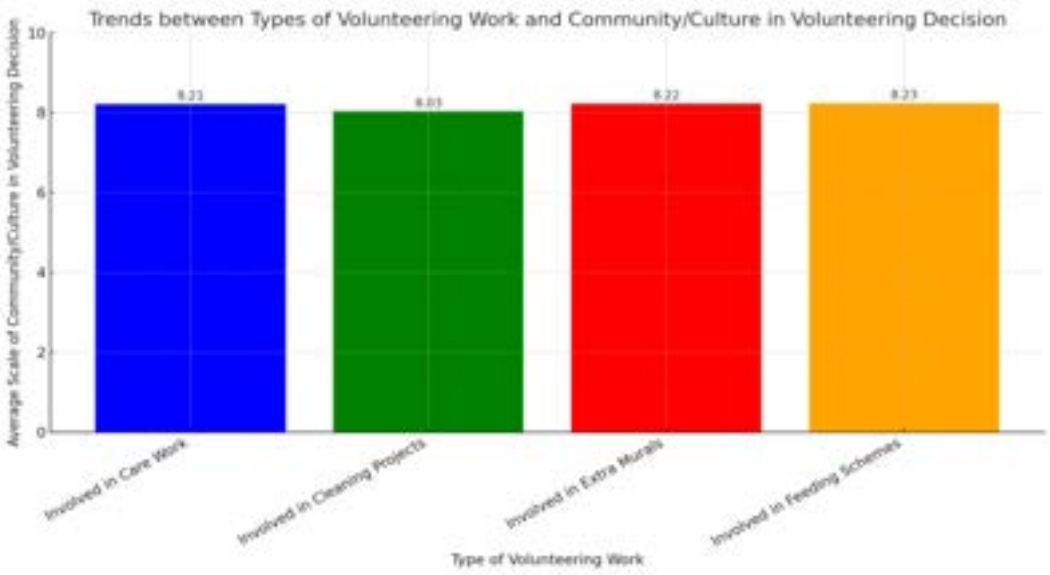


Figure 22:Trends between types of volunteering work and culture in volunteering decision.

The data indicate that respondents consistently rated community and cultural values as important influences across all categories of volunteer work. Average scores ranged from 8.03 to 8.23, indicating very little variation between care work, cleaning projects, feeding schemes and extra-mural activities (Figure 22).

These findings indicate that respondents consistently regarded community and cultural values as important influences across all forms of unpaid volunteer work examined in this study. The similarity of the average scores suggests that respondents perceived these values as important regardless of the specific volunteer activity they performed. As with faith, the survey identifies the consistency of this reported influence, while the qualitative phase of the study provides a richer understanding of how participants interpreted and experienced these values in practice.

4.5.10. Engagement Levels in Various Volunteering Types Across Faith Traditions

To further understand how religious identity shapes the landscape of unpaid work, I focused on the relationship between faith tradition and the types of volunteering activities respondents are involved in. Given the diversity of religious expression in South Africa, I thought it would be beneficial to explore whether different denominational cultures produce different patterns of engagement in care work, cleaning, feeding schemes, and educational activities. Figures 23-A and 23-B present this comparative data across six major faith categories.

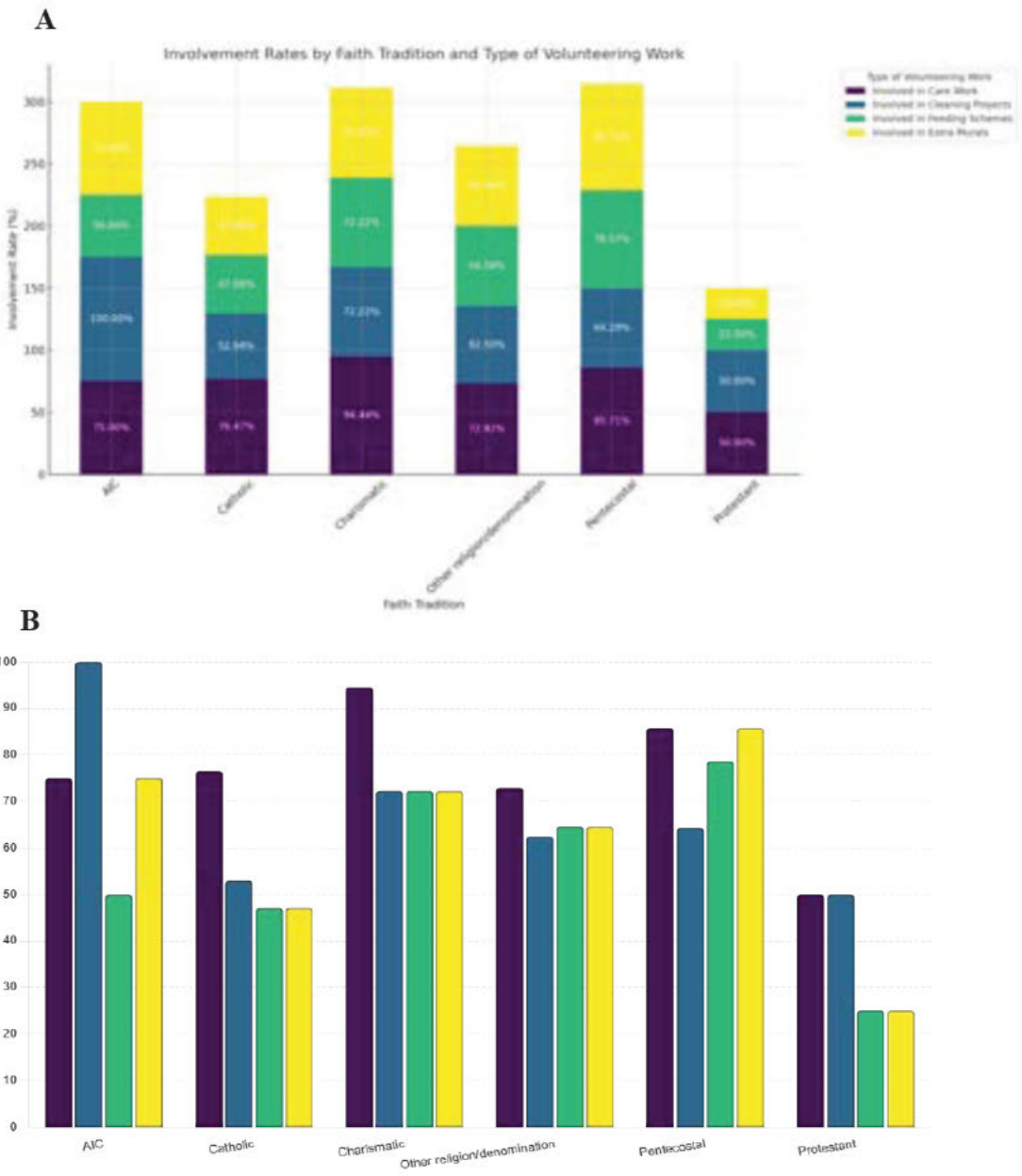


Figure 23 A and B

The data indicates that involvement rates in various types of volunteering work vary significantly across different faith traditions. For AIC, 100% are involved in care work, 50% in cleaning projects, 50% in feeding schemes, and 75% in extra murals. Catholic volunteers show 76% involvement in care work, 53% in cleaning projects, 47 % in feeding schemes, and 47 % in extra murals. Charismatic volunteers have a 94 % involvement in care work, 72 % in cleaning projects, 72 % in feeding schemes, and 47% in extra murals. Volunteers from other religions/denominations show 72.92% involvement in care work, 65% in cleaning projects, 65% in feeding schemes, and 65% in extra murals. Pentecostal volunteers show high involvement, with 86% in care work, 77% in cleaning projects, 86% in feeding schemes, and 64 % in extra murals. Protestant volunteers have lower involvement rates with 50% in care work, 25% in cleaning projects, 25% in feeding schemes, and 25% in extra murals.

This distribution reveals notable variations in volunteer involvement across different faith traditions. Pentecostal and Charismatic volunteers report consistently high engagement across all activity types, especially in care work and feeding schemes. AIC respondents show strong involvement in care work and extra murals, but less so in feeding and cleaning. Catholic and "Other" denominations exhibit moderate involvement across categories, while Protestant respondents report the lowest levels of participation overall. These differences may reflect how various traditions frame service, communal obligation, and gender roles within their theological and organisational cultures. In particular, traditions with strong emphasis on relational ministry, healing, or outreach may be more likely to normalise volunteering as a spiritual duty. This data suggests that faith tradition not only shapes belief, but also influences the kind of unpaid labour individuals are willing, or expected, to perform within their communities.

4.5.11. Community/Culture and Faith Influences Volunteering Decisions Correlation

To complement the visual data presented in the previous figures, Tables 2 and 3 provide a statistical summary of respondents' reported faith and community/cultural influence scores. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the two scales, while Table 3 summarises the distribution of responses across the scale scores. Together, these tables provide an overview of the consistency and variability with which respondents identified faith and community/cultural values as influences on their decisions to volunteer.

Table 1: Faith and Culture Scale Statistics:

The descriptive statistics indicate that respondents generally reported high levels of both faith and community/cultural influence on their decisions to volunteer. The Community/Culture Scale has a mean score of 8.09 and a median of 9, suggesting that respondents tended to rate community and cultural values as important influences. The Faith Scale has a slightly higher mean score of 8.58 and a median of 10, indicating that respondents generally reported faith as a more consistently important influence than community/cultural values. The standard deviations (2.43 for community/culture and 2.21 for faith) suggest relatively little variation across responses, particularly for the Faith Scale.

Statistic	Culture Scale	Faith Scale
Mean	8.09	8.58
Median	9	10
Standard Deviation	2.43	2.21

Table 2: Faith and Culture Score Distribution:

The distribution of responses further illustrates the consistency of respondents' reported faith and community/cultural influence scores. Community/cultural responses were distributed across the scale, although higher scores remained common. By contrast, the Faith Scale showed a stronger concentration of responses at the upper end of the scale, with thirty-nine respondents selecting the highest possible score. This distribution suggests that respondents consistently regarded faith as an important influence on their volunteering decisions.

Culture Scale	Faith Scale 1	Faith Scale 2	Faith Scale 3	Faith Scale 4	Faith Scale 5	Faith Scale 6	Faith Scale 7	Faith Scale 8	Faith Scale 9	Faith Scale 10
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
3	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
4	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0
5	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	1
6	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	1
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1
8	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	4	3	6
9	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	4
10	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	39

These descriptive statistics indicate that respondents consistently reported both faith and community/cultural values as important influences on their decisions to volunteer. The slightly higher mean, median and concentration of responses at the upper end of the Faith Scale suggest that faith was more consistently rated as an important influence than community/cultural values within this sample. The survey identifies the presence and relative consistency of these reported influences but does not explain how respondents understood faith or community/cultural values or how these shaped their decisions to volunteer. Those questions are addressed in the qualitative phase of the study, where participants' narratives provide a richer understanding of the meanings they attached to faith, culture and unpaid volunteer work.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, within this study, women's unpaid work occupies a central place in the functioning of faith communities. The survey findings reveal a consistent pattern in which women constituted the majority of respondents and reported regular participation across a wide range of volunteer activities. These quantitative findings highlight both the scale and the gendered nature of volunteerism within the study sample, demonstrating that unpaid labour is predominantly undertaken by women, a pattern consistent with broader feminist analyses of social reproduction (Elson, 1998; Budlender, 2016).

The survey findings further indicate that respondents identified both faith and community/cultural values as important influences on their decisions to volunteer. While faith

was generally rated slightly higher than community/cultural values, the survey measured the reported presence and relative consistency of these influences rather than ranking them against other possible motivations or explaining how respondents understood them. The survey also demonstrates that many respondents volunteered several times each week and across multiple areas of community life, illustrating the structured and sustained nature of unpaid volunteer work within the faith communities represented in this study.

These quantitative findings establish the broad patterns of women's unpaid volunteer work and the consistency with which respondents identified faith and community/cultural values as influences on their participation. However, they cannot fully explain the meanings respondents attached to these influences or how they shaped their experiences of volunteerism. The qualitative phase of this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study, therefore, builds upon these descriptive patterns by exploring how participants themselves understood faith, culture, calling, care and responsibility in relation to their unpaid work. Chapter Five turns to these lived experiences, providing a deeper account of how women define, negotiate and sustain unpaid volunteer work within the realities of everyday life.

CHAPTER 5

VUK'UZENZELE
– WOMEN DOING IT BY THEMSELVES

"If we don't do it, who will?... we trying because you need to create your own legacy, vuk'uzenzele" (Nandi)

5.1. Introduction

The isiZulu expression *vuk'uzenzele* emerges from the absence of formal support, jobs, or structured welfare systems in South Africa. It is in these settings that Black women in South African faith communities have taken up community-making through unpaid labour. This chapter explores the ways in which women navigate volunteerism and care work in contexts of scarcity, not as passive recipients of aid, but as agents of survival, organising themselves and their communities through informal structures of support. These actions embody the expression *vuk'uzenzele*, meaning "get up and do it yourself."

Participants repeatedly described circumstances in which they stepped in to meet urgent social needs, feeding children, caring for the elderly, running crèches or community clinics, without pay, formal titles, or institutional support. Their volunteerism was not structured by organisations but emerged from a shared understanding that "someone has to do it." The work they do is unpaid, informal, and often invisible, but it is vital. *Vuk'uzenzele* thus becomes a logic of survival, a cultural and moral response to systemic absence. Drawing on both qualitative interview data and supporting survey findings, this chapter addresses Research Question 1: How do women of faith navigate the volunteerism terrain in South Africa? The following themes emerging from the interviews are used to explore how women build trust-based, community-rooted forms of volunteerism and replace formal systems through unpaid and invisible labour.

5.2. Participants Profiling

To gain a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of unpaid and invisible work within faith-based volunteerism, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 participants selected from the 105 who responded to the survey. While the survey provided a broad overview of the volunteerism terrain and demographic trends, the interviews allow for a more detailed exploration of individual experiences, motivations, and the socio-cultural and religious dynamics that shape unpaid work. The interviews were designed to capture the personal narratives of women who contribute their time and labour to their communities, often without recognition or compensation. These conversations offer rich, qualitative insights into the complexities of informal volunteerism, such as how participants perceive their roles, the challenges they face, and how faith and culture influence their work. Each interview focused on key areas, including the types of unpaid work participants engage in, their motivations, the impact of their work on their personal lives, and their reflections on community and faith.

This section introduces the 12 participants whose voices shape the qualitative findings of this study. For confidentiality, I have assigned each participant a pseudonym, along with a brief profile detailing their background, including age, religious affiliation, and the type of volunteer activities they are involved in. I chose to use isiZulu names as pseudonyms in honour of the linguistic and cultural context in which this research is rooted. Each name carries a meaning that symbolically reflects the participant's role, character, or contribution. Names such as *Nomusa* ("compassionate one") and *Thembeka* ("trustworthy one") echo the values embedded in their volunteer work. These profiles provide context for understanding the diverse but interconnected experiences of these women and serve as a foundation for analysing their narratives. Below are brief participant profiles whose experiences will be explored in this chapter.

Sibongile – *"We are grateful",* a 25–35-year-old woman from uMsunduzi, is affiliated with a non-mainstream faith tradition and has been part of her church for over 10 years, attending services twice weekly. As a trained nurse, she stepped into unpaid community work after her contract at a local clinic ended, volunteering for 8 months to mobilise residents for HIV testing, vaccinations, and contraceptive access. She became a crucial link between marginalised communities and the clinic and encountered significant challenges, including gendered barriers in traditional leadership spaces and a traumatic robbery during her outreach. Yet, her

commitment kept her grounded in volunteering. Though she is not currently volunteering, she was actively involved twice a week for 2–3 years. Sibongile rated both faith and community/cultural motivation at 10.

Nandi – *"Nurturing one",* a 25–35-year-old woman from eThekwini, is a new member of the AIC, having joined less than a year ago. Although she attends church only occasionally, her commitment to care work is consistent. Over the past several months, she has been volunteering informally every other day, caring for children, the elderly, and the sick, cleaning in public spaces like parks and streets, and helping children with homework. She describes her work as an extension of who she is, not something assigned to her. Nandi rated faith influence at 10 and community/culture at 8.

Makhosazana – *"Daughter of royalty",* a 36–45-year-old Pentecostal pastor living outside uMsunduzi and eThekwini, has been a committed church member for over 10 years, attending twice a week. For more than five years, she has volunteered regularly, twice weekly, through care work, food initiatives like soup kitchens and school porridge programmes, and educational efforts in dance, music, and life skills. She founded a drug rehabilitation programme, later expanding into youth mentorship, school reintegration, and public speaking. She rates faith influence at 10 and community/culture at 1.

Nokuthula – *"She who brings peace",* a 25–35-year-old woman from uMsunduzi, is affiliated with a Charismatic church and has been a member for 5–10 years, attending weekly. She has volunteered consistently for over five years, contributing twice a week to elderly care, public service, food parcel distribution, and youth development. As a former athlete herself, she became the only woman in her area coaching soccer and training elderly teams in Indigenous and Golden Games sports. Her journey was shaped by resistance, excluded from leadership roles and often overlooked in male-dominated spaces, but she persisted out of passion for her players. Nokuthula rated her faith influence at 9 and community/culture at 10.

Buhle – *"Beauty",* a 36–45-year-old Catholic woman from eThekwini, has been a church member for 5–10 years and attends weekly. Though no longer volunteering, she was actively involved 2–3 years ago, offering her time every other day for 18 months. While studying Early Childhood Development, she volunteered at a local school, carrying out the full responsibilities of a paid teacher. Passionate about special needs education, she identified children requiring

extra support, ensuring they weren't left behind, something that paid teachers neglected. Although she hoped for permanent employment through her volunteerism, which did not happen due to internal politics, she dreams of starting her own crèche, but currently lacks the space. She rated faith influence at 8 and community/culture at 7.

Zanele – *"We are enough",* a 46–55-year-old Pentecostal woman living outside of uMsunduzi and eThekwini, has been an active church member for over 10 years, attending services twice weekly. For more than five years, she has volunteered consistently twice a week across a wide range of caregiving and community support roles. Her work includes caring for children, the elderly, and the sick; cleaning public and church spaces; running soup kitchens and porridge programmes. She also cultivates food gardens as a response to hunger in her area. For Zanele, there is no separation between faith and volunteering; she speaks of communal care as a calling. She rated both faith and community/culture motivation at 10.

Lungile – *"It is/ she is good",* a 36–45-year-old woman from uMsunduzi, is affiliated with the AIC. She has been a church member for 3–5 years, attending weekly, and has volunteered consistently over that same period, twice a week, in childcare, church cleaning, gardening, and sewing or handcrafts. Her introduction to unpaid labour came early, helping her mother with domestic work in a white household where cultural expectations made refusal difficult. As an adult, she continued to take on extra unpaid tasks at her workplace, often out of habit or religious or cultural obligation. She rated faith motivation at 10 and community/culture at 8, revealing both personal conviction and social pressure as drivers of her labour.

Ayanda – *"They are increasing",* a 25–35-year-old woman from eThekwini, is affiliated with a non-mainstream religious tradition and has been an active church member for over 10 years, attending weekly. She volunteered consistently for 3–5 years, last active around 2–3 years ago. Her service focused on childcare, cleaning public and church spaces, and youth empowerment as a co-founder of a youth development organisation that offers career guidance, recreational spaces, and mentorship for rural youth. She is deeply passionate about mental health and youth leadership and is navigating cultural resistance, especially from male traditional leaders. She rated both faith and community/culture influence at 10.

Thembeka – *"Trustworthy one",* a 46–55-year-old woman from uMsunduzi, is affiliated with a non-mainstream religious tradition and has been a devoted church member for over 10 years,

attending twice weekly. She has volunteered for more than five years, offering her time every other day to childcare, street cleaning, soup kitchen initiatives, and youth coaching. As a gym instructor, she transformed her personal fitness journey into a community wellness programme since 2012. Her sessions emphasise accessible routines and wellness in communities affected by lifestyle diseases. She also donates workout gear to those in need. She rated both faith and community/culture influence at 10.

Nomusa – *"The compassionate one",* a 56–65-year-old Pentecostal woman from eThekwini, has been a faithful church member for over 10 years, attending twice a week. She dedicated over five years to consistent, every other day volunteering in caregiving, cleaning, feeding, and youth support. A pastor and long-time HIV activist, Nomusa has run a home-based care centre since 2007, offering HIV testing, medication pickups, counselling, and support for those living with HIV. Alongside her husband, she cultivates a community garden that helps feed their clients. Her service extends to survivors of gender-based violence and the care of abandoned infants, whom she often shelters. She sees her work as a divine calling and rates both faith and community/culture influence at 10.

Thobeka – *"The humble and respectful one",* a 25–35-year-old woman from uMsunduzi, is affiliated with the AIC and has been a devoted member for over 10 years, attending weekly. For more than five years, she has volunteered twice a week in church-based care, youth coaching, and food provision. Her most notable contribution is founding a soup kitchen to serve chronically ill and unemployed community members, an effort rooted in her own childhood experiences of hunger. Despite opposition from church leadership, Thobeka persisted, organising food parcels and rallying community support. She rated both faith and community/cultural motivation at 10.

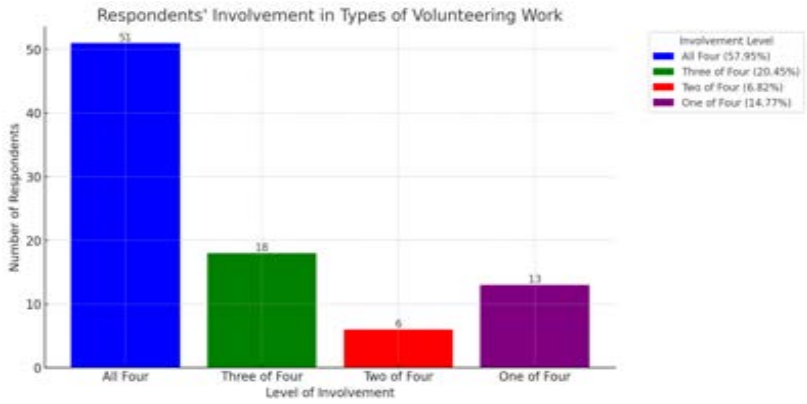
Lindiwe – *"The one we waited for",* a 25–35-year-old woman from eThekwini, is affiliated with a non-mainstream religious tradition. She has been a church member for over 10 years and attends twice weekly. Though she is not currently volunteering, she was actively involved within the past year, volunteering twice a week. While completing her BA in Development Studies, she assisted at the Department of Social Development, helping older community members register Non-Profit Organisation (NPOs) and leading youth empowerment initiatives. Her unpaid work laid the foundation for her career and ultimately led to a municipal internship. She rated both faith and community/culture influence at 10.

Table 3: Participants Profiling

Name	Age	Faith Tradition	Church Attendance	Volunteering Status	Volunteering Frequency	Faith Influence	Culture Influence
Sibongile	25–35	Other	Twice/week	Past (2–3 yrs)	Twice/week	10	10
Nandi	25–35	AIC	Once in a while	Present	Every other day	10	8
Makhosazana	36–45	Pentecostal	Twice/week	Present	Twice/week	10	1
Nokuthula	25–35	Charismatic	Once/week	Present	Twice/week	9	10
Buhle	36–45	Catholic	Once/week	Past (2–3 yrs)	Every other day	8	7
Zanele	46–55	Pentecostal	Twice/week	Present	Twice/week	10	10
Lungile	36–45	AIC	Once/week	Present	Twice/week	10	8
Ayanda	25–35	Other	Once/week	Past (2–3 yrs)	Once/week	10	10
Thembeka	46–55	Other	Twice/week	Present	Every other day	10	10
Nomusa	56–65	Pentecostal	Twice/week	Past (2–3 yrs)	Every other day	10	10
Thobeka	25–35	AIC	Once/week	Present	Twice/week	10	10
Lindiwe	25–35	Other	Twice/week	Past (≤1 yr)	Twice/week	10	10

5.3. Balancing Volunteerism and Daily Life

One of the clearest findings from both the survey and interviews is that women rarely limit themselves to a single form of volunteerism. Instead, they are often engaged in multiple types of unpaid work simultaneously, including care work, feeding schemes, cleaning projects, and educational or extra mural activities. Survey results, Figure 12, reported that half of the respondents (58%) are involved in all four categories of volunteering, while a further 20% engaged in three categories.



This indicates that volunteerism in urban Black faith communities is not a specialised or compartmentalised practice but rather a multiplicity of overlapping commitments. The interviews provided vivid illustrations of this reality. Participants consistently described being involved in more than one form of volunteering at a time, often across different sectors of community life. Like in the case of Thobeka, who started in health but quickly moved into food support, driven by the recognition that poverty, hunger, and illness are interconnected. She worked with other women to meet needs beyond the clinic setting.

> Obviously, I was not doing only one type of voluntary work all this time. When I did my in-service training at the clinic, I noticed how some patients were not just sick, but it was poverty. That touched me, so I worked with other women from the church to start a soup kitchen. We also did food parcel distribution for the sick, especially those with no income. I've done a lot–always more than one thing. (Thobeka)

Zanele presents a staggering list of tasks: teaching pensioners, helping children, supporting people with HIV, and cleaning community spaces, highlighting the everyday nature of unpaid work, which includes both direct service and manual labour.

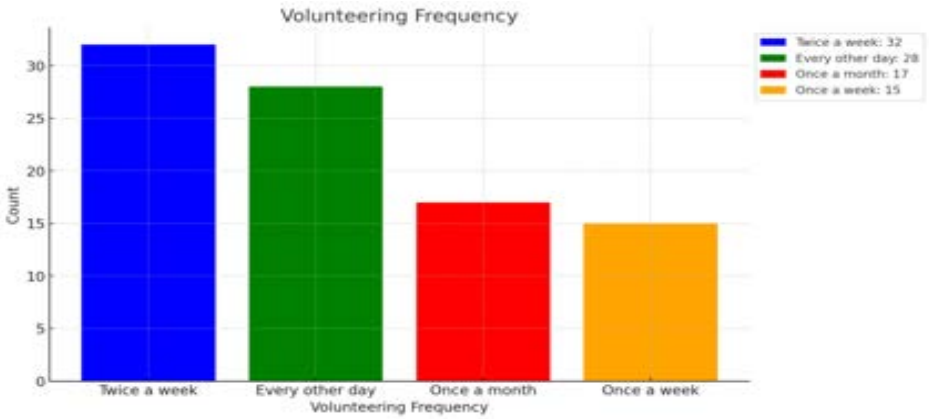
> First, I helped old people with their pensions and taught them to use ATMs. Then I had a project for seniors where they exercised, ate together, and got spiritual guidance. I also helped kids with school uniforms and outings, supported people living with HIV/AIDS, and raised groceries for those on medication. I even clean sports grounds and cut grass. I do a lot. (Zanele)

These examples highlight the breadth and versatility of women's unpaid labour. Participants did not see volunteering as confined to one sphere, but as holistic work that responded to diverse community needs such as health, education, spirituality, food, and social welfare. Through the lens of AFTOW, this multiplicity is a reflection of the expectation that women's labour is limitlessly elastic, resonating with feminist analyses of unpaid labour (Elson, 1998; Budlender, 2016). Unlike formal volunteer models, where individuals might be assigned discrete roles, women in these communities are called upon to "do everything", often without boundaries. This multiplicity paradoxically makes their contributions both visible and invisible: visible in quantity but invisible in value. The fact that women can be carers, cleaners, counsellors, and organisers simultaneously normalises their contributions as part of their identity rather than recognising them as distinct skills or community expertise.

Activism slogans originating from cultural idioms such as *vuk' uzenzele* ("get up and do it yourself") reinforce this expectation, situating unpaid labour within communal logics of self-reliance and survival. Theologically, churches often frame this breadth of volunteering as holistic ministry or a sign of spiritual maturity, yet African feminist theologians caution that this framing can sanctify overextension and mask the exploitative structures that rely on women's constant availability (Oduyoye, 2001; Phiri, 2002). From an AFTOW perspective, women's performance of multiple types of volunteer work can be understood as a form of survival multitasking. Communities depend on women's ability to provide essential services through their labour, ensuring that no social need, whether food, care, education, or cleaning, is left unattended.

5.3.1. Juggling Paid Work and Volunteer Work

Balancing paid employment and unpaid volunteerism emerged as one of the most significant challenges for participants. For many participants, unpaid community work was not a side activity but an integral part of daily routines, layered alongside paid employment, family care, and personal responsibilities. Survey data underscores this intensity. As shown in Figure 10, 35% of participants reported volunteering twice a week and 30% every other day, which participants understood as every day.



Such frequency illustrates that unpaid work is regular and demanding, requiring careful planning and, often, personal sacrifice. The challenge was not only about juggling multiple roles but also about overlapping duties and blurred boundaries between home, work, and community. Participants frequently described how their days were spent juggling paid work, unpaid volunteer duties, and family care, often with little to no rest in between. One participant explained:

> I do have a job that's full-time, and I do volunteer work full-time as well... In the morning, I start my day at eight o'clock. Before I leave for work, I go check the community garden, then go to work... Throughout the day, I'm on a WhatsApp group dealing with community problems... I get home at about two or three, then from 4 pm I visit an elderly person or a family... then I get home again, do laundry, prep for tomorrow. I usually go to bed at eleven o'clock. (Zanele)

Her words highlight how unpaid and paid responsibilities were not separated into shifts but ran alongside one another, with voluntary duties extending into the evening long after paid work ended. For her, both roles were experienced as full-time commitments, each demanding attention and energy throughout the day. This left little space for personal rest, underscoring how unpaid labour is interwoven into daily life rather than slotted in as a secondary activity. What is striking in her narrative is how it troubles the conventional metaphor of the second shift. The notion of women carrying a double burden, first performing paid work in the formal economy and then unpaid domestic work at home, has become a familiar lens for understanding women's labour. However, this participant's description complicates that binary. She does not move between discrete shifts; instead, she embodies them simultaneously. Her statement, "Throughout the day, I'm on a WhatsApp group dealing with community problems," reveals

that care, community, and employment are not separate domains but overlapping layers of responsibility.

In Caroline Moser's (2012) framework of productive, reproductive, and community-making work, the third shift is often conceptualised as an additional task undertaken after domestic duties, something women fit in occasionally or when time allows. Yet, as this participant's experience shows, the "third shift" does not merely follow the second; it occurs alongside it. The boundaries between paid work, unpaid domestic work, and voluntary community engagement are porous and continuous. Her day begins with checking the community garden before paid work, continues with problem-solving for neighbours via WhatsApp during office hours, and ends with visiting an elderly person after returning home. What emerges here is a portrait of concurrent labour, in which multiple forms of work flow into one another. This overlap exposes the inadequacy of linear metaphors that treat women's responsibilities as sequential. Instead, women like her live within an ongoing circuit of care that circulates through every part of the day.

For others, such as Lungile, voluntary responsibilities sometimes competed directly with paid work, impacting their performance or even forcing difficult choices. As Lungile shared:

> Yes... I do have an eight-to-five job, but in my eight-to-five job, there are other voluntary aspects of my job that actually eat almost a day a week. This voluntary work... I'm not getting paid for it, and it actually takes more of my time, which means even in my paid work, I'm no longer performing as expected because I also have a lot on my plate. (Lungile)

Her account reveals how unpaid labour can be woven into the very structure of formal employment. The tasks she describes are not external acts of community service, but internal expectations embedded within her paid role, responsibilities that fall outside her job description yet are necessary for the smooth running of the workplace. These are forms of invisible volunteering, absorbed into the rhythms of paid work without acknowledgement or reward. Here, the "second shift" does not happen after formal work hours; it unfolds within them. Rather than leaving the office to begin unpaid labour elsewhere, she performs unpaid duties alongside her paid ones, extending the emotional and practical demands of her job. This silent extension of labour highlights how the boundaries between paid and unpaid work are collapsed

in many women's experiences, where institutional cultures rely on women's willingness to "go the extra mile". Such expectations normalise overwork as care, positioning women's voluntary efforts as expressions of commitment rather than exploitation.

One participant described how leaving her job to care for her estranged but ill mother was both an act of family duty and a form of community work:

> There was a time when I left my job to take care of my sick mother, who had abandoned me when I was a baby, and I only found her when I was at university. I think that also counts towards community work. She didn't raise me, but she was now old and sick, and I felt like God had positioned me to be there, even though I became unemployed at the time. (Thobeka)

Her narrative reveals a complex entanglement between moral duty, faith, and gendered expectation. She not only performed unpaid care work but left her paid employment to do so – a decision that underscores that what might appear as a voluntary act is, in fact, shaped by the social and religious expectation that women will step in when care is needed, even at great personal or economic cost. Her framing demonstrates how unpaid family care can itself be understood as community work, especially when narrated through spiritual or moral lenses. In describing her care for a mother who had once abandoned her as "God positioning" her for a purpose, she locates her unpaid labour within a theology of service rather than sacrifice. Yet, beneath this language of calling lies an implicit social script that caregiving, particularly for family and the elderly, is a woman's natural responsibility. Her decision to leave formal employment thus illustrates not only the emotional depth of women's caregiving but also how moral and cultural expectations continue to tether women's bodies and time to unpaid labour, even when it demands withdrawing from economic independence.

5.3.2. Balancing Family and Volunteer Work

Another consistent feature of women's narratives was the merging of family responsibilities with community volunteering. Women in this study revealed that unpaid work in their communities did not replace family responsibilities but was stacked on top of them. They spoke of how caregiving for their children, extended family, and community members merged into one continuous stream of unpaid work, with little distinction between private and public roles.

Some participants described how family caregiving and volunteering overlapped directly. For instance, a pastor narrated how she combined her pastoral duties with the care of abandoned children entrusted to her through the courts, while also caring for her grandchildren, who often stayed with her for extended periods:

> I'm also a pastor... sometimes the kids are here, maybe for a week, two weeks... I've got to go to the court now with the police, carrying this little bundle of joy... and still no payment whatsoever. It's not easy, you know, especially when you know you have your own children as well, your own responsibilities, but this is what God has called me for. **(**Lindiwe**)**

Her story demonstrates how unpaid work cannot be neatly separated into "home," "public," or "church" domains. Instead, care work moved across these spaces. In her case, unpaid caregiving performed in the home extended into public institutions such as the courts, while her pastoral identity blurred the line between formal ministry and unpaid labour. This blurring illustrates what social reproduction theorists argue: that women's unpaid care sustains not only families but also broader social and institutional systems (Fraser, 2016; Folbre, 2018). Moreover, in African cultural contexts, caring for grandchildren is not only a family responsibility but often perceived as community-making work, which entails raising the next generation as part of a wider ethic of Ubuntu. Her testimony shows how unpaid work is continuous, flowing through the day, the household, and the community, without the clear boundaries that paid employment assumes.

This merging of roles with family life often came at an emotional cost. For some women, unpaid work overlapped directly with family responsibilities in ways that strained their time, energy, and relationships. like in the case of Lungile, who described the pressure of extending care to her mother even when she was exhausted, and Zanele, who acknowledged the quiet guilt of her children, who felt neglected because of their mothers' commitments. Lungile explained how, after finishing her wage labour, she would immediately assist her mother with her paid domestic work, interpreting this support as part of her volunteering: "When I knocked off from work, even if I was hot and tired, I had to help my mum, for her sake I need to up my game and help. to lessen the burden for her" (Lungile) and Zanele shares

> My daughter always says to me, 'Mum, I don't like coming back home because that's a community home.' She means that there are always people at home, people I'm helping. Sometimes I feel bad, like maybe I'm not giving them enough time. But this is what I do. (Zanele)

These narratives highlight the personal sacrifices that underpin women's unpaid labour and reveal that family is not a separate sphere but deeply entangled with community obligations, often leading to guilt, fatigue, and conflict. Yet participants consistently framed this work as a calling or moral responsibility, a form of service that could not be abandoned even when it strained household relationships. This dynamic echoes feminist scholarship on the gendered invisibility of care work, where women's unpaid contributions at home and in the community are taken for granted as natural extensions of motherhood and femininity (Tronto, 2020; Budlender, 2016). In the South African context, where state support for childcare and eldercare is limited, women's unpaid work effectively becomes a family and community safety net**,** sustaining both households and public life, as in Lindiwe's case. This overlap of family and community obligations underscores that balancing volunteerism is not merely about finding time, but about constantly negotiating emotional and moral priorities in gendered ways.

Apart from the emotional strain placed on children and kin by attempts to balance family and community obligations, participants also spoke strongly of the direct emotional costs they themselves bore in sustaining unpaid work. As Hackman (2023) reminds us, care is not only physical but also *emotional labour*, the work of listening, absorbing pain, and managing feelings of duty, guilt, and calling. For women in this study, the weight of such labour was often overwhelming, leaving them exhausted, isolated, and at times burnt out. One participant captured this vividly:

> The services we are doing are quite a lot. It's overwhelming... sometimes I even feel burnt out because it's just too much. Sitting and listening to people's stories as well – it can also weigh you down... But we just keep on going. (Nomusa)

Another described the emotional isolation of volunteering, where her private tears became the only outlet for managing the weight of others' suffering: "Yes, I do get overwhelmed sometimes, so I go to the toilet... I sit down, close the door... that's the only time I get to breathe

and cry." (Thobeka). Even when women attempted to pause or withdraw, their absence revealed just how indispensable their unpaid labour had become:

> When the work got too much... I would say, no, let me rest a bit because I am not coping. I would just stay at home for a few days, and then the principal would call me to ask why I wasn't coming to work. That would make me feel like, Oh, they do love me; bayangi bona–they see me. (Buhle)

These narratives reveal that unpaid volunteerism comes with an emotional tax that is seldom acknowledged or compensated. Women internalise responsibility for the suffering of others, often at the cost of their own well-being. The language of burnout, crying in private, and needing rest reflects the hidden dimension of unpaid care: the emotional labour of managing not only tasks but also feelings, both their own and those of the community (Hochschild, 1983). This underscores the gendered nature of unpaid work; while men may volunteer in public roles, it is women who bear the emotional weight of sustaining families and communities, often in silence. Moreover, this dimension of care resonates with African feminist theologians such as Kretzschmar (2010) and Phiri (2002), who argue that the way women's unpaid work is framed in church and community results in exploitation. In this sense, the emotional burden of caregiving is both a marker of resilience and a site of vulnerability, revealing the cost of sustaining community life under conditions of limited institutional support.

Naming the Silence

A tension emerges in the ways participants narrated their own exhaustion. Nomusa names burnout directly, Thobeka retreats to a toilet cubicle to cry where no one can see her, and Buhle explains that she only allows herself to stop working when she is physically unable to continue. Yet none of these women presents their experience as evidence of exploitation or injustice. Instead, they describe the work as demanding, emotionally taxing and sometimes overwhelming, before returning to the conviction that it remains theirs to carry. These narratives, when read on their own terms, speak of resilience, commitment and faith, but when read alongside the coping mechanisms discussed throughout this chapter, they reveal women who have developed ways of sustaining themselves within demanding circumstances. Yet read through another lens, they also invite a more difficult question: what does it mean when women

can describe the weight of their labour in remarkable detail without ever naming the structures that produce that weight?

This question lies at the heart of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) provocation, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak's argument does not suggest that marginalised people are unable to speak; instead, her concern is more subtle. She argues that those who occupy subordinate positions often speak through languages and categories that have already been shaped by the very structures within which they live. Their voices are not absent; rather, they become intelligible only through dominant cultural, political and ideological discourses. Within the context of this study, those discourses are not only social but also theological. Participants consistently interpreted their experiences through the language of calling, grace, sacrifice, discipleship and service. These theological narratives did not simply motivate volunteerism; they also provided the interpretive framework through which suffering, endurance and self-sacrifice acquired spiritual meaning.

Buhle's reflection illustrates this tension well. Speaking about her workplace, she explains, *"they do love me; bayangibona, they see me."* At first glance, this appears to be a simple affirmation of appreciation. Yet the timing of this recognition deserves closer attention. Buhle experiences her value most clearly only when she is absent. Her labour becomes visible only when it can no longer be performed. She does not describe her work as being undervalued while she is carrying it; rather, recognition arrives retrospectively, through her absence and in forms determined by the institution itself. This is not a weakness in her testimony, nor should it be interpreted as evidence that she is incapable of recognising injustice. Instead, it illustrates the complexity of speaking from within institutional and theological worlds that have already defined what counts as faithful service and what counts as complaint. In this regard, Spivak (1988) offers a helpful conversation partner. Her work encourages not only considering what participants say, but also the discursive frameworks through which their experiences become meaningful.

This perspective also reshapes the way the coping mechanisms discussed in this section are interpreted. As Spivak (1988) reminds us, the question is not simply whether marginalised women speak, but whose language is available to them when they attempt to describe exhaustion, disappointment or injustice. When the vocabulary of vocation, sacrifice and Christian service becomes the primary language through which unpaid labour is interpreted,

other ways of naming exploitation may become more difficult to articulate. The narratives presented in this study illustrate that toilet cubicles become the only private spaces in which tears may be shed. Withdrawal from volunteering becomes the only socially acceptable form of protest. Being missed when absent becomes the clearest evidence that one's labour had value all along. These details reveal that participants often carried emotional and physical burdens for which there appeared to be little publicly available language beyond perseverance and faithfulness. Listening to these stories, therefore, requires attentiveness not only to what participants explicitly name, but also to the silences, hesitations and assumptions that shape their accounts. This resonates with AFTOW, which draws from Phiri (2002) and Kretzschmar (2010), to argue that patriarchal religious structures frequently normalise women's unpaid labour by presenting service as an unquestioned expression of Christian discipleship.

The present study moves beyond simply identifying these structures; the AFTOW offers a constructive theological response to the tension revealed in participants' narratives. Rather than asking whether women's commitment to unpaid work reflects agency or oppression, AFTOW begins from the recognition that these realities often coexist. Participants exercised genuine agency in choosing to serve their communities, yet that agency was expressed within historical, cultural and theological traditions that have long associated women's faithfulness with self-sacrifice and invisible labour. AFTOW therefore does not question the authenticity of women's faith or their desire to serve, but to interrogate the theological narratives through which sacrifice becomes normalised, and invisibility becomes spiritually intelligible. It seeks to affirm women's vocation while simultaneously insisting that work performed in the service of God and community should neither depend upon nor perpetuate the invisibility of those who perform it.

AFTOW drawing on Spivak's work helps explain why participants rarely described their experiences using the language of exploitation, even where the material realities of burnout, financial strain and emotional exhaustion were clearly evident. The African Feminist Theology of Work proposed in this study responds to this insight by making visible what has too often remained unnamed: that unpaid work may simultaneously be an authentic expression of faith, an act of profound community care, and a site where gendered inequalities continue to be reproduced. Recognising this paradox is essential if theology is to move beyond celebrating women's volunteering towards imagining forms of discipleship that honour both their calling and their dignity.

5.3.3. Volunteerism and Personal Safety

Women also highlighted the risks and vulnerabilities that came with unpaid labour. These risks ranged from gendered vulnerability in unsafe spaces to direct exposure to violence. The accounts reveal that women not only carry the emotional and physical weight of volunteering but also bear the cost of compromised safety. One participant described a traumatic experience during a mobile clinic visit:

> We were in a mobile bus to distribute medication, … Just after we took out the laptops and tablets, men with guns came in and pointed it on my forehead, I just felt something cold. They locked us in and took laptops, tablets, our phones and bags. That time, we were only four women in there. Luckily, they didn't harm us– I just fainted… I had trauma... but I went back. Even now, I work with the same community. **(**Sibongile**)**

Safety was not only about armed violence but also about the unspoken pressures of cultural expectations**.** Another participant explained how women often cannot say "no" even when overburdened, because silence and endurance are seen as cultural virtues:

> It needs all parties to understand that this person is volunteering... But when we look at culture, culture has made us to be quiet. It's difficult for you to express yourself… But it becomes hard to say no, enough is enough. **(**Lungile**)**

Volunteers also played an informal role in ensuring the safety of others. Local women acted as relational buffers between external workers and community members who might pose threats:

> The people employed by the clinic were not from this community, so my job was to accompany them in the clinic's vehicle to provide directions and show them the patients' homes. No one will harass the employees when there is a familiar person with them, because the guys who cause problems will be scared to do anything when there is someone who can identify them. Where else, if they make rounds by themselves, they will be in danger. **(**Sibongile**)**

These accounts complicate the image of volunteering as a safe and benevolent service. For women in this study, unpaid community work sometimes entailed life-threatening risks, including exposure to armed violence and ongoing trauma. Through the lens of the AFTOW, these experiences highlight the paradoxical nature of safety in unpaid labour. Women are both vulnerable and protective: exposed to harm themselves yet relied upon to safeguard others. Their bodies become sites of sacrifice, instruments through which communities are secured, but without the recognition or protection that formalised labour might guarantee. In addition, cultural expectations stripped women of the ability to set boundaries, reinforcing the invisibility of their suffering and the precarity of their roles. Feminist scholarship on care work has long emphasised its invisibility, but these findings highlight an additional dimension: the danger of care. Women are not only drained emotionally and physically, but also asked to put their bodies on the line to sustain fragile community systems. This underscores the urgency of recognising unpaid volunteerism not merely as "helping work" but as labour performed under conditions of precarity and sacrifice.

Balancing unpaid volunteerism and daily life is not a matter of fitting charity into free time, but of layering multiple roles and sacrifices into already stretched lives. Women juggle paid labour, caregiving, family responsibilities, and community service, often restructuring their time with discipline and creativity. Yet this balancing act carries steep costs: emotional exhaustion, family tension, and even threats to personal safety. What emerges is a picture of volunteerism as survival labour, unpaid, unprotected, and demanding. These findings highlight that unpaid work in faith communities is not occasional or optional but central to how women navigate their lives, often at personal cost. This unpaid work is not only individually managed but collectively organised through networks of trust, proximity, and shared obligation. The next theme shows how volunteerism is embedded in communal life rather than isolated acts of service.

5.4. Organic and Parochial Volunteerism

While the previous theme examined how women juggle unpaid work within their own lives, this theme turns outward to explore how that work is collectively organised within communities. Women's volunteering in urban Black faith communities does not arise from formal recruitment drives or structured programmes. Instead, it grows organically from everyday life, rooted in kinship, friendship, neighbourhood ties, and the moral imagination of

care that defines community belonging. Participants described their work not as a separate activity, but as part of who they are and how they live with others. This relational, localised, unpaid work reflects what can be called organic and parochial volunteerism. It is organic because it emerges from within, arising naturally from relationships, proximity, and shared responsibility rather than the structured, external models of volunteering introduced by NGOs or state agencies. It is parochial because it is rooted in particular contexts of neighbourhood and congregation, oriented towards "our own" people rather than anonymous beneficiaries. Understanding this dynamic requires paying attention to how women mobilise trust, relationships, and local knowledge, which are the invisible threads that make their work possible. Through the AFTOW lens, this is a form of communal care labour: relational, localised, and responsive to survival pressures.

5.4.1. Locally Embedded Volunteerism

Women's unpaid work in faith communities operates less as a structured programme and more as a relational system of care. Its strength does not lie in institutional design like in formal volunteerism, but it lies in the relational networks that enable communities to act when formal structures fail. These networks of belonging and obligation create what can be called moral infrastructure, the invisible social system through which care, trust, and survival circulate. For many women, the motivation to act arose from lived experience rather than external mobilisation. As one participant reflected,

> We've always wanted to do... to bring change... most of my personal motivation comes from the mistakes that I've made in life, and trying to teach teenagers through my own experience... we come from communities and homes where we can't speak sometimes about our experiences, but we can actually help. (Makhosazana)

Her reflection exemplifies what the AFTOW identifies as *communal care labour*, a Theology of Work rooted in relationship and moral accountability. Here, personal experiences become a social resource; pain is re-channelled into empathy and teaching. In this sense, unpaid labour is not simply service to others but a form of self-repair that binds the individual back into the moral life of the community. These relational economies also sustain the volunteers

themselves. Mutual aid, encouragement, and the informal support of fellow congregants function as the framework that keeps unpaid work going. As one woman noted,

> What sustained me, I'd say it's the support of other church members, their involvement in donating canned food, because if they had not, honestly I would have been discouraged... the food parcels were mainly from the women's league. (Thobeka)

The women's league in her church exemplifies this reciprocal economy of care. Here, the women's league acts as a community backbone, not only supplying resources but also affirming the value of her efforts. This dynamic reflects a circular relationship where volunteers give to the community, and the community, in turn, sustains them. This exchange mirrors what feminist sociologists describe as embedded reciprocity, an economy of giving and receiving that does not depend on money but on trust, recognition, and shared moral obligation (Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2020). Within these networks, material resources and emotional encouragement circulate simultaneously: food parcels travel alongside affirmation, prayer, and solidarity. Through this circular exchange, women's unpaid labour becomes self-sustaining, not because it is formally funded, but because it is socially reproduced through care itself. The act of giving produces a sense of belonging, and belonging, in turn, replenishes the will to give. This pattern aligns with the *vuk'uzenzele* ethic – to rise, to act, and to keep others rising with you, revealing how community networks convert scarcity into collective resilience.

AFTOW reveals that care itself becomes the currency of faith in which relational volunteerism cuts across religious or institutional boundaries. Makhosazana, a Christian pastor, captured this pragmatic inclusivity when she explained, "I have worked with people who did not know God… with social workers, social development, Muslims and Hindus… you just need to be human to see there is a gap here" (Makhosazana).

Her words 1. highlight how organic volunteerism is inclusive and pragmatic, driven by shared humanity rather than rigid organisational boundaries. 2. They reject sectarian understandings of "faith-based" volunteerism, situating care within a broader Ubuntu ethic that affirms that *being human together* is itself a sacred act. This inclusivity grounds what AFTOW frames as a "theology of relational belonging", where moral action arises from proximity, not hierarchy (Oduyoye, 2001). Trust is the foundation of this moral infrastructure. Because volunteers are

known within their communities, they embody credibility that external institutions often lack. A participant who supported survivors of abuse explained,

> Volunteering gives us a chance to get to know the patients and for them to know us... even when someone is abused, they can come to me, and I can help by connecting them with social workers or police. I can be their advocate if they can't speak for themselves. If I get close to the community and earn their trust, they'll know they can come talk to me about their struggles (Sibongile)

Sibongile's account demonstrates how relational credibility opens doors to forms of care that might otherwise remain inaccessible. For victims of violence, trust is the bridge between silence and seeking help. In these settings, formal systems may be present, but they often lack the intimacy and responsiveness that local volunteers provide. Within AFTOW, this represents a calling enacted in ordinary spaces rather than professional ones. This relational trust is also emotional and mutual. A volunteer who worked with schoolchildren recalled, "Whenever I walk on the road, a kid will say, 'Ma'am, I miss you.'… They trust me because I take the time, and they know I'm there for them" (Nandi). Trust here functions as recognition, a quiet affirmation that one's labour matters. In contexts of scarcity, such acknowledgement becomes a form of symbolic remuneration, the emotional wage that sustains continued care.

The ethic that underpins these interactions is captured in the phrase *vuk'uzenzele* – get up and do it yourself. Contrary to individualistic interpretations, the women invoke this phrase as a call to collective agency: when no external help arrives, the community must rise together. This ethic materialises in countless small gestures, such as a woman who buys shoes for a neglected child or neighbours who feed each other's families. Yet as one participant lamented, even these solidarities are precarious: when enthusiasm fades, initiatives collapse. Volunteerism thus persists in a delicate tension between resilience and fatigue, its strength measured not by permanence but by repetition. Some groups have transformed this ethos into enduring social systems. A widow in one community described how a small gardening collective reinvested its modest income to keep their work alive: "We've got a community garden... the widows run the sales. They use that money for more seedlings and manure... I feel I have a slice of bread, and I share that slice with five more people" (Zanele). Her metaphor of sharing a slice of bread illustrates the principle of communal reciprocity that defines *vuk'uzenzele* even when resources are scarce, they are stretched and multiplied through collective effort. This is survival work,

but it is also a form of redemptive participation, where women convert scarcity into solidarity (Phiri, 2002).

Taken together, these practices constitute what can be understood as a relational system through which women collectively absorb the failures of the state, church, and market. Through the lens of AFTOW, women's unpaid labour becomes both pragmatic and prophetic, pragmatic in meeting immediate needs, and prophetic in modelling an alternative moral order where community replaces institution as the locus of care. In this sense, *vuk'uzenzele* is more than a survival strategy; it is a theological declaration that when systems abandon them, women will not only rise but rise *together*.

5.4.2. Women-led Initiatives

While women are often positioned in narratives of care as passive nurturers or helpers, the stories shared by participants reveal them as strategic leaders and innovators. Far from simply following directions, they are the ones imagining, initiating, and sustaining many of the most critical community projects. Whether establishing crèches, running soup kitchens, or managing old age homes, women occupy the driving seat in grassroots development efforts. Unlike institutional leadership defined by titles, budgets, or policy, this is a form of embedded governance rooted in daily life. Women identify needs, mobilise people, coordinate resources, negotiate with local authorities, and sustain long-term projects, all without payment or formal authority. One participant reflected on the visibility of women's leadership in her community:

> Women start crèches. I've never seen a man start a crèche in all my time there. Even in the NPO constitutions, you won't find male members in any of the crèche organisations; it's always women. Soup kitchens too, it's just women. Old age homes? Mostly women. I can boldly say, in community development projects, the ones who participate the most are women. (Lindiwe)

Her observations are that women are not only the emotional backbone of community care but also its architects and operational leaders. The absence of men in these spaces echoes feminist analyses of the gendered division of community labour (Budlender 2016; Moser 2012), highlighting how the burden and the responsibility for sustaining social welfare have been naturalised as women's work. Yet through an AFTOW lens, this pattern is not only sociological

but also theological, revealing how women's calling to care has been naturalised into community expectation. Leadership here does not operate through titles or budgets but through constancy, reputation, and moral competence. Women become agents of practical wisdom (Kretzschmar, 2010) where they hold the community together through discernment, rather than through positional power. Much of this leadership unfolds within church spaces, where the labour of women is vital yet erased. A participant described this imbalance:

> When it comes to cleaning the church or preparing food during church conferences, it's always the women. You won't find men in the kitchen, I've never seen that where I come from. Women organise everything: buying groceries, cooking, serving, even if they're not paid. And the church just lets it happen because it works. (Thobeka)

Her statement reveals how ecclesial life depends on women's unpaid coordination. The church, as an institution, benefits from a steady flow of invisible governance, from event management to pastoral care, while rarely naming it as leadership. AFTOW exposes the theological contradiction here: the church preaches service as virtue but structures it as a gendered duty. Women's labour is sanctified, yet their authority is withheld. What is called *servanthood* in theology becomes *free labour* in practice. Outside formal religious structures, this leadership takes even more creative forms. Makhosazana, a young pastor who founded a community centre to assist child-headed households, shared:

> I ran a drug rehabilitation programme and a teenage pregnancy intervention programme. I started a centre where child-headed homes would come for food and homework support. We did whatever we could, sometimes just second-hand clothes. It wasn't because someone gave me a mandate; I just saw the need and started. (Makhosazana)

Her story highlights the visionary leadership required to create sustainable care structures without formal backing. This kind of leadership is both entrepreneurial and relational, driven by the urgency of local conditions rather than external agendas. AFTOW frames this as the *prophetic imagination of work*, a moral responsiveness that converts discerned need into organised action (Phiri, 2002). In a context of institutional absence, women innovate new ministries of care, often combining logistical management, emotional counselling, and spiritual

mentorship within the same role. This kind of work collapses distinctions between volunteer, pastor, and social worker. However, women's leadership is often precarious. Because these initiatives are informal and under-resourced, one participant described a soup kitchen that initially thrived but later faltered, "There is a woman in the community who had a soup kitchen, but because of the elections, it slowed down, and people just forgot to carry on supporting her" (Nandi).

The story highlights how women's leadership, although essential, remains structurally unsupported. When resources run out or their personal capacity is exhausted, the initiative dissolves, leaving them shouldering the emotional burden of unfinished work. Feminist economists argue that unpaid social reproduction sustains the very systems that marginalise it (Elson 1998). Similarly, African feminist theologians like Phiri (2002) and Oduyoye (2001) warn that the church's celebration of women's "service" often conceals the extraction of their labour. Through AFTOW, this contradiction becomes visible: what appears as self-sacrifice is often institutional outsourcing of care to women's bodies. At the same time, these stories reveal innovation under constraint. Women constantly redesign fragile infrastructures of survival: they rotate food donations, adapt gardens into feeding schemes, mentor youth through informal schooling, or stretch minimal resources into community support systems. Their leadership is improvisational, responsive to scarcity rather than planned through policy. This agility transforms lack into creativity. These narratives also reveal that women's unpaid leadership performs both care and coordination: they feed, organise, negotiate, and mediate. Yet this leadership is rarely inscribed into the grammar of power. It exists in the margins of recognition as invisible leadership.

5.4.3. Local Volunteerism As a Critique of Formal Volunteerism

While women valued their grassroots volunteering, many expressed frustration with how external organisations and state agencies approached community work. Their critiques revealed a sharp distinction between organic care rooted in local relationships and formal volunteerism driven by external agendas, short-term funding cycles, or political visibility. For participants, these differences were not simply about methods but about meaning, what it means to care, to belong, and to be recognised. One volunteer captured this divide vividly:

> It's very, very different because I mean, I'm on the grassroots level. So I take a lot of pride in what I do. Whereas those that are sitting in lavish offices with aircons

> and everything, they take work as they would like... you're not getting anything for what you're doing, you are so cautious that when a call comes in, you answer it, if someone gets knocked over, you're running over there... It's in your spirit. It's in your heart, this thing that you are doing. (Nomusa)

Her distinction between "air-conditioned offices" and the immediacy of "a call that comes in" symbolises two opposing moral economies. In one, care is bureaucratised and detached; in the other, it is relational and embodied. For her, volunteering is not about ticking boxes or fulfilling quotas, not a task to complete but an ongoing ethical commitment, a form of care inseparable from the self. Participants frequently criticised how formal organisations entered communities during crises but departed as soon as the cameras and campaigns moved on. Their interventions, women observed, were often generous in appearance but hollow in practice. As one woman recounted after a flood response:

> When there were floods and everything, organisations like Key of Hope, Gift of the Givers came just to say 'take' because they were expecting some handout. They don't know the whole story; they don't know the cycle. If they stayed and studied the community, they would learn that giving food is not enough, it's more than food that is needed there. (Nandi)

Her frustration underscores how aid without understanding can perpetuate cycles of dependency. Temporary relief may address immediate hunger or loss, but it does not address the long-term social and structural challenges communities face. In Nandi's accounts, external organisations often treated communities as passive recipients rather than partners, offering relief without engagement or follow-up. Several participants described these encounters with outside organisations as disempowering or even harmful. As one participant put it: "Some of these initiatives humiliate people and cause pain. They're not empowering, they're just crap" (Makhosazana). Her blunt critique points to the dignity dimension of care. It is not only about what is given, but how it is given, and whether it uplifts or shames those receiving it. This underscores a recurring theme in feminist scholarship: that dignity is as central to care as material provision (Folbre, 2014a). When people are treated as projects rather than participants, the relationship of care collapses. This distinction between external and internal approaches was especially clear when participants contrasted formal aid with their own relational methods. When external actors perform similar tasks, their work is formalised, funded, and publicised.

Participants recognised this double standard, that the same labour, when performed by outsiders, is classified as development or humanitarian work, while their own remains "helping." One woman captured this irony through her reflection on aid distribution:

> Now I feel it's a waste of time because Gift of the Givers will come with blankets and black plastic when there's a disaster or give out food parcels. But who's going to pick up the pieces once Gift of the Givers is gone? We mustn't look for quick solutions and ignore the aftereffects. You wouldn't find Gift of the Givers at SASSA. You wouldn't find Gift of the Givers at Home Affairs. You wouldn't find Gift of the Givers taking care of someone who's frail and sick. Because when you come and offer a quick solution, you must ask yourself, Am I making this problem bigger, or am I assisting this family? (Zanele)

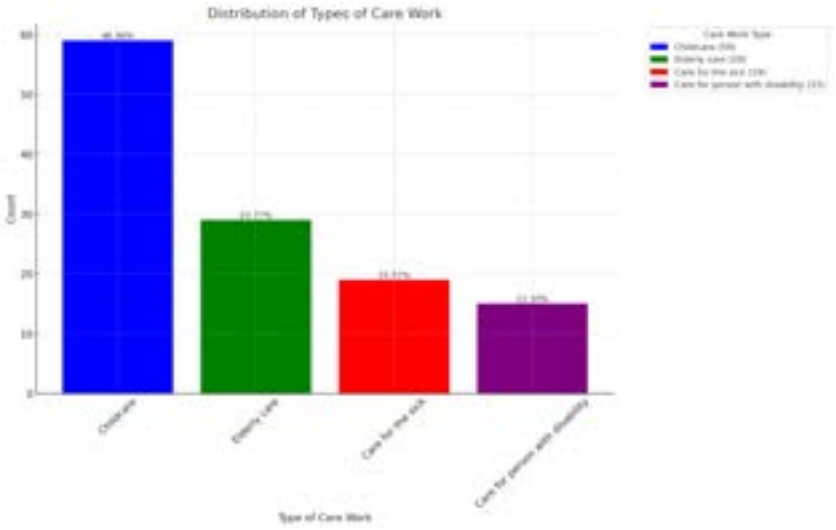
Her critique contrasts handouts with sustained, relationship-based care. By serving meals rather than giving parcels, she creates accountability and connection, ensuring that resources are used as intended and that people feel cared for rather than managed. These critiques also reveal a consistent theme: formal volunteerism, no matter how well-funded, often lacks the relational embeddedness and long-term commitment that grassroots volunteers provide. External organisations may enter during crises, but they leave before the deeper work of healing and transformation takes place. For the women in this study, real care is not about quick fixes or visibility; it is about staying, listening, and building trust over time.

Women's unpaid work in urban Black faith communities is not only relationally grounded but also politically charged. Through *vuk'uzenzele*, women have created systems of care that are organic, localised, and sustained by trust rather than funding. These informal networks function as community infrastructure, feeding, cleaning, mentoring, and healing in the everyday spaces where formal systems rarely reach. Yet, participants' critiques make clear that this embedded labour also exposes deep inequities. Their volunteerism sustains families, churches, and communities, but remains unrecognised within the hierarchies of professional and institutional care. In this sense, women's volunteerism sits at the intersection of agency and inequality, a space where creativity and constraint coexist. The next theme turns to the broader implications of these dynamics, examining how unpaid labour in faith communities has become an informal safety net that fills the gaps left by the state, mediating survival through women's invisible and unprotected work.

5.5. Volunteer work as a Social Safety Net

Women's unpaid volunteerism functions as a critical social safety net within urban Black South African faith communities. The study finds that these women are not merely providing supplementary care or occasional support; instead, they are sustaining entire systems of survival, stepping into roles that formal institutions have failed to fill. Their contributions extend across food security, health services, child-protection, and bureaucratic navigation, roles ordinarily assigned to the state or NGOs. Survey data reflect the scale and diversity of these responsibilities. As shown in Figure 13-A, nearly half of the participants (48%) provide childcare, while 24% care for the elderly, 16% support the sick, and 12. % care for people living with disabilities.

A



Interpreted through AFTOW, which draws from SRT and Wilson & Musick's integrated framework, two insights emerge. First, addressing research sub-question 1, women navigate volunteerism by mobilising relational, cultural, and religious capital, including community networks, local knowledge, and faith-based alliances, which enable them to provide care without relying on institutional resources or payment. Second, in response to research sub-question 2, these same theories expose the injustice of states, churches, and NGOs benefiting from women's unpaid labour without recognition, contracts, or protection. Women thus bear the responsibility of keeping communities alive while their contributions remain invisible,

feminised, and undervalued. The following are the three pathways through which this safety net is built and maintained:

5.5.1. Filling Gaps in State and NGO Support

Women described stepping into spaces where formal services had retreated or failed. Their unpaid labour is a continuous, community-based system of welfare and becomes the only reliable form of social protection in neighbourhoods where welfare departments, clinics, and NGOs are under-resourced or administratively inaccessible. Women distribute food, provide health care, shelter, counselling, and bureaucratic navigation – tasks ordinarily performed by paid professionals. Through these actions, volunteers transform private commitment into public infrastructure. One volunteer explains how her group targets those who fall through administrative cracks and pairs relief with capability-building:

> You see, like when you've applied for an ID and you got that waiting period… no one ever looks out for the people between the time you apply for your ID and the time when you have your ID to then apply at SASSA. So we look for people like that. We also look for child-headed homes, or homes where there is totally no income. Then we will go there and make a garden for you. We need to teach you how to plant… to live off the soil is one of the weapons that we use to fight poverty. (Zanele)

Her account exposes a critical gap in the state's welfare system, the spaces between eligibility and access, where bureaucratic timelines and technicalities exclude those most in need. These "cracks of the system" are not merely administrative oversights but lived spaces of vulnerability, where survival becomes precarious. Women volunteers like her step into these gaps, performing a kind of informal governance that helps restore the social safety net when institutions fail to reach it. What emerges here is a form of grassroots statecraft: unpaid, gendered labour that keeps communities functional in the face of bureaucratic neglect. By identifying and supporting those who exist in the in-between, the undocumented, the waiting, the overlooked, these women take on the moral and logistical work of redistribution. They mediate between the community and the state, bridging the gap between policy promises and lived realities.

Her words also show how women's unpaid work extends care beyond emergency relief toward capacity-building, turning gardening projects into a survival strategy. This is unpaid welfare work, but also local governance – designing interventions that combine food security, social protection, and empowerment in one. Such efforts embody what feminist economists call *social reproduction labour*: the unpaid work of maintaining life when institutions withdraw (Moser, 2012; Elson, 1998). In these interstitial spaces of care, women do more than patch the system's failings; they reconstitute community itself as a site of resilience, solidarity, and survival. Others described similar interventions where care became crisis management. One volunteer coordinated a church-based programme for pregnant teenagers expelled from their homes:

> I was working with the Department of Education to run teenage pregnancy programmes, helping girls who were kicked out of their homes. We tried to find them places to stay, youth centres, safe houses, or even a *mzalwane* (church member) to host them until their families forgave them. (Makhosazana)

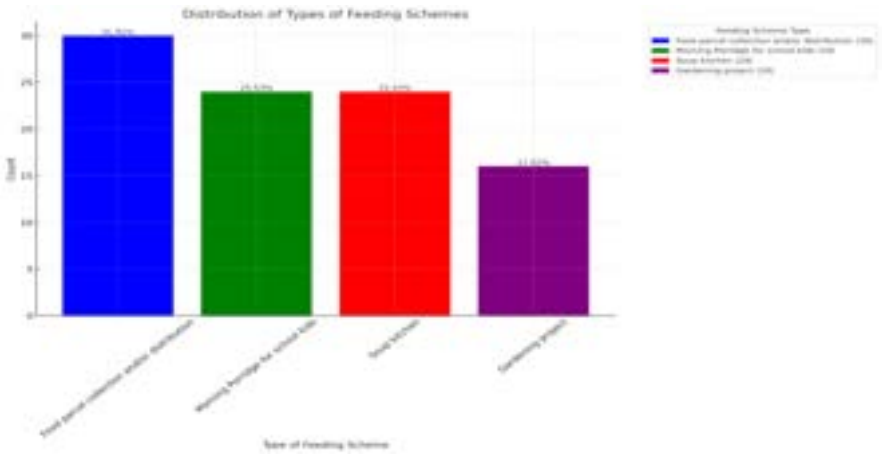
Here, the church network operates as an informal protection system, mobilising *religious capital* – trust, networks, and legitimacy, to meet social needs that the state neglects (Wilson and Musick, 1997). These actions blur the boundary between faith practice and social policy: volunteers do the work of social workers, counsellors, and housing officers without contracts or pay. The depth of this substitution is clearest in cases where individual homes become emergency centres. One woman recounted how her house functions as a nighttime refuge for abandoned infants:

> When abandoned babies are dropped off, sometimes at twelve midnight or three a.m., they come to my place because there's nowhere else. The police station doesn't have a place to keep them. (Nomusa)

Her story captures the extreme consequences of institutional absence. When police, health, and child-protection systems cannot respond, women absorb life-and-death responsibilities using their own domestic space as infrastructure. The cost is both emotional and material: their homes, time, and resources become public goods. These examples illustrate a pattern of shadow welfare provision, where women replicate state functions through informal systems of care. Survey data Figure 12-C confirm this scale: 32% of respondents regularly distribute food

parcels, 26% run porridge programmes, and 26% operate soup kitchens. This is not marginal activities but the everyday infrastructure of survival in low-income urban communities.

C



In many cases, the home itself functions as a site of public service, a place where care, counselling, health support, and food provision converge. As one woman explained,

> We started testing people from our own home. It was an RDP house with two bedrooms, and I used my own room as a testing room... We cooked and educated people about ARVs, and even started gardens. (Nomusa)

Such examples underscore how private domestic spaces are reconfigured into communal sites of welfare. By stepping into these gaps, volunteers transform what is often labelled as "helping" into an alternative system of public service. Their unpaid work substitutes for the logistical and moral responsibilities of the state. They feed schoolchildren when feeding schemes collapse, nurse the sick when clinics close early, and mediate domestic conflicts when police intervention fails. Their homes become hybrid spaces, simultaneously private dwellings, food banks, counselling centres, and clinics, demonstrating how the domestic sphere is re-politicised as a site of social reproduction and community governance. Women's unpaid work also exposes the fragility of formal welfare structures and challenges assumptions about who is responsible for sustaining community life. From an AFTOW perspective, this also reveals a profound injustice, as Chant (2008) argued, this reflects the feminisation of responsibility and obligation, where women are expected to carry the burdens of care, welfare, and community

survival when governments, NGOs, and formal systems withdraw or fail. In this context, essential care is not only unpaid but structurally offloaded onto women, normalised as love, duty, or faith rather than recognised as labour.

5.5.2. Volunteering As Advocacy

Alongside providing direct care, many women in this study take on the role of advocates and system navigators, helping others access resources and services that might otherwise remain out of reach. In contexts where formal institutions are intimidating, bureaucratic, or entirely absent, these volunteers act as intermediaries, bridging the gap between marginalised individuals and state systems. Their work moves beyond meeting immediate needs to challenging the structural barriers that produce vulnerability in the first place. One participant explained how she regularly assists elderly members of her community with administrative and financial matters that would otherwise leave them at risk of exploitation:

> Every first Wednesday of the month is for IDs. If someone has a problem with their ID, I book for them at Home Affairs. On pension days, people send challenges via our WhatsApp group, and I assist. Some of our elderly have amnesia and don't even know that money is missing from their pension. We investigate and find out that loan sharks have been deducting money without consent. We help them fix it. (Zanele)

Her work demonstrates how volunteers assume tasks typically handled by social workers, legal advisers, or state officials. This work is complex and skilled, requiring deep knowledge of bureaucratic systems and the relational trust needed to protect vulnerable people from harm, yet she does so informally and without pay. This aligns with Moser's (2012) concept of the "triple role of women", where women take on reproductive work, productive work, and community-making. This unpaid advocacy expands the "community work" role into the realm of public administration and legal protection. She went on to explain how her group supports families during moments when they are in a liminal space, excluded from formal support and struggling to survive:

> You see, like when you've applied for an ID, there's that waiting period. No one looks after you between applying and when you get it to then apply at SASSA. So

> we look for those people… We go there, and we teach them how to survive in the meantime. We even help people who don't have birth certificates for their children. (Zanele)

This type of advocacy addresses the silences within the system, the periods when official processes leave people ineligible for services or without necessary documentation. Volunteers step in to provide practical assistance, information, and material support until formal mechanisms catch up, if they do at all. For others, advocacy work is relational, rooted in being a trusted presence who can stand beside individuals in moments of crisis. One woman explained how she acts as a guide and protector for those navigating intimidating systems:

> When someone is abused, they can talk to me. I connect them with social workers or the police. I even act as their advocate if they can't speak for themselves. If you face a problem alone, you might not get a solution. But if someone opens the door for you, it's done. (Sibongile)

Her statement illustrates what, through an AFTOW lens, I term accompaniment care work. Advocacy in this context is not only about access but also about dignity, ensuring that people are not left to confront institutions on their own. This kind of advocacy is not official but embodied: standing with someone at a clinic, police station, court, or Home Affairs office becomes an act of protection and dignity. For some volunteers, advocacy emerges not only from compassion but from their own experiences of marginalisation and survival. One participant reflected:

> I told myself I must be the voice for those voiceless people out there. I have to educate them. Now, with the 60 Days of Activism and GBV, I get called all over. Today I was speaking for the Deaf Society. I go where I'm needed. (Nomusa)

Her work shows how unpaid advocacy is not fixed within one sector, location, or institution; instead, it is fluid and intersectional, moving across health, gender, and disability issues. Also, she reflects what Oduyoye (2001a) is Phiri and Nadar (2010) framed as a form of embodied prophetic witness, where women draw on their lived experiences to speak, teach, and stand in the gap for others. This is not institutional activism; it is relational resistance. She is called not because of institutional authority, but because of moral credibility, trust, and lived testimony,

qualities that Wilson and Musick (1999) describe as forms of religious and social capital. Rather than being tied to a single organisation or role, she responds to multiple justice struggles as they arise, demonstrating the breadth and adaptability of informal volunteering.

These narratives reveal that women's unpaid work is not limited to direct service delivery. It is also representational labour, making visible the needs of those who are otherwise unseen or unheard. Volunteers act as guides, translators, and defenders, helping people navigate systems that might otherwise exclude or exploit them. This form of unpaid advocacy highlights the political dimension of volunteerism. By navigating bureaucratic barriers and amplifying marginalised voices, these women are not only helping individuals but are also challenging the structural injustices that create vulnerability in the first place. Their labour ensures that people are seen, heard, and protected, even when formal systems fail to do so.

5.5.3. Survival-driven Volunteerism

For many women in this study, volunteering is not perceived as a charitable act or a hobby. It is described as a matter of survival, both for themselves and for their communities. In environments marked by poverty, unemployment, and the lack of state services, unpaid work becomes a vital mechanism for holding families and neighbourhoods together. This labour addresses urgent material needs while also fostering social cohesion and hope in spaces where formal systems have retreated or failed. Some participants reflected on moments of acute crisis when their work became a bridge between collapse and survival. During both the HIV epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic, periods when public health systems were overwhelmed and under-resourced, women volunteers stepped in to fill the gaps. One woman recalled how her home became an improvised relief centre:

> Given the time of COVID as well, we were feeding over thousands and thousands of people here at our place. Some had no food at all… Clinics weren't equipped for ARVs back then, we stepped in, took people to hospitals, and eventually, the government noticed and equipped the clinics. We became the bridge until formal systems caught up. (Nomsa)

Her account highlights the flexibility and responsiveness of informal networks. In the absence of quick institutional action, volunteers became first responders, providing essential services

until the state was able to intervene. This reveals the capacity of unpaid labour to adapt quickly to shifting needs, often with minimal resources and infrastructure. Survival work also occurs in everyday contexts, beyond moments of visible crisis. One participant described how consistent food provision transformed the lives of those who would otherwise be forced to live on the streets:

> Some who used to live on the streets don't anymore. That, to me, is an achievement. When someone realises there's no food at home and chooses to live on the streets, but now they know there's a place where they can get a meal – it's like we've created a homey environment even for people who don't have homes. (Thobeka)

Her words reflect the dignity-restoring dimension of this work. By providing reliable meals, volunteers not only alleviate hunger but also create a sense of belonging and stability for those at the margins. Other participants highlighted how their initiatives transformed the social functioning of the community. One woman described how their efforts to create safe spaces for children and provide meals before school led to a measurable decrease in local crime rates:

> We saw kids roaming around playing in the street, so we fixed up a sports ground. If children have nowhere to go, they end up in danger. We also give sandwiches to school kids in the morning. Because of what we do, the crime rate has dropped drastically in our area. (Zanele)

Here, unpaid labour is shown to have structural impacts, extending beyond direct care to address root causes of harm. By providing safe environments and meeting basic needs, volunteers reduce desperation and strengthen the social well-being of the neighbourhood. The relational nature of this survival work was evident in how women described mutual care and solidarity among volunteers themselves, as the women rarely talked about what they do as "I" but as "we" referring to other women they work with.

Across these three pathways, women's unpaid volunteerism is framed as community-making work, a functional, parallel welfare system that sustains neighbourhoods where the state, NGOs, and formal economies withdraw. Through the lens of the AFTOW, this labour can be understood as: 1. Life-sustaining work, where their labour of feeding, sheltering, mediating, and advocating is not "extra" but essential to the survival of communities. 2. Homes, church

halls, WhatsApp groups, and pavements function as workplaces. This supports AFTOW's second tenet that legitimises the home and community as sites of work: work is not only what is paid, formal, or visible, but it is wherever life is sustained. *3.* Drawing from Moser's triple role and African feminist critique, this theme shows how survival work is feminised, invisible, and sacrificial. And yet, it is also resistant in feeding thousands during COVID, safely housing pregnant girls, confronting pension fraud, or speaking against GBV. Women resist abandonment and refuse disposability; their unpaid labour is both a burden and a form of resistance.

5.6. Motivations for Volunteering

The previous themes have shown that women's unpaid labour holds together the fragile foundations of community life, filling the gaps left by the state, faith institutions, and NGOs. Yet, beyond the structural demands of survival lies another question: *why do women continue to do unpaid work under such strain?* In this theme, the focus turns inward to examine the motivations that sustain women's unpaid work. Despite exhaustion, limited resources, and the absence of pay, participants continue to volunteer with striking consistency and devotion. Their stories reveal that the drive to serve is not purely altruistic nor purely instrumental; it is a complex mix of emotion, experience, faith, and pragmatic survival. Women's motivations emerge from both heart and circumstance. They speak of passion and calling, of the joy found in nurturing others, and of the satisfaction that comes from witnessing transformation. They also frame their work as repayment for care once received, or as an act of redemption for pain once endured. Still others acknowledge the practical reasons for staying involved, the hope that volunteering might build networks, skills, and employability. In every case, unpaid work is more than a response to external need; it is a way of making sense of one's own life. The labour of care becomes a moral and emotional economy, sustained by love, community affirmation, and the search for purpose.

5.6.1. Love and Passion for the Work

At the heart of many women's commitment to volunteering is a profound love and passion for what they do and for the people they serve. This passion is more than just liking the tasks they perform, but a deep attachment to the value and meaning of the work itself, a sense that volunteering is both a calling and a moral duty. In contexts where formal reward is absent, love

becomes the invisible wage that sustains endurance. Sibongile described this calling with powerful clarity:

> Also, you must love what you do. Because without passion, you are doomed. In this job, you don't get a thank you. It has to be a calling; you must love it so you can understand it and help a hundred percent. I won't lie, some do it for money, and you can tell. They have *inhliziyo encane* [no heart for this]. They respond to people anyhow. (Sibongile)

Her words highlight how emotional investment separates true care from mere duty. Without love, she argues, the work becomes hollow and unsustainable. This reflects the emotional labour that Hackman (2023); Stulikova and Dawson (2023) describe as central to care work. Here, passion is not simply enthusiasm; it is moral stamina. Women distinguish between those who volunteer "with heart" and those who do it out of obligation, positioning genuine care as an ethical marker of integrity.

For others, this love is tied to a particular group of people or a kind of service. As Nokuthula explained, her affection for elders animates her sense of purpose:

> I volunteered the longest in the Golden Games because I love old people. I don't even know why, *yibona abantu abangiphilisayo* (but they give me life). I wasn't getting anything in return, just offering my time. But I would still show up every day. (Nokuthula)

Her words invert the usual logic of care, where the giver is expected to be depleted by the demands of others. Instead, she finds vitality in giving, an exchange where the act of care itself replenishes the caregiver. In this moral economy of love, *giving becomes a form of receiving*: through service, women draw emotional and spiritual sustenance, gaining energy, joy, and a deeper sense of meaning. This dynamic echoes Tronto's (2020) argument that care, while demanding, can also be profoundly sustaining when rooted in relationships of reciprocity and moral connection. Similarly, Ayanda spoke of passion as both a source of endurance and a compass that guides her through scarcity:

> What keeps me going? It's the vision. We've had no resources since the beginning and still don't have much. But it's the passion, the zeal, that pushes us. I believe this work is exactly what the community needs. Even when nothing is coming in, we continue because of love for the work and for the people. (Ayanda)

Her words show how conviction itself can become a resource. In the absence of funding, infrastructure, or institutional recognition, emotional commitment takes the place of formal support. Passion functions as both motivation and mechanism; it enables continuity where systems fail. Through this, we see that the sustainability of unpaid work rests not only on material inputs but on affective ones: hope, belief, and the conviction that the work matters. This affective endurance reflects what feminist scholars describe as the moral infrastructure of care (Fraser, 2016; Tronto, 2020). However, as feminist economists such as Elson (1998) and Budlender (2016) remind us, the language of love and passion can obscure the inequalities embedded in unpaid work. When compassion becomes the justification for endurance, exploitation can easily hide behind moral virtue. Women's passion sustains the work, but it also enables systems that rely on their selflessness. This paradox, that love both empowers and exhausts, runs through many of the narratives in this study. Still, love remains central to how participants make sense of their labour. It is the foundation of what Tronto (2020) calls a moral economy of care, where emotional investment, not profit, gives work its meaning.

5.6.2. Personal Experiences and Testimonies

For many participants, the motivation to volunteer is not abstract or detached from their own lives; it is rooted in personal experiences of hardship, loss, or transformation that have shaped their moral imagination. Their volunteerism is grounded in empathy that comes from having "been there" themselves. As women narrated their motivations, they often returned to moments of pain, survival, or redemption that had become the moral foundation of their care for others. Thobeka reflected on how her difficult childhood informed her current drive to serve:

> "I think, first of all, it's the way I grew up – how I wish there was someone who did what I do now, but there wasn't. My background was hard. I went to school hungry and came back home to nothing. That's what motivated me. Even now, my passion is for those who don't have. The moment I see someone in need, I just drop everything. It's impulsive." (Thobeka)

Her reflection illustrates how memory can become a way of transforming pain into purpose. Rather than producing bitterness, women convert past deprivation into a sense of duty and identification with others who suffer. Through this transformation, hardship becomes what Phiri (2002) describes as redemptive experience: the process by which African women reinterpret suffering as a resource for care, resistance, and solidarity. Similarly, Kretzschmar (2010) frames such responsiveness as a form of moral agency, an inner conviction to act for the good of others. In this sense, volunteering becomes an act of moral continuity between personal deprivation and communal service. The experience of "having lacked" fuels the desire that others should not endure the same, transforming empathy into responsibility. What these women offer, therefore, is not only practical help but the moral knowledge of survival itself – an ethic of care born out of lived experience and sustained by conviction. For others, motivation is intertwined with grief. Buhle connected her work with children to the loss of her brother to drug addiction:

> I love kids, and I also have children, so it breaks my heart to see a child growing up to become a junkie. My own brother grew up well; he knew right from wrong, but he chose that path. He died. What I do now comes from a deep place because of that. (Buhle)

Her statement reveals how volunteering functions as a moral response to personal tragedy, a way of giving meaning to loss. In helping others avoid the fate of her brother, she transforms private grief into public action. Similarly, Nomusa described how her HIV-positive status became both a source of credibility and compassion in her health-related volunteer work:

> I am HIV positive. So it's actually better to speak to people like that because I'm there, I know what they're going through. Whatever questions they ask me, I can answer honestly. Not like someone who doesn't even take ARVs. If you're not living it, you can't really relate to the patients. (Nomusa)

Her account demonstrates how lived experience produces what Wilson and Musick (1999) call religious and social capital, the moral authority that arises from embodied testimony. Her story echoes African women theologians such as Phiri (2002) and Oduyoye (2001), who highlight the power of personal narrative as both witness and pedagogy. However, while their

frameworks are theological, in this context, such storytelling operates sociologically as a form of *relational knowledge*: credibility built not on credentials but on shared vulnerability.

These testimonies reveal that women's unpaid work is profoundly autobiographical. Each story carries traces of survival, memory, and faith, integrated into present action. Volunteering becomes a form of storytelling through practice, a way of re-narrating one's past in the service of others. As many African feminist scholars have noted (Oduyoye, 2001a; Phiri, 2005), storytelling is not only a means of remembrance but also a method of social reconstruction. In these women's lives, the act of volunteering is itself a testimony, a living narrative that bridges the personal and the collective. Women's motivations are not grounded in abstract ideals of altruism, but in the lived intersections of pain, empathy, and hope. Their unpaid work becomes a continuation of their own stories, a way to heal what was broken, affirm what was lost, and make visible the strength that emerges from suffering.

5.6.3. Seeing Change and Being Seen

While unpaid work offers no financial reward, many women spoke about a different kind of return, one measured not in money, but in moments of transformation and recognition. For them, seeing others' lives change and feeling seen in the process became the emotional currency that sustained their labour. In the absence of wages or institutional appreciation, these forms of relational affirmation act as "social recognition" (Honneth, 1996; Deranty, 2022): a validation of one's worth through the eyes of others. Sibongile described how witnessing the growth of young people she had mentored over the years gave her an enduring sense of fulfilment:

> I have children who were at UKZN, children I worked with. I love them like my own. These children were going through a lot, and now I see some of them on TV, some on Facebook, saying, 'Here is the lady who brought us up from disadvantaged backgrounds.' Just by helping one person, you can change ten people. That's what keeps me going. (Sibongile)

Her reflection illustrates that volunteering is not an act with immediate outcomes. Unlike waged labour, where reward is immediate, the fulfilment here arrives later, as symbolic recognition within the community. This delayed validation affirms the moral and social worth of her labour, echoing Honneth's notion of social esteem and reflecting how women measure

productivity not in pay but in lives transformed (Honneth, 1996; Deranty, 2022). For others, smaller everyday victories carried equally profound meaning. Buhle described how her motivation came from observing the progress of the children she worked with:

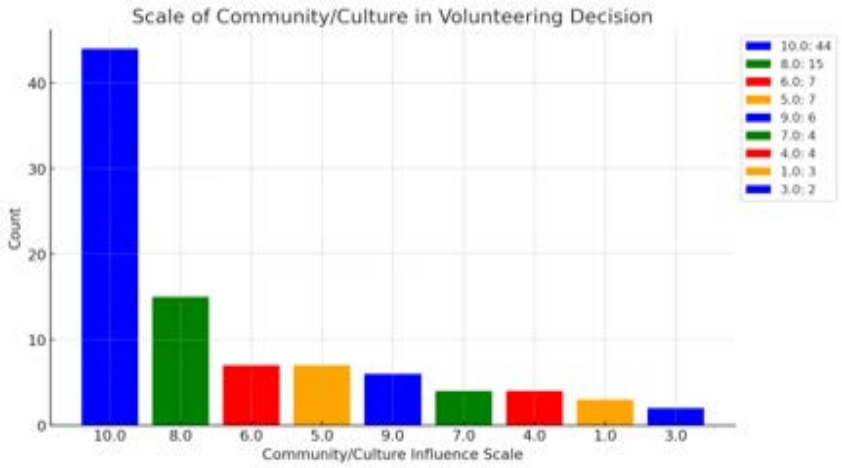
> That's what made me wake up in the morning – knowing I'm helping someone and I can see their progress. Especially with my special kids. When a parent says, 'My child couldn't do this before, now they can,' I feel proud. It's like, wow, job well done. (Buhle)

In this sense, the act of care becomes self-affirming: each sign of improvement is a reflection of her effort and a confirmation of her agency. This kind of emotional reward echoes what feminist scholars describe as the "moral wage" of care work, the psychic satisfaction that compensates for the absence of financial pay (England, 2005; Folbre, 2006). Lindiwe contrasted the affirmation she received from her community with the scepticism she encountered at home:

> My family sometimes felt like I was wasting my time. But for me, it was different. I saw it as something valuable. People in the community started saying, 'You're always helping out, always present,' and that motivated me. It made me proud to be seen that way. (Lindiwe)

Her reflection shows how public validation can counter the private devaluation of women's labour. When the broader community affirms their contribution, volunteers experience their work as both socially meaningful and personally dignifying.

These narratives point to an alternative economy of reward, one that circulates through visibility, gratitude, and relational pride. As Figure 15 shows, nearly half of respondents (48%) rated community and cultural values as 10 out of 10 in influencing their decision to volunteer. This confirms that affirmation and recognition are central, not peripheral, to sustaining unpaid



work.

Through these acts, women's labour attains moments of moral visibility within their communities, even as it remains structurally invisible. Recognition here does not erase invisibility but compensates for it, offering emotional restoration where formal validation is absent. In a world that seldom credits their work, hearing "You're always helping out, always present" becomes an act of care in itself, a small but vital gesture that sustains dignity within an economy that otherwise denies it.

5.6.4. Work Experience and Survival

Alongside the emotional and relational rewards of volunteering, many participants also spoke about the pragmatic value of their unpaid work. In an economy marked by chronic unemployment, volunteering offers more than service to others; it becomes a form of participation in public life, a means of staying visible, connected, and hopeful. For these women, unpaid work functions as both a *contribution* and a *strategy*, providing experience, networks, and a sense of purpose in contexts where formal employment remains elusive. Lindiwe described how volunteering became a bridge between her studies and the labour market:

> The first reason was passion for community development. The second was to gain experience – because these days, it's hard to get hired without experience. I volunteered for a year, and it gave me ideas and knowledge about what the field is really about. That helped me in interviews. It made it easier to explain myself, and I eventually got a municipal internship because of it. (Lindiwe)

Her reflection captures the dual character of unpaid labour: while it is framed as service, it also performs the role of informal apprenticeship. In a system where "experience" is a precondition for employment, volunteerism becomes a pathway to employability. Yet, as feminist political economists such as Gill and Bakker (2003) remind us, this arrangement reproduces gendered inequalities; the same work that would merit pay in formal spaces is normalised as free when done by women in the community. For others, volunteering substitutes directly for wage labour, filling time that might otherwise mark unemployment as social failure. Buhle explained how she treated her voluntary post as a full-time job despite the absence of pay:

> I volunteered for 18 months without pay. Even though I was assigned to Grade R, I used to go into the Grade 1, 2 and 3 classes too – just to learn. It was like I was going to work every day, even without pay. What encouraged me was learning school dynamics and gaining experience. That's what I wanted. (Buhle)

Her testimony exposes both the empowering and exploitative edges of volunteerism. On one hand, it provided learning and confidence; on the other, it required full-time commitment without compensation. What she calls "experience" is also the unpaid subsidy that keeps under-resourced schools and welfare projects functioning. From the perspective of AFTOW, these practical motivations show that survival and vocation are not opposites but intertwined. Women volunteer not because they are detached from economic need, but precisely because need propels them into action. Their unpaid work is therefore both moral and material, an act of faith in possibility. Through volunteering, they claim a place in the economy of care, refusing erasure and insisting that contribution does not depend on a payslip.

Across these accounts, women's unpaid labour is sustained by a moral and emotional economy that fuses love, necessity, and meaning. Their motivations are layered rather than singular; rooted in affection for the work, memories of personal struggle, the visible transformation of others, and the hope of opportunity. In the absence of wages or institutional reward, these

affective and relational returns become the currency that keeps care circulating. Through a sociological lens, this reveals that volunteering functions as both a moral economy and a survival strategy. Women act from conviction and compassion, yet their participation also secures belonging, visibility, and purpose in precarious social worlds. The boundary between service and self-preservation blurs: unpaid work becomes a way of sustaining life–one's own and others'–when formal structures fail. From the perspective of the AFTOW, these motivations show how faith, love, and resilience operate as social resources. Passion and calling infuse labour with dignity, even as they risk concealing exploitation; endurance is moralised as virtue, and sacrifice becomes normalised. Yet within this paradox lies quiet resistance: women transform scarcity into solidarity, invisibility into care, and exhaustion into purpose. Their motivations reveal an ethic of care that is simultaneously emotional, moral, and strategic, an everyday theology of survival through which communities remain alive despite structural neglect.

Volunteerism as Calling, Grace and Vocation

Throughout this study, participants interpreted their volunteer work through theological rather than economic language. They rarely described their work as simply helping others or contributing to community life. Instead, they spoke of being called by God, serving out of gratitude for God's grace, and understanding their unpaid labour as ministry rather than employment. Their accounts suggest that volunteer work is not merely something they do, but something deeply connected to who they understand themselves to be before God. These findings indicate that participants' commitment to unpaid work is rooted in a theological identity that gives meaning to both their service and their perseverance, raising an important theological question: What does it mean to understand unpaid work as a calling?

Within Christian theology, vocation has traditionally been understood as God's invitation to participate in God's ongoing work in the world (Volf, 2001; Mannerfelt and Maurits, 2026), an understanding that continues to inform contemporary South African theological reflections on vocation, public witness and faithful citizenship (Forster, 2020). Read in this way, participants' descriptions of volunteering as a calling represent a coherent theological claim rather than simply a language of personal motivation. Their commitment reflects an understanding that work performed in service of others can itself become an expression of discipleship through which God's love is made visible in everyday life. This understanding also resonates with the

biblical references. In Ephesians 2:10, believers are described as being "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." Calling, therefore, is not limited to ecclesial office or paid employment; it encompasses faithful participation in God's work wherever human dignity is nurtured, and communities are sustained (Kristanto et al., 2024). The women in this study demonstrated this understanding by locating their volunteer work within God's purposes rather than within expectations of financial reward. Their feeding schemes, care for vulnerable families, mentoring of young people and support for neighbours were understood not as peripheral activities but as faithful participation in God's continuing work within their communities.

The findings also invite a more critical theological reading. Participants spoke with genuine conviction about the joy and fulfilment they found in serving God. At the same time, they described financial strain, emotional exhaustion, competing family responsibilities and, in some cases, the expectation that they would continue serving regardless of personal cost. This suggests that while calling provides profound meaning, it may also become intertwined with social and ecclesial expectations that leave little room to question the unequal burdens associated with service. Similar tensions have been observed within South African theological reflections on women's work, where unpaid labour is recognised as spiritually significant while simultaneously remaining materially undervalued (Marie, 2012). These perspectives suggest that vocation should not be interpreted in ways that separate spiritual commitment from the material realities within which that commitment is lived. Calling, therefore, should not be interpreted uncritically as a theological justification for sacrifice.

African women theologians challenge such interpretations. Oduyoye (2001a), Kanyoro (2001) and Phiri (2004) argue that Christian concepts such as calling and service have too often been interpreted within patriarchal contexts that assume women's availability for care while rarely interrogating the unequal distribution of that care. These concerns remain central within contemporary African feminist theological scholarship, which continues to call for church communities characterised by reciprocity, justice and mutual flourishing rather than gendered expectations of self-sacrifice (Maseno, 2021; Naicker, 2024). Their critique is not directed against vocation itself, but against theological interpretations that sanctify women's self-sacrifice without equally affirming their dignity, well-being and flourishing. The participants' narratives invite a more nuanced understanding of calling, one that honours their faith while remaining attentive to the structural realities within which that faith is lived.

The findings, therefore, suggest that calling should be understood as both a gift and a responsibility. It is a gift because it enables participants to experience their work as meaningful participation in God's mission. It is also a responsibility shared by the whole Christian community rather than one disproportionately borne by women. When vocation becomes detached from justice, it risks reinforcing rather than transforming patterns of inequality. Building on earlier African feminist critiques of the theology of work (Nkosi, 2021), the AFTOW argues that faithful participation in God's mission requires communities that recognise, share and sustain the labour through which that mission is accomplished. AFTOW, therefore, does not reject the language of calling or grace. Rather, it seeks to reclaim these theological concepts in ways that affirm women's agency while simultaneously challenging the historical, cultural and ecclesial structures that render their labour invisible. Calling should never require invisibility, nor should grace become a theological rationale for unequal sacrifice. Instead, Christian vocation must hold together service, dignity, justice and mutual responsibility, recognising unpaid work not simply as an act of devotion but as work that participates in God's mission and is therefore worthy of recognition, support and shared responsibility.

5.7. Conclusion

This chapter has explored how women's unpaid labour in faith-based urban communities functions as the quiet infrastructure of social survival. Through *vuk'uzenzele*–" rise and do it yourself", we have seen how women organise, nurture, and sustain community life where formal systems falter. Their unpaid work stretches across feeding schemes, caregiving, education, and advocacy, transforming scarcity into solidarity. What emerges is a moral economy of survival, held together not by contracts or compensation but by love, obligation, and collective responsibility. Through the lens of the AFTOW, these acts are not merely charitable but theological: lived responses to absence and neglect. Women's labour here becomes the site where theology is made visible through practice. Yet this labour is also very gendered and extractive, marked by exhaustion, precarity, and risk.

Their unpaid work is simultaneously sacred and exploited, visible in its effects but invisible in its worth. It is within this paradox that women continue to hold their communities together.

The next chapter examines the religious and cultural resources that sustain this endurance and the communal ethics that enable women to continue providing care work.

CHAPTER 6

NGOMUSA IZANDLA ZIYOVUNA
– SOWING, SERVING, AND SUSTAINING

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored how women navigate unpaid community work as a space of survival, solidarity, and faith. Their stories revealed a theology of agency from below, women building and sustaining communities through informal, faith-based work. Yet beneath these narratives of resilience lies a quieter truth: the same cultural and religious structures that enable women's volunteerism also reinforce their marginalisation. This chapter takes up this tension by tracing the paradox of women's work, how faith both constrains and sustains those who volunteer. The chapter is divided into two sections that correspond to the final two research questions. The first section, *Ubunzima Bezandla* – the burdened hands, addresses research question 2: *In what ways, if any, might volunteerism and contours of care perpetuate gender injustices among, and within, South African faith communities?* This section focuses on the hidden weight of women's labour, how faith-based volunteerism, while meaningful, often reproduces gendered inequalities. Through three interconnected themes, the gendered division of labour, unequal access and power, and religion's role in entrenching gendered labour, this section explores how women's volunteerism becomes both a spiritual practice and a social burden.

The second section, *Izandla Ezibusisekileyo* – the blessed hands, will address research question 3: exploring *the cultural and religious resources that sustain or constrain women's unpaid work.* While the first section uncovers the injustices embedded in volunteerism, the second considers the religious and cultural ethics. Izandla Ziyagezana - One hand washes the other, as an extension of Ubuntu ethics of care, which enable women to endure, find meaning, and reimagine the value of their labour. Together, these two frameworks, *Ubunzima Bezandla* and *Izandla Ezibusisekileyo*, capture the paradox of *Ngomusa Izandla Ziyovuna* – by grace the hands will reap: which hold together the "burden" and "blessing," or "injustice" and "sustaining grace," that the same hands which carry the burden of unpaid work are also the hands that sow, serve, and sustain life.

Section 1: Ubunzima Bezandla – The Burdened Hands

This section explores the invisible weight that women carry through their unpaid volunteering within faith communities, which is the weight of expectation and endurance. While volunteering is often spoken of as a calling, the women's narratives reveal that it also bears the marks of inequality. *Ubunzima Bezandla* captures this tension: hands that nurture are also hands that labour without rest, recognition, or reward. Drawing from the voices of participants, this section examines how volunteerism and the contours of care perpetuate gender injustices among and within South African faith communities. It begins with the most visible layer of this inequality, the Gendered Division of Labour, where the boundaries between home, church, and community blur, and women's caregiving becomes both the heart and the hardship of volunteerism.

6.2. Gendered Division of Labour

Women's accounts show that unpaid volunteerism within faith and community spaces is organised along clear gendered lines. Care, cleaning, organising, and emotional labour are consistently assigned to women, while authority, visibility, and decision-making remain largely male-dominated. This theme examines the gendered division of labour as the most immediate and everyday expression of inequality in faith-based volunteerism. It demonstrates how women's unpaid work is normalised through cultural expectations, religious teachings, and early household socialisation, rendering care not as labour but as an extension of womanhood

6.2.1. Women Expected to Do Care Work

Women are expected to do care work; this is revealed in their stories across all interviews, where they shared that care work is not a choice but an expectation. Within churches and neighbourhood projects alike, women spoke of how they are not merely encouraged to help, they are assumed to be the ones who will cook, clean, and comfort, while men's absence from these tasks goes unquestioned. As one participant explained:

> I have not seen a man cleaning the church, not even once… even when we have conferences at church, you only find women preparing food. Men come dressed in their suits and just sit down. You don't find men in the kitchen; where I am from, it is known that people who cook are women. (Thobeka)

Her description captures the normalisation of gendered labour within faith spaces. The absence of men in kitchens or cleaning teams is not seen as neglect but as a natural order. Women's participation, meanwhile, is constant and unacknowledged; instead, their work is absorbed into the patterns of worship as if it were part of their faith itself. This expectation extends beyond the church into the broader community. As Buhle, who volunteered at a school, reflected, "When nature calls… I had to monitor them, help them and clean them. A male teacher or volunteer will never do that; they will call you as a woman to come do it."

Her experience is particularly insightful because she occupies a liminal space, an informal volunteer in a formal institution. She was not officially recruited or appointed; she approached the school herself and asked to help, filling a need the system did not formally recognise. Her role thus existed within a structured organisation but outside its formal mechanisms. This informality within formality shows how unpaid labour infiltrates even institutional settings, sustained by women's self-initiation and moral sense of duty. Even though the school had not identified a gap or requested assistance, her offer was readily accepted and immediately framed within gendered expectations. The tasks she was asked to perform were not freely chosen, but an institutionalised expectation, one that defines cleanliness and nurture as women's domain. In this way, unpaid work becomes an extension of women's bodies, tied to notions of decency, propriety, and maternal duty. Even in structured volunteer settings, women are called to perform the kinds of labour that men refuse, illustrating how the boundaries between professional and voluntary domestic work collapse along gendered lines.

For Lindiwe, the expectation is internalised and spiritualised: "I think it's because women are more caring, they have that empathy, that motherly thing… most women are not employed so they do these things on the side to keep themselves busy." Her explanation reveals how gendered ideologies of care are sustained not only by personal belief but by societal and religious influence. Culturally, women are the ones who nurture, serve, and sustain others (Rwafa, 2016). Religiously, this ideal finds affirmation in biblical and church teachings that extol women's unpaid work as godly virtues (Olojede, 2014). Over time, these cultural and

religious teachings become internalised, shaping women's self-understanding and moral identity. Thus, her claim that women are "naturally caring" is less an observation than a reflection of how deeply the theology of care has been gendered, binding women to unpaid work through both social expectation and spiritual conviction.

These testimonies reveal that unpaid care work operates as both a social expectation and a gendered moral economy. Women's willingness to serve is interpreted as evidence of virtue, while their fatigue or refusal is read as moral failure. The repetition of these expectations, in the church, the school, and the home, demonstrates how deeply gendered scripts of service are embedded in everyday life. What appears as voluntary, compassionate labour is in fact an enduring obligation, shaped by patriarchal norms that equate womanhood with selfless care.

6.2.2. Men Take Leadership, Visible Roles

Women also described how men dominate positions of visibility and decision-making, while women occupy the supportive and invisible. Leadership, then, is not defined by who does the most work, but by which tasks. Thobeka captured this dynamic vividly:

> Most of the men were against the soup kitchen… I was even called to a meeting by the church council. They felt like I was using people from the church, especially because those people were not getting anything from doing this. (Thobeka)

Her words show how male church leaders claim the authority to question and regulate a project started by a woman. Even as she leads the initiative, her actions are subject to male approval. The council's intervention positions men as moral gatekeepers of community work, while women remain the labouring hands. This dynamic reveals how power operates not through explicit prohibition but through the right to authorise and legitimise what women do. Decision-making authority remains a masculine privilege guarded by institutional councils, while women's leadership is tolerated only within boundaries deemed acceptable by men. Buhle drew a similar contrast in her work environment:

> The male teachers are not involved in the admin; even when we have to plan events, the female teachers do that; the males just sign to authorise to go buy this and take this money. Not that he will run around looking for hoodies, gowns and all that, no. (Buhle)

Her description illustrates how men's visibility is tied to symbolic acts of decision-making, signing, approving, and authorising, while women handle the logistical and invisible labour that sustains those decisions. What appears as male leadership is, in many cases, the performance of authority rather than the execution of labour. Women are responsible for the practical coordination, organisation, and emotional maintenance that make these projects function, yet their contributions remain backgrounded and unnamed. The same pattern extends into domestic and community spaces, where women's aspirations to lead or initiate projects are often reduced by male control over household and physical spaces. As Buhle further shared:

> I want to, but I don't have the space. The only space I have is the garage where I stay, but my husband doesn't want people going in and out of his house. The area we live in doesn't have a crèche. It's so heartbreaking seeing these kids roaming the streets; I wish I had space so I could collect them and teach them. (Buhle)

Her account exposes how women's social contributions are limited not only by institutional hierarchies but also by domestic power relations. The home, often viewed as the site of women's influence, becomes a place of restriction, where men exercise authority over how space is used and by whom. Her husband's refusal to allow the garage to be converted into a crèche demonstrates how women's community-making potential is constrained within patriarchal notions of ownership and respectability. She identifies an urgent social need and imagines a solution, yet her capacity to act is curtailed by spatial and relational control. In this sense, her unpaid initiative, to teach, nurture, and protect local children, is suppressed by a gendered logic that privileges male authority over communal welfare.

These voices reveal how men's leadership is both structural and symbolic. They occupy the council meetings, signatures, and pulpits that make authority visible, while women perform the daily, sustaining work that gives those institutions life. The gendered distribution of visibility and labour reflects a deeper moral hierarchy: men's contribution is valued through presence, women's through volunteering. When women step into visible roles, their legitimacy is challenged, their leadership questioned, or their space restricted to what is seen as "women's work." This division of visibility reinforces the belief that men lead and women serve, a hierarchy so deeply normalised that it is mistaken for divine order (Olojede, 2014). It reveals how patriarchal logics persist even in spaces defined by community and religion. Leadership,

in this context, becomes a performance of masculinity, while volunteerism becomes the moral labour of womanhood. Women's unpaid work thus sustains not only communities but also the very structures that obscure their power.

6.2.3. Household Labour Patterns are Reproduced in Public Volunteering

Women's stories reveal how the gendered division of labour in the home extends effortlessly into public and faith-based spaces. The same patterns of cooking, cleaning, and caregiving that define domestic life are replicated in churches, schools, and community projects. What begins as a household duty becomes the template for how women engage in volunteer work, unpaid, expected, and often invisible. Lungile reflected on how these expectations began in childhood and continued into her adult life:

> "I did everything my mum was doing… washing dishes, taking care of kids, babysitting when they went out. It was the whole nine yards, everything that my mum used to do, I also used to." (Lungile).

Her recollection captures the early internalisation of gendered roles within the household. The domestic space becomes the first site where labour is gendered, with daughters apprenticed into unpaid care through observation and repetition. What she describes is not mere participation in household chores but the transmission of a social script, a learned understanding that care and cleaning belong to women. As feminist economists such as Elson (1999), Floro and Komatsu (2011) argue, this early socialisation naturalises unpaid work as an extension of femininity. Her mother's routine becomes her own not by command but by example, producing a set of embodied dispositions that feel natural because they are lived and repeated daily. Through this process, girls inherit not only household responsibility but a moral identity tied to service, obedience, and relational care.

She elaborated further on how these gendered patterns followed her into volunteering: "My brother would also visit, they would still find something for me to do. They would never ask me to paint or take out the trash, but they would always ask my brother to do that." (Lungile). Her second reflection reveals how domestic hierarchies migrate from the private to the public sphere. The division between "women's work" and "men's work," learned at home, reappears unchanged in volunteer spaces. She is tasked with supportive, nurturing duties, while her

brother performs physical tasks associated with strength and productivity. This illustrates how household labour patterns are reproduced within public volunteering; the feminised care roles extend into community spaces, while men's participation is framed as productive or authoritative. As Hirway (2015) observes, this pattern sustains the illusion of women's natural aptitude for care, making their unpaid contributions seem inevitable rather than constructed. What Lungile describes is therefore a cycle of social reproduction in which the household becomes the training ground for unpaid work and volunteering, its public stage. The same moral and emotional expectations that shape domestic life are carried into community projects. Her story shows how deeply gendered labour is embedded, not only in what women do, but in how they have been taught to understand who they are.

6.3. Gendered Access and Power

Gendered power relations that govern access, authority, and recognition in religious and communal settings also influence women's participation in unpaid volunteer work. This theme looks at how male-dominated frameworks that govern opportunities, legitimacy, and decision-making mediate women's participation. It illustrates how power functions through informal networks, moral gatekeeping, relational control, and formal leadership hierarchies

6.3.1. Male Dominance in Decision-making

Women's participation in leadership within both church and community spaces is not only limited but actively controlled through institutional and cultural gatekeeping. Across the narratives, participants described how access is mediated through men, pastors, councillors, or community leaders, whose approval determines whether women's voices are heard or dismissed. As Sibongile explained:

> You won't believe that even to this day and age, women are undermined, … there is a protocol that you need to follow for entry: a man must introduce you to the community, and that man is a community leader. When you are introduced by that man, then the community will listen to you, but if you just come as yourself, not even one person will pay attention to you. (Sibongile)

Authority is ritualised through masculinity. Sibongile's account exposes a deeply embedded hierarchy of legitimacy, where women's visibility in public life is mediated through male

endorsement. The phrase "a man must introduce you" signals control, a symbolic gate that women cannot open on their own authority. In this gendered protocol, men function as intermediaries between women and the community, reproducing the belief that female leadership must be validated through male presence. This dynamic mirrors a gendered organisational logic where authority is assumed to be masculine, and women's entry into public roles depends on their ability to conform to male-defined norms of legitimacy (Rwafa, 2016). For others this exclusion took on a more personal form:

> I was asked by one of the male coaches who introduced me to the golden games… that's how I started coaching the club. Sometimes I feel like I am being used, because they know that I know and love soccer. Then, one year, they replaced me without my knowledge… I found out the person who replaced me was in a relationship with the male coach I rejected. (Nokuthula)

Informal, gendered networks regulate access to opportunities. A woman's inclusion is conditional, determined not by skill or commitment but by compliance with male power. When she resists that power's advances, she becomes expendable. This reflects the relational gatekeeping alluded to by African Feminist Theology (AFT) when describing a practice where men control women's advancement through personal patronage, moral judgment, or exclusion (Phiri, 2007; Olojede, 2014). Within this framing, a woman's autonomy threatens the order of male dominance and is punished through subtle or overt displacement. These patterns of control reproduce a system in which access to leadership and voice is filtered through patriarchal norms of legitimacy. Women's work, therefore, as discussed in the previous theme, sustains the very structures that marginalise them, while their access to decision-making remains conditional. Whether through formal rules ("a man must introduce you") or informal retaliation ("I was replaced"), the outcome is the same: women's leadership is neither autonomous nor secure.

Through these testimonies, it becomes evident that gendered exclusion is not merely structural but relational and spiritual. In many faith-based and community contexts, power is couched in the language of order, humility, and respect, virtues that, when applied selectively, silence women's initiative. As argued by Phiri (2002) that African churches often mirror patriarchal social systems, where men are positioned as custodians of divine authority and women as

custodians of service. Within this paradigm, leadership remains masculinised, and access to it becomes a moral privilege rather than a communal right.

6.3.2. Sexual Harassment and Power Abuse

Beneath gatekeeping and exclusion from public power lies another layer of gendered control: the abuse of authority through harassment, humiliation, and intimidation of women volunteers. Several participants spoke openly about how male leaders and colleagues cross professional and moral boundaries, take advantage of women's vulnerability within unpaid or informally structured spaces. Nokuthula's earlier story reappears here as both opportunity and violation. Her replacement after rejecting a male coach's advances exposes how men leverage control over access and recognition to reward compliance or punish resistance. The word "used" carries multiple meanings: emotional exploitation, professional exclusion, and moral betrayal. Her skills and commitment were instrumentalised, while her refusal of a man's advances led to her removal. In these encounters, male authority is exercised not through institutional hierarchy alone but also through personal coercion. This dynamic echoes what social reproductive theorists describe as the use of power to preserve male dominance not only through formal structures but through intimate, relational control (Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017). In unpaid spaces, where contracts and accountability structures are absent, such coercion hides easily behind familiarity, trust, and the language of faith.

Makhosazana described how gendered power operates through more subtle but equally damaging forms of humiliation and ridicule:

> What I have also noticed, unfortunately, is that when you seem strong, they normally use sexuality to bring you down… whatever way they can find, especially when they don't know how to bring you down, they use that a lot. (Makhosazana)

Women who assert confidence or authority become targets of sexualised insinuation, a tactic that restores male dominance without overt confrontation. By "using sexuality" to discredit women, men reassert moral control, implying that female leadership is incompatible with respectability (Nkosi, 2021). Masenya (2003) and Phiri (2002) note that in many African religious and community settings, women's credibility is inseparable from moral purity, making sexualised rumours a particularly effective tool of silencing. Nokuthula and

Makhosazana's, narratives reveal a pattern of gendered harassment that operates beneath the surface of church and community life. It is rarely named as abuse; instead, it is normalised as the inevitable "cost" of working with men (Nkosi, 2021). Women are expected to endure quietly, as confronting such behaviour risks moral judgement, ridicule, or exclusion. The informal, volunteer nature of their work compounds this vulnerability; without contracts, pay, or formal protection, women are left to navigate exploitation in silence. Women are socialised to absorb harm for the sake of harmony, loyalty, and faithfulness. In these stories, harassment becomes an unspoken cost of service, tolerated under the rhetoric of "working for God." Yet beneath that piety lies a deep structural violence, one that distorts the very spiritual ideals of justice, compassion, and community that these spaces claim to uphold.

6.3.3. Men Credited for Women's Work

In addition to being excluded from decision-making, women often find that their labour and achievements are absorbed into male-led systems of recognition. Participants expressed frustration at how men, often ward councillors, pastors, or officials, receive public credit or tangible benefits for work that women have initiated, organised, and sustained. This dynamic reveals that patriarchy extends beyond control to encompass the politics of visibility and reward. Nokuthula described this injustice most clearly in relation to her role as a sports volunteer:

> After I coach and we win a gold, the formal volunteer male coach from the sports office will go to the office and collect the credit, even though I am the coach who won the game. It is his name registered as a coach at the office. Then he gets to make the selection and coach at the nationals, yet I am the one who won the gold at the local, municipal, and district level that qualifies the team to play at the nationals. (Nokuthula)

Her statement lays bare how recognition is institutionally gendered. The system records men's names, not women's achievements, reproducing invisibility through bureaucratic and organisational norms that define merit. Despite her evident leadership, she is denied ownership of her success. Her reflection exposes what Moser (2012) describes within GAD frameworks where women's contribution to collective outcomes is reframed as supportive rather than central, ensuring that visibility and mobility remain masculine privileges. Nokuthula further

reflected: “Even though moving forward the credit went to other people [male coaches] and I was not recognised, I know I am the one who won… at the soccer grounds I was recognised, even though at the office I was not.” This duality, being acknowledged locally but erased officially, captures the emotional and structural cost of invisibility. Recognition within informal community networks provides affirmation but lacks the institutional weight that translates into material benefit or career advancement. It mirrors the broader pattern found in women’s unpaid work across faith and community life, where appreciation replaces accountability and gratitude substitutes for justice.

6.3.4. Women Pushed Out of Paid Opportunities

This issue of access has particularly harsh consequences for women who volunteer with the hope of gaining experience that will eventually lead to paid employment, as discussed in Section 5.4.4. Instead, their unpaid service often becomes permanent labour, a system in which women’s work sustains institutions without creating any pathway to formal opportunity. The promise of “experience” functions as both a moral and an institutional trap, drawing women into cycles of unpaid contribution that reproduce economic and gendered inequality. One example is Buhle, who explained her motivation, “Because I wanted to gain more knowledge about school dynamics… that’s what encouraged me to learn and gain experience.” She later spoke candidly about the outcome of this effort:

> I volunteered for 18 months without pay… I did everything that those who are getting paid are doing even more… there was an opportunity that came up… they should have hired me full-time, but there was that [jealousy]. (Buhle)

Her words reveal how women’s willingness to volunteer for experience is exploited within formal institutions. What begins as training becomes long-term unpaid work, where volunteers shoulder the same responsibilities as paid staff under the guise of learning. Even when paid positions become available, women like Buhle are bypassed, their dedication rewarded with invisibility rather than employment. This dynamic reflects what Hirway (2015) and Folbre (2018) describe in SRT analysis as the gendered segmentation of labour markets, where women are channelled into unpaid or undervalued roles justified by moral or educational reasoning. Her story also illustrates how deeply the discourse of “experience” has been normalised as a substitute for fair compensation. Within the logic of development and education, women internalise unpaid work as both a moral obligation and an investment in the future, yet that

future rarely arrives. Instead, their volunteerism fills institutional gaps that should generate employment, making women the invisible workforce of community and faith-based service delivery. A similar experience was shared by Lindiwe, who reflected on her year of volunteering:

> First one, it was the passion and the love of the field of community development and secondly it was to get experience, because I did that volunteering for a year… because sometimes it's difficult to hire someone without any experience…
> Because I remember after volunteering, I got my first interview ever since I graduated… it helped me… but there were no chances to get a job at the department. (Lindiwe)

Lindiwe's reflection captures the double bind many women face: volunteering offers exposure but rarely mobility. While it can open doors to interviews, it seldom results in employment. This pattern echoes what Bhattacharya (2017) and Fraser (2016) argue, that women's unpaid work reproduces both the labour force and institutional stability, enabling organisations to function without cost. In faith and community settings, this reproduction is moralised, framed as calling, service, or training rather than exploitation.

Participants repeatedly described how their unpaid work, initially voluntary, gradually became permanent as churches and community organisations relied on their willingness to serve. This dynamic traps women in cycles of unpaid labour, where they perform full-time work under the moral language of calling, devotion, and community care. Thobeka reflected on this by giving an example of her church's cleaning role:

> It is not a paid job… the church looked at her situation and the church decided to give her R1000 a month, so I wouldn't say she was paid… after she passed on, a new one took over, it just continued with the R1000 a month. (Thobeka)

The examples she gives expose the structural normalisation of tokenism. The cleaning role continues to be unpaid or severely underpaid, regardless of the fact that a new woman performs it. Payment becomes a symbolic form of charity rather than a wage, confirming that women's labour is valued through the moral economy of generosity rather than economic fairness. Moser (2012) and Elson (1999) argue that such tokenistic gestures mask exploitation by presenting

underpayment as a form of compassion. The institutional church benefits from consistent labour without employment costs, embedding women's unpaid work within its moral and operational logic. Buhle also drew attention to the gendered mobility gap within her field: "When we graduate… the males go to the higher grades." This short statement reveals a larger system of gendered progression. Men transition into higher-paying, higher-status roles, while women remain in unpaid or low-paying caregiving positions. The same skills that qualify women for professional work are absorbed into volunteer or informal roles justified as service. Shabangu (2017) and Marie (2012a) identify this as horizontal segregation, where women's labour is clustered in nurturing, undervalued roles, while men's work is associated with leadership and financial rewards.

She further described the cultural stigma attached to men's absence in volunteerism, "Men want money… they think I need money or that they will be laughed at" (Buhle), revealing how the association between masculinity and paid work reinforces the feminisation of unpaid labour. Men avoid volunteering to protect their social standing, while women are encouraged to embrace it as moral fulfilment. In this sense, faith-based and community settings reproduce an ideological reproduction of gender roles, where women's unpaid care work sustains both the moral and economic systems that privilege men (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2016). Women's unpaid work does not serve as a bridge to paid employment but rather replaces it. Institutions rely on women's commitments to fill structural gaps, while the promise of "experience" keeps them tethered to invisible, undervalued labour. What begins as hope becomes habituated inequality. From an AFTOW standpoint, this reproduces a sacrificial economy of women's labour, a moral framework that glorifies women's endurance while concealing structural injustice.

6.4. Religion Entrenches the Invisibility of Gendered Labour

While gendered labour and unequal power structures shape women's experiences of unpaid volunteerism, religion plays a central role in legitimising and sustaining these inequalities. This theme shows how religious language, practices, and expectations spiritualise women's unpaid care work, making it morally virtuous while simultaneously obscuring its status as labour. It also shows how faith frames caregiving as a divine duty, normalises women's submission through service, and sets boundaries around women's authority within religious spaces.

6.4.1. Care Work Spiritualised As Divine Duty

Women framed their unpaid community work not as labour, but as a divine calling. Acts of caregiving, cleaning, and feeding were narrated as religious commitments rather than social contributions, a form of worship performed through service. This theological language transforms what might otherwise be recognised as work into an expression of faithfulness and gratitude. Makhosazana's reflection, "When I started volunteering, it was because I'm a child of God, trying to show the love of God. You don't expect anything back; it's just something you do because you're grateful for what God has done for you." captures the moral language of Christian womanhood that supports this ethic. Her words are steeped in reciprocity: because God gave freely, she must give freely in return. Yet this exchange is asymmetrical. The "thank you" offered to God takes the form of service to others, but without social or material reciprocation.

The phrase "you don't expect anything back" reveals how spiritual worth is measured through selflessness; the less one expects, the purer one's faith appears. In this context, self-denial becomes currency. Gratitude replaces justice as the organising principle of work, rendering the absence of compensation not as a sign of exploitation but of spiritual maturity (Folbre, 2014b; Federici, 2020) and love for God becomes the invisible wage that compensates for labour, normalising the absence of payment as virtue. Nomusa extends this sacred logic further, describing the extensive work, counselling, feeding, and caring for the sick as the outworking of divine placement:

> I didn't ask to be put here, but I said to myself, God put me here, so what am I going to do to assist these people… not that I want any money because, you know, looking at the plight of the people, they really need help. (Nomusa)

In this case, religious calling overrides personal circumstance. Her phrasing of "God put me here" displaces agency, repositioning it within divine sovereignty. By declaring that she does not want money, Nomusa positions moral duty above economic need. The refusal of payment is not merely a matter of humility, but also a theological conformity: to desire remuneration would risk contradicting the divine will. Across interviews, the very rhetoric that dignifies women's volunteerism simultaneously erases their right to recognition. Both accounts expose a religious discourse that fuses piety with gendered obligation (Golder, 2011). Within this

moral universe, women's caregiving mirrors Christ-like sacrifice, the willingness to pour oneself out for others without return. This theological framing of care as divine duty, therefore, performs a double move: it uplifts women's labour as sacred, yet it also secures their subordination. It provides existential meaning where material value is denied, while ensuring that the denial remains unquestioned. In this sense, unpaid care becomes not only invisible but untouchable, protected by the idea of selflessness and serving that religion bestows upon care work. To make this labour visible thus requires not merely counting its hours but unsettling the religious language that has made invisibility appear godly.

While unpaid care work is spiritualised as devotion, its gendering is normalised through repetition. Participants spoke casually yet consistently about the gendered division of labour in church spaces, often describing it as something self-evident. Their language, "you only find women," "It's known," reveals how deeply ingrained these patterns have become. Religion does not merely endorse women's volunteering; it domesticates it, transforming the church into an extension of the home. As Thobeka explained,

> Even when we have conferences at church, you only find women preparing food. Men come dressed in their suits and just sit down. You don't find men in the kitchen… it is known that people who cook are women. (Thobeka)

The phrasing "it is known" captures the force of custom disguised as common sense. Gendered labour is not questioned because it is presumed to be the natural order of things. Men's visible presence in worship and leadership contrasts sharply with women's visible labour in kitchens and meeting halls, where service, not speech, defines belonging (Marie, 2012a). The church becomes a moral mirror of the household, a space where women's worth is measured by service, and men's authority is assumed as leadership. These narratives expose the subtle ways in which faith sustains the invisibility of women's labour. What is framed as voluntary service is, in practice, the repetition of unpaid domestic work under sacred sanction (Nkosi, 2021). Religious gatherings depend on women's continuous presence, their cleaning, cooking, and preparation, yet this contribution rarely enters sermons or church reports. In this way, the gendered patterns of home life are not left at the church door but are blessed, repeated, and made holy within it.

6.4.2. Submission Through Caregiving Roles

Makhosazana stands out for how clearly her story exposes the unequal ways women's work is accepted and resisted within faith spaces. She leads several community initiatives, including counselling, visiting families, youth outreach, and street ministry, all of which are warmly received by her church. Yet when she moves from voluntary care to preaching, her presence becomes contested. The same institution that embraces her unpaid labour rejects her spiritual authority. She reflected,

> I've got different organisations that I'm involved with. I do counselling, I visit homes, I go to prisons. Sometimes we do street ministry with the youth… The church supports us when it's community work. (Makhosazana)

But the tone changes when she recalls her experience in the pulpit:

> It was written that Pastor Ntombela is going to preach, and that was me. The moment I went up, some people stood up and left. Many males don't want women to preach to them… what you're saying sounds okay, but the problem is it's a woman who is saying it. (Makhosazana)

This contrast reveals a deep contradiction at the heart of religious life. Women's unpaid service is seen as an extension of care, an act that fits the moral and theological mould of humility and nurturing, while their leadership from the pulpit threatens the symbolic order of male authority. The same church that benefits from their labour draws boundaries around their voice. Religious acceptance, therefore, is conditional: it welcomes women's work when it is invisible and domestic, but withdraws legitimacy when it becomes visible and authoritative. Through the AFTOW lens, this contradiction reflects how sacred spaces reproduce gender hierarchy through selective recognition (Oduyoye, 2001a). Unpaid work is holy when it supports male-led ministry, but becomes subversive when it challenges it. Makhosazana's experience shows that religion does not silence women by exclusion alone; it does so through inclusion on limited terms, inviting women to work for God, but not to speak or lead for God.

Section 2: Izandla EZibusisekileyo – The Blessed Hands

This part of Chapter 6 explains why women continue to volunteer despite the gendered injustices exposed in Section 1. It traces the cultural meaning and theological imagination that make unpaid work feel purposeful and spiritually anchored. Without this section, this dissertation would risk portraying women as trapped victims; yet the data reveals something more nuanced. Women are agents within constraints, drawing on cultural and religious resources that help them endure, resist, survive, and sometimes reimagine the value of their work. It shows that women's volunteerism cannot be understood only through gender inequality, but the stories of women in this study reveal that women volunteer because it is spiritually meaningful, faith gives them emotional and moral strength, church networks offer identity, purpose, and connection, and cultural ethics like *Izandla Ziyagezana* create belonging and solidarity.

Izandla Ziyagezana is an isiZulu ethic of mutual aid that creates belonging and solidarity, framing care as a shared responsibility rather than an individual burden. *Izandla Ziyagezana* emerges here as an extension of the broad and often abstract literature on Ubuntu; it is an embodied ethic, shaping real decisions, motivations, and everyday acts of support within women's unpaid labour. These resources form a moral world that enables women to sustain their volunteerism even in the midst of structural inequality. This section, therefore, explores not only what sustains women's care work but also how these cultural and theological frameworks provide a vital, though ambivalent, source of meaning and strength.

6.5. Volunteerism as Spiritual Currency – Ngizoyivunela

Religion emerged as the central lens through which women understood and sustained their unpaid community work across the interviews. The women in this study do not describe their labour in social or economic terms; instead, they framed it as devotion–an extension of prayer, worship, and calling. In this frame, ordinary acts of cooking, visiting, organising, or caring were interpreted as service rendered to God, making them spiritually visible labour that remains socially invisible. Here, women transformed their daily work into acts of worship through scripture, prayer, and religious identity. At the same time, this spiritual framing created a parallel "spiritual economy," where blessings, protection, and future rewards stood in place of material rewards. In this light, religion offered emotional resilience and a sense of purpose, enabling women to continue despite exhaustion, particularly in contexts marked by poverty

and institutional neglect. Yet this same religion also masked structural inequalities by locating compensation in the spiritual realm rather than in tangible support. This resulted in religion as both sustaining and subduing; in a sense, it provides meaning and strength, while simultaneously normalising the endurance of unpaid, gendered labour.

6.5.1. Serving Others As Worship

Women consistently framed their unpaid community work as worship enacted through everyday labour across the interviews. Volunteering was understood as an extension of prayer, devotion, and obedience to God, where acts of care became spiritually meaningful precisely because they were offered to God rather than to institutions or individuals. In this theological framing, the boundaries between worship and work collapse and caregiving, mentoring, organising, and walking long distances to serve others are interpreted as sacred acts rather than secular tasks. This framing renders women's labour spiritually visible even as it remains socially and economically invisible. A golden games coach described how her volunteer work unfolds in direct conversation with God as she moves through the township to reach the children she coaches, "Sometimes I will be walking from section 13 to 3 to coach, talking to God, saying, Lord, I love this thing, I just want you to bless it." (Nokuthula)

The physical act of walking, often a long and exhausting one, performed without compensation or transportation support, is transformed into a devotional practice, turning movement through townships and community into prayer, and the route to unpaid work is reimagined as a sacred pathway rather than a site of hardship. Nokuthula does not frame the distance as a burden or injustice; instead, she frames it as a liturgical space in which effort, vulnerability, and commitment are offered to God. Through this theological reframing, structural constraints are rendered spiritually meaningful rather than politically contestable. The accounts shared by women reveal that they interpret their labour as worship because it aligns with their understanding of how faith is lived, not because their work is recognised by churches or institutions. A life skills facilitator articulated this clearly through the language of vocation, "It's a matter of believing what God has called me to do… I'm for children, I'm for youth… God has called me to do so much" (Ayanda). Calling in this account is firmly tied to community-based care rather than approached as an abstract or aspirational concept, as in most traditional TOW literature on vocation (Volf, 2001; Woolley, 2007; Jones, 2009). Ayanda's understanding of herself as positioned by God for specific people, children and youth, and her

unpaid labour becomes the material expression of that divine assignment and shows how identity and responsibility are integral parts of the calling. Volunteering, therefore, is not experienced as optional or temporary, but as a sacred obligation.

Through this theological lens, women claim moral authority and purpose in spaces where their labour might otherwise be dismissed as informal or supplementary. Some participants articulated worship through the imitation of Christ's servant leadership. A woman whose volunteering centred on domestic and caregiving tasks explained:

> The person that I follow, Jesus Christ, had a servant heart… to portray Christ in a good way, I also need to have a servant's heart. (Lungile)

Unpaid care work here is framed as a site of discipleship, where volunteering is not perceived as a sacrifice imposed from outside, but as faithfulness enacted through humility and imitation of Christ. In this light, theology is not confined to sermons or doctrine; it is embodied in everyday activities such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for others. This resonates strongly with AWT, which insists that theology emerges from women's lived experiences rather than from abstract reflection (Kanyoro, 2001; Nyengele, 2004). God is not encountered in formal religious spaces alone, but also in the ordinary and often exhausting practices that sustain community life. Through this sacralisation of labour, women reclaim dignity and meaning within work that remains unrecognised by social, economic, and ecclesial structures. Volunteering becomes worship, and worship becomes the moral framework through which unpaid labour is sustained. However, this spiritualisation is deeply ambivalent; while it provides emotional strength, joy, and a sense of divine companionship, it simultaneously obscures structural neglect. When labour is framed as service to God, the absence of material support, remuneration, or institutional accountability becomes less visible and less contestable.

The desire expressed by Nokuthula, "I just want you to bless it", reveals how affirmation is sought from the divine rather than from systems responsible for resourcing care work. Therefore, serving others as worship enables women to endure taxing conditions with purpose and resilience, transforming hardship into devotion. At the same time, it relocates the meaning of labour from the material to the spiritual realm, where injustice is absorbed rather than challenged. This section, therefore, exposes a central dynamic of faith-based volunteerism in

this study: worship does not merely motivate unpaid work; it redefines it, rendering women's labour sacred while leaving the structures that depend on it largely untouched.

6.5.2. Calling, Endurance, and Sanctified Suffering

Closely linked to the framing of volunteerism as worship is a theology of calling that normalises endurance and sanctifies suffering. The women interviewed repeatedly described their unpaid labour as something they had been called to do by God, likening it to an assignment that required perseverance, sacrifice, and tireless commitment, regardless of material conditions. Calling, in this sense, is not aspirational; it is lived through continuous acts of care performed in contexts of scarcity; therefore, hardship is not interpreted as a sign of injustice or institutional failure, but as part of faithful obedience to that calling. Ayanda articulated this clearly by grounding her long-term commitment in divine calling rather than choice or circumstance: "It's a matter of believing what God has called me to do… I'm for children, I'm for youth… God has called me to do so much" (Ayanda). Here, calling functions as an organising framework for identity and labour. The participant does not speak about volunteering as something she does; she speaks about it as who she is. Being "for children" and "for youth" reflects a vocational identity in which unpaid work becomes inseparable from the self. This theological framing produces agency; she understands her labour as purposeful and divinely sanctioned, but it also establishes an expectation of endurance. Because the work is "from God," its demands are not easily negotiable, postponed, or refused.

This sense of calling is closely tied to narratives of perseverance, evident in the way participants described continuing their work despite exhaustion, lack of resources, and uncertainty, drawing on theological language to interpret endurance as faithfulness rather than as a response to constraint. A volunteer working with youth explained: "We've had no resources… there is nothing right now, but the vision keeps us growing." (Ayanda) In this account, the absence of material support is acknowledged but not problematised. Instead, endurance is sustained through "vision," a term that collapses hope, faith, and future orientation into a single moral resource. The present lack is rendered temporary and spiritually meaningful, while the responsibility to endure remains individualised. Structural neglect is therefore reframed as a test of commitment rather than as a failure of institutions meant to support community work.

Other women narrated endurance through embodied experience, such as walking long distances, working in unsafe conditions, or managing emotionally demanding situations without support. As discussed in 6.4.1, where a participant described praying while walking to her volunteer site, asking God to bless her work (Nokuthula). This repeated physical exertion, undertaken without compensation or protection, becomes a spiritual discipline. Suffering is not denied; it is absorbed into faith. Walking becomes worship, fatigue becomes devotion, and risk becomes evidence of commitment. This theology of endurance resonates strongly with Christian narratives of suffering and sacrifice, particularly those that valorise perseverance as moral strength (Maluleke, 2010; Vellem, 2015). However, within the context of unpaid volunteerism, this framing has significant consequences. When suffering is interpreted as spiritually productive, it becomes difficult to distinguish between faithful endurance and structural exploitation. African women's theologians have long noted that women often theologise from sites of pain, crafting meaning that sustains them while simultaneously obscuring the systems that generate their suffering (Zainga, 2013; Adonis, 2017). In this study, endurance is not merely personal resilience; it is a theological expectation placed upon women whose labour remains unpaid and unsupported.

Calling, thus, operates as a double-edged framework; on the one hand, it empowers women with purpose, moral authority, and a sense of divine accompaniment, allowing them to interpret their labour as meaningful even when it is invisible to others. On the other hand, it sanctifies suffering by positioning hardship as part of God's design rather than as a condition that should be challenged or transformed. When exhaustion, lack of resources, and emotional strain are framed as aspects of calling, the demand for recognition, redistribution, or institutional accountability is muted. The account by these women shows us that calling does more than motivate volunteerism; it disciplines it and binds women to long-term unpaid labour by moralising endurance and reframing suffering as faithfulness. This study aimed to expose a critical tension that lies at the core of faith-based volunteerism, the same theology that enables women to persist with dignity and hope, also normalises the conditions that necessitate such endurance in the first place.

6.5.3. Spiritual Currency and Deferred Reward

While calling and endurance explain how women remain committed to unpaid community work in the present, a further theological logic sustains this commitment over time; this is the

belief that volunteerism functions as spiritual investment, described by the women when asked what they benefit from volunteering. They immediately spoke about their labour as generating future spiritual returns, such as protection, blessing, growth, and/or divine favour, within a moral economy where material compensation is absent. These women understood unpaid work not as a loss, but as a seed sown into a spiritual future. A parallel spiritual economy thus emerges, one in which religion mediates value and recompense when formal economic reward is unavailable and unpaid labour is exchanged for anticipated spiritual returns. This logic was articulated most clearly in participants' reflections on care work as a source of divine protection. A volunteer who worked closely with elderly women explained: "The grannies… I think they're a blessing, I feel like there is some protection that I have or a covering because *nginabo* [I am with them/ I have them]… I think it's spiritual" (Nokuthula).

In Nokuthula's reflection, caregiving establishes a form of spiritual insurance, suggesting that the emotional and physical effort invested in others returns to her in the form of safety and blessing and that care work establishes a moral claim before God, offering safety where the state, church, or labour market cannot. So instead of questioning why such work remains unsupported, Nokuthula interprets her labour as spiritually generative. In this sense, unpaid care work produces value, not in wages, and exposure and risk are transformed into divine protection and moral credit before God. A similar investment logic appears in narratives oriented toward the future. One participant working in youth development reflected: "We do believe one day… it might be small right now, it's going to be big one day… looking at the future, not the now" (Ayanda). The absence of immediate reward is reframed through an eschatological imagination in which present scarcity is not evidence of failure or exploitation, but part of a temporal delay embedded within divine economy, where meaning is deferred, and growth is expected later. This framing allows women to remain committed to unpaid labour by locating fulfilment and recognition in a future moment that lies beyond institutional accountability. The future, rather than the present, becomes the site where value will eventually materialise. This eschatological logic is deepened through the idiom *ngizoyivunela*–I will reap, used by Nokuthula to describe her unwavering commitment to volunteer work:

> I am doing it with my heart, and I do it not caring what happens on the side… even if it rains or there's wind… I think one day *ngizoyivunela* [I will reap]. (Nokuthula)

Here, volunteerism is explicitly framed through the theology of sowing and reaping using metaphors common in prosperity-oriented Christian discourse and traditional TOW (Cosden, 2006; Keller and Alsdorf, 2012). Labour is imagined as a seed which is planted quietly, patiently, and often invisibly. Therefore, just as the seed endures in adverse conditions ("even if it rains or there's wind"), endurance is interpreted as evidence of faithfulness and not as injustice. So then, material discomfort, physical exhaustion, and lack of institutional support are not interpreted as signs of injustice, but as conditions under which faithfulness is proven. The anticipated harvest is not necessarily expressed in material terms; instead, it remains deliberately open, and it may take the form of blessings, protection, recognition, or future opportunities. This openness allows the belief to remain resilient even when material improvement does not arrive. The absence of immediate reward does not negate the labour's value, because its worth is deferred to divine timing rather than organisational accountability.

Through this spiritual economy, women reinterpret unpaid work as morally productive even in the absence of tangible return, and blessing replaces income; hope substitutes for institutional support. This belief system provides women with emotional resilience and a sense of coherence in precarious conditions, particularly in contexts where poverty, unemployment, and state withdrawal significantly impact everyday life. Religion thus functions as a temporal bridge, holding together present deprivation and anticipated future reward. However, this framework is too, ambivalent in that while spiritual investment enables women to endure and to make meaning under conditions of scarcity, it also legitimises the deferral of justice. When reward is imagined as future and spiritual rather than present and material, structural neglect becomes easier to absorb. The lack of pay, resources, or institutional recognition is reframed as temporary or spiritually insignificant. As feminist political economists argue, when labour is moralised or sanctified, it is less likely to be materially valued (Fraser, 2016; Folbre, 2018; Federici, 2020).

Volunteerism as spiritual investment reveals a crucial mechanism through which unpaid labour is sustained. Religion is not simply an external motivator of volunteerism as suggested by most volunteerism literature (Wilson and Musick, 1997; Seabe and Burger, 2017); instead, it constructs an alternative economy in which sacrifice is rewarded symbolically rather than materially. This economy empowers women with hope, meaning, and moral worth, yet it also entrenches inequality by making endurance virtuous and compensation unnecessary. Deferred

reward becomes the condition under which unpaid labour remains both meaningful and unchallenged.

6.5.4. Religious Identity over Material Compensation

When discussing their tireless commitment to unpaid work, women revealed that they prioritised religious identity and moral purpose over material rewards in the way they spoke about volunteering, not in terms of income, recognition, or institutional support, but framing their labour as an expression of who they are before God. They did not discuss volunteering as something they did in addition to their faith, but rather spoke about it as a way they expressed their faith. Several participants grounded their motivation directly in biblical imperatives that emphasise love, care, and perseverance. A health care volunteer explained her commitment through scripture: "Yes, the Bible says 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'… The Bible also speaks about love and caring for each other" (Sibongile). In this context, unpaid care work is legitimised through biblical command, rather than through social contract or institutional mandate. The theological language of "love of neighbour" becomes the ethical foundation upon which unpaid labour rests. Sibongile does not frame her work as generous or exceptional; it is understood as required moral behaviour for someone who identifies as a Christian. In this sense, religious identity functions as an internal regulator, shaping expectations about what one should do regardless of material circumstances. This prioritisation of spiritual identity over economic reward was reinforced through repeated references to perseverance:

> The Bible says… do not grow weary of doing good… it's better doing something than just sitting. (Nokuthula)

The exhortation not to "grow weary" reframes exhaustion as something to be managed spiritually rather than structurally. Fatigue, discouragement, and lack of support are met with moral instruction rather than demands for change. Doing "something" is positioned as spiritually preferable to inaction, even when that action is unpaid, unsupported, and emotionally taxing. Through this logic, endurance becomes a marker of faithfulness, and stopping becomes morally suspect. For some women, religious identity also extended beyond formal Christianity to encompass a broader moral self-understanding shaped by faith-inflected humanism. Sibongile explained that "You don't need to be Christian… you just need to be human. But that's why I started – to show the love of God." Her statement reveals how religious

identity operates less as doctrinal affiliation and more as moral orientation. Even when service is framed as "human," it is still anchored in the desire to embody divine love. Sibongile's sense of self, as someone who shows God's love through action, remains central. Volunteering, therefore, becomes a site where religious identity is lived, displayed, and affirmed, independent of material recognition. Religious identity was also explicitly tied to theological training or spiritual calling. A participant involved in youth work explained:

> For me, theology is not just for the pulpit… it's to help youth build their spiritual life. (Ayanda)

In this case, unpaid community work becomes the practical application of theological knowledge. Identity as a theologian or religious leader is realised not through formal employment but through voluntary service. Work that would otherwise be seen as informal or peripheral is elevated as the true expression of religious vocation. Because the activity is perceived as a spiritual responsibility rather than professional labour, in this framing, compensation becomes irrelevant, even inappropriate.

This prioritisation of religious identity grants women dignity, purpose, and moral clarity, making them understand themselves as faithful, obedient, and ethically grounded individuals whose labour matters to God and to their communities. Religious identity becomes a source of resilience, enabling women to persist in demanding roles with pride and conviction. However, this same identity suppresses expectations of remuneration, support, or rest. When unpaid work is central to one's identity, questioning its conditions risks appearing selfish, faithless, or morally suspect. From an AFTOW, this dynamic illustrates how unpaid labour is sustained through internalised moral obligation rather than external coercion. African feminist theologians have long argued that women's spirituality often becomes the site where exploitation is normalised, and sacrifice is celebrated while material injustice remains unaddressed (Oduyoye, 2001; Phiri, 2004). In this study, religious identity performs precisely this work of transforming unpaid labour into moral duty, rendering compensation secondary and critique difficult.

Religious identity over material reward adds another layer to the logic of volunteerism as spiritual currency. Women's labour is not only worship, calling, endurance, or investment; it is a reflection of who they understand themselves to be before God. Religion provides meaning,

legitimacy, and strength, but it also disciplines desire, shaping women to accept invisibility, exhaustion, and lack of support as the moral cost of faithful service.

6.6. Volunteerism As Mutual Aid – Izandla Ziyagezana

While faith provides a moral and spiritual framework that sustains women's unpaid labour, cultural ethics shape how care is organised, distributed, and expected within everyday community life. *Izandla Ziyagezana*, an isiZulu ethic meaning "one hand washes the other", captures a cultural expectation that people must support one another materially, emotionally, and socially. Participants discussed helping as a moral obligation shaped by the principles of Ubuntu, cultural norms, and intergenerational teachings. The needs of children, the elderly, neighbours, and struggling families become shared responsibilities under this worldview. Giving, sharing, stepping in, and supporting one another on a daily basis is how mutual aid is put into practice. It portrays a social structure in which morality is relational, and survival is communal. This caring ethic, however, is highly gendered, with women bearing the majority of the burden of mutual aid.

6.6.1. "Ubuntu" Moral Obligation to Uplift Others

Helping others was regularly described by participants as a moral duty rather than a voluntary act of kindness. The women emphasised that meeting the needs of others is required as a sign of character, upbringing, and belonging in their communities. This duty stems from relational identification; one contributes because Ubuntu demands it and because one is a member of the community. The phrases "I saw a child," "I can't allow," and "I like to help" demonstrate that caring is not portrayed as exceptional compassion but rather as the inevitable result of being a morally upright individual in a shared social context. The interviews demonstrate that, within Izandla Ziyagezana, moral duty is carried out through regular, spontaneous acts of care rather than structured support networks. When there is a noticeable need, neighbours step in right away, according to one participant:

> You will have someone from the community saying, 'I saw a kid, I am not happy with the way that kid was looking, I am going to buy that child sandals.' It shows that there are people who care (Nandi).

This example illustrates that institutional referral, policy, or permission is not used to facilitate treatment. Rather, moral obligation is triggered by visibility and proximity; witnessing a child in need triggers an instinctive moral reaction. Help is assumed; it is not negotiated nor postponed. In this sense, providing care is no longer an unusual act of kindness but rather a reflexive social practice. Moral obligation is further ingrained within culturally specific norms of reciprocity and respect. One participant articulated this through age-based ethics grounded in Ubuntu:

> In our culture, I can't allow anyone older than me to work while I'm seated. Ubuntu does not allow it. (Lungile).

Here, moral behaviour is defined as adhering to a social structure that dictates who should serve whom and when. It would be morally wrong to do nothing. Ubuntu thus functions as a regulatory ethic, shaping behaviour through shared expectations of dignity, respect, and relational responsibility. This ethic is learned, embodied, and reproduced through everyday encounters, making care work a culturally enforced obligation rather than a voluntary choice. Other participants internalise this duty as a sign of their moral identity. Buhle explained :

> I think I have Ubuntu too much, I like to help… maybe I have a very good heart. I really love helping (Buhle).

According to this perspective, assisting is a person's identity rather than just something they do. One's ability and willingness to care for others becomes a determining factor in their moral worth. This self-understanding demonstrates how accountability for collective care becomes gendered and personalised, because women are socialised to embody Ubuntu more consistently and openly than men; they come to regard themselves as the caregivers. Moral duty, therefore, places the burden of unpaid care on women, positioning them as the primary moral actors responsible for sustaining community life.

6.6.2. "Izandla Ziyagezana" Collective Responsibility

Mutual aid emerges through practical acts of sharing shoes, food, money, childcare, knowledge and is enacted horizontally across community networks. The accounts shared by women reveal that support flows through neighbours, church peers, teammates, siblings, and informal groups,

and does not originate from formal institutions, the state or NGOs. Mutual aid, therefore, becomes the real welfare system in communities where government and church structures provide little material support. This ethic of shared responsibility becomes most visible in how women respond to immediate and practical needs within their communities. Care is enacted through small, everyday decisions that are treated as normal rather than extraordinary. This is how a fitness and health volunteer described her group members' intervention when someone lacks basic resources:

> Sometimes someone joins the group, but they don't have running shoes… since I have more than one pair of running shoes, let me give this person one. We help each other. (Thembeka).

What is striking here is not only the act of giving, but the ease with which it is narrated. Sharing is not framed as sacrifice or generosity; it is assumed. Possession is understood relationally; having "more than one" creates an obligation to redistribute. Within this moral framework, excess is not private entitlement but a resource held temporarily for the benefit of others. This same ethic scales up into larger forms of collective care, such as informal food distribution, which are organised and sustained by women, and become a recurring community responsibility rather than a once-off intervention. A woman who started an informal food collection and distribution club, which she named iZandla Ziyagezana, explained:

> On Women's Day, Mother's Day, Youth Day, iZandla Ziyagezana distributes close to 500 food parcels. (Zanele).

The regularity of these distributions, tied to commemorative days, suggests that care has been institutionalised informally. In the absence of consistent state or church welfare, women create their own rhythms of redistribution, embedding care into the social calendar. These women address hunger through acts of mutual responsibility and do not wait for formal policies to be implemented. Mutual aid also flows through dense networks of women's relationships, extending beyond individual households or projects. One participant described how support circulates through sisterhood and peer groups: "We do this with my sisters… they have get-togethers with the girls. So even if it's not from me, they can get help from my teammates." (Ayanda). Care here is decentralised, and responsibility does not rest on one woman alone, but is dispersed across relational networks that function as informal safety nets. These

interconnected systems allow support to continue even when one individual is stretched, revealing how women collectively manage scarcity through co-operation rather than competition.

While *Izandla Ziyagezana* enables community survival in contexts of poverty, precarity, and structural neglect, it is women who overwhelmingly perform the labour that keeps these systems functioning. Women organise, fundraise, distribute food, coordinate care, and absorb the emotional weight of ensuring that others are supported. Their informal networks compensate for the failures of the state, the church, and formal welfare systems, effectively holding communities together in moments of crisis and in the ordinariness of everyday need. Considered through an AFTOW lens, this represents Ubuntu in practice, solidarity enacted through concrete, relational acts of care rather than abstract moral philosophy (Mkhize, 2008; Metz, 2011). At the same time, a GAD perspective reminds us how this solidarity is sustained through women's unpaid and often invisible labour (Kabeer, 1994; Vavrus and Richey, 2003). The responsibility to notice need, to intervene, and to sustain care over time becomes feminised and naturalised.

6.6.3. "Indlela Ibuzwa Kwaba Phambili" Intergenerational Knowledge

Participants described mutual aid as an inherited practice passed down through generations. The phrase *indlela ibuzwa kwaba phambili*, translated "the way forward is asked from those who walked it", captures this transmission: one learns the "right way" from those who came before. Helping, respecting elders, and stepping in for vulnerable children are norms taught through observation and embodied through repetition. These intergenerational practices shape women's identities from girlhood, establishing care as both a moral expectation and a cultural inheritance. The women's reflections illustrate how these lessons are integrated into daily life. One participant explained the cultural principle of age-based respect: "It is our culture… you don't allow an older person to work while you sit." (Lungile). Here, age determines responsibility; one learns early that care must flow upward as well as outward. Another participant described how elders intervene even when a child is not their own: "There are older people in the community who see a child struggling and step in, even if it's not their child." (Nandi). This practice models communal responsibility for younger generations. The same participant reflected on how children learn these norms by watching adults:

> Kids learn from you as an elderly person… 'indlela ibuzwa kwaba phambili'… what I give to the kids, some of them have already adapted to me… why must I do wrong when she does the right thing? (Nandi).

Her reflection shows how continuity is produced; children mimic what they see, internalising caregiving as the correct way to be. It also shows how women understand themselves as moral educators, consciously embodying care because they recognise their role in shaping the next generation. Behaviour becomes pedagogy through repeated acts of helping, intervening, and nurturing; women do not only transmit skills but also moral expectations about what it means to be a good person within the community. These narratives reveal how cultural identity is reinforced through inherited care practices. However, they also expose a gendered pattern: the knowledge being transmitted is overwhelmingly about nurturing, helping, and intervening, roles traditionally assigned to women. Through the lens of SRT, these practices reproduce unpaid labour across generations, ensuring that girls grow into women who bear the responsibility of care (Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017). AFTOW helps illuminate how mothering and caregiving become forms of moral training, teaching not only how to behave but who one is expected to become.

Thus, indlela ibuzwa kwaba phambili reveals how mutual aid is sustained over time. It ensures that *Izandla Ziyagezana* does not disappear with social change but is continuously renewed through embodied practice. However, while intergenerational knowledge builds continuity, cohesion, and cultural pride, it also entrenches patriarchal labour expectations. Women inherit care, while men inherit authority, where girls are taught to serve; boys are taught to lead. In this context, mutual aid becomes both a cultural strength and a mechanism for reproducing gender inequality. This theme has shown that *Izandla Ziyagezana* operates as a cultural survival ethic, far more than casual neighbourly assistance. Importantly, this theme reveals that *Izandla Ziyagezana* is not simply a repetition of Ubuntu but an extension of it, more personal, practical, and emotionally charged. It is Ubuntu translated into daily action, where solidarity is expressed through giving, sharing, and stepping into the gaps. This ethic generates social resilience, enabling communities to withstand hardship because women hold the fabric together. This theme deepens the central paradox of the dissertation: like faith in the previous theme, mutual aid is both profoundly empowering and profoundly burdensome. It strengthens women and simultaneously depends on their invisible labour.

6.7. Volunteerism as Social Network – Ukubambana

Churches and community groups emerged as the central organising structures shaping women's unpaid volunteerism. Participants described the church not only as a place of worship but as a hub where leadership skills, social belonging, and collective identity are formed. Women move through roles such as Sunday school teachers, children's ministry leaders, women's league chairpersons, and informal coordinators, positions that give them visibility and purpose, even though they are rarely paid. Through these roles, the church becomes a platform rather than a provider: it hosts activities, offers legitimacy, and gathers people together, but it seldom supplies the resources required to sustain the work. As a result, women's unpaid labour fills the institutional gaps, carrying out programmes that benefit the church's mission without receiving material support from the institution itself.

Volunteerism is framed here through the concept of *Ukubambana* – unity, a relational ethic of "holding one another" that is enacted within church-based networks rather than through individual initiative. Participants consistently describe how fellow church members, less often formal leaders or board members, and more frequently women's groups come alongside one another during volunteer activities, stepping in to assist and forming patterns of shared participation. *Ukubambana*, therefore, names the way the church functions as an organising hub: it brings people into proximity, normalises collective involvement, and creates informal support systems through which unpaid work is sustained. Volunteerism, in this sense, is embedded in ecclesial relationships, with women holding one another within the structures and practices of church life.

6.7.1. Churches As Organising Hubs

Participants described the church as a central organising hub where much of their volunteering, leadership development, and community engagement takes shape. Women's narratives show a deep-seated embeddedness in church-based structures, as they emphasise their long-standing involvement in multiple church roles. One woman reflected on her layered responsibilities: "I was a Sunday school teacher for many years… I was also a young adult class teacher and a chairperson of the women's league." (Thobeka). Her account illustrates how leadership roles accumulate over time, positioning women as central organisers and stabilising figures within church life. Another participant similarly described her ongoing commitment to children's programmes: "I used to be very involved at church, I used to teach Sunday school, I am still

involved in the children's ministry." (Ayanda). The repetition of "used to" and "still" points to continuity rather than episodic engagement. Church-based volunteering becomes part of women's life trajectories, woven into their identities and daily routines. These roles are rarely framed as temporary or optional; instead, they are narrated as enduring commitments that evolve but do not easily fall away. Through such involvement, the church becomes a training ground where women acquire organisational skills, leadership experience, and moral authority, often without formal recognition or remuneration.

Beyond formal roles, the church also functions as a coordinating space that draws others into community work. One participant noted how church leaders and members regularly join her volunteer activities: "Most of them [church board members] come and join me when I'm busy working… It's now even a habit in the church" (Zanele). This suggests that while initiatives may be driven by individual women, the church provides a platform that normalises participation and facilitates collective action. The church does not always initiate or fund these projects, but it offers a space where activities gain visibility, moral legitimacy, and a sense of shared ownership.

These accounts demonstrate that the church operates as an organising hub rather than a provider of resources. It gathers people, legitimises activities, and anchors women's leadership within familiar institutional structures. At the same time, this embeddedness has both positive and negative consequences. While church involvement enables women's agency, skill development, and public participation, it also reinforces gendered patterns of service. Women are positioned as organisers, teachers, coordinators, and caregivers, the ones who sustain programmes and ensure continuity. This dynamic reflects African women's theological insight that the church can be both empowering and oppressive (Kanyoro, 2001; Oduyoye, 2001a; Dube, 2016), and a GAD emphasis that the church mirrors many institutions that rely heavily on women for administrative and care work while offering minimal institutional investment in return (Kabeer, 1994; Vavrus and Richey, 2003). The church thus becomes both a site of empowerment and a space where unpaid, gendered labour is routinised and normalised, laying the groundwork for subsequent themes on institutional dependence and invisible work.

6.7.2. Limited Institutional Support (Space, not Funds)

While churches serve as important organising spaces, participants repeatedly emphasised that institutional support seldom extends beyond providing a venue. Churches offer halls, kitchens, classrooms, or moral encouragement, but rarely provide the material resources needed to sustain community-based projects. As a result, women become responsible for fundraising, sourcing donations, and covering material gaps themselves. This creates a pattern in which the church appears supportive on the surface, yet contributes little to the actual labour or costs of community care. Participants described this gap in clear and sometimes frustrated terms. One woman explained bluntly: "We're not getting any help from the church… it's each man for himself." (Nomusa). Her words convey not only disappointment, but a sense of abandonment and an awareness that responsibility has been individualised rather than shared institutionally. Another recounted how even church-linked initiatives received no meaningful backing: "Even the one linked to the church was not getting support… they don't support. They only help when it makes the church look good" (Makhosazana). This comment points to a selective form of institutional engagement, where support is offered primarily when it enhances the church's public image, rather than when it sustains the labour of those doing the work. Care becomes valuable insofar as it is "visible", but not necessarily worthy of investment. In the absence of institutional support, women turn to one another. Peer networks become the primary source of material and emotional assistance. As one participant explained:

> We started a soup kitchen… I advertised it at church, asking for canned food… women from the young adult league who were assigned to clean the church would come cook at the soup kitchen during the soup kitchen days… The food parcels were mainly from the women's league. The men would also donate, but only once during their July conference. (Thobeka)

Although this example reinforces a broader pattern evident across the data that, when needs arise, women rely on relational solidarity rather than institutional provision. This reliance on peer support normalises the expectation that women will absorb gaps in resources, stepping in quietly and collectively to prevent projects from collapsing. As Thobeka further noted, men's contributions were occasional and event-based, while women's labour was ongoing. This dynamic reflects a deeper dependence on women's unpaid labour. Churches benefit from the outreach, social credibility, and moral authority generated by women's volunteer work, while

avoiding the costs associated with sustaining it. Through the lens of SRT, this can be understood as an extraction of value where community care, children's work, and welfare functions are effectively outsourced to women, without compensation or institutional accountability (Swanson & Carreon, 2024; Cohen, 2022). The labour that sustains community life is displaced from the institution and relocated into women's bodies, time, and emotional reserves.

The limited institutional support offered by churches reveals a subtle yet persistent form of a gendered mode of dependence where the church offers space, moral authority, and symbolic recognition, while women supply the labour, resources, and emotional endurance required to keep community care functioning. What appears as support is, in practice, a transfer of responsibility, one that leaves women carrying the burden of sustaining both the community and the church's public mission.

6.7.3. Volunteers As Church Outreach Agents

The women's narratives also reveal that volunteers often function as the practical extension of the church's outreach work, even when the church has not formally mandated or resourced these activities, but through food distribution, children's ministry, neighbourhood support, and informal social work, women embody the church's public presence in the community. Their labour aligns with the broader mission of the church: care, compassion, service, and evangelism. This makes volunteers the operational backbone of church-based outreach, while the institution retains the moral credit. Participants spoke openly about how their efforts sustained the church's community reputation when she reflected on how her father, the pastor, would help distribute items during events in ways that enhanced the church's image:

> They would help me because it made the church look good… the hall of the church will be used for the soup kitchen, and then my father [the pastor] will hand out something, so that it looks like an event. (Makhosazana).

This statement reveals an underlying awareness that women's labour contributes to the church's visibility and credibility in the community. Even small gestures are carefully staged to reinforce the church's role as a caring institution, despite the fact that the resources and labour originate largely from individual volunteers and their networks. The church benefits

symbolically from work it does not fully sustain. Therefore, volunteers act as the church's outreach agents not because the church commissions them, but because their unpaid labour fills a gap the institution has normalised. Their work strengthens the church's presence while concealing the institution's reliance on women's invisible, feminised labour.

6.7.4. Peer Encouragement Sustains Long-term Engagement

While formal recognition and material support from institutions remain limited, peer encouragement emerged as one of the quiet but powerful forces that sustain women's long-term involvement in unpaid community work. What stands out in the women's stories is not recognition from church leadership or formal structures, but the everyday affirmation they receive from one another. Within the ethic of *Ukubambana*, encouragement becomes part of how women hold each other in the work. It is relational rather than institutional, offered through words, presence, and shared acknowledgement. In contexts where there is no pay, no promotion, and little formal recognition, encouragement begins to carry the weight of compensation, sustaining motivation where structures fall short.

Participants spoke about encouragement as something that slowly builds resilience. One woman reflected on how community feedback affirmed both her work and her sense of self: "The comments I received from people… recommending me that this lady is doing wonders– that sustained me" (Lindiwe). What sustains her here is not the scale of the project, but the fact that others see it and name its value. Another participant described how support from fellow church members protected her from giving up altogether: "What sustained me… the support of other church members… because if they had not, I would have been discouraged" (Thobeka). Her words suggest how fragile commitment can become in the absence of support, and how encouragement functions as a form of emotional holding. A third participant reflected on how small moments of success create momentum: "The balance of what you did yesterday and you did well encourages you for today" (Makhosazana). Encouragement here is temporal; it carries yesterday's effort into today's endurance.

These narratives show how *Ukubambana* is lived through emotional labour. Encouraging one another, noticing effort, and affirming impact are not incidental gestures; they are forms of work in themselves. Women actively produce emotional safety nets that help stabilise morale and prevent withdrawal. In this sense, *Ukubambana* operates as emotional infrastructure. It

keeps women connected to the work and to one another, especially when institutional structures offer little in return. At the same time, this relational strength reveals that while peer encouragement deepens solidarity and strengthens women's sense of belonging, it also enables unpaid labour to continue under unequal conditions. Within the logic of *Ukubambana*, emotional support absorbs pressure that might otherwise expose institutional neglect. Encouragement becomes both sustaining and containing. It empowers women to persist, yet it also fills the motivational gap left by organisations that benefit from their labour without materially supporting it. In this way, inequality is not resolved, but made survivable. *Ukubambana* thus reveals both women's remarkable relational agency and the structural conditions that make such agency necessary in the first place.

This theme foregrounds the collective nature of women's volunteerism. Unlike *Ngizoyivunela* in Section 6.4, which centres personal faith, and *Izandla Ziyagezana* in Section 6.5, which emphasises shared cultural ethics, *Ukubambana* reveals the relational structures that make unpaid work possible in everyday life. Through *Ukubambana*, women sustain one another emotionally, practically, and socially, forming church-based networks that carry the weight of community care. At the same time, this collective strength sharpens the dissertation's central paradox: women sustain both the community and the church, yet the church does not materially sustain them in return.

6.8. Volunteerism as Lived Theology – Ukuphila Ngokwenkolo

The concept of ukuphila ngokwenkolo developed throughout this section resonates with what scholars of religion have described as lived religion. Rather than locating religion primarily in official doctrine or institutional practice, lived religion draws attention to the ways faith is experienced, negotiated and embodied within the ordinary rhythms of everyday life (McGuire, 2008; Ammerman, 2021). It invites scholars to examine how people express their beliefs through everyday practices such as caring for others, responding to need and sustaining relationships. Read through this lens, the women's accounts presented in this chapter reveal faith not as an abstract system of beliefs but as something enacted through prayer, care, endurance and community service.

While lived religion provides a valuable interpretive lens, this study moves beyond description to ask what these everyday practices reveal about unpaid work, gender and justice within faith

communities. Situated within Theology and Development, the concern is not only how faith is lived but also how those lived expressions of faith contribute to human flourishing, community transformation and the pursuit of justice. African women theologians such as Oduyoye (2001a) and Phiri (2004) have similarly argued that women's theology emerges through everyday practices of care and survival, while simultaneously calling attention to the unequal burdens that women continue to bear within the church and society.

For this reason, this dissertation adopts the language of lived theology (ukuphila ngokwenkolo) rather than lived religion alone. The participants are not simply practising religion in their daily lives; through their unpaid work, they are interpreting, embodying and giving theological expression to their faith. Their volunteerism becomes a site where theology is lived, negotiated and enacted within the realities of everyday community life. It is within this conversation between lived religion, African women's theology and Theology and Development that the African Feminist Theology of Work (AFTOW) developed in this dissertation is located.

For many women in this study, faith is not something that is only spoken about or practised within formal church spaces. It is lived out in ordinary, everyday acts of care and service. *Ukuphila ngokwenkolo* – living out faith, captures this understanding of faith as something done rather than declared. While Section 6.4 explored faith as a spiritual resource that sustains women internally, providing motivation, endurance, and a sense of spiritual reward, this section turns to how faith is enacted and embodied. Here, volunteerism becomes a site of theological practice through which women express who they are as Christians, pastors, or followers of Christ, and how they understand their relationship with God and others. This section, therefore, approaches unpaid volunteer work as lived theology, where belief takes visible shape through action, presence, and sustained commitment within community life.

6.8.1. Faith Through Everyday Practice

Many of the women in this study do not primarily express their faith through formal religious language, church attendance, or doctrine. Rather, it is enacted and lived via everyday activities of endurance, mobility, and care. Here, ukuphila ngokwenkolo manifests as faith practised in everyday settings, including houses, cars, and the slow patterns of unpaid labour. In this way, theology develops through everyday acts of responding to need rather than being limited to sermons or pulpits. One participant described how prayer is woven directly into the physical

act of volunteering: “Sometimes I will be walking from section 13 to 3 to coach, talking to God, saying Lord I love this thing, I just want you to bless it” (Nokuthula).

This image is striking in its ordinariness. Faith is not paused for prayer; prayer accompanies the body in motion. The act of walking toward a volunteer task becomes a theological space, where work, prayer, and devotion collapse into one another. As African women theologians have long argued, theology is often lived before it is named, enacted through daily survival, care, and relational commitment rather than articulated through formal theological discourse (Oduyoye, 2001; Phiri, 2002). Here, faith is neither abstract nor reflective in hindsight; it is enacted in real time, through movement, bodily effort, and commitment. The road itself becomes a site of theology, revealing a form of faith that is practical, embodied, and responsive. Another participant spoke about being placed in a context of need and responding without deliberation:

> I didn’t ask to be put over here, but I’m put over here. So what am I going to do to assist these people because they really need their help (Nomusa).

Her words suggest a theology that is deeply situational. Faith is not something she consults before acting; it is what compels action in the face of circumstance. The language of being “put here” displaces individual choice and centres responsibility. This reflects what Phiri (2002) describes as a contextual and relational theology, one that emerges from lived realities rather than abstract reflection. Need itself becomes a theological call, and response becomes the practice of faith. In this framing, ukuphila ngokwenkolo is lived through attentiveness to context and a readiness to act when help is required, even when such action carries personal cost. A third participant described her relationship to church work in deeply embodied terms. After listing a wide range of unpaid activities–running a homework club, caring for elderly community members, and cleaning public parks–she was asked at the end of the interview whether she did anything at church. Only then did she mention that she teaches Sunday school. When asked why she had not included this earlier, she responded:

> Anything that has to do with church, I put it here (tapping her heart), I wrap it alone (Nandi).

The delayed mention of her church work suggests that she does not experience it as a separate or exceptional form of labour. Instead, it is folded into her broader sense of care and responsibility. The gesture toward her heart indicates that this work is internalised and carried emotionally. At the same time, the phrase "I wrap it alone" points to the individual burden she carries. Even when church work appears collective, the moral and emotional responsibility remains hers. Faith, in this account, is not something publicly declared or institutionally distributed; it is carried quietly and personally. In this way, ukuphila ngokwenkolo takes the form of responsibility that is held, protected, and endured, rather than named or shared.

Together, these narratives show that women's faith is lived through practice rather than proclamation. Ukuphila ngokwenkolo is enacted through walking, assisting, enduring, and carrying responsibility in the body. This lived theology does not seek visibility or validation; it simply responds. Yet in responding, women are not merely practising faith; they are producing theology from below. Their unpaid work becomes a theological site where meaning is made, values are embodied, and belief is rendered tangible in everyday life. Long before faith is named as doctrine, it is already being lived, sustained, and transmitted through women's ordinary acts of care.

6.8.2. Moral Authority Without Institutional Power

While women's faith is lived through everyday practice, it also becomes a source of moral authority, even in the absence of formal institutional power. Across the interviews, women spoke about their work from positions that were not always officially recognised or resourced by the church. Yet they claimed authority through who they understood themselves to be: Christian women, pastors, and people called by God. Ukuphila ngokwenkolo, in this sense, does not rely on titles, salaries, or institutional endorsement. Authority is grounded instead in lived responsibility and sustained action. One participant named this authority explicitly through religious identity: "What sustains me is that I'm a child of God… I am a pastor in the church, and I pray… and that keeps me going" (Zanele).

She does not explain or defend her authority; she simply names it. Being a "child of God" and a "pastor" is presented as sufficient grounding for her work. Prayer is not framed as preparation for leadership, but as its ongoing condition. This resonates with Masenya's (2003) observation that African women often claim spiritual authority through relational identity rather than

institutional status. Authority here is not bestowed by hierarchy but flows from a lived relationship with God that authorises action. In this framing, leadership is sustained through faithfulness rather than position, and legitimacy is anchored in spiritual identity rather than organisational recognition.

Another participant described how she exercised authority through decisive action, offering her own home as a site of care: "We gave our home up to serve the community… I used my room as a testing room for people" (Nomusa). This account represents a reconfiguration of authority. Without waiting for permission or institutional direction, she makes a personal decision with significant public consequences. Authority is expressed through control over space, responsibility for others, and a willingness to take risks. The home, often theorised as a private or domestic space, becomes a site of public ministry and lived theology. Her work, from the perspective of social reproduction theorists, blurs the boundaries between the private and public spheres (Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017). From a theological perspective, it also echoes African women's theologies that locate sacred action within everyday spaces rather than formal religious institutions (Oduyoye, 2001). Faith here authorises action beyond church buildings, revealing how women transform personal resources into communal care.

A third participant located her authority in a sense of divine calling rather than formal position: "It plays more because it's a matter of believing what God has called me to do… God has called me to do so much" (Ayanda). In this account, calling functions as a legitimising force. She does not reference church structures, leadership hierarchies, or approval processes. Instead, authority flows from conviction and continuity, doing what one believes God has entrusted to them. This understanding aligns with Phiri's (2002) argument that women often negotiate authority through calling when institutional leadership remains inaccessible. Calling enables women to act with confidence even in the absence of formal recognition, sustaining their work through a sense of divine mandate rather than organisational stability. Authority, in this sense, is not fixed or granted; it is enacted and reaffirmed through continued service.

These accounts show that women exercise moral authority through practice, identity, and consistency rather than institutional power. Ukuphila ngokwenkolo enables women to claim legitimacy from below, grounded in faith lived out through care, risk, and responsibility. Their authority is relational and enacted, sustained through action rather than appointment. In

contexts where formal power is often inaccessible to women, lived theology becomes a way of leading without permission–shaping community life through commitment rather than position.

6.8.3. Living Christ Through Care and Service

For many women in this study, volunteerism is not only an expression of faith but a way of embodying Christ in everyday life. Rather than engaging theology through abstract reflection or formal teaching, women understand their unpaid work as a means of living out Christ's example. Ukuphila ngokwenkolo here takes on a distinctly Christological dimension, where care, humility, and service become the primary ways in which faith is made visible. A theologian who participated in this study articulated this connection directly, grounding her actions in the life and character of Christ: "The person that I follow, Jesus Christ, had a servant heart… to portray Christ in a good way, I need also to have a servant's heart" (Lungile). Her words reveal a theology shaped less by doctrine and more by imitation. Christ is not referenced as a distant figure to be worshipped, but as a model whose life sets the pattern for how she relates to others. To "portray Christ" is to embody his disposition through service. This reflects what Kretzschmar (2012) describes as an ethical Christology, where discipleship is measured not by confession alone but by the alignment of one's life with Christ's practice of humility and care. Volunteerism, in this framing, becomes a site of Christological practice, where faith is expressed through availability, service, and moral posture rather than authority or status.

A former nurse grounded this embodied theology in the language of scripture, but scripture is interpreted through action rather than citation: "The Bible says 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'… you are my neighbour" (Sibongile). Here, biblical teaching is not treated as an abstract moral principle or a verse to be memorised. It is personalised and localised. The "neighbour" is not imagined at a distance, but recognised in the immediate context of need. This collapses the space between text and life, turning scripture into an ethic that demands response. Such readings resonate with Masenya's (2003) critique of decontextualised biblical interpretation, which often overlooks how African women read scripture through lived experience. Care, in this sense, becomes a theological obligation enacted through everyday encounters, where loving the neighbour is inseparable from responding to suffering. Sibongile further emphasised the posture required to live out this kind of faith:

> You must put yourself at their level… don't be high and mighty over them (Sibongile).

Her words speak to a theology of humility that resists hierarchy and moral superiority. Living Christ through care requires lowering oneself, meeting others where they are, and rejecting positions of dominance. This understanding challenges forms of religious authority that privilege status, distance, or moral control. Instead, it echoes African feminist theological critiques of hierarchical leadership, which argue that Christ-like authority is relational and grounded in solidarity rather than power (Oduyoye, 2001; Phiri, 2002). Christ is encountered not through elevation above others, but through closeness, vulnerability, and shared humanity.

These accounts reveal a form of lived Christology emerging from women's unpaid work. Christ is not encountered primarily in formal worship, sermons, or theological discourse, but in the act of serving others with humility and compassion. Ukuphila ngokwenkolo, in this sense, is a theology of embodiment. Through care, women do not merely speak about Christ; they enact him. Their volunteerism becomes a way of making faith visible, relational, and grounded in the realities of everyday life. In contexts where women's authority is often constrained, this embodied Christology offers a powerful theological alternative, one that locates faith not in position or voice, but in presence, service, and sustained commitment.

Servanthood and the Limits of Imitation

The preceding discussion demonstrates that participants understood their volunteer work through the example of Jesus Christ. They described serving others as an expression of Christian discipleship, frequently referring to Jesus' humility, compassion and willingness to place the needs of others before his own. For many participants, volunteerism was therefore more than an act of generosity; it was an intentional attempt to imitate Christ's life and ministry. Their narratives raise an important theological question: how should Christian servanthood be understood when the call to serve is experienced within unequal gendered realities? The participants' understanding of discipleship reflects the biblical portrait of Jesus as the servant who gives himself for others. In Mark 10:45, Jesus declares that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Likewise, Philippians 2:5–8 presents Christ's humility and self-emptying as the pattern for Christian life. The women in this study interpreted these biblical themes through practice rather than doctrine. Caring for

vulnerable families, visiting the sick, mentoring children and responding to community crises became concrete expressions of their desire to follow Christ. Their volunteer work, therefore, functioned as an embodied expression of Christian discipleship.

Mark 10:45 redefines leadership through service, presenting Jesus not as a figure of domination but as one whose authority is expressed through self-giving love (Kgatle, 2017). Jesus' teaching on servant leadership challenges hierarchical understandings of power by locating genuine leadership in humility, sacrifice and responsibility towards others (Yengkopiong, 2023). These perspectives help explain why women understood volunteerism as an expression of faithful discipleship rather than simply a social responsibility. Their accounts suggest that service was not peripheral to their faith; it was the primary way in which they believed Christ became visible through their lives.

However, participants' experiences also reveal that the imitation of Christ was often lived within social realities characterised by unequal expectations. Many women described carrying responsibility for church activities, family care and community support simultaneously, while rarely questioning why these responsibilities rested primarily with them. Their commitment to serving others reflected deep spiritual conviction, yet their narratives also exposed the physical, emotional and economic burdens that accompanied this commitment. Similar tensions have been identified within South African theological reflections, which acknowledge that Christian service is indispensable to community life while recognising that such service frequently depends on unpaid and gendered labour (Marie, 2012; Nkosi, 2021). The findings, therefore, suggest that servanthood cannot be understood apart from the social and economic realities within which it is practised.

Participants' experiences also resonate with longstanding critiques within African women's theology who argued that teachings on humility, sacrifice and obedience have too often been interpreted in ways that encourage women to embrace self-denial without equally challenging the structures that produce gender inequality (Oduyoye, 2001a; Kanyoro, 2001; Phiri, 2004). They argue that authentic Christian service must be grounded in mutuality, shared responsibility and justice rather than unequal expectations placed upon women (Maseno, 2021; Naicker, 2024). These perspectives do not reject servanthood itself. Rather, they challenge interpretations of servanthood that normalise women's disproportionate responsibility for sustaining both church and community life. Participants themselves did not reject the call to

serve. On the contrary, they described volunteerism as a source of spiritual fulfilment, purpose and faithful witness. The concern is not with service itself but with the unequal distribution of responsibility that often accompanies it. These women's experiences, therefore, invite a more nuanced theological understanding in which servanthood is interpreted not as unlimited self-sacrifice but as participation in relationships characterised by reciprocity, dignity and shared responsibility. Such an understanding remains faithful to the example of Christ while refusing to separate discipleship from questions of justice.

From the perspective of the AFTOW, servanthood is neither diminished nor abandoned; rather, it is reimagined through the lens of gender justice. Building on earlier African feminist critiques of patriarchal interpretations of Christian service (Marie, 2012; Nkosi, 2021), AFTOW argues that Christ's model of servanthood calls the entire faith community into mutual participation rather than placing the burden of care primarily on women. Genuine Christian service, therefore, requires not only willing hearts but also just relationships that recognise, value, and share the labour through which God's work becomes visible in communities. In this way, servanthood remains a faithful expression of discipleship while simultaneously becoming a theological resource for challenging, rather than perpetuating, gendered inequalities.

6.8.4. Faith As Public Witness

Faith is not confined to the private realm of belief or personal spirituality for the women in this study. Instead, it is enacted publicly through presence, reliability, and visible care within their communities. Ukuphila ngokwenkolo, in this sense, becomes a form of public witness, where faith is recognised not through verbal confession but through consistent action. Women's unpaid work places them in positions of social trust, making their faith legible and credible to others in tangible ways. A participant reflected on how community members respond to her role during moments of crisis: "People run here first… because they know if I phone, the police will come quickly" (Nomusa). This statement reveals how faith-based service translates into social authority and public trust. Her home becomes a first point of contact, not because of a formal office or institutional power, but because of a reputation built through care and reliability. Faith here is not internal conviction alone; it is embodied in responsiveness and recognised by the community as effective action.

Another participant drew attention to how women's volunteer labour shapes the public image of the church itself: "They would help me because it made the church look good" (Makhosazana). This candid reflection exposes how women's unpaid work functions as a visible extension of the church's moral presence. Acts of care are not only meaningful in themselves; they are also read as evidence of the church's relevance and compassion. Yet the visibility of faith does not always translate into recognition for the women who perform it. Instead, their labour becomes absorbed into the institutional reputation of the church, reinforcing the paradox in which women make faith visible while remaining personally invisible.

A third participant reflected on how her relationship to the church has been shaped through long-term service: "I was a Sunday school teacher… this one is different… the church is something else for me" (Nandi). Her words suggest that faith has been reconfigured through practice. Church is no longer only a place of worship or membership; it is a space where identity has been formed through sustained action. Belonging is produced through doing rather than declaring, through long-term commitment rather than formal affiliation.

These accounts show that women's faith operates in the public sphere as lived witness. Ukuphila ngokwenkolo is enacted through care that builds trust, service that shapes institutional reputation, and sustained presence that redefines belonging. Faith is not confined to private belief or verbal confession; it is made legible through action, through what women do, how they show up, and the responsibilities they carry. At the same time, this visibility exposes a persistent tension. While faith becomes highly visible through women's unpaid labour, the women who enact it often remain unnamed and unrewarded. Their work becomes the means through which faith is recognised in public life, even as they themselves recede into the background of the institutions and communities they sustain. In this way, Section 6.7 demonstrates that women are not only sustaining community life through unpaid work; they are actively doing theology from below, producing meaning, authority, and witness through everyday practices that keep faith alive in lived form.

Seeing, Naming and Valuing Women's Work

The preceding discussion demonstrates that participants understood their volunteer work as a public expression of their faith. Through organising feeding schemes, supporting vulnerable

families, teaching children, visiting the sick and responding to community crises, they believed they were making God's love visible within their communities. Their volunteer work became powerful forms of public witness through which churches established trust, demonstrated compassion and extended their presence beyond church buildings. Yet, despite the visibility of their unpaid work, participants also described how their contributions often remained unnoticed, unrecognised or taken for granted. This means that those through whom God's work becomes visible remain largely invisible themselves.

Christian reflections on work within the field of theology of work have consistently grounded their understanding of human work in the doctrine of the imago Dei, arguing that the dignity and value of all work begin with the affirmation that every human being is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27; Volf, 2001; Le Bruyns, 2005; Forster, 2020). Human dignity is not determined by status, remuneration or institutional position but by God's gracious act of creation (Ehusani, 2025). This has important implications for understanding unpaid work. If every person bears the image of God, then the work through which people nurture life, restore relationships and sustain communities also possesses profound theological significance. The participants' stories illustrate this clearly. Their volunteer work was not peripheral to the Church's mission; it was one of the primary ways in which God's care became tangible within everyday community life. Feeding hungry families, accompanying vulnerable neighbours, caring for children and sustaining local ministries were not simply practical tasks. They were acts through which God's love was embodied in the lives of others. Theological reflection on human dignity reinforces this understanding by emphasising that affirming human dignity is itself an expression of Christian mission (Mellows and Du Toit, 2023). Faith communities contribute to social transformation by recognising the inherent dignity of every person. Therefore, the doctrine of the imago Dei requires communities to value every human contribution as participation in God's creative purposes (Ehusani, 2025). Read in this light, women's unpaid volunteer work is not merely an act of appreciation, but a theological affirmation of the image of God reflected in their lives and labour.

Participants' narratives also reveal a persistent tension between visibility and recognition. While women became the people whom communities relied upon in times of need, they also described their work as ordinary, expected and rarely acknowledged. Their labour strengthened churches, supported families and sustained local networks of care, yet it frequently remained absent from formal leadership structures and institutional recognition. South African

theological scholarship argues that care work often becomes invisible precisely because it is associated with women's presumed responsibilities rather than recognised as valuable social and theological labour (Marie, 2012; Nkosi, 2021). The findings therefore suggest that invisibility is not the absence of contribution but the failure to recognise contribution. This invisibility of women's contributions highlights the need for a transformative theological framework that values and affirms their roles in caregiving and community support. By recognising their labour as integral to the mission of the church, we can begin to challenge the narratives that render their efforts unacknowledged and elevate their dignity as co-creators in God's work. These experiences also resonate with insights from African women theologians who have argued that women's everyday practices of nurturing, caregiving and community building constitute important sites of theological knowledge, even when these practices remain marginal within institutional church life (Oduyoye, 2001a; Kanyoro, 2001; Phiri, 2004). Recognising women's lived experiences is essential for building churches characterised by justice, participation and mutual flourishing (Maseno, 2021; Naicker, 2024). This affirms that women's unpaid volunteer work should not be understood as peripheral to the Church's mission. Rather, it is one of the primary ways in which the Church embodies the gospel within everyday community life.

Participants also challenge churches to reconsider what counts as ministry and whose work is publicly valued. Although many occupied no formal leadership positions, their everyday acts of care functioned as visible expressions of Christian witness. Their experiences, therefore, echo Paul's description of the Church as one body in which every member contributes to its life and flourishing (1 Corinthians 12:12–27). Just as Paul argues that the parts of the body often considered less honourable deserve greater recognition, participants' narratives suggest that those whose work sustains the daily life of faith communities should likewise be recognised as indispensable participants in God's mission (Lawson, 2024). Recognition, therefore, becomes more than institutional appreciation; it becomes a theological practice that affirms the dignity, agency and vocation of those whose labour sustains both church and community.

From the perspective of the AFTOW, making women's work visible requires more than documenting their contributions. It calls for a theological reorientation that intentionally names, values and transforms the structures through which unpaid labour has become normalised. Building on Nkosi's (2021) call for an African feminist theology of work, this study argues that

visibility itself is a matter of theological justice. AFTOW therefore contends that faithful communities are not simply those that benefit from women's service, but those that intentionally recognise, share and affirm the labour through which God's mission is embodied. Naming women's work is consequently not only an act of social recognition but also an act of theological witness that reflects God's commitment to justice, dignity and the flourishing of all who participate in God's work.

6.9. Conclusion

This chapter has traced the paradox at the heart of women's unpaid volunteerism in South African faith communities. Through the framework of Ubunzima Bezandla, I showed how volunteerism and care work are embedded in gendered expectations, unequal power relations, and religious discourses that normalise women's labour while rendering it invisible. At the same time, Izandla Ezibusisekileyo revealed why women continue to volunteer despite these injustices. Drawing on faith, cultural ethics such as *Izandla Ziyagezana*, church-based networks of *Ukubambana*, and lived theology (ukuphila ngokwenkolo), women sustain their work through moral meaning, relational support, and spiritual conviction. Together, these sections demonstrate that women's unpaid work is neither purely oppressive nor simply empowering. It is a site of tension, where burden and blessing coexist, and where women simultaneously reproduce and reconfigure the conditions of their labour. This chapter, therefore, makes visible both the costs and the resources of women's community-making work, setting the stage for the concluding chapter's reflection on what this labour gives back, to women, to communities, and to faith itself.

CHAPTER 7

BAYANGIPHILISA
– THEY GIVE ME LIFE

7.1. Introduction

This chapter returns to the phrase *bayangiphilisa*–they give me life, not only as a thematic conclusion, but as an epistemological point of departure for reflecting on what this study has sought to know, how that knowledge was produced, and why it remains necessarily unfinished. Throughout the research, women described their unpaid labour in the language of life, endurance, and survival. Their words named care as the work through which households, congregations, and neighbourhoods are sustained in contexts of economic scarcity, gendered vulnerability, and institutional absence. To say bayangiphilisa is therefore to articulate both a social reality and a theological claim about the forms of labour that hold life together when formal systems fail. Situated at the intersection of Theology and Development, this dissertation has examined the gendered organisation of unpaid community-making work within urban Black South African faith communities. It has traced how women navigate informal volunteerism, how care is moralised and distributed, how faith both sustains and constrains labour, and how gendered inequalities are reproduced through religious and cultural norms. This knowledge emerges not from abstract theory, but from women's narrated experiences, stories shaped by fatigue and conviction, frustration and prayer, and by the refusal to separate faith from survival.

This chapter, therefore, leads not with conceptual frameworks but with storytelling as a mode of knowledge. It reflects on what becomes visible when women's voices are treated as epistemic sources, how volunteerism appears when understood as lived and relational practice, and what it means to construct theology with women whose lives are structured by obligation and care. In doing so, it draws together the study's empirical and theoretical contributions and situates the AFTOW proposed in this study as an intentionally incomplete and open framework. The chapter also reflects on the methodological conditions under which this knowledge was generated. It concludes, as the study began, with women's voices, returning to the everyday

realities and forms of labour that are simultaneously burdensome and sustaining, exploited and meaningful, invisible and indispensable.

7.2. Key Findings of the Study

This study set out to examine what can be learned about the gendered nature of unpaid and community-making work among faith-based volunteers in South Africa, specifically how women navigate informal volunteerism, how care reproduces or contests gendered inequalities, and how faith shapes the meanings and organisation of labour in urban Black faith communities. Four interconnected findings emerge from the analysis:

7.2.1. Gendered Volunteerism as a Lived and Relational Practice

Women in this study describe volunteerism as deeply integrated into their daily lives and inseparable from other forms of responsibility. Care work unfolded in kitchens and hospital queues, during prayer meetings and burial preparations, through phone calls checking on sick neighbours and informal collections for funeral costs. These practices rarely bore the markers of "volunteering" as defined in formal development discourse. They were not scheduled, contracted, or institutionally recognised. Instead, they were relational and repetitive, shaped by proximity to need and by expectations about what it means to be a "good woman," a "faithful Christian," or a "responsible neighbour." Such accounts complicate dominant representations of volunteerism as discretionary or episodic service. For many participants, care was not something one opted into after fulfilling other obligations; it was the terrain on which life itself was organised. Women moved between childcare, elder support, congregational maintenance, and community caregiving without naming these activities as work, revealing volunteerism as part of the ordinary labour of social reproduction rather than as exceptional service.

This labour was also described as deeply relational. Women narrated how requests for help travelled along networks of kinship, friendship, and congregation rather than through formal channels. Need was recognised through presence: seeing an empty cupboard, noticing a child missing school, hearing of a death in the community. Responses were similarly embodied, bringing food, offering childcare, or accompanying someone to the clinic. In these interactions, care circulated as both obligation and gift, reinforcing bonds of mutual recognition while extending women's working days into the night. Gender shaped not only who performed this labour but how it was interpreted. Participants often spoke of their involvement in care work

as natural or divinely ordained. Men's participation, when it occurred, was more likely to be framed as leadership or ministry, while women's labour remained unnamed and taken for granted. Through such patterns, gendered divisions of labour were reproduced in subtle ways, normalised through religious language and cultural expectations rather than enforced through explicit rules.

Understanding volunteerism as lived and relational practice thus reveals how deeply it is entangled with women's identities and moral self-understandings. It also shows why unpaid labour becomes difficult to refuse: withdrawal risks being read as selfish, unfaithful, or indifferent to communal suffering. Gendered volunteerism, therefore, functions both as a source of connection and as a quiet discipline, binding women to socially necessary yet structurally invisible work.

7.2.2. Informal Volunteerism as Community Infrastructure

Informal volunteerism emerges as a form of social infrastructure that sustains everyday life in contexts of chronic inequality. Unpaid labour was described as responding to gaps left by overstretched households, under-resourced congregations, and fragile public services. Feeding schemes, childcare arrangements, home-based care, emotional support, and assistance with accessing clinics or social grants functioned as informal systems of provision. In communities marked by unemployment and precarious housing, women's unpaid work often constituted the first response to crisis. When food ran out, neighbours shared what they had. When illness struck, women organised transport, washed bodies, prepared meals, and sat through long nights of vigil. When death occurred, it was women who organised funerals, gathered contributions, and sustained bereaved families long after formal condolences had ended.

Understanding these practices as community infrastructure shifts how volunteerism is conceptualised within Theology and Development. Rather than treating care work as marginal or charitable, this framing recognises it as foundational to social reproduction. Women's labour did not merely supplement existing systems; it frequently substituted for them. Clinics were navigable because women accompanied one another. Schools functioned because women ensured children were fed and clothed. Churches maintained their moral authority because women cleaned, organised, counselled, and prayed in the background. Yet these roles remained largely unacknowledged, and this invisibility is not accidental. Informal volunteerism operates

precisely because it is naturalised as women's moral duty rather than recognised as work that carries economic and emotional cost. In this sense, women's unpaid labour sustains life while absorbing the shock of inequality in ways that protect institutions from accountability. Naming informal volunteerism as infrastructure, therefore, makes visible what has long been hidden: that the stability of communities rests on unpaid, feminised labour that is often overlooked, yet without which social life would simply not hold.

7.2.3. Faith as Resource and Constraint in Women's Labour

Faith emerged as one of the most significant resources through which women made sense of their unpaid labour. Community work was described as obedience to God, compassion in action, or response to divine calling. Religious language reframed exhaustion as sacrifice and routine care as ministry. In contexts lacking material reward or recognition, faith provided a moral grammar that rendered women's labour intelligible and worthwhile. The belief that their work was seen by God, even when overlooked by institutions, sustained their willingness to continue. Prayer, worship, and biblical narratives of service shaped how women interpreted both suffering and perseverance. Through such frameworks, care became a social necessity and a spiritual practice, enacted through the body, time, and emotional labour.

Faith did more than motivate; it also structured expectations. Discourses of servanthood, humility, and self-sacrifice subtly positioned women as morally suited to care, while men's contributions were more readily associated with leadership or visible ministry. In this way, religious commitment became entangled with gendered obligation, binding women to forms of work that were difficult to negotiate or withdraw from, revealing a tension at the heart of faith-based volunteerism. On the one hand, faith operated as a source of dignity and endurance, offering women interpretive tools through which to claim value in conditions that often devalued them. On the other hand, it functioned as a disciplinary force, shaping ideals of femininity around availability, patience, and emotional generosity. Women were not unaware of this tension. Several participants articulated moments of doubt, resentment, or quiet resistance, even as they continued to frame their labour in religious terms. Such expressions complicate any simple portrayal of faith as either oppressive or liberatory. Rather, faith appeared as a terrain of negotiation, where strength and exhaustion coexisted.

Understanding faith as both a resource and a constraint, therefore, deepens the analysis of unpaid labour beyond questions of motivation alone. It draws attention to the theological architectures that shape how work is valued, distributed, and endured within religious communities. It also underscores the need for a re-theologising of labour that can affirm care as sacred without rendering women's overwork morally inevitable. Within the African Feminist Theology of Work proposed in this study, such re-theologising becomes an ethical imperative: to disentangle devotion from disposability, and to imagine forms of faith that sustain life without demanding its invisibility.

7.2.4. Unpaid Labour as Lived Theology

Women's unpaid labour in faith communities is not only socially necessary and morally framed, but also theologically generative. Through acts of care, women articulate understandings of God, duty, dignity, and hope rarely formalised in doctrine, yet are no less complex or consequential. Their work becomes a site where theology is enacted through bodies moving between homes and hospitals, through hands preparing food and washing wounds, through time given to others where time itself is scarce. Participants did not consistently name their labour as theology, yet their decisions were saturated with theological reasoning, about whom to help, how long to endure, and when to persist. Unpaid labour functioned as practical theology produced in everyday life rather than institutional settings such as seminaries or synods. It was in this everyday life that questions of justice, suffering, sacrifice, and faithfulness were worked through, often without the conceptual tools afforded to academic theologians, yet with a depth born of sustained encounter with need.

This lived theology was neither uniform nor static. Younger women often spoke of volunteering in relation to aspiration and visibility, hoping that faithfulness might open pathways to paid work or social mobility. Older women framed their labour in the language of legacy, endurance, and moral example. Across these differences, however, care emerged as a central theological idiom, a way of understanding what it means to live well before God and within community, even when such living exacted a heavy toll. Also, this theology did not romanticise suffering in simple terms. While participants frequently described their work as meaningful, they also acknowledged exhaustion, frustration, and moments of despair. Their faith did not erase these realities but coexisted with them, offering neither complete consolation nor total justification. Their faith held tension between hope and resignation, calling and

compulsion. Such narratives refuse neat theological resolution often sought in theological discourse; instead, they hold together contradiction as a condition of lived faith.

To recognise unpaid labour as lived theology is to challenge dominant assumptions about where theological knowledge resides and who is authorised to produce it. Within the African Feminist Theology of Work presented in this study, women's labour is understood as a primary locus of theological reflection in which divine presence, social obligation, and gendered vulnerability intersect. This reframing does not deny the costs of unpaid labour, nor does it sanctify inequality. Rather, it insists that women's practices of care already constitute a form of theological reasoning, one that demands to be taken seriously within both ecclesial and academic spaces. In doing so, it opens the possibility of a Theology of Work that begins not with abstract accounts of vocation or productivity, but with the fragile, sustaining labour through which communities are held together daily.

7.3. Contributions of the Study

This study makes empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions to scholarship at the intersection of theology, gender, and development. All three contributions help understand unpaid faith-based labour as a central social practice, a site of theological knowledge, and a domain shaped by inequality and moral meaning.

7.3.1. Empirical Contributions

Integrating survey data and in-depth narrative interviews, this study challenges the marginal status often assigned to volunteerism in development research. Rather than treating volunteerism as marginal or supplementary, it demonstrates that unpaid care constitutes a central organising feature of social life in many urban Black South African communities. First, the study provides empirical evidence that faith-based volunteerism is overwhelmingly feminised; women perform the majority of unpaid care work and carry responsibility for its coordination, emotional labour, and continuity. Tasks such as feeding schemes, home-based care, funeral assistance, childcare, and congregational maintenance are routinely assumed to be women's work and normalised through cultural expectations and reinforced by religious language. This gendered pattern is not incidental but structural, reproduced through everyday practices. Second, the research documents how informal volunteerism operates as a primary mechanism through which communities manage vulnerability. Participants' accounts show that

unpaid labour often substitutes for formal welfare provision, mediating access to food, healthcare, transport, and emotional support. The empirical material thus challenges development frameworks that locate social protection primarily in the state or non-governmental sector, revealing instead the extent to which survival is organised through unpaid work.

Third, the study contributes to understanding the moral economy within which unpaid labour is embedded. Women describe their work as situated within moral narratives of responsibility, faithfulness, and belonging. Acts of care were evaluated not only by their outcomes but by character such as generosity, obedience, patience, and spiritual maturity. These moral logics help explain why women continue to labour under conditions that offer little material return, and why refusal is often experienced as ethical failure. Fourth, the findings clarify the ambivalent role of faith. While religious belief provides motivation, dignity, and interpretive resources, it also legitimises unequal expectations and renders exploitation less visible. Women draw on faith to endure hardship, yet that same faith can be mobilised to silence critique of the gender division of labour. Lastly, by privileging women's narrated experiences, the study brings into view forms of knowledge that are rarely captured in institutional surveys or policy-oriented research. Participants articulate their labour through idioms of calling, obligation, exhaustion, and hope, revealing that unpaid work cannot be fully understood through quantitative measures alone. These empirical contributions reframe faith-based volunteerism as a site where gender, labour, and theology converge in ways that are socially consequential and analytically under-theorised, providing the grounding for the theoretical framework developed in this study.

7.3.2. Theoretical Contributions

Beyond its empirical findings, this study offers a conceptual contribution in the form of an African Feminist Theology of Work. AFTOW is proposed as a contextual theological framework rather than a closed or comprehensive systematic theory. It seeks to re-centre unpaid, informal, and gendered labour as a primary site of theological reflection and ethical concern. It emerges from women's narrated experiences of care, obligation, faith, and survival, rather than being imposed as an abstract system upon them. AFTOW brings into dialogue GAD scholarship, SRT, sociology of volunteerism, AWT, and contemporary debates within the theology of work. In doing so, it challenges dominant assumptions about what counts as work,

whose labour is visible, and where theological knowledge is produced. It insists that everyday practices through which women sustain households and communities are central to understanding faith under conditions of structural inequality.

Mainstream theological accounts of work privilege paid employment and formal vocation, rendering unpaid care marginal or invisible. When acknowledged, women's labour is often sentimentalised as duty rather than analysed as work shaped by power and inequality. Similarly, dominant theories of volunteerism conceptualise service as discretionary and time-limited, presuming distinctions between work and volunteering that collapse in contexts of poverty and unemployment. For participants in this study, care was continuous, morally compelled, and intertwined with survival. Development theory, for its part, tends to treat unpaid labour as a variable within household coping strategies rather than as a lived reality infused with moral and spiritual meaning. Across these traditions, women's embodied experience is marginalised, and labour is separated from theology. AFTOW arises from these absences. It responds to frameworks that treat unpaid labour as supplementary, volunteerism as elective, and theology as detached from material conditions.

AFTOW introduces several conceptual shifts. First, it redefines work to include the practices through which life is sustained: caring, organising, cleaning, counselling, praying, and accompanying the sick. These are named as labour requiring skill, time, and endurance. Second, it conceptualises community-making work as labour that produces social cohesion, moral order, and collective survival, not merely individual support. Third, it theorises faith as social and spiritual capital embedded in labour practices, both of which sustain resilience and regulate gendered expectations. Fourth, it positions unpaid labour as a primary site of theological knowledge, expanding who counts as a theologian and where theology is produced. Finally, it integrates economic, cultural, and religious dimensions as mutually constitutive rather than analytically separate. These innovations reposition women's unpaid labour from the margins to the centre of theological and development discourse.

AFTOW is grounded in a specific context: urban Black South African Christian communities shaped by unemployment, fragile public services, complex religious life, and gender inequality. It does not claim universality nor exhaustiveness. Its feminist orientation foregrounds women's voices while leaving other dynamics, men's care work, non-Christian contexts, and rural settings less explored. These are boundaries rather than failures. The framework is therefore

offered as provisional and open, inviting dialogue with systematic and biblical theology, feminist economics, development studies, and sociology of religion. By acknowledging its partiality, AFTOW resists the temptation to present coherence as completeness. Instead, it affirms incompleteness as a condition of ethical scholarship in a field marked by inequality and diversity. In this sense, the framework aligns with the broader argument of this dissertation: that theological reflection on work must remain attentive to voices at the margins and open to continual revision as new stories, struggles, and interpretations come into view.

7.3.3. Methodological Contributions

Central to this dissertation is the conviction that women's stories are not simply sources of illustration or background context, but sites of knowledge production in their own right. Participants' narratives do more than describe unpaid labour; they interpret it, assign moral value to it, and situate it within religious, familial, and communal worlds. Storytelling thus functions as an epistemological practice through which women theorise their own lives, even when such reflection is not named as theology or analysis. Writing about unpaid work through women's narratives takes seriously the long-standing claim of African women theologians that theology is generated in ordinary spaces of struggle, care, and endurance. Participants spoke of volunteerism as both ubizo (calling) and exhaustion, as spiritual fulfilment and economic necessity, as joy and burden. These tensions are not analytical failures but forms of lived reasoning that hold contradiction without forcing resolution. Narration also resists the abstraction typical of development discourse. Women locate care within dense networks of relationships, between neighbours, church members, kin, and God, moving fluidly between prayer and budgeting, compassion and calculation. Through this narrative movement, unpaid labour appears not as marginal but as ordinary infrastructure in contexts where insecurity is routine, and state provision is thin.

The study was shaped by a commitment to work with women as participants in knowledge production rather than as objects of investigation. Interviews unfolded as relational conversations in which women determined what to foreground, what to narrate indirectly, and what to withhold. Their stories were treated as interpretive acts through which they made sense of labour, faith, and social position. This stance disrupted conventional hierarchies between researcher and researched. While the project remained guided by analytical questions, its conceptual direction was repeatedly reshaped by women's concerns, fatigue, unrecognised

contribution, disappointment in institutions, and ambivalence toward care itself. The framework developed here is therefore not merely informed by women's experiences but co-constituted through them. Researching with women also meant recognising the uneven risks embedded in the research encounter. Participants spoke from conditions of economic insecurity and gendered vulnerability. Their willingness to narrate was an act of trust that carried ethical weight beyond formal consent. Knowledge emerged within relationships marked by exposure, reciprocity, and moral responsibility.

The relational character of the research was inseparable from my social location as a Black South African woman, shaped by similar religious and gendered expectations as many participants. Shared language, faith practices, and moral worlds created conditions of recognition that enabled certain conversations to occur and rendered everyday assumptions about care analytically visible. This proximity, however, did not erase power differences. My institutional position introduced asymmetries that required ongoing reflexivity in how questions were framed, silences respected, and narratives represented. What participants chose not to say, about church conflict or resentment, also reflected the risks of speaking critically within close-knit communities. Treating positionality as a methodological resource, therefore, meant acknowledging both its openings and its limits. It enabled access to intimate accounts while demanding vigilance against assumptions of sameness. The knowledge produced is thus situated, shaped by relationships marked by gender, race, class, and shared histories, rather than neutral or detached.

In contexts of economic insecurity and gendered violence, ethical research could not be reduced to procedural compliance alone. Participants shared stories from within conditions of ongoing vulnerability, requiring an ethics grounded in relationship rather than regulation. Trust was built slowly through attentiveness, consistency, and practices that signalled reliability and care beyond the formal moment of the interview. Every day, logistical arrangements became part of this ethical labour. Meetings were held in familiar, neutral restaurants rather than private or isolated spaces, both to minimise risk and to avoid placing participants in situations that could expose them to suspicion or harm. In addition, before each meeting, I changed my WhatsApp profile picture to a photograph taken that morning, showing what I was wearing and how my hair was styled. This enabled participants to recognise me immediately in public spaces and to confirm that they were meeting the correct person. In a social context where women are often targeted in malls and restaurants, and where cases of disappearance and

trafficking are part of everyday public consciousness, such measures were not incidental but essential to creating minimal conditions of safety and mutual assurance.

Attention to safety also shaped the timing and pacing of interviews, as well as decisions about when to end conversations or relocate if discomfort became visible. These choices sometimes limited the amount of data that could be gathered, but they prioritised participants' dignity and bodily security over analytical completeness. The study, therefore, affirms that what can be known about unpaid labour is inseparable from how knowledge is produced: through fragile relationships negotiated under conditions of inequality, fear, and constraint, and sustained through small, practical acts of care that make research encounters possible at all.

7.4. Implications

The findings and conceptual framework developed in this study carry implications that extend beyond academic debate. They call for substantive rethinking within theology and theological education, within the everyday practices of churches and faith communities, and within development policy and practice. These implications challenge institutions that benefit from women's labour to reckon more seriously with its organisation, meaning, and cost.

7.4.1. Implications for Theology and Theological Education

The findings of this study call for a reorientation of how work is conceptualised within Christian theology and taught within theological institutions. If women's unpaid labour constitutes one of the primary ways in which faith is enacted and communities are sustained, then its marginalisation within theological discourse is not a neutral oversight but a distortion of lived religious reality. Dominant theologies of work continue to equate vocation with paid employment, professional identity, or formal ministry. Such frameworks obscure the labour through which social life is daily reproduced and privilege forms of productivity historically associated with male participation in public institutions. Re-theologising work from women's experiences requires expanding theological attention to include caregiving, emotional labour, and community organisation as sites of divine calling and ethical significance.

Recognising unpaid labour as lived theology also unsettles conventional assumptions about where theological knowledge is produced. Women who feed, organise, nurse, counsel, and accompany others are not merely recipients of theology but active interpreters of faith. They

negotiate questions of suffering, obligation, dignity, and hope in the midst of ordinary life. Theological education that remains confined to textual mastery and doctrinal abstraction risks reproducing a hierarchy between academic theology and everyday religious practice, thereby silencing the epistemic contributions of those whose labour sustains churches themselves. These insights suggest the need for curricular reform within seminaries and faculties of theology. Courses on vocation, ethics, ecclesiology, and social justice should engage unpaid and informal labour as central theological categories rather than peripheral concerns. Incorporating women's narratives into theological training would not only diversify sources of knowledge but also ground doctrinal reflection in embodied social realities.

Finally, ministerial formation must confront gendered expectations of service. When clergy are trained within frameworks that naturalise women's unpaid labour as spiritual duty, they may unknowingly reproduce patterns of extraction within congregational life. A feminist-informed Theology of Work would instead equip leaders to recognise the costs of care, to question unequal distributions of labour, and to cultivate ecclesial practices that protect rather than quietly deplete those who sustain communal life.

7.4.2. Implications for Churches and Faith Communities

If women's unpaid labour constitutes a central pillar of congregational life, churches cannot remain neutral regarding how this labour is organised, valued, and distributed. This study shows that many faith communities depend materially and symbolically on women's care while rarely naming it as work or attending to its cumulative effects. A first implication concerns visibility and recognition. Much of women's labour occurs in the background: cleaning church spaces, preparing food, visiting the sick, organising funerals, maintaining prayer networks, and supporting families in crisis. These practices are often framed as "helping" or "serving" rather than as sustained work requiring skill, time, and emotional investment. Churches must develop ways to publicly acknowledge this labour and engage seriously with questions of workload, exhaustion, and sustainability. A second implication concerns redistribution. The concentration of care work among women is neither natural nor inevitable, even when culturally normalised or theologically justified. Leadership structures, ministry teams, and volunteer systems actively shape who serves and how. Intentional efforts to involve men in caregiving and community support, and to broaden what counts as legitimate ministry, would challenge the persistent association between femininity and availability.

The theological language of service also requires critical scrutiny. Discourses of calling, sacrifice, and humility profoundly shape moral self-understanding. When applied selectively to women's labour, they can transform devotion into obligation and endurance into spiritual virtue. Churches, therefore, face the task of articulating forms of discipleship that affirm care as sacred without rendering women's overwork morally compulsory. Pastoral training constitutes a crucial site of intervention. Leaders need tools to recognise unpaid labour as labour, to identify patterns of gendered extraction, and to respond ethically to caregivers' vulnerability. Without such formation, institutional dependence on invisible work remains both unexamined and intact. Ultimately, churches committed to justice cannot confine that commitment to preaching or public advocacy. It must extend to their internal labour economies. To benefit from women's work while ignoring its conditions is to participate, however unintentionally, in the reproduction of inequality.

7.4.3. Implications for Development Policy and Practice

The empirical and theoretical insights of this study also carry significant implications for development policy and practice. By documenting how faith-based care functions as informal community infrastructure, it exposes the extent to which social survival is organised through gendered unpaid labour rather than formal systems. This study, therefore, contributes to debates on social protection by reframing unpaid faith-based care not as a residual household activity but as a foundational component of welfare provision that is systematically externalised onto women under conditions of poverty and limited state support. Development frameworks frequently acknowledge unpaid care work in principle, yet struggle to integrate it meaningfully into policy design, budgeting, and evaluation. When such labour is treated as a natural household function rather than as work with economic and bodily costs, it remains politically invisible. Current indicators rarely capture the intensity, continuity, and moral force of women's labour. Time-use surveys and household metrics offer partial insight but fail to register the relational obligations and theological meanings that bind women to ongoing service. More adequate approaches must attend not only to hours worked but to the structures of responsibility within which care is sustained.

The study further raises questions about social protection. When unpaid labour substitutes for public provision, women absorb the risks of unemployment, illness, and food insecurity.

Policies that implicitly rely on this labour without effectively supporting caregivers transfer the burdens of structural inequality onto those least resourced to carry them. Recognising caregivers as economic actors entitled to material support, through income grants, healthcare access, childcare, and community resources, would mark an important shift toward distributive justice. Faith communities' role in development initiatives also warrants reconsideration. Churches are often treated as convenient partners because of their reach and moral authority. Yet where internal labour arrangements remain gendered and invisible, such partnerships risk intensifying the extraction of women's work. Development practice must therefore attend not only to institutional capacity but to the gendered economies that make such capacity possible. Finally, policy must take seriously the interpretive worlds of those who labour. Women do not understand their work solely in economic terms but through moral and theological narratives of duty and compassion. Ignoring these meanings misrecognises both constraint and motivation; celebrating them uncritically risks sanctifying inequality. An approach informed by AFT holds these tensions together, affirming the dignity of care while refusing its naturalisation.

7.5. Beyond This Study: Intentionally Incomplete and Future Directions

This dissertation has argued that women's unpaid labour in faith communities constitutes a central yet systematically overlooked site of social reproduction and theological meaning. In doing so, it has sought to make visible forms of work that sustain life while remaining structurally marginal to both theological reflection and development policy. Yet the very realities this study seeks to name, precarity, gendered obligation, religious ambivalence, and ongoing care, resist definitive closure. For this reason, the study is offered not as a comprehensive account of women's labour or a finished Theology of Work, but as an intentionally incomplete intervention. This incompleteness is not the result of analytical limitation or empirical insufficiency. It reflects a methodological and theological judgement about the nature of the subject itself. Women's labour is dynamic, internally contradictory, and embedded in shifting social and religious conditions. Any attempt to stabilise it within a closed theoretical system would risk reproducing the abstractions through which women's experiences have historically been marginalised. To claim completeness in this context would be to mistake coherence for fidelity.

The African Feminist Theology of Work proposed in this study is therefore offered as a framework in motion. While it reorients theological attention toward unpaid, informal, and feminised labour, it does not resolve the full range of doctrinal, biblical, and ecclesiological questions raised by such a shift. Issues of suffering, vocation, embodiment, divine justice, and institutional responsibility demand sustained engagement across theological subfields. Addressing them adequately requires dialogue with systematic theologians, biblical scholars, ethicists, and practitioners whose approaches extend beyond the narrative and contextual focus of this research. To situate the dissertation as incomplete is also to recognise its contextual boundaries. The analysis is grounded in urban Black South African Christian communities and shaped by particular histories of economic marginalisation, religious practice, and gendered inequality. While some patterns may resonate more widely, the framework does not claim universal applicability. Other contexts, rural settings, non-Christian traditions, different political economies, and men's experiences of care remain insufficiently explored. These absences mark not failures of method but limits of scope, and they signal where further work is both necessary and ethically required.

Future research could extend this inquiry in several directions. Comparative studies across Christian denominations could examine how different theological traditions structure expectations of women's labour. Research in rural communities may reveal alternative configurations of care, kinship, and faith-based obligation. Studies of men's participation in unpaid labour could illuminate the processes through which care is avoided, delegated, or renegotiated. Interfaith research could explore whether similar moral economies of service and sacrifice operate within Muslim, Hindu, or indigenous religious communities. There is also significant scope for deeper engagement with systematic and biblical theology. Bringing women's lived practices of care into sustained conversation with doctrinal traditions and scriptural interpretation could further challenge dominant accounts of vocation, productivity, and suffering. In development studies, future work might investigate how informal volunteerism can be recognised and supported without being bureaucratised or instrumentalised, and how social protection policies might redistribute rather than quietly rely upon women's labour.

Finally, incompleteness functions here not only as an academic position but as an ethical stance. Women's narratives in this study repeatedly resist resolution. They hold together commitment and resentment, meaning and depletion, faith and fatigue. Any theological

account that sought to resolve these tensions into harmony would do violence to the texture of lived experience. To remain open-ended is therefore a form of scholarly restraint and a refusal to claim authority over lives that remain in motion. In this sense, the unfinished character of the dissertation mirrors the unfinished character of the social world it describes. Care continues. Need multiplies. Faith is reworked daily under conditions that rarely change as quickly as theological language does. To acknowledge this is not to weaken the study's contribution, but to situate it honestly within the ongoing labour of women whose work exceeds any single framework or author.

7.6. Closing Reflections: "There Is Still So Much to Be Done"

In one of the final interviews conducted for this study, a participant reflected on her daily routines of care, preparing food for neighbours, visiting the sick, organising church activities, and attending to family responsibilities. When asked how she managed to continue, she paused and replied simply that there was always more waiting: more people to help, more needs to meet, more suffering that could not be postponed. "Kusekhona okuningi okufanele kwenziwe," she said. There is still so much to be done. This statement captures the orientation of many women whose lives form the substance of this dissertation. Their labour does not move toward completion or resolution. It unfolds through repetition, through the steady return of hunger, illness, loneliness, and loss. Care does not conclude; it accumulates. Yet it is within this accumulation that meaning is forged. Women continue not only because they must, but because their work sustains relationships, preserves dignity, and affirms belonging in contexts where survival itself remains fragile. To return to bayangiphilisa is therefore to name a paradox. Women's unpaid labour gives life to others: to families, churches, and communities. At the same time, it often depletes their bodies, time, and futures. It is sustaining and extractive, chosen and imposed, sacred and taken for granted. It carries the weight of gendered expectation and the texture of moral purpose. It is lived at the intersection of faith and fatigue.

This dissertation has sought to take that paradox seriously. It has traced how women navigate volunteerism not as an abstract category but as an everyday reality shaped by economic insecurity, religious obligation, and proximity to need. It has argued that their labour constitutes a form of lived theology: a practical reasoning about God, responsibility, endurance, and hope enacted through care. It has proposed an African Feminist Theology of Work as one way of naming and analysing this reality without collapsing it into either heroism or victimhood. Yet

the women whose stories ground this study do not offer a final word. They offer continuity. They speak of tomorrow's tasks, the next funeral, another child who will need food, another neighbour who will fall ill. Their narratives do not resolve into conclusions; they remain open, unfinished, carried forward by necessity as much as by conviction. In this sense, their lives mirror the incompleteness claimed by this dissertation itself. To end with their voices is to acknowledge that theological reflection on work cannot outpace the labour it seeks to understand. Scholarship follows where care has already gone. It names what women have long been doing, often without language that grants their work public or theological weight. And it remains accountable to the fact that while theories are written, labour continues.

There is still so much to be done!

Not only in communities, where women will wake again to tasks that cannot be deferred. But also in theology, in churches, and in development practice, where institutions have learned to depend on care without fully recognising its cost. The work of re-theologising labour, of redistributing responsibility, and of making visible what has long been hidden remains unfinished. To say bayangiphilisa is therefore not to close the conversation, but to situate it where it belongs: among women whose hands are tired, whose faith is complex, whose labour is indispensable, and whose work continues to give life, even as it asks more than it should.

REFERENCES

Adeyemi, O.E., Odusina, K.E. and Akintoye, A.E. (2016) 'Religion and labour force participation in Nigeria: is there any inequality among women?', African Journal of Reproductive Health, 20(3), pp. 75–84.

Adonis, M.M. (2017) An African women's theological analysis of a development programme: "Churches, Channels of Hope". Master's thesis. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

Akintola, O. (2008a) 'Defying all odds: coping with the challenges of volunteer caregiving for patients with AIDS in South Africa', Journal of Advanced Nursing, 63(4), pp. 357–365.

Akintola, O. (2008b) 'Unpaid HIV/AIDS care in Southern Africa: forms, context, and implications', Feminist Economics, 14(4), pp. 117–147.

Akintola, O. (2010a) 'Perceptions of rewards among volunteer caregivers of people living with AIDS working in faith-based organizations in South Africa: a qualitative study', Journal of the International AIDS Society, 13(1), pp. 1–10.

Akintola, O. (2010b) 'What motivates people to volunteer? The case of volunteer AIDS caregivers in faith-based organizations in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', Health Policy and Planning, 26(1), pp. 53–62.

Aleksandra Maria, F. (2019) A conceptual model of volunteer well-being: a hermeneutic phenomenological study. Doctoral thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Alsdorf, K.L. (2014) 'Interview: Katherine Leary Alsdorf', in Gill, D. (ed.) Theology of work. Mockler Memo, pp. 1–7.

Ammerman, N.T., 2021. Studying lived religion: Contexts and practices. In Studying Lived Religion. New York University Press.

Asi, Y. and Williams, C. (2020) 'A woman's (unpaid) work: global perspectives on gender, healthcare, and caregiving', in Three facets of public health and paths to improvements. Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp. 261–294.

Ayanga, H.O. (2016) 'Voice of the voiceless: the legacy of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians', Verbum et Ecclesia, 37(2), pp. 1–6.

Bahn, K., Cohen, J. and van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. (2020) 'A feminist perspective on COVID-19 and the value of care work globally', Gender, Work & Organization, 27(5), pp. 695–699.

Basiliere, J. (2016) 'Women in development', in The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of gender and sexuality studies. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 1–3.

Bawa, A.C. and Pouris, A. (2023) 'An assessment of the economic impact of South Africa's public universities', South African Journal of Science, 119(9–10).

Benfante, A., Di Tella, M., Romeo, A. and Castelli, L. (2020) 'Traumatic stress in healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: a review of the immediate impact', Frontiers in Psychology, 11, Article 2816.

Bhattacharya, T. (2017) Social reproduction theory: remapping class, recentering oppression. London: Pluto Press.

Biru, M., Lundqvist, P., Molla, M., Jerene, D. and Hallström, I. (2015) 'Surviving overwhelming challenges: family caregivers' lived experience of caring for a child

diagnosed with HIV and enrolled in antiretroviral treatment in Ethiopia', Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing, 38(4), pp. 282–299.
Bompani, B. (2015) 'Religion and development in sub-Saharan Africa: an overview', in Tomalin, E. (ed.) The Routledge handbook of religions and global development. London: Routledge, pp. 101–113.
Boserup, E. (1970) Woman's role in economic development. London: Earthscan.
Boya, K.S. (2022) 'The ambivalence regarding volunteering and reward systems in church settings', HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies, 78(1), Article a7505.
Brear, M., Manderson, L., Nkovana, T., Mkhwanazi, S., Mkhonto, S., Mistri, P., Dayi, N. and Mabaso, M. (2024) 'Conceptualisations of "good care" within informal caregiving networks for older people in rural South Africa', Social Science & Medicine, 343, Article 116597.
Bruyns, C.L. (2018) 'Industrial theology in South Africa: Problems, priorities and prospects', Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa, 93(1), pp. 330–338. Available at: https://doi.org/10.7833/93-0-1373.
Budlender, D. (2008) The statistical evidence on care and non-care work across six countries. Gender and Development Programme Paper No. 4. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
Budlender, D. (2010) Time use studies and unpaid care work. London: Routledge.
Budlender, D. (2011) Statistics on informal employment in South Africa. WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 3. Cambridge, MA: WIEGO.
Budlender, D. (2012) 'Unpaid work and women's empowerment', in Shahra Razavi and Staab, S. (eds.) Handbook on gender and social policy. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 85–100.
Budlender, D. and Lund, F. (2011) 'South Africa: a legacy of family disruption', Development and Change, 42(4), pp. 925–946.
Bvuma, M.P. (2025) 'Robes of resistance: Black women, church uniforms, and decolonial identity in South African Independent Churches (AICs)', Pharos Journal of Theology, 106.
Casale, D. and Posel, D. (2002) 'The continued feminisation of the labour force in South Africa: an analysis of recent data and trends', South African Journal of Economics, 70(1), pp. 156–184.
Cavaliere, A. (2018) 'Romanticising female volunteering: the consequences of the "good woman" frame in international development', Progress in Development Studies, 18(1), pp. 20–35.
Cavaliere, P. (2018) 'Mothers and moral activists: observing religious informal volunteering in Japan', Journal of Religion in Japan, 7(2), pp. 93–125.
Chadwick, A. and Fadel, B. (2020) Volunteerism and community resilience: locally owned solutions delivering impact. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
Chant, S. (2008) 'The "feminisation of poverty" and the "feminisation" of anti-poverty programmes: room for revision?', Journal of Development Studies, 44(2), pp. 165–197.
Chilisa, B. (2012) 'Postcolonial indigenous research paradigms', in Chilisa, B. Indigenous research methodologies. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 98–127.

Chilongozi, D. (2022) ‘Women’s informal volunteerism and community development in Malawi’, Community Development Journal, 57(3), pp. 445–462.
Chilongozi, M.N.P.T.S.S.U. (2022) Microfinance as a tool for socio-economic empowerment of rural women in Northern Malawi: a practical theological reflection. Master’s thesis. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
Chisale, S. (2018) ‘Ubuntu as care: deconstructing the gendered Ubuntu’, Verbum et Ecclesia, 39(1), pp. 1–8.
Chisale, S. (2020) ‘“Deliver us from patriarchy”: a gendered perspective of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa and implications for pastoral care’, Verbum et Ecclesia, 41(1), pp. 1–8.
Chung, Y.B., Young, S.L. and Bezner Kerr, R. (2019) ‘Rethinking the value of unpaid care work: lessons from participatory visual research in central Tanzania’, Gender, Place & Culture, 26(11), pp. 1544–1569.
Chus, G. (2014) Volunteerism for gender equality. New York: United Nations Volunteers.
Chus, S. (2014) Volunteering and the state: from service delivery to governance. London: Routledge.
Cock, J., 1989. Maid and madams: Domestic workers under Apartheid.
Cohen, J. (2022) ‘Precarity of subsistence: social reproduction among South African nurses’, Feminist Economics, 28(4), pp. 1–26.
Collins, P.H. (2000) Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J.L., 2008. Of revelation and revolution, volume 1: Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness in South Africa (Vol. 1). University of Chicago Press.
Comaroff, J.L. and Comaroff, J., 2009. Of revelation and revolution, volume 2: The dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier (Vol. 2). University of Chicago Press.
Compion, S. (2016) Volunteering and democratization in Southern Africa: a structural and cultural analysis. Doctoral thesis. Canterbury: University of Kent.
Cornell, D. and van Marle, K. (2015) ‘Ubuntu feminism: tentative reflections’, Verbum et Ecclesia, 36(2), pp. 1–8.
Cosden, D. (2006) A theology of work: work and the new creation. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.
Crenshaw, K. (1989) ‘Demarginalising the intersection of race and sex: a Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics’, University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1), Article 8.
Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark, V.L. (2023) ‘Revisiting mixed methods research designs twenty years later’, in Handbook of mixed methods research designs. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 21–36.
Cronin, M.A. and George, E. (2023) ‘The why and how of the integrative review’, Organizational Research Methods, 26(1), pp. 168–192.
Cronin, P. and George, E. (2023) ‘The why and how of the integrative review’, Irish Journal of Medical Science, 192, pp. 1905–1911.
Dean, J. (2022) ‘Care, gender, and the moral economy of volunteering’, Gender, Work & Organization, 29(3), pp. 789–805.
Dean, J. (2022) ‘Informal volunteering, inequality, and illegitimacy’, Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 51(3), pp. 527–544.

del Villar-Toribio, C., Saavedra Macías, J. and Calderón-García, M. (2022) 'Caring through the lens of African feminisms: a systematic review', Revista Estudos Feministas, 30(3), Article e77471.
Denbow, C. and Watson, J. (n.d.) A snapshot of best practices and challenges. [Unpublished report].
Deranty, J-P. (2022) 'Recognition in a historical key: Axel Honneth on the history of recognition and social freedom', Journal of Social and Political Philosophy, 1(2), pp. 169–185.
Diouf, E.N., Dyer, U. and Gilbert, M. (2023) 'Our ubuntu: a Black feminist turn', Agenda, 37(2), pp. 4–14.
du Plessis, G.E. (2019) 'Gendered human (in)security in South Africa: what can ubuntu feminism offer?', Acta Academica, 51(2), pp. 44–65.
du Plessis, L.A. (2014) 'Practical theology and providing service: the service through love of the Mamas Africa in South African society', HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies, 70(2), Article a1931.
Dube, Z. (2016) 'The African Women Theologians' contribution towards the discussion about alternative masculinities', Verbum et Ecclesia, 37(2), pp. 1–6.
Dugarova, E. (2020) Unpaid care work in times of the COVID-19 crisis: gendered impacts, emerging evidence and promising policy responses. New York: United Nations.
Ehusani, R. (2025) 'Created in the image of God: Meaning and implications for humanity', International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation, 12(1), pp. 119–127. Available at: https://doi.org/10.51244/ijrsi.2025.12010011.
Einolf, C., Philbrick, D. and Slay, K. (2016) 'National differences in well-being among volunteers and non-volunteers in six European nations', VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 27, pp. 1529–1555.
Einolf, C.J., Prouteau, L., Nezhina, T. and Handy, F. (2016) 'Informal, unorganized volunteering', in Smith, D.H., Stebbins, R.A. and Grotz, J. (eds.) The Palgrave handbook of volunteering, civic participation, and nonprofit associations. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 223–241.
Elphick, R., 2012. The equality of believers: Protestant missionaries and the racial politics of South Africa. University of Virginia Press.
Elson, D. (1999) 'Labour markets as gendered institutions: equality, efficiency and empowerment issues', World Development, 27(3), pp. 611–627.
England, P. (2005) 'Emerging theories of care work', Annual Review of Sociology, 31, pp. 381–399.
Esquivel, V. (2014) 'What is a transformative approach to care, and why do we need it?', Gender & Development, 22(3), pp. 423–439.
Esquivel, V. (2014) The care economy in Latin America: putting care at the centre of the agenda. Santiago: ECLAC (United Nations).
Faronbi, J.O., Faronbi, G.O., Ayamolowo, S.J. and Olaogun, A.A. (2019) 'Caring for seniors with chronic illness: the lived experience of caregivers of older adults', Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics, 82, pp. 8–14.
Federici, S. (2012) Revolution at point zero: housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Ferrant, G., Pesando, L.M. and Nowacka, K. (2014) Unpaid care work: the missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes. Paris: OECD.
Fisseha, S., Sen, G., Ghebreyesus, T.A. and Rasanathan, K. (2021) 'COVID-19: the turning point for gender equality', The Lancet, 397(10271), pp. 117–118.
Floro, M.S. and Komatsu, H. (2011) 'Gender and work in South Africa: what can time-use data reveal?', Feminist Economics, 17(4), pp. 33–66.
Folbre, N. (1994) Who pays for the kids? gender and the structures of constraint. London: Routledge.
Folbre, N. (2001) The invisible heart: economics and family values. New York: The New Press.
Folbre, N. (2014a) 'The care economy in Africa: subsistence production and unpaid care', Journal of African Economies, 23(Suppl. 1), pp. i128–i156.
Folbre, N. (2014b) Valuing children: rethinking the economics of the family. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Forster, D. (2014) 'Called to work: a descriptive analysis of Call42's research on faith and work in South Africa', Koers – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship, 79(2), pp. 1–9.
Forster, D.A. (2020) 'Reflecting on the nature of work in contemporary South Africa: A public theological engagement with calling and vocation', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 76(2), pp. 1–10.
Fraser, N. (2016) 'Contradictions of capital and care', New Left Review, 100, pp. 99–117.
Friedemann-Sánchez, G. and Griffin, J.M. (2011) 'Defining the boundaries between unpaid labour and unpaid caregiving: review of the social and health sciences literature', Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 12(4), pp. 511–534.
Gaitskell, D., 2005. Devout Domesticity?. Readings in gender in Africa, p.177.
Gill, S. and Bakker, I. (2003) Power, production and social reproduction: human in/security in the global political economy. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Golder, R. (2011) 'Towards a theology of work from a perspective of women migrants', in Mtata, K. (ed.) Dignity of work: theological and interdisciplinary perspectives. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, pp. 35–50.
Gordon, S.F. (2021) 'Women, domestic labour and COVID-19: exploring the inequitable gendered impacts of COVID-19', Psicología Iberoamericana, 29(1).
Goundar, S. (2012) Research methodology and research methods. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
Grönlund, H., Holmes, K., Kang, C., Cnaan, R.A., Handy, F., Brudney, J.L., Haski-Leventhal, D., Hustinx, L., Kang, C. and Yamauchi, N. (2011) 'Cultural values and volunteering: a cross-cultural comparison of students' motivation to volunteer in 13 countries', Journal of Academic Ethics, 9(2), pp. 87–106.
Guérin, I., Hillenkamp, I. and Verschuur, C. (2021) 'Social reproduction: a key issue for feminist solidarity economy', in Guérin, I., Hillenkamp, I. and Verschuur, C. (eds.) Social reproduction, solidarity economy, feminisms and democracy: Latin America and India. London: Routledge, pp. 7–29.
Hackman, R. (2023) Emotional labor: the invisible work shaping our lives and how to claim our power. New York: Flatiron Books.
Haddad, B. (2004) 'The Manyano movement in South Africa: site of struggle, survival, and resistance', Agenda, 18(61), pp. 4–13.

Haddad, B.G. (2000) African women's theologies of survival: intersecting faith, feminisms, and development. PhD thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal.
Harcourt, W. (2023) 'Care, the economy and feminist political ecology', Feminist Economics, 29(1), pp. 1–22.
Harcourt, W. (2023) 'The ethics and politics of care: reshaping economic thinking and practice', Review of Political Economy, 35(1), pp. 1–17.
Hardt, M. (1999) 'Affective labour', boundary 2, 26(2), pp. 89–100.
Harvey, C. (2018) 'Blurring boundaries between researcher and participant: the ethical use of a psychoanalytically informed research interview', in Iphofen, R. and Tolich, M. (eds.) The SAGE handbook of qualitative research ethics. London: Sage, pp. 163–178.
Hassim, S., 2006. Women's organizations and democracy in South Africa: contesting authority. Univ of Wisconsin Press.
Hatton, E. (2017) 'Mechanisms of invisibility: rethinking the concept of invisible work', Work, Employment and Society, 31(2), pp. 336–351.
Hesse-Biber, S.N. (2010) Mixed methods research: merging theory with practice. New York: Guilford Press.
Himmelweit, S. (2007) 'The prospects for caring: economic theory and policy analysis', Cambridge Journal of Economics, 31(4), pp. 581–599.
Hirway, I. (2015) 'Unpaid work and the economy: linkages and their implications', Indian Journal of Labour Economics, 58(1), pp. 1–21.
Hochschild, A.R. (1983) The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Honneth, A. (1996) The struggle for recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Horwood, C., Haskins, L., Alfers, L., et al. (2019) Work and childcare among informal working mothers in Durban, South Africa. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
Hustinx, L., Cnaan, R.A. and Handy, F. (2010) 'Navigating theories of volunteering: a hybrid map for a complex phenomenon', Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 40(4), pp. 410–434.
Hustinx, L., Cnaan, R.A. and Handy, F., 2014. *Volunteerism and Volunteering*. In: D.A. Snow et al., eds. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
International Labour Organization (2019a) Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work. Geneva: ILO.
International Labour Organization (2019b) Work for a brighter future: Global Commission on the Future of Work. Geneva: ILO.
Jackson, A.Y. and Mazzei, L.A. (2009) Voice in qualitative inquiry: challenging conventional, interpretive, and critical conceptions in qualitative research. London: Routledge.
Jackson, L. and Adarlo, G. (2016) 'Bridging cultures through unpaid labor: US volunteer teachers' experiences in China's Yunnan Province', VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 27, pp. 2330–2352.
Johnsen, E.M.F. (2013) Volunteerism – an act of good will or a heritage of colonial power structures? A qualitative study of sport volunteers at the East Africa Cup, their

motivation and the applicability of Western theory. Master's thesis. Oslo: Norwegian School of Sport Sciences.
Johnsen, S. (2013) 'Informal volunteering in homelessness services: the benefits and limitations', Housing Studies, 28(6), pp. 890–910.
Kabeer, N. (1994) Reversed realities: gender hierarchies in development thought. London: Verso.
Kabugi, J.W. (2004) 'Women's empowerment through community health programmes in Kenya', Development in Practice, 14(4), pp. 503–517.
Kanyoro, M.R. (2001) 'Engendered communal theology: African women's contribution to theology in the 21st century', Feminist Theology, 27(2), pp. 36–56.
Keller, T. and Alsdorf, K. (2012) Every good endeavour: connecting your work to God's plan for the world. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
Kgatle, M.S. (2017) 'Servant leadership: Son of Man as minister and life giver in Mark 10:45', Journal of Pentecostal Theology, 26(2), pp. 286–298.
Kgatle, M.S. (2019) 'Gender dimensions in Pentecostal leadership: the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa as a case study', Verbum et Ecclesia, 40(1), pp. 1–7.
Kihuha, M.W. (2023) 'Appropriating ubuntu philosophy to women's existentialism in Africa', in Advances in psychology, mental health, and behavioural studies. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, pp. 181–196.
King, H.B. (2020) 'Whose work is real work? A triple labour framework for sustainable development initiatives', Economic Anthropology, 7(2), pp. 215–227.
Kretzschmar, L. (2012) 'Towards the Christian ethic of work in South Africa', Acta Theologica, 32(2), pp. 125–146.
Kristanto, D., Tompo, H.B., Silalahi, F.H.M., Ersada, L.A., Salurante, T., Wibowo, M. and Bilo, D.T. (2024) 'Hearing God's call one more time: Retrieving calling in theology of work', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 80(1). Available at: https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9703.
Laryeafio, M.N. and Ogbewe, O.C. (2023) 'Ethical consideration dilemma: systematic review of ethics in qualitative data collection through interviews', Journal of Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Technology, 3(2), pp. 94–110.
Lawson, J. (2024) 'Solidarity and brokenness in the body of Christ', The Ecumenical Review. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12841.
Le Bruyns, C. (2005) 'The world of work "as it is" and "as it could be"', South African Baptist Journal of Theology, 14, pp. 1–7.
Le Bruyns, C. (n.d.) Theological perspectives on the world of work: problems and prospects for socio-economic transformation. Stellenbosch: Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, University of Stellenbosch.
Le Roux, E. (2019) 'Can religious women choose? Holding the tension between complicity and agency', African Journal of Gender and Religion, 25(1), pp. 1–19.
Leszczyńska, M. (2019) 'The problem of unpaid work in households in the context of the evolution of contemporary socio-economic thought', Humanities and Social Sciences, 26(3), pp. 83–91.
Lund, F. (2010) 'Hierarchies of care work in South Africa: nurses, social workers and home-based care workers', International Labour Review, 149(4), pp. 495–509.

Luria, G., Cnaan, R.A. and Boehm, A. (2017) ‘Religious attendance and volunteering: testing national culture as a boundary condition’, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 56(3), pp. 577–599.

Madondo, M.C. (2009) An emerging form of the church? Community-based volunteers in HIV and AIDS work as a religious health asset. Master’s thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Makhulu, A. (2012) ‘The conditions of after-work: financialisation and informality in post-apartheid South Africa’, ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies, 11(3), pp. 391–410.

Makina, A. (2009) ‘Caring for people with HIV: state policies and their dependence on women’s unpaid work’, Gender & Development, 17(2), pp. 309–319.

Manchego, C. (2019) Volunteerism and development: a critical analysis. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Manchego, C.F. (2019) The role of gender in volunteerism for community resilience. Research report. [Place of publication unknown].

Mannerfelt, F. and Maurits, A. (2026) ‘The theology of vocation: The theological context’, in The First Ordained Women in the Church of Sweden. Manchester: Manchester University Press, Chapter 4. Available at: https://doi.org/10.7765/9789198994148.00010 (Accessed: 1 August 2026).

Marie, D. (2012) ‘The feminist challenge to the sacred: a critical analysis’, Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 28(2), pp. 89–108.

Marie, R.S. (2012) Towards a gendered theology of work: a case study of the paid and unpaid work experiences of Indian Christian women in Pietermaritzburg. Doctoral thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Marindi, I. and Batisai, K. (2024) ‘Optimism and resilience among the precariat: a gendered analysis of community home-based care work in South Africa’, Home Health Care Services Quarterly, 43(4), pp. 315–334.

Maseno, L. (2021) ‘African women’s theology and the re-imagining of community in Africa’, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 77(2).

Masenya, M. (2003) ‘Trapped between two canons: African–South African Christian women’s experiences’, Journal for the Study of Religion, 16(2), pp. 3–15.

Masenya, M.J. (2004) Proverbs 31:10–31 in a South African context: a Bosadi (womanhood) perspective. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press.

Matina, S.S., Manderson, L., Brear, M., Mkhwanazi, S., Mkhonto, S., Dayi, N. and Kahn, K. (2025) ‘Distribution of informal caregiving for older adults living with or at risk of cognitive decline within and beyond family in rural South Africa’, The Journals of Gerontology: Series B, 80(2), Article gbaf008.

Mbiti, J.S., 1990. African religions & philosophy. Heinemann.

McGuire, M.B., 2008. Lived religion: Faith and practice in everyday life. Oxford University Press.

Meier zu Selhausen, F. and Weisdorf, J. (2016) ‘A colonial legacy of African gender inequality? Evidence from Christian Kampala, 1895–2011’, Economic History Review, 69(1), pp. 229–257.

Mellows, S. and Du Toit, N.B. (2023) 'Social transformation through affirmation of human dignity in a faith-based organisation', Stellenbosch Theological Journal, 8(2). Available at: https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2022.v8n2.a10.

Merriam, S.B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M.-Y., Kee, Y., Ntseane, G. and Muhamad, M. (2001) 'Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures', International Journal of Lifelong Education, 20(5), pp. 405–416.

Metz, T. (2013) 'The Western ethic of care or an Afro-communitarian ethic? Specifying the right relational morality', Journal of Global Ethics, 9(1), pp. 77–92.

Metz, T., 2011. Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa. African human rights law journal, 11(2), pp.532-559.

Meyer, B. (2004) 'Christianity in Africa: from African Independent to Pentecostal-charismatic churches', Annual Review of Anthropology, 33, pp. 447–474.

Miranda, V. (2011) Cooking, caring and volunteering: unpaid work around the world. Paris: OECD.

Mkhize, N., 2008. Ubuntu and harmony: An African approach to morality and ethics.

Molyneux, M., 1979. Beyond the domestic labour debate. New Left Review, 116(3), p.27.

Montgomery, A. (2020) 'Difficult moments in the ethnographic interview: vulnerability, silence and rapport', in Gubrium, J.F., Holstein, J.A., Marvasti, A.B. and McKinney, K.D. (eds.) The SAGE handbook of interview research. 2nd edn. London: Sage, pp. 143–159.

Moser, C. (2012) Gender planning and development: theory, practice and training. London: Routledge.

Moyo, F.L. (2012) 'We demand bread and roses when we are hired: gender justice in workplaces: a feminist ethical perspective', The Ecumenical Review, 64(3), pp. 254–267.

Mtata, K. (ed.) (2011) Dignity of work: theological and interdisciplinary perspectives. Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press.

Murtola, A.-M. and Vallelly, N. (2023) 'Visible and invisible work in the pandemic: social reproduction and the ambivalent category of the essential worker', Journal of Gender Studies, 32(8), pp. 887–897.

Murtola, A.-M. and Vallelly, P. (2023) 'Invisible labour and social reproduction under financialised capitalism', Capital & Class, 47(1), pp. 3–22.

Musick, M.A. and Wilson, J. (2007) Volunteers: a social profile. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Musili, T.K. (2024) 'Deconstructing gendered glorification of charitable work: a case of women in Nomiya Church', HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies, 80(1), Article a9570.

Nackerdien, F. and Yu, D. (2021) 'Examining time use patterns in South Africa, 2000–2010', Development Southern Africa, 38(3), pp. 1–31.

Nadar, S. (2009) 'Palatable patriarchy and violence against wo/men in South Africa: Angus Buchan's Mighty Men's Conference as a case study of masculinism', Scriptura, 102(1), pp. 551–561.

Naicker, L. (2021) 'Sisters in solidarity: resistance and agency through urban community food gardens in Pietermaritzburg', Agenda, 27(1), pp. 86–98.

Naicker, L. (2025) 'Disrupting the waters of patriarchy: A critical evaluation of the role of Christianity in promoting male hegemony and women's economic disempowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa', in Manyonganise, M., Gunda, M.R., Naicker, L. and Kügler, J. (eds.) Religion, Gender and Masculinities in Africa: Essays in Honour of Ezra Chitando. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, pp. 107–122. Available at: https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-106039.

Naidu, T. and Sliep, Y. (2012) 'Understanding the agency of home-based care volunteers: establishing identity and negotiating space in AIDS home-based care in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', African Journal of AIDS Research, 11(2), pp. 99–108.

Naidu, T., Sliep, Y. and Dageid, W. (2012) 'The social construction of identity in HIV/AIDS home-based care volunteers in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', SAHARA-J: Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS, 9(2), pp. 113–126.

Niehof, A. and Wahlen, S. (2017) 'Moral economy meets the care economy: care practices in rural Indonesia', Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment, 39(2), pp. 90–99.

Nkosi, L. (2021) Engaging gender inequality in theology of work: an African feminist theological critique. Master's thesis. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Nussbaum, B., 2003. Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on our common humanity. Reflections, 4(4), pp.21-26.

Nyengele, M.F. (2004) African women's theology, gender relations, and family systems theory: pastoral theological considerations and guidelines for care and counselling. New York: Peter Lang.

Oduyoye, M.A. (2001) Introducing African women's theology. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Olojede, F. (2014) 'Women and the task of caregiving in the Old Testament', Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, 149, pp. 43–55.

Oosthuizen, M. (2018) Counting women's work in South Africa: incorporating unpaid work into estimates of the economic lifecycle in 2010. Research report. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011a) Cooking and caring, building and repairing: unpaid work around the world. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011b) Doing better for families. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Ostring, E.E. (2014) The theology of human work as found in the Genesis narrative compared with the co-creationist theology of human work. Doctoral thesis. Cooranbong: Avondale College.

Ostring, E.E. (2016) Be a blessing: the theology of work in the narrative of Genesis. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Palinkas, L.A., Horwitz, S.M., Green, C.A., Wisdom, J.P., Duan, N. and Hoagwood, K. (2015) 'Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research', Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 42(5), pp. 533–544.

Parry, B.R. and Gordon, E. (2021) 'The shadow pandemic: inequitable gendered impacts of COVID-19 in South Africa', Gender, Work & Organization, 28(2), pp. 795–806.

Patel, L., Kaseke, E. and Midgley, J. (2007) 'Indigenous welfare and community-based social development: lessons from African innovations', Journal of Community Practice, 15(1–2), pp. 85–100.

Patel, L., Perold, H., Mohamed, S.E. and Carapinha, R. (2007) Five-country study on service and volunteering in Southern Africa. Johannesburg: Centre for Social Development in Africa.

Patton, M.Q. (2002) 'Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: a personal, experiential perspective', Qualitative Social Work, 1(3), pp. 261–283.

Patton, M.Q. (2014) Qualitative research and evaluation methods: integrating theory and practice. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Perold, H. and Graham, L.A. (2017) 'The value of volunteers in community-based organisations: insights from Southern Africa', in Perspectives on volunteering. Cham: Springer, pp. 115–127.

Phiri, I.A. (2005) 'The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians: its contribution to ecumenical formation', The Ecumenical Review, 57(1), pp. 34–42.

Phiri, I.A. and Nadar, S. (2010) 'African women's theologies', in Stinton, D.B. (ed.) African theology on the way: current conversations. London: SPCK, pp. 90–100.

Pillow, W. (2003) 'Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research', International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16(2), pp. 175–196.

Posel, D. (2025) 'The economic consequences of unpaid caregiving in South Africa', Development Southern Africa, 42(1), pp. 1–16.

Posel, D. (2025) 'Who cares? Gender differences in social reproduction and well-being in South Africa', Gender, Work & Organization. (in press).

Pupo, N. and Duffy, A. (2012) 'Unpaid work, capital and coercion', Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation, 6(1), pp. 27–47.

Rae, S.B. (2019) 'A theology of work for a virtual age', in The HTML of cruciform love: toward a theology of the internet. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, pp. 75–92.

Rajamohan, S. (2021) 'Enhancing personhood in the care of older adults with dementia: A biblical perspective', Journal of Christian Nursing, 38(1). Available at: https://doi.org/10.1097/CNJ.0000000000000801.

Rakoczy, S. (2004) In her name: women doing theology. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Rathgeber, E.M. (1990) 'WID, WAD, GAD: trends in research and practice', Journal of Developing Areas, 24(4), pp. 489–502.

Razavi, S. (2011) 'Rethinking care in a development context: an introduction', Development and Change, 42(4), pp. 873–903.

Razavi, S., 2007. The political and social economy of care in a development context: Conceptual issues, research questions and policy options.

Ridzuan, F. and Zainon, W.M.N.W. (2019) 'A review on data cleansing methods for big data', Procedia Computer Science, 161, pp. 731–738.

Rochester, C., Paine, A.E., Howlett, S., Zimmeck, M. and Paine, A.E., 2010. *Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century* (Vol. 1998). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ruffner, B.E. (2013) A theology of business: a Reformed perspective on the basis and application of Christian ethics in business. Master's thesis. Charlotte, NC: Reformed Theological Seminary.

Russell, B. (2016) 'Measuring the contribution of volunteering to the Sustainable Development Goals: the measurement of volunteering in the Global South', paper presented at the 12th International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), Stockholm, July 2016.

Russell, E. (2016) 'Informal volunteering: expanding the conceptual boundaries of volunteering', Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 45(2), pp. 371–389.

Russell, L.M. (1985) Feminist interpretation of the Bible. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press.

Rwafa, U. (2016) 'Culture and religion as sources of gender inequality: rethinking challenges women face in contemporary Africa', Journal of Literary Studies, 32(1), pp. 43–52.

Saunders, B. (2020) Christian international volunteering: unpacking motivations and engagements with poverty, injustice and inequality. Doctoral thesis. Aberystwyth: Aberystwyth University.

Saunders, C. (2020) 'Informal volunteering and social action', Voluntary Sector Review, 11(1), pp. 3–19.

Seabe, D. and Burger, R. (2017) Building bridges or deepening divides: resources and formal volunteering in post-apartheid South Africa. Research report. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

Seabe, D. and Burger, R. (2022) 'Examining the relationship between resources and the likelihood to participate in formal volunteering in post-apartheid South Africa', VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 33, pp. 149–161.

Seabe, D.S. (2014) Understanding volunteerism in South Africa: a mixed methods approach. Master's thesis. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

Shabangu, B.F. (2017) Exploring gender division of labour within households: the case of Schoemansdal Village in Nkomazi Local Municipality, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. Master's thesis. Thohoyandou: University of Venda.

Shargie, M.B. (2017) Children diagnosed with HIV on antiretroviral therapy in Ethiopia: the family caregivers' lived experience and treatment outcome. Master's thesis. Lund: Lund University.

Sharma, M. and Singh, J. (2025) 'Institutions and invisible labour: unveiling the structural dynamics of the unpaid and care economy', South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics, 22(6), pp. 267–282.

Sharma, M. and Singh, R. (2025) 'Unpaid care work and gender inequality in the Global South', Feminist Economics, 31(1), pp. 45–67.

Simmonds, J.E., Parry, C.D., Abdullah, F., et al. (2021) '"Knowledge I seek because culture doesn't work anymore… it doesn't work, death comes": the experiences of third-generation female caregivers (gogos) in South Africa discussing sex, sexuality and HIV and AIDS with children in their care', BMC Public Health, 21(1), Article 1–9.

Skinner, C. and Rogan, M. (2019) 'The nature of employment and earnings in the informal economy in South Africa', WIEGO Working Paper No. 38. Manchester: WIEGO.

Smith, L.T. (2021) Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples. 3rd edn. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Sperber, E. and Hern, E. (2018) 'Pentecostal identity and citizen engagement in sub-Saharan Africa: new evidence from Zambia', Politics and Religion, 11(4), pp. 830–862.

Squires, A. (2009) 'Methodological challenges in cross-language qualitative research: a research review', International Journal of Nursing Studies, 46(2), pp. 277–287.

Statistics South Africa (2018) Volunteer activities survey: General Household Survey 2018. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Stichter, S.B. and Parpart, J. (2019) Patriarchy and class: African women in the home and the workforce. London: Routledge.

Stulikova, H. and Dawson, M. (2023) 'Stretching the double hermeneutic: a critical examination of lay meanings of "emotional labour"', Sociological Research Online, 28(4), pp. 1130–1148.

Sultana, F. (2007) 'Reflexivity, positionality and participatory ethics: negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research', ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies, 6(3), pp. 374–385.

Sunderland, R.H. (2003) 'The dignity of servanthood in pastoral care', Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling, 57(3), pp. 269–279. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/154230500305700303.

Swanson, R.T. and Carreon, E. (2024) 'Uncovering the transformative labour in Black women's community work', Affilia, 39(3), pp. 425–441.

Swartz, A. and Colvin, C.J. (2015) '"It's in our veins": caring natures and material motivations of community health workers in contexts of economic marginalisation', Critical Public Health, 25(2), pp. 139–152.

Swilling, M. and Russell, B., 2002. *The size and scope of the non-profit sector in South Africa*. Centre for Civil Society, University of Natal.

Szemerei, V.S. (2017) Called out of the world and into vocation: Reformed contributions to a theology of vocation as responses to Roman Catholic and Anabaptist traditions. Doctoral thesis. Charlotte, NC: Reformed Theological Seminary.

Tanzarn, N. (2024) 'What if our data lies? African feminist methods for researching the invisible', Nite Tanzarn Blog, 12 March. Available at: https://www.nitetanzarn.com/post/what-if-our-data-lies-african-feminist-methods-for-researching-the-invisible (Accessed: 21 January 2026).

Theology of Work Project (2014) Theology of Work Project. Available at: https://www.theologyofwork.org (Accessed: 21 January 2026).

Tiessen, R., Lough, B.J. and Cheung, S. (2021) 'The gendered costs of international volunteering: a comparative analysis', Gender, Work & Organization, 28(5), pp. 1836–1853.

Tiessen, R., Rao, S. and Lough, B.J. (2021) 'International development volunteering as transformational feminist practice for gender equality', Journal of Developing Societies, 37(1), pp. 30–56.

Toffanin, T. (2021) 'Implications of COVID-19 on women workers in the service sector', Gender, Work & Organization, 28(S1), pp. 95–102.

Tronto, J.C. (2020) Who cares? How to reshape a democratic politics. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

van Pinxteren, M., Slome, C., Mair, F.S., Levitt, N.S., Crampin, A.C. and Grimsrud, A. (2024) 'Exploring the workload of informal caregiving in the context of HIV/NCD multimorbidity in South Africa', PLOS Global Public Health, 4(10), Article e0003782.

Vavrus, F. and Richey, L.A. (2003) 'Women and development: rethinking policy and reconceptualizing practice', Women's Studies Quarterly, 31(3/4), pp. 6–28.

Venter, A., Petersen, C. and Hoffman, J. (2024) 'Older Black South African women's perceptions and attitudes of long-term care: an Ubuntu-centric cultural perspective', Culture & Psychology, 30(3), pp. 456–478.

Vertesi, J. and Dourish, P. (2011) 'The value of data: considering the context of production in data economies', in Proceedings of the ACM 2011 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work. New York: ACM, pp. 533–542.

Volf, M. (2001) Work in the Spirit: toward a theology of work. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Waghid, Y. and Smeyers, P. (2012) 'Reconsidering ubuntu: on the educational potential of a particular ethic of care', Educational Philosophy and Theory, 44(S2), pp. 6–20.

Walker, C. ed., 1990. Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945. New Africa Books.

Walker, C., 1991. Women and resistance in South Africa. New africa books.

Williams, D.M. and Bentley, W. (2016) 'The covenantal relationship between the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and her presbyters: an ethical appraisal', Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae, 42(1), pp. 14–29.

Wilson, J. (2012) 'Volunteerism research: a review essay', Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 41(2), pp. 176–212.

Wilson, J. and Musick, M. (1997) 'Who cares? Toward an integrated theory of volunteer work', American Sociological Review, 62(5), pp. 694–713.

Woodfield, K. (2017) The ethics of online research. Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

Yengkopiong, J.P. (2023) 'Biblical foundation of servant leadership: An inner-textural analysis of Mark 10:41–45', East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion, 6(1), pp. 40–55.

Zainga, G.L.D. (2013) Towards an African women's liberation theology of human dignity: a reflection on women's domestic work in Malawi. Master's thesis. Zomba: University of Malawi.

Appendix 1: Ethics and Access Documents

1A Ethical Clearance Letter

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

05 October 2023

Rev Lerato Thelma Nkosi (219088514)
School of Rel Phil & Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Rev Nkosi,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005944/2023
Project title: Unpaid and invisible work in the context of community volunteerism in South African faith communities.
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 27 September 2023 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 05 October 2024.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 **Email:** hssrec@ukzn.ac.za **Website:** http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics
Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

1B Gatekeeper Permission Letters

KWAZULU-NATAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL

Physical Address: 50 Langalibalele Street , Pietermaritzburg , 3200 Contact No : 087 158 9546

04 July 2023

The Ethics Committee
University of KwaZulu Natal
Pietermaritzburg
3200

To whom it may concern,

A Letter of Support and Permission to approach, or access KZNCC member churches.

We, as KZNCC, fully support UKZN PhD student, Lerato Nkosi's study titled 'Unpaid and Invisible Work in the Context of Community Volunteerism in South African Faith Communities.'

We hereby grant her permission to conduct her research among our member churches between 01 June 2023 to 31 May 2024. We also grant permission for Lerato Nkosi to use our website and social media as a platforms through which to recruit participants for her study, from our member churches in KZN.

The KZNCC had an opportunity to talk to the student and in our discussion it was clear that her studies will add value to the body of knowledge about the use of volunteers in the church.

We will also provide Lerato Nkosi with a letter of support and introduction to our member churches

With blessings,

[redacted]

The Programmes Director

KwaZulu Natal Christian Council

mnyuswa@kzncc.org.za

C: [redacted] or W: 087 158 9546

KWAZULU - NATAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL
P.O.Box 2035
Pietermaritz[illegible]9 3200
50 Longmarket Street
Phone 033 - 3454819 / 3454449/ 3943308
Fax 033 3949965

APPENDIX 2: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

2A Recruitment Social Media Post



2B Recruitment Posters



2C Recruitment Social Media Post on My Facebook



APPENDIX 3: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

3A Survey Question in English

https://forms.gle/uTMwEPz4BEZtyug58

Help me make visible the work that deserve to be seen

I am Lerato, a PhD student from the Faculty of Religion, philosophy and Classics at University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am surveying to help better understand the unpaid and invisible work within the context of faith-based volunteerism in the south African faith communities.

To better understand the faith-based volunteerism and community-making I would like to ask you some questions about the information you may be exposed to about volunteering, helping, and community-building and about your experience and feelings in term of this work. Based on your experience, this survey has three section and will take you 5 to 8 minutes, not more than 10 minutes to complete.

We will use the research information for academic purposes. Additionally, we will keep your responses anonymous and confidential. Your participation in this research will help conduct the study ideally. Thank you very much.

What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Other:

What is your age?

☐ 25-35

☐ 36-45

☐ 46-55

☐ 56-65

Where do you reside?

☐ UMsunduzi

☐ Ethekwini

What is your faith tradition?

☐ AIC

☐ Catholic

☐ Protestant

☐ Pentecostal

☐ Charismatic

☐ Other religion/denomination

How long is your church membership?

☐ Less than 1 year

☐ 1-3 years

☐ 3-5 years

☐ 5-10 years

☐ 10 years and more

How regular is your church participation?

☐ Twice a week

☐ Once a week

☐ Once in a month

☐ Every other day in a year

Do you do volunteer work?

☐ Yes, presently

☐ Yes, in the past (months - 1 year)

☐ Yes, way in the past (2-3 years)

☐ Never

How long are you volunteering/ did you volunteer?

☐ Months - 1 year

☐ 2- 3 years

☐ 3-5 years

☐ More than 5 years

How often do you/ did you volunteer?

☐ Once a week

☐ Twice a week ☐

Once a month

☐ Every other day

What kind of volunteering activities do you do?

Please check all relevant boxes below

Care work	Childcare ☐	Elderly care ☐	Care for the sick ☐	Care for person with disability ☐
Cleaning Projects	Parks ☐	Street ☐	Church ☐	Elderly people ☐
Feeding schemes	Soup kitchen ☐	Morning Porridge for school kids ☐	Gardening project ☐	Food parcel collection and/or distribution ☐
Extra Murals (educational)	Dance and/music club ☐	Sawing or hand crafts ☐	coaching ☐	life skills ☐

On a scale of 1-10 how much does your community matter in you volunteering decision?

don't matter at all ... is the very reason I volunteer

1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9☐ 10☐

On a scale of 1-10 how much does your faith matter in you volunteering decision?

don't matter at all ... is the very reason I volunteer

1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9☐ 10☐

Do you give permission to be contacted for further discussion or one on one interview on the topic? ☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

Please select preferred contact method

☐ WhatsApp

☐ Call

☐ Email

Please give your selected contact details
(eg. phone number or email address)

Your answer

3B Survey Question in IsiZulu

https://forms.gle/J5Az3uvhVfK1Lstq8

Ngisize ngibonakalise umsebenzi ofanelwe ukubonakala.

Igama lami ngingu-Lerato. Ngingumfundi owenza iziqu zobudokotela emkhakheni wezeNkolo, kanye neFilosofi esikhungweni sezemfundo ephakeme iNyuvesi yakwaZulu-Natal. Ngenza ucwaningo oluzosiza ukuqonda kangcono umsebenzi ongakhokhelwa futhi ongabonakali kumongo wokuvolontiya ezinhlakeni zezenkolo emiphakathini yaku leli laseNingizimu Africa.

Ukuze kuqondakale kangcono lomsebenzi wokuvolontiya ezinhlakeni zezenkolo kanye nokwakheka komphakathi; ngingathanda ukukubuza imibuzo eyingcosana ngolwazi ongabanalo ngomsenzi wokuvolontiya, ukusiza, kanye nokwakhiwa komphakathi, kanjalo futhi ngesipiliyoni sakho uqobo kanye nendlela ozizwa ngayo mayelana nalo msebenzi wokuvolontiya.

Ngokwesipiliyoni sakho, lolucwaningo lunezigaba ezintathu futhi luzokuthatha cishe imizuzu eyisihlanu (5) kuya kweyisishiyagalombili (8). Ngeke kuze kube ngaphezulu kwemizuzu elishumi (10) ukuqeda zonke lezi zigaba.

Ulwazi oluzotholakala kulolucwaningo luzosetshenziswa kwezemfundo. Ukwengezela, izimpendulo zakho kanye nolwazi ozolunikezela kuzogcinwa kuyimfihlo futhi angeke libalulwe igama lakho. Ukubamba iqhaza kwakho kulolucwaningo kuyosiza ekuqhubeni lolucwaningo kahle kakhulu.

Yibuphi ubulili bakho?

- ☐ Owesilisa
- ☐ Owesifazane
- ☐ Okunye:

Uneminyaka emingaki?

- ☐ 25-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46-55
- ☐ 56-65

Uhlala kuphi?

- ☐ UMsunduzi
- ☐ Ethekwini

Ukuyiphi inkonzo?

- ☐ AIC
- ☐ Khatholika
- ☐ Protestani
- ☐ Phentekoste
- ☐ AbakaMoya
- ☐ Enye inkonzo

Usunesikhathi esingakanani uyilungu lebandla okulo?

- ☐ Ngaphansi konyaka wodwa?
- ☐ 1-3 weminyaka
- ☐ 3-5 weminyaka
- ☐ 5-10 weminyaka
- ☐ 10 weminyaka noma ngaphezulu

Uzibandakanya kangakanani ekubambeni iqhaza ezintweni zasenkonzweni okuyo?

- ☐ Kabili ngeviki
- ☐ Kanye ngeviki
- ☐ Kanye ngenyanga
- ☐ Mhlawumbe ngasukulumbe onyakeni

Ngabe ukhona umsebenzi wokuvolontiya owenzayo?

- ☐ Yebo, ukhona kumanje
- ☐ Yebo, ngesikhathi saphambilini (izinyanga - 1 unyaka)
- ☐ Yebo, kudala (2-3 weminyaka eyedlule)
- ☐ Angikaze nhlobo

Usuwenze/wawenza isikhathi esingakanani lomsebenzi wokuvolontiya?

- ☐ Izinyanga - 1 unyaka
- ☐ 2- 3 weminyaka
- ☐ 3-5 weminyaka
- ☐ Ngaphezu kweminyaka eyisihlanu

Uvolontiya/wawuvolontiya kangaki?

- ☐ Kanye ngeviki
- ☐ Kabili ngeviki
- ☐ Kanye ngenyanga
- ☐ Ngasukulumbe ngaleyonkathi

Yimiphi imisebenzi yokuvolontiya owawuyenza?

Ngicela udwebele kulokhu okwenzayo/owawukwenza

Umsebenzi wokunakekela	Ukunakekela abantwana ☐	Ukunakekela abadala ☐	Ukunakekela abagulayo ☐	Ukunakekela umuntu ophila nokukhubazeka ☐
Imisebenzi yokuhlanza	Amapaki ☐	Izitaladi ☐	Isesontweni ☐	Abantu abadala ☐
Izinhlangano zokondla abantulayo	Ukuphakela isobho ☐	Ukwenzela abantwana besikole iyambazi ekuseni ☐	Ukusebenza engadini ☐	Ukunikezela noma ukuqoqa izijumbane zokudla ☐
Imisebenzi exhantile (engefundisayo)	Ukudansa kanye nomculo, ☐	ukuthunga noma ukuqeqeshela ☐	amakhono empilo ☐	inhlangano ubuciko ☐

Ngokwesikali kusuka ku-1 kuya ku-10, unomthelela omngakanani umphakathi wakho esinqumweni sakho sokuvolontiya?

Awubalulekile nhlobo — Uyisona kanye isizathu ngivolontiya

1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9☐ 10☐

Ngokwesikali kusuka ku-1 kuya ku-10, inkolo yakho ibaluleke kangakanani esinqumweni sakho sokuvolontiya?

Ayibalulekile nhlobo — Iyisona kanye isizathu ngivolontiya

1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐ 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9☐ 10☐

Uyayinikezela imvume yokuphinda uthintwe ngokwenaba ngengxoxo okanye ngeminye imibuzo ngawedwana?

☐ Yebo

☐ Cha

☐ Mhlawumbe

Ngicela ukhethe indlela yokuxhumana nawe oyincamelayo

☐ WhatsApp

☐ Ukufonelwa

☐ Yimeyili

Ngicela unginike imininingwane esingaxhumana ngayo (ihambisane nokukhethile ngenhla)

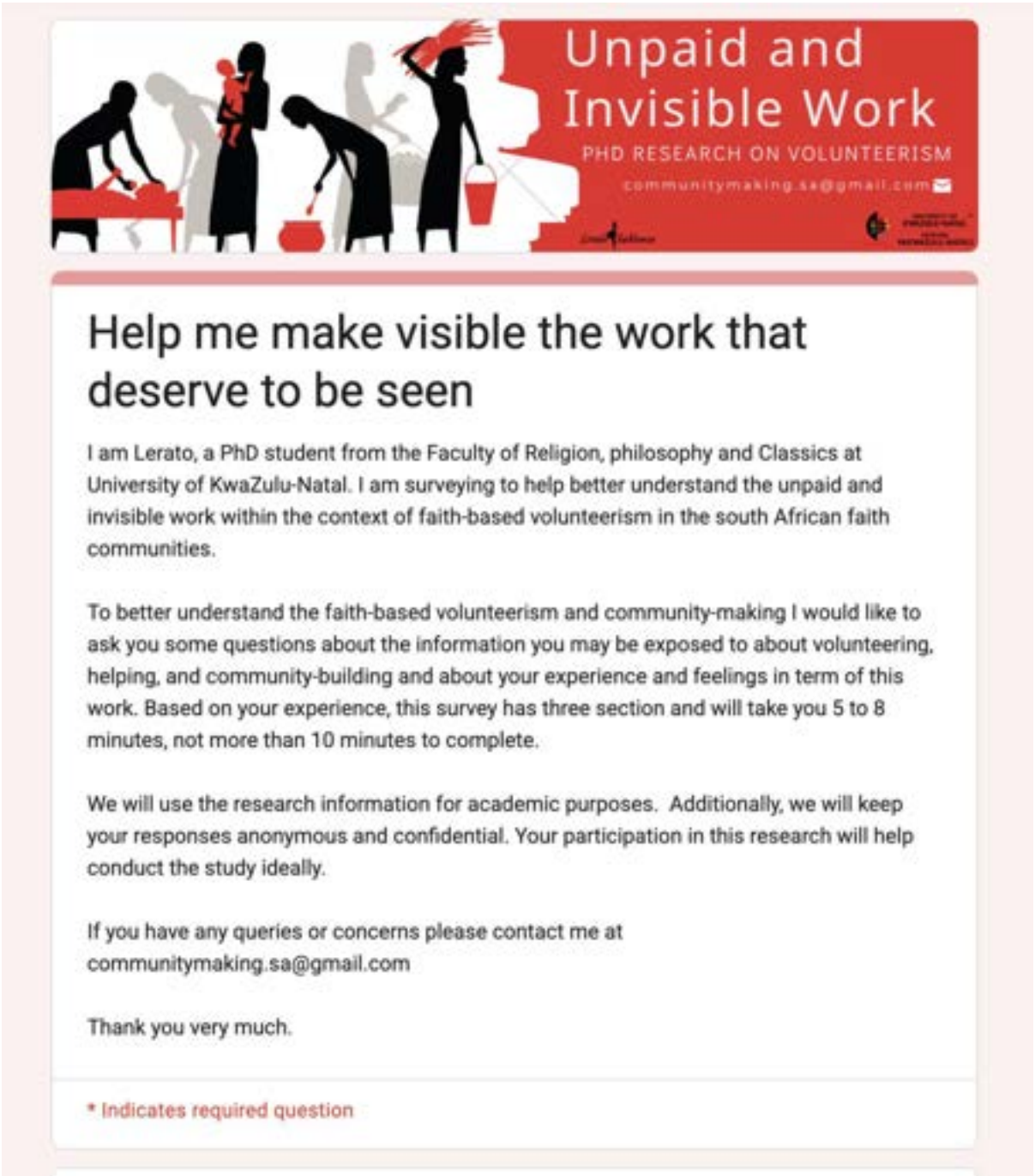
(isibonelo. Inombolo yocingo okanye imeyili)

_____

Izimpendulo zakho

3C Survey Google From in English

https://forms.gle/uYEEHVY71H4DLrXKA



What is your gender? *

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Other: _____

What is your age? *

- ◯ 25-35
- ◯ 36-45
- ◯ 46-55
- ◯ 56-65

Where do you reside? *

- ◯ UMsunduzi
- ◯ Ethekwini
- ◯ Other

What is your faith tradition? *

- ◯ AIC
- ◯ Catholic
- ◯ Protestant
- ◯ Pentecostal
- ◯ Charismatic
- ◯ Other religion/denomination

How long is your church membership? *

- ◯ Less than 1 year
- ◯ 1-3 years
- ◯ 3-5 years
- ◯ 5-10 years
- ◯ 10 years and more

How regular is your church participation? *

- ◯ Twice a week
- ◯ Once a week
- ◯ Once in a month
- ◯ Once in a while

Do you do volunteering work? *

- ◯ Yes, presently
- ◯ Yes, in the past (months - 1 year)
- ◯ Yes, way in the past (2-3 years)
- ◯ Never

Next Clear form

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google. - Contact form owner - Terms of Service - Privacy Policy

Does this form look suspicious? Report

Google Forms



Help me make visible the work that deserve to be seen

* Indicates required question

Volunteering Work

How long are you volunteering/ did you volunteer? *

- ◯ Months - 1 year
- ◯ 2- 3 years
- ◯ 3-5 years
- ◯ More than 5 years

How often do you/ did you volunteer? *

- ◯ Once a week
- ◯ Twice a week
- ◯ Once a month
- ◯ Every other day

What kind of volunteering activities do you do?
Please check all relevant boxes below

	Childcare	Elderly care	Care for the sick	Care for person with disability
Care work	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Parks	Streets	Church	Any Public Space
Cleaning Projects	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Soup kitchen	Morning Porridge for school kids	Gardening project	Food parcel collection and/or distribution
Feeding schemes	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Dance and/music club	Sawing or hand crafts	coaching	life skills
Extra Murals (educational)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other activity not listed

Your answer

Other activity not listed

Your answer

On a scale of 1-10 how much does your community/culture matter in you volunteering decision? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
don't matter at all	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	is the very reason I volunteer

On a scale of 1-10 how much does your faith matter in you volunteering decision? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
don't matter at all	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	is the very reason I volunteer

Do you give permission to be contacted for further discussion or one on one interview on the topic? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Maybe

Back Next Clear form

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.



Help me make visible the work that deserve to be seen

* Indicates required question

Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and all information collected in this survey will be kept strictly confidential. The information gathered will only be used for the following study purposes. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions/items or to avoid participating at any time for any reason. If you have any queries regarding the survey questions, do contact me via e-mail. Thank you for giving your valuable time to complete the following survey questionnaires.

Would you now consider giving permission to be contacted for further discussion or one on one interview on the topic? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Back Next Clear form

Never submit passwords through Google Forms



Help me make visible the work that deserve to be seen

* Indicates required question

How can I get in touch with You?

Please select preferred contact method *

- ◯ WhatsApp
- ◯ Call
- ◯ Email

Please give your selected contact details *
(eg. phone number or email address)

Your answer

Back Submit Clear form

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

In-depth interview questions

1. Can you tell me about your experience volunteering?
2. How do you balance your volunteer work with your other responsibilities, such as family and work?
3. Have you ever experienced any gender-related challenges or inequalities in your volunteer work?
4. Can you describe the kinds of volunteer work that women in your community typically do, and how it differs from the work that men do?
5. How do cultural or religious beliefs inform your decision to volunteer and the way you approach your volunteer work?
6. In your opinion, does volunteer work help create a more equitable society or reinforce existing gender inequalities?
7. Can you describe a particularly meaningful experience you've had as a volunteer?
8. How do you think your volunteer work contributes to the overall well-being of your community?
9. What resources do you draw on to sustain yourself while doing volunteer work, particularly when facing challenges?
10. Based on your experience, what changes could be made to improve gender equity in volunteer work?

In-depth interview questions in IsiZulu

1. Ungangixoxela ngesipiliyoni sakho maqondana nokuvolontiya?
2. Wenza kanjani ukuthi kube nokulingana phakathi komsebenzi wakho wokuvolontiya kanye nokunye okubheke wena njengomndeni kanye nomsebenzi?
3. Wake wahlangabezana nanoma ngabe yiyiphi inselelo ehambisana nokobulili okanye nokungalingani emsebenzini wakho wokuvolontiya?
4. Ungazichaza izinhlobo ezahlukene zemisebenzi yokuvolontiya eyenziwa ngabesifazane emphakathini wangakini nokuthi lemisebenzi yehluke kanjani kuleyo eyenziwa ngabesilisa?
5. Usikompilo kanje nezinkolelo okholelwa kuzo ngokwezenkolo kunamthelela muni ezinqumweni zakho zokuvolontiya kanye nangendlela othatha ngayo umsebenzi wakho wokuvolontiya?
6. Ngokombono wakho, ngabe umsebenzi wokuvolontiya uyasiza ukubumba umphakathi onobulungiswa noma uqinisa kakhulu ukungalingani ngokobulili?
7. Ungachaza ngokugcwele osuke wahlangabezana nakho njengevolontiya?
8. Ucabanga ukuthi umsebenzi wokuvolontiya unomthelela kwinhlalakahle yomphakathi yonke?
9. Yiziphi izinsiza oyaye uzisebenzise ukuzigcina wena usesimeni esikahle ngesikhathi usenza umsebenzi
10. Ngokwesipiliyoni onaso, yiluphi ushintsho olungenziwa ukwenza-ngcono okanye ukuphucula ukulingana ngokobulili emsebenzini wokuvolontiya?

APPENDIX 4: CONSENT FORMS

4A Consent Form in English

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL
For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

15 May 2023

Dear Participant

My name is Lerato Nkosi from The University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Religion and Classics (College of Humanities). My cellphone number is [redacted] and my email address is [redacted] and I am supervised by Professor Federico Settler (Settler@ukzn.ac.za)

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research focusing on exploring the gendered nature of unpaid work and community-making work among faith-based volunteers in South Africa.

The study is expected to enroll 10 black women between the ages of 25-65 years of age. These women should be black women, active community member and identify as a person of faith. should have been doing volunteering work for more than 1 year and they should also either be living in KwaZulu Natal.

The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be 3 days one-on-one onsite interview at your convenience, and a follow-up interview if necessary. The study is funded by myself.

We hope that the study will create an understanding of unpaid and invisible work, bring to light the different layer of this kind of work and it gendered nature, and give recognition to those who are dedicated in doing this kind of work. It is hoped that this study will contribute to existing knowledge about the gendered nature of unpaid work and community-making work among faith-based volunteers in South Africa, particularly about the contours of care/volunteerism in urban black faith communities.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at [redacted] or [redacted] or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HREC UKZN Oct 2008

1

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in this research is voluntary and that participants may withdraw participation at any point, and in the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation the participants will not incur penalty or loss of treatment or other benefit to which they are normally entitled. A participant may indicate verbally or in writing that they would want to withdraw from the study and there will be no prejudice to the participant. In the event that a participant is disrespectful in any way, the researcher will ask the participant to withdraw from the group.

There will be no cost incurred by you as the participant, and no reimbursement will be offered for travel to and from the focus group.
I hereby declare that your identity will be kept confidential, and the information gathered will be used for academic purposes only. The information gathered will be stored in the office of my supervisor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

.....

CONSENT

I ..... have been informed about the study entitled Unpaid and invisible work in the context of community volunteerism in South African faith communities by Lerato Nkosi.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice to myself.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at [redacted] or [redacted]

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

_____ _____
Signature of Participant **Date**

_____ _____
Signature of Witness **Date**
(Where applicable)

_____ _____
Signature of Translator **Date**
(Where applicable)

4B Consent Form in IsiZulu

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

ISICELO SEMVUME YOKWENZA UCWANINGO EMPHAKATHINI

IFOMU LEMVUME ELINEMININGWANE

Ikhasi lemininingwane kanye nemvume yokubamba iqhaza ocwaningweni

15 kuNhlaba 2023

Sawubona

Igama lami nginguLerato Nkosi, ngivela eNyuvesi yakwaZulu-Natal ngaphansi kophiko lwe-Religion and Classics (College of Humanities). Inombolo yami yocingo yilena: [redacted] ebese i-email yami ithi rev.leratonkosi@gmail.com, umphathi wami uSolwazi Federico Settler (Settler@ukzn.ac.za).

Uyamenya ukuba ucabange ngokubamba iqhaza esifundweni esihlanganisa ucwaningo olubheke kakhulu ukuhlaziya ngokwenabile ngomsuka wemisebenzi engaholeli kanye naleyo eyakha imiphakathi kumongo wokuvolontiya ezinhlakeni zezenkolo eNingizimu Afrika.

Lesi sifundo kubhekeke ukuba sithathe abesifazane abalishumi abaphakathi kweminyaka engama-25-64. Laba abesifazane kufanele kube ngabebala elinsundu, abayingxenye yomphakathi futhi abahambisana nenkolo thizeni. Kuzofanele babe nesipiliyoni esingangonyaka owodwa kuyaphezulu emsebenzini wokuvolontiya futhi kufanele babe ngabahlali bakulesi sifundazwe sakwaZulu-Natal.

Uma uzibophezela ekubambeni iqhaza kulolucwaningo, kuyothatha izinsuku ezintathu ukwenza inhlolovo nawe futhi ngesikhathi esizohambisana nawe, kanjalo futhi nenhlolovo yokulandelela uma isidingo sokwenzenjalo siyoba khona. Loluchwaningo luxhaswe yimina uqobo ngokwezezimali.

Siyathemba ukuthi loluchwaningo luzoletha ukuqonda kangcono uma kuziwa emsebenzini engakhokhelwa futhi engabonakali, luphinde lucacise amazinga ehlukene kulemisebenzi kanye nemvelaphi yayo ngokobulili luphinde luchome uphaphe lwegwalagwala kulabo abazinikele ngokugcwele ekwenzeni loluhlobo lwemisebenzi. Sinethemba lokuthi loluchwaningo luzophosa itshe esivivaneni kumthamo wolwazi oselukhona maqondana nemvelaphi (ngokobulili) yomsebenzi ongaholeli kanye nowakha umphakathi kumongo wokuvolontiya ezinhlakeni zezenkolo eNingizimu Afrika, ikakhulukazi emazingeni okunakekela/okuvolontiya emiphakathini yabebala elinsundu abazinze emiphakathini esemadolobheni.

Loluchwaningo seluhlolisisiwe lwaphinde lwavunywa ngabophiko lwe- UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number).

Uma kungenzeka kube nokuhlangabezana nezingqinamba/imibuzo, ungaxhumana nomcwaningi kulenombolo [redacted] noma uthumele i-email ku- rev.leratonkosi@gmail.com okanye uxhumane ngqo ne- UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, kulemininingwane elandelayo:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Ukubamba iqhaza kulolucwaningo kungukuzikhethela ngokwakho futhi ababamba iqhaza bangayeka noma ngabe kunini uma befisa ukwenza kanjalo futhi uma labo ababambe iqhaza bezizwa bengasafuni okanye bekhetha ukuziqhelelanisa, angeke kube khona inhlawulo noma ukuphathwa ngendlela eyehlukile okanye ukulahlekelwa ngokuyinzuzo okubafanele. Obambe iqhaza angakuveza ngowakhe umlomo okanye abhale phansi uma enesifiso sokushenxa kulolucwaningo futhi akuyikuba khona ubandlululo ngokwenza kwakhe kanjalo. Uma kwenzeka ukuthi lowo obambe iqhaza ukhombisa ukungahloniphi noma ngayiphi indlela, lowo ocwaningayo uyomcela ukuba aqhele ekuzihlanganiseni neqoqo elizobe liqhubeka nocwaningo.

Akukho zindleko eziyobhekana nawe ngenxa yokubamba iqhaza futhi akunankokhelo oyoyithola ngokuza nokubuya emihlanganweni yeqoqo elenza ucwaningo.

Ngiyaqinisekisa ukuthi igama lakho liyogcinwa liyimfihlo, kanjalo futhi nolwazi oluqoqiwe luyosetshenziswa emkhakheni wezemfundo kuphela. Ulwazi oluzotholakala luyogcinwa ehhovisi lomphathi wami eNyuvesi yakwaZulu-Natal.

ISIVUMO

Mina ngitsheliwe ngocwaningo olunikwe isihloko - Unpaid and invisible work in the context of community volunteerism in South African faith communities olwenziwa ngu- Lerato Nkosi.

Ngiyayiqonda injongo kanye nezinqubo zalolucwaningo.

Nginikeziwe ithuba lokuphendula imibuzo ngalolucwaningo futhi ngayiphendula ngokweneliseka.

Ngiyaqinisekisa ukuthi ukuzibandakanya kwami kulolucwaningo kube ngukuzikhethela kwami futhi nokuthi ngingashenxa ngingaqhubeki nokuzibandakanya noma ngabe kunini ngaphandle kokuthi ngizithole sengibandlululeka.

Ngitsheliwe futhi ngokwenkokhelo engaba khona kanye nokunakekelwa ngokwelashwa uma ngingazithola sengilimala ngenxa yezinqubo ezihambisana nalolucwaningo.

Uma ngineminye imibuzo okanye ukukhathazeka noma ngifuna ukwazi kabanzi ngokuhlobene nalolucwaningo, ngiyaqonda ukuthi kufanele ngixhumane nomcwaningi kulenombolo - [redacted] noma ngimbhalele i-email ku -r[redacted]

Uma nginemibuzo noma ukukhathazeka ngamalungelo ami njengobambe iqhaza ocwaningweni, noma nginokukhathazeka ngengxenye ethile yocwaningo okanye ngaye umcwaningi uqobo, ngingaxhumana nesikhungo:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001

Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Okwengeziwe kwesivumo, lapho

kudingeka khona ngiyavuma uku:

Qoshwa iphimbo/Ukugxila engxoxweni yeqoqo YES / NO

_____ _____

Isiginesha yobambe iqhaza **Usuku**

Isiginasha kaFakazi **Usuku**
(Lapho kudingeka khona)

_____ _____

Isiginesha yohumushayo **Usuku**
(Lapho kudingeka khona)

APPENDIX 5: SAMPLE ANONYMISED TRANSCRIPTS

5A Sample Anonymised Interview Transcript 1

Participant: Pseudonym: *Buhle*

Location: Durban (DBN)

Interview Type: Semi-structured interview

Context: Informal volunteerism in early childhood education

Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity and readability. Repetitions, fillers, and interviewer prompts have been minimally adjusted without altering meaning. IsiZulu phrases are retained as spoken.

Interviewer: Please tell me about your experience as a volunteer.

Participant: I did my volunteer work at a school because I was studying Early Childhood Development and training to be a practitioner. As part of my studies, I had to complete practical work, so I went to the school to volunteer.

I approached the school on my own. There was no letter explaining my role or duties. I spoke directly to the principal and asked if I could volunteer. I was placed in a Grade R class.

I volunteered there for eighteen months without pay. There were many challenges. I did everything that the paid teachers were doing, and sometimes even more. On days when teachers attended workshops or meetings, they would leave me alone with the children. At times, I was responsible for two classes with more than two hundred learners. It was difficult. The children would fight, they were energetic, and I had to learn to manage them. Over time, I got used to it, and the children got used to me. Eventually, they started loving me.

I stayed at the school until I fell pregnant. When I first arrived, I was treated like an outsider. They would place me near the door and ignore me. It was painful, but I loved teaching and I loved children. I really wanted to do this work, so I forced myself to be patient.

Interviewer: Was the school far from where you live?

Participant: No, it was close by.

Interviewer: Were there conversations about you becoming part of the full-time staff?

Participant: There was an opportunity that came up. They could see that I was close to the children. The children loved me, sometimes even more than the full-time teachers. I helped them with routines, especially during meal times. In our schools, especially in Black

communities, there are children with special needs in ordinary schools. Those children need a lot of attention, but the full-time teachers were struggling to provide that. I was able to identify children who needed extra help, especially with writing. Some children are slow and easily left behind.

That is what motivated me. Knowing that there was someone I was helping made me wake up every morning. I could see their progress.

Interviewer: At that time, were you doing any other work?

Participant: No, I was not doing anything else. It felt like I was going to work even though I was not getting paid at the end of the day.

Interviewer: How did your family and friends view this work?

Participant: They thought I was working. There was excitement, thinking that I would be hired full-time. But it never happened. Two Grade R teachers left, and I expected to be appointed, but it did not happen. I believe there was jealousy involved.

Interviewer: What motivated you to continue doing this work?

Participant: I wanted to gain experience and understand how schools work. Even though I was assigned to Grade R, I sometimes assisted in Grades 1, 2, and 3. I would look after the children and help with lessons. That encouraged me to learn more.

Interviewer: Were you the only volunteer at the school?

Participant: No, others would come and go.

Interviewer: What was the gender composition among volunteers?

Participant: There were no male volunteers. It was only women.

I also felt that I had more work than the paid staff. They were relaxed and pushed most of the work onto me, saying that I was there to learn. They used that as an opportunity to make me do all the work.

Interviewer: Have you ever thought of starting your own crèche?

Participant: I want to, but I don't have space. I only have a garage, and my husband does not want people going in and out of the house. The area we live in does not have a crèche. It breaks my heart to see children roaming the streets.

Recently, we experienced a house break-in involving teenagers from the neighbourhood. I spoke to them and asked why they were not focusing on school instead of breaking into houses. They have nothing to do to keep them busy.

Interviewer: It sounds like this work goes beyond skills and is something you are passionate about.

Participant: I love children. I also have children of my own. It breaks my heart to see children growing up and ending up on drugs. My own brother was raised well but later became addicted. He has passed away. What I do comes from a deep place.

Interviewer: What cultural values influenced your decision to volunteer?

Participant: I see it as a calling and as Ubuntu. I believe I have Ubuntu too much. I like helping people. I realised this when I worked for a Chinese company in Johannesburg. When workers arrived from China, we helped them settle, showed them where to buy food, taught them English, and even helped them learn basic things like how to use the toilet. That's when I realised that I have this quality of caring – *sinayo lento yokunakekela*.

Interviewer: What sustained you in this work?

Participant: Passion.

Interviewer: When things became difficult, what would you do?

Participant: I would stop going for a few days. When I felt overwhelmed, I stayed at home. The principal would then call me to ask why I was not coming. That made me feel like they did see me – *bayangibona*.

Interviewer: How did you know when you needed to withdraw?

Participant: When the work became too much and I felt that I was no longer coping, I knew I needed to rest.

Interviewer: Are there men involved in this kind of volunteering?

Participant: There are men, but very few.

Interviewer: Do you think that is because it is seen as women's work or because it is unpaid?

Participant: It is because it is unpaid. Men need money. Some do volunteer, but most will not.

Interviewer: You do unpaid work at the school. How is it at home?

Participant: At home, I do not work for free. I will not wake up early, make lunchboxes, clean, and then get nothing. When my husband's salary comes in, I must also get paid. He understands that.

Interviewer: What was the highlight of your volunteering experience?

Participant: Seeing improvement in children with special needs. When parents say their child can now do things they could not do before, I feel proud. I felt like it was a job well done. Paid teachers often move on even when a child does not understand. As a volunteer, you notice when a child is left behind and needs help and love.

Interviewer: What was the most difficult experience?

Participant: Helping children when they soiled themselves. They were older, around five or six years old. Male teachers would never do that. They would always call a woman to come and help.

Interviewer: Do you think gender inequality in this field can be addressed?

Participant: We receive the same training as men, but after graduating, men avoid crèches and early grades. Even in schools, male teachers are known for disciplining children harshly. Women do administration, event planning, and caregiving, while men authorise budgets.

I believe we still have a long way to go. Women are always placed lower, and men higher, even at home. If a woman makes a mistake, she is blamed. If a man does the same, people excuse it.

Interviewer: Why do women volunteer more than men?

Participant: Men want money and they have pride. Volunteering is seen as something that does not suit men.

Interviewer: When you were doing this work, did you see it as volunteering?

Participant: At first, no. Over time, it felt like work. Even at home, I planned for the next day. It felt like I was employed.

5B Sample Anonymised Interview Transcript 2

Participant: Pseudonym: *Zanele*

Location: KwaZulu-Natal (deep rural)

Interview Type: Semi-structured interview

Context: Informal and community-based volunteerism

Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity and coherence. Repetitions, fillers, and false starts have been reduced while preserving meaning, narrative flow, and participant voice. No analytical interpretation has been added.

Interviewer: As part of this study, I would like to confirm that your participation is voluntary. Your real name will not be used, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Do you consent to this interview being recorded?

Participant: Yes, that is fine.

Interviewer: Thank you. To begin, can you please tell me about the kinds of volunteer work you have done, both in the past and currently?

Participant: Over the years, I have been involved in many different kinds of volunteer work. I first started by working closely with senior citizens. I assisted elderly people to apply for their pensions and taught them how to use ATMs. In our area, many older people depended on their grandchildren to withdraw their pensions, only to later realise that the full amount had not been brought back to them. I therefore took it upon myself to teach them how to sign, how to recognise their numbers, and how to use ATMs safely.

From there, I started a project called *Izandla Ziyagezana*. Once a week, we would bring senior citizens together at a local venue. They would receive a meal, participate in exercise, check their pension-related issues, and also have opportunities for conversation and spiritual reflection. We would talk about life, Christianity, and everyday challenges.

Later, I extended this work to underprivileged children in the community. At the beginning of each year, we provide school uniforms and shoes. Throughout the year, we assist with books and other school-related needs. We also organise outings for children, especially during Youth Day, so that they can experience different environments and not feel intimidated by unfamiliar spaces.

I also became involved in supporting people living with HIV and AIDS, especially those who had defaulted on their medication. I worked with the local clinic to identify those who were struggling. We made sure medication was distributed, and for those who defaulted repeatedly, we followed up closely to ensure adherence. Alongside this, we distributed food parcels and groceries so that people could take their medication with food.

In addition, I do practical work in the community such as fixing potholes, cutting grass, trimming trees, and developing a sports field so that children do not have to play soccer in the streets.

Interviewer: That is a wide range of activities. How long have you been doing this kind of work?

Participant: For about ten years.

Interviewer: How do you fund this work?

Participant: I started a community garden where we grow vegetables. Every Thursday, we distribute what is ready to community members. I also write to businesses requesting donations. Sometimes they help, sometimes they do not. When donations are not available, I take from my own home. I feel at peace knowing that even if I go to bed without eating much, someone else has eaten.

Interviewer: Do you also have paid work?

Participant: Yes, I have a full-time job. I work full-time and also volunteer full-time. I needed the job because I want to start my own centre. I have already bought land and started building.

Interviewer: How do you manage to balance paid work, volunteering, and family life?

Participant: My day usually starts early. Before going to work, I check on the community garden. During the day, I stay connected through a WhatsApp group where people share challenges such as issues with IDs, pensions, or grants. I assist where I can, often by making bookings or giving advice over the phone.

In the afternoons and evenings, I visit elderly people, those who are bedridden, or families facing urgent needs. Sometimes it is a child without shoes or a torn school uniform. I assess the situation first before offering assistance. I usually go to bed around eleven at night after preparing for the next day.

My daughter sometimes tells me she does not like coming home because it feels like a community home. I explain to her that helping others makes me feel fulfilled. If I do not help anyone in a day, I feel unhappy.

Interviewer: Do you see differences between formal volunteer work and the informal volunteer work you do in your own community?

Participant: Yes, there are differences. In towns, elderly people are often targeted by loan sharks and criminals. Many elderly people suffer from memory problems and are easily exploited. We assist them with investigations and reporting, and we also work with young people who are involved in crime by redirecting them towards support grants and alternative livelihoods.

Interviewer: In your experience, who does most of this kind of care work?

Participant: Mostly women. People often feel more comfortable opening up to women. In cases involving trauma or abuse, sending a man can trigger fear. While I work with both men and women volunteers, I have more women involved in care work.

Interviewer: Do cultural or religious values influence your volunteer work?

Participant: Yes. I was abandoned as a child and raised by a family that cared for many people. Growing up in that environment shaped me. From a young age, I knew I wanted to help others who are vulnerable.

Interviewer: What do you gain personally from doing this work?

Participant: I do not expect material gain. I believe my reward will come from God. Helping others gives me peace.

Interviewer: How do you view the work of large organisations compared to the work you do in your own community?

Participant: Large organisations often provide short-term solutions during disasters. But when they leave, the problems remain. Local, community-based volunteerism addresses everyday needs. We are present at Home Affairs, SASSA, clinics, and households. We stay long after others leave.

Interviewer: Can you share one difficult experience and one meaningful experience from your volunteer work?

Participant: One difficult experience was helping a family with accommodation and later discovering that they had illegally bypassed electricity for a long period. That hurt me deeply, and I had to ask them to leave.

A meaningful experience is seeing how *Izandla Ziyagezana* distributes hundreds of food parcels on special days and supports youth to learn skills like carpentry, plumbing, and welding so they can become self-sufficient.

Interviewer: Do you think volunteer work contributes to community well-being?

Participant: Yes, it contributes greatly. Families receive food, children go to school supported, people living with HIV receive care, and crime rates have dropped.

Interviewer: What sustains you in doing this work?

Participant: What sustains me is the soil and the community garden, the support of widows who help manage it, and my own income. I live simply and believe in sharing what I have. Most importantly, my faith sustains me. I am a child of God and a pastor, and prayer keeps me going.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing your experiences.

Participant: Thank you.