

Integrating Gender in Research and Development: A Case Study of How Organizations Working in Honduras Approach Participatory Gender Analyses in Agrifood Systems

M. T. Rodriguez¹, R. J. Williams², J. E. Niewoehner-Green³, S. Morales⁴

Abstract

Gender assessments are often used to inform gender mainstreaming in agriculture for development programming and practices. However, they often lack true community engagement, integration of critical perspectives for structural transformation, and a systems approach to support gender equality. In our qualitative case study, we conducted a content analysis of gender policies and approaches for the largest funding and implementing organizations working in Honduras. Our findings indicate that some organizations address the known gaps in the effectiveness of gender analyses such as inclusion of masculinities and moving beyond economic empowerment to address other important domains for women's empowerment. However, the majority of organizations continued to approach participation as extractive rather than transformative, over-relied on the economic domain as the sole indicator of empowerment, failed to integrate critical contemporary theories such as intersectionality and masculinities, and inadequately addressed the fundamental structural inequalities in the systems that reinforce normative gender roles. Improving practices for participatory gender assessments and addressing dominant social norms during research is necessary to have significant gender transformative and sustainable impacts on agrifood systems.

Article History



Received: June 1, 2023

Accepted: August 14, 2023

Published: January 31, 2024

Keywords

gender analysis; Honduras; participation; empowerment; masculinity; systems approach

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1. Mary T. Rodriguez, Associate Professor, Ohio State University, 2120 Fyffe Rd, 200E Ag Administration Bldg, Columbus, Ohio 43210, rodriguez.746@osu.edu,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8716-2787>
 2. Rebecca J. Williams, Assistant Professor, Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Grand Valley State University, 213 Lake Ontario Hall, 1 Campus Drive, Allendale, Michigan 49401, williarj@gvsu.edu,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3849-9348>
 3. Jera E. Niewoehner-Green, Assistant Professor, Ohio State University, 2120 Fyffe Rd, 200G Ag Administration Bldg, Columbus, Ohio 43210, niewoehner-green.1@osu.edu,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0340-1956>
 4. Sarahi Morales, Directora Departamento de Currículo General, Zamorano Pan-American Agricultural School, PO Box 93, Km 30 highway from Tegucigalpa to Danlí, Valle de Yeguaré, Municipality of San Antonio de Oriente, Francisco Morazan, Honduras, CA, morales@zamorano.edu,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1331-2375>

Introduction and Problem Statement

Gender relations in Honduras are shaped by socioeconomic and cultural context of the country. As the second poorest country in the region, an estimated 62% of the Honduran population lived below the poverty line in 2020 (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2020). Over the years, Honduras has been characterized as a predominantly patriarchal society, where men have decision-making authority at the household and community levels (Humphries et al., 2012). The Honduran government has made international commitments to gender mainstreaming in policy including those in sectoral levels such as agriculture, but implementation is lagging (Howland et al., 2021). However, the reality of poverty, outmigration of men, and the demands of building sustainable food systems, requires development organizations to adopt approaches that effectively promote women's empowerment and address gender dynamics in implementation. According to Njuki et al. (2022), agri-food systems have structural inequalities directly linked to gender, such as access to knowledge and information as well as technological, financial, and natural resources, reinforcing social gender norms and impacting livelihoods. A holistic view of agrifood systems provides a pathway for sustainable agricultural intensification to ensure food security and nutrition in an equitable and resilient manner (Campanhola & Pandey, 2018).

Gender analyses are a key component of agrifood systems projects due to the work of feminist scholars and development practitioners who brought attention to the importance of analyzing gender roles and norms to understand the social constructs that influence agrifood projects (Connelly et al., 2000). At their simplest, gender analyses are conducted to understand the normative roles and responsibilities of men and women to ensure that agricultural development initiatives are appropriately targeted (Connelly et al., 2000). At their most complex, gender analyses can support understanding the values, norms, and systems that oppress women. The latter approaches aim to transform systems to empower women to live the lives they desire (Kabeer, 1999). Since gender analyses are essential to highlight gender dynamics of different contexts and programmatic areas, we sought to explore how major organizations integrate these perspectives into their work. In this study, our objective is to examine gender policies and frameworks of development organizations in Honduras, specifically focusing on definitions and measurements of empowerment, levels of analysis, incorporation of critical perspectives, and community participation.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Critiques of gender analyses in development practice are rooted in part in the lack of clarity in theoretical underpinning and the complexity of incorporating a gender lens in a meaningful way (Tavener & Crane, 2022; Warren, 2007). Approaches to gender analyses range in purpose from addressing women's practical needs to addressing women's strategic needs or women's ability to make the life decisions that were previously denied to them (Mayoux, 1995; Warren, 2007). This is also termed transformational empowerment. The theoretical underpinnings of these analyses can differ significantly resulting in different strategies for change (Chilisa & Ntseane,

2010; Connelly et al., 2000). Understanding theoretical underpinnings of gender analysis frameworks is important to appraise approach, assumptions, and how women's roles and norms versus women's subordination are understood.

A primary concept underlying gender analysis approaches is that of empowerment. However, understandings of empowerment are often grounded in institutionalized terminology that ignore local agency and context, resulting in an oversimplification of local gender relations (Batiwala, 2007; Cornwall et al., 2004; Jupp et al., 2010; McOmber, 2021; Tavenner & Crane, 2022), as well as an overreliance on economic factors in the determination of an empowered woman (McOmber, 2021; Tavenner & Crane, 2022; Warren, 2007). Critiques of empowerment approaches point out a lack of focus on how social interactions mediate gender, particularly in terms of masculinized household leadership responsibilities and the role of men and masculinities in women's empowerment efforts (Tavenner & Crane, 2019; Tavenner & Crane, 2022). Additionally, in keeping with contemporary understandings of gender, taking an intersectional approach to gender analyses is needed to understand the relationship between gender and other identities including race, ethnicity, class, and sexual identity (Bojin, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Das & Singh, 2014; de Mel et al., 2013; Tavenner et al., 2022). For example, Honduras boasts nine indigenous groups, including two afro-indigenous groups, all of whom experience high levels of poverty (Tauli-Corpuz, 2016). In addition, it is well documented that the LGBTQ+ community in Honduras face high levels of discrimination (Villeda, 2012). How issues such as indigeneity, poverty, and sexual identity intersect with gender dynamics is not well studied in terms of gender analyses in the Global South (Fundación ETEA, 2022).

Another important aspect of gender analysis approaches are participatory processes (e.g. Participatory Rural Appraisal and Participatory Action Research). Participatory gender analysis processes began in the 1990's in part due to the need to unpack the relationship between men's and women's normative roles (Guijt & Kaul Shah, 1998; Mayoux, 1995). The work of Arnstein (1969) and Biggs and Farrington (1991) demonstrate the challenges of participatory process by categorizing participation from lack of farmer participation to collective decision making and collaborative communication. Although participatory processes are rooted in critical and later feminist theory, like gender analyses, the practical application of participatory processes do not always reflect these theoretical underpinnings. Similarly, not all gender analysis processes use participatory methodologies, resulting in a lack of understanding of the role of power dynamics, responsiveness, and understanding of cultural contexts in these approaches (Thomas et al., 2022). Negative impacts to the agrifood system in Honduras can disproportionately impact women (CARE Honduras & UN Women, 2020), thus participatory methodologies would center women's lived experiences and allow for nuanced programming and research.

Finally, a major critique of participatory processes is that they can neglect the complexity of communities and divert attention from the broader systems that are affecting them (Cornwall, 1998; Lilja & Dixon, 2008). Systems approaches consider the interconnected and dynamic nature of various systems affecting a specific problem or phenomenon (Meadows, 2008; Rosas, 2017) and in practice can be a useful tool to explore the level of power that people have in

issues related to their own food systems (Washington, 2016). Applying a systems approach to agrifood systems pushes back against reductionist considerations of agricultural issues and instead includes food systems activities, cultural, economic, and social, drivers, and environmental effects (Borman, et al., 2022; Ericksen, 2008). Further, food sovereignty or agroecology movements emphasize the world's relational aspects, acknowledging the interconnections among local knowledge, human culture, and nature while centering gender equality (Portman, 2018).

Purpose

Gender analysis frameworks vary in their theoretical underpinnings; therefore, we employed a feminist lens to critically analyze them, focusing on definitions and measurements of empowerment, community involvement in the process, levels of analysis from utilitarian to transformational, and evidence of systems informed interventions. Drawing on feminist approaches that aim to question the dominant discourse, we purposefully moved beyond considering gender analysis as a means to just include women by applying contemporary approaches to analyzing gendered contexts such as the role of masculinities, intersectionality and systems approaches, and the integration of women and men, girls and boys, in agrifood system development efforts. As previously mentioned, gender assessments are often used for the benefit of the funder as opposed to being a participatory tool used by and for the community. Therefore, we sought to understand how organizations are approaching the measurement of gender constructs such as empowerment, participation, equality, and power-sharing as well as how they engage the community through participatory processes and understanding of social, political, and cultural systems. We identified Honduras as the context of interest for this case study as authors have done extensive gender research in the country. In addition, despite multiple organizations working for decades on gender issues, the country's inequality in development continues to deepen the feminization of poverty and limit women's access to basic services, resources, and economic opportunities as well as participation at political and organizational levels (CARE Honduras & UN Women, 2020). Further, Honduras has the highest femicide rate in Latin America (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2021), indicating that substantive gender equity work is imperative.

Methods

Research Design

A collective case study research strategy was employed wherein we explored multiple gender analysis processes from development organizations to understand the approach and intended outcomes (Stake, 1995). We utilized qualitative content analysis as the method of data collection and analysis, defining our case or bounded system as the process of conducting a gender analysis in the context of Honduras (Creswell, 2018). A directed content analysis of development agencies' gender inclusion strategy documents focused on establishing an integrated view of text and their contexts through a systematic classification process of coding and identifying patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). Therefore, our

analysis sought to use a feminist lens to identify and name the predominant concepts around gender and development in agriculture that guide data collection, outreach, and extension practices.

Data Collection

Our sampling frame was identified through a list of registered development organizations working in Honduras ($N=82$). We sampled the larger organizations working in the agricultural sector that influence the processes of smaller funders and implementers ($n=19$), then searched for publicly available gender analysis documents in agricultural development. Larger organizations were categorized as those who were recognized worldwide implementers and who were registered or funding projects in Honduras. From the sample, 14 organizations had published documents that described their approach to addressing gender through assessments and evaluations (see Table 1).

Table 1

Sample of Funding and Implementing Organizations Operating in Honduras

Type of Organization	Organization Name	Organization Acronym
Funders	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*	BMGF
	Canada Aid*	CA
	United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (formerly termed the Department for International Development) *	FCDO (DFID)
	Food & Agricultural Organization of the United Nations*	FAO
	Japan International Cooperation Agency *	JICA
	United Nations Population Fund	UNFP
	United States Agency for International Development*	USAID
	World Food Program*	WFP
Implementers	Action Against Hunger*	AAH
	CARE International*	CARE
	Catholic Relief Services*	CRS
	ETEA Foundation of Loyola University Lutheran World Relief*	LWR
	PLAN International*	PLAN
	Save the Children*	STC
	World Relief	WR
	World Vision*	WV
Both	Heifer International	
	OXFAM International*	OXFAM

Note. *denotes the organizational documents were included in the data analysis

Data Analysis

Deductive coding was employed utilizing NVivo v.12. The use of this software allowed for coding schemes to be tracked and to conduct searches for key terms when revisiting the data. Provisional coding was employed to establish the code list. Provisional coding begins with a predetermined “start list” of codes based on what previous investigation suggests might appear in the data (Saldaña, 2021). Our code list was derived from the review of the literature on gender assessments and researcher’s experience in gender and development research; however, as data are collected, coded, and analyzed, codes can be revised or expanded to include new codes (Saldaña, 2021). The practices, policies, and guidance that influence gender analysis were coded, while background information (e.g. demographics) were not coded. The original codebook consisted of 15 a priori codes derived from the literature and our conceptual framework. During data analysis, seven more codes arose. Codes were then placed into categories and then themes to create consolidated meaning of how organizations engage in gender and development work.

Evaluating the rigor and trustworthiness of the research was done throughout the process. Credibility was upheld through the transparent development of the data collection and coding process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Research team members collaborated throughout to review and interpret the data. Further, to improve dependability, researchers kept an audit trail during the data analysis through NVivo and shared documents which included theoretical and process notes. The findings should not be considered generalizable due to the focus on organizations working within Honduras; however, the broad influence of these organizations allow the findings to be transferable to gender and development work in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The provisional coding process supported confirmability by documenting the codes that were first established and tracking additional codes that arose through the analysis. Finally, conducting a document analysis subverted some threats to trustworthiness such as reactivity, researcher bias, and respondent bias (Bowen, 2009).

Subjectivity Statement

All four authors have engaged in gender and development work for 48 years, collectively. Prominent themes in our research have been food security, gender and leadership, community and household resilience, masculinities, youth leadership, irregular migration, and youth and gender-based violence. We all seek to transform communities and livelihoods of marginalized people through the integration of critical perspectives and sustainable, community driven approaches and practices. The authors addressed potential biases through memoing, audit trails, and ensuring that all four authors agreed on the analysis and findings (Flick, 2009).

Findings

Four main themes emerged from the data analysis: 1. Approaches to empowerment; 2. Practical application of gender in development work; 3. Incorporation of contemporary critical perspectives; and 4. Transformation of structure and systems (see Table 2).

Table 2*Data Themes and Subthemes*

Theme 1: Empowerment	Defining Empowerment Measuring Empowerment Leadership Decision Making
Theme 2: Practical Application of Gender in development work	Gender Mainstreaming Gender Assessment/Analysis/Eval Supporting Frameworks Assessment/ Gender Inclusion Methods Participatory Engagement
Theme 3: Incorporation of contemporary critical perspectives	Intersectionality Men & Boys Masculinity Power
Theme 4: Transformation of structure and systems	Transformation [Cultural] Systems Systems Approaches

Theme 1: Approaches to Empowerment - Subthemes: Defining Empowerment; Measuring Empowerment; Leadership; and Decision Making

Every organization mentioned the needs for women’s empowerment. However, the way they defined it, measured it, or tied in concepts such as leadership or decision-making differed amongst the organizations. Empowerment was defined similarly amongst the majority (12 of 14) of participants. AAH stated, “Empowerment is about women, men, girls and boys taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, developing skills (including life skills), building self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance” (p. 16). Interestingly, none of the organizations co-define empowerment in collaboration with the local people. Rather, empowerment is defined by the organization and informed by the local context.

All organizations mentioned empowerment in their documents, with nine including direct reference to men and boys. CRS mentioned that “improvement of [women’s] political, social, economic status is a highly important end in itself but also essential for sustainable development.” This sentiment was echoed by LWR, where they added that investing in women’s empowerment by increasing their “productive economic activity and decision-making at the household, community and government level, their contributions have the potential to grow their local economies exponentially” (p. 1).

The majority (8 of 14) used the domain of economic empowerment as a way to define and measure women’s empowerment. WFP stated, “Economic empowerment is a cornerstone of gender equality that refers to both women’s ability to succeed and advance economically and to their power to make and act on economic decisions” (p. 20). The focus on control of

resources was prominent in the measurement of empowerment, even as it relates to disempowerment of women:

Globally, women tend to have far more roles and responsibilities than men particularly with regard to household and reproductive work. This imbalance disempowers women and girls from participating fully in economic, education, and governance opportunities, further contributing to their marginalization and subordinate status (CRS). (p. 5)

Furthermore, leadership and decision-making emerged as subthemes. They were often tied together when described as a component of empowerment or failing to empower. Leadership was most consistently described as positional leadership such as community leadership and governmental representation. As one organization reported, “Women and girls generally face inequality in participation and leadership, particularly in terms of decision-making or leadership roles in public fora and governance entities” (p. 5). (CRS). Similarly, DFID mentioned that women also lack leadership opportunities “at every administrative level, and in leadership positions in business” (p. 7).

Finally, every organization discussed the need to improve women’s decision-making power as an essential part of empowerment. Most organizations did not discuss decision-making in terms of specific domains. However, the few that did typically framed decision-making in the economic domain (CRS, FAO, WFP, WV), or in terms participation and leadership in the community through the political domain (DFID, WFP, JICA, USAID). FAO stated:

Participation alone, however, might not be sufficient to ensure that women’s needs and demands are effectively addressed and translated into action. [We must] enhance women’s leadership and decision-making power within institutions and governance mechanisms at all levels and increase their involvement in the formulation of legal frameworks, policies and programmes. (p. 6)

Similarly, WFP centers decision-making capacity as central to their work stating they “support self-determination such that all people have increased power to take up leadership roles and make decisions about their personal, household, community and societal food system, food security and nutrition needs and experiences” (p.12). Ultimately, no matter the organization, women’s empowerment was at the core of their analysis approaches although it differed greatly in practice.

Theme 2: Practical Application of Gender in Development Work - Subthemes: Gender Mainstreaming; Gender Assessments; Supporting Frameworks; Assessment/Gender Inclusion Methods; and Participatory Engagement

The concept of gender can be integrated into an organization’s practices ubiquitously or minimally. We explored how gender was practically applied throughout the organizations’ work. Gender mainstreaming was described as a strategy to ensure “the needs and interests of all genders are an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any planned action or procedure, so that everyone has the opportunity to benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated” (BMGF, p. 3). Several organizations (5 of 14) stated that this purposeful integration of gender is necessary to ensure progress towards gender equality.

Every document mentioned the need to begin with a gender assessment/analysis. A gender analysis was described as a method to “understand the relationships between men and women, their access to resources, their activities, and the constraints they face relative to each other” (CA, p. 1). Organizations such as STC stated that these assessments/analyses “generate evidence that enables the design of programmes that contribute to advancing gender equality and social justice” (p. 3). Some documents gave specific details for how they should be planned, conducted, and used; however, most did not go into this level of detail. Multiple frameworks were mentioned to provide guidance for how to integrate gender into development efforts: the socio-ecological model (CRS, STC), CRS’s integral human development (IHD) framework, Harvard Analytical Framework (CA), and the Six Domains of Gender Analysis (USAID). WV stated that these types of assessments go beyond just providing a superficial view of the realities of men and women/boys and girls, recognizing the potential of analyses to create a broader picture of people’s realities. As WV states:

[Gender analyses can] identify the root causes upholding negative gender and social norms and practices (social relations, institutions, and structures)... [and] uncover potential positive and negative consequences of program activities on men, women, boys, girls, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. (p. 17)

Methods described to conduct assessments and integrate gender into their work varied amongst the organizations. USAID encourages beginning by “consult[ing] with gender experts at NGOs, donors, and other organizations who may be able to outline key gender issues in the countries and the sector that will be the focus of your project” (p. 3). Others mentioned the purposeful inclusion of gender must include a thorough literature/desktop review, preceding quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. When it came to data collection, JICA stated the best method was to conduct a survey to “collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data and related information in the target countries and areas to understand the current situation and issues of each gender” (p. 15). However, most supported the use of mixed data collection methods. In addition to the literature review and the primary data collection from key stakeholders, STC included the importance of “[examining] laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices to determine if direct or indirect biases exist, how they may reproduce inequitable power relations, and how they impact different populations” (p. 30). This view would provide a critical look at the reality of participant livelihoods.

Finally, community participation was stated to be an important component of integrating gender into the organization’s work. For example, AAH stated “[AAH] recognizes that community driven approaches, collaboration and long-term partnerships are critical in the journey to empower women and girls, transform gender relations and build gender equitable systems” (p. 9). Furthermore, several organizations state that engagement is essential for sustainability of their efforts. STC specifically speaks about the importance of youth engagement through their child-centered approach saying “[this approach] puts children’s safe, meaningful, and equitable participation at the centre and enables us to examine how age discrimination intersects with gender inequality and other forms of oppression” (p. 10). It is important to note that although the majority of organizations recognize and state the importance of participatory methods or integration of community voice, participation was

relegated to their inclusion as participants in the research and not in active decision making of programming efforts. Participation is an essential approach to challenge the way gender has been integrated into programming leading to our exploration of how other contemporary critical perspectives are integrated into this work.

Theme 3: Incorporation of Contemporary Critical Perspectives - Subthemes: Intersectionality; Masculinity; Men & Boys; and Power

Incorporating critical perspectives is essential for the transformative changes needed to make a difference in gender dynamics in Honduras. Here we explored an organization's expressed integration of feminist perspectives. Only half of the organizations (7 of 14) articulated the need to adopt the critical perspective of intersectionality. AAH gives the most in-depth definition:

[Intersectionality] describes the complex ways that different aspects of identity overlap and intersect with structures and systems of power and oppression. It recognizes that our identities are made up of multiple interrelated attributes (such as race, gender, ability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sexual identity, socio-economic status and a history of colonialism and dispossession)... [exposing] people to multiple forms of discrimination, disadvantage, cultural and structural oppression, and violence. (p. 17)

The organizations that mention the need for this critical perspective, also mention how incorporating intersectionality can challenge power structures (WV), systems of oppression (STC), and injustices that create "deep rooted barriers to equality and justice..." (AAH, p. 17).

Masculinity is another critical perspective mentioned in the data. Half of the organizations (7 of 14) mentioned the need to engage men and boys, in addition to women and girls, into gender mainstreaming efforts. Men and boys play key roles in ensuring that women and girls have access to the resources they need (LWR). They must be included to address gender inequality, leading to changes in societal norms and transformation of unequal power dynamics (AAH, BMGF, PLAN, WFP). However, when it came to addressing the social construct of masculinity, only half of the organizations specifically mention men and masculinity. These organizations range in approach including focusing on raising men's awareness of women's roles (FAO), changing men's attitudes about and participation in household responsibilities (CRS, FAO), engaging men as allies (BMGF, CRS, FAO WFP), and working to fundamentally shift the performance of masculinity including men's roles and responsibilities, power, social relationships, and structures (BMGF, CRS, PLAN, STC). Several organizations (5 of 14) state that masculinity and gendered norms of manhood can have significant effects in how societies treat and relate to women (CRS, FAO, PLAN). However, if gender-equitable masculinities could be adopted, it could "transform gender norms and unequal power dynamics" (CRS, p. 8). AAH went as far as to mention patriarchy as the root of inequality and leads to harmful perspectives "based on stereotypes ... and underlies many kinds of gender-based discrimination that impact the way women and men engage in society" (p. 17).

Finally, the construct of power is mentioned by the majority of organizations (10 of 14) as related to either the empowerment of women or the aforementioned critical perspectives.

Women's power was often associated with economic decision-making: "women and girls lack decision-making power relative to men (and boys) in several areas...from how to spend income earned by women or the family to what a family should produce, sell or buy" (CRS, p. 5). FAO states that "enhancing women's control over resources is essential to ensure that they can reap the benefits of their work in agriculture and have more control over household resources" (p. 7). This focus on control or decision-making reduces a woman's power to the role she plays in the household. BMGF brings a shift in focus "from seeing women and girls as beneficiaries to viewing them as active agents of change" (p. 9). Acknowledging women's important role in decision-making combined with the integration of masculinity, men and boys, and intersectionality, moves toward theoretical underpinnings for sustainable, transformative change.

Theme 4: Transformation of Structure and Systems - Subthemes: Transformation; [Cultural] Systems; and Systems Approaches

This final theme incorporates perspectives geared to create structural and systemic change. The majority of organizations (9 of 14) recognize the need for gender transformation. WFP states: "a gender transformative approach focuses on transforming (e.g. changing) unequal gender relations by challenging deeply entrenched gender norms, biases and stereotypes in order to promote shared power, control of resources, decision-making and support for women's empowerment" (p. 19). To create this type of change, organizations must work closely with all stakeholders across multiple dimensions. FAO states:

Discriminatory sociocultural norms affect how policies and legal frameworks are formulated and implemented; who participates in decision-making processes and governance mechanisms; how rural institutions are managed; how service providers target their clients and prioritize their needs; and, ultimately, how resources are allocated and decisions are taken within households and communities. (p. 3)

The influence of sociocultural norms on women's empowerment calls for addressing the root causes of inequality: unequal power relations, discrimination, policies, and practices (LWR, STC, WFP, WV).

CRS demonstrates that to have fair and just structures and systems, we must create an enabling environment including laws and policies, culture and norms, and institutions that "respect and promote equality, freedom and the dignity of all people" (p. 5). Some organizations recognize the need for a significant shift in their approaches. DFID claims they will "[take] an even more consistent and systematic approach...[tackling] the discrimination and barriers that prevent individuals from reaching their potential, and that further entrench gender inequalities" (p. 13). Furthermore, organizations can use gender analyses to shed light on gender and intersectional realities and lay the groundwork to "address disparities, challenge systemic inequalities...and build efficient and equitable solutions" (CA, p. 2). All efforts will require broader perspectives and impact.

Despite the need for a broader perspective, systems approaches were only implicitly mentioned. A few organizations (3 of 14) described how programming for women and girls could have significant effects in many areas of their lives. For example, DFID stated:

When [a girl] is not empowered to finish school or to get a job; to decide who to marry, who to have sex with and when, and how many children to have; and when she is not safe at home, in school, outside or at work, she cannot participate fully in society, or realise her potential.... Evidence shows that combinations of interventions are needed to respond to these interlinked challenges. (p. 7)

To achieve gender equality, more integrated and inclusive approaches aimed at changing the reality of marginalized groups on multiple levels are needed.

Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

Gender transformation requires pushing the envelope in how we challenge systems for sustainable, impactful change. This includes the integration of critical perspectives, participatory engagement, and systems thinking. The evidence found in our content analysis suggests that greater efforts are needed to achieve a sustainable, gender-responsive food system. First, most organizations focus on economic empowerment at the household level as the primary domain, or area, of women's empowerment, using decision-making as an indicator. Although economic empowerment is important, the hyperfocus on this domain ignores the cultural context and local views of empowerment (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010; Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2015), potentially sidelining more holistic, culturally nuanced gender empowerment strategies. For example, the indigenous Lenca of Honduras, place a high value on collective action, decision-making, and leadership at the community level as a route to women's empowerment (Accerenzi & Duke, 2023; Fundación ETEA, 2023; Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019). However, gender norms around domestic roles, lack of self-esteem, mobility, and participation, remain as limitations to women's leadership (Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019). A narrow economic perspective of empowerment undermines the capacity for transformative change, underscoring the need to address local understandings of empowerment, as well as the cultural, psychological, and social domains of empowerment (Costa et al., 2023).

Additionally, we found the participatory approaches used by most organizations were extractive in nature rather than integrative and empowering. The organizations included women and girls' voices in their data collection but then would not include them in co-development of programs and interventions. This extraction of women's and girls' voices flies in the face of the spirit and purpose of participatory approaches, resulting in colonial-minded and organizationally driven agendas embedded in gender interventions. Furthermore, although many organizations discuss the importance of addressing structures and systems, their interventions use a top-down approach simply informed by participants rather than meaningful engagement throughout all project aspects. Classen et al. (2008) demonstrates the potential of integrated participatory processes in Honduras, finding that intentionally building capacity, promoting inclusiveness, building social capital, and taking a long-term approach with

communities both results in positive project outcomes and empowers participants. The intentionality and integration of meaningful participation throughout a project cycle can have significant transformative results for communities.

Another major gap area in the gender analyses was the lack of critical perspectives including intersectionality and masculinities. Although all organizations recognize the need to understand both men and women's gender norms, roles, and responsibilities, few organizations are working towards transformation. Intersectionality encourages organizations to address multiple systems of oppression linked to a person's various cultural and social identities rather than treating them as one-dimensional (Crenshaw, 1989). Without this perspective, organizations risk narrowly addressing the realities of gender dynamics. Additionally, a growing body of evidence suggests that masculinities must be addressed as part of gender justice for women (Bojin, 2013; Das, 2014; de Mel, et al., 2013; Howland et al., 2021). This is particularly true in Honduras, where masculinity can result in gender-based violence including backlash for economic empowerment initiatives (Sanín, 2023; Vonderlack-Navarro, 2010) and control over women's mobility, reproductive decisions, and assets (Speizer et al., 2005). We must also acknowledge how masculinity affects men and reinforces gender norms, as demonstrated in the high levels of male-on-male violence in Honduras (Williams & Castellanos, 2019).

Organizations working on gender in Honduras continue to highlight the need to transform systems but only express this implicitly. For example, Howland et al. (2021) critiqued gender mainstreaming approaches in Honduran agriculture, finding gaps in transforming gender systems such as poor translation of policy from the international to national levels, lack of knowledge and capacity, lack of solutions addressing structural racism and machismo, and censorship of civil society. Further, Pastran (2017) found many of these systemic barriers negatively influenced women's ability to fully participate in agricultural cooperatives. Arguably, systems are difficult to shift within the life of a project cycle but organizations must do more than simply building capacity and providing financial support to address the systemic barriers.

Finally, our analysis shows that there have been advancements in organizational approaches to gender. Several are addressing the major critiques of gender mainstreaming through their analysis approaches, including a few organizations who are integrating intersectionality and masculinities such as BMGF, CRS, PLAN, and STC. Similarly, some organizations are moving beyond the economic domain to address other important domains of women's empowerment such as WFP and STC. These efforts must be scaled across organizations and expanded to focus on participatory approaches that empower women and communities throughout the life of a project to fundamentally address their needs. In addition, organizations should use systems approaches to understand the interconnections of factors that influence gender equality such as food systems activities, social and cultural practices and broader environmental and institutional influences.

Researchers also have the opportunity to further integrate critical perspectives, participatory methods, and systems thinking into their work in transforming agrifood systems. Research with a gender lens must include women's voices throughout the process more so than just as passive

participants in the research. This helps the community to feel ownership over the process and the data, enhancing the potential for the research to benefit the community. Researchers must recognize the importance of understanding masculinity as a key component of gendered cultural systems, how masculinity influences men and women's agency and participation, and how men and masculinity must be addressed as part of gender equity and women's empowerment goals. Finally, researchers must consider the intersectional nature of social systems and power dynamics that affect how women navigate systems of access and decision making.

Acknowledgements

Author Contributions: **M. T. Rodriguez** – idea generation, data analysis, writing, review and editing; **R. J. Williams** – idea contribution, literature review, writing, editing; **J. E. Niewoehner-Green** – methods design, data validation, writing, editing; **S. Morales** – writing, review and editing.

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