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Neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse within agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa

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By

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Declaration of Authorship

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own, except where work which has formed part of jointly-authored publications has been included. The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to work of others.

The publication Smith, R., Mdee, A., & Sallu, S.M. (2022) 'How gender mainstreaming plays out in Tanzania's climate-smart agricultural policy: Isomorphic mimicry of international discourse' – (published in the Development Policy Review journal), is included as chapter five of this thesis.

The conceptual underpinnings and research design were agreed by all authors. The framework and methodological design was led by the candidate. The candidate performed the data collection and analysis and created all figures and tables. The text and findings were written up by the candidate, with contribution from A. Mdee & S.M Sallu. Editorial text editing and revisions were undertaken by all authors, led by the candidate.

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Abstract

Motivation

The apparent 'success' of centring gender equality in international development agendas calls into question whose version of gender it is that is mainstreamed and what values and knowledge are upheld within this. Drawing on critiques of the aid-driven development landscape, this thesis explores how the gender 'buzzwords' which have long animated the field of gender and development have now been absorbed within agricultural transformation discourse.

Purpose

Through analysis of key gender-development buzzwords and policy paradigms: gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and smart economics, the overarching aim is to explore how gender inequality is discursively framed as a policy 'problem' within agricultural transformation discourse, and how this then shapes how it is approached within policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa.

Approach and Methods

A qualitative approach to data collection and analysis - combining discourse analysis of key policy and practitioner documents and key-informant and expert interviews – is utilised to explore how the discursive framing of gender inequality co-opts feminist discourse, and hence shapes how gender relations are understood and approached within development.

Findings

Through linking gender equality and empowerment with agricultural productivity and profitability, gender inequality - and specifically women's *dis*empowerment - is discursively framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity and transformation. These donor-driven gender narratives impose a reductive and simplistic version of gender couched in mainstream Western ideals of what 'empowerment' entails, and promotes the continued victimisation and instrumentalisation of rural African women.

Contribution and Policy Implications

Findings demonstrate that these gender buzzwords and myths have been purposefully absorbed into agricultural transformation discourse where they are reinforced by powerful hegemonic donors through control of narratives, funding and reporting relationships in development projects, programmes and policy. An important contribution is through promoting the potential that decolonial and African feminist literature offers in

constructing counter-hegemonic discourses that disrupt neoliberal framings of the Third World Woman that underlie these myths and buzzwords.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Authorship ii

Acknowledgements iv

Abstract vii

Table of Contents ix

List of Tables xiii

List of Figures xiv

Abbreviations xv

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Motivation 1

1.1. Research Rationale and Aim 3

1.2. Thesis Structure 5

1.3. Contributions to Literature 6

1.3.1. Theoretical and Empirical Contributions 6

1.3.2. Implications for Development Policy and Practice 9

1.4. Conclusion 12

Chapter 2 – The 'Gender Agenda' 14

2.1 Understanding Persistent Women, Environment and Development Linkages 15

2.1.1 Simplification into Buzzwords and Myths: Gender Policy Paradigms 17

2.2 Neoliberal Feminism in a Corporatised Development Landscape 22

2.3 Entwining Gender Equality with Agricultural Transformation 26

2.3.1 Climate-Smart Agriculture 28

2.3.2 The Isomorphism of Policy and Practice 29

2.3.3 'Gender Transformative Approaches' 31

2.3.4 The Challenge of Measurement and Quantification 33

2.4 Conclusion 36

Chapter 3 – Reflections 39

3.1 In the Beginnings 40

3.2 Fieldwork 43

3.3 Adapting Methodological Approach 46

3.4 Power, Privilege & Positionality 49

3.5 Critical Reflections on Methods & Terminology 51

3.6 Research Collaborations 53

3.7 Conclusion: My Personal Learning Journey 57

Chapter 4 – Research Design & Methodological Approach 59

4.1 Research Philosophy & Conceptual Approach 59

4.2 Research Aim 62

4.3 Research Sub-Questions 62

4.4 Empirical Chapter Structure 62

4.4.1 Chapter five: How gender mainstreaming plays out in Tanzania's climate-smart agricultural policy: Isomorphic mimicry of international discourse 63

4.4.2 Chapter six: Quantifying the intangible? Problematising universal applications of Western definitions and measurement indicators of women's empowerment 63

4.4.3 Chapter seven: Neoliberal ideologies and philanthrocapitalist agendas: What does a 'smart economics' discourse empower? 64

4.5 Data Collection 64

4.6 Reflection on Methods & Limitations in Approach 65

4.6.1 Policy, Practitioner and Organisational texts 65

4.6.2 Key-Informant Interviews 67

4.7 Data Analysis 70

4.8 Research Ethics 73

Chapter 5 - How gender mainstreaming plays out in Tanzania's climate-smart agricultural policy: Isomorphic mimicry of international discourse 75

5.1 Overview 75

5.2 Introduction 76

5.3 The Diffusion of Gender Mainstreaming within Agricultural Transformation Discourse 77

5.4 History of Tanzanian Gender and Agricultural Dynamics 79

5.5 Methodological Approach 82

5.5.1 Analytical Approach 82

5.5.2 Policy Selection 83

5.5.3 Coding 85

5.5.4 Key-Informant Interviews 86

5.6 Discussion 87

5.6.1 Gender Narratives within Tanzania's CSA Policy Landscape 87

5.6.2 Mainstreaming Gender within Tanzania's Decentralised Governance Structure… .... .95

5.7 Summary & Conclusions 97

5.8 Chapter Summary 98

Chapter 6 – Quantifying the intangible? Problematising universal applications of Western definitions and measurement indicators of women's empowerment 100

6.1 Overview 100

6.2 Introduction ... 102
6.3 The Legacy of Colonialism within Contemporary Development ... 103
6.4 Simplification and Quantification: Individualising Women's Empowerment ... 104
6.5 Decolonising Women's Empowerment: Bringing in the Collective and the Relational ... 106
6.6 Research Methodology ... 108
6.6.1 CARE's GTA Portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa ... 108
6.6.2 CARE's Utilisation of the WEAI ... 109
6.6.3 Data Collection and Analysis ... 111
6.6.4 Positionality ... 113
6.7 Results - Conceptualising 'Women's Empowerment': Upholding Western Neoliberal Values ... 113
6.7.1 Women's Empowerment as Individual 'Smart Economics' ... 113
6.7.2 In(ter)dependence as Empowerment Goals ... 114
6.8 Operationalising Empowerment: Simplification and Quantification ... 115
6.8.1 Individual Indicators and Rudimentary Inadequacy Cut-Offs ... 115
6.8.2 Measuring the Messy & Intangible ... 115
6.9 Reporting on 'Success' through the WEAI ... 116
6.10 Empowerment as *Ubuntu* ... 118
6.10.1 Ubuntu: Towards a Holistic View of Empowerment ... 119
6.11 Whose Definition of Empowerment Counts? ... 121
6.12 Conclusion ... 122
6.13 Chapter Summary ... 123

Chapter 7 – Neoliberal ideologies and philanthrocapitalist agendas: What does a 'smart economics' discourse empower? ... 124

7.1 Overview ... 124
7.2 Introduction ... 125
7.3 Philanthrocapitalism – Can the Rich 'Save the World'? ... 126
7.4 BMGF & The Hegemony of Neoliberalism ... 127
7.5 Philanthrocapitalism and Agenda-Setting in Agricultural Development ... 127
7.6 The 'Gender Agenda' and Rise of Smart Economics ... 128
7.7 Methodological Approach ... 130
7.7.1 Power Analysis ... 131
7.8 Overt Power: 1st Dimension of Power ... 133
7.8.1 Controlling 'Investments' in Women ... 133
7.8.2 Philanthrocapitalist Approach to Measuring 'Women's Empowerment' ... 134
7.9 Agenda Power: 2nd Dimension of Power ... 135
7.9.1 Investing in Women as 'Smart Economics' ... 135

7.9.2 Women as Adopters of 'Smart' Technologies ... 136
7.9.3 Co-opting 'smart economics' language ... 137
7.10 Discursive/Ideational Power: 3rd Dimension of Power ... 137
7.10.1 The Onus on the Individual ... 137
7.10.2 Saviour Narrative ... 138
7.10.3 Resisting the hegemony of Western knowledge ... 140
7.11 Conclusion: BMGF & Agenda-Setting in Women's Empowerment? ... 141
7.12 Chapter Summary ... 143

Chapter 8 – Discussion ... 145
8.1 Research Aim & Sub-Questions ... 145
8.2 Conceptualising and Operationalising 'Gender Inequality' Within Agricultural Transformation Policy and Practice ... 146
8.2.1 What is the problem represented to be? ... 147
8.2.2 The resilience of gender myths: upholding the neoliberal development agenda and the co-optation of feminist discourse ... 149
8.2.3 Neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse within agricultural transformation policy and practice in sub-Saharan Africa ... 152
8.3 Re-politicising Gender Inequality and the Potential for Transformative and Decolonial Feminist Praxis ... 154
8.3.1 Moving beyond narrow gender-development buzzwords and policy paradigms? ... 158

Chapter 9 - Conclusion ... 167
9.1 Thesis Summary & Findings ... 167
9.2 Future Research Directions & Policy Recommendations ... 169

Bibliography ... 172

Appendices ... 193
Appendix A – Ethics Clearance University of Leeds ... 193
Appendix B – Ethics Amendment Clearance University of Leeds ... 196
Appendix C – Supplementary Material to Chapter 5 ... 197
Appendix D – Supplementary Material to Chapter 6 ... 205

List of Tables

Table 5. 1 Four dominant narratives that describe how gender is conceptualised across Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape. 93

Table 5. 2 Narrative 3: Reinforcing Gender Stereotypes - dominant gender narratives and reasons cited within the analysed policies. 94

Table 6. 1WEAI vs WEI Indicators and Weights……………………………………………110

Table 7. 1 BMGF organisational documents analysed in Chapter 7…………………………132

Appendix C. List of Tanzanian National Policies analysed in Chapter 5..……………..……199

Appendix D. WEAI domains of empowerment and associated weighted (WEAI vs WEI) indicators…………………………………………………………………….....……….207

List of Figures

Figure 5. 1 Tanzania's CSA Policy Landscape 84

Figure 6. 1 Comparing the CARE EKATA vs Gender Light Model 109

Abbreviations

5DE Five Domains of Empowerment

A-WEAI Abbreviated-Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

A4D Agriculture for Development

AAP African Adaptation Programme

AAS Agricultural Advisory Services

AFRICAP Agricultural and Food systems Resilience: Increasing Capacity & Advising Policy

AGRA Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

ASDP Tanzania Agricultural Sector Development Programme

ASDS Tanzania Agricultural Sector Development Strategy

ACRP Tanzania Agriculture Climate Resilience Plan

BMGF Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

BNPP The Bank-Netherlands Partnership Programme

CCAFS Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security

CEO Chief Executive Officer

CGIAR Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

COMESA Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

COO Chief Operating Officer

COSTECH Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology

COVID-19 Coronavirus 2019

CSA Climate Smart Agriculture

CSA-SuPER Climate Smart Agriculture-Sustainable, Productive, Profitable, Equitable and Resilient

DFID UK Department for International Development

EAC East African Community

EKATA Empowerment through Knowledge and Transformative Action

ESRF Economic Social Research Foundation

FAO Food and Agriculture Organisation

FAOLEX Food and Agriculture Organisation Legislative Database

FYDP Tanzania Five Year Development Plans

GAAP Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project

GAD Gender and Development

GCP Global Challenges Programme

GCRF Global Challenges Research Fund

GDP Gross Domestic Product

GM Genetically Modified

GMO Genetically Modified Organism

GPI Gender Parity Index

GTAs Gender Transformative Approaches

IDRC International Development Research Centre

IFAD The International Fund for Agricultural Development

IFI International Finance Institution

IFPRI International Food Policy Research Institute

ILRI International Livestock Research Institute

INGO International Non-Government Organisation

IP Intellectual Property

LGA Local Government Authorities

LGBT+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Others

LMP Tanzania Livestock Master Plan

M&E Monitoring and Evaluation

MKUKUTA Tanzania National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty

MP Member of Parliament

NAP Tanzania National Agriculture Policy

NAPA National Adaptation Plan for Action

NCCS Tanzania National Climate Change Strategy

NEPAD New Partnership for Africa's Development Agency

NFP Tanzanian National Fisheries Policy

NGMG Tanzania National Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender into Climate Change Adaptation Related Policies, Strategies, Programmes and Budgets

NGO Non-Governmental Organisation

OPHI Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative

Pro-WEAI Project-Level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

PwC PricewaterhouseCoopers

RQ Research Question

SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

SUA Sokoine University of Agriculture

TAFSIP Tanzania Agriculture and Food Security Investment Plan

TANGO Technical Assistance to NGOs

TDV Tanzania Development Vision 2025

TGNP Tanzania Gender Networking Programme

ToC Theory of Change

UCU University and College Union

UN United Nations

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

USA United States of America

USAID United States Agency for International Development

VSLAs Village Savings and Loans Associations

WID Women in Development

WEAI Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

WEFI Women's Empowerment in Fisheries Index

WEI Women's Empowerment Index

WELI Women's Empowerment in Livestock Index

WENI Women's Empowerment in Nutrition Index

WED Women, Environment and Development

WUR Wageningen University and Research

WFP World Food Programme

WPR What's the Problem Represented to be?

Chapter 1

Introduction and Motivation

Attention to gender within international development has increasingly moved from the margins into the mainstream over recent decades where, at the macro global level, gender is increasingly visible on the agenda (Bergeron, 2016; Farhall and Rickards, 2021). 11 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) incorporate indicators related to gender dynamics (Doss et al., 2018), with goal 5 as a stand-alone on gender equality. This highlights the ascendance of an international consensus that overcoming gender inequality is not only a condition for ending global poverty, but that women's empowerment and gender equality is a developmental and political goal in itself (Odera and Mulusa, 2020). Indeed, gender is everywhere – and efforts to integrate the 'gender agenda' across the fields of development have, at least in terms of visibility, been declared a *"resounding success"* (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015:396). Yet the precise meanings of 'gender equality and women's empowerment' are not only contested (Farhall and Rickards, 2021) – but, as this thesis argues, are both dynamic and contextual. Yes, women and gender are now a highly visible discursive presence within international development where almost all development agencies and international organisations incorporate gender analyses and programmes (Beneria, 2003) – but is this apparent 'success' too superficial, or is it well-founded? Whose definition of women's empowerment is everywhere, what values and knowledge are upheld within this, and how does this shape how gender inequality is approached within development policy and practice? The precise and purposeful ways in which gender inequality is framed within mainstream development discourse has important implications for how we understand gender relations, the types of policy and interventions promoted and where development aid is targeted, and shapes where and how we view 'progress'. Critical examination of the ongoing *"gendering of global poverty and development"* (Dogra, 2011: 333) is therefore essential. In this context this thesis has one overarching research question: how is gender inequality framed as a policy and development problem within agricultural transformation discourse, and how does this shape gender and agriculture development interventions across sub-Saharan Africa?

In order to respond to this question, this thesis takes a critical look at the aid-driven development landscape in sub-Saharan Africa and persistent women, environment, development linkages within this development discourse. Grounded in a historical trajectory of gender and development theory and practice over the past fifty years, this thesis explores the shifting and evolving discourse through examination of key development buzzwords and policy paradigms: gender mainstreaming (chapter five), women's empowerment (chapter six), and gender equality as smart economics (chapter seven), demonstrating that these shifts represent a development of

ideas that have historic precedents. As argued by Cornwall in her 2007 paper 'Buzzwords and fuzzwords: deconstructing development discourse', *"Buzzwords get their 'buzz' from being in-words, words that define what is in vogue"* (pp.472) – where their resilience and apparent universality stems from their ambiguity which shelter multiple agendas – *"providing room for manoeuvre and space for contestation" (*pp.474). It is their ambiguity and vagueness that thus make the goal of gender equality vulnerable to appropriation by political agendas, where 'paradigm maintenance' and 'knowledge management' (Broad, 2010) are practiced by development elites through privileging knowledge that resonates with their ideology. Within the current neoliberal development landscape[1], favoured narratives and policy paradigms of how development should be done and whose feminism counts are rendered legitimate by powerful elites who use their immense influence to shape development agendas (Narayanaswamy, 2016). Elite international development actors such as the United Nations (UN) agencies, Bretton Woods Institutions and prominent philanthropies like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) occupy much of this mainstream development space, and their increasing focus on gender equality and women's empowerment within agricultural transformation discourse can be understood within the context of a concerted effort within neoliberal development to adapt to new economic and political realities (Prügl, 2021).

This thesis contributes to this discourse and demonstrates how the neoliberal co-optation of feminist notions of 'empowerment', 'agency' and 'choice', and the dominance of 'Western[2]' individualism and Western knowledge inherent within this discursive framing, have been purposely absorbed into the agricultural transformation rhetoric used by these elite development actors in order to promote the neoliberal development agenda - and their positioning as key development actors within it. The thesis also draws on decolonial feminist praxis throughout to

[1] The 'neoliberal development landscape' refers to the dominance of neoliberal ideology within the current development industry. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as a *"theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade"* (2005:2). The early 1980s saw the beginning of the neoliberal era during which what was perceived as harmful government intervention reduced in order to allow market institutions to operate more freely (Kashwan, MacLean and García-López, 2019).

[2] 'Western' here is used as a shorthand for the former colonial powers of Europe and North America. Conventional hierarchies of scientific evidence borne out of modernity/colonialism uphold Western knowledge as objective and exclusive (Milbank *et al.*, 2021). Purewal and Loh (2021) outline how the Western feminism inherent within the contemporary development system upholds this ethnocentrism, obscuring Afrocentric geographical perspectives – *"thereby placing it in alignment with systems of knowledge underpinning conditions of coloniality"* (pp. 127).

explore how depictions of the Third World Woman are central to this neoliberal development agenda, and to consider how the gender buzzwords and policy paradigms explored are ill-suited to varied sub-Saharan African contexts. This is explored within the context of agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa. The aim of agricultural transformation is nothing new in many countries, but, as Mdee et al. (2016) argue, it has to some extent been 'rediscovered' by donors in the past decade. 'Transformation' has become the rallying cry of global sustainability initiatives where it is promoted within international arenas by an increasingly large coalition of development actors - from regional and international funding institutions, government bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private actors – who have all coalesced around the promise of transforming food systems (Whitfield et al., 2021). As such, there are now a growing number of NGO projects that aim to drive agricultural transformation – often within short funding timescales. However, frameworks to monitor and hold accountable processes for fostering such transformational actions are still lacking (Mapfumo et al., 2015). In addition, the term 'transformation' in relation to agriculture remains vague and ambiguous, lacks practical examples, and has plural definitions (Vermeulen et al., 2018) – varying in vision from relatively simple changes in cropping locations right through to significant redesign of global food systems. Transformations are inherently political with winners and losers (Hebinck et al., 2018) – and it is important to critically examine exactly what or who is being 'transformed' in these processes. Considering the absorption of the 'gender agenda' within agricultural transformation discourse and practice, it is also important to problematise both how the goals of gender equality and transformation have become entwined, how they are defined, and by whom. This is achieved through a multi-scalar approach: exploring the promotion of 'gender mainstreaming' within Tanzania's national climate-smart agricultural (CSA - a key approach within agricultural transformation) policy framework (chapter five), CARE International's 'Gender-Transformative Approaches' (GTAs) portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa and the 'Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index' (WEAI) used to report on project 'success' (chapter six), and the gender equality and women's empowerment discourse of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) (chapter seven) – arguably the most prominent funder of development projects promoting gender equality (Garcia and Wanner, 2017). Through this approach, this thesis explores how and why neoliberal framings of gender have been purposely absorbed into donor-driven agricultural transformation discourse across sub-Saharan Africa.

1.1. Research Rationale and Aim

The overarching research aim and question of this thesis is to explore how gender inequality is discursively framed as a policy 'problem' within agricultural transformation discourse, and how this then shapes how it is approached within policy and practice. Much current agricultural

transformation discourse on policy and practice is based on the assumption that in order to move societies toward more desirable and sustainable futures, global food systems need to fundamentally change to meet societal goals for the environment, livelihoods and nutrition (Chandra, McNamara and Dargusch, 2018; Vermeulen et al., 2018). Within agricultural transformation policy and practice, the mainstream development focus on gender as the main axis of inequality has entwined with agricultural transformation discourse as a means to bridge the 'gender gap' within agriculture to drive agricultural productivity (Huyer, 2016; Collins, 2018; Huyer and Partey, 2020).

Yet the gender and policy paradigms which are promoted often rely on and perpetuate gender myths and assumptions (Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Cornwall, 2007a; Doss et al., 2018), and, centred upon 'Western' ideals, are ill-suited to sub-Saharan African contexts (Bawa, 2016; Tamale, 2020). With a regional focus on sub-Saharan Africa, this thesis explores how Western notions of gender and women's empowerment are operationalised within agricultural transformation policy and practice. Drawing on critiques of the aid-driven development landscape (e.g. Banks, Hulme and Edwards, 2015; Büscher, 2014; Kloster, 2020), this thesis engages with decolonial feminist work to critique the fixation of actors in the Global North on the trope of 'the poor rural African woman' (Tamale, 2020), and to explore how approaches to gender within agricultural transformation policy and practice can better relate to the complex and contextual reality of gendered agricultural livelihood dynamics across sub-Saharan Africa.

In this thesis, I thus aim to contribute to the debate on the top-down nature of mainstream development, exploring how the understandings and conceptualisations of gender and women's empowerment within these buzzwords and policy paradigms diffuse into agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa. I do this by exploring and critiquing three key gender-development policy paradigms: gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and smart economics, and their integration into current agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa. By doing this, I contribute to a better understanding of how and why the gender myths and assumptions that underpin these policy paradigms persist in an increasingly neoliberal development landscape.

In order to respond to the overarching research aim and question, this thesis has three corresponding research sub-questions (RQ):

> **RQ1**: How is gender mainstreamed and addressed in agricultural transformation policy?
>
> **RQ2**: How is gender equality and women's empowerment defined and measured in gender transformative approaches?

RQ3: What does a 'smart economics' approach to gender and agricultural transformation empower and who shapes these dominant narratives?

Three targeted case studies respond to these three sub-questions in turn, as outlined below.

1.2. Thesis Structure

In order to address the above research aim and corresponding research sub-questions, this thesis is structured as follows: the following section outlines the key contributions from this thesis. Chapter two situates this research through a literature review of current discourse and evidence on gender and agricultural development policy and practice. Chapter three then provides a critical personal reflection on my role and journey within this PhD – where I acknowledge not just my own limitations and assumptions, how these guided me, and how I have overcome them, but also the external processes that have shaped the content and structure of this thesis. This is necessary in order to understand the research design and methodological approach which is outlined in chapter four.

This thesis then explores how gender inequality is discursively framed as a policy 'problem' within agricultural transformation discourse, and how this then shapes how it is approached within policy and practice, through a series of three novel empirical case studies: chapters five to seven, as outlined below. These empirical chapters are structured as academic papers and all have been submitted to academic journals (see page 57 for a discussion on this).

1. The diffusion of 'gender mainstreaming' as an internationally promoted solution to gender equality within Tanzania's national CSA policy framework (chapter five);
2. The conceptualisation and operationalisation of 'women's empowerment' within CARE International's GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa and the WEAI (chapter six); and
3. The framing and promotion of 'gender equality as smart economics' within the BMGF's organisational documents around gender equality and women's empowerment (chapter seven).

Chapter eight then links these case studies from these empirical chapters together, and outlines the key contributions of this work to knowledge and academic debate regarding gender and agricultural development theory and practice. The concluding chapter then summarises the key findings of this thesis before considering the implications for future research directions in this field and key policy recommendations. This is followed by the bibliography and the appendices.

1.3. Contributions to Literature

Based on the empirical chapters outlined above, this thesis makes several specific contributions – theoretical, empirical and also practical contributions to development policy and practice. Considering that this thesis takes a regional focus of sub-Saharan Africa (see page 52 for a discussion of the term 'sub-Sahara'), the contributions outlined below are in regard to agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa, nonetheless some wider conclusions and contributions can be drawn.

1.3.1. Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

This thesis makes three key theoretical and empirical contributions:

I. Within agricultural transformation discourse gender inequality is framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity and transformation, promoting the victimisation and essentialism of African female farmers

My first contribution is to demonstrate that through linking gender equality and empowerment with agricultural productivity and profitability, gender inequality, and specifically women's *dis*empowerment, is discursively framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity and transformation - and ultimately to economic growth. The thesis uses Carol Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' tool to explore empirically how gender inequality is framed as a policy 'problem' and how it is then 'governed' through policy implementation plans in Tanzania's national CSA policy framework. Through this, chapter five demonstrates that this discursive framing relies on and perpetuates the essentialism and victimisation of rural African women through narratives around women being inherently vulnerable to climate change, having lower agricultural productivity as a result of their inadequate skills and knowledge, and more domestic responsibilities owing to their closeness to nature. As such, this thesis represents an important contribution to critiques regarding the gender myths, assumptions and buzzwords that have long animated the field of gender and development (Cornwall, 2007b) - demonstrating that they remain resilient and still underpin mainstream approaches to gender despite long lasting critique (see for example Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Cornwall, 2007a; Doss et al., 2018). Importantly, the empirical chapters demonstrate that the 'gender agenda' and the gender myths, assumptions and buzzwords that underpin this field have now permeated and become entwined with agricultural transformation discourse.

The different case studies demonstrate how these gender buzzwords and policy paradigms are diffused uncritically into sub-Saharan African contexts. Contributing to policy transfer and isomorphism literature (e.g. Andrews et al. (2012, 2017a, 2017b; Mdee and Harrison, 2019; Aminzade, Schurman and Lyimo, 2018), chapter five provides new insights into policy

isomorphism where the gender mainstreaming policy paradigm is performatively diffused into Tanzania's national CSA policy framework in order to align with the discourse of international development organisations, many of whom provide technical and financial assistance to the policy process in such countries. It outlines how this formulaic mainstreaming of gender in policy becomes an almost meaningless performative game played out by development actors across all scales, rather than producing considered policy and actions to address gendered inequalities in agriculture. Rooted in an increasing debate around what 'empowerment' entails, who gets to decide, and the Global North's fixation on 'improving African women's empowerment' (Bawa, 2016; Tamale, 2020; Purewal and Loh, 2021), chapter six demonstrates that it is the assumed *dis*empowerment of African female farmers that is holding back progress in agricultural productivity and transformation. Contributing to critiques of the neoliberal co-optation of feminism with the 'gender equality as smart economics' paradigm (Chant and Sweetman, 2012; Prügl, 2021), chapter seven demonstrates how African female farmers are framed as untapped adopters of promoted 'smart' agricultural technologies aimed at increasing productivity.

In sum, gender inequality, and specifically women's *dis*empowerment, is discursively framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity - where gender myths, assumptions and buzzwords victimise and essentialise African women within approaches to agricultural transformation.

II. Gender buzzwords and myths have been purposefully absorbed into agricultural transformation discourse where they are reinforced by powerful hegemonic donors in line with their neoliberal ideology

My second contribution is to apply Kashwan, MacLean and García-López's (2019) 'Power in Institutions' framework, building on Lukes' (2005) theoretical three-dimensional approach to power, to the BMGF donor discourse of gender and women's empowerment. Through this novel approach, this thesis demonstrates that discursive framings of gender inequality and women's empowerment that essentialise and victimise rural African women persist largely owing to elite actors such as the BMGF's philanthrocapitalist approach to development - shaping what we understand as poverty and inequality, how to address it and by whom. Here the thesis explores how the gender myths that underpin these policy paradigms and the smart economics rhetoric have now been purposefully absorbed into agricultural transformation policy and practice where they are reinforced by elite development actors to reify and uphold neoliberal approaches to gender and development. Analysis of the BMGF's semantic displacement of the concept of philanthropy through discourse around 'investing in women', 'return on investment' and 'market logic' represents important contributions to debates regarding the 'business case' framing of gender equality within mainstream development (Roberts, 2012): where female farmers across

sub-Saharan Africa are depicted within agricultural transformation discourse as consumers, market subjects, and adopters of 'smart' technologies. A key contribution of this thesis is a critique of the 'Third World Woman' which I argue remains central to today's neoliberal development agenda, in which these contested terms are upheld and promoted by elite development actors.

Critical analysis of the BMGF's approach to gender equality and women's empowerment is lacking, as such this thesis provides novel and important insights regarding how the concept of 'gender equality as smart economics' has been purposefully absorbed into agricultural transformation policy and practice in line with the increasingly neoliberal approach to agricultural development, and how gender myths and buzzwords are reinforced by donors such as the BMGF in the process. Application of the Power in Institutions framework here is a particularly novel approach that enables disaggregation of the tangible and covert ways that the BMGF's power shapes discourses and agendas in gender equality and women's empowerment praxis.

III. Disrupting gender myths and reconceptualising gender framings through a decolonial and afro-feminist lens

My third theoretical and empirical contribution draws on African feminism through applying a decolonial feminist lens to CARE's GTA portfolio and the operationalisation of women's empowerment through the WEAI. Within this approach I problematise the Western-centric conceptualisations of empowerment that form the foundation of such interventions and their mainstream monitoring approaches, demonstrating how they promote Western-centric ideals of individualism and autonomy. This is an important and original contribution to the problematisation and deconstruction of development discourse. The thesis thus provides novel insights into mainstream conceptualisations of empowerment, highlighting their neoliberal economic underpinnings: increased autonomy and economic independence through increased individual asset ownership and control, increased income and participation in market systems, and increased leadership within the household and community. Here the thesis also makes important contributions regarding the fixation of actors in the Global North on 'improving the empowerment' of rural African women, demonstrating the colonial roots of such framings that perpetuate the victimisation and objectification of African women through conceptualisations of the Third World Woman that underpin these myths and buzzwords. Within this I am not implying that there is one African or Western feminism - these are long contested arenas. However, through drawing on critiques of African feminism, I help to reveal the ethnocentric notions of empowerment and autonomy that sit behind the design of a tool such as the WEAI.

Through this consciously decolonial approach, chapter six highlights the disconnect between the Western conceptualisation of empowerment centred around autonomy and independence that underpins the WEAI, and local perceptions and understandings of empowerment in sub-Saharan African communities that appear to promote interdependence and communitarianism. An important empirical contribution here is in demonstrating that engagement with African feminism and African-rooted philosophies of *Ubuntu* and collectivism may help in challenging and decolonising women's empowerment praxis by offering an alternative understanding of 'empowerment'. In sum this thesis makes an important and novel contribution regarding how decolonial and African feminist literature can help to disrupt such gender myths and assumptions by offering alternative ways of understanding and approaching dynamic and normative concepts like empowerment. Concluding with a proposal of how such literature may be used within the 'cracks and contestations' opened up in the neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse in chapter eight, this thesis outlines how decolonial and afro-feminist literature may help to construct counter-hegemonic discourses that disrupt neoliberal framings of the Third World Woman that underlie these myths and buzzwords.

1.3.2. Implications for Development Policy and Practice

It is important to set the above theoretical and empirical contributions in the context of development policy and practice implications, of which this thesis yields three important insights.

I. The isomorphism of gender policy paradigms leads to policy-implementation gaps and capability traps for sub-Saharan Africa

The first implication for development policy and practice is that the uncritical diffusion of gender buzzwords and policy paradigms into Tanzania's national policies in order to align with mainstream development discourse results in policy disconnected from the reality and the complexity of gendered agricultural livelihood dynamics within the country. Chapter five finds little evidence that gender has been effectively 'mainstreamed' across Tanzania's national CSA policy framework, with a significant gap between the normative goal of gender mainstreaming and the actual inclusion of gender (and intersectional) inequalities within policy. Chapter five thus demonstrates how the isomorphism of gender mainstreaming as an internationally promoted policy paradigm and solution to gender inequality thus incorporates gender in a superficial and insubstantial manner, resulting in 'wish list' policies that do not respond to existing evidence on intersectional inequalities. Turning to the implementation of such policy, this chapter also outlines how the diffusion of gender mainstreaming and discursive framing of gender inequality as a barrier to agricultural transformation rarely carries through to policy implementation plans or monitoring systems. This thesis thus makes an important contribution to development policy

and practice through demonstrating that the performative inclusion of gender policy paradigms results in policy that does not relate to institutional capacity nor to the complex and dynamic nature of gender.

This is particularly an issue in decentralised governance structures, as in Tanzania, where policy set at national level is not sufficiently disseminated down to local government authorities, who are then tasked with interpreting and implementing policy with little training and resources. This results in capability traps for local government authorities when states lack the capability to implement the promised actions in their policies and plans. Through this novel case study, the thesis thus offers new insights regarding the policy implications of what happens when policy is not designed with implementation in mind - highlighting that the performative inclusion of the gender mainstreaming rhetoric is actively preventing policy from responding to actual conditions within the Tanzanian agricultural sector, as the question of *how* gender intersects with other axes of inequality to shape agricultural transformation in regards to CSA is brushed over. In sum the development policy and practice contributions of this thesis point to the need for producing policy that relates to and starts with contextualised understanding of existing evidence regarding intersectional inequities, and to existing institutional practice and capacity to implement – thus offering a way of navigating beyond these capability traps. Considering these implications and the limited institutional capacity of the Tanzanian state to implement existing gender mainstreaming strategies, chapter eight thus offers important considerations as to whether it is realistic to promote such ‘perfect’ policy - contemplating what it would mean to remove performative gender signalling from policy.

II. The increasingly quantitative and results-based agenda within mainstream development and reductionist indicators obscures culture and context, privileging certain knowledge and understandings

The second implication for development policy and practice is that methodological claims regarding progress and impact in development that are based on standardised quantitative measures need to be problematised before we evaluate the proclaimed ‘successes’ of such interventions. Through critiquing the conceptualisation of empowerment that underpins the WEAI and its operationalisation through the normative selection of narrow indicators, this thesis highlights how standardised quantitative metrics designed around Western concepts and ideals do not translate into sub-Saharan contexts without some serious shortcomings. Problematising the notion that empowerment is a static and measurable concept that can be owned and counted, this thesis thus makes important contributions to methodological debates regarding the growing reliance on quantification within the development industry aiming to measure an increasing

range of complex social phenomena (see, for example, Merry, 2016; Mennicken and Espeland, 2019).

Despite the growing use and continued adaptations of the WEAI family of indices, it has received little critical academic critique. This thesis thus makes an important and needed academic contribution in this area - particularly considering the novelty of applying a decolonial lens to its conceptual underpinnings. Chapter six also provides an overview of how the ongoing WEAI adaptations reflect advancements in empowerment research and efforts to validate the indicators. Yet the analytical findings provide important insights into how any version of the WEAI imposes artificiality and will never truly represent the reality of decision-making, asset use and ownership, or respect among household members – as the data that is produced is created in response to the normative selection of indicators. Chapter six also explores how CARE utilised the Outcome Mapping methodology as a way to address the methodological limitations of the WEAI, and considers how such bottom-up approaches may offer more grounded understanding of lived experience and gender relations.

Considering this, chapter eight thus offers important considerations regarding the way forward for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and the use and future of standardised metrics within development policy and practice. This is especially important in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the tracking and reporting on progress in relation to different global challenges through the SDGs and their various indicators. In this way I raise important questions regarding approaches to measurement within mainstream development, and the utility of increasingly sophisticated quantitative measures that are both costly and resource-intensive. I also question whether simply enriching conceptualisations of women's empowerment within development approaches with African philosophies like *Ubuntu* and local values and belief systems is enough to 'decolonise' women's empowerment praxis, considering that such approaches still operate within the context and confines of a wider neo-colonial development industry primarily led and funded by actors in the Global North (Amarante et al., 2021) fixated on their role in the empowerment of African women.

III. The hegemonic power of donors and role of external development partners within development policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa limits the potential for context-specific 'agricultural transformation'

The final implication for development policy and practice lies in the hegemonic and outsized power and influence of donors and external development partners within aid chains and development across sub-Saharan Africa. Chapter five contributes to critiques on conditionality of development aid within policy processes (e.g Acosta et al., 2019), outlining the extent of external influence on the policy process in Tanzania where many of the policies reviewed

received financial and technical support from international development organisations and bilateral agencies. This chapter also considers the role of consultants within policy process and contributes some important practical insights on development policy and practice (e.g. Ferguson, 2015), outlining how the outsourcing of policy writing to consultants within Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape is also an important contributing factor to the policy implementation gaps outlined above. Chapter six provides new insights into the politics and conditionality of development aid (e.g. Kloster, 2020) – outlining how NGOs have little room to manoeuvre in this contested space where they are under pressure from donors to demonstrate project impact and results through, as outlined above, an increased reliance on standardised quantitative measurement indices. The power framework utilised in chapter seven provides a compelling overview of the hegemonic power and influence of these donors over development policy and practice, demonstrating how they overtly and covertly shape how global challenges are understood and approached – and, importantly, by whom.

All empirical chapters thus explore the top-down donor-driven nature of mainstream development and discourse and also the power and politics within the aid chain, with each chapter demonstrating how the outsized power and influence of such elite development actors is inherent within a neo-colonial development industry that continues to centre and uphold hegemonic Western ideology. In this process, other worldviews are sidelined, and, in terms of practical and policy implications, the potential for agricultural and social transformation that is contextual and beneficial to farmers across sub-Saharan Africa is limited.

1.4. Conclusion

Crucially, this thesis deals with issues of isomorphism, simplification and measurement within mainstream development and how these work in relation to gender and agriculture. In sum, this thesis provides new insights into the resilience of the gender buzzwords and myths that have long animated the field of gender and development – demonstrating how they are reinforced by powerful hegemonic donors in line with their neoliberal ideology. The thesis demonstrates that the myths and assumptions that underpin these buzzwords and policy paradigms have now been purposefully absorbed into agricultural transformation policy and practice, which itself has been somewhat 'rediscovered' by the same donors over the past decade in their philanthrocapitalist approach to agricultural development. An important novel contribution of this thesis lies in highlighting the opportunities that decolonial and African feminist literature offers in constructing counter-hegemonic discourses that disrupt the neoliberal framings of the Third World Woman that underlie these myths and buzzwords.

In light of development policy and practice contributions, chapter eight considers whether it is realistic to promote 'perfect' policy - contemplating what it would mean to remove performative

gender signalling from policy altogether, how the role of development partners in the policy process can be improved, the ways forward for M&E, and how to challenge and resist the hegemonic power and influence of donor-driven development discourse and practice.

Chapter 2

The ‘Gender Agenda’

The ‘gender agenda’ refers to the *“gendering of global poverty and development”* (Dogra, 2011: 333) which has seen an increased visibility of gender within mainstream development over recent decades (Farhall and Rickards, 2021). The international development industry has evidently fully embraced the language and goals of ‘gender equality’ and ‘women’s empowerment’ where they take pride of place among the development priorities of a plethora of development actors - from international NGOs, donors and government departments (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). *“The rise and rise of gender and development”* (Pearson, 2006: 232) has seen gender equality as not only a standalone goal and fundamental right, as is evident in SDG 5, but the focus on gender has also permeated almost all fields of international development – where *“gender talk is everywhere”* (pp. 232). The intellectual project of gender and the feminist fight for centring women’s rights onto the international development agenda can thus be *“declared a resounding success”* (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015: 396), where gender has been ‘mainstreamed’ into all corners of development policy and practice – from developing gender-participatory budgets, targeting women’s practical needs across government departments and fields (Pearson, 2006), and, as this thesis demonstrates, entwining gender with agricultural transformation goals. Although feminism is above all a movement for gender justice (Fraser, 2013), the apparent success of the salience of gender within mainstream development discourse has, however, been critiqued for its long and troubled history entwined with neoliberalism in mainstream development policy and practice (Calkin, 2017).

Within recent years, an increasingly large coalition of private organisations and transnational corporations have also converged on the need to promote gender equality within their development approaches – particularly in the Global South. As Cornwall (2007c:69) notes *“Gender, it seems, has passed into the lexicon of development without troubling business as usual”*. This ‘transnational business feminism’ (Roberts, 2012) presents the business case for gender equality and has been critiqued for its centring of Western liberal feminism, transitioning away from its roots in feminist discourse and justice and eviscerating feminist terms of their conceptual and political bite (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). Grounded in these critiques, it is important to question what and whose gender it is that is everywhere – and how this shapes how gender is approached within development policy and practice. This thesis takes this as a starting point: whilst not erasing the legacy and ‘incredible victory’ (Narayanaswamy, 2016) of feminist campaigners in centring gender equality within international development discourse, this chapter will give a brief historical overview of the ‘gender agenda’: how and why gender has become

such a visible presence in an increasingly corporatised development industry, and the racialised undertones of the 'Third World Woman' requiring development assistance.

It is necessary to first situate the analysis of current gender and agricultural transformation policy and practice within the broader historical trajectory of over fifty years of gender and development theory and practice (Wong et al., 2019; Farhall and Rickards, 2021). As such, this introduction will first briefly outline the conceptualisations of gender that have underpinned these policy shifts, and an overview of persistent women, environment and development linkages within this discourse. Within this trajectory there has also been a growing frustration with the simplistic slogans and unsupported myths, ambiguous buzzwords, and vague policy paradigms that have characterised this field (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007), which are also incorporated within this chapter. I then consider the increasingly corporatised development landscape in which these gender buzzwords and policy paradigms are promoted and upheld, critiquing the neoliberal co-optation of feminism in the pursuit of capitalist development agendas through the 'business case' for gender equality.

Grounded in these critiques, I then outline how the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment have entwined with agricultural development and transformation policy and practice. Demonstrating how gender inequality is framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity and transformation, I outline how the same myths and buzzwords that have long animated the field of gender and development now continue to circulate within agricultural transformation discourse. I then consider how this then shapes how gender is approached within agricultural development through two key examples of agricultural transformation policy and practice: 'climate-smart agriculture' and 'gender transformative approaches'. Here I critique the political economy of policy and practice through drawing on concepts of policy isomorphism (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2017b), the challenge of measurement and the instrumentalisation of gender through quantitative measurement (Merry, 2016), and the pressure on NGOs to demonstrate impact and 'success' within their funded projects (Kloster, 2020). Within all this I critique the framing and positioning of African female farmers within the top-down donor-driven development landscape, outlining how she becomes a tool in the hand of aid providers in their pursuit of capitalist development. As such, this provides a useful and necessary introduction to the overarching research aim and empirical chapters of this thesis: exploring how gender equality is discursively framed a policy problem within agricultural transformation discourse, and how this shapes how it is approached within policy and practice.

2.1 Understanding Persistent Women, Environment and Development Linkages

The language of 'gender equality' and 'women's empowerment' was mobilised by feminists during the Women in Development (WID) and Women, Environment and Development (WED)

movements of the 1970s and 1980s - 90s, respectively, fighting for women’s rights to be recognised and integrated within the international development agenda (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). Combined with the feminist fight for equal pay, working conditions and citizenship for women in the US, the WID movement gained momentum throughout the 1970s through the narrative that the gendered division of labour resulted in women’s disadvantages in society (Razavi and Miller, 1995). Gender inequality was therefore seen as a hindrance to economic growth and a waste of women’s capital (Jerneck, 2018), and development organisations lobbied for women-centred policies in order to improve female education and the breakdown of gendered stereotypes. Translated into development policy and practice, ‘women in/and development’ became synonymous with microcredit programmes – aligning with the pro-market approach of the neoliberal development agenda. Based on gender stereotypes and the essentialism of women, such approaches were also based on the assumption that women spend more of their income on children’s nutrition, health, and education than men (Jaquette, 2017). Against the backdrop of major droughts and famines across much of Africa and the increased salience of desertification and deforestation within the media, the women’s movement intertwined with the environment and development movements in the 1980s-90s to form the WED movement. Ecofeminist scholars such as Vandana Shiva argued that the gendered division of labour - particularly in reproductive and subsistence-focused activities - results in women’s higher knowledge of and dependence on the environment and forest produce as a source of food, fuel and sustenance for themselves and their families (Leach, 2007). Shiva developed on this ideological relationship between nature and women through demonstrating that the destruction of nature equates to the destruction of women’s resources and the material oppression of women (Agarwal, 1992; Resurrección, 2013). Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead (2007) note how these ‘feminist fables’ evoke powerful and appealing narratives and images about environmental degradation that are harnessed within popularised gender myths that promote women’s inherent closeness to nature and role as environmental protectors, arguing that it is the mythical qualities of such narratives that spur people into action. Here they note how the persuasive power of such myths comes in defining the problem as well as the solution, where such narratives inspired a large range of interventions centred solely on women’s labour and knowledge.

Not only do such myths rely on the essentialism and instrumentalism of women, there has been a visible racialised and classist approach to the depiction of the vulnerable woman in need of development assistance in these movements. The rhetoric of the ‘vulnerable’ rural/Indigenous woman and her powerful image of having to travel ever further in the search for food, fuelwood, and water for her family became popular within international development organisations and feminist activist circles in the 1980s in order to promote their women-centred policies and programs. This ‘Third World Woman’ as a singular monolithic subject, as discussed by Mohanty

(1988) in her seminal 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' article, (re)asserts colonial framings of sexually constrained, poor, uneducated women living under patriarchy vs the discursive self-representation of Western women as autonomous and liberated, educated and modern. Translated into development policy and practice, this targeting thus promoted the portrayal of women as vulnerable 'victims' that require development assistance (Jerneck, 2015). This narrative was further strengthened when women, and in particular Indigenous and poor women, were portrayed as the natural protectors of the environment through demonstrating their intrinsic relationship with nature and special understanding of environmental protection (Resurrección, 2013). By the end of the 1980s the positive image and narrative of women as efficient natural resource managers and protectors gained traction and resulted in the interpretation that women should be exclusively targeted within policy and programming.

At the heart of both movements has been an analysis and focus on women's subordination, giving rise to feminist critiques regarding the homogenisation of women – presenting their roles as static and fixed – and the depiction of men and women as operating in parallel worlds (Agarwal, 1992; Nightingale, 2006). The shift from WID to 'Gender and Development' (GAD) occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, stimulated through postcolonial feminists emphasising the heterogeneity of women's experiences and criticising the portrayal of the vulnerable Third World Woman inherent within Western feminism at the time (Mohanty, 1988; Jaquette, 2017). The GAD movement centred around the normative project of changing inequitable gendered power relations. The response within development policy and programming was to 'mainstream' gender as an action-orientated process of gender integration, promoting the depiction of women as the saviours and protectors of the natural environment upon whose shoulders lies the burden of responsibility in caring for nature (Jerneck, 2015). The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 adopted the 'Beijing Declaration' – the first global policy framework to confirm 'gender mainstreaming' as a as a key strategy to achieve gender equality, and called upon governments and other development actors to make meaningful commitments to bring about change concerning the equality of men and women. 'Gender mainstreaming' has thus been promoted since the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 as a transformative agenda to ensure a gender focus within development policy and practice (Quisumbing et al., 2014).

2.1.1 Simplification into Buzzwords and Myths: Gender Policy Paradigms

International development actors converged around gender mainstreaming where it has since been promoted at the international level as the vehicle of choice to achieve 'gender equality and the empowerment of women' (Moser and Moser, 2005, Sweetman, 2015). Yet Collins (2018)

notes that the celebrations with which gender mainstreaming was met in the 1990s has given way to widespread critiques regarding its neoliberal and technocratic approach often simplified into 'adding women' to fill quota systems and failing to challenge male privilege. Indeed, insisting on women's participation on boards and inclusion in existing institutions may not necessarily improve gendered rights in decision making, and may in fact overlook the institutional and cultural discriminatory practices that give rise to such gendered inequalities in the first place (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). The World Bank's *"forceful embracing of gender mainstreaming"* since 2007 has been critiqued as an attempt to establish a new consensus over the regulation of the economy, as Prügl (2017:32) argues, through incorporating women and reproductive labour into contemporary commodity relations and global financial markets.

The lack of any agreement regarding any operational clarity and implementation guidance for gender mainstreaming (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015) is reflective of the increased dependence on buzzwords within development discourse and practice, where they *"gain their purchase and power through their vague and euphemistic qualities, their capacity to embrace a multitude of possible meanings, and their normative resonance"* (Cornwall, 2007a:472). As Smyth (2007:583) notes, bland talk of 'gender' obscures the feminist roots and potential of such policy measures, while "*the language of 'mainstreaming' creates the possibility of orderly tools…and systems through which profoundly internalised beliefs and solidly entrenched structures are miraculously supposed to dissolve and be transformed"*. Chapter five takes gender mainstreaming as a key gender policy paradigm: exploring how it has been diffused into national policy contexts through the case of Tanzania's climate-smart agricultural policy framework. This chapter outlines that despite the lip service paid to conceptualisations of gender as socially and politically constructed, most gender mainstreaming strategies continue to be based on gross essentialisms of women.

The recognition that climate change will adversely affect the world's poor and exacerbate existing inequalities, and thus vulnerability to its impacts will be articulated along social poverty lines (Nelson et al., 2002), has provided space for the women's movement to yet again strategically position themselves and revive their rhetoric in order to drive policy and programming. In the early millennium, rural women in the developing world were consistently portrayed as one dimensional objects that were inherently vulnerable to climate change and rarely entered into discussions as anything else – thus leading to the narrative that they required the assistance of the international development agencies of the North (Macgregor, 2010). Arora-Jonsson (2011) outlines three main arguments within climate literature as to why women require special attention within climate change discussions: firstly, women are proposed to make up 70% of the world's poor; secondly, women have a higher mortality rate in climate-induced natural disasters; and, finally, women are portrayed as being more environmentally conscious.

This narrative therefore builds on the inertia associated with the WED movement since the 1990s through yet again welcoming notions of vulnerability, feminine agency and care for the environment. The identity of women is therefore again presented as static and uniform – and again intrinsically tied to nature (Resurrección, 2013). Such popularised gender myths are often used within mainstream development discourse and circulated within policy texts - yet are rarely backed up with any empirical evidence. One noteworthy example is the claim that women are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster – a claim that even despite having unclear history (Arora-Jonsson, 2011) is still being used by UN agencies to this day (UNDP, 2022) to uphold and justify a 'woman-centred' approach within their policy and programming. Such examples corroborate Cornwall's (2018) argument that these seductive statistics become *'travelling fictions'* where they *"take on a life of their own as they ripple from website to report to speech to policy"* (pp. 4).

Such myths also demonstrate that despite the term 'gender' having provided camouflage, 'women' as an analytical category has remained remarkably resilient within development policy and planning – most prominently through discussions around 'women's empowerment' (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). The writings of Sen (1985, 2001), Batliwala (1993, 1994), and Kabeer (1999) were instrumental in early understandings and theorisations of empowerment as it entered the development lexicon in the early 1990s.

Naila Kabeer's work centres relationships – both within the family and the community – in understandings of empowerment. Her influential 1999 article 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment' provided a conceptual foundation for women's empowerment, and sparked a huge increase in research funding and publications around the concept (Priya, Venkatesh and Shukla, 2021). Kabeer's empowerment work builds on the capability approach but makes explicit the interaction between agency and power structures (Kabeer, 2021). Within this work Kabeer stressed the need to focus on the cultural values and power relations that constrain women's ability to make strategic life choices, emphasising that structural inequalities cannot be addressed by individuals alone. Kabeer's more relational understanding of autonomy points to the centrality of relationships that shape women's lived experiences and their power to act - where women cannot be separated from the relational webs that constitute their social and economic lives.

Srilatha Batliwala reflected on processes of empowerment and struggles for social justice within her state of Karnataka in southern India, where the 12th and 13th Century Veerashaiva movement against caste and gender oppression called for the redistribution of power through the destruction of forms of social stratification (2007). Her empowerment work was grounded within her early work in community health and rural Dalit and tribal women's movements in Karnataka explored the gendered impact of poverty and discrimination. Batliwala's work explored how

empowerment was understood and operationalised across South Asia by grassroots women’s and development organisations who claimed to promote women’s empowerment. Her conceptual and strategic framework coincided with Kabeer’s own research in the early 1990s. Both Batliwala and Kabeer stressed understandings of empowerment as a process that shifts social power and the importance of facilitating spaces for women to collectivise and recognise their own agency and power in organising themselves to confront and transform the social and political constraints that shape their subjugation (Batliwala, 2007). This is embedded and emphasised in Batliwala’s own definition of empowerment: *“Empowerment is not a goal, but a foundational process that enables marginalised women to construct their own political agendas and form movements and struggles for achieving fundamental and lasting transformation in gender and social power structures”* (Batliwala, 2015). This consciousness-raising: of being able to imagine the possibility of a different life free from oppression, is central to the process of empowerment by which people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical perspective on it (Kabeer, 1999).

Whilst both Kabeer and Batliwala were instrumental in understandings of empowerment in the early 1990s, they have both come to critique its simplistic adoption within mainstream development praxis. Reflecting on the appropriation of the concept within Indian development policy and practice, Batliwala and Dhanraj (2004) claimed that neoliberal economic reforms within India were instrumentalising poor women in a process of their own disempowerment to serve the agenda of the state. Reflecting on how the concept has been “*depoliticised, degraded and instrumentalised in the Indian context…but also how the word itself travelled into other domains and became a personal power technique, rather than a transformative political process*” (2015).

The centring of women’s empowerment within mainstream development agendas has led to a burgeoning research field exploring its theorisations and measurement capabilities. Moving beyond the conventional mainstream emphasis on improving women’s financial independence and business skills, the ‘Pathways of Women’s Empowerment’ project set out in 2006 to explore how women in different contexts, cultures and circumstances experience power, empowerment and change in their lives - thus aiming to explore other contextual dimensions of women’s lives that are a source of empowering pleasure and leisure (Cornwall and Edwards, 2014). An outcome of the project was the book ‘Feminisms, Empowerment and Development: Changing Women's Lives’ in 2014. Bringing together a range of studies from across the Pathways network, the book offers diverse perspectives on empowerment that disrupt and complicate the conventional narrative. Aligned to Kabeer’s work above, the findings *“serve as a vital reminder that empowerment is not a destination, nor something that can be ‘delivered’, but a journey that is neither linear nor predictable in terms of its outcomes”* (2014:x). Findings from the Pathways

project thus promote understandings of empowerment as a complex process of negotiation rather than a linear sequence of inputs and outcomes, and argues for a more nuanced context-based approach to development practice aiming to improve the empowerment of women. Such a framing runs in direct contradiction to how empowerment is conceptualised within static quantitative measurement indices.

'Empowerment' has thus become another buzzword within development policy and programming (Cornwall and Brock, 2005) – and is often framed by development actors as 'unleashing the potential' of women (Hillenbrand et al., 2015) *"where they are put to work for development, rather than making development work for **them**"* (Cornwall, 2018:2, emphasis in original). Cornwall (2018) terms this 'empowerment lite' – where it has been stripped of its roots in radical feminist social movements and systemic change to instead be propped up by the gender myths that represent women as a development asset. It has become *"probably the most widely used and abused"* (Batliwala, 2007:557) buzzword through its uptake by development agencies as a development objective, depoliticising and subverting the politics that the term was created to symbolise. Development policy and practice that claims to 'empower women' also implies that power is a status (Cornwall, 2018) – something that can be owned and transmitted from the empowered/powerful Global North to the perceived disempowered Global South.

In this context, chapter six explores how 'women's empowerment' is conceptualised within development programming, and how it is operationalised through measurement indices to measure and report on 'changes' in women's empowerment and project 'success'. Researchers often define, operationalise, and measure empowerment in different ways (Alkire et al., 2013) – with improving empowerment frequently identified as a research priority within agricultural development (Richardson, 2018). This chapter outlines how, despite growing recognition that the persistent focus on improving women's economic empowerment over recent decades has failed to bring about significant structural improvements in gender and agricultural livelihood dynamics (Hillenbrand et al., 2015), mainstream approaches to women's empowerment still take a technocratic approach through a focus on her access and resources where feminist notions of 'empowerment' and 'agency' are reconceptualised as integration into labour and financial markets (Byatt, 2018). This thesis thus outlines that despite market-orientated approaches to development being often critiqued for reproducing the very power relations that serve to undermine gender equality (Wong et al., 2019), women's empowerment is often framed as a technical issue aimed at bringing more women into existing market systems that does little to question how and why these systems function to perpetuate inequality in the first place (Hillenbrand et al., 2015). Such a narrow focus characterises development simply in economic terms to reproduce capitalist objectives, and thus overlooks the importance of social

development in enhancing freedoms and agency, and of strengthening women's awareness and capacities to challenge patriarchal structures on their own terms (Wong et al., 2019).

Importantly, this chapter also explores how Western feminism influences the design, implementation and monitoring of gender equality policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa, drawing on African and decolonial feminist critique of the profound misreadings of gender in Africa by Western feminist researchers (Cornwall, 2007b). This chapter begins with an overview of how the violent colonial suppression of Indigenous institutions restructured hierarchical power relations – outlining how the colonial introduction of gendered hierarchies and the exclusion of women from the public sphere and its resources is one of the antecedents of the current mainstream development focus on African women as 'victims'. African women thus not only saw their resources deplete and their freedoms decline during colonial rule, but also their status in society regressed sharply through the hierarchical gender binary as a structuring form of power relations (Prügl, 2017). Within the sustained interest in research on African women (Tamale, 2020), as Narayanaswamy highlights (2016), there is a tendency within this hegemonic 'northern-hemisphere feminism' exported by global institutions to depict the 'Global South' as universally marginalised and in need of development assistance - and through doing so excludes the Southern woman and Southern feminist priorities from the mainstream development space – unless they can align their discourse and objectives with that of the Global North. The result is that these elite global actors speaking for the marginalised (who, is it presumed, have little agency and are not advocating for change in their own ways) tend to frame their programs and interventions on Western/northern feminist assumptions on gender relations that exclude alternative framings – such as the intersectional lens of Africa Womanism (Bedigen et al., 2021). As such, this chapter applies a decolonial lens to Western conceptualisations of women's empowerment that underpin the design of development interventions and their mainstream monitoring indices – exploring how they may be made more culturally relevant through engagement with African philosophies and understanding of oneself in relation to others.

2.2 Neoliberal Feminism in a Corporatised Development Landscape

The pro-market approach to gender equality and the entwinement of empowerment with labour and markets has thus defined the field of 'gender and development' as a field of policy and practice over recent decades (Moeller, 2018). Feminist knowledge and agendas have been redefined by corporatised development by *'making women fit for capitalism and capitalism fit for women'* (Prügl, 2021:470) – where growth and progress are defined narrowly in economic terms. 'Gender equality as smart economics' was the title of the World Bank's 2007-10 Gender Action Plan, which promoted the instrumental case for 'investing' in women to further economic development and growth. The 'business case' for the empowerment of women is ever present in

this logic: gender equality is framed as a barrier to further economic development, corporate profit and capitalist accumulation that needs to be overcome to enable women to start and grow businesses, innovate, and compete in markets. 'Smart economics' therefore markets 'empowerment' as the new development panacea (Cornwall, 2018).

Smart economics has thus become another buzzword and policy paradigm, where 'success' in gender quality is commonly framed through income growth, market expansion, and participation in 'productive' decision-making. 'Gender equality as smart economics' thus progresses the WID agenda by endorsing female participation and integration in markets and economies (Farhall and Rickards, 2021). Such participation is deemed economically valuable, and yet simultaneously devalues other areas of work traditionally thought of as 'women's labour' such as domestic household tasks, care and reproductive labour. This is contrary to its promoted 'feminist' outlook (Byatt, 2018) and indeed regresses the feminist economic argument that calls for recognising the socioeconomic worth of domestic labour. Furthermore, central to the smart economics framing is the promotion that women are more likely than men to reinvest their earnings into improving the wellbeing of their families and communities (Roberts, 2012) – perpetuating the essentialism of women's natural role as caregivers and mothers and reifying the gender norms they purport to challenge (Bergeron, 2016).

As outlined in chapter seven, the timing of the 'gender equality as smart economics' policy framing was no coincidence. The 2007-8 financial crisis led global financial institutions and large development actors, such as the World Bank, to look for policy solutions out of the crisis – were women presented an 'untapped resource'. For example, the multinational accounting firm Ernst & Young stated in 2009 that *"The financial crisis jolting the world's economies only highlights the missing voices and lacking presence of women…A crisis presents an opportunity for change. Now is the time in history to realize and harness the powerful and positive effect that women's empowerment and leadership can have on the global economy'* (Earnst & Young, 2009:3). On the timing of the 'gender equality as smart economics' conception Prügl (2021) notes:

> *"A number of circumstances converged to make the Smart Economics agenda resonate. The Bank's communications campaign fortuitously coincided with the 2008 financial crisis, which spawned gender anxieties as reports of sexism in finance and macho hubris on Wall Street hit the news in conjunction with news of the economic damage wrought by reckless male gam-bling (Prügl 2012). Messages about the potentially moderating influence of supposedly more risk-averse women flourished in parallel and may have created a certain receptiveness among policymakers to issues of gender equality."*

Smart economics has thus been critiqued for giving 'neoliberalism a feminist face' (Prügl, 2021), where the neoliberalisation of feminism entails not only the insertion of women into neoliberal economic projects, but is also a cultural formation. The discursive translation of feminist ideas – such as empowerment and agency - into capitalist endeavours is apparent through the commodification of values and processes and the construction of productive entrepreneurs governed through markets and incentives. However, rather than focusing on the flaws in feminist theory that allow for neoliberal cooptation, Calkin (2017) argues that we should begin with asking why neoliberalism concerns itself with gender inequality in the first place – asking to whom it assigns power in global development.

The neoliberalisation of feminism has been driven in part by the increased influence and role of corporations in global governance (Grosser and McCarthy, 2019), where 'smart economics' stems from the much broader realm of 'transnational business feminism' (Roberts, 2012; Byatt, 2018). As chapter seven outlines, given their vast control over financial resources, such global institutions are empowered to determine the global development agenda – framing what they consider as important in their development focus (for example women's empowerment), and how this should be tackled (a focus on economic empowerment and integration into capitalist market systems) (Narayanaswamy, 2016). In this space, powerful global actors drive certain development narratives that they render legitimate - which, owing to the positioning of these actors, both geographically and politically, favours the global development agenda of the 'Global North' and often overlooks the diversity of development discourse from the so-called 'Global South'. This is one dimension of control that is described as 'hidden power' (Hillenbrand et al., 2015) whereby influential actors shape the development agenda, deciding what issues are important and whose viewpoints are legitimate. In the 'gender agenda' era, so-called 'gender experts' are increasingly employed within such corporate and development institutions to ensure a gender lens is applied to policy and practice. Yet Fraser (2009) argues their discourse has become independent of the feminist movement – facilitating the neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse within development. Perhaps this is in part owing to the pressures feminists experience in their encounters with development: *"pressures to simplify, sloganize and create narratives…that come to depend on gender myths and five rise to feminist fables"* (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007:13). Neoliberal reforms done under the pretence of gender equality focus on improving outcomes through technocratic policy interventions - keeping the status quo and the core ideology of the capitalist economic model intact (Bergeron, 2016). Space for discussions of justice and ethics of the structural antecedents for inequalities and exploitation is limited.

Kathryn Moeller explores the corporatised development's focus on poor girls and women in the Global South in her book 'The Gender Effect: Capitalism, Feminism, and the Corporate Politics

of Development' (2018) through the case of the Nike Foundation and their 'Girl Effect' philanthropic organisation. Calkin (2015) argues that the Girl Effect typifies a post-feminist political discourse which promotes the notion of a Western empowered woman 'saving' a disempowered Third World Woman by investing in her economic potential, thus promoting a hierarchical relationship structured by oppositions between modern and traditional, empowered and disempowered, and agent and victim. The colonial underpinnings of such a framing are not accidental and underwrite neoliberal approaches to development where gender inequality is presented as the failing of state-led development in which gender justice is a 'smart business' strategy that should be sold to the private sector. For example, 'The Third Billion Campaign' promoted by PwC's strategy consulting business unit 'Strategy&' (formerly Booz & Company) promotes the idea of 'The Third Billion' - a composite figure that estimates the number of women aged 25-65 who could participate in the global economy but lack sufficient education or family/community support - 882 million of whom are located in so called 'emerging' or 'developing' countries (Moeller, 2018). The image is clear: these racialised subjects live under patriarchal oppression, and are holding us all back. Yet such notions of women as 'untapped resources' reconceptualises and de-politicises both gender inequality and poverty itself: presenting these 'Third Billion' women as overlooked consumers and entrepreneurs, and disregarding capitalism's political and structural causes of poverty (Byatt, 2018)

The relations constructed in the smart economics framing between the empowered Western woman and the disempowered Third World Woman thus reify colonial framings of women in the Global South as lacking agency and requiring the development assistance of the Global North, working to erode bonds of solidarity and entrench structural inequalities (Calkin, 2015). Promotion of this framing is key to neoliberal approaches to development, where in terms of the uptake of gender inequality as a key focus within the neoliberal development agendas of these organisations, as Narayanaswamy (2016:2170) states, it is important to *"ask whose interests and objectives are ultimately served through initiatives to tackle gender inequality as part of global efforts to promote inclusive development"*. Chapter seven thus explores the smart economics discourse through the case study of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMFG) – arguably the most prominent funder of development projects towards gender equality (Garcia and Wanner, 2017). This chapter outlines how the BMGF adopt and promote the smart economics framing through their philanthrocapitalist approach to gender equality and agricultural development in order to uphold the neoliberal development agenda and their positioning as a key development actor within this space. Importantly, this chapter also considers what space there is for more radical and transformative agendas in constructing counter-hegemonic discourses that move beyond the smart economics rhetoric that argues it is only worth investing in women if they can contribute to the global economy.

This section has briefly outlined the trajectory of gender and development theory and practice over recent decades – from the WID, WED and GAD movements, and how it has been translated and operationalised through key policy paradigms which are the focus of the empirical work in this thesis: gender mainstreaming, women’s empowerment, and gender equality as smart economics. The thesis now turns to a further and more recent policy paradigm concerning agricultural development: agricultural ‘transformation’, and outlines how these gender buzzwords and policy solutions have been absorbed into the agricultural transformation rhetoric and are reinforced by powerful development elites in order to further uphold the neoliberal development agenda.

2.3 Entwining Gender Equality with Agricultural Transformation

The interest in agricultural transformation stems from a recognition that in order to move societies toward more desirable and sustainable futures, global food systems need to fundamentally change to meet societal goals for the environment, livelihoods and nutrition. The need for agricultural transformation is particularly pertinent as under the threat of global anthropogenic climate change, food systems need to be prepared for and able to withstand rapid shifts and tipping points for food production under which agricultural livelihoods may become progressively untenable or stressed (Vermeulen et al., 2018).

Gender has become a key focus within agricultural transformation policy and practice in recent decades, where women and girls are a highly visible discursive presence within the ‘agriculture for development’ (A4D) sector (Farhall and Rickards, 2021). The narrative that gender inequality is a barrier to economic growth present in various WID, WED and GAD movements has thus been absorbed into A4D – where it is framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity and the development of inclusive and sustainable food systems. The simplifications and sloganizing of gender myths that have underpinned various WID, WED and GAD movements continue to circulate within agricultural transformation discourse. Doss et al.'s (2018) paper entitled *“Women in agriculture: four myths”* outlines how much of the policy discourse used to support a women-centred approach within agricultural transformation relies on and perpetuates stylised facts and seductive statistics on women, agriculture and the environment: 1) 70% of the world’s poor are women; 2) Women produce 60 to 80% of the world’s food; 3) Women own 1% of the world’s land; and 4) Women are better stewards of the environment – none of which are grounded in any sound empirical evidence. Similar unsubstantiated myths are animated in the current ‘feminisation of agriculture’ discourse (Kawarazuka et al., 2022). The notion of ‘myth’ helps to make sense of how and why certain ideas gain purchase and how they motive development interventions (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007), where the lasting impacts of the various WID/WED/GAD movements are evident in these persistent myths: women being inherently vulnerable, more connected to nature, and naturally more altruistic and caring. As

Cornwall (2007:163) notes, *"the myths that animate gender and development interventions may hold little resonance with the lived experiences of the women whom gender and development interventions seek to empower"*.

The ongoing adherence to gender equality as smart economics and the persistent focus on gender myths within mainstream development has entwined with the discourse and approaches to agricultural transformation through a persistent policy focus on women's access and resources. Within this, there has been a prominent emphasis on the perceived differing needs, preferences and constraints of male and female farmers (Kristjanson et al., 2017). Addressing persistent 'gender gaps' in access to agricultural resources, climate-information and extension services form a central tenet of this discourse and practice – where targeting women's perceived vulnerability in these areas is promoted as a means of achieving greater impact. Such focuses on gender gaps in agricultural productivity also take a simplistic approach to farm management and the separation of tasks by gender. Inherent within this approach is the notion of a monogamous wife and husband and unitary household model where it is easy to delineate agricultural tasks. Amartya Sen's seminal work on gender inequality has been of much importance in demonstrating that the household is not an undifferentiated unit, but a unit of cooperation as well as internal inequalities (Sen, 2001). Numerous studies have shown that the reality of farm management systems across Africa are much more complex than the unitary household model allows – where women work within networks not just in their household but also within the community to contribute to agricultural production (Kristjanson et al., 2014).

This thesis explores how the gender myths that underpin these policy paradigms and the smart economics rhetoric have now been purposefully absorbed into agricultural transformation policy and practice where they are reinforced by elite development actors to reify and uphold neoliberal approaches to gender and development. Arguments surrounding the 'gender gap' in agricultural productivity, for example, often take a narrow approach to what tasks are valued as 'productive', where important activities often carried out by women such as food processing and preparation (Kristjanson et al., 2014) are not counted – highlighting the devaluation of domestic care and labour. This thesis takes two key examples of agricultural transformation policy and practice - 'climate-smart agriculture' and 'gender transformative approaches', exploring how the neoliberal co-optation of feminism discursively frames gender inequality as a barrier to agricultural productivity and further economic growth, and solidifies the hegemony of powerful Global North development actors through wielding their immense power to push capitalist development agendas.

2.3.1 Climate-Smart Agriculture

‘Climate-smart agriculture’ (CSA) is one such strategy promoted to ‘transform’ agricultural systems across Africa premised on the assumption of ‘triple wins’: achieving increased agricultural yields whilst simultaneously tackling food security, increasing the resilience of vulnerable communities and, where possible, removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere (Karlsson et al., 2018). CSA rose to prominence during a period of growing political concern regarding global population increase and food security combined with market instability amidst the 2007-08 economic and food crisis (Neufeldt et al., 2013; Chandra et al., 2018) which led to food riots in over 30 countries (Karlsson et al., 2018). These market instabilities and fluctuating prices for crops led to concerns regarding social and economic tensions in poor-food importing countries and a renewed focus on agricultural development (Neufeldt et al., 2013). CSA entered policy arenas through a projected Malthusian crisis of a lack of food to feed an estimated global population of 9 billion by 2050 (Collins, 2018) and the recognition that in order to accommodate a projected increase of 2.4 billion people living in developing countries, agricultural production will need to expand by 60% by 2050 (Karlsson et al., 2018) – the majority of which will need to come from increased productivity (Lipper et al., 2014). At the core of the CSA strategy is the insistence that economic growth is compatible with environmental protection (Nagothu, 2016). As such, the theoretical underpinnings of CSA resonate well with the goals of policy makers as it aligns with the larger narrative of further economic growth (Nagothu, 2016) - where CSA has proved a powerful concept to unite the fields of agriculture, climate change and development (Neufeldt et al., 2013).

As chapter five outlines, CSA is also promoted as having the potential to bridge the gender gap in agriculture (Huyer and Partey, 2020). Module 18 of the FAO of the UN, World Bank and The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)’s ‘Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook’ focuses specifically on gender and climate-smart agriculture (IFAD, 2015) - emphasising the importance and ultimate goal of integrating gender in CSA practices through stating that it is unlikely for CSA strategies to reach their full potential if due attention is not given toward gender in their design and implementation. The same corporatised development that promotes CSA as a means to transform agriculture across Africa frames gender inequality as the barrier to agricultural productivity and adoption of CSA practices: where unequal gendered access to ‘productive’ resources such as land, fertiliser and credit, as well as agricultural extension training and farmer groups, produces ‘gender gaps’ that require intervention (Prügl, 2021). Evidently, the mainstream focus on gender as a key determining factor in vulnerability, as in the smart economics rhetoric, has permeated high-level agricultural transformation discourse. Numerous studies explore gender preferences in CSA practices (Kristjanson et al., 2017), and, according to Chandra et al.'s (2018) review of the literature and

discourse surrounding climate-smart agriculture, ‘gender’ is highlighted as one of three thematic clusters (the others being ‘market’ and ‘policy and institutional’) that frequently underpins research priorities into CSA. The focus on market-led and productivity-orientated practices are precisely why corporate-led and trade-driven CSA has been critiqued for being antithetical to feminist approaches in agriculture for development (Collins, 2018).

Since inception the CSA agenda has evolved from one that was largely centred around promoting investment in agricultural research and innovation (Nagothu, 2016) to one that is now principally promoted for smallholder farmers, low-income producers and consumers - particularly in developing country contexts (Nagothu, 2016; Chandra et al., 2018). However, despite marginalised smallholders being described as the *‘ultimate beneficiaries of CSA’* (Chandra, McNamara and Dargusch, 2018:537), CSA is commonly critiqued for its lack of consideration of smallholder-specific issues within CSA policy and programming - fuelled by the focus on climate mitigation within global discourse on CSA as critics argue that the burden of climate mitigation is thus being forced onto the shoulders of smallholder farmers in developing countries who have contributed little to global anthropogenic climate change (Karlsson et al., 2018). Encouraging the integration of smallholder farmers in carbon markets is also seen by many as a push to commercialise small-scale agriculture (Karlsson et al., 2018) and could lead to further displacement of smallholders and populations without recognisable property rights through land appropriation by corporate interests and local elites (Nagothu, 2016). That the CSA agenda focuses predominantly on technological innovation and market integration within smallholder farming systems in developing countries thus upholds the neoliberal ideology at the centre of mainstream approaches to agricultural development - that there is only one pathway out of poverty for smallholders: market led development (Akram-Lodhi, 2013). Chapter seven explores critiques regarding the technocratic approach to agricultural transformation which legitimises agro-industrial expansion, in which African female smallholder farmers are framed as an ‘untapped resource’ in the adoption of promoted climate-smart agricultural technologies, in more detail.

2.3.2 The Isomorphism of Policy and Practice

Despite being a relatively new concept, CSA circulated remarkably widely and was quickly popularised within the international community (Nagothu, 2016; Karlsson et al., 2018), where it now dominates discussions around agricultural development (Neufeldt et al., 2013) and is lauded as a pivotal mechanism for achieving the SDGs (Taylor, 2018). An increasing number of large development organisations, most notably the FAO and World Bank, and corporate agribusiness, such as Yara International and Bayer (formerly Monsanto) currently promote CSA as an approach to transform global food systems. In this context, chapter five analyses the power

and politics of the policy space through critiques of good governance to explore how certain mainstream development discourses are promoted within international arenas - exploring the proliferation of CSA policy and practice, and its entwinement with the pursuit of gender equality, within the context of policy isomorphism and policy transfer literature.

Political sociology literature on world polity argues that common policy models and global norms proliferate globally as the enactment of 'world culture', diffusing down to nation states whereby states enact models in an effort to seek legitimacy on the international stage – resulting in the isomorphism of policy and practice (Meyer et al., 1997; Swiss, 2011). This world culture, argues Swiss (2011), carries with it a prescriptive set of values, norms and models that establish legitimate actors and actions. As world cultural models are deemed universally applicable and acceptable, policy models that reflect internationally agreed upon best practice lead to institutional isomorphism – evident particularly through development aid where recipient states seek legitimacy on the international stage. This results in a one-size-fits-all approach to global challenges, as this thesis argues through the case of the gender mainstreaming policy paradigm to address gender inequality. Chapter five problematises this approach through outlining the disconnect between the donor-driven discourse of gender mainstreaming and the complex reality of gendered agricultural livelihood dynamics in Tanzania.

In this context, chapter five explores gender mainstreaming and CSA as elements of 'good governance' and policy isomorphism – where their prescription has been inserted into national policy frameworks of aid-recipient countries in order to follow the 'best practice' approach of mainstream development agendas. Policy frameworks dominated by an aid-driven donor discourse and a donor focus on 'good governance' often result in the inclusion of gender in order to make 'policy noise' (Mdee et al., 2020) – resulting in policy that appears to reflect internationally agreed upon policy frameworks but does not relate to existing capability and capacity to implement extensive change. Drawing on the concept of 'isomorphic mimicry' (Andrews et al. (2012, 2017)), here the thesis outlines how the gender mainstreaming rhetoric has been diffused uncritically and performatively within Tanzania's CSA policy landscape, resulting in policy-implementation gaps for the Tanzanian state in responding to intersectional inequity within the agricultural sector. Governments 'mimic' one another all the time through sharing experiences, lessons learned and best practices - and the importance and potential success of this should not be dismissed - yet when the formal institutions of success are imitated, rather than the path to functional and successful government structures and policies, the result is a *"futile chase for that one best-practice path towards development"* (Krause 2018, p.1). This conflation of form and function – confusing 'looks like' for 'does' within policy – serves as a key reason why, after decades of policy reform, many countries are still struggling to build effective state capability to substantially reduce poverty levels (Andrews et al., 2017) and

transform agriculture (Andrews, 2013). 'State capability traps' (Pritchett et al., 2010) arise where imported standard responses to predetermined problems camouflages the limited capacity of the state to address or understand these problems. It is through this lens that this thesis examines the donor influenced policy landscape in Tanzania - looking at how mainstream gender discourses are adopted into policies in the context of CSA, what this reflects about the Government's understanding of the relationship between gender and agriculture in Tanzania, and the effect that this has on the institutional capacity of the Tanzanian government to implement said policies.

In light of this, chapter five, and continued in more detail in chapter eight, discusses what it would mean to create 'perfect' policy that deals with the complexity and dynamic nature of gender relations in Tanzania. Here the thesis considers what it would mean to remove performative gender signalling from policy altogether in an effort to move away from ineffective one-size-fits-all policy solutions to complex challenges. This relates to Doss's (2018) questioning to what extent agricultural development interventions can and should target women specifically. Doss goes on to argue that interventions aimed at increasing the productivity of female farmers may not necessarily need to focus on the agricultural sector at all. Projects aimed at reducing women's workload in other areas of life – for example through reducing the time needed for water/firewood collection (jobs that are predominantly carried out by women in the developing world) are likely to give women more time and energy to work on the farm and/or participate in projects. Chapter eight thus considers the implications of producing perfect policy given limited resources to address the complexity of intersectional inequities embedded in complex socio-political interactions.

2.3.3 'Gender Transformative Approaches'

The 'transformation' rhetoric has also permeated 'gender-responsive' agricultural policy and practice through the promotion of 'Gender Transformative Approaches' (GTAs). One of the ways agricultural transformation projects aim to appear just and equitable is to ensure that they consider gendered inequalities in agricultural practices. In the context of the gender agenda and in order to secure funding, NGOs often have to demonstrate a commitment to gender objectives (Warren, 2012). Projects aimed at reducing 'gender gaps' within agriculture (Huyer, 2016) tend to focus on the visible manifestations of gender inequality: gendered access to resources, markets, land (Wong et al., 2019 - yet frequently this is done within existing social norms and structures (Kantor, Morgan and Choudhury, 2015). Mainstream approaches to women's economic empowerment have thus been critiqued for failing to acknowledge the social and political structures that reinforce societal inequalities, and instead represent technical fixes and 'gap-filling', with the potential to reinforce inequalities and exacerbate poverty as a result (Hillenbrand et al., 2015).

In order to move beyond mere gender integration and a focus on the vulnerable female farmer in agricultural development projects, it is recognised that more needs to be done to question and challenge the underlying power dynamics and societal structures that mediate gendered (and intersectional) inequalities in agriculture. As a result ‘Gender Transformative Approaches’ (GTAs) have become prominent in the gender and agricultural development literature and are frequently incorporated into agricultural transformation projects in sub-Saharan Africa. Defined by Wong et al. (2019:i) as *“ways to address the foundations of gender inequity and unequal power relations, with a focus on transforming gender relations to be more equitable”*, GTAs thus offer an alternative from simply integrating gender into development projects by working towards transforming power dynamics and societal structures that reinforce gender inequity. As such, GTAs work explicitly to change gender norms and relations in order to promote more equitable gender relations between women and men, and a more socially enabling environment (Farnworth and Colverson, 2015). GTAs that claim to ‘revolutionise’ (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2020) the lives of participating individuals and their families have thus gained traction during the last decade in the context of food security and agricultural transformation.

One of the key characteristics of GTAs that distinguish them from other development efforts, according to Kantor et al. (2015), is that they foster the development of a deep understanding of people in their context and the way social inequalities intersect to affect choices and outcomes. It takes considerable time to understand and work effectively with communities with normative and structural change where trust and longer-term engagements are critical (Wong et al., 2019). The time it takes to build up the necessary relationships and trust to observe and understand livelihood dynamics often exceeds the shorter timeframes of project funding cycles. This begs the question: how are GTAs in agricultural development projects designed – how long and through what processes is this understanding built up and how does this feed into project interventions? How closely do donors, International NGOs (INGOs) and national NGOs work with and understand the communities in which they operate and design projects around? How effective is the ‘aid chain’ in reducing poverty and driving development? These questions are particularly pertinent to agrarian transformation which is necessarily slow and incremental, often relying on the changing of social and cultural norms which are arguably inherently difficult to measure. This thesis thus explores GTAs within the era of ‘projectisation’ – the perpetual mode of actioning development through time-bounded interventions with fixed goals and budgets (Asiyanbi and Massarella, 2020) – that has been associated with the rise of multiple-win, global-scale ‘fads’ that are ‘embraced enthusiastically and then abandoned’ (Redford, Padoch and Sunderland, 2013).

As GTAs become increasingly popular within development agencies, it is important to bear in mind the trajectory of gender and development theory and practice that has led to their initial

impetus (Wong et al., 2019), and also the political context within which NGOs attempt to 'transform' gender and agricultural livelihood dynamics.. Donors which fund NGO projects need to demonstrate 'value for money' to legitimise their aid budget, and so their need for control over project activities increases (Wallace, 2004). INGOs, national and local NGOs must remain competitive as future funding depends on their 'success' rate (Kloster, 2020). Where failure is a political problem, governance thus depends on reputation and legitimacy – resources that are high in demand for INGOs and NGOs operating in an ever competitive environment (Mosse, 2004). As such, despite the fact that many development NGOs may set out to affect specific global norms and challenge the status quo through policy reform, this pressure to align with donor narratives means that they are often in fact reinforcing global development agendas and mainstream understandings of what policy and participation should look like - leading to the *"remarkable isomorphism of these organisations' agendas and strategies across very different societies"* (Watkins et al., 2012:294). Gendered agricultural transformation NGO projects are thus frequently designed to deliver on donor expectations (Silliman, 1999) with pre-determined goals through focusing on achieving specific measurable outcomes, rather than seeking to challenge power relations and achieve long-term societal transformation (Kloster, 2020).

2.3.4 The Challenge of Measurement and Quantification

The challenge of measurement and quantification is central to this. It is within this context that the past 30 years has seen an expansion in the pace, purpose and scope of quantification (Mennicken and Espeland, 2019). 'Indicator culture' (Merry, 2016) refers to the growing use of quantitative indicators used in development projects in response to the demands of policy makers and donors to demonstrate project impact and 'success' (Kloster, 2020). A key aspect to this proliferation is the desire for accountability – where donors want to demonstrate that their aid is being directed into functioning and impactful projects that deliver on their promised outcomes (Merry, 2016). International governance increasingly relies on quantitative measures (Merry, 2016), and indicator culture is perhaps best evidenced in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Presenting a 'blue print to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all by 2030' (UN, 2015), the SDGs are comprised of 17 interlinked goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators to address global challenges such as poverty and climate change. Broad goals to 'Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls' (SDG 5) are subdivided into more limited targets, measured by indicators that measure only a small part of the issue and often leave out important information. This issue is complicated even further by the use of proxy indicators to measure what is important or uncountable – with potentially significant implications for development policy and programming (Merry, 2019).

This move toward governance by numbers and the use of global goal setting as a policy tool (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019) signifies a fundamental shift and restriction in how we view development (Merry, 2019). Taking the shift from the MDGs to the SDGs as an example, the transformative significance of the SDGs are greatly reduced through the translation of broad and aspirational goals into narrow measurable quantitative indicators that rarely do justice to the conceptions behind the goals (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2019; Merry 2019). Fukuda-Parr and McNeill (2019) demonstrate that the ‘slippage’ in ambition seen in the selection of certain SDG targets and indicators in some cases represent genuine difficulty in selecting an appropriate indicator, and in others (according to the accounts of negotiations), highlight the highly political process in their formulation and signify a contestation about the agenda. This shift toward global governance by numbers can be seen to produce and privilege certain kinds of knowledge over others that may not be so easily ‘captured’ by reductionist quantitative indicators (Darian-Smith, 2015) – and are therefore used to align with the development agendas of the organisation(s) involved in their formulation

Anthropologist Sally Engle Merry’s seminal work around the ‘seductions of quantification’ in regards to measuring human rights, gender violence and sex trafficking highlights a number of issues with the growing trend of quantitative indicators used to measure social phenomena. Merry argues that it is easy to see the seductiveness of quantification through organising and simplifying often complex phenomena into concrete numerical information that enables comparison and ranking (Darian-Smith 2015; Merry 2016b; Mennicken and Espeland 2019). Such numbers also convey an aura of objective truth and scientific authority, and are used to legitimise decision-making and the proliferation of ‘evidence-based’ policy and project design (Merry, 2016). However, as Merry argues, it is this apparent objectivity that can be dangerous when interpreting and comparing universal indicators – and we should be wary of how our world is being increasingly subjected to such forms of managed measurement (Darian-Smith, 2015). The authority of the final numbers, presented as neutral and universal, overlook the potentially highly contested nature of their design (Buss, 2015) and the underlying theories and values behind why a particular measurement tool was selected among alternatives (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019). Moreover, presenting such social phenomena as quantifiable and comparable inevitably means that it is stripped of its context, history and complexity. Quantitative indicators are therefore inherently reductionist – capturing just a small part of the full social objective (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019). For example, a narrow definition of what constitutes violence against women within the SDG indicators, focusing almost exclusively on physical and sexual violence with intimate partners, overlooks trafficking and other forms of exploitation and also social attitudes that may tolerate or even support violence (Merry, 2016).

In the context of GTAs, measurement is crucial. This thesis explores how this pressure to measure and report on project 'success' is reconciled in projects that claim to drive gender transformational change – where the complexity and intangibility of changing social norms and dynamics thus challenges commonly used and narrow project impact indicators (Morgan, 2014). Arguably such change is necessarily slow and incremental, and will likely span many more years than development projects with short-term funding contracts. Such change needs to be understood in terms of historical, social and political contexts, with indicators grounded in the social environment and local histories likely to help interpret meaning and significance of any measurable change (Hillenbrand et al., 2015). It may also require re-conceptualisation of how project 'success' is defined (Wong et al., 2019) – where it should be grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of affected groups. What does success mean and look like to them? Understanding the process of change in social norms is a key issue, and the tools and frameworks we use to understand and measure such change must enable us to situate individuals and households within the political economy of power relations at the community, national and global levels (Doss 2021). They must enable scrutiny of access to resources and decision-making at the individual level, but also appreciate the political and social context within which these choices are made. Using surveys questioning access to resources and control over income to produce indicators around women's empowerment thus measure static metrics, and at best provide a snapshot of women's empowerment at a specific point and time. Producing ever more complex measurement indicators in an attempt to account for this complexity and holistic nature of empowerment, as outlined in chapter six, is both resource- and time-intensive, and is unlikely to ever truly represent the reality of decision-making, asset use and ownership – as the data that is produced is created around the normative selection of indicators. In addition, forever tweaking survey responses and adding modules in efforts to validate indicators and capture the holistic nature of empowerment will inevitably need to be balanced with the time commitment of survey participants. What exactly is the end point then in the chase for ever more complex indices to capture the fuzzy and contested values of empowerment? How does the challenge of measurement and quantification, for example, account for less tangible dimensions of change, such as psychological measures and well-being? These are often not explored within the M&E systems of gendered interventions (Hillenbrand et al., 2015) as Bedford (2007) notes neoliberal empowerment programmes rarely consider such 'non-productive' chores or caring responsibilities. In this context, chapter eight considers the way forward for M&E, and how feminists and development practitioners push back against the quantification of complex and nuanced gender issues within the development sector.

In sum this thesis approaches the important question of how GTAs are designed, implemented and monitored within the context of the conditionality of development aid. Chapter six explores

how CARE International – a global humanitarian and development NGO with a longstanding focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment – define, measure and demonstrate success within their GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa. It is within this context that I critique the ‘Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index’ (WEAI) used in CARE’s GTAs that has been popularised as a multidimensional tool aiming to produce measurements of empowerment in the agricultural sector that are comparable across time and space and that enable the monitoring of project impact (Alkire et al. 2013). As highlighted by Bedigen et al. (2020), the language of such projects is often rooted in English development jargon, with use of buzzwords like ‘empowerment’, ‘agency’ and ‘rights’ – that are often either not directly translatable or made meaningful in local languages. Here I use a decolonial feminist lens to problematise how normative Western conceptualisations of empowerment are imposed on African societies through development interventions and operationalized through standardized measurement indices such as the WEAI - and what is missed in this reductionist simplification.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of historical gender and development theory and practice through to more contemporary feminist analyses of gender in agricultural transformation discourse. This thesis is grounded and situated within this literature - guided by an overarching aim to explore how gender inequality is discursively framed within agricultural transformation discourse across sub-Saharan Africa, and how this then shapes how it is approached within policy and practice.

As this chapter has outlined, the gender agenda has seen increased visibility of and attention to gender both within a plethora of development actors and also across numerous development fields – including agricultural development and transformation. That gender truly is everywhere in international development is the starting point of this thesis. By taking a critical approach to conceptualisations of ‘gender’ within mainstream aid-driven development, this thesis understands that the fluidity of gender roles mean that they can change over time and are affected by changing resources, governments, policies and contexts (Quisumbing et al., 2014). That gender is socially constructed, and so gender roles are fluid and subject to change based on changing norms, policies and contexts (Quisumbing et al., 2014), supposedly forms a key focus within agricultural development initiatives that aim to reduce gender inequities. How then does development discourse approach and account for the complexity and dynamic nature of gender? What - and, importantly, whose - gender is everywhere? How does the gender that is promoted shape how it is addressed within policy and practice? These questions are pertinent to ensuring that development policy and practice is grounded in the contextual and differentiated nature of gender relations. However, as this thesis outlines, mainstream development interventions aimed at ‘empowering’ women are often based on gender myths, gross essentialisms about women,

and rarely consider the complexity of women's relational ties and livelihood dynamics (Cornwall, 2007b).

Through taking a critical approach to unpacking and deconstructing the gender buzzwords and policy paradigms that have been promoted within international arenas to achieve gender equality, this thesis explores how these buzzwords and policy paradigms often rely on and perpetuate gender myths and assumptions. The focus of this PhD is therefore on how agricultural transformation policy and practice, and the development elites who exert their power and influence within this space, have responded to this trajectory of gender and development theory and practice, how key gender policy buzzwords and paradigms are absorbed within policy and practice, and how this continues to shape the field of how gender inequality is understood and approached within international development.

Chapter five contributes to critiques of isomorphism in gender policy paradigms through exploring the performative inclusion of the gender mainstreaming rhetoric within Tanzania's CSA policy framework, outlining how a one-size-fits all approach to gender within policy limits the capacity of the Tanzanian state to address the complexity of gendered agricultural livelihood dynamics in country. Chapter six is situated within critiques of the empowerment buzzword, demonstrating how it upholds Western ideals of what 'empowerment' and 'equality' entails, and, in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, relies on the victimisation of rural African female farmers through her assumed *dis*empowerment. This chapter makes important contributions to critiques of the growing reliance on quantification - where I take a critical approach to how concepts of gender and empowerment are increasingly instrumentalised and turned into quantitative indicators that are used by these powerful development actors to demonstrate 'impact' and 'success' within their funded projects. Chapter seven contributes to critiques of the 'smart economics' policy paradigm, exploring the neoliberal co-optation of feminist notions of 'empowerment', 'agency' and 'choice' within the dominance of 'Western' individualism and Western knowledge inherent within this discursive framing. This chapter goes on to demonstrate how this co-optation has been purposely absorbed into the agricultural transformation rhetoric used by these elite development actors in order to promote the neoliberal development agenda and their positioning as key development actors within this space.

In sum, this thesis is grounded in critiques of mimicry, simplification and quantification, and how these work in relation to gender and agriculture. Situated within critiques of neoliberal feminism (Prügl, 2017), I contribute to a better understanding of how and why the gender myths and assumptions that underpin these policy paradigms persist in an increasingly neoliberal development landscape. To move beyond the gender myths and buzzwords that underpin these policy paradigms, this thesis argues that we need to approach gender as a historical and cultural phenomenon. Here I present an overview of how decolonial and afro-feminist praxis offers

potential in deconstructing the Western feminism inherent in mainstream development approaches to gender – in doing do offering alternative ways of approaching gender equality through changing the normative basis of what is ‘equality’ and ‘empowerment’.

Chapter 3

Reflections

Before turning to the research design and methodological approach taken within this thesis, this chapter offers a reflection on the PhD journey which has ultimately shaped the content and structure of this thesis, and my own personal learning journey within this.

The content, focus and structure of this thesis has changed countless times over the duration of this PhD. People often say that the research process is never linear, and certainly doing a PhD during a global pandemic has taught me the need for ensuring flexibility and contingency within my approach to research.

I also believe it is important to be honest about the iterative and often reactive nature of research. When we write research proposals, apply for ethical review or submit risk assessments for planned research, as I have done over the course of this PhD, we are often encouraged to include contingency plans in case things don't go as planned. Of course there are any number of things that can have an impact on your research and circumstances which you cannot foresee nor control, a global pandemic being but one. Yet when we present the outcomes of research – in theses, journal articles, books – it often gives the impression that this is the natural outcome of research: that we always planned it this way, that we knew what we were doing all along. Perhaps more journals and books now might mention how COVID-19 impacted their research, but often we read such research outputs and are given the false impression that research is in fact more linear than the reality: we did xyz and these are our findings. The empirical chapters in this thesis, for example, might give the impression that I had always planned to explore these specific topics and case studies. Yet this is not the thesis I initially planned. I want to use this chapter to give an honest account of the research process of this thesis and my own personal learning journey. Along the way, and particularly owing to COVID related impacts, I felt like I was met with multiple dead ends, and much of my decision-making was reactive to the circumstances I was faced. The process has been messy and difficult, as research often is - yet I look at this journey not full of failings, but learnings. Research itself is not a time-bound exercise, and certainly in PhDs you do what you can in the time you are given. I describe in this chapter the iterative and reactive nature of this journey – the changing focus and methodological approach, critically reflecting on these processes and my positionality and personal learning journey in undertaking this research.

This chapter critically reflects on my role and journey within this PhD – where I need to acknowledge my own limitations and assumptions, how these guided me, and how I have overcome them. Research is never linear, and this journey has been a constant (un)learning

process for me (and still is). Reflecting on our active role as a researcher within the research process is a hugely critical component of any research project. I include this chapter prior to outlining my research design and methodological approach used within the empirical chapters, as I feel like a lot of my choices throughout this PhD were more reactive to dynamic and unpredictable situations which ultimately guided my approach and the structure and content of this thesis. Writing this chapter has also been somewhat of a cathartic exercise in what has been a stressful few years with many ups and downs.

3.1 In the Beginnings

My PhD started with a different, albeit similar, focus. I wanted to learn more about the intersections of gender, climate change and agriculture. I applied for a PhD with my own proposal, written together with my supervisors. Under the working title of *"Exploring Gendered Influences in the Adoption of 'Climate Smart Agriculture' Practices in Tanzania"*, my PhD was also planned to overlap with a number of my PhD supervisor's own research projects, namely the GCRF funded Agricultural and Food systems Resilience: Increasing Capacity & Advising Policy (AFRICAP) programme which launched just prior to my PhD start in 2017. The Priestley International Centre for Climate scholarship was awarded to our research proposal which promoted project linkages and interdisciplinarity with cross-departmental supervisors: Associate Professor Susannah Sallu in the School of Earth and Environment and Professor Anna Mdee in the School of Politics and International Studies. I was proud that we had put together our own research proposal for this PhD, which had been successful in obtaining me a place at the University of Leeds and a scholarship to fund the research. Exploring the nexus of gender, agricultural transformation, and development policy and practice has thus always been the central theme of the PhD, however initially I planned to approach this from the perspective of communities to learn from their lived reality and experiences of such development policy and programming.

I applied for the PhD as I was finishing my MSc in Environment and Development, also at the University of Leeds. I had studied part-time, and spent the third year of my MSc working full time whilst completing my final project. For this I worked with Dr Sallu alongside another of her research projects: EuropeAid- funded Global Climate Change Alliance+ 'Integrated Approaches for Climate Change Adaptation' in Tanzania. I spent 7 weeks in two separate rural communities in Tanga region as part of this, and so had some (albeit limited) fieldwork experience that I was keen to build on through the PhD. Designing a heavily fieldwork-based PhD was thus a key drive of mine in writing the research proposal. Tanzania was selected as the regional focus of the PhD, which also made sense as Tanzania was also one of four focal countries of the GCRF-AFRICAP programme at the University of Leeds - thus enabling me to

build on the partnerships and collaborative links through this project. I was also awarded fieldwork money through the GCRF-AFRICAP programme. When I reflect back on the process of writing the research proposal and planning an extended period of fieldwork in Tanzania, I was excited to gain more of what I considered 'first-hand' experience, something I thought was necessary to undertake a research project on this topic.

Reflecting on my own thinking at this time, I also went into this process with my own assumptions regarding the research topic and process. I wanted to learn more about how different vulnerabilities intersect, and specifically what the lived realities are at those intersections. Learning about the intersections of gender and climate change within my Masters research had sparked this interest. I had not, however, specifically studied gender, and in hindsight I held unexplored privilege in not questioning how it was relatively easy for me to secure a PhD position and funding for this project with little knowledge of gender in Tanzania. This is, at least in part, a function of my privilege and the access that it affords me. The time I spent in Tanzania for my Masters had given me a glimpse of the reality and complexity of gendered agricultural livelihood dynamics – showing me that not all women in rural Tanzania are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change where vulnerability can and is differentiated and experienced along multiple social identities. Yet much of my reading at the time was around why gender is an important, if not the most important, focus within climate change adaptation and vulnerability. The victimisation of women in the Global South is so pervasive in much of the mainstream – by this I mean high-level UN reporting – development policy and practice that this was at least in part ingrained in my thinking at the time. I do not mean to say that I went into the PhD with a saviour narrative, I was well aware I had much to learn – particularly from my planned fieldwork and from the female farmers I would speak to. I do not think, however, that I went into the PhD with as much of a critical eye as I do now (although this is always a work in progress). I did not question my own myths and assumptions enough, nor whether I was the right person to be undertaking this work. I wanted to gain more 'field experience' and learn from those on the 'front line' of climate change, so that when I read about why adopting a 'gender lens' is important in development policy and practice, I could have a better grounded understanding of what gender and gender inequality actually mean in reality. I thought fieldwork was crucial for this, and was naïve in thinking that the first-hand experience from fieldwork would enable me to speak on this topic. In hindsight, I am not sure that spending months learning from rural communities in Tanzania about what gender and gender inequality means to them, and how this shapes their agricultural practices, would have allowed me to speak on this issue with any more clarity. Can you ever truly know what it's like to walk in someone's shoes?

The aim of my PhD in my first year was to *"understand how gender influences the adoption of CSA practices within smallholder farming communities in Tanzania whilst also exploring the*

influence of other social determinants". The first year of my PhD was spent researching gender and agricultural livelihood dynamics and reading more critically around the gender myths and assumptions that underpin mainstream development discourse. One example that has stayed in my mind was reading more critically into the claim that 'Women are 14X more likely to die in a disaster than men' used in high-level UN reports around women's inherent vulnerability, and a claim that I had included in my own Masters essay to argue why adopting a 'gender-lens' was important in climate adaptation policy. I remember fruitlessly searching for the origins of this statistic, only to find it had once been mentioned in a presentation, before being adopted into numerous reports by an increasingly large number of development actors. I was shocked that this was done so easily, despite such an obvious lack of supporting evidence. From this and similar experiences, I began to read such statistics with a more critical eye – not just on whether they had any empirical backing, but why such statistics are used in the first place: what purpose do they serve, who is it promoting them, and why. In essence this first year was spent becoming a more careful and critical researcher, especially when considering my own assumptions and what data I use to back-up my arguments – pushing me to critically interpret 'evidence', 'knowledge' and 'success' in development policy and practice. I planned at the time to also write and submit my thesis via the alternative thesis route which is offered within my host department - the School of Earth and Environment at the University of Leeds. This meant that each chapter would be structured as a journal article.

I also spent months mapping CSA projects in Tanzania in order to select an appropriate study site for data collection. I chose the 'Climate Smart Agriculture-Sustainable, Productive, Profitable, Equitable and Resilient' ('CSA-SuPER') project in Iringa rural district, being implemented by a consortium comprising CARE International, the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), and Wageningen University and Research (WUR). A key reason for this selection was that the project aimed to upscale gender equitable CSA approaches amongst small-scale women producers in Iringa Rural District by reducing their labour burden and improving household nutrition (GCP, 2017) whilst considering changes in (intra)household behaviour (Pamuk et al., 2018). I planned to take a critical approach to how CSA and gender were framed and understood from national to local policy and then how this is translated into development projects, what practices were being promoted and why, what 'adoption' meant in this context, and also exploring the conceptualisation of the unitary/collective household within development policy and practice. I reached out to practitioners on the project at WUR and CARE Tanzania, and had various meetings to discuss my research interest and PhD focus and how this might fit alongside the project.

The later months of my first year were spent arranging fieldwork plans and also applying for the necessary documentation you need to undertake research in Tanzania. This included my risk assessment and ethical review application for the University of Leeds, plus the COSTECH research permit and Tanzanian visa application. Working alongside the GCRF-AFRICAP programme provided me with the links to the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) in Tanzania (AFRICAP Tanzanian country partner) who supported my applications. Upon arrival in Tanzania and collection of my COSTECH research permit, I would also apply for a Tanzanian residency permit. All in all, whilst these applications and waiting for approval did take some time, I include the stages here as it is worthwhile to take a moment to reflect on the ease with which they were approved and enabled me to undertake the research. The privilege I held as a white British woman educated in an academic institution based in the Global North, supported by a Tanzanian organisation in my applications because of a research project that was also based at this institution, meant that my applications were approved with little questioning. As a white, cisgender, straight and able-bodied women with postgraduate education, my privileged positions benefitted me through this process and throughout the months I did spend in Tanzania, and likely would have benefitted me during my planned data collection also. This is particularly true as my fieldwork was planned to take place in rural remote villages in Iringa region. Owing to a long history of colonisation and decades of Western interference and foreign aid, now exhibited through the development policy and programming discussed in this thesis, white people in rural villages in Tanzania are viewed with curiosity – where white is often viewed as privilege, wealth and given a superior social status. I experienced this prior to the PhD through the time spent in Tanga during my Masters. This is particularly true when you undertake fieldwork linked to an NGO project – as I had done in Tanga and planned to do in Iringa – where you are transported around in large 4x4 NGO vehicles. This also has implications for you as a researcher being seen to be linked to the NGO project, potentially resulting in individuals/communities acting a certain way towards you. I will reflect on this further in the following section on the months I did spend in Tanzania. A further layer of privilege and protection was afforded to me by my status as a straight woman, considering that Tanzanian law prohibits homosexuality, and in recent years has become increasingly hostile to LGBT people. I state this here just to demonstrate the privileges afforded to me by my ethnicity and British passport, the links to Tanzanian organisations and development projects, and my various identities that meant I could plan this fieldwork with relative ease.

3.2 Fieldwork

I travelled to Tanzania in November 2019 to begin a 7-9 month ethnographic fieldwork, and was excited to use a range of qualitative and participatory research techniques which I had read about in the study of gendered social norms and power relations. My British passport enabled me to

arrive in Tanzania and obtain a tourist visa with relative ease. I first spent a few weeks in Dar es Salaam meeting AFRICAP project partners ESRF and also CARE Tanzania who were implementing the CSA-SuPER project. With the assistance of ESRF, I chased up my COSTECH research permit. During these few weeks I also met with friends and colleagues and, in part likely owing the privilege afforded to me owing to my whiteness, passport and perceived wealth, I accessed 'expat' spaces in Dar. It was in these spaces that I met and befriended other expats working and living in Dar, some in the field of international development, who themselves had friends in positions of influence and power. This was all beneficial to my arrival in Tanzania and organisation of fieldwork in that they provided me with useful knowledge regarding how to apply for and chase up the official documentation (COSTECH, residency permit), general knowledge regarding life in Tanzania (setting up sim cards, getting around safely), and also connected me to other researchers and practitioners working in this field. All in all they made the 'settling in' process much smoother and less daunting, yet I acknowledge that my whiteness likely granted me access to these spaces, people and opportunities in ways that other non-white colleagues may not have been gifted.

I left Dar to spend 4 weeks at an intensive Swahili language training course. My desire (and need) to learn Swahili was mainly to help with integration with the project communities. I had always planned to work with a research assistant and translator in conducting the planned interviews and focus groups, but wanted to have a basic understanding prior to this that I could build on. I was aware that my whiteness and nationality would create some distance between myself and the communities, something I had experienced in Tanga during my Masters. I viewed learning Swahili as a crucial part of the fieldwork, particularly in working with a research assistant who I knew would be key to the 'success' of my fieldwork and also my enjoyment of it. I hoped that this would also help me make friends, integrate, and not be viewed quite as much as an outsider. The first two weeks were spent at my tutors residence on the outskirts of Dar, before travelling to Iringa for the reminder where I stayed in a hostel. The intensive training course involved just me and a Swahili tutor for 6 hours of language training each day, some of which was 'language walk around' which involved interacting with people in the community. This was extremely valuable, not least as it helped me to understand cultural greetings and interactions better.

Iringa town itself has a surprisingly large number of people from the Global North – owing largely to the high number of development organisations in the region and also, at the time, the presence of Peace Corps volunteers from the USA. Again it is worthwhile acknowledging the privilege that staying at the hostel afforded me, particularly as the hostel was run by a Canadian expat working with development projects who had lived in Iringa for many years and was thus very helpful in advising me and connecting me with people to help with my residency

application. Whilst waiting for this application to be processed and approved before I could officially begin fieldwork, I did spend time meeting the CARE Tanzania project team and visiting and learning about the project interventions across the different project villages. Again, I was aware of the implications that being seen to be ‘part’ of this project and too closely associated with the NGO would have on how others in the community would perceive me. The colleagues (who became friends) from CARE Tanzania were very helpful in supporting my arrangement of fieldwork – including offering a space for me to work in their offices, connecting me with the necessary village officials to introduce myself, and with the arrangement of a place to stay in the project village. I wanted to stay in the village itself rather than in Iringa town, as wanted to distance myself from the practitioners and not to be seen driving in and out of the village everyday in a NGO 4x4. In essence I wanted the community to see me as separate from the NGO so that they would (hopefully) be more comfortable in talking to me about the project activities, and their views on them.

My application for Tanzanian residency unfortunately took longer than planned and, owing to miscommunications on where it was sent/I would collect, I did not receive it until early March 2020. I had not moved to the project village yet as I needed to present the residency permit to the village officials. At this time of course we had been watching COVID-19 spread from China to Italy, Europe and across the world. Panic was growing at this perceived ‘white’/‘Western’ disease arriving in Tanzania. My supervisors and myself were keeping a close eye on the developments, and, ultimately owing to the closure of air spaces and the concern that I might get stuck in Tanzania where the university could not help if needed, I was told to return to the UK in mid-March. In the time between collecting my residency permit and having to leave, I had conducted two in person key-informant interviews for my first paper. As such I had to leave Tanzania just a few days before planning to re-locate to the project village. The day I was told I had to return was also the day of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Tanzania, and I could witness the panic and unease in Iringa and in Dar. I had also heard of anecdotal stories of people from China / white people being avoided and harassed in the streets, owing to the perception that they were the bringers of disease. At the time I was considering to stay on in Tanzania and continue with my fieldwork regardless of the closure of air spaces – I had made friends (expats and ‘locals’), was working with CARE Tanzania in Iringa, and was enjoying my time and eager to begin my data collection. Yet such stories confirmed that I should indeed leave – not because I was worried for myself necessarily, although this did cross my mind, but more that I did not want to be perceived as disease-carrying or dangerous in that sense and to make others feel uncomfortable and/or scared in my presence. It was also an uncomfortable feeling, as at the time I was worried for how COVID-19 would spread through Tanzania where social distancing would likely not be easy and people living hand-to-mouth meant lockdowns weren’t a hugely viable

option. I felt unease with how straightforward it was for me as a white person from the Global North to simply leave this behind.

Whilst having to leave Tanzania was obviously hugely disappointing for me, I still count myself lucky in having those few months in Tanzania. The process of setting up and fostering research collaborations overseas, the various stages of applying for research and residency permits, and learning about the project design and implementation 'on the ground' is an important part of the research process which I had not experienced independently before.

3.3 Adapting Methodological Approach

Returning to the UK in March 2020 shortly before national lockdown restrictions were imposed was needless to say a stressful time. Of course, at the time, we did not know how long such restrictions would last, and I remember having a supervision meeting where we discussed hopefully getting me back to Tanzania in summer 2020. Whilst waiting to see how things would develop, I worked towards my first paper. I had already conducted the two interviews in Tanzania, which needed writing up and analysing. I tried to organise more, to be conducted online. Reflecting on this process, I think that conducting interviews online has many differences and some limitations to holding them in person, and I think has undoubtedly affected the 'quality' of these interviews. Specifically I am reflecting on the process of organising and conducting interviews for chapter five, during the height of the first wave of COVID in 2020. I found this process very difficult, notwithstanding the personal difficulties of this time, but also in attempting to organise these interviews. I was trying to speak to a range of development actors in order to get a varied and balanced overview of the policy process in Tanzania, and was hoping to speak to informants from Tanzania's National Government Ministries, universities, NGOs and International Finance Institutions (IFIs)/development partners. It was difficult to reach out to them via email and to explain what I was trying to research. Had I been in Tanzania in person and visibly present, I think this would have been easier and I would have been able to speak to more people. I also feel like the virtual interviews influence the discussion itself. These rely on strong internet connectivity, something that is not a constant in Tanzania, and unstable connectivity definitely affected the flow of discussion within some interviews. As Silverman (2020) notes, the claims of qualitative research are often based on being physically present in a setting where the researcher is able to record interactional factors. I felt that the removal of nonverbal communication affected the rapport between myself and interviewee, as is also noted by Stevenson (2021). Even through the move to online interviews enabled me to speak to varied development actors all around the world, especially towards chapters six and seven, I think it is worth noting their limitations and how I personally felt the move to online affected the research

process. One advantage in the online conduction of interviews is the ease with which I could record the discussions.

As such, the process of conducting the interviews for the first empirical chapter (chapter five) took some months, with the final conducted in September 2020. During these months my supervisors and I were keeping a close eye on developments in Tanzania. The hope was that I would be able to travel back to Tanzania once the situation in both the UK and in Tanzania had calmed somewhat. The second option was for me to work remotely with a research assistant who would travel to the project villages to collect data, and whom I could speak to everyday and work closely with. Whilst I wanted to go to Tanzania and resume fieldwork myself, I felt this was also a good option in strengthening research partnerships where my research assistant would become more of a researcher collaborator. Ultimately, however, neither of these options were feasible. Tanzania was an odd and unique case, having stopped officially reporting on COVID-19 cases in May 2020 with just 509 documented cases (Buguzi, 2021), with the late President John Magafuli declaring Tanzania 'COVID-19-free' in June 2020. Airspaces re-opened and life in Tanzania seemed to continue as if nothing had happened (at least in official news reports). I could, in theory, travel back to Tanzania and continue with my paused fieldwork. However anecdotal news reports from social media and friends and colleagues in Tanzania suggested a different reality. Reports of hospitals overflowing and people dying after a brief illness associated with breathing difficulties pointed to high rates of transmission of COVID-19 in Tanzania, and WHO general director Tedros Ghebreyesus urged Tanzania to share data. We were not sure that my travelling to Tanzania would be safe, nor whether having a research assistant traveling frequently in and out of rural villages would risk bringing COVID-19 to the communities. I paused my PhD from October-December 2020 in the hope that, upon returning to PhD studies in January 2021, the situation might be clearer and that we could make more of an informed decision.

Unfortunately this was not the case, and with time also running out on my PhD, we – my supervisors and I – decided that I would shift the entire of my PhD to online with no data collection in person in Tanzania by myself nor a research assistant. This was a hard decision, but ultimately I remember feeling hugely relieved. 2020 was a year full of uncertainty and waiting to see what would be possible, and whilst 2021 did of course not bring an end to the pandemic nor the uncertainty, I could at least plan what I was going to do with the time I had left more clearly.

COVID has forced us all to (re)consider how we in the Global North approach 'doing' development in the 'Global South'. Not only was travel and overseas fieldwork suddenly complex if not impossible, but we also needed to consider the ethical implications of travel, of

access to and acceptance of COVID-information and vaccines in different contexts, and of how we collaborate and support our colleagues overseas. In not considering it safe for myself or, more importantly, for the communities in Tanzania for me to be there, and in the highly uncertain COVID situation in Tanzania for much of 2020-21 that meant collaborating virtually with a research partner to collect data was also a risk, I had to consider what research I could do safely and online. Whilst COVID was 'unprecedented', understanding risk, considering the ethical implications of my decisions, and prioritising the health and safety of communities which we 'research' is and should always be paramount. Whilst I won't deny that changing the focus of my PhD has been extremely challenging, I believe that I am now a better researcher - more resilient and, importantly, more flexible and careful in my approach.

In the three month pause of my PhD from October-December 2020, I supported the GCRF-African Food Systems Transformation and Justice Challenge Cluster programme – another of my supervisor's projects. During this time I met and worked with colleagues from CARE USA on issues around gender and intersectionality. My supervisors and I submitted a research proposal to them to conduct some research around their GTA work – how such projects are designed, implemented and monitored owing to the intangibility of changing social norms and the short funding cycles such projects are often faced with. I thus shifted my research focus to working more with those who design and implement development policy and practice, rather than those who experience it. Exploring this topic led to a more thorough critique of the conceptualisations and operationalisations of gender within mainstream development. The remainder of my data collection and interviews were conducted online. I worked closely with a colleague from CARE USA who connected me with other CARE staff working at different stages of the project cycle. The process of organising these interviews was much quicker and easier with her help than it had been for the first empirical chapter (chapter five). This process was not, however, without its challenges. COVID-19 was still (and still is) wreaking havoc across the world, and whilst virtual data collection meant it was easier to speak to people in different countries, the dynamic and worsening situation in different regions meant data collection was hard. One pertinent example is that the CARE colleague helping me to organise the interviews was living in India when global news were reporting on the escalating crisis in India of runaway infections and daily death records. Again, it is important to consider how the privilege afforded to me by studying in a Global North academic institution which had good links to external development organisations, and how this supported me in changing my PhD focus and collecting data during a stressful and uncertain time. PhD students around the world whose projects involved fieldwork would have faced similar difficulties, and I am exceedingly grateful that I was well supported by my supervisors and their research links to adapt my research focus and continue with my PhD, where others might not have been offered such support.

I think it is useful to reflect on this process as the structure and content of this thesis has been so impacted by the reactive decisions which I (together with my supervisors) took in the difficult and dynamic situations in which we were faced. Chapter five was grounded in my original (pre-COVID) PhD plan, whereas chapters six and seven were grounded in my adapted (post-COVID) PhD plan. The months and years post-March 2020 have been particularly gruelling and there have been many times when I have considered leaving, wondering not just if I had the strength to continue, but if what I could produce would make any sense when I tried to link the chapters together into a thesis. The final few months of my PhD have been spent trying to pull what felt like disjointed chapters together into one coherent story. I have found this process difficult, particularly when considering what the wider implications of my research are and how my thesis fits into the wider body of literature on agricultural transformation and gender and development theory and practice. Trying to find the commonalities between the chapters led me to consider their linkages, and how I could develop on these to write a story which I believe also reflects my journey throughout this PhD process. This is not the thesis I planned to write, but I am proud of it nonetheless as I believe it shows my resilience and determination in difficult circumstances. The reactive decisions taken are reflected in these chapters.

3.4 Power, Privilege & Positionality

I have reflected in the preceding sections on my power and privileges and how these have afforded me the opportunities to undertake and complete this research. An essential part of the research process is to outline the researcher’s positionality as ontological and epistemological assumptions will shape not only the approach to theory and have methodological implications, but also influence the interpretation and understanding of the data gathered. There is a positionality statement included within chapter six specifically in relation to discussions around decolonisation, and of how the positionality of all co-authors influenced the approach to that research project and chapter in particular. However it is important to also reflect more carefully on my own positionality and how I approached this PhD.

As a white middle-class female educated in the Global North, my Western education has influenced my approach to research and how I understand the world. My own interpretivist approach understands gender as a set of socially constructed norms and practices that shape what it means to be a man or a woman in a given society or context. I therefore believe experiences of gender are contextual. This raises important questions in relation to this research topic. How am I to understand the experiences and lived realities of gender within Tanzania (the original focus of this PhD)? Could I ever? COVID-19 pushed me more to consider my positionality and the role and ethics of the researcher more than I had prior. Adapting my research approach to consider the nexus of gender, agricultural transformation and development policy and practice

from the perspective of development policy-makers and practitioners pushed me to consider also how other development actors attempt to understand and conceptualise gender within different contexts. How well do they themselves understand the lived realities at these intersections?

Importantly, however, this adapted focus has also given me the space to consider my own positionality. Exploring their approach, their misconceptions and preconceived notions – and the colonial underpinnings of this – in turn gave me space to reflect on my own. During my first year, and particularly the time spent in Tanzania, I was inwardly battling with a lot of these questions and who was I to be exploring this topic. I remember feeling uneasy in Tanzania when people asked me my topic and experience, and one Tanzanian man in the hostel I was staying in Iringa town questioned if I was going to teach the communities about gender. Horrified, I tried to outline how I was here to learn from them, and there was nothing I could teach about their way of live or gendered agricultural livelihood dynamics in Tanzania. Inwardly I was worried this perceived higher social status and patronising viewpoint was how I came across to others. In shifting my perspective to those who design, implement and monitor development policy and practice I was able to reconcile with these thoughts more. It is still a fine line to walk, however, in critiquing how mainstream development policy and practice victimise and essentialise women across sub-Saharan Africa through the perpetuation of gendered myths and assumptions, as in arguing against these conceptualisations I do try to present alternatives. Am I then part of the problem in trying to speak on their behalf? I felt this particularly writing chapter six when discussing how local communities perceive, understand and experience empowerment. I was not talking to or observing these women, and was relying on discussions that practitioners had had with them as included in the project reports. I think this is a serious limitation of that chapter in particular. I can not be sure how well the text in those reports reflect those discussions nor the reality of experiences of empowerment. I tried to work around this by engaging more in decolonial and afro-feminist literature within that chapter in particular, and also in collaborating with an African feminist, Dr Constance Akurugu, in the thinking and writing, which I reflect on in the positionality statement in chapter six.

It is particularly pertinent to reflect on my positionality as I engage with decolonial praxis. Decolonisation has in many ways also become a buzzword in recent development jargon. I hesitate to use the term in this thesis – as with many buzzwords, it has come to lose its meaning in its ambiguity and popularisation and I do no wish to add to that. As I mention in chapter six, decolonisation has been popularised within mainstream development discourse following the brutal murder of George Floyd in 2020 and the global protests supporting the Black Lives Matter movement. Yet decolonisation has a long history prior to this. It is an ongoing project (does it even have an end point?) that radically critiques power in all its manifestations. When I do use the term decolonise/decolonial within this thesis, I do so carefully – speaking to specific colonial

histories of the violence of gender binaries and disruption of pre-colonial gender fluidity. The process within which I and the co-authors on chapter six came to apply a 'decolonial feminist lens' to conceptualisations of women's empowerment within development projects was not done to jump on the bandwagon of decolonial praxis. This is outlined within the positionality statement of the chapter. It was done more in a way to engage with the topic of the chapter and to push back against the top-down ways in which development interventions are designed and the Western obsession of 'increasing women's empowerment' within mainstream development discourse and praxis. In approaching this chapter, it was important for me to reflect on my own position and whether I was the right person to be offering this critique. As a white, middle-class education women in the 'Global North', was I contributing to the very issue I was trying to critique? I want to believe I approached this work in a careful and considered manner. I do not want the authorship on this paper to appear tokenistic. Rather I hope it reflects that I recognised my own limitations, and searched for help from those more experienced on the topic of African feminism, and built on research collaborations through this process. At the end of a PhD journey, people often say you are an 'expert' in a topic. I do not wish to claim to be an expert or near it on decolonial thought. I hope that this clarification on its use within this thesis in specific relation to the colonial history of gender and gender binaries demonstrates that the term has been included carefully and in acknowledgement of recent critiques.

In confronting and acknowledging the various privileges afforded to me by my multiple identities in this chapter, I am aware that doing so may be viewed earnestly and/or as an attempt to assuage any feelings of guilt by showing that I have in fact considered this and so therefore my approach and presence in this research is validated. This is likely in part true, yet more I think it is necessary to reflect on this and my own personal learning journey in grappling with and navigating these thoughts throughout this PhD. Reflecting on positionality and power is particularly needed, I believe, in discussions around decolonisation, which I include throughout this thesis and particularly in chapter six. Such critical self-reflections is a necessary first step in decolonising research and development more broadly. I am very grateful for the personal learning journey that the few months in Tanzania offered to me, and the time spent considering the top-down nature of mainstream agricultural development policy and practice, that have allowed me to grow in this respect.

3.5 Critical Reflections on Methods & Terminology

After adapting my research approach as outlined above, this thesis is based on document (policy, project and donor organisational documents) analysis and key-informant interviews. I reflect on these methodologies specifically in the following chapter. However, considering how I have outlined my initial research approach in this chapter, it is worth briefly reflecting on how I

planned to approach my fieldwork and data collection in Tanzania. I also use this section to critically reflect on some of the terminology used within this thesis.

I had originally planned to use a range of qualitative and participatory research methodologies in my planned fieldwork, including participatory village maps, season calendars, transect walks, oral life history interviews and participant observation. I hoped these would help me break down the power hierarchies in research and data collection, facilitating a more open and safe space for dialogue and a deeper exploration around sensitive issues (Behrman, Meinzen-Dick and Quisumbing, 2014). Ethnographic tools, including participant and direct observation and the use of case studies, are beneficial in the study of gender relations as they provide deep insight into how gendered social norms and power relations manifest themselves in complex social interactions and livelihood patterns (Behrman et al., 2014; Dancer and Tsikata, 2015). Whilst the use of qualitative and participatory research methods offers the possibility of obtaining a holistic picture of the community in question (Chung et al., 1997), the findings and conclusions drawn from this study were unlikely to be generalizable beyond the communities involved.

It is also important to make note of the contested and problematic terminologies that are so prominent in mainstream development discourse, and of which I make reference to throughout this PhD – often for want of a better phrase. This is especially important considering that I know these terminologies are fraught with colonial and racial histories and inaccuracies, and I hesitate to contribute to these problematic discourses.

For example, this PhD focuses on agricultural transformation policy and practice in 'sub-Saharan Africa'. The term sub-Saharan Africa is an enormous catchphrase and is geographically inaccurate, where some of the 46 of Africa's 54 countries it refers to are located on the Sahara. It has been critiqued for dividing the African continent through an invisible border based on ideas of race, with the term 'sub-' carrying negative connotations and is only used in reference to the African continent. Similarly, the terms 'Global South' and 'developing countries' are used within this PhD, both of which are widely critiqued for sweeping generalisations and imposing colonial and imperial categorisations of countries and world politics. The homogenising effect of these terminologies obscures difference and promotes the 'othering' of nations based on economic development. Such terminologies superseded the outdated notion of the 'Third World' - all of which are thus political groupings, rather than geographical, and are based on colonial histories. As outlined by Sud and Sánchez-Ancochea (2022), these political constructs are fundamentally about the distribution of power in the global system, and contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities by presenting the 'South' as backward – thus encouraging racist understandings of the world. Yet despite these critiques, such terminology is still prevalent in today's development discourse. A central theme within my PhD is a critique of the 'Third World Woman' which I argue remains central to today's neoliberal development agenda, in which these

contested terms are upheld and promoted by elite development actors. I thus make reference to this terminology in order to ground my analysis in the language of these actors.

3.6 Research Collaborations

Personally, I like to look at this thesis as the outcome of many fruitful collaborations. I think this is how theses should be viewed. The PhD journey is not just a collaboration between the candidate and their supervisor(s), but also the corridor conversations, research group meetings, video calls with other academics etc. All of which involve the presentation and discussion of views, sharing ideas and together pushing forward on theory and practice. This thesis has certainly benefited from all of this – both from academics and also practitioners, development workers, various actors in the development sector. The 'participants' of my research have challenged my own thinking, and many of the interviews conducted throughout this process have involved the unpacking of ideas and concepts, discussing how these fit into my overall aims and objectives, and together thinking through future avenues for research and development practice. To move away from the common more extractive nature of much research, and terminology such as 'participants' or worse 'beneficiaries', I prefer to look at everyone I have spoken to across this journey as knowledge collaborators or co-producers. Their views and our discussions are represented in these chapters, and have shaped the structure and content of this thesis. Acknowledging their contribution is a first step to ensuring equity in research partnerships.

In particular, the co-authorship of the three empirical chapters acknowledge and give credit to this collaborative process. Chapter five is co-authored by my two academic supervisors, Associate Professor Susannah Sallu in the School of Earth and Environment and Professor Anna Mdee in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. We worked together on submitting a journal article of this chapter, which was published in the Development Policy Review journal on 12th May 2023. This first case study was conducted in the earlier stages of my PhD when my focus was on Tanzania and the relationships between gender and CSA practices within smallholder farming communities in Tanzania. Whilst I led this research, the co-authorship reflects the valuable insights from both Susannah and Anna from their years of experience in working in Tanzania. I have been incredibly lucky to have had them both as supervisors for this PhD, and have learnt a great deal from them both in the process.

As I outline in this chapter, I changed course following this first case study owing to the COVID-19 disruptions and restrictions. As I was waiting for the situation in Tanzania to become clearer, questioning if and when my fieldwork might be able to resume, I took a pause from my PhD from October-December 2020 to support the GCRF-African Food Systems Transformation and Justice Challenge Cluster programme led by Professor Stephen Whitfield, also from the School of Earth and Environment at Leeds. At this uncertain time in my PhD journey, Stephen provided

additional supervisory support. Coming back from Tanzania, this was at a time when I was questioning my own assumptions and role within this research space. Coupled with the uncertainty from the COVID-19 pandemic, to be honest I felt quite lost in my PhD at this time. The PhD suspension came at a much needed time for me to take a step back from my research and think about not just what was feasible, but which direction I actually wanted to go in.

The GCRF Challenge Cluster brought together academics from the University of Leeds and other UK universities, but also scholars from a range of African universities all working on different aspects of agricultural transformation. In addition, researchers and practitioners from the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research's Climate Change Agriculture and Food Security (CGIAR-CCAFS) Initiative, and also CARE International. We got together in regular meetings focused on unpacking different aspects and case studies within global food systems – working to understand and analyse justice within transformative change. Owing to CARE's work and focus in gender and women's empowerment, I particularly enjoyed working and learning with CARE practitioners on issues of intersectionality and women's empowerment. This led to separate conversations around how we could take this collaboration forward. Often development organisations and projects don't have the capacity or time to conduct any critical academic analysis of their work, as owing to pressures in the development chain and dependency on external funding, they are often required to align their work and focus with that of donors and the current buzzwords in the mainstream development agenda. We therefore worked on a proposal together – initially with my supervisors and then also with CARE colleagues. This was initially designed to explore how development projects design, implement and monitor programmes around gender. I was particularly interested in this given the often short-funding cycles of such development projects. Aligning with my own thinking at the time around my role, I was questioning how well such organisations understand the complex and dynamic nature of gender agricultural livelihood dynamics. This led me to engage more with CARE's GTA work – where GTAs claim to go beyond mere gender integration within projects, to challenge deep-rooted social norms and create more long-lasting transformative change. Given that such projects are typically funded for around five years, I wanted to explore the extent of the engagement and understanding with the communities in which they design projects around. Whose interests and values are being centred?

Taking this research proposal to CARE colleagues and working on it together was in itself a really enjoyable and important learning process for me. Not only did it provide me a potential pathway out of the COVID uncertainty, but I was excited at the prospect of learning from the 'on-the-ground' experience of the CARE practitioners. In a way maybe this filled the gap I felt I had once the decision that in-person data collection wasn't going to be an option for my PhD

research. I was encouraged by how receptive the CARE colleagues were to our proposal, where I felt like they were eager for some academic appraisal and critique of their work.

Research collaborations and working with NGOs can have its difficulties, particularly when a researcher may be analysing and/or critiquing their work, and when the community sees the researcher as linked to the NGO, as outlined in this chapter. Collaborating with CARE – both the Tanzanian team implementing CSA-SuPER and also CARE USA regarding their GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa – has, however, been an immensely useful in many ways to this PhD process which bear noting. I have learnt a great deal regarding the project cycle from working closely with colleagues at different points across this journey. In Tanzania, whilst my time there was limited, I did have the opportunity to meet the project staff, visit the project sites and learn about the delivery side of development projects. Working with colleagues from CARE USA, I learnt more about how development projects are designed from the proposal stage, and the relationship with donors (in this case the BMGF) throughout this process. Evidently, such experiences were critical in shaping what I ended up focusing on: learning more about the politics of development aid and the hegemonic power of philanthropic organisations like the BMGF, and how NGOs operate within and navigate this contested space. It has also been a highly informative process in how to collaborate with external organisations, and walking the fine line between collaboration and critique. I felt this particularly during the process of chapter six, and am very happy that this paper is also co-authored by my CARE collaborators. I learnt a lot in the delicate art of diplomacy in this process. There are, however, also some limitations that come with collaborating with external partners. For example, in selecting which of the Pathways project countries to include in my analysis out of the six countries, Tanzania was ultimately excluded. This was because my CARE collaborators encouraged that we did not include Tanzania as the Pathways project implementation had faced issues there, and there would not be enough data/project reports for me to look at in my analysis. This was a shame as the regional focus of this PhD is on sub-Saharan Africa and so I would have liked to include all Pathways sub-Saharan African project countries, and particularly as including Tanzania would have provided more links to the first empirical chapter. Ultimately, collaborating with external partners does mean that to some degree that you are reliant upon what they tell you and where they steer you.

Through chapter six, I also collaborated with Constance Akurugu from the Simon Diedong University of Business and Integrated Development Studies in Ghana who was also crucial in my learning journey. Born out of existing research partnerships and the afro-feminist reading group spearheaded by my supervisor Anna Mdee, working with Constance helped to guide my thought process in chapter six specifically where we were critiquing the top-down design of development projects. This was an important collaboration for me and has shaped my own

learning. Across the course of my PhD but particularly during the analysis and write up on chapter 6 I was questioning my role in the research process. Engaging with the decolonial and African feminist literature as a way to push back against the mainstream gender myths and buzzwords also pushed me to question my positionality. In critiquing the popularisation of such myths, I wanted to offer alternatives grounded in local voices and experiences. However I do not and never will have this first hand experience, and it is important for me to recognise my own shortcomings and whether I should be conducting this research. Constance is an expert in African feminism, and engaging with her opened up the space for me to learn from not just her lived experience but also her academic experience in pushing back against the neoliberal status quo. Helping me to unpack the Western and colonial underpinnings of mainstream development, Constance's own work helped to put in perspective and context the disconnect between this design and the reality of gendered agricultural livelihood dynamics. Her thinking and this collaboration has had a big influence on this thesis, reflected in her co-authorship of chapter six, for which I am exceedingly grateful.

These external collaborations with CARE and Constance and my personal learning journey within this took me to question why long critiqued gender myths and buzzwords are still promoted within mainstream development discourse, and what this suggests regarding how development policy and practice is designed and implemented. One of the key points that came out of my work with CARE was the often pressured relationship between them and the donors of their funded projects. This was something I wanted to explore more – not just the pressures that NGOs and similar actors dependent one external funding may be under, but the wider politics of development aid and how this shapes global discourse and agendas. My collaboration with CARE gave me the space to do this – as many of the people I had spoken to through this also reflected on the relationship with donors at different points in the funding cycle of CARE GTAs. Not only this, but some of the interviewees also had direct experience of working within different donor agencies, offering interesting reflections on international organisational politics. As the BMGF are the largest donor organisation supporting gender and women's empowerment work, and had funded the majority of CARE's GTAs, they provided a really interesting case study through which to explore these questions further.

The co-authorship on this final empirical chapter includes my two academic supervisors, Associate Professor Susannah Sallu in the School of Earth and Environment and Professor Anna Mdee in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. In addition, Professor Stephen Whitfield provided extra supervisory support not just during my work with the GCRF Challenge Cluster but throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and my PhD journey, and is also named in the co-authorship. Whilst this chapter came off the back of the collaboration with CARE, owing to the more critical position this final chapter took in looking at the power

and influence of the BMGF and the political sensitivity of this, the CARE collaborators were not included in this co-authorship. Nonetheless, the discussions and collaborations shaped this final empirical analysis.

I hope this chapter helps to show myself within the research, but I also want to view this thesis as a collaborative effort, where these research collaborations have not just shaped my own personal learning journey but the content and structure of this thesis too.

3.7 Conclusion: My Personal Learning Journey

Whilst the central theme of this PhD has always been exploring the nexus of gender, agricultural transformation, and development policy and practice, I do feel like the content and structure of this thesis is radically different from what I had originally planned. Perhaps it is just because of my journey that I feel this particularly as a disconnect between the first empirical chapter (chapter five) and empirical chapters six and seven. Nonetheless I am proud of this thesis and think it does represent an important contribution to this field.

As previously stated, I planned to submit this thesis via the alternative format route, meaning each chapter is submitted as an academic paper. Ultimately, the long and uncertain review process meant that I changed course in November 2022 to submit via the traditional thesis route. The review process relies on free labour and has been impacted by COVID and the UCU strikes, making it harder to secure reviewers for the duration of the full review cycle for a paper. After facing several setbacks because of this, and with the already short funding timescales of social science PhDs, notwithstanding the very limited support offered by funding institutions to remedy the COVID-19 disruptions outlined above, I chose to pivot to traditional thesis late in my PhD process. Nevertheless, I have included the empirical chapters structured as journal articles. I think that this structure makes sense given that each empirical chapter has a defined case study, and so they are structured as individual articles rather than one longer results chapter. I am still happy that I tried to go down this route, as it has meant that all of my empirical chapters have undergone stages of rigorous peer-review. At the point of submission, empirical chapters five and seven have been published in academic journals, with chapter six currently in an advanced stage of editing in preparation for journal submission, having received comments from reviewers. The status of each manuscript is noted in the footnotes at the beginning of each chapter. Changing to traditional thesis format has also enabled me to include this lengthy chapter regarding my personal learning journey, something I think is necessary to understand the content and structure of this thesis.

Some of the changes I have made were hard to make, yet all were reactive to uncertain, difficult and evolving situations. I could not have foreseen the circumstances and situations outlined in this chapter, nor how they would impact my work in different ways. In a strange way, I am

somewhat grateful for the change in research direction that I have taken during this PhD, as outlined above. I am sure that the research I had planned to undertake prior to the COVID-19 pandemic would have been interesting and I would certainly have learned a lot from spending time in the villages in Iringa learning from the communities and the CSA-SuPER project. The direct experience of witnessing how a development project engages with the community would have helped me understand the benefits and challenges of time-bounded development projects. Speaking to and learning from practitioners on the ground would likely have led to the similar conversations I ended up having with CARE practitioners for chapters 6 and 7 around the pressures NGOs are under to conform to a narrative set by donors. However I don't think that the fieldwork would have given me the understanding of how to speak to the reality and dynamic nature of gender agricultural livelihood dynamics in rural Tanzania. If I am critiquing the time-bounded development projects of not spending enough time understanding the needs and realities of communities and designing projects that don't prioritise this, what did I realistically expect to gain from a few months of fieldwork? Even If I spent longer, years, living in the communities – would this make a difference? I think it is important for researchers from the Global North to reflect on our role in the research process, the often highly extractive nature of research, and whether we are in fact just taking up space. I don't mean to say there isn't a role for Global North researchers in these fields of study, but it is crucial that we reflect on our positionality and role. Really this should have been the centre of my research plans from the very beginning. But the unrecognised privilege I had, as I have outlined in this chapter, kept me from truly confronting these difficult questions. The time I spent in Tanzania, and also the COVID-19 pandemic, gave me space to reflect on this more. So when I say that I am somewhat grateful for the change in research direction, it isn't necessarily that I mean the final research focus was more interesting or worthwhile - it is because I think this process has made me a more careful and reflective researcher. The change in my focus to explore the perspective of development practitioners rather than the communities thus aligned more to these questions and reflections. I may never be able to speak to the lived reality faced by rural African women living under centuries of Western oppression and intervention, but I can see myself more in the development practitioners who claim to be supporting them. Exploring this engagement gave me the space to reflect on my own, and reckoning with my own positionality, my own myths and assumptions has been an important part of this process. My thinking on this has changed and evolved as I have gone through this PhD, and I think in itself that has been more important than the fieldwork I didn't get to do.

Chapter 4

Research Design & Methodological Approach

This thesis explores the neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse within agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa. As outlined in the introduction, past policy efforts related to gender equality have promoted different policy 'solutions' or blueprints for gender equality: gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and gender equality as smart economics. The thesis explores these three policy paradigms and their integration within current agricultural transformation policy and practice. Grounded in a historical trajectory of over fifty years of gender and development theory and practice, this approach also facilitates exploration of how gender equality policy and practice has changed over the years: from the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 and the promotion of gender mainstreaming, to a mainstream development focus on improving the empowerment of the Third World Woman, to the promotion of gender equality as smart economics which, as this thesis outlines, is now central to the agricultural transformation rhetoric. Exploring these paradigm shifts in gender equality framing (Kabeer, 2005; Ferguson, 2015) enables analysis of the slippage in transformative feminist thinking within this neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse, why these policy paradigms are promoted, and by whom. The thesis thus helps to answer the political questions of *"what kinds of agendas and values does neoliberalism with a feminist face promote, who gets to define these agendas, and how are decisions being made"* (Prügl, 2021).

4.1 Research Philosophy & Conceptual Approach

This thesis explores how gender inequality is discursively framed as a problem within agricultural transformation policy and practice. The conceptual underpinning of this thesis is that public policy creatively and discursively constructs problematisations of aspects of society that need to be 'fixed'. The thesis thus explores the discursive framing of gender inequality as a policy 'problem' within agricultural transformation policy and practice, how this co-opts feminist discourse, and hence constructs gender relations in the process. The analytical focus is centred on policy and practitioner texts as a crucial part of the discursive environment in development (Farhall and Rickards, 2021). In understanding how gender inequality is discursively framed, this thesis takes a predominantly interpretivist qualitative methodological approach which enables exploration of gender inequality as a social construction. This interpretative approach directs attention primarily to how mainstream development actors develop 'problematisations' (ways of understanding) (Bacchi, 2015) of gender inequality within policy and practice.

Interpretivist research is recognised for its value in providing contextual depth to understanding the social world (Chowdhury, 2014). Interpretivism acknowledges that 'knowledge' is contextual, and thus enables exploration of what we 'know' about gender inequality, how this is integrated into agricultural transformation discourse, and how this is shaped by the political economy of mainstream development and its key actors. Building on Max Weber's influential ideas regarding social theory, an interpretivist approach is useful in this study to look for meanings and motives (Chowdhury, 2014) behind how and why certain gender discourses persist and are promoted by mainstream development actors. My own interpretivist approach understands gender as a set of socially constructed norms and practices that shape what it means to be a man or a woman in a given society or context (Doss, 2014; Quisumbing et al., 2014). It permits a flexible and inductive research design that lends itself to predominantly qualitative methodologies in order to enable the collection of rich and detailed descriptions of social phenomena (Tuli, 2010; Antwi and Hamza, 2015). This is because the research emphasis is on understanding how gender influences agricultural transformation policy and practice through specific case studies, rather than attempting to explain and generalise across multiple settings.

My interpretivist approach lends itself well to qualitative research as I believe there are multiple realities, and qualitative methodologies are one way of co-constructing a particular version of reality. What I mean by this in the context of this research is that qualitative research methodologies help me to understand how different development actors practice gender owing to their context and experiences. This approach also aligns to Judith Butler's seminal work which builds on the notion that gender is socially constructed, arguing that the concept of gender is performed and practiced where *"gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing"* (Butler, 1999). I therefore believe that how people understand and practice gender is relative. A particular strength of qualitative research is in its ability to focus on how people 'do things', enabling analysis of the everyday practices that construct and underpin daily life (Silverman, 1998). David Silverman (2021) criticises the often-held view that qualitative research is predominantly the study of people's experiences – where qualitative methodologies enable the researcher to 'get inside people's heads' or 'walk in their shoes'. Whilst this thesis is to some degree concerned with how people 'experience' gender and gender inequality, the analytical focus is more on how gender is practiced. By questioning the discursive framings of gender inequality within agricultural transformation policy and practice, I am exploring issues of language and representation. Through questioning problem representations and how these have come to be, analytical issues have underpinned my approach to this PhD from the beginning.

The critical gendered discourse analysis adopted builds on Foucault's poststructural conceptualisation that *"power and knowledge directly imply one another…there is no power*

relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977:27). It is thus an interpretive discourse analysis – considering policy, project and organisational texts as constitute bodies of discourse (Heracleous, 2004), aiming to identify discursive narratives and central gender problematisations and to explore how these narratives and problematisations influence and shape development actors' interpretations of gender inequality and the actions they take within policy and practice. This Foucault-influenced poststructural discourse analysis enables critical scrutiny of how problematisations of gender inequality are produced and represented in development policy and practice (Bacchi, 2015).

The thesis thus focuses on discourse within these texts as a key site of gender inequality problematisations within agricultural transformation policy and practice. As Cornwall (2007:471) notes, *"words make worlds"* – where the language of development discourse defines how we understand inequalities and global challenges, animating and legitimising certain interventions in the process. The thesis takes an interpretivist approach to discourse as more than a collection of words or discussion, where the meaning of words and concepts used within texts are socially constructed - reflecting the speakers own beliefs and experience of the world and the social context within which they are produced (Fischer, 2003a). As such the selection and collection of words taken together produce a meaning larger than is contained in the sentences examined independently (Fischer, 2003a). As noted by Feindt and Oels (2005), a discursive perspective within policy and practice analysis allows the researcher a particular awareness of the role and importance of language within policy. Building on Foucault's quote above regarding the constituting relationship between power and knowledge, the discourse analysis reflects an understanding that certain concepts, 'knowledge' and discourses make it into policy and practice texts where others are excluded - reflecting bias and power relations on part of the actors involved: policymakers and practitioners themselves but also advisory development partners that provide expertise and input to their formation who have the power to create and impose selective discourses on the general public (Mayr, 2008). It is thus an important focus of this thesis to explore the political context in which development policy and practice is produced, and the growing pressure and conditionality of development aid - unpacking the constraints and influence within which key development actors operate. Policies and interventions are therefore shaped by discourse, reflecting how gender equality is discursively framed and what activities are prioritised and funded as a result of this construction (Fischer, 2003a). As such this analysis is premised on that it is essential to consider why some concepts and discourses are given more weight or are included in policies where others are not.

As Farhall and Rickards (2021) note, critical analysis is needed of not just *what* women's place is in development, but *how* women are incorporated into developmental discourses. This thesis

contends with the how and also the *why*: how is gender inequality discursively framed as a policy problem, how does this shape how it is approached within development policy and programming, how are women in particular framed and integrated within this discourse – and why these framings are promoted by elite development actors, and why they help to uphold their position within the development industry.

4.2 Research Aim

The overarching aim of the thesis is to explore how gender inequality is discursively framed as a policy 'problem' within agricultural transformation discourse, and how this then shapes how it is approached within policy and practice. Each empirical chapter is structured as an academic paper and each explores a key gender-development buzzword and policy paradigm: gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and smart economics. Using a multi-scalar approach, the thesis explores this at the policy level within Tanzania's national climate-smart agricultural (CSA) policy landscape (chapter five), at the programme level within CARE International's 'Gender Transformative Approaches' (GTAs) portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa – applying a decolonial feminist lens to the 'Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index' (WEAI) used to report on project 'success' (chapter six), and at the international level through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) donor discourse (chapter seven).

4.3 Research Sub-Questions

In order to respond to the research aim, this thesis has one overarching research question: how is gender inequality framed as a policy and development problem within agricultural transformation discourse, and how does this shape gender and agriculture development interventions? With three corresponding research sub-questions (RQ):

RQ1: How is gender mainstreamed and addressed in agricultural transformation policy?

RQ2: How is gender equality and women's empowerment defined and measured in gender transformative approaches?

RQ3: What does a 'smart economics' approach to gender and agricultural transformation empower and who shapes these dominant narratives?

Three targeted case studies respond to these three sub-questions in turn.

4.4 Empirical Chapter Structure

Three empirical chapters respond to these three research sub-questions in turn through each exploring a different gender-development buzzword and policy paradigm: gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and smart economics – as outlined below.

4.4.1 Chapter five: How gender mainstreaming plays out in Tanzania's climate-smart agricultural policy: Isomorphic mimicry of international discourse

The first empirical chapter, chapter five, targets research sub-question one. This chapter explores how the gender mainstreaming policy paradigm has been diffused into Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape, what the dominant gender narratives are, and how this shapes how gender is approached within the agricultural sector in Tanzania. The theoretical grounding of this chapter is the argument that public policy creatively and discursively constructs problematisations of aspects of society that need to be 'fixed'. Effective implementation of gender mainstreaming thus requires a focus on how policy creatively constructs 'problems' and hence shapes gender relations (Bacchi and Eveline, 2003). In this context, chapter five is grounded in a feminist critique of gender mainstreaming as being '*caught between a rock and a hard place*' where it has resulted in poverty becoming '*feminised'* and a multitude of different gender equality strategies and activities that are *'often not working in ways we would have hoped'* (Rao and Kelleher, 2005:59). Exploring the myths and assumptions upon which gender mainstreaming relies and perpetuates thus helps to ascertain how gender inequality is framed as a policy problem within the agricultural sector in Tanzania, and how this relates to the reality of gendered livelihood dynamics within Tanzania.

4.4.2 Chapter six: Quantifying the intangible? Problematising universal applications of Western definitions and measurement indicators of women's empowerment

The second empirical chapter, chapter six, targets research sub-question two. This chapter explores how the women's empowerment buzzword is conceptualised within CARE International's GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa, and how the complexity and contextual nature of empowerment is translated into the standardised quantitative WEAI. The theoretical grounding of this chapter comes from decolonial feminist critique of 'women's empowerment' – arguing it is a complex and contextual concept to define, much less to measure. This chapter is also grounded in critiques of development aid, considering how the pressure to measure and report on project 'success' is reconciled in projects that claim to drive gender transformational change in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa – such change that is inherently complex and intangible. The approach taken within this chapter therefore enables analysis of how empowerment is framed within agricultural transformation discourse, how this aligns to local understandings of empowerment in sub-Saharan African communities, and how this shapes the mainstream monitoring indices used to report on project impact and 'success' in terms of gender 'transformation'.

4.4.3 Chapter seven: Neoliberal ideologies and philanthrocapitalist agendas: What does a 'smart economics' discourse empower?

The third empirical chapter, chapter seven, targets research sub-question three. This chapter explores how the 'gender equality as smart economics' policy paradigm has become central to the BMGF's agricultural transformation discourse. The theoretical grounding of this chapter comes from a critique of the BMGF's philanthrocapitalist approach to agricultural development and is also grounded in a feminist critique of the smart economics rhetoric. The 'Power in Institutions' framework utilised in this chapter enables a theoretically grounded approach to disaggregate the tangible and covert ways that power shapes discourses and agendas in gender equality and women's empowerment praxis. Through this approach, this chapter enables exploration of how gender inequality is discursively framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity and transformation, and within this how African female farmers are positioned as productive consumers and adopters of promoted climate-smart technologies. Answering *what* a smart economics discourse empowers also enables a critique of how and why the BMGF reinforce the gender myths and assumptions present in the neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse within agricultural transformation policy and practice.

The eighth chapter critically discusses both the empirical findings regarding the discursive framing of gender inequality as a policy 'problem' within agricultural transformation policy and practice in sub-Saharan Africa, and summarises how neoliberal framings of gender have been purposely absorbed into donor-driven agricultural transformation discourse in order to uphold the hegemony of the neoliberal development agenda. The concluding chapter closes with considerations for future research directions in light of these findings and offers policy recommendations, critically evaluating the opportunities for decolonial and transformative feminist agendas within this contested space.

4.5 Data Collection

As each empirical chapter is its own defined case study, the following section briefly outlines the data collection tools used for each chapter. Following this is a more in-depth analysis of the methodologies used.

Chapter five explores gender inequality problematisations through the diffusion of gender mainstreaming as a policy paradigm within Tanzania's national CSA policy framework. The specific policies included within this analysis, and how together they constitute Tanzania's national CSA policy framework, are outlined in figure 1 in chapter five. In total, 13 policy texts were analysed, sourced from the FAO Legislative Database (FAOLEX) (2019) and the Tanzanian Government Portal and/or a web search. Findings were triangulated through nine key-informant and elite interviews conducted between March – September 2020. Interviewees were

purposively sampled to represent perspectives among Tanzania's National Government Ministries, universities, NGOs and International Finance Institutions (IFIs)/development partners. Owing to the COVID-19 travel restrictions, two of these interviews were conducted in person and the rest were conducted online.

Chapter six explores gender equality problematisations through the conceptualisation of women's empowerment within CARE International's application of the WEAI within their GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa. The specific GTA projects analysed are outlined in chapter six. In total, 32 project texts were analysed, provided by CARE collaborators. Findings were triangulated through 17 key-informant interviews conducted between May – July 2021. Interviewees were selected and approached with the support of CARE collaborators. Interviewees were purposively selected to give an overview of CARE GTA project design through to implementation, CARE's application of the WEAI, monitoring and reporting, and also of the relationship between CARE and the BMGF as donors. All interviews were conducted online.

Chapter seven explores gender inequality problematisations through the political economy of mainstream approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment, focusing on the case study of the BMGF. The specific organisations documents included within this analysis are outlined in table 1 of chapter seven. In total, 37 key organisational documents were analysed, sourced from the BMGF website. Findings were triangulated through the same set of key-informant interviews as in chapter six. This was suitable as the purposive selection of interviewees included BMGF staff and also representation from other major philanthropies, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government bilateral development departments, consultancies and research institutes – who had all worked with and reflected on their relationship with the BMGF.

4.6 Reflection on Methods & Limitations in Approach

4.6.1 Policy, Practitioner and Organisational texts

The specific and different data analysis tools and frameworks used to analyse the CSA policy, CARE practitioner, and BMGF organisational documents are discussed in the following section. It is important to briefly first note why these texts have been included in the analysis for this thesis, and the limitations of this approach.

Policy, practitioner and organisational texts represent important analytical sites through which to explore the discursive representation of how gender inequality is problematised and how this shapes how it is then approached within policy and practice. As Farhall and Rickards (2021) note, the ambiguous status of such texts as both literature and data means they are too often neglected in social research. Yet scrutiny of the discourses included in these texts shape how

'problems' such as gender inequality are understood and approached. Analysing such discourses: where and why they are included, what is missing, and what the implications of this are, therefore offers insights into why certain gender narratives persist and who is shaping and influencing this. This helps to provide an overarching view of different development actors dominant narratives around gender, and to understand the trajectory of gender and development theory and practice over recent years. This thesis thus approaches these texts as sources of primary data, analytical sites which need to be understood and analysed in their own right.

As all such documents analysed in this thesis are already existing and have not been 'manufactured' for this research, they can also be viewed as a source of naturalistic data (Silverman, 2014) – a window into the world of different development actors, where they have constructed the understandings and practices of gender to different audiences. After I had gathered the policy, practitioner, and organisational texts for empirical chapters five, six, and seven, respectively, the process of analysis occurred both before and during the process of conducting interviews. This is important to note as the gathering of and interpreting data thus occurred concurrently, enabling flexibility and self-reflection to inform the iterative process of gathering, analysing and interpreting (Silverman, 2022). For chapter seven, I had already conducted the interviews prior to analysis of the BMGF's organisational documents, as I used the same set of interviews as in chapter six. This was thus a more iterative process, where analysis of these interview transcripts led me to question further the problematisations of gender and gender inequality, why they persist, and who is promoting them. As I outline on page 123, this line of questioning took me a further step up the development chain to explore how donors practice gender through their organisational texts.

It is important to reflect also on the limitations in using these texts as a source of primary data. First, in their selection: there is likely a degree of subjectivity to account for in the normative selection of which texts to include in the analysis. For each empirical chapter case study, I aimed to select all policy/practitioner/organisational texts relevant to the specific focus. For Tanzania's CSA policy landscape, I selected all CSA specific policies (all plans, programs, strategies and guidelines are referred to as policies within this chapter) related to CSA specifically but also in the fields of agriculture (including consideration of crops, livestock, and fisheries), climate change and development as these areas allow for a broader perspective of how gender is conceptualised within Tanzanian policies associated with CSA. For CARE's GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa, practitioner texts were selected with the assistance of CARE collaborators. As such, there may have been bias on behalf of CARE colleagues to only provide the GTA project documents that frame CARE in a positive way and/or demonstrate 'good' results (although this also depends on what is defined and reported on as impact and 'success'). Similarly, the normative selection of which projects and/or countries was taken with CARE

collaborators, and as such the same limitations apply. I aimed to remedy this as best as possible through first conducting an independent mapping of all CARE GTA projects across sub-Saharan Africa, although this was based on data from the CARE website, and so again has its limitations. For the BMGF's organisational texts were purposively selected by myself from what was accessible through the BMGF website. This selection process provided 37 key organisational documents from 2008 (introduction of gender requirement within their agricultural development grant-making) to present from their program resources to provide an overarching view of their gender work and gender 'journey'. Compared to the previous case study, whilst I was able to select which texts to include myself, the texts available evidently depend on what texts the BMGF chose to put on their website, and so there may be bias within this. Similarly, whilst I aimed to select all relevant texts around gender and women's empowerment, this was a subjective selection and this is again stated as a limitation.

In sum, it is hoped that all relevant documents have been included for each case study, however it is important to note that this was a subjective process, and the potential limitations of this in that some texts may have been missed.

4.6.2 Key-Informant Interviews

Key-informant interviews are an important methodology and source of data that have long been considered a vital part of qualitative research. They are often inadvertently positioned as producing more valuable knowledge because of the status and expertise of the 'key' informant (Lokot, 2021). The interviews I conducted for this thesis were all semi-structured, as these are useful to cover relevant topics (such as discussions around the main CSA policies in Tanzania and how these affect smallholders), whilst also allowing for probing of emergent themes (Wilde, 2001). I began by asking questions that aimed to understand the interviewee: their research and/or educational background and previous work experience(s) - in order to build a picture of their individual context and how this shapes their understandings and practices of gender. For all interviews, I had a rough outline of key questions, which I aimed to keep open-ended to encourage detailed responses. My understanding and appreciation of such forms of qualitative methodology is that it helps to gather rich and detailed data, and is flexible and iterative in its approach where quantitative methodologies are often not. Considering that much of this thesis critiques the top-down nature of development policy and practice that does not engage with the worldview nor understandings of the intended 'recipients' (for want of a better word), it was also important to me that my research approach did not do this. This view is evident particularly in chapter six where I critique the rigid and narrow design of standardised quantitative indices which I argue produce a version of reality, and are highly reductive in nature. As an example, I do not believe that the complexity and contextual nature of decision-making can be reduced into closed survey question and responses. The openness of my interview questioning and style was

thus an important way for me to counteract this and limit bias (Mikkelsen, 2005), facilitating space for open discussions regarding gender and gender inequality where I could also be flexible in responding to interviewee's priorities and viewpoints.

There are a number of limitations I wish to reflect on regarding the key-informant interviews used in this thesis. Firstly, David Silverman views interviews as forms of 'manufactured' data – i.e. the researcher has manufactured and artificially created the discussion and data between interviewer and interviewee, rather than 'finding' it in the 'field' or in naturalistic data (Silverman, 2013a). Through this process, Silverman outlines, the interview data produced is the direct artefact of the research process, where it would not exist had the researcher not manufactured this space and discussion. This is an important limitation to consider in this thesis, as, in addition to approaching and using policy, practitioner and organisational texts as sources of primary data, much of the data analysis in this thesis is based on key-informant interviews. An important consideration in interviews is the risk that, if respondents are made aware of the interviewer's interests, it can affect their responses (Silverman, 2013b). Rather than using interviews to understand the meaning of gender from the perspective of the different development actors I speak to in these interviews, I view interviews as an approach to study how development actors practice gender within their work: how they understand and act gender and gender inequality. As such, the interviews are treated not simply as a window to the experiences of the interviewees (Silverman, 2013b), but as a co-construction between myself and the interviewees of how gender is practiced. Nonetheless, it is important to note the subjectivity inherent in the manufacturing of interviews in that I designed the questions, and so have, to some degree, tailored the responses. In addition, the data is somewhat limited based on what the interviewee choses to share.

This raises important consideration regarding issues of generalisability of the interview data. The aim of this research is not to generalise to population, but to explore how gender inequality is discursively framed as a policy problem by and through different development actors: policymakers, practitioners, donors, academics, etc. I aimed to understand how these different development actors understand and practice gender, how this shapes how they approach gender inequality through development policy and practice, and to reflect on what can be learned from this. As such, the case study approach is appropriate where generalisation is not the aim nor focus, but to generate deep understanding of these processes.

Secondly, it is important to note that there has been a relatively small sample size, both for each case study and in total. Nine key-informant and elite interviews were conducted for the first empirical chapter on Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape. As I reflect on in chapter three, these interviews were mostly organised via email and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I believe that the online nature of this process impacted the number of interviews I was able to

conduct. Nonetheless, I was able to speak to key informants from Tanzania's National Government Ministries, universities, NGOs and International Finance Institutions (IFIs)/development partners. As such, even with a relatively small sample size, the in-depth nature of the interviews I did conduct provided a broad overview of the policy process in Tanzania, and the perceptions and understandings of gender inequality and gender mainstreaming of a range of key development actors. 17 key-informant interviews were conducted for the second and third empirical chapters on CARE's GTA portfolio and the BMGF's discourse around gender equality and women's empowerment. The same interviews were used for both chapters. As I outline in chapter three, the initial focus of this collaboration with CARE International and the reason for the interviews was to explore how GTAs are designed, implemented and monitored given the intangibility of social norm change and the conditionality of development aid. During the analysis and write-up, it became clear that there were multiple important stories present that related to the research aim: firstly, the top-down nature of how such projects are designed, how gender and women's empowerment is conceptualised, and if and how this aligns to local perceptions and understanding. Secondly, why the gender myths and assumptions and the caricatured victimhood of rural African women in particular persist through these different gender buzzwords and policy paradigms, despite the critique covered in chapters one and two. This led me to then explore the influence and power of the BMGF over these discourses, considering they were the key donor to the majority of the CARE GTA projects analysed. In sum, the same set of interviews provided enough data for both chapters.

Reflecting on who is categorised as a 'key' informant, the purposive selection of interviewees for these chapters meant I spoke to development practitioners who had worked across the different CARE GTA projects analysed and so provided a good overview of their portfolio. In addition, many of these interviewees either had previously or were currently working in different development organisations – i.e. they are not all presently working for CARE. However, all interviewees had experience of working for or directly with the BMGF. As I reflect on in chapter three, these interviews were organised with the assistance of my CARE collaborators. It is thus important to note the potential for bias here, were I was reliant on my collaborators to suggest and put me in contact with the relevant CARE staff. There is likely a degree of unavoidable subjectivity here in regard to who my collaborators chose for me to speak to. Nevertheless, I was able to speak to CARE practitioners along the different stages of one of their key flagship projects (the Pathways Programme). These stages included: initial conception, discussions with the BMGF, the proposal process and relationship with the BMGF along the way (from the perspective of the BMGF Programme Assistant and CARE grant writers), project implementation and monitoring (both in-country and overall), and reporting. As such, from these

interviews I was able to map out the key CARE practitioners at each stage, and so was also able (to some degree) to chose who I approached for interview.

Finally, it is also important to reflect on the normative process of interview analysis. I have outlined my ontology and epistemological approach in the above sections, and reflect on my positionality in chapter three. All of this will have, to some degree, affected how I approached my interview analysis. Particularly, it is important to note how the subjective approach to deciding which sections of interview text to include as quotes in the three empirical chapters shape my argument. It is not possible nor appropriate to include entire interview texts within journal articles nor theses. The normative selection of which data extracts to include thus means I am presenting a small snapshot of these interviews, and through this subjective process I am creating my own narrative. This is a serious limitation, and one that is not easily overcome in qualitative research. In addition, the selective use of job/sector titles and/or gender of the interviewees, as in chapters five and seven, or selective use of pseudonyms, as in chapter six, also bears noting on the implications for the claims I am making. People can identify themselves through numerous and endless characteristics and identities, and in favouring which characteristics to include within the interviewer identifiers can, to some degree, guide the reader to a particular set of interpretations (Silverman, 2013b). For example, noting that an interviewee is female could give the impression that I then think what she says is representative of all females. Such characteristics and identities are, I believe, necessary to understand the background to viewpoints. Yet their selection is also subjective, and again can influence the narratives I am presenting.

4.7 Data Analysis

Chapters five, six and seven apply a critical gendered discourse analysis to Tanzania's CSA policy texts, CARE's GTA project texts, and the BMGF's organisational texts, respectively, aided by NVivo software. The critical gendered discourse analysis used throughout this thesis builds on other forms of textual and context analysis and is particularly relevant to the aims and objectives of this thesis as it critically approaches the context within which the information was placed: i.e. not viewing the words in isolation, but rather presented as a cultural product contingent on and shaped by the organisations own political ideologies (Farhall and Rickards, 2021). Contextual factors, including the political milieu, where the text sits within the trajectory of gender and development theory and practice as outlined in the introductory chapters, and the organisations who provided technical and financial assistance to the policy and practitioner texts are drawn on to consider how dominant gender discourses are actively incorporated and promoted and how they respond to feminist concerns. As such, this critical gendered discourse analysis enables the identification of dominant gender narratives regarding key

problematisations of gender inequality and the kind of assumptions that underlie and are embedded within these problematisations and in the practices of societal institutions – assumptions around the role of different genders and their position within society. The thesis explores these narratives in the context of the broader historical trajectory of gender and development theory and practice as outlined in the introductory chapters in order to explore the political economy shaping gender agricultural transformation policy and practice. The thesis thus grounds analysis of high-level policy, project and organisational texts within this trajectory, enabling analysis of how certain narratives persist within the current neoliberal development agenda and how others fight for recognition. The critical gendered discourse analysis also enabled the exploration and comparison of the gender narratives and problematisations with (decolonial) feminist thinking, and how this either bolsters or challenges the neoliberal development paradigm, and what space there is for transformative feminism within this contested space. This is outlined in more detail in chapter eight and nine: discussion and conclusions.

Chapter five explicitly uses a 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach as designed by Bacchi (2009) in order to better explore gender inequality problematisations. As chapter five outlines, the WPR tool facilitates a critical interrogation of public policies (Bletsas and Beasley, 2012) through looking at how they *"give shape and meaning"* to the *"'problems' they purport to address"* (Bacchi and Eveline, 2010:111). As such it takes the theoretical concept of 'problematisations' - questioning the taken-for-granted and accepted truths presented in policy – to analyse how and why certain things become 'problems' that need to be governed and discerning how these problems are represented (Bacchi, 2012). The WPR approach follows a practical methodology of six analytical questions (Bacchi, 2009):

1. What is the problem (for example gender inequality) represented to be?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this problem representation?
3. How has this problem representation come about?
4. Can the problem be thought about differently, and what is not being considered in this problem representation?
5. What effects are produced by this problem representation?
6. How/where has this problem representation been produced and disseminated, and how has it (or could it be) questioned or replaced?

Reflexivity on part of the researcher is then encouraged by applying these questions to their own problem representations – understanding that where problems are socially produced within policy, so does the researcher play a key role in subjectively establishing what is true, how such problems came to be and how they could be thought of differently (Bacchi, 2012). As such the

WPR approach lends itself well to discourse analysis through enabling critical rigorous appraisal of how 'problems' such as gender inequality are presented in policy, why certain discourses are included where others are not, and how such problems are then approached through policy and practice.

Chapter six applies a decolonial feminist lens to CARE's application of the WEAI across their GTA portfolio – analysing project documents to critically explore conceptualisations of women's empowerment. As outlined in the chapter, this is based on colonial depictions of the Third World Woman and the focus of Global North institutions on 'improving' her empowerment. The chapter introduction outlines how Western conceptualisations of empowerment are based on individualism and autonomy, which is often at odds with the sense of communitarianism and interdependence present within rural communities across sub-Saharan Africa. The chapter thus outlines how the CARE project documents were analysed according to the concept of individualism and collectivism as defined by Dubois and Beauvois (2005) whose influential work in social psychology explored the normative features of Western individualism to identify five core characteristics: placing individual goals over collective ones, self-sufficiency, internality, individual anchoring, and contractuality (these terms are discussed and explained in chapter six). These five features are central to the core idea of individualism as individuals who are independent of one another with personal aspirations, skills and control, and who strive first and foremost to feel good about themselves and achieve their individual goals. The opposite may be said for collectivism: placing collective goals above the individual, interdependency, externality, categorical anchoring, and community. In other words, interdependent communities built on supportive relations and who value and strive toward collective goals. The chapter applies these characteristics of individualism and collectivism to CARE's GTA portfolio to analyse which traits are inherent in both their conceptualisation of women's empowerment and within the WEI.

Chapter seven utilises Kashwan, MacLean and García-López's (2019) 'Power in Institutions' framework to disaggregate the tangible and covert ways that power shapes discourses and agendas in gender equality and women's empowerment praxis. As chapter seven outlines, the power in institutions framework is grounded in the BMGF's own language of power, and facilitates the unpacking of how the BMGF conceive 'power' in 'empowerment' as a 'property' that can be bestowed upon others through philanthropic development. The matrix builds on Foucault's (1984) conceptualisation of power as a force that flows through society and is inherent in all social relations through enabling exploration of not just how the BMGF exercise power over their funded projects and their mainstream monitoring indices, global agenda setting, and over development discourses, but also how other development actors navigate this contested space.

The use of NVivo software facilitated the analysis of policy, programme, and organisational texts, in addition to key-informant and elite interview transcripts – enabling the identification and recording of key codes and themes by allowing the researcher to annotate the texts. NVivo also facilitated key word searchers when needed, as outlined in chapter five, to accurately capture and code key gender narratives and problematisations. All coding was conducted in a sequential fashion, firstly beginning with descriptive coding through keywords, and then progressing to more analytical coding. Texts in chapters five and seven were inductively coded to enable gender narratives and key problem representations to emerge organically through the analysis. Chapter six utilised a hybrid of inductive and deductive coding (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) to enable both the themes aligned to the traits of individualism and collectivism, as outlined above, and also emergent relevant themes to be simultaneously analysed. Each chapter discusses the coding process in more detail.

4.8 Research Ethics

Human participation was involved in all empirical chapters five, six and seven. Full ethical approval for interviews was obtained from the University of Leeds Faculties of Business, Environment and Social Sciences Ethics Committee – approval number AREA 19-016. This ethical approval was granted for my first application for ethical review for my planned fieldwork in Tanzania, and thus relates to the initial thesis topic: 'Exploring Gendered Influences in the Adoption of 'Climate Smart Agriculture' Practices in Tanzania'. Here ethical approval was sought for a range of ethnographic research techniques with a focus on qualitative methods, as outlined in chapter three. Attached to this application was the following the following supporting documentation: 1) Research project information sheet and consent form (combined); 2) Research summary leaflet (to be shared with project partners and local district/regional authorities in Tanzania as required), and 3) Completed risk assessment application (submitted at the same time as this ethics application). This ethical clearance was required in order to apply for a COSTECH research permit in Tanzania, with the granted clearance submitted to COSTECH alongside my research permit application. The ethical clearance from the University of Leeds is included in Appendix A.

An amendment to the original ethics application was approved by the same Ethic Committee (AREA 19-016 (Amd 1, Mar 2021)) owing to the changes in research approach following COVID-19 related disruptions, as outlined in chapter three. This amendment outlined the changes to my original ethics application – namely that I had adjusted my participant focus through focusing more on the project design and implementation side of gendered agricultural projects by conducting online key-informant interviews with CARE International project staff (i.e. rather than speaking to project participants as originally planned). As mentioned in chapter three, collaborating with external partners within this research project can have its difficulties.

As such, this amended ethical application included discussion of the ethics regarding the cooperation of an intermediary to gain access to research participants or material: where research partners from CARE International assisted in connecting myself to CARE project staff involved in the CARE GTAs and assisted in the organisation of key-informant interviews. The research project information sheet and participant verbal consent form were adapted as per the adjusted research focus, and also included in this amended application. The ethical clearance from the University of Leeds for this amendment is included in Appendix B.

The ethics of working with third parties can highlight tensions over views and interpretations of data. This is discussed in chapter three, but it is worth returning to here. Collaborators, particularly NGOs to those who they work with, also have strict ethical requirements that they are contractually obliged to adhere to. Working with CARE research partners was a fine line between collaboration and critique. I led and conducted the data collection and did the data analysis. Whilst third parties supported the data collection, subsequent to data collection, they did not have access to the raw data. I wrote up the findings, and consulted with CARE research partners on the drafts. I believe academics working together with practitioners holds potential for meaningful outputs, and as such the final output is balance of our views – reflected in the co-authorship on this paper.

As per the Research Project Information Sheet shared with interviewees, full consent was obtained prior to each interview. For the interviews conducted in person, written consent was obtained, and for the remaining interviews conducted online during the COVID-19 pandemic, verbal consent was obtained. All personal information that would allow the identification of any person or person(s) described in the thesis has been removed. Where direct quotes are used within the empirical chapters, the following approaches were adopted in order to give background to viewpoints and yet ensure the anonymity of interviewees: within chapters five and seven the job/sector titles are given, with chapter six using pseudonyms.

Chapter 5

How gender mainstreaming plays out in Tanzania's climate-smart agricultural policy: Isomorphic mimicry of international discourse [3]

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents the first case study: an exploration of how gender mainstreaming as an internationally promoted policy solution to solve gender inequality is diffused into Tanzania's national CSA policy framework. As such, this chapter targets research sub-question one: How is gender mainstreamed and addressed in agricultural transformation policy? Using a critical gendered discourse analysis combined with a WPR approach, this case study sets the analysis within academic critiques of the gender mainstreaming paradigm and the gender myths and assumptions upon which it is based. Exploring the power and politics of the policy space within Tanzania, this chapter focuses specifically on how gender inequality is problematised across policy and how it is then 'governed' through policy implementation plans. Through this analysis, the chapter teases out the donor-driven development landscape and the disconnect between gender mainstreaming policy in theory and application in practice, and also considers what this suggests regarding the capacity of the Tanzanian state to approach gender within the agricultural sector.

This chapter is co-authored by my two academic supervisors, Associate Professor Susannah Sallu in the School of Earth and Environment and Professor Anna Mdee in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. We worked together on submitting a journal article of this chapter, which was published in the Development Policy Review journal on 12th May 2023. This first case study was conducted in the earlier stages of my PhD when my focus was on Tanzania and the relationships between gender and CSA practices within smallholder farming communities in Tanzania. The co-authorship reflects the valuable insights from both Susannah and Anna from their years of experience in working in Tanzania. The conceptual underpinnings and research design were agreed by all authors. I led the framework and methodological design and performed the data collection and analysis and created all figures and tables. The text and findings were written up by myself, with contribution from Susannah and Anna. Editorial text editing and revisions were undertaken by all authors, led by myself.

[3] This manuscript was manuscript was accepted at the Development Policy Review journal on 3rd May 2023. It was published online on 12th May 2023.

5.2 Introduction

Since the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, 'gender mainstreaming' has been positioned on the international stage as the vehicle of choice to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women (Moser and Moser, 2005, Sweetman, 2015). The isomorphism[4] of gender mainstreaming as a policy framework is evident not only in development assistance whereby major donor states and donor organisations seek to maintain legitimacy of their aid programmes, but also within the policy frameworks of aid-recipient nations who seek to reflect internationally-agreed-upon best practice. Despite its popularity, gender mainstreaming relies upon and perpetuates gender myths and assumptions, lacks operational clarity and implementation guidance (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015), and relies on its interpretation and implementation at the local level within institutional structures that themselves are often highly gendered and have previously supported male privilege (Alston, 2014). It is therefore important to critically question 'what are we mainstreaming when we mainstream gender' (Bacchi and Eveline, 2003) within countries with high levels of aid dependency, such as Tanzania, who are under greater pressure to conform to ideas of 'best practice' (Mdee and Harrison, 2019).

In this paper, we apply a discourse analytical perspective (Fischer (2003a, 2003b) and Feindt and Oels (2005)), combined with Carol Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) tool (2009), to Tanzania's Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) policy framework to explore this question – analysing how gender inequality in the agricultural sector is framed as a policy 'problem' and how it is then 'governed' through policy implementation plans. We begin by critiquing gender mainstreaming as a policy strategy through drawing on broader arguments within the wider discourse and practice of 'good governance'. We then apply the concepts of capability traps and isomorphic mimicry to examine the gap between gender mainstreaming policy in theory and application in practice. This is important considering that decentralisation shapes the governance agenda of Tanzania, meaning it is important to also explore how policy is resourced and implemented through levels of government. Supporting our findings through key-informant interviews with staff from Tanzania's National Government Ministries, universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and development partners, we demonstrate that Tanzania's CSA policy framework incorporates gender in a superficial and insubstantial manner which results in 'wish list' policies that do not respond to existing evidence on intersectional inequalities, nor to current institutional capacity for implementation. We

[4] Political sociology literature on world polity argues that common policy models and global norms proliferate globally as the enactment of 'world culture', diffusing down to nation states whereby states enact models in an effort to seek legitimacy on the international stage – resulting in the isomorphism of policy and practice (Meyer et al., 1997; Swiss, 2011).

suggest that this formulaic mainstreaming of gender in policy becomes an almost meaningless performative game played out by development actors across all scales, rather than producing considered policy and actions to address gendered inequality in agriculture.

5.3 The Diffusion of Gender Mainstreaming within Agricultural Transformation Discourse

Gender mainstreaming discourse has its roots in persistent women, environment and development linkages in climate change and sustainable development agendas (Resurrección, 2013). Feminist debates on the gendered division of labour and the essentialism of women's knowledge and dependence on the environment centred within the Women in Development (WID) and Women, Environment and Development (WED) movements of the 1970s and 1980s-90s, respectively, seeped into development industry discourse and practice through the lobbying and promotion of women-centred policies and projects (Leach, 2007).

By the mid-1990s, the promotion of 'engaging men and boys' in the fight for gender equality shifted the discourse to Gender and Development (GAD). The GAD came to be reliant on gender binaries defined by access to resources and opportunities, with 'gender training' promoted as the solution (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). The Beijing Declaration in 1995 then enshrined gender mainstreaming into the objectives and discourse of international development (Ferguson, 2015), where it has since diffused down into the domestic policy of many countries as a fundamental strategy that requires all policy and interventions to be assessed in relation to their differential impact on men and women to ensure that gender inequalities are not perpetuated through institutional means (Staudt, 2003; Alston, 2014). Yet despite the term 'gender' providing camouflage for a persistent focus on women (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015), a mainstream emphasis on the vulnerable woman in need of development assistance has remained resilient through the rhetoric of 'women's empowerment' (Cornwall and Brock, 2005) and 'investing in women and girls as smart economics' (Chant and Sweetman, 2012; Hickel, 2014) in the agendas of international development agencies (Prügl, 2015).

In agricultural transformation discourse, gender mainstreaming has entered policy discourse through debates over increasing women's agricultural productivity (Doss, 2014), increasing women's access to credit and land tenure markets (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2010, 2017), and increasing women's participation in decision-making and policy-making arenas (Collins, 2018). It has become mostly a rhetorical commitment within policy spheres, often adopting technocratic approaches and quota-based female representation in governance bodies (ibid.). Gender mainstreaming is therefore critiqued for becoming a 'strategy' lacking coherence in both application and implementation guidance, with limited agreement in either policy or academic literature on what precisely gender mainstreaming means nor how it should be done. Critiques

have reached a 'critical mass' (Hankivsky and Hunting, 2022) – largely as it is judged as having failed to deliver substantive improvement in the socio-economic status of marginalised women (Changachirere, 2019; Huyer and Partey, 2020).

In part, this is because the discourse around gender is often reflective of the mainstream development reliance on stylised 'facts' regarding women: (1) women make up 70 percent of the world's poor, (2) women produce 60-80 percent of the world's food, (3) women own just 1-2 percent of the world's land, and (4) women are intrinsically better stewards of the environment (Doss et al., 2018). Despite such statistics being rarely supported by reliable or conclusive empirical evidence, they are frequently used by international organisations to support their women-centred approaches (ibid.) – increasing the universalisation of women as vulnerable or virtuous in relation to the environment (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Critiques also centre on the forceful embracing of gender mainstreaming by neoliberal development actors like the World Bank who distort and co-opt feminist knowledge within their promoted strategies of 'investing in women and girls as smart economics' which presents the business case for gender equality (Davids and van Eerdewijk, 2016; Prügl, 2017).

In reality, gender-agriculture relations are diverse and differentiated, embedded in complex socio-political interactions. As Noe et al. (2021) point out, rural areas in Tanzania are sites of dynamism and change – where any new livelihood opportunities and income-generating possibilities are likely to give rise to new periods of contestation over the ownership and control of revenue streams, continuing to shape gendered livelihood dynamics in the process and disrupting visions of linear progression towards gender equality. Owing to the complexity and dynamic nature of gendered social power relations, a one size fits all approach to gender inequality is unlikely to have uniform or transformational impact (Sandler and Rao, 2012).

Gender mainstreaming can thus be taken as an element of 'good governance' – where its prescription has been inserted into national policy frameworks of aid-recipient countries in order to follow the best practice approach of mainstream development agendas. 'Isomorphic mimicry' (Andrews et al. (2012, 2017a, 2017b) is a direct consequence of the promulgation of universal good governance principles whereby states mimic the appearance of best practice in their design of institutions and policies, and yet don't have the underlying functionality or capacity to follow through - often leading to unclear state accountability and elite capture (Mdee and Harrison, 2019). This is because policies themselves do not succeed or fail on their own merits, but rather are dependent upon the process of implementation (Hudson, Hunter, and Peckham, 2019) – and so rely on the training and knowledge of relevant government staff and the institutional capacity of government ministries to understand, implement and monitor policy (Pritchett, Woolcock and Andrews, 2013). This is important considering that *"gender mainstreaming can only do as much*

as those institutions into which 'gender' is 'mainstreamed'' (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015: 404). Capability traps thus arise when states lack the capability to implement the promised actions in their policies and plans (Pritchett et al, 2010).

Transplanting international best practice through gender mainstreaming as a policy strategy within domestic policy thus offers an interesting insight into policy isomorphism and capability traps owing to the interrelated widespread critiques that gender mainstreaming relies on and perpetuates gender myths and assumptions, lacks any implementation guidance, and that it has failed on an international scale in advancing gender equality. Exploring how the gender mainstreaming rhetoric interacts with local gender relations and practices in the process is important (True and Mintrom, 2001) considering that neo-institutional sociologists highlight how such global norms and discourses interact with domestic politics and institutions – not always directly or unproblematically (Aminzade et al., 2018). This is particularly true in the context of Tanzania considering that decolonial feminist praxis argues that the mainstream doctrine of 'equality' within the gender mainstreaming rhetoric fosters Western values embedded in autonomy and individualism, and that it is ill suited to African contexts (Tamale, 2020). As such we are not interested in defining or promoting gender mainstreaming, rather we are concerned with how it is deployed and promoted by development actors as a policy strategy to achieve gender equality, and how this sits at odds with evidence on the reality of gendered livelihood dynamics within Tanzania, and the implementation capacity of the Tanzanian state.

5.4 History of Tanzanian Gender and Agricultural Dynamics

Successive governments in Tanzania have sought to modernise agriculture with an emphasis on commercialisation (Mdee et al., 2017) – with CSA promoted as both a panacea for agricultural transformation in the context of climate change (Collins, 2018) and as a means to bridge the 'gender gap' in agriculture (Huyer, 2016). CSA in Tanzania has its antecedents in post-independence socialist ideology 'Ujamaa' and state-led agricultural investment codified in the Arusha Declaration – ultimately abandoned when the government was starved of finance by donors in order to force compliance with the IMF/World Bank conditions of the structural adjustment programs and liberalisation which promoted modernisation - and more recently in the 'African green revolution' focused on large-scale commercial investment (Rusimbi and Mbilinyi, 2005, Mbilinyi, 2016, Mdee et al., 2020). Mbilinyi's (1994, 2016) work on agrarian struggles and gendered livelihood dynamics in Tanzania explores the continuity between colonial efforts to dismantle peasant production and promote settler and corporate agriculture, showing that throughout the colonial and post-colonial period an 'unholy alliance' between donors, the Tanzanian state, big business and peasant household heads constructed and

reinforced patriarchal relations and control over women's labour as a mechanism of social control.

Women are very active in the agricultural sector in Tanzania - where 70 percent of economically active women work, with 70 percent of the Tanzanian population living in rural areas (Mbilinyi, 2016). Yet the colonial conceptualisations of women's roles remain powerful today through unequal power relations and access to and control over resources, political representation and say in agricultural decision-making (Badstue et al., 2021). The relationship between gender and agriculture within Tanzania is, however, far more complex than the donor discourse allows, where colonial regimes and structural adjustment policy reforms have interweaved with customary arrangements to shape the current landscape of social relations (Mdee et al., 2020). Women's roles in agricultural value chains across Tanzania are thus diverse and dynamic, with regional, economic and cultural variations (Bradford and Katikiro, 2019).

Indigenous women's struggles have long fought for Tanzanian legislation for women's rights (Badstue et al., 2020), and since the Beijing Declaration in 1995 Tanzania has committed to gender mainstreaming within its policies - and specifically in relation to climate change policy through *'The National Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender into Climate Change Adaptation Related Policies, Strategies, Programmes and Budgets'* (URT, 2012b). Demonstrating how mainstream development has affected the practices of both the state and local elites in Tanzania (Green, 2014), agro-industrial corporations have also adopted a variety of gender mainstreaming strategies – promoted within their rhetoric of improving smallholder production - not just to fall in line with the international development agenda, but also to resolve the threat to the agro-industrial conquest which traditional smallholder farming poses through the resistance of peasant women to land-grabbing and commercialisation. Gender mainstreaming is thus purposefully absorbed so as to accompany the promoted message that their ultimate objective is to improve smallholder production in order to reduce poverty (Mbilinyi, 2016).

Yet far from moving towards gender equality, recent research highlights that the current discourse within Tanzania appears to promote essentialist understandings of gender based on patriarchal characterisations of women and what their roles should be (Badstue et al., 2021). The Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), a transformative feminist umbrella organisation, argues that the Tanzanian government pay inadequate attention to gender, with a lack of any specific strategies or interventions aimed at the attainment of gender equality within the agricultural sector (TGNP, 2018). Research also points to policy-implementation gaps in regards to existing gender policy within Tanzania. Ampaire et al. (2020) explored the extent of gender integration in agricultural and natural resource policies in Uganda and Tanzania, noting both an interpretation of gender issues as 'women's issues', with significant 'gender gaps'

through shortfalls of information, action and strategy - particularly at lower governance levels (also in Acosta et al., 2015, 2016). In Uganda specifically, Acosta et al. (2019, 2021) show that top-down donor discourses of gender mainstreaming influence the development policies of Uganda, yet its transformative potential is limited through policy processes that are themselves gendered and premised on gender assumptions - resulting in variegated interpretations of gender shaped by local norms.

In the policy transfer literature, Mdee and Harrison (2019) apply the concept of isomorphic mimicry to current irrigation and water management institutions in Malawi and Tanzania, demonstrating that when these governance frameworks are designed according to 'best practice' and 'good governance' principles, in practice they result in dysfunctional governance systems that are disconnected from actual irrigation patterns. Aminzade et al. (2018:71) explore the diffusion of mainstream agricultural development discourse within Tanzania, noting that, owing to its dependence on foreign aid, Tanzania is *'precisely the sort of country where one would expect policy transfer to occur'*. They found multiple and competing discourses – particularly around the major national policy visions for the agricultural sector and the role of smallholder farmers within this. Importantly, they highlight that the dominant domestic discourse privileges the business elite and openly encourages private investment and foreign capital as business partners in new agro-industrial activities – pointing to an emerging national bourgeoisie within Tanzania. Not only have neoliberal policy discourses been imbibed from the outside since the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s, they are simultaneously promoted within Tanzanian government by officials who are themselves part of an internationalised business class closely connected with donors and private sector actors, and who see such public-private partnerships as being in their own interests. This is an important consideration in exploring the factors shaping the reception and diffusion of gender mainstreaming in the context of agricultural development discourse in Tanzania.

Our study expands beyond existing literature through bringing together research on global norm diffusion and policy isomorphism to critiques of gender mainstreaming as a policy strategy within Tanzania's CSA policy framework. We contribute to these debates through exploring what 'gender' it is that is being mainstreamed, and by answering the following questions: what is the problem represented to be within Tanzanian policy regarding the relationship between gender and agriculture in Tanzania? How is this then 'governed' through policy implementation plans? What does this demonstrate regarding the capacity of the Tanzanian state to understand and approach gender within the agricultural sector? Owing to Tanzania's decentralised governance structure, we also explore how policy is disseminated and implemented through levels of government.

5.5 Methodological Approach

5.5.1 Analytical Approach

This paper uses a discourse analytical perspective (Fischer (2003a, 2003b); Feindt and Oels (2005)) combined with the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) tool (Bacchi, 2009) to consider how gender is mainstreamed across Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape. With its roots in Fairclough's (1995) seminal work, critical discourse analysis examines policy as discourse – allowing the researcher a particular awareness of the role and importance of language within policy (Feindt and Oels, 2005). Exploring the policy transfer of gender mainstreaming within Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape thus necessitates an exploration of the framing and narratives of gender present within these policies and the extent of external influence on the policy process. A discourse analytical perspective (drawing on Foucault's (1991) theory of discourse) also helps to explore how policies exercise power though a production of truth, and in the process discursively construct gender and social relations.

The WPR[5] approach follows a practical methodology to extract and scrutinise problem representations (Bacchi, 2009):

1. What is the problem (for example gender inequality) represented to be?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this problem representation?
3. How has this problem representation come about?
4. Can the problem be thought about differently, and what is not being considered in this problem representation?
5. What effects are produced by this problem representation?

[5] The background to the WPR approach is the argument that public policy creatively and discursively constructs problematisations of aspects of society that need to be fixed. Effective implementation of gender mainstreaming requires a focus on how policy creatively constructs problems and hence shapes how we understand gender relations and gender inequality (Bacchi & Eveline, 2003). The WPR approach therefore lends itself particularly well to policy discourse analysis through approaching policies as 'prescriptive texts' - discussed by Foucault as texts that construct social relations and prescribe how societies should be governed. The WPR approach thus builds on Foucault's (1984) use of problematisations through encouraging a critical interrogation of policies (Bletsas and Beasley, 2012) in how they *"give shape and meaning"* to the *"problems' they purport to address"* (Bacchi and Eveline 2010, p.111).

6. How/where has this problem representation been produced and disseminated, and how has it (or could it be) questioned or replaced?

Together these tools enable critical rigorous appraisal of the extent to which gender has been mainstreamed within Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape – with a discourse analytical perspective enabling study of *which* gender discourses are included, and the WPR approach leading the researcher to question *why* certain discourses are included where others are not.

5.5.2 Policy Selection

We illustrate Tanzania's CSA policy framework in Figure 1 within a wider policy framework aimed at driving agricultural development and reducing poverty within Tanzania. This demonstrates which policies are in place to target the agricultural sector, the relationship between these policies and how together they aim to operationalise the Five Year Development Plans (FYDP, I and II), The National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (I and II, known as MKUKUTA I and II), Kilimo Kwanza ('Agriculture First'), and the National Adaptation Plan for Action (NAPA), and provide a roadmap to achieve the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 (TDV) of becoming a middle-income country by 2025[6]. At national level we selected key Tanzanian policies (all plans, programs, strategies and guidelines herein after are referred to as policies) related to CSA specifically but also in the fields of agriculture (including consideration of crops, livestock, and fisheries), climate change and development as these areas allow for a broader perspective of how gender is conceptualised within Tanzanian policies associated with CSA. The analytical focus of this paper is on mainland Tanzania. As this research is focused specifically on CSA, the following policies written from 2010 (when the concept of CSA was first introduced and entered policy making arenas (Chandra et al., 2018)) to 2019 (year of analysis) were included:

[6] This was achieved five years ahead of schedule as Tanzania was re-categorised as a lower-middle income country by the World Bank in July 2020. However, it should be noted that this doesn't yet account for the impact of COVID-19 on Tanzania's economy.

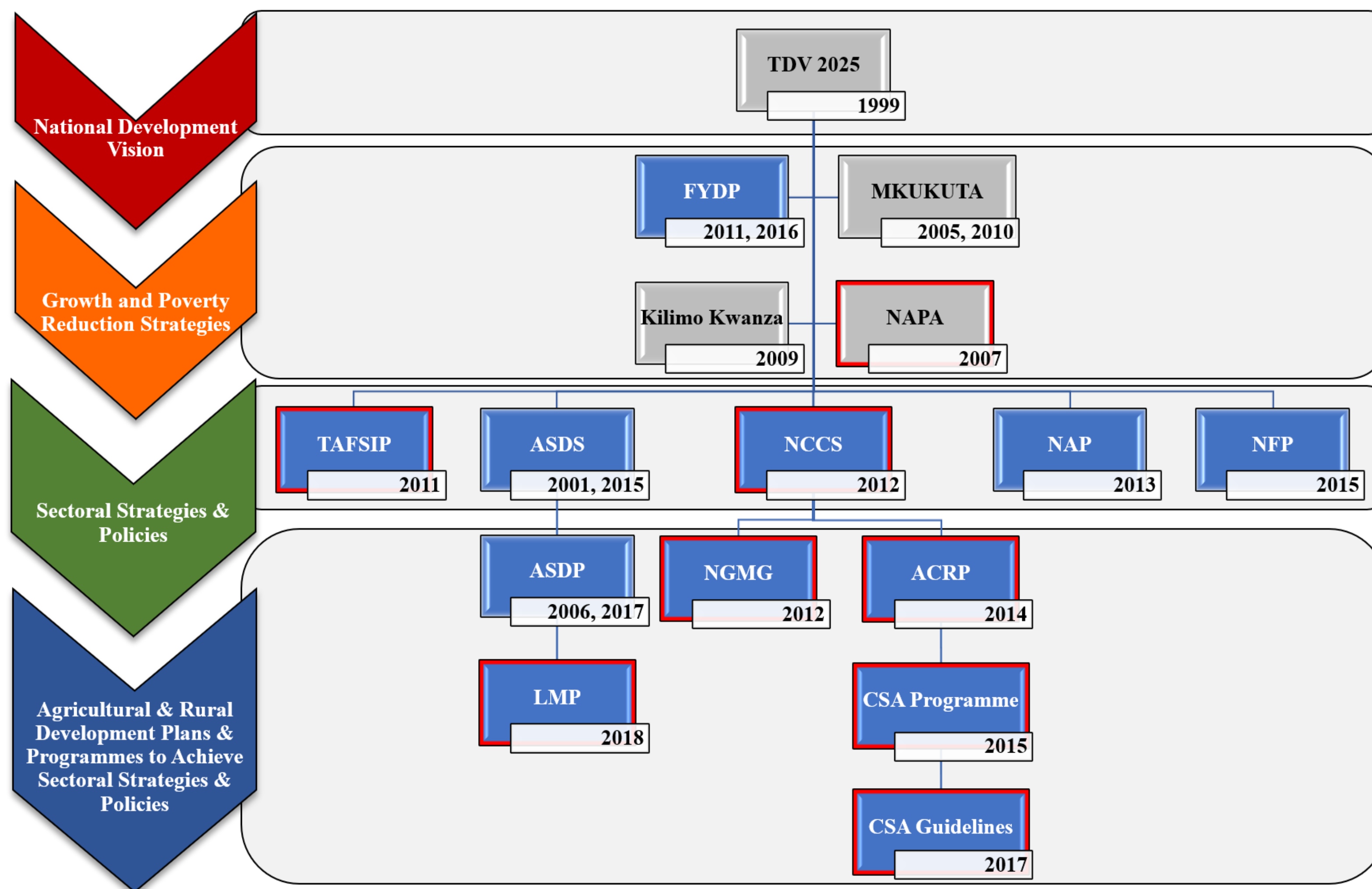

Figure 1: Tanzania's CSA policy landscape - outlining which policies are in place to target the agricultural sector. Policies shaded in grey have not been included in the analysis as were produced prior to 2010. Policies outlined in red received financial and technical support from international organisations and country development partners – details of which can be seen in Appendix C.

1. Tanzania Climate Smart Agriculture Programme, 2015
2. Tanzania National CSA Guideline, 2017
3. Tanzania National Agriculture Policy (NAP), 2013
4. Agricultural Sector Development Programme Phase 2 (ASDP-II), 2017
5. Agricultural Sector Development Strategy II (ASDS-II), 2015
6. Tanzania Agriculture Climate Resilience Plan (ACRP), 2014
7. Tanzania Agriculture and Food Security Investment Plan (TAFSIP), 2011
8. Tanzania National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS), 2012
9. Tanzania Five Year Development Plan (FYDP I), 2011b
10. Tanzania Five Year Development Plan (FYDP II), 2016
11. The National Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender into Climate Change Adaptation Related Policies, Strategies, Programmes and Budgets (NGMG), 2012
12. Tanzania Livestock Master Plan (LMP), 2018
13. Tanzania National Fisheries Policy (NFP), 2015

Where possible, the FAO Legislative Database (FAOLEX) (2019) was used to obtain national policy documents. In addition, the Tanzanian Government Portal and/or a web search was used to obtain the remaining documentation. Further details regarding each policy are detailed in Annex 1. This review is particularly pertinent to Tanzania as many of the policies reviewed (Annex 1) are currently in review.

5.5.3 Coding

Inductive coding of policy documents was employed using NVivo 12. This was useful to examine each policy document in full as discourse and to code text into different themes. Inductive coding allowed categories and narratives to emerge through the analysis rather than being pre-conditioned by the researcher (Behrman, Meinzen-Dick, and Quisumbing, 2014).

A first round of coding scanned for any mention of gender, with a second round of coding involved searching for key words (‘gender’, ‘women’, ‘men’) and terms (‘gender mainstreaming’, ‘gender equality’, ‘gender social norms’) within the documents to ensure that all relevant text was captured. Different codes were assigned depending on the ideas and concepts and how gender issues were discursively framed within the policy text – including, for example, the following codes: ‘definition of gender’, ‘women’s access to agricultural resources’,

and 'women's vulnerability to climate change'. Following this, the final stage analysed the coded text to group the initial codes into dominant themes and concepts. This process enabled us to ascertain dominant problem representations and key gender narratives within Tanzania's CSA policy landscape. For example, we grouped the initial codes concerning women's access to resources and inherent vulnerability into a dominant narrative that demonstrated discussions of gender equality within Tanzania's policies are often framed as solely women's issues and rely on popularised gender myths.

5.5.4 Key-Informant Interviews

Findings were then supported and validated through nine key-informant interviews conducted between March and September 2020[7]. Key informants were purposively sampled to represent perspectives among Tanzania's National Government Ministries, universities, NGOs and International Finance Institutions (IFIs)/development partners. At government level, key informants were selected who had experience of working in the Ministries involved in the production of the majority of analysed policies (Annex 1). Where direct quotes are used, job/sector titles are given in order to give background to viewpoints and yet ensure the anonymity of interviewees.

[7] The majority of these interviews took place online owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.6 Discussion

Our discussion is structured as follows: firstly a critical analysis of what gender is mainstreamed within Tanzania's national CSA policy framework – i.e. what themes and narratives are dominant, and, importantly, a consideration of how and why donor-driven gendered discourse impacts how such policies are designed and implemented. Secondly, we then explore how gender is mainstreamed within Tanzania's (in theory) decentralised governance structure given that lower governance levels are tasked with the interpretation and implementation of policy directives concerning gender mainstreaming.

5.6.1 Gender Narratives within Tanzania's CSA Policy Landscape

Our analysis revealed four dominant narratives regarding what and how gender is mainstreamed within Tanzania's CSA policy landscape: 1) gender being either absent or inconsistent (gender blind); 2) gender discourse focusing solely on women (gender = women); 3) and within this women being consistently portrayed as victims (reinforcing gender stereotypes); and 4) a disconnect between gendered policy goals/objectives and implementation and monitoring plans (limited and inconsistent implementation plans) - outlined in table 1 at the end of this section. The first three narratives demonstrate that if and when text around gender is included within Tanzania's CSA policy documents it is often inconsistent, repetitive and likely copied verbatim from elsewhere, and reflects donor-driven discourses that reinforce gender stereotypes around women's inherent vulnerability and domestic responsibilities. Our analysis of the implementation and action plans of Tanzania's CSA policy landscape revealed that any ambition for gender mainstreaming appeared to stop at policy formation level as it was rarely carried through to planned interventions to tackle gendered inequalities, often with no monitoring plan in place to track progress.

In discussing why gender was either absent or inconsistent across policy, interviewees noted that gender is often included as something of a box-ticking exercise to please development organisations who provide technical and financial support to the policy process – as was suggested by one Intergovernmental Organisation informant in reference to Tanzanian policy: *"our policy environment is also externally driven, financed if I may say. So that explains a lot why we have just gender as a component thrown into the policy rather than having it as part and parcel of the policy"*. Looking further into which policies included the generalised gender statements seen in table 2, our analysis highlighted that many of these policies received financial and technical support from international development organisations (CSA Programme) such as the FAO (CSA Guideline), World Bank (ACRP), and United Nations Development Programme (NGMG), and also bilateral agencies (TAFSIP) such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID) (CSA Guideline, ACRP), the Danish International Development Agency

(NCCS) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (NGMG). This is important to note as this recurring narrative of the vulnerable woman in need of development assistance corresponds to the mainstream stylised gender myths noted by Doss et al. (2018) and is evident within the rhetoric of these same organisations (Macgregor, 2010; Arora-Jonsson, 2011).

Grounded within the sole focus on women and their consistent portrayal as victims, the 'vulnerable woman in need of assistance' is reminiscent of the Women, Environment and Development (WED) movement discourses (Agarwal, 1992; Resurrección, 2013) and stems from pressures within the development agenda to simplify narratives to provide an entry point for gender within development discourse (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). The recognition that the impacts of climate change will be articulated along social poverty lines (Nelson et al., 2002) has provided space in the international development agenda for the women's movement to again strategically position themselves and revive their rhetoric in order to drive policy and programming. This isn't to say that women aren't sometimes vulnerable to climate change - but this will vary widely according to different contexts. Importantly, such narratives also homogenise all women into a single group who are all inherently vulnerable to climate change. As Chigbu et al. (2019) argue, this homogenisation is tantamount to a lack of recognition of women and their individuality – with their development becoming dependent on generalised stereotypes. This tendency to focus on the 'vulnerable woman' within Tanzanian policy is thus reflective of neoliberal understandings of poverty within international development whereby vulnerability is framed as an individual problem resulting from identity-based disadvantage (Mdee et al., 2020) – here through simply being a woman. This was noted by one Foreign Affairs Development Organisation informant: *"those policies are not even addressing gender, they were there characterising women…as people who are vulnerable"*.

As an example of the good governance phenomena, this mimicry of mainstream gender narratives within Tanzania's CSA policy framework highlights the domination of some aspects of Tanzanian policy-making by donors and NGOs: *"most of the development including the CSA is coming from the outside with the package of gender…but that gender is not unpacked to suit the local circumstances"* (Tanzanian national working in the Tanzanian office of an Intergovernmental Organisation). This was noted by informants who had experience of working in Tanzania's government, and was eloquently illustrated by one informant working in a Foreign Affairs Development Organisation: *"if they* [policymakers] *know you are a donor, they will speak the language you want to hear"*. A number of informants suggested that the influence of these donors on the policy process meant that gender mainstreaming was included within Tanzania's policies so as to appease donor requirements – as outlined by one former Government employee: *"I have seen in some documents people are doing it* [gender mainstreaming] *just for the sake of funds"*. That the aspirational narrative of gender mainstreaming appears to stop at

policy formation level, with limited and inconsistent implementation plans, operational clarity or budget was also evident in neighbouring Uganda's climate change policy, a country with similarly high levels of aid dependency (Acosta, van Wessel, et al., 2019). This is perhaps unsurprising given the lack of international agreement regarding what exactly gender mainstreaming means nor how it should be done. In absence of clear implementation and monitoring plans, 'mainstreaming' gender throughout policy and programming through retrofitting existing projects with a gendered focus, often led by staff who have little experience or knowledge of gender analysis, will likely result in gender becoming invisible in many programs as critical issues and opportunities are missed (Quisumbing et al., 2014).

Indeed, in almost half of the analysed policy documents gender considerations were included in the cross-cutting section of the policy - often grouped together with 'youth'. However, across the policies it was never outlined *how* gender cross-cuts different sectors of society, nor how it should *"be addressed in all thematic areas"* (ASDS-II). For example, in the NCCS gender was mentioned just once outside of its cross-cutting section – indicating there was little recognition - given to how gendered inequalities impact different aspects of society. Noting how cross-cutting issues are neither budgeted for nor made specific to the activity level, one Foreign Affairs Development Organisation informant noted *"So this cross-cutting issue becomes nobody's responsibility…it just falls through the cracks"*.

Importantly, this points to the power of external development organisations over the policy process in Tanzania. Demonstrating this point clearly, a separate former Government employee noted:

> *World Bank has been a very big funder to* [the Agriculture] *Ministry. And FAO…UK Aid, DFID…they have been stipulating that…if your interventions, or your program or your projects do not show exactly how you are doing to deal with gender, we are not giving you money.*

Interrogating further the influence of such organisations, it became apparent in some key-informant interviews that the actual *production* of some policies is in fact outsourced to external consultants – highlighting how the policy process is a co-production between Tanzanian policy elites and external consultants elites who have absorbed the gender mainstreaming agenda. One Foreign Affairs Development Organisation informant emphasised this clearly: "*as a rule of thumb, all these Ministries are using consultants to do their policies…so the document is detached from the reality and the people who should implement it"*. They went on to reflect on the consultative/participatory workshops within the policy process which supposedly ensure that policies are robust and have input from multiple sectors of society: *"they just want to say 'oh so many people attended the consultative session'…They didn't give us the document ahead of the*

meeting! They only come with a PowerPoint presentation". Considering the gender stereotypes included within Tanzania's CSA policy framework and the policy-implementation gaps discussed above, we would agree with Ferguson (2015) that the prevalence of consultants and 'gender experts' in international policy processes has not led to the high-quality gender mainstreaming processes envisaged, and indeed may be complicit in embedding neoliberal models of development (Fraser, 2013) through giving the appearance of 'doing gender' reduced to 'helping women' (Cornwall, 2007c). As a case in point, numerous informants touched upon gender quotas and improved female representation within Tanzanian policymaking as evidence that gender is being sufficiently addressed.

Presenting and accepting all women as inherently vulnerable and as a target group for interventions not only shifts attention away from the structural causes of such inequities, but it also importantly shapes the interventions that are included as a result – as picked up by one IFI informant: *"What are the main underlying causes of these issues that we need to address? That could be missing and might also influence the nature of the solution that we might take on board"*. In sum, we argue that the policy transfer of gender mainstreaming, and the gendered assumptions and myths that underpin this, produces policy that appears more like *"wish lists"* that can be *"really well produced but are not going to work here* [in Tanzania]*"*(Intergovernmental Organisation and Former Government informant, respectively) - as was clearly illustrated by one IFI informant who noted that "*the gap is in implementation itself because no clear guidance is given on how that needs to be done"*.

Table 1: Four dominant narratives that describe how gender is conceptualised across Tanzania's CSA policy landscape

	Description	Policy Example(s)	Interview Example(s)
Gender Blind	Gender either not included or inconsistently discussed across policies	1. **LMP:** gender was not mentioned once 2. **ASDS-II:** gender was not mentioned in the policy goals nor objectives across ASDS-II 3. **FYDP I:** despite stating that *"gender equality…has been given special emphasis in the plan"* gender was mentioned just three times across the main document 4. **National CSA Guideline and NCCS:** text around gender had clearly been copied verbatim across study sites and objectives/interventions	1. This finding was reconfirmed across all key-informant interviews, with one Intergovernmental Organisations informant stating: *"Most of them* [policies] *are gender-blind…it depends on who is in the policy making process. When it is dominated by men, gender is not an issue"* 2. When questioned on what this narrative reflects about the Government of Tanzania's approach to tackling gendered inequalities, one Academic informant again noted that the 'fashion' of including gender within policies means that those involved in its production will *"cut it from anywhere and paste it there…because it pleases development partners"*
Gender = Women	Gender discourse focusing solely on women	1. **ACRP:** states *"The ACRP is an opportunity to build resilience of female farmers"* and calls for a comprehensive assessment on the impacts of climate change on women and girls 2. **ASDP-II and TAFSIP:** used phrase *"women and other vulnerable groups"* 3. Nine of the thirteen policy documents included instances	1. All key-informant interviews illustrated this, with two interviewees both noting that it is becoming 'fashionable' to include gender – and particularly women's vulnerability – in Tanzanian policy, with one former Government informant noting: *"you are not empowering them, you are just giving them names, you are giving them titles"* 2. Multiple informants further noted that this comes down to a simplistic understanding of the concept of gender in Tanzania – for example: *"in Tanzania*

		where women were discussed in terms of their vulnerability	*unfortunately…when you speak of gender…they mean women"* (former Government Worker); and *"in Tanzania, gender is synonymous with women"* (Academic)
Reinforcing Gender Stereotypes*	Women consistently being portrayed as universal victims of climate change	1. **NAP:** *"there are inadequate skills and knowledge among women"* 2. **CSA Guideline:** *"women have a…greater dependence on natural resources for livelihoods, responsibility for food production"* 3. **TAFSIP:** *"women as producers of staple food and the guardians of household food and nutrition security"*	1. Key-informant interviews illustrated just how embedded these stereotypes are within Tanzanian society – with almost all interviewees acknowledging that women are inherently more vulnerable to climate change: *"Women are differently impacted by climate change"* (Intergovernmental Organisation informant) *"Women are more vulnerable to climate change…we know women have less productivity in their farms…we are the main care givers in the house"* (IFI informant)
Limited and Inconsistent Implementation Plans	Gender included in policy goals/objectives but not carried through to implementation plan nor given any gendered performance indicators	1. **CSA Programme:** included gender in the first core objective to *"Increase productivity of the agricultural sector through (appropriate) climate smart agriculture practices that consider gender"* - yet didn't outline how appropriate CSA practices should consider gender nor was gender mentioned in any of the policy actions to achieve the objectives 2. **CSA Guideline:** *"enhance gender and youth capacity to adapt"* was frequently included in the gender	1. Key-informant interviews also supported this, with one NGO informant noting: *"most of the policies are well formulated but…lack implementation strategies"* - an issue which many informants noted was common across Tanzania's policy landscape 2. Lack of guidelines as to how 'gender mainstreaming' should be done was picked up by one Academic informant who noted that *"the mere mention of gender mainstreaming does not make such policies gender sensitive…we need to see the*

		recommendations across the 21 study sites but it was never outlined how this should be achieved, with no mention of gender within the performance indicators of the monitoring and evaluation plan **3. NFP:** included a policy objective to *"ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed in the fisheries and aquaculture interventions in order to attain gender equity and development"* - yet how this is to be achieved was not discussed **4. FYDP I and II:** noted that a lack of M&E indicators is common across Tanzania's policy frameworks: *"More than ten years have elapsed since Vision 2025 was launched. In the absence of a formal framework for monitoring and evaluating its implementation, efforts to evaluate the progress and achievements have been thwarted, making it difficult to ascertain the outcome on the country's development"* (FYDP I)	*strategies in place with regard to gender mainstreaming"* **3.** One Academic informant stated that *"policies were written just as aspirations of what you want to achieve… there was no plan actually for implementing them. And at the end of the day there was no monitoring and evaluation"* 4. Suggested reasons for this disconnect were a lack of coordination between Ministries and a lack of resources when it comes to implementation
* Table 2 describes these stereotypes in more detail.			

Table 2: Narrative 3: Reinforcing Gender Stereotypes - dominant gender narratives and reasons cited within the analysed policies.

Gender Narratives	Frequently cited reasons supporting each narrative	Policies
Women more vulnerable to climate change/ affected by climate change impacts	Women have: • less access to resources, information, education/training and credit • less assets and face legal or regulatory obstacles (e.g. land-credit) • low literacy levels and less say in decision-making • limited mobility • greater dependence on natural resources	CSA Guideline ASDP-II TAFSIP NCCS FYDP I NGMG
Women have lower agricultural productivity	Women have: • limited technological support and skills • less access to resources • other (time-consuming) responsibilities	NAP ACRP FYDP II NGMG
Unequal gender roles: women have more domestic responsibilities	Women have: • responsibility for food production, water and fuel • more caring responsibilities which affects participation in political and economic activities, adult literacy programs and training • more responsibilities owing to male-urban migration • inadequate skills and knowledge • inequitable access to productive resources and inappropriate technologies	CSA Guideline NAP NCCS NGMG

5.6.2 Mainstreaming Gender within Tanzania's Decentralised Governance Structure

Our analysis of how gender is mainstreamed within Tanzania's decentralised governance structure yielded some important insights regarding the capacity of the Tanzanian state to understand and approach gendered inequities within the agricultural sector. We found 1) a lack of state capacity to make use of evidence on the relationship between gender and agriculture in Tanzania, 2) limited dissemination of policy from national to local level, and 3) a lack of capacity and resources at local level to interpret and implement policy.

Firstly, the narratives above suggest a lack of state capacity to make use of existing evidence on the relationship between gender and agriculture in Tanzania. For example, despite the LMP being completely gender blind, there are numerous studies that highlight gendered differences in types and sizes of livestock keeping in Tanzania specifically (Covarrubias et al., 2012; Galiè et al., 2015), Eastern/Southern Africa (Njuki and Sanginga, 2018), and more generally (Kristjanson et al., 2014; Doss, 2018). Going beyond a sole focus on gender as the main axis of inequality, more effective policy addressing gender within CSA requires increased incorporation of already existing evidence on intersectional inequalities in agriculture in Tanzania – for example Van Aelst and Holvoet, (2016) and Tavenner and Crane (2019). In neighbouring Kenya, Mungai et al. (2017) outline why it is important to take an intersectional approach to CSA to enable policy makers to understand how an individual's multiple identities intersect to mediate inequalities within the agricultural sector, and thus how to structure policies in a manner that acknowledges these complexities.

That very few of the policy documents cite any academic studies to back up their gender stereotypes (table 2) further points to a lack of engagement with the wealth of literature into the relationship of gender and agriculture within Tanzania. Other than the ACRP which cited an Open University of Tanzania report to support the statement that gendered access to resources results in women having lower agricultural yields than their male farmer counterparts, the second and final policy document to cite studies was the NGMG – yet the references are limited to support the numerous claims regarding the inherent vulnerability of women to climatic change. As argued by Ferguson (2015), the failure to include academic insights within policy often boils down to having to 'sell' gender to sceptical policymakers through refraining from presenting ideas about gender that are 'too complex' or 'too political'.

That Tanzanian policy is out of step with feminist theory and empirical research points to a lack of understanding and commitment amongst policymakers themselves - as was highlighted by informants: *"you cannot require gender to be mainstreamed very well when they* [policymakers] *don't know themselves"* (Foreign Affairs Development Organisation) and *"there is no political*

will to mainstream gender" (Academic). The Foreign Affairs Development Organisations informant went on to reflect on their experience of pushing for Tanzania's agricultural policies to include gender, noting that it wasn't until female Members of Parliament (MPs) stood up that the need for inclusion of gender was taken seriously: "*we presented the findings to the Members of Parliament in Tanzania, and I got a professional shock…I just couldn't believe…the lack of appreciation that gender was in any way related to climate change, related to food security!"*. This also demonstrates how gender is predominantly viewed as a woman's issue – where it is the job of female MPs (a minority) and 'gender people/specialists' (who are always thought of as women) to fight for its 'appreciation' and inclusion within policy in Tanzania - so long as such gender specialists are included in the policy process.

Secondly, the policy-implementation gaps outlined above are particularly evident within Tanzania where, in theory, owing to the policy rhetoric of decentralised governance (Mdee and Ofori, 2018), the responsibility for interpreting and implementing these policies falls to local government authorities (LGAs). One former Government informant stated that: *"the* [Agriculture] *Ministry is disseminating to the district level only, who are supposed to take it further to the ward and villages…things are stuck like that"*, going on to state that the limited dissemination of policy from national to local level leads to capability traps: *"have these ground level people interpreted the national policy well and correctly so that they can put it into implementation?...if interpretation is not done very well and correctly here, expect dis-linking"*.

Thirdly, this is compounded by LGAs which frequently lack trained personnel to understand how or why gender should be mainstreamed, and technical and financial resources to do so: *"districts would tell you 'we don't know how to do this'…they have not had any training in gender before"* (Foreign Affairs Development Organisation informant). This issue was even discussed within policy, with the ASDS II stating "*The LGAs are supposed to be* [the] *epicentre of planning and implementation of agricultural development programmes…However, some of local government authorities usually suffer from a number of problems…*[including] *delayed and inadequate deployment of funds from approved national budgets. These weaknesses are known and they need to be addressed"*. This is also evidenced in the wider literature on local service delivery (e.g. Mdee et al., 2017; Mdee and Mushi, 2020; Mdee et al., 2020; Mollel and Tollenaar, 2013; Pilato et al., 2018).

Whilst this paper did not examine the finance allocated to budgeting for gender responsive actions within the documents analysed, Ampaire et al. (2016) found a significant gap between policy implementation strategies and gender budgets in Tanzania's natural resource sector policies – with many national policies and district plans either not budgeting for gender at all or having inconsistent budgeting plans. A drive to include 'women' and 'youth' led to the

allocation of 10 percent of district revenues to formally registered women and youth groups in Tanzania (5 percent to each). However, informants noted that most women's groups do not receive these funds and they are often diverted into more tangible local infrastructure projects, with Mdee and Ofori (2018) highlighting that the opaque application process and delay in distributing funds means that the impact of such funding is minimal and subject to elite capture. This was supported by one former Government informant: *"if you are waiting for the government money they cannot be followed closely…Because funds will be little and will not be enough"*.

This issue is not limited to gender alone and represents a wider issue in Tanzania's theoretically decentralised governance structure where roughly three quarters of the (already limited) local budgets go toward fixed costs (salaries and running district council meetings), with further limits on the utilisation of the remaining budget - meaning local development plans are rarely funded (Venugopal and Yilmaz, 2010). Looking further afield, underfunded and under-resourced local councils and districts are a common issue in the policy-implementation space in southern and eastern African countries – as reported in both Malawi and Zambia (Mdee et al., 2020). In reality, Tanzania's governance remains highly hierarchical and centralised as LGAs receive very few resources and lack authority - with the result that they are ill-equipped to implement policy interventions and are often forced to attempt gap-filling through donor-funded projects (Mdee and Ofori, 2018; Mdee et al., 2020).

5.7 Summary & Conclusions

This research has shown that, at the international stage, gender mainstreaming relies on and perpetuates gender myths and the homogeneity of women. Focusing on identity-based disadvantage limits any engagement with the complex reality of inequities as a product of structural class relations, resource control and power - and leads to identity-based labelling as a strategy to tackle inclusion (Mdee et al., 2020): fitting women into the status quo through representation politics rather than transforming the status quo (Nkenkana, 2015). We find little evidence that gender has been effectively mainstreamed across Tanzania's CSA policy framework, with a significant gap between the normative goal of gender mainstreaming and the actual inclusion of gender (and intersectional) inequalities within policy. This is compounded by limited understanding and commitment within Tanzanian government – from national to local level – of how such inequities impact the agricultural sector. As a proxy of best practice favoured by major donor states and organisations, gender mainstreaming offers a classic case of how the good governance problem leads to isomorphic mimicry whereby policies and institutions give the appearance of gender being understood and taken seriously, but in practice lack intersectional understanding and recognition of local context, implementation specificity or capacity to

implement policies as designed. Crafted in the international arena, we demonstrate that the incorporation of gender mainstreaming across Tanzania's CSA policy framework leads to capability traps for the government of Tanzania in responding to the differentiation between farmers and to patterns of existing inequalities.

With calls to *'leap beyond the endless debates on gender mainstreaming'* (Sandler and Rao, 2012:549), it is crucial that we move away from the gender myths and essentialism of women that has riddled work on gender mainstreaming, inherited from transnational neoliberal framings of gender. Incorporating greater conceptual clarity on gender inequalities within Tanzanian policy that is intersectional, contextual and location-specific is imperative. We therefore argue against the ambitious gender mainstreaming statements, and for producing context-specific policy frameworks that respond to existing institutional capacity.

Producing near-perfect policy that deals with this complexity would require a huge administrative capacity, and, in line with our evidence here, is unlikely to make much difference in implementation potential. Designing such 'perfect policy' is thus both an unlikely and counterproductive aim. Rather, our argument is that it is imperative that policy is designed with implementation in mind - relating to existing institutional capacity to interpret and implement policy, to monitor and track change, and to understand dynamic and contested changes in gendered livelihood dynamics. From a WPR perspective, producing policy that relates to and starts with contextualised understanding of existing evidence regarding intersectional inequities in Tanzania and to existing institutional practice and capacity to implement offers a way of navigating beyond these capability traps. To avoid the unsupported gender myths and assumptions upon which many internationally promoted gendered policy solutions are based, it may be better, counterintuitively, not to prioritise gender at all in order to address the complexities of and intersectional nature of inequity (Hunting and Hankivsky, 2020). In the context of Tanzania, this would mean designing policy that doesn't uncritically absorb the gender mainstreaming rhetoric, but starts from an intersectional understanding of agricultural livelihood dynamics and nuanced patterns of resource use within country.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter responds to research sub-question one (*how is gender mainstreamed and addressed in agricultural transformation policy?*) through exploring how the isomorphism of gender mainstreaming as an internationally promoted policy paradigm and solution to gender inequality has been diffused into Tanzania's national CSA policy framework, and what this suggests regarding the capacity of the Tanzanian state to approach gender inequality within the agricultural sector. Through a critical gendered discourse analysis using a WPR approach, this novel case study explores discursive framings of gender inequality within agricultural

transformation policy in Tanzania. The findings of this chapter highlight that gender has been ineffectively mainstreamed through Tanzania's CSA policy framework, where the gender narratives that are present rely on and promote unsupported myths and in practice lack intersectional understanding and recognition of local context, implementation specificity or capacity to implement policies as designed. Grounded in a feminist critique of the gender mainstreaming policy paradigm, this chapter thus demonstrates how the gender myths and assumptions which underpin this buzzword at the international stage have been absorbed performatively into Tanzanian policy to align with donor-driven discourse. This chapter concludes by acknowledging the tension in promoting 'perfect policy' that deals with the complexity of gendered agricultural livelihood dynamics, particularly considering the evidenced limited institutional capacity within Tanzania. Although the specific focus is on Tanzania, some wider conclusions and implications for development policy and aid can be drawn, as will be discussed in chapters eight and nine. The central argument is thus that policy must not only be grounded in contextualised understanding of existing evidence regarding intersectional inequities in country, but also importantly that policy must relate to existing institutional practice and capacity to implement.

Initially, the plan was to follow this policy review with a case study exploring CARE's CSA-SuPER development project in Iringa region of Tanzania which aimed to upscale gender equitable CSA approaches amongst small-scale women producers in Iringa Rural District. The plan was therefore to explore how CSA and gender are characterised across policy and project levels within Tanzania, and question how gender considerations get translated and incorporated from policy to project level (if at all). As outlined in chapter three, my approach changed following COVID-19 related travel restrictions and limitations to fieldwork an data collection. This is summarised in the introduction to the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Quantifying the intangible? Problematising universal applications of Western definitions and measurement indicators of women’s empowerment[8]

6.1 Overview

This chapter explores conceptualisations of women’s empowerment within CARE International’s GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa, and is operationalisation through the WEAI to report on project impact and success. This chapter therefore targets research sub-question two: How is gender equality and women’s empowerment defined and measured in gender transformative approaches? The decolonial feminist lens used within this chapter problematises and challenges the conceptualisation of women’s empowerment within mainstream development approaches through engagement with African feminism and African-rooted philosophies of *Ubuntu* and collectivism. The findings of this chapter demonstrate that the women’s empowerment buzzword remains a poorly defined and understood concept. This chapter highlights how Western framings of women’s empowerment are conceptualised through neoliberal economic terms framed around economic independence and individual goals and aspirations, and operationalised within the WEAI indicators through decision-making, autonomy, and individual ownership/control of assets. Importantly, the consciously decolonial approach used within this chapter highlights how these indicators (and the data created as a result) often appear to (mis)align to local understandings of empowerment within sub-Saharan African societies. Through this novel approach we are offered another way of thinking about what is empowerment. Crucially, these findings demonstrate that the measurement of empowerment is a site of considerable contestation and entails deeply rooted cultural and normative assumptions. In light of this, and in the context of the conditionality of development aid and the pressure on NGOs to demonstrate impact, chapter eight considers the challenge of simplification and measurement within the development industry.

Despite the shift in focus following the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the overarching exploration of framings of gender within agricultural development practice in sub-Saharan Africa remains the same, albeit now with a larger regional focus. A key difference in this chapter to what was initially planned is the perspective: originally I had planned to explore experiences of agricultural development practice through the perspective of those communities engaged with the CSA-SuPER programme. Yet, as outlined in chapter three, COVID-19 restricted who I could (safely and easily) speak to, and so the following chapter is based on analysis of CARE’s GTA

[8] At the time of final thesis submission, I am currently working on this chapter to submit to an academic journal.

project documents and key-informant interviews with CARE project staff. As such, the perspective shifted to, predominantly, that of those who design, implement and monitor development projects. Yet, whilst I was not able to speak to the project communities directly, I do still discuss their perspective and understanding of empowerment and development practice based on both analysis of the project documents and reports regarding community discussions, and also reflections from interviewees. I discuss the limitations of this approach on page 50.

This chapter was co-authored by my by my two academic supervisors, Associate Professor Susannah Sallu in the School of Earth and Environment and Professor Anna Mdee in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. In addition, Professor Stephen Whitfield, also from the School of Earth and Environment, provided extra supervisory support during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is also named in the co-authorship. Through working with the GCRF-African Food Systems Transformation and Justice Challenge Cluster led by Stephen, I connected and worked with colleagues from CARE International – Karl Deering and Pranati Mohanraj. This chapter is an outcome of this collaboration, where we worked together to explore the design, implementation and monitoring of CARE's GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa. Through this work we began to unpack and problematise the conceptualisation of women's empowerment that underpins mainstream monitoring approaches, engaging with decolonial and African feminist literature as a way to push back against the Western liberal ideals that underpin mainstream development approaches. In recognising our own positionality and limitations here, we collaborated with Dr Constance Akurugu from the University of Ghana who is an expert in African feminism. This chapter is the outcome of this expanded collaboration – and the diverse co-authorship includes not just my Leeds supervisors but also my CARE collaborators and also Constance. Having both academics and practitioners in the co-authors, I believe, strengthened this chapter with theory and real life experiences of development projects and how these are shaped by external donor relations. The conceptual underpinnings and research design were agreed by myself and Susannah, Anna and Stephen together with input from collaborators from CARE USA. I collected the project document and interview data, with organisational support from Pranati. All data analysis was conducted by myself. The text and findings were written up by myself, with comments to text from all co-authors. Constance and Anna consulted specifically on text in regard to African feminism. The figure was sourced from CARE project documents by myself, with support from Pranati. I produced all tables. Editorial text editing and revisions were undertaken by all authors, led by myself.

6.2 Introduction

'Empowerment' has become a buzzword in the development industry (Cornwall and Brock 2005) – reflected in the increasing number of development interventions led by organisations in the Global North aiming to 'increase women's empowerment' of actors in the 'Global South'. Tracking 'women's empowerment' has thus become a key focus within such development organisations – spurring a growth in the tools and methods of measurement indicators (Miruka et al. 2016). Within this context and the increasing reliance on quantification within the development industry (Mennicken and Espeland 2019), the 'Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index' (WEAI) has been popularised as a multidimensional tool aiming to produce measurements of empowerment in the agricultural sector that are comparable across time and space and that enable the monitoring of project impact (Alkire et al. 2013). Yet the complex and highly normative nature of empowerment raises important challenges for the project of measurement, where imposed Western ideals of what an 'empowered woman' looks and sounds like are unlikely to resonate with women in different cultural settings (Richardson 2018). In the sub-Saharan African context, decolonial and African feminist praxis offers an alternative understanding of 'empowerment' values grounded in Indigenous women's voices, knowledge and belief systems (Akurugu, Nyuur and Dery, 2023).

The primary aim of this research is to explore how the conceptualisation and operationalisation of women's empowerment within mainstream monitoring approaches is challenged when set in conversation with African-rooted philosophies of *Ubuntu* and collectivism. We contribute to a growing body of literature criticising the mainstream misrepresentation of the assumed need and desire of the 'African women' to 'meet her potential' through the normative actions of development agencies. We apply this critical lens to the utilisation of the WEAI family of indices within CARE International's (a global humanitarian and development non-governmental organisation (NGO) with a longstanding focus on gender equality and women's empowerment) Gender Transformative Approaches (GTAs) portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa. We explore how women's empowerment is conceptualised within the WEAI and operationalised through indicators and survey-based measurements, and, in the context of the development sector's reliance on standardised metrics, how CARE grapple with measuring and reporting on project impact and 'success' through their use of the WEAI. Targeting a gap in the academic critique of the WEAI and the Western-centric definition of empowerment inherent within this, we offer a novel contribution to a growing field of study that questions how to define and measure women's empowerment, and raise important questions regarding the utility of increasingly complex quantitative measures that are both costly and resource-intensive.

6.3 The Legacy of Colonialism within Contemporary Development

Calls to decolonise development approaches are by no means new, yet have gained momentum following the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of the brutal murder of George Floyd in the USA in 2020. Considering that contemporary development practice is primarily led and funded by former colonial powers (Amarante et al., 2021), calls to decolonise are opening up the much needed space for difficult conversations regarding power imbalances and the role of researchers and practitioners within this space, and what development priorities and whose knowledge are valued and promoted in the process.

Historically, the most visible instrumentalisation of white supremacy and colonialism is race and racial categorisation (Koum Besson 2021). Yet gender itself was a tool for early colonial domination and classification meant to subjugate and control the colonies (Purewal and Loh 2021). Decolonial feminist literature challenges the colonial imposition of binary dichotomous identities of male/female and masculine/feminine through demonstrating that within many Indigenous African societies prior to colonisation, understandings of sex and gender were more pluralistic, elastic and accommodating (Oyěwùmí, 1997, 2002; Bawa, 2016; Tamale 2020). This scholarship also challenges the ethnocentric assumption of a universal subordination of all women through highlighting that gender was often not an important organising principle within such societies as roles and categories were not always gender differentiated, with women exercising both status and authority (LeBeuf, 1963, noted in Amadiume, 1987). The construction of binary dichotomous identities and the perceived dominance of men inextricably bound within the colonial paradigm (Barry and Grady 2019) were thus imposed on the colonies as a method of hierarchical categorisation - deliberately reducing and de-humanising non-Western understandings of sex and gender relations (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Lugones, 2010). Combined with a racialised understanding of humanity, African women were placed at the bottom of this hierarchy.

The lasting legacy of Europe's colonialism and imported Abrahamic religions that propagated ideologies of gender inequality and the confinement of women to the family sphere (Amadiume, 1987; Tamale, 2020) is evident today in the gendered division of labour, inequities in resource access and less female representation in politics across much of Africa. Decolonial feminism thus demonstrates that gender was both integral to early colonialism (Purewal and Loh, 2021) and also now to neo-colonialism through development interventions led by actors in the Global North that, in targeting these very inequities, impose Western concepts onto African people – an extension of white supremacy through forced cultural assimilation.

It is within this context that we explore the development sector's focus on the trope of 'the poor rural African woman' and how she continues to be dehumanised through development discourse

(Tamale, 2020) - and the consequent fixation of actors in the Global North on their role in ‘her empowerment’. Within this, rural African women are seen as the prime targets for empowerment interventions as they are perceived to be living under (and need rescuing from) the multiple oppressions of poverty and patriarchal traditional cultural practices (see Hosken, 1981; Cutrufelli, 1983; Mohanty, 2003), and that in order to become ‘empowered’ they need elevation to the level of the Western ideal (Bawa, 2016). Imposing certain mainstream Western conceptualisations of empowerment through development initiatives and their monitoring approaches thus continues to centre European/American knowledge (Gudynas 2011). In bringing Amadiume’s perspective (1987:4) that *“It baffles African women that Western academics and feminists feel no apprehension or disrespectful trivialization in taking on all of Africa…in one book”* to women’s empowerment praxis, we express similar concerns regarding neoliberal and capitalist institutions that design and implement such interventions.

In terms of ‘women’s empowerment’, this means problematising supposed universal definitions and applications of empowerment - encouraging us to critique who has the power to define and whose voices are not being considered in this process.

6.4 Simplification and Quantification: Individualising Women’s Empowerment

Many of the concepts embraced by mainstream Western[9] feminist scholarship, including ‘empowerment’, are deemed to be universal and yet hide long histories of erasure, denial and silence (Purewal and Loh, 2021). The distortion of the foundational underpinnings of empowerment is particularly evident within the neoliberal and corporate uptake and co-optation of the concept through its simplification into measurement. For example, Naila Kabeer’s influential article ‘Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women’s empowerment’ (1999) emphasised the social, political and economic relations of power which shape women’s ‘ability to make strategic life choices’. The World Bank’s selective co-optation of Kabeer’s work within their empowerment framework (Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland, 2006) overlooked Kabeer’s relational analysis by reducing her conceptual framework of interrelated dimensions (resources, agency and achievements) to an emphasis on the need to identify and measure her ‘assets’ and ‘opportunity structures’. Adopted by a range of other development actors, the framework presented empowerment as a measurable end-point to which targets can be attached - encouraging a focus on its simplification into measurement indices (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). This typifies empowerment’s depoliticisation and

[9] In considering Western and African feminism, we do not intend these as essentialising and fixed binary categories. When western is used here – it is a shorthand for the dominant development mainstream – which in itself hides deep contestations (e.g. current rows on gender identity).

decontextualisation - transitioning away from its roots social power and transformative systemic change to a shift toward a focus on individual power, achievement, and status (Batliwala 2007; Anyidoho and Manuh, 2010; Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). Presenting empowerment as an outcome was (and continues to be) a deliberate move by such development organisations as it enabled the positioning of themselves as critical actors in helping women to achieve such status.

Within the mainstream development emphasis on measurable targets and results, empowerment is largely simplified to the individual: her skills, goals, and pathways to achieve these seen as independent from her family and community (Sardenberg 2016) – evident in Donald et al.'s (2020) review of agency. The WEAI family of indices is a key example of this. Developed in collaboration between the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) for USAID's 'Feed the Future' initiative, the WEAI attempts to operationalise the less-researched and arguably less tangible (Hanmer and Klugman, 2016; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019) 'agency' dimension. Across 'Five Domains of Empowerment' (5DE): 1) production, 2) resources, 3) control over income, 4) leadership in the community, and 5) time use, the WEAI aims to measure the agency and inclusion of women in the agricultural sector. It also incorporates a 'Gender Parity Index' (GPI) which measures the relative percentage of women whose 'achievements' across the 5DE are at least as high as men to reflect intrahousehold differences in empowerment (Alkire et al., 2013). Since its launch in 2012, various forms of the WEAI has been used by over 113 organisations in 56 countries worldwide (CGIAR, 2021). With funding support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), USAID, and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, the WEAI has since been modified to the 'Abbreviated-WEAI' ('A-WEAI') (Malapit et al. 2017), the 'Project-Level WEAI' ('pro-WEAI') (Malapit et al., 2019), and also adapted to the Women's Empowerment in Livestock Index (WELI) (Galiè et al. 2019), the Women's Empowerment in Nutrition Index (WENI) (Narayanan et al. 2019), and the Women's Empowerment in Fisheries Index (WEFI) (Ragsdale et al. 2022). However, despite its growing use and continued adaptations (e.g. in the water sector (Dickin et al., 2021), the foundational assumptions of the WEAI have received relatively little critical academic analysis.

A key assumption inherent within the WEAI is that the external definition of empowerment embedded within the 5DE and associated indicators are relevant and meaningful across different contexts. Using individual level data with a focus on individual agency, autonomy, sole decision-making and leadership as markers of empowerment, the WEAI is an extension of the Westernised notion of empowerment that focuses on independence and the pursuit of individual goals. The GPI not only imposes a Euro-American definition of a household that assumes a monogamous relationship between one husband and wife (see Oyěwùmí (2002) for why this is

central to white feminist theory), but also imposes assumptions regarding the composition and stability of the domestic unit and of how assets and decisions are shared. This unitary household model has long been critiqued for obscuring evidence of the complex and dynamic intergenerational and communal livelihood networks that make up African farming households (see for example Chant 1997; Doss 2014, 2021; Brockington et al. 2021).

The creation of indices forms a central component of 21st century development industry activity, and the WEAI is supported by a cadre of professionals, whose careers are entwined in its promotion and use. Considerable resources have been invested in efforts to validate, disaggregate and extend the indicators through the Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP) led by IFPRI. Recent additions in the A-WEAI and pro-WEAI, for example, utilise vignette-based survey measurements (Malapit, Sproule and Kovarik, 2016) and attempt to incorporate local perceptions of empowerment through indicators including 'respect among household members' and 'collective agency', with add-on optional modules around livestock and nutrition/health (Malapit et al., 2019). Yet, as Hannan et al. (2020) note, 'respect' is a similarly normative concept which requires further context-specific response categories, where reductionist questioning is unlikely to offer any true understanding of respect among household members. A further modification in the pro-WEAI is the recognition not only that joint decision-making can potentially be empowering, but also the potential for the respondent to be involved in decisions if they want to – i.e. the assumed agency lies in the choice. Yet simplifying decision-making into reductionist survey questions limits its potential for assessing empowerment where 'joint' decision-making is a further contextual process that requires unpacking (see for example Acosta et al., 2020). Not only are these seemingly endless modifications and additions to the WEAI costly in money and time, but they increasingly demonstrate that there is no single conceptualisation of empowerment that is universally applicable. Rather than providing *'direct measures of empowerment'* (Gupta et al. 2019:245), we argue that, fundamentally, the WEAI indices will never truly represent the reality of decision-making, asset use and ownership, nor respect among household members as they impose artificiality where the data produced is created around the normative selection of indicators and associated survey questions.

6.5 Decolonising Women's Empowerment: Bringing in the Collective and the Relational

The vast majority of studies into theorisations and measurements of women's empowerment are conducted in 'developing countries' - and yet are led and funded by Global North institutions (predominantly situated in the UK and US) (Priya et al., 2021). Such actors are thus able to exert considerable discursive control over how empowerment is conceptualised and where we view progress – hugely important in the era of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

Drawing parallels with how the binary categories of sex and gender did not match the fluidity and pluralism inherent in Indigenous African societies, this Western autonomous individualism is unlikely to resonate with the actual diverse practices of African people. In Tamale's 2020 book 'Decolonization and Afro-Feminism' she argues that the societal ethos across much of Africa values the community over the individual, emphasising and valuing relationships with the natural environment, with ancestors and spirits, and the animal world. Tamale is explicit that she does not wish to impose a single unitary notion of 'African' values, rather she asserts that there are different ways of seeing. For example, the values of communitarianism and solidarity are embedded in the African humanist philosophy of *Ubuntu* – traced back to ancient Egypt and popularised in post-apartheid South Africa, whose roots and essence, as Tamale (2020) notes, run deep in the fabric of many African societies – from Uganda to Central Africa to Nigeria. Rather than promoting a unitary African conceptualisation of empowerment, we use *Ubuntu* as one example through which to consider how the normative basis of what is 'empowerment' is changed.

In its fundamental sense, *Ubuntu* denotes humanity and morality (Tamale, 2011; Oelofsen, 2020), and is also a deeply spiritual worldview (Ngunjiri, 2016). The common maxim *"I am because you are"* (*"umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"* in Zulu) reflects the reciprocity and interconnectedness that forms the bedrock of the belief systems of many African societies (Ngunjiri, 2016; Tamale, 2020). When we apply this philosophy to understandings of 'empowerment' within Africa as a philosophical and analytical counterpoint to the privileging of individual independence and autonomy inherent we are offered another way of thinking about what empowerment is.

Such considerations highlight the difficulties in designing and implementing a single universal conceptualisation of women's empowerment to people with varied cultures and histories – and problematises attempts to simplify the complexity of empowerment into one universally applicable metric. We also need to appreciate that centuries of Western intervention in Africa has (and continues to) disrupt Indigenous and precolonial ways of being, and be mindful of continued efforts to categorise and simplify understanding of oneself and perceptions of empowerment into binary identities of individualism vs collectivism. In doing so we wish to avoid reinforcing common dichotomies of 'modern' vs 'traditional' and 'Western' vs 'African/Indigenous' science/knowledge that uphold Western hegemonic structures, and take a pluralistic approach that accommodates 'othered' and ways of being. *Ubuntu*, as Oelofsen (2020) notes, is not *"trapped in the false dichotomy posed between individualism and communitarianism"* as it recognises that individuality is important but not at the expense of collective rights (Tamale, 2020) - emphasising unity in diversity through valuing relationships between unique and distinct persons (Oelofsen 2020).

6.6 Research Methodology

In this research we apply a decolonial feminist lens, as an analytical approach, to the application of the WEAI family of indices within CARE International's GTA portfolio in across sub-Saharan Africa to explore the conceptualisation and operationalisation of 'women's empowerment'. Given the contested space in which NGOs such as CARE operate – where a reliance on donor funding places pressure on NGOs to create a 'narrative' of development that corresponds with donor requirements (Büscher, 2014; Gideon and Porter, 2016) – analysing how the WEAI is deployed in development projects provides an important and useful case study through which we can explore how NGOs navigate these contestations.

6.6.1 CARE's GTA Portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa

Our case study approach involved exploring CARE's application of the WEAI within a number of their GTA programmes across sub-Saharan Africa:

1. CARE Pathways to Empowerment (hereafter referred to as Pathways)

Pathways was funded through the BMGF and was initially implemented in six countries: Mali, Ghana, Tanzania, Malawi, Bangladesh and India from 2012 to 2016. For the purpose of this research, we focus specifically on Ghana, Malawi and Mali. Pathways was a flagship initiative with an overarching goal *"to increase poor women smallholder farmers' productivity and empowerment in more equitable agriculture systems at scale"*.

2. CARE Burundi: A Win-Win for Gender, Agriculture and Nutrition (hereafter referred to as Win-Win);

Funded through the BMGF and framed around this conceptualisation, from 2015-2019 the Win-Win program in Burundi implemented the 'EKATA' approach ('Empowerment through Knowledge and Transformative Action') integrated into an agriculture program to test its effectiveness against a typical gender mainstreaming approach ('Gender Light') (see figure 1 for comparison of models) and a 'Control' (agriculture interventions only) in a modified randomised control trial.

3. CARE Ghana: Transforming the Vaccine Delivery System;

Funded through the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), CARE Ghana partnered with the International Livestock Research Institute to test two approaches – one 'gender accommodative' and one 'gender transformative' – to address gender-based barriers in livestock vaccine delivery in rural Ghana from 2019-2022.

4. CARE International: She Feeds the World (implemented in Peru, Uganda, and Ghana).

She Feeds the World is CARE's global programmatic framework that guides its food and nutrition security programming, with a PepsiCo Foundation funded She Feeds the World program from 2018-2024 informed by this framework.

Figure 1. *Comparing the CARE EKATA vs Gender Light Model. Taken from the 2021 'A Win-Win for Gender and Nutrition Testing A Gender-Transformative Approach From Asia In Africa' Policy Brief, p2.*

Gender-Transformative (EKATA)	Gender Light
EKATA focuses on developing critical reflection skills, power analysis and deeper engagement with male relatives of participating women, male community leaders and the wider community on social norms through group dialogues and the evolution of group solidarity.	Modeling standard gender-mainstreaming approaches, Gender Light integrates key messages and predefined discussion topics alongside the program of livelihoods skills sessions. To ensure that the program does no harm, spouses and community leaders are informed of the program objectives and gender topics even though they are not actively engaged in critical reflection processes.
Package includes: ■ Identify and train EKATA trainers. ■ Awareness-raising through power and gender socialization analyses. ■ Building women's critical reflection and communication skills (leadership, conflict management, negotiation skills). ■ Active engagement of community and religious leaders, local government and traditional councils. ■ Active engagement with male relatives of VSLA members using male change agents (*Abatangamuco)* and reflection groups. ■ Resolution of group action plans through collective action and solidarity between women's (and men's) groups.	**Package includes:** ■ Identify and train trainers on gender messages. ■ Inform male spouses of the program objectives. ■ Sensitize community leaders on program objectives and gender topics. ■ Disseminate messages and discuss with women's groups, focusing on: ○ Gender division of labor ○ Household decision-making ○ Control over assets and income

6.6.2 CARE's Utilisation of the WEAI

The WEAI family of indices forms a key monitoring tool within CARE's measurement approach to women's empowerment – with both Pathways and She Feeds the World utilising CARE's 'Women's Empowerment Index' (WEI) (modelled closely on the WEAI – see table 1), the Win-Win project adopting the pro-WEAI, and CARE Ghana utilising the adapted WELI. Whilst our analysis focused predominantly on Pathways and the WEI and which we reference in our discussion, it should be noted that our critique of its methodological assumptions can be applied to the broad family of WEAI indices.

CARE utilised the WEI in Pathways to calculate the percentage of women who were considered 'empowered' based on their empowerment score at baseline, with a directly comparable endline survey to compare empowerment scores from project start to finish to determine 'changes' in women's empowerment across the project cycle.

Table 1: WEAI vs WEI Indicators and Weights.			
5 Domains of Empowerment (5DE)	**Indicator**	**WEAI weight**	**WEI weight**
Production (20%)	Input into productive decisions[a]	10%	10%
	Autonomy in production[a]	10%	10%
Resources (20%)	Ownership of assets[a,b]	6.67%	6.67%
	Purchase or sale of assets[a,b]	6.67%	6.67%
	Access to and decision on credit	6.67%	6.67%
Income (20%)	Control over household income and expenditures[a,c]	20%	20%
Leadership & Community (20%)	Participating in formal and informal groups	10%	5%
	Confident speaking about gender and other community issues at the local level	10%	5%
	Self-confidence	N/A	5%
	Demonstrating political participation	N/A	5%
Time/Autonomy (20%)	Satisfied with the amount of time available for leisure activities	10%	6.67%
	Workload	10%	0%
	Mobility	N/A	6.67%
	Expressing attitudes that support gender equitable roles in family life*	N/A	6.67%

In order to define 'success' within each indicator, CARE project staff included general guidelines, including thresholds for 'inadequacy', for calculating indicators used as part of the WEI. The WEI did not use the GPI included in the WEAI per se, but rather examined men's and women's empowerment in each domain through which CARE hoped to gain an understanding of parity. The 'empowerment score' was thus calculated from the 13 weighted indicators using the following formula:

$$5DE = H_e + H_d A_e = (1- H_d A)$$

Where:

H_e is the percentage of empowered women

H_d is the percentage of disempowered women

A_e is the average absolute empowerment score among the disempowered

With the removal of the GPI, 'empowerment' through the WEI was defined as achievement in 80 per cent or better of a weighted-index of the 13 indicators. Given that our analysis is concerned with how the WEAI is being deployed in practice in development projects, it is therefore important to provide a background to the WEI. Appendix D thus describes CARE's WEI in more detail, including the 5DE and associated indicators, WEAI vs WEI weights, definition of success and inadequacy cut-offs and WEI survey questions.

6.6.3 Data Collection and Analysis

This research combined key document analysis with findings triangulated through key-informant stakeholder interviews. With our analysis focusing predominantly on CARE's flagship Pathways program, 24 Pathways project documents were selected to provide an overview of how CARE themselves conceptualise empowerment, and analysis of their application of the WEI and its associated indicators and survey questions. This included the global proposal, Theory of Change (ToC), and operational framework, in addition to the country proposals, baseline and endline reports specific to Ghana, Malawi and Mali. Selected key documents, including policy briefs and evaluation reports, relating to CARE's GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa were also analysed.

The document analysis focused on conceptualisations of 'women's empowerment' both within the WEI and by CARE, how these conceptualisations interacted with each other and were operationalised through monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicators, and ultimately how project impact and 'success' was reported on as a result. Documents were analysed using NVivo 12 and according to the concept of individualism and collectivism as defined by Dubois and Beauvois (2005) whose influential work in social psychology explored the normative features

of Western individualism. They identified five core characteristics: placing individual goals over collective ones, self-sufficiency, internality (the tendency to accentuate the causal weight of the actor), individual anchoring (the tendency to define oneself without reference to their group membership), and contractuality (the predisposition to relationships of a contractual nature). These five features are central to the core idea of individualism as individuals who are independent of one another with personal aspirations, skills and control, and who strive first and foremost to feel good about themselves and achieve their individual goals. The opposite may be said for collectivism: placing collective goals above the individual, interdependency, externality (the tendency to minimise the causal weight of the actor), categorical anchoring (emphasis on the properties that individuals inherit from their social memberships), and community (relationships rooted in similarities). In other words, interdependent communities built on supportive relations and who value and strive toward collective goals. We do not see these characteristics as binary opposites but as ends of a spectrum. We apply these characteristics of individualism and collectivism to CARE's application of the WEAI within their GTA portfolio to analyse which traits are inherent in both CARE's conceptualisation of women's empowerment and within the WEAI – and, importantly, to explore the (mis)alignment with local understandings and experiences of empowerment. In this sense a hybrid approach of both deductive and inductive coding was applied (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) to enable both the themes aligned to the traits of individualism and collectivism and also emergent relevant themes to be simultaneously analysed.

Key-informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders purposively selected to give a good overview of the Pathways project (n=17). This included CARE staff involved with the initial design of Pathways, applying for and receiving the grants from the BMGF, and the implementation and monitoring of Pathways both globally and in-country. Additionally, interviews were conducted with staff from TANGO (Technical Assistance to NGOs) International, a consultancy specialising in food security and livelihoods who were contracted by CARE to support the development of Pathways' evaluation plan and to conduct the baseline and endline surveys, and also with staff from the BMGF involved with handling the Pathways proposals and grants. A key point of interest was in exploring the relationship between CARE and the donor of Pathways – with a specific focus on CARE's utilisation of the WEI and how they reported on project impact and success to the BMGF. This sampling also enabled us to explore CARE's application of the WEAI across their GTA portfolio. Interviews were conducted between May – July 2021, and interview transcriptions were analysed using the same hybrid approach. Where interview quotes are used, pseudonyms have been assigned in order to ensure anonymity.

6.6.4 Positionality

In decolonial work, the researchers' positionality and epistemological biases are critical. This work was initially focused on exploring how GTAs define and attempt to monitor social norm change, and was led by white academics, all educated in 'Global North' institutions, in collaboration with CARE. The analysis of CARE's GTA project documents and discussions with CARE staff highlighted key issues in the top-down nature of how such measurement indicators are designed and by whom, and what knowledge(s) they are based on. Engaging with decolonial and afro-feminist literature in problematising the conceptualisation of 'women's empowerment' within these projects and their mainstream monitoring approaches necessitated that we also reflect on our own positionality and whether we are the right people to do this work. In order to both give back and give credit to the decolonial and afro-feminist literature that has come before us, we built on existing discussions and collaborations within our afro-feminist reading group to give space in this research to those who are trained in such schools of thought and whose experiences and realities are directly intertwined with such scholarship. This research output is the product of a fruitful collaboration from a diverse authorship, each of whom have contributed in different ways and learnt from each other in the process.

6.7 Results - Conceptualising 'Women's Empowerment': Upholding Western Neoliberal Values

The following section outlines how CARE and the WEI use the concept of women's empowerment in the following ways, and how such conceptualisations (mis)align to local understandings and values: :

6.7.1 Women's Empowerment as Individual 'Smart Economics'

CARE and WEI conceptualisations of empowerment within Pathways place strong emphasis on increasing the output and yields of women farmers in order to increase income, where an 'empowered' woman is seen as a self-reliant individual who is both productive and profit-making and increasingly engaged in market systems. Such a narrow focus on economic empowerment is pushed by donors within their 'smart economics'(Chant and Sweetman, 2012; Hickel, 2014) discourse so as to rationalise their 'investments' in women – setting global development agendas around increased yields, productivity and market integration in line with their neoliberal ideology (Smith et al., 2022[10]).

Whilst being *"financially independent"* was listed in the Ghanaian community definitions of empowerment within the Pathways Midterm Review, the reasons for aspiring toward this were

[10] This is in reference to chapter 7 of this thesis.

in order to be *"able to pay children's school fees and the family's health insurance"* – illustrating that the desire to have money is to be able to support the family. Shifting away from the Western ideal of a self-reliant individual, this offers an alternative conceptualisation of empowerment as the ability to support others - both financially but also physically and emotionally - and centres interdependent relationships within the household.

6.7.2 In(ter)dependence as Empowerment Goals

This emphasis on independence was reinforced within Pathways design through framing 'empowerment' as a woman having individual goals and capacities, separate and distinct to her household and community. This was articulated by Erik who worked for CARE: *"Pathways really brought it to life - looking at how we address the individual woman's aspirations and desires, her ability to negotiate within the marketplace, her knowledge and skills to produce".* Articulating clearly the centring of a self-reliant and independent individual when asked on their understanding of empowerment, Lucy noted: *"I think that the crux of it is autonomy…I have an idea, I'm passionate about it, and nobody's getting in my way to pursue it".* Within the WEI, individual empowerment of women is further underpinned through comparing empowerment scores between men and women. This overlooks their differing needs and barriers and reinforces a dichotomous relationship with men's empowerment seen as the benchmark, as stated by Eleanor who worked for CARE: *"I don't think that theoretically that is a good comparison. Because they don't have the same barriers…*[this] *tends to set up this conflictual relationship between men as the oppressors and women as victims".* That gender parity measures within Pathways *"are based only on households in which a man and a woman answered questionnaire modules respective to their sex"* (WEI Measurement document) also imposes a Euro-American definition of a household that assumes a monogamous relationship between one husband and wife, which is unlikely to fit into the complexity and diversity of many African household structures (see Oyěwùmí, 2002).

In contrast, our results demonstrate that local expressions of empowerment were framed around strong relationships, where collective needs are valued and aspired to before the individual. For example, the Pathways Midterm Review states that: *"Women define…being respected and loved by the community"* (Ghana), *"being able to look after and caring for their husband and children"* with *"honesty"* listed as a top empowerment trait (Mali), and *"working hard, both for her household and community, were seen as traits of empowered women that create harmony within the household and community"* (Malawi). Eleanor went on to discuss how 'interdependence', which was also listed as a top desired empowerment trait by Malawian communities in the Pathways Midterm Review, as a marker of empowerment may be more desirable to African communities: *"it's a kind of a very Western notion of empowerment, it's like*

associating empowerment with autonomy, which is not necessarily how those interrelationships are defined in these contexts. It's not necessarily independence that's the desirable change, but interdependence".

6.8 Operationalising Empowerment: Simplification and Quantification

6.8.1 Individual Indicators and Rudimentary Inadequacy Cut-Offs

Absent within the WEI is an adequate attempt to measure the importance and strength of relationships – as highlighted by Eleanor: *"it's not just about resources and agency, but moving away from those individual indicators to the collective actions to the…couple's communications and the other dimensions that are subjectively important"*. For example, the measurement indicators used to inform the 'Leadership and community' domain within the WEI are framed around individual participation and confidence in speaking in public – one's ability to lead, organise, and to influence.

When it comes to M&E, the centring of the individual is particularly evident in how empowerment is conceptualised and operationalised through the WEI indicators and 'inadequacy' thresholds. A reliance on income and productivity as markers of empowerment is evident where a woman is defined as 'inadequate in empowerment' *"if* [an] *individual does not make decisions"* regarding agricultural production or *"has no or little input on decisions on use of income"*. That data is gathered at the individual scale and that the WEI indicators focus almost entirely on individual traits with rudimentary inadequacy cut-offs highlights the methodological individualism inherent within mainstream monitoring approaches – further disregarding any attempt to recognise the relational dimensions of empowerment.

6.8.2 Measuring the Messy & Intangible

Translated into M&E, the goal of independence is particularly evident within the WEI where it is operationalised through indicators like *"autonomy in household production domains"* and an emphasis on sole decision-making as a mark of empowerment. This neoliberal understanding of empowerment is further complicated by relying solely on unreliable and difficult questioning of both income/expenditure and decision-making, as noted by Peter and Lucy (respectively) who are both engaged in M&E: *"the data we're collecting on income is so poor. People don't want to tell you their income"* and *"There are shades of decision making, and simply asking somebody, do you make the decision alone? Do you make it jointly?...It doesn't really tell you anything"*.

Reductionist questioning on indicators of intangible psychological beliefs and values such as self-confidence, and the more recent additions to the WEAI indices of respect and collective

agency, gathers at best superficial data produced around the normative selection of indicators. Using this data as proxy for empowerment measurements thus not only dilutes our understandings of what is means to be empowered in different contexts, but also overlooks the complex and dynamic social and cultural norms which shape how such beliefs are practiced and experienced.

6.9 Reporting on ‘Success’ through the WEAI

It is interesting to note how CARE themselves grappled with the above through their use of the WEI within Pathways. Interviewees involved in M&E noted on numerous occasions the difficulties faced by staff in the use of the WEI during baseline data collection around the lack of contextually and locally relevant indicators, and that *“there was a major disconnect between what we were observing and then what we were getting when we were asking those questions”* (Prisha - female CARE interviewee). As a result, during Pathways midterm evaluations, CARE attempted to navigate these difficulties through utilising the ‘Outcome Mapping’ methodology designed by the IDRC in 2001 – a qualitative and participatory approach used to explore the incremental processes of behaviour change around harmful social norms at intra-household level in both women and men's behaviour and attitudes. Not only was this bottom-up approach felt to be a far more fun and less extractive methodology for the communities, but it also enabled participating women to discuss empowerment in their own terms and what changes they deem important – resulting in the identification of culturally specific indicators of change known as ‘progress markers’. Gathering information around intimacy and harmony in the household thus helped to capture change that mattered at the local level and *“all came from qualitative inquiry … not a single bit from the index*” (Lucy). This highlights the absence of relational values and indicators aligned to communitarianism and that recognise the importance of interdependent relationships within the WEI. Interviewees discussed the potential for collective measurement indicators around trust, communication, and honesty, but also an understanding of how the individual relates and positions herself to her household and community in the design of M&E approaches that resonate with such communitarian values. Yet, as is evident in the ongoing WEAI modifications, the simplification of such normative and contextual beliefs and values into quantitative-based survey measurements will undoubtedly lose some of their meaning and context.

Looking to how CARE report on project impact within their women’s empowerment projects, the Pathways Final Report states:

> *The number of empowered women, according to CARE’s women empowerment index…more than doubled in Ghana and Tanzania. Similarly, women’s empowerment*

> *scores increased by an average of 14 points for Mali and Tanzania, and 6 points for India, Ghana, and Malawi.*

Women's empowerment, as measured through the WEI, was thus seen to increase throughout project implementation, and Pathways was widely regarded by interviewees as a success: *"I think the data speaks for itself: net positive impacts all around"* (Collin - male CARE interviewee). Despite CARE's recognition of the limitations of the WEI during Pathways implementation which led to use of the Outcome Mapping methodology – which is now also integral to CARE's measurement and reporting approach – the continued utilisation of the WEAI family of indices remains a key focus within their ongoing GTA work. For example, the Win-Win Impact Evaluation Report impressively states that *"Analysis shows that EKATA achieved the highest increment in Pro-WEAI score of 0.65 (+84% increase from baseline), followed by Gender light, 0.52 (+31%)"*. This is influenced by the donors reliance on quantification and standardised metrics to report on project impact and 'success' – as outlined by Eleanor: *"It was used to present to the donor …* [donors] *want standardised indices and it gets people to pay attention"*.

The WEAI emerged within the development industry's increasing reliance on quantification to understand and measure complex social phenomena (Merry 2016). In needing to demonstrate 'value for money' in order to legitimise their aid budget (Wallace 2004), donors increasingly apply downward pressure throughout the aid chain on NGOs who are compelled to demonstrate project impact and 'success' (Kloster 2020) that corresponds with donor requirements (Büscher, 2014; Gideon and Porter, 2016). This conditionality of development aid has resulted in a focus on impact through measurable targets and indicators – producing 'success stories' now overshadows the importance of actual outcomes of projects and social transformation (Banks et al., 2015). Yet the authority of the final numbers, presented as neutral and universal, overlook the potentially highly contested nature of their design (Buss 2015) and the underlying theories and values behind why a particular measurement tool was selected among alternatives (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2019).

Where indicators appear to present 'objective truths', it is important to remember that they themselves are socially constructed – most often by 'experts' in the Global North who have the power to decide what is measured and whose knowledge counts (Buss, 2015). Their creators often have little sustained engagement with the real-life experiences of the poor and marginalised in the 'Global South' whom they design M&E systems around (Waldmueller 2015). Our results highlight that the co-optation of empowerment within mainstream development approaches and evident within the WEI emphasises an independent woman with her own goals and aspirations, self-sufficient in her livelihood, with her own skills and capacities

in order to maximise her individual needs. This shift toward global governance by numbers can therefore be seen to produce and privilege certain kinds of knowledge (Darian-Smith 2015) – in this case a Western understanding of individual empowerment. We therefore argue that such quantified ‘improvements’ in women’s empowerment need to be problematised before we look to the ‘successes’ of such development projects. Using CARE as a case study, our findings suggest that a reliance on standardised metrics within mainstream development constrains development organisations in their approach to measuring and reporting on changes in women’s empowerment, and are not necessarily useful in practice - rather their use is the production of data for external evaluation.

CARE’s difficulties in the utilisation of the WEI demonstrate the complexity and culture-laden task of defining empowerment meaningfully. This makes the task of quantitative based monitoring even more contentious of, as articulated by Jelani: *“how we develop the tools for tracking progress is what is really, really important. That they really have to reflect people's own meanings, people's own aspirations for their empowerment”.* As a way of working through this challenge at a conceptual level, we explore how African philosophy and African feminism might offer insights to move beyond this impasse.

6.10 Empowerment as *Ubuntu*

Within the worldview of *Ubuntu*, once basic physical needs are met, the highest regard is given to relationships with the goal of community building (Metz 2007). An alternative framing of women’s empowerment around the ethic of *Ubuntu*, which is in essence egalitarian (Oelofsen, 2020), may thus offer some useful avenues in striving to negotiate gender equality. In a sub-Saharan African context, such a framing may better align to communitarian values and therefore be more locally resonant. Desmond Tutu, the renowned South African Nobel Peace Prize winning cleric and theologian, articulates the normative connotations of *Ubuntu* (quoted in Metz (2007: 323)): *“When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘Yu, u nobuntu’; ‘Hey, so-and-so has Ubuntu.’ Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say. ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in yours’”.* In underscoring the importance of interdependence and bringing this to women’s empowerment, this perspective highlights that gender equality could thus be fostered by setting individuality in relation to collective and social identities. Under such a conceptualisation, equality would begin not with individual autonomy, sameness and independence (Nzegwu 1994), but in collectivism, diversity in unity, and interdependent healthy relationships within the household and community.

Akurugu, Nyuur and Dery (2023)note how a male Chief Executive Officer (CEO)of a Local NGO in northern Ghana reflected on being guided by *Ubuntu* by appealing to notions of

interdependence, to promote the importance of nurturing women's agency in access to land and seeds in order to achieve collective agricultural goals. In a further example, Chisale (2018) notes how Zulu elders in South Africa narrated incidents of caregiving not as exclusively feminine but, linked to *Ubuntu*, as communal in which a partnership between men and women was fostered. A framing of empowerment that emphasises one's relationship and anchoring to others - for example through highlighting that when you humiliate or harm a woman you also diminish part of yourself (Tamale, 2020) - thus appeals to the sense of justice and empathy inherent in *Ubuntu* philosophy.

Engaging with *Ubuntu* encourages that issues around gendered division of labour or access to resources – key focuses within CARE's GTA work – are solved using a community-focused model (Barry and Grady, 2019). Centring such relationships would encourage that such dialogue promotes reciprocity, participation and mutuality, and framing the household relationship as a partnership and interconnected. Indeed, one of CARE's key implementation approaches is 'engaging men and boys' and 'gender dialogues' through which CARE conduct *"sessions at the community-level to promote change around social and gender norms … focused on power relations, gender-based violence, gender-based discrimination and inequality"* (Pathways Final Report). Emphasising to men that when their wife has the time and skills to excel in agriculture then they too excel, and that when decisions are made together and assets/income shared equally then there is more harmony in the household, are evidently already core tenets of CARE's GTA interventions - suggesting that the values of *Ubuntu* already feature within such programs. Scaling these up to the community level, to invoking *Ubuntu* in the positioning of individuals in relation to those around them and the collective values, aspirations and needs may help to appeal and imbue a sense of communitarianism.

6.10.1 Ubuntu: Towards a Holistic View of Empowerment

Ubuntu may help to not only horizontally connect individuals within their networks of relationships, but also vertically to spirits, ancestors and offspring and to the natural environment (Tamale, 2020) to account for external influences on empowerment and aid in the imagining of sustainable and harmonious relationships with others and nature.

Indicators measured at the individual level overlook that individuals are embedded in societies where a complex web of relationships within the family and community, and also belief and worship in ancestors and spirits (Akurugu, 2020b), shape individual behaviour and agentic practices (Doss, 2021). Spirituality is very important in the belief systems of many African societies where mystical forces and supernatural powers interweave with dis/empowerment and agency in complex ways (Akurugu, 2020a; 2020b). Research from across Africa highlights that the philosophy of *Ubuntu* can aid in our approach to and understanding of spirituality

(Mahlungulu and Uys, 2004; Masango, 2006; Mamman and Zakaria, 2016) – as it emphasises vertical relationships to supernatural powers that are perceived to be above the individual’s ability (or projects control). For example, Akurugu (2020b) reflects on encounters with the complex ways in which Dagaaba women in northwestern Ghana exercise agency – where supernatural powers, what Akurugu names ‘mystical insecurities’, inherent in the Dagaaba context require women not to assert themselves for fear that such forces could cause harm to them and their loved ones. Read through a liberal Western conceptualisation of empowerment premised on overt practices of agency, such acts could easily be misinterpreted as a lack of autonomy. An alternative framing of empowerment within such African societies around *Ubuntu* would, for example, help to give context to how such power forms shape daily and ritual lives and to understandings of how agency is performed.

A conceptualisation of empowerment as *Ubuntu* may also help to explain Galiè and Farnworth's (2019) proposition of a fifth typology of power (see Yount et al., 2019) ‘power through’ that conceptualises the boundaries of individual empowerment as overlapping with those of others. Galiè and Farnworth propose ‘power through’ from qualitative fieldwork conducted in Syria, Kenya and Tanzania around local understandings and perceptions of empowerment. This accounts for instances when individual power is related to the empowerment of others (e.g. significant people associated with the individual such as parents, siblings and spouses), or through relating to others (either through the way intrinsic personal characteristics are considered to affect how an individual relates to others, or by how the community judges the individual’s empowerment). As such, this ‘power through’ conceptualisation highlights how the empowerment of an individual resides not only in their ‘agency’ and ability to make life choices, but also in others around her and is mediated by communities and their values. Acknowledging this thus reduces the validity of methodologies that attempt to measure the relative empowerment of individual women vis-à-vis individual men in a household (Galiè and Farnworth, 2019). In essence, ‘empowerment’ can and is experienced through others.

We argue that this concept of ‘power through’ is critical to understandings of ‘empowerment’ in African societies. It embodies *Ubuntu* in which, underpinned by group solidarity with inbuilt support systems (Tamale, 2020), an individual is a person only through other persons - where their humanity is bound up in the humanity of others so they are inseparable from the community of others around them (Ngunjiri, 2016). The results of this study corroborate that local perceptions and definitions of empowerment within the Pathways program are often expressed as relational rather than individual.

6.11 Whose Definition of Empowerment Counts?

Local perceptions of 'empowerment' can be influenced by projects as often interviewees/participants learn to 'talk the talk' of what is expected of them by practitioners (referred to by Meinzen-Dick et al. (2019) as 'NGO-speak'). Based largely on quantitative data collected through the Pro-WEAI, the Win-Win Project Baseline Report states that

> *Women had less autonomy than men in most production and household decisions, felt less capable of achieving their goals and objectives but had more belief in the power of community and the benefits that come from being members of a collective.*

At endline, participants across the three groups were asked to describe the traits of an empowered woman and were asked *"do you consider yourself empowered?"* The Endline Report describes how:

> *Women in the Control group placed most emphasis on the theme of women's participation in associations (with husband's consent)…In contrast, women in the Gender Light and EKATA groups emphasized financial independence, good asset management, and an ability to think and manage and plan for oneself. Both Gender Light and EKATA groups said that an empowered woman was one who could meet her own needs, does not waste resources, takes initiative, and is not dependent on her husband for food or for identifying opportunities.*

This shows that, women in the Gender Light and EKATA groups described empowerment traits more aligned to individualism and points to the influence that the CARE EKATA 'awareness raising' and 'critical reflection' trainings might have had on the beliefs and desires of group members. With a neoliberal 'smart economics' empowerment framing influencing these 'awareness' trainings around the importance of economic independence and self-reliance, the participant's understandings and perceptions of 'empowerment' changed over the course of project implementation - as articulated by one EKATA member in the Endline Report: *"our eyes were opened"*. This points to the influence that development projects have on participant's perceptions of oneself in relation to their community, and also highlights the complexity of assuming a one-size-fits-all philosophy in different contexts.

That values shift and change is important. The fuzzy concept of 'empowerment' is therefore dynamic as well as contested. Again, we do not argue here that simply rooting empowerment in collective definitions solves this fundamental problem. The communitarian nature of 'African societies' should not be romanticised or seen as fixed and unchanging. Rather such societies are dynamic and hybrid spaces (Tamale 2020). Colonisation, capitalism, and decades of foreign aid and the influence of development projects all shape the experiences, desires and normative values that sit behind the state of being 'empowered'.

6.12 Conclusion

This research demonstrates that 'women's empowerment', pervasive as it is in mainstream development efforts, remains a poorly defined and understood concept. The definition provided by Kabeer, whilst certainly useful in conceptualising the different dimensions of empowerment, has been co-opted and hijacked by neoliberal and corporate development actors. Empowerment's roots in relations of power and grassroots mobilisation have been stripped away to promote a static conceptualisation around economic independence and individual goals and aspirations. Such conceptualisations now form the bedrock of mainstream monitoring approaches of women's empowerment through the WEAI and its ongoing adaptations, where empowerment is operationalised through decision-making, autonomy, and individual ownership/control of assets. Within the development sector's reliance on quantification, this shapes the data gathered and how such projects report on project impact – where 'success' is conveyed to donors through percentage point increases in 'empowerment'. In turn this shapes mainstream development discourse and the future allocation of aid. The framing and conceptualisation of women's empowerment is therefore critical.

Our findings suggest that the measurement of empowerment is a site of considerable contestation and entails deeply rooted cultural and normative assumptions (this resonates with the findings of Bedigen et al., 2021). Through drawing on the concept of *Ubuntu* and the work of African feminist authors (specifically Constance Akurugu and Sylvia Tamale) we show that the some of the locally expressed forms of empowerment seen in our data emphasise collective and relational forms of empowerment resonant with the collective nature of *Ubuntu*. CARE tried to satisfy both a donor-driven agenda to measure empowerment (through the WEAI) but also consciously acted at the local level to overcome it's limitations through a qualitative participatory process. They found a way of working between constituencies but it doing so we are left with a question: can measurement approaches overcome this disconnect through more and better indicators?

It is possible to argue that in order for objectives of empowerment to resonate more firmly it is necessary to be mindful of it's pluralistic and contested nature and to work creatively to incorporate contextually relevant collective values within the design of interventions and M&E approaches. This is no easy task and the costs of such an exercise may well outweigh the benefits. It is also important to recognise that efforts to enrich measurement indicators to account for the more holistic nature of empowerment, as documented above, in the name of 'decolonisation' would overlook that the process measurement in development policy and practice operates within the context and confines of a neo-colonial development industry primarily led and funded by the Global North (Amarante et al., 2021) fixated on their role in the *economic* empowerment of rural African women – as demonstrated in this paper.

Rather, what our analysis reveals is the fundamental nature of the contestation of values that sit behind development fuzzwords such as 'empowerment'. The values that such words embody can be contradictory and conflicting. The autonomous rational economic actor of Western liberal capitalism is a different human being to that of the *Ubuntu* which foregrounds interconnected relationships built on trust, support, reciprocity; connection to others, spiritual beliefs, ancestors, offspring and nature. Sylvia Tamale sees this as an ideal rather than a managerial tool for productivity (2020:229): *"just as gender equality is an ideal that we can aspire to, the concept of Ubuntu is an ideal that can take us a step closer to that aspiration"*. Aspiring to *Ubuntu* within understandings of empowerment thus is to position individuals within the bonds that connect all humanity - helping to avoid 'othering' and instead centre the focus on that which unites us. This is the antithesis of the 'smart economics' approach.

6.13 Chapter Summary

This preceding chapter responds to research sub-question two *(how is gender equality and women's empowerment defined and measured in gender transformative approaches?)* through exploring the conceptualisation of women's empowerment within CARE's GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa, and how it is then operationalised through the WEAI to report on project impact and 'success'.

Through the first two empirical case studies of agricultural development policy and practice, the preceding chapters both explored the gender myths and victimisation of rural African women that underpin the gender-development buzzwords and policy paradigms of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. Yet, as this thesis has outlined, critiques against these myths and buzzwords that have long animated the field of gender and development are not new, and have indeed been discussed for almost 20 years (see for example Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Cornwall, 2007a; Doss et al., 2018). This led me to question why such myths persist and have remained resilient in current development policy and practice, and have now been absorbed into agricultural transformation discourse. Such questioning encouraged me to take a step back and look at the development industry more broadly: questioning who has power and influence over gender-development narratives, how this power is exerted, and why.

Chapter 7

Neoliberal ideologies and philanthrocapitalist agendas: What does a 'smart economics' discourse empower? [11]

7.1 Overview

This chapter moves a step up the development chain to explore the power and influence that the BMGF has over framings and approaches to gender and women's empowerment within agricultural development policy and practice. As such, this chapter targets research sub-question three: What does a 'smart economics' approach to gender and agricultural transformation empower and who shapes these dominant narratives? This is an important analysis considering that the BMGF are now arguably the most prominent funder of development projects promoting gender equality. Applying the 'Power in Institutions' framework to the analysis of the BMGF's organisational documents around gender in a novel approach that enables the unpacking and disaggregation of the tangible and covert ways that the BMGF's power shapes discourses and agendas in gender equality and women's empowerment praxis. The following chapter thus offers some important insights regarding the reasons why such gender myths and buzzwords persist: where they are reinforced by powerful hegemonic donors such as the BMGF in line with their neoliberal ideology and philanthrocapitalist approach to agricultural development.

This chapter was co-authored by my by my two academic supervisors, Associate Professor Susannah Sallu in the School of Earth and Environment and Professor Anna Mdee in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. In addition, Professor Stephen Whitfield, also from the School of Earth and Environment, provided extra supervisory support during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is also named in the co-authorship. My work with the GCRF-African Food Systems Transformation and Justice Challenge Cluster led by Stephen, and my collaboration with CARE International outlined in the preceding chapter, encouraged me to explore the relationship between donor and grantee within CARE's GTAs, and how this shapes the design, implementation and monitoring of development policy and practice. This final empirical case study thus explores the politics of development aid in shaping discourses and agendas around gender and women's empowerment within agricultural transformation policy and practice.

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7.2 Introduction

The field of international development is loaded with powerful ideas and normative frameworks (Fejerskov, 2017), where the neoliberal development paradigm has persisted and dominated for nearly four decades (Kashwan, MacLean and García-López, 2019). With diminishing government support in recent decades (Otter, 2010), it is a space where major philanthropies increasingly exert their outsized influence over development agendas. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) has emerged as this era's most influential actor (Birn, 2014) in the field of global health and agricultural development – and, more recently, in gender equality and women's empowerment. In directing their vast resources into business partnerships and interventions aimed at improving their market presence (Morvaridi, 2012), the BMGF are critiqued for their 'philanthrocapitalist' approach to development that conflates business aims with charitable endeavours (Mcgoey, 2012). We use the BMGF as a case study to explore the political economy of mainstream approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment. In applying a critical gendered discourse analysis to their organisational documents combined with key-informant interviews with a range of development actors, we adopt Kashwan, MacLean and García-López's (2019) 'Power in Institutions' framework to explore and disaggregate the multiple dimensions of power that the BMGF exercise over their grant-making, agenda- and discourse-setting around gender equality and women's empowerment.

We first introduce 'philanthrocapitalism' and set the concept within broad critiques of the hegemonic neoliberal development agenda, before introducing the BMGF as a key actor within this space – outlining how they are both a product of the neoliberal era and in how they apply business principles and 'market logic' to their development approaches in order to uphold the tenets of neoliberalism. With much research already conducted on their philanthrocapitalist approach to global health (see for example: Greenstein and Loffredo, (2020)), we focus on their 'Agricultural Development' programmes - part of their 'Global Growth & Opportunity' division. This is important in two ways. Firstly, the history of the BMGF's philanthrocapitalist approach to agricultural development aids understanding of how they came to introduce a new division: 'Gender Equality' (previously incorporated within the 'Global Growth & Opportunity' but elevated to the divisional level in 2020). Secondly, the critiques waged against this philanthrocapitalist approach – of focusing on the symptoms rather than the causes of structural inequities, and a narrow capitalist interpretation of how to support smallholder farmers that promotes neoliberal economic policies and corporate globalisation (Curtis, 2016; Brooks, 2013) – are critiques which we argue can also be applied to their approach to gender equality and women's empowerment. As such we offer a novel contribution to the literature on philanthrocapitalism through bringing these critiques to an under-researched area (Fejerskov,

2018; Haydon, Jung and Russell, 2021), and contribute to a growing critique of their hegemonic dominance in global development aid.

7.3 Philanthrocapitalism – Can the Rich 'Save the World'?

Haydon, Jung and Russell (2021:367) define philanthrocapitalism as the *"integration of market motifs, motives and methods with philanthropy"* – where proponents consider it 'effective' philanthropy through which wealthy motivated donors 'fill the void' left by diminished government spending (Mcgoey, 2012) and bring innovative ideas to scale by investing their time and energy to solve the world's problems (Bishop and Green, 2008; Eikenberry and Mirabella, 2018). Development challenges are discursively framed as scientific problems in need of market-based solutions in which the 'beneficiaries' of philanthropy are presented as productive entrepreneurs and investment opportunities - contrasting with their inherent vulnerability within some development discourse (Haydon, Jung and Russell, 2021). Entwined in this approach are elements central to neoliberal capitalism (Morvaridi, 2012): reducing the public sphere in favour of privatisation, deregulation, and data-driven solutions with a focus on measurable targets and results (Mcgoey, 2012; Thompson, 2014; Ignatova, 2017; Eikenberry and Mirabella, 2018; Mushita and Thompson, 2019) – projects compatible with for-profit capitalist business and investment to attract 'innovative' corporate actors (Haydon, Jung and Russell, 2021).

Questioning if there is money to be made from eradicating poverty (Calkin, 2017), a central ideological appeal of the growing trend in philanthrocapitalism is that philanthropy itself may be a lucrative business opportunity – where charity is a form of investment (Ignatova, 2017; Haydon, Jung and Russell, 2021) through which philanthropists can 'do good socially…[by] do[ing] well financially' (Mcgoey, 2012: 185). Yet not only do philanthrocapitalists have the authority to decide where to direct their investments and who gets to benefit, but with no economic or electoral accountability or transparency obligations (Eikenberry and Mirabella, 2018), private philanthropies such as the BMGF are accountable only to their self-selected boards (Birn, 2014). Widespread critiques surround the immense influence on public and social policy that comes with their 'strings attached' donations and investments, how their actions serve to weaken support for government programmes, and, importantly, how their strategies may indeed exacerbate the inequalities that philanthropists purport to remedy (Eikenberry and Mirabella, 2018).

As much of the analysis of the BMGF is journalistic (Birn, 2014), and indeed the term 'philanthrocapitalism' was originally coined by The Economist (2006), we have included considerable grey literature in our overview of the BMGF's philanthrocapitalist approach to development. As such, this paper represents a much needed academic contribution in this area.

7.4 BMGF & The Hegemony of Neoliberalism

The BMGF's 'California consensus' approach puts its faith in the ability of innovation and technology to solve global development challenges (Desai and Kharas, 2008; Fejerskov, 2018) - where the strategic and management techniques honed at Microsoft underpin the Foundation's approach to its philanthropy (Mcgoey, 2012). Central to the neoliberal development agenda, inherent within this view is that with access to the right resources and technologies, individuals will prosper.

Yet the neoliberal model has failed to produce institutions capable of tackling such development challenges, and has fostered economic globalisation that has brought extraordinary capital accumulation and concentrated wealth in the hands of capitalists like Bill Gates (Morvaridi, 2012). Criticising their problematic profit sources, the Los Angeles Times (quoted in (Thompson, 2014)) estimate that over 40% of the BMGF's assets derive from companies whose operations contradict foundation goals. Combined with reports of large-scale tax evasion within Microsoft (Americans For Tax Fairness, 2012; Curtis, 2016; ActionAid International, 2020; Neate, 2021), there is a paradoxical tension that money taken from the public sector and representative welfare systems, and which relies to some degree on the underdevelopment and exploitation of labour forces and countries (mostly concentrated in the 'Global South'), is now being touted as funds which will 'save the world' (Morvaridi, 2012; Birn, 2014). The BMGF is thus both a product of the neoliberal era and a key development actor in sustaining its ideology: an economic system that has allowed Bill Gates' net worth to double in the last two decades (Greenstein and Loffredo, 2020) and that propels their self-generated legitimacy through its 'philanthropy' and the centrality of 'aid' in helping the poor (Curtis, 2016).

7.5 Philanthrocapitalism and Agenda-Setting in Agricultural Development

There is a long history of philanthropic foundation influence in agricultural development rooted in neoliberal economic policy. This is exemplified through Rockefeller and Ford's backing of the first 'Green Revolution' that swept through much of Asia and South America - now widely critiqued for its unsustainable practices that have led to long-term declines in soil fertility and groundwater supplies, a loss of natural diversity, and the impoverishment of small-scale farmers unable to sustain the higher costs of input-intensive farming practices (Wise, 2020).

The BMGF now wield huge influence over global agricultural development agendas (Spielman, Zaidi and Flaherty, 2011) - targeting much of its money into what it sees as the problems of African agriculture: low productivity of smallholder farmers, poor soils and plant disease, and the scarcity of formal markets (Schurman, 2018). Philanthrocapitalism is perhaps best exemplified by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) (Mushita and Thompson, 2019) - launched by the BMGF in partnership with The Rockefeller Foundation in 2006. Based

on the technology package of the first Green Revolution, AGRA focuses largely on vast monocultures, commodification, and capital-intensive technological and market models for increased agricultural output (Holt-Giménez, 2008; Thompson, 2014; Ignatova, 2017) - with a distinct lack of participatory farmer-led approaches (Whitfield, 2016) or recognition of international calls for food sovereignty (Holt-Giménez and Altieri, 2012). Since its inception, widespread critiques have centred on AGRA's focus on hybrid or genetically modified seeds, fertilisers and pesticides reliant on fossil fuels, and on its primary goal of linking African food producers and consumers to global capitalist markets (Thompson, 2014) - fostering increased control within private entities dominating the 'corporate-cartel controlled' global food chain (Birn, 2014).

A central component to the promotion of genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) (Morvaridi, 2012; Curtis, 2016) is the strengthening of Intellectual Property (IP) regimes upon which genetically modified seeds and their associated petroleum-based inputs rely (Shaw and Wilson, 2020). The BMGF's grants and close relationship with Monsanto (now Bayer) (McGoey, 2015; Curtis, 2016) and shares in fossil fuel companies like ExxonMobil, BP, and Shell (Park and Lee, 2014; Shaw & Wilson, 2020) raise legitimate questions over whether its priorities lie more in profit-making than philanthropy. Linked to their promotion of such 'smart' technologies is their privatisation and exploitation of farmer seed systems and public seed repositories for financial corporate gain (Ignatova, 2017; Thompson, 2012, 2018; Mushita and Thompson, 2019) – referred to as 'the appropriation of Africa's genetic wealth' (Thompson, 2014).

The BMGF's philanthrocapitalist approach to agricultural development thus relies on 'market logic' - where African food producers and consumers represent an untapped market for their promoted 'smart' technologies and brand-name seeds (Thompson, 2014). Since stipulating in 2008 that all agricultural grants have to explicitly address gender to be considered, the BMGF have been increasingly focusing on women's role in agriculture and are now arguably the most prominent funder of development projects towards gender equality (Garcia and Wanner, 2017) – noting that it *'has consequences for the success of our work'* (Gender-Responsive Programming document). Before bringing the above critiques to the BMGF's gender work – questioning what is meant by 'success' in this context: promoting transformational social justice reforms for women and girls, or integrating a new workforce into global capitalist market systems – it is important to first understand the international development context within which the BMGF came to stipulate a gender focus within their grantmaking.

7.6 The 'Gender Agenda' and Rise of Smart Economics

The 'gender agenda' has seen attention to gender within international development increasingly move from the margins into the mainstream from the late 1990s and early 2000s in the search

for new development strategies following the failure of the structural adjustment plans (Bergeron, 2016), bolstered by the feminist ‘Women in Development’ and ‘Women, Environment and Development’ movements of the 1970s and 1980s-90s, respectively, pushing to get women’s rights onto the international development agenda (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). ‘Gender Equality as Smart Economics’ became the title of the World Bank’s 2007-2010 Gender Action Plan, mainstreaming gender into the Bank’s core mandate: economic development and growth. The below quote taken from the BMGF’s 2016 Annual Letter typifies ‘smart economics’:

> *“Economists call it opportunity cost: the other things women could be doing if they didn’t spend so much time on mundane tasks…it’s obvious that many women would spend more time doing paid work, starting businesses, or otherwise contributing to the economic well-being of societies around the world. The fact that they can’t holds their families and communities back.”*

Discursively framing gender inequality as economically inefficient (Calkin, 2017), this smart economics approach is also revealing of the BMGF’s narrow capitalist approach to development – where the ‘mundane’ tasks of care and reproductive labour are not valued. Following the World Bank’s Gender Action Plan, significant investments were made to build the ‘business case’ for gender equality through presenting it as not just necessary for economic growth but mutually reinforcing (Prügl, 2017). Through this the smart economics agenda by steps any critique regarding the meaning of growth in neoclassical economics through reinforcing its core commitment: growing economies through the expansion of capitalist markets, in which women need to be ‘empowered’ to take advantage of economic opportunities (Prügl, 2017). Drawing on feminist notions of ‘empowerment’, ‘agency’ and ‘choice’ as selling points (Grosser and McCarthy, 2019), this neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse positions women and girls as the new frontier for further capitalist growth and accumulation, and devalues even further care and reproductive work (Moeller, 2018).

In addition to launching their Gender Action Plan, the World Bank also engaged in a significant communications campaign to bring business on board through encouraging them to integrate women’s empowerment within their corporate social responsibility initiatives. Numerous international accounting firms and private foundations, including the BMGF, fell in line through absorption of the smart economics rhetoric (Prügl, 2021). The timing of the corporate focus on gender equality is not coincidental. Many critics have outlined how companies embroiled in public relations and/or legal crises such as Nike (Calkin, 2015; Moeller, 2018), Coca-Cola (Grosser and McCarthy, 2019), and indeed Microsoft (Arthur, 2009), and also investment banking companies like Goldman Sachs looking for post-financial crisis recovery following the 2008 crash and widespread reports of sexism in finance (Prügl, 2021), promoted investments in

gender equality as good public relations and to cover up the failures of capitalism (Byatt, 2018). Through this 'transnational business feminism' (Roberts, 2012), corporatised development thus shifted its neoliberal hegemonic project to adapt to new economic and political realities through making gender equality a central focus within their investments (Prügl, 2021).

The BMGF increasing focus on gender equality and women's empowerment within their agricultural development work since 2008 can thus be understood within the context of a concerted effort within corporate development to entwine neoclassical economics with the pursuit of gender equality – in doing so presenting markets as the purveyor of equality rather than inequality. The 'gender agenda' has thus indeed been successful in making women and girls highly visible subjects within global development – but what exactly does the smart economics discourse empower? Legitimising the expansion of markets and corporate power, this rhetoric imagines gender equality as both congruent and reliant upon innovation (Calkin, 2017) – and, as we will now demonstrate, is central to the BMGF's philanthrocapitalist approach to agricultural transformation and gender equality.

7.7 Methodological Approach

This research explores the political economy of mainstream approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment, focusing on the case study of the BMGF. We apply a critical gendered discourse analysis to their organisational documents around gender, exploring their use of language to reinforce societal power relations (Fairclough, 1995) and discursively (re)produce narratives around gender. We purposively selected 37 key organisational documents from 2008 (introduction of gender requirement within their agricultural development grant-making) to present from their program resources to provide an overarching view of their gender work and gender 'journey' (table 1). Documents were analysed using NVivo 12 utilising inductive coding to enable narratives to emerge organically, with findings triangulated through 17 key-informant interviews conducted between May – July 2021 of which transcripts were also inductively coded using NVivo software. Interviewees were purposively sampled to represent a range of major development actors who all had experience of working with the BMGF across the donor-grantee relationship spectrum – including representation from the BMGF and other major philanthropies, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government bilateral development departments, consultancies and research institutes. Interviews explored the BMGF's conceptualisation of and approach to gender and women's empowerment within their agricultural development grantmaking and their relationship with grantees throughout the proposal, design, implementation and monitoring of funded projects. Where quotes are used, names and organisational affiliations have been removed to protect interviewee's anonymity.

7.7.1 Power Analysis

To disaggregate the tangible and covert ways that power shapes discourses and agendas in gender equality and women's empowerment praxis, we adopt Kashwan, MacLean and García-López's (2019) 'Power in Institutions' matrix. This matrix builds on Lukes' (2005) theoretical approach which understands power as having three dimensions: 1) direct and observable power over behaviour and decision-making outcomes; 2) covertly and intentionally predetermining the agenda through manipulation of decision-making processes; and 3) discursively upholding and reinforcing persistent and dominant norms and ideals that guide mainstream development paradigms. In this research, this matrix enables exploration of how the BMGF exercise 'power over' through 'overt power' over, for example, stipulations around the use of particular measurement indicators within their funded projects. The matrix also enables exploration of covert manifestations of 'agenda power' where certain discourses and approaches are promoted that can be seen to benefit and align to the BMGF's neoliberal ideology. Lastly, the matrix also enables analysis of manifestations of 'discursive/ideational power' that reinforce historical mainstream neoliberal approaches to development within which the status quo – and the BMGF's position as a key development actor within this - is both beneficial and fixed, marginalising alternative perspectives in the process (Lukes' first, second and third dimensions of power, respectively). The power in institutions matrix is also particularly useful in unpacking how the BMGF themselves conceive 'power' within their focus on and approach to 'women's em*power*ment' - helping to explore how power is presented as something like a 'property' that can be bestowed upon others through philanthropic development. Suggesting a social relation of domination, a power-focused analytical framework that explores the 'power over' form is thus grounded in the BMGF's own language and conceptualisation of power.

The 'Power in Institutions' matrix goes beyond standard power analyses through exploring how other development actors navigate this political space through the 'power to' form –building on Foucault's (1984) conceptualisation of power as a force that flows through society and inherent in all social relations. Whilst our analytical focus is on the BMGF and how they exercise the 'power over' form within the 'Power in Institutions' matrix, our analysis also yielded two instances of the 'power to' form whereby other development actors 'coopt' and 'resist' the overt and discursive power of the BMGF – thus contributing to Kashwan, MacLean and García-López's (2019) proposition that such facets of power often act in conjunction.

Table 1: BMGF organisational documents analysed,

BMGF Document/Website	**Year**	**In-text Reference**
Gender Impact Strategy for Agricultural Development	2008	Impact Strategy
Annual Letter	2009-2022	(YEAR) Annual Letter
Annual Report	2014-2020	(YEAR) Annual Report
Creating Gender-Responsive Agricultural Development Programs	2012	Gender-Responsive Programming
Putting women and girls at the centre of development	2014	Putting women and girls at the centre of development
A Conceptual Model of Women and Girls' Empowerment	2017	Conceptual Model of Empowerment
White Paper: A Conceptual Model of Women and Girls' Empowerment	2017	White Paper
Gender and Agricultural Advisory Services (AAS) Issue Brief	2018	Gender and AAS Issue Brief
Gender Mainstreaming at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation: A Primer for Fresh Approaches and Sustainable Solutions	2018	Gender Mainstreaming Primer
What Gets Measured Matters: A Methods Note for Measuring Women and Girls' Empowerment	2019	Empowerment Methods Note
Gender, Agriculture and Climate Change Brief	2020	Gender, Agriculture and Climate Change Brief
BMGF Website: Gates Foundation Commits $2.1 Billion to Advance Gender Equality Globally	2021	Gender Equality Commitment
BMGF Website: Gender Equality	2022	Gender Equality Website

7.8 Overt Power: 1st Dimension of Power

Overt power is exhibited through aid bureaucracy where the BMGF dictate the language used around gender and the measurement indices utilized to track progress within their funded projects (as noted in Smith et al., unpublished[12]).

7.8.1 Controlling 'Investments' in Women

With regard to the BMGF exerting their immense hegemonic influence over what type of gender projects are funded, interviewees discussed how they were directed to align their project proposals to the BMGF's philanthrocapitalist approach to gender equality - noting that they had to use *'a bit of the instrumental language to promote it to the Foundation… why you should invest in women, that smart economics kind of language'*. Central to smart economics is this efficiency approach which rationalises 'investing' in women through touting increased economic development outcomes (Chant and Sweetman, 2012; Hickel, 2014; Fejerskov, 2017; Farhall and Rickards, 2021). Women are presented as a development resource which if overlooked would mean their *'potential and talent continue to go untapped'* (2018 Gender Mainstreaming Primer). For example, the BMGF's current Gender Equality website purports that *'the global economy would grow by an estimated US$28 trillion by the year 2025 if women were to participate in the economy to the same degree as men'*. Arguments toward 'investing' in women are thus framed predominantly in narrow economic development terms, and, despite their 2017 White Paper purporting that their work is partly based on the motivation of *'investing in empowerment of women and girls as a goal in itself'*, the societal and transformational goals of equality are starkly overlooked.

This smart economics emphasis overtly dictates how projects are designed, with one interviewee reflecting on the proposal writing process: *'they* [BMGF] *adopted a…technocratic approach. They were like: how much are the yields going to increase? What technological advancements are the farmers going to get?...What are the market prices? What are the linkages?...Are assets going to increase?'*. Another interviewee reflected on trying to highlight to the BMGF the important social and normative benefits of projects aiming to improve women's empowerment, noting that the technocratic management within the BMGF wanted to see benefits in agricultural output: *'Jeff Raikes was the guy who had to approve this as the COO* [Chief Operating Officer]*…this is not going to make any sense to Jeff!...you have to show him that yields raised by 200 times or something!'*. Interviewees from the grantee side thus noted having to demonstrate projected impact of women's empowerment interventions through quantification of increased yields and productivity and increased access to markets, thereby aligning with this

[12] This is in reference to chapter 6 of this thesis.

neoliberal view of African women smallholders through a focus on profit-orientated and efficiency behaviour – ultimately 'transforming' them into producing consumers and tools in the hands of aid-providers (Shaw and Wilson, 2020).

7.8.2 Philanthrocapitalist Approach to Measuring 'Women's Empowerment'

When it comes to 'improving women's empowerment', the BMGF's goal-orientated approach and expectation of linear progression casts empowerment as an endpoint rather than a process (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). In this way the BMGF conceive power as a property which can be 'owned' by an individual and thus counted (Galiè and Farnworth, 2019) – where, conversely, the status of 'disempowered' can be assigned to individuals who are perceived to lack agency, again reifying the domination inherent within the 'power over' form. This is apparent across the vast majority of organisational documents through a heavy reliance on standardised quantitative indicators to demonstrate 'impact' and 'success'. Despite promoting both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods within their 2019 Methods Note, and stating that one of three requirements to guarantee that their grants are 'gender responsive' is to ensure that their grants are *'accountable to her'*, there is little discussion around the reductive nature of such standardised metrics, nor of the political nature of which knowledge(s) are privileged and deemed worthy in their design. 'Indicator culture' is a central component of the international 'governance by numbers' approach to development – evident in the Millennium- and Sustainable-Development Goals centring on a set of easy-to-understand goals and indicators that give the illusion of a managerial, quantitative and results-based agenda (Fejerskov, 2018, 2020). Yet rather than revealing the truth, the reductionist nature of indicators create it (Merry, 2016a; 2016b; Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019)

For example, the BMGF is one of the main funders in the ongoing development of the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) which attempts to produce measurements of empowerment that are comparable across time and space and that enable the monitoring of project impact (Alkire et al. 2013). However, rooted in an increasing debate around what 'empowerment' entails, who gets to decide, and the Global North's fixation on 'improving African women's empowerment' (Tamale, 2020; Purewal and Loh, 2021) – Smith et al. (unpublished) demonstrate that the WEAI is based on and promotes a Western individualist conceptualisation of empowerment centred on autonomy, asset ownership and decision-making around 'productive resources'. As a leader in promoting gender-responsive programming, the methods and approaches the BMGF endorse towards 'measuring women's empowerment are deemed widely recognised and appropriate (Garcia and Wanner, 2017). Thus, owing to their dependency on external funding, NGOs are often under pressure to create a 'narrative' of development that corresponds with donor requirements (Gideon and Porter, 2015). As

highlighted by interviewees, this is increasingly seen through an emphasis on quantitative standardised measurement indices like the WEAI to demonstrate that project implementation is proving 'successful' and addressing the priority areas of donors.

7.9 Agenda Power: 2nd Dimension of Power

The highly visible discursive presence of gender equality and women's empowerment in mainstream agricultural development approaches is critiqued by feminists and grassroots movements who challenge the reproduction of neoliberal policy frameworks which fail to take meaningful steps toward gender equality (Farhall and Rickards, 2021). We highlight two narratives that demonstrate how the BMGF's hegemony in investments toward gender equality and women's empowerment contribute to agenda setting in this area: BMGF's investments in women as 'smart economics', and the framing of women as adopters of 'smart' technologies.

7.9.1 Investing in Women as 'Smart Economics'

Key to the 'smart economics' discourse is the narrative that female farmers are not meeting their 'potential' – and that to do so requires setting development agendas aimed at improving their agricultural productivity and further integrating them into agricultural markets. In the BMGF's 2012 Gender-Responsive Programming document it was claimed that empowerment of women would entail 30% increases in household yields and a 2.5-4% increase in agricultural output for countries 'across the developing world'. This was later compounded by Melinda Gates in 2014 in an article entitled 'Putting women and girls at the centre of development', which reiterated that agricultural production across Africa would increase by 20% if women had equal access to productive resources, and also was outlined by a BMGF interviewee: *'we're very precise in how we define it* [women's empowerment] *at the Gates Foundation…in our particular investments, we really want to see not only an increase in her productivity, but an increase in her income'.* These types of stylised facts that persist in mainstream approaches to gender not only lack any sound empirical evidence, but they also negatively influence the design of effective policies and programs that are both blind to and side-line gender relations through focusing solely on access to productive resources – in effect holding back progress on gender equality (Doss et al., 2018).

This persistent focus on the economic gains of *'investing in the women'* thus covertly shapes the development agenda where the business case is prioritised over the goal and moral imperative of social transformation and equal human rights, shaping targets and interventions where progress is understood narrowly through economic growth. Pro-market solutions are central to neoliberalism and yet overlook that further integration of women into masculinised capitalist systems of production and consumption does little to challenge the social and political structures which constrain and marginalise them in the first place (Chant and Sweetman, 2012; Hickel,

2014; Farhall and Rickards, 2021). The BMGF thus pay lip service toward goals of gender equality in its own right, yet they exercise agenda power through their arguments rationalising the funding of such programmes - influencing development agendas around what 'empowered women' can bring to the global capitalist economy.

7.9.2 Women as Adopters of 'Smart' Technologies

Central to the agenda-setting within this 'smart economics' discourse is that female farmers are viewed as untapped adopters of the 'smart' agricultural technologies which the BMGF promote to increase productivity (Shaw and Wilson, 2020). Within their focus on improving the agricultural productivity of women, a key focus is on the unequal adoption of new practices and technologies by male and female farmers – with their 2012 Gender-Responsive Programming document stating that *'Adoption differences are largely explained by women's unequal access to land, labour, and education, which reduces the likelihood of women's awareness of new technology or practices, and limits women's resources for obtaining them'*.

Their smart economics framing of women as not just consumers and producers but also adopters of 'smart' technologies is perpetuated through the BMGF's commissioning of reports into the gendered adoption of climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices such as the 2020 'Gender, Agriculture and Climate Change Brief' produced by the Global Center for Gender Equality at Stanford University. Such reports state that '*gender disparities in access to and agency over key resources – chiefly land, labor, financial capital, and climate-relevant information'* - stand in the way of women reaping the touted potential benefits of CSA: *'improved yields, income and resilience, along with lower emissions'*. 'Adoption' here becomes a goal and metric of success in its own right, simplifying the dynamic and contextual nature of agricultural decision-making and resource access (see, for example, Hermans et al., 2020) to numerical targets. Such statements rely on and perpetuate neoliberalist assumptions that if women are equipped with the right tools and productive resources, they will lift themselves out of poverty (Hickel, 2014) – setting mainstream development targets around closing the 'gender gap' (Huyer, 2016). Subsequent policy and programming based on this notion fails to acknowledge the structural antecedents that mediate such inequities and pursue 'gap-filling' within existing harmful social structures (Kantor, Morgan and Choudhury, 2015).

These technical fixes and 'smart' discourses serve to entwine women's empowerment with technological advancement, productivity and economic growth – further influencing development agendas around increased 'adoption' of CSA technologies and the combined goal of expanding markets - ultimately benefitting large corporations with whom the BMGF is closely associated.

7.9.3 Co-opting 'smart economics' language

As Prügl (2017) notes, there may still be openings for feminist agendas within the neoliberalisation of feminism – in effect co-opting these discourses in return. Our analysis highlighted how grantees exercise 'power to' through the cooptation subtype (Kashwan, MacLean and García-López, 2019) in their strategic aligning of language within project proposals to that of the BMGF's smart economics framing in order to receive grants in the interest of advancing social and transformational rights. One interviewee noted that including targets for increased agricultural yields and technologies in proposals to the BMGF is thus often viewed as a *'backdoor entry'* point for such social justice goals - where grantees are told by the BMGF that *'if you can align yourself with certain value chains* [of the BMGF] *that have funding attached to it, the more you can do that, the more money you'll get'*. Bergeron (2016) argues we must take advantage of the 'cracks' opened up within the smart economics approach where its attention to equity and economic diversity offers space for feminist agendas to cultivate economic subjects opposed to the 'business case' but rather guided by motivations of care, cooperation and ethical concern. In this contested space, feminist social movements may offer innovative strategies to contest the neoliberalisation of feminism through navigating this political space in ways that emphasise opportunity rather than constraint (Grosser and McCarthy, 2019).

7.10 Discursive/Ideational Power: 3rd Dimension of Power

Discursive/ideational power is exhibited through two narratives: discursively framing the onus on the individual to become empowered – thus overlooking the need for structural and radical reforms in the path toward gender equality; and the BMGF's strategic framing and positioning of themselves as a key development actor within the field of gender equality and women's empowerment.

7.10.1 The Onus on the Individual

The focus on the isolated individual economic unit inherent in the WEAI (Smith et al., unpublished) is also evident across the BMGF's organisational documents where the onus is often placed on women to pull themselves out of poverty. For example, their 2019 Annual Report (and reiterated across numerous other annual reports) states that *'more women and girls can transform their lives as barriers to economic participation are removed'*. Here the onus is placed on individual women to 'transform'– where, if given the resources, failure is personal (Farhall and Rickards, 2021). Moreover, set within the smart economics discourse, references across the 2012 Gender-Responsive Programming document around the potential contribution that empowered women could bring to household nutrition - with Melinda Gates noting that because

of this it *'makes sense to invest in…women'* – rely on essentialising and perpetuating maternalistic gender stereotypes (Chant and Sweetman, 2012). Not only is the onus placed on individual women to overcome any discriminatory barriers to participate economically and to empower themselves, but they are also handed the moral burden of ensuring their family's well-being (Farhall and Rickards, 2021). Considering that the BMGF's approach to agricultural development repeatedly favours the opening up of markets to GM crops that decrease nutrition (Shaw and Wilson, 2020), and support for companies like McDonalds and Coca Cola (Park and Lee, 2014) - their arguments toward investing in women and girls to ensure food security and household nutrition appear contradictory and disingenuous at best.

Importantly, this onus on the individual also exposes the assumptions that underpin the BMGF's neoliberal ideology: that poverty is caused not by marginalisation and structural inequities within the global economic system - a system which has enabled and sustains the vast and increasing global wealth divide and the existence of organisations like the BMGF – but rather that poverty and vulnerability are depoliticised: the result of identity-based disadvantage, lack of productivity, and lack of integration within market systems. Vulnerability is then marketized and turned into a form of investment (Mediavilla and Garcia-Arias, 2019) – where if women are provided with the right tools and resources, they and their families will prosper. The onus of responsibility is thus shifted from the very institutions that have directly caused and perpetuate the marginalisation of women and girls, to place the burden on individuals to 'bootstrap themselves out of poverty' (Hickel, 2014:1366). This discursive power thus solidifies the BMGF's hegemony where they control the neoliberal development agenda under the benevolent mask of philanthropy (Mediavilla and Garcia-Arias, 2019).

7.10.2 Saviour Narrative

Set clearly within this, the discursive language used that Bill Gates was *'lucky enough to accumulate the wealth that is going into the foundation'* and that they are *'winners of the "ovarian lottery"'* (2009 Annual Letter) for being born in the US paints a very clear divide between 'us' vs 'them' and the 'Global North' vs the 'Global South'. Such statements reinforce the notion that it is 'luck' that has determined Bill Gates' unfathomable wealth and that it is 'generosity' that determines his philanthropy (Ramdas, 2011). Similar to how poverty is depoliticised, this ideational framing thus overlooks that Microsoft's wealth was amassed through the exploitation of outsourced labour, monopolisation of markets and manipulation of IP regimes upon which the global economic system is predicated (see, for example, Birn (2014); Curtis, (2016)). Not only is Bill Gates painted as a lucky 'winner-takes-all' in the lottery of life, but he is one who is elevated to saviour status through narratives around the BMGF having *'a role to play…in making the world a more equitable place'* and describing women and girls as

'beneficiaries of development programs' (Melinda Gates, 2014). This, combined with the hegemonic dominance of the BMGF, increasingly portrays 'charity' as central to development - and reinforces a dependency narrative in which the poor are but recipients of favours from the rich who are portrayed as their saviours (Curtis, 2016). Such narratives are reiterated throughout the BMGF's annual letters which repeatedly tout the benefits of philanthropy and aid in reducing the world's ills. This 'crumbs from the rich man's table' (Wilson, 2014) embodies 'trickle-down economics' - predicated on the assumption that the vast wealth accumulated by capitalists like Bill Gates can and will eventually help to lift those at the bottom out of poverty (McGoey, 2015).

Reflective of William Easterly's book 'The White Man's Burden' (2006) which suggests development failure stems from 'Planners' who propose grand schemes to alleviate poverty, it is evident that both Bill and Melinda Gates perceive themselves as *'billionaires who know best'* (McGoey, 2015) in holding the solutions to a range of global challenges – from health and vaccines, agricultural technologies and GM seeds, gender equality and women's empowerment, and, more recently, to both climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. This 'solutionism' rarely considers or attempts to embrace local knowledge (McGoey, 2015) and is reinforced through their investments where the BMGF exert their self-generated legitimacy (Shaw and Wilson, 2020) through the magnitude of resources they wield. Yet we must question the distribution of such resources – where, for example, in 2014 just 4% of the $669m channelled through the Foundation to agricultural NGOs went to NGOs based in Africa (Park and Lee, 2014). In their 2022 Annual Letter the reason for this unbalance was: *'a significant proportion of global technical expertise and capacity remains in the Global North and, thus, so does much of our grantmaking'*. 'Expertise' is thus recognised as Western knowledge – again perpetuating and upholding the geopolitical hierarchy between the powerful Western core and the subordinate periphery it seeks to manage (Hickel, 2014; 2022).

This saviour narrative is protected and strengthened within public discourse – of considerable importance in fostering support for public policy – as the BMGF wield significant power and influence over how its endeavours in global development are portrayed through its sizeable 'donations' to major media outlets (Greenstein and Loffredo, 2020). In the UK, for example, the entire 'Global Development' section of The Guardian – where in 2003 and again in 2008 Bill Gates was named 'Saint Bill' – has been funded through a $3.5m grant from the BMGF since 2020 *'to produce regular reporting on global health and development topics in its Global Development section'*. Such 'donations' thus not only further the agenda of the BMGF within public discourse that aid is working (McGoey, 2015) and generate positive publicity for its approach (Morvaridi, 2012; Birn, 2014), but also limit objectivity and any mainstream media critique of the BMGF (Curtis, 2016; Macleod, 2021).

7.10.3 Resisting the hegemony of Western knowledge

Inherent within the smart economics rhetoric which individualises women needing development assistance is the image of the oppressed 'Third World Woman' central to Western liberal feminism, discursively (re)producing colonial approaches to gender and women's empowerment (Mohanty, 2003). Decolonial feminist scholars and activists exercise 'power to' by countering and resisting this discursive power through engaging with the structural and colonial antecedents of and contextual nature of gender (and intersectional) inequities – in effect re-politicising Western notions of poverty and gender inequality. These counter-hegemonic decolonial discourses promote the principles of communitarianism, collective and grassroots action in which individuals are part of a unity – disrupting the Western knowledge and autonomous individualism present within the smart economics discourse (see for example Tamale (2020)). The BMGF pay lip-service to 'Intersectionality and engaging men and boys' in attempts to move beyond the Third World Woman, noting that *'Strengthening the voice and choice of women and girls requires challenging gender inequalities as well as other power inequalities that intersect with gender relations'* (2017 White Paper), with a BMGF interviewee noting that *'gender transformative programming really requires the engagement of men and community leaders and other leaders as well as women…it usually takes longer, it's usually higher risk'*. Yet as the smart economics discourse has been purposefully absorbed into their approach to agricultural development, areas of the 'Global South' are targeted as laboratories for technological innovation with female farmers as their test cases - thus mobilising racial and gendered representations of women. Shaw and Wilson (2020) highlight how such colonial framings of appropriately productive subjects are inherent within the BMGF's necro-populationist promotion of unsafe, uncertain and ineffective 'population technologies' and 'climate-smart' agricultural technologies, with Canfield (2022) arguing the BMGF's ideology of innovation reasserts racial regimes of ownership necessary for capital accumulation. Combined with their saviour narrative, such discourses reinforce coloniality through extending regimes of racialised and gendered socio-spatial inequality (Shaw and Wilson, 2020) – demonstrating that their engagement with the intersections of gender, race and class is done at a superficial level at best.

7.11 Conclusion: BMGF & Agenda-Setting in Women's Empowerment?

This analysis disaggregates the multidimensional dimension of power that the BMGF exert over mainstream approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment. The power framework thus offers new insights into the BMGF's hegemonic power through a theoretically grounded approach, building on Foucault's conceptualisation that *'power and knowledge directly imply one another…there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations'* (Foucault, 1977:27). The BMGF use their immense power and influence to control 'knowledge' around gender equality and women's empowerment: what data is produced and how this shapes what we 'know', controlling how this knowledge becomes validated and sets development agendas, and even insidiously influencing how this production of knowledge discursively defines global challenges, how they should be addressed, and by whom, in line with their neoliberal ideology (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). The recurrent 'smart economics' discourse demonstrates that it is not always easy to disentangle and differentiate between each power dimension – and yet highlights clearly how the BMGF's underlying assumptions around what 'women's empowerment' entails visibly shapes their grant-making and their ideological approach to agenda- and discourse-setting. We therefore agree that smart economics is no 'epiphenomenon' (Byatt, 2018) – it is a neoliberal instrument of capitalist exploitation with a feminist face (Prügl, 2021).

Bill Gates stated in his 2009 Annual Letter that the *'common sense of the business world, with its urgency and focus, has strong application in the philanthropic world'*. Their business approach to gender equality and women's empowerment is exhibited through this 'smart economics' semantic displacement of the concept of philanthropy through terms like 'investment' and 'return on investment', a focus on 'market logic' to empower women, and their impact-orientated approach to measurement that promotes standardised metrics which further centres narratives around asset and income generation. Their philanthrocapitalist approach to gender equality and women's empowerment goes hand in hand with their 'biocapital'/'biopiracy' approach to agricultural development (Thompson, 2012) - where just as African food producers and consumers represented an untapped market for AGRA's philanthrocapitalist approach (Thompson, 2014), so do African women in BMGF's smart economics approach to women's empowerment. We thus contribute to Hickel's (2014) argument that the BMGF and similar neoliberal development agencies have converged around the campaign for women's empowerment in order to stimulate further economic growth, expand market systems and produce consumers of their new 'climate-smart' technologies.

Philanthrocapitalism is thus a neoliberal artefact (Mediavilla and Garcia-Arias, 2019) – a financing model of international development that continues to concentrate vast wealth and

influence within the hands of elites who supposedly hold the solutions to global development challenges, whilst moulding the masses into their market subjects. Such elites legitimise their position in the social hierarchy through their vast wealth – a self-perpetuating cycle which is fertile ground for plutocracy by philanthrocapitalists themselves. Ironically, the power and perceived indispensability of philanthropies like the BMGF is not just a symptom of a neoliberal economic system that results in vast and increasing inequalities, but it also relies on it – where, as McGoey (2015:147) points out, *'the failure of philanthropy is its own success'*. Discursively framed in the economic language of poverty alleviation, in reality philanthrocapitalism is a class strategy (Wilson, 2014) that is both complicit with and reproduces the hegemonic power and domination of actors like the BMGF. Our analysis thus contributes to arguments that neoliberalism persists precisely because of its ability to serve powerful development actors in the status quo (Kashwan, MacLean and García-López, 2019) like the BMGF, who in turn uphold the hegemony of individualism and Western knowledge inherent in the neoliberal development agenda.

We therefore contribute to a growing critique against the current neoliberal development landscape in that prominent organisations like the BMGF are able to wield their power and influence to push capitalist development agendas – looking to how they can maximise their impact through economic gain and further monopolistic control. The result is that NGOs, non-profits and other development actors working in this space are under pressure to strategically use the kind of instrumental language around 'smart economics' in order to align their projects with the BMGF strategy. The resulting homogenisation of narratives amongst such proposals means that projects which aim to work toward social justice and gender equality but which lack such smart economics language are overlooked – as was reflected by one interviewee: *'the unfortunate thing about women's empowerment…is that the donors have not put the emphasis on it that they should…you want to emphasise agricultural production, or livestock production, or increased incomes…*[but] *if your overall goal is women's empowerment – that's been more difficult to get funding for'*.

We conclude with some concerns for the current and future development landscape and its funding models. That the scale of private philanthropy is increasing concurrently with the reduction in overseas development assistance – the magnitude of which dramatically intensified through the COVID-19 pandemic (Nowski, O'Flanagan and Taliento, 2020) – contributes to the immense power which philanthrocapitalists like Bill Gates exert over development approaches and priorities. Through this hegemonic dominance they influence approaches to global development - from health, agricultural development, and, as we demonstrate, to gender equality and women's empowerment – through increasingly centring their discourse and investments around neoliberal corporate interests. As researchers and practitioners working in this space, we

should be concerned about the consequent homogenisation of discourse and development approaches which uphold Western knowledge, continuously silencing and eroding alternative knowledge and socio-political ideologies in the process, and work to resist their dominance. To fight for radical transformational reforms in the context of gender equality and women's empowerment, this in part means unifying, forming transnational alliances and strategizing around the counter-power and resistance 'power to' subtype – challenging and resisting the 'smart economics' language that argues that it is only worth investing in women if they can contribute to the global economy, and toward fighting for the contextually and culturally relevant empowerment goals in their own right.

7.12 Chapter Summary

The preceding chapter responds to research sub-question three *(what does a 'smart economics' approach to gender and agricultural transformation empower and who shapes these dominant narratives?)* through exploring donor-driven discourse around gender equality and women's empowerment - unpacking how the smart economics policy paradigm has been absorbed into agricultural transformation discourse, why, and by whom. This is done through exploring the political economy of mainstream approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment, focusing on the case study of the BMGF – arguably the most prominent funder of development projects promoting gender equality (Garcia and Wanner, 2017). The theoretically grounded approach to power used within this chapter helps to disaggregate the tangible and covert ways that power shapes discourses and agendas in gender equality and women's empowerment praxis. Findings demonstrate how overt power is exercised through direct control over the types of gender projects that the BMGF fund and the mainstream monitoring techniques they promote in order to track progress in line with the their impact-orientated approach. Agenda power is exhibited through their 'smart economics' discourse rationalising investments in women that set global development agendas around increased yields, productivity, and market integration. Discursive/ideational power is evident through the BMGF's shaping of narratives around vulnerability – discursively defining global challenges, how they should be addressed, and by whom.

In sum, this chapter offers important reflections in response to the aim of this thesis: demonstrating how within agricultural transformation discourse gender inequality is discursively framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity, where African female farmers are positioned not only as consumers and producers but also adopters of the 'smart' technologies promoted by neoliberal development actors such as the BMGF. Findings thus highlight how the smart economics rhetoric has been purposefully absorbed into agricultural transformation policy and practice by such elite development actors in order to rationalise their investments in market

expansion and their impact-orientated approach to measurement that promotes standardised metrics - further centring narratives around asset and income generation. In this way this chapter demonstrates how the gender buzzwords and policy paradigms that rely on and perpetuate unsubstantiated gender myths and assumptions, victimising and essentialising African rural women in the process, are reinforced by powerful hegemonic donors like the BMGF in line with their neoliberal ideology. In light of this, chapter eight will now summarise these findings within the wider body of literature in which this thesis sits.

Chapter 8

Discussion

8.1 Research Aim & Sub-Questions

In chapter one I presented the research aim and overarching research question of this thesis: to explore how gender inequality is discursively framed as a policy 'problem' within agricultural transformation discourse, and how this then shapes how it is approached within policy and practice.

Translated into one overarching research question (*how is gender inequality framed as a policy and development problem within agricultural transformation discourse, and how does this shape gender and agriculture development interventions?*), this was targeted through three corresponding sub-questions (RQ):

RQ1: How is gender mainstreamed and addressed in agricultural transformation policy?

RQ2: How is gender equality and women's empowerment defined and measured in gender transformative approaches?

RQ3: What does a 'smart economics' approach to gender and agricultural transformation empower and who shapes these dominant narratives?

Through three empirical case study chapters responding to each research sub-question in turn, this thesis critically explores how three key gender-development buzzwords and policy paradigms promoted at the international level are featured within agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa, and how this shapes how gender inequality is understood and approached within development. This chapter draws together the findings of the empirical chapters and outlines the key contributions of this work to knowledge and academic debate. Reflecting on the overarching research question, section one summarises the literary contributions of this thesis and the empirical findings focused on how gender inequality is discursively framed within agricultural transformation discourse and how this shapes gender and agriculture development interventions across sub-Saharan Africa – exploring the resilience of gender myths that uphold the neoliberal development agenda and the co-optation of feminist discourse within this. Section two takes a more reflective stance to consider the opportunities that transformative feminist discourse and agendas offer in re-politicising gender inequality and women's empowerment praxis.

8.2 Conceptualising and Operationalising 'Gender Inequality' Within Agricultural Transformation Policy and Practice

This thesis set out to explore the discursive framings of gender inequality within agricultural transformation policy and practice. As outlined in the methodological approach, the conceptual underpinning of this thesis is that that public policy creatively and discursively constructs problematisations of aspects of society that need to be fixed. This thesis has therefore explored how gender inequality is discursively framed as a policy problem – specifically through three different internationally promoted gender-development buzzwords and policy paradigms: gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and smart economics. The three empirical chapters have explored these in turn and their integration within current agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa through three specific case studies. Grounded in feminist critiques of gender mainstreaming and the gender myths and assumptions which it relies upon and perpetuates, chapter five explores gender mainstreaming as the internationally promoted vehicle of choice to achieve gender equality and its diffusion into Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape - and what this suggests regarding the capacity of the Tanzanian state to approach gender inequality within the agricultural sector. Chapter six moves from policy to the project level: exploring the conceptualisation of women's empowerment within CARE's GTA portfolio in sub-Saharan Africa and its operationalisation through the WEAI, engaging with decolonial and African feminist literature as a way to push back against these myths and assumptions and the Western ideologies upon which these gender policy paradigms are centred. Considering how and why such gender myths and assumptions remain so resilient in development policy and practice despite the decades of critique outlined in the preceding chapters, chapter seven then moves to the international donor discourse level through applying a power analysis to the BMGF discourse around gender equality and women's empowerment. Here the thesis outlines how the smart economics approach to gender equality is a neoliberal instrument of capitalist exploitation which solidifies the hegemony of powerful development actors like the BMGF – upholding the neoliberal view that gender inequality is a barrier to agricultural productivity and transformation that needs to be fixed through the further integration of African female farmers into capitalist market systems.

As such, through exploring the discursive framings of gender inequality within agricultural transformation policy and practice through conceptualisations and operationalisations of gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and smart economics, this thesis also explores how and why the gender myths and assumptions upon which these policy paradigms rely continue to form the foundation of current mainstream approaches to gender despite decades of critiques. Crucially, this thesis deals with issues of mimicry, simplification and measurement within mainstream development and how these work in relation to gender and agriculture. I will

summarise the findings, implications and contributions of the empirical chapters in relation to the overarching research aim below, followed by a consideration of how decolonial and African feminist literature can help to reclaim some of these concepts and construct counter-hegemonic discourses.

8.2.1 What is the problem represented to be?

Chapter five responds to research sub-question one *(how is gender mainstreamed and addressed in agricultural transformation policy?)* through showing that the isomorphism and diffusion of gender mainstreaming into Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape has resulted in policy-implementation gaps and capability traps for local government authorities in implementing wish list policies. Through a WPR approach, here the thesis demonstrates that gender inequality, and more specifically women and their perceived inherent vulnerability, are framed as a policy problem and barrier to the adoption of CSA practices. Concurrently, women are frequently framed as holding the potential to influence agricultural practices owing to their greater dependence on natural resources and affinity to household food and nutrition security. Such narratives date back to the discursive framing of women as both heroines and victims (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007) within the WID and WED movements discussed in the introduction. However, chapter five also demonstrates that this discursive framing of gender inequality as a barrier to agricultural transformation rarely carries through to policy implementation plans or monitoring systems. This was partly down to a lack of state capacity to make use of evidence on the relationship between gender and agriculture in Tanzania, and also a lack of understanding and commitment amongst policymakers themselves. This was compounded by limited dissemination of policy from national to local level within Tanzania's (in theory) decentralised governance structure, where a lack of capacity and resources to interpret and implement policy resulted in capability traps for local government authorities. In sum, gender inequality is discursively framed as a policy problem within Tanzania's national CSA policy landscape, yet this was not translated into actionable implementation plans - with a significant gap between the normative goal of gender mainstreaming and the actual inclusion of gender (and intersectional) inequalities within policy.

Chapter six responds to research sub-question two *(how is gender equality and women's empowerment defined and measured in gender transformative approaches?)* through showing that the conceptualisations of women's empowerment that underpin CARE's GTAs and mainstream monitoring approaches are grounded in Western-centric neoliberal understandings of empowerment centred on autonomy and individualism. Here the thesis demonstrates that through linking empowerment with agricultural productivity and profitability, gender inequality - and specifically women's *dis*empowerment - is framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity

and transformation. Through the WEAI, the route to empowerment is clear: increased individual asset ownership and control, increased income and participation in market systems, and increased leadership within the household and community. This discursive framing of gender inequality and women's disempowerment as a barrier to agricultural productivity and the 'transformation' of gendered social norms, which GTAs aim to challenge, thus shapes how empowerment is approached and 'monitored' within such development interventions. The reliance on income, assets and productivity as markers of empowerment translates into development interventions centred around aiming to increase women's participation in labour markets and 'productive' value chains. Increased yields, productivity and market integration are seen as 'positive' improvements in empowerment – reduced to percentage point increases through standardised indices. Through the decolonial lens used within this chapter, findings also demonstrate how the notions of independence, autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-reliance upon which this conceptualisation is based often don't align with the strong interdependent and communitarian values of different communities in sub-Saharan Africa. In sum, this chapter argues that there is a significant gap between the top-down discursive framing of gender inequality and women's disempowerment as a barrier to agricultural productivity and the 'transformation' of gendered social norms, and the more bottom-up community perceptions and understandings of empowerment. This disconnect means that the more collective values are not carried through to the design of interventions and M&E approaches.

Chapter seven responds to research sub-question three *(what does a 'smart economics' approach to gender and agricultural transformation empower and who shapes these dominant narratives?)* through showing that smart economics shapes the BMGF's discourse around gender equality and women's empowerment - where gender inequality is again framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity and agricultural transformation, and, in the case of the BMGF's approach to agricultural development, to the adoption of their promoted agricultural technologies. The theoretically grounded approach to power used within this chapter helps to disaggregate the tangible and covert ways by which the BMGF shape discourses and agendas in gender equality and women's empowerment praxis. Firstly, the BMGF overtly control where aid is disbursed - imparting legitimacy upon their favoured development approaches and measurement indices (Eikenberry and Mirabella, 2018). Secondly, within this, their 'smart economics' arguments rationalising their investments in gender set development agendas around market integration, increased yields and productivity, and adoption of their promoted technologies. Finally, they covertly shape narratives around vulnerability and individualism – discursively defining global challenges, how they should be addressed, and by whom, in line with their neoliberal ideology. As such, the chapter argues that not only is gender inequality discursively framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity by the BMGF, but they also use their

immense power and influence as a key international development actor to control 'knowledge' around gender equality and women's empowerment. By controlling what data is produced, and influencing how this data becomes validated and sets development agendas, the BMGF manipulate how this production of knowledge discursively shapes how gender is understood and approached within development interventions (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). The discursive framing of gender inequality as a barrier to agricultural productivity by the BMGF thus has far-reaching effects within mainstream approaches to gender within agricultural transformation policy and practice.

8.2.2 The resilience of gender myths: upholding the neoliberal development agenda and the co-optation of feminist discourse

These empirical chapters demonstrate that the gender myths, assumptions and buzzwords that were critiqued in development policy and practice in the early 2000s have remained resilient within development discourse. This section explores the why: questioning why such myths still form the foundation of mainstream approaches to gender within agricultural transformation policy and practice despite these longstanding critiques.

The discursive framing of gender inequality as a barrier to agricultural productivity has its roots in the neoliberal development agenda, purposefully aiming to de-politicise gender inequality (and vulnerability more generally) in order to promote market-based solutions to global challenges. Neoliberal ideology promotes a *"theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade"* (Harvey, 2005:2). Neoliberal policy approaches to development within sub-Saharan Africa in particular stem back to the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s – 90s under the guise of 'poverty reduction' and 'policy reform', which, by the end of the century, began to associate gender issues with social policies – opening up the discursive space to consider gender equality in economic development more broadly (Prügl, 2021). As outlined in chapter seven, we see the persistence of neoliberal orthodoxy evident within mainstream approaches to agricultural development over recent years – driven by the desire to commodify and marketise farmers within the increasingly corporate-driven global agri-business promoted by big development actors (such as the BMGF) and aggressive agri-giants (such as Bayer and Cargill) (Morvaridi, 2012). This is particularly evident in sub-Saharan Africa where neoliberalism have discursively displaced racist tropes of improvement with a vision of progress and freedom through the marketplace (Canfield, 2022).

The prominence and pervasiveness of the instrumentalisation of women within the gender myths and buzzwords - and the touted economic benefits that their increased access to resources and

participation in markets will bring to the global economy - demonstrates how the discursive framing of gender inequality as a barrier to agricultural productivity relies on the framing of women as market subjects. This neoliberal approach to development promotes the notion that the market is the most efficient allocator of both production and consumption of goods and services, and will bring equality to those engaged in its systems (Mushita and Thompson, 2019). As outlined in chapter seven, such a framing individualises and de-politicises both gender inequality and poverty more broadly – where vulnerability and inequality are discursively framed as a lack of engagement and integration within capitalist market systems. This opens the space for corporate development actors to promote their vision of technology-intensive farming, positioning female farmers across sub-Saharan Africa as an untapped labour pool and consumers of their promote 'climate-smart' technologies. In doing so, they co-opt and hijack feminist language – as we see demonstrated within the policy paradigms analysed in this thesis. As chapter five shows, the isomorphism and technocratic uptake of feminism as institutional 'gender mainstreaming' (Calkin, 2017) translated into narrow gender quotes and representation politics does little to consider the structural antecedents to gender inequality, merely reducing it to a box-ticking exercise with limited and vague implementation plans. Chapter six outlines how the complex and normative nature of 'women's empowerment' is simplified within development interventions and their mainstream monitoring approaches through a narrow neoliberal focus that centres on Western individualism and autonomy. Here empowerment is transitioned from its roots in societal and systemic change, to a noun signifying individual power, achievement, and status (Batliwala, 2007). Gender mainstreaming thus comes to equal integration into policy- and decision-making arenas, whereas women's empowerment equals access to and control over 'productive' agricultural assets and decision-making and participation in markets. Within this, her promoted 'agency' is implicitly relational – where the attention is on what women and girls are able to do for their families and communities through their prescribed roles as caregivers (Cornwall, 2018). Chapter seven demonstrates that the smart economics approach thus explicitly ties women's empowerment to economic growth (Lyon, Mutersbaugh and Worthen, 2019) and the right to participate in the market economy (Roberts, 2012) – in which female farmers in sub-Saharan Africa are framed as entrepreneurial and innovative adopters of the brand-name seeds and promoted climate-smart agricultural technologies of corporate agribusiness.

As outlined by Prügl (2017:42), this 'neoliberalism with a feminist face' "*relies on the promise that the liberation of women from the shackles of the patriarchal family will make it possible for markets to work for women, allowing them to take opportunities and thus achieve equality*". The thesis introduction notes how there has often been a tendency to frame women as victims or saviours/agents of change within development discourse. Yet the empirical insights from this thesis demonstrate that, in the context of agricultural transformation policy and practice, the

women within the saviour narrative are presented as entrepreneurial, innovative and increasingly engaged in market systems and profit-making activities. The depiction is not simply victims or virtuous (Arora-Jonsson, 2011), but as consumers and entrepreneurs.

This neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse thus reverts feminist gains made within the GAD movement to a development focus on women's access and resources to further her economic development, and the benefits that come when she reinvests this within her family and household. As Nancy Fraser (2009) argues, the feminist struggles of the WID and WED movements were waged against gender injustice and rooted in critiques of capitalism and the gendered division of labour. Yet this neoliberal approach to gender equality disregards domestic and household labour and positions women as rational and entrepreneurial economic actors who need to be integrated into financial markets in order to become empowered – thus running directly counter to feminist visions of a just society. In effect resonating with the WID approach, this thesis demonstrates that women continue to be instrumentalised in the name of agricultural transformation. As argued by Cornwall and Rivas (2015), the continued co-optation of feminist notions of empowerment and agency continuously eviscerates them of their conceptual and political bite, further compromising their use as frames through which to demand rights and justice. Furthermore, the responsibility for poverty alleviation is also de-politicised - where the neoliberal appropriation of feminist language such as 'agency', 'choice', and 'empowerment' increases the burden on women to 'fix' perceived issues of low agricultural productivity and nutrition. Rather than targeting their supposed 'agency' to make their own life choices, the responsibility to alleviate their own poverty and delivery economic growth is bestowed upon them.

The neoliberal construct of the 'active' and 'responsibilized' citizen who does not depend on direct state intervention and who responds to market incentives (Ferguson, 2010) is also evident within this framing. The prominent focus on individual capabilities and responsibilities is outlined in chapter six through the WEAI, where the empirical findings also demonstrate that this Western individualism does often not align with the more collective and communitarian values and understandings of oneself often present in African societies. The neoliberal preoccupation with empowerment as autonomy and independence thus centres on Western ideals, obscuring the complexity and multiplicity of gendered livelihood dynamics and relationships in different cultural contexts. Such findings align with Cornwall's (2007) earlier ethnographic fieldwork in Nigeria in which she talks of the disconnect between Western ideals of female solidarity and autonomy and the lived experiences of the women gender and development interventions seek to empower, demonstrating how such ideals are themselves based on *"potent gender myths in which idealized representations of women, and their relationships with men and with each other, gain a life of their own"* (pp. 149). This

individualising and de-politicising of both poverty and gender inequality is central to neoliberal ideology (Grosser and McCarthy, 2019), overlooking not just the structural and political antecedents of inequality but also alternative conceptualisations of gender - thus shaping how inequality is approached through development. Empowerment is thus further co-opted and remains anchored at the level of the individual - further stripping the concept of any notion of collective action or the ability to act in concert (power with). The aim of this discourse is to create a neoliberal and reflexive market subject who is freely able to exercise her 'agency' and 'choice' within markets (Prügl, 2017). This individualism is therefore central to the continued instrumentalisation of women within mainstream development discourse.

8.2.3 Neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse within agricultural transformation policy and practice in sub-Saharan Africa

From a WPR perspective in exploring the uptake of the 'gender agenda' within agricultural transformation policy and practice, this thesis has considered *why* gender inequality has come to be framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity. Considering the WPR approach, outlined on page 71, it is important to consider not just how gender equality is discursively framed as a policy problem within agricultural transformation policy and practice, but how and when this problem representation come about. From this angle, it is important to explore the timings as to when gender became such a prominent focus within agricultural development. Similar to how the World Bank's promotion of 'gender equality as smart economics' grew, at least in part, out of the failure of the structural adjustment plans and as a way out of the financial crisis (Bergeron, 2016; Byatt, 2018), the entwinement of the smart economics discourse into agricultural transformation policy and practice has provided agricultural economics and corporate development actors a new source of investment in a time of crisis. Following the global food crisis of 2008, growing calls to 'transform' agriculture and food systems in the Global South needed a new policy direction. At the same time, a global uptake in the 'feminization' of agriculture showed that women farmers make up an increasing percentage of the world's farmers (Lyon, Mutersbaugh and Worthen, 2019), often relying and perpetuating the gender myths evident in mainstream development discourse (Doss et al., 2018; Kawarazuka et al., 2022). Large development and corporate actors, such as the BMGF, coalesced around the 'gender agenda' and have since promoted the smart economics framing rationalising investments in women to further economic growth – where the 'untapped resource' of marginalised female farmers in sub-Saharan Africa provided a useful pathway to 'transform' agriculture. Within this framing, these elite development actors reinforce the essentialist gender myths discussed in this thesis. Yet, as Ferguson (2010) notes, markets only serve those with purchasing power – and such market-based solutions are likely to be 'true' solutions only to the corporate development actors who promote this vision and stand to gain from the continued modernisation of global

agriculture. This business case approach to gender equality legitimises the increasing role of public-private partnerships and role of corporates within development, which we see outlined in chapter seven (Ferguson, 2015). This thesis has thus shown that the smart economics discourse has been purposefully incorporated into agricultural transformation discourse through framing the ‘gender gap’ in agriculture as the reason to why there is low agricultural productivity, promoting targeted policy interventions that aim to enrol women as economic actors within agricultural value chains. Corporations, such as the BMGF, have hijacked and co-opted feminism to reconceptualise women’s empowerment as integration into labour and financial markets (Byatt, 2018). Where neoliberal feminism re-writes poverty and gender inequality as a failure of state-led development that requires private sector investment (Calkin, 2017), its integration within agricultural development discourse re-writes the ‘gender gap’ in agricultural productivity as a failure that requires private-sector led technological innovation and female entrepreneurship.

As such, this thesis argues that the assumption underlying this neoliberal approach to gender equality and women’s empowerment is not necessarily that increasing women’s access and control over income and assets and her participation in capitalist market systems will reduce gender inequality and lead to improved social and livelihood outcomes. Considering the vast and outsized power and influence that neoliberal and corporate development actors such as the BMGF have over mainstream approaches to gender and the discourse adopted within policy and practice, as outlined in chapter seven, a key assumption underpinning this problem representation is that this will lead to increased agricultural yields, more market subjects, and ultimately increased economic growth. This is the main driver of the neoliberal development agenda: the expansion of capitalist markets. The lack of engagement with the structural and political antecedents of gender inequality and poverty is therefore purposeful, as to do so would make visible deep fissures within its economic ideology. In addition, this neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse does not engage fully with intersectionality (class, race, caste and numerous other identities) as to do so would risk the discursive framing of gender inequality as the prominent barrier to economic growth. To do so would mean that development actors would have to fully engage with gender as an expression of power, and would thus necessitate reflection on their own power and the neoliberal structures in which they operate that perpetuate inequality – re-politicising gender inequality, vulnerability and poverty. Smart economics is thus the *“ideological component of a hegemonic project to give neoliberalism a feminist face”* (Prügl, 2021) - which this thesis argues has been purposefully absorbed into agricultural transformation policy and practice in order to uphold and promote neoliberal approaches to agriculture centred on commodification and capital-intensive technological and market models for increased agricultural output.

8.3 Re-politicising Gender Inequality and the Potential for Transformative and Decolonial Feminist Praxis

This section reflects on what can be learned from the problematisations of gender inequality within agricultural transformation policy and practice, and identifies the opportunities and challenges of integrating transformative and decolonial feminist praxis within agricultural transformation discourse in the context of sub-Saharan Africa.

Considering the policy implications of this thesis, it is important to question what the findings mean for researchers, development practitioners and policymakers operating in this contested space. Chapter five critiques the isomorphism of gender-development policy paradigms, outlining the policy-implementation gaps and capability traps that arise when governments uncritically adopt such policy 'solutions' without considering or engaging with the complex reality and dynamic nature of gendered livelihoods dynamics. This raises important questions as to how to ensure policies engage with gender – and, arguably, intersectionality – in all its complexity. Promoting a one-size-fits-all policy solution to gender inequality such as gender mainstreaming is unlikely to address the diverse and contextual nature of gender-agricultural relations. Chapter five also teases out the limited administrative capacity of the Tanzanian government to consider and incorporate the relational aspects of gender and agriculture. Considering this, is it realistic to promote such near 'perfect' policy? Designing policy that addresses the complexity of patterns of intersectional inequalities will not be an easy task in the context of institutions like Tanzania that already lack the capacity to implement existing 'gender mainstreaming' strategies. It is thus important to consider the limits of the state and political processes that shape what can be achieved with policy. This goes back to the central argument within this chapter: that policies must be designed with implementation in mind. Producing a 'perfect' policy document is akin to the 'wish list' policies critiqued by interviewees within chapter five: leading to widening policy-implementation gaps and capability traps for local government authorities (LGAs) when they lack capacity to implement. One way to move beyond this is of course to improve the implementation capacity of LGAs – more trained personnel, better resources and support, and authority over decision-making and budget allocation will be imperative in closing the policy-implementation gap in Tanzania and in neighbouring sub-Saharan African countries, as outlined in Mdee et al. (2020). Yet, considering the fragmented policy process in Tanzania where inadequate funds reach small numbers of women's groups, and also the limited understanding and capacity of government institutions to design and implement policy addressing the complexity of gender-agricultural livelihood dynamics, it is even arguable to remove the performative gender signalling described in chapter five. To avoid the unsupported gender myths and assumptions upon which many internationally promoted gendered policy solutions are based, it may be better, counterintuitively, not to prioritise gender

at all in order to address the complexities of and intersectional nature of inequity (Hunting and Hankivsky, 2020). Promoting and investing in social programs and structures: improved healthcare, water and energy infrastructure may help to reduce poverty levels and indeed lead to more transformative gender outcomes.

Considering the role of consultants and the outsourcing of the policy process discussed in chapter five, the role of development partners in the policy process should also be reviewed in aiming to close policy-implementation gaps and ensure policies relate to existing resources and government capacity. Simply separating donors from the policy process will in many cases not be feasible where many sub-Saharan African countries rely on funds from external sources. However, the influence of donors should be made more positive through ensuring that policies are grounded in an understanding of the reality of lived inequalities, are actionable and also accompanied by costed implementation strategies.

To take a step further, promoting an African-centred and -led policy process through endogenous development may help to promote an African development sector that is in some way removed from the Western neoliberal theory and practice inherent in the current donor-driven development landscape (Zakiya, 2014). With its roots in colonialism, decades of foreign investment and interference within Africa through structural adjustment plans and the good governance era have been largely ineffective in encouraging real policy changes (Nanda, 2006) and reducing poverty in African countries (Escobar, 2004; Moyo, 2009) - and, as we see here, contribute to policy-implementation gaps and capability traps. An African 'bottom-up' alternative that encompasses endogenous approaches would build on local institutions, culture, knowledge, and local ownership and participation – implying a power shift in the policy process from the donor world which currently controls and shapes development discourse, to societies seeking to control their own development (Holcombe, 2014). Needless to say this is an ambitious aim that would face many barriers, but worth stating nonetheless. Such arguments may also appear contradictory to some of the findings in this thesis. For example, chapter five highlights the lack of political will within Tanzanian government to engage with and integrate gender within agricultural policy, and a lack of understanding and commitment amongst policymakers themselves. Aminzade et al. (2018) also reflect on how the modernising bureaucratic elite within Tanzania pursue their own interests and ideas. In their analysis of circulating agricultural discourses present within Tanzania's agricultural development policy, they note how Tanzanian state technocrats and domestic entrepreneurs rejected one of the central tenets of global discourse: the emphasis on smallholder agriculture as the optimal route to reducing food insecurity and poverty. Advocating for private and foreign investment in commercial farming and agro-enterprise, this class of Tanzanian business elites produce and promote neoliberal approaches to development through seeking opportunities for foreign partnerships in a global

economy. As Aminzade et al. argue, such neoliberal discourses are thus not simply transferred from the outside but are simultaneously promoted within Tanzanian policy spaces by a growing Tanzanian bourgeoisie – many of whom are foreign-education state administrators who embrace Western science and technology as the solution to their country's agricultural problems. Such findings thus suggest a more Tanzanian-led policy process, less reliant on external funding and technical assistance from development organisations, may not lead to more grounded policy that reflects the reality of gender agricultural livelihood dynamics. In reality it may not be possible to separate Tanzanian government and policymakers from the globalised world in which we live, where domestic policymakers, institutions and knowledge are intricately linked to global processes of development. There is no easy route to closing the policy-implementation gaps and capability traps that arise as an outcome of these vested interests and complex policy processes. As Aminzade et al. note, the fuzzy boundary between external and internal factors shaping discourses blurs this line between global and domestic.

Chapter six critiques the increasing use of standardised quantitative metrics within mainstream development which attempt to translate a growing range of social phenomena into numeric values – from sex trafficking and gender violence (Merry, 2016) to wellbeing (Loveridge et al., 2020). Importantly, this chapter builds on these critiques through exploring how highly normative and contextual concepts like empowerment are reduced through narrow measurement indices – and, in this process, how measurement exerts power in this contested space over whose values matter. Approaching the challenge of measurement through exploring the operationalisation of women's empowerment through the WEAI, findings demonstrate that presenting such social phenomena as quantifiable and universally comparable inevitably means that it is stripped of its context, history and complexity. If the purpose of M&E within development policy and practice stems from a genuine interest to learn from experience and improve the design and implementation of interventions in order to lead to improved development outcomes, measuring and tracking development is clearly an important strategy (Merry, 2019). However, considering that the ways in which development is measured influences what knowledge are privileged and what development interventions are favoured, such indicators evidently have both a knowledge effect and a governance effect (Merry 2016b; Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2019). In this context, chapter six outlines how the WEAI produces data regarding women's income, asset ownership and market integration – thus not only influencing what 'knowledge' is produced regarding changes in empowerment but also shaping future neoliberal policy directions. Standardised project evaluations therefore discursively reproduce mainstream development narratives that are favourable to donors, where project evaluations are used in future decision-making and intervention design - thus serving to further establish framings of what 'good' interventions look like (Massarella, Sallu, and Ensor, 2020).

In this way, organisations favour particular measurement processes over others in order to orientate and shape the outcomes to serve their particular agenda (Mahajan, 2019).

Chapter six also explores how NGOs navigate this contested space – where, despite recognising the limitations of the WEAI, it remained a key focus and reporting tool within CARE's women's empowerment work owing to pressure from donors to report on project impact and success. 'Selling success' is thus crucial to organisations operating within the aid chain who must construct projects and ideas that are seen as valuable to encourage donors and policymakers to buy into them (Büscher, 2014). Within this context, 'success projects' often emerge that serve to legitimise mainstream development narratives and to enable the continuous flow of resources into particular interventions and approaches (Asiyanbi and Massarella, 2020). Where failure is a political problem, governance depends on reputation and legitimacy – resources that are high in demand for INGOs and NGOs operating in an ever competitive environment (Mosse, 2004). Such debates raise important questions regarding the primary motivation for project M&E – suggesting the main purpose is to serve as a mechanism of upward accountability to donors where they are used to demonstrate project 'success'. The challenge of measurement is thus approached within this chapter, and also outlined in chapter seven, through outlining how it is a field where key development elites exert their power and influence to promote specific measurement approaches that uphold Western knowledge and values - continuously silencing and eroding alternative knowledge and socio-political ideologies in the process.

What then is the way forward for M&E – how do feminists and development practitioners push back against the quantification of complex and nuanced gender issues within the development sector? Certainly aiming to promote more bottom-up qualitative measurement approaches that open up and facilitate discussion around contextually and culturally relevant values and changes, such as the outcome mapping methodology used by CARE, is one such approach. Or, in the case of the WEAI, is it possible to tweak the indicators if we reconceptualise empowerment? The WEAI family of indices have undergone numerous adaptations attempting to validate the indicators to reflect advancements in empowerment research, as discussed in chapter six. These seemingly endless modifications are costly in time and money and yet, as chapter six argues, continue to produce data around the normative selection of indictors that are unlikely to capture the complexity and nuanced contextual nature of psychological and emotional processes. Enriching conceptualisations of empowerment with African-rooted philosophies and understandings and values of collectivism, as discussed in chapter six, offers alternative ways of understanding what is empowerment. Yet, is attempting to account for this more holistic nature of empowerment within measurement indices enough to 'decolonise' measurement approaches? Is it even possible? The holistic nature of *Ubuntu*, as outlined in chapter six, surely points to the fact that the complexity of how empowerment is experienced through relationships with the

natural environment, with ancestors and spirits, and the animal world could never be simplified into a quantitative measurement index and associated narrow indicators. Importantly, to do so in the name of decolonisation would also overlook the fact that measurement still operates within the context and confines of a development industry that is primarily led and funded by the Global North fixated on their role in the *economic* empowerment of rural African women – as demonstrated in this thesis. The neo-colonial architecture of development thus has long historical roots that are unlikely to be challenged through tinkering around the edges in forever tweaking quantitative measurement indicators.

Is the way forward then to drop all standardised quantitative indicators? Evidently quantitative measures are attractive to donors and policymakers, whose buy-in is needed. Perhaps aiming to shift their reliance on quantitative measures toward recognising the value in such bottom-up grounded qualitative approaches is another avenue. As noted in chapter six, it is doubtful that such pushback would suffice to disrupt mainstream neoliberal understandings of empowerment – particularly considering the vast power and philanthropic hegemony of donors like the BMGF, as outlined in chapter seven.

8.3.1 Moving beyond narrow gender-development buzzwords and policy paradigms?

It is thus important to consider how the neoliberal co-optation of feminism can be resisted or countered. As Moeller outlines in her 2018 book *'The Gender Effect: Capitalism, Feminism and the Corporate Politics of Development'*, the 'project' of investing in girls and women is fragile and always incomplete - where feminist activists navigate and are actively negotiating how women and girls are discursively framed within corporatised development and how gender inequality is approached within policy and practice. The smart economics discourse has proven highly salient – where 'the gender agenda' and the integration of women within mainstream development discourse has been hailed a *"resounding success"* (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015:396). As outlined in this thesis, this success is apparent in agricultural transformation rhetoric where gender, and, in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, specifically women, are now highly visible within policy and practice. This presents a dilemma: where the increased visibility for gender equality is an important achievement, yet the precise framings and policy interventions promoted as a result of this visibility matter enormously (Calkin, 2017). The ease that feminist notions of 'empowerment', 'agency' and 'choice', wrapped in a language of care and equity (Bergeron, 2016), have been co-opted by neoliberal approaches to agricultural transformation (and development discourse in general) limits the space for transformative feminist change. Yet, as the introduction outlines, it is important to recognise the legacy and 'incredible victory' (Narayanaswamy, 2016) of feminist campaigners in centring gender equality within international development discourse. Even if, as this thesis argues, gender equality has been co-

opted by neoliberal development actors, there is still room for transformative feminist agendas to resist and contest this neoliberalisation. As Prügl (2017:48) notes *"In the encounter between feminism and neoliberalism the latter may have the upper hand, but the wholesale defeat of feminist agendas should not be a foregone conclusion. A feminist politics inside hegemonic institutions should not underestimate the subversive potential of powerful ideas".* This section thus considers what space there is for feminists working in and navigating this space, how to move beyond narrow gender-development buzzwords and policy paradigms, and explores how gender inequality could be conceived differently to offer opportunities for more transformative feminist discourse and agendas.

Bergeron (2016) encourages researchers and practitioners to explore the 'cracks' within the neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse that are opened up, noting that the 'contradictions and contestations' that emerge from these cracks can never be entirely co-opted. Such cracks and contradictions, as noted by Hall, Massey and Rustin (2013), represent opportunities. Bergeron explores this specifically through the attention to equity and economic difference within the smart economics discourse. A central tenet of the neoliberalisation of feminism and gender inequality which has been discussed within this thesis is the devaluation of domestic labour in the focus on marketized and 'productive' agricultural labour. This operates in counter to transformative feminism - in effect undoing the progressive steps taken in the more recent GAD movements through again narrowly framing women as consumers who require integration into capitalist market systems. However, as Bergeron notes, the increased attention to questions of equity within mainstream development has provided space for the integration of not just economic issues and activities historically associated with women, but also personal attributes previously dismissed as 'non-economic' to be supported in development policy. Similarly, Cornwall (2007) notes that, despite 'empowerment' having been sapped of its transformative underpinnings and reduced to a focus on economic empowerment framed through market integration and asset accumulation, such economic empowerment interventions do at least give women more choices — including the choice to use their gains to maintain their marriages and enhance their bargaining power within the domestic arena if they so wish. Feminist economics have long fought for household and intrahousehold economics to centre in mainstream economics, recognising the critical need to incorporate both market and nonmarket activities in order to understand household and economic choices (Doss, 2021). Non-market social reproduction, household economics and community-building work are now acknowledged and even supported in development policy, in addition to increased focus on non-market activities and motivations such as care and cooperation. As Bergeron (2016) points out, these previously invisibilised activities formerly viewed as 'outside' the economy often carried out by women

are increasingly being integrated within development policy and programming. Bergeron (2016:74) concludes with this:

> *"the openings created by its recognition of care, solidarity and economic diversity might provide ways for imagining and doing development otherwise…This new picture of a diverse economy need not reinforce essentialist notions of gender, nor need it be complicit in attempts to subsume all activities under the supposed self-expanding force of capitalism (Cameron and Gibson Graham 2006). By rejecting the business case approach that defines everything with reference to capitalism, space is opened up to cultivating economic subjects who are guided by motivations of care, ethical concern and solidarity from which we can imagine a process of development that allows us the chance of a future worth inhabiting."*

One such way to disrupt the essentialist notions of gender within the gender myths and assumptions that underpin the policy paradigms outlined in this thesis, and to centre motivations and values of care and solidarity within approaches to gender and development more broadly, is to engage with decolonial and African feminist scholarship. As discussed throughout this thesis, incorporating this scholarship within conceptualisations and operationalisations of gender inequality within agricultural transformation policy and practice will also help to move beyond the disempowered Third World Woman so present in the smart economics agenda. Chandra Mohanty's powerful article *'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses'* (1988) outlines how Western feminism has constructed the Third World Woman as a monolithic subject who is simultaneously a universalised victim in need of saving and also 'the answer' to further (economic) development – as evident within the policy paradigms and gender myths critiqued in this thesis. The targeting of women and girls, as argued by Moeller (2018), within the smart economics rhetoric currently used by neoliberal and corporate development actors is underpinned by their racialised, gendered, sexualised and classed bodies in particular geographies of interest. Discourse around the 'Third World Woman' has been constructed within the projects of colonisation, global capitalism, and Western feminisms, as Moeller notes: *"Just as colonized girls' and women's bodies were a terrain upon which colonization violently occurred, the bodies of racialized girls and women in the Global South are the ground upon which corporatized development is imagined, constructed, and continuously negotiated"* (pp. 34). Resisting and contesting this discourse and categorisation thus necessitates engagement with decolonial and African feminism scholarship. The 'epistemic advantage' of African feminist writers, as argued by Narayan (1989), enables the documentation of the wealth and complexity of local economic and social structures that existed prior to colonialism.

Calls to 'decolonise' approaches to the Western feminism inherent within mainstream development are by no means new, and it is important to recognise the conceptual thinking and writing of African feminists over the past five decades. As Akurugu notes: *"Decolonial and postcolonial feminist discourses on development and women's empowerment praxis in the global South have drawn attention to the dominance of Western–oriented beliefs, knowledge and assumptions that underpin much of development interventions in these setting"* (forthcoming). Sylvia Tamale's 2020 book 'Decolonization and Afro-Feminism' provides a powerful guide through which to situate the struggles of African women not in the dominant Western tradition, but grounded in the lived experience of women and men on the continent and the specificities and nuances of what they hold as their culture (Tamale, 2011) - thus making a compelling case for unlearning the gender myths and assumptions inherent within the Western neoliberal focus on the Third World Woman. In the context of the policy paradigms discussed within this thesis, Tamale notes that *"Symbolic gestures of inclusion provided in the rhetoric of "gender equality" and "gender mainstreaming" within the context of neoliberal systems will certainly not deliver freedom or gender justice"* (2020:9).

Decolonial and African feminist literature helps to move beyond the stereotypical construction of the Third World Woman as a poor, rural woman burdened by motherhood and domestic responsibilities. Such representations, as Anyidoho (2020) notes, do not allow for the range and complexity of African women's realities, nor does it allow for a recognition of the many dimensions which shape experiences of (dis)empowerment – including income, class, ethnicity, sexuality, among other subjectivities. African feminist scholars ground their analytical frameworks and tools for theorising in local realities (Nnaemeka, 2021). Just as this thesis notes on page 104 that Western feminism is an umbrella term that itself hides deep contestations, African feminism is not used here as a fixed binary category. Nnaemeka proposed in 2003 the term 'nego-feminism': the feminism of negotiation as a term that encapsulates the diversity of African feminisms. As she noted in her earlier work *"it will be more accurate to argue not in the context of a monolith (African feminism) but rather in the context of a pluralism (African feminisms) that captures the fluidity and dynamism of the different cultural imperatives, historical forces, and localized realities conditioning women's activism/ movements in Africa . . . the inscription of feminisms . . . underscores the heterogeneity of African feminist thinking and engagement as manifested in strategies and approaches that are sometimes complementary and supportive, and sometimes competing and adversarial"* (Nnaemeka, 1998:5). Nego-feminism evokes the dynamism and processes of negotiation, collaboration, compromise, and balance that not only form the foundations of shared values in many African cultures, but also of feminist engagement in Africa. Such processes, argues Nnaemeka, offers opportunities in defamiliarizing and refamiliarizing feminist theory as we know it. In defamiliarizing and

deconstructing notions of the Third World Woman and the gender myths and assumptions that underlie the gender buzzwords and policy paradigms analysed in this thesis, African feminism thus offers alternative routes to refamiliarize theorisations and constructs through the eyes of African women.

It is also important to recognise the theoretical and empirical contributions from feminist thinkers across different continents, such as that of Naila Kabeer and Srilatha Batliwala. Looking more closely at the ways in which their work around empowerment has been taken up by development institutions, what is evident is a stripping away of some of its foundational dimensions through a series of discursive moves (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). As chapter five highlights, Kabeer's influential work on women's empowerment was selectively adopted in the corporate uptake of empowerment within the mainstream development agenda. Kabeer and Batliwala's accounts of grassroots conscientization and mobilisation in India and Bangladesh contributed to understandings of collective agency and the relational dimensions of empowerment. Their work highlighted the importance of women organising in collectives or coming together in collective action as a force for positive change.

A further point in Kabeer's work on empowerment that has been diluted in the mainstream development uptake of the concept is that empowerment is a process: by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability (Kabeer, 1999). The simplification and quantification of empowerment into measurement indices such as the WEAI instead present empowerment as a static status. Kabeer reflected on this *"What is understandably missing from the measurement literature are examples of the more processual model of social change subscribed to by many feminists (Batliwala, 1993, 1994). A processual understanding of social change tends to treat it as open-ended. It is premised on the unpredictability of human agency and on the diversity of circumstances under which such agency is exercised."* (1999:442). Capturing such dynamic and contextual processes of change are missed in the development sector's focus on quantification and thus dilute our understanding of the concept.

As Cornwall and Rivas (2015) note, the uptake of Kabeer's framework of empowerment – highlighting the interrelated dimensions of resources, agency and achievements – within mainstream development discourse is often done at the expense of her analysis. As this thesis highlights, such framings are missed in the corporate development focus on individual women's status and trajectories of self-improvement. Empowerment entered into mainstream development agendas as the self-actualising individual who enters into to the marketplace to provide for their families and become self-sustaining (Cornwall, 2018). Batliwala thus reflects that *"in keeping with the insidious dominance of the neo-liberal ideology and its consumerist core, we see the transition of empowerment out of the realm of societal and systemic change and*

into the individual domain – from a noun signifying shifts in social power to a verb signalling individual power, achievement, status" (Batliwala, 2007:563). The mainstream empowerment narratives that underpin much development policy and practice, and that form the foundation of monitoring approaches such as the WEAI, thus neglect the importance of relationships. This watered down version of empowerment promotes the belief that a focus on the business skills and asset ownership of women is enough to empower her and overcome the barriers to equality. Such a discursive framing is evidently more palatable to international donors such as the BMGF and institutions such as the World Bank (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015).

Batliwala called for a more precise understanding of both power and empowerment. In 1994, she argued that the increased salience of women's empowerment within mainstream development was in danger of losing the concept's transformative edge, promoting a centring of power and control in what she called an 'empowerment spiral' to mobilise larger-scale transformative political action. Within this Batliwala encouraged a move away from the mainstream primary focus on individual self-assertion to the structural basis of gender inequalities and the power relations that shape women's lives. In Batliwala's 2007 article 'Taking the power out of empowerment – an experiential account', she stated that *"Of all the buzzwords that have entered the development lexicon in the past 30 years, empowerment is probably the most widely used and abused"* (pp.557). Within this article Batliwala states that at its heart, empowerment processes entail shifts in political, social, and economic power between and across both individuals and social groups. In her 2015 book 'Engaging with Empowerment: an intellectual and experiential journey', Batliwala considers how to challenge the neoliberal paradigm and the politics of constructing counter-hegemonic discourse and institutions, contending that the simplistic and narrow appropriation of the concept of empowerment within mainstream development is so that these actors don't have to deal with the very core of empowerment: the fundamental shifts in power, privilege, and the control of resources and agenda-setting. The findings outlined in this thesis align to such arguments where gender inequality and women's empowerment are discursively de-politicised to fit into neoliberal development agendas.

An important point which Batliwala makes in her 2007 article is whether the word and idea that empowerment originally represented is worth reclaiming, given its dilutions and subversion by a plethora of corporate actors who use the term flippantly to promote their own neoliberal ideologies. She concludes that one way to navigate this co-optation is to listen to poor women and their movements – learning from their values, articulations and actions in their search for justice.

Following from Batliwala's and Kabeer's calls to explore the role of women's organisations and social movements in creating the conditions for change (Kabeer, 1999), Grosser and McCarthy

(2019) draw on social movement theory and feminist social movements in particular to offer more hopeful strategies and alternatives for feminists to contest and resist the neoliberalisation of feminism. As noted within the Feminisms, Empowerment and Development: Changing Women's Lives book, *"the international development enterprise has been profoundly neglectful of the role that women's movements, small and large, have in making change happen to bring about greater gender justice and equality"* (2014:xi). Centring and capitalising on the collective solutions to communal problems embedded within social movements offers opportunities to resist the Western individualism that is central to neoliberal feminism, as discussed within chapter six of this thesis. Feminist movements in Latin America and South Asia, for example, pushed consciousness-raising within radical organisation and movement building for gender equality (Batliwala, 2007). Yet African women have a history of collective struggles often not included in the history of feminist struggle (Kolawole, 2002). Revisiting the history of women's mobilisation across parts of Africa and engaging with African feminism as a social movement – opening up space to restore colonised peoples a sense of the richness of their own history and culture (Narayan, 1989) - thus offers potential in line with this. There are few cases of resistance to the marketisation of empowerment from lower-tier actors of aid chains, particularly considering their dependency on funding, of which Gerard (2021) offers an interesting example in line with the above: where staff at a lower rung in the aid chain designed a project around empowerment as initially conceived by promoting movement building that amplified women's voices and activism, rather than market inclusion.

Whilst closing gender gaps is important – a central focus and struggle within African feminism is the meaning attached to gender itself (Tamale, 2020). Many of the gender myths outlined in this thesis have colonial origins – where the essentialisation of women within development discourse and the framing of 'victims or virtuous' (Arora-Jonsson, 2011) has its roots in the victimization and objectification of the exotic 'Other' perpetuated by Western narratives (Mohanty, 1988). Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (2002: 7) outlines the eurocentric foundations of such Western feminist concepts and the difficulty in their application to analyse African realities. Critiquing the dichotomous gender binaries in which the male is assumed to be superior, she notes that *"When African realities are interpreted based on these Western claims, what we find are distortions, obfuscations in language and often a total lack of comprehension due to the incommensurability of social categories and institutions"*. Grounded in case studies across Nigeria, Oyěwùmí notes the challenges to the unwarranted universalisms of Western gender discourses – one of which is the idiom of marriage used for social classification and the concept of the nuclear family that provides the grounding for much of Western feminist theory. The imposition of the Western unitary household model and assumption of a nucelar family and monogomous relationship inherent within mainstream approaches to gender and development is

critiqued in chapter six in relation to the WEAI. African women have multiple identities, where conjugal relations are one part of the complex relational ties within which women live their everyday lives (Cornwall, 2007b). Yet the Western focus on her marriage as a defining feature of her empowerment and site of contestation thus overlooks important relationships between women and other members of the community which shape women's lived experience of power and powerlessness. It also frames women's disempowerment and subordination purely in relation to her husband – thus overlooking her relationship with the state and any structural antecedents to her perceived disempowerment. African feminism and philosophies, such as *Ubuntu*, which transcend the narrow confines of the nuclear family to centre collective needs and community relations, as outlined in chapter six, are thus needed to account for the complexity of gendered agricultural livelihood dynamics across sub-Saharan Africa. Alternative Indigenous variants, rooted in African histories and cultures, thus offer opportunities to recognise and incorporate the multiplicity of peoples with varies cultures and histories (Tamale, 2020) – opening space to move beyond the essentialism of women and the individualism inherent within current neoliberal approaches to gender and development as evident in this thesis.

Tamale (2020:206) encourages us not to just unpack what we mean by gender, but also what we mean by equality, noting:

> *"in reality, it is a concept that rings hollow for many of the marginalized. Its very conception as "sameness" or "equivalence" has been challenged by many theorists, compelling us to recast the dominant discourses of patriarchy and oppression.*[67] *Does gender equality imply that men and women must be the same, take on the same roles, and be treated in the same way? Or is it about attaching the same value to their natural and social differences? Should we focus on the complementarity between the sexes instead of their equivalence? In other words, must the natural and socially constructed differences between men and women be viewed in hierarchical terms or do we need to look deeper? If we do, is it possible to forge equitable and mutually beneficial relationships between the different genders?"*

'Equality', as argued by Tamale, does not fit into African contexts without some serious critique. This is because it is rooted in the Western liberal conception of human rights founded in the autonomous individual, which, as outlined in chapter six, may be diametrically opposed to the traditional ethos in most of Africa (and other non-Western cultures) which values the community over the individual and foregrounds interconnected relationships (Nzegwu, 1994). The individualistic notion of equality suggests a standard against which it can be measured. 'Equality' as we see discursively and politically operationalised within the gender policy paradigms in this thesis is viewed narrowly and quantitatively through the mere physical

presence of women in policy- and decision-making spaces, and the closing of 'gender gaps' in access to agricultural resources. In all these approaches it is the underrepresentation of women that is the focus and the benchmark of the male standard that is aspired to, where 'equal' representation and access is seen as the solution to equality with men (Tamale, 2020). Not only is gender reduced to a dichotomous binary, but intersectional differences and oppressions are also invisibilised - reducing the efficacy of equality. Rather than fight for gender equality through equal representation, African feminism, as outlined by Tamale, encourages that we struggle against those institutions and structures that engender women's subjugation and denigrate their gender roles. Engaging with African feminisms and philosophy which value and emphasise unity in diversity over 'equality' through valuing relationships between unique and distinct persons (Oelofsen 2020), and embracing different-by-equal-complementarity (Tamale, 2020), of which *Ubuntu* is one, may thus help to move us beyond the essentialism and individualism within the equality framework.

'Africana womanism' is another African theoretical perspective which Barry and Grady (2019) argue should be incorporated into the political ecology of health research studies in order to account for a unique Africana perspective. Rooted in afro-centric ideology, African womanism examines the intersection of African women's experiences and needs as influenced by race, capitalism and colonialism – thus distinguishing African women's struggles for liberation from dominant Western feminist struggles (Ogunyemi, 1985; Kolawole, 2002; Hudson-Weems, 2019; Tamale, 2020). Such an approach recognises the pluralistic struggle against all forms of oppression, resisting the homogenisation and approach to African women's reality as monolithic (Kolawole, 2002) evident within the policy paradigms and gender myths discussed in this thesis. Africana womanism specifies an individual's needs are only accounted for once the needs of the family and community as a whole have been addressed – thus, similar to *Ubuntu*, moving beyond individual needs which are a *"colonial, patriarchal and westernised concept"* (Barry and Grady, 2019:183). According to Barry and Grady, Africana womanists similarly do not chase the same sense of equality as in Western feminism, noting that such desires are rooted in the colonial oppression and subjugation of women. The communitarianism imbibed within African philosophies such as *Ubuntu* and Africana womanism may help to counter narratives regarding gender hierarchies and the neoliberal co-optation of feminism which rely and perpetuate gender myths and assumptions. Such approaches may thus help to align to Bergeron's call to centre the values of care, social justice and equity in imagining a process of development to aspire to.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

9.1 Thesis Summary & Findings

This thesis aimed to address an overarching research question: how is gender inequality framed as a policy and development problem within agricultural transformation discourse, and how does this shape gender and agriculture development interventions? This was in turn addressed through three corresponding sub-questions (RQ):

RQ1: How is gender mainstreamed and addressed in agricultural transformation policy?

RQ2: How is gender equality and women's empowerment defined and measured in gender transformative approaches?

RQ3: What does a 'smart economics' approach to gender and agricultural transformation empower and who shapes these dominant narratives?

The three empirical chapters present targeted case studies to answer these sub-questions in turn, providing critical insights on the diffusion of three gender-development buzzwords and policy paradigms promoted at the international level – gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and smart economics - into agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa. Through this empirical analysis, this research has addressed overarching research aim and question – as outlined below.

This research is grounded in the historical trajectory of gender and development theory and practice over recent decades – from the WID, WED and GAD movements – and critiques waged against the gender myths, assumptions and buzzwords that have long animated this field. Applying a 'WPR' approach to Tanzania's national CSA policy framework to explore the isomorphism and diffusion of 'gender mainstreaming' across policy highlighted discursive framings of gender inequality that rely on the essentialism of women and perpetuation of gender myths regarding their vulnerability and virtuous nature. Applying a decolonial feminist lens to conceptualisations of 'women's empowerment' within CARE's GTA portfolio across sub-Saharan Africa, and its operationalisation through the WEAI highlighted the Western-centric neoliberal understandings of empowerment centred on autonomy and individualism that underpin such interventions and their mainstream measurement approaches. Applying a power analysis to the BMGF's discourse and approach to gender equality and women's empowerment helped to tease out why such gender myths and neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse persist in an increasingly neoliberal and corporatised development industry. Together these empirical chapters demonstrate how gender inequality is discursively framed as a barrier to agricultural productivity and transformation, and ultimately to economic growth – thus answering the first part of the overarching research question.

Empirical findings demonstrate that translating this discursive framing into development policy, interventions and monitoring approaches across sub-Saharan Africa enables and sustains the neoliberal development agenda. The uncritical and performative isomorphism and diffusion of internationally promoted policy solutions to gender equality that are based on gender myths within the policy landscapes of sub-Saharan African countries results in policy disconnected from the complex reality of gender and agricultural livelihood dynamics, and capability traps on behalf of government institutions tasked with implementing wish list policies (RQ1). Development interventions and monitoring approaches designed around Western assumptions and ideals of empowerment do not resonate with the lived realities and local understandings of empowerment within sub-Saharan African communities, and result in disconnected and opaque reports of project impact and 'success' (RQ2). Such findings are perhaps unsurprising given the dominance of hegemonic philanthropists such as the BMGF within mainstream approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment who use their immense power and influence to continuously control 'knowledge' to discursively define global challenges, how they should be addressed, and by whom, in line with their neoliberal ideology (RQ3). Together this thesis deal with critiques of mimicry, simplification and quantification within the development industry and how these work in relation to gender and agriculture – thus answering the second part of the overarching research question.

In sum this thesis demonstrates that the neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse is evident within agricultural transformation policy and practice - centred around and perpetuating the simultaneous victimisation and objectification of African women whilst also instrumentalising them in the name of agricultural productivity and transformation. Within this framing, Western ideology centred on individualism and autonomy is upheld - inherent in the promoted ideals and depiction of female farmers across sub-Saharan Africa as consumers and market subjects. The gendered myths, assumptions and buzzwords that have long been critiqued in mainstream approaches to gender and development underpin all these approaches. The contribution of this thesis is therefore that their resilience is reinforced by powerful hegemonic donors where they have now been purposefully absorbed into discourse around agricultural transformation, which itself has been somewhat 'rediscovered' by the same donors over the past decade in their philanthrocapitalist approach to agricultural development.

This thesis has also highlighted that the simplistic appropriation of feminist theory around concepts like empowerment within mainstream development has diluted their meaning and potential for fighting for transformative change. A further and important contribution of this thesis is acknowledging and promoting the potential that decolonial and African feminist literature offers in constructing counter-hegemonic discourses that disrupt neoliberal framings of the Third World Woman that underlie these myths and buzzwords. Whilst such scholarship

and calls to decolonise are not new, identifying the 'cracks and contestations' opened up in the neoliberal co-optation of feminist discourse offers space to centre and promote African philosophy and feminism grounded in motivations of care, equity, solidarity and collective action. This thesis thus builds on this scholarship, offering a novel contribution through engaging with such African philosophy and feminist praxis to offer 'ways for imagining and doing development otherwise' as noted by Bergeron (2016) – distancing itself from the myths and assumptions that have long underpinned the field of gender and development. Going back to Cornwall's 2007 paper on 'Buzzwords and Fuzzwords' noted in the introduction, if just for the sake of circularity, such an approach thus positions itself in her argument that *"It is, after all, in the very ambiguity of development buzzwords that scope exists for enlarging their application to encompass more transformative agendas"* (pp.481).

9.2 Future Research Directions & Policy Recommendations

In light of this, this thesis concludes with key avenues and implications for future research around agricultural transformation policy and practice, and also highlights some key policy recommendations:

In terms of future research directions, more intersectional analysis is needed into agricultural livelihood dynamics across sub-Saharan Africa, building on the existing research outlined in chapter five. Ensuring that such research is made policy relevant in order to ground the policy process in such literature is also needed. Further research and funding is needed to challenge the power and politics of the policy process within sub-Saharan Africa regarding both the reliance on financial and technical assistance from mainstream development actors, and also the outsourcing of parts of the policy process to external development consultants. Such research needs to consider the findings on p177-178 which highlight how neoliberal theory permeates African development policy not only through external but also internal forces, and consider potential avenues for navigating these complexities.

This thesis contributes to critiques of the increasingly quantitative and results-based measurement agenda within mainstream development, demonstrating how the reductionist indicators obscures culture and context and privileges certain knowledge and values. Empirical findings from this thesis thus contribute to critiques regarding the chasing of 'success' stories in mainstream development. Further research is therefore needed that explores and critiques the growing use of standardised metrics, questioning their universality and validity. This is especially important in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the tracking and reporting on progress in relation to different global challenges. In terms of development practice and the role of NGOs operating within time and funding constrictions, findings in chapter six evidently raise questions regarding how such development interventions and monitoring approaches resonate

with the lived experience of the women whom gender and development interventions aim to empower. In order to account for these differentiated and nuanced contexts, histories and cultures, research and funding is needed to promote more bottom-up grounded approaches and methodologies to push back against the growing standardisation of development.

This thesis also importantly outlines how the hegemonic power of donors and role of external development partners within development policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa limits the potential for context-specific 'agricultural transformation'. All empirical chapters explore the top-down donor-driven nature of mainstream development and discourse and also the power and politics within the aid chain, with each chapter demonstrating how the outsized power and influence of such elite development actors is inherent within a neo-colonial development industry that continues to centre and uphold Western knowledge. As this thesis has noted, there is a large and growing body of research that resists and counters the essentialism of women and gender myths inherent within mainstream neoliberal approaches to development. Calls to decolonise development and to disrupt the Western feminism that forms the foundation of these approaches are not new. More research to add to this, which this thesis represents, is needed – yet I do not want to discount the existing work of African feminists and theorists in this field. Evidently what is needed is to shine more of a light on this scholarship in order to push back against the 'mainstream'. Giving credit, recognition and space back to such theorists is needed, as is the forging and strengthening of research collaborations across boundaries and cultures. Constructing counter-hegemonic discourses, as outlined in chapter seven, necessitates the power of social movements across borders and disciplines to push for radical transformations in understandings of and approaches to gender, equality, and development more broadly.

In terms of policy recommendations, the empirical findings from this thesis contribute to critiques of the isomorphism of gender policy paradigms, demonstrating how, though the case of the diffusion of gender mainstreaming within Tanzania's CSA policy framework, this leads to policy-implementation gaps and capability traps for sub-Saharan Africa. In light of this, this thesis contributes to arguments that policies need to be grounded in the reality of livelihood dynamics and designed with implementation in mind. Without first fully understanding what shapes gender in different contexts, and an intersectional analysis of how this relates to agricultural change, what Mdee and Harrison (2019) call the 'first building block' in policy formation, the inclusion of these normative statements are actively preventing policy from responding to actual conditions within agriculture as the question of *how* gender intersects with other axes of inequality to shape agricultural transformation in regards to CSA is brushed over. Practical steps are needed to build up the capacity of government institutions -particularly at the local level in decentralised governance structures, and research demonstrating the improved

development outcomes when policy in theory relates strongly to policy in practice and the implementation capacity of the state.

Aligned to the calls for more research into locally grounded and contextual monitoring approaches, it is imperative that development policy and practice are supported with robust and funded monitoring strategies. Yet given the findings of this thesis, it is also important to question the ultimate motive for such monitoring and evaluation – whether it is to provide upward accountability to donors or to improve understanding of local change in gender agricultural livelihood dynamics. Ensuring that such monitoring strategies are co-designed with communities, relate to their needs and aspirations, is thus crucial. This runs true not just for the monitoring of development policy and practice, but also for their design and implementation.

Building on this, it is important to question how the decolonial and African feminist literature and theorisations can feed into agricultural transformation policy and practice across sub-Saharan Africa. As this thesis has outlined, such scholarship can help in grounding constructions of women, empowerment and understandings of gender inequality in the lived experiences of African women, rather than the Western neoliberal constructions of the Third World Woman evident within this thesis. Practical steps to promote this would include, as highlighted in the sections above, ensuring such policy and practice engages with existing literature from the region, is designed by policymakers who are trained in and experience these realities and have the resources and capacity to invest in a contextually grounded policy process, and are not dependent on the technical and financial assistance from Western neoliberal powers. A decolonial approach to domestic and foreign policy that is anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist, removed from the neoliberal ideology that underpins much of mainstream agricultural transformation policy and practice, would centre the social and economic wellbeing of African communities and prioritise human dignity. Ensuring that such policy is grounded in current patterns of existing inequalities is important, but should also be rooted in history from across the continent. Historical lessons from anti-colonial African leaders like Thomas Sankara, Kwame Nkrumah, and Julius Nyerere who fought for independence and Pan-Africanism within policy should feed into this. The growing field of African feminism can help to ensure that such policy is intersectional in its approach, challenges colonial power imbalances that shape not only resource distribution but also knowledge production, and centres African voices and values. Such a decolonial approach would likely benefit from embedding philosophies such as *Ubuntu* across all areas of domestic and foreign policy, as *Ubuntu* is underpinned by principles of justice, humanness, communitarianism and interdependence - thus offering potential in designing people-centred agricultural development policy and practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Ethics Clearance University of Leeds

The Secretariat
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT
Tel: 0113 343 4873
Email: ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Ruth Smith
Sustainability Research Institute
School of Earth & Environment
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT

Business, Environment and Social Sciences joint Faculty Research Ethics Committee (AREA FREC)

27 August 2023

Dear Ruth

Title of study: **Exploring Gendered Influences in the Adoption of 'Climate Smart Agriculture' Practices in Tanzania**

Ethics reference: **AREA 19-016**

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the Social Sciences, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

Document	Version	Date
AREA 19-016 SRS Ethics Application_New v1.5 upd 30.08.19.doc	1	30/08/19
AREA 19-016 1. SRS_Research Project Information Sheet + Consent Form v1.0.docx	1	30/08/19
AREA 19-016 2. SRS_Research Summary Leaflet v1.0.docx	1	30/08/19
AREA 19-016 3. SRS_RiskAssessment_v1.9 upd 30.08.19.docx	1	30/08/19

Committee members made the following comments about your application:

Application section	Comment	Response required/ amended application required/ for consideration
6.2	The use of translators also impacts on talking about sensitive issues. You need to recruit wisely on this – using someone that has no connection with the place you are working. The gender of the translator might be significant too.	For consideration
8.2	Do you mean here that you are going to anonymise the villages that you choose? This seems a good idea given the sensitivity of the information for households.	For consideration
8.6	What happens to data afterwards?: there seems a discrepancy perhaps here – see below. • Section 8.6 states "All hard copies (audio recordings and field notes) will be stored securely and destroyed 1 year after the end of the project." • The participant info sheet states: "After the research is finished the data will be securely stored in a special archive for use in future research." Perhaps it is less of a discrepancy and more of a difference/ sequential overlap between what's provided on the two different forms. We understand how the original hard copies of audio and paper notes would be destroyed after 1 year, that makes sense. And we also understand that you also want the option for the anonymised data to be stored for later use in future research. It might be helpful to add the note from one to the other and vice versa. Please make it clearer that it is the anonymised data that is being kept in the special archive for future research purposes.	For consideration

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation and other documents relating to the study, including any risk assessments. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week

notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie
Senior Research Ethics Administrator, the Secretariat
On behalf of Dr Matthew Davis, Chair, AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee

CC: Student's supervisor(s)

Appendix B – Ethics Amendment Clearance University of Leeds

Re: AREA 19-016 (Amd 1, March 21) - Favourable Ethical Opinion

From: John Hardy <J.E.Hardy@leeds.ac.uk> **On Behalf Of** ResearchEthics
Sent: 25 March 2021 12:05
To: Ruth Smith [ee15srs] <ee15srs@leeds.ac.uk>; ResearchEthics <researchethics@leeds.ac.uk>
Cc: Susannah Sallu <S.Sallu@leeds.ac.uk>; Anna Mdee <A.L.Mdee@leeds.ac.uk>
Subject: AREA 19-016 (Amd 1, March 21) - Favourable Ethical Opinion

Hi Ruth,

AREA 19-016 (Amd 1, Mar 2021) - Exploring Gendered Influences in the Adoption of 'Climate Smart Agriculture' Practices in Tanzania

NB: All approvals/comments are subject to compliance with current University of Leeds and UK Government advice regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as any local restrictions where the study is being carried out regarding in-person data collection and travel.

I am pleased to inform you that the above research ethics amendment has been reviewed by the AREA FREC Committee and on behalf of the Chair, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion based on the documentation received at date of this email.

Please retain this email as evidence of approval in your study file.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted and approved to date. This includes recruitment methodology; all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. Please see https://ris.leeds.ac.uk/research-ethics-and-integrity/applying-for-an-amendment/ or contact the Research Ethics & Governance Administrator for further information.

Ethics approval does not infer you have the right of access to any member of staff or student or documents and the premises of the University of Leeds. Nor does it imply any right of access to the premises of any other organisation, including clinical areas. The committee takes no responsibility for you gaining access to staff, students and/or premises prior to, during or following your research activities.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, risk assessments and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited.

It is our policy to remind everyone that it is your responsibility to comply with Health and Safety, Data Protection and any other legal and/or professional guidelines there may be.

I hope the study goes well.

Best regards
John Hardy
On behalf of Matthew Davis, (Chair) AREA FREC
John Hardy
Research Ethics Administrator
The Secretariat,
University of Leeds, LS2 9LT

Please note: The University is closed from 12:30 on Thursday 1 April-Wednesday 7 April

Please don't print this email unless you really need to

Appendix C – Supplementary Material to Chapter 5

Appendix C: List of Tanzanian National Policies analysed with information as to each policy implementation period, goal, Ministries involved and also the organisations who provided financial and/or technical support.

No.	Policy	Year	Implementation Period	Policy Goal	Ministries Involved in Production	Organisations providing Financial/Technical Support
1	**Tanzania Climate Smart Agriculture Programme**	2015	2015-2025	*'To have an "Agricultural sector that sustainably increases productivity, enhances climate resilience and food security for the national economic development in line with Tanzania National Development Vision 2025"'*	• Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives[1] • Vice President's Office	• New Partnership for Africa's Development Agency (NEPAD) • Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC) • Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) • East African Community (EAC) • The Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS)
2	**Tanzania National CSA Guideline**	2017	-	*'To inform implementation and up-scaling of CSA practices in Tanzania… The guideline provides a platform for application of sustainable approaches and practices across the agricultural, food security and climate change related policies at all levels'*	• Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries[2]	• Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) • VUNA Programme (DFID Funded)

3	**Tanzania National Agriculture Policy (NAP)**	2013	-	*'To facilitate the transformation of the agricultural sector into modern, commercial and competitive sector in order to ensure food security and poverty alleviation through increased volumes of competitive crop products'*	• Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives[1]	Not mentioned
4	**Agricultural Sector Development Programme Phase 2 (ASDP-II)**	2017	2017/18 - 2027/28	*'Transform the agricultural sector (crops, livestock & fisheries) towards higher productivity, commercialization level and smallholder farmer income for improved livelihood, food security and nutrition'.*	• Ministry of Agriculture	Not mentioned
5	**Agricultural Sector Development Strategy II (ASDS-II)**	2015	2015/2016 – 2024/2025	*'Contribute to Tanzania's national economic growth and poverty reduction (Vision 2025/LTPP) by:* *- Promoting inclusive and sustainable agricultural growth (at a rate of 6 percent per annum);* *- Reducing rural poverty (i.e. reduce the percent of rural population below the poverty line from 33.3% in 2011/12 to 24% by 2025/26);* *- Improving food and nutrition security (e.g, reduce % of rural households below food poverty line: 11.3% in 2011/2012 to 5 % by 2025/26)'*	• Ministry of Agriculture	Not mentioned

6	**Tanzania Agriculture Climate Resilience Plan (ACRP)**	2014	2014-2019	*'To provide Tanzania's crop agriculture sub-sector and stakeholders with a roadmap for meeting the most urgent challenges of climate change*	• Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives[1]	• World Bank • UK Department for International Development (DFID) • IDRC-funded climate change project under the Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) • AGRA through Open University of Tanzania • The Bank-Netherlands Partnership Programme (BNPP)
7	**Tanzania Agriculture and Food Security Investment Plan (TAFSIP)**	2011	2011/12 – 2020/21	*'Contribute to the national economic growth, household income and food security in line with national and sectoral development aspirations'*	• Ministry of Finance	• 'Funding of the task has been through the Governments and a number of development partners'
8	**Tanzania National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS)**	2012	-	*'To enable Tanzania to effectively adapt to and participate in global efforts to mitigate to climate change with a view to achieving sustainable economic growth in the context of the Tanzania's national development blueprint, Vision 2025; Five Years National Development plan; and national cross sectoral policies in line with established international policy frameworks'*	• Vice President's Office (Environment)	• Government of Denmark, TAFSIP Drafting Team

9	**Tanzania Five Year Developme nt Plan (FYDP I)**	2011	2011/12 - 2015/16	*'To unleash the country's resource potentials in order to fast-track the provision of the basic conditions for broad-based and pro-poor growth. The targeted average GDP growth rate for the FYDP I period is 8 percent per annum (equivalent to a 5 percent per capita growth target), building up from a 7 percent growth in 2010, and thereafter consistently maintaining growth rates of at least 10 percent per annum from 2016 until 2025'*	• President's Office, Planning Commission	Not mentioned
10	**Tanzania Five Year Developme nt Plan (FYDP II)**	2016	2016/17 – 2020/21	*'FYDP II…implements aspects of Tanzania's Development Vision (TDV) 2025 which aspires to have Tanzania transformed into a middle income and semi industrialized nation by 2025…raise annual real GDP growth to 10 percent by 2021 (from 7.0 percent in 2015), per capita income to US$ 1,500 (from US$ 1,043in 2014) and reduction of the poverty rate to 16.7 percent from 28.2 percent recorded in 2011/12*	• Ministry of Finance and Planning	Not mentioned
11	**The National Guidelines for Mainstrea ming Gender**	2012	-	*'To provide a systematic approach in mainstreaming gender into National Climate Change Adaptation related policies, strategies, programs, plans and budgets for MDAs, LGAs, CSOs and*	• Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children	• Government of Japan - financial support through the African Adaptation Programme (AAP) • United Nations Development Programme – facilitation

	into Climate Change Adaptation Related Policies, Strategies, Programmes and Budgets (NGMG)			*private sector to ensure gender equality in sustainable development'*		
12	**Tanzania Livestock Master Plan (LMP)**	2018	2017-2022	*'The LMP is a series of five-year development implementation plans or 'roadmaps', to be used to implement the ASDP II…The LMP sets out livestock-sector investment interventions—better genetics, feed and health services, and complementary policy support—which could help meet the ASDP II targets by improving productivity and total production in the key livestock value chains of poultry, pork, red meat and milk, and dairy'*	• Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries	• Funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation • Technical support from International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)
13	**Tanzania National Fisheries Policy (NFP)**	2015	-	*'To develop a robust, competitive and efficient fisheries sector that contributes to food security and nutrition, growth of the national economy and improvement of the wellbeing of fisheries stakeholders while conserving environment'*	• Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries	Not mentioned

[1] The Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives was merged into the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries in 2015
[2] The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries split in 2017 into two separate Ministries to improve efficiency: the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries

vided financial

Appendix D – Supplementary Material to Chapter 6

Whilst the five 'domains of empowerment' (5DE) of the WEAI remained the same in the WEI (production, resources, income, leadership and autonomy), the WEI included additional indicators previously unaccounted for that were considered by CARE in the Pathways design process to be important to women's empowerment: women's self-confidence, mobility, attitudes toward gender equitable roles in family life, and political participation. To account for these additional indicators, relevant indicators were re-weighted. The WEAI domain 'Time' was also relabelled to 'Autonomy' to better reflect the additional indicators contributing to this domain in the WEI.

Table 1. WEAI domains of empowerment and associated weighted (WEAI vs WEI) indicators, definition of success and inadequacy cut-offs as detailed by CARE in their Pathways Women's Empowerment Index document, and associated WEI survey questions as detailed by CARE in their Pathways project baseline survey.

Domain	Indicator	WEAI weight	WEI weight	Definition of Success	Inadequacy cut-off	WEI Survey Question
Production (20%)	Input into productive decisions[a]	10%	10%	A country-specific % that is ≥ 50% of all productive decision domains, can make sole or joint decisions AND input into all or most decisions	Inadequate if individual does not make decisions	*When decisions are made regarding the following aspects of household life, who normally makes the [decision]?*[1.1] *…How much input do you have in making decisions about [ACTIVITY]?*[1.2]
	Autonomy in production[a]	10%	10%	Country specific achievement (1-5 domains)	Inadequate unless s/he makes sole decisions	
Resources (20%)	Ownership of assets[a,b]	6.67%	6.67%	A country % that is ≥ 50% of all household asset domains	Inadequate if household owns the asset but s/he does not solely or jointly own the asset	*Does anyone in your household currently have any [ITEM]? …Who would you say owns most of the [ITEM]?*[2]
	Purchase or sale of assets[a,b]	6.67%	6.67%	A country specific % that is ≥ 50% of all asset decision domains	Inadequate if 1) household does not own asset, or 2) if owned but s/he does not participate in any decisions about it	*…Who would you say can decide whether to sell [ITEM] most of the time?*[2] *…Who contributes most to decisions regarding a new purchase of [ITEM]?*[2]

	Access to and decision on credit	6.67%	6.67%	Achievement in any decisions on loans	Inadequate if 1) no loans taken out, or 2) loans taken out but s/he didn't participate in any decisions about them	*Have you taken out any loans greater than 1000 MK in the last 12 months?* *…Who made the decision to take out the loan?*[2] *…Who makes the decision about what to do with the money?*[2]
Income (20%)	Control over household income and expenditures[a,c]	20%	20%	Achievement in any if not only minor household expenditures	Inadequate if participates in activity but has no or little input on decisions on use of income	*Who earned income from this [activity] over the last 12 months?*[3.1] *…Who was primarily responsible for decisions on how this income was spent?*[3.2]
Leadership & Community (20%)	Participating in formal and informal groups	10%	5%	Achievement in any	Inadequate if not a member of any group	*Is there a [GROUP] in your community?* *…Are you an active member of this [GROUP]?* *…How much input do you have in making decisions in this [GROUP]?*[4.1]
	Confident speaking about gender and other community issues at the local level	10%	5%	Achievement in two out of four		*Do you feel comfortable speaking up in public:* *1) to help decide on infrastructure (like small wells, roads, water supplies) to be built in your community?*[4.2] *2) regarding gender issues (e.g., women's rights, access to common resources, etc.)?*[4.2]

						3) to protest the misbehaviour of authorities or elected officials?[4.2]
	Self-confidence	N/A	5%	Achievement in any two	Inadequate if response is 'strongly disagree', or 'somewhat disagree', or 'no difference'	*I can always resolve household problems if I try hard enough*[4.3] *If somebody opposes me, usually I can find a way to get what I want*[4.3] *I always find some way to deal with problems that confront me*[4.3] *I have the skills and information I need to improve my agricultural production*[4.3] *I have access to the resources and services I need to improve my agricultural productivity*[4.3] *I can take action to improve my life*[4.3] *I can influence important decisions in my community*[4.3]
	Demonstrating political participation	N/A	5%	Achievement in any and made her own decisions about who to vote for	Inadequate if did not vote OR if did vote but did not make her own decision about who to vote for	*Did you vote in the last parliamentary election/local election?* *…Who decided who you should vote for in the last parliamentary election?*[4.4]
Time/Autonomy (20%)	Satisfied with the amount of time available for leisure activities	10%	6.67%	n/a	Inadequate if response is 'disagree'	*Are you satisfied that you have enough time for leisure activities like visiting neighbours, watching TV,*

						listening to the radio or doing sports?[5.1]
	Workload	10%	0%	n/a	n/a	*n/a*
	Mobility	N/A	6.67%	Score of 16 or higher		*Do you have to seek permission of your husband or other family member to go [LOCATION]?*[5.2]
	Expressing attitudes that support gender equitable roles in family life*	N/A	6.67%	Achievement in all		*Personally, I think* *…that most household decisions should be made by the man*[5.3] *…that there is men's work and women's work and the one shouldn't ever do the work of the other*[5.3] *…that if a woman works outside the home, her husband should help with child care and household chores*[5.3] *…that a husband should spend his free time with his wife and children*[5.3] *…a husband and wife should decide together about what kind of family planning to use*[5.3] *…there are times when a women deserves to be hit*[5.3] *…a woman must tolerate violence in order to maintain stability in the family*[5.3]

[1]CODE 1: Production Responses

1.1
Main male or husband……………………………………………..1
Main female or wife……………………………………………..2
Husband and wife jointly………………………………………..3
Someone else in the household…………………………………..4
Jointly with someone else inside the household………………..5
Jointly with someone else outside the household………………6
Someone outside the household/other…………………………..7
Decision not made………………………………………………..8

1.2
No input …………………………………………………………1
Input into some decisions………………………………………..2
Input into most decisions………………………………………..3
Input into all decisions…………………………………………..4

[2]CODE 2: Resources Responses

Self………………………………………1
Partner/Spouse…………………………2
Self and partner/spouse jointly…………..3
Other household member………………..4
Self and other household member(s)……………………5
Partner/Spouse and other household member(s)……….6
Someone (or group of people) outside the household....7
Self and other outside people……......8
Partner/Spouse and other outside people…….....................................9
Self, partner/spouse and other outside people…...10

[3]CODE 3: Income Responses

3.1
Men……………………………………………………………..1
Women. ………………………………………………………..2
Both Men and Women.. ………………………………………3
Children. ………………………………………………………4
All HH Members. ……………………………………………5
No one…………………………………………………………6

3.2
Men……………………………………………………………1
Women…………………………………………………………2
Both Men and Women…………………………………………3
Children…………………………………………………………4

[4]CODE 4: Leadership & Community Responses

4.1
No input……………………1

4.2
No, not at all comfortable…………..........1

4.3
Strongly disagree (never agree)………..1

4.4
Myself ..………………… 1

Input into some decisions...2 Input into most decisions………..……..…3 Input into all decisions……………...…..4	Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty...2 Yes, but with a little difficulty...............3 Yes, fairly comfortable ....4 Yes, very comfortable 5	Somewhat disagree ………………..…..…2 No difference …………………………3 Mostly agree ……………………….….…4 Strongly agree (always)…………..……5	My spouse ……......….. 2 Local leaders…......….... 3 The Party…..…………4 Other (specify)_______5

[5]CODE 5: Time/Autonomy Responses

5.1	**5.2**	**5.3**
Agree……………………..……………….1	Yes, always……………………………………....…1	Agree……………………………………..1
Disagree……………………………...…...2	Yes, most often…………………………….…..……2	Disagree…………………...…………2
	Yes, but only now and then……………………...……3	
	No, Never have to……………………………….....…4	

[a] Calculated as a the ratio of the number of domains in which women are making sole or joint decisions or have sole ownership to the number of domains in which the household makes decisions or owns the asset
[b] excluding poultry, small consumer durables, and non-mechanized farm equipment as modelled in the WEAI
[c] excluding minor household expenditures as modelled in the WEAI
* This indicator was not included in Bangladesh