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WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORKS

by
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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE

DEGREE OF

MA (DEVELOPMENT STUDIES) (full-time)

IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

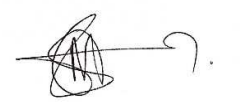
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Supervisor: Prof. Sam Kariuki
Word count: 29 784 (beginning at Chapter 1-5, excluding references)

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own work (of which, some of the contents of this document, particularly Chapters 1 to 3, are from the research proposal I previously submitted electronically and physically to the Faculty of Humanities and Development Studies Department).

This research is being submitted to the Degree of Master of Arts (Development Studies) to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has never been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other university





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Miss M. Mzima (student) Prof. S. Kariuki (supervisor)

17 April 2020

---------- day of ---------- year----------

day *month* *year*

“Here’s to all the strong women. May we know them. May we be them. May we raise them.”

- *Unknown*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

God is good, first and foremost.

This journey has been both incredibly fulfilling and unbelievably challenging. What was once a dream is now a tangible achievement and I have so much gratitude to everyone who has been part of this rollercoaster ride.

Mandiqale ngobulela abantu abadala for always walking with me, for fighting battles I do not have the capacity to and for being as constant as the northern star in lighting my path. Camagu.

To Prof. Kariuki, thank you for your patience, your guidance, your advice and for allowing me to shape this research the best way I knew how. Thank you for accepting the call to be my supervisor when it came, it has not been an easy journey, but I am grateful that I got to share it with you. May God continue to bless you abundantly. I must thank the Development Studies department, especially Yurisha, for their consistent support and encouragement for the 2019/20 Masters class. You have been lovely. Thank you to the Post-Merit Award and GAP for funding this degree – I am forever in your debt for turning my dream into a reality and I will certainly use the knowledge and skills I have gained to contribute to the development of the world in a meaningful, sustainable way. I would also like to thank the University of the Witwatersrand for taking a young girl fuelled by passion and eagerness to learn and grooming her into the brilliant, educated and dynamic women I have since become. It gives me pride to say I have yet again conquered the edge.

To my sisters, I hope you will be inspired to be relentless in your pursuit for your dreams, and to my mother, thank you for all your support – it has never gone unnoticed. To my friends, thank you for being so inspiring. It gives me so much joy and pride to be surrounded by intelligent, talented, and beautiful people. Thank you for the always helping me up in my moments of distress, for celebrating with me in moments of victory and for loving me flaws and all. We're going to do great things in this world! To myself – I am so proud of you. Things you did… THIS! Aphi ama-hater?!

Lastly, but most importantly, a dedication. This one is for you, tata. I love and miss you every day. Thank you for always seeing me, for believing in me and teaching me that nothing in this

world is far from my reach. I know you are proud because I feel your spirit in me everywhere – ndiyabulela Mzima.

Abstract

The expansion of the conceptualisation of empowerment to include gender discourses into the contemporary development agenda triggered the emergence of women's empowerment as a transformative movement aimed at deconstructing the myth of neutrality in policies and replacing this with a more engaged acknowledgement of gender power relations. Borne from this was the integration of the socio-political objectives of women's empowerment discourse into other developmental arenas, including education, employment, property rights, reproductive and sexual rights, income equality, access to resources and the distribution of work. Drawing from the works of contemporary development theorists, such as Naila Kabeer and Srilatha Batliwala, this research employs a critical discourse analysis methodological approach to debunk the ideological frameworks and objectives of the selected South African government policy (the National Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality) and non-governmental strategies (from 18Twenty8 – a women led NGO) dedicated to women's empowerment.

The aim here is not to scrutinise the implementation of the policies and programmes of the chosen case studies or how these institutions operate, the aim is rather to analyse how the language used in the chosen documents informs how we understand women's empowerment within the development paradigm. The key findings of the research reiterate the arguments made in the literature review and confirm the expected outcomes which indicate that women's empowerment shifted from being a social-political transformation motivated concept to being a 'buzzword' to make neoliberal interests more palatable in the contemporary (neoliberal) development era. Thus, it is concluded that the conceptualisations of women's empowerment in the selected policies and programmes do not offer transformative discourses that can be used to dismantle and rebuild institutional structures, challenge the existing gender power relations and absolve discriminative stereotypes and norms that contribute to the disempowerment of women. Instead, these documents offer women's empowerment discourses that are underpinned by mainstream anti-poverty and basic needs approaches to development disguised as women's empowerment discourses and ignoring the most important objective of the concept of 'empowerment' - which is to embed power within any and every activity and discourse advocating for social change and progress.

Key words: *Discourse analysis; Women's Empowerment; Frameworks*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Development emerged as an aspect of the political ideologies that advocated for progressive social democracy, modern liberalism and global capitalist markets (Teghtsoonian and Campbell 2010). European expansion, through conquest and slavery, played a key role in perpetuating the impact of concepts of race, reason and development that dominated scientific and political domains between the 15th and 18th centuries (Bulhan 2015). Even with independence, previously colonised nations – particularly those in Africa and Latin America – continue to suffer from the insecurity of being economically inferior to western nations, thus, are deemed 'underdeveloped' (Bulhan 2015). Mainstream development discourse is underpinned by the neoliberalist free-market model. The notions of 'equal rights' and 'opportunity' are regulated by development bodies that benefit from the dominant discourse (Teghtsoonian and Campbell 2010).

In the 1990s, empowerment began to expand its proponents to gender discourses and the contemporary development agenda; hence, the emergence of women's empowerment. The objectives of women's empowerment in development range from increasing political participation and representation, education, employment, property rights, reproductive and sexual rights, income equality, access to resources and the distribution of work (Kaur 2010). Furthermore, women's empowerment attempts to neglect the myth of neutrality in policies, replacing this with a more engaged acknowledgement of gender power relations (Kaur 2010). However, women's empowerment discourse has been diluted with the objectives of pro-poor development approaches that emphasise opportunity and security as the keys to poverty alleviation (Mishra, and Triphathi, 2011). Capability building has also been presented as a means by which women's empowerment can be achieved (Duflo 2011).

Notoriously known for its brutality, disregard for human rights and racism, the apartheid system was not an easy system to eradicate – so much so that its repercussions continue to plague South Africa twenty-six years later. Nonetheless, the liberation struggle was one that was valiantly fought through mass action and mobilisation. Workers, students and communities united in the fight for what they envisioned as a better, equal, fair and just future society. However, the role of women in the liberation struggle was – and continues to be – downplayed

to elevate that of men, which led to a secondary struggle against the oppressive gender relations – a struggle that modern-day women have inherited.

Since 1994, the South African government has claimed to position its policies as articulations and guidelines of its goal to build an equal society that prioritises and legally upholds the rights of all men and women, irrespective of their differences in race, status, cultures, etc. Consequently, this ideal has been adopted as the fundamental principle of South Africa's gender equality objective as reflected in Chapter 2 (the Bill of Rights) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. The Ministry of Women, Children and Persons with Disability, Gender Focal Points (GFP) at national departments, and the Commission for Gender Equality are some of the structures that bear the responsibility of driving the national gender equality objectives. Given South Africa's painful history from before the adoption of the new political dispensation in 1994, it became necessary for any gender-equality policy and initiatives to consider the multifaceted intersectionality of race and gender discrimination in our new society.

Additionally, policymakers needed to review, amend and where necessary remove legislation that discriminated against people based on gender. The African National Congress Discussion Document of 1997 emphasised that whilst there is a need for transformation of mechanisms and processes in various spaces to establish a society that advances gender equality, this would be challenging to achieve with the confusion, lack of debate and ridicule of the accepted approaches and meanings used to paint how a completely 'non-sexist country' would look. This critique resonates in today's reality in South Africa as there is still ambiguity in the discourse followed to formulate gender equality policies and programmes both in government and in the non-governmental sector.

Conversely, over the recent decades, girls' education has taken centre stage in international development – particularly within the framing of development policy discourse relating to equipping people with the tools to empower themselves and their communities. Arguably, this has created a loophole for development practitioners to avoid delving into intricate gender issues that hinder the progress of gender equality. Foucault (2002) correctly posits that discourse is powerful as it ultimately shapes how we interpret reality, and thus omitting certain (important) points of discussion in the language used in development policies and

programming affects how we comprehend complex issues, such as the broader factors that pose as challenges for girls' education in development.

The research considered the varying conceptualisations of women's empowerment underpinned by instrumentalist, institutionalist and feminist objectives. It sought to illustrate how these conceptualisations find expression in governmental and non-governmental women's empowerment frameworks in South Africa. Following this, a post-colonial/post-structural feminist theoretical framework was employed to critically assess these illustrations and uncover the meanings underpinning the language used in selected women's empowerment frameworks that dominate the development paradigm in South Africa. Thus, the researcher that this research will progressively contribute to the limited knowledge within feminist critical discourse analysis in this regard.

To do this, the researcher first focused on analysing the *National Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality*, a fundamental government policy that is supposed to foreground and guide the empowerment of women within the development in South Africa. The proposed argument, based on the literature reviewed, was that the lack of consensus regarding the definition of women's empowerment allows for the co-option and adaptation of the concept in different contexts of development discourse.

Following this, the researcher critically analysed various materials (including programme documents, website discussions and video interviews) from *18Twenty8*, an NGO that exclusively works with girls for its empowerment objectives. The material selected was used to uncover the empowerment discourse, particularly of girls' education, within an organisation operating within the NGO sector in South Africa. From the literature review, three precise discursive arguments for girls' education are presented, that is empowerment arguments, justice arguments and utility arguments. Arguably, this undermines the complexities intrinsic within 'gender' including its intersectionality with the theoretical underpinnings of equity and equality; thus, limiting our understanding of what is considered imperative for gender equity in education. In this regard, development policies limit their scope of engagement to girls and not gender as a whole (including boys and the LGBTQI+ community). Thus, the success of these policies relies on flawed measurable indicators, such as statistics of how many girls versus boys are in school.

Consequently, this research argues that this approach to policy and programme discourse fails to recognise that gender can be a social process that reproduces social inequalities – but could also be used to challenge these inequalities. It is recommended that all policy undertake a multidimensional perspective of women's empowerment to ensure that its outcomes do not further perpetuate gender inequalities.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Women constitute more than half of the earth's population, but up until the 1970s, they were almost non-existent in development discourses. As such, the Women in Development (WID) school of thought was responsible for setting the stage for women's needs to be prioritised as it advocated for the equitable and efficient inclusion of women in economic and development policies. From this, the Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD) schools of thought were born. Contrast to WID which focused on highlighting the need for women to be perceived as equal to men in their productivity potential, WAD exposed the exploitative nature of capitalist accumulation vis-à-vis women's productive and reproductive labour. Furthermore, WAD highlighted how class plays a fundamental role in in determining the effects of development on women. GAD focused on women's social reproduction and showed how their participation in the labour market is underpinned by broader gendered power structures that intersect with race and class to ultimately reproduce inequality. Given this then, it is evident that over time feminism has established a relationship with the development that has birthed various development approaches. 'Women's empowerment' is one such development approach that is rooted in feminist theory and practice.

The development agenda has made some headway in formulating legislation and policies that are progressive insofar as investing and including women in development discourse and initiatives. This, of course, has been a great step towards achieving gender equality and transformation – a well-received effort compared to the invisibility of women in the development agenda before the 1970s. However, gender inequalities persist in both the developed and developing world. Moreover, feminists who do not adhere to liberal discourses of empowerment highlight how the little consideration women receive in empowerment initiatives and policies are often problematic.

Acclaimed for her contributions to critical feminist scholarship, Boserup (1970) in 'Women's

Role in Economic Development' noted that whilst women were positioned as the central targets of subsistence agriculture and reproductive actives, they were almost completely invisible in international development initiatives and policies. To this, she notes that "by their discriminatory policy in education and training the Europeans created a productivity gap between male and female farmers, and subsequently this gap seemed to justify their prejudice against female farmers" (Boserup 1970, 45). Male farmers were equipped with modern methods of farming for cash crops, whilst women continued to utilise old methods that limited them to farming solely to provide food for their families (Boserup 1970, 43–44). This statement rings true in various spaces in patriarchal societies wherein men are given opportunities that further their privilege over women.

Poverty, inequality and unemployment are the most prevalent issues that disproportionally affect women (Duflo 2011). As a response to these challenges, policymakers across government and non-governmental institutions continue to promulgate legislation and establish strategies that are aimed at transforming unequal gender dynamics. But are these legislations and strategies genuinely progressive or old wine in new bottles?

The 1995 Beijing Women's Conference (referred to as Beijing hereafter) was seen as a prelude for fundamental transformations in global policy for gender equality and women's empowerment; however, that momentum was quickly subdued as mainstream development discourses re-emerged as dominant (Eyben 2008) . The Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals enforced an approach to development that ignored the role of power, culture and history in determining individual and societal conditions (Eyben 2008). In the same instance, the policy environment is one that is vulnerable to the trends in the global political economy (Eyben 2008). Consequently, the mainstream development agenda to globalise markets and limit the role of the state has distorted the priorities and strategies undertaken within policy concerning other issues, such as women's empowerment (Duflo 2011; Escobar 1995; Eyben 2008).

South Africa declares itself as a 'developmental state' that ultimately follows the dominant neoliberal development framework. The country is currently ranked the most unequal nation, it has a femicide average five times more than the global average and the public education system is ranked one of the worst in the world (Robertson 2019). The issues run deeper than what meets the eye and perhaps a good starting point to address these issues lies in introspecting

on whether the current development discourse is best suited for the needs of women in our context – of which this research attempts to do.

Women's empowerment has been conceptualised in various ways, which range from instrumentalist, institutionalist and feminist perspectives, that have been contested, expanded and embraced in different contexts (Sharaunga, Mudhara, and Bogale, 2019). This allows for flexibility in how development practitioners conceptualise women's empowerment and thus, objectives are prioritised to suit specific development agendas. Eyben (2008) stresses that the biggest challenge to progressive policymaking regarding empowerment is fundamentally the different conceptualisations associated with it, which significantly affects how it is framed and implemented. This is a crucial point that will be explored in this research.

Related to the above-mentioned concerns of this research, Duflo's (2011) argument that development policy often fortuitously approaches gender rather than considering the underlying structural causes of gender differences and inequalities forms part of what the research seeks to elaborate on by debunking the women's empowerment policy and programming discourse. This then undermines the importance of using policy and programming to advance strategic gender needs that require the assessment of gender power relations and reconstructing governance institutions to be more democratic as women are often perceived as subservient citizens.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Women's empowerment has certainly become an important aspect of the dominant development framework – so much so that effort to achieve Goal 5 (Gender Equality) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which replaced the MDGs, has been intensified through the formation of its synergy with SDG 16 (Peace and justice, strong institutions). This was done based on the presumption that by forming more effective and strong institutions, there will be a beneficial result of equality between men and women (Pedercinia et al. 2019). In addition to becoming a global trend, women's empowerment has become an indicator of democracy in this day in age. Public and private entities have devoted some of their activities to advancing awareness of gender inequalities as well as providing some assistance insofar as tackling gender inequality and poverty. This is a welcome effort to move towards progress and transformation.

However, several development practitioners; activists; institutions and academics have highlighted the inconsistencies in the reality and objectives of gender equality initiatives, arguing that the efforts and resources dedicated to this cause have not significantly improved the status of women. It is worth noting that the latest report from UN Women's Commission on the Status of Women sat on March 22nd, 2019 for its 63rd conference (referred to as CSW63 hereafter) and took conclusions on "social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls" ("Commission on the Status of Women Sixty-Third Session" 2019).

CSW63 discussions reflect that there has been an increase in political representation of women in developing countries ("Commission on the Status of Women Sixty-Third Session" 2019), however; these isolated instances do not illustrate the reality at a larger scale – especially when considering the socio-economic conditions of women, globally. To this point, Dang (2019) further criticises the focus on isolated instances of increased women's representation as sights of tokenism as there is no considerable representation of women in decision making spaces. Hassim (2005; 2014) echoes this by highlighting the disjuncture in the perpetually growing gap between the political empowerment of women and the indicators of their economic and social empowerment, of which he dubs a serious development issue.

The background above provides a more general account of the approach to women's empowerment within international development, and whilst this is certainly an important factor to remain cognisant of, it is not the focus here. This research limited its scope to South Africa because it is uniquely positioned in a continent that is plagued with some of the most atrocious development conditions, but it is also more advanced in its development in comparison to the rest of the continent. The latter characteristic arguably demands that women and children be prioritised in South Africa's development path.

As mentioned before, both public and private entities play fundamental roles in development. The government is at the forefront of setting the national standard for women's empowerment in South Africa and therefore it is important to analyse its input in advancing the empowerment of women. Conversely, NGOs have become global machines in the implementation of empowerment initiatives facilitated by both private and public entities, hence their input in the national context is also worth analysing.

Given this then, this research employed qualitative and interpretive approaches to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the ideological orientations and objectives of the selected government policy and non-governmental strategies to women's empowerment. Furthermore, given the varied conceptualisations of women's empowerment, the research sought to debunk how these varied conceptualisations are expressed in gender policy frameworks. The research adopted a post-structuralist/post-colonialist lens to uncover and probe the assumptions, meanings and omissions underpinning the government's and 18Twenty8's women and girls' empowerment policies and initiatives. In doing this, the research critically analysed the influence that discourse has in curbing and/or perpetuating gender inequality. The aim was not to scrutinise the implementation of the policies and programmes of the chosen case studies or how these institutions operate, the aim was rather to analyse how the language used in the chosen documents informs how we understand women's empowerment within the development paradigm.

The expectation was that by looking at the discursive frameworks of the chosen policy documents, the researcher and readers will be able to see what qualifies and prevents particular discussions about women's empowerment, as well as how it is done and understood. The researcher adopts the same stance as many existing critical policy analysis documents which respect policies as "representations of knowledge and power, discourses that construct a topic" (Maguire et al. 2011, 157). As such, another focus here is on the variety of ways in which the dominant international development paradigm has discursively influenced the construction of women's empowerment globally. Conversely, the researcher considers how this construction has undermined the complexity and scope of issues affecting 'gender' and (women's) 'empowerment', as well as how it fails to provide a holistic understanding of how gender is relevant to development. The multidimensional approach, as proposed by Eyben (2008), Malhotra and Schuler (2005) and Bayisaa et al (2017) is recommended as a desirable approach to women's empowerment. In this way, the research sought to conceptualise women's empowerment as a process rather than an outcome.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How is women's empowerment conceptualised and expressed in selected policy frameworks of government and non-governmental organisations?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a review of the literature on women's empowerment. Here the researcher seeks to highlight the debates around women's empowerment in all its forms. In noting this, the researcher illustrates how the dominant approach to women's empowerment is fundamentally focused on economic objectives that fail to address the structural causes of their disempowerment and instead exacerbate issues such as poverty. The researcher explores the intersectionality of inequality and illustrates how the dominant development practices and discourse depoliticise gender. Moreover, it is shown how dominant development discourse uses 'women's empowerment' as a buzzword in the interest of maintaining its hegemony.

Given this then, the literature shows how development entities, such as governments; NGOs and global institutions like the UN, are the knowledge hubs determining women's empowerment discourse through policies, reports and initiatives. These discourses are ultimately used as the driving forces that mediate power in society, which then creates a platform for benefactor-beneficiary relationships to be established. These beneficiaries have specific characteristics that make them 'ideal' subjects of post-feminist development discourse and practices. As such, this section critically analyses the interactions between various discourses that influence women's empowerment as a concept and discourse.

DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY APPROACHES

The historical transformation of the development paradigm since the 1950s has increased the prioritisation of questions around gender and the integration of women. At first women's concerns and needs were viewed as a sub-component of 'people's development'. However, after Esther Boserup's 'Women's Role in Economic Development' was published, the attitudes towards women in the development paradigm gradually shifted towards prioritising their specific concerns and needs (Hegeman-Davis 2013). Feminist scholarship thinks of women's empowerment as a way to improve women's lives in all their complex economic, social, cultural and political dimensions (Andrea Cornwall and Brock 2006; 2006; Naila Kabeer 2015; Sanyal 2009).

It can be said that in any place and at any time, notions of empowerment adopt and build on a magnitude of contested meanings, including national histories of anti-colonial struggle, financial institutional programming, donor requirements or feminist political engagements (Sharma 2008). However, it should be noted that these specific articulations are determined by the global context of neoliberalism, wherein development and gender discourses have been used to perpetuate the incorporation of women in the capitalist economy. Hence, as the Women in Development (WID) approach was popularised in the 1970s, policy-makers deviated from the multi-layered understanding of empowerment and instead, women's economic empowerment, through employment outside the home or access to credit, dominated the development paradigm (Hegeman-Davis 2013).

Boserup's work revealed that the capitalist economy marginalises women everywhere. Following WID's call for increased women's participation in development, Boserup proposed a more systematic integration of women in key economic sectors; i.e. agriculture and industry; arguing that this would be beneficial for global economic development (Hegeman-Davis 2013). Instrumentalist arguments for women's empowerment take a similar stance as Boserup as they imply that women allocate resources more efficiently than men and therefore are better 'targets' for development and empowerment projects (Hafner Burton and Pollack 2002; Moser and Moser 2005; Struckmann 2017). The radicalism of WID subdued once it was embedded within the Gender and Development (GAD) approach of the 1980s (Leder 2016). GAD focused on power dynamics that exist within the gender relations and social conditions in specific contexts (Leder 2016). It called for development policies that explicitly focused on gendered empowerment.

Scholars then expanded on these approaches to formulate new ways of strategising and implementing development programmes. These include concepts of empowerment through capabilities (Sen 1992) and participation (Agarwal 2001). However, policy-makers struggled to translate the proponents of GAD and other transformative approaches into concrete policy; thus, the WID approach continues to inform the global policy paradigm as women are perceived as the most capable and trusted economic actors of development (Sharaunga, Mudhara, and Bogale, 2019). Even in the contemporary era, women's economic self-sufficiency is deemed to be the primary indicator of their empowerment. It can be argued that the discursive emphasis of women's economic empowerment is perpetuated by the material shifts in the global economy that ignore the importance of considering power relations and

structural dimensions in development policy (Chant and Sweetman 2012; Naila Kabeer 2015; Hegeman-Davis 2013).

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN DEVELOPMENT

Development over the years has reshaped and shifted into prioritising the protection of human rights, hence declarations; such as the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Declaration of Rights (UDHR); are undoubtedly important documents that have inspired the fight for attaining gender equality. To this point, Cornwall and Rivas (2015) posit that these human rights declarations are important as they "set a vision for a world where there is justice". In line with this, many development practitioners and scholars have established a consensus that the dominant approach to development needs to prioritise human rights – even where it is not the modus operandi in practice. Klirodotakou (2015) notes that this disjuncture is particularly evident in women's rights development discourse. It was previously highlighted that the achievement of women's empowerment has become an imperative concern within the international development agenda. However, its dissemination from broader structural issues that influence the translation of gender politics has arguably de-radicalised the discourse of women's empowerment; thus, removing it from its feminist grassroots and instead, modelling it as an apolitical ideology (Andrea Cornwall and Molyneux 2006; Klirodotakou 2015).

Consequently, dominant development discourse is argued to subscribe to an insufficient definition of empowerment that neglects to pursue a holistic, practical and transformative change for society and women. Instead, it works to preserve and articulate the same socio-economic concerns of the dominant development agenda. It has been twenty-five years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), and this document still provides important points as a guide to the goal towards the protection of women's rights and empowerment. Since the adoption of the BDFA, there have been several agreements that been signed by governments, globally – especially concerning the role women can play in attaining world peace and conflict resolution, i.e. the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). Whilst this is welcomed progress, the world we live in now faces a magnitude of issues; including, but not limited to, climate change, conflict, extremism, and the global financial crisis. Given this, development agencies; practitioners; governments and private organisations who benefit from the currently dominant development agenda and

practices have minimised the commitments and obligations listed in the pre-existing international development agreements.

Ironically, women's empowerment is perceived as the panacea of development by governments, civil society and international institutions. As such, women's rights, women's empowerment, and gender equality are promoted as important drivers and indicators of development. Scholars have been interested in how the concept of (women's) empowerment has different meanings and how it has transitioned with global development. In particular, the era of neoliberal orthodoxy has influenced how women's empowerment has been conceptualised, interpreted and included in development policy (A. Roy 2010; Escobar 1995; Eyben 2008; Sharma 2008). Neoliberalism, as it relates to development, is underpinned by the deregulation of markets, trade liberalisation, limited state involvement in the economy and welfare sectors (Sharma 2008). It is unsurprising then, as it will be illustrated in the discussion chapter, that empowerment within development discourse emerged and continues to be treated as a function of economic development and an outcome of processes of democratisation that remove the state as the central driver of development.

Given this then, it can be said that (women's) empowerment is a sub-component within the mainstream development discourses and it has transitioned within these discourses. The prevailing rhetoric presents women; and particularly girls; as the best-positioned subjects to fix all of society's development challenges. Klirodotakou (2015) narrates this thinking as a flawed blanket solution that assumes that by simply getting more women into the workplace, economies will thrive; that by educating girls, communities will prosper; and by turning women into politicians, peace and security will be achieved. While some have profusely argued that these are achievements worth celebrating as women have now been included in the development agenda (O'Neil, Valters, and Domingo 2014), others have brought to the fore the disputes and contradictions intrinsic in this narrative.

An important argument amongst feminist development practitioners is that there has been a change of hands responsible for the process of transformation as women and women's organisations are no longer the agents of change, and instead have been replaced by mainstream international development agencies and multilateral development institutions (A. Allen 2008; Ahlborg and Strandmark 2006; Anderson 2013; Lundahl 2013; Wiseman 2010). Grassroot formations, such as the women's rights movement, which played a significant role in bringing

attention to the call for gender equality in the past whilst also conscientising other women, are not the drivers of this process today. To this point, O'Neil et al (2014), posits that this is the ideal approach to address the plight of gender inequality and women's disempowerment as it embraces, mainstreams and supports women's rights and gender equality within the dominant development domain.

However, it is important that the mainstreaming of women's rights and gender equality is happening simultaneously with the fundamental turn in empowerment as a discourse, objective and process of development. Given this then, contending arguments posit that women's rights and women's empowerment discourses and efforts have been co-opted by the dominant development paradigm which is underpinned by instrumentalist, apolitical, results-based, cause and effect frameworks. Sharma (2008) talks to this argument as she suggests that women's empowerment has been stripped of its core concerns and re-conceptualised as a means to eradicate poverty through a neoliberal economic model. The latter point is particularly emphasised in the discussions pertaining to the discourse of women's empowerment in South Africa. Given this then, pertinent gender issues; such as gender-based violence and discrimination against women; are seen as insignificant conundrums that can be compartmentalised and addressed through time-bound initiatives (Klirodotakou 2015).

'Empowerment lite', a term coined by Cornwall (2008), is a fitting description of this haphazard approach to development and gender equality as it prioritises quantitative results and seeks to eradicate the symptoms of oppression and poverty rather than tackling the tipping scale of power and/or empowering women in a meaningful, sustainable and tangible manner. Since the MDGs, and most recently the SDGs, international development discourse has microscopically defined women's empowerment as relating to education, employment and political participation. These definitions have been adopted at national and local levels, as will be shown in the discussion chapter, and in turn, the inconsistencies and insufficiencies of the women's empowerment discourse continue to dominate development policies and programmes. This deliberately undermines the multidimensionality of women's empowerment in relation to inequality, patriarchy and agency inter alia (N Kabeer 2012; Naila Kabeer 2015; 2005).

SUBJECTS OF EMPOWERMENT

PART 1: THE POOR WOMAN

The production of knowledge is a critical aspect of this empowerment-development discourse. Knowledge is used to control and organise social affairs which then becomes discourse (Taylor 2015). Gender focused policies, for instance, have become discursive knowledge as certain agendas are presented as norms. Women's empowerment policy documents often represent 'women' as a helpless and powerless homogenised group "out there" (in the poverty-stricken and unequal developing world) that is economically and politically disadvantaged (Duflo 2011; Hassim 2014). Chandler (2013) argues that by focusing on 'saving' these supposed helpless victims, mainstream development shapes development processes to protect western priorities and interests. Post-colonial feminists suggest that development strategies should privilege the voices of local populations in policy-making to ensure that their priorities inform the women's empowerment agenda (Esquivel 2016). For this to happen there needs to expansion and recognition of individual agency – particularly one's capacity to make decisions and have a choice. This is an idea that is futher emphasised in the discussion chapter.

Women's empowerment is presented as a 'unique public good' as it seeks to lift (poor) women from their disempowerment by creating viable economic and political conditions for them to develop. This framing of women empowerment, therefore, necessitates that their disempowerment is 'fixed' through technical and managerial solutions (Chant and Sweetman 2012; Duflo 2011). However, technical 'business case' solutions ignore the human and historical political-economic aspects that contribute to women's disempowerment; hence, development policies that seem to address gender issues are often depoliticised (Chant 2016). The pioneers of mainstream development; i.e. multilateral organisations such as the World Bank, which has recently re-established itself as a 'knowledge bank', are at the forefront of ensuring that this framing of women and their empowerment attains power. Consequently, alternative knowledge, other 'experts' and gender professionals are excluded from the dominant narrative. Given this then, it can be said that policy-making, as a knowledge field, is questionable and this the basis of inspiration for this research.

'Women' as a category has been presented as unhistorical and atemporal resulting in the hybridisation of women in policy documents; thus, perpetuating the idea that women are all disempowered in the same way (Chandler 2013). Moreover, the assumption is that at any given point in history women have been disempowered in the same way. Considering this, the

researcher hopes to further emphasise the argument made in the existing literature (Malinga 2016; Marshall 1997; Ball 2006; Eyben 2008; Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Monkman and Hoffman 2013; Anderson 2013) that any policy that focuses on women and gender inequality should remain aware that 'women' is not a single uniform category and that there are different shaded experiences of marginalisation and disempowerment. This can only be achieved by de-constructing the universal explanations for what is presented as a universal subordination of women, as well as periodising that same subordination (Mishra, and Triphathi, 2011). Moreover, the conceptualisation of key empowerment objectives, such as emancipation, equality and rights, should not be universalised as what every individual wants.

PART 2: THE GIRLS

As the world ushered in the 1990s, which were characterised by a turn in the international political dispensation following the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the international development policy paradigm was also experiencing a shift as gender became a more critical area of concern. A study conducted by King and Hill (2010) looked at the education enrolment patterns in low-income countries, and unsurprisingly the study exposed the perverse gender disparities within the education systems. Since Beijing, many international development conferences and initiatives took place throughout the 1990s – and the call for educating girls gained more and more traction within global development policies. Policies such as the Education for All (EFA) Platform for Action (2000), the MDGs (2001), and the SDGs (2015)., are examples of education policies that many bilateral development agencies, governments, NGOs and the UN committed to.

Reports and studies conducted about girls' education indicate that the number of girls in schools has increased and that the disparity between the enrolment of girls and boys has shrunk. On the whole, it is reported that the number of children in school has increased globally, however; in the 2015 Millennium Development Goals Report, it was revealed that the goal of full primary education for all children, as envisioned in the MDGs and EFA, had not been realised. Moreover, Monkman and Hoffman (2013) Wiseman (2010) and Anderson (2013) assert that violence against women and girls, gendered stereotyping in the curriculum, the quality of education, and girl-friendly pedagogy, just to name a few, have not been sufficiently considered, and in some instances have been completely ignored as significant issues in policies related girls' education and implementing inter alia projects.

Earlier this research report, it has been emphasised that policy discourse defines and shapes our understanding of what is and is not possible within and outside the scope of an issue. As such, Monkman and Hoffman (2013) note that the aforementioned omissions can be consequential insofar as limiting the potential for engaging and understanding the complexities of gender issues that inhibit gender equity. It is not enough to discursively frame getting girls into school as the main issue because 'gender' as a social construct plays a fundamental role in determining who gets to be educated, why them, what is taught and how, and where education takes place, etc. (Monkman and Hoffman 2013). These are certainly important factors to consider and thus, policies must prioritise more than increasing the enrolment of girls into school. There needs to be an engagement with the social processes and the consequences hitherto affecting education which necessitate prioritising educating girls. This idea is further elaborated on in the discussion chapter.

The 'girl-child' empowerment narrative allows development stakeholders to market themselves as change orientated when they are not doing adequate work to redress injustices on a political, structural or redistributive level (Chant and Sweetman 2012). It also feminises poverty, exaggerates the benefits of the efficiency (capabilities) approach to development, and burdens women with the responsibility to empowerment themselves (Chant and Sweetman 2012). Considering this, policies that perceive women and girls as agents of change should not assume that they are intrinsically disempowered but rather see them as disadvantaged due to the unequal structures of power that hinder women from using their agency (Struckmann 2017; Stuart and Woodroffe 2016). As it will be shown in the discussion chapter, this means that policies should not solely focus on the immediate problems that women and girls are subjected to, but rather on challenging and transforming patriarchal structures of power. Hence, the collective action of all women should be emphasised as a critical strategy to achieve transformative gender relations (Stuart and Woodroffe 2016).

GENDER AND INEQUALITY

The categories of 'men' and 'women' are used to differentiate between the sexes of people and unfortunately have also been equated to identifying gender. However gender is a spectrum of multiple and fluid identities, and therefore using static categories such as 'men' and 'women' to identify people can result in their misgendering (Friis-Hansen and Duveskog 2012; Bhattacharya, Banerjee, and Bose 2013). In light of this, gender should be understood as a "cultural construction, which makes biological and physical differences into socially

meaningful categories that seem reasonable and appropriate" (Nanda and Warms 2004, 234). Gender not only defines the roles different people have within a society; it also differentiates between people's social statuses. Badey (2013) elaborates on this by postulating that the systematic roles and relationships between men and women are not solely defined by biology, but by economic and socio-political aspects.

Given this then, gender cannot be seen as synonymous to sex although it is used as a sex-role identifier for the gendered qualities and activities that determine people's access to power and resources (Badey 2013). It is a result of the socio-cultural and socio-political construction of gender that gender inequalities exist. In this way then, gender creates the inequalities between men and women in labour markets, political structures and the household (Badey 2013). Mikkola and Miles (2006, 6) define gender inequality as "hierarchical gender relations, with men above women, and women being registered as inferior and less valuable solely by virtue of their sex". Other scholars have used the intersectionality approach to define and analyse gender inequalities. Accordingly, here are some definitions of the concept.

> "Intersectionality: how gender interacts with other social identities to shape bias" (D. Miller 2016)
>
> "Discrimination against women persists in every corner of the world, but the experience is shaped by interwoven factors that build upon and extend beyond the gender element. These factors include race, socio-economic class, age, sexual orientation, disability and more." (Friis-Hansen and Duveskog 2012).
>
> "The concept of intersectionality… [is used to study] dimensions beyond the original foci on race, ethnicity, gender, and class to incorporate citizenship, sexuality, religion, age, and other dimensions of subordination, across many different social settings" (Bhattacharya, Banerjee, and Bose 2013)

Coupled with race and social class, patriarchy plays a significant role in reinforcing gender inequality. The ANC Gender Policy Discussion Paper (2012) defines patriarchy as a system of ideologies, beliefs, values, and practices that differentiates and perpetuates unequal relations between men and women. Another definition of patriarchy perceives patriarchy as "the common denominator of the South African nation; it is a system of domination of men over women, which transcends different economic systems, eras, regions, and class" (Akala 2018). Sultana (2012) connects the existence of patriarchy to the establishment of societies that do not respect women's rights and their potential. Men are in turn unfairly advantaged in the political

economy and the distribution of resources as they own the means of production whilst women's productive and reproductive labour is exploited. It is worth noting that patriarchy is particularly prevalent in rural communities, nonetheless, in all societies it is a system that reinforces women's subordination and suppression in every aspect of life, including within social institutions and cultural practices (Akala 2018).

Patriarchy's conceptualisation of women as intellectually and physically inferior has resulted in an acceptance of this essentialist ideal and thus, many women see their inferiority as the status quo. This false narrative is further perpetuated by gender stereotypes that are underpinned by patriarchal hegemony and in turn, advance the discrimination between sexes (Akala 2018; D. Miller 2016). It is a fundamental factor that hinders the achievement of gender equality as men are continuously in positions of privilege and entitlement over women. This is an ideal that finds expression in the themes discussed in the discussion chapter. Furthermore, decision making is mostly afforded to men whilst women occupy invisible or less valued roles that are feminine and inferior in the chain of command (D. Miller 2016; Badey 2013).

Given the above, Sultana (2012)and Akala (2018) note that any policy that seeks to advance gender equality needs to take into account the relationship between gender and patriarchy. That is, the perpetuation of gender inequality is intrinsically linked to ideological foundations of patriarchy which are formed, sustained and replicated through social structures and institutions and consequently work to maintain imbalanced hierarchical and power relations (Sultana 2012; Badey 2013; D. Miller 2016; Akala 2018).

In the South African context, the interaction between gender, patriarchy and race plays a significant role in setting up the social, economic and political conditions of both black and white communities. This is because of the long history of Afro-Eurocentric mythodologies that used race to brutalise men and neutralise women. As Akala (2018) highlights, women continue to be the most marginalised and neglected group in South Africa and, thus their disempowerment is heightened by oppression and violence within social institutions and social structures. Given this then, Akala (2018) posits that development policies often prioritise 'gender issues' and ignore race as a factor as acknowledging the latter is likely to undermine the institutional privilege of men. Moreover, in most policy-making spaces, men are at the forefront of drafting and passing policies (Akala 2018). This undermines the importance of allowing women to drive the conversation around their challenges.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT DEPOLITICISED

There is an important relationship between individual agency, collective action and structural transformation that is ignored by liberal feminism. Sardenberg (2008) suggests that these three dimensions can be used to breakdown and transform patriarchal power structures. Klirodotakou (2015) and Galiè and Farnworth (2019) agree that reclaiming the discourse of (women's) empowerment is a crucial step in shifting the titanic plates holding together patriarchy, transforming the institutions and structures that advance and maintain discriminations and inequality, and creating an enabling environment for women to have access to, and control of, resources. Arguably, establishing holistic and progressive empowerment frameworks women anywhere and everywhere – including women's rights organisations – will be able to hold the governments and development practitioners and institutions accountable.

One might ask why this is not widely done?

Klirodotakou (2015) suggests that the primary hindrance to achieving a long-term substantive transformation of women's and girls' lives is the lack of commitment to do so. As we move forward, instrumentalist frameworks continue to dominate the empowerment paradigm. Women are perceived as 'a means to an end', inequality and poverty are approached as one-dimensional cause-and-effect issues, and the depoliticisation of women's empowerment and gender equality persists (Klirodotakou 2015). Perversely, women's rights organisations are put between a rock and a hard place as they have to decide if they will assimilate to this paradigm shift or they will soldier on advocating for their priorities even with the risk of ceasing to exist.

In light of the above, it is arguably difficult to highlight the discrimination and inequality women experience and an intersectional issue of dysfunctional power dynamics of access to and control of resources. To this point, Sharaunga, Mudhara, and Bogale (2019) argue that reforming legislation cannot single-handedly address societal attitudes, norms and practices that reinforce the oppression and subjugation of women. Furthermore, Sharaunga, Mudhara, and Bogale (2019) assert that initiatives that fail to utilise holistic methods to end gender-based violence, discrimination and inequality do not have the ability and capacity to rigorously pursue women's rights.

Gouws and Coetzee (2019) concluded in their report that affirmative action and quotas are not a one-size-fits-all band-aid that will address all the structural and systematic mechanisms that prevent more women from joining politics and occupying managerial and executive positions in corporates. Conversely, this report notes that it is imperative that safer, enabling spaces to be created for women to flourish in their respective careers – this means that these spaces should be a platform for women to improve their skills, better their knowledge and network each other so they can see themselves as esteemed professionals before they pursue senior leadership. Moreover, an enabling environment would be one that welcomes and promotes the participation of women using various mediums of communication, i.e. engaging with local leaders, civilians, politicians, traditional leaders and the media (Gouws and Coetzee 2019). In doing this, policymakers and development practitioners will be able to take into account the diversity intrinsic to the disempowerment of women, thus they will be able to tend to the structural inequalities that exist even within this domain. This way every woman's voice and her agency will be taken into account, and therefore the temporary gratification that is characteristic of current approaches that fail to manifest long-term substantive transformations in society can be curbed.

THE POWER MECHANISM OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Power is intrinsic to understanding the causes of disempowerment as well as achieving a balance in the power relations that influence the choice, opportunity, and well-being. The liberal conception of empowerment disregards power from the narrative and instead perceives women's empowerment as merely an instrument for development objectives, such as poverty alleviation and democratisation, and not as a means to transform one's self and the collective and collapse patriarchy (Sardenberg 2008). Rowlands (1997) established four categorisations of power relations, namely; power over (the ability to influence and coerce), power to (organise and change existing hierarchies, power with (power from collective action) and power within (power from individual consciousness).

The notion of 'power over' is of interest as it stresses the need for participation in economic and political structures but does not seek to change those structures. Oakley (2001) and Bayissa et al (2017) conceptualises this form of empowerment as a process in which relative positions of formal and informal power are experienced by different socio-economic groups resulting from the consequences of the imbalances in the distribution of power. Nussbaum (2011) argues that women's empowerment policies should address the fundamental choices and freedoms

that women in different contexts lack. Capability building strategies and policies for women should be framed in a manner that achieves quality empowerment that is tailored for the specific individual needs of recipients or the different cultures of groups (Nussbaum 2011) Furthermore, it is reiterated that empowerment should not be conceptualised as the replacement of one form of power with another, instead, there should be a variety of choices for the type of empowerment women want that will not reproduce the social inequalities that exist or limit the rights of others (Chant and Sweetman 2012; Chant 2016; Naila Kabeer 2001; Scott 2016).

Development policies seek to include women into the development processes without recognising specific cultural contexts, and the social and political implications of economic growth. The primary objective is to integrate women into the development processes, i.e. financial markets, but this is based on the presumption that women are not already participants of development (Nussbaum 2011). This ignores and devalues women's existence in the informal economy and household production (Nussbaum 2011). Consequently, mainstream development policies maintain the notion that women need to leave the 'traditional' sector for the 'modern' sector to successfully progress. Development agencies, governments and NGOs have arguably adopted liberal feminist formulations of empowerment to legitimise and maintain policies and practices that do little to empower women.

To make a case in point, Klirodotakou (2015) refers to a study, conducted over four decades concluding in 2012, which reinforced that women's right organisations should still play a fundamental role in initiatives geared towards securing the rights and needs of women. In this study that looked at seventy countries, Htun and Weldon (2012) found that women's organisations and movements' mobilisation are more important and effective for addressing gender-based violence compared to international development organisations like the UN, left-wing political parties, or reaching quotas for women's representation. However, as shown in the analysis that will follow in the discussion chapter, even with with the existence of such rigorous and extensive research, the disjuncture between discourse, rhetoric and practice remains.

In her chapter titled 'Taking the Power out of Empowerment – an experiential account', Srilatha Batliwala (2010) discusses how empowerment has been coopted into a 'buzzword' and 'magic bullet' by mainstream ideologies and institutions, thus losing its original meaning and strategic value as a political concept. In India, the interplay of Gramsci's "subalterns" and

hegemonic role of dominant ideologies, inspired a rise in social construction theory and post-colonial theory in the 1980s which expanded 'women's empowerment' as a political and transformatory ideal to challenge patriarchy and the structures of class, race, ethnicity, caste and religion (Srilatha Batliwala 2010). These sociopolitical and socioeconomic mechanisms were used to determine women's positions and conditions in developing societies. The growth in feminist conscientisation theories that prioritised deconstructing the social understanding of gender and gender subordination influenced the widespread adoption of empowerment in several development spaces, including education; health; rural development; workers' rights; etc. Accordingly, by the 1990s empowerment had become a strongly hailed concept in development theory and jargon, particularly in relation to women and gender equality (Srilatha Batliwala 2010). Earlier terminology, such as "people's participation" and "women's development" were instantiously replaced with the "e" word by global development agencies as it presented a 'new' way to 'fast-track' the process of social transformation.

To this point, Batliwala (2010) highlights that "all efforts to more clearly conceptualise the term stressed that empowerment was a *socio-political* process, and that the critical operating concept within empowerment was *power*, and that empowerment was about shifts in political, social, and economic power between and across *both* individuals and social groups". However, since its mainstreaming, women's empowerment has lost its 'power' as it now represents a set of largely apolitical, narrow and technocratic interventions that do not amount to the same or even close to the radical transformation envisioned by early women's movement leaders. It is argued that the discourse of women's empowerment was brought to the fore to serve the interests of neo-liberal economic agendas.

Consequently, there is little room to transform the existing power relations and structures that perpetuate poverty and, the disempowerment and exclusion of women (Teghtsoonian and Campbell 2010). There are several examples of grassroots formations and women's rights organisations that have had their funding retracted by donors and instead have been replaced by mainstream civil society organisations as beneficiaries (Teghtsoonian and Campbell 2010). Some organisations have had to reshape their ideologies to fit the dominant development agenda – for instance, having to adopt power and gender-neutral frameworks to addressing women's exclusion in civil and political spaces (Klirodotakou 2015). This, in turn, undermines women's self-awareness and confidence, as well as their agency (Teghtsoonian and Campbell 2010; Klirodotakou 2015). These are characteristics that can be easily quantified as indicators

of ‘good governance’ – thus the discourse of these organisations often has to prioritise tangible outcomes, such as the provision of social services and skills development (Klirodotakou 2015). An example of such an organisation is the selected NGO for this research. Whilst donor agencies were not central in the advancing or defining of the empowerment approach in India, Batliwala (2010) reiterates that they promoted it amongst their development partners – and therefore compelled NGOs and women’s development organisations to change their language and strategies to fit the new empowerment discourse and mantra. The current development funding strategies are ‘results-oriented’ – which the original ideal of empowerment did not prioritise as the process was less focus on predictable outcomes but rather shaped by the interests and contexts of those invested in it (Srilatha Batliwala 2010).

THE BUREAUCRATISATION OF WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

Some scholars view empowerment policies as a co-option mechanism that uses social organisations and NGOs as tools to support capitalism and the patriarchal system (Bayissa, Smits, and Ruben 2017; Leder 2016). Even with the promise of growth and development, these empowerment initiatives often result in deplorable effects on the socio-political order and institutional and economic structures of societies. Roy (2015) posits that the ‘NGOisation’ of development played a significant role in transforming autonomous feminist formations in the 1970s to transnationalised and professionalised women’s organisations in the 1990s. This transformation coincided with the intense economic liberalisation and withdrawal of state welfare funding; and thus, NGOs were repositioned as the deliverers of these key provisions. In the same instance, gender was becoming a currency in the mainstream development paradigm which resulted in women and gender becoming prominent rhetorics for development experts, states and political discourses (S. Roy 2015). Arguably this reinforces the argument postulated earlier that dominant development discourse that relates to the empowerment of women and gender equality is apolitical.

Additionally, the burden of exclusion and poverty is formulated as a resultant from the economic disempowerment of women. Latterly simplifying women’s disempowerment allows for the trickle-down effect argument to prevail as a solution – that is the assumption that by merely having access to resources, women’s other issues will be resolved and therefore both the women and the development agenda are satisfied (Bayissa, Smits, and Ruben 2017; Scott 2016; Mishra, and Triphathi, 2011; Hunt and Samman 2016). But can it be said that these two things reinforce each other? Even with compelling research, as shown earlier in throughout this

chapter, blatantly showing that equality, women's rights, and empowerment are phenomena and objectives that require collective mobilisation to be secured; there is still a dominant trend that ignores the significance of rights and equality in women's empowerment and development discourse and practice (Klirodotakou 2015; Donnelly 2007; Andrea Cornwall and Molyneux 2006; Agarwal 1998).

Given this, it can be said that for as long as development agendas and policies ignore the importance of political organisation, mobilisation, and collective action, liberal feminism will continue to fail at achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. NGOs have been used to advance the mainstreaming of gender and development objectives of the dominant development paradigm.

Roy (2015) argues that this institutionalisation of NGOs that work with women or on women's issues has forced them to compromise their political autonomy, thus abandoning their radicalism. Wolf-Dictor (2009) posits that the credibility of global civil society, i.e. NGOs, as a democratic force rests on them establishing improved empirical theory, elaborating on their conceptual framework and providing more rigorous methodological research. The lack of progress in these dynamics of NGO strategies has led to their adaptation and professionalisation, which is often masked using the necessary knowledge and skills promoted by mainstream development discourse (King and Hill 2010; Sardenberg 2008). It also exonerates the state from its service and welfare delivery responsibilities by perpetuating 'self-help' practices for the disempowered. The international development paradigm has, for many decades, focused on women's and girls' rights.

Education policy has been especially catalysed by dominant discourses as the main strategy for the empowerment of girls and national development (Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Andrea Cornwall and Brock 2006; R. Allen 2008; King and Hill 2010; Akala 2018). In this way then, empowerment is conceptualised as an outcome of education and a mechanism by which gender equality can be achieved. Scholars have criticised the use of education as a tool for developing women as human capital for the benefit of national development goals (Wiseman 2010; N Kabeer 2012). A prominent critique amongst policy analysts is that of education being promoted as a means to foster women's empowerment within the economic realm (Tarabini 2010; Akala 2018; Tarabini 2010; Ball 2006; Nanda and Warms 2004; Monkman and Hoffman

2013). Arguably, this further perpetuates the reductionist conceptualisation of empowerment as a way to achieve gender equality.

According to the United Nation's website, the fifth SDG is dedicated to achieving gender quality and empowering all women and girls. The targets of this goal seek to enhance aspects of liberalisation, equality, human rights and governance that is effective globally. Before the MDGs, the dominant discourse adopted by governments and international development agencies was focused on providing children with access to schooling to advance national development. However, the 'new dawn' in the international development paradigm which emerged with the MDGs shifted the focus to advancing access to primary school education globally to end global poverty (Lundahl 2013). In light of this then, donor organisations and programme partners, such as NGOs, have not traditionally sought to secure education as a legal right, rather the trend has been to create policies and programmes that focus on schooling needs (Lundahhl 2013). Furthermore, gender equality, particularly as it pertains to women and girls, has increasingly become a focus in education but little sustainable change has happened in ensuring that their right to access to social and political institutions, such as schools, is protected (Wiseman 2010).

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979, documents the legal economic, political and social rights of women. The document explicitly states that gender equality and non-discrimination have to be incorporated in the legal systems of states, discriminatory laws removed, institutional protections against discriminations established, progressive measures be advanced to ensure gender equality, and discrimination against women needs to be dismantled in organisations and from other person (UN General Assembly 1979). Moreover, the document makes provision for gender equity at all levels of education - including, but not limited to curricular resources, teaching methods and physical accommodations that do not discriminate according to sex. Similarly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1990 conceptualises access to education as a human right. Accordingly, this policy instrument calls for free, universal access to primary and secondary education, including the provision of higher and vocational education. Here, inclusive and non-discriminatory education is conceptualised as a universal human right. Moreover, CRC mandates that international education and development policies should approach gender equality in a manner that includes both women and girl children.

As mentioned before, the most influential policy instrument relating to women and girls in the international development paradigm is by far the Beijing Platform for Action, 1995. It was in this document that the term women's empowerment was first explicitly mentioned in an international policy framework that is exclusively targeted as women and girls. The document adopts a rights-based approach wherein empowerment is framed as a capability for bringing forth gender equality and as a condition of gender equality. However, whilst many modern policies and reports refer to this document as a source of inspiration, the dominant discourse within the development paradigm today have since neglected the integration of empowerment and gender equality and instead, education is now framed as an enabling condition for the empowerment of women and achievement of gender equality.

During Beijing, both the biological and social conceptualisations of gender were analysed, which then shaped the discourse of the Beijing Platform for Action on gender. In there, gender is defined as a "social construct of relationships between men and women" (Lundahl 2013, 26). The relevance of the document's discourse on gender lies in its operalisation of gender as a social construct, that is not determined by biology - and thus, other gender policies should adopt this discourse. Moreover, this document was ground-breaking in that it conceptualised girls as a separate social group from women, which previously was not done within the gender-development paradigm. However, Anderson (2013) notes that women and girls have been framed as co-constructed target populations within the development paradigm which has consequently shaped how girls' education policies are produced. This is a notion that is explored in the discussion paper. Another priority has been creating 'spaces'; dedicated to women and girls within the development arena, especially in education systems. This also includes the commitment to promote women's 'voices' within policies and programmes dedicated to their empowerment (Anderson 2013).

The dominant gender-related education discourse thus has had three priorities - that is: women's (economic) empowerment, political participation and the elimination of violence against women. However, even with the claim of the adoption of a "rights-based" approach to gender equality and education policy by donor agencies and international organisations, the pursuit of the legal right to education has not been explicitly been done by these organisations. Hence, the dominant discourse within the gender-related education community has been to focus on the entitlement to go to school.

Consequently, Donnelly (2007) notes that attending school is treated as possession of educational rights but adopting the entitlement approach to education has resulted in governments neglecting their responsibility to change the legal structures that hinder girls from accessing school or being mobile. It will be shown later that this is the case in South Africa. The empowerment narrative has been shaped into the primary principle in the international gender-related education agenda, which dilutes the importance of focusing specifically on human rights and human development (Donnelly 2007). Hence, this is a prevailing perspective even within national policies and local programming. In this way, women's empowerment is conceptualised as an outcome that contains everything that the subject could ever need to be deemed "empowered" (Donnelly 2007; Lundahl 2013). Even so, there remains ambiguity and lack of consensus in the development community on the hows, whats and whys of empowerment-focused policies and programmes to gender equality. Nonetheless, dominant discourses emphasise economic empowerment and political participation in their conceptualisations of women's empowerment. Development scholars have further stressed choice, agency and voice as important frameworks that underpin women's empowerment (Anderson 2013).

Agency is particularly prioritised as it means having the ability to make choices and decisions that can improve women's outcomes (Chandler 2013). Given this then, education within dominant discourse has been shaped as an enabler for women to obtain the knowledge and skills that can use to better the economic and social status. Here, the capabilities building discourse is used as the framework for policy objectives of empowering women and girls through education. This discourse operates according to the assumption that this approach will result in women and girls having agency and choice to improve their lives, but again the structural factors that drive and maintain the economic, political and social marginalisation of women and girls are left untouched of scrutiny.

Anderson (2013) notes that the dominant discourse avoids 'non-economic instrumental' approaches to education policy and the women's empowerment agenda because these are harder to measure. Hence, programme partners and development organisations prioritise quantifiable outcomes for their education projects, instead of rights-focused discourses that tackle the core values of education, because that is what attracts donors.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This section outlines the methodological tools that were used to conduct this research. The main approach here was to analyse, using critical discourse analysis, how language in policy is used to shape and frame how issues, priorities and realities of development, empowerment and gender are understood. A brief account of what is policy research is provided at the beginning to explain what the importance of discourse is within policy research. Following this, the tenets of critical discourse analysis are discussed, then there is an outline of how this research was approached; including the data collection tools used and ethical considerations.

POLICY RESEARCH

Policy research is a diverse form of research wherein researchers seek to debunk how policy is understood. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) posit that development policy consists of both processes and texts, of which Ball (2006) extends this by seeing policy as consisting of processes, outcomes and 'things' (i.e. texts). There are two ways of perceiving policy as a process; the first being a fairly linear process that begins with its formation and ends with its implementation ((Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Monkman and Hoffman 2013; Ball 2006). The second perceives it as a complex cyclical process that has various kinks and knots of **c**ontestation and non-linearity (Ball 2006; Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Monkman and Hoffman 2013). Some policy research is limited to only measuring the impact of the said policy. This type of research has been criticised for often prioritising the interests of the originators or funders of the given policy and thus, failing to consider how the policy is understood, resisted, reinterpreted or re-appropriated by its implementers (i.e. government departments) (Monkman and Hoffman 2013).

Hence, interpretative policy analysis is arguably a better approach as it provides comprehensive analyses using qualitatively informed case studies that focus on the meanings of given policies and how these affect relevant actors (Monkman and Hoffman 2013). For instance, such a study might interview government officials to find out their understanding of policies and their responses hitherto. However, Monkman and Hoffman (2013) point out that even within interpretative policy analyses, basic assumptions can be ignored. In light of this then, critical policy analysis is far more valuable for researchers as is based on the deeper explorations of

policy, including but not limited to: questions about who benefits from a given a policy and who does not as a result of how that policy is formed, framed, implemented, and understood (Monkman and Hoffman 2013).

In this way, critical policy research provides an explicit or implicit critique of the way assumptions are embedded into any given policy to expose how it may advance or destabilise the fundamentals of democracy or social justice (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). It is for the aforementioned reason that the latter approach is adopted for this research. Monkman and Hoffman (2013) provide a working definition for critical policy analysis lifted from Marshall's *Feminist Critical Policy Analysis I: A Perspective From Primary and Secondary Schooling* which sees it as:

> . . research that conducts analyses for women while focusing on policy and politics [.It] asks, first, how does this policy or structure exclude certain publics... ., then asks, what political arrangements support policies and structures that devalue alternative perspectives, that reinforce gender [and other] inequities, and asks, who benefits from these arrangements, and finally, what are possible ways to restructure power dynamics and political arrangements to address issues of social justice? (Marshall 1997, 2)

Conversely, the authors stress that the identification and legitimation of an issue and the mechanisms perceived as useful for studying and resolving it are driven by bias, power and values (Monkman and Hoffman 2013). Furthermore, what we see and do not see as an issue is influenced by the aforementioned identification and legitimation (Monkman and Hoffman 2013).

Given this then, it can be said that our perception of the factors and issues related to empowering women, or to gender as it relates to development in various contexts, plays a role determining which actions are legitimate and which are illegitimate. Here, the example of the international policy community stressing its primary concern for education as being getting girls into school is relevant as this has resulted in their efforts being geared towards increasing enrolments. Whereas if the international policy community started to regard the social construction of gender as a principal factor in the determination of who gets to go to school; what is taught and why it is taught; and how important education is, then the focus in policy might be on ironing out the complexities intrinsic in social processes and their consequences.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Given the brief discussion above, this research must provide an analysis and interpretation of the contents of the selected policies to understand how the problems and solutions hitherto are framed, what perspectives are brought to the fore, and others ignored. Hence, Monkman and Hoffman (2013) assert the use of critical discourse analysis, as applied to policy documents, provides an understanding of the framing of policies and its possible outcomes. It is imperative to scrutinise the use of language in the policy to understand the politics advancing the said policy (Monkman and Hoffman 2013). According to Tyack and Cuban (2009, 40), policy documents are what create "policy talk" – that is, the "diagnoses of problems and the advocacy of solutions".

It is important to note that policies are not epiphenomena that reflect objective reality, rather they are active agents in the shaping of reality and thus, they have real effects so it cannot be said that they are immaterial and not symbolic. Miller and Dingwall (1997, 77) concurs with this point as he asserts that policy documents "are one aspect of sense-making activities through which human beings construct, sustain, contest and change our senses of reality". Considering this, we must comprehend the discursive meanings of written content and that which is not written in policies to understand the factors that shape the text as well as the intended influence the text is meant to have on how reality is perceived.

It is for the aforementioned reasons that this research uses critical discourse analysis to produce a rich qualitative study that analyses which discourses are prominent in each of the selected policy documents. Gee (2009, 3) describes discourse as the "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, behaving, speaking, and often reading and writing...". For him, each discourse takes into account 'theories', which are often seen as insignificant and tacit. These theories define the 'right' ways of thinking, feeling and behaving for a 'normal' person (Gee 2009, 4).

Moreover, these theories provide perspectives on the distribution of 'social goods', such as worth and status, as well as material goods in society – particularly regarding who deserves to have them and who does not (Gee 2009; Monkman and Hoffman 2013). These theories form part of every discourse and therefore, underpin the use of language in all discourses. Given this, Gee (2009) calls them ideologies. According to Monkman and Hoffman (2013), ideologies create our assumptions about how the world works and what we perceive as

important. To this point, Gee (2009, 161) reiterates that discourses are inherently ideological thereby "making them resistant to internal criticism and self-scrutiny". Shaw and Bailey (2009, 413) define discourse analysis as "the study of social life, understood through the analysis of language in its widest sense (including face-to-face talk, non-verbal interaction, images, symbols and documents)". This then allowed the researcher to formulate an in-depth theoretical discussion of gender, women, gender equality and empowerment. It was important that the researcher also consider how political issues are framed and how that framing is used to shape the public's perception of the world.

Monkman and Hoffman (2013, 69) posit that framing is useful insofar as providing "clues to the discourses that shape the ways that policy is understood". This means that people's unconscious mental frames influence their actions, what they consider as good or bad consequences of their actions, goals and plans (Monkman and Hoffman 2013). Extending this idea to politics means that frames are what create social policies and the institutions that are responsible for implementing those policies. To this point, Lankoff (2004) posits that policy discourse should be understood as all the words that are defined relative to conceptual frames because discourse is what triggers metal frames and determines how 'common sense' is understood.

Critical discourse analysis interrelates theory and method, which requires the researcher to accept the fundamental principles of the theoretical framework they choose to use to critically analyse empirical data (Shaw and Bailey 2009). This method is appropriate for this research as it questions the effects of power and structure on the policy formulations of women's empowerment. To answer the research question, the post-colonial/post-structuralist feminist framework will be used as a lens in both theory and methodology as it considers social injustice, inequality and power struggles as areas of women's disempowerment. By employing this method, the researcher will explore how knowledge acts to maintain and transform discursive patterns in the empowerment-development trajectory. The post-colonial feminist framework reveals how discourse is used as a tool to maintain oppressive structures and analyses how these oppressive structures are normalised.

It is important, however; to understand the tenets of policy language not just how frames and discourses relate to policy. For this, we can look to Ball (2006) who draws a line between policy as text and policy as a discourse. According to him, discourses create frameworks that

can be understood as sense and obviousness. These are then used to think, talk and write about policy (Ball 2006) thus, within these frameworks exists policy texts. This research is particularly interested in the framing of the possibilities and impossibilities of policy – that is how the discursive framing of women's and girls' empowerment policy shapes the way women are or are not empowered and how they are thought about. Given this, the research also seeks to consider how gender and empowerment issues relating to women and girls can be reframed to contribute to the achievement of equity and transformation that is sustainable.

The research is critical insofar as identifying which voices matter when defining women's empowerment and formulating policy/programme solutions. In this way, the study considered who holds the power to define and interpret women's empowerment in development. Jørgensen and Phillips (2005) posit that critical discourse studies should take a solid stance and therefore cannot be neutral, descriptive and reserved. In this respect, this research is explicit in showing what the prevailing assumptions on women's empowerment are and how they find expression in selected frameworks. It should be noted that discourses here are deemed as changeable as they are historically and politically determined systems of meanings, and they are symbolic systems that are influenced by competing social configurations.

MATERIAL SELECTION

The discourses of two principle institutions have been chosen as they are regarded as fundamental for work related to women's rights and empowerment in South Africa. The Office of the Status of Women is used as a representative of the state and the selected NGO (18Twenty8) represents civil society organisations. These organisations were chosen as representatives of the general groups of institutions that inform the thinking around and policies of women's empowerment. Following the comments from the reviewed proposal for this research, the researcher had expanded the scope of focus to two NGOs and two government policies. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, which were detailed in the request for an extension, a great portion of the work done between May 2019 and October 2019 was permanently lost. Upon supervised consultation, the researcher reverted to the initial proposed scope of focusing on the selected institutions. Whilst this limited the research focus, it also resulted in more in-depth discourse analysis.

By undertaking this approach to material selection, the researcher hoped to produce a research report that illustrates the complexities and diversity that informs discourse and

policy/programming. In this way, it should be understood that the funding, size and location of women's empowerment are reflected in policies and programmes. Moreover, these policies and programmes are both informants and reflections of the ideological and historical stance of the society they emerge in. Given this, the material selected provides the reader with nuances of the discourse of women's empowerment in South Africa.

The research focused primarily on one government policy document and several reports, video interviews and website content from the selected NGO which allowed for a more in-depth critical analysis of women's empowerment strategies and programming. Further consultation was made with other secondary sources deemed relevant to the research, these include; academic literature, journal articles, reports, laws and other policy documents. The disadvantage of this is that the findings of the research do not represent the overall narrative of women's empowerment within development and thus, cannot be generalised. It can also be argued that the data collected can be interpreted in various ways and, thus there is a strong potential for the researcher to be biased (Gray 2014).

However, it should be noted that it is not the objective of the research to provide generalised conclusions on the topic, but rather the research seeks to interpret the content and language of the selected documents to reveal the archaeology and genealogy of their women's empowerment policies.

18Twenty8 is a women-led NGO that is focused on empowering young women, from disadvantaged backgrounds (townships in Johannesburg), by formulating strategies for their educational and personal development. The organisation focuses on women between the ages of 18 and 28 and aims to help these women perceive tertiary education as a desirable and necessary instrument for their empowerment. This is done to ensure that young women become prospective leaders and mentors in all productive sectors that will help others in the communities develop themselves and their communities in the futures. Moreover, they aim to enhance the young women's skills, through their recruitment community-based workshops, so that they have valuable skills set to bring to their employers.

18Twenty8 essentially adopts the same framework as the mainstream development paradigm which seeks to invest in building women's capabilities in hopes that they will then use these capabilities to contribute to the development process and to empower themselves. Given that

formal mentoring programmes that are focused on girls are not common in South Africa, the scope and methodology of 18Twenty8's programmes is especially of interest. Stewart & Openshaw (2014) highlight the benefits of mentoring as professional development, i.e. apprenticeships, and personal development resulting from counselling, guidance and psychoeducation. These benefits are part in parcel what 18Twenty8 seeks to achieve and are especially relevant in the South African context. Inquality is especially prevalent in South Africa and forms part of the triple burnden – poverty and unemployment being the other two – the majority of citizens, especially women and girl children, carry throughout their lives.

Accordingly, Albertyn (2011) brings to the fore the unnerving reality of black women in South Africa whose marginalisation is intensified along class, gender and racial lines. Furthermore, despite the existence of some legislative policies aimed at addressing and mainstreaming gender empowerment, these have been insufficiently implemented and arguably perpetuated extisting gender inequalities (Yaliwa, Selebogo, and Ojakorutu 2013; Tung 2019). Sociocultural factors also contribute to the limited progress in the empowerment of women and girl children in South Africa. Patriarchal traditions are the fundamental underpinning of this social ill – even in cases where there are commendable developments in empowering women, patriarchal attitudes and norms undermine these shifts. The lack of women, especially black women, in high profile leadership positions is an example of the dissolution of meaningful exposure to 'role models' young women and girl children can look up to. Block and Tietjen-Smith (2016) reiterate the latter point by positing that the scarcity of women in leadership positions makes it difficult for young women and girl children to find role models to aspire to as adults. This negatively affects the leadership development of women as mentoring and role modelling certainly can significantly assist women leaders in positively effecting their own development and their communities in various situations and levels (Block and Tietjen-Smith 2016; Tung 2019).

In South Africa, we have seen how various influential women's organisations and political figures have continuously failed to prioritise women's interests for the benefit of their male counterparts. The most illustrative, and perhaps heartbreaking, example has been the nonchalantness in which gender-based violence, trafficking of women and girl children, and the ongoing femicide have been treated with over the passed few years. In a recent tweet, MEC Faith Mabuza gave praise to the Minister of Police for closing a nightclub operating after curfew and several concerned citizens brought up the lack of the same urgency and

prioritisation the South African Police Services (SAPS) and Minister of Police have displayed for gender based violence and human trafficking. This happened against the background of the Minister of Police publicly denouncing the trafficking of women and girl children in South Africa as a "publicity stunt" despite there being women and children reported as missing everyday. In response to the confrontations, the MEC responded "how do you know that by closing down that club the police did not save a women from being trafficked tonight?", which can be viewed as a gaslighting statement considering that several posts about trafficking syndicates are rarely ever pursued by the police with the same vigor. Similarly, the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) venomously attacked and shunned Fezile "Khwezi" Ntsukela Kuzwayo during her rape trial against former president, Jacob Zuma, and continued to operate without taking accountability of their actions – even in their response to Khwezi's death.

In light of this, an organisation like 18Twenty8 is important as it gives young women and children access to positive and relatable women role models in a country that is plagued with suffering that acutely affects woman and girls, especially those from an underprivileged backgrounds. It also has the potential to provide its beneficiaries with a widened understanding of power dynamics that challenges existing problematic and oppressive social norms. As a platform for holistic development, 18Twenty8 has the potential to close the gap between the 'self' and the 'other'. Taking into account the aforementioned potentials of an organisation such as 18Twenty8 as well as the organisation's own mission to empower young women and stimulate their personal development through education, the researcher found it fitting to for this research.

The *National Policy Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equity*, written by the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) was chosen as it outlines the national vision for gender equality and how the state intends to achieve this goal strengthen the institutional mechanisms to inspire more commitment and response to gender policy measures. It is a generic policy document meaning that it serves as a guideline for other government sectors by detailing the principles that ought to be integrated into relevant institutions and government sectoral gender equality and women's empowerment policies, practices and programmes. Thus, it is relevant for this research as it reflects South Africa's approach to gender issues and therefore informs its empowerment-development discourse. The key guiding principles of the document is establishing an intersectional coordination framework as well as mainstreaming gender. Gender -mainstreaming is described as:

> "…a process that is goal-oriented. It recognises that most institutions consciously and unconsciously serve the interests of men and encourages institutions to adopt a gender perspective in transforming themselves. It promotes the full participation of women in decision-making so that women's needs move from the margins to the centre of development planning and resource allocation" *(National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, xviii)

In reading the document, one can ascertain that the empowerment is a central objective of the document. Apart from its mention in the title, "women's empowerment" appears fifty-two other times in the document, but none of these mentions is subsequently followed by a clear definition of the concept. The document profusely stresses that "women's empowerment is a means to achieving gender equality rather than an end in itself" (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, 6) and distinguishes between 'women's empowerment', 'gender equality' and 'gender equity'. However, these words are used interchangeably in the document and treated as synonymous.

The document posits that the disempowerment of women is largely a result of the systematic and socially engineered location of women in rural areas; patriarchal constructions of womanhood; and repressive Apartheid laws, customs and traditions. These sources of disempowerment have had insurmountable consequences for women in South Africa that will take generations to undo.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The process of analysis for this research took the form of note-making; coding; and categorising and comparing the data. This facilitated the researcher in organising the data adequately. For instance, documents that have similar arguments were grouped into the same category, i.e. those that focus on the financialisation of women's empowerment through microfinance were grouped as such.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The research falls within the no-risk category as it will be a textual study based on policy, document analysis and existing online content only. While there is no requirement for ethics clearance, a waiver form signed by my supervisor was given to the Development Studies

Department and the Humanities Faculty to indicate that permission has been granted to continue with the research. Ethical clearance was approved on 24 August 2019.

A significant limitation of this research was the loss in direct consultation/interviewing the individuals and/or institutions who are close to the formulation of the chosen policies and organisations. An incorporation of this aspect to the research would have provided the researcher with better understanding of how women's empowerment and related matters are framed by said institutions and persons. Thus, in writing the research report, the researcher would have had direct knowledge (beyond the researcher's own biases) of how these framings are used in policy and programmes to shape what has become the public's perception of women's empowerment and its discourses.

Considering that the study undertakes a critical discourse analysis approach, there is potential for the researcher's own sociopolitical beliefs to influence the explicity of assumptions made before interpretation of the material chosen is conducted. However, this bias was curbed in that the research was not justified merely by the individual choice of the researcher, rather, the research seeks to fulfil sociopolitical functions for the benefit of those who are receipients/subjects of the prevailing assumptions on women's empowerment discourses, i.e. by exposing which narratives and voices are dominant when women's empowerment policies/programmes are formulated, and the inqualities and injustices that are intrinsic in the sociopolitical fabric of South Africa. The researcher relied on facts rather than opinions in their interpretation of the findings. Irrespective of this however, any interpretation of a sociopolitical dimenstion is subject challenge – this including interpretation of the content and language of the selected documents in this research.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This section provides a discussion of the findings (which have been collated as part of the discussion). The section is divided into two parts: *Part 1: Policy or Policing* is primarily focused on the *National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* (referred to as the Gender Policy Framework hereafter), and Part 2: is mainly an analysis of the various sources of material, i.e. reports, readily available video interviews, website content, etc. on 18Twenty8.

PART 1: ANALYSING THE GENDER POLICY FRAMEWORK

In this section of the discussion, the researcher discusses the findings concerning the conceptualisation of women's empowerment in the Gender Policy Framework. In reading the Gender Policy Framework, the researcher found that many of the arguments postulated in the literature reviewed were inherent in the discourse underpinning the aforementioned document. It was duly noted in earlier chapters that the Gender Policy Framework whilst not a prescriptive statute in South Africa, it was developed by the OSW as a guideline for development policies aimed at transforming the unequal relations and societal structures in the country. It should, therefore, be treated as the foundation of policies that seek to promote and implement the empowerment of South African women. Under *Part 1: Analysing The Gender Policy Framework* there are five (5) sub-headings, excluding the introduction, which thematically uncover the core threads of analysis in this regard.

INTRODUCTION

This introductions briefly outlines the arguments that will be elaborated on in this section of the discussion. Following the definition given by Eyben (2008), the researcher understood discourses to be about more than what is written in documents, such as policies, rather they also encapsulate the activities and procedures embedded within the words that determine whose knowledge takes priority, the available alternatives and those that are perceived as achievable. Discourses are multidimensional in that they affect change in the present reality and the future. In this way, discourses should be understood as an expression of the power held by those who shape them. In the South African context, the women's empowerment discourses are essentially an extension of the provisions of Bill of Rights contained in Constitution of the

Republic of South Africa, 1996 and dominant international discourses that have been asserted by international feminist movements and renowned transnational organisations, such as the UN. This makes it difficult to separate the prevailing local gender and women's empowerment discourses from those of the international development realm. This is an important ideal to keep in mind whilst reading the foregoing analysis and discussion as it significantly influences how the women's empowerment discourse in the Gender Policy Framework has been formulated.

The researcher found that the influence of hegemonic international political economy discourses in South African development approaches, adopted by the post-apartheid governments, has not only been maintained through donor conditionalities, but it has also infiltrated the policies and programmes dedicated to women. Kabeer (2015), Batliwala (2007) and Struckmann (2017) assert that at its inception, empowerment was conceptualised as an interventionist mechanism to establish a balance in the power relations between men and women as well as in the social classes by redistributing the sources of power (such as money, labour, and land). Furthermore, the intention was to transform the ideological and institutional vehicles that drive the perpetuation and justification of gender inequality (S Batliwala 2007; Naila Kabeer 2015; Struckmann 2017). However, as the literature reviewed and the findings of the analysis of the Gender Policy Framework reveal, the latter and former objectives have been disregarded as instrumentalist discourses on growth and social cohesion prevail within government development policy, which has extended to women's empowerment policies.

The economic empowerment of women is a dominant theme within all the policies and programmes of the selected organisations, as there is emphasis placed on it being the best-suited strategy for eradicating poverty for individual women and the country as a whole. Having read the policies and programmes, 'economic empowerment' is accordingly understood as a way to reduce the challenges that hinder women from accessing resources and employment, and thus prevent them from increasing their income and productivity. This can be read in the objectives and strategies of 18Twenty8 and the government (represented here by the Office of the Status of Women as they prepared the Gender Policy Framework). Whilst there is mention of a need to tackle the structural forces that contribute to the oppression and disempowerment of women in the Gender Policy Framework, the document barely goes into detail about how these structures will be dismantled and restructured to give women more access to resources and ensure that even where women are given specific opportunities, these

structures do not prevent their advancement. There will be an elaborated analysis of economic development later in this section.

Women's involvement in the agriculture sector, which is an area of concern in the Gender Policy Framework, is an example of this. Whilst this may be viewed as a progressive step towards empowering women, it is not enough to frivolously mention increasing women's presence in the sector without addressing the issues related to ownership of land in South Africa. Arguably, approaching the economic empowerment of women by increasing their access to means of production, i.e. land, credit and equipment, is a tedious method as it fails to address the larger issue of land reform. The latter is complex as it requires a radical transformation of the division of reproductive and productive labour; control and ownership of production; and social relations between men and women in households and communities.

The aforementioned are intricate concerns of power at a national, interpersonal and global level and yet the discourse of the Gender Policy Framework hardly addresses or analyse them. The Gender Policy Framework locates the most disempowered women in rural and peri-urban areas. The document states that:

> … gender equality cannot be attained without women's participation in all spheres of life as well as the empowerment, in particular, of the most deprived women. In South Africa, the latter are predominantly African women who live in rural areas. They constitute the majority of the poorest of the poor. Their access to national institutions, resources and facilities is grossly limited. Many live in isolated rural areas where there are few roads or transport services to facilitate communication, and where it is harder to organise a defence of their common practical needs and strategic interests (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, 6).

The literature reviewed revealed that there is a consensus amongst policymakers that the 'poorest of the poor' are the panaceas of development as their 'empowerment' is easily measurable by studying the reduction of their poverty (Naila Kabeer 2015; Struckmann 2017; S Batliwala 2007). As such, I will use the term 'vulnerability' to describe this conceptualisation of women's empowerment within development discourses. It is a theme that is often related to economic empowerment as it presumes that extreme disadvantage is solely identifiable by the lack of material wealth – which is treated as a variable of economic growth and stability.

Hunt and Samman (2016) observes that vulnerability is perceived as the opposite of economic empowerment and therefore it is unsurprising that development policies, scholars and practitioners often couple the 'poor and vulnerable' as a description of those living in extreme conditions of disadvantage. The language used by the selected documents of this research strips away agency from women and instead positions them as victims. Consequently, the provision of welfare goods and services is proposed as a solution to this issue, which is also arguably monotonous as it does not directly address the structural and systematic forces that are the foundations of victim-hood. Moreover, the language used to categorise this 'vulnerable' group totalises their experiences and fails to acknowledge that there may be aspects in their lives wherein these women and girls have agency and/or power.

Considering the assertion made by Hunt and Samman (2016), the researcher argues that the broadness of the conception of economic empowerment is self-contradicting as it neglects to acknowledge that women can be disempowered in other areas of their lives, even when they are economically advantaged. The presumption that poor and rural women have the short end of the development stick is the reason why policies and programmes dedicated to women's empowerment gravitate mostly towards them.

A key priority in this regard is education, which is perceived as both an area of concern and a remedy by the selected institutions. The Gender Policy recognises that the history of South Africa, coupled with the patriarchal norms embedded within culture, made it difficult for 'previously disadvantaged' groups to attain an educational back-group that would radically advance their skills and knowledge. Bantu education was not only a racist system but it also limited the potential career growth of many South Africans. As such, it is unsurprising that many black and coloured families only have one or two generations that have either attended tertiary or had the opportunity to (McKeever 2017).

Consequently, organisations such as 18Twenty8 exist because the dominant discourse proposes that by equipping women with knowledge that will enable them to act and increase their self-esteem and expertise, women will have the power to participate in decision making and facilitate their development. Of course, equipping women with the tools they need to better themselves is a cause that everyone should support and be inspired by, however; the assumptions made by this conceptualisation of women's empowerment are arguably audacious. This will be elaborated on in Part 2 of this chapter.

The Gender policy makes specific mention of participation and representation in local and national politics, economic activities and civil society institutions. In particular, it stresses that gender mainstreaming should be implemented within all political spaces to increase the awareness, demand and exercising of women's rights. However, there is no discussion of how emphasising the aforementioned theme within development discourse will ensure that women's participation only limited to entry-level or middle position leadership roles. Moreover, the gender mainstreaming strategy as it relates to economic empowerment is discussed at length and in a manner that promotes inclusive markets and production processes whereas women acquiring political power is perceived as a threat to the patriarchal order of society.

In the following sub-headings, the above framing of the discussion on the Gender Policy Framework will be elaborated on.

1.1 WOMEN AND THEIR NEEDS

Literature suggests that patriarchy, along with race and social class, is a cog in the machine that creates and maintains gender inequalities. As per the ANC's (2012) definition of patriarchy, it can be argued that social institutions and cultural practices significantly reinforce and reproduce the unequal relations and perceptions between men and women, both in the private and public spaces. Women are allocated roles that are categorically 'feminine' and 'inferior' in patriarchal societies, and their decision-making positions are often invisible or insignificant (Sholkamy 2010; Maseno and Kilonzo 2011; Moghadam 2007). Young (1990) proposes two types of feminism: humanist feminism and gynocentric feminism. Accordingly, the literature reviewed, postulates that mainstream development discourses stress the conservative ontological opposition of phenomena that is intrinsic to life – that is; freedom, the body, and spirit, nature and culture.

Similarly, Young (1990) argues that humanist feminism positions femininity at the centre of women's oppression, and thus it is proposed that institutions and organisations dominated by men should allow the participation of women within their operations and, create conducive and enabling environments for women's participation where they have been previously excluded. This discourse has been adopted by liberal feminism, however; there are indeed limitations to it. To this point, hooks (2012) and O'neil et al (2014) posit that it is indeed true that women

were able to make more money and relatively increase their power within society when they started to perform and assimilate to masculinity, however; this also forced them to embrace, advance and advocate for dominant cultural ideologies.

Young (1990) outlines another type of feminism - that is, gynocentric feminism which advocates for a paradigm shift within feminist theory. This paradigm shift is one that would prioritise women's experiences as a challenge to the current status quo which excludes it from dominant discourses. In this way then, difference is acknowledged, rather than advancing neutrality or the universalising of women's experiences (Young 1990). Furthermore, Young (1990) stresses that taking into account claims, epidemiologies and standards beyond masculine experiences is imperative for empowerment discourses - which is a factor that is absent from neutrality and thus, femininity is devalued.

The situational analysis section of the Gender Policy Framework provides a brief analysis of the socio-economic and political concerns and challenges that contribute to the disempowerment of South African women. The categories identified as barriers for women's progress are poverty, education, health, violence, housing, welfare, land and agriculture, the environment, the economy, power and decision making, information communications **t**echnologies (ICT), human rights, and institutional mechanisms (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003). There is no analysis of how these barriers affect different women, in different spaces, at different points in their lives. It is simply presumed that women in South Africa have the same experience oppression and discrimination under these systems, irrespective of their background. This assertion is an example of the monolithic perception of women that is dominant in development discourse and the patriarchal system that regards these realities as being identical in every society. Such a discourse contradicts the 'empowering' aspect that the Gender Policy Framework seeks to achieve and ignores the importance of context when formulating the discourse.

Following from Young's (1990) arguments outlined earlier in this section, it can be said that the Gender Policy Framework adopts gender-neutral principles that advance the idea that women and men have the same experiences, which is untrue considering that we are all socialised differently and therefore are prepared for different expectations, skills and behaviours. Although the Gender Policy Framework envisions that South Africa needs to achieve "a society free of racism and sexism" by "undergo[ing] a paradigm shift" to change

how people relate to each other (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, iii) there is no detailed discussion of what this change would look like. However, to the society described by the Gender Policy Framework, femininity needs to be valued in development and empowerment discourses. As such, the Gender Policy Framework would be a good place to start as it is the foundation of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in the development policies and programmes in South Africa. Following from Young's (1990) propositions, claims, epidemiologies and standards embedded within the Gender Policy Framework's women's empowerment discourse must not be limited to the masculine experiences and gender neutrality.

However, the Gender Policy Framework's principles mention that "women differ according to factors such as race, disability, class, culture, religion, sexual orientation and geographic location" (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, 21). In light of this, the document calls for increased representation of women in all spheres of life as per their race, socio-economic class, disability, culture, religion, sexual orientation and geographical location in terms of their proportion in the population (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003). This proposal aligns with the focus offered by gynocentric feminism which rejects the centralisation of traditionally male experiences within development policy and instead advocates for prioritising those experiences that are traditionally allocated to women. In light of this, one might be inclined to say that gynocentric feminism is more radical than humanist feminism which simply challenges femininity.

However, by prioritising the 'specificity' of women, gynocentric feminism fails to acknowledge the difference amongst women and thus, it can be argued that this is an essentialist approach that is biased as it is based on the experiences of a few women. By highlighting and prioritising difference among women, the Gender Policy Framework sets a progressive discourse that can be used to see privilege and oppression with a more focused lens, and therefore more rigorous ways of dismantling these notorious realities can be established.

Throughout the Gender Policy Framework it is reinforced that women lack "access to" several capabilities and resources that man have, and where they do have this access, there is an unequal distribution with women having less access/ownership. This language exposes that

women's realities are approximated to those of men - of which, what men have is perpetuated as the standard for everyone. This comparison and standardisation is unsurprising considering that most discourses that are concerned with equality often disregard the role of the 'perpetrators' of inequality and focus on the subjects of that inequality. This then results in the creation of the 'other' and often questions about what makes the 'other' different arise. In the Gender Policy Framework, women are conceptualised as the other. Such discourses victim blames the subjects/objects of oppression and inequality.

The Gender Policy Framework also recurrently mentions that integrating 'women's needs' into the larger transformation and development objectives is important. This reinforcement of integrating 'women's needs' alludes to an overall messiah stance of the Gender Policy Framework's women's empowerment discourse, which perceives women as a problem or case study in need of saving. The proposed solutions require that women follow the humanist feminism logic which proposes that they ought to adopt more masculine personae to be empowered.

This narrative is not problematised and instead humanist notions of feminism are reinforced. Some might argue that bringing to the fore women's needs is a progressive step towards inclusive development and adheres to the principle of embracing diversity as enshrined in the Constitution, however; by not challenging the masculine hegemonic standards and the gendered power relations and distribution of resources, the Gender Policy Framework loses its potential to radically transform the discourse within sectoral and national development policies on gender equality and women's empowerment. As mentioned before, this WID approach to women's empowerment is underpinned by market economics principles that simply attempt to make the discourse more palatable by 'including women' in the process of development.

It was mentioned earlier that the Gender Policy Framework emphasises that the government undertakes a rights-based approach in conceptualising women's empowerment. To this end, the document posits that "South Africa has enacted legislation and ratified international and regional instruments aimed at the protection and promotion of women's rights as human rights. These rights fall into two broad categories: socio-economic rights as well as political and civil rights. By socio-economic rights, it is meant, rights dealing with basic necessities such as housing, health, water and food. Political and civil rights refer to the rights of individuals to citizenship, language, culture, religion and basic freedom of movement and expression"

(*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, 19). This abstract illustrates what several authors have argued concerning gender equality stating that it is often conceptualised as a mechanism by which other development goals can be achieved rather than the goal itself (Ahlborg and Strandmark 2006; Wiseman 2010; Nanda and Warms 2004).

The Gender Policy Framework differentiates 'women's empowerment' as the fulfilment of basic/practical needs, which is said to be a prerequisite for achieving 'gender equality' as a strategic need. However, the document defines gender equality as "...a situation where women and men have equal conditions for realising their full human rights and potential; are able to contribute equally to national political, economic, social and cultural development; and benefit equally from the results" (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, xxviii) Considering this, it can be argued that gender equality and women's empowerment are actually, indeed treated as synonymous because not only are they conceptualised as human rights, but it is reinforced that the achievement of women's empowerment means there are gender equality and socio-economic development. This assertion is problematic because, again, it puts the responsibility of changing on women so they can be perceived as equal to men.

Moreover, the assumption that there is a trickle-down effect from empowerment to growth and productivity is flawed and reinforces the argument made earlier regarding the exploitative nature of the WID approach. The Gender Policy Framework further alludes that gender equality is a matter that seeks to ameliorate the living standards for both men and women - in which case, if the aim is to create conducive conditions to bridge the gender gap, prioritising the 'empowerment' of men with the same rigour as the empowerment of women is arguably redundant and reproduces gender inequality.

1.2 PROBLEMATISING EMPOWERMENT

When empowerment emerged in the 1980s, activists used it as a strategy to refute western feminisms but over the years this concept has been mainstreamed into international development discourses advanced by dominant agencies, governments, multinational organisations, NGOs globally. It is now a concept that is embraced across the world (in both the southern and western regions) and it has also become a catch-phrase in the feminist community. Larsson (2010) notes that the concept of empowerment is malleable in that it varies

in how it is defined and implemented depending on the context it is used in - that is, in the economic, political, social, personal development or leadership. As noted in the literature review, empowerment, in the development context, is often used to encourage and establish participatory initiatives that give women opportunities to express themselves but this does not necessarily amount to giving them power (Jo Rowlands 1997).

Hence, it should be emphasised again, that there is no consensus on the definition of empowerment and as Galiè and Farnworth (2019) suggest, this may also be a result of the flexibility of power as a concept. Thompson (2007) posits that empowerment and power are words whose nuance can be reduced to suit a particular narrative. Following this, Galiè and Farnworth (2019) assert that power goes beyond the notion of one thing or a person making another do something that they would not do on their own accord. It is argued that control, dominance and influence are not the only factors underpinning power, rather it is important to acknowledge the notions of the 'power to'; and the 'power within'; when discussing empowerment. Conversely, Thompson (2007; 2017) notes that empowerment is often framed as the act of giving 'power to' the people but he asserts that this should not be understood in its literal terms.

It can be argued that the presumption that individuals possess latent power has led to the words 'empowerment' and 'power' to be used to describe instances when marginalised groups can achieve, attain and act on things. Larsson (2010) extends this argument by postulating that the development of one's abilities and capacity is a form of empowerment. Moreover, scholars have stressed that access to decision-making is not the only indicator of empowerment and thus, there must be a process in which people unlearn their unconsciousness to see themselves as entitled and able to hold decision-making power (Jo Rowlands 1997; Galiè and Farnworth 2019). In this way then, the 'power to' and 'power within' are married into one.

Principle	Definition of Principle	KEY INDICATORS FOR MEASURING PROGRAMME APPLICATION
Economic empowerment for women	This principle refers to the capacity of women to access and control economic resources and make decisions for improving their quality of life	· Access; · Control/ownership; · Decision-making; · Change in power relations; · Choices; · Participation; · Self-reliance

Lifted from page 22 of the Gender Policy Framework

From the table above (which is part of a bigger table in the document), it can be seen that the Gender Policy Framework prioritises economic empowerment as a principle for women's empowerment. Accordingly, the Gender Policy Framework's discourse emphasises building capacity to effectively make choices and act on them to achieve particular objectives (otherwise stated as the "key indicators for measuring programme application" as per the table above) that would characterise an 'empowered' women. The assumption here is that the targets of this economic empowerment can make informed choices, at all times in all spaces, which is simply untrue. Earlier in this chapter, it was noted that the Gender Policy Framework is progressive in terms of acknowledging that highlighting the differences among women, but in this principle it neglects to take into account how those differences influence women's ability to make informed choices. Consequently, the indicators of economic empowerment in this instance are inherently biased as they only favour those women who have the privilege of making choices that will most likely result in them achieving those objectives.

To this point, Agot (2008) posits that 'effective choices' are underpinned by two factors. The first is agency; which he defines as the "personal ability and asset base to envisage and purposefully make meaningful choices". The second is opportunity structure, which refers to the "formal and informal contexts within which one operates, including laws, regulatory frameworks and norms governing behaviour". Many women in South Africa, especially those living in conservatively patriarchal communities/households, face a double-edged sword in their inability to make 'effective choices' as they not only do not have complete information for what 'meaningful choices' look like in the greater outside world (i.e. the 'democractic' spaces of society) and secondly, even under a 'democratic' South Africa, the formal and informal institutions perpetuate gender inequality, and so their choices are devalued.

For Thompson (2007) these translate to agency and voice as he asserts that these two things give people the ability to express themselves, their aspirations, their needs and feelings. Given this, the voices of the oppressed must be heard otherwise 'empowerment' is merely a "lip service" (Lundahl 2013, 24), and for this to happen, the Gender Policy Framework's discourse of women's empowerment needs to acknowledge that even within oppressed groups, i.e. women, there is a hierarchy of privilege that constitutes the extent to which one will be able to move towards being 'empowered' as per the outlined objectives. Notably, 'poor women' are emphasised as a target group for empowerment in the Gender Policy Framework, and we are to assume that this capability building is specifically targetted at them then it can be argued that the Gender Policy Framework's empowerment discourse is individualistic as it would be stressing that poor women should be responsible for their emancipation and importance of collectivism (of all women – privileged and not) is completely ignored.

It was mentioned earlier that the Gender Policy Framework reiterates that its guidelines for women's empowerment are especially targeted at "rural and poor women". This kind of singling out mirrors the meta-narrative within international development and empowerment discourses that perceive women in developing countries as a singular social group that is not part of pertinent community institutions. Given this then, it can be argued that the discourse of empowerment in the Gender Policy Framework adopts the same logic of neoliberalism which prioritises individualism and disregards structural forces that perpetuate disempowerment. Moreover, as evident in the Gender Policy Framework, the only consideration made between men and women is women's proximity to the achievements of men. There is little acknowledgement and discussion of women's autonomy as individuals and, thus, the empowerment discourse presented by the document is such that women's commitment to the relationships they have with men is unaccounted for.

Elliot (2008) argues that such a lacking conceptualisation of empowerment does not capture the realities of women (or men) and therefore revised conceptualisations would be useful for understanding communities as well as individuals. Hennink et al (2012) make a point worth thinking about, as they acknowledge the importance of agency as a factor of development and empowerment strategies, but question how exactly agency is integrated into the concept of empowerment.

In light of the above analyses, empowerment is presented as a crucial concept for the government. However, its iterations within the policy discourse of the Gender Policy Framework reinforces the idea that it is the responsibility of women to "catch up" to men as their disempowerment is simply approximated to the experiences of men without rigorous acknowledgement, discussion and proposals for transforming the structural forces that are at the core of women's disempowerment.

Furthermore, whilst there is explicit mention of the constraints that have led to women being far behind men, that is - poverty, education, health, violence, housing, welfare, land and agriculture, the environment, the economy, power and decision making, information communications technologies (ICT), human rights, and institutional mechanisms – there is more emphasis placed on them achieving economic empowerment. This point will be further elaborated on in the next sub-section. However, the economic empowerment as women's empowerment rhetoric adopts the same problematic thinking within market economics that was outlined earlier in this research, which assumes that access to economic opportunity has a trickle-down effect on dismantling all other forms of disempowerment. If we are to follow the rhetoric implicit in this thinking, as advanced by the Gender Policy Framework, it would be sufficient to assume that by simply making the same opportunities men have available to women, women will choose these new opportunities - but this thinking is flawed as it ignores the prejudiced nature of labour markets.

1.3 THE PLAGUE OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Mainstream development discourse has perpetuated the idea that economic growth is the primary mechanism by which inequalities, including those related to gender, are alleviated. Following this then, many practitioners and scholars have explored the relationship between women's issues and economic growth, hence the existence of the concept of economic empowerment. However, critics of the concept have vehemently highlighted the biases of labour markets which makes them the perfect breeding ground of gender-based inequality, discrimination and domination (Lundahl 2013). John Friedmann in '*Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*', expresses his dysphoria with the hegemony of economics as a discourse that shapes the world. He posits that arguing that economics, even in its neoclassical form, is value-neutral is blasphemous and bogus (Friedmann 1992).

In the 'Women and the Economy' section of the Gender Policy Framework there a brief outline of the grimness and unequal state of women, particularly black women, in South Africa - both in comparison to men and to white women. Given this then, the document defines women's economic empowerment as "the capacity of women to access and control economic resources and make decisions for improving their quality of life" (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, 22).

The document goes on and states that women's economic empowerment seeks to achieve the following principles for women: access, control/ownership, decision making, change in power relations, choices and participation (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003). It is stated that "compared to men, women, especially black women, have low access to paid employment. When they do find paid work, black women typically have lower incomes and less security than all men. Most black women are found in poorly paid domestic labour and micro-enterprises which do not offer job security and benefits nor much by way of legislative protection. Although gender discrimination has been removed from labour laws, this has not been sufficient to achieve equality in women's participation in the paid labour force… White women are still overrepresented among employed women " (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, 17).

The Gender Policy Framework also states that "women constitute the poorest group in South Africa and are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed. The challenge is to ensure that South Africa's macro-economic strategy promotes economic growth and sufficiently addresses the differential impact of macroeconomic policy on various groups of people depending on class, race, age, gender, location and disability" (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, iv).

The quotes above subtly imply that women are 'unemployed' until they acquire jobs that are perceived as productive labour and so they have unlimited leisure time. From this, we can ascertain that women are significantly excluded from economic processes, and their reproductive labour is ignored as unpaid labour - which is necessary for men to flourish economically. Housework is perceived as a consumable instead of productive work. Arguably, this allocation is done to distinguish between the public and the 'real' economy. Friedmann (1992) and Kabeer (2012) agree with this argument as they highlight the separation of economic and domestic life, and based on this categorisation, non-productive activities are

framed as those done by women. However, care-giving is a crucial driver of the productive economy and thus, it is influential in the national development of a country.

Hence, it can be said that the division of labour devalues what is perceived as 'women's work' for the benefit of prioritising 'men's work'; and this explains why caregiving is not included in the Gender Policy Framework, which is an important policy document for national development and a framework that claims to be for the benefit of empowering women. By highlighting that women are the largest and poorest group in South Africa and therefore are the ideal candidates for empowerment, the Gender Policy Framework adopts the same rhetoric as the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which assumed that the inadequate provision of social and welfare services would be compensated by the unlimited supply of women's reproductive labour.

Accordingly, the Gender Policy Framework in its situational analysis identifies that "the take-up rates amongst African women for state maintenance grants have been particularly low, effectively reflecting racial bias in the distribution of such grants in practice if not in strictly legal terms. The Lund Report recommended the adoption of a system that would grant less money to more people. The reduced level of the grant has attracted considerable criticism from welfare NGOs and women's groups" (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, 15). The reduced level of welfare grants has been consistent over the years and one can presume that this has a lot more to do with the earlier assessment of the Gender Policy Framework which assumes that trickle-down effect of economic interventions on a national scale, will result in the economic empowerment of poor women (primarily made of African women) and therefore there is no need to prioritise welfare services, grants included.

Lundahl stresses that it is not enough to see the sexual division of labour as evidence of the disadvantage and oppression of women. According to Lundahl (2013), it is important to understand the difference between the descriptive versus the explanatory conceptualisation of the sexual division of labour. In light of this then, it can be said that the discourse of economic development adopted by the Gender Policy Framework ignores the complex relationship between women's reproductive work and how it drives the productive economy. It adopts a descriptive conceptualisation of the marginalisation of women at the centre of its women's empowerment discourse and fails to account for the explanatory aspects of their disempowerment in this regard.

The Gender Policy Framework (2003) states that many women, especially black women, are forced to work in underpaying and unregulated informal sector employment because there are limited opportunities in the formal employment sector. Moreover, part of the long term performance indicators of the impact of the Gender Policy Framework is the "full recognition of women's work and contribution to the national economy including in the informal sector and subsistence economy" (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, 52).

Whilst it can be argued that acknowledging women's contribution to the economy through the informal sector and thus promising to advance it is valiant, the framing of this aspect of the government's women's empowerment discourse asserts the 'advanced' condition of the 'formal sector' in comparison to the 'informal sector'. This then paints women as not modern and non-progressive – which is the opposite of their male counterparts. Arguably, this is reflective of the perception embedded within capitalism which suggests that pre-capitalist societies were uncultured and economically inferior and thus women's disempowerment and oppression are argued to have been born out of pre-capitalist societies (Benson Wahlén 2017).

Given this then, it can be said that the Gender Policy Framework discourse of economic empowerment reinforces the underestimation of the complex relationship between 'productive' and 'unproductive' work resulting in the marginalisation of women. Furthermore, the potential (and in some instances proven) ability of pre-capitalist societies to establish self-sustaining and sufficient economic and technological activities is undermined by above-mentioned the dynamics of the productive-unproductive labour dimension.

1.4 PROBLEMATISING GENDER EQUALITY

Lundahl (2013) and Galiè and Farnworth (2019) agree that class, race, and culture are some of the critical social categories that hinder people from accessing particular political groupings that facilitate the emergence of other gender identities within the social hierarchy. This continuum of genders is not acknowledged nor represented in the Gender Policy Framework and thus, the document's proposal of only two genders (men and women) is arguably reductionist. The Gender Policy Framework defines gender as,

> "…the social roles allocated respectively to women and to men in particular societies and at particular times. Such roles, and the differences between them, are conditioned by a variety of

> political, economic, ideological and cultural factors and are characterised in most societies by unequal power relations. Gender is distinguished from sex which is biologically determined." (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, xvii).

The assertion that sex and gender are different can be argued to be the government's way of recognising that biological categories are not suitable for identifying femininities and masculinities. However, by stating that 'social roles [are] allocated respectively to women and men' the document perpetuates the notion that only two types of bodies exist and these can be placed into either one of the gender categories mentioned. Therefore, various intersections of power relations are conflated in 'gender'. The Gender Policy Framework's limitation of this objective to just 'women' and 'men' ignores the fact that gender is a spectrum and, thus it loses its potential to be transformative when addressing gender issues, particularly when analysing the tug-of-war between power structures in society.

It is worth noting that the definition recognises various social factors construct these categories in particular societies and at particular times, which result in unequal power relations. This acknowledgement to some extent rejects the monolithic perspective that is perpetuated by patriarchal norms that fail to recognise that oppression and control (power) has different faces in different spaces (Jo Rowlands 1997; Michael Foucault 1980).

Furthermore, the Gender Policy Framework defines gender equality as,

> "Gender equality refers to a situation where women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential; are able to contribute equally to national political, economic, social and cultural development; and benefit equally from the results. Gender Equality entails that the underlying causes of discrimination are systematically identified and removed in order to give women and men equal opportunities. The concept of Gender Equality, as used in this policy framework, takes into account women's existing subordinate positions within social relations and aims at the restructuring of society so as to eradicate male domination. Therefore, equality is understood to include both formal equality and substantive equality; not merely simple equality to men" (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, xviii).

Whilst there is some mention of the interaction between race and women's disempowerment resulting from South Africa's history of oppression, there is no analysis of race and class as

they relate to gender in the Gender Policy Framework's conceptualisation of women's empowerment and gender equality. In the aforementioned definition, it is stated that "gender equality entails that the *underlying causes* of discrimination are systematically identified" (the researcher's emphasis), which alludes to a recognition that there are other factors at play in the construction of gender, but these are not explicitly mentioned. Given this then, it can be argued that the Gender Policy Framework's empowerment discourse is depoliticised.

However, it is important that policies and programmes geared towards 'gender equality' contextualise their use of 'women'. Furthermore, it is stated that the Gender Policy Framework advocates for both formal equality and substantive equality; not merely simple equality to men, and therefore the discourse suggests that gender equality is not just a women's issue. If we are to follow this logic then 'men' should hold a presence just as strong as 'women' in policy, which is not the case here as there is little said on the role men should play in transforming today's gender structure. The Gender Policy Framework mentions the 'eradication of male domination' (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, xviii) as an aim, which highlights that men do hold more power in society but the document does not acknowledge that this 'male domination' is at the expense of femininity and/or women. Thus, merely acknowledging that subjugation of women is not enough to empower them - there needs to be an intentional transformation of the power held by men because women's disempowerment is a consequence of dominating structures which are predominantly controlled by men.

Arguably, any policy or programme that advocates for gender equality should have a discourse that conceives gender as a framework that scrutinises society's divisions of femininity and masculinity. Lundahl (2013) posits that empowerment and gender equality policies should not merely advocate for women to work with men, they should include women in the process of analysing their problems and lived experiences to adequately attend to their needs. To this point, it is emphasised that women's lives will not change until men's lives change (Lundahl 2013). This means that men have to be proactive and meaningfully present in the work that is done to change the gender dynamics and structures that advance their interests over those of women. In this instance, the Gender Policy Framework stresses that the rights of women are a key priority, but the responsibility to change the gendered status quo and to entrench said rights is beholden to women which removes men entirely from the process.

1.5 GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The adoption of gender mainstreaming as a global strategy for achieving gender equality and development objectives that have a gendered perspective of the development process happened as a result of Beijing (Eyben 2008; Duflo 2011; Pickard 2005; Akala 2018). Accordingly, gender mainstreaming seeks to highlight gender inequality as a critical issue in the institutional structures, decision-making structures, policies and the distribution of resources that drive development (Malinga 2016). As such, gender mainstreaming not only forms part of many mainstream development discourses, policies and practices – it is also a strategy that is appraised within the African context. In particular, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a community that South Africa forms part of, advocates for gender mainstreaming and has committed itself to abolish legislation that propagates the discrimination against women and limits their access to key developmental resources, i.e. finance and land. As a regional economic community, SADC aims to enhance socio-economic development and, equitable and sustainable development (Southern African Development Community (SADC) 2015).

In theory, the above aligns with the objectives of gender mainstreaming; however, Malinga (2016) notes that gender mainstreaming has hardly if at all, brought changes for women as they continue to be marginalised and their participation in the institutions and structures that drive development remains partial. Scholars posit that this is due to the lack of change in the policy environment within which gender mainstreaming processes are operationalised, the inadequacy of resource allocation for this strategy, stringent institutional structures that hinder transformation, and the poor implementation of gender mainstreaming processes (Malinga 2016; Moser and Moser 2005; Zachariassen 2012). Furthermore, the gender mainstreaming strategy is limited in its scope of addressing the complexities of gender relations as well as the various contextual factors that influence the process and outcomes resulting from gender inequalities (Duflo 2011; Escobar 1995; Eyben 2008; Akala 2018).

To this point, Malinga (2016) asserts that the implementation processes of gender mainstreaming are the same in most countries irrespective of the national development position. However, the national development position contributes to the extent of failure to achieve developmental change for the vulnerable groups and places that need the most attention, and thus it is useful in highlighting what is required and important for particular

populations (Andrea Cornwall and Rivas 2015). To this point, Cornwall et al. (2013) assert that,

> "gender mainstreaming has thus imposed narrowness on what are actually very diverse processes, conflating policy reform with changes in bureaucratic practice, and confining the analytical gaze to the advancement of women's cause within institutions with often little mandate and power to reflect real change" (A. Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2013, 113).

The Gender Policy Framework (2003) identifies 'mainstreaming' is as a key principle by which 'gender equality' is to be achieved. By gender mainstreaming, the document suggests that the government "...recognises that most institutions consciously or unconsciously serve the interests of men and encourages institutions to adopt a gender perspective in transforming themselves. It promotes the full participation of women in decision-making so that women's needs move from the margins to the centre of development planning and resource allocation" (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, XVII).

As noted earlier in this sub-section, this is a concept that is not new to the development and gender paradigm as it often forms part of the strategies for representation. The Gender Policy Framework (2003, 22) states that the government will allocate resources to programmes for mainstreaming gender equality, all government policy and programmes will be engendered, policies and programmes aimed at achieving the mainstreaming of gender equality will be created and gender aggregated data will be provided by all institutions. Notably, women are at the core of this agenda and it is stated under the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (*National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* 2003, 40) that specifically identified gender-based programmes will be prioritised, i.e. supporting rural women agriculturalists and special education programmes for girls. This then implies that the government's gender mainstreaming discourse seeks to empower women who show potential to substantially contribute to changing its political and socio-economic agenda to favour women.

In this way then, vulnerable women are yet again burdened with the responsibility of transforming their lives and leading the process of obtaining their rights that will then presumably result in gender equality. Whilst the Gender Policy Framework's framing of its discourse of gender mainstreaming brings into question the dominance of masculinities and

men, it simultaneously further asserts the association of women and gender that was outlined earlier in this research. Moreover, the discourse is framed in a way that implies that women and men will benefit from gender mainstreaming in the same ways – which is an enticing idea but is not necessarily true. Consequently, the Gender Policy Framework further perpetuates the implicit models of social change and promotes the traditional, and to some extent discredited, development approaches that prioritise investment and the provision of economic resources as a key principle for women's empowerment and gender equality. This suggests that gender inequality can be 'managed' using bureaucratic tools advanced by instrumentalist development discourses, i.e. the notion that investing in women results in high pay-offs, which again is not necessarily true (A. Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2013; Malinga 2016).

Arguably, economic investment in women can exacerbate their disempowerment. To this point, Malinga (2016) posits that instrumentalist strategies have burdened women with debt, lack of control of the resources they are given access to, domestic abuse, etc. Moreover, gender mainstreaming further depoliticises gender as it merely aims to make women visible by including them in the development policies and programmes that will supposedly advance their capabilities to meet their needs (Malinga 2016).

The assertion made by the Gender Policy Framework that the Gender and Development (GAD) is used to focus on the attainment of 'strategic needs' which in this instance is gender equality, is profoundly relevant here. The Beijing Accord politicised gender mainstreaming in that it was an agenda that was promulgated by feminist scholars. Lundahl (2013) suggests that this may be the cause of delay in implementing gender mainstreaming from the top-down. Given this then, it can be argued that this is the reason why the Gender Policy Framework fails to effectively provide guidelines for mainstreaming gender in a manner that is significantly politically and socially transformative. Furthermore, gender relations have been simplified by the dominant gender mainstreaming strategy, which in turn has created a false narrative of how social change occurs.

This then deems the GAD approach unfulfilling for in the South African context which demands that there be new ways of thinking about gender and empowerment without leaning on the dominant discourses that have been infected with a myriad of agendas that do not sufficiently address women's issues. Hence, the call for gender-based decision making and

gender mainstreaming does little to inspire true transformation, and instead, it simply indicates a move from traditional forms of state-hood to a more modern, capitalist democracy.

PART 2: ANALYSING 18TWENTY8

In this section of the discussion, the researcher discusses the findings concerning the conceptualisation of women's empowerment in various material and programme report content found on the 18Twenty8 website. In this analysis of 18Twenty's empowerment discourse, the researcher focuses on their educational programmes, i.e. the financial assistance programme, mentorship, sexual health education, etc. It should be noted that whilst the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive comparison between 18Twenty8's empowerment discourse and that of the Gender Policy Framework, to elaborate and enrich particular arguments, there are parallels drawn between the two discourses. Under *Part 2: Analysing 18Twenty8*, there are three (3) sub-headings, excluding the introduction, which thematically uncover the core threads of analysis in this regard.

INTRODUCTION

It was noted in the literature review that the dominant discourse of women's empowerment included girls, specifically, as a target population within its framework and this commitment represented a shift in the way organisations dedicated to education development frame gender within their programme discourses. 18Twenty8 adopts this reconstruction of the gender-related education discourse which focuses on providing girls with access to education as a way to advance women's economic empowerment. This idea will be explored in the coming sub-sections of this section of the discussion chapter.

The MDGs and SDGs dedicated to this end adopt a linear and causal relationship between education and empowerment to secure gender equality. Programme and policy actors, such as 18Twenty8, adopt the same structure in how they formulate their discourse but the target population is no longer women rather it is girls. Furthermore, the focus within their education programmes has moved away from vocational and civic education, to formal schooling (tertiary education in this instance). This change in policy discourse (referred to as the 'new discourse' hereafter) was done to accommodate the goal to improve the status of women. However, as it will be shown, changing the target population and the desired impact of education policy has not led to the reconceptualisation of empowerment and equality from how they are framed in dominant gender-related development discourse.

Through an analysis of 18Twenty8, this section will show that the new discourse is underpinned by three principles.

- First, is that the needs of women and girls are identical.

- Second, is that what is deemed positive and progressive for girls is perceived as good for women too.
- Third, is the assumption that gender-related programmatic and policy objectives can foster gender equality.

In light of this, it is argued that the new discourse adopts the 'power in' narrative in its gender framework which has also shaped how 18Twenty8 approaches its girls' education programmes. In this way, the dominant discourse has infiltrated into the new discourse, in that women and girls have been conflated into one target population, rather than separate target populations. As a result, education, empowerment and equality remain the three foundation blocks of development discourse related to women.

This construction of new discourse reflects the 'dynamic construction' (A. Allen 2008, 115) of policy and gender within the development paradigm, which in this instance has influenced how a local NGO in South Africa approaches education programming. Furthermore, by marrying girls' entitlement to education to the economic status of women, the new discourse has reinforced the socialisation of girls as future women rather than human beings with rights that demand that there be specific policy provisions made for their needs and vulnerabilities

2.1 INCLUDING GIRLS IN THE EMPOWERMENT DISCOURSE

Forming donor partnerships for funds, resources or expertise has become a favoured strategy to drive empowerment initiatives, especially those focused on women and girl children. This approach can certainly be an effective way to foster development. However, as Sharma (2008) and Hennick et al (2012) point out, donor partnerships can reproduce disempowerment. Arguably, NGOs are not innately empowering as a concept, but they do have the potential to be, if and when they have a focused and sufficient direction to do so. Given this then, institutions have re-framed their provision of experts, grants and loans as 'technical assistance' rather than 'donations' thereby forcing beneficiaries, such as NGOs, to adopt the 'empowerment' rhetoric.

The first line on 'About Us' webpage of the selected organisation website states that "18twenty8 is an **award-winning**, **women-led** Non-Profit Organisation that empowers young women by developing strategies for their educational and personal development" (18Twenty8 n.d.). The organisation emphasises that it is an "award-winning women-led" NGO to illustrate

that it has the expertise and reputation of an elite education-empowerment organisation. Furthermore, we can see how the term 'empowerment' (in this instance the organisation uses "empowers") is used to reinforce the hierarchical order between a powerful institution (the state or elite) and the powerless (the poor, women and children). The latter group is perceived as passive, helpless and in need of saving. To this point, Parpart et al (2002) suggest that organisations should rather make use of the term 'empowering' which is synonymous to 'enabling' or 'capacitating' since the primary concern of NGOs is mostly with creating conducive conditions for targeted groups to progress in a particular area of concern and equip them with the skills and knowledge to improve the quality of life for themselves and their communities, thus, fostering development. Somek (2013) suggests that 'emancipation' is a better-suited term to describe efforts made to attain and protect human rights.

However, Nanda and Warms (2004) note that the new discourse, as outlined in the introduction of this sections, is primarily characterised by the notion of 'bringing in' girls into the current development discourse, which prioritises the interests of adult women who are seen as 'first-class citizens' as they have rights and can act on them. Arguably, girls are not seen as a worthy target group on their own and; thus, they have been brought into the existing discourse of women's empowerment as additional targets. 18Twenty8 perpetuates this ideal in that when referencing its target group, it refers to them as "young women" rather than girls or just women. The 'young' is to qualify them as individuals who have not reached full womanhood whilst simultaneously removing their childhood to make them more palatable for potential investors.

> "We encourage young women, between the ages of 18 and 28, to pursue higher education as an attractive and necessary tool for their empowerment" (18Twenty8 n.d.).

> "Through fund-raising […] we are passionate about supporting young women to make uninterrupted transitions from high school, to university and ultimately the world of work" (18Twenty8 n.d.).

The quotes above from the organisation's website and they suggest that when girls are equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources they need to progress, they will achieve whatever they set their minds to and become the ideal 'empowered' women. This is demonstrative of the first principle of the new discourse which is treats women and girls one target population within the education and development paradigm. Arguably, by targeting girls instead of women, the

generational effects of education in the new discourse have also shifted. The dominant discourse framed the generational effects of the empowerment and education of women in a manner that presupposed that girls would benefit from this (Wiseman 2010). The new discourse, however; has flipped the coin over and promotes girls' access to education as an investment in the women they will become, which presupposes that there will be an improvement in the status of women in the future.

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There is a wealth of literature, as reviewed in chapter 2 and reference throughout Part 1 of this chapter, that debunks the instrumentalist approach to women's empowerment and how it can be counter-productive for the objectives hitherto, however; the quotes above illustrates how the tenets of this approach persist within gender-related education policy and programmes. Additionally, 18Twenty8 (n.d.) posits that "we have many examples of young women who are academically-competent but forced to stay at home while they apply for funding or entry level jobs, in a country with stubbornly high youth unemployment, in order to earn an income to pay for their education. This causes frustration and unnecessary delays for their educational attainment for their personal development." Here, education is again stressed as a means to an end – which is 'personal deevelopment' that is linked to economic/financial stability.

The 'bottom-line' remains to be economic returns on investment and this is evident in the way the value of girls' education has been attached to anticipated economic prosperity. In light of this, it can be said the dominant discourse and the new discourse adopted by 18Twenty8 conceptualise empowerment as an outcome of education. 18Twenty8 asserts that it is not prescriptive in terms of which courses or which programmes it funds because they are confident that the "young women will make a success of their careers focusing on something that they love and studying something that they are passionate about" (Seseane 2018).

Whilst this is an admirable principle to adopt, in assessing the application forms for various bursaries that 18Twenty8 has posted since its inception, the researcher found that at least 70% of them fit within the 'critical skills' degree category – that is; information technology and communication; engineering; mathematics; health professionals and related clinical sciences; architects, town planners and surveyors; and business, management and economics. It is also clear that the prioritisation of economic development remains precedent as education is framed as primrily that knowledge and set of skills that result in the improvement of women's

economic status, of which these degrees that fit in the 'critical skills' category are presumed to best position graduates for economically rewarding careers, i.e. their 'personal development'.

To this point, Somek (2013) suggests that cognitive empowerment is framed merely as acquiring knowledge and skills without necessarily bringing into question the institutional and structural constraints that hinder women from fully participating in the economic, political and social activities of their societies. Similarly, as argued in the literature review, 'girl-child' empowerment narrative allows development stakeholders to market themselves as change orientated when they are not doing adequate work to redress injustices on a political, structural or redistributive level (Chant and Sweetman 2012). Arguably, 18Twenty8 perceives girls ('young women') from disadvantaged backgrounds as inherent agents of change and neglects to understand the disadvantages of these girls ('young women') as underpinned by structural forces rather than a result of the immediate problems they are faced with, i.e. lack of funding or mentorship.

Consequently, by tending to these immediate issues, 18Twenty8 neglects to recognise the cyclical nature of disempowerment because those structural oppressions the girls are subjected to will persist in their new environments, i.e. university. As such, the unequal structures of power that prevent these girls ('young women') from using their agency are ignored (Struckmann 2017; Stuart and Woodroffe 2016). Moreover, empowerment, education and equality are linked to girls in the new discourse. 18Twenty8 conceptualises the empowerment of girls as an outcome of their attainment of formal education and contributes to the achievement of equality. Education is constantly referred to as a "tool for empowerment" (18Twenty8 n.d.; n.d.b; 2016b; 2016a; 2011; 2012).

However, their participation in the education system is also limited to their future economic activities rather than addressing the intrinsic causes and reinforcers of gender inequality within and beyond normal schooling. This then arguably reinforces the instrumentalist approach to women's empowerment and development policy as there is no real analysis and acknowledgement of the unbalanced power relations between women and girls, as well as amongst each target population.

In examining the 18Twenty8, the researcher found that the needs of women and those of girls were being presented as aligned, which arguably perpetuates the assertion made earlier that

these two target populations have been constructed as a single category in policy and programming. To this point, the organisation posits that:

> "self-empowerment is intrinsic in the development of all women. The empowerment workshops are aimed at equipping young women with the values and lessons they will need to become empowered women. The workshops cover assertiveness, goal setting and life planning, employability, financial freedom, and grooming and presentation skills. These workshops are aimed at preparing students for the world of work." (18Twenty8 2016b, 8)

Ahlborg and Strandmark (2006) discuss the gendered relationship between women and children is particularly relevant here. They suggests that children's experiences are normatively constructed as a phase in the process of social development and these experiences are viewed from the dominant western lens that perpetuate globalisation ideals through international aid and development policies (Ahlborg and Strandmark 2006). Following Ahloborg and Strandman's (2006) thinking, it can be said 18Twenty8's empowerment discourse is gendered as it positions girls as the ideal subjects of development objectives, particularly those that directly relate to gender equality and economic empowerment.

Arguably, 18Twenty8 adopts the WID approach in its girls' education programming as its conceptualisation of empowerment simply advocates for 'bringing girls [women]' in development without necessarily addressing the dominant economic, political and social structures that oppress women. In the following extracts, 18Twenty8 justifies, though not explicitly, why they have adopted the new discourse within its education programming.

> "We facilitate life-skills workshops for girls in Grade 11 and Grade 12 at high schools in marginalised communities that are characterised by a lack of exposure to opportunities… The workshops have a strong focus on skill-building exercises that support the girls' development." (18Twenty8 n.d.)

> "In addition to financial constraints, the lack of positive role models and academic mentors, within families and the broader community, is the main reason for high university drop-out rates. Through fund-raising, we have funded the full undergraduate costs of young women…" (18Twenty8 2012)

Again, here there is a narrow focus on the entitlement girls for their education rather than on the underlying economic, social and political challenges and needs they have. Including girls

into the development discourse of empowerment is indeed a progressive step, however; it is not enough when it comes at the expense of critically analysing and targeting their needs and vulnerabilities.

Education policy actors have co-opted empowerment into their discourses as a means of addressing economic and political concerns (Naila Kabeer 2015; J Rowlands 1998). 18Twenty8 asserts the following as the key principles of their work: entrepreneurship, 'young women's' participation in leadership and 'young women's' ability to actively participate as decision-makers (18Twenty8 2011; n.d.c; 2016a). The organisation is a perfect example of the new discourse being implemented as it solely targets girls from disadvantaged communities.

The Big Sister Network initiative specifically seeks to give 'voices' and a 'platform' to girls to express themselves while also supporting them through the mentorship programme. In this way then, the girls have been strategically brought into the organisation's empowerment discourse and practices. Education is firmly positioned as the glue between women and girls by the organisation. In a video on the organisation's website, one of its 'Big Sisters' (this term refers to the mentors assigned to the girls) states that "education is very important, it is critical because if you do not educate yourself how will you evolve? Education for me is about evolving as an individual, constantly innovating yourself and if you don't get yourself self-educated you are going to be stuck in the same way of thinking. And the same way of doing things".

As the Big Sister speaks, the video shows a slide-show of what is presumably some of the schools and students the organisation works with. The students all look like they are in their late adolescent years (which corresponds with the organisation's target population of girls in grade 12 who will be starting university the year after) and the classes and school building photographed are run-down, poorly maintained and the background views show that they are likely to be located in disadvantaged communities. Later on, in the video, one of the organisation's executives' states that "this is the first generation of young, black professional women who are coming into university and workplace, with all the pressures of society that are involved in that. So, to provide clear, focused mentoring support from people who understand what the issues are, is so incredibly vital for building these women for the future".

From the above, it is clear that the organisation sees educating girls and empowering women as co-dependent objectives. Moreover, the narrative that empowerment is the result of the

generational effects of education is asserted by the organisation as two things are consistently emphasised: 1) that education is an ongoing commitment that one makes to progress and "evolve", and 2) that the baton of education should be passed along to following generations to open opportunities for the women of the future. If this is the case, then it is arguably important that development practitioners see themselves as visitors during particular stages of women and girls' lives. In this way, they will be able to focus solely on the needs of women and girls at the particular point in their lives that they visit instead of trying to conflate their experiences into one and proposing universal solutions that are ineffective.

This certainly would affect and complicate how policies and programmes are framed to address women and girls' needs, but it is a step in the right direction to dismantling the idea that their needs are the same. Conversely, the organisation's focus on girls as a target population also represents how gender is conceptualised within the development paradigm. Here, gender is framed as an organising tool in education policy and programming. For instance, the organisation's prioritisation of rights does not distinguish between girls' rights and women's rights - these are presented as the same.

2.2 THE EMPOWERMENT-GIRLS EDUCATION DICHOTOMY

At the beginning of the sub-section above, a narrative outline is provided to illustrate how the dominant discourse focuses specifically on women as the target for its development and empowerment initiatives. In line with that, Chant (2013) posits that solely focusing on women as the targets of empowerment was at the detriment of girls as it excluded them from the mainstream development paradigm. The literature reviewed in chapter 2 showed that since the 2000s, through the MDGs, girls have been a favoured target group in the new discourse, but it should be noted that the principles entrenched within the dominant discourse persist even in this new discourse.

Hence, as it was previously mentioned empowerment, education and equality remain the key objectives within the new discourse. To this point, 18Twenty8's website and programme reports stress that it seeks to "fuel gender transformation in South Africa" by enhancing the skills and knowledge of the "young women" they work with so that they can be equipped to address some of their challenges. Here, the same logic perpetuated by the dominant development discourse which places the responsibility of 'empowerment' in the hands of women, the subjects of oppression and discrimination, is applied to girls as well who are

additionally given the responsibility to use their education to improve the dire conditions of their communities.

Lundahl (2013) correctly asserts that western feminism is at the core of the discourse of 'development assistance' or 'development partnership'. The idea that vulnerable groups (in this instance it is girls from disadvantage backgrounds) are often framed as 'the other' to perpetuate the idea that their survival is hinged on an external party (here it is 18Twenty8) that swoops in to help liberate and 'empower' them (here it is through facilitating them with personal and skills development and education). In this way then, 18Twenty8's discourse adopts the same messiah stance of the government's women's empowerment discourse that was outlined in the analysis of the Gender Policy Framework. That is, that "disadvantaged people *are not aware* of the causes of their poverty, that they *do not know* how to resolve their circumstances and that they *passively accept* these dire circumstances" (the researcher's own assertion). Hence, the hierarchical relationship western development agencies and the oppressed in the global south translates into the relationship between programme partners, that is the NGO and the oppressed which are the disadvantaged girls in this instance.

> "The realisation that you don't have, as a woman, I am talking now specifically for the young girls, you don't have to depend on anyone if you have an education. When you are educated, you become a solution, a solver of other people's problems – including your own" (18Twenty8 2017).

The quote above, said by one of the organisation's executives on a video on the website, reinforces how empowerment has been intertwined with girls education in 18Twenty8's discourse. This stems from the new discourse which focuses on education as a means to achieving women's empowerment. As it was outlined earlier, the goal to secure equal access to primary education is reflected in the MDGs. As the SDG era drew closer, the international development community began to include access to lower secondary schooling as a strategy or girls' educational empowerment (Wiseman 2010). The new discourse further adopted the discourse that promotes (tertiary) education as an investment which enhances the narrative that educating girls is a strategy for increasing women's (economic) empowerment.

The recurring emphasis of skills and knowledge development within 18Twenty8's programming reflects similar priorities as the capabilities building framework to education and

empowerment as it suggests that girls (and women) are the catalysts of gender equality. Somek (2013) and Malinga (2016) asserts that the capabilities framework presumes that the education (that is the skills and knowledge) that girls attain can be influence social change devoid of the power structures that establish and maintain gender inequality. Essentially this suggests that policy discourses that adopt the capabilities building approach promote the idea that by getting an education, girls can improve their economic, political and social conditions without addressing the structural forces that limit their participation in these spaces.

Policies that are underpinned by this approach are typically geared towards ensuring that the targeted subject uses education to attain agency and choice in the interest of improving their lives, however; there is no explicit discussion of what should be improved or what this improvement would look like (Wiseman 2010). It is for this reason that those policy actors, as evidenced by the foregoing analysis of 18Twenty8, prefer to steer clear of this approach in their conceptualisation of empowerment-development policies and programmes.

Malinga (2016) notes that the current climate of the development paradigm reflects this reluctance as the policies stress the importance of quantitatively measurable objectives for education initiatives rather than addressing educational values. Hence, partnerships with NGO initiatives have a limited time frame, in the instance of 18Twenty8 their programmes cycles span from one to four years, and therefore these initiatives are results-based over the short term. An example of this is the organisation's financial assistance programme, which funds full costs of undergraduate degrees only. The measurement indicators for this programme are 80% pass rate each year, 70% throughput rate (number of students who pass each academic year), less than 5% dropout rate (18Twenty8 2018).

Whilst the funding of undergraduate degrees is a progressive step, it, unfortunately, does not guarantee that students will be employed after they have graduated. The economy continues to suffer from youth unemployment getting worse every year, and thus, short-term results-based approaches to 'girl empowerment' fail to address the many barriers that even educated girls to continue to be faced within our country. Again, priority is placed on meeting targets rather than dismantling the structures that hinder the transformation of the economy as a whole and the unconducive conditions of society for women and girls' empowerment.

Lundahl (2013) posits that this begs the question of whether 'hurried empowerment' can be considered real empowerment. Moreover, the organisation's website and reports do not provide a direct definition of empowerment, even though the tag-line on the homepage of the website states "Empowering young women. Personal development through education". This lack of definition is unsurprising as it reflects the lack of consensus within the empowerment-development paradigm vis-à-vis the definition of empowerment, the subjects/objects of empowerment, and education's role in the empowerment discourse.

Nonetheless, the critically analysed conceptualisation of 18Twenty8's empowerment discourse arguably mirrors the same controlling principles of development politics wherein development is the twin-sister of colonisation as its discourse is devoid of empowerment that conscientises and equips people with the necessary ideological armour to dismantle oppressive structures. In a similar fashion as the conceptualisation of the individual power, it can be said that the process of empowerment should be kick-started by grass-root groups who have an informed understanding of specific contexts. This means that external parties, like 18Twenty8, should not influence this type of empowerment as there is a high possibility that it will absolve its alternativeness, rather they should use their established reputation and privileged access to the powerful education structures, i.e. the Department of Higher Education, donors and other vested stakeholders, to bring to the fore the concerns raised by in-community groups and individuals and fight to have these concerns addressed sustainably.

However, the 'bringing in' of girls into the new discourse has been widely accepted and perpetuated because it does not necessarily provoke the framework by which gender and development are approached. Moreover, it must be noted that including girls in the empowerment discourse is not necessarily transformative. Given this then, whilst the existence of NGOs such as 18Twenty8 could potentially drive the enactment of national policy, such as the Gender Policy Framework, and building capacity within civil society and its institutions, considering the absence of significant efforts to change the policy structures that disempower girls, it cannot be said that these organisations are transformative.

Another way in which the 'education as an investment' rhetoric is perpetuated by 18Twenty8 in addition to its Big Sister Network mentoring programme, and its the hosting of workshops and leadership camps. The workshops focus on skill-building exercises that are meant to "support the girls' development", whilst the leadership camps are a follow-up activity in which

the girls are supposed to use the life-skills and knowledge they gained at the workshops to learn how to handle leadership, mental health, career pathing, financial fitness, entrepreneurship and personal branding. Empowerment-focused mentorship programmes are presented as beneficial for women to the extent that they 'empower' not just one woman, but communities of women.

The idea of the aforementioned programmes by 18Twenty8 is that they will "build up the girls" and "support the young women to voice and solve their challenges". Here, the new discourse has been adopted through a support structure programme for schools and communities sub-nationally. The assumption is that the girls ('young women') who participate in these mentorship programmes are likely to become more economically and politically empowered and to have the 'voices' to express their and others' concerns. The investment into the mentorship programmes is thus conceptualised as a 'quick win' for the empowerment-development agenda as it facilitates the creation of 'networks' of empowered girls. This is a goal that is elusive in the discourse of empowerment as social relationships between empowered women (and girls) are encouraged and the desired outcome once individual girls have 'uplifted' their communities.

2.3 AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO GIRLS EDUCATION

18twenty8 reinforces that girls are the panaceas of development. "We encourage young women, between the ages of 18 and 28, to pursue higher education as an attractive and necessary tool for their empowerment" (18Twenty8 2011). This quote perpetuates the same 'girl effect'; ideology adopted by western and mainstream development agencies. Accordingly, it can be said that these types of assertions are underpinned by humanist feminism, as proposed by Young (1990), which perceives femininity as an extension of individualism and a challenge to the notion of collective action. Such a discourse promotes the idea that the standard of achievement is a universalist gender-neutral notion by which all human beings are judges through rationality, strength, courage, cunningness and quick-wittedness - which are characteristics often used by men to judge each other.

Hence, it can be argued that 18Twenty8's empowerment discourse that follows same the 'girl effect' ideology outlined in earlier chapters, and consequently, perpetuates the same devaluing of femininity as that done by patriarchy and is arguably underpinned by rhetoric that equates humanity to men.

The current education empowerment discourse is underpinned by an additive approach which simply includes girls within existing discourses of women's empowerment. Given this then, the researcher advocates for moving towards a discourse that prioritises girls' rights exclusively as a means to dismantle the oppressive and discriminative structural forces that are maintained by both the dominant and new discourses. Girls' education has been instrumentalised as it is framed as a mechanism by which women's economic empowerment and national development can be achieved. This is evident in how the Gender Policy Framework identifies investing girls' education programmes as one of its strategies to achieving its objectives for gender equality.

Moreover, as analysed in previous subsections, 18Twenty8 also adopts this narrative in its conceptualisation of girls' empowerment. Adopting the proposed rights-based discourse means that education should not be perceived as the only way to drive the empowerment of women and girls. This means that the linear and causal dimension between access to education and women's empowerment that is perpetuated by the dominant and new discourses should be abandoned. These discourses conceptualise the girls' education as an interventionist strategy for advancing the participation of women in labour markets for the advancement of economic development (Wiseman 2010; Naila Kabeer 2015; Anderson 2013).

The rights-based discourse adopted by 18Twenty8 directly denounces this narrative and instead asserts that there ought to be a focus on access, quality and the safety of girls' education after they have left primary and secondary schooling. To this point, 18Twenty8 highlights that most of its beneficiaries are the first in their families to complete grade 12, let alone enrol at university (18Twenty8 2018). As a result, their beneficiaries face several challenges in addition to financial constraints, such as the the lack of positive role models and academic mentors, within families and the broader community (18Twenty8 2018). Additionally, the organisation runs a health and safety workshop in highschools for learners in grade 9 to grade 12, and this workshop is aimed at educating learners about sexual health, pregnancy and HIV/Aids (18Twenty8). In the following excerpt, Rifiloe Seseane, co-founder of 18Twenty8, explains in a video interview why the organisation has taken up the sexual health, pregnancy and HIV/Aids initiative to complement their main focus on education. Here, we are able to see how the organisation has linked access to education, the quality of that education and the safety of girls in relation to the sexual and reproductive rights.

> "Studies show that the age cohort that these workshops are aimed at is the most at risk to contract HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted illnesses. Teenage pregnancy is particularly rife within highschools in disadvantaged communities. As 18Twenty8, we believe that it is imperative that we bring sexual health education in the communities and schools we operate in because education and sexual health are co-dependent. Children are having sex, that's the reality – and what I've come to learn from these workshops is that they are not ignorant about the risks of unprotected sex, they just do not fully understand or even know what they are. Our hope is that once we have had these conversations, which most learners would otherwise not openly have with the parents or teachers, learners will be more informed about the risks of poor sexual health and become more intentional in protecting themselves and their futures, including once they get to university." (Seseane 2018).

This conceptualisation of the empowerment inspires a change in position for 'empowerment', which is perceived as a mediator of gender equality in the existing education-development paradigm, and instead, it would then be positioned as a result of the equality in educational opportunities for girls. The latter principle demands that girls are treated as a separate target group from women. This is direct opposition to the co-construction of women and girls as a single category within the new discourses. The new discourse distinguishes itself from the dominant discourse by pursuing the inclusion of girls in the empowerment-development paradigm, but girls are not necessarily treated as an isolated target group from women. Under the new discourse, access to education for girls is conflated with the priorities of women's economic empowerment as it is framed as a means of improving the status of women. The rights-based discourse challenges the reconceptualisationn of girls as 'empowered objects' belonging to education and development policy.

Although rights as profoundly important within discourse, it should be noted, however; that the violation of said rights does not necessarily mean there will be legal ramifications for whoever violates the (Andrea Cornwall and Molyneux 2006; Donnelly 2007; Klirodotakou 2015). Consequently, the 'bringing in girls' approach positioned girls as a target group within the development paradigm and education policy community, but it simultaneously normatively constructed them as passive rights-bearers (Somek 2013). To this point, Tarabini (2010) correctly points out that rights are not measurable or quantifiable, and therefore; it is easier for programmes and policies to focus on the object of said rights as they are perceived as

universally measurable and valuable. Hence, the formulation of education programming and policies is typically framed as a way to eradicate poverty.

Moreover, empowerment is conceptualised as a precondition for the achievement of gender equality. Moghadam (2007) highlights the tension intrinsic in the formulation of the rights-based discourse of education - that is, education as an object of rights versus education as a right itself. The prevailing discourses have mainly approached the access to education as a means to achieving development objects and not as a right that girls have.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This research uncovers the rich and complex concepts, language and meanings used to formulate women's empowerment discourses. Through the analysis of literature, it is revealed that various influences have contributed to the emergence and evolution of women's empowerment discourses, including nationalist struggles, women's movements and international and national development discourses. The prominence of mainstream development agencies, such as the United Nations, through their various conferences, conventions and declarations dedicated to advancing and mainstreaming gender equality in development discourses, policies and practices are evidenced throughout the research report. Given the integration of international rights and development concepts in national discourses, this approach has been adapted into the rights-based women's empowerment frameworks.

RESEARCH AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Considering the above, this research is a critical discourse analysis of the conceptualisations of women's empowerment underpinned by feminist, institutionalist and instrumentalist objectives. The researcher does this through critical analysis and discussion of the *National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* and various material from 18Twenty8. Through analysis, the researcher aimed to demonstrate how these conceptualisations find expression in governmental and non-governmental women's empowerment frameworks in South Africa. This illustration was used to answer the research question, which is: **How is women's empowerment conceptualised and expressed in selected policy frameworks of government and non-governmental organisations?**

By employing a postcolonial/poststructural feminist lens, this **research argues that the lack of consensus regarding the definition of women's empowerment has resulted in the co-option and adaptation of the concept in different contexts of development discourse**. Consequently, the complex aspects embedded in 'gender', especially concerning the intersectional tenets it has with the theoretical underpinnings of equality and equity, are ignored in women's empowerment discourses. Conversely, empowerment is treated as an extension of broader developmental objectives, particularly for stimulating economic growth, alleviating

poverty and increasing employment rates, instead of an objective on its own. This has resulted in the conflation of gender, equality and empowerment as concepts.

LINKING THE ARGUMENTS IN THE LITERATURE REVIEW TO THE KEY OUTCOMES OF THIS RESEARCH

Given the research question, the researcher found that there is a common trend in the themes and theoretical orientations of empowerment discourses of the development institutional machine of development in South Africa. The disempowerment of women is dis-contextualised from the process of empowering the country as a whole as development policies and programming in both governmental and non-governmental organisations lack a sufficient, and in some instances no focused analysis of the social structures that inhabit particular processes and outcomes. This then allows for the dominant development discourses to infiltrate the true objectives of women's empowerment in the interest of making mainstream development appealing in different contexts.

Additionally, the literature reviewed revealed that inadequate education, skills and training as well as the lack of access to markets and capital, are some of the pressing challenges to development, however; these factors are not addressed within the conceptualisation of power and social inequalities in development policy. Following this, the absence of critical analysis and contextualisation within the Gender Policy Framework and 18Twenty8's programming, is argued to have resulted in women being framed as a conflated social category. However, there is no significant acknowledgement and call for collective action in placing power in women's hands to determine for themselves what empowerment looks like for them in the various aspects of their lives.

It was argued in the literature review that the empowerment discourse has been adopted by dominant development ideologies that are underpinned by instrumentalism. It can be argued that the individualistic approach to the women's empowerment discourses within the selected policy and programmes is an extensional of instrumentalism within mainstream development as the main objective within the Gender Policy Framework's and 18Twenty8's discourses are to improve productivity within the status quo rather than driving radical social transformation.

The Gender Policy Framework stresses that its approach to women's empowerment is rights-based, but its discourse contradicts this as it is dominated by the framing of women's empowerment as merely attaining welfare and basic needs. This aligns with the women in development (WID) approach outlined in the literature review because the Gender Policy Framework perceives women as victims and a marginalised group that needs to be integrated into development and taken care for the benefit of the country as a whole. Moreover, the programme content and reports from 18Twenty8 further promulgate this narrative in their educational programmes for girls. As a developing country, South Africa is unsurprisingly primarily concerned with development which emphasises the eradication of poverty and economic growth as the main objectives. Given this then, the women's empowerment discourse has been intertwined with these objectives – which is an approach often taken by dominant international development approaches. This again speaks to the main argument of this research.

The literature reviewed highlights that the limitation of the scope of 'women's issues' - that is; economic activity (i.e. productive labour and their integration into markets), social relations (i.e. education) and 'vulnerabilities' - is another consequence of the instrumentalist approach to empowerment. In the selected material for this research, there is little to no discussion of critical aspects of womanhood, such as sexuality and leisure, as pertinent spheres of empowerment. This again exposes the lack of consideration of women as complex beings in the discourses of the selected frameworks, instead, they are treated merely as a means to achieve broader development objectives.

The aforementioned aspects must be addressed as they are often used to oppress and discriminate against women both as a collective and individuals thus furthering their economic, political and social disempowerment. Moreover, measuring the empowerment of women according to their economic involvement is arguably counterproductive as the focus is often limited to their primary economic activities (i.e. agriculture) and access to markets (i.e. trading) rather than creating conducive working environments for them to progress or simply attaining formal employment with equal conditions for men and women.

Considering the above postulations, it is argued that the conceptualisations of women's empowerment in the selected policies and programmes do not offer transformative discourses that can be used to dismantle and rebuild institutional structures, challenge the existing power relations and absolve discriminative stereotypes and norms that contribute to the

disempowerment of women. Instead, these documents offer women's empowerment discourses that are underpinned by mainstream anti-poverty and basic needs approaches to development disguised as women's empowerment discourses and ignoring the most important objective of the concept of 'empowerment' - which is to embed power within any and every activity and discourse advocating for social change and progress.

The literature reviewed further posits that the word 'empowerment' should be replaced with 'emancipation' or 'capacitating' or 'enabling' does not necessarily amount to the concept being redefined and understood differently. Furthermore, it is stressed that mainstream development ideology has proven that adaptation is part of its modus operandi, and thus it would be naive to assume that global governance and vested organisations (i.e. NGOs) would not follow suit should this redefinition and re-conceptualisation happen. However, as argued in chapter 4, it would be beneficial that there be a change and redistribution of power to define the concept of empowerment.

By this, it is meant that objects/subjects of oppression, that is women and girls in the instance of this research, should be able to define their empowerment in their context and therefore have control over how it is understood and its objectives. This is a direct contrast of how the concept of women's empowerment finds expression in the selected material. In the Gender Policy Framework, women's empowerment is painted as merely achieving equality to men and a mechanism to achieve strategic needs – that is 'gender equality'. 18Twenty8 adopts the dominant additive approach which positions girls' education as a complementary phenomenon in the pursuit for women's (economic) empowerment.

The risk of allowing object/subjects of oppression to define their empowerment is that the concept could lose its relevance within global development discourses and practices. However, this concern is arguably minuscule when considering that irrespective of the fact that the concept is presented as homogeneous and universally applicable, the arguments throughout this research show that the concept is used to suit whatever convenient narrative is being put forward. Thus, as argued in the discussion, it is not enough to simply changing the term without doing the work to dismantle all forms of disempowerment will result in the 'paradigm shift' envisaged in the Gender Policy Framework and 18Twenty8, nor will it avoid being adapted into the current dominant discourse of empowerment.

As illustrated by the literature reviewed, there are growing critiques within the development paradigm that disprove the use of the term 'empowerment' by development agencies to maintain dominant development objectives rather than addressing the underlying issues of women's oppression. A key argument offered is that the framing of empowerment is inherently flawed as it is presented as a predictive and static outcome rather than a complex process. The tendency is to propose ordinary business measures as a proxy to women's empowerment. These policy measures are not adjusted for gender effects, and therefore they reproduce the bias in analysis and policy-making. Arguably, the promise for humanist benefits of working towards economically empowering women, the propensity to focus exclusively on business growth or income generation indicates the uncertainty in women's empowerment policy goals and disagreement about the intended beneficiaries.

As mentioned before, the analysed women's empowerment frameworks treat all women as the same, conflate the experiences and objectives of women and girls, and neglect to account for the subjective experiences of women even within their class categories. Thus, it is argued that the aforementioned needs to be acknowledged when formulating policies and programmes on women and this demands that policy-makers have a better understanding the implications this change in priorities and therefore, provide better approaches and discourses of women's empowerment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As noted in the discussion chapter, the researcher strongly advocates for empowerment to be redefined to achieve the transformation of power structures. This transformation demands that we, as emerging development practitioners, reject the narrative that suggests that getting power in today's social structure is the only mechanism by which we can fight oppression. Instead, we need to emphasise that we are indeed dependent on each other and refute the idea that the dominant theoretical framing of the global political economy, what the literature reviewed identifies as a world underpinned by the 'power over' is indeed the world's reality. Acknowledging and advancing the idea of power as the 'power to' is more likely to dismantle the hierarchical structure of our societies.

The researcher proposes that the government and non-governmental organisations in South Africa conceptualise women's empowerment with consideration of global, national and local factors as all these affect how women experience life. Moreover, there needs to be a more

critical analysis of power as a tool for oppression thereby turning this knife on its head entrenching collectivism ('power to') and individualism ('power within') as mutually reinforcing forms of empowerment. In this way then, power will be re-conceptualised as an exercise instead of a possession. Most importantly, economic and political structures need to be scrutinised with particular focus placed on analysing the cultural (patriarchal) assumptions perpetuated by these institutions even in their discourses of human rights that result in women being victim-blamed for their oppression. Conversely, women's empowerment should be conceptualised as a process and an outcome – that is the multidimensional approach.

The multidimensional approach recognises that there can be predictive conditions that hinder an intervention or policy focused on women from being unsuccessful – not because of failure on the women's part of the pro-poor approach – but rather because of the persistent structural interferences. The literature reviewed argues that the formulation of a gender-specific goal focusing on gender equality is important for mainstreaming this principle in development objectives. Goal 5 of the SDGs aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. However, it is argued that neither the MDGs nor the SDGs go far enough in highlighting the shortcomings of the aims of Goal 5 (i.e. cross-cutting the SDGs and mainstreaming gender across all the goals). To this point, the literature reviewed posits that governments failed to meet their commitments to achieve gender equality during the MDG era because of their indebtedness to western nations and multilateral organisations. This has not changed in the SDG era because even with this emphasis on women's and girls' empowerment, Goal 5 still fails to acknowledge the nuanced nature of disempowerment.

Moreover, targeting specific issues is left to individual countries, but this condition is not binding or subject to national policy. As evidenced in the analysis of the Gender Policy Framework for this research, this has resulted in countries prioritising national development policies that impede the implementation of gender policies in line with Goal. Given this then, employing a multidimensional approach to women's empowerment in government and NGO intervention policy allows for women's voices and demands to be acknowledged in the broader development 'gender equality' goal and embeds gender within the local struggles that occur across different contexts, i.e. unequal divisions of labour, workplace exploitation and class inequalities.

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