

Are international agriculture projects empowering rural female farmers in sub- Saharan Africa? A case study of North Central Nigeria

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis examines women's empowerment within the context of agriculture exploring whether international agriculture projects are empowering rural female farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. The thesis investigates if producer organisations, a common approach to reaching rural small-scale farmers in Nigeria, are instrumental in empowering rural female farmers.

Focusing on four producer organisations(all female and mixed) of the USAID Maximising Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises in Targets Sites II (MARKETS II(MII) project in Benue State, North Central Nigeria, the research explores four conceptual pathways of empowerment and five mediating factors. Employing in-depth interviews(39), focus group discussions(12), ethnographic records, and relevant literature, the research explored whether membership in the producer organisations enabled the female farmers to develop the type of power, to negotiate new conjugal and gender contracts in their households and communities. The concepts of conjugal and gender contracts, gender roles and identities, power, and empowerment were used to examine women's actions or inactions in their households and communities. The research also explored the impact of the incessant herder-farmer conflict in the study site on masculinities and the negotiations of new gender contracts.

Employing a broad definition of women's empowerment, I conclude that agriculture projects are not empowering rural female farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. This is because of the failure of producer organisations to transform into spaces for the nurturing of the generative and productive power of rural female farmers to exercise agency to change unequal gender and power relations. Although the MII intervention had all the elements of the pathways of empowerment, it failed to apply a feminist perspective to the design and implementation of its project. This meant that the producer organisations could not become transformative spaces. Furthermore, the organisations did not thrive during the project and ceased to exist immediately after MARKETS II ended. The reasons for their collapse include among others the nature of their establishment, the inability to develop a member-driven agenda, and the lack of committed members.

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Declaration

I, Ngukwase Surma, declare that this thesis is my work, undertaken with the guidance of my supervisors.

This work has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other degree at the University of East Anglia or elsewhere.

February 2023

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List of abbreviations

BLP	Better Life for Rural Women's Programme
DFID	Department For International Development
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPO	Farmers Producer Organisation
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
MARKETS II (MII)	Maximizing Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises in Targeted Sites II
OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PO	Producer Organisation
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Inequality
UKAID	United Kingdom Aid Direct
UN	United Nations
V4C	Voices for Change
VAPP law	Violence Against Person Prohibition Law
WEF	World Economic Forum

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents a broad overview of the thesis, what I set out to research, and why. The chapter begins with the research background and motivation for the research in section 1.1. Section 1.2 articulates the research problem and lays out the research questions while section 1.3 provides a brief description of the study context. This is followed by the thesis structure in section 1.4.

1.1 The research background

This research offers an analysis of the empowerment of rural female farmers by international agriculture projects in sub-Saharan Africa with a focus on Gwer West Local government Area of Benue State, North Central Nigeria. It investigates whether and how producer organisations enable the empowerment of women to effect changes in social norms and customs that disempower them. I examine this by focusing specifically on the producer organisation itself, household decision-making, and control of resources as well as participation in community decision-making processes and structures by female members of the organisation.

One of the objectives of agriculture intervention projects' is empowering rural female farmers from an instrumentalist's perspective of increasing productivity and incomes. This eliminates the political undertone of the initial usage of the concept of women's empowerment which aimed at transforming the ideologies and structures such as patriarchy, class, race, and ethnicity, that not only determined women's subordinated position in society but ensured its reproduction (Batliwala, 2007). Empowering women presupposes a recognition of the power

differentials between men and women because women have lost power (Kabeer, 1999), which they should take back to eliminate gender inequality. Rao and Kelleher (2003) however argue that although a lot has been achieved by various efforts at reducing gender inequality, gender inequality persists in all countries. In other words, women remain disempowered. In Nigeria, evidence of this inequality continues to manifest despite constitutional guarantees of equality and efforts at empowering women. The March 2022 rejection of five gender bills by the national legislature of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is one of several examples of this inequality. The bills intended to amend various sections of the Nigerian constitution to include clauses that would implement increased inclusion and gender equality (Adetayo, 2022). For example, one of the bills was to enshrine equity by also conferring automatic citizenship on foreign husbands of Nigerian women just as foreign wives of Nigerian men currently get automatic citizenship by marriage. The male-dominated legislature however rejected this bill. Yet another example of gender inequality is the impunity with which women suffer gender-based violence, within and outside the home perpetrated by the family, community, and the state despite laws under which perpetrators have been prosecuted and sentenced to prison with some even to death. For instance, in August of 2022, an older widow was locked up for days and beaten by the young men in her community on accusations of witchcraft until she was rescued by the police and traditional leaders (Sahara, 2022) and in December another woman was burnt to death on the accusation of witchcraft by men in her community (Sahara, 2022). A popular gospel musician died in April 2022 from injuries sustained from being battered by her husband (Olaoluwa, 2022) while a staff of the World Bank was killed when her husband purposely ran her over with the car she paid for (Sahara, 2021). An undergraduate student was gang raped and killed while studying in her church (Orijinmo,2020), and policemen raped women they arrested at an Abuja night club at the police station (Orijinmo,2020). These few examples of widespread violence against women are a manifestation of age-long gender

inequalities that manifest in all spheres of life. This is rooted in sociocultural beliefs about masculinity and femininity, men's authority over women, and a general tolerance of men's right to use violence to exert dominance over women (V4C, 2015). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development(OECD) Social Institutions and Gender Index(SIGI) 2023 ranks Nigeria with high gender inequality at forty-two percent(42%) while the UNDP Gender and Social Norms Index says that ninety-nine-point-fifty-one percent of Nigerians have a bias against gender equality. In agriculture, these gender inequalities have led to differentials in productivity and income between male and female farmers (FAO, 2012). It is therefore not surprising that empowering rural female farmers has been an objective of agriculture interventions in line with the current international development focus.

My interest in studying women's empowerment in agriculture is political from the position of a Nigerian feminist and activist. As the main employer of rural women (FAO, 2011; British Council, 2012), agriculture interventions provide an opportunity to reach grassroots women with the education that would enable them to make the choices to transform gender relations in their communities as agents of change (Freire,1974). I see agriculture therefore as an entry point for the political education of women. Secondly, as producer organisations are a common strategy of reaching farmers, these organisations thus provide opportunities and spaces where women can be educated to develop the skills to reflect on their lives and be able to exercise the power to make changes in the gender relations in their households and community. Observing some rural Nigerian communities (as well as urban communities) however, I often feel that nothing is happening in terms of the broad empowerment of rural women. Working as part of evaluation teams, evaluating agriculture and other projects, and hearing women say they have been empowered while noticing their subordinate status, coupled with my knowledge that

several producer organisations or farmers cooperatives do not thrive after an agriculture programme ends, yet acknowledging their potential, motivated this study.

Women's empowerment for me is about changing women's powerlessness and eliminating gender inequality while acknowledging gains made in other areas such as health, education, political participation, and employment. This is to say that if gains in areas such as health and education are not accompanied by at least a reduction in gender inequality in the community, then I do not see it as women's empowerment. This is what Longwe (1991) described as simply enabling women to manage their lives better which she also says is not empowerment. Molyneux (1985) describes this as meeting women's practical gender needs. My position and Longwe's thus resonates with Batliwala (2007) who talks about the historic conceptualisation of empowerment by social movements for social justice, who wanted 'more equitable, participatory and democratic forms of social change and development' (Batliwala, 2007:557). Herein lies my political standpoint, women's empowerment should lead to a change in the norms and practices that sustain gender inequality and not simply enable women to better manage their lives or poverty. Secondly, I wanted to research women of my ethnic group, the Tiv, where I am keenly aware of the deep-rooted power disparities between men and women, among a people whose women do not have the burden of restricted movement or association, two indicators used to measure women's empowerment (Sarker and Chakrabarti, 2013; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Hill, 1969). Tiv female farmers are also celebrated for having control over their yams (a food as well as a cash crop), a claim that I debunk in this thesis as being over-romanticised and not wholly true for my research location. Furthermore, I desire to contribute to the literature on Tiv women's socio-cultural position and gender relations in the ethnic group. Most importantly, it is that this research will trigger a reassessment by feminists and gender advocates who are committed to achieving real change in 'empowering women',

to identify new ways of how best to utilise farmers' producer organisations and transform them into spaces for the nurturing of women's generative and productive power, to conscientise rural female farmers to begin to renegotiate gender contracts in their localities and expand the boundaries that limit them.

1.2 Framing the research

Fifty percent of the agricultural labour in sub-Saharan Africa is provided by women with the region having the highest average agriculture labour force participation of women (FAO, 2011). Women are therefore a significant demographic in agriculture. In Nigeria where over seventy percent of Nigerian women are said to live in rural areas, the majority of these women are employed in agriculture (British Council, 2012). This means that a large percentage of rural women can be reached through agriculture. Local and global policymakers consider the sector as key to achieving the development agenda in sub-Saharan Africa (Amenyah and Pupiampu, 2013). It is therefore imperative to understand if agriculture programmes are empowering women and to utilise the opportunity these programmes provide to empower a large percentage of rural women to begin to address gender inequalities in their communities.

The agriculture sector is not immune to the pervasive gender inequality in Nigeria as I have stated in section 1.1 above. Gender inequality manifests in agriculture in the several constraints rural female farmers face at all stages of agriculture production (Oseni et al, 2015). These are in areas such as access to land and land tenure, seed varieties, labour, credit, technology, and extension services (Kilic et al, 2015; Huyer, 2016). Women's farm productivity is thus negatively impacted leading to lower inputs, productivity, and incomes compared to male farmers (Oseni et al, 2015; Goldstein and Udry, 2008; Udry 1996;). Oseni et al (2015), point

out that bridging these gaps will not always result in equal outputs between men and women in all communities. This means that other non-agriculture factors drive women's low productivity. Kilic et al (2015) explain that gender gaps in agriculture are rooted in social norms and practices that limit women's access to productive resources. Focusing on bridging the gender gaps in agriculture alone to empower rural female farmers will therefore not deliver the expected results because external socio-cultural issues are not addressed. Reiterating this, Friedson- Ridenour et al's (2019) study of female farmers in Ghana, highlights the need to go beyond economic and asset-based approaches in agriculture for women. They found that the failure of the intervention programme to address the social and cultural practices of the community meant that women could not fully reap the benefits of knowledge acquired because of constraining boundaries determined by social norms. A female farmer for instance could not hire tractor services without her husband's support, only accessing the service at the end of the cropping season constraining her to cultivate a small plot despite having the funds for a larger farm (Friedson- Ridenour et al.2019). This implies that agriculture programmes aiming to empower women need to expand their definitions of empowerment so they can address the multiple dimensions of empowerment.

Alongside the targeting of rural female farmers for empowerment, a key approach to reaching farmers through farmers' groups/producer organisations, a feature of intervention programmes has also become a policy staple (Ozoani,2019). This strategy enables interventions to reach large numbers of farmers at a time. Intervention programmes also expect that these producer organisations will provide support for their members during and after the project (Liverpool-Tasie, 2014). Several studies have reported positive economic impacts and even social impacts of membership in producer organisations for female farmers (Lecoutere, 2017; Ferguson and Kepe, 2011). However, despite the attractiveness of this strategy, research has failed to study the viability of these organisations as spaces for women's transformation, years after the

intervention ends. There is also a dearth of research as to whether producer organisations empower women beyond the economic and why the majority collapse after an intervention exits the field (Develtere, 2009).

I, therefore in this study explored whether and how the producer organisations in the USAID's Maximizing Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises in Targeted Sites II (MARKETS II (MII) project have been spaces for the empowerment of rural female farmers after the project ended. To answer this key question, three sub-questions have been elaborated to guide the study.

- 1) Are producer organisations instrumental for the empowerment of rural female farmers, *interdiu* and *ex post* an agriculture intervention project?
- 2) How does women's membership in farmers' producer organisations shape their intrahousehold relationships?
- 3) How and to what extent does female farmers' participation in farmers' producer organisations affect their interactions with the community?

Expanding the scope of empowering women in agriculture beyond the economic gains to the sociocultural aspects which would help secure a project's economic gains (Friedson-Ridenour et al, 2019; Oseni et al, 2015) brings up the discourse around what women's empowerment is. Therefore, to conceptualise women's empowerment, I explore and elaborate on its root concept, power, and its different types - the power over, the power within, the power with, and the power to (Lukes, 2005; Rowlands, 2008; Parpart et al, 2002; Cornwall and Edwards, 2014; Morris,2006; Pansardi, 2012). I also discuss Hayward's (1998) concept of 'defacing power' to enable me to define women's empowerment for this thesis. I engage with the power construct in more depth in subsequent sections. I am interested in the type of power that enables women

to reflect deeply, make strategic choices, and act in the manner they desire to change unequal power and gender relations (Deveaux, 1994). Empowerment is thus about a process that leads to the exercise of this agency both individually and collectively to change power asymmetries in different domains (Malhotra et al, 2002; Alsop et al, 2006). These domains include society (the household and the community), the market, and the state (Alsop et al, 2006). This research focuses on the societal domain looking at the household and the community. These two domains interest me because these are the places where gender norms and behaviour as well as gender identity and gender stereotypes of a community are produced, reproduced, and enforced (Gelderblom, 2003; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Moore, 1988). Changes in gender norms, beliefs, and attitudes in these two domains will therefore percolate into the other domains.

1.3 The research context

The study area, Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State, North Central Nigeria, was purposively selected because I wanted to research women's empowerment among Tiv rural female farmers who were beneficiaries of the MARKETS II programme. The programme was implemented between 2012 and 2017 in twenty-one states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria including Benue State. Additionally, I am familiar with this programme and study site having provided short-term technical services at the end of the MII.

An indigenously Tiv area (Shabu et al, 2020), the location thus presents a homogenous ethnic group for this study. Gwer West Local Government Area is a predominantly agriculture-based rural economy of small-scale subsistence farmers with other economic activities including hunting, trading, and fishing with some people working for the government (Agada et al, 2020; Shabu et al, 2020). Like the other local government areas in the state, farmers in this area grow

several crops including yams, soyabeans, maize, rice, cassava, and cowpeas. The area has been plagued by herder-farmer crisis resulting in farmers abandoning their villages and farms at the height of the conflict between 2011 and 2014 (Genyi,2017), thus affecting farming. More details about the research context are presented in chapter four.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised and presented in eight chapters. Chapter two focuses on the literature review and presents the conceptual framework. I start the chapter by looking at gender inequality in Nigeria and then women in agriculture, discussing the gender gaps as well as how the agriculture sector in Nigeria has treated women. I touch on the treatment of female farmers even though women in Nigeria have been active farmers historically, post-independence government policies on agriculture had ignored them until 1986. I then review the literature on producer organisations also referred to as cooperatives and show that in Nigeria, the history of external stimuli instigating the formation of these producer organisations, from colonial times to date, has led to a dependency culture inimical to the sustainability of producer organisations. The literature on producer organisations is replete with success stories from research mostly conducted during the life cycle of a programme with very little research on producer organisations that do not thrive after an agriculture programme ends. I present four theoretical pathways of women's empowerment as identified in the literature within which I explore the extent to which MARKETS II utilised these pathways in the implementation of its projects to empower rural female farmers. The chapter also sets out the conceptual framework and defines concepts that guide this research, clearly stating the study's definition of women's empowerment.

In chapter three, I set out my methodology and methods laying out the epistemological considerations that inform and guide this research as well as my positionality. I also described the research process in detail. As a qualitative research, I present and explain my choice of case study which was purposively selected to answer my research questions. This chapter also states the data that will be used to respond to each research question as well as the intersecting factors used for the analysis and discussion of findings. The intervening factors are type of household; type of producer organisation; location of producer organisation; membership of other groups; and age of members of the producer organisation. This chapter also has the list of research participants and profiles of interviewees. I triangulate my data with relevant literature to ensure the credibility and validity of the interpretation.

Chapter four picks up from chapter three with a presentation of the research context. This chapter looks at the socio-political, educational, legal, and economic context of Nigeria as this affects gender relations at the household and community levels. It provides a background of the environment within my study site and looks at demographic trends in polygamy for instance to support inclusion from the data collected. I describe the study site in Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State, North Central Nigeria in detail.

Chapters five, six, and seven are the empirical chapters. Chapter five focuses on the MII producer organisations seeking to find out whether they thrived after the MII project ended and if not why. I explore four pathways of empowerment and assess how these were utilised to nurture the groups to ensure that the producer organisation and its members could thrive during and after the project. I highlight the failure of MARKETS II to tap into the full potential of these pathways in empowering rural female farmers even though all the basic ingredients were there.

Chapter six focuses on the households of female members of MII producer organisations to investigate how membership in MII producer organisations has enabled them to renegotiate conjugal contracts within the household and to influence intrahousehold relationships. To aid this analysis and identification of new contracts, I present an ethnographic account of the Tiv farming household from secondary sources and contemporary households. I investigate what changes have occurred in household decision-making and control of household resources. Could these changes, if any, be attributed to the women's membership in the MII producer organisation? This chapter, therefore, explores women's empowerment within the household domain.

In chapter seven, I investigate women's empowerment within the community, by looking at women's access to decision-making processes and structures in the community. Mirroring what I did in chapter six, I start by presenting the ethnographic account of a rural Tiv farming community, drawing out the power and gender relations in this historical and contemporary setting. I examine the impact of the farmer-herder conflict on masculinities in the study site and its impact on gender relations in the setting. How does this in turn constrain women from renegotiating gender contracts at the community level in the face of threats to perceptions of being a man? I examine the current situation to identify if there are new gender contracts within the community and if these are an outcome of rural female farmers' membership in the MII producer organisation. I also seek to identify any collective actions taken by the female members of the MII producer organisations on any issues in their community. This is in an attempt to understand how the MII producer organisation has nurtured their collective power to exercise political agency.

Chapter eight is the final chapter where I discuss my findings and draw conclusions as well as make recommendations for further research. I show how the research questions have been answered as I reflect on whether producer organisations could be transformed into spaces for the empowerment of women beyond the economic focus of agriculture projects. My findings show that the MII producer organisations failed to thrive after the MII project ended. I also found that the MII producer organisations were unable to build women's power to effect changes in the gender and power relations within their households and communities. The female farmers have the 'power within' and the 'power to' which they have exercised in deciding how to use the money generated from their farm work in their various women's labour groups. However, the producer organisations were not able to nurture the type of power that would enable women to take political action.

Chapter 2: Literature review and conceptual framework

This chapter reviews the relevant literature and presents the study's conceptual framework. To anchor this study within the overall country context, section 2.1 examines women and gender inequality in Nigeria highlighting how norms and customs continue to drive gender inequality. It sets the ground for the discussions in sections 2.2 and 2.3. Section 2.2 continues this discussion of gender inequality with a focus on women and gender issues in the agriculture sector and the resultant gender gaps. The section also highlights the use of producer organisations in agriculture which section 2.3 investigates in detail. I discuss producer organisations, a strategy frequently adopted by agriculture interventions to reach rural farmers, and their potential to be spaces for building women's generative and productive power to transform norms and customs. I set out the theoretical pathways of empowerment which this study explores. I begin to present the study's conceptual framework in section 2.4 where I conceptualise and explore in detail power which is the root concept of empowerment to set the basis for the discussion on women's empowerment. I then explore the concept of women's empowerment and define what it means in this study. The section also looks at how women's empowerment is measured and what domains are of interest to this research. Section 2.5 looks at women's empowerment and institutions where the two institutions - the household and the community - which this study focuses on, the reasons for the selection of only these two sites and discusses the power relations that advantage and disadvantage women's position in these institutions. In section 2.6 other concepts in the study, gender roles and identities are discussed as well as the conjugal and gender contracts.

2.1 Women and gender inequality in Nigeria

Although a lot has been achieved in terms of promoting gender equality in Nigeria within the sixty years of independence from colonial rule, gender inequality persists. Several global gender equality indices measuring gender inequality in different ways point to high levels of inequality between men and women in Nigeria. The World Economic Forum (WEF) 2023 global gender gap report (GGGR) which ranks countries according to their proximity to gender equality ranks Nigeria 123 out of 146 countries with a gender parity score of zero-point six-three-seven (0.637) This means that Nigeria has a wide gender gap in all four key dimensions of the WEF measures - economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. To attain gender parity, this gap has to be closed in all of these four measures. Full parity has a score of one. The gender gap is the distance from full parity(WEF, 2023).

The four sub-indexes of the GGGR offer a more detailed picture of Nigeria's challenges to attain gender parity. For instance, the political empowerment sub-index is where Nigeria has the widest gap, which has continued to widen since 2012. Currently, the 2023 GGGR index stands at zero-point-zero-four-one (0.041). This shows the level of gender inequality in elective and appointive positions and how far away from parity the country is. Political participation is about leadership in all spheres and this level of parity reflects the population's attitude to women's leadership. Several other indices such as the UNDP Gender and Social Norms Index (GSNI), 2017/2020, UNDP Human Development Report(HDR),2021-2022, the Gender Inequality Index(GII) corroborate this wide gender gap in political participation and leadership¹. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) 2023

¹ The UNDP Gender and Social Norms Index (GSNI), 2017 and 2020, measures bias in four dimensions and ranks Nigeria highest in the political empowerment index with eighty-five-point fifty-three percent (85.53%) of people

Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)², highlights some of the reasons that inform and drive the gender parity reported by the other indices. The SIGI measures discrimination in four social institutions - discrimination in the family; restricted physical integrity; restricted access to productive and financial resources; and restricted civil liberties. While all four institutions provide reasons for the disparities reported above, two of the four, the discrimination in the family and restricted civil liberties, provide more specific reasons for gender disparity. Nigeria scores fifty-seven(57) and forty-seven(47) percent respectively in the sub-indexes of discrimination in the family and restricted civil liberties. This means that there is high discrimination in these institutions against women. It is the norms engendered by these discriminations that drive the low numbers of women in political leadership because people believe that men make better leaders than women(V4C, 2015).

An analysis of how Nigerian women have performed in the political sphere shows that women have not been able to make significant inroads into elective positions since the country's return to civil rule in 1999. The percentage of women elected to the national legislature in the Senate and House of Representatives within this period has remained below ten percent (10%) of elected members fluctuating between three-point four percent (3.4%) in 2000 and seven-point three percent (7.3%) in 2019 (IPU, 2023). As the SIGI(2023) report says formal and informal norms, practices, and rules continue to set women back. Thus, the political participation space for women remains constrained by factors that may not confront the male politician. Practices such as the party or community asking female candidates to step down for males and rigging

with a bias against gender equality in this dimension. Reflecting this further is the UNDP Human Development Report(HDR), 2021-2022 Gender Inequality Index(GII)¹, which puts the percentage of women and men in the empowerment index at forty-point four percent (40.4%) and fifty-five-point three percent (55.3%) respectively.

² The SIGI is a cross-country measure of discrimination against women in social institutions and measures four social institutions – discrimination in the family; restricted physical integrity; restricted access to productive and financial resources; and restricted civil liberties. Scores range from 0 to 100. A 0 score indicates there is no discrimination while a 100 score indicates absolute discrimination (OECD,2023)

internal party processes in favour of male aspirants (Alubo,2011; Uwa et al, 2018). Political party qualification rules further narrow women's access to political party structures such as nomination forms³, and length of membership in the party before qualifying to contest for nomination as the party's candidate for an election. These rules hinder, women from even seeking to enter the space of political decision-making (Ihugba and Aaron, 2018). As I show in Chapter 7, this is also reflected even at the grassroots level in terms of women's access to community traditional decision-making structures

A closer look at the economic participation and opportunity dimension of the WEF GGGR 2023 shows Nigeria with a score of 0.715 which indicates a narrowing gap. This however masks a very high disparity in each of the five indicators that make up this sub-index. For instance, the indicator for labour force participation has a score of 0.199 while wage equality for similar work scored 0.310 showing a wide gender disparity. This gap as earlier discussed is caused by discriminatory laws, norms, and practices in social institutions. These gender gaps in leadership, economic participation, and opportunity as well as in other dimensions manifest in agriculture constraining rural female farmers' productivity and incomes, as I discuss in the following sections.

2.2 Women and gender inequality in agriculture

The five indicators for the economic participation and opportunity subindex of the GGGR 2023 for Nigeria show very wide gender gaps with all five sub-indexes being far from the parity point. For instance, the estimated wage income scored 0.221; the legislative senior officials

³ In Nigeria, political parties have a policy that gives nomination forms free to female aspirants for elections as part of their affirmative action strategy to get more women elected. Research has however found that this has become counterproductive as it is used to challenge female politicians' financial contribution to the Party thus ensuring they do not get the Party's ticket to contest the election

and managers scored 0.149 while the professional and technical workers indicator scored 0.121. The discriminatory practices that drive this disparity impact women in all aspects of life including their livelihoods. The main source of women's income and livelihood is agriculture. Agriculture employs a large percentage of women, especially in rural areas. A majority of the over seventy per cent (70%) of Nigerian women living in rural areas are employed in agriculture (British Council, 2012). These women work on their small farms as well as on family farms and as hired farm labour. They work in contexts where cultural and social norms constrain and determine the outcome of their farming (productivity and income) and lives generally (Friedson-Ridenour et al, 2019). Yet, women have been acknowledged as a vital part of agriculture and its development in sub-Saharan Africa (Latynskiy and Berger, 2016) even as they continue to negotiate and navigate the various forms of gender inequality confronting them in agriculture. Gender inequality in agriculture persists in several key areas from production decision-making to the sale of produce. Women's productivity, therefore, remains lower than male farmers even within the same household, and for the same crop resulting in lower incomes for female farmers (Levy, 2017; Oseni et al, 2015; Goldstein and Udry, 2008;). Several reasons account for these differentials between male and female farm productivity.

A primary factor is how women access farmland. Access to land in sub-Saharan Africa continues to be governed by customary practices that prevail despite statutory laws, especially in rural areas (Yecho, 2016; Odeny, 2013). Women's access to farmland is therefore primarily through her natal or matrimonial family (Yecho, 2016; Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003; Whitehead and Bloom, 1992; Knowles, 1991). This access does not include a right to inherit, loan, or sell the land nor does it confer assurance of availability for her use as her family could allocate her a new plot at their discretion (Adeloka et al., 2013; Quisumbing et al., 2001). What this means for female farmers is that the size of their farms is partially dependent on how much land they can access for free from family allocation. This affects women's productivity in

several ways, one of which is that they cannot invest in the land⁴ nor use it as collateral for funds to purchase inputs (Doss et al, 2015; Adeloka et al, 2013; Goldstein and Udry,2008). Women in western Ghana, for instance, were more likely to plant cocoa trees (long-term investment) on land if they were certain that rights of land would not change after trees had been planted (Quisumbing et al,2001). The Mandinka of the Gambia even though a patrilineal and patrilocal people present a different route to access to land where women traditionally could own land in matrimonial homes if they cleared these lands for their rice farms(known as kamamyango land) and could bequeath this land to their daughters(Carney and Watts, 1991). For women in matrilineal societies like in northern Mozambique, natal access to land confers security of tenure (De Brauw,2015). Yoruba women in western Nigeria who inherit cocoa farms and land from their fathers even though this land cannot be transferred to their husbands can invest long-term in these lands and the cocoa trees (Afonja,1981). For Tiv women, access to land is through male relatives in marital or natal homes. A man is obligated to give his wife land to grow her yams to feed the family over which she has only usufructuary rights (Yecho, 2016; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). Women's security of tenure is therefore rooted in their being wives as well as their sons inheriting those lands from their fathers(Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003). Women could thus invest in the land long term for instance in planting economic trees but not in using it as collateral for credit, even then they could still lose investments if men decide to sell the land. A rural female farmer in a patrilineage can have a more secured tenure if she purchases the land under statutory law in her name and invests long-term on the land. Gendered norms of inheritance in patrilineal societies, while constraining women are also an expression of the unequal power relations that govern the various ethnicities.

⁴ Customary rights of access to land make it impossible for female farmers to invest in crops with long term gestation or with continuous yields such as cocoa and fruit trees, thus restricting opportunities to expand their business and income.

In terms of agriculture information technology, technology development has begun to respond to the needs and social constraints of women with the use of farmer field schools and the involvement of female farmers in the development and selection of new varieties (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2019). For instance, African upland female rice farmers benefited from the New Rice for Africa (NERICA) rice variety. Its high yield potential and short growth cycle thus its reduced labour requirement meant women could meet the labour needs of this rice variety and have time to attend to other household demands (Samado et al,2008).In the MII project, the targeting of female farmers with information meant that women were reached directly with new planting technology. Nevertheless, technology especially for land preparation, weeding, drying, and energy is usually either too heavy or inappropriate for women (Huyer 2016). Additionally, women are likely to lose control of such technology to men even if they purchase it from their personal or group savings (Porter and Zovighain, 2014). This means bridging the gender gap in accessing technology for women cannot stop at just the point of purchase of equipment but requires going further to also address the gender norms governing women's and men's work in the community and the value ascribed to each. Carr (1982) points out the need for technology development to understand women's roles, and how they are performed so that new technology (such as for planting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, shelling, and other processes where women have traditionally provided labour) does not add to their labour burdens. New technology should also not take away any control women have over crops and sales from such because of cultural norms of behaviour. Taking away women's control means disempowering them in areas where they had some leverage and voice as this may also take away income from women.

Closely linked to new technology is agriculture extension services, traditionally biased against women because of beliefs that men are the farmers as well as agriculture decision-makers, women do not farm and where they do, it is marginal (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2019;

Croppenstedt, et al., 2013; Okojie, 1991). This was reflected in Nigeria's agriculture policies which only began to see women as farmers more than two decades post-independence. In 1996 the government started targeting women with extension services with the creation of women in agriculture units in the Agriculture Development Projects (ADPs). The post-independence assumption was that agricultural information would get to all members of the household through the men (Meinzen-Dick, et al, 2010). This means that female farmers are less likely to get the right information, depend on second or third-hand information, not able to seek out the extension worker to ask for advice, especially in communities with restricted movement and interaction between males and females (Fletschner and Kenney, 2011). Female extension workers would therefore be needed to reach female farmers effectively in some communities. Herein lies a challenge for agriculture services in Nigeria, as the government agencies, the Agriculture Development Projects (ADPs) tasked with providing extension services have failed to replace retiring extension workers resulting in a shortfall of extension workers (Auta and Dafwang, 2010). Even with the increasing shift to farmer field schools as avenues for the provision of extension services, other factors could hinder women's access to these services. These include the timing of training and channels of getting information to farmers which may predominantly be through men, who are always primary contacts even for extension workers (Esenu et al, 2005). Another limitation could be that information always reaches the same set of people thus alienating other women. Local nuances of information dissemination would also need to be considered when targeting female farmers with new technology and extension services. This will however not be a problem in localities such as my study site where there are no restrictions on women's movements and interactions with men. In the MII project, for example, female farmers had access to male extension workers and could reach them without first having to ask permission from their husbands.

In terms of access to agricultural credit, female farmers generally do not have the needed collateral to seek loans from formal financial institutions and end up seeking micro-loans from informal associations within the community (Meysonnat et al, 2022; Yamada et al, 2020; Diagne et al, 2000)⁵. Micro-loans mean that women's farms will remain small for lack of credit to cultivate larger plots. One source for this micro-credit is from women's local groups (Meysonnat et al, 2022) and in some instances, this is in the form of labour. The women's labour groups in my study area, for example, provide cheaper labour on members' farms on a credit basis which is paid after the season's harvest. Despite lower charges for group members, not all members can afford to hire labour on credit from their groups because they may not be able to provide the mandatory refreshments. Lack of and shortage of cash means that the intensity of labour on female-owned farms is lower, as women cannot afford to hire labour and are thus dependent primarily on their labour (Perez et al, 2005) and that of their hearth-hold. Additionally, this determines the size of women's farms in situations where they can access more land they are constrained by the issue of labour. Labour hired by the household will most likely be for cash crop farms controlled by men. Other reasons for the lower intensity of labour on women's farms include time constraints because of reproductive roles and responsibilities which leave less time for productive work on their farms (Croppenstedt et al., 2013; Perez et al, 2005; Udry et al, 1995;). Furthermore, cultural norms also constrain women's access to labour. In parts of Ghana, for instance, women can only access the labour of household members younger than them or lower than them on the gender hierarchy. In cocoa farming areas of Ghana, female farmers cannot access free male labour for strength-demanding jobs

⁵ In Nigeria for instance, microfinance institutions because of their short-term loans, payable weekly, are targeted at traders who make daily income and returns on trading. Farmers who on the other hand can only repay loans after months of waiting for crops to be harvested, processed, and sold, cannot pay back weekly, and have complained of the high-interest rates from these microfinance institutions (Onugu, 2012). Access to finance remains a challenge for rural farmers in Nigeria because microfinance institutions do not consider lending to small-scale farmers as a profitable business because of the uncertainties around agriculture such as weather, pests, and disease (Alegieuno,2010)

because men and women are in separate labour groups (Hill and Vigneria, 2011). Women are therefore constrained to grow crops that are less labour-demanding or where labour is intense but spread out and to farm smaller plots (Von Braun and Webb, 1989). This gives them time to attend to other reproductive and productive responsibilities. Division of labour in sub-Saharan African farming communities is primarily sex-based with men performing heavier tasks such as making mounds and ridges and women being responsible for planting, weeding, and harvesting (Agada and Igbokwe, 2016; Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985; Carney and Watts, 1991; Stone et al, 1995). The division of labour is also crop-based as among the Mandinka of the Gambia where rice is traditionally a women's crop. While there are these specificities, farm labour is not always gender specific as reported by Stone et al (1995) among the Kofyar of north-central Nigeria. Burfisher and Horenstein (1985) also imply these blurred boundaries when they say that Tiv men and women perform complementary roles in planting, harvesting, and storage. These complementary roles in harvesting, for instance, are still sex-based divisions of labour, but what it shows is that men and women can perform the same tasks on the farm. A commonality is that generally, women have more responsibility over food crops than men, primarily providing the labour for these crops while also working on household/husband farms. While research shows women providing labour on household and husbands' farms in terms of weeding, harvesting, and storage, little is reported of such reciprocity on women's farms. This means that women have fewer sources of labour for their farms. I discuss women's use of their labour for household bargaining and negotiation in section 2.6.2 on conjugal contracts.

These gender differences also manifest in other aspects such as input into production decision-making. Women are disempowered when they have limited input in production decision-making in male-headed households (Achandi et al, 2019). This limitation is eliminated in female-headed households, communities where women have always had control over decisions about their farms and income; and farming systems where women and men make joint

production decisions in the household (Wouterse, 2019; Forsythe et al, 2016; Sell and Minot, 2018; Achandi et al, 2019; Masamha et. al, 2017). Despite these three scenarios women are still limited in production decisions as long as they do not control access and use of farmland (Masamha et. al, 2017). The land is a critical means of production for the farmer with credit determining what can be cultivated.

It could therefore be presumed that eliminating these gaps would lead to increased productivity for female farmers, however, this is not the case. In some communities, controlling for these factors, women's productivity has matched that of men while it has remained low in other communities (Aguilar et al, 2015; Slavchevska, 2015; World Bank, 2012; Peterman et al., 2011). This means that in addition to closing the gender gaps in agriculture, other factors also need to change (Croppenstedt et al., 2013; Peterman et al,2011). Oseni et al. (2015) for instance found that controlling for factors of production, the productivity of female farmers in Northern Nigeria remained lower than that of male farmers, reaffirming similar findings by Peterman et al (2011) in the same region. For women in southern Nigeria, productivity differentials between male and female farmers became insignificant when controlled for production factors (Oseni et al, 2015). These findings suggest that the other factors that need to change are the socio-cultural norms of different communities that impact women's agriculture productivity. Eliminating the gender gaps in agriculture would therefore require going beyond addressing the provision of agriculture resources discussed above to addressing asymmetrical power relations between men and women (Croppenstedt et al., 2013; Peterman et al,2011). What this means in the long-term for agriculture projects is that their goals of economic empowerment will be undermined by these sociocultural factors if these are not addressed. Friedson-Ridenour et al's (2019) study in Ghana clearly illustrates this.

To address these gender gaps and challenges faced by small-scale rural farmers' agriculture projects whether government or donor-driven, have resorted to collective action as a route to increasing access to productive resources and thus improving their productivity (Sugden et al. 2021; Agarwal, 2018; Doss et al., 2015;). Despite its chequered history of failure in communist regimes and the post-colonial agrarian reform programmes of developing countries, collective action in agriculture has taken on a new form (Sugden et al., 2021). Collective action in agriculture, which is farming in groups, is being approached from the position of bottom-up voluntary groups as against its historic character of a top-bottom coerced format (Sugden et al., 2021). Collective farming takes on different formats and models from farmers themselves deciding (Sugden et al., 2021; Agarwal, 2020) to that proposed to farmers as in the MARKETS II project. Rural female farmers would benefit more from collective action in some regards than men, such as in accessing financial resources and labour as they do not control family labour (Selhausen, 2016; FAO, 2011). I discuss in detail this collective action in agriculture in my study in the following section on producer organisations.

2.3 Producer organisations: A Pathway to empowerment?

A popular approach to reaching rural farmers, adopted by both governments and international projects in Nigeria, is the use of farmers producer organisations. This approach enables projects to reach many farmers at once (MII, 2017; Sellare et al, 2023; Othman et al, 2020; Porter and Zovighain, 2014; Liverpool-Tasie, 2014). There is also the expectation that these producer organisations will support their members in not only applying new technology but at all points of the crop value chain thus increasing productivity and incomes (Abdulrahman and Abdulai, 2018; Liverpool-Tasie, 2014;). Agriculture intervention projects also expect that these producer organisations will grow into successful agro businesses offering members business services such as finance and linking farmers to markets. (Levy, 2017; Berdegue, 2001). The MII

project's approach to reaching farmers, therefore, did not differ from this pattern as its engagement with rural farmers (male and female) was through farmer producer organisations. The MII approach emphasised the inclusion of female farmers who had three routes to engaging with the project while the men had only two. These were through all-female producer organisations, youth groups (these were mixed groups), as well as through mixed producer organisations (McNamara et al, 2019).

While the practice of group activity (informal cooperatives) is not new in sub-Saharan Africa, its current form has largely diverted from this historic practice. The continent has a history of cooperative⁶ activities where people benefited from and depended on group activity to meet needs such as farm labour, getting married, and building a house (Othman et al, 2020; Develtere, 2009; Sudgen et al, 2021). In the pre-colonial Tiv households and communities for instance, a man was dependent on his age grade and the larger group for survival, even for protection from witchcraft with initiation into a group cult which was a means of attaining social stature (Mead, 1955). Commitment to such groups was thus weaved into the fabric of local cultures as the expected and right behaviour. However, the modern cooperative sector in Africa has a history of external triggers for its creation (Sellare et al, 2023; Mwanbi et al, 2021; Mutonyi, 2019; Abdulrahman and Abdulai, 2018; Develtere, 2009; Chikwendu, 1997; Abdelrahman and Smith, 1996; Desta, 1995). These external triggers range from colonial administrations to post-colonial governments, not-for-profit organisations as well as individuals. Colonial administrations established cooperatives to smoothen the process of stocking and exporting cash commodities (Wanyama, et al, 2008). On the other hand, post-colonial governments use cooperatives as channels to reach communities such as rural people with agriculture projects and microcredit (Mwanbi et al, 2021; Coker et al, 2022; Chikwendu,

⁶ I use the term cooperatives in a generic sense when referring to such groups outside the agriculture sector and use the term Producer Organisations for cooperatives in agriculture whose members are farmers.

1997; Desta,1995). Individuals and not-for-profit organisations have also reached poor, rural people through cooperatives with various programmes such as microcredit and skills acquisition training, donor funds, and subsidies (Levy, 2017; Liverpool-Tasie, 2014; Chikwendu, 1997). In Nigeria, programmes such as the ‘Better Life for Rural Women’, a 1987 project of a First Lady, utilised cooperatives to implement its agriculture intervention for rural women (Ozoani,2019). These cooperative societies⁷ especially in rural areas are run by elected officers and volunteers drawn from their membership⁸ and regardless of their skills, entrepreneurial and organisational experience, these officers are responsible for the accounting, public relations, marketing, and management of the cooperative (Levy, 2017; Enete, 2009). What this means is that people are doing jobs without relevant experience or supervision, yet these groups are expected to thrive and expand. Even though capacity-building training is organised by the agriculture projects, which generally focuses on record-keeping and farm technology, there is no certainty that new skills learned will be applied, especially post-project, given that projects such as MII had no post-project backbone structure in place to support its producer organisations.

Despite these challenges, cooperatives⁹ have the potential to empower and reduce gender inequalities in sub-Saharan Africa, including in the agriculture sector (Lecoutere, 2017; Okechukwu, and Agbodike, 2016; Baden, 2013;Okwoche and Obinne, 2010; Idrisa et al, 2007; Porter and Zovighian, 2014; Baden, 2013). Various studies report a positive economic impact

⁷ Members of rural Producer Organisations are usually made up of family, neighbours, and friends (Wanyama,2009). This relationship may contribute to members not questioning leadership when they should about how group is being run.

⁸ Because of size and financial status, most primary-level cooperatives cannot employ staff (Enete, 2009).

⁹ In agriculture, the literature describes cooperatives in the sector by different names ranging from agriculture cooperatives to producer organisations. This study uses the term producer organisations when referring to cooperatives in the sector. Where the word ‘Cooperatives’ is used it refers to cooperatives generally within and outside the sector as some cooperatives may not be producer organisations such as thrift and credit cooperatives. The focus is on primary level cooperatives even though if the study finds links with secondary and tertiary level cooperatives in the field, these relationships and impact will be explored.

of female farmers' membership in producer organisations in terms of improved access to markets, credit, and farm inputs (Brandão and Breitenbach, 2019; Lecoutere, 2017; Porter and Zovighian, 2014; Liverpool-Tasie, 2014 Baden, 2013). Farming in groups has several benefits for rural small farmers in reduction of overheads such as in bulk purchasing of fertilizers and inputs, hiring of tractors and other farm machinery as well as putting farmers in strong positions to negotiate rent of farmland (Agarwal, 2020; Sugden et al, 2021). Other benefits include the reduced cost of labour as members provide the labour on the group farm as well as the group entering the market on behalf of the farmers. In communities where women do not own land or access to land is a problem, female farmers working in group farms are better positioned to negotiate with landowners (Agrawal, 2020; Sugden et al, 2021). Female farmers' access to government programmes, agencies, and financial institutions is also enhanced when approached as a group (Agarwal, 2020; Mutonyi, 2019). For some government programmes, farmers can only get access through producer organisations (Coker et al, 2022). As Sugden et al (2021) point out, the success of collective farming is tied to the type of model that evolves from the farmers themselves with farmers able to modify their model to fit their needs at any given point in time. What this means is that where models of cooperating are imposed by an external agent, such groups are more likely to collapse than those that evolved from the farmers themselves depending on their context and realities. This is evidenced in Sugden et al's (2018), project in Eastern India and Nepal where four models of cooperating were developed by the farmers. Even then the farmers kept modifying these models to suit changing environments such as the different seasons - the dry and raining seasons. These included a model where the group leased land and farmed it as a group and shared all costs and outputs; in the second model, land was owned by individual farmers but pooled and farmed collectively in the dry season. In the third model, farmers rented a plot of land but also had their farms while in the fourth model, farmers pooled their farms in a contiguous area and

cooperated on preparing the land, irrigation, and input purchase but did not share labour with members cultivating their additional plots. The MII producer organisations in my study were not established along this approach where farmers decided how to cooperate in groups. The model of cooperating was ascribed by the project. The MII model did not focus on collective farming. Farmers were brought together into producer organisations to enable the teaching of new technologies and to support each other in the application of new technologies as well as linking farmers to buyers of their soyabeans produced to meet the buyer's demand.

Despite the benefits of working in a cooperative, producer organisations face several limitations which make it difficult for them to thrive. These include a lack of management and leadership skills, free-rider problems, and limited financial sustainability without external support (Brandao and Breitenbach, 2019; Sellare et al, 2023; Shiferaw et al, 2016). Others include failure to produce a surplus for the group to sell. Where members cultivate their individual plots and pool products in the group for marketing, members are more likely to sell individually as the need for money arises than to pool all their produce at the group level (Sellare et al, 2023; Shiferaw et al, 2016; Baden, 2013; Selhausen, 2016). Active producer organisations could decide on what percentage of grains each individual can contribute to aggregation at the organisational level for bulk marketing. Other challenges include the misappropriation of resources by leaders, and the side-lining of illiterate members (Mrema, 2008; Liverpool-Tasie, 2014). Gender-specific challenges faced by all female producer organisations include women's inability to be active members and resolve internal disputes (Baden, 2013; Selhausen, 2016). Failure to resolve internal conflicts, which is not peculiar to women groups, may also be because of the intricacies of several people attempting to do business together and the challenges associated with this (Liverpool-Tasie, 2014). Women in the women's labour groups in my study have established conflict resolution mechanisms that have worked for them as they navigate their relationships in these groups. These skills would

also be of benefit to their MII all-female producer organisations. Lecoutere (2017) suggested that the very gendered nature of society could be a primary hindrance as women may not even be able to participate because of time constraints, workload, and men's lack of support. The female extension worker I interviewed explained how some men stopped their wives from participating in the producer organisation by assigning them tasks during the meeting times. Furthermore, once the external triggers cease to exist, the producer organisations collapse as clearly observed with my producer organisations in chapter five. Notwithstanding, several development projects such as the World Bank FADAMA I, II and III¹⁰ projects in Nigeria¹¹, Federal Government of Nigeria agriculture projects such as the Anchor-Borrowers programme, have initiated and supported the establishment of producer organisations as vehicles for promoting collective action for rural farmers to improve their access to resources, increased productivity, and markets (Coker et al, 2022; Liverpool-Tasie, 2014; Johnson et al, 2018).

Several studies on cooperatives in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa do not investigate their performance in empowering rural female farmers beyond increased productivity and incomes nor do they research the survival rates of producer organisations whether established by local or international projects years after the intervention project ends¹². Research focus has been on successes recorded during a project, on the individual farmers without an interest in the producer organisation itself. This post-project research may also take place immediately (more likely within months and not years) after the project ends. There is therefore a general dearth of case study research conducted several years post-project on producer organisations in

¹⁰ projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/PO73686?lang=en&tab=overview

¹¹ The World Bank FADAMA II project is just one example of several other international agriculture projects (by DFID, USAID for example) that have initiated the establishment of producer organisations as channels to reach and work with rural farmers.

¹² For example, Porter and Zovighian's (2014), study of female farmers user groups under the World Bank FADAMA II project in Nigeria, took place within the project cycle and focused only on successful groups in a place rated successful by the programme implementers. It did not investigate changing gender norms arising from membership in these groups.

Nigeria. As a result, there is a wide gap in contextualised understanding of why the majority of these producer organisations eventually collapse when an intervention exits the field as well as the producer organisation's impact on women's empowerment beyond economic empowerment post-intervention (Shiferaw et al, 2016; Develtere, 2009). Even during a project's life cycle, research focus has not been on the capacity of these producer organisations to thrive several years post-intervention. When I asked the organisational capacity-building experts I interviewed what made them confident that the producer organisations they worked with would thrive post-MII, they said the leaders had received capacity-building training and were keeping proper records of meetings. Similar producer organisations in other projects (such as the FADAMA I, II and III projects), who had received organisational capacity building training and were keeping records, failed to thrive post intervention. This suggests that capacity building and implementing new learning was not sufficient to keep organisations growing and thriving.

Yet, producer organisations remain an approach that projects in the agriculture sector continue to adopt with little interest in understanding why they fail to thrive years after the intervention ends. Neither have agriculture interventions introduced innovations to the establishment of producer organisations as reported by Sudgen et al. (2021) discussed above. Project objectives have also not focused on the producer organisation's contribution to social transformation, changing gender norms and power relationships in the household and community.

Research findings point out that women's groups such as producer organisations can be spaces for women to develop their 'power within' and 'power with', and 'power to', to question gender relations both within the household, in the community, market, and state (Cornwall, 2016; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire, 2016; Agarwal,1997 and Rowlands, 2008). While women's groups

have this potential, it has to be nurtured as these groups do not automatically translate into spaces that enable women to develop deep analytical and reflective skills to begin to reflect on gender relations in their households and communities (Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021; Rowlands, 2008). This is demonstrated by the deliberate inclusion of mandatory consciousness-building classes for all female participants in the Chapeu de Palha Mulher safety net programme in northeastern Brazil (Cornwall, 2016). Participants thus reported how these classes opened their eyes to understand their entitlements as citizens, and rights as women and informed their choice of vocational training under their project. This expanded their horizons of the things they could do within their households and the community(Cornwall, 2016).

This study, therefore, seeks to understand how and to what extent producer organisations, have been a pathway to women's empowerment in agriculture. It goes further than just the economic to a broader definition of women's empowerment as well as looking at whether such producer organisations survive at least three years after the project exits the field. Thus, providing members (female members) with a space to develop the analytical skills to ask questions about the nature of gender relations in their environment. These are the gaps in the literature that this study seeks to address.

In seeking to do this, the study explores the various pathways to women's empowerment in the MII case study and what factors mitigate this process. These pathways of empowerment are;

1. Role of frontline intermediaries, the capacity - building and gender experts
2. Agronomic training
3. Building critical consciousness(civic education) and relationships among female members of the producer organisation

4. Building strong producer organisations, and creating a structural backbone for the sustainability of the producer organisations

Five mediating factors will be considered. These are the location of the producer organisation – rural and semi–urban; household types; type of producer organisation (all female or mixed group); the age of members of producer organisations; and membership of other groups.

2.4 Conceptualising Women’s Empowerment

2.4.1 Power and Empowerment

Empowerment is a concept widely used across several disciplines, by bureaucrats and politicians as well as by intervention projects locally and internationally (Cornwall, 2016; Rowlands, 1995). The concept’s definition is as varied as its usage because its root concept of power is itself contested (Gaventa, 2006). Power is defined and used in different ways by different people, which explains the malleability of the concept of empowerment (Annan et al, 2021; Elias et al, 2021; Rowlands,1995). Batliwala (2007) captures this when she argues that power has been taken out of the concept of empowerment where it was initially used in the historic struggles for social justice, to encompass demands for equitable, participatory, and democratic forms of social change and development. This means that its traditional usage, which was always in the search for radical change in social relations, is lost in the contemporary application of the word empowerment. Others using the concept from a differing definition of power will not agree with her and argue that the usage has simply evolved. One thing that is clear in situations in which the term empowerment is applied is that someone or a group has been disempowered and cannot make choices (Kabeer, 1999). Therefore, to precisely define what empowerment is, requires an understanding of the concept of power as definitions of

empowerment are based on a person's definition of power (Rowlands, 2008). To conceptualise women's empowerment therefore in this study, I will first examine the concept of power. Despite these contestations over the meaning and manifestations of power, it is often understood and defined in four broad types. These are the 'power over', 'power to', 'power with', and 'power within', which occur at the individual and collective levels (Cornwall and Edwards, 2014; Lukes, 2005; Rowlands, 2008; Parpart et al, 2002).

The 'Power-over'

The conceptualization of power as 'power-over' encompasses what Lukes (2005) classifies as three dimensions of power with the second and third building on their critique of the first dimension. This conceptualisation thus presents a broad continuum on which to research power as 'power over'.

In the first dimension of power, Lukes (2005) says the focus is on decision-making over issues where conflict is observable because of differing subjective interests which are seen as policy preferences in political participation. So, it is the behaviour of A in the decision-making process to get B to support her interests, thus where A gains, B loses. This type of power, therefore, is the ability, the capacity that an actor has, exercises it, and is observable in the actions (decisions made) taken (Lukes, 2005; Hathaway, 2016).

The second dimension of 'power-over' is about an actor, 'A', determining what gets to the decision-making process. Two issues are involved here which are what gets on the agenda and what does not get on the agenda presented by the leader (Lukes, 2005; Hathaway, 2016). Therefore, the focus should also be on what does not get on the agenda (the non-decision) as it is a decision taken by the leader that stifles the presentation of alternative opinions (Roscigno,

2011). Thus, power is also about being able to determine what does not get to the decision-making process, in contexts of observable conflict of subjective interests of the people involved. The power to suppress an opinion in a group may lie not just with a leader but with a subgroup of people, so A does not necessarily have to be an individual. Understanding how issues are kept off the agenda provides further understanding of power, its different dimensions, and its process. The Hunter Biden's¹³ 'laptop from hell' saga in American politics, is an example of a group (the mainstream media and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)) with the 'power over' to keep this issue off the agenda (the non-decision) during the 2021 American presidential campaign because they presumed its contents would have negative consequences on his father's campaign (the overt conflict between two political parties) for president.

While the one-dimensional power is concerned with decision-making, the two-dimensional power is concerned with who determines what gets to the table for discussion and what is excluded. Lukes (2005) further argues that the 'power-over' encompasses more than these aspects. The third dimension of 'power-over' he defines as when decision-making and non-decision-making happen where conflict may be either overt or covert, influenced by 'socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, the practices of institutions and may be manifested by individual inactions' (Lukes 2005:26). In other words, people may simply act in ways that seem natural to them by not questioning the way things are being done by a group or an institution because this is how it has always been (Hathaway, 2016). An example would be Tiv women in my study not questioning why they are not allowed to participate in community decision-making processes. The men on the other hand simply keep doing what they consider normal, excluding women based on age-long reasons even when they consult

¹³ Hunter Biden is the son of the 47th American President elected in the 2021 presidential elections, whose laptop has revealed his business dealings, the legality of such businesses as well as his father's involvement, which are being questioned by the American congress and people

them privately. 'Power over' is exerted by 'A' even without A making any effort because 'B' simply responds in a manner that has become the norm which gives A the power and reinforces A's power.

Summing up these dimensions of power, Allen (1998:33) defines power over as 'the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way.' She argues that power-over cannot be equated with domination even though it may be implied because some situations of power-over cannot be referred to as domination. Therefore, the context of power-over will determine if it is used as domination. For instance, where a medical doctor insists that a patient be administered prescriptions at set times, this cannot be considered domination because it is for the good of the patient who has consulted the doctor for help to get well.

The 'Power-to'

While 'power-over' is relational, 'power-to' is about the individual's ability to act or attain their goals (Roscigno, 2011). 'Power-to' exists when a person develops, has, and retains the autonomous capacity to act to achieve what they want (Allen, 1998; Roscigno, 2011). Pansardi (2012) considers 'power-to' as the most basic form of power as an actor can only influence another if they have 'power-to' act. Allen (1998) says that one must first have the 'power-to' before exercising the 'power-over'. This means that even where female leadership is one of dominance, there exists an empowerment that has taken place in 'A' which is worth studying. 'Power-to' is therefore about human agency, an enduring capacity to accomplish something by oneself as well as about bearing the consequences of such actions (Morris, 2002). Action is necessary to ascertain that a person has 'power-to' (Pansardi, 2012). When it does not manifest in action it is latent and one cannot be said to possess the 'power-to'. For instance, if women

in a producer organisation decide to save money and purchase herbicides in bulk for group members, they can be said to have the 'power-to' only because we have seen action and in this instance two actions, the act to save and the act to negotiate with an agro dealer for the purchase. Women in a producer organisation who therefore decide to ask the men to let them speak at community meetings that exclude women have exhibited the 'power-to' by the act of asking.

Has membership of MII producer organisations enabled women to develop and strengthen their 'power-to' so they can act to change subordinating norms within their households and community? Have the producer organisations nurtured their female members to develop and strengthen their 'power-to' as individuals and as a group, to identify and address subordinating gender relations? This is the type of power that interests this study.

The 'power-within'

The 'power-within' is closely related to the 'power-to'. I see these two types of power as two sides of the same coin. While 'power-to' focuses on an individual's ability to act to achieve her goals, the 'power-within' is about self-acceptance, self-respect, a sense of control over one's life, accepting, as well as respecting others (Roscigno, 2011; Pansardi, 2013). Power starts from this position, especially for women who have internalized oppression and worthlessness, who would first need to find a sense of self-worth within themselves before they can take the action ('power-to') needed to change their situation (Mosedale, 2005). A sense of worthlessness could be, being unable to ask a question because you accept the community's way of doing things and do not see yourself as capable of influencing change. Women in my study expressed this sense of worthlessness when they did not think of approaching community members to ask why they were not part of the decision-making process, instead arguing that it was the custom, they are visitors and cannot know the issues and secrets of the community. This

conceptualisation of power aligns with feminists' conceptualisation of power as self-actualization, self-determination, and self-definition (Annan et al, 2021; Deveaux, 1994). Thus, feminist research on empowerment places the subject at the centre of her interpretation in the research on the how and why of power. Women begin to understand that they can assess their lives from a viewpoint different from the one they have always known (Kabeer, 1994), think differently, question their existence, and act to enact change (Sharp et al, 2003). An analysis of power would therefore seek to ask how the woman experiences power; what possibilities exist of resistance and how women can personally and collectively take actions to effect change (Deveaux, 1994).

'Power-within' and 'power-to' both focus on a person's capacity as a basis from which power can be exercised. A thin line lies between which type of power comes first as different authors have claimed both as the starting point of power. This means that both types of power reinforce each other and may develop at the same time. This is why I see them as two sides of a coin, both sides develop simultaneously. For feminists, therefore, developing the 'power-within' is critical to being able to change unequal power relations in society. Developing the power-within, therefore, cannot be separated from the development of the power-to, because if one has the power within, it can only be observed when she acts (the 'power to').

Has membership in MII producer organisations provided the basis for female farmers to develop the 'power- within' to begin to reflect on their lives from a different position, develop new analytical skills, strengthen their social and organisational networks, and feel the strength of support from these networks in a new manner that enables them to act (Agarwal, 2020; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire, 2016; Kabeer, 2011; Kabeer, 1994). One expression of this would be identifying and taking on their own identified women's needs and priorities in the producer organisation in addition to MII objectives.

The 'power-with'

The fourth type of power is the 'power-with'. This type of power focuses on collective action and solidarity with others (Allen, 1998). It is about people acting and speaking in unison (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire, 2016; Kabeer, 2011; Arendt, 1970). Arendt (1970) described power as a self-referential relation in a group meaning that it occurs in a community of individuals who are engaged with an issue. Group action achieves more than individual action, thus when groups act together, they achieve more than if only one person acts (Mosedale, 2005; Stromquist, 1995). The gender and capacity building expert I interviewed in this study echoed this same thinking when she said that if the women in the producer organisations act together, they are more likely to engender some things because their demands will be as a group and not just one woman who may end up being considered a rebel by the community. Feminists examining power from the perspective of the collective¹⁴ will, therefore, emphasise the importance of women spending time together reflecting on their lives and identifying what strengths they have (Cornwall, 2016). Then they can decide on collective actions that will bring about the desired change in gender social relations in their community. For example, Said-Allsopp and Tallontire (2016) in their study of women workers in Kenyan tea and cut flower industries supplying European retailers and brands, found that female workers who had a platform where they could share their experiences were more likely to act to bring empowering changes to themselves than those who did not have a platform to discuss. In sharing experiences, the group of women developed a consciousness to act together to demand change. In other words, being part of a group where discussions were about experiences in the industry

¹⁴ I consider the collective here as contextual as women are not homogenous and have different identities and interests. Even in my producer organisations they are not homogenous as some for instance are richer than others, different household types, education but homogenous based on ethnicity, religion, and membership of a farming organisation.

directly affecting the female workers enabled them to develop the 'power with' to decide what changes they wanted and exercise their agency accordingly. The MII producer organisations provided rural female farmers with a space to meet and discuss. The questions asked earlier are therefore pertinent: has the producer organisation transformed into a broader-focused organisation enabling its members to articulate their self-defined concerns and priorities? Do the women manifest the power that can enable the organisation to act collectively to change gender relations within the community and the household? This means that members of the producer organisation are responsible for determining what is of importance, what actions to take, and how to take these actions without imposition from outsiders.

In conceptualizing power as 'power-with', the 'whole' is greater than the individual even though individuals develop 'power within' to be able to take collective action. This implies that not all members would have attained the same level of the 'power within' and 'power to' at any given point where collective action is taken. On the other hand, some members may have the 'power within' and the 'power to' but may not agree with a planned action and may therefore not be part of it. For these individuals 'power over' may be exercised by the group where they are not totally in agreement on an issue. So, even though 'power with' may be the type of power that enables social transformation, it could also create powerlessness for some group members. Allen (1998) points out that 'power with' as seen in actions of solidarity, may also be spontaneous and therefore not be easy to identify empirically. Thus, in measuring power as 'power with', the researcher will have to differentiate between actions that grew out of a process of conscientisation and those that were spontaneous. Understanding the workings of 'power with' in a producer organisation would therefore require diligence to understand how women's leadership is being experienced as it could also be oppressive and not empowering for all group members (Cornwall, 2007; Brandao and Breitenbach, 2019). This means that where collective action is borne out of the leaders' exercise of their 'power over' group

members, then the researcher cannot refer to such actions as the group's expression of the 'power with'. For instance, in March of 2022 when women's groups and individual women in Nigeria protested the national legislature's action to 'stand down' five gender bills before it, women's groups and activists went on weeks of protest at the entrance of the national legislature with accompanying protests at state legislatures across the country. These actions were the outcome of about two weeks of discussions and planning by women's rights activists which started on the 'Nigeria Womanifesto feminist group' on WhatsApp. The process which led to the decision to protest can be studied empirically. Even in situations where the leaders of groups exercise their 'power over' the group, women's understanding of the commonalities of their subordinated positions will enable an acknowledgment and acceptance that they can collectively change (Kabeer, 1994) what has become accepted as natural. Such an exercise of power would be 'power with' as it would build on a process of reflection that has been ongoing in the group. Young (1993) opines that the collective power of women acting to change things has a significant effect on women's power in society. This type of power is the power that would enable women to renegotiate a gender contract in their community and is therefore of interest to this research.

All four types of power are interconnected and thus present different features of a situation (Whitehead, 1984). This means that all forms of power therefore can be present in any one situation. Definitions of women's empowerment excluding one type of power such as the 'power over' because it is seen as domination, could therefore lead to the lack of an in-depth understanding of a situation (Allen, 1998; Haugaard, 2008). Allen (1998) therefore says that all four conceptual relationships of power are an important aspect of understanding power and the intricacies of power. In other words, the researcher should be open to seeking to understand why 'power over' is manifested instead of dismissing it because she considers it domination. In my understanding, even where a definition of power and subsequently empowerment does

not encapsulate all types of power, the researcher should be conscious of the type(s) of power excluded. Empirical work and analysis should therefore consciously look out for its expression and not ignore it where it is seen to occur. This ‘power over’ could be exercised by frontline intermediaries working with women’s groups to build their consciousness and may therefore be viewed from the perspective of catalysing action and not control(Cornwall, 2016).

Defacing power

Hayward (1998) proposed a conceptualisation of power that departs from the generality of conceptualisations as presented above, to one that does not focus on who uses power to direct the actions of the other (the powerless). She calls her concept ‘defacing power’. She conceptualised power as ‘the network of social boundaries that delimit fields of possible actions.’ She sees freedom to act as constrained by mechanisms of power of which actors may or may not be aware. These mechanisms determine the boundaries of actions for A (the powerful), and B (the powerless).

Power's mechanisms are best conceived, not as instruments powerful agents use to prevent the powerless from acting freely, but rather as social boundaries that, together, define fields of action for all actors(Hayward, 1998). Power defines fields of possibility. It facilitates and constrains social action. Its mechanisms consist of laws, rules, norms, customs, social identities, and standards, that constrain and enable inter and intra-subjective action. Actors might act intentionally upon particular mechanisms of power. (Hayward, 1998:12).

Freedom is the state that enables individuals to shape these boundaries, yet their freedom is determined by social practices and institutions (Hayward, 1998). This means that an actor’s freedom to act is never free from the social practices and the institutions in the environment in

which she has grown up and lives. The actor is therefore already constrained in the actions she takes or does not take. When A, therefore, exercises power over B, B's reaction is in part influenced and constrained by the social relations and environment in which she lives and so also are A's actions. In other words, a cultural and gender system determines how power is used and expressed.

In a power relationship therefore A can act upon these mechanisms of power to determine the parameters of B's field of action thus limiting the boundaries of action for B (Hayward, 1998). So, when men in my study exclude women from community decision-making processes, they draw upon the norms of the community that have been learned through socialisation to define the boundaries within which women will respond. It follows that women's response of not questioning this exclusion is therefore a response within these boundaries and not a choice that is 'free.' So, while the women say 'We accept it, it is our way of doing things', this does not come from a place of freedom as they are already constrained by culturally gendered ways of thinking and acting. Hayward (1998) further explains that in her concept of power, attention is paid to how the mechanisms of power determine the boundaries of possibility for not only the A (the powerful) but also B (the powerless). She points out that exercising power constrains and enables all social action. For instance, the community in my study will continue to do those things that constrain women's freedom to question their exclusion in community decision-making unless someone succeeds in redefining the boundaries of limitations by asking why and demanding change.

Identifying these boundaries created by the mechanisms of power will inform strategies for changing differential forms of social constraint on freedom (Hayward, 1998). This makes the ability to analyse one's position in the gender system critical for women if they are to seek ways of renegotiating gender and conjugal contracts. Hayward's conceptualisation of power is

thus central to my definition and understanding of empowerment for this study. It provides a basis for the analysis of women's response to norms that limit the boundaries of their possibilities which they may not even be conscious of and reinforce by their actions and inactions. Her conceptualisation enables an analysis of empowerment from the perspective of how rural female farmers and members of MII producer organisations are breaking the boundaries of constraints in gender relations and forging new gender contracts in their households and communities.

2.4.2 What is empowerment?

Following the above discussion of power, definitions of empowerment would reflect the type of power the user aligns with. Thus Rowlands (1995:102) drawing from her conceptualisation of power as encompassing the power within, the power to, and the power with, which she refers to as generative and productive, defines empowerment 'as the process by which people become aware of their interests, how this relates to the interests of others, and to participate from a position of greater strength in decision-making and to actually influence such decisions.' This resonates with Kabeer's (1999:437) definition of empowerment as 'the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability'. Kabeer sees power as the ability to make choices which is reflected in her definition. To make choices a woman would have developed her 'power within' and her 'power to'. She qualifies the choices she refers to as those that are critical for the actor to live the life they want such as choice of livelihood, whether and whom to marry and have children. Batliwala (1994) sees empowerment as a growing process of awareness that leads to identifying areas that one wants to change, deciding on what actions to take but also reflecting on the whole process. A common thread runs through these definitions which are of interest to this study, and this is the emphasis

on the individual developing that sense of self and awareness, using that ability to reflect on her environment, to act to make the choices and changes she wants (in other words exercising agency). A second thread is a need to pay attention to process, as change does not happen suddenly but is an outcome of time and growth. Malhotra et al (2002) say this emphasis on agency, with women at the centre of defining and making choices comes from the feminist epistemology, which I discuss in chapter three. Like Pansardi (2012), said in discussing power, the way to know if a person has developed the 'power to' and 'power within' is when the person acts. Self-awareness and environmental awareness coupled with action, therefore, are central to empowerment. This action should lead to life changes in the direction so desired and defined by the actor and it happens over time. How can a woman act to make her strategic choices if she has not been able to develop her self-awareness and ability to analyse her circumstances? The actor must therefore be at the centre of the process of change.

Rowlands (2008) further specifies domains at which this empowerment takes place which is helpful for empirical measurement in the field. She says that empowerment is experienced and operates at the personal, close relationships and collective levels. Her elaboration of these three domains introduces aspects of relevance to this study which are the collective dimensions that involve working with others in groups at the local, formal, informal, or international levels. The relational dimension is also of interest as it focuses on negotiating and influencing the nature of a relationship. This is what happens not only in the family/household but also within the community. It is about exercising one's 'power within' and 'power to' and is relevant to this study as I seek to understand if and how female members of producer organisations are negotiating and influencing relationships within the household and community to bring about the changes they want. Kabeer (1999) emphasises that there must be changes that affect and define the parameters of one's life, this means empowerment is much more than just buying

food, clothing, and paying children's school fees for instance. Mosedale (2005) picks this up in her definition of empowerment as the expansion of the possibilities which will enable women to do things that they previously could not.

While Mosedale (2005) does not define what those possibilities are, I qualify what they are for my study. Thus, I examine these possibilities in the light of Hayward's (1998:9) definition of power as the 'the network of social boundaries that delimit fields of possible actions', with the freedom to act constrained by mechanisms of power which actors may or may not be aware of, but these mechanisms determine the boundaries of actions for A (the powerful) and B (the powerless). As stated above, the mechanisms of power that define social action are the 'laws, rules, norms, customs, social identities, and standards, that constrain and enable inter- and intra-subjective action' (Hayward, 1998:12). Empowered women will therefore be able to expand the boundaries of social action constrained by the norms, customs, social identities, and standards of their communities. This expansion of the boundaries of social actions of the actor's community is part of the action that creates choices and alternatives for women. It is these choices and alternatives that indicate empowerment for me because the women then have a basis to negotiate new gender and social relationships. I seek to respond to my research question as to whether producer organisations have been able to enable women to expand the boundaries of their possibilities by redefining the parameters of their lives and the strategic choices they make; do they even have a choice? Two issues that are not stated by these definitions are that each context of study presents its nuances, and that empowerment is not given by an external agent but developed. While this is not stated explicitly here it is apparent in the writings of both Rowlands (2008) and Kabeer (1999). This means that the women in my study who do not develop the capacity to ask questions, make choices and act to influence their boundaries of possibilities cannot be said to be empowered.

Bringing together these aspects of interest from the definitions of empowerment presented above, I define empowerment in this study to consist of all the three issues highlighted. In this study therefore empowerment is when women begin to become aware of their circumstances of limited boundaries, ask questions, identify possibilities of change, and act individually and with others to transform these limiting boundaries in a manner that determines how they live their lives. It is not just about the individual but also about the group working with others to achieve the change they want. This self-awareness and identification of choices and actions to achieve change cannot be externally imposed but must be internally generated by the women and groups involved. The process of self-awareness and development of analytical skills however can be facilitated by an outsider as shown in the use of frontline intermediaries, a pathway of women's empowerment highlighted by Cornwall (2016).

2.4.3 Measuring women's empowerment

In addition to empowerment being about power, its conceptualisation, and application, empowerment also takes place in multiple dimensions because the issues of gender inequality between women and men are not only complex, but this inequality varies in different ways across different dimensions and domains (Desai et al., 2022; Akter et al, 2017; Malhotra et al, 2002). These dimensions and domains provide a basis for operationalising empowerment for measurement. Operationalising empowerment has generated several measuring frameworks which are presented as domains and dimensions where empowerment happens and is experienced. These frameworks provide different levels of specificity meaning some are more detailed while some are broader depending on the subject of research. This is exemplified in the discussions on the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) below.

Malhotra and Schuler (2005) present a five-dimension framework consisting of the economic; social and cultural; legal; political and psychological dimensions. For this framework, the domains in which empowerment is experienced are the household, the community, and the broader areas. In these three domains, all five dimensions of empowerment can be studied. Rowlands (2008) presents a framework of three domains of the personal; the close relationships and the collective (working with others, at political structures, locally or institutionalised national/international networks). She does not specifically identify dimensions of empowerment, but these are implied in her study. Alsop et al (2006) also present a three-domain framework. These domains are the state; the market and the society with a total of eight subdomains. The societal domain which she also refers to as the social domain has two subdomains, the intrahousehold and the intracommunity which provide an opportunity to explore relationships within the household and the community. In experiencing empowerment in these three domains, Alsop et al (2006) say that this experience takes place at different levels, this means that some levels of experience are narrower while some are broader in scale. These levels are the macro, the intermediary and the local (Alsop et al, 2006) all referring to spatial spaces of physical boundaries. Thus, applying this to Nigeria, the macro level will be national; the intermediate level will be the state; and the local level will be at the local government area. My study is thus situated at the local level. The levels where empowerment is experienced are thus administrative boundaries. This means that a woman could be empowered at the local level but not at the intermediate or macro level. It is interesting to bear this explanation in mind when analysing data to make the connections between these levels of empowerment and how the broader level influences empowerment at the narrower level and how changes at the narrower level could trigger changes at the broader level.

The domains of Rowlands (2008) and Malhotra et al(2002), could all be collapsed into Alsop et al's (2006) three domains. This suggests that each researcher could expand or narrow down and select domains that are relevant to their inquiry. This is seen in the various research on women's empowerment in different sectors such as nutrition, and food security where researchers focus on very specific domains, dimensions, and indicators(Nahar and Mengo, 2022). Dimensions of empowerment as presented by Malhotra could thus be studied within each of these domains. Malhotra and Schuler (2005) point out that dimensions of empowerment (economic, socio-cultural, political, social, and psychological) could overlap but that this is dependent on the context, thus bringing up the issue of the impact of context on women's empowerment. However, empowerment in one dimension does not mean that a woman will automatically be empowered in another dimension (Kabeer, 1999, Malhotra et al, 2002; Alsop et al, 2006). Thus, instead of assuming that empowering women economically will translate to changing gender norms, it would be better to strategically plan to work on the two dimensions of the economic and the socio-cultural to attain these two goals. The difference therefore in applying these frameworks will be the impact of contextual issues as well as what questions get asked and what is being studied.

Rao (2012:1044) captures this when she concludes that 'economic empowerment is clearly not adequate for crossing gender boundaries and radically transforming social norms and relations'. It is the transformation of social norms and relations that interests this study and thus defines its domains of study. The household and the family are the loci for the disempowerment of women because it is here that gender norms of a community are deeply entrenched and institutionalised as the family is the institution where the norms and behaviour of society are taught and reproduced (Gelderblom, 2003; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). Kabeer (1999) says that this is one domain where it is difficult for change to happen because of the

institutionalisation of gender roles and identities, and where men's control over household resources seems non-negotiable. The central place of the family and household in the life of a person makes it a domain where women's empowerment can be easily measured because like Kabeer(1999) points out it is difficult to change. The community domain on the other hand is the power base of social hierarchies and patriarchy. It is here that gender ideologies and family systems are reproduced, and reinforced, and normative changes occur and affect women's empowerment (Malhotra et al, 2002). Furthermore, it is at the community level that agriculture intervention projects aimed at empowering women are implemented. These reasons inform my decision to study what impact MII producer organisations are making in the household and community domain in my study context. The need to study the community domain is further reinforced by Friedson-Ridenour et al's (2019) finding in Ghana, that increasing female farmers' productivity was hampered by gender norms which made it difficult for women to access tractor services at the right time even when they could afford it without the husband's support. In other words, empowerment in the economic dimension failed to result in empowerment in the social dimension which in turn hampered empowerment in the economic dimension. Whatever changes were happening in the household were constrained by the community, meaning these two sub-domains are closely intertwined.

Focusing specifically on the agriculture sector, the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) which was developed in 2012 is the first comprehensive and standardised measure that captures women's empowerment in agriculture. It focuses on women's agency through the collection of individual-level data from men and women in the same household (Alkire et al, 2013; Akter et al, 2017;). Jointly developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), IFPRI, and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), the WEAI is a country or regional-level survey-based index, that consists of

two sub-indexes - the five domains of empowerment (5DE) and the Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Alkire et al, 2013). The sub-index, 5DE (with ten indicators) assesses the degree of respondents' empowerment in five domains of empowerment in agriculture. These domains are decisions about agricultural production, access to and decision-making power about productive resources, control of the use of income, leadership in the community, and time allocation (Alkire et al. 2013). The second sub-index, the gender parity index(GPI), measures the percentage of women empowered or who have the same level of achievement as men in the same households(Alkire et al., 2013).

Quisumbing et al (2023) report the emergence of several variants of WEAI with the abbreviated -WEAI (A-WEAI) and project level-WEAI (pro-WEAI) (Malapit et al, 2019) being the earliest versions derived directly from the original WEAI. These versions of WEAI are a response to several factors arising from using the WEAI. These include the need to shorten the time of administering the questions as well as meeting the demands of different users. The abbreviated WEAI, for instance, retained the five-domain structure of the WEAI (which is based on the thematic programming priorities of the US Feed the Future initiative) but has only six indicators and takes about twenty per cent (20%) less time to administer than the original WEAI(Quisumbing et al, 2023; Malapit et al. 2019).

The pro-WEAI index was a response to the demand for an index that will enable projects to measure 'the impact of agriculture development projects on women's empowerment as well as a diagnostic tool for tailoring such programmes to specific settings'(Malapit et al. 2019: 677). The need for specialised indices has seen the development of add-on modules to the original WEAI for livestock, health, and nutrition projects, as well as the development of other metrics which are adaptations of WEAI developed by parallel research teams(Malapit et al., 2019;Quisumbing et al, 2023). The pro-WEAI like the WEAI has two sub-indexes, the three

domains of empowerment (3DE) and the gender parity index(GPI). The three domains are intrinsic agency (power within), instrumental agency (power to), and collective agency (power with). The pro-WEAI has twelve indicators which include the recognition of unintended negative impacts of women's empowerment such as increased time burden and backlash from men(Quisumbing et al, 2023; Malapit et al, 2019). The pro-WEAI domains focus on the agency dimension of empowerment which can be seen as a more direct measure of empowerment conceptually when compared with resources or achievements which could exist in contexts where women are disempowered(Malapit et al. 2019). This reflects my earlier argument that empowerment is when women can make life choices as stated by Kabeer(1994). It is not just about making decisions, but the type of decisions made.

The WEAI has been criticized for its use of national-level data which makes it difficult and expensive to use where such data does not already exist as researchers would then need to generate this data to use the index (Akter et al, 2017). This may be another reason why researchers adapt it to their context. Additionally, the WEAI is a quantitative measure that may not be able to assess the deep and nuanced reasons for women's disempowerment. The index is also designed for use in households with couples. Its failure to incorporate different types of households (excludes female-headed households or male-headed polygamous households) means that its findings cannot be representative of all types of households thus posing concerns of exclusion(Akter et al, 2017). On the other hand, pro-WEAI's exclusion of WEAI's GPI does not allow for an empowerment comparison between men and women in the same household. Friedson-Ridenour et al. (2019), say a key limitation of WEAI and its various adaptations is the underlying assumption that increasing women's access to and control over productive resources and assets is a key driver of empowerment. In other words, definitions of women's empowerment and measurement indices should not just focus on the economic dimension but include other dimensions of women's empowerment such as the socio-cultural and political

dimensions. If the goal of development interventions is to achieve women's empowerment and gender equality, then the gender norms that subordinate women should be addressed (Okali,2011). The understanding of these gender norms impeding women's empowerment and gender equality is best understood by qualitative methods (Akter et al, 2017; Miedema et al, 2018;Kabeer, 2011; Malhotra, 2003). This however does not mean that insights cannot be gained by quantitative measures. Quantitative measures need to be triangulated with qualitative data for an in-depth understanding of the situation. Nevertheless, the WEAI has been used in several other ways. These include as a diagnostic tool for policymakers, development organisations and academics working to increase women's empowerment(Sell and Minot, 2018). Other studies have used the WEAI to measure how specific development issues are linked to empowerment (Sell and Minot, 2018). This study's investigation covers all of the pro-WEAI domains and some of the indicators in the pro-WEAI and WEAI. These are decision-making and control of resources and assets in the household (autonomy of income) participation in community leadership, as well as participation in producer organisations. These indicators are however not peculiar to the WEAI family of indices, but the most popularly applied indicators used in the literature on women's empowerment(Nahor and Mengo, 2022).

Still within the landscape of measuring women's empowerment, are several gender analysis frameworks. Developed by gender and women's rights advocates, these gender analysis frameworks provide different perspectives on measuring women's empowerment, especially in project implementation. This study focuses on the empowerment of female farmers by an agriculture programme thus, these gender analysis frameworks are of significance. March et al (1999) present six frameworks, which are the Harvard analytical framework and people-oriented planning; the Moser framework; the gender analysis matrix (GAM); the capacities and vulnerabilities analysis framework; the women's empowerment (Longwe) framework, and the

social relations approach. I will present the women's empowerment (Longwe) framework generally referred to as the Longwe framework and the social relations framework. I use aspects of both frameworks in this study.

Longwe (1991) was concerned that development programmes in sub-Saharan Africa were missing the mark in their conceptualisation of the rural woman whom she described as a hardworking producer of food primarily consumed by others. These others include her husband, townspeople, rich people, and landlords, leaving her, and her children malnourished and short of food. She thus argued that the development problem was not about enabling the rural woman to be more productive but about empowering her. This empowerment should enable the rural woman 'to take an equal place with the man, participate equally in the development process to achieve control over the factors of production on an equal basis with men' (Longwe, 1991:150). In other words, even if women's productivity increases and they have increased incomes, their problems will persist because of gender norms and roles that keep them out of the decision-making process, leaving them no options to make strategic choices nor control over how to live their lives. Development programmes have continued to focus on increased productivity to the exclusion of working to change the gender systems that disempower women. This is because it is easier to count the successes in terms of the economic dimension than be involved in the long-term work needed to change norms (Friedson-Ridenour et al, 2019). Longwe(1991), therefore, developed a framework for use in project planning and implementation to measure women's empowerment. Though directed at projects, this framework is relevant for this study as I seek to find out if membership in a farmers' producer organisation of a development project has empowered women. In other words, has MII being able to get female farmers to participate on an equal footing with men in the control of the factors of production and the decision-making process?

Longwe's framework which can be used for assessing the level of development of a woman in any area of social or economic life consists of five levels of equality. These levels are in a hierarchical relationship with the highest (equality of control where neither the male nor female dominate) being more important for women's development. These levels of empowerment in ascending order are welfare, access, conscientisation, participation and control (Longwe,1991).

What this means is that the extent to which any of these levels of equality is present in any social or economic situation reflects the level to which women are empowered. For instance, when women have equal access to training on new agronomic practices, credit, and land or equal access to welfare which includes income, food, and medical care, they have not addressed the issues of equality (women's issues) but only the concerns¹⁵ of women. Kabeer (1999) refers to these 'issues of women' as those involving strategic choices as when to marry, whom to marry, and where to live. It is this identification of levels of equality that interests this study as I seek to find out if female farmers and members of MII producer organisations have attained the highest level of equality socially in the household and the community. While useful in identifying what type of changes have taken place, Longwe's framework does not consider the complexity of the gender system of rights, claims, and responsibilities between men and women and thus fails to account for power relations between men and women and what this means for women's empowerment(March, et al, 1999). Longwe also fails to examine social institutions and their role in shaping women's and men's lives (March, et al, 1999). The framework does not account for the fact that a woman may have attained the level of control

¹⁵ Longwe (1991) differentiates between women's issues and women's concerns in her empowerment framework. By women's concerns' she refers to women's traditional and subordinated sex-stereotyped gender roles, such as women being responsible for producing food crops, ensuring welfare of children. This she explains is not about attaining equality with men. By 'women's issues', she refers to those things that are about equality with men in social and economic spheres. When women do not receive a fair share of their labour of food and income not fairly distributed between men and women, these would be women's issues for Longwe.

in one dimension of empowerment but not in another. Women can have control over some issues in the household or community but will not be empowered. However, looking at Longwe's hierarchy, she puts conscientisation¹⁶ before participation and control, meaning she expects that at the point at which a woman controls resources, she should be conscientised. It is also possible that some of the levels could happen in a woman's life simultaneously, or a forward and backward integration of the levels of empowerment and not in a hierarchal linear manner as the framework conceptualises it. Time was also absent in Longwe's conceptualisation of empowerment thus the framework does not address change over time (March et al, 1999). While this is not explicit it is implied as the attainment of the capacity to analyse one's position, understand the issues of inequality, and act to change it, takes time and is a process. Nevertheless, its generalisation enables me to make statements about women's empowerment in terms of where women's positions are on the hierarchy of equality in terms of engagement with the MII producer organisation. The Longwe framework will enable assessing whether the MII producer organisations were able to nurture women's consciousness and develop their ability to analyse gender and power relations, determine what they want and act individually and collectively to get the change they want. The framework also enables me to determine what the MII producer organisation achieved, whether it stopped only at welfare and access. To address the limitations of Longwe's framework I also adopt the social relations framework which focuses on the relationships between women and men in institutions.

The social relations approach (SRA) espoused by Kabeer (1994) is a consciously feminist approach to analysing gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, responsibilities, and

¹⁶ Longwe (1991: 151-152), conscientisation means 'the understanding of differences between the sex and gender role and that the latter are cultural and can be changed....it involves a belief that sexual division of labour should be fair and agreeable to both sides and not involve the economic or political domination of one sex by the other. Belief in sexual equality lies at the basis of gender awareness and provides the basis for collective participation in the process of women's development.'

power and for the design of programmes/policies so that women are enabled to become the agents of their development (Hillenbrand et al, 2014; Manyungwa et al, 2019). This is based on the approach's underlying rationale that human well-being is the final goal of development and human resources are one of the key resources for achieving this goal (Kabeer, 1994). Hence the policies, planning as well and implementation of projects should be assessed on what they contribute to the achievement of human well-being(Kabeer, 1994). The SRA focuses on the social relationships between women and men, their relationships to resources and activities, and how these are mediated by the four institutions of the family/kinship; the community; the market, and the state(Kabeer, 1994). These institutions are connected through the network of social relations. A change in one will affect the other because of this interconnectedness (Hillenbrand et al, 2014; Manyungwa et al, 2019). This means that when changes occur in the gender relations within the family/household, these will very likely lead to gender and power changes in the community. In other words, these four institutions are not independent and separate even though they may be researched and viewed as independent of each other (Kabeer, 1994). This explains why changes in the state in terms of women's appointment and election to political office led to changes in my study community on permitting women to contest for political office.

Building on the core rationale of the approach, which is that development should be about increasing human well-being, Kabeer(1994), says that the goal of development should be more than economic growth and improved productivity. It should encapsulate security, survival, and autonomy which constitute the basic goals of human well-being. Autonomy gives the person the ability to participate in decisions that shape their choices and life chances. The second concept of social relations approach is about the structure of relationships that construct and replicate the systemic differences in the positioning of people or groups of people. These are

the relationships that determine who people are, what they do, their responsibilities, and what they can claim. They determine people's rights, and the control they have over their lives and those of others(Kabeer, 1994). People's access to resources (tangible and intangible)¹⁷ is determined by social relations, as well as a person's position in the social hierarchy of their community(Kabeer, 1994). The third concept of the SRA is institutional analysis, which Kabeer defines as a framework of rules for achieving social and economic goals. The SRA as stated earlier focuses on four institutions that it conceptualises as interconnected.

Institutions create and perpetuate social difference and inequality by ensuring the production, reproduction, and reinforcement of social relationships (Hillenbrand et al, 2014). Kabeer(1994) argues that to transform institutions, unequal relations(including unequal gender and power relations) as well as institutional practices that perpetuate inequality must be changed. While the SRA focuses on social relations, it also enables the analysis of roles and responsibilities in understanding gender power relationships within an institution. This means that these relationships do not exist in a vacuum and that the institutions within which social relations occur are not immutable. The social relations approach states that though institutions may differ based on locality and local cultures, they have five interrelated dimensions of social relationships that are critical in the analysis of social and gender inequality. These are the rules, resources, people, activities, and power. These five dimensions enable the research to understand the patterns of behaviour in an institution, its norms and traditions, laws, and customs that either constrain or enable what is done, who does what(who is in and who is out), who gains, when it is done, who has the power to determine what is done and whose interests are served and who accesses resources(Kabeer, 1994).

¹⁷ Kabeer(1994) describes tangible resources to include assets, money, and commodities. While intangible resources are solidarity, contacts, information, and political clout.

In other words, understanding how these five dimensions are deployed in the household and the community will enable an understanding of how women can negotiate changes in conjugal and gender contracts. What areas they will not want to negotiate because the cost may be too high for instance questioning practices that could lead to loss of marriage(Kabeer, 2011). On the other hand, understanding how social and gender relationships within the household and community function will also enable the understanding of what constrains women from challenging the gender and social norms of their community. Thus, enabling strategies to address these constraints to expand the boundaries of women's possibilities.

I use the social relations approach to enable me to understand how women negotiate their roles and responsibilities, networks, within the household and community to expand the boundaries of limitations that perpetrate power asymmetries. How do the rules, activities, resources, people, and power used, within and between the institutions of the household and community reinforce gender identities as well as impose an unseen constraint as espoused by Hayward(1998) on women and men? How has membership in MII producer organisations provided their members, rural female farmers, with the resources and network to negotiate these gender contracts?

2.5. Women's empowerment and institutions

Even though I have provided reasons for focusing on the family/household and the community as domains of study in section 2.4.3, it is imperative to briefly discuss these two institutions which are also domains of empowerment to further explain my choice of these institutions (domains). As stated earlier it is within these two institutions that gender norms of a community

are deeply embedded and reproduced, and gender systems and hierarchies are reinforced (Batliwala, 2007; Kabeer, 1994). The family/household for instance impacts women's lives directly as the locus for the organisation of domestic/reproductive labour, thus its composition determines how women will access resources, labour, and income (Moore, 1988). This also includes accessing resources, labour, and income outside the household. For instance, where gender norms support early marriage, young girls will be married off when they should be in school, thus leaving them illiterate and narrowing the possibilities of accessing resources because of their illiteracy. Furthermore, it is at the community level that projects intending to empower rural female farmers are implemented. Rules and norms of the community will thus impact how women interact and engage with such interventions. Batliwala (2007:560) says that critical to shifting social power in the process of empowering women is 'the transforming of the institutions and structures that reinforce and sustain existing power structures such as the family, the state, market, education and media.' Rao and Kelleher (2003) opine that a significant change in gender inequality will be achieved if changes happen in institutions, both formal and informal, that sustain women's unequal position.

The term 'institutions,' widely used across the social sciences including political science, economics, and sociology, is sometimes used interchangeably with the term 'organisations' even though several authors have argued that the two terms have different meanings and are not interchangeable (Hodgson, 2006; Gelderblom, 2003). Gelderblom (2003:3) defines institutions as 'a set or regular behaviour patterns associated with a particular sphere of our lives that is structured by rules of behaviour.' Hodgson (2006: 2) defines institutions as 'systems and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions.' Therefore, institutions determine what is acceptable behaviour in all areas of human life, from the family, and community (social) to the economic, the political, the religious, the legal and the media. For

instance, all societies have rules of how marriage is to be contracted, and how people in a family (household compound) treat each other (for example children are expected to take care of old parents and not abandon them to starve in old age). Wells (1970) says social institutions are part of the more general concept of social structure, meaning that institutions themselves are structures. There is a form, a consistency embedded in the institution; people know what is expected of them; the rules and therefore sanctions, the roles, and expectations of the behaviour of others, rules are socially transmitted, meaning there is a developed social culture (Hodgson, 2006). This social culture in institutions is a set of interrelated social positions that are acted out by members of the group such as boy, girl, mother, father, brother, and sister (Martins, 2004). It is these norms of behaviour which are socially transmitted with their attendant sanctions that Malhotra et al (2002) say need to be transformed if women are to be empowered. The necessity for this transformation derives from the fact that the norms of behaviour and roles between women and men are skewed against women, keeping women in positions of less power than men within the family/household, the community, and other areas of life. Secondly, even though institutions are enduring, they are constantly changing as past practices modify present practices (Connell, 1987; Kabeer, 1994). That is, present practices evolved from past practices, and past practices themselves engendered their transformation. Therefore, gender power relations can change and do change even in my study site, the Tiv community which traditionally excluded women from community leadership now elects female political representatives. The interdependence of social institutions on each other (Roscigno, 2000) accounts for this as global and national pressure for increased women's representation in political institutions influenced local communities to allow women to enter the political arena and be elected to office. Power is an element that permeates institutions and determines social position and access. This is seen in the practices and behaviour of people. Power differentials and dynamics are therefore always at play in institutions determining who accesses resources

and what positions people hold (Martin, 2004; Kabeer, 1994). This means that someone will always be at an advantage because they have more power, but that these relations of disadvantage can always change as institutions are constantly changing.

2.6 Gender concepts

2.6.1 Gender roles and identity

I examine cultural norms about men and women, expected duties and responsibilities, rights and privileges in the study context. This is to identify what has changed and how MII female farmers were part of the process of this change within their household and community.

Gender roles are socially constructed expectations of masculine and feminine behaviour, and these are derived from sex roles determined by biological sex (Moore, 1988; Lipman-Blumen, 1984; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Because gender roles are socially constructed, they differ between contexts even though some are similar across different communities (Moore, 1998). If gender roles are socially constructed, it means they can change and have indeed changed over the years. Gender roles, however, become more complex than biological sex roles as different societal expectations of behaviour, attitudes, norms, and values are assigned to each gender role. These gender roles in turn have privileged men over women, giving men more power than women over societal resources and becoming a major source of power differentials between men and women. Men's activities, privileges, responsibilities, and resources have thus been more valued than women's across all societies (Jenson, 2017; Silberschmidt, 2001). Women's biological sex role in childbirth as Lipman-Blumen (1984) argues became the origin from where the man took on the responsibility to bring in the food when the woman became pregnant and could no longer hunt. The breadwinner role was created

for the man with its attendant higher value and power than the women's childbearing and rearing role (Jenson, 2017; Moore, 1988; Benería, 1979). Sex and gender roles have therefore intertwined in all societies to what feminists call a 'sex-gender system' as an important expression of power between women and men (Hirdman, 1991). Because of these underlying power differentials in gender roles, gender roles are carefully guarded by the powerful to ensure that changes do not happen. This is why Batliwala et al (2002), said for women's empowerment to happen, structures that reinforce power differentials must be shifted. For this shift to occur, a central element in institutions - the sex-gender system - whose infrastructure is power, has to change. In other words, it is the power that ensures the survival of the sex-gender system which is at the core of all institutions. Changing the sex-gender system will therefore change the power differentials. However, Kabeer (1994) says, that changing this sex-gender system as manifested in domestic responsibilities to women in the household seems impossible because of how deeply embedded it is in household rules and practices.

Yet, since socially constructed gender roles change, it means that changes can still happen (even though small) in gender roles within the household and community. This would require a deliberate exercise of agency by actors. It is these changes that I am interested in identifying in this study. Have any changes occurred in gender roles in the households and communities of female members of MII producer organisations because of activities and actions in the organisation? In elaborating on gender roles, Moser (1993) categorises women's gender roles into three – women's reproductive role (care and maintenance of the household and members, bearing and caring for children, cooking, collecting fuel and water, shopping, housekeeping, family health care); women's productive role (production of goods and services for consumption) and women's community role (collective organisation of social events, activities to improve the community, participation in groups and organisations). Men do not have clearly defined reproductive roles and are considered the breadwinner, thus making the male's

productive role more dominant and valuable (Moser,1993). Community roles for women and men further reflect the sexual division of labour. The man has a leadership role (community politics which could be paid for) while the women's role centres around community-managing activities (unpaid for voluntary work) (Moser,1993). All three types of roles are of interest in this study as I seek to answer my research questions. In this study, I focus more on women's productive role and work in the household, even though some aspects of her reproductive role in terms of the use of income are addressed. At the community level, I am interested in women's involvement in community politics.

The productive role (work) is about the production of goods and services for payment in cash or kind done by both men and women (March et al, 1999). Moser (1993) explains that this work includes that done in the market as well as subsistence/home production. For women in rural farming communities, this includes their work on their farms, family, and husbands' farms as well as wage workers. In my study, working for wages would include the women providing paid labour on farms as well as working on each other's farms. In the Tiv farming household, sexual division of labour is seen in farm activities yet there is a blurring of lines which lends credence to the argument that gender roles are socially constructed and differ across societies. Men and women both work on the farm as is typical of most sub-Saharan African countries (Longwe, 1991), but there is differentiation with men doing the heavy labour such as making ridges and women doing the weeding and harvesting, while both men and women plant as well as clear new fields. Yet in some parts of Tiv land women have challenged this stereotype by making their ridges and mounds in the absence of, or inability to hire, male labour for this. This reinforces Moser's (1993) postulation that the stereotype of the male breadwinner does not bear out in reality as women are actively engaged in producing for the household and contributing to family income. Nevertheless, in the Tiv farming household, the man's status as the head and thus the breadwinner persists even as seen in production decision-making where it is the

woman doing the actual going to farm, working, and managing the farms. I, therefore, seek to understand how female farmers participate in decision-making concerning household production, control and use of resources generated from the farms in which they make a significant contribution of labour. I also wanted to find out how decisions were made concerning other aspects of family living.

In terms of community role (work), which Moser (1993) categorises into two – community management and community politics, women dominate in the community provisioning of items for collective consumption. These may include water, healthcare, education, and any other activity in the community such as festivities/celebrations or deaths/funerals. Men dominate community politics where they may even be paid.

Closely linked with gender roles is the issue of gender identities where maintaining and acting these identities become a hindrance to women's empowerment or undermine women's empowerment. Identity is described as how a person sees themselves and often this is expressed in the stereotypical characteristics and actions of how society defines femininity and masculinity (Woodard, 2004). Masculine and feminine behaviour is itself derived from gender roles and reinforces gender roles. Women are expected to behave in prescribed ways while men are expected to behave in certain ways, thus people often behave to fit their gender categories (Gove and Watt, 2004). Thus, for instance, in the Tiv culture, it is not expected that a man would go to the kitchen and cook for a visitor, or the family nor give the visitor water to drink (when his wife is at home), but he can ask his wife to cook or give the visitor drinking water. These two behavioural expectations are the culture's way of classifying men as heads of homes and women as responsible for cooking and household chores. This does not mean that men do not work in the household, but their work may be less frequent and therefore not noticeable

(Jackson, 2000), and sets it apart as men's work. Yet, men's housework reflects communities' expectations of feminine and masculine behaviour, such that men roof the buildings and effect repairs, while women can contribute by fetching water for the construction. While nothing stops women from roofing houses, women will behave in the manner expected of them, and so also would men as in the absence of women, men would cook if hungry. Thus, in the construction of identities, people themselves adopt gender-typical behaviour to fit with their categorisation as either men or women (Gove and Watt, 2004). What this means is that gender identity is not fixed, it can change as people decide which feminine or masculine characteristics to act or support. Changing gender identities is however constrained by the cultural perceptions of masculinity and femininity (Gove and Watt, 2004), meaning that people may be reluctant to act against stereotypes and rather maintain them so as not to be considered deviant. This study is interested in applying gender identity to understand women's empowerment in rural Tiv farming households where women have been members of MII producer organisations. How has this membership enabled women to act in ways that would challenge stereotypes that constrain them? The concepts of gender roles and identities in women's empowerment are used to analyse the data for chapters six and seven.

2.6.2 The Conjugal contract

Whitehead (1981) in exploring how claims, obligations, responsibilities, access to and control over resources as well as forms of sharing are ordered in household relationships between the husband and the wife, espoused the concept of the conjugal contract. The conjugal contract 'refers to the terms on which husbands and wives exchange goods, incomes and services including labour, within the household' (Whitehead, 1981:93). The husband's and wife's access to and use of the products and income produced by their labour is determined by the

conjugal contract, whether it is for personal or collective use. This contract is not only a basis of marriage but also of exit from the marriage (Jackson, 1995). It determines the maintenance of household members, household relations are based on it, and it is impacted by the location of the household in the wider economy (Whitehead, 1981). Jackson (1995) points out that the terms of the conjugal contract can be influenced by other issues such as environmental changes and changes in social relations in the community, women manipulating the meanings and contents of the contract as well as their bargaining power and agency. In other words, although both husbands and wives broadly know the terms of this contract before marriage because it is rooted in the norms of the people, the terms of the contract are not fixed, and its terms change as changes occur in the prevailing economy, environment and among the people themselves. The terms of the conjugal contract can be renegotiated, so also gender relations and power within the household. Norms of bargaining and intrahousehold relations are thus explicit *ab initio* (Jackson, 1995). Whitehead (1981) points out that regardless of the type of household, (including where it is a household-based production unit as in my study site where some members sell their labour externally for a wage), distribution and consumption of household resources are characterised by inequalities of power.

Men's power within the household is related to other bases of husbands' and men's power over women and wives. One such base of men's power outside the household is the community where gender norms and roles place the man at a higher powerful level than the woman and this is reinforced by masculine and feminine stereotypes. Women's power in the household is relative to others because her consumption is more attached to the household compared to her husband's more individualistic control of resources and consumption (Whitehead, 1981). What Whitehead means here is that men are more likely to spend resources on personal things or leisure than women and this is reflected in my study site where when women made money

from their side trade, they still spent it on the family. When I asked, “What do the men do with their money,” I was told their ‘own things’ with one woman saying drinking with friends. This is buttressed by some men deciding to give household money to their wives, because the women will not spend it on themselves (Farnworth et al, 2020). Whitehead (1981:93), thus posits that ‘women lose access to the resources they have produced themselves or to equal shares in household resources.’ This highlights the conflict of interest within the household of which Locke and Okali (1999:275) say that negotiating these conflicts is done ‘within a general framework of cooperation for the survival of the household’ which in itself may ‘perpetuate gender inequalities in the household’ as women seek to maintain their marriages and may thus not be too insistent on their opinions. How the woman negotiates these conflicts of interest and expresses her agency, will be mediated through the overarching consideration of protecting her livelihood and security through various negotiation strategies (Kandiyoti, 1988). One such negotiation tactic has been the withholding of labour by Mandinka women in the Gambia where the women insisted that their traditional rights to land be upheld (Carney and Watts, 1991), which the community had to respect and uphold the norm. For Kofyar women, their culturally recognised control over their labour and ability to determine how to use it becomes a bargaining chip to negotiate within the household.

What interests me in the conjugal contract is that it is not fixed, therefore women can re-negotiate this contract which is the basis for the ordering of gender relations within the household. Applying this concept to the Tiv farming households of female members of MII producer organisations enables the identification of whether membership and learnings within the MII producer organisations aided women to act within the household to re-negotiate their conjugal contracts. I acknowledge like Locke and Okali’s (1999) contention that perhaps there are hidden negotiation strategies that were not expressed by participants because of the

emotional manipulations involved, thus the women or men did not point to aspects of a renegotiated contract because of these strategies. I therefore cannot account for them as evidence of women's empowerment as a result of engagement with the MII producer organisations. The conjugal contract concept is thus relevant as I seek to understand household decision-making processes and control of household resources. In chapter six, I explore what changes have occurred in the basic conjugal contract within the households of female members of MII producer organisations.

2.6.3 Gender contracts

While conjugal contracts focus on gender relations in the family/household domain, gender contracts, espoused by Hirdman(1991) are a broader concept that can be used to analyse the relationship between men and women at the interpersonal (family/household), community and organisational levels. A gender contract is a component of a gender system which could comprise several gender contracts(Hirdman, 1991; Kalambamu, 2005). This is exemplified in Forsberg's (2001) study where he identified three gender contracts(the traditionalist; the modernists and the non-modernists). This means that new gender contracts can emerge out of an existing gender contract that would address a specific issue. In my study, I found a new gender contract that allowed women to seek political office while the overarching contract excluded women from traditional decision-making processes.

Elucidating the gender system and contracts theory, Hirdman (1991), emphasised that power is a feature of social relations with gender roles being an expression of these power relationships between women and men. However, these power relations also exist amongst women where there are differences based on class, age, and family status. These differentiations impact all aspects of human life - in the social, political, and economic spheres

– and should be considered when analysing the relationships between men and women. Furthermore, these power structures are not static, but they can change, as a result of which new gender contracts emerge (Badstue et al, 2021). Sometimes this power in social relations may not be obvious but in other instances, it is, such as in the relationships between female gardeners and their husbands in Schroeder’s (1996) Gambian study and Friedson-Ridenour et al’s (2019) study in Senegal.

Hirdman (1991:191) defines gender contracts as ‘the abstract phenomenon or invisible relationships between men and women based on perceptions of how women and men, girls and boys ought to behave.’ These contracts reflect the gender inequalities and subordination of women reflecting the power imbalance between men and women. These power hierarchies are drawn by the party that defines the other and often men define women because of the power they wield. These contracts are not fixed but can be renegotiated and changed. Referring to these contracts as abstract phenomena means that they are not written but are known and determine gender relations. Thus, tasks, for instance, are assigned to men and women based on social rules. Kalabamu (2005) points out that these gender contracts are an outcome of a long period of daily interactions. These interactions do not happen in a vacuum but are informed by gender norms and stereotypes of a community which determines how people behave. Changing them will require the exercise of agency to change the content of these interactions as gender is performative, so changing the repeated acts of gender will lead to new definitions and understanding of gender (Butler, 1988). Gender contracts are thus not only context-specific but time-specific, meaning that there is a process involved, new gender contracts do not just happen. The emergence of new gender contracts is influenced by prevailing socio-economic and political situations as espoused by Hirdman (1998) and seen in Kalabamu’s (2005) study of self-housing in Lobatse, Botswana, where women’s traditional role of constructing houses

was taken over by men because of government's housing policy. A new gender contract does not automatically mean a radical change in the gender system, this change could be piecemeal (Carreta and Borjeson,2015) and such change may even negatively impact women if it takes away the power they already had side-lining them from benefiting from government policies as in the Botswana house construction scheme.

Negotiating and bargaining new gender contracts happens individually or collectively. Whether in the household or community, these negotiations are characterised by conflict and cooperation and are either implicit or explicit (Agarwal, 1987). A person's negotiation is influenced by their bargaining power (the power within and the power with), as well as what they bring to the process that gives them more power than the other person or persons. Agarwal (1997) explains that this bargaining power is influenced by factors such as personal assets and endowments (income, assets, skills, education); exchange entitlement mapping (using personal assets for employment); fallback support position (available support after breaking off current relationship); social norms (what are the limits on acceptable behaviour); social perceptions (are women and their work valued by the society); state support (are state institutions gender sensitive and support women). She explains that these factors complement and substitute each other, meaning all do not have to be present for negotiation to take place. Women thus cannot enter the process of re-negotiating gender contracts at the community level without an awareness of what their strengths are and what bargaining chips they have. This assessment is sufficient to dissuade women from negotiating at the community level. Yet, the very act of re-negotiating gender contracts seeks to break or extend these gender confines and re-draw these parameters of possibilities (Hayward, 1998). Negotiating with patriarchy within the community as a collective implies that women need to find ways to get community support to demand re-negotiation and re-writing of a gender contract. This could start from their households getting

the men's support. These negotiations could be slight modifications in existing gender contracts that signal renegotiated contracts (Caretta and Borjeson, 2015). In searching for new contracts, therefore the researcher should pay attention to little changes that may escape notice if attention is not paid to these occurrences. This resonates with Kalabamu (2005), who says gender contracts are written over time. In other words, they are the outcomes of gradual socio-economic, political, and cultural changes over time (Hirdman, 1998).

This study uses the concept of gender contracts to investigate how female members of MII producer organisations have been able to act collectively to change norms that restrict their participation in community decision-making processes. Agarwal's (1997) factors that influence the negotiation process provide a useful frame for me to analyse the women's ability to renegotiate the existing gender contract with the community as a collective. These factors bring to the fore the fact that women and men do not enter the negotiation process with the same power. This is implied in the concept of the gender contract even though not explicitly stated. Forsberg (2001) points out that the very concept of the contract gives women an active role as active partners in gender relations and not one who simply performs a predetermined role. In applying this concept these two issues are important to remember; women and men negotiating a contract while both active partners in the process do not have the same power. Therefore, men who have more power are likely to determine the outcome. However, women could through strategic actions create a new contract even if the change is small. I keep this in mind as I discuss women negotiating gender contracts in chapter eight.

Chapter 3: Research design

In this chapter, I present my epistemological stance which guides the research and interpretation of data generated by the ‘knowers of knowledge’ within this study context. I take a feminist standpoint epistemological approach which argues that knowledge is situated, subjective, power, and value-laden, with the researcher impacting the whole process with her values (Jackson, 2016; Intemann, 2010). Section 3.1 thus focuses on epistemology, positionality, and reflexivity. Building on this, in section 3.2, I present my methodology which is qualitative using both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to elicit the data from the ‘agents of knowledge.’ Section 3.3 describes the case study, to provide the boundaries within which this research is situated showing how the MII producer organisations, my unit of analysis, came into being and how the MII project was envisioned and implemented. This section also explains my decision to study farmer-producer organisations in the soyabeans value chain and not any of the other six value chains in which MII worked. This leads to section 3.4 where I present the sample selection and profile of all the respondents providing some basic demographic information about respondents such as age, household type, and location. Details of the qualitative methods I used in this study are described in section 3.5 followed by the data management and analysis in section 3.6. Section 3.6.1 explains how each of my research questions is answered (in chapters, 5, 6, and 7), what type of data is used, and the intersecting factors which provide a basis for analysis.

3.1 Epistemology, Positionality, and Reflexivity

This study is situated within feminist epistemology, particularly feminist standpoint epistemology, and draws on aspects of constructionist epistemology. According to Harding (1987), feminist standpoint epistemology and research are characterised by three underlying assumptions. These are the focus on women's experiences as 'knowers' and 'creators of knowledge' which is the basis for the definition of reality and the generation of the problematics against which feminist researchers seek to find answers. Questioning traditional assumptions of men, of a specific race and class, as the sole knowers and agents of knowledge, feminist epistemologies legitimise women as knowers and challenge traditional theories of knowledge that have focused on men's experiences. Therefore, feminist epistemologies prioritize women's experiences as a resource of social analysis (Brooks, 2017; Harding, 1987; Jackson, 2006).

This starting point of social inquiry from a women's perspective leads to the second characteristic of feminist standpoint epistemologies, which is designing an inquiry for the sake of women (Harding, 1987; Brooks, 2017) by offering women explanations that enable them to act on social phenomena that subjugate them. For instance, feminists' research into issues of violence against women has led to an understanding of the types of violence, and subsequent actions and activism to end it. Women's experiences vary and are not the same for all women. Women have different cultural and material realities that shape their experiences, and they should therefore generate the 'problems' for social inquiry (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Smith, 1987). Women's experiences will also generate different knowledge from men's experiences because social actors reflect and draw on their own experiences; added to which men do not experience some of the phenomena women do (Diaz, 2002). It also means that even among women, experiences of social phenomena differ, and not all women experience the same

phenomena or even experience the same phenomenon in the same manner because of their social locations (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Molyneux, 1985). For instance, women in my study experience engaging with the ‘community of men’ (discussed in chapter six) differently from wealthy, powerful women who are invited into this male space, while the others do not have the status to warrant an invitation to participate in community decision making. Therefore, as Harding (1987) points out, the purpose of research, its analysis, and the origins of research problems are intertwined and not separated.

Feminist standpoint epistemology argues that knowledge is gendered because it is socially constructed between men and women. It sets limits to what people know because what humans do shapes and constrains what they know (Jackson, 2006; Harding 1987). Thus, women’s experiences are shaped by what they do, which is assigned to them by ruling men, and makes their ‘knowing’ limited, reinforcing what work has been assigned to them by men. For women’s experiences to present a ‘truer’ version of social reality, women need to struggle against male domination (Harding, 2012; Harding, 1987; Hawkesworth, 1989). Thus, central to the feminist standpoint epistemology is the action by women to see and understand an activity that is considered inferior by ruling men’s experiences. Within each society, therefore, there are ‘ruling men’s views’ that have structured social reality, setting limits to what women can know and do from men’s points of view, and requiring women to struggle against this reality for their experiences to become truer so they can be knowers and agents of knowledge.

Knowledge is therefore embodied and situated, with people’s experiences differing based on their locations, (Harding, 2012; Intemann,2010). Even within one group, women’s experiences will differ based on different material conditions, just as membership in a particular group affects experiences because it changes the social, political, and material circumstances of the members. Thus, female farmers in my study site will not have the same experiences concerning

their social and community life as well as intrahousehold gender relations even as members of one ethnicity. Consequently, knowledge is achieved from a standpoint. Standpoints are a result of deep scrutiny and awareness of power structures shaping and limiting knowledge in a context and this consciousness lies within the community and not the individual (Intemann, 2010). However, a woman's power within enables her to be part of this communal consciousness, thus the community consciousness is an expression of the collective consciousness of several women or the women in a particular group. Therefore, I laid out the ethnographic information of the Tiv people in chapters five and six, to enable me to understand the traditional power structures and how they continue to impact women's experiences and knowing in the Tiv farming community; and whether producer organisations have enabled the development of this critical consciousness among the women. I provide a contextual socio-cultural, political, economic, educational, and legal background of Nigeria, to aid an understanding of the factors that impact the household and community and contributed to changes in the traditional settings contained in ethnographic reports. As Kabeer(1994) says changes in other institutions such as the state, markets, and government impacts the community and household as well. Thus, changes at the national level and the international would impact communities and households.

The third characteristic of feminist standpoint epistemologies is the visibility of the researcher in the research process and how the researchers' experiences impact the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Harding, 1987). In other words, the researcher cannot distance herself from her research; paradoxically this subjective element increases the objectivity of feminist inquiry (Harding, 2012). Haraway (1988) therefore says feminist objectivity is 'located and situated', the subject and the object are not divided, and the researcher is accountable for what she learns to see. The researchers' values and beliefs are part

of knowledge created from a particular location about a specific problem. Jackson (2006) sums this up by saying that research is not value-free, and all researchers co-create knowledge with the participants. This means that the researcher brings into her research the values she carries because of her own experiences reflected in her desire to research a particular issue. Thus, I bring into my research my experiences and interpretation of social phenomena based on my varied identities which informed my decision to research this topic.

Conscious of the fact that the researcher's experiences impact her research, and this calls for reflexivity in the process (Mann and Patterson, 2016; Jackson, 2006), I entered my field aware of my various 'identities' that infuse my values and how this will impact the respondents, the data generated, and my interpretation. My interest in researching farmer producer organisations and women's empowerment arose from my reflections on some agriculture projects I worked on providing short-term technical support, as well as my interactions with women at the grassroots level as a member of staff of a local women's non-governmental organisation in Nigeria, a feminist, and a women's rights advocate. Added to this were my observations of the government's agriculture policies and projects like international agriculture projects that aimed at reaching rural farmers through cooperatives/farmer-producer organisations. Though these projects invariably aimed at empowering women, they were not succeeding in changing unequal power relations within the households and the communities nor in changing the way women think about their positions. Furthermore, the producer organisations I had the privilege of engaging with seemed to me to be lacking in members who were committed to the organisation. Space that could be transformational, in developing a collective consciousness of their standpoint and thus other dimensions of women's empowerment was lost. This impacted in the long term, the organisation's economic empowerment goal, a connection that the producer organisations were not able to properly articulate or appreciate.

My choice of study site was and is very political. I decided to research women of my ethnicity even though I do not live in my home state. I wanted to add to the knowledge pool of information about women, who are northern Nigerian, of ethnicities other than Hausa, and who are Christian or traditionalists, whose experiences are different from northern Nigerian Muslim women, who are the standard of the narratives about northern Nigerian women by local and international development projects, incidentally, even failing to consider the differences within the northern Muslim women. Harding (1987) pointed out that there is no ‘woman’s experience’, only ‘women’s experiences as women differ by class, culture, ethnicity, and across religious affiliations (Olesen, 2018). Thus, to have a monolithic narrative of northern Nigerian women based on the experiences of a small group of women renders others invisible in the development process, even if projects are reaching them because they do so on a generalised analysis of who they are. The agriculture sector struck me as the best avenue to contribute to this knowledge since it employs the majority of Nigerian women, seventy percent of whom live in rural areas (British Council, 2012). My second political reason was to instigate discussion among women of my ethnicity (in the community and academia) about the power relations in the community that continue to subjugate women which are constantly presented as ‘our natural way of doing things’, as normal (Harding, 2012; Intemann, 2010)

My other identity is that of a Tiv woman researching among her ethnic group and thus as an insider, I shared an identity with my participants and this gave me legitimacy and acceptance with research respondents, which was evident from the very first contact with each producer organisation I interacted with (Bilgen et al, 2021; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). I had easy access to my respondents as I did not require a translator and spoke Tiv with everyone. Issues of consent were therefore unproblematic, and while I had expected some curiosity about coming

from a university outside the country, no one even asked about this, and all willingly signed the consent form and just wanted to talk about their MII experience (Berger, 2015). However, I also suspected that because the research was situated within the MII project as a case study, the farmers were eager to share their experiences. Despite my repeated explanation that this research was academic and independent of MII, they felt that I could influence MII's return or some other project to reach them. Herein lay the issue of me having more perceived power than them as they all believed that the outcome of my research would mean a project for them. This was also the end point of my insider status, which was only obvious to me as I reflected. Furthermore, my earlier experience of being a member of an evaluation team that had evaluated the MII project and visited other producer organisations outside my study site gave me familiarity with the project which enabled me to ask certain questions and probe for further details during the conversation, which added to my credibility (Berger, 2015). Nevertheless, I was also alert to the fact that researching within the context of MII and my knowledge of it could become a deterrent for respondents to be truthful in their responses, so I took mitigating measures. These mitigation measures informed the questions I asked and probes such that they enabled further conversations where people told me more than they did at the onset. For instance, about the continued use of new planting techniques taught by MII. Some women explained that they had reverted to their old methods of broadcasting the seeds because the new method was waist breaking for women, a slow process as women had a lot of work to do and couldn't spend too much time on planting soyabeans.

I was careful not to come across as 'bossy' so that respondents would be free to express themselves. I was conscious of how my position as the researcher could influence knowledge sharing and production thus I endeavoured to give respondents a safe and free space to talk. An anecdote illustrating this is that in one focus group with female members of a mixed

producer organisation, one woman (this was the triad interview) came in late and in explaining herself went on about the stress of fetching water and the shenanigans of people at the stream. One of the other ladies had to stop her by reminding her that she had interrupted a discussion. In a different situation, I would have stopped her but in this case, I was the one soliciting information, so I gave her some time to share her water-fetching frustrations with the other women commenting to create an environment that would enable knowledge sharing.

Presenting my research as an inquiry into how MII impacted their lives not just as farmers but all aspects of their lives, put participants at ease as people were willing to discuss their engagement. However, there was a hesitation when I asked about what impact it had in their homes relating to husbands, wives, household members, and in the community. Also, what new things could they do now because of their MII experience? This hesitation, I surmised, was not a withdrawal from the conversation but a pausing to reflect as several said they did not know how to respond or had no response. They had never reflected on these questions beyond what they did with the money from increased production. They all said nothing had changed within the home or their engagement with the community, as I discuss in chapters six and seven. Divorce was not an option for these women¹⁸(as they have more value in the marital home where they have children), meaning that they would be careful in engaging in issues that would disrupt the existing order of gender relations, not because they could not but as a survival strategy, aptly captured by a respondent when she said, ‘women have no home, no place.’

¹⁸ Bohannan and Bohannan(1953) report that men seldom divorced their wives as some people felt a wife is worth keeping and instead of divorcing her induce her to leave by not meeting her personal needs such as clothing.

I wanted to find out what had changed in the women's lives individually as well as collectively, which informed my decision to speak with significant others of women and men interviewed as well as women in mixed producer organisations to identify any difference between the experiences of women in all-female producer organisations and women in mixed producer organisations. Are there further differences between women in different household types, female-headed, male-headed monogamous, and male-headed polygamous households? Speaking with women as a group, I found that the main difference was that some women were more vocal than others with the vocal ones occupying leadership positions in the organisations. While women in female-headed households made their decisions without depending on the man to decide what actions to take in the household.

Merriam et al (2001) point out that a researcher could be both an insider as well as an outsider even when researching within your own culture. The outsider positionality for a researcher in these circumstances could affect the information respondents are willing to provide. My experience of being an outsider other than when I felt helpless at respondents' belief that my presence was a signpost to a new project, was when an MII youth group that said it was still active failed to give me an appointment to observe their meetings. My research assistant and I concluded that the group was inactive, and the two members had just given that response not expecting that I would ask to visit. Other than this, my outsider status, an educated urban dwelling Tiv woman, active in the women's movement and keenly conscious of the daily tilt of power against the Nigerian and Tiv woman was something personal I had to reflect on during fieldwork. There was no indication from respondents that this aspect of my status mattered, and I think it was because I was speaking the language. My 'outsider status' therefore informed the way I interpreted their conversations and non-verbal expressions as well as their silences and moments of their reflections. Several times, I had to tell myself to listen carefully to what

the women and men were saying and not be overly concerned with my impressions of the women not reflecting deeply on their situations.

Whether my outsider status influenced their responses I cannot tell as it wasn't obvious other than when I asked, 'why they had not attempted to approach the community of men and asked to speak' and their response was 'We never thought of it, but we will now that you have educated us'. I think the possibility of this happening is very slim except on issues that do not threaten men's power and identity such as sinking a community borehole and making roads. I also had to reflect and appreciate the inability of female leaders of all female producer organisations to nurture a stronger producer organisation with interests beyond what MII was focused on by acknowledging to myself their limitations of the understanding of the possibilities available to them as a collective in influencing gender norms and renegotiating gender contracts. Added to this, MII capacity building did not provide facilitation for nurturing this consciousness. I also had to deal with a personal pessimism about the impossibility of a shift in skewed gender norms as men's power was not only obvious, but women seemed to accept this as a culture that cannot change. Two women exhibited a level of consciousness when they said men were afraid of giving women opportunities because they knew women would be better than them and both shared examples of what I identified as changing culture (discussed in chapters six and seven) yet insisted culture cannot change, 'it is the way we do things', they said.

From ethnomethodology, I take the aspect that posits that gender emerges during interaction and is thus in a process of ongoing accomplishment occurring between and within the sexes (Chaffetz, 1997; West and Zimmerman, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) explain that people are constantly reacting to the other's sense of gender which is also a reflection of theirs.

This means that a person has embedded ideas of what gender or gender relations should be, thus during interactions does what is needed to show that he or she knows and acknowledges this personally and with the other. I take this aspect of the interactionist perspective for analysis to discuss how gender relations and norms could be subverted by changing these interactions. For instance, women in my study could simply decide to always ask to speak at men's only community meetings (see chapter seven). This will begin to change the norm that generally women cannot speak at such meetings, only women of certain privileges and status can be permitted to speak.

3.2 Research methodology

This study employs qualitative methodology which consists of several methods of data collection (Silverman, 2011). O'Shaughnessy and Krogman (2012) describe qualitative methods as addressing power and representation and thus favourable to feminist inquiry. The subject matter of my inquiry lends itself to qualitative methodology as I seek to understand how and if farmer-producer organisations in an agriculture intervention project have influenced women to negotiate gender norms and relations in their communities. So, I seek answers in the actions, non-actions, and interactions of women and between women and men (Silverman, 2017). The qualitative methodology, therefore, enables me to examine deeply people's behaviour in a specific setting and explore emerging themes, acknowledging that my experiences and identities also impact the design, collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Holliday, 2013; Letherby, 2011), which in my study enabled me, identify any changes in norms and gender relations. Qualitative methodology enabled my participants to be the agents of knowledge as they share their experiences with me and at the same time, my values become part of the research process and its product. Furthermore, this methodology enabled me to

explore a concept that researchers have described as multidimensional and therefore tease out the various manifestations of empowerment in my study context given that I wanted to go beyond the economic dimension of empowerment to a broader definition of empowerment exploring what changes have taken place in the women, gender relations within their households and community.

Additionally, the qualitative methodology has been used extensively by feminist researchers (O'Shaughnessy and Krogman, 2012) who seek to understand issues of power and gender relations allowing the researchers' reflections in the research process. The methodology permits women as agents of knowledge to express themselves on their terms (O'Shaughnessy and Krogman, 2012; Fonow and Cook, 2005; Hammersley, 1992). Therefore, I follow an established tradition by employing this methodology in my study. The choice of this methodology was further reinforced by my reading of the literature on empowerment which showed that empowerment as a process is about the 'power within', the 'power with', and the 'power to'. The qualitative methodology thus enabled me to explore deeply the issues of power in the household and community to capture the tilt of power and how it has changed or not since the female farmers' contact with MII.

Qualitative data and findings are generated using several methods, which in contemporary times have expanded to take on several new methods. Silverman (2017) identifies some of these methods as observation (ethnography); texts (analysing documents, including internet research); interviews and focus groups; talk (conversation analysis); and visual data (video, analysis of social interaction). O'Shaughnessy and Krogman (2012) found that research using stand-alone interviews and/or focus groups were predominant methods used by feminist researchers as these have a higher degree of flexibility in application, meaning they give the

researcher the space to ask deeper questions of participants as well as allow the participants to reflect deeply. My research thus employs interviews and focus group discussions which Platt (1992) says enables the reconstruction of a social fact with the actor as key to this reconstruction. The rural female farmers were thus the key actors in this reconstruction and understanding of their reality. I had planned to use the observation method as well to observe meetings of producer organisations, but this did not happen because none of the MII producer organisations in my study site were active and had thus stopped holding meetings long before I entered into the field.

My interest in studying empowerment within the context of farmer producer organisations defined the context of my study. I, therefore, decided to use an agriculture project as my ‘case’ to investigate the empowerment process. Schwandt and Gates (2018:341) define a case as ‘an instance, incident or unit of something and can be anything – a person, an organisation, an event, a decision, an action, location like a neighbourhood, or a nation-state’. Swanborn (2010) said that depending on the researcher’s interest, a case could be located at any of three levels the micro (persons and interpersonal relations), the meso (organisational, institutional), and the macro (large communities, nation states). Actors in cases at any of these levels could be just one actor or more than one actor. Researching the MII producer organisations thus enabled me to study the state of the society within a micro-social unit as well as at the meso level, in clearly defined boundaries and its real-world context (Yin, 2018; Swanborn, 2012, Hamel, 1993). I chose the MII producer organisations as a case study because of my experience with its implementation. Prior contacts made during my work with the project were thus critical in accessing the participants. Secondly, MII fitted the parameters I had drawn of a project having exited the field between a period of a minimum of three to five years of my study. This was to ensure that farmers could still recall their engagement with the project and be able to reflect on

their experiences and make critical linkages to any changes in their lives. It was also important that I could still locate some of the experts such as extension workers and capacity-building experts who had worked on the project, to interview.

3.3 The case study: Maximising Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises in Targeted Sites II (MARKETS II (MII))

As stated in section 3.2, my decision to study farmer producer organisations that were engaged with the Maximising Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises in Targeted Sites II (MARKETS II (MII)), was because of familiarity with the project. Therefore, I established links with the project's capacity building experts in Benue state. I also had a list of MII producer organisations which made it easier for me to identify the organisations and their members. I was specifically interested in investigating producer organisations of an intervention project that had ended.

The Maximising Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises in Targeted Sites II (MARKETS II (MII)) was a United States Agency for International Aid (USAID MII, 2017) project implemented in Nigeria between 2012 and 2017 with a budget of about sixty-five (65) million US dollars. The project's objective was to promote sustainable agriculture development by increasing private sector participation and investments, raising incomes, increasing employment, attaining food security, and reducing poverty (USAID MII, 2017). The project was to address constraints along the commodity value chains, work with farmers to increase production and quality of products through improved post-harvest handling, link farmers with agro-processors, provide incentives to adopt improved technology along the value chain, produce value-added products and identify new markets (USAID MII, 2017). The target beneficiaries were therefore poor smallholder farmers, defined as a family unit with ownership

or usufruct of less than five hectares of arable land. This initial participation criterion of one to five hectares was reduced to less than one hectare to meet inclusion criteria to allow women and young people to participate as research showed that smallholder female and young farmers cultivated plots of less than one hectare (McNamara et al, 2019).

The MII approach was one of demand-driven production so farmers produced what they could sell and not what they could maximally produce (USAID MII, 2017). MII therefore first identified the buyers of farmers' products who were small to large agro-processors in the project states, their unmet demands of their required grains. The project then identified farmers growing or willing to grow the needed grains, who were introduced to the processor's variety specification through training on new agronomic practices, access to the right seed variety, and post-harvest techniques to meet the processor's requirements (McNamara et al, 2019). Farmers I interviewed affirmed this and said they were introduced to non-shattering higher-yield varieties of soyabeans whose pods did not burst on maturity, thus reducing loss pre and during harvest. The locals in my study site call this variety 'rubber-rubber' because of the non-shattering pods' ability to remain intact at maturity and harvest. The farmers also acknowledged that they were given information about the soyabeans processing factory in the state where they could sell their soyabeans thus they were linked to the soyabeans agro-processor in the state.

The MII programme contracted local agriculture consulting firms (referred to as service providers) in each state to mobilize farmers directly under the supervision of the MII working with the extension assistants from the state's Agriculture Development Projects. The extension workers trained farmers and provided support to farmers throughout the farming season to designated 'lead farmers' (see below) and other farmers (McNamara et al, 2019). Through the

extension assistants and service providers, MII worked with established farmer groups of not more than twenty-five members, so groups were manageable for organisational and training purposes. Farmer groups were established by the service provider where they did not exist. The gender and capacity-building expert I interviewed attested that where they could not identify any women and youth groups, they would then establish such groups with assistance from the community leader. Farmer groups were either all-female, youth groups (male and female), or mixed groups. Each farmer group selected lead farmers based on farming experience, willingness to train others, and possession of some literacy skills. These farmers received in-depth training by extension assistants and stepped down training to members of their producer organisation (McNamara et al, 2019), and in essence, became junior extension assistants in their localities. What this meant was that these junior extension assistants and knowledge acquired remained domiciled in the locality and available to members of farmers' groups as well as others in the community.

Project-sponsored trainings and capacity building for farmer groups were done in collaboration with NGOs and private sector firms including seeds and fertilizer firms, farm implement providers, extension services, and credit providers. Trainings were presented in an easy-to-understand and apply set of procedures at pre-season, in-season, harvest/post-harvest periods. The training introduced farmers to the use of high-quality inputs, proper planting techniques, timely application of fertilizer, irrigation scheduling, agriculture equipment, and technology (McNamara et al, 2019). Various components of the MII project worked with the government of Nigeria's Growth Enhancement Scheme, agriculture research institutions, private sector firms, microfinance banks, and farmers' organisations to improve the quality of inputs reaching the farmers. For instance, lead farmers and their farmer organisations were trained on best seed production practices so they could become seed out-growers for local seed companies. This

was part of a strategy to make available good quality seeds for farmers so they could meet the demand from the buyer thereby creating a steady demand/supply market for farmers (USAID MII, 2017).

The project also had agricultural mechanisation equipment and a capacity-building component. This was aimed at mitigating the challenges of manual farming and assisting farmer organisations in developing business models. Grants were given in kind, in the form of equipment to farmer organisations whose proposals were selected. None of the producer organisations in my study accessed this grant, as they did not know about it. Even the extension assistants and capacity-building experts I interviewed did not mention this aspect of the MII project perhaps because none of the organisations they worked with accessed this particular grant. Most groups could not access this grant due to a lack of experience with equipment and business management (USAID MII, 2017). This criterion for the award of a grant was not realistic as it failed to take into consideration the managerial capacity of rural farmers' groups. As a result, some of the funds earmarked for this component had to be moved to another project activity (McNamara et al, 2019).

A formal MII requirement for farmers to work in farmers' organisations was to enable them to aggregate their commodities and transport them as a group to processors as this would reduce the transportation cost. This was not compulsory, farmers could decide not to sell to the processors directly but instead sell in the open market (USAID MII, 2017). MII groups in my study site never aggregated and transported crops to the soyabeans agro-processor because farmers sold individually when they needed money. The producer organisations also felt it did not make financial sense to move their produce far away because of transportation costs. Neither did any of the study's producer organisations become out-growers for the processor as

they never established contact. Demonstration plots were established by the lead farmers as a further learning resource encouraging farmers to adopt new technology. These farms had one-half of the plot planted using MII techniques and the other half using traditional practices. Outputs convinced farmers to adopt new crop management methods (McNamara et al, 2019). In my study site, demonstration farms were planted and managed by the extension workers and not the lead farmers of the various farmer's groups working in the soyabeans value chain.

The project worked in seven value chains of cocoa, aquaculture, rice, sorghum, cassava, maize, and soyabeans in twenty-six states of the federation. Benue State, in North Central Nigeria where my study site is located, was one of the twenty-six targeted states where the MII focused on the rice and soyabeans value chains. Target local government areas in each state were selected by MII working with the state-owned Agriculture Development Projects (ADPs) whose mandate includes the provision of extension services to farmers. Extension assistants for the project in each state were provided by the ADPs. In Benue state, MII was implemented in twenty of the twenty-three local government areas including Gwer West Local Government Area which is my study site. Soyabeans value chain engagements were however in only eight of these local government areas. Gwer West Local Government Area was one of the eight soyabeans-producing areas as it had a history of soyabeans production (Beejor and Iwuchukwu, 2018).

3.4 Sample selection and profile of respondents

I purposefully selected Gwer West Local Government Area as my study site for several reasons. My first consideration was to ensure my safety and the safety of my team considering the incessant killing of farmers by Fulani cattle herders. I, therefore, wanted to stay as close to the state capital as possible and conduct fieldwork in a local government area with more than

one exit in the event of an attack, while having access to a rural community. Secondly, I wanted to stay at least within a one to three hours' drive out of the state capital, Makurdi which I designated as my base camp for the fieldwork. I had decided not to immerse myself in the study site in an ethnographic approach as it would have been an unnecessary imposition on any one producer organisation. This would also have introduced dynamics that would otherwise not exist as well as burden my hosts. Furthermore, I felt that I could get the information I was looking for as a non-resident researcher. And I did, as farmers' response to being interviewed was excellent in terms of turnout and reflections.

I decided to study all-female groups as my interest was in how farmer-producer organisations were empowering rural female farmers years after agriculture intervention projects had exited the field. I also decided to study women in mixed producer organisations, to find out what differences if any, existed between women in these two groups in terms of empowerment and which type of producer organisation empowered women more. Fourthly, the Gwer West Local Government Area presented the case of a typical rural Nigerian farming community without any agro-processors whose demands could influence farmers to grow more of its raw materials, in this case, soyabeans. The only agro-processors in Gwer-West Local Government Area are the micro rice millers who are present in all twenty-three local government areas of Benue State because rice is grown in all these areas.

After ensuring that I was not breaking any confidentiality rules, I used the list of farmers' producer organisations I had which was provided by the MII during the evaluation exercise. I further cross-checked my list with the local MII service provider to ensure I had the correct list. From this list, I focused on producer organisations that were on the list in 2014 (the MII list was grouped by different years of engagement) which was the earliest contact of MII with

farmers in Gwer West Local Government Area in the soyabeans value chain. I selected the only two all-female producer organisations on the list for 2014. I then identified mixed producer organisations that had at least twelve female members, but there were none with such large numbers of women. I therefore reduced the female membership of such groups to six, so I could have at least a minimum number of women for a focus group (Bryman,2016; Finch and Lewis, 2003).

I had two lists, categories A and B, which my research assistant and I finally agreed on. I had a category A list which consisted of producer organisations that were not far in the interior from the main road, again for security reasons. We also did not want groups that were family-based producer organisations, whose members were from one extended family because the dynamics within the group would be different. I wanted at least one group to be semi-urban based in the local government headquarters and two in the interior to give me a semi-urban-rural differentiation in my study perhaps there were changes in gender relations happening in one setting but not the other. The Category B list had groups further in the interior of the local government headquarters which we could draw from in the event we were not able to access any of the ones in Category A.

My research assistant and I began the process of identifying the groups on our shortlists by visiting each locality and meeting with organisation leaders to introduce my study and invite them to participate. My research assistant had worked with the local MII service provider in Benue state as a capacity-building specialist(Gwer West Local Government Area was not one of his assigned areas, so he had no prior work contact with producer organisations in the study site). We were thus able to get phone numbers of some contacts as well as the extension workers in the area. This was one means of contact. The second means of contact was going to the villages listed against producer organisations and asking for the names on the list. Four groups

emerged from this process; the Greenfield mixed producer organisation was the only producer organisation from the category B list as we could only identify one of the mixed organisations in category A. We, therefore, replaced it with a category B group. Producer organisations in this study are thus two all-female producer organisations and two mixed producer organisations all networked to MII in 2014. These had longer contact with MII than producer organisations networked in the following years. These producer organisations all grew soyabeans. My choice of the soyabeans value chain was because soyabeans is less labour-intensive compared to rice, which was the second MII crop in Benue state. Thus, women can cultivate small plots of soyabeans with little funds, requiring men to only make the ridges and spray herbicides as weeding, harvesting, and post-harvesting is almost a hundred percent women's affair (Farnworth et al, 2020; Burfisher and Horenstein, 2005). Members of these producer organisations who were available were all interviewed in the FGDs according to organisations. The criteria for selecting respondents were that they were members of the selected MII producer organisations.

Two unplanned focus group discussions, one all-male, and one all-female were held after the meetings with all organisations. Participants were drawn from all four producer organisations, to explore the concepts of a 'community of women' and a 'community of men' that came up in my conversations in all the organisations. I discussed this with my supervisors before holding these two focus group discussions. These focus group discussions lasted approximately one hour thirty minutes and two hours each. A total of twelve focus group discussions were thus held. This number falls between the range of four to fifteen focus groups in a study suggested by Bryman (2016), for easier management of data. This is contested, and various studies have had more focus groups while some have had fewer (Bryman, 2016). I decided to have more than the recommended maximum number of participants in each focus group as recommended

by several authors on the size of the focus group in the two unplanned focus groups. My reason was because I was drawing active people from four producer organisations and had to also make provisions for ‘no shows’ as well as people who may not feel at ease speaking in a larger group (Clark et al, 2021; Finch and Lewis,2003). All participants turned up with one man sending someone in his place who came late and did not contribute to the discussion. A total of ten focus group discussions were planned but twelve were conducted.

Tables 1 to 4 present the members of each of the four producer organisations and the expert group(table 5)who were in the focus group discussions as well as those interviewed. The tables also include active and non-active members as well as significant others of leaders and provides a snapshot of respondents. Names have been changed for confidentiality for display in the tables. In the body of this work, I refer to participants by age and producer organisation or designation for the experts. I use one word for all women (Ngo) and one for men (Ter) differentiating each person by a different letter of the alphabet. ‘Ngo’ meaning mother is used as a name for all females and ‘Ter’ meaning father is used for all males. ‘Ngo’ and ‘Ter’ are Tiv words and names often at the beginning of a longer name and not stand-alone names but are sometimes the shortened version by which people with these names are called. A more detailed profile of the interviewees is presented in appendix one with one of these profiles highlighted in box 1.

Table 1: Menagbe all-female producer organisation respondents, FGDs and KIIs

Sn	Name	Sex	Age	Education	*Marital status	**Household type
Menagbe women’s producer organisation						
1	Ngo A	F	55	Primary	W	FH
2	Ngo B	F	51	Primary	W	FH
3	Ngo C	F	30	Primary	M	MHM
4	Ngo D	F	35	Primary	M	MHM
5	Ngo E	F	38	Primary	M	MHP
6	Ngo F	F	50	Primary	M	MHM
7	Ngo G	F	49	Primary	M	MHM

8	Ngo H	F	53	Primary	M	MHM
9	Ngo I	F	37	Primary	M	MHM
10	Ngo J	F	45	Tiv reading	M	FHM
11	Ngo K	F	61	Primary	M	MHM
12	Ngo L	F	38	Primary	M	FH
13	Ngo M	F	41	Secondary	M	MHM
14	Ter A	M	29	Primary	M	MHM
15	Ter B	M	50	Primary	M	MHM
16	Ter C	M	48	Primary	M	MHP
17	Ter D	M	55	Primary	M	MHM
18	Ter E	M	45	Primary	M	MHM
19	Ter F (Significant other)	M	60	Primary	M	MHM
20	Ter G (Significant other)	M	39	Secondary	M	MHP

***Marital status**

- Single (S)
- Married (M)
- Widowed(W)

****Household type**

- Female-headed (FH); Male-headed monogamous (MHM; Male-headed polygamous (MHP)

Table 2: Mbabuande all-female producer organisation respondents, FGDs and KIIs

Sn	Name	Sex	Age	Education	*Marital status	**Household type
Mbabuande Women's producer organisation						
1	Ngo N	F	40	Primary	M	MHM
2	Ngo O	F	45	Primary	M	MHM
3	Ngo P	F	45	Primary	M	MHP
4	Ngo Q	F	31	Secondary	M	MHM
5	Ngo X	F	40	Tertiary	M	MHM
6	Ngo Y	F	45	Secondary	W	FH
7	Ngo Z	F	37	Secondary	W	FH
8	Ngo AA	F	45	Primary	W	FH
9	Ngo BB	F	41	Tertiary	W	FH
10	Ngo CC	F	45	Primary	M	MHP
11	Ngo DD	F	37	Primary	W	FH
12	Ngo EE	F	38	Tertiary	M	MHM
13	Ngo FF	F	31	Primary	M	MHM
14	Ngo GG	F	34	Primary	M	MHP
15	Ngo HH	F	44	Secondary	M	MHM
16	Ngo II	F	55	Secondary	M	MHM
17	Ngo JJ	F	27	Tertiary	M	MHM
18	Ngo KK	F	48	Secondary	M	MHP
19	Ngo LL	F	49	Secondary	M	MHM
20	Ngo MM	F	49	Primary	M	MHM
21	Ngo NN	F	38	Tertiary	M	MHM
22	Ter H (significant other)	M	25	Secondary	M	FH

***Marital status**

- Single (S)
- Married (M)
- Widowed(W)

****Household type**

- Female-headed (FH); Male-headed monogamous (MHM; Male-headed polygamous (MHP)

Table 3: Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation respondents, FGDs and KIIs

Sn	Name	Sex	Age	Education	*Marital status	**Household type
Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation						
1	Ngo OO	F	25	Primary	M	MHM
2	Ngo PP (significant other)	F	20	Primary	M	MHM
3	Ngo QQ (significant other)	F	35	Primary	M	MHP
4	Ngo RR	F	30	Primary	M	MHM
5	Ngo SS	F	33	Primary	M	MHM
6	Ngo TT	F	40	Primary	W	FH
7	Ngo UU	F	55	Primary	W	FH
8	Ngo VV	F	31	Primary	W	FH
9	Ter I	M	44	Tertiary	M	MHP
10	Ter J	M	50	Secondary	M	MHP
11	Ter K	M	31	Primary	M	MHM
12	Ter L	M	45	Secondary	M	MHM
13	Ter M	M	31	Secondary	S	MHM
14	Ter N	M	30	Secondary	S	MHM
15	Ter O	M	32	Secondary	M	MHM
16	Ter P	M	48	Tiv only	M	MHM
17	Ter Q	M	55	Tiv only	M	MHM
18	Ter R	M	35	Tiv only	M	MHM
19	Ter S	M	45	Tiv only	M	MHM
20	Ter T	M	49	Tiv only	M	MHM
21	Ter UW	M	35	Tiv only	M	MHM
22	Ngo XX (significant other)	F	27	Tiv only	M	MHP
23	Ngo YY (significant other)	F	37	Primary	M	MHP

***Marital status**

- Single (S)
- Married (M)
- Widowed (W)

****Household type**

- Female-headed (FH); Male-headed monogamous (MHM); Male-headed polygamous (MHP)

Table 4: Greenfield mixed producer organisation respondents, FGDs and KIIs

Sn	Name	Sex	Age	Education	*Marital status	**Household type
Greenfield mixed producer organisation						
1	Ngo ZZ	F	30	Primary	W	FH
2	Ngo AAA	F	38	Secondary	M	MHM
3	Ngo BBB (significant other)	F	34	Secondary	M	MHM
4	Ter V	M	45	Tiv only	M	MHP
5	Ter W	M	45	Primary	M	MHM
6	Ter X	M	41	Primary	M	MHM
7	Ter Y	M	50	Tiv only	M	MHP
8	Ter Z	M	37	Secondary	M	MHP
9	Ter AA	M	31	Tertiary	S	MHM
10	Ter BB	M	55	Tiv only	M	MHP
11	Ter CC	M	33	Primary	S	MHM
12	Ter DD	M	43	Primary	M	MHM
13	Ter EE	M	35	Primary	M	MHM
14	Ter FF	M	27	Primary	M	MHM

15	Ngo CCC (Significant other)	F	28	Secondary	M	MHP
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***Marital status**

- Single (S)
- Married (M)
- Widowed(W)

****Household type**

- Female-headed (FH); Male-headed monogamous (MHM; Male-headed polygamous (MHP)

Table 5: Expert respondents, KIIs

Sn	Name	Sex	Age	Education	*Marital status	**Household type
Experts						
1	Extension worker	F	62	Tertiary	M	MHM
2	Extension worker	M	62	Tertiary	M	MHM
3	Gender and capacity building expert	F	37	Tertiary	M	MHM
4	Capacity building expert	M	35	Tertiary	M	MHM

***Marital status**

- Single (S)
- Married (M)
- Widowed(W)

****Household type**

- Female-headed (FH); Male-headed monogamous (MHM; Male-headed polygamous (MHP)

I had three stages of selection for in-depth interview respondents. At the first level, my focus was to interview leaders of the producer organisations. I wanted to understand how the organisations were run and if there were any attempts at generating issues of concern and interest to members independent of the MII objective which brought them together. I, therefore, decided to interview the chairperson, secretary, and lead farmer from each organisation with the public relations officer as a substitute. The second level selection was the interview of active and non-active members identified by the chairperson of each producer organisation. I wanted to find out what gave them the status of active or non-active members as part of my strategy to understand the group dynamics. At the third level of selection, to further explore the impact of MII on female farmers' households and in the community, I also interviewed their significant other. This significant other could be a husband, adult child, or any adult member of their household who has been with them since they participated in the MII project. I had a mix of all three types of households female-headed households, male-headed monogamous households, and male-headed polygamous households.

Extension assistants who worked with the MII producer organisations were interviewed, one female and one male, to garner their insights into what farmers learned and applied during the intervention and after it ended as well as group interactions in the two types of producer organisations, challenges and gender relations in the household and community. Two capacity-building experts employed by the local implementation partner who worked with producer organisations were also interviewed, one female and one male. They provided insights into the capacity building of the organisations, and what changes they identified in the women and community arising from membership of the producer organisations.

In the follow-up interviews, I selected respondents from all three types of households. These included the leaders I had interviewed earlier and other respondents who were active during the focus group discussions. So, at this level, I had leaders, significant others (two of whom were themselves members of the producer organisation), and other members of the organisations drawn from all four producer organisations with the majority from the all-female producer organisations. These were both women and men but a greater proportion of them were female respondents. I decided to do follow-up in-depth interviews because it became apparent to me that I needed more information about the gender and power relations in the household and community to understand further the dimensions of these relationships (Birks and Mills, 2022). Twenty-eight(28)people were interviewed in the first round of interviews while twenty-two people were interviewed in the follow-up interviews. Eleven (11) people were repeat respondents and eleven (11) were new people who had participated in the FGDs. In total thirty-nine (39) people were interviewed. The overall number of respondents in the FGDs and KIIs was eighty-four (84).

Profile: All-female Producer Organisation leader, Ngo II

Aged 55, has secondary level education and lives in a male-headed monogamous household in the local government headquarters(semi-urban) with her husband, children, grandchildren, in-laws, and her relatives. An active politician who gets invited to political meetings in the community. A member of four women's groups including her church group and a women's cooperative savings society but not a member of a women's labour group. She was a leader in some of these groups but is no longer in a leadership position at the time of this interview. Does not have any other source of income other than farming which is done jointly with her husband who no longer goes to the farm because of old age so she manages the farms alone. Grows yams, soyabeans, groundnuts, cassava, and vegetables. She was interviewed twice.

See other in-depth interview respondents profiles in Appendix 1

3.5 Data collection methods

I decided to use three methods to collect the data because they were most appropriate but one of these, observation, was not utilised because all producer organisations were non-active. Therefore, only focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview (IDIs) methods were used, a combination that has high currency with qualitative and feminist researchers (Harding, 2019; Swanborn, 2010; Ritchie, 2003). I wanted to discuss the research topic with the group as my interest is in understanding how the producer organisations were and are spaces and vehicles for empowering rural female farmers. The focus group discussion was thus an appropriate method to utilize to understand the group process, the interaction between members, the development of their own goals as well as an understanding of differences, stimulate recall to enable the sharing of expectations, attitude to the group (Gronmo,2020; Ritchie, 2003). It enabled me to see and understand the impact(self-reported) of MII on

members as individuals as well as a collective and to observe the group dynamics and how listening to each other provided them an opportunity to reflect and reassess their contributions or not. The focus groups also allowed participants to share their understandings and explanations, which is critical in their understanding of my study (Gronmo, 2020; Lewis, 2003). The decision to combine the focus group with in-depth interviewing was to give me further opportunity to explore my research topic with leaders and other individuals at a more personal detailed level (Harding, 2019; Gronmo, 2020; Bryman, 2016; Ritchie, 2003) coupled with the fact that renegotiating conjugal contracts takes place at a personal level.

Primary data was recorded digitally in the field, and I had notes taken during interviews as well as my general observations of participants. Secondary data was ethnographic information providing a context about the Tiv people to present a socio-political and economic picture of the Tiv farming community and household, to enable an understanding of conjugal and gender contracts and identification of any renegotiated contracts. Additionally, literature on women's empowerment and other issues such as conflict in other contexts was used to triangulate data with literature on Nigeria providing a contextual understanding of the country and what changes have occurred legally, socially, economically, educationally, and politically that impact women's empowerment locally in the household and the community.

Fieldwork only commenced after receiving ethical approval from the ethics committee of the School of Global Development, University of East Anglia. I now examine the field methods with how I used them for my study.

3.5.1 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

As stated earlier, my use of the focus group was to bring together people, women mostly but also men who had engaged with MII through their membership of producer organisations to

understand through their experiences how membership of this group had empowered women in all dimensions (Harding, 2019; Gronmo, 2020; Bryman, 2016). I wanted to study how the members interacted with each other and responded to each other to understand what the producer organisations were like and also to understand how membership in the MII producer organisation impacted the individual (Clark et al, 2021; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). One of the limitations of the focus group is that the researcher has less control over proceedings (Gronmo, 2020; Bryman, 2016), and one way this is manifested is in managing the micro-politics within the group. I handled this by always ensuring that the person silenced by members was allowed to respond to a question by asking them directly what they thought about an issue. Nevertheless, something is lost when powerful members dominate the discussion thereby shutting out the less powerful, bringing to bear what Hayward (1998) said about power is people doing what they are accustomed to and thus enabling the dominance of one group/person over the other. One glaring instance, in one of the FGDs, occurred when two powerful women shut down a younger woman when she wanted to speak and asked her to wait her turn; it happened very fast, and something was lost because when she eventually spoke, she simply concurred with what the other women had said. Waiting her turn meant she could not speak before them and other older women. I, therefore, decided to invite her to the cross-organisations focus group discussion to explore the concepts of a community of women and men, but she came late and did not contribute much. I felt she held back because two of the powerful women in the producer organisation who had shut her down earlier were also in attendance.

Focus group discussions were held in the localities of each producer organisation and at venues and times decided by the leaders of each group. All group discussions were recorded digitally after participants gave their consent and were told they could withdraw at any point that they did not feel comfortable with the discussion. No one left any of the group discussions. In one all-male focus group, I had a member who was late and had a condescending attitude as it was

clear to me, he looked down on all the others. He missed the beginning part of the discussion where I explained that the research was academic university research for a Ph.D. and had no connection with the return of MII or any new agriculture project. Consequently, at the end of the discussion, he asked me to switch off the recorder as he was going to ask me a sensitive question, only to request that I explain to him what the discussions were all about after which he told me he had done similar fieldwork for his master's degree (this explained his condescending attitude as he was the most educated). His question was good for me because I felt he reinforced the legitimacy of what I was doing, making participants feel more comfortable engaging with me.

I had two focus groups in each of the all-female producer organisations. This was to enable me get the opinion of as many of the members as possible. Focus groups were between six to nine people each (Gronmo, 2020; Finch and Lewis, 2002; Clark et al, 2021). Even though there are debates about how many people should be in a focus group to ensure easier management of the discussions (Gronmo, 2020; Bryman, 2016; Clark et al, 2021), I found that the numbers I had were manageable. I chose a relatively large number of participants because I had to ensure that I not only recruited sufficient numbers to make up for 'no shows' but also because I was talking about an activity that had ended a few years back, which means I wanted to ensure that I had people who could recall and reflect. This was a process that would be assisted by having more people present (Gronmo, 2020; Finch and Lewis, 2003). Thus, all members who could be reached were invited as the list had a maximum of twenty-five members. Who was in which focus group (group 1 or 2) was determined by the chairperson of each producer organisation based on the order of arrival to the venue. Even though I had given the leaders different meeting times for the groups, the members all turned up at about the same time preferring to wait their turn. In the Menagbe all-female producer organisation, the second focus group was with the male members (*sic*), of whom I was naturally surprised to find their names on the list, seeing

that the group is an all-female producer organisation. They were more vocal than the female members of the group and explained that they only got registered as members of the group to make up numbers when they took their wives for training. I discuss the implications of this making up of numbers for farmers' organisations in chapter five.

In the mixed producer organisations, I had three focus groups, one all-female, one all-male, and one mixed. The same-sex focus groups were longer as they were responding to questions for the first time and in the mixed groups, questions were responded to in shorter sentences, but I noticed during the early stages of the meeting that the women always waited for the men to speak first before making their contributions. However, once this happened at the start, women after a few questions did not wait for men to respond first and spoke freely. In one of the mixed producer organisations, the focus group with the women was a triad (in-depth interview) even though I classify it as a focus group because only three of the five women in the group were available as the other two had moved out of the locality. Triads, however, allow for in-depth discussions as there are fewer people, and thus each person can contribute and talk as much as they want, which was my experience with this group (Harding, 2019; Ritchie, 2003). The mixed focus group discussions were held basically so I could observe interactions between men and women in mixed producer organisations. I had to change my plans for the mixed focus groups where I had intended to have a different set of people from the ones in the same sex groups so it would be a new experience. I had to select people from the same sex groups for the mixed focus groups because none of the groups recruited all the members on the list as people had moved to other localities or were not available. I held two unplanned focus groups with participants selected from across all four producer organisations to discuss the concept of a community of women and a community of men. This issue came up in all four producer organisations as participants responded to questions about women's participation in community decision-making.

Steps in the focus group discussions:

1. The first step was welcoming participants, asking which language they preferred for the meeting, Tiv or English. They preferred Tiv so meetings were in Tiv. This put participants at ease and helped them to relax (Harding, 2019; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).
2. I then introduced my research assistant and explained why I was there and what they were participating in. I informed them that it was a university-based study for the award of an academic degree and had nothing to do with a proposed agriculture project nor the return of the MII. Consent was sought, which they all accepted, and consent forms were signed. I also sought consent to record and explained that recording ensured I captured all their opinions when I transcribe and analyse. This step further provided an opportunity for respondents to establish familiarity with me (Harding, 2019; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Because they were all from one producer organisation, they already knew each other so I left out the self-introduction. In the cross-organisation focus group discussions, the research assistant introduced people by producer group.
3. I moderated all the focus group sessions using my guide which had been translated into Tiv by an expert Tiv language translator.
4. Discussions were smooth even though there were always a few people who expressed themselves more than others and the quieter ones often only repeated what the more vocal ones said even though they also had their own opinions. Participants found it easier to speak about the material benefits of MII than how the producer organisation impacted their lives in terms of gender and power relations with the community and in the household because they now had to reflect deeply. I asked for examples to illustrate what was being said so I could get respondents to reflect deeper enabling me to get to an understanding of what they were saying.

5. I was careful to let participants end the discussions by always asking if they had more examples or something else to share about our discussion. This way it was clear that they ended the conversation when they said they had nothing more to say.
6. I did not leave my seat after each interview until the respondents all did so that conversations could continue afterward as these may provide me with further insights of relevance to my research.

3.5.2 In-depth Interviews (IDIs)

The interviews enabled me to explore deeply the world of the individual respondents and how they experienced it concerning my research focus. This was what I was seeking to enable me to find the data that would respond to my research questions which focus on female farmers' real-life experiences (Clark, et al. 2021; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018; Finch and Lewis, 2003). Conscious of some of the critiques of interviews such as the asymmetrical power relations where the interviewer has all the power in terms of the topic of research, questions, follow-ups, and termination of the research¹⁹ (Clark, et al. 2021; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018), I ensured that interviews were fixed at the interviewees' time and convenience. I also asked interviewees what language they would prefer for the conversation. Added to this was the seeking consent for as well as to record the interview. All but one interviewee chose to have the interview conducted in Tiv, their language. Interviews were also held in locations of their choice in their homes or where the leaders chose meeting venues. My further attempt to address the issue of power imbalance was always asking interviewees at the end if there was something they would like to say or ask; this way they were also part of ending the interview. I also gave them time to respond and waited quietly when they reflected, enabling them to reconstruct their reality by

¹⁹ This may not always be the case and sometimes the interviewee may have all the power, for example where the researcher is interviewing an older professional or a political office holder

asking for examples at appropriate times that supported their assertions. I was accompanied by a research assistant in all interviews (he did not sit in during the interviews) just as in the focus groups but assisted me where needed to explain what was being said where I did not fully understand. I think this further established my credibility and helped put the respondents at ease, as I did not turn up alone, even though I was a local with an ethnic name speaking their language. Informing them how we got the contact details of the leaders as well as showing them our list of members of their producer organisations further confirmed the genuineness of our purpose.

One-on-one interviews were held with respondents from each of the four producer organisations. All interviews were held after focus groups to enable me to cross-check issues arising during the focus group discussions with leaders of the organisations. I decided to interview three leaders of each producer organisation to provide further in-depth insights as to how the organisations functioned as well as to provide me insight as to the type of leadership and how membership in the organisation impacted their lives, household, and community relations. Leaders of producer organisations selected for one-on-one interviews included the chairpersons of the producer organisations, the secretary, lead farmers, and the public relations officer where the secretary was not available. I also interviewed active and non-active members in each organisation identified by the group leaders, which were members selected based on their attendance at group meetings. I found out in interviewing these active and non-active leaders that their selections were a true reflection of why they were selected by the leaders. One non-active member for instance never attended group meetings but only appeared at the MII trainings because of privileged contact outside the group that registered her in the organisation and always invited her to the trainings. I also interviewed significant others of these leaders, active and non-active members to get an insight into changing intra-household

and community gender relations arising from engagement with MII. The significant other was either a spouse, an adult child, or any adult in their household who supports and can speak authoritatively about them.

As with the focus group discussions, all interviews were pre-arranged with the assistance of the group leader who was our main contact. And although I had asked the leaders to invite respondents for specific times, I found out that leaders gave the same time to all and these were for the interviews that were held at the same venues as the focus groups. In other interviews, respondents were interviewed in their own homes, especially for all follow-up interviews. At this stage, we had participants' phone numbers, and my research assistant could call on respondents and meet with each person at their selected places and times. Follow-up interviews were conducted by my research assistant, who had been with me all through the focus groups and interviews. He assisted me in the focus groups and had a good understanding of what I was researching. Number of people interviewed is stated in section 3.4 above.

3.6 Data management and analysis

My data was generated from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. I also had field notes and observations which I recorded in bullet form. For audio recording, I used an Olympus digital audio recorder as my main recording device which has a powerful inbuilt microphone that captured sound crisply. Digital recordings were transferred to my laptop every night when I returned to my base camp to ensure I had sufficient recording memory in the digital recorder for the next day's interviews. I had a separate notebook for taking notes for each producer organisation. As I conducted all the focus group discussions and interviews on the first outing, I had all the data with me, thus it was safe. I transcribed the data according to producer organisations followed by transcriptions of the extension assistants and capacity-building

experts. Filing of transcriptions was also done under these categories, which ensured that I could easily locate each transcript if I needed it when writing. My research assistant who conducted the follow-up interviews also in Tiv used a phone to record his interviews and uploaded them to a drop box folder I had created, which was accessible to only the two of us. His interviews were sent to me in real-time as soon as he ended an interview, or in batches at the end of the day. Herein was the advantage of having a local who spoke the same language as a research assistant.

I started transcribing the data in April of 2021 after leaving the field until the end of May 2021 when I finally completed transcriptions. It was a tasking endeavour but worth it as transcribing myself saved me the trouble of having to go through someone else's transcriptions to ensure it was verbatim. I transcribed and also cleaned the data of typographical errors. The follow-up interviews I transcribed as I received them. Follow-up interviews were conducted and transcribed between March and April 2022. This time difference was because after the transcription of the first round of interviews, I did not go back immediately to probe the household and community relations where I felt a need for further insights to enrich my research. Going back to further explore gender relations in the household and community of my respondents served to validate my findings. The responses in the second interview confirmed what respondents had said in the first round of interviews which I considered as validation. I acknowledge that there could be an element of social desirability bias in their responses as interviewees could be saying socially acceptable things. This is where other relevant literature was used to triangulate my findings to ensure validity. Conducting the focus group discussions and first round of interviews as well as doing all the transcriptions enabled me to develop familiarity with the data which is the first step in thematic analysis as stated by Braun and Clarke(2022). I used a simple approach in anonymizing my data even though I did

not consider that this research would constitute any harm to participants. I do not mention names but identify respondents by age, gender, and producer organisation or designation for the experts interviewed(extension assistants and capacity-building experts) in the body of work.

Data analysis of qualitative data generated from my interviews and focus group discussions was done using NVivo 1.6.1(1137), provided by the University of East Anglia. All transcripts were imported from Microsoft word to a new NVivo project called ‘women’s empowerment in agriculture’ and ‘women’s empowerment in agriculture follow-up’. Each transcription became a case. As stated earlier I used a thematic analysis approach to analyse my data.

Braun and Clarke (2022:4) define thematic analysis as ‘a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes-themes are your ultimate analytic purpose’. While this is a basic generic definition of thematic analysis there are several approaches²⁰ to doing thematic analysis with Braun and Clarke(2022), naming their approach as the reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis ‘recognises and values the reflexive researcher as a fundamental characteristic of thematic analysis and a differentiating factor across versions of thematic analysis’(Braun and Clarke, 2022: 5). They explain that reflexivity is when the research critically reflects on their role as researcher, her research practice and process. In other words, the conscious and subjective acceptance that research is not value-free but embodies the values and experiences of the researcher is a central characteristic of reflexive thematic research. This resonates with standpoint feminist epistemology which posits that research is situated and

²⁰ Some other approaches to thematic analysis are template analysis; framework analysis; guidelines from Joffe,2012;Joffe and Yardley, 2004 amongst others (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Clark et al, 2021)

value-laden, and the researcher is part of the process of co-producing knowledge with the researched. Braun and Clarke (2022) set out a six-phase process of doing reflexive thematic analysis.

The six-phase process is familiarising yourself with the dataset; coding; generating initial themes; developing and reviewing themes; refining, defining, and naming themes; and finally writing up. They point out that this is not a linear process and that the phases are guidelines, meaning that the researcher can go back and forth in these six-phase process, and it will not be regressing (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Thus, even in the process of writing, themes can be modified and renamed with data re-coded. I found myself doing this in the process of writing in a few places.

All six phase processes outlined above were used in analysing my data. This began, as stated above, from the point of transcribing interviews and focus group discussion interviews and importation of these documents into NVivo. In analysing and assigning codes to my data, I started with the interviews bearing in mind my research questions to enable me to develop analytical depth. I went through each case and read it line by line and assigned codes allowing codes to emerge from the responses of the women and men interviewed. This style of coding allows respondents' experiential lives and knowledge to emerge in the creation of knowledge (Richards, 2021; Letterby, 2011). My line-by-line coding enabled the women's knowledge of their context to be told through my first-level interpretation. The coding process thus enabled me to infuse myself in the creation of this knowledge as an 'insider-outsider' as I named the codes that were emerging, some of which were in their own words such as the 'community of women' code (Richards, 2021; Intemann, 2018; Letterby, 2011).

The first line of coding produced 150 codes. I went through all these codes and began to merge all similar codes to make the data more manageable and for themes to emerge. As I merged codes, I noted which ones could become parent codes, and which ones could be grouped into the various codes and named child codes. For instance, in merging the first 150 codes, all codes that had similar names were highlighted and grouped. I read each of these codes to ensure they were saying the same thing, after which they were merged into the most appropriate-sounding code. This first round of mergers led to the second level of 123 codes. I went through the same process again trimming down the codes to the third level of ninety-one codes. At this point of merging and renaming codes, I started marking out the possible parent-child codes as there were codes I did not want to merge but all spoke to an overarching theme. For example, the leadership parent code consisted of child codes of ‘becoming a leader; encouraging other women to be active’. I then identified such codes and created parent-child codes. At the fifth stage of reviewing my codes, I decided that there were none left to merge. Finally, fourteen (14) codes (themes) emerged, these were *advising new interventions; dependence on men to address issues of concern to women; engaging with the community; the existence of other producer organisations; farming soya and other crops; household decision making; identifying and networking producer organisations with MII; leadership; markets; MII impact on farmers; other women’s groups; producer organisations activities during MII; post-intervention producer organisations; women doing new things; women’s farm labour groups.*

I used the coding framework that emerged from the interview data for the FGD also from a feminist standpoint approach which allows knowledge to emerge from the people because the coding framework emerged from the same context as the interviews; therefore, using the coding framework was not imposing a predetermined framework or previous knowledge on the participants. With the follow-up interviews, line-by-line coding was done. A final list of

ten (10) codes(themes) emerged. These were *access to land and farm inputs; community of men; community of women; control over resources; decision-making in the household; impact of membership of MII producer organisation; non-farm employment and trade; women's labour groups; women's voices in the household and the community*. Thereafter, I began to write using relevant literature to triangulate and validity my research findings.

3.6.1 Exploring and testing the research questions

In testing my research questions, data generated from the FGDs and interviews with leaders, extension workers, and capacity-building experts informed this analysis. Relevant literature was further used to validate the credibility of the data. Responses from extension assistants and capacity-building experts also serve to validate farmers' responses. Three research questions have been elaborated to enable me to answer my overarching question of whether producer organisations empower rural female farmers to develop the power to question unequal gender and power relations in their households and communities and thereby forge new gender contracts.

The research questions I have posed as stated in Chapter One are;

1) Research question 1

Are producer organisations instrumental for the empowerment of rural female farmers, *interdiu* and *ex post* an agriculture intervention project?

To answer this question. I have examined MII engagement with rural female farmers to identify which pathways of empowerment (theoretical pathways of change) were taken by the project. I explore the pathways of agronomic practices and building strong producer

organisations; types of producer organisations; the role of frontline intermediaries, building relationships among women and establishing a network of producer organisations in each local government area (for example Cornwall, 2016; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire,2016; Kabeer, 2011; Levy,2017; Bryan and Mekonnen, 2023; Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021;).

These pathways are explored in the context of the intersecting factors of location and type of household, age of female farmer, farmer, and farmer-trader vocations; level of women's engagement and participation in the producer organisation(leaders, active and non-active members). I used the data from the FGDs and interviews with leaders, extension assistants, and capacity-building experts to test this research question.

2) Research question 2

How does women's membership in farmers' producer organisations shape their intrahousehold relationships?

Exploring the influence of membership in producer organisations on intrahousehold relationships between women and men, I look at the indicators of empowerment constantly used in the literature on women's empowerment - decision-making in the household; access and control of resources and assets. I examine these through the prism of intersecting factors of the age of female farmers, type and location of household, farmer, and farmer-trader vocations. This was examined along the pathway of building critical consciousness and relationships among female members of the producer organisation.

Data was drawn from interviews with leaders, extension assistants, and capacity-building experts. Responses about gender relations in the household from extension assistants and capacity-building experts are used to test the reliability of respondents' data. Data was

triangulated with literature to identify supporting positions and understand differences (for example, Farnworth et al, 2020; Agarwal, 2020; Sell and Minot, 2018; Meysonnat et al, 2022; Bernard et al, 2020; Acosta et al, 2020; Annan et al, 2021; Aberman et al, 2018; Van Campenhout et al, 2023; Barr et al, 2019; Akresh et al, 2016; Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010).

3) Research question 3

How and to what extent does female farmers' participation in farmers' producer organisations affect their interactions with the community?

For research question three, I explore the concepts of a community of men and a community of women to identify how membership of the MII producer organisation influenced rural women's interaction with the community. I probe the impact of violent conflict in the area on masculinities and women's participation in community decision-making. Have unending conflicts between farmers and herders resulted in the women attempting to protect and uphold the men's masculine identities. Has this therefore hindered women from asking to be admitted to community decision-making structures?

I use data from the focus group discussions, interviews with organisation leaders, significant others, extension assistants, and capacity-building experts as well as literature to ensure the validity of the data. Interviews of extension workers and capacity-building experts also serve to test the reliability of information from female and male members of the producer organisations. I look at how this engagement with the community intersects with household type and location, the age of the female farmer, being an active politician member of a political party, and the level of women's engagement and participation in the

producer organisation(leaders, active and non-active members). I relate findings to relevant literature in the discourse on women's empowerment and collective action, as well as the impact of violent conflict on masculinities, women, and the community, to validate my findings (such as Mwambi et al, 2021 Agarwal, 2020;Mutonyi, 2019; Selhausen, 2016; Farnworth et al, 2020; Sudgen et al,2021; Acosta et al, 2020; Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021).

Chapter 4: Contextualising the Research

In chapter three, I laid out the process of fieldwork and the epistemological position that guides this research stating my positionality and how it impacts this study as well as discussing the research participants. This chapter continues this discussion by presenting changes and trends in Nigeria within which the MARKETS II project was implemented. These are changes in the sociocultural, economic, educational and legal as well as the political environment of Nigeria. These factors determine to a large extent how rural women and men access resources impacting their household relations and participation in the community. I begin with a general profile of Nigeria to provide an understanding of the development of the state, how it is organised, how policies are made and implemented in section 4. Section 4.1.1, on the Nigerian economy, continues this discussion by focusing on the agriculture sector and how government actions and inactions have impacted the development of this sector as this is the policy environment in which agriculture interventions take place. This is followed by the sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 on women and political participation in Nigeria; the educational and legal environment while section 4.1.4 looks at the social-cultural environment. Section 4.2 is focuses on the immediate context of the research which is Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State. Section 4.3 looks at the impact of violent conflicts on gender relations in the rural Tiv farming household and community and what this means for women's empowerment. In providing the overall country picture I focus on the local Benue State context which is the immediate locality of the research.

4.1 The study area: Country profile

Nigeria is located in West Africa on the Gulf of Guinea (Falola, 1999; Onah, 2014;) and is often referred to as the ‘Giant of Africa’ because it is a regional power on the African continent. It has a population which in 2022 was estimated at 218,541 million people (51% male and 49.5% female)(World Bank, 2022) making it the most populous country in Africa with a growing young population (NBS, 2020). Nigeria has a land mass of 923,768 sq. kms and is bordered by the Republic of Benin to the west, the republics of Niger and Chad to the north, the Republic of Cameroon to the East, and the Atlantic Ocean on the South(Falola, 1999; Onah, 2014;). Its terrain consists of tropical climates in the centre and north with an equatorial climate in the south.

Estimated to have between 200 and 250 ethnic groups (McLoughlin and Bouchat, 2013) categorised into majority and minority ethnic groups. The majority ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani of the North, the Igbo of the South-east, and the Yoruba of the South-west. The minority ethnic groups make up the remaining consisting of ethnicities such as the Tiv, Idoma, Junkun, Angas, Birom, Igala, Gwari, Kataf, and others in the middle belt, the Edo, Urhobo, and Itshekiri in the Mid-west, the Ijaw, Efik, Ibibio, and Ogoni in the South-south, and the Kanuri in the Northeast (Falola, 1999). What this means is that even though there are similarities in cultural norms and gender ideologies, there are contextual differences dependent on each ethnic group as well as the impact of religious beliefs such as Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions. This is demonstrated when one of my research participants said men are superior to women because the bible says so. This is their understanding of the bible and their Christian faith which supports their traditional views of male superiority.

Post-independence Nigeria witnessed years of military rule(Onah, 2014). The military years were opportunities for imposing a cultural change in terms of women's representation in office as military regimes rule by edicts. This did not happen, however, a military-era edict of 1983 which directed all state governments to appoint at least one woman to state and national executive councils, saw the emergence of women at these highest levels of governance(Abdulkareem, 2023). This has become a norm(Abdulkareem, 2023), ensuring that there is always a woman appointed to the executive branch of government. I provide further detail about the political structure in section 4.1.2.

4.1.1 The Nigerian Economy

With a vast arable land, the country's economy at independence was largely agriculture-based producing its food with each region known for producing different cash crops - peanuts in the north, cocoa, and rubber in the west, and palm produce in the east(Ofana et al, 2016). With the commercial exploitation of oil in the early seventies, oil became the major revenue earner. Agriculture lost its place, having never received the push to make the sector commercial, it remained at the level of smallholder farms. The fall of oil prices in the eighties left the country with a high debt profile and coupled with other factors an increasingly impoverished population. Even though today there is a steady annual growth rate of six-point-two percent (6.2%) (Baltissen et al, 2023), poverty is on the increase. The World Bank reported that in 2018, thirty-point-nine percent(30.9%) of the population was living on less than US\$2.15 per day (World Bank, 2022).

Even though agriculture lost its place as a major revenue, successive governments, continued to enact policies and programmes to promote increased productivity and incomes for small-scale farmers(Aluko, 2020). These interventions included policies as well as the establishment

of specialised agriculture agencies such as banks, and agriculture credit funds to specialised agriculture universities(Shuaibu, 2023; Ofana et al 2016). The federal government began to gradually withdraw from agriculture in the era of the Structural Adjustment Programme(SAP) and post-SAP. Market-oriented programmes were introduced such as export incentives to boost export production (Shuaibu, 2023; Ofana et al, 2016; Aluko, 2020). However, these programmes and the push for market-oriented agriculture have not transformed the sector which remains driven by small-scale holders farming at the subsistence level(Aluko, 2020; Ofana et al, 2016) with rural female farmers contending with the issues I discussed in chapter two.

Several factors account for the failure to commercialise agriculture in Nigeria. These factors include poor policy development and implementation; the difficulty of smallholders to access agriculture loans despite premium on them; corruption in the sector leading to embezzlement of funds because of duplication of roles in government agencies as well as the risk-prone nature of agriculture where farming is rain-fed with yearly variations in yields(Aluko, 2020; Ofana et al, 2016). Nevertheless, government policies, programmes as well as donor interventions have continued to focus on commercialising the sector. The reason for this focus is because agriculture is considered as critical to the development of sub-Saharan Africa.

Donor interventions in agriculture focus on increasing productivity and incomes for the farmer by addressing the various challenges farmers face along the crop value chain and making farming market-oriented(Baltissen et al, 2023; McNamara et al 2019). These interventions have also focused on developing other points on the value chain such as agro-processing to boost production (Baltissen et al, 2023; McNamara et al 2019). The MII case study for this research is one example of such interventions. Contemporary government policies and programmes as

well as donor interventions always have a focus on women to ensure that they are specifically reached. The Benue State 2020 agriculture policy, for instance, dedicates a section in its strategy chapter to women in agriculture. The policy's provision for women is to support women to transition from subsistence farming to medium and large-scale agribusiness; to improve the quality and quantity of food production and consumption, and to improve women's active participation in sector decision-making and institutions. What this means for local female farmers in my study context is that state government agriculture interventions will provide a space for women to meet and discuss as the Benue State policy's vehicle for reaching farmers is through producer organisations. These spaces could become the sites for transformative thinking, ideas, and actions to redefine the boundaries of women's possibilities as discussed in Chapter 2.

4.1.2 Women and Political Participation in Nigeria

As a federal republic, Nigeria has a three-tier system of government - the federal, the state, and the local - which are independent but work together (FGN, 1999). The federation consists of thirty-six states and 774 local government areas as well as the Federal Capital Territory Abuja (FGN, 1999). Elections are held every four years for national and state legislatures as well as for the president and state governors. Local council elections are held every three years and are governed by state electoral laws. Federal elections are governed by federal electoral law and regulations (Ekokoi, 2022). All citizens of the country aged eighteen and above are eligible to vote and contest elections. This eligibility is governed by the constitution, electoral act, other electoral regulations, party constitutions, and practices (such as length of membership and financial status) (Ihugba and Aaron, 2018). Minimum age and educational limits are set for the various offices by the constitution and electoral act. For instance, to contest elections for state legislature a candidate (male or female) must be a citizen of Nigeria, aged thirty and

educated to at least school certificate level or its equivalent, a member of a political party and sponsored by that party(Section 106, of the constitution). Women who meet the criteria for each office can and have contested elections.

Nigerian women have been active in the political arena since independence to varying degrees. In the colonial era, Nigerian women were active as evidenced by the number of women's associations and groups that were established including a women's political party. These groups became platforms for the pursuit of freedom and political inclusion(Abdulkareem, 2023). However, when it came to representation in terms of political party leadership and elections to office women were generally invisible. For instance, in the discussions leading to independence, only one woman was a member of a political party delegation(National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC)), to the United Kingdom (Abdulkareem, 2023). Osimen(2018) attributes this limited presence to the role the colonial government played in keeping women out of positions of authority in the public sector. This he said helped to entrench politics as masculine and eroded whatever political authority women had in some ethnicities of Nigeria. The Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria for instance have female regents and other women leaders who wielded political power(Akpoghome, and Awhefeada, 2023; Bako et al, 2023). Other ethnicities such as the Tiv people, in this study, did not have such traditional roles for women as women were not part of the community governance structure(Bohannan and Bohannan,1953). Nigerian women's political agitations led to southern Nigerian women gaining the franchise in 1958. Northern Nigerian women on the other hand only received the franchise in 1979 (Abdulkareem, 2023).

While there has been an increase in the number of women elected and appointed to public office, women have not been able to attain and maintain the thirty-five percent²¹ threshold in either elected or appointed offices from the local, state to the national level. For example, the number of women elected to the national legislature between 1999 and 2023, fluctuated between seven and ten percent (IPU,2023). Eight women were elected senators in 2007; seven in 2011, eight in 2015, and dropped to three in 2023, with eight the highest number of female senators elected since 1999(IPU, 2023; Oladapo et al, 2021). Similarly, in the House of Representatives, the number of women elected dropped from its highest of twenty-six in 2011 to the current fourteen women in a 360-person lower legislative chamber(IPU,2023).

The low representation of women in political leadership in terms of elections and appointment to public office is reflected in Benue State which produced the first female speaker of a state legislature in 2003 and had the highest number of women in all the thirty-six state legislatures of the federation in 2003 (Akpoghome, and Awhefeada, 2023; Alubo, 2011). The state was unable to consolidate and build on this as seen in table 6. In 2011, the state was again the only Northern Nigerian state with a female local council chairperson but has subsequently been unable to maintain nor build on this. This reflects the status of women’s political participation in Nigeria (Akpoghome, and Awhefeada, 2023; Alubo, 2011).

Table 6:Benue State Nigeria: Number of women and men in the state legislature, 1999-2023

Year of election	Female	Male	Total
1999	1	31	32
2003	4	28	32
2007	2	30	32
2011	3	29	32
2015	2	30	32
2023	2	30	32

Source: Author’s compilation, 2021

²¹ The Nigeria National Gender Policy(2006) calls for 35% affirmative action for women in all sectors as a minimum threshold

Male politicians have continued to dominate national and state legislatures as well as other elected and appointive offices (Jaiyeola and Isaac, 2020). Factors responsible for this trend have included cultural beliefs that consider women as men's property, discrimination against women who marry outside of their ethnicity thereby considered outsiders in both marital and natal homes, and the high cost of contesting elections among others (Osimen, 2018; Akpoghome, and Awhefeada, 2023; Alubo, 2011). Within the political parties, women face multiple challenges before they even reach the stage of being candidates in an election, most do not get to this level (Nkereuwem, 2023). Contradictory opinions continue to enable the marginalisation of women in politics at all levels and this has implications for gender and social relations within the household and local community leadership. Religious beliefs that subordinate women to men further support traditional norms about women which are reasons for excluding and opposing women's quest for elected office as they privilege men above women (Oladapo et al, 2021; Akpoghome, and Awhefeada, 2023; Alubo, 2011).

There is lip service about promoting female participation in political parties. Alubo (2011) reports that women receive less support from communities and political parties who consider politics outside of women's sphere of activities resulting in female politicians being called unflattering names. This puts husbands under pressure not to allow wives to run for elective office or be too active even though the men would lobby for their wives to be given appointive positions (Akpoghome, and Awhefeada, 2023; Alubo, 2011). Yet, it is this male support that has enabled several women to win elections at the national and state legislature as well as be appointed into public office (Suleiman, et al, 2011). Suleiman et al (2021) point out that establishment leaders use religion and culture to manipulate women's political participation and the results of their electoral contests to their advantage. This means that when they do not

support a female candidate who wins elections, the results are manipulated to favour the male opponent. When it is one of their own, then they support her to win elections or get appointed.

It has been more difficult for women to break male dominance of elected offices at state and local levels, with some states of Northern Nigeria never producing a female state legislature or local councillor since 1999. While Benue State has elected a few women at this level, the scenario of the inability of women to maintain or expand their space in elected office has become the norm. Gwer West Local Government Area has elected women to the state legislature and the local council. One female participant in this study was once an elected councillor. To this extent, the study site has exhibited an inclination to support women's aspirations for elective offices, an openness that can be explored to expand traditional decision-making space to women. The contradictions mentioned above appear in Chapter Seven and allude to the possibility of women negotiating gender contracts at the community level for greater involvement in community leadership. Nevertheless, the national picture of low representation of women in elected office is replicated in Benue State for the reasons stated above. This impacts women's engagement with the community in the state and in my study site.

4.1.3 The educational and legal context

Education statistics for Benue State reflect the national picture with a narrow gender gap between boys and girls. While the national primary enrolment shows more girls enrolled in primary school the opposite is the case in Benue state. As shown in table 7, the gender gap between boys and girls in primary school is very narrow, with a narrow gap between boys and girls completing primary school in urban and rural areas (Table 8).

Table 7: Primary school enrolment, boys and girls at national and Benue State

Gender	National level	Benue State
Boys	85	75.2
Girls	86	74.7

Source: World Bank, 2022; NDHS,2018

Table 8: Urban and rural: Boys and girls completing primary school

Gender	Urban	Rural
Boys	10.9	10.9
Girls	11.8	10.9

Source: NDHS,2018

At the secondary school level there is a wider gender gap in the number of boys completing secondary education compared with girls especially in rural areas (see table 9). This wide gender gap is further reflected in the percentage of women and men without an education.

Table 9: Urban and rural: Boys and girls completing secondary school

Gender	Urban	Rural
Boys	24.6	14.5
Girls	22.7	9.8

Source: NDHS,2018

Table 10: Boys and girls completing primary and secondary school in Benue State, Nigeria

Gender	Completed primary school	Completed secondary school
Boys	9.0	19.9
Girls	10.7	12.7

Source: NDHS, 2018

Generally, men are better educated than women, thirty-five percent (35%) of women and twenty-two percent(22%) of men aged 15 - 49 have no formal education with urban women better educated than rural women(NPC and ICF, 2019). In Benue State, twenty-four percent of women have no education compared to twelve-point-three percent of men with no education. Education is an important factor in the human development of individuals(NPC and ICF,2019) meaning that rural women like the ones in my study are more likely to depend on another person for basic reading, writing, and numeracy thus making them vulnerable to exploitation

in their business and other endeavours. This was highlighted in the Camp Nagi producer organisation where the women had requested adult literacy classes so they could at least sign the attendance register at meetings instead of thumb printing.

In terms of leadership, education has a differing impact on women's political participation and varies between countries and regions where in some contexts it has no impact (Le and Nguyen, 2021; Oladapo, 2021). In Nigeria, several studies have argued that education is a factor determining women's participation in politics and that it will enable the change of traditional thinking that excludes women from public spaces (Oladapo, 2021; Sulieman et al, 2021; Nkereuwem, 2023). For a diverse country like Nigeria, this would have to be contextualised. In the north-central zone of Nigeria and Benue State where literacy level is high, the number of women in elective positions is low in comparison meaning education alone in this context is not a predictor of women's political participation. Thus, when it comes to participation in community decision-making, a woman's level of education will not change traditional norms but may put her in a better position to be allowed to participate. Education therefore gives women some leverage.

Looking at the legal environment and the trends that have impacted women, the normative framework for the promotion and protection of gender equality and women's rights in Nigeria are the constitution, the legislature, policies (for instance, national gender policy and the gender policy in education) as well as the international human rights and humanitarian law treaties (Sasa et al, 2022). The country however has a tripartite system of civil, customary, and religious laws, making it difficult to harmonise legislation and remove discriminatory measures. Nevertheless, the constitution provides the ultimate rules and doctrines from which other legal norms in the country derive validity (Sasa et al, 2022). This means that laws that

contradict the constitution or federal law, and policies can be contested in a federal court of law. Thus, some women have contested and obtained judgments against customary laws that disinherit women as in the Gladys Ukeje case which took thirty-three years to finally get the Supreme Court to uphold the low court's judgment that female children can inherit their father's estate (Shalom, 2023). Women contesting such customary norms are more likely to be elite wealthy women and not rural poor women like the ones in my study. Nevertheless, this provides precedence for rural women to begin to ask for a change in gender norms that exclude them from decision-making at the community level. Most importantly, there are contestations for a more inclusive cultural environment which indicates an evolving situation of expanded boundaries of possibilities for women.

One such change happened concerning access to land when the Land Use Act of 1978 placed all lands in the country in the care of governments, meaning that men and women could own land through purchase from the government. However, traditional laws of access to land persist and are stronger than statutory law at the local level (Yecho, 2016). Rural women also cannot afford to purchase farmland or constantly hire land to farm when they can get this for free through the traditional route. Some state governments such as the River State government have laws that prohibit the exclusion of females from inheriting their father's property²². This means that female children can now inherit land from their fathers. The enforcement of this law has to be evoked by women as traditional customs excluding women persist. In 2023, four sisters evoked this law and received a court ruling mandating their three brothers to distribute their father's property with the girls and awarded damages to the girls (Okonkwo, 2023). Thus, there are laws that women can evoke to challenge traditional norms of exclusion. Benue State does not have statutory legislation as in River State upholding women's right to inheritance.

²² Rivers State Prohibition of the Curtailment of Women's Rights to Share in Family Property Law No. 2 of 2022

Inheritance is governed by customary practices. Women therefore cannot inherit land. Land is considered the attestation of a Tiv man's citizenship of his community. Tiv women therefore who do not inherit land only have citizenship through their male relatives. In effect they are non-citizens and at most second-class citizens. I discuss this issue in chapter seven.

4.1.4 The sociocultural environment

Nigeria has a diverse socio-cultural environment given its over 200 ethnic groups, which are either Christian, Muslim, Traditionalist, or mixed religions. These ethnic groups are predominantly patriarchal (Onah, 2014; McLoughlin and Bouchat, 2013). Thus, certain gender norms are common and deeply entrenched such as men's superiority over women. Religious beliefs that subordinate women to men serve to further give credence and are used to justify traditional practices such as men being leaders and women not being emotionally strong to lead, thus men are tough and women weak (Suleiman et al, 2021). The Being a Man in Nigeria report (V4C, 2015), showed that while people have started shifting perceptions of women in leadership saying women can also lead. However, men and women consider men as better leaders. Thus, women are expected to obey and be controlled by husbands with men making the decisions in the home and outside the home (V4C, 2015).

Underscoring men's dominance over women is the tolerance of violence against women in intimate relationships supporting men's use of violence to ensure conformity to ideas of womanhood and a strong belief that women should put up with violence to keep the family together (V4C, 2015). This is reflected in the National Demographic Health Survey 2018 which shows that the percentage of women who had experienced physical violence since age fifteen increased from twenty-eight percent (28%) in both 2008 and 2013 to thirty-one percent (31%)

in 2018. Other studies show a general lack of tolerance for physical violence against women, which is a seeming contradiction given that intimate partner violence in marriage is tolerated. Nevertheless, what this shows is a shift in the thinking of cultural ways of gender expectations. For instance, less than forty-eight hours after the video of the ruling political party chairman in Arigidi, in Akoko Northwest Local Government Area of Ondo State, publicly beating the state commissioner for women's affairs, went viral on social media, women's rights activists organised press releases and held a protest march demanding that the man be prosecuted (Awodipe, 2023; Johnson, 2023). There was also a public outrage at his action which was his response to a disagreement. The State Party executive immediately suspended him, and the governor vowed to ensure he was prosecuted (Babajide, 2023). This shows a clear shift in public acceptance of violence against women.

Another culturally and religiously (Islam and traditional religions) accepted practice is polygyny. Even though accepted there has been a downward trend in the number of polygynous households between 1990 and 2018. In 1990, forty-one percent (41%) of women reported men had other wives compared to thirty-three (33%) in 2003 and thirty-one percent (31%) in 2018 (NPC and ICF, 2019). While there are no regional or state figures, this reduction in polygynous households was apparent among my study participants, where only a few participants were in male-headed polygynous households. Bargaining in such households is different from male-headed monogamous households and has implications for women's decision-making in the household, access, and control over assets as well as community participation. I discuss this further in chapter six. The changing socio-cultural environment means that women in my study can also act to change dominant social norms of power and gender relations.

4.2 Locating Gwer West Local Government Area

Gwer West Local Government Area is one of the twenty-three local government areas of Benue State. Benue State lies within the lower river Benue trough of North Central Nigeria and is located between 7° 47' E and 10°0' E longitude, and between 6° 25' N and 8° 8' N latitude (Ujoh et al, 2019). With a land area of 30,800 Km² Benue State was created in 1976 and the last national population census of 2006 puts its then population at 4,253,641 (NPC, 2006). With two farming seasons, the dry (November to March) and wet season (April to October), a rainfall of over 2000mm, Benue State is referred to as the 'food basket of the nation'. The state's economy is dominated by agriculture producing seventy percent of the country's soyabean as well as the largest fruit concentrate and cassava (Otitoju and Arene, 2010). Seventy-five percent of the state's predominantly rural population produces several cash crops including yam, rice, cowpea, cassava, potatoes, maize, soyabean, sorghum, millet, guinea corn, cocoyam, sesame, melon, groundnut, tomatoes. These are grown by small-scale subsistence farmers on family or hired plots (Otitoju and Arene, 2010; NIPC, 2022; Biam and Tavershima, 2020).

Marketing of farm produce takes place in local markets, controlled by the local government councils, and open to all traders and buyers, where middlemen purchase produce for storage or for agro-processors within and outside the state (Abah et al, 2015). These markets may be characterised as oligopsony, with the balance of power tilted against the farmer (Abah et al, 2015), meaning that the farmer is not part of the process of how prices of their produce are fixed. Some middlemen I spoke with informally in the Naka market said this is determined by the agro-processors. The state has other undeveloped economic potentials such as tourism, with several abandoned tourist sites such as the Ikogen cattle ranch and other potential sites like the

river Benue that traverses across the state from Cameroun ranges that border the state to its southeast (Nomishan et al, 2020).

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria with Benue state highlighted

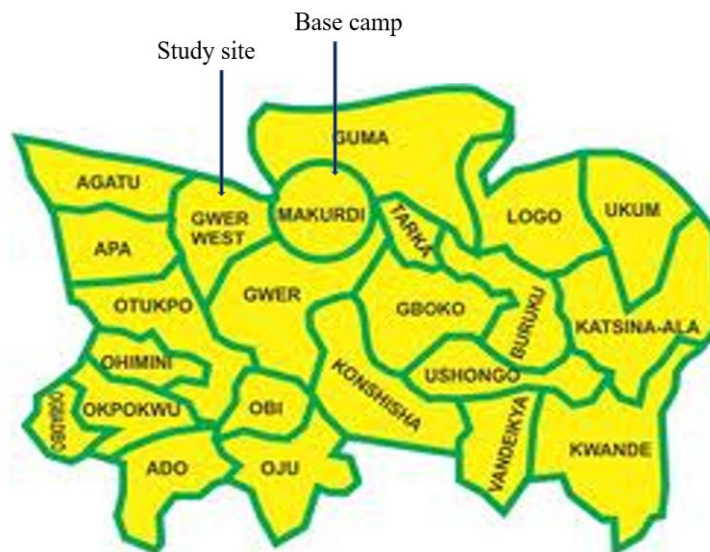


Source: ResearchGate

Gwer West Local Government Area has a land area of 456.45 sq. km, a projected population figure of 154,942 from the 2006 national population census and is located between latitudes 9 and 12°N and longitudes 6 and 9°E (Ujoh et al, 2019). Sharing its northern border with Makurdi Local Government Area means that it is located close to the state capital. Its headquarters in Naka town is located just forty kilometres along the Makurdi-Ankpa interstate road (Ekhuemelo, 2017). The area has an annual rainfall of between 1500mm to 2000mm, major crops grown in the area include rice, maize, guinea corn, sesame, yam, and soyabeans (Agada et al, 2020). Bordered to the north by the river Benue, the area has ten small rivers all draining

into the river Benue thus making fishing an occupation for some (Shabu et al, 2020). In addition to the local government headquarters, Gwer West has five other smaller towns with nucleated villages because of family settlements surrounded by their farmlands. The Tiv constitute the majority of the indigenous people with a small number of Idoma people found in one small ward as well as other Nigerian ethnicities in Naka town (Shabu et al, 2020). The primary occupation of the people as in other parts of the state is small-scale subsistence farming as well as fishermen, hunters, lumbermen, traders, and civil servants (Agada et al, 2020; Shabu et al, 2020).

Figure 2:Map of Benue state showing all 23 LGAs, Gwer West, and my fieldwork basecamp



Source: Research gate with author's additions

The profile of Gwer West Local Government Area, just like that of Benue State and other States of North Central Nigeria, and indeed of the whole country, cannot be complete without the story of the unending violent attacks of nomadic Fulani cattle herders armed with AK 47 guns against farmers. Gwer West Local Government Area has continued to suffer from the violent attacks of farmers by nomadic Fulani herdsman which have resulted not only in the loss of lives and property but also a reduction in the size and number of farms cultivated by farmers(Ogebe et al, 2019).

Genyi (2017:142-144) chronicles the herder attacks on farmers in the area from 2011 to 2014.

Between 8 and 10 February 2011, when the massive degree of attacks by Fulani herdsman began, Tiv farmers along the coast of River Benue in Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue state came under attacks by hordes of herdsman killing 19 farmers while 33 villages were burnt down. The armed attackers returned on 4 March

2011 to kill 46 people including women and children and ransacked an entire district. Between December 2010 and June 2011, more than 15 attacks were recorded resulting in the loss of over 100 lives and over 300 homesteads destroyed all in Gwer West Local Government Area. These attacks intensified in the middle of 2013 when the major road from Makurdi to Naka, the headquarters of Gwer West Local Government, was blocked by armed Fulani men after ransacking more than 6 districts along the highway. For more than a year the road remained closed as armed Fulani herdsmen held sway. From January to May 2014, scores of settlements in Guma, Gwer West, Makurdi, Gwer East, Agatu, and Logo Local Government Areas of Benue state were overwhelmed by horrendous attacks by armed Fulani herdsmen. What was obvious was the absence of state protection for the farmers while the attacks lasted. The state security personnel arrived long after the attacks had stopped - when the aggressors had disappeared.

Ogebe et al (2019) said that added to the loss of lives and property was the degradation of the land because of overgrazing by the herdsmen's cattle which exposed the land making it susceptible to erosion and difficult to cultivate. Furthermore, there is the continuing insecurity that stops farmers from accessing their larger farms in the interior. During the follow-up interviews in April of 2022, there was an incidence of herders ambushing and killing farmers, men, and women, enroute to the headquarters town of Naka in the daytime. This was supposed to be a period of peace. The killing of farmers by herders has never stopped as there continue to be pockets of reported killings, with corpses of victims as testament. Farmers had explained to me that it was always better to flee at night because poor visibility provided cover for them from armed herdsmen. However, this strategy can only be effective when there is an ongoing conflict and not when people get ambushed during periods of peace. Ogebe et al (2019), sum this up by saying that insecurity has an overall negative impact on rural agricultural development in some instances hindering the implementation of agriculture policies and programmes in areas of incessant conflicts. Farmers who would have focused on growing their farm businesses after the assistance from government or international agriculture programmes instead become internally displaced persons. I discuss in detail the impact of this unending conflict on the farmers in section 4.3 and its implication on gender relations in the study site.

4.3 The impact of violent conflicts on gender relations in the Tiv rural farming household and community

The direct and immediate effects of the farmer-herder violent conflicts in Nigeria and Gwer-West Local Government Area on farmers are the loss of lives; injury; assets and income because of the disruption of farming activities, markets, and destruction of infrastructure; forced displacement, and migration as well as gender-based violence. (Ikezue, and Ezeah, 2017; Genyi, 2017; Buvinic et al, 2013). The numbers of lives lost in farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria are generally reported without disaggregation thus it is difficult to approximate the numbers of men and women, boys and girls killed (Muhammed et al, 2022; Unah, 2018; Ikezue and Ezeah, 2017; Buvinic et al, 2013;). This makes it difficult to determine how many widows and female-headed households are a result of these conflicts. The creation of single-headed female households is one outcome of violent conflicts as men either get killed at the war front or defending their communities (ICG, 2018). Nevertheless, this can be determined by research to identify how many single-head households were created as a result of a conflict in each community. In my study, male-headed households are the predominant type of household with very few female-headed households even among the two producer organisations who reported fleeing their homes during the conflicts. This suggests that these people fled their homes before the herders arrived or that the men survived the conflict.

Closely linked to this displacement is the loss of labour not just for the households but for the community as a whole. Young labour is lost when the majority of the young people displaced from their villages to the towns do not return (Ogebe et al, 2019). Buvinic et al (2013) corroborate this when they say one of the impacts of violent conflict on communities is the loss of young labour either to death or migration. This is further exacerbated among my study

participants as most people I interviewed had townhouses or rented rooms in the local government headquarters where their children remained and went to school. Only suckling babies were in the villages with their parents. Older children who would normally work on farms with their parents after school or at the weekend can no longer do so, thus their labour is also lost. Townhouses also make it easier for young adults not to return to the village as they have adequate housing in town. This means that farmers are forced to cultivate smaller plots even when they return to their villages because of a lack of farm labour. Farmers interviewed spoke about the continuing threats of attack by nomadic herders and how they cannot access their large farms that are further away from the homestead (Aluko, 2020). Members of the Camp Nagi producer organisation for example explained that they started returning to the town in 2019 to spend a few days. Before this, they only went to the town in the daytime to work on their farms near the homestead before quickly returning to the local government headquarters town of Naka. Farmers who have returned to their villages and small towns said they are constantly on the alert and watching out for unusual movements of Fulani herdsmen. The Ak-47-carrying herdsmen continue to graze openly in the area in flagrant contravention of the state government's 'Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law 2017', referred to as the 'anti-open grazing law'.

A key loss for farmers has been the inability and restriction (as discussed above) to access family land and having to restart farming in their new localities. This means that farmers incur a loss of income and are further impoverished because they have to rent farmlands in other parts of the local government area or the state thus increasing their overhead costs (ICG, 2018). Renting of such farmlands was done by the men for the wives' yam farms while the men also had their farms. This was in keeping with the traditional responsibility of the man to provide farmland for his wife (Ola, 2020; Yecho, 2016). One respondent, for instance, said he rents land

for both wives, and each has her yam farm while he has his farm growing cash crops. The man's role as protector and provider for his family was thus not completely disrupted for my research participants except where incomes decreased because of farming smaller acreage due to the cost of rent and availability of farmland. Gender relations in the household may therefore basically remain unchanged in the sense of women becoming the main source of economic income for the household as reported in other areas of violent conflict. As Kabeer(2011) says changes in the overall socioeconomic and political environment always impact the family even if it is not visible. These conflicts can therefore be said to have some indiscernible impact on gender relations within the household. There is a dearth of literature on the impact of violent conflict on intra-household relationships and dynamics(Buvinic et al, 2013). For my participants, however, it seemed that at the time of interviews, they had recovered some of their losses in terms of assets and productive inputs lost during the conflict and had restarted live. What this means as seen in their responses in the empirical chapters, is the return to the prevailing norm of gender relations in the household.

At the community level, because of concerns for safety when the people return, women may not be involved in security discussions as the study participants explained. Women are therefore less likely to participate nor request for permission to participate. As the male participants explained women cannot be involved in community security meetings because they cannot keep secrets and discussing strategies with other women will jeopardise such plans. This means that securing the community is considered a male responsibility. This is corroborated by the International Crisis Group(2022) report that said most vigilante groups battling armed insurgents tend to be male-dominated. This masculine definition of protector is further evidenced in the minimal role women play in post-conflict peacebuilding despite the multiple ways in which conflict affects them (Afolabi,2022). Perhaps this is because there are no

reported cases of women's involvement in vigilante groups protecting the community, who would then demand to be at such community meetings. El-Bushara and Gardner (2016) have argued that in times of violent conflict where governments fail to provide the avenue where men can portray their masculine identities, men tend to join traditional groups, and communities revert to traditional practices to provide protection and uphold their masculine identities. This means that these conflicts could reinforce the exclusion of women from community decision-making processes as men deal with the loss and limited space to work.

At the time of fieldwork, people in Gwer West Local Government Area had returned to their villages but children were left in the townhouses. My interview with the Camp Nagi producer organisation was held in the community. Some members of the Greenfield producer organisation however remained in town and only went home to farm because their village was further in the interior. The forced migration meant that the Camp Nagi and Greenfield producer organisations could not continue to meet in their localities. While this situation disrupted producer organisation meetings, none of the four groups were functional at the time of fieldwork. In Camp Nagi for, instance, I met an active women's group established by an extension worker to participate in a contract farming scheme consisting of some of the women who were members of the MII producer organisation. The inactive MII producer organisations could have resumed meetings even while in the town to act collectively to access government relief packages for displaced persons for their group members. This would have kept them active.

Chapter 5: ‘We are sleeping because we have no one to help us’: Producer organisations as platforms for women’s empowerment

We were invited to join the MII project by our son who lives in the state capital and had contact with the new project

FGD participants, Menagbe Women’s producer organisation

The extension worker told us about this new project that was going to focus on soyabeans and invited us to join as a group. But because membership of this producer organisation was limited to twenty-five people, we had to select women from the larger group to constitute this small sub-group so we could be networked with MMII

55-year-old leader, Mbabuande Women’s producer organisation

These two quotes sum up the popular routes for inviting farmers to establish producer organisations often by an extension assistant acting on behalf of an agriculture intervention project (Abdulrahman and Abdullai, 2018; Othman et al, 2020; Bijman, J. and Wijers, 2019; Porter and Zovighian, 2014; Chikwendu,1997; Ortmann and King, 2007; Wanyama,2008; Develtere,2009; Enete, 2009). I argue in this chapter that the nature of the establishment of producer organisations determines their survival post-intervention and therefore how it empowers rural female farmers. I examine different elements of the MARKETS II intervention and its potential for pushing boundaries of limitations and empowering women. Thus, following on from the pathways of empowerment presented in chapter two, I explore these various pathways of empowerment and what changes occurred in the women’s lives and actions.

In this chapter, therefore, section 5.1, presents the various types of formal and informal groups in the study context in which female farmers participated before engagement with MARKETS II. Participation in groups is an indicator of women’s empowerment included in several measurement indices. This section thus provides some foregrounding of the context within

which MARKETS II established its producer organisations. Section 5.2 examines two pathways of women's empowerment, the building of the capacity of the producer organisation and training on agronomic practices. Section 5.3 continues with the discussion on pathways by focusing on the role of frontline intermediaries' engagement with the producer organisations. In section 5.4, I focus on building relationships among members and establishing support structures for the producer organisations as pathways for women's empowerment. I go on in section 5.4 to examine the state of the post-MARKETS II producer organisations, in which I found them, and what factors are responsible for this.

Drawing from my data, and triangulating with the relevant literature, this chapter responds to and answers my first research question which is, '**Are producer organisations instrumental for the empowerment of rural female farmers, *interdiu* and *ex-post* an agriculture project?**'. I found that the producer organisations failed to thrive after the MII project exited, and neither were they able to transform into arenas for the nurturing of the power of its female members to question gender inequality in the household and the community. They only enabled women to access new agronomic technology which increased the productivity of their soyabean farms resulting in increased income.

5.1 Formal and informal women's groups in Gwer-West Local Government Area

The discourse on women's empowerment including various measurement indexes such as the WEAI, and pro-WEAI have membership of groups as an indicator of women's empowerment. In my study site, membership, and participation in women's groups as well as other mixed groups is part of the fabric of the community. Women can join various local groups of their choice as long as they meet the criteria and are accepted in the groups. These groups range

from the women's labour groups providing farm labour services for hire, the savings and loans groups comprising the rotational savings and credit associations to the church women's fellowship groups.

Church-based women's fellowships are faith-based in local churches and provide spiritual teaching and guidance for members. Membership in a particular church is thus the criteria for membership in these faith-based groups. With well-laid-down structures, members elect women to leadership on a rotational basis. These leaders are women committed to the church doctrine, the group, and are of good standing in the community. Focusing on spiritual matters, evangelism, and service, these fellowships also provide support for each other when a member is in need, organise sensitisation meetings for women on issues such as nutrition, health, and other matters affecting women, their homes, faith, and community (Tengatenga,2018). These women's groups support institutions within the church such as the diocese, and seminaries, handle catering for all church functions such as ordinations of priests, marriages, burials and are an active part of the church(Okure, 2021). Faith-based groups also provide access to resources for their members including social capital and networks (Takyi and Lamptey, 2020). The number of such church-based women's groups in a locality depends on the number of local churches in an area.

The women's labour groups comprise women from the same extended family or neighbours who provide cheaper labour on members' farms but charge non-members higher to generate revenue for the group. Participants in my study explained that all money from such labour is pooled and shared equally between all members who were in the work groups at the end of the year. The women's labour groups in my study discussed in Chapter 7, operated two schemes. One was the farm labour for hire and the second was the savings and credit scheme. Women

can participate in either one or both schemes. They are entitled to dividends only in the scheme in which they participated. These groups exist in rural communities. In large extended families, there could be more than two or three such groups. Leadership is often elected on a rotational basis from among the members. They are informal groups.

The loans and credit multipurpose societies as well as the rotational savings and credit associations are privately owned and usually, the person who set up the group remains in leadership. These groups are self-selecting meaning that you must be known and trusted sufficiently in the community to be invited to join the group because of the money that it handles (Lukwa et al, 2022). Amounts saved may be agreed upon or dependent on an individual's income meaning that members of a savings scheme will have different amounts of savings as this is dependent on what extra income they have. A member's savings determines how much they can borrow from the scheme (Meysonnat et al, 2022; Osundu, 2015; Oraro and Wyss, 2018; Lukwa et al, 2022). In rotating savings and loan schemes, an agreed amount is contributed by each member at the agreed time (weekly, monthly), and money collected is then given to a member. This goes around all members, thus providing them with capital to invest (Lukwa et al, 2022; Osundu, 2015; Oraro and Wyss, 2018). In other types of savings and loan schemes contributions are returned to members annually plus any interest accruing from interest on loans and fines (Lukwa et al, 2022; Osundu, 2015; Oraro and Wyss, 2018). In my study context, the female farmers belong to savings schemes that return money to contributors at the end of the year before Christmas. This was the type of savings scheme the women's labour groups operated and was open to women in the extended family and community. Research shows that in female-headed households these savings are used to meet household needs such as food while in male-headed households it was for emergencies. Households therefore save to invest, a safety net for financial crises, accidents, illness, pregnancy, job loss,

and divorce(Meysonnat et al, 2022;Osundu, 2015; Lukwa et al, 2022). Even though these loans and savings groups provide an important financial service for rural communities, they have been found to have high drop-out rates because of low intra-group trust and poor governance which inhibits groups' capacity to provide each other large amounts of collective savings for fear it will not be paid back or lost because of poor governance(Meysonnat et al, 2022).

MII was thus engaging with women and men who had some form of informal group experience and participation. This experience could have had a positive or negative impact on the farmers' engagement with MII. The women thus engaged with MII with awareness and experience of what will be expected of them to ensure the success of the intervention in terms of commitment to the organisation.

5.2 Building the capacity of producer organisations and training in agronomic practices

Training and building the capacity of women's groups to respond to emerging issues and act collectively as a group to expand the boundaries of their possibilities are two theoretical pathways of change that have been identified in the research and discourse on women's empowerment(Cornwall, 2016; Nguyen-Phung and Nthenya, 2023). In the process of developing the power to act collectively(the power with), women would develop the 'power within' and the 'power to'. The power to act collectively presupposes that there are elements of the development of these two types of power. In this section, I look at building the capacity of producer organisations and agronomic training as pathways of empowerment employed by the MII intervention.

5.2.1 Networking producer organisations with MARKETS II (MII)

Farmers' producer organisations were MII's platform for engagement with local farmers. These producer organisations were either all-female or mixed groups. Extension assistants employed by MII local implementing partners oversaw the identification and selection of these groups. Extension assistants using their knowledge and contacts in assigned localities invited 'existing' groups of farmers or individual farmers to join or establish groups so they could be networked with the project. These existing groups did not necessarily have to be active to be invited. New producer organisations were established only in the absence of existing groups to network or to meet the required numbers of groups. The MII gender and capacity-building expert I interviewed explained that in localities without youth groups to network, extension assistants and capacity building experts would encourage young farmers to establish such groups. This was to ensure that the project met its mandate of reaching young farmers and women. Extension assistants and community gatekeepers could thus invite individual farmers to set up a group to network with MII. The gender and capacity building expert explained that even though there was a focus on the inclusion of women and young farmers, the important criterium for selection was that the farmer, as well as the group, was interested in increasing their yield, farming soyabeans or rice which were MII's crops for Benue State. Farmers groups, therefore, did not have to be farming the project's crops at the point of contact but only had to consent to farm these crops to get networked. For instance, the MII female extension assistant I interviewed worked with a cooperative that was a cassava processing group but with MII, the group farmed soybeans alongside their main cassava activity.

As Extension assistants enter a community and introduce the project to the gatekeepers, the gatekeepers invite the people to collaborate with you on your project so you can get the results. They know their people better than you an outsider

Gender and capacity building expert, female, MII local implementation partner

The only groups the extension assistants did not approach were religious /church-based groups even though these are always active wherever there is a church. Accessing communities through local contacts and gatekeepers, with extension assistants themselves being local gatekeepers ensured that committed farmers and their groups were networked with MII. This however did not mean that all groups and farmers networked were committed to farming the target crop as any person could present themselves as a farmer if the community does not contradict their claims. This was my experience as I tried to locate one of the MII producer organisations on my study list. My team and I could not find a single person in the organisation's locality who would point us to a member of the organisation. Rather we were told the group's location was further in the interior and that the area was not safe. This was an indication that the people who constituted this producer organisation were dubious, thus locals did not want to get in their bad books by pointing them to us despite our explanation that we were doing research and not associated with MII or any other project. This contrasted with the other groups who were willing to meet with me. There is always a possibility that committed farmers would be overlooked especially if there is a conflict between them and community gatekeepers or they do not have any links with the extension assistant responsible for their locality. Interpersonal relationships thus play a significant role in the inclusion of farmers and farmers' groups in agriculture projects (Porter and Zovighian, 2014; Liverpool-Tasie, 2014).

On how to reach farmers, Extension assistants were given an open slate, we were to bring in farmers in hard-to-reach places as well as encourage women to participate. So, as an extension assistant, I am equipped to reach farmers and get them to take part as I have collaborated with farmers in this locality for a long time. So, we educated farmers on the benefits of the intervention, and they accepted our invitation, and we networked them

Extension assistant, male, Benue State ADP

The four groups I researched, were invited, and networked by extension assistants as well as through individual contacts who introduced them to the MII project. The Mbabuande Women's multipurpose group is an existing group of wives of the community that meets once a month. A member was approached by her husband to invite the group to join the MII project. The extension assistant also knew this group. Membership of the soyabean producers' organisation that emerged from this larger women's group consisted only of twenty-five registered members drawn from the larger group even though meetings of the soyabean producer organisation were open to all members of the larger group. The second all-female producer organisation, the Menagbe women's producer organisation, was also an existing women's community group that ended up like the Mbabuande women's group with some of its members registered as the soyabean farming women's producer organisation networked to the MII project (Bijman and Wijers,2019). This group was introduced to MII by a member of the community living in the state capital. He also selected the women who became members of the soyabean producer organisation. This was confirmed by a member identified by the group as inactive for not attending group meetings who said she was invited to the group by this man. She did not take part in group meetings as she lived in town but only attended MII trainings as she got her invitations to meetings from her contact. The Menagbe women's producer organisation surprisingly had male members, who explained that they only got on the membership list because when they took their wives for training, they sat in and got registered to make up the numbers. In my FGD with the men, I found they expressed themselves more confidently about the project than the women. They explained that as members of the all-female producer organisation they only supported the women by reminding them of what was taught if they forgot as well as doing the heavy farm work on their group farm. Both women's producer organisations, were a sub-group of an existing group that was convened to engage with MII. They were thus ad hoc arrangements created simply to interact with MII. For the Menagbe

women's producer organisation, the male contact had power over the women and what they did. For instance, the inactive member always attended training because he informed her of meeting dates, yet she never attended group meetings. This had implications for group cohesion and development. Porter and Zovighian (2014) also found this behind-the-scenes control of women's farmers' groups in the FADAMA II project in Southwest Nigeria especially where men had given the women money to use as counterpart funding to access equipment from the programme. Decision-making in such groups is therefore done by the men as the women must run their plans by the men. This simply replicates gender roles and norms of the community and the households.

I was invited by one of the sons of the community who heard about MII and told us to join. We already had the Menagbe women's group before MII. Only the women whose names he wrote attended trainings as members of the organisation
45-year-old, leader Menagbe women's producer organisation.

On the other hand, the two mixed producer organisations, I interviewed, were contacted by extension assistants who knew of their existence, accessed the groups through its leadership, invited the group to farm soyabeans, and networked them with MII. These two mixed groups, the Camp Nagi producer organisation, and the Green Field producer organisation were existing groups prior to contact with MII and both claimed to have been active at the time of contact with MII. Soyabeans was not the groups' main crop prior to contact with MII but both groups agreed to grow soyabeans. Accepting to grow soyabeans in addition to their main crop was not unusual as the farmers explained that it was their practice to take on new grains which had the potential to attract a high price.

A producer organisation or an individual farmer could be invited to several projects by extension assistants or individuals who know them. For instance, the active member I

interviewed in the Mbabuande women's producer organisation was invited (as an individual) in 2020 to join a cassava project where the women would grow cassava exclusively in a contract farming arrangement. Agriculture projects both local and international, have created a culture where farmers take part in any agriculture project that invites them, simply for the immediate benefits. While this willingness to participate is not bad, it becomes counterproductive especially when producer organisations do not survive post interventions because farmers were not committed to these organisations. The Menagbe women's producer organisation, for instance, met only a few times as a group during the intervention, members were more focused on attending MII trainings, which was an immediate benefit of the project as farmers also received lunch and a transport allowance at the training.

For women, the failure of organisations to survive post-project means opportunities for nurturing platforms for collective action to address issues of interest whether economic or social are lost. Stringfellow et al (1997), in their research, reported this same attitude of farmers belonging to a producer organisation simply because membership was a means to receiving a free benefit, in his case a truck. An EU-funded horticultural marketing project in Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe, decided to establish farmers' associations to manage trucks in response to the project's identified constraint. The farmers were not interested in the association which they perceived as a means to receive a free truck as a project evaluation concluded that the farmers' associations were not profitable or sustainable. This suggests a lack of genuine farmer commitment and cooperation to projects thus reducing the probability of the producer organisation's surviving post-project. Ajah(2015) also reports a lack of farmer commitment and motivation as one of the challenges to the survival of producer organisations.

In networking farmers' producer organisations to projects, some farmers are invited just to make up the numbers (Chikwendu,1997; Bijman and Wijers,2019). These individual farmers invited by extension assistants and local contacts may not necessarily be the right fit for these organisations but have enabled the extension assistant to tick his or her boxes. This may change group dynamics and cohesion as 'padded' members may not be committed to the organisation or may become very dominant and subjugate other members. In the Menagbe women's producer organisation, for example, men became members to make up numbers at training events. Two things are likely to happen where men's names are added to make up numbers in a women's group. First, opportunities that were meant for women are lost and colonised by men as these men occupy spaces meant for females thus blocking other community women from been invited to participate in a space meant for them. Secondly, because of the gendered nature of the community, the power dynamics shift instantly in favour of the men with the women letting them take charge. The men in this women's organisation took on the responsibility to remind women of what was taught at the training when they forgot thus placing them in a superior leadership position even though they held no offices. A potential space for women to develop their 'power within and power with' was lost as the men became the advisers. Yet, this is not uncommon as men provide support for women's organisations assisting them with funds, and financial and administrative tasks such as budgeting and financial reporting. Porter and Zovighan (2014), point out that this type of support is beneficial for women's farmer organisations whose members have low literacy, limited financial capacity, and are elderly. Identifying young literate women to support such groups thus building their capacity as leaders would have been a better strategy. But more interesting was why the project allowed this to happen and why the benefactor did not select other women in the community to make up the numbers thereby allowing men to fill the gap. This is the type of influence men have on women's groups which Porter and Zovighan (2014) referred to when

they said that membership in agriculture projects is determined by a person's social network and whether or not they are in the good books of the gatekeepers. However, if the men provide the money to enable these groups to access counterpart funding, then the men retain all power over these women's groups. This helps women to achieve empowerment at the welfare level but becomes a constraint for women's conscientisation and ability to take control as they will keep asking men for advice and never develop self-confidence in their ability to take and act on their decisions as an organisation to address gender inequality. As female farmers' organisations remain dependent on men (Farnworth, et al, 2020), the possibility of renegotiating gender relations diminishes. Men for instance continue to play the leadership roles assigned to them by the community even in women's producer organisations, while women continue to justify this based on their gendered identity as the ones that do not lead men. The situation has implications for women not just in their attempt to enter male-dominated traditional decision-making spaces at the community level but even in taking actions to educate themselves and develop an opinion about gender relations in the households and community.

These two routes of accessing rural farmers and setting up cooperatives create challenges of participation and management which often leads to the disintegration of rural organisations (Sellare et al, 2023; Othman et al, 2020; Abdulrahman and Abdullahi, 2018; Chikwendu, 1991). For instance, illiterate farmers in an organisation run by inaccessible elite leaders could withdraw because promised benefits such as loans are not reaching them even though they provide all the labour on group farms (Chikwendu, 1991). Several authors have also made this point positing that the process of establishing producer organisations is often instigated by outsiders (Sellare et al, 2023; Bijman and Wijers, 2019; Abdulrahman and Abdullahi, 2018; Othman et al, 2020; Shiferaw et al, 2011) with Shiferaw et al (2011) saying that rural farmers rarely organise on a formal level independently. This is true for the female producer organisations I interviewed while the mixed producer organisations claimed to have

been in existence before MII but were inactive at the point of my contact with them. Kabeer(2011) points out how women's groups that decide what crops to grow are more likely to thrive than those who are compelled to plant a particular crop. Producer Organisations therefore that do not emerge from a membership initiative or take on a membership driven agenda will struggle to survive. Desta (1995) highlighted the dangers of such foundations, pointing out that farmer producer organisations developing from external stimuli rather than from their initiative were less likely to survive. For the producer organisations in this study, the dangers of external stimuli are further worsened in the case of the two all-female organisations. As sub-groups of existing community women's groups, these producer organisations established by the instance of an external stimulus were ad hoc in nature, subordinated to the main group, and bound by the rules of representation of the main group. Survival post MII for these two women's groups was therefore less likely to happen compared to the mixed groups. I examine the implications of external stimulus for the establishment of farmers' producer organisations in section 5.4 on the post-MII producer organisations.

All four producer organisations were either rural(Menagbe Women's Producer Organisation and Camp Nagi Producer Organisation) or semi-urban-based (Mbabuande Women's Producer Organisation and Greenfield Producer Organisation). The location did not change the manner of identifying and networking the groups. Furthermore, all the semi-urban-based organisations farmed in their ancestral homes in the interior where they had free land. Only farmers who rented land did not go back to their rural villages but went to other rural locations.

5.2.2 Building the capacity of the producer organisations

One of MII's interactions with farmers involved working with farmers to develop their capability to successfully manage the producer organisation as a business venture. Members of producer organisations received training and guidance from capacity-building experts, who visited their organisations helping them to put in place systems for the functioning of the groups. These included record keeping and establishment of simple conflict resolution mechanisms as well as ensuring that conflicts were resolved. The conflict resolution mechanism encouraged members to ask questions of leaders when they do not understand issues and need clarification instead of staying away from the group meetings and activities. Leaders were encouraged to share information and be transparent. Ensuring that groups functioned properly was necessary to set the stage for the work of extension assistants and agronomists, as these experts could not do their jobs properly with a dysfunctional organisation. Capacity-building experts carried out some of these trainings and resolved some conflicts as their voices lent credence to explanations from leaders. For instance, in reiterating the criteria for attending MII training.

We held trainings with them in their groups, helped to structure the groups, and set up systems

Gender and capacity building expert, female, MII local implementation partner

One of my responsibilities was to ensure that there was cohesion and unity among members and that they were working as a group with all members, keeping records, and if there were any issues, facilitating conversations with them to resolve the problems. I made sure the group functioned properly and was ready for extension assistants and other trainers

Capacity building expert, male, MII local implementing partner

Interestingly none of the producer organisations I interviewed mentioned the aspect of organisational capacity building which was the foundation for MII's work with the organisations. The fact that they wittingly or unwittingly failed to mention this suggests that they did not consider it to be very important. Another reason could be, that the producer organisations I interviewed did not receive organisational capacity building which is unlikely as they all reported attending trainings organised by MII. Yet another reason for their silence could be that even though they reported holding meetings, they never took these trainings seriously and thus did not recall what they learned and decided not to mention it or completely forgot the capacity-building sessions. This silence is an indicator that farmers were not really interested in cooperating but saw the producer organisation as a means to get immediate benefits from MII (Stringfellow et al, 1997).

A missing element of the MII training was the lack of a specific leadership training component even though there were capacity-building meetings held with the groups, none of the capacity-building experts reported that there was specific training for leaders to develop their leadership skills. Rowlands (1997) explains that the expansion of the issues focused on and the development of a membership-driven agenda in a group was dependent on a strong visionary leader. Cornwall's (2016), example of the regeneration of the women's group, SAPTAGUM in Bangladesh further exemplifies strong and visionary leadership that drew from previously conscientised members and the power of relationships that had been cultivated to revive the organisation after the demise of its founder-leader. This makes the development of leadership skills that encompass gender and power relations awareness training a critical need to enable the development of group capacity to begin to question gender inequality, discuss how to address such situations, and enable women to develop the 'power within' and the 'power with' to act.

There are two other missing elements in building organisational capacity. The first was the failure to link the organisational capacity development training and the agronomic training even though trainers knew that this was part of preparing the ground for the agronomic training. Leaders and members would have taken it more seriously if the organisational capacity building training was a pre-condition for accessing the agronomic training. Secondly, was the lack of content that would have built their understanding of civic and human rights which could have resulted in critical thinking about their rights and gender relations. Cornwall(2016) opines that programmes that have a component of building critical consciousness of women have a higher possibility of success. This expands women's thinking so they can break limiting boundaries of gender and power relations in their households and community. Thus, adding the dimension of transformation to an intervention whose focus is solely economic.

5.2.3 Agronomic Training

The new technology introduced to the farmers included improved seeds (non-shattering higher-yield varieties), fertilizer application, inoculation of seeds before planting, spacing, harvest techniques to improve soil, and bee pollination service pilots(Chemonics, 2017). These technologies were introduced to the farmers through trainings that were delivered in an easy-to-understand format which was picture-based ensuring that regardless of educational level all farmers could understand the material (Chemonics, 2017). The training was divided into three phases yearly during the pre-season (planning, land selection, seed selection, ploughing); in-season (use of agrochemicals, weed killer, and crop management); and harvest/post-harvest (reaping and post-harvest handling) (Chemonics, 2017). This training was done through

interactive sessions, by the extension assistant and lead farmers of the producer organisations at demonstration plots enabling the farmers to have hands-on experience.

The training was comprehensive and in stages so farmers understood and could apply. Farmers were taught site selection, planting, application of fertilizer, weeding, harvesting, threshing, and winnowing. Even though they were farmers, they were still taught how to plant

Extension assistant, male, Benue State ADP

The expected outcome of this training was that farmers would adopt the new technologies and achieve increased yields from their soybean farms. This would in turn lead to increased incomes which the project had hoped would improve the standard of living for both male and female farmers(MacNamara et al, 2019).

If they keep using the new farming methods, this would be good because there were good testimonials of increased yields and incomes during the project

Gender and Capacity building specialist, female, MII local implementation partner

The testimonials of the positive impact (in terms of increased yields) of these different trainings were unanimous across all four producer organisations. These trainings were what all farmers reported as what MII taught them, no one forgot this. This is understandable because it related directly to their farming and results were immediate as against training meant to build producer organisations to function effectively. The farmers generally agreed that farming soyabean with the new methods increased their incomes as they had more money because of higher yield and heavier beans which attracted a higher price. This was part of the MII model to identify the variety of grain required by the agro-processor and get local farmers to produce aimed at selling

to these processors. Farmers decided whether to sell directly to the agro-processor at an agreed fixed price or to sell in the open market (Chemonics, 2017). Women who applied the new methods MII taught them, reported that they have even doubled the size of their farms with one woman, who kept emphasising her widowhood status, saying she has a large soyabean farm as she and her sons provide all the labour. The labour of her two sons enabled her to cultivate a large piece of land. Without this labour she would have been constrained to cultivate a smaller piece of land.

If not because of covid-19, my son would have been at the university now; another son has bought a motorbike, and I still have soybean to sell later and use as seed for this year's (2021) farming

45- year- old Female member of Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

Iwuchukwu and Beeior's (2018), study confirms these findings. MII soyabean farmers in their study which were conducted in eight local government areas of Benue State said that the new technologies taught by MII were efficient and better than their traditional practices. As with my participants, Iwuchukwu and Beejor (2018) also reported that farmers described the new soyabean variety introduced by MII as good and readily available to all networked farmers. My respondents said this soyabean variety was better than other varieties they had planted before MII. The other soyabean varieties' had weak pods that burst at maturity and harvest leading to high grain loss. The new seed variety introduced by MII is described as 'rubber-rubber' by the farmers because of its ability to remain intact at maturity and even during harvest thus eliminating loss of grain at these two stages of production. This corroborates MII's report of the introduction of non-shattering seed variety (McNamara, et al, 2019).

Evidence of this impact of new technologies is captured in my participants' description of what increased incomes were used for. Women in the two types of producer organisations and regardless of location and household type, reported that increased incomes from soyabean production were used to meet household needs such as clothing, school fees, buying soup ingredients, and purchase of clothes for husbands, contributing to the needs of the extended family as well as investing in other trading activities. Overall, they(women and men) said this increased income freed them from the stress that they were constantly under for lack of money to meet household needs. Money from the soyabean farm was also used to buy inputs for the next farming season so they could apply pesticides and fertilizers at the right time for each stage of production to ensure a good harvest. The first things women used increased incomes for were household needs such as school fees for children, clothing, soup ingredients, and investing in trade. This corroborates the literature that says women in sub-Saharan African households are responsible for household needs recalling Ekejiuba's (1995) concept of the hearth-hold where each woman is responsible for providing the food and needs of her hearth-hold. The hearth-hold being the woman's children and all persons in her 'hut'. Bohannan and Bohannan (1968) reported that women in Tiv households feed their children, and husbands as well as meet the needs of the children with income from the sale of their yams. Burfisher and Horenstein (1985) added that while female farmers provided for their children's food and needs, the men also contributed to these needs from their farms.

The male farmers I interviewed, said their increased incomes were used to do several other things in addition to what was mentioned by women. These included building peaceful homes because there was more money to take care of family needs, changing the house roofing from thatch to zinc roofing sheets, buying mattresses for the family, and motorbikes for themselves. Motorbikes are the main means of transportation for rural farmers in these communities and

are used for personal transportation as well as for public transportation businesses. Owning a motorcycle also saves the family the cost of moving produce to the markets. Men had more money from their farms as evidenced in their taking on more capital-intensive projects. Men have direct access to more land than women and could also count on the additional labour of their wives on their farms. MacNamara et al (2019), corroborate what men in my study said about using their additional funds for the family. Of interest is the fact that the men in my study control the sale and use of money from cash crops such as soyabeans even if the woman has her soyabean farm as I discuss in Chapter 6. Only in female-headed households did the women control the sale and use of funds from soyabean farms. The MII training also enabled the farmers to better calculate their investments, what they sell, and their profit and loss concerning their soyabean farm. Prior to MII, the farmers said they did not pay attention to this. This raises the question of what the mixed producer organisations who said they were in existence before contact with MII, were doing if they did not even teach their members to keep expenditure, profit, and loss accounts of their farming. One reason for this could be that these producer organisations were not active at the time MII identified and networked them even though they claimed to be.

Even though all respondents said MII training on new technologies was positive, not all farmers had a happy story about the impact of the application of the new MII technology. This was not because of the new technology but due to poor rains. These farmers said they had a poor yield and struggled to make a profit as poor rains had damaged the crop in the last farming season(2020). All farmers agreed that poor rains in the last season affected all their crops, so the yield was poor. Additionally, the low price of soyabeans discouraged them from farming it but with the higher prices especially in 2020 and 2021, they will farm soyabeans in 2022. Another concern was that the new method of planting soyabeans was seen as an added burden

for women. Women in two FGDs in different producer organisations and a significant other of an active member of a mixed producer organisation said the new method of planting soyabean is waist-breaking and time-consuming. Women do not have the time to spend doing this, so once contact with MII ended they went back to the old practice of broadcasting their seeds. They however continued to use other aspects of the new technology such as fertilising and weeding the soyabean farm. This was corroborated by one of the extension assistants who said manual planters would reduce the drudgery of planting²³ for women. In their study, Iwuchukwu and Beeior (2018), also highlighted this same factor, of some technology not being cost-effective as well as burdensome such as fertilizing farms before ploughing and planting the seed in a straight line. This is what my participants described as waist breaking and time-consuming for women. Women's access to relevant technology is one of the gender gaps in agriculture where women do not have the money to buy labour-saving devices nor access to credit to do so. Furthermore, technology especially for land preparation, weeding, drying, and energy is usually either too heavy or inappropriate for women as these have tended to be designed for men's physiques (Bryan and Mekonnen, 2023; Guyer, 2016). If women are not adapting new planting technologies or keep farm size small even where they have access to land, interest, and commitment to membership of producer organisations may be affected as this would further add to their time burden with little benefit to show for the time spent at meetings.

If there are farm implements that will ease the work of women such as a manual planter, it will encourage them to practice the new methods of planting, otherwise, they go back to the old methods of broadcasting which is less labour intensive

Capacity building expert, male, MII local implementation partner

²³ MII did not have the provision of such farm technology to farmers groups in its project. This is what an active introspective producer organisation would have addressed, the purchase and rent to members at subsidized rates manual planters. The producer organisation may have even been able to get MII to purchase more if it had a well thought out strategy

In addition to the agronomic training, the MII programme created linkages between agro-processors and farmers. This was to open new market for farmers and provide a direct source of raw material supplies for the processors. The new seed variety introduced to farmers was the variety of grain these processors required for their industries.

While the producer organisations were all given information about the soyabean processor to whom they could sell their produce, farmers in all four producer organisations said MII did not bring them a buyer. The women of Mbabuande women's producer organisation for instance said that MII should have introduced the agro-processor to them by taking them to the processors' factory. Therefore, her advice for new interventions was that they connect farmers to the buyers and not abandon them to the open market with no alternative buyer than the regular middlemen like MII did. They said this lack of an alternate buyer was the reason they abandoned their group farm which eventually contributed to the organisation becoming inactive as they had no reason to stay together. Interestingly the soyabean processor buys from whoever approaches them and because of engagement with MII, they even buy one measure(2kg) of grain especially from women because of their need for quality soyabeans to meet the high demand for their products. The managing director explained that the company does not have buyers in the market, so farmers take their produce to the factory. Taking their produce to the processor, therefore, did not require a special introduction from MII. A more plausible reason for why they did not take their soyabeans to the processor is the one given by members of the Greenfield mixed producer organisation. They explained that the cost of transporting goods to the processor three to four hours away by road does not make financial sense. It is a better financial decision to sell in the local market which is closer to them thus keeping transportation overheads at the barest minimum.

A key reason for reaching farmers through producer organisations was to enable farmers to become more business oriented in their farming and to have a platform on which to aggregate their commodities and access identified processors. This would reduce individual overhead costs including the purchase of inputs such as fertilizer (Chemonics, 2017). These organisations were also to be learning platforms for farmers. This would ensure that there was always someone close from whom others could seek guidance on applying farming techniques taught by MII. In other words, MII was hoping to nurture mini-extension agents in each producer organisation, experts on specific crops such as soyabeans. Farmers' testimonials in the FGDs and interviews conducted corroborated this with all attesting that they learned new technologies, applied them, and saw an increase in yield from the same plots of land that had produced much less before contact with MII. Female farmers as well as male farmers reported that the new ways of planting soyabeans changed their farming techniques and new knowledge was also applied to other crops. Empowerment for women from this was thus in the access to new knowledge and to increased yield resulting in increased income both of which are at the lowest rungs of Longwe's (1991)'s employment framework. Gender roles and relations did not change to the extent that men controlled the soyabeans from the women's farms, deciding when to sell and what to do with the money. Training on new agronomic practices did not include civic and human rights components. There were thus no deliberate efforts at building the capacity of members to ask critical questions about gender and power relations. For the female farmers, this meant they could not attain the level of conscientisation on Longwe's(1991), empowerment framework but remained at the two lower levels of welfare and access.

5.3 The role of frontline intermediaries' engagement with the MII Producer Organisations

The people who deliver programmes on the ground are at the critical point of project delivery where they could push the boundaries of empowerment. In the MARKETS II programme, the capacity-building experts and extension assistants would be part of the frontline intermediaries(Cornwall, 2016). Their role in supporting women's empowerment is vital as they interpret and deliver the project. Thus, if they are change agents then the project may enable women to develop a critical awareness of gender relations and how to address such issues(Cornwall, 2016; Kabeer, 2011;Rowlands, 2008). The frontline intermediaries of the MII project who had regular contact with the farmers were the capacity-building experts and the extension agents who delivered specific aspects of the project. Others such as the monitoring and evaluation staff would not have regular contact like these two groups but could be frontline intermediaries as well.

Capacity-building experts contracted by MII local implementation partners as well as extension assistants(from the government agency) had the responsibility of training the leadership of the producer organisations on what the MII referred to as soft skills, business development, and crop management (Chemonics, 2017). Soft skills training included group membership and dynamics as well as leadership. The microenterprises' fundamental training focused on farm business cycles, record keeping, group membership and dynamics, business planning, purchasing decisions, savings and credit, costs and benefits, and basic cash flow(Chemonics, 2017).

The Capacity Building Specialist is responsible for mobilisation of farmers, group formation and registration, group development, access farmer association capacity, recommend and coordinate appropriate MARKETS II training packages (see Toolkit), provide on-going and follow-up support, and assists the agronomist during training/field day events.

Coordinating with ADP Extension Agents to align key messaging additional technical assistance and linkages and reinforcing the ADP/farmer association relationship lead in providing key reporting information on farmer association institutional development to their respective Service Provider

Chemonics(2015) Orientation Handbook | MII Capacity Building Specialist

The Capacity building experts explained that ensuring that groups functioned properly was necessary to set the stage for the work of other experts. These experts included the Extension assistants, agronomists, and other stakeholders such as the microfinance institutions as they could not do their jobs properly with a dysfunctional organisation. In the process of engaging with the groups, capacity-building experts were involved in some conflict resolution as their voices lent credence to explanations from producer organisation leaders. For instance, in reiterating the criteria for attending MII training.

Part of my job was to periodically visit groups and provide support where it was needed. We held training with them in their groups, helped to structure the groups, and set up systems

Gender and capacity building expert, female, MII local implementation partner

My main responsibility was to visit groups, discuss with them, and ensure that there was cohesion and unity among members and that they were working as a group with all members, keeping records, and if there were any issues, working with them to resolve the problems. I made sure the group functioned properly and was ready for Extension assistants and trainers

Capacity building expert, male, MII local implementing partner

Capacity-building experts were simply focused on getting the producer organisations ready for economic empowerment because of how MII was conceptualised and implemented. Thus, there was a missing element in the training and responsibilities of capacity-building experts. The missing element in the training/orientation of frontline workers was a focus on civic and human rights as well as on women's empowerment itself. Cornwall(2016) in discusses the importance of frontline social workers in an Egyptian cash transfer programme, highlighted how their training and strong visionary leadership impacted the expansion of issues in the women's' group. The Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity and its partners in designing a conditional cash transfer programme from a feminist approach focused on the role of the social workers as well as beneficiaries. The programme thus built-in training for social workers on the values of rights and justice and trained them as facilitators supporting the female beneficiaries. The programme also presented the cash transfers as compensation for attending trainings and meetings with the social workers(Cornwall, 2016; Kabeer, 2011). What this means is that the development of leadership skills that encompass gender and power relations awareness training is critical to transforming spaces such as producer organisations and women in organisations. Frontline workers such as capacity-building experts and extension assistants are an important part of enabling such transformation.

This means that deliberate efforts should have been made by MII to nurture their frontline intermediaries to be change agents who can, in turn, impact this knowledge to producer organisations. This would have required a change in the planning and focus of the programme to aim at not just the farmers but at the frontline intermediaries as well. Only the gender and capacity-building expert encouraged the women's groups she worked with to pursue other self-identified interests instead of solely focusing on the MII project. Even then she encouraged them to take actions focused on economic empowerment. The training they received, and the

facilitators' guidelines given capacity building experts did not contain a section on human rights, or civic education meaning they did not receive the training that would have enabled them to support the female farmers in a transformative manner as the social workers in the Egyptian case cited above.

Extension assistants were also focused on the farming aspect and gave no thought to the other aspects of women's empowerment other than economic empowerment. They were limited by the nature of their training, and even though they were aware of the need to always reach women, their focus was achieving the MII gender target. The MII's gender target was to ensure that fifty percent of farmers reached were female and twenty-five percent were youths(male and female)(MacNamara et al. 2019). The Extension assistants achieved this target but did not build women's ability to question power and gender relations. Looking at this through the lens of Longwe's(1991), empowerment framework, it can be concluded that MII was focused on welfare and access which according to Longwe is not empowerment. At this level of the framework, women are not equipped to reflect, decide, and act to change inequality in their environment.

5.4 Building relationships among members and establishing support structures for the PO

The relationships that women build among themselves in their organisations enable women's empowerment. These become a strong basis for the expression of collective agency. It is these relationships that become the glue that holds the organisations together as they are relationships of love, trust, and loyalty(Cornwall, 2016). The MII producer organisations especially the all-female groups provided a platform to build such relationships among women members from

which the group could take on issues in their community, which they wanted to change. This sub-section explores relationships that were built among women as a pathway of empowerment enabled by the MII programme. I look at leadership and participation as well as the post-MII producer organisations to identify these relationships.

5.4.1 Leadership and Participation within the Producer Organisations

MARKET II aimed to nurture producer organisations that would transition to small-scale rural agribusinesses providing services to their members and other farmers in the community (McNamara et al 2017; Chemonics, 2017). As business organisations, managerial and entrepreneurial skills are essential for running farmers' producer organisations (Sellare et al, 2023; Brandao and Breitenbach, 2019; Mabuza et al, 2015). Pingali et al (2005), said, the lack of these assets could contribute to the collapse of small rural farmers' organisations. This means that it is important for leaders to have the skills to manage the organisations, inspire members as well as give informed guidance in the managing of the producer organisation's business. In the appointment of leaders in the producer organisations, I studied, these skills are not a criterion for leadership. Leadership in the women's producer groups was by selection based on existing practices such as age, incumbency, literacy level, or because one had contact with the extension worker. The public relations officer of the Mbabuande women's producer organisation was given the job because she had direct contact with her husband's friend who had contact with MII and gave her information about training dates. Yet, this information would still have reached the women through the extension assistant or from the capacity-building experts. This was a strategic decision to appoint her as the public relations officer but not a decision based on the long-term survival of the producer organisation beyond MII. Interestingly she was the inactive member of the organisation, I interviewed. Still, in the Mbabuande

women's producer organisation, the president of the main group at the time of the group's introduction to MII simply became the president of the producer organisation and continued in this role even when her tenure as head of the larger group ended. She was the person we contacted as president of the Mbabuande women's producer organisation, but she had to take us to the current president of the main group. This was for us to explain our research and get permission to meet with the women who had engaged with MII. She explained that she could only interact with us after this introduction, so the president does not feel undermined and sidelined.

The main women's group consists of wives from three clans and each clan produces a president when it is their turn. So, the women of my clan made me the president and when MII came I became the president of the MII producer organisation which consisted of twenty-five women drawn from the three clans in the main group

55-year-old leader, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

In the Menagbe women's producer organisation, the president was simply selected by the older women in the community based on a rotational policy and age. It did not matter to them whether she had the capacity to lead a business venture or not. In fact, in my interview with her as the president, her concerns were all about her needs with no consideration about reviving her organisation. Her response to what she would want a project to do for her organisation, was that she needed support as she no longer farms because of old age and ill health. She said she did not know the needs of her organisation because there is no project currently working with them. As a leader, she had no vision for the group and felt that only in the presence of an external stimulus can the group function. Underpinning these criteria for appointing leaders is the need to build trust and acceptability as well as conform to the norm in the belief that one day it will be another person's turn to be a leader. This is what Shiferaw et al (2011) meant when they talked about the difficulty of getting rural farmers to commit to a producer

organisation. Even the leader was not committed to her organisation and was dependent on external support to lead. This is not surprising as this producer organisation was the weakest of the four organisations I interviewed. While these patterns of selecting leaders for producer organisations have their benefits, such as the locals knowing and adhering to the rotation system that will reduce conflict, it inevitably selects leaders for community harmony as against the possession of managerial and entrepreneurial skills. This maintenance of harmony informed the need for the president of the Mbabuande women's producer organisation to seek permission from the current president of the main group to meet with me. Berdegue (2002) pointed out that, a concern with community harmony was one reason for the collapse of the farmers' producer organisations he studied.

The mixed producer organisations had a similar scenario. The president of the Camp Nagi producer organisation, a mixed group said he was appointed to lead because he started the conversation on the need to establish a farmer's group. The size of his farms was also a secondary reason for his appointment. The Green Field producer organisation's president was also selected by members because of his farms, even though I felt (my observation) he was asked to be president because his brother, an extension assistant, established the organisation and was very involved in its activities. Only the post of secretary had a specific requirement which was basic literacy, being able to read and write English, and not based on a community rotation principle. This was necessary for record-keeping and external representation.

The group needed someone to write minutes and represent them at external meetings and be able to report back, so when MII came the group asked me to be the secretary of the MII producer organisation

45-year-old male, Leader of mixed producer organisation

The women selected me to be secretary. When we were active, I used to attend meetings and write minutes

41-year-old female, Leader, women's producer organisation

Finding literate people who can write is a challenge for rural farmers' producer organisations, especially for women's groups because of low literacy among women as most female members are not literate. The 2018 Nigeria national demographic survey shows that fifty-one percent (51%) of rural women have no education (NPC and ICF, 2019). This low literacy rate is reflected in the all-female producer organisations. For instance, only one of the fourteen women I interviewed in the Menagbe women's producer organisation had secondary school-level education. Therefore, instead of rotating leadership especially for the post of secretary, one person may become saddled with this responsibility permanently. This has implications for attending trainings or meetings outside the local government area or off the farm that were held in English as participants were drawn from different ethnicities. So only those who were literate in English could attend such meetings.

When we did group meetings with women's groups, we would be searching for one woman with a secondary level education that qualifies her to be a leader but in a group of for instance thirty women, there may just be two women who can read and write English. This means that these two can be president and secretary

Gender and capacity building expert, female, MII local implementation partner

The gender and capacity-building expert explained that in local community groups where there is no formal pressure for record-keeping, nor representation at external meetings held in English, locals rotate leaders as the group depends on members whose memory is trusted for its records. The women's groups and the two mixed organisations I interviewed had no problems with this type of leadership selection based on established practice and not literacy.

Rather, a conflict that could arise would be of location of the organisation's meetings. For instance, in the Menagbe women's producer organisation, members living further in the interior refused to attend the meeting with me because they questioned why meetings were never held on their side of the community and why they always had to go to the other end. Unfortunately, I could not go to their side of the community to interview them for security reasons because of their location, given that the meeting was already in the interior, far off the highway and I could not go further in.

Leadership in the mixed groups was male-dominated as none of the two groups had female leaders. In the Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation both men and women in the mixed FGDs said that women cannot lead but can contribute to discussions and if women had better suggestions this was adopted. The reason for women not leading men was based simply on the culture that heads of homes, clans, and kindred leaders are always male (Bohannon and Bohannon, 1968).

Men will talk, and women will support. Women cannot say they will lead men
Female participant in mixed FGD, Camp Nagi producer organisation

I however noticed that wives of the president and public relations officer were actively standing in and taking messages for their husbands as well as inviting other women for the FGDs. They were also the first people we met when we contacted this organisation as husbands were away from home. It was clear that they had 'power over' people in the organisation at least amongst the women. While the 'male as leader' view did not come up in the Green Field interviews, the organisation did not present any female leader. This corroborates what the gender and capacity-building expert said about the level of women's participation in the mixed producer organisations at the beginning of MII's contact with the farmers. She said, that at the beginning

of the project with the mixed groups, women were quiet and never on the list of people to attend training which was in the local language. Meaning they were not heard much less to be in leadership, they simply made up the numbers and gave the producer organisation the identity of being a mixed group. This began to change with sensitisation but even she did not say the women assumed leadership positions in the mixed groups, they only attended training and were encouraged to speak at meetings.

Furthermore, extension assistants and capacity-building experts said female farmers were more relaxed and spoke freely in female-only groups than in mixed groups even though there were outspoken women in the mixed groups who were bold to contribute to discussions. All female organisations thus provide safer environments for women to discuss. In mixed FGDs in the mixed producer organisations, I had to prompt the women to contribute, and, in most cases, they reiterated what had been said by the men. This reflects what the people in the Camp Nagi mixed FGD said about men speaking and women supporting. It was obvious that the women wanted to respond to questions but waited for the men to start the conversation, in keeping with the custom. Traditionally, Tiv women have no say in the political affairs or representation of the family and clan as this is a man's role (Bohannon and Bohannon, 1968). This is what is reflected in mixed producer organisations where the women say the men lead conversations. As conversations continued, however, the women were speaking without waiting for the men to respond first. It means that, once a conversation in a mixed setting where women feel safe to express themselves warms up, women feel freer to contribute without having to wait for the men to speak first. It also shows an openness by men to allow women to speak in certain contexts. Nevertheless, only a few women would be bold enough to speak up in such settings without being prompted.

Appointed leadership did not harm attendance and participation, especially in the early days of the producer organisations' work with MII. Producer organisations were encouraged by extension assistants and capacity-building experts to meet at least once a month to discuss their farming issues and hold step-down training even though meetings could be held more than once a month as agreed upon by the organisation. The Mbabuande women's producer organisation and the Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation met once a month during the MII project. Green Field producer organisation continued with their usual twice-a-month meeting adding their engagement with MII to their regular agenda. The Menagbe women's producer organisation had conflicting accounts of meetings, while the women in the village said they met a few times, the secretary explained that the organisation met only once but this could be that she attended only one meeting given that she lives in the local government headquarters and not in the village where the organisation is domiciled. As secretary, she recalled calling for only one meeting. Members of this organisation kept attending MII trainings, so they may have met in the village without her as they had a group farm.

The organisations were not free of internal conflicts even though my study groups did not report any during my interviews. The capacity-building experts said other groups had incidences of conflicts where members stopped attending meetings because they were never nominated to attend MII training. These trainings had a few perks such as transport reimbursement and lunch. They were also an opportunity to take a break from the drudgery of daily work at someone else's expense. These meetings were an MII key engagement event with farmers. Even though no one mentioned it, attendance at these meetings was prestigious as not all members could attend thus giving those who did a superior status. Nominations for training were thus seen by some members as discriminatory with leaders favouring some above others. This was the conflict that the capacity-building expert resolved by explaining the criteria for the selection of

participants for training. Yet, the criteria would have been explained by the leaders, however, only the project staff's explanation resolved the conflict. Here again, is the dependence on external support even for settlement of minor conflicts. This inhibits internal growth and cohesion making the producer organisation vulnerable to collapse once intervention ends and the organisation no longer has the luxury of project staff settling internal conflicts for them (Berdegue, 2001).

In terms of participation during meetings and activities, all four farmers' organisations described their meetings as interactive with all members able to contribute to all discussions. In the Green Field producer organisation, women in the female-only FGD explained that all members contributed to discussions and the president always asked the opinion of the quiet ones, so all members' opinions were heard. Discussions in all producer organisations' meetings focused on their soyabean farming. Conversations in the Mbabuande women's and Green Field mixed producer organisations differed because they had a group farm. Their discussions also centred on how to manage the farm as all members provided farm labour and other inputs with defaulters paying a fine. Members who did not take part in assigned group tasks were described by the participants in the Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation male FGD group as 'non-members' and people who only wanted to be in a group but were not interested in its activities or executing assigned tasks. They said these were the ones who always grumbled and eventually withdrew from the group. Additionally, not all members were consistent in attending meetings as they had other engagements that were of greater importance to them, yet these were the members who always complained of not being selected to attend training. This resonates with Shiferaw et al's (2011) point about the difficulty in securing member commitment to respect producer organisation rules and the challenge of how to deal with free riders who only want the benefits of membership but not the work, attitudes that weaken the

organisation. Agarwal(2010) argues that organisations that can deal with free-loaders either by expelling them or disciplining them strengthen the organisation. For the Camp Nagi producer organisation, members labelled some as the real members and these were the ones who attended meetings consistently and were interested in learning new things. This means that committed members would always represent the organisation at training further creating discontentment inimical to the organisation's growth and survival.

The inconsistent members who had small plots used to say, they did not need to pay attention to new teachings nor weed the farm as instructed because they would still get a harvest, only for them to begin to attribute their poor harvest to diabolical reasons when they notice others had a better harvest

Participants at male FGD, Camp Nagi producer organisation

In terms of the depth of deliberations, Camp Nagi producer organisation reported more extensive long-term focused discussions as recounted in the FGD with male members. They explained that they supplied labour on each member's farms at no cost and were planning to get storage facilities so members could aggregate their soyabeans. This would have enabled the organisation to enter the market as a bulk seller on behalf of members, at least reducing overheads for individual members, but this did not happen as MII's engagement ended. Again, with the dependency syndrome, farmers fail to act independently but wait for an external agent to act on their behalf or tell them what to do. Nothing stopped them from aggregating and entering the market themselves when they knew that the MII project had a time limit and would exit. This lack of a membership-driven agenda is one of three factors named by Stringfellow et al (1997) that determines whether a producer organisation will survive post intervention. Rowland (2008), in her study of two women's groups in Nicaragua also pointed out that long-term survival of the groups was because they were able to independently identify their issues and set an agenda for themselves. Agarwal's (2020) example further reemphasises this point

when she reports that groups who decide what crop to grow are more likely to thrive than those who are constrained to grow a specific crop. The decision about what crop to grow is a membership-driven agenda. This was corroborated by the capacity building expert, who said that groups that had other interests in addition to their engagement with MII were more likely to survive citing the examples of two of such groups, none of which were in my study site. One had set up a rental business during MII engagement, and the other, a producer organisation of only university graduates of agriculture had transformed into a successful agriculture business venturing into all aspects of agriculture including training farmers. This is an example of a producer organisation with all three of Stringfellow et al's (1997) factors for success. These factors are 1) a match between existing skills/experience (literacy, organisational, and business skills) of members and what is required to undertake joint activities; 2) internal cohesion and a membership-driven agenda; 3) successful, commercial-oriented, integration of organisation into the wider economy. These factors were present in one MII producer organisation. This particular producer organisation started as an MII youth organisation, took learnings and opportunities provided by MII, developed its agenda, and kept growing into a business and has survived after MII ended. However, this youth group is not the typical local youth producer organisation as it was a specialised producer organisation of young university graduates of agriculture science. None of the farmers' producer organisations in my study evolved and developed areas of interest independent of MII.

5.4.2 Building Supporting Structures for the MARKETS II Producer Organisations

As part of the strategy to use the farmers and their groups to encourage each other, MII local implementation partners organised exchange and learning visits between its various producer organisations where farmers visited more successful producer organisations to learn

(Chemonics, 2017). Leaders of producer organisations also met each other at training. There was therefore a level of familiarity among the women as well as the men. Working with the state ADPs to provide extension services created a relationship that could have been leveraged for the sustainability of the programme during and after it ended.

However, MII did not have a deliberate policy to build a network of all the MII producer organisations at either local, state, or national levels to meet and discuss their work, and challenges. Such a network would have provided support for the groups post-MII to identify strategies for survival. None of my four producer organisations had contact with other MII organisations even though members knew of other organisations in the area whom they also described as inactive. Neither did they on their own consider establishing links with each other to work together during and post-MII. Jones et al (2012) say that when collective enterprises are linked together, they become networks and alliances which can play a political role to advocate for the interest of their members. The failure of MII to link its producers organisations with each other was a lost opportunity to create a structure that would have played the role of encouraging producer organisations to grow beyond the project. Such a network could have become an advocate for its member organisations to interact with the market and community as well as on issues of security. For female farmers, such sustained networking would have provided platforms for deeper discussions beyond the need for welfare and access issues and would have become a pathway for empowerment. Cornwall(2016), emphasis the place of women working together and building collective power to address their issues. She says out of such networking would be the power of collectivisation and movement building that would build in the women a sense and source of collective power that gives them other gains such as respect and recognition.

5.5 Post MII intervention producer organisations

A common theme emerged from all four producer organisations, in describing their status and I write this in their own words, ‘we are sleeping.’ This was the phrase they used to describe themselves and the producer organisation. This same phrase was used by all the extension assistants and capacity-building experts interviewed. I see the use of this phrase as symbolic of the fact that they are always ready to ‘wake up’ and engage with a new intervention. The reasons for this comatose status of the producer organisations were attributed to members being tired of holding meetings because MII had stopped inviting them to trainings and no one to encourage them. Their use of the word ‘encouragement’ as explained by one of the capacity building experts, refers to a project or government giving farmers farm inputs such as fertilizer or seed varieties²⁴.

In one of the mixed producer organisations, the leaders just stopped calling for meetings and members did not ask why. The mixed organisations interviewed explained that the incessant attacks by Fulani nomadic cattle headers which led to members constantly fleeing from their villages, made it impossible to hold meetings. Yet, none of these groups held meetings with members who had taken refuge in the town nor when they returned home up to the period of my interaction with them. Interestingly, an extension worker who had worked with MII established a women’s producer organisation in one of my study sites in 2019 and networked them with an ongoing rice project by the International Fund for Agricultural Development

²⁴ Provision of such inputs were not in the design of the MII project

(IFAD). Therefore, even if farmers had not been forced to leave their villages for security reasons, the MII producer organisations would still have become inactive.

We do not hold meetings again, we have become tired as we do not have help with inputs, so we got tired and stopped meeting

FGD participant, Mbabunade women's producer organisation

The groups have disintegrated but individuals still apply new learnings

Extension assistant, female, Benue State ADP

Members considered the leadership of their organisations as key to the organisation's survival. Both female and male farmers interviewed said that leaders determine the focus of an organisation. Once the leadership is weak the group becomes weak, stops calling for meetings, members do not ask why, and the organisation goes to sleep. The choice of leaders based on persisting practices becomes crucial in deciding the future of a producer organisation post an agriculture intervention programme. A weak person whom everyone knows is not active may be selected as a leader based on a norm. This is one of the issues Berdegue (2001) speaks of when he says that because of close social relations, members cannot enforce organisational rules for fear of offending relatives, friends, and neighbours. In this instance, it is the fear of offending neighbours, friends, and relatives by breaking established rules of rotation, so leaders are selected regardless of their ability to lead and manage the producer organisation. Furthermore, members' comments about the growth of an organisation being dependent on its leaders, resonates with Pingali et al (2005) and Rowlands (1997) who emphasize the need for managerial skills, and visionary leaders who encourage members to identify their concerns and discuss how to resolve these issues. Members, then have their own agenda and reasons to keep the organisation active and independent of the initial external reason that brought them together in the first instance.

In our group, once leaders do not call for a meeting no one cares but once a meeting is called people respond immediately

Female FGD participants, Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

Responding to this state of comatose post-MII producer organisations, the male extension assistant said that what has happened to the MII producer organisations is not strange. He said throughout his career, which spans over three decades, farmers' producer organisations do not thrive once a project ends.

When we were in extension work, the Green Revolution programme came, and cooperatives were set up. These stopped functioning after the Green Revolution programme ended. Some got tractors but once the government stopped focusing on the project, the cooperatives went to sleep, same as with the FADAMA farmer groups that have also gone to sleep after the FADAMA project ended

Extension assistant, male, Benue State ADP

Another factor for the comatose state of the producer organisations was that most farmers expected farm inputs which they did not get, thus they were disappointed. Even though it was clearly stated that the MII project will teach farmers how to farm, at the end of all the training, the farmers questioned the project strategy saying, 'we have been farming all this while, will you just keep on teaching us how to farm?' So, once the trainings ended and they did not receive support in terms of farm inputs, they felt there was no need for the producer organisation. Even if MII had supplied farm inputs like earlier projects before it as mentioned by the extension assistant, the organisations would still have become inactive. This dependence on the provision of external support and farm inputs is part of the legacy of the history of rural agriculture organisations in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa (Chikwendu, 1991; Enete, 2009; Shiferaw,

2011). This has contributed to retarding the growth of rural producer organisations as platforms for broader collective action. Producer organisations are therefore seen as avenues to get free or subsidised farming inputs. This is aptly captured by the active member of one of the producer organisations. She said in the early days of her marriage, her mother-in-law had registered her husband in a cooperative and they got a big bag of fertilizer for their guinea corn farm that year. This experience made her always ready to respond to any call for farmers to establish a producer organisation or village group. Her expectation from all agriculture projects will be that she will receive inputs at no cost or at least at a subsidized price.

There is a mindset of receiving free things without working for them, some will adopt new teachings, others will not because their interest is in immediate gains of what they can get from the intervention. So, while individuals may continue using new technologies, the groups disintegrate

Extension assistant, female, Benue State ADP

Members even dropped out because loans that they had been expecting never materialised even though the project told them, it was all about teaching new techniques. Two reasons explain this expectation. The first reason was that farmers have come to associate projects with loans from experience, so they expect to receive loans even when loans are not explicitly mentioned. The second reason could be that the expectation of loans came from extension assistants who in an attempt to persuade farmers to network with MII, gave them false impressions of loans as a potential benefit. Perhaps the extension assistants themselves based on their experiences with other agricultural projects expected farmers would receive loans even though the project did not mention loans. The same extension assistant who said he has witnessed a history of failed producer organisations throughout his career, attributed the comatose status of the producer organisations to MII even though he knew the project's design.

The farmers were not tired of working in the organisations rather it was MII that got tired as it failed to give the farmers what they expected from the intervention. Farmers became tired because the MII did not bring them buyers as the key focus was to increase soyabean yields. So, if soyabean yields increase and there are no buyers except the middlemen, the farmers get tired and stop being active in the producer organisation

Extension assistant, male, Benue State ADP

The farmers get tired of working as a producer organisation but do not get tired of farming and continue farming individually. This indicates that the problem is not with farming as it is their main source of income but with working together. Shiferaw et al(2011) said rural farmers find it difficult to work in producer organisations even though they have a history of cooperation, for instance, providing labour on each other's farms. This brings up the issue of how the model of the producer organisation was agreed on. Sudgen et al(2021) in their study on farmers' collectives in Eastern India and Nepal show the positive impact of farmers deciding the type of model for their collective action. These include being able to overcome agrarian stress and create more viable farm units and have the capability to challenge gender relations in the community. The MII approach was different and did not give the networked farmers the freedom to decide on the type of model of organising much less being able to change the model during the project cycle to suit their current needs and demands.

Another reason for the producer organisations becoming comatose as pointed out by the capacity-building expert was the lack of trust and transparency among members as everyone preferred to work only within their households and not across households. For instance, people always assume that leaders use funds contributed for group activities for their own personal needs. They then leave the organisation without asking for an explanation. These are the type of members who only want to work within their nuclear families. In Zimbabwe, for instance, Shiferaw (2011) pointed out that a lack of trust amongst group members led to the collapse of a farmers' organisation set up to access inputs and markets. Members trusting leaders to manage

the affairs and funds of the organisation in an open honest manner is therefore important to the survival of an organisation. How experts work around this issue will enable producer organisations to go beyond this bottleneck and thrive. However, this can happen only with visionary experts who envision a life for the organisations beyond the project and are not focused only on ticking boxes for project reports.

Enete (2009), argues that producer organisations are all about meeting the needs of members and when these organisations are established by external stimuli and do not have an ingrown sense of duty to each other, such groups are likely not to survive when the external stimuli withdraws. This is the case of my four producer organisations. While the youth producer organisation of university graduates mentioned earlier is not a typical rural farmers producer organisation, it is an example of the possibilities of nurturing a producer organisation beyond an external stimulus because of visionary leaders and members. It shows the importance of an organisation having a membership-driven reason to stay together. The main Mbabuande women's group, for instance, is still active, while the soyabean producer organisation which emerged from it as an ad hoc arrangement for the purpose of engagement with MII did not thrive because it had no reason to exist post-MII. The Menagbe women's group on the other hand is not active like the Mbabuande women's group but comes alive when the need arises therefore it's ad hoc women's soyabean producer organisation also had no reason to survive post-MII as it had to merge back with its inactive parent body. In both instances, therefore being active before or not prior to MII did not matter because the main issue was the ad hoc nature of these soyabean producer organisations. These types of ad hoc arrangements for the establishment of producer organisations just to network with an intervention project are therefore destined to fizzle out *ab initio*.

Despite their later collapse, these producer organisations were assessed by the capacity-building experts as doing well during the intervention, with the ability to survive post-intervention as they kept good records and minutes. Interestingly, none of the groups I interviewed even had a list of members from which I could cross-check names with the list I got from MII local implementing partner. Leaders simply did not have the records anymore and wondered where they could be in their house. The leaders and members however confirmed that the names on my list were the members of the organisations. Neither did any of the organisations try to contact other MII producer organisations near them or any of the capacity-building experts and extension assistants to discuss the next steps in surviving the absence of MII. Extension assistants for instance were domiciled in the local government area so were easily accessible. Members of one of the all-female producer organisations, however, kept asking the extension assistant when MII would return, and he kept reassuring them that MII would return. He should have told them that the project had ended given his experience of over three decades of working with different agriculture projects. For the farmers who asked him this question, their interest was not in strengthening their producer organisations independent of an external stimulus but in searching for new opportunities for dependency. If their interests were the strengthening of their producer organisations, they would have kept the organisations active in anticipation of the return of MII or even another project.

Despite the culture of dependency, not all members of producer organisations are in it just for the benefits of free things. Capacity building experts and extension assistants said there is always someone who is committed to working in the producer organisations, but it becomes too much burden for just one or two members to keep the organisation alive. This again raises the question of how these producer organisations are established such that the majority of members are not committed. To nurture strong producer organisations, committed members

would need to have had some prior experience they can draw from, or be open to learning, be visionary, and have a support system that does not have to be financial.

The two routes of setting up rural organisations from the colonial to the post-colonial era in sub-Saharan African countries such as Nigeria are inherently contradictory. Instead of encouraging growth, they set the stage for the collapse of these producer organisations, thereby limiting their potential for the empowerment of rural female farmers.

Chapter 6: Intrahousehold gender relations of female members of MII producer organisations

The family and household²⁵ are the centres for decision-making on issues that affect the well-being of individuals (Quisumbing, 2003), functioning as a sphere for production, consumption, investments in human and physical capital as well as the management of risks (Doss, 1996). Kandiyoti (1998) says that the household is the location for the reproduction of gender identities and inequalities while Deshmukh-Ranadive (2005:103) describes it as the place where ‘the main roots of gender discrimination are located’. The rules and norms of society are taught to children and young adults in the family and household thus making it an important social institution for the production of gender inequality. These inequalities between the man and the woman underlay the rights and obligations, access to resources, competing interests and the bargaining that takes place in the household (Moore, 1994; Kabeer, 1994). Bernard et al (2020), thus describe households as places where cooperation and contestations exist together.

Embodied in gender relations are the norms and values that define not only who has the power in decision-making but also access to household resources (Jones et al, 2012). What this means is that gender identities give men power over women, especially in patrilineal and patrilocal societies such as in my study site. Gender relations in the household will reflect this construction. However, several factors impact this process with social norms determining how these gender and power relations play out in intrahousehold bargaining as they determine and

²⁵ The terms ‘family and household’ are used interchangeably with both terms referring to a domestic unit (Deshmukh-Ranadive, 2005). This enables me to use the term household to cover a variety of household types ranging from female headed households to polygamous households in my research context. I thus use these terms family and household interchangeably.

limit what can be negotiated, and how it can be negotiated (Agarwal, 1997). Social norms determine that what is considered natural cannot be negotiated such as who cooks in the Tiv society and who provides farmland (Lambrecht, 2016; Fyanka, 2018; Ahua, 2019). Sweeping the compound for instance is a task for both men and women, with boys and young men often responsible for this. Yet, transformations in gender relations can be seen in the household and may happen daily, be gradual and piecemeal and improve the lives of women even if they do not become long-term transformations (Rao, 2012). These changes could also be a result of changing social norms in the community as norms are accepted ideas and practices of a community (Lambrecht, 2016; Agarwal, 1997). The discourse on women's empowerment often seeks to understand how women negotiate within households to transform these gender relations. Additionally, it is within the household that women's domestic and reproductive labour is organised thus making it of interest to feminists as the composition and organisation of the household determines how women access resources and income (Moore, 1988) as well as how they negotiate and bargain in the household.

The individual and relational empowerment enabled by women's membership in groups is what interests me in this chapter. As I seek to answer my second research question, **'How does women's membership of farmer producer organisations shape their intrahousehold relationships?'**, I examine the extent to which membership in the MII producer organisations has enabled rural female farmers to question internalised norms and values that disempower them, negotiate and influence relationships and decision-making within their household or if they have maintained the norm. I use the concept of 'conjugal contract' by Whitehead (1981), to enable me to understand and analyse intrahousehold gender relations and bargaining. I draw from the findings in Chapter 5 to inform my analysis of whether the MII producer organisations

have been spaces for the development of personal and relational agency of rural female farmers in their households.

In Section 6.1, I present an ethnographic picture of the Tiv farming household for contextual understanding to enable analysis, in line with the consensus in the discourse on women's empowerment, that empowerment is nuanced in different contexts. This context will provide an understanding of what empowerment would mean (based on the study's definition of women's empowerment in Chapter 2, for rural female farmers within the Tiv farming household. While the ethnographic background presents a backdrop, it is the contemporary rural Tiv farming household which I present in section 6.2 on the conjugal contract in the Tiv farming household, that offers an additional basis for analysis of gender relations within the household. In sections 6.3 and 6.4, I explore decision-making in the household and control of household resources and assets, with the intersecting factors of household type and location to identify any differences and similarities in decision-making. Has membership in the MII producer organisations enabled its female members to renegotiate these intrahousehold gender relations? What I found was that for rural Tiv farming households, the core of the conjugal contract has remained unchanged.

6.1 The Tiv farming household

The Tiv are a patrilineal and patrilocal people even though men can settle in their mother's agnatic lineage or their father's mother's agnatic lineage because the mother's lineage is considered the protector of a woman and her children (Downes, 1933; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). A woman can therefore return to her natal family upon divorce with her children and be given a place to stay and land to farm. The household consists of a single

extended polygynous family of a man, his wives, children, unmarried adult daughters, and his sons with their wives and children, married grandchildren, and their families (George-Genyi et al, 2021;Downes, 1933; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953; Mead, 1955). Other members of the household may include relatives of the wives or the husband as well as visitors. These households referred to as ‘compounds’ by Downes (1933) as well as Bohannan and Bohannan (1953) could be single units of a man, his wives and children or multiple units of men and their wives all of whom trace descent from the male head of compound. Each man controls the affairs of his household, but all matters of importance such as building a new hut, allocation of farmland, marriage, and conflicts are referred to the compound head (Downes, 1933; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). Women married to the men of the compound are referred to as ‘my wife’ by her husband and all adult males of the compound and she, in turn, refers to all adult males as ‘my husbands,’ the children are referred to by all adults as ‘my child’ (Downes, 1933; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968). This has implications in terms of decision-making and control within the household and reinforces the gendered identity of the man as head of the house and the subordinate status of the wife. Women in my study site pointed out that a woman has many ‘husbands’ and is therefore never without a husband. So even though widowed, when things need to be done in her ‘hearth-hold²⁶,’ such as accessing farmlands, and marriages of her children, she must refer these to her male in-laws. This was reiterated by men in my general focus group discussion. This pattern of household dwellings has not changed for rural female farmers in my study site living in their husbands’ extended family compounds or in their single

²⁶ Ekejiuba (1995) concept of the ‘hearth-hold’ refers to an independent social subset or a subset within the household based on the mother-child bond where the woman is the head of the unit. This unit consists of a woman, her children, co-resident relatives, and non-relatives who assist her in the provisioning, caring, and nurturing of members of her hearth-hold and share in the food cooked on her hearth. The woman is partially or fully responsible for the food security of members of her hearth-hold and her ‘husband’ may be a full member of the hearth-hold or a partial member who oscillates between hearth-holds of his other wives, mother, and mistresses. It is a unit of production, consumption, reproduction, and socialising. This concept in the Tiv farming household is limited to the extent that the husband actively contributes to household food.

monogamous or polygamous units. Neither has the layout of the compound changed, which symbolises a male-headed household with the huts of wives and other members of the household built in an oval or circle behind the man's meeting hut leaving a cleared space in the middle which is the centre of the family life (Bohannon and Bohannon, 1968). The meeting hut is however open to all: men, women, and children. Every visitor entering this compound notices the meeting hut which has low walls and open sides and knows where to seek audience and permission to interact with members of the household.

Farmland was allocated by the compound head to all adult men who in turn distributed land to their wives. Adult males in the compound were entitled to sufficient land to meet the food needs of their families. The man in turn had the responsibility to give each of his wives a farm sufficient to feed her and her dependents (Bohannon and Bohannon, 1953). Unmarried or divorced daughters in the household were also entitled to farmland (Yeche, 2016). This was the main route of accessing farmland traditionally among the Tiv, dependent on agnatic kinship, while a stranger's access was dependent on the residence which lapsed once he seized to be a resident (Bohannon and Bohannon, 1953). This means a visitor could not come back after he leaves to lay claim to a piece of land because he never had any rights to it in the first place nor can he pass it on to his male children as they are also visitors.

Land is not a property among the Tiv. It cannot be sold, that would be tantamount to selling a genealogical position. It cannot be rented, for one's right to it depends on kinship status and residence. The Tiv have precise rules about the inheritance of cloth, weapons, and wives; they do not need such rules for land because all have rights already (Bohannon and Bohannon, 1968:8).

Access to land based on agnatic relations persists with women in my study site, farming on lands provided by husbands who received these from their fathers. However, contemporary

access to land has expanded routes to accessing land with the Tiv now renting as well as selling land (George-Genyi et al, 2021;Yecho, 2016). The lack of security from incessant violent conflicts between farmers and nomadic cattle herders has displaced some families in my study site, who now farm on rented farmlands in safer areas as they cannot access their free family lands in the interior. A few women and their husbands farm on women's natal family lands.

I farm on my father's family land, my husband does not have land because his father did not have land, so I go to my family, and we get as many farmlands as we want from my brothers and relatives

40-year-old, member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

George-Genyi et al (2021) explain that when men relocate to the towns in search of jobs and neglect to farm their lands, they tend to lose such land to the person who has been cultivating it. This explains why some men do not have land to farm or give to their wives to even cultivate a small yam farm. Men as custodians and distributors of land reinforce their position as heads of families and households further strengthening their assigned role as providers and decision-makers even though women actively participate in providing the food and income for the family (Apusigah, 2009). Women's dependence on men for land indicates their lower status, especially as the land has high value as the source of identification for a lineage and claim to kinship.

In terms of labour, the production of food in traditional Tiv households was a family activity with all members of the family taking part. Farm tasks were assigned based on sex, age, and status. For instance, the local chief does not make mounds and ridges for planting crops even though he supervises work on his farm, while a woman's work decreases as she gets older and has a younger wife attached to her or a daughter-in-law (Ivande et al, 2015;Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985;Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968). Production was conducted as part of the

rights and obligations of membership in the family; thus, men worked as fathers, sons, brothers, husbands, and neighbours thereby retaining the right to reciprocal work on their farms (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968). Access to farm labour had already started changing by the time Bohannan and Bohannan published their book on the Tiv economy in 1968. People who could afford it had started hiring young men to make mounds and ridges for them on their farms, and this is now commonplace (Ivande et al, 2015). It is interesting that Bohannan and Bohannan (1968), failed to include women in the list of persons who worked and benefited from the reciprocity of rights and obligations given that women also worked on farms and were very active in the Tiv economy. Bohannan and Bohannan's (1968) failure to recognise women's labour reflects their acceptance that women could be seen only through the lens of husbands and fathers. It further points to women's lower status as neither full members of the husband's nor natal kin group (Deshmukh-Ranadive, 2005). This is echoed in my conversations with farmers where both men and women describe women as visitors. I discuss this identity of women as visitors in sections 6.3 and 6.4 as well as in chapter 7. Division of labour was very distinct, with men doing the heavier farm work such as laying out farms and making mounds and ridges, and women and men pulling tall grass to clear new fields for farms. Both women and men planted and harvested several crops together such as millet, guinea corn, rice, benniseed, and yams. Weeding was women's work with women doing all the weeding on all farms (Agada and Igbokwe, 2016; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968; Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985).

While men and women work in the same fields, the labour input into a crop determines who controls its disposition. For instance, while men made the mounds for yams, the main food staple and planted seed yams alongside women, women took control of the yam farms once planting was done, doing all the weeding, and harvesting (Agada and Igbokwe, 2016; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968; Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985). Women also controlled its

disposition for household food, kept seed yams for the next planting season and for sale as well as controlled income from it (Bohannon and Bohannon, 1968; Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985). Side crops intercropped on women's farms and on kitchen farms were also controlled by women and used for household food with surplus sold and money used for other household needs such as the purchase of salt, palm oil and onions (Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985). Guinea corn was another crop controlled by women, but millet belonged to men though women were entitled to some millet because of the work they had done on the farm. Similarly, women also gave yams to men when they asked for yams to sell, entertain visitors, or give as a gift because of their work in making the mounds. Millet was also used for food in the lean months before the next yam harvest and men gave it to their dependents when needed (Bohannon and Bohannon, 1968).

So, there was a clear understanding of who controlled and had access to different farm produce in the household and obligations to each other because of the labour that was invested in the farm. Nevertheless, women had less power over the crops that were theirs, as Bohannon and Bohannon (1968), said that a husband could beat his wife or publicly ridicule her if she ran out of yams because she sold them. The wife's lack of total control over her yams is further exemplified in the fact that she could not refuse to give her husband yams when he requested nor contribute her yam if requested by the compound head because not only will her husband reprimand her, but the women of the compound will also not support her and justify her husband's reprimand. Comparing Tiv women's control over their farms and produce with the Kusasi of Ghana and the Kofyar of northcentral Nigeria, it becomes clear that Tiv women did not have and still do not have control over the produce of their farms. Among the Kusasi and Kofyar, women had control of their farm produce and money made from its sale (Whitehead, 1984; Stone et al, 1995), such that Stone et al (1995) recorded that Kofyar women were wealthy

and in most instances wealthier than their men, yet still expected and received household food from the husband's granary.

In addition to farming, men, and women kept domestic animals such as chickens, goats, pigs, ducks and pigeons and some compounds had cattle. Additionally, the men hunted, fished, and weaved cloth while women collected herbs, spices, and sauce plants (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968; Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985). Incomes from sales of these items were also used for the needs of the family. Women were responsible for household food, clothing for their children, soap, and kitchen supplies (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968; Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985). Women also fished most often as groups of wives in a compound for household food. A 45-year-old, female member of the Camp Nagi producer organisation explained how the wives of the extended family went fishing with their basins and baskets and spent all day scoping water from the stream hoping to catch fish to be used for household food. Domestic chores of cooking and caring for children were women's responsibilities. Bohannan and Bohannan (1968) pointed out that all children had a young nanny who cared for them once they were a few months old thus relieving the women to attend to their other responsibilities. Fathers also spent a lot of time playing with small children and instructing the sons which also reduced the stress of childcare on the women and young nannies.

Despite changing socio-economic situations, these basic characteristics of the rural Tiv farming household have remained. The household continues to be patrilocal, and access to farmlands remains patrilineal with men's identity as heads of households. Women still have the right to farmland from their husbands, and the division of labour on the farm and control of produce remains unchanged with hired labour added to the source of farm labour for household farms (Ivande et al, 2015; Agada and Igbokwe, 2016). This was corroborated by all female farmers I interviewed who said they farmed on their husbands' family lands, and so also widows.

Changes have happened in terms of the making of mounds and ridges for planting crops. Ivande et al (2015) report that the sexual division of farm labour is blurring between men and women with each doing another's work if needed. The male MII capacity-building expert said that when women cannot find a man to make yam mounds and ridges, the women now make their yam mounds and ridges, and this is not considered taboo.

A significant change that occurred, was the abolishing of exchange marriage by the colonial administration in 1927(Ahua, 2019; Fyanka, 2018; Mead, 1955). This was the highest form of marriage as exchange wives replaced daughters(Ahua, 2019; Mead, 1955). Women's value was dependent on whether she was an exchange wife or not as only sister substitutes could inflict death by witchcraft as they were considered blood relatives by the exchange. Husbands would normally erect the emblem of their 'akombo'²⁷ for protection by the entrance of their exchange wife's hut as evidence of her importance. Even though women had lower status and were owned by natal and marital families, the central place of the 'Tsav'²⁸ and the 'akombo' in the lives of the Tiv(Sambe and Ugba, 2023;Mead, 1955; Abraham, 1933) meant that an exchange wife had some leverage with her husband and marital home especially if she was perceived as possessing powerful witchcraft powers. The 'tsav' and 'akombo' in Tiv religious belief worked in unison for the benefit of the people and community. The 'tsav' protected the

²⁷ In Tiv religious belief, the concepts of 'Tsav' and 'Akombo' are central. 'Tsav' refers to occult perception 'the possession of which enabled unusual success to be obtained through the aid of personal beings, spirits, or ancestors'(Downes, 1933: 39). Those who developed this potency and had strong 'tsav' influenced those that did not have the magical powers. Seen as a force that could be either good or bad, it is the good aspect that was the predominant thinking and thus 'tsav' was used to enhance the good of the community, ensure good harvests, and protect the land(Mead, 1955; Downes, 1933; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). The 'Akombo' are magical emblems and forces which could interfere with the natural order of things(Abraham, 1933; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953) and in themselves are neither good nor bad but dangerous, if manipulated by those with 'tsav' powers could be used for good or bad(Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). 'Akombo exists of itself and can act of and in themselves'(Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953) and was used 'to ward of illness, diseases, cure illness and repair some lack such as sterility in women or paucity of game animals'(Abraham,1933: 116). 'Akombo' is therefore a magical process to expel evil or to prevent evil keeping it away from the land and the people (Downes, 1933).there are different types of 'akombo' for instance for safe delivery, for good luck, for illness, for hunting, for obtaining wives (Abrahams, 1933).

²⁸ Explained in footnote 21 above

people and land while the 'akombo' protected people from evil (Sambe and Ugba, 2023; Mead, 1955; Abraham, 1933). Thus, with the abolition of exchange marriage, some aspects of wizardry could not be practised or had to be modified. The key point here is how religious beliefs and practices were part of the people's lives and even though may not be as obvious in contemporary times, still influence social and gender relations in the household and community. Mead (1955:100), sums this up when she says.

A grasp of these religious systems is essential to understanding the Tiv concept of life and death and health, of personality development, of law, of authority, as well as political structure since all political organisation and administration rested on a socio-religious base, on kinship structure sanctioned and sustained through religious rites.

6.2 The conjugal contract within the Tiv farming household

Debates on the conceptualisation of intrahousehold relations and bargaining have evolved from the unitary type of household characterised by altruistic sharing, and equal and cooperative relationships, the critique of its failure to capture the variability of the nature of households, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Guyer, 1988; Berry, 1989; Moore, 1994; Guyer, 1998) to the cooperative and non-cooperative types of households. (Verschoor et al, 2019; Doss, 2013; Himmelweit et al, 2013; Iversen et al, 2011; Lechene and Preston, 2011; Kiewisch, 2015). The separate spheres as well as the non-cooperative view see the household as an arena of rights and obligations, resources, and competing interests where there are conflicts as well as unending bargaining and negotiations (Kiewisch, 2015; Whitehead, 1981; Hartman, 1981;). The separate spheres of the bargaining model of the household are characteristic of West African farming households including the Tiv farming household (Verschoor et al, 2019; Lundberg and Pollak, 1993; Afonja, 1981; Kiewisch, 2015; Himmelweit et al, 2013). In this model men and women have clearly defined roles and responsibilities with each partner contributing to the household goods from their separate but interacting spheres (Verschoor et al, 2019; Carter and

Katz, 1997; Whitehead, 1984; Carney and Watts, 1991; Stone et al, 1995). This means that there is a pooling of household goods and in a farming household, these would be their farm produce and money from the sale of these.

Whitehead's (1981) concept of the 'conjugal contract' encapsulates this perspective, emphasising that the household consists of separate but related gendered spaces of decision-making and activity. She explains that these separate gendered spaces are connected by a 'conjugal contract' which sets out the terms under which husbands and wives exchange goods, income, and services including labour within the household. Household relations are thus characterised by the relations of exchange, distribution, and consumption which make up the conjugal contract (Whitehead, 1981).

These conjugal contracts govern the maintenance of the household and how the needs of household members are met. Conjugal contracts in sub-Saharan African communities are based on the customs of the people, thus men and women know their duties and obligations (Munachonga, 1988). Women and men enter marriage with an understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities and all members of the household know their responsibilities and what is expected of them. Intrahousehold arrangements and dialogues are built around these roles and responsibilities (Ahua, 2019; Jackson, 2012). It also means that they are not fixed but can change within the whole community or in a household and be renegotiated depending on changing internal and external factors at any point in time (Silberschmidt, 2001; Carney, 1988). While this concept seems to suggest that both men and women entering a marriage do so based on equality, this is not the case. The overarching social system gives the man a higher status which is reproduced within the marriage, with women taking on the added burden of reproduction. Patrilocality itself lowers a woman's status to that of a visitor, meaning she does

not enter the conjugal contract on an equal footing with the man. Farnworth et al(2020)'s study illustrates the deeply embedded inequality between men and women. The majority of respondents in this study, both male and female, said gender equality is negative holding the view of men as heads of the family as a cultural and religious provision.

I use this concept of 'conjugal contracts' to examine gender relations within the Tiv farming household because of the specific roles and responsibilities of this farming household performed separately by men and women but intersect in a nucleus for production, reproduction, and consumption. In the Tiv farming household, this conjugal contract includes the exchange of labour between the husband and the wife which is obtained among farming households in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Berry, 1988). Men's and women's farming roles have remained unchanged as presented in section 6.1 above so also the men's obligation to give women grains in return for their labour on their husband's farm as well as the woman's obligation to give her husband yams when he makes a request (Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985). Also, the obligation to provide household food remains the responsibility of both men and women, with women having the primary responsibility to feed their household from their farm produce in the Tiv farming household. Additionally, women provide the soup ingredients by growing vegetables on their farms and kitchen gardens as well as picking herbs and spices from the bush(Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968; Burfisher and Horenstein, 1985). Men bring in meat purchased from the market, hunted, or fished and women sometimes contribute chickens from their stock. Women's income from petty trading of vegetables, spices, and herbs as well as other goods is also spent on the household and for their personal needs such as clothing and cosmetics.

In contemporary times where households purchase farm inputs from income made from selling grains from the farms, men are expected to provide such inputs as fertilizers for their wives'

farms. Men also pay for hired labour from these funds, especially for cash crops which is usually the man's farm(s) as households in my study report pooling all their crops and selling to meet family needs. Access to this common fund is however not equal for all members (Acosta et al,2020; Whitehead,1981). For example, Farnworth et al (2020) report that men are more likely to unilaterally decide to spend family resources on themselves than women. In my study, a few women spoke about the husband's spending money on his leisure such that the wife devises a means to deny him access to funds for personal use. Closely associated with this is the provision of land for farming where households have been displaced by violent conflict and have to rent farmland. The man rents the land for his wife's farm thus meeting this conjugal obligation(George-Genyi et al, 2021). This also applies to families who live in semi-urban and urban areas and cannot go back to their family land to farm. A significant other in a male-headed polygamous household whom I interviewed explained that he rents farms for his wives so each has her yam farm and any grain they may decide to grow. The man's position as head of the home does not change even if he fails to provide the basics of farmland, and housing nor meet his other responsibilities because this stems from the culture and religious beliefs(Farnworth et al, 2020; V4C, 2015). Changes in land use laws in Nigeria have also not changed the primary route for rural female farmers accessing agricultural resources such as land which remains through husbands or male relatives or from rent regardless of location (Yecho, 2016). Conjugal contracts within the Tiv farming household are thus one of separate spheres with clearly defined roles with a strongly knitted core of cooperation which is the nucleus of the contract for production, income earning, and meeting the responsibilities and needs of the household. Without the nucleus of cooperation, there would be no conjugal contract as it encapsulates everything about living in a family/household (George-Genyi et al, 2021; Ahua, 2019).

For female-headed households where husbands have died, the aspects of this conjugal contract that remain are those with the husband's extended family which involve upholding the woman's right to continue to farm her husband's farms. Male relatives also oversee other issues, such as the marriage of her children, and she remains a member of her husband's family. This is an expression of the fact that marriage in Tiv land is said to be traditionally between families, thus a woman has many 'husbands' as all men in the extended marital family are her 'husbands' (Ahua, 2019; Ushe, 2015; Torkula, 2001; Downes, 1933; Bohannon and Bohannon, 1953). Except members of the Menagbe women's producer organisation, most of the women in this study do not live in extended marital family compounds even though they have relatives living with them, thus the conjugal contract is primarily between the husband and the wife. This does not erase their obligations to the larger family given that they continue to farm on family lands. The living arrangements reflect changing times as people move away from ancestral lands to smaller villages or bigger peri-urban centres while still returning to the ancestral land to farm (George-Genyi, et al, 2021). All participants in my study continue to farm on ancestral lands where possible or rent land in conflict-free areas if they cannot access their family farms or farm in the wife's natal family land.

While this picture of the conjugal contract in rural Tiv farming households seemingly presents a picture of equality between the man and women, it covers underlying gender inequality. A glaring example of this is the transmission of a man's property only through male members of his family, his sons, and his brothers (Yechio, 2016), despite the amount of work women put into production (in her natal and marital family) and reproduction in the husband's lineage. Women also take on most of the reproductive work, with men sometimes being responsible for taking household members to the hospital when needed and paying medical bills, as reported by the women in my study.

6.3 Decision-making in the Households of Female Members of MII Producer Organisations

Drawing from the understanding of the Tiv farming household and the application of the concept of the conjugal contract in the Tiv farming household, as well as recent literature on decision-making in the household, I will now examine decision-making in the households of female farmers who were members of MII producer organisations. The significance of women's ability to contribute to decision-making within the household is underscored by its constant occurrence as a dimension of women's empowerment in several indices for measuring women's empowerment as well as in qualitative studies on women's empowerment. For example, the Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), the project-level Women's Economic Empowerment in agriculture index (pro-WEAI), and the survey-based Women's Empowerment Index (SWPER) have the household as a domain of empowerment where it seeks to measure women's empowerment in decision-making in the household (Alkire et al, 2013; Malapit, 2019; Ewerling et al, 2017). In chapter two, I also highlighted the central place of the family/household domain as an institution that is studied by various disciplines and is important in understanding social and gender relations in a community. I will discuss decision-making in the households of female farmers looking at it from the intersecting factors of household type as well as location.

6.3.1 Decision-making in female-headed households

The female-headed households in this study are households where the woman is a widow and living with her children and relatives. None of the households was female-headed because the men were absent or the woman had never married (Saad et al, 2022; Gebre et al, 2021; Milazzo

and Van de Walle, 2017). Angel-Urdinola and Wodon(2010) said that in the African context, female-headed households are more likely to be because of the death of the husband or husband who has migrated. Household decisions are therefore taken by the lone parent. There were no migrated husbands among my study participants and what this means is that no husband will return from the city and take over the running of the household from the female heads at a later date, thus creating conflict.

In female-headed Tiv farming households, decision-making about production as well as other needs such as school fees, health, and clothing, varies between the woman being the sole decision maker or the woman who has an adult son whom she discusses with. Such discussions would include what to farm when to go to the farm and the purchase of farm inputs. Access to land for female-headed households remains the lands that they farmed with their husbands. In this type of household, the current limitations of the Tiv saying that ‘all the men in the extended family are a married woman’s ‘husband’ become obvious. One respondent, a 45-year-old widow with five children, explained that her husband’s brother normally shows her which land to farm and this land would be the one she farmed with her husband. Other than this, all other production and household decisions are hers to make. The asking of where to farm when she knows her husband’s farms is therefore just a formality to maintain harmony with the extended family. This resonates with the need to show men respect as head of the family which underpins women’s decision-making(Farnworth et al, 2020). Failure of this widow to go through the yearly ritual of asking for farmland would be interpreted as disrespect to male in-laws and would earn her a reprimand or abandonment by the male in-laws. For the widow with an adult son, she takes these decisions with her adult sons even if she has the final say.

I am the head of my house, I discuss with my sons what needs to be done, and I give them a portion of the farms I used to farm with my husband, so they also have their own farms, as I have several farmlands and when my sons need to expand their farms, they ask me first and I show them where to expand

55-year-old widow, member of the Camp Nagi producer organisation

For this type of household, women do not need to ask male in-laws where to farm because the adult son assumes the role of the man in the household even though she is the *de facto* head of the house. The sons by tradition inherit their fathers' farms and do not need male relatives to show their mothers where to farm (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968). Where there is a male relative in the household, production decision-making involves these relatives as they are members of the household. A 55-year-old widow whose household consists of her brother-in-law, her children, and stepchildren said that production decisions are taken between her, her son, and her brother-in-law.

6.3.2 Decision-making in male-headed monogamous households

The majority of my research participants are in male-headed monogamous households. This reflects the downward demographic in the number of polygamous households in Nigeria between 1990 and 2018 (NPC and IFC, 2018). Even though this trend shows that polygyny is higher in rural than urban areas, my research participants present a different picture with fewer polygynous households. Ahua(2019) explains that monogamy is an accepted practice alongside polygyny in the Tiv marital system. This and the predominantly Christian area may account for higher monogamous households as polygyny is not an acceptable Christian practice(Bisong and Orji, 2020).

Female farmers in male-headed monogamous households reported that decision-making is a joint endeavour between them and their husbands. This was always the initial response of all the women in male-headed households. Nevertheless, as they went on to explain the process of the conversations between them and their husbands, they ended up saying men made decisions and decided the order of work. While Ivande et al (2014) concluded in their study that decision-making in the Tiv farming household was a joint affair between men and women, they failed to take into consideration the reflective statements reproduced below by women, which give further insight into the power dynamics in the households. Agade and Igbokwe (2016) on the other hand found that men were the ones making all the household decisions in farming households. These two narratives are an indication of the power dynamics going on in the household reflecting two different sides of reality. Being part of the discussions with husbands on when to purchase farm inputs, clear farms for ploughing, hire labour and sell produce, and what to do with this income, gives women the opportunity to influence the outcome and therefore be part of the process leading to the final decision taken.

Even though we discuss with men, we do not have the authority to take decisions alone, they tell us what to do

40-year-old, member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

As I am with my husband, once it rains, my husband says today we will go to the yam farm, and the next day the maize farm. My husband makes the decisions, and sometimes I make suggestions.

50-year-old, member, Menagbe women's producer organisation

My husband makes the decisions and I go along with him. I also make suggestions, yesterday he asked if it was time to clear the farm and I said not yet but if he has labourers who can do it tomorrow then he can go ahead, otherwise let us wait.

49-year-old, member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

The process of decision-making matters more than the final decision, even if the women do not always get what they want, the opportunity to contribute to the process partially makes up for this. This is corroborated by Acosta et al's (2020), findings in their study of differences in men's and women's reporting of intra-household decision-making. They found that women's interpretation and understanding of joint decision-making involved being told by the men what was to be done, raising her opinion even though the final decision was made by the man without consideration of her suggestion. Even where there are no conversations, women and men still feel a joint decision was made because both parties were there when the man decided or if the woman was only told what the man had decided to do (Acosta et al, 2020). Annan et al (2021) see women's reporting of being part of joint household decision-making as an expression of them taking power through such self-declarations and not waiting for the men to give them power. The question however is what impact does this taking power have if it does not impact household decision-making and actions? Does it change the power relations within the household, or does it serve to reinforce normative cultural expectations? (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010).

The women's responses present a perfect picture of a household that democratically cooperates for the interests of all members. However, there is an interplay of power going on in these Tiv farming households which negates the perfect picture of a household presented by the women meaning their presentation is only one part of the reality. Whitehead (1981:97) says '...the family household is a site of subordination and domination, of sexual hierarchies of many kinds and conflicts of interests between its members, especially between husbands and wives.' One such conflict of interest is that between a 20-year-old woman and her husband, where she hands over money to her mother-in-law, to stop her husband from accessing it whenever he wants and

spending it on alcohol. These ‘hierarchies of many kinds’ are evident in several studies (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968; Rao, 2012) that have shown that older women in the household have higher status and therefore more decision-making power. Even then this decision-making is linked to women’s traditional gender roles as carers and house managers when it involves food, health, care of family members, and weeding as these are traditional women’s responsibilities where men will not contest women’s decision-making power (Farnworth et al, 2020; Mwambi et al,2021;Acosta et al, 2020).

Responses from younger women in a male-headed monogamous household who were living with their mother-in-law reflected such hierarchies. A young wife aged 20, said her husband makes decisions with his mother and then tells her what to do. And sometimes he asks her what she wants, and if he approves, then she can do what she wants. In this instance key household decisions such as production decisions are made by her husband and mother-in-law, she is not invited to the discussion, yet her labour is a valuable part of the conjugal contract. Her mother-in-law has a higher status than her because of her age and is therefore part of the decision-making and may even be the one making all the decisions. Therefore Whitehead (1981) says that where a woman lives in a household with her in-laws, the contract may not be at the conjugal core but will involve wider social relations within the household. In this instance, even though her labour in production and reproductive work is valuable, her status is lower than her mother-in-law and other older wives in the household. But her mother-in-law supports the enforcement of her conjugal contract as she curbs her husband’s expenditure ensuring that funds are spent on household needs.

Age becomes an important factor in a male-headed monogamous household where the husband is much older and no longer goes to the farm. The younger 54-year-old wife assumes more power in the home and makes the decisions even though discussions are held with her husband

and son who has moved away from home. She manages the farms and obviously has a lot of decision-making power but also emphasises that her husband has to make decisions and she obeys so that there will be peace. Here again, is the presentation of the process of decision-making which gives the man respect and superiority, ensuring that social norms are seen to be respected (Farnworth et al, 2020). The maintenance of social relations between the man and woman in the household as well as in the sight of the community reinforces community norms of masculine and feminine behaviour which ensure that the rules of power relations are not flagrantly disobeyed. Angel-Urdinola and Wodon (2010) in their study on income generation and intra-household decision-making in Nigeria, that women's empowerment in household decision-making is limited and women do not make decisions about capital expenditure in the farming household. In other words, households, where women seem to make the decisions, are an abnormality thus the women ensure that their responses are socially desirable by always emphasising that, men make the final decisions and tell them what to do.

6.3.3 Decision-making in male-headed polygamous households

Continuing with the discussion on 'hierarchies of power', this is echoed in a polygamous household, where the eldest of three wives, aged thirty-six, is the only one involved in the decision-making process with her husband, where they discuss production issues, children's school fees and other household needs. The husband then instructs the two younger wives individually on what is to be done. The husband in this scenario exhibits the decision-making characteristics of a monogamous man with the eldest wife (Barr et al, 2019). The two younger wives do not participate in the decision-making process. Neither have they said they want to be part of the decision-making process. This could be because they understand who has the power in the household and may not want to get on the wrong side of the eldest wife. They

may also consider being informed of what is to be done by the husband as being part of the decision-making process (Acosta et al, 2020). In my observation of this family during meetings to plan for the focus group discussions and interviews with members of the producer organisation, it was evident that the younger wives were more like younger sisters in the house. They pointed us to the eldest wife and did not join the planning meetings. Respect for her higher status in the household has benefits as the middle wife had her name added to a list of members of a producer organisation to work with the IFAD contract rice farming project. The eldest wife here has not only 'power over' the younger wives but also 'power with' her husband (Akresh et al, 2016). The extent of her 'power over' the younger wives and her husband is further seen when she explains that all three wives cook together and work together on the farm and 'she tells the other wives what work will be done and the next day everyone in the household follows her instructions. For instance, she said 'We needed to mold blocks for our township house, so I said tomorrow we will mold the blocks and that's what we did.' There is a level of cooperation between co-wives which enables the decision to work together on rice farming acceptable to all wives (Barr et al. 2019). Yet, the eldest wife concludes her explanation with the statement that her husband is the decision-maker in the household.

This is not the case in another polygamous family, where age is a factor that enables younger women to gain access to the decision-making process within the household and higher status. One respondent, a 35-year-old second wife in a polygamous household, said that the process of decision-making in her household involves the elder wife, the husband, and herself even though she says, 'We always ask him to make the decision'. She is involved in the decision-making process because of her age. In this household, the husband is too old to go to the farm and stays home while the women do the farming with hired labour when they can afford to pay. The second wife's age becomes a source of power that strengthens her status in the household because the ageing husband and older wife need the strength of her youth. In another

household, a 45-year-old woman said, decisions in the household were taken by her husband and his first wife who were both elderly and she had to implement them. She only became part of the decision-making process when the first wife died, and she became the only wife.

Despite these seeming situations of significant power in the household, the women present the husbands as the person making the decisions and instructing the household on what to do. One respondent captures the reason for this when she says, ‘Even if the husband has no source of income, he is the head and the head has to make decisions because men give good advice, which is why women discuss with them.’ The use of decisions and advice almost as synonyms gives the impression that the women may be making the decisions in reality but give the impression that it is the men.

Individual household context matters in both household types, male-headed monogamous or polygamous households as presented in sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3 above (Akresh et al, 2016). For example, the age of the woman was a different factor in two different scenarios, one enabling while the other disabled participation in decision-making. Nonetheless, within the male-headed monogamous and male-headed polygamous household types, a common theme can be identified, which is also reflected in the female-headed household with an adult male child. From the women's and men's responses, husbands' discussing household issues with wives before making decisions is an accepted norm in the study site, which was also observed by Ivande et al (2015). Acosta et al's (2020) study however points out that such normative responses reflect different scenarios that both husband and wife consider as joint decision-making. For women, Acosta et al. (2020) say that being told what will be done by the man is seen as joint decision-making even when women's suggestions are ignored. For men, informing the wife of what the man has decided needs to be done is considered joint decision-

making. The man's identity and image as head of the household who provides direction for the household and makes decisions, which is respected by the wife is upheld. Herein lies a paradox, which shows that men have more power in the decision-making process and women do not participate as equals. Women can only make decisions concerning their traditional roles without men's approval (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon's, 2010). Even though her role in the household has value, her gendered identity constrains her to be subordinate to her husband. One male interviewee's response to decision-making in the household sums up the general conception of women's identity in the community and hence the home. He said, 'women are half people as the bible says because of the way of creation and men are full people.' As 'full people' therefore, the man's decision is the one the household implements.

If the man decides and the woman says no, and insists that it must be what she wants, then there will be conflict and the man will lose control of his house. Sometimes a man will tell his wife not to attend an event such as a burial but if she insists on attending, when she returns, it becomes trouble in the household, not respecting the man's decision leads to conflict

40-year-old, member of the Mbabunande women's producer organisation

I brought them to this house, so they must respect what I say, but I also listen to their advice so that I do the right thing, I have the final decision even about matters in their natal families, so I make the final decision in the household

55-year-old, significant other of a member of Menagbe women's producer organisation

The issue of respecting the man as the head is central to the decision-making process. This is what the women mean that men must make the final decision. All men I interviewed corroborated this and said they discuss it with their wives but make final decisions. They were emphatic in stating they were the decision-makers. It is not just respecting the man as the decision-maker in the household but ensuring that the husband is portrayed as such to the wider community. Men's dominance of decision-making in the household is thus very

obvious (Farnworth et al, 2020). Yet, this presentation of the man as the decision-maker is women's way of extracting benefits from the men and the system without drawing attention to their changing positions of power within the household (Aberman et al, 2018; Rao, 2012). Women understand this need for respect from men and seem to use this to influence decision-making and ensure they retain their support (Farnworth et al, 2020), which accounts for their unquestioning acceptance of their husband's decisions. None of the women reported doing the contrary to what the husband had directed. One woman pointed out that she got into trouble with her husband for giving her brother yams from her farm without her husband's approval because her brother worked with her at harvest time. There is therefore an ambiguity and ambivalence on women's agency as women can either be subordinated or enabled (Rao, 2012). Kabeer (1994:227) says such situations could also be that 'women find it more strategic to avoid or defuse potentially conflictual situations with men because they recognise that the rules of the game are loaded against them, and the cost of confrontation is likely to be high.' This means women's depiction of men as the decision-makers, a picture they are contented with, conceals the pervasive dominance of men.

This is evident in section 6.4 where I discuss the control of household resources. The varying accounts of Ivande et al (2015) and Agada and Igbokwe (2016) of Tiv farming households capture the ambiguity and ambivalence of the situation showing that within the same society, there are farming households with varying degrees of women's participation in the decision-making process while in other households women do not participate. This situation is also reflected in my study. The female extension assistant, I interviewed said that 'some men say they have major things to do with their money and consider household food and children's school fees and clothing as women's responsibilities. Women therefore make major contributions to the family needs from their farms and trading.' This means that in such households there is no pooling of farm produce nor income from the sale of such, nor is there

a decision-making process where women are involved. Men's controlling power in decision-making in households is also exemplified in the dependence of some all-female producer organisations on men.

Some women's groups have men who guide them, and these men are not members of the group but are silent advisers sitting somewhere and directing the women

Gender and Capacity building specialist, female, MII Local implementation partner

Over ninety percent of female farmers in my study, participate in the decision-making process in their households and always know what has been decided having made an input even if it was not acceptable to the husband. Two things stand out from this situation. First, men dominate decision-making but do not have absolute power over household decisions even as they still retain more advantages, and the degree of this power varies between households and types of households (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010; Farnworth et al, 2020; Akresh et al, 2016; Barr et al,2020). Secondly, men and women interact in decision-making for the benefit of the household as income from selling farm produce is the main source of household funds used for the maintenance of the household. Therefore, there is a pooling of resources and cooperation in this study's farming households even though husbands and wives have separate spheres (Okali, 2012). This is the situation that existed before female farmers engaged with MII. For this reason, all the women said nothing has changed in decision-making in their homes other than that they have more grains to sell and more money to spend because of applying MII teachings to their soyabean farms and other crops.

The change in the household has only been in our farming of soyabeans, we plan how to use the income from it and still farm the following season, for instance, in the construction of this townhouse, we sold our soyabeans to buy some building materials such as sand

35-year-old female member Camp Nagi producer organisation

MARKETS II producer organisations did not facilitate conversations that enabled women to reflect on the decision-making process in their households to identify what aspects they want to change or strengthen and how to go about it. This lack of deep reflection may also be responsible for their inability to recognise changes(if any) in the decision-making process in the household. In the Tiv farming household, the primary issue is not getting women to be involved in decision-making as Tiv rural female farmers are involved as I have shown, but to enable them to be heard in the areas where they identify as being powerless in the decision-making process and to strengthen their power(Van Campenhout et al, 2023; Cornwall, 2016; Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021; Angel-Urdinola and Wodon,2010). Elements of normative bias in responding to questions by research participants show the desire to present a united front to outsiders and potential funders. This is corroborated by the findings of other researchers with Angel-Urdinola and Woden (2010) stating women’s powerlessness in decision-making to corroborate the study’s conclusion that women do not have a voice in capital decisions in the household.

6.4 Control of household resources and assets

The main productive asset for Tiv farming households is the land on which they grow their crops. These family lands are controlled by men (Tushima, 2016; Alfa, 2023;Yecho, 2016; Berry, 1989; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968;) who decide where members of the household will farm, including unmarried daughters as well as married daughters who return to their natal families seeking farmland. Women have only usufruct rights to farmlands as wives, daughters, and sisters (Yecho, 2016; Agada and Igbokwe, 2016; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). A woman’s control over her farmland subsists only during her marriage; if she is divorced and

moves out of the house, she loses her rights to the farmland (Tushima, 2016 ;Yecho, 2016; Rao, 2012; Burfisher and Horeinstein, 1985). This is part of the conjugal contract where the wife knows that she cannot lay claim to her farmland in the event of a divorce as land cannot be transferred out of the household or clan (Tushima, 2016).

In female-headed households, widowed women control the farmlands of their husbands in trust for their sons. A 55-year-old female member of the Camp Nagi producer organisation exemplifies this when she said, 'I show my sons where to farm and when they need to expand the farm, I point out to them the directions they should go.' Because she knew her husband's land and had adult sons, male members of the extended family would respect her control of the land if she did not cross the boundaries which were her husband's. A 45-year-old member of the Mbabuande women's producer organisation continues to farm her husband's farms even after his death because she remains unmarried meaning she has not left the family. Yet her control is limited as the land is family land and she cannot for instance decide to sell it on her own 'because the land is associated with a segment in a lineage system and hence with agnation' (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968:92). Only the agnates can therefore sell the land under the current land use Act. In male-headed monogamous and polygamous households, the men control the land and decide where the wife farms in line with the traditional means of land ownership which is through patrilineage (Tushima, 2016; Yecho, 2016). I found two instances in my study where families/households did not have access to family land and therefore had to rent land. The first is the instance of women not having farmlands in their husband's family and therefore renting farmland or going to their natal kin.

I farm in my home because my husband does not have land because his father did not have land, so I go to my brothers and relatives who always allocate a big plot to us because they have a vast land.

40-year-old member Mbabuande women's producer group.

One aspect of the conjugal contract is thus unmet by the husband who cannot provide his wife farmland. Such a situation is an abnormality as the Tiv system of land ownership ensures that all agnates have access to land for their farming needs (Tushima, 2016; Yecho, 2016; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968). The willingness of the natal family to give their sister farmland for free is because they have the lands, where there is insufficient land, her access would not be guaranteed as she is still married and should access land in her marital family. The man's inability to provide farmland for his wife can be offset by renting a farm or giving money for the purchase of all household food.

The second scenario for renting land is as a result of violent conflicts that have displaced people from their ancestral homes and lands making them internally displaced persons. One participant explained that he rents farmland for his two wives, so each has her farm, thus ensuring that the traditional provisioning of farmland for the wife is met. For displaced people, this is a temporary measure until they return to their homes. With post-colonial land laws and the growth of urban areas, land can now be bought or rented in Tiv land (Yecho, 2016). Female farmers can now buy farmlands if they have the money over which they will have full control except if they decide to hand it over to their husbands.

In terms of labour, husbands, and wives as well as everyone in the household, regardless of the type of household understand that they are expected to provide the labour needed on the farms. All adult members of the household including teenagers and children, work on the farm and where adults cannot go to the farm because of other work engagements, they pay for hired labour. Control over this labour is joint as well as self-driven, yet husbands exert more control

over the labour of women and other household members (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010; Berry, 1989). Female farmers said that husbands decided which farm to work on, and on what day, but they also made suggestions. This exchange of labour is part of the conjugal contract which extends beyond the husband and wife to all members of the household (Carney, 1988). This right to women's labour is not exclusive to the household and therefore the man. Women retain some control over their labour as they can be members of women's labour groups. Women in such groups provide labour on members' farms and as hired labour on non-members' farms for a fee. In this instance, the women have control over their labour and the proceeds of their labour.

In our women's labour groups, we provide labour on each member's farms.....payment for this labour is made to the group.... The group's treasurer keeps the money. We charge members of the labour group less and charge non-members more for farm labour. At the end of the year before Christmas, we use the money to purchase agreed items for group members. The group may decide to buy items like basins, food flasks, clothing, and plastic chairs, these are distributed equally to all members who were part of the labour teams working on farms.

41-year-old member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

The money women make in their women's labour groups is theirs to spend, without their husbands' oversight regardless of household type and location. This explains why the Gender and capacity-building expert wondered why the women in one of her women's producer organisations did not want to use their funds to buy farming inputs but would rather spend on clothing or some other kitchen items. This was a financial resource women had complete control over, to spend without first asking permission from their husbands. When looked at only in terms of farming and increased productivity, it would appear as if the women cannot make critical farming decisions as they felt they could not negotiate with agro-dealers to purchase pesticides, herbicides, and fertiliser for their farms. They would rather spend their group money on themselves. Yet they had been making decisions for years on how to spend

the money from their farm labour, going to the market bargaining to purchase bulk items for all group members. They just did not want to spend their money on the farm where they had limited or no control over money from the sale of farm produce. Spending it on the things they wanted was therefore an opportunity to have power and control over their money and assets independent of their husbands. Household members including husbands, therefore, do not have any claims to this money as it comes from the women's private group labour (Whitehead (1981), which even the conjugal contract cannot lay claim to, as it belongs to a group of women, not under the conjugal contract. The husbands recognise this and when asked what his wife would take away if there is a divorce, a 45-year-old husband of a member of the Menagbe women's producer organisation who has two wives said, 'her clothing and kitchenware... she did not bring anything so she will leave with nothing.' This resonates with Goody (1976:6), talking about marriage in Ghana, who said 'If a woman brings nothing into a marriage, she gets nothing when the union is dissolved.' This is regardless of the labour she has expended in the family doing productive and reproductive work as well as contributing to community development through her community work. Domestic work has no value despite its importance in the survival and maintenance of the family (Moore, 1988).

Control and management of income from farm produce are treated in the same manner as decision-making in the household. In monogamous male-headed households, control over income from farm produce also involves an agreement between the husband and the wife, when to sell, and what the household needs to spend money on. This seemingly joint control of farm produce and income extends to the women's yams and other crops intercropped on her yam farm as well as her soyabean farm. The women cannot decide on their own to sell the yams from their farms without their husband's approval. In 1953, Bohannan and Bohannan documented that women could get reprimanded publicly by their husbands if they ran out of

yams too early because they sold the yams that should have been reserved for household food. This meant that women could sell yams or sell more than they should without their husband's knowledge, and he only became aware of this at the point of lack. Women in my study however said they do not sell their yams without the husband's knowledge. Again, women, even when they say they have joint control over income from the sale of farm produce, end up saying the man is in control. It, therefore, means that the man has more power over the control of household income. This is corroborated by Agada and Igbokwe (2015), who say that men in Tiv farming households control family income.

We have joint control.... when we meet family needs, the husband then gives me some money to spend on my personal needs from what is not spent.... even if it is your farm, the husband must decide what should be done with the produce

45-year-old member, Mbabuande Women's Producer Organisation

Once we bring our produce home from the farm, he tells me when to sell and what to sell. So, I sell, and money is used as predetermined for instance for school fees, money left over is used for other household needs, and we control things together

40-year-old, member Mbabuande Women's Producer Organisation

When I want to buy clothing, I tell my husband and he gives me the produce to sell and meet my needs. The husband is in control of the farm produce as I did not bring land from my family for the farming, nor do I buy the inputs, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, or seeds for the farming, he buys so he is in control

20-year-old, member Camp Nagi producer organisation

We farm together, all our farms are ours as we work on all our farms together, from yam farm to grain farms, we have one purse, my wife is the one who sells the produce, and we decide what to sell together and what the money will be used for

60-year-old, male, significant other of an active member, Menagbe women's producer organisation

In polygamous homes, the women said the men have control of household resources. The husbands decided when the farm produce was to be sold and for what it was to be used. He controls also what the money is spent on as wives must inform him of how much they sold

their produce, and they can only spend the money on the items on which they sought permission to sell in the first place.

Our husband is in control of household resources, even if he discusses it with us, he is the one in control and tells us what to do and the wives comply. When all three wives have a meeting with him, he tells us what will be done with the resources and how money from the sale of grains will be used. Even though each wife has her yam farm, you cannot just go and sell your yams and spend the money, you tell your husband that you want to sell your yams and if he permits then you sell but you tell him how much you have sold it for and you only spend the money when he says you can on the things he has approved for you to use it on. As for the husband, he has his produce from his farm and sells and uses it as he pleases

35-year-old, female member, Camp Nagi producer organisation

The same situation obtains in male-headed monogamous households as in polygamous households. Income from women's farm produce is controlled by men as women still need the man's approval to spend money after they have sold their farm produce. This means that the husband could change his mind after her yams and produce are sold and not give approval for her to spend the money. Also, where the family needs outweigh the money made, the woman's needs are shelved and moved forward to a time when there is extra money. The female extension assistant said the husbands are in control of all farm produce in the house including the yams.

After harvests, the landlords (husbands) take over, and the women always hand over produce to their husbands to decide on what should be done with it and when they sell, the money is handed over to the husband. So even if wives farm on their own, they must wait for their husbands to decide when to sell and the husband must know how much was made from sales, what the money was used for and sometimes even take the money.

Extension assistant, female, Benue State ADP

My husband takes control as head of the house when it comes to money from sell of farm produce, the discussion with me is only about how to go about farming. Once money comes in, he is in charge ... except when it comes to household food, otherwise, I do not control anything

49-year-old, member, Mbabunade women's producer organisation

In female-headed households, both scenarios played out, where the women have control over the household resources, as heads of the household as well as where she had an adult son living with her, who takes control of income because he is the man. Women in this type of household have a stronger voice and control over household resources.

I have my farm, so I do not share income from my farm produce with anyone, I manage all my household resources and all income from my trading in groundnut oil and cakes. And if I want to discuss anything about this, I discuss it with my friend with whom we sometimes farm together

45-year-old member, Mbabuanade women's producer organisation

Income from women's trading is their money but all women who said they have a trade outside farming said they spent money from these trading on household needs such as children's school fees, school lunches, household breakfast, and purchase of kitchen supplies such as salt, oil, and clothing for themselves and the children. This was reported by women in all three types of households - female-headed, male-head monogamous, and male-headed polygamous households.

I trade in grains; I buy and sell. When I have money, I buy, store, and sell. The first thing money from this trade goes to is the children's school fees and other school supplies, then household food. I have been doing this for over ten years, before contact with MII

35-year-old, female member, Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

I used to trade in dry fish for three years but now the business has slowed down because of attacks by nomadic cattle herders, who have made it risky for the fishermen and for women to go to the interior to buy fish to resell in town. I used to get an income and spend it on household food and my children. We are a large (polygamous) household, and our husband was struggling to purchase soup for the family. So, I asked my husband, and he gave me money to start the fish business which was helpful as we also used the fish for household food

45-year-old, member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

Even where women have pigs, goats, and chickens, the only instance they can make a unilateral decision is when they decide to slaughter a chicken for household food because they have no alternative. In this instance, there will be no conflicts. Women however cannot sell their goats or chickens or give chickens as gifts without their husbands' prior knowledge and approval as this will be considered disrespectful to the man. Again, the issue of disrespect arises for not getting approval, even though it is referred to as 'informing the husband of your intention,' it is an approval-seeking process. This approval-seeking process applies to everything said to belong to the woman - yams, chickens, goats, pigs, grains intercropped on her yam farm, soyabeans, vegetables, spices, and herbs. Only cooking items such as salt, oil, and matches do not need to go through the man's approval and can be freely given to a neighbour or friend.

Goats, chickens, she controls as they are hers and she can do what she wants, she can sell ...she can tell me that she is going to sell, so no problem... if she gives to someone, I know then no problem.... but if she gives a stranger I will ask for an explanation....so I have to know what she is doing as we have these things for the benefit of the household, they have to be properly managed...we do things together, she cannot just go ahead and do whatever she wants, it is just to respect me that is why she tells me that she wants to sell or do something with her assets

45-year-old man, member of Camp Nagi producer organisation

I control major things and income from my wives. I deposit money in my account from the sale of major crops such as rice, yams, and soybeans. The women control other things such as their soyabeans, groundnuts, maize, and dry yam chips and use money from it to buy household needs such as soap, soup, and cosmetics, these are theirs to control. So, when they need to buy something, they ask me permission to sell and use

64-year-old man, member, Menagbe women's producer organisation

She cannot just sell or give out her things because she is in my care. I must give consent for her to use them. And if we discuss what she wants to do first, then no problem but if she does not discuss it with me first, it will be a conflict because I must know about everything except, they explain very satisfactorily why I was not told first.

55-year-old man, significant other of an inactive member of Menagbe women's producer organisation

There is a contradiction in women's control of resources just as in decision-making which indicates gender inequalities. While women and men say that women control specific resources, they conclude by saying men control these resources. When women must go through an approval process to enable them to sell or gift what is theirs, this reinforces their status as that of a child who cannot make an independent choice or decision. This reason of 'women being like children' is given by men and women, to explain why men must control the use of women's assets as well as household resources. Afonja (1990) remains relevant when she says that this reflects the lower status of women as they remain subordinated to men, despite claims that women control food crops and domesticated animals. This contrasts with the Kofyar women where Stone et al (1995), report that women keep the money from the sale of their farm produce and local beer selling as their assets, yet the women continue to depend on their husbands to provide for household food and need thus leaving them wealthier than their husbands. Similarly, Muslim Hausa women of northwest Nigeria, own their home-based trades(work for payment, sale of home processed foods) and money from it with some women being wealthier than their impoverished husbands (Verschoor et al. 2019; Hill, 1969). This is not the situation with the Tiv rural female farmers in my study. Female members of MII producer organisations do not have equality of control over agriculture production and the distribution of benefits. They thus have not attained the highest level of Longwe's empowerment framework where they can be said to be empowered(Longwe, 1991). Control and power over agriculture decisions in the household and household relations remains in the hands of the man who decides what resources the woman can access and how and when she can use them. This maintains the gender relations within the family/household in keeping with

the acceptable norms of the institution (Kabeer, 1994) and even where there are changes, the women ensure that this remains private, so they are not seen as breaking community norms.

CHAPTER 7: ‘Women are visitors, they are not community’

The definition of a community from the perspective of a spatial location and what Tönnies (1974) calls the ‘Gemeinschaft community’ aptly describes my study site. A community is defined as a place, a village, where social ties are centred around families, common ethnicity and language, a shared culture, traditions, and local political culture, where in some instances agriculture is the predominant economic activity (Fielding-Lloyd and Blackshaw, 2009; Bradshaw, 2008; Salomon, 2005; LeGates, 2013; Agarwal, 1997). In my study site, which is a rural community, agriculture is the dominant economic activity. Even in the semi-urban local government headquarters, agriculture is the dominant economic activity given that families have farms as is characteristic of the Tiv people (George-Genyi et al, 2021; Mead, 1955; Bohannan, and Bohannan, 1953). A common interest and a sense of solidarity are thus built by people in the locality engaging with each other as neighbours, family, friends, and business partners in their social networks (Bradshaw, 2008; Salomon, 2005; LeGates, 2013). I extend this definition beyond the village to cover smaller towns such as the local government headquarters in this study which is more cosmopolitan than the villages. People in the local government headquarters are Tiv from different villages as well as people of other ethnicities engaging in economic activities other than agriculture. For the MII producer organisations in this study, all members are Tiv, from the same locality by marriage for the women and as agnates for the men from different families having additional sources of income such as trading, masonry, and carpentry. Even when it is a semi-urban producer organisation such as the Mbabuande women’s producer organisation based in the local government headquarters it is homogenous consisting of Tiv women, most of whom are primarily farmers as well as traders.

Women in this study site are all actively involved in social groups, the most prominent being the women's labour groups and church groups, thus they have a sense of solidarity as well as an established basis for collective action (Cornwall, 2016; Baden, 2013) even if this action is not aimed at changing power relations in the community. Therefore, when I reference a community called 'ityo' in Tiv, all interviewees have the same understanding of what I refer to. Their first response to the word community is the community of men and then they talk of a community of women.

In this chapter, I, explore these 'two communities' within one spatial community as I examine whether membership in MII producer organisations empowered women to challenge or resist disempowering gender relations within the community collectively and what impact this had on their other social groups. The clear distinction in the minds of women and men of these two communities is a testament to the gender differentiation within the community and the ordering of gender relations. I use the concept of gender contracts to analyse gender relations at the community level. Are women bargaining with patriarchy at this level and renegotiating gender contracts? It is possible to renegotiate gender contracts at the community level even in a strongly knit patrilineal community such as the Tiv? I discuss this at the intersection of the mediating factors of herder-farmer conflict and what this means for masculinities in the study context, the opportunity for renegotiating gender contracts, and whether or not women seized the opportunity to renegotiate gender contracts of community participation with regards to security. I also discuss women's entry into formal political spaces, how these new political gender contracts were formed, and what has changed in gender relations as a result of this new contract. In discussing the articulation of MII project goals, I examined this in the light of respondents' contextual definition of women's empowerment as a reflection of how the project

was implemented and whether it followed any of the pathways of empowerment discussed in chapters two and five.

Therefore, in seeking to respond to my third research question, **‘How and to what extent does female farmers’ participation in farmers’ producer organisations affect their interactions with the community,’** I first present the socio-political setting of the Tiv which provides the traditional definitions of what the community is in Tiv land and who can be a member of the community. The title of this chapter is the succinct definition of community as explained by my male and female participants. In section 7.2, I briefly present the concept of the gender contract I use to analyse my data on whether female members of MII producer organisations have attempted to bargain with the patriarchal gendered systems and identities for new gender contracts. I explore this further in section 7.2.1 where I interrogate the new political gender contracts, seeking to find out if these new gender relations have led to further negotiations of the community’s overarching gender contract. In section 7.3, I look at the community of women seeking to understand if membership of the MII producer organisation has provided the space for women to develop a sense of shared interests, identities, and solidarity to enable them to renegotiate gender contracts with the community (Cornwall, 2016; Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021; Baden,2013; Rowlands, 2008). Section 7.4 investigates the concept of ‘ityo,’ which refers to the community generally in Tiv but also means ‘the community of men’. I set the groundwork for this discussion earlier in chapter 6 when I discussed strongly knit men’s age grades, family, and community leadership. In section 7.5, I examine the impact of incessant herder-farmer conflict on masculinities and the opportunity that conflict offers for women to renegotiate gender contracts and if this happened in my research context. And finally, in section 7.5, I present the contextual definition of women’s empowerment, to enable an understanding of what the people, both men and women, mean when they talk about women’s empowerment. All respondents defined women’s empowerment in economic terms, an indication of MII’s

exclusive focus on economic empowerment. I find that women in my study site, despite an active engagement in social groups even before MII, having some level of conscientisation and questioning, have not been able to develop the power and solidarity to renegotiate gender contracts at the community level and that MII missed an opportunity to develop their capacity to do so.

7.1 The Tiv social and political structure

The social and political organisation of the Tiv begins with the age group of men who are born within the same year and who take seniority among themselves banding together as a society for mutual help (Ushe, 2021; Downes, 1933). These age groups who grow up and get circumcised together have a common interest, protect each other, take offensive action against evildoers, and ensure that witches who kill anyone of them are punished (Downes, 1933). The age groups provided farm labour on each other's farms, went hunting together, settled matrimonial disputes, loaned each other money, and held age-grade feasts (Downes, 1933). What this meant is that strong sub-communities of men were nurtured right from childhood, building a close-knit circle of men that did not let women in and who became family, kindred, clan, and community leaders. A strong masculine identity was nurtured through these groupings of men. The individual man was thus dependent on his family and age group for his development (Mead, 1995). This has implications for the definition of community amongst the Tiv as these age groups reinforce the norms of the patrilineal society which gives them power and authority.

Downes (1933: 26) reported the presence of female age groups but says little about these except to say that 'the elder women were revered and feared who hold positions according to their

capabilities which depends on their witchcraft.’ The important thing about the women’s age grades was witchcraft powers and not about protecting and supporting each other as the men do because these women were mostly wives of the family. It also meant that such women with witchcraft powers would be consulted and have some level of prestige, but it also made them vulnerable to being accused of killing someone (Abraham, 1933). Women thus had no age grades and where they existed they were so weak that ethnographers failed to report on them. Women thus could do little for each other in terms of upholding women’s interests but could be a source of enforcing punishment on women who deviated from social norms. Bohannan and Bohannan (1953) gave an example of women who refused to give the yams requested by the head of the household being reprimanded by the women in the compound. Bohannan and Bohannan (1953) contradict Downes (1933) with their findings that women did not have age groups and were only associated with their husbands’ age groups; even if widowed with a male child to take care of her, the man’s age grade was responsible in his absence to provide her with the same assistance they would give him. These two contradicting findings about women’s age grades further indicate women’s lower status as this could mean that women’s age grades were not a common feature across the ethnic group, that what existed was a loose grouping of older women with magical powers, or that they were so relegated to the background such that their witchcraft power was of no importance nor benefited the community. This lack of information about women’s age groups reflects the focus of anthropologists researching the Tiv people at the time of Downe’s (1933) writing. There was a dearth of research focused on intrahousehold relations between men and women, and what influence women had in the family, household, or community. Downes(1933) for instance was researching for the colonial administration as a staff to understand the people for administration. Intrahousehold gender relations would therefore not have been a priority for him.

The various age grades of men were under the authority of the household head of the compound. All matters of importance had to be referred to the head of the household, usually, the oldest male of his age grade, and his permission was sought (Nomishan,2020; Downes, 1933; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). He had the responsibility of settling disputes and performing the fertility rites for the people and crops. His authority was respected and enforceable if it was considered just (Downes, 1933; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). Male authority and leadership were thus created in the household as women were never heads of the household as the lineage was not matrilineal. The heads of such households constituted the council of elders of the kindred which was made up of four or five households all of whom traced lineage to the same patriarch(Mead, 1955). The council elected a chief, a man with powerful magic to protect the land, perform magic rites of fertility for the land and the people, and was the kindred's spokesperson and implemented the will of the group (Downes, 1933). These kindred groups were the village areas and were as Downes (1933) described them 'the natural administrative units of the Tiv'. The criteria for election as the chief of this council were strong wizardry skills('tsav' and 'akombo'), as well as rotation. Thus, other members of the council could be stronger than the chief in terms of magical powers. Consequently, the chief had no opinion of his own and was only the voice of the council of elders(Mead, 1955). Mead(1955) however says that this system could not be called a political system in pre-colonial Tiv land as it was more of a council of elders. This is buttressed by Bohannan(1958) when she explains that the Tiv do not have a political affairs sphere as even the language has no word for politics even though the people are concerned about the maintenance of peace and waging of war which can then be regarded as political. Underpinning this society thus was the religious beliefs and the moral obligations arising there.

A 'political and governance system', the council of elders, was exclusively male, headed by the eldest man and supported by other older men from the family compounds at the kindred level. Women did not qualify to be members of this council (Ushe, 2021; Aper, 2018; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968). The nurturing of leaders in family compounds was focused on boys and young men, searching for young men with occultic discernment who were then trained to develop their magical powers (Ushe, 2021; Downes, 1933). These boys and young men became influential community leaders as they had the magical power to protect the land and perform fertility rites. Women were excluded from this process of developing the potential occultic discernment, which some girls and women would have had if given the opportunity. Abrahams (1933) acknowledges the existence of older women with strong magical powers, which certainly developed over time and not just at old age and nurtured by female and male experts in wizardry. In addition, the Tiv considered that every person possessed 'tsav' which was a substance attached to the heart but did not develop in everyone. This means that women too had this substance and thus girls with this occultic magical sense of perception could also be nurtured to develop their Tsav and become community leaders as this was a key criterion for leadership. As pointed out in section 6.1, the Tiv religion underpinned their everyday life, 'it was an ever-present aspect of their everyday activities, of the interpretation of all experiences and behaviour'(Mead, 1955: 97). In other words, every aspect, of the Tiv people, was understood in the light of their religious beliefs, their farming and relation to nature, marriage, birth, death, kinship, health, wealth, social relations, peace, and war. This religious belief informed the grooming of male leaders and the close knitting of men of family and kindred to the exclusion of women. It was therefore a source of male power and authority which the women did not have to draw from.

The community, called 'ityo' in Tiv refers to a man's agnates. His 'ityo' was responsible for providing him with a field, a wife, and allies during war, accord to him the right to live in the land of his 'ityo' (a fixed territorial space), and through his 'ityo' he had citizenship. He could also practice his witchcraft within this group and be killed by witchcraft in this group (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). So, all men of the same lineage referred to each other as 'ityo', meaning they were obligated to protect each other's interests (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968). This was the Tiv social and political units and system, which persists today as people are identified with their pater's lineage even if not residents in the territory. The maternal lineage was also recognised and its obligations to a man were voluntary, but they were responsible for protecting daughters and their children; for instance, the maternal lineage would insist on a death inquiry to find out who killed their daughter's children, and it was a place of refuge for men accused of witchcraft by his 'ityo' (Abrahams,1933).

The absence of female age groups and the subsequent exclusion of women from leadership within the family and kindred group as leaders or assistants, coupled with the definition of the 'ityo' as masculine, effectively excluded women from community('ityo') decision-making. This resonates with Agarwal (1997) who said that women are often excluded from (or severely underrepresented) in public decision-making bodies that enforce and modify the rules governing the community. A 55-year-old woman I interviewed described women as 'homeless' because women had no voice or respect in either their natal or marital families, women, therefore, have no value. So, both men and women in my study described women as visitors, brought to the family by men and therefore not community. Tiv women by custom and norms of the ethnicity have minimal power in the administration of the family and community even though they have control of certain domestic aspects with the wives of the eldest man in the

compound commanding more respect²⁹ (Nomishan,2020; Angel-Urdinoli, 2010; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). A strong androcentric social and political system was thus established which remains active. This exclusion of Tiv women from the community decision-making process is not peculiar, Alwedinani (2017) says women in patriarchal societies are often powerless, especially in the public sphere. Kandiyoti (1988), however, says that women can either challenge patriarchal constraints or find alternative ways to exercise their power. Are Tiv rural female farmers, members of MII producer organisations finding ways to challenge and exercise power in a system that excludes them from participation in community decision-making?

7.2 Gender contracts, bargaining with patriarchy in the Tiv farming Community

I present here the concept of gender contracts, outlined in chapter two. I examine how rural female Tiv farmers bargain (or not) with patriarchy in the community ('ityo') which by its constitution, as outlined in section 7.1 above, excludes women from all its governing councils and administrative units from the family to the kindred level, the two basic levels of Tiv society.

The concept of gender contracts is useful for understanding how female membership in MII producer organisations has influenced women's negotiations and influencing their community, as the concept posits that gender relations are not static but can be renegotiated incrementally (Caretta, and Borjeson, 2015;Kalamabamu, 2005; Forsberg, 2001). Hirdman (1991) who espoused the concept says that gender contracts are a result of gender conflicts and a response to new material, economic and political environments (Hirdmann, 1991). Kalabamu (2005:

²⁹ One reason for the respect of older women was the belief that they had strong magical powers (Tsav) to have outlived their peers (Downes, 1933).

245) defines gender contracts as ‘invisible power relationships, which establish roles, responsibilities, privileges, status, sexuality and behaviour of men and women within households, communities, the market, and the state.’ These invisible relationships are based on perceptions of how men and women, girls and boys ought to behave, the shaping of meaning that these perceptions can change over time (Caretta and Borjeson, 2015). Culture is, therefore, shaped by these gender contracts which define social, economic, and political relationships (Kalabamu, 2006). The status of men and women in a society is determined by people with the power to do so, normally the men as can be seen from the definition of ‘ityo’ presented in section 7.1, thus creating explicit and implicit differences and inequalities (Kalabamu,2006). Caretta and Borjeson (2015) point out that even though power structures are unequal they are not static and change through the process of negotiation entrenched in everyday practice. Female Tiv farmers can therefore achieve incremental changes in a strongly knit patriarchal structure. The non-static nature of the concept of gender contracts, which are informal just like conjugal contracts, is useful in understanding how gender contracts have been and are renegotiated between men and women. Several such gender contracts can be identified within one society (Hirdman, 1998). As Forsberg (2001) pointed out, three types of gender contracts were identified in one Swedish study. This means that there could also be more than one gender contract in the Tiv community, indicative of the possibility of negotiating beliefs and actions that are traditionally considered unchanging cultural norms. At the community level in Tiv society, the overarching community gender contract is one where women have no place in community decision-making, where the space is occupied by agnates with strong age-grade ties headed by older men with witchcraft powers acting as guardians of the land and the people

7.2.1 Tiv women negotiating new political gender contracts?

Northern Nigerian women (including women in Benue State) gained the franchise in 1979, which allowed them to vote and be voted for elective positions in the second republic (Abdulkareem, 2023). This was nineteen years after their southern Nigerian counterparts got the franchise, voted, and were elected to regional and federal parliaments (Abdulkareem, 2023). Before this, women in northern Nigeria who were active in political parties were simply voiceless supporters as they had no vote (Osimen, 2018). There was therefore a limited presence of women in leadership positions in partisan politics in the first republic in Northern Nigeria (Abdulkareem, 2023; Osimen, 2018). The 1979 franchise was an outcome of external and internal pressure in the northern region for the inclusion of women in governance which was part of events that would culminate in new gender contracts in Tiv land.

As pointed out by Forsberg (2001), within the traditional gender system I found other gender contracts which I will refer to as the modern political gender contracts that allow women to participate, contest, and be elected to office as community representatives in partisan politics. There is also the admittance of women with political power and wealth to their 'ityo' discussions and decision-making when the need arises. All this means that the overarching gender contract is negotiable and can change even if it continues to maintain an androcentric appearance.

Women are in active partisan politics ... they learn new things and share with other women and men; sometimes it helps men as well as other women who would otherwise have no idea of these new things. Yes, we have permitted women to participate in partisan politics

51-year-old husband of a member, Menagbe women's producer organisation

I have been invited to attend political meetings because I am an active political party member, so once there are party activities, I am invited as one of the female politicians and mobilisers

54-year-old member, Mbabuande, women's producer organisation

During the selection of local councillors, they asked women to contribute to the discussion, so I also spoke, as a member of the executive council of a political party ... on security issues such as the cattle herders attack, if you are a big woman then they will let you contribute to the discussion, as the herders' issue is a big problem. So, if a woman has a suggestion to solve the issue, they will let you speak at their meetings.

45-year-old member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

The overarching gender contract now exists along these two sub-gender contracts because of social, political, and economic reasons. These reasons include women who had godfathers or rich powerful husbands sponsoring them for elective office and women who had money contesting for elected office. The renegotiation of this gender contract has taken place over time catalysed by the franchise and the increasing numbers of educated women, but the big push was global and national agitations for more women in elected and appointive offices (Abdulkareem, 2023). The growing inclusion of women in leadership positions in the country is evidenced by the military directive of 1983 (Abdulkareem, 2023) that instructed all state military governors to appoint at least one woman to the state executive council. This has become a norm with gender activists pushing for a minimum of thirty-five percent (35%) of women in appointive positions as provided for in the national gender policy. These and other external socio-political and economic changes are impacting rural farming communities. This impact is forcing communities to change so they are not left behind.

Communities just like families are influenced by changes beyond their borders. And this could have happened in antiquity as well. Abraham's (1933) reference to the respect of older women who had strong magical powers, (and there were many women practicing witchcraft), is an

indication that these women could have been secretly admitted into the 'ityo' discussions or aspects of it especially with the nocturnal witchcraft rituals for fertility and protection. The older women's witchcraft power is equivalent of contemporary political power and wealth. What this means is that the practice of excluding rural female farmers as 'visitors' who cannot participate in the 'ityo' discussion can be transformed, incrementally, as is already happening. However, changes so far have not had a significant impact on the structure of the 'ityo' as it remains androcentric. This is what Kandiyoti (1988) meant when she said small individual changes at the personal level within the household will not translate to changes in gender structures.

Even though she was referring to the household level, this can be extrapolated to the community level because the 'ityo' in the Tiv society starts at the family level. Admitting some women into male-dominated community decision-making spaces will not change a gendered system but may only bring certain reliefs for certain women enabling women to better manage male authority. On the other hand, according to Kibria (1990), the 'community of women' may only use their new economic status to cope with male authority in the home and community without desiring to change traditional gender relations between men and women in the household and thus in the community. For this to happen, women's groups in the Tiv farming community need to amass collective power at the community level (Agarwal, 2020) to achieve for instance what the Vietnamese women in Kibria's (1990) did. I did not see this collective power in my study site. The Vietnamese women, however, were in a new environment as migrants and had gained a stronger voice because their incomes were the family's main income as the men could not find employment. These conditions do not hold completely for the Tiv women in this study and may explain their inability to question gender norms. I discuss this further in section 7.3. What is evident here is that the new political gender contracts even though externally forged have

moved an aspect of the ‘doxa’ to the ‘heterodoxy,’ thereby forcing an issue that is taken for granted(exclusion of women in community decision-making spaces) into the space of discourse and contestations(Agarwal, 1997).

7.3 The Community of Women

Numerous measurements of women’s empowerment have membership in groups as indicators of empowerment either within a leadership domain (Alkire et al, 2013) or a collective agency domain (Malapit, 2019). Several studies show that group membership is key in the development of women’s collective agency with the potential to change gender relations in a community and the household (Cornwall, 2016; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire, 2016; Levy, 2017; Sugden et al, 2021; Agarwal, 2020; Rowlands, 2008). This is also reflected by others such as Lecoutere (2017) who found that group membership had a positive impact on women’s decision-making power in the household and the community. Chen (1983) shows how women began to take a stand in their community on issues of justice even threatening to hold their judicial councils if the verdicts of the local courts were prejudiced against women. This was a proposed group action, and the women could only begin to think so radically because of their membership in the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) women’s group established by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee³⁰ programme. Group membership and activities built the women’s power to take a collective stance against the village elite and norms such as female seclusion, support and working together (power with) to address individual as well as community issues. These women had moved from literacy classes, health, and agriculture groups to becoming groups where members had become confident in themselves (the power within) to address their other identified issues. They came

³⁰ BRAC is a private, non-governmental rural development institution established and managed by Bangladeshis in the aftermath of the Bangladesh war of rehabilitation in 1972(Chen, 1983)

to understand that they could gain more acting as a group and were so conscientised that they were ready to call and constitute their own local councils (local judicial councils were traditionally called and administered by men) if needed. For example, they were also able to take a stance and stop men from marrying second wives. A group's potential to change community attitudes was echoed by the 35-year-old female, gender, and capacity-building expert (staff of MII local implementation partner), I interviewed. She said that 'women working together can negotiate cultural restrictions with community leaders. Community leaders are more likely to listen to a group of women than a single woman, who would be labelled a rebel refusing to do what is expected of women.' The MII producer organisations thus were potential spaces that could become like the BRAC women's groups.

Membership of women's groups is part of the fabric of the Tiv farming community because of the historical existence of women's labour groups to which the majority of rural female farmers belong. All female members of MII producer organisations, therefore, are members of other women's groups in their community, meaning that all of them had experience with group membership before engagement with MII. They, therefore, had experiences of the possibilities that collective action provides from the things they have achieved working together in these groups. Membership of the MII producer organisation was thus not their first experience with such associations. In addition to the women's labour groups other groups include women's savings groups as well as church women's fellowship groups. Additionally, four women were active politicians involved in partisan politics. This membership of women's groups cuts across all three types of households in this study, the female-headed household, the male-headed monogamous household, and the male-headed polygamous household.

I am a member of three groups. One is where the focus is on assisting members when there is an emergency such as a death in the family, we contribute money to support such a person. In another group, we planted guinea corn but this year we could not

because of insecurity so we could not go to the farm and then I am a member of this Mbabuande women's group organisation

40-year-old Member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

Lack of mobility, therefore, in this locality is not a disempowering factor for women even before MII because it does not exist. The women were very mobile and could go to different places and actively participate in women's groups. Bohannan and Bohannan (1968) said that selling in the market was considered women's work, meaning that women had some level of freedom of movement even in traditional settings as contrasted with Muslim women in purdah. This has not changed, as all the men interviewed said their wives go to the markets to sell farm produce and are members of several women's groups. One man even said he had given up on encouraging his wife to join other non-labour groups and attend meetings so she can learn new things. She expects him to always take her to the meetings, and he does not have the time to chauffeur her around as he has his engagements.

Some of the women are in women's labour groups and work on each other's farms my wife is in three of such labour groups and is the treasurer of one of them.

55-year-old, non-active male member Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

I am in three women's groups, in one we have been networked to work with IFAD rice project, so we farm rice. In the other two groups we provide labour on members' farms, save money from dues paid at each meeting and at the end of the year before Christmas, we buy kitchen utensils for all members.

35-year-old, female member, Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

I am in one labour group, and I have been in it for more than five years. We do two things, one is to provide labour on each member's farm as well as on non-members' farms who hire us, and the second aspect is where we meet monthly, pay dues, and run our savings scheme. So, women can decide to participate in both aspects or in just one. In the farm labour aspect, some women do not invite a labour party to their farms because they must feed the party in addition to paying the group. When it comes to buying and distributing items from money saved, women will only receive such items from where they participated - on the farm, at home or both

50-year-old, member Menagbe, women's producer organisation

I used to be in women's labour groups when I was younger, we used to work on the farm and then meet at home twice a month on the savings scheme aspect. The money from savings we used for kitchenware and the funds from farm labour we used for wrappers for ourselves. Now I do not have the strength to be in a labour group anymore as I am too old, and some members have died or are also old. All the women were from this extended family but sometimes women from other families could join the savings scheme, not the farm labour aspect.

55-year-old, member Menagbe women's producer organisation

Membership of these labour groups is usually family based with women in one extended family constituting a labour group. In a large family compound, there will be several women's labour groups whose membership varies with as many as twenty members even though the women said they try to keep the numbers low. This makes it easier to provide labour on members' farms more than once in a farming season. Which group to join and how many are the woman's decision to make as women could join labour groups outside of their family as well. The women therefore decide how active they will be and when to withdraw. This further indicates that husbands do not stop their wives from joining such groups, especially considering that benefits from membership eventually accrue to the family.

I used to be in five labour groups, I did farm labour in all these groups so I could get a lot of things to take home at the end of the year. Some of the groups consisted of members of one extended family, and others had women from different families. Now I am old so can only work in one group

55-year-old, female member, Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

The composition of these women's labour groups provides a strategic opportunity for women to seek to change gender norms within the family/household/ compound and the community as households are the micro-level of the 'ityo'. Bargaining and negotiating new gender contracts by these family-based women's groups would set in motion changes in the existing gender contract that excludes women from the decision-making of the 'ityo.' The defining of new

gender contracts could thus start in small family compound units and gain wider acceptance gradually. But this was not happening among the women, I interviewed.

The Women are also actively involved in celebrating the successes of community sons, daughters, and wives such as politicians who win an election and attending weddings and funerals. Funerals are community events such that the women say, they do not wait to be invited, once a death is announced usually by word of mouth, everyone converges at the deceased's home. For the Mbabuande women's producer organisation when there is a death in the family of a member, members are taxed to raise financial support for the bereaved member. Yet, women are not invited to community meetings because they are considered visitors

We have never met with the community, we are women, we are visitors, so we are afraid to talk about community issues...we were never invited to speak as we were afraid to approach the community... I have never been invited by the community, a woman is a visitor no matter how old you are, and the community cannot just invite you, so here women cannot lead and if men are talking and you make a comment you will be embarrassed. But we could tell our husbands our grievances and they would speak with their fellow men

55-year-old member, Menagbe women's producer organisation

Women are not invited to community meetings and women have not invited the community to meet with them, as women discuss their issues in their groups. But the men sometimes ask what we are meeting for, and we tell them we are discussing our farming, and they give us their good wishes.

45-year-old, female member, Menagbe women's producer organisation

The community has not invited me as a leader of the producer organisation, and I have not ventured to go to the community meeting, ... but we do not have any problems, so we do not need to go to the community meeting,

50-year-old, member Mbabuande women's producer organisation

These women's groups and activities are referred to by both women and men as the 'community of women,' where women meet to discuss their issues. The community of women's voice in

the community decision-making process is through their husbands. This is regardless of household type, location, age, and education of the woman.

Women hold their meetings, so if they have problems in their meetings, they invite men to assist, so 'ityo' sits and investigates and resolves the issues

45-year-old, male member, Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

For community issues, the women may be contributing indirectly or directly because if the husband is an influential person within the community, anything discussed at home can be reflected at community meetings but in terms of inviting a woman to address issues, this did not happen during the project.

Capacity building specialist, male, MII Local implementation partner

When men are talking a woman will only sit and listen, but cannot ask to speak as it's a men's thing, only if it concerns the woman then the men will ask you questions otherwise, how will men be talking, and you a woman will also join the discussion, it will not be good, women's intelligence is limited, men are more intelligent so if a woman speaks, she may cause problems as men are the ones who solve issues, women can inflame issues by their half-wit comments. If I have an idea, then I can tell a man close to me, and they will think about it and tell me how to talk and what to say properly,

45-year-old, member, Menagbe women's producer organisation

When asked what they discuss in the women's groups, their response was farming, settling internal conflicts between members, the group's income and how to spend it, and occasionally they call a member to order if she is being a bad wife. The groups' failure to discuss political issues affecting them as women in the community reduced the possibility of their discussing their exclusion from the community decision-making structure and process. As one female interviewee said the women do not have any problems with their exclusion, so they do not bother attempting to get into the community decision-making structure. Moreover, why bother when in the final analysis, you are just a woman, a visitor, who did not bring any land to the marriage. Additionally, women are dependent on men, so why should women want to get involved in men's community issues? This is accepting the doxa without questioning and by

so doing acting according to the rules of social and gender relations thereby doing what Hayward(1998) says that the person with power does not have to demand a particular behaviour but the powerless simply act out the norm that reinforces their powerlessness. In other words, the rules of the institution, and the community constrain the boundaries of women's possibilities which the women do not question. Even where they do, the discussion is not made as a collective one enabling them to act together with a stronger voice.

Gender contracts emanate from gender conflicts, where there are seemingly no gender conflicts, or these conflicts are ignored and accepted as part of the way of being, then there will be no efforts at negotiating new contracts (Hirdman, 1991). Furthermore, the discourse on women's empowerment says that the collective empowerment dimension is linked to the personal empowerment dimension, and it is difficult for an individual who has not developed her critical 'power within' and the 'power to', to be active collectively in a non-economic manner(Cornwall, 2016; Agarwal, 2020; Rowlands 1997). In my study context, I did not find any collective action to bargain with patriarchy even though some form of resistance exists in the women's labour groups where they decide how to spend their money without recourse to the men. However, this is not the type of resistance that leads to political actions to address unequal power relations.

7.4 Community of Men

The persisting characterisation of the 'ityo' as exclusive of women is a statement of not just her lower status but also of her subordination in the Tiv society. This reflects the patrilocal nature of the Tiv society. The community only consists of women when there are community events such as weddings, funerals, political activities(open-air rallies and voting), and other

celebrations in which women are free to participate because their community work is valuable for a smooth event. This is captured in the description of the community by both men and women and is the same traditional social and political arrangements I discussed in section 7.1 above. Both men and women say that meetings of the 'ityo' are a male-only space and women cannot be invited because they do not have the mental capacity to make valuable comments as they think like children. Furthermore, they cannot keep secrets so inviting them to such meetings risks having community secrets leaked.

Traditionally we do not invite women to 'ityo' discussions, women have shallow thoughts, get annoyed easily, and start quarrelling, so we do not invite them. ...But as it is what we have always done there is no problem

45-year-old, male member, Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

When it is the whole community, what will a woman have to contribute, they discuss issues such as a person's illness, or a man has not paid the bride price what can I say about these issues as I was not there when he married but our sons are invited because they are members of the community ... if they ask him a question he will answer, but if they ask me, I will have no response because I am not community. Sometimes a man discusses with his sons, how will I know if the husband does not tell me? Even for security issues, women will not be invited to contribute because it is not a women's issue. I also accept that a woman is a visitor

35-year-old, female member, Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

We always discuss secret issues that outsiders cannot be privy to... if women hear private things, they go and discuss them with other women and cause trouble

51 -year-old male, significant other of a member, Menagbe women's producer organisation

Women cannot be invited to our meetings because sometimes our discussions are very private, and we do not want them exposed for instance, when we are discussing how to secure the community from attacks by our neighbours

64-year-old male member, Menagbe women's producer organisation

There are exceptional instances when women are invited to meetings of the 'ityo' and these include when the community needs to raise funds for an activity, and when there are conflicts

between women that cannot be resolved between the families. In the latter type of instance, the community invites both warring women to present their cases. Women can also attend open meetings of the community of men as uninvited observers and listen from the sidelines. Several reasons have been proffered for women's exclusion as members of the community. The exclusion of women and what issues they can be allowed to participate in are not universally agreed upon as men had divergent responses. Several men interviewed said women can be allowed to contribute to discussions on community security, especially about the persistent attacks by nomadic cattle herders, because they may have valuable information. Others opined that women cannot speak on security issues because these are not women's issues and women may expose men's defence strategies. Yet none of the people interviewed had an example of where women participated in such security meetings despite years of this insecurity. One woman explained that women and children usually run away from the villages and thus are not invited to attend such security meetings.

The question is are security meetings held only when there is a crisis when there are no women in the village to be invited to a security meeting? Are these meetings held only in the village or can and have they been held at places of refuge where community members congregate? The lack of consensus on this one issue indicates that gender contracts can be renegotiated in the rural Tiv farming community. However, all interviewees, both male and female, agree that when it comes to 'ityo' and family issues, women cannot attend the 'ityo' meetings as they are visitors and did not bring the land to the marriage. Land therefore becomes the central criteria for determining women's value. Bohannan and Bohannan (1953) pointed out the importance of land to the Tiv and how it is the basis of citizenship in the agnate lineage. Here again, it is used to justify the exclusion of women from community decision-making. Yet, daughters are also not invited to 'ityo' meetings in their natal homes. Some women said if it is about matters such as community roads and water, they would speak up. Women used their agency in these

instances in a manner that did not threaten male power and cultural norms (Kabeer, 2003; Kibria, 1990) and within the parameters of the gender contract that allows women to participate in community meetings on issues that do not threaten men's position.

Traditional things are only for men because of the culture, which considers a woman a visitor, so we do not want her to know. She is represented by her husband because her husband can tell her what is discussed at such meetings on issues of illness and death or other matters, so there is no need to invite women

58-year-old, male member, Greenfield producer organisation

If husbands can brief their wives on issues discussed at these traditional meetings, it means that the issues are not secret. So, women could still gossip about these issues, since women are seen as people who cannot keep secrets. Men, however, can argue that they only share with wives issues that are not secret. Issues discussed at these meetings include issues of marriage and payment of bride wealth, illness, death, and land disputes. There are also issues of witchcraft discussed given that traditionally, men's witchcraft ability was a prerequisite to being a community leader. These were the only issues people interviewed identified which were the same as in the ethnographic records I have referenced. However, if witchcraft powers were a basis for men's participation in the 'ityo' then men without these powers would be excluded except if there is an inner caucus of the 'ityo' that no one speaks of as it did not come up in my conversations nor any of the ethnographic records. If women can attend open meetings discussing these same issues uninvited as well as hear from husbands, it means that the persisting exclusion of women is simply to uphold men's status as heads of families, and decision-makers, and keep women powerless as visitors. The exclusion is therefore about the mystification of men, maintaining men's power and superiority over women as well as upholding women's respect for men which underpins men's insistence that women take permission from them before they even sell their produce and how money from the sale of

these crops should be used. The gender system thus uses its definition of women as incapable of intellectual discourse, childlike and visitors simply to exclude them from community decision-making at the same level as men (Alwedinani,2017; Whitehead, 1984). A 49-year-old member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation captures this dominance over women and their powerlessness.

Men are afraid to give women an opportunity because the women will become leaders and if you insist on expressing your opinion, your husband will tell you, I brought you here so shut up or leave, go and be stubborn elsewhere, so the woman keeps quiet Some men will ask your opinion privately before going to the community meeting to present your opinion as theirs'

48-year-old member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

The man who takes his wife's advice always stands out among other men because they have two ideas, but they will send you away from the community meeting because you will speak better than them

54-year-old member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

A woman cannot just talk at 'ityo' meetings because you have children so you are afraid that someone will harm her children with witchcraft and she will be called a disrespectful woman who sticks her nose in things that do not concern her, even your husband may harm you for being disrespectful and irrepressible

45-year-old member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

A 58-year-old male member of the Green Field producer organisation said when a visitor enters a house and asks who is at home, the women say it is only us and children, thus equating themselves with children. Even though the women perpetrate their identity as children by describing themselves as such, they do not accept this identity and exclusion justified by tradition. This only emerged later during conversations at a focus group to explore the concepts of the two communities. This means that if there is a space where women can discuss and

question gender norms, several changes could begin to emerge in the gender contract regarding women's participation in traditional community decision-making.

As for me, we do not like being called visitors as we are the ones giving birth to the men, yet they have no regard for us, it would be good for a woman to have value. I do not think I am a visitor as I gave birth to them and nurtured them to manhood.... In security discussions, they will not let us speak. If I attend, I cannot talk but if allowed to speak, I will say, let us investigate who is at fault so everyone stops their bad behaviour, so the fighting will end

55-year-old, female member, Camp Nagi Producer organisation

If I were a man, I would say that I do not like the community leader, but I am a woman. Some time back I did not like seeing the men fighting to become the local chief instead of sitting to discuss and selecting a young man. There were five men competing for the post with each person inviting everyone in the village to a feast. It became an embarrassment, and we became a laughingstock. We could have deliberated, selected a family that had not produced a chief before and asked them to present a community chief from their family.

55-year-old member, Menagbe Women's producer organisation

The issue of respect for the man resurfaces again at the community level and this time it is respecting all men including younger males. This constrains women from speaking so they do not get labelled as disrespectful to the community and their husbands. The practice of bride price prevalent in sub-Saharan African patrilineal and patrilocal communities such as the Tiv gives men a sense of ownership over women, reinforcing negative masculine and feminine stereotypes of male dominance in marriage and in the community (Adjei, 2019; Laiphrakpam and Aroonsrimorakot, 2016). This commodification and ownership of women is evident in how the women in this study perceive themselves and how even younger men in the family expect to be respected by women and are supported by older men in expressing this dominance. As the family and community domains are interlinked and reinforce each other (Kabeer, 1994) this status of women is reflected and reinforced at the community level.

As a wife, my husband brought me to cook so I am a visitor, even my son is a child of the land, a daughter is also not considered as community, so a woman has no community because you are a woman where you are married, they will not listen to you. And the men will tell women to go back to their natal homes and speak up there, when we go to our natal homes, we are still women not regarded as members of the community. Women have no place and are nothing because everywhere they go, they are told you are not community

55-year-old female member, Camp Nagi producer organisation

As a woman, your business is in your home with your husband not with the community. Once all the women of the family compound went fishing when we got tired and decided to do what the men do, drop some fertilizer in the pond and catch the fish. Some young boys saw us and started shouting asking who permitted us to use fertilizer. When I questioned one boy who was directly related to my husband for being disrespectful, I was reported to the head of the family compound, and it became a big issue. I was asked who gave women the right to use fertilizer to catch fish. We were told that even if our natal families came to resolve the matter, they would not be welcomed, and no one would speak with them. All because of fish that was to be cooked for the families to eat. So, women are nothing in the community

30-year-old female member, Camp Nagi producer organisation

This norm of women not participating in community meetings was reflected in the MII mixed producer organisations. At the initial contact with MII, the men did all the talking while the women listened. When it came to nominating members to attend training, all organisations' nominees were male.

Even though MII insisted on 35% women's representation at trainings, it was a big challenge to get the mixed groups to this point but after a series of sensitisation on why women should participate not only in training but also contribute to discussions at organisation meetings, the men understood, included women in training and encouraged women to speak at meetings

Gender and capacity building expert, MII local implementation partner

Yet, I still observed this silence during mixed focus group discussions. Women joined in the conversations only after the men spoke but as conversations continued, they became freer and

started responding to questions before the men. At this point, they had shown respect to the men and felt free to speak up; it was also not an 'ityo' issue being discussed but farming-related issues with an outsider, so men did not feel threatened.

Both men and women agreed that women have no voice in the community and even if they have a useful opinion, it must be channelled through their husbands. Only where the community of men decides that women can express an opinion, will women be heard. This means that only where the men feel pressure to re-write a gender contract will a new contract emerge such as with the 'new political gender contract' which was a response to external pressure. Thus, without pressure through negotiations or externally uncontrollable situations such as economic and political forces, traditional gender contracts at the community level will not change. Women do not have equality of participation in the decisions which will affect their communities nor control over the decision-making process (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010; Longwe, 1999). Women have thus learnt throughout the socialisation process, to be careful to stay within the boundaries permitted to them as women, to protect their marriages and children (Hayward, 1988; Kabeer, 2003). In their marriages, they have some level of voice and security, an indication of value and respect which they do not have at the community level, whether in their natal or marital homes. They will therefore not take actions at the community level that will disrupt a system that accords them some respect (Van Campenhout et al, 2023; Kibria, 1990). The extent of Tiv women's powerlessness and subjugation is reflected in the language of a specific genre of modern Tiv song theatre (considered deviant for its vulgarity yet popular) and its denigration and ridicule of women. These songs present women as sex objects, for the pleasure of men, controlled by men, who then ridicule them for their female anatomy (Asen and Tsav, 2017). Such songs perpetuate gender norms of men's power over women and reinforce masculine and feminine identities. The language of daily communication is the

language of exclusion, alienating the woman and portraying her as insignificant. Cornwall (2016) showed how changing the portrayal of women in popular music in Ghana was a pathway for women's empowerment and enlightenment as well as the empowerment of society. The language of popular culture thus matters in the discourse on women's empowerment both at the community and household level.

7.5 Conflict, masculinity, and new gender contracts in the Tiv farming community

In Chapter Four, I discussed the incessant farmer-herder crisis in Benue State and all parts of Nigeria. This has led to the displacement of many farmers thus affecting their farming, loss of lives, and investments as the Fulani herders have looted crops, and destroyed farms, and property (Afolabi, 2022; Bendavid et al, 2021; Unah, 2018; ICG, 2018; Lwambo, 2012). The conflict thus affects everyone's life from children to women and men as well as whole communities (El-Bushhra and Gardner, 2016). Even where farmers have returned to their homes, they are unable to go to their larger interior farms for fear of being killed by the herders and are constrained to farm the smaller plots nearer the homestead as in my study site (Soomiyol and Fadairo, 2020; Afolabi, 2022). Once communities and households are displaced access to inherited free family land for farming is lost and men can no longer meet the core of their conjugal contract which is the provision of sufficient farmland to the woman (Soomiyol and Fadairo, 2020). A core identity of the male household head is thus challenged and lost in several instances. Also questioned is the ability of the family, the clan, and village leaders to protect their community against evil and ensure the fertility of the land and the people (Aper, 2018; Sambe and Ugba, 2023; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). El-Bushhra (2003) points out that one of the outcomes of conflict is that while men lose household responsibilities, women

take on more of such and in several instances become the main breadwinners for the family. Even though gender relations are changed because women become more economically independent, the gender ideology does not change rather in some instances it strengthens these ideologies and the desire to return to them (V4C, 2015; El-Bushra, 2003). Nevertheless, conflict presents an opportunity to forge new gender contracts even if these may become weakened after the conflict.

Most of the respondents in this study had townhouses or rented rooms where they stayed with their families. When parents returned to the villages to farm, the children stayed back and went to school in the local government headquarters ensuring their safety from attacks by the herders. What this means is that the men continue to provide the basics of their responsibilities of shelter and food for the children at the same time maintaining their male role expectations of providing security by returning to the villages to check if it is safe to return to the farm and holding security meetings. While the families are away from their ancestral lands for fear of being attacked by Fulani herders, men lose their sense of pride as they cannot provide security for their families; are in IDP camps dependent on humanitarian rations to feed families (Soomiyol and Fadairo, 2020; El-Bushra and Gardner, 2016). This may account for why the community does not include women in security discussions and women interviewed say that it is men's responsibility to secure the community. Even though a few women would want to make suggestions they do not speak up. Providing vigilante services for the community is thus an important part of male roles and is in line with ideas of masculinities in the Tiv farming community. None of the women in my study were part of the vigilante group, which corroborates ICG's (2018) report which says community vigilante groups are dominated by men with a few women allowed in some communities.

Supporting men to reaffirm their masculine roles and responsibilities could be one reason why women have not requested to be part of security meetings even though conflict affects them. As primary caregivers, they may have a perspective that could be unique to tackling the insecurity. As evidenced by the comment of a 55-year-old female member of the Menagbe women's producer organisation, who said if they let women talk at community security meetings, she would advise the community to investigate and establish who is at fault in the unending inter-ethnic violence, apportion blame and sanctions appropriately to dissuade anyone from engaging in bad behaviour which often instigates the conflict.

While the herder-farmer conflict especially at its peak, provided an opportunity for women to request involvement in the community security discussions, women regardless of household type, location, and age failed to do so. Several reasons could account for this failure to seize the opportunity. A fundamental reason would be the respect of traditional masculine and feminine roles where men are the ones expected to guard the family, given that respondents were always quick to explain gender roles as 'the way we do things. Secondly, it could also be that this is one area where men can show that they are meeting their conjugal responsibilities thus the women do not want to insist on being in this space as well. Women's support of men to meet the community's masculine expectations of them is explained by El-Bushra and Gardner (2016). El- Bushra and Gardner (2016), researching the impact of war on Somali men concluded that women despite the burden of being sole breadwinners for families, still support husbands to maintain obligations to the clan which is a traditionally masculine role. Failure to meet this obligation means you are not a man and cannot call on the clan to support you in time of need.

Critical here was also the lack of collective agreement from the women to approach the community even when they had returned to their villages and security meetings were held. Neither did the men, decide to draw up a new gender contract involving women in security discussions given that women are also affected by conflict. Some men interviewed said women could be allowed into community security meetings because they may have seen something and have vital information. Yet, they did not take the initiative to advise the community to invite women. As stated by El-Bushra and Gardner (2016) conflicts more often than not reinforce traditional masculine and feminine roles and do not transform gender relations even where women have become the main breadwinners and gained a stronger voice in household decision-making because of this new economic position.

7.6 Defining women's empowerment in the study context

Responding to the necessity for researchers and projects to contextualise the definition of women's empowerment to position their research in the realities of the context and an understanding of what needs to be done to support women to gain the power to transform their lives, which I highlighted in chapter 2, I asked both men and women to explain their understanding of women's empowerment. While there was no single phrase or word for women's empowerment, the common expression used was, 'suen kasev ken agar³¹' had the same meaning as to 'support someone or women to be stronger in what they were doing /better able to do what they are doing.' One basic aspect of empowerment, therefore, is that it cannot be given to an idle person but to a person who is already engaged in some activity such that a change in the condition of the recipient will be apparent. The responses from both men and

³¹ Directly translated means, supporting women to be strong and putting this in the context of agriculture it will be 'suen kasev mba eren tomsule ken agar', this means 'supporting female farmers to be strengthened in their farming'

women thus centred on their farming, which is understandable as this is their main source of income, and the research was conducted within the context of their membership in the MII producer organisation.

I am a trader in addition to farming, so when I ask you for assistance for my trade or farm and you give me, then you have helped me to do my work, for example, if you give me a hoe, then I can farm or goods for my shop

40-year-old member, Mbabuande Women's producer organization

When someone gives you farm inputs, it reduces your cost of farming and enables you to get a good harvest to sell and meet household needs such as children's school fees

45-year-old member, Mbabuande Women's producer organisation

For example, MII gives us labour saving devices to support our farming and we farm, get a good yield, and can meet our household demands such as food, clothes, building a house, and other things

49-year-old member, Mbabuande women's producer organisation

When the government gives you or a cooperative society support, for example, an agriculture project that gives farmers loans you can invest in your farm, so if someone invests in you, and gives you support to improve your farm, for me, if I get a new tractor that will be empowering me, this is empowerment

58-year-old male member, Greenfield mixed producer organisation

This was also the same response from all experts interviewed, ranging from the gender capacity-building experts to the extension assistants. When asked what new agriculture projects can do to empower women, their responses did not go beyond the economic instrumentalist dimension of empowerment focused on increased productivity and incomes. This focus comes from their experiences of working from this one perspective with rural farmers in their producer organisations.

Projects should aim beyond training to provide farmers with other inputs such as loans, grants, labour saving devices, especially for the aspects where women dominate such as manual planters. Projects should also be flexible so they can accommodate farmers'

expectations during the project's life cycle, where farmers begin to want more than just training even if these expectations are not in the design of the project

Capacity building expert, male, MII local implementation partner

Furthermore, when asked what had changed in their lives since contact with MII, all female interviewees only pointed to their farms, increased yields, and incomes, and having more money to spend on family needs. This was the same response from the males interviewed as well as the extension assistants. This is in line with their perceptions of women's empowerment being solely economic, women's agency directed at making a better living for themselves and their families. They all touched on other dimensions of empowerment during the interviews, but when it came to defining women's empowerment, they all had an economic default position. What this means is that for women to exercise agency beyond what they currently do, in terms of membership of groups and role in household decision-making and food provisioning, the women themselves must understand the possibility that some changes can be made around norms that render them powerless. While to an extent they understand this, as they pointed out issues on which women can contribute at community meetings, they need to go further and ask why things are the way they are and what possibilities exist for changes. Kandiyotti (1998) says for this to happen, women would have to develop their capacity to articulate their interests and acquire the means to act. Articulating their interest would entail reflections, analysis, and assessments of their lives and situations to understand how all of them fit into the socially constructed norms of their society (Kabeer, 2003). This process will lead to the development of their 'power within,' 'power with' and 'power to' at least for some women in the producer organisations. It is the development of these three levels of power that Rowland (1997) points to in her study of women's groups in Honduras, where the women in one of her case studies only began to review their lives from their vantage points when deliberate efforts were made to develop a curriculum that facilitated reflections on their life situations and what

options exist for them to renegotiate gender contracts. The catalyst for this was first the membership in women's groups, improved material capabilities of the women, and the initiation of conversations around their powerlessness through a deliberate effort (Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021; Cornwall, 2016; Heyer et al, 2002; Agarwal, 1997; Kibria,1990). Cornwall(2016), captures this when she highlights consciousness building as a pathway to women's empowerment, pointing out how the inclusion of training on civil rights in an economic empowerment programme transformed the thinking of beneficiaries and contributed to the success of the programme.

This is what I did not find among the MII women's producer organisations. The programme did not have a consciousness-building component as seen in Lecoutere and Wuyts's (2021) study. The MII groups did not develop their independent objectives and thus failed to expand the scope of their discussions to other aspects of their life. Neither did they develop their capacity to deeply question their position in the community even when they described themselves as having no value in the community. The BRAC women's groups in Chen (1983), are an example of how women's groups could transform into spaces of nurturing women's power when women in a group identify their issues and decide what solutions they want and what actions to take. For the BRAC women's groups, this led to challenging social norms such as restrictions on women's employment outside the household because of women's seclusion norms.

Nevertheless, I saw conversations emerging among female members of the four producer organisations whom I brought to a focus group discussion to further explore the concepts of a 'community of women' and a 'community of men'. With the use of vignettes, women discussed several scenarios criticising and proffering solutions and strategies to negotiate gendered norms

without being seen to be disrespecting culture but getting what they wanted. The initial critique of women who broke gender norms turned into a critique of the manner the men and community reacted to such women in the vignettes. Yet, these women were meeting as a group for the first time, but reflections and snippets of a different thought process began to emerge. Even though they still defended the existing gender contract that upheld men as a community and women as visitors without a voice, there was sufficient discontent with the situation to enable new snippets of thinking to emerge. This is an indication that with a curriculum to enable self-reflection from their vantage points, more could happen. MII women's producer organisations thus had the potential to go beyond focussing on the economic aspect of empowerment to enabling women to strengthen and develop their collective agency (Cornwall, 2016; Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021; Rowlands, 2008) to negotiate new gender contracts within their communities (Baden, 2013; Kandiyotti, 1998) or at least begin conversations on issues of importance to them. I do not presume that all women in the producer organisations will develop these capacities at the same time or even develop them at all because people have different interests, so it may take longer for the group to be sufficiently empowered to take collective action.

For the Tiv society, these contestations and bargaining to renegotiate the gender contract will be interspersed with a lot of fear for women because, as I have shown in chapter 6 and section 7.1 above, they will face a strongly knit 'community of men' who will guard the space that defines their identity as men. This identity of men and solidarity exists in both women's natal and marital homes, so in the event of a divorce because of wanting to renegotiate a gender contract, women may not get natal support. This is a deterrent for women to act. As Hayward (1998) said in her conceptualisation of power, power is about the mechanisms of power that determine and limit the boundaries of action in such a way that people's actions reinforce their powerlessness without any prompting actions by the powerful. The women may

simply act in a manner that upholds existing gender relations. Added to this is the understanding of being exposed to wizardry for challenging gender norms, giving the intertwining of everyday life with traditional religious belief. Women in the rural Tiv farming communities may therefore only attempt to address issues that do not threaten their marriages such as speaking up in support of a woman experiencing domestic violence - an issue about which women generally share a sense of solidarity (Whitehead,1984). This will be done in a manner that does not challenge the gender system in which they live, even then not all may add their voices to this as they may consider the women as instigators of the violence they experience. All women will not have the same reactions to unequal gender relations because women are not the same. They have different subjectivities, viewpoints, experiences, and desires even though they live in the same locality, households differ materially and socially (Butler, 2004; Flax, 1990). This is however not to give a false impression that the women have not resisted and in the words of Harding (1987:5) 'women have always resisted male domination' even as seen in the Tiv women using money from their labour and savings in the labour groups, independently of their men. However, this type of resistance has not always led to renegotiated gender contracts.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, I set out to examine if international agriculture programmes empower rural female farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. My interest which was politically motivated³² was to investigate women's empowerment in the context of agriculture and if farmers' producer organisations, a strategy of agriculture programmes for reaching farmers, were spaces where women could learn to critically reflect on the gender and power relations in their household and communities and to act beyond the economic dimension of empowerment to change power relations. To investigate this, I focused on producer organisations that had engaged with the MII programme in Gwer West Local Government Area, Benue State, North Central Nigeria. I chose the MII project as a case study because it had been three years since it ended. This provided me with a timeframe to assess the producer organisations' sustainability post-project by whether they were still active when I contacted them. I was looking for long-term impact and sustainability in terms of space for the development of women's critical power which the majority of research on producer organisations does not focus on.

I, therefore, posed three research questions to fill in the gaps in the literature which were first, the dearth of literature especially within my context and the broader area of Nigeria on whether producer organisations were thriving after the end of agriculture programmes. If they were not, what was responsible as most studies on producer organisations focused on producer organisations thriving within project cycles or immediately after a programme ends. Even then the focus would be on the ones that did well during the project cycle. Few, go back at least

³² My political motivation was based on identifying ways and how to reach a large portion of rural women with skills that will enable them to begin to question gender inequality in their households and communities and act as they desire to change the power asymmetries that underly gender relations and norms

three or more years post a programme to research producer organisations. Secondly, while the discourse on women's empowerment acknowledges that women's membership in groups such as producer organisations impact women's status in the household and community, there is a gap in the literature in terms of how farmers' producer organisations have enabled rural women to transform gender and power relations in their households, years after the exit of an agriculture intervention. Thirdly, the literature also fails to address how these producer organisations have changed the political environment at the community level by enabling women to collectively demand new gender contracts that allow them entry into traditional decision-making space that has historically excluded women given that producer organisations are themselves supposed to be collective action organisations (Kormelinck, et al, 2019).

The thesis, therefore, answered the following three research questions;

- 1) Are producer organisations instrumental for the empowerment of rural female farmers, *interdiu* and *ex-post* an agriculture project?
- 2) How does women's membership of farmer producer organisations shape their intrahousehold relationships?
- 3) How and to what extent does female farmers' participation in farmers' producer organisations affect their interactions with the community?

To answer these research questions, five intersecting factors were considered that impact the relationship between women's membership of the producer organisations and empowerment, intrahousehold relationships as well as the exercise of collective agency at the community level. The factors considered were the type of household (female-headed, male-headed

monogamous, male-headed polygamous); location of producer organisation (rural and semi-urban); type of producer organisation (women-only or mixed-gender producer organisations); membership of other groups; and age of members of the producer organisation

Underpinning this study is the conceptual framework laid out in chapter two, where I explored the concept of power. I highlighted the type of power that producer organisations would nurture in their female members in the process of building their consciousness to exercise agency within the household and in the community. The thesis argues that empowerment should be defined to encompass more than economic empowerment even where the intervention programme is focused on economic empowerment such as in agriculture interventions. What happens in the social and political dimensions impacts the economic dimension. Failure to consider these other dimensions would lead to minimal long-term gains for economic empowerment. I used the concepts of conjugal and gender contracts to enable a reflection on how female members of MII producer organisations bargain and negotiate in the household and the community, gender roles, and responsibilities. I reflected on gender roles and identities reinforcing power asymmetries in the household and community and point out that the presence of new gender contracts suggests the possibility for women to renegotiate conjugal and gender contracts. I have used Longwe's empowerment framework to analyse whether the producer organisations were able to build women's consciousness. I acknowledged that women have a level of consciousness, but this is not likely to lead to negotiating with patriarchal norms. Kabeer's social relations approach was also used to understand relations between women and men in the household and community as well as in the producer organisations.

This chapter, therefore, brings together my research questions, findings, and conceptual framework as I answer the research questions in the order of presentation in the thesis structure.

I draw conclusions based on whether producer organisations are empowering rural female farmers as I discuss in the various sections below and end with a few suggestions for further research and action.

Reflecting on my findings, I value the approach and methodology used in the conduct of this research. I view my research as contributing to the debate about women's empowerment, especially in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa. I focus on the role of producer organisations as vehicles for empowering rural female farmers beyond the economic dimension. In researching the impact of producer organisations on their female members to address power asymmetries in their households and community, the research pushed a discussion to assess the producer organisations as vehicles and spaces for social transformation and not just for economic reasons. I have highlighted the fact that the failure of producer organisations to thrive post an intervention impedes the long-term economic goals of such agriculture interventions. The research design enabled me to examine my research topic in detail from the point of view of rural female farmers independent of any intervention programme. This enabled me to speak with programme beneficiaries directly and elicit information that would be of use to policymakers, implementors, researchers and academia to further explore why most producer organisations in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria fail to thrive after an intervention programme ends. Information was gathered from the rural beneficiaries as well as experts on the programme and triangulated with relevant literature to assess the validity of my data which was basically recall data and to present a specific study that would encourage further research.

8.1 Producer organisations: A pathway for rural women's empowerment

Producer organisations play a central role in the promotion of agriculture as an engine of growth in developing nations such as Nigeria and are considered a useful mechanism to reduce inequalities and foster rural development (Kaaria et al, 2016). These organisations reach small-scale rural farmers with the services that enable them to increase their productivity, connect to input and output markets while reducing overhead costs, increase incomes, and improve their livelihoods(Kaaria et al, 2016; Latynskiy and Berger, 2016; Kormelinck, et al, 2019 Tabe-Ojong,2022). Additionally, producer organisations have also had social and political benefits for members and the community. Women have reported increased community respect because of their improved incomes and being able to speak in public(Kormelinck, et al, 2019; Lecoutere, et al, 2017). The question I asked was are there producer organisations going beyond economic empowerment to encompass other dimensions of empowerment such as the social? Friedson-Ridenour et al, (2019), found that failure to consider the social-cultural dimension of women's empowerment resulted in financially empowered women not being able to farm large plots because of sociocultural norms that hindered their access to tractors at the right time in the farming season.

The MII project thus utilised producer organisations to deliver its intervention to rural farmers including women. What pathways of empowerment did the project adopt? In line with the theoretical pathways, I presented in chapter two, I explored, the pathways of building the capacity of producer organisations; agronomic training; the role of frontline intermediaries; building relationships among members and establishing support structures for the producer organisations. It was evident that the MII project deliberately spent time to build the capacity of the organisations(both all-female and mixed gender as well as semi-urban and rural) to be viable, and able to provide the support needed for farmers' business. The leadership of these

organisations were also trained to run the organisations, keeping proper records. However, one aspect was missing. This was the absence of components (a deliberate feminist approach) that built women's consciousness about civic rights, and leadership training aimed to strengthen women's participation and leadership skills. It is this missing component that is the base for the success of building the capacity of the organisation and leadership that makes it a pathway through which women are empowered to address issues of subordination and exclusion in their households and communities (Cornwall, 2016; Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021).

Similarly, the training of frontline intermediaries did not include a focus on building their capacity to provide feminist support for producer organisations, in terms of civic education and human rights. Thus, they could not build the capacity of producer organisation leaders and members to begin to question gender relations and act to change desired imbalances. This was the experience of all the producer organisations, both all-female as well as mixed-gender, regardless of whether they were semi-urban or rural. Thus, this pathway to women's empowerment was not utilised by the MII intervention to enable the empowerment of women.

Yet another pathway of empowerment in the literature is the place of a network as a backbone that supports the empowerment of women (Cornwall, 2016; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire, 2016). The MII intervention failed to establish a backbone structure to provide support for all its producer organisations, during or after the intervention. Thus, there was no network of its producer organisations, trained and established to encourage and support the producer organisations to thrive post the programme. All producer organisations I interviewed had no links with each other even though they were aware of other MII organisations in the local government area. The MII partnerships with the State Agriculture Development Programme (ADP), and local partners as well as other industry actors such as the agro-processors, could have been linked to this network to provide a strong post-MII support for the farmers. Sugden

et al(2021) illustrate how support networks of producer organisations assist them to thrive and are a support to fall back on in times of stress. They are also a platform to assist producer organisations in developing an agenda that gives them direction thereby keeping them alive and thriving.

Other factors further contributed to the inability of the producer organisations studied to thrive regardless of type the type of organisation. My findings show that the producer organisations I studied were more a collection of individuals making it easy for agriculture intervention to reach more female farmers during the project's life cycle. Members were not committed to building an organisation. Shiferaw et al (2011) say that rural farmers find it difficult to cooperate and work together as a group. Thus, the producer organisations were weak even during the lifecycle of the project, and immediately after the project ended they become inactive. The failure of leaders and the MII producer organisations to develop and implement member-driven programmes was a factor that led to a lack of members commitment to the organisation. This supports the assertion that small-scale farmers see producer organisations as a means to accessing free things (Shiferaw et al, 2011; Stringfellow et al, 1997). When they met the only item on the agenda was farming soyabean, a situation that could not sustain members' interests once the MII programme ended. Producer organisations should be supported to identify their additional membership-driven agenda as well as rules to expel and replace free-loaders built into the rules of the organisation and enforced (Mabuza et al, 2015; Friedson-Ridenour et al,2019; Shiferaw et al, 2011;Agarwal 2010;Bergue,2001;2002; Stringfellow et al,1997). These elements were missing in the producer organisations in my study. The content of the organisation's discussions is therefore critical to its long-term survival. Women who have several demands on their time will not attend meetings that focus only on farming a particular crop as they are already farmers and have learned new technologies during the intervention.

Furthermore, the ad-hoc nature of the female producer organisations, a sub-group drawn from a larger women's group meant that once MII ended, the producer organisation would merge back to its parent body. To thrive after an agriculture intervention, producer organisations should not be ad-hoc arrangements drawn from a larger women's group to engage with an intervention. Additionally, the model of the producer organisation will determine its survival. If the type and form of a producer organisation emerges from the farmers, they may show more commitment to its survival. This is evidenced in Sudgen et al's (2021) study where the intervention programmes allowed farmers to decide the form of their organisation which allowed them to realign its type to fit changing seasons. The MII producer organisation simply imposed the common model on the farmers which allowed each person to farm their lands. There is a need for interventions to spend time with farmers to develop the model of the producer organisation they want, its rules, and membership criteria, in the hope that it will garner sufficient support and thrive during and post-intervention. The nature of the establishment of the producer organisations, therefore, impacts their ability to thrive during and after a programme. With a path dependency being established by an external stimulus (Bijman and Wijers, 2019), these producer organisations are programmed to implode, *ab initio*.

Comatose producer organisations such as the ones in this study, simply wait to be revived by an external stimulus (as was the case when leaders invited members to meet with me) to tap into new largess. The conceptual basis of this research is that women's groups such as producer organisations are spaces where women's generative and productive power could be nurtured to develop a degree of understanding of the power relations, and how it manifests in their communities and households. even as they identify what actions to take to address issues of

concern. Producer organisations that fail to thrive during and after an intervention can therefore not be such spaces. Neither can they fulfil their potential to reduce gender inequality as suggested by several authors (Latynskiy and Berger, 2016; Kaaria et al, 2016; Lecoutere, 2017; Baden, 2013; Okechukwu, and Agbodike, 2016; Okwoche and Obinne, 2010; Idrisa et al, 2007; Porter and Zovighian, 2014; Baden, 2013).

My findings, therefore, agree with authors such as Bergue (2001;2002), who says farmers' organisations do not thrive after a programme ends. I go further to highlight the failure of these organisations to be sites for the development of the type of power ('power within', 'power with' and 'power to') in women that would enable them to expand the boundaries of their possibilities in the forging of new conjugal and gender contracts. These organisations have only helped women attain the levels of access and welfare on Longwe's empowerment framework but have failed to build their consciousness to be involved in decision-making at the same level with men. They have also failed to get the female farmers to understand the nature of social and gender relationships that keep them marginalised and excluded.

8.2 Expanding boundaries of limitations: Negotiating new conjugal contracts

From my analysis of the findings, I conclude that rural female farmers regardless of type of household(monogamous, polygamous) and location(rural, semi-urban) had a minimal voice in household decision-making. Women's and men's understanding of being involved in decision-making differed. The man's voice was the strongest and his decision was the one that mattered. Women were simply informed and sometimes their suggestions were considered. Both considered this joint decision-making in the household (Acosta et al,2020). This reflects and reinforces traditional gender roles and identities which the conjugal contract reinforces, of the

man as head of the family/household providing direction for farming and other needs while the woman is responsible for household food.

While it seems that the women and men gave normative responses, Acosta et al (2020), explains this seeming contradiction as a reflection of the different instances men and women base their responses on as the questions were not tied to a specific time or event to enable them to respond differently. It could also be that both the men and women responded according to what was the most common experience in the household. For junior wives in polygamous households, it is clear from the findings that there is no pretence of joint decision-making. Only in households with aging husbands and senior wives, do young wives get to be part of the decision-making because her younger age is needed for survival. Annan et al (2021) present an alternate explanation for women reporting joint decision-making. They say that this is women taking power and not waiting for their husbands to give it to them. This is thus an expression of women's empowerment. Whether this announcing of joint decision-making is leading to changes in gender relations and a rewriting of conjugal contracts within the household requires further research. I do not see evidence of this happening in the context of my research. It could also be that I did not notice it because I was not looking for this type of expression of empowerment. The missing component of the training of frontline workers and producer organisation leaders mentioned in section 8.1 could be expanded to include training men and women on participatory decision-making in the household, so they have a shared understanding as a step towards transformative change (Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021).

Women's nominal control and decision-making power over household food and her assets is evidenced by the boundaries that constrain this power. For instance, she cannot sell the yams from her farm and spend the money as she pleases, she must receive the man's permission to

do so. Thus, even the yams which the Tiv women have been celebrated as having control over by anthropologists such as Bohannan and Bohannan (1953;1968) and reiterated by later researchers (such as Burfisher and Horenstein,1985; Ivande et al, 2015; Agada and Igbokwe, 2016), in reality, does not exist in my study context. Angel-Urdinola and Wodon (2010) corroborate this when they say that husbands are in control of household decisions in Nigeria. The low level of women's control of resources and assets in the Tiv farming household becomes very obvious when compared to the Kofyar women of north-central Nigeria(Stone et al, 1995), the Kusasi women of Ghana (Whitehead, 1984), the Mandinka women of the Gambia (Carney and Watts, 1991) as well as the Muslim Hausa women household traders of northwest Nigeria(Munro et al, 2019; Hill, 1969). Women from these ethnicities have total control over their crops, their labour, their trade, and their income from these. The Tiv women in my study saw no reason to change the gender relations in the home nor challenge any patriarchal stereotypes simply accepting it 'as the way we do things.' Kabeer (1999) describes this situation as women's way of avoiding conflict knowing they cannot win. This is why these women were careful to portray that they were not challenging men's identities or roles, so as not to be labelled bad wives and therefore attract the community's condemnation. I cannot account for individual changes which happen when women lobby husbands privately because I did not identify any such occurrence. However, a deeper closer study may raise issues not picked up by this research.

The MII producer organisation failed to enable women to understand that empowerment went beyond increased productivity and incomes and that it was about their ability to be able to renegotiate conjugal contracts to give them more control for instance over the produce of their farms and other personal assets. This failure was further reflected in women's definitions of empowerment solely in economic terms. The absence of a transformative agenda fused into the

pathways of empowerment I discussed in chapter five, meant that women and the organisation's capacity was not built to work towards a transformation in gender and power relations in the household.

My findings support arguments that increased incomes and economic empowerment do not translate to empowerment in other dimensions of empowerment nor does it transform social relations and norms (Munro et al, 2019; Rao,2012; Friedson-Ridenour et al, 2011; Alsop et al, 2006). The findings further show that women's increased income was not even theirs' to spend as men dictated not only how money from the sale of soyabeans would be used but also when it would be sold. Therefore, technically, women's incomes did not increase, what increased was money in the household controlled by men. I, therefore, argue that it is not just membership in a producer organisation and the economic benefits that accrue to women there that play a crucial role in the organisation's potential to reduce gender inequality as suggested by several authors (Porter and Zovighian, 2014; Okechukwu and Agbodike,2016; Lecoutere, 2017). Rather, it is the ability of these producer organisations to enable women to identify the boundaries of their limitations and determine how they will expand these boundaries (Hayward, 1998) that gives the organisation the potential to improve gender equality. Increasing the money in the hands of women (which may not be in their control as shown above) and giving them new social status within the community does not change the discriminatory and subordinating norms.

When groups build women's capacity to question inequality it enables them to take action to change unequal power relations(Cornwall, 2016; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire,2016; Rowlands, 2008). For these Tiv rural female farmers, it was not an absence of some level of 'power within' and the 'power to' as all the women I interviewed were members of other women's groups

exercising their 'power with' and 'power to' at levels of access and welfare on Longwe's (1991) empowerment framework as well as managing gender relations within the household as seen in their ability to keep the men out of their labour group business. What was missing therefore was the critical awareness (self and environmental) and knowledge to develop this power to the level of understanding the workings of power relations, how it impacts their lives, and the possibility that they can effect some change in social norms (Batliwala, 1994; Malhotra et al, 2002; Pansardi, 2012; Harding, 2012). The failure of the producer organisations to thrive after the MII project meant that the women also lacked the space within which the process of empowerment would have taken place, as empowerment happens over time. An environment that enables the development of self and environmental awareness is critical to women being able to reach the point where they can question norms, customs, social identities, and standards that constrain them (Hayward, 1998). The women and their producer organisations for instance could not analyse and understand the opportunity for a new conjugal contract that opened with women's soyabean farms during the MII project. They failed to negotiate with their husbands for full control of these farms, the sale, and the use of money from it.

Women and men continued to be bound by their conventional gender roles and identities, without forging identifiable new conjugal contracts traceable back to engagement with MII. Perhaps the incessant violent conflicts with cattle herders which I discussed in chapters four and six, may have put their focus on survival. In such situations, El-Bushra and Gardner (2016) explain that people fall back to traditional forms of social organisations for survival especially where men have lost those activities that define their masculinities such as employment and other avenues of making an income. These conflict situations give women an opportunity to negotiate roles and positions in the household as well as increase their political participation in the community(El-Bushra and Gardner, 2016). For the Tiv men in my study, the only loss of

masculine responsibilities was the failure to secure their homestead and keep it safe from the marauding armed herdsmen who forced them to take refuge at the local government headquarters.

8.3 Expanding boundaries of limitations: Negotiating new gender contracts

My findings show that rural female farmers have a level of consciousness about power relations in their household and community and have exercised agency at a collective level in a manner that has not challenged the community's gender contract but in fact, reinforces it (Kibria, 1990). In their women's labour groups, women refused to invest their money in farming deciding to spend it as they please, in this space not covered by the conjugal contract where men have no control. The women decide what they want and purchase for themselves. Thus, it was not about a lack of skills to negotiate a bulk purchase of farm inputs as argued by the gender and capacity building expert I interviewed but it was about not giving their power to men. The women's labour groups are independent of MII and were in existence long before the MII intervention.

Even though the women have exercised some level of collective action and have gained social assets, skills, and confidence (Baden, 2013), this 'power within', 'power with', and 'power to' is limited to actions that do not challenge the power structure. Thus, I found that the MII female farmers never expressed a desire to contest their exclusion from community decision-making. There was a general unquestioning acceptance of how things are done and even when women asked a few questions, they did not desire to change gender relations in the community. This was the position of the women regardless of their location whether urban or rural or the type of household - female-headed, male-headed monogamous, and male-headed polygamous.

Yet, these women have seen two new political gender contracts occasioned by external pressure but could not think collectively to act. They could not act because they had nothing to demand as they had not reached a collective consciousness to demand change. Again, the failure of the MII producer organisation to have a component of training that focused on building women's awareness of their civic and human rights meant they had no training that enabled them to consider gender relations of power from a perspective of critically questioning their status at that time and beyond (Cornwall, 2016; Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021).

As a result, the producer organisations did not seize opportunities to negotiate new gender contracts at the community level. The deferring opinions among men of what issues women can contribute to provide an opportunity to write new gender contracts. For example, on community security issues, conscientised women would have negotiated for space given the incessant attacks by nomadic cattle herders and its impact on the communities.

Admitting women to community decision-making space is therefore something that can be done at least on a piecemeal basis depending on the issue being discussed. Piecemeal changes may be easier to achieve and less threatening to men because like Hirdman (1991), says, men will protect the gender systems that accord them privileges. This explains the reference to women as visitors, childlike, and who should therefore be contented with remaining in their women's community and accessing the community of men through their husbands. This negative portrayal of women provides a further justification for their exclusion from the community structures of power and the mystification of what happens in these spaces as men are portrayed as intelligent and shrewd (Alwedini, 2017). This serves to maintain the local kin-based order that privileges men (Whitehead and Tsikatsa, 2003; Hirdman, 1991) as well as maintain masculine and feminine identities.

The mystification of this space serves to control women from requesting to be heard. Thus, women are afraid of speaking at community meetings for fear of witchcraft being used against them and their children. This mystification of the space resonates with ethnographic accounts, where the community leadership consisted of men with magical powers used to protect the land, for fertility rites and well-being (Nomishan, 2020; Ushe, 2021; Abrahams, 1968; Bohannon and Bohannon, 1953; Mead, 1955). The women understanding this, therefore, are cautious about breaking norms lest they incur the wrath of the wizards who may even be their husbands. Added to this is the fear of denunciation and possible lack of support in both the marital and natal communities as the customs are the same. This dissuades women in the producer organisation who have not been able to attain the levels of conscientisation to act collectively to ask for the inclusion of women in community decision-making. It would be more difficult for the men to denounce and use their wizardry against a collective of women. The failure to exercise their collective 'power to' thereby preserves men's power while the possibility of open denunciation by husbands ensures that women do not challenge the existing power structure. Hirdman (1991: 191) sums this up when she says;

Men must also fight - in individual cases against their conscious desires - on behalf of a gender system that both segregates and creates a hierarchy between the sexes, because (and in order to maintain) their position in the homosocial order

It is therefore not just the participation of women in women's groups as suggested by several authors on women's empowerment (Lecoutere, 2017; Ewerling et al, 2017; Ferguson and Kepe 2011; Agarwal, 2010) that enables the empowerment of women but what happens in such groups. If activities and discussions are focused solely on economic empowerment, it is unlikely that members will develop the capacity to even question the boundaries of their limitations, much less take collective action to negotiate new gender contracts to change

asymmetrical power relations in the community (Hayward, 1998; Rowlands, 2008; Kabeer, 1994; Kibria, 1990; Kandiyotti, 1998).

The understanding of what women's empowerment is, within the study context, makes it imperative that farmers' producer organisations work with women to develop a broader conceptualisation of women's empowerment such as the one elucidated by this research. It is this broader understanding of women's empowerment that can set in motion the process of building women's collective power to question social norms that can lead to negotiating new gender contracts with the community. In doing so, the hold of traditional religious beliefs should be understood as these beliefs underpin the existence of the Tiv and the lower status of women. Traditional religious beliefs also continue to be reflected in the gender and social relations among the people as well as the continuing ideologies of submission and respect.

8.4. Conclusion

There is no question about producer organisations being a means of reaching large numbers of rural farmers including women. This study is concerned with whether these organisations are pathways of empowerment for rural female farmers or not. Are producer organisations able to nurture the type of generative and productive power that builds women's critical consciousness to begin to question gender relations in their households, and communities, enabling them to rewrite conjugal and gender contracts? My findings show that the design and implementation of agriculture intervention programmes determine whether or not their producer organisations will be spaces for transformative change and empowerment of women. If the programme implements some of the theoretical pathways of empowerment identified in the literature on

women's empowerment, then the producer organisations may become spaces for transformation.

While the MARKETS II design had several elements of these pathways of empowerment, there was no specific and deliberate approach in the design and implementation of the intervention to follow these pathways from a transformative standpoint feminist perspective. A deliberate feminist approach would have enabled the producer organisations and their members to go beyond just the economic dimension of increased productivity and incomes to the social and political dimensions of empowerment. MII's definition of empowerment focusing on just economic empowerment was a constraining factor for the programme. This study's conceptualisation of empowerment as women's ability to expand the boundaries of their limitations in the exercise of their 'power within', 'power with', and 'power to', provides a definition of empowerment that would have enabled the MII programme to develop a strategy based on this encompassing definition of empowerment aimed at social transformation.

I have also pointed out that there exists a level of conscientisation among the female members of the MII producer organisations because of collective action taken in other groups. This could have been nurtured to the next level of reflection on power asymmetries in the household and community, also, for the building of awareness and the knowledge that women can take action to change the ways of doing things that are not acceptable to them. In the Tiv farming household, there remains a lot of conscientisation to get the women to begin to question aspects of power and gender relations that limit their boundaries of possibilities. Increasing women's agriculture productivity and incomes means that men have more money to control in the household and to use for household needs. Women have no control or decision-making power over these assets. Agriculture programmes therefore will need to redefine their

conceptualisation of women's empowerment to encompass more than just the economic aspects.

The social relations approach posits that the household and the community domain are interlinked and happenings in one affect the other. The state of affairs in the households of the female members of MII producer organisations is mirrored in the community domain. These rural female farmers have also been unable to negotiate new gender contracts at the community level that would let them into community decision-making spaces. The women simply said, they have no problems and do not have to be in this space. Even the incessant herdsmen's attack on the farming communities leading to displacement, loss of property, life and deaths was not a sufficient necessity for women to request participation in security meetings in the community. What the female farmers lacked was a platform for collective action to address the community as a group. Women are better able to challenge community norms as a group and be heard.(Sudgen et al, 2021). Platforms for collective actions are therefore important to assist women in negotiating new gender contracts with the community.

However, such platforms can only enable transformative change if they are spaces where women develop the type of power(as analysed in my conceptual framework) that enables them to question power and gender inequality, define for themselves what changes they want, and then work individually (in the home) and collectively (in the community) to achieve the desired change. It is this type of power that the MII producer organisations were unable to nurture. Without this type of power, women therefore cannot renegotiate new conjugal or gender contracts because of what Hirdman (1991) described as deeply entrenched 'irrefutables' (how things are) produced by the existing gender system. Women thus remain anchored in the gender identities and roles of their communities such that they do not see a reason to question

prevailing norms thereby feeding the system that upholds discrimination against women as they continue to do culture and gender (Lorder, 2002; Badstue et al, 2020). Hence, there are no gender conflicts (or they are carefully suppressed or managed as in Luke's (2005) three-dimensional power) to drive the negotiation of new gender contracts (Hirdman, 1998).

It is the failure to nurture this type of power that leads to my conclusion that international agriculture programmes do not empower rural female farmers in Nigeria *interdiu* and *ex-post* the programme. The producer organisations they promote to be platforms for farmers' engagement collapse immediately after the programme ends. Female farmers are thus left without a space to develop their generative and productive power.

8.5 Moving forward

I draw attention again to my findings which show that membership in producer organisations does not automatically translate into women's empowerment and the transformation of gender and power relations in the household and community. The producer organisations themselves only have the potential to be spaces for building women's generative and productive power. The popularity of this strategy to reach female farmers calls for more research to further understand how to ensure that producer organisations do not collapse as soon as an intervention ends. Additionally, there is a need to understand if the surviving ones have become spaces for female members to develop critical consciousness, and the capacity to make choices and transform these into actions that affect changes in gender relations in the household and the community.

To explore the potential of producer organisations for reducing gender inequality and being spaces for transformative change, feminists and gender advocates working in head offices of international donor programmes will need to adopt a broader definition of women's empowerment as stated in section 8.4. These external stimuli, the intervention programmes, would need to identify pathways of empowerment (Cornwall, 2016; Lecoutere and Wuyts, 2021) to strengthen the producer organisations so they become spaces for transformation. One such pathway is the building of the skills of leaders of these organisations to guide their members to develop and pursue their own goals as well as initiate the process of empowerment through self-reflection. Additionally, intervention programmes could initiate the networking of their producer organisations to support each other to thrive after the programme exits the field. This will give rise to another area of further research, which would be to study this process and investigate the outcomes of such efforts years after the intervention ends (a minimum of at least three years after) and how each context impacts the outcomes. A deliberate feminist approach in engaging with producer organisations is thus needed if agriculture programmes aimed at empowering rural female farmers in sub-Saharan Africa are to succeed and achieve their goal.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Profile of interviewees

The profile of respondents interviewed is presented according to their producer organisations as well as the experts' group, excluding people in the focus groups.

1. Menagbe women's producer organisation

Member producer organisation, Ngo A

Aged 55, widowed and head of her household, has four children and has only primary school level education. Members of her household include her two married sons, their wives, and grandchildren as well as some in-laws and husbands' sons; her husband was polygamous. She has her yam farm where she intercroops other vegetables even though she does not do much farm work anymore as she is old. She used to be a member of several women's labour groups as a young woman but can no longer do the farm work.

Member producer organisation, Ngo J

Aged 45, primary level education, widowed, lives with her seven children and daughter-in-law. She is head of her household but discusses and takes decisions with her oldest son. All farms were managed tighter with her children and daughter in law. They have a yam farm, soybean, cassava, maize, and groundnuts. She is a member of one women's labour group.

Member producer organisation, Ngo F

Aged 50, married and her household is male headed monogamous. Has three children and her household consists of her husband, their relatives and her two sons and daughter-in-law. All farms are managed together with her husband as they work together and do not have separate farms. She and her husband grow, yams, rice, soybean, groundnuts cassava. She has a petty trading business and sells provisions

Member producer organisation, Ngo E

Aged 38, male headed monogamous household, educated to primary level and lives with her children husband and her husband's wife and her children. Has her own yam farm, grows maize and ground nuts and farms soybean. Also does petty trading selling cooked food. Is a member of two women's labour group

Member producer organisation, Ngo H

Aged 53 and educated to primary school level lives in a male headed monogamous household with her husband, five children Their compound consists of her brothers-in-law and their wives, but each brother runs his household with his wife or wives. She has a yam farm as well as a soybean farm and grows groundnuts as well. The farms are managed jointly with her husband as they do not separate their farms. She is a member of only one women's labour group. Also sells grains in the market as a wholesaler

Member of women's producer organisation, male, Ter E

Educated to primary school level, aged 55, had one wife and six children. His household consists of his wife, children, in-laws, his son's mother-in-law, and a friend who farms on one of his farmlands. All adults in the household have their own farm but all members of the household provide labour in each other's farms. The household is run as a unit in terms of

cooking and supporting each other in issues such as health, constructing a new building. Crops grown included yams, maize, rice, soybean, groundnuts, and vegetables grown by the women. Farming is his main source of income since he withdrew from services about three decades ago.

Significant other of member of producer organisation, Male, Ter F

Aged 51 and married to one wife, he has three children, and his household consists of his wife, his children, and grandchildren as well as his relatives and wife's relatives. He and his wife farm together and do not separate their farms. They farm yams, maize, rice, groundnuts, cowpeas with melon intercropped in the yam farm. He is a full-time farmer without any other source of income and has primary school level education. He is the significant other of a female member of the women's producer organisation.

Significant other of member of producer organisation, Male, Ter G

Aged 55 and a significant other of a female member of the women's producer organisation, he has two wives and is the head of his household. In addition to farming, he is also a mason. His household consists of him, his two wives and their children. Each wife has her own farm growing yams, soya, maize, groundnuts, and vegetables. He grows rice but controls sell of rice and soybean while the wives are responsible for their other produce such as yams and groundnuts. Educated to secondary school level.

2. Mbabuande women's producer organisation

Producer organisation leader, Ngo BB

Aged 41 with a diploma (Polytechnic awarded certificate), she is the head of her household with her son, grandchildren, and daughter-in-law. Farms yams, soybean, rice, maize, sesame,

and vegetables with the help of her son and daughter-in-law. She also sells soy milk which she processes daily using her own produce. Not a member of a women's labour group and lives in the state capital and not in the local government area only goes back to attend the parent group meetings.

Producer organisation leader, Ngo NN

Aged 38, married and lives in a male headed monogamous home. Does not farm but was attending all trainings as she could step down training and was the group's lead farmer. A civil servant with a polytechnic level education, she introduced the larger women's group to MII through her husband's contacts. She thus always had information about meetings, which she brought to the producer organisation.

Non-Active member, Ngo P

Aged 45, lives in a male headed polygamous household and was picked out by leaders of her producer organisation as the most in-active member. She explained her lack of commitment to the organisation to having several other engagements leaving her no time to attend producer organisation meetings. Has primary level education and trades in grains in addition to her farming. She farms, yams, soybean, groundnuts, and vegetables.

Active member, Ngo Y

Aged 45, with secondary level education, and head of her household, her main source of income is trading, only started farming to augment household food and contact with MII encouraged her to farm soybean. Her household includes her five children, relatives. An active politician was once elected as the councillor for her ward. Was active in the producer organisation because she wanted to learn about farms small plots of yams, soybean and rice as well as vegetables. Works on her farm with her children. She was interviewed twice

Member producer organisation, Ngo N

Aged 40, with primary level education, living in a male headed monogamous household. Her household consists of her husband, two children, in-laws, and her mother. She is a tailor with fifteen years' experience and sells cold drinks. Membership of the MII producer organisation encouraged her to start farming yams, soybean, rice and maize.

Member producer organisation, Ngo CC

Aged 45 with primary level education lives in a male headed polygamous household as second wife. Household consists of her husband, his wife's adult children and her young children. Used to trade in dry fish. Household has joint farms, and all adult members work together on the farms. The household grows yams, soybean, rice, maize, guinea corn, groundnuts.

Member, producer organisation Ngo LL

Aged 49, with secondary level education, lives in a male headed monogamous household with her husband, children, grandchildren, brother-in-law's children. Does petty trading, sells provisions and grains, her long-time business. Her household farms yams, soy, maize, groundnut, rice. Young teenage sons have small plots of land to grow their own produce and sell for their pocket money.

Significant other of member of producer organisation, Male, Ter H

Aged 25 educated to secondary school level and living in a female headed household with his mother, wife and two children. Unemployed works with his mother on her farms and they farm yams, soybean, rice, maize, sesame, and vegetables. Main source of family income is farming and trading of processed foods from soya as well as produce from their farms

3. Camp Nagi mixed producer organisation

Active member of producer organisation, Ter I

Aged 50, head of polygamous household with two wives, and his children and relatives, producer organisation selected him as active member for attending all meetings. He explained that he was active because he is always active in all groups he belongs because he wants to learn new things. He farms, rice, soybean, maize and is an active politician and has other sources of income which he describes as varied and could various activities such as masonry. Each wife has her own yam farm as well as soya and farms groundnuts and other vegetables in their yams farms. Has secondary level education.

Producer organisation leader, Ter S

Aged 45, monogamous household, lives with wife, children, mother, and other relatives, reads and writes Tiv only. Farms, rice, soya, Guinea corn, maize, and cassava. His wife has her own yam and soybean farms and grows vegetables. Earns income from his other government job but says farming is his main source of income. Actively involved in community activities and attends community meetings as an active member of the community, meetings such as security meetings because of the violent herder attacks the community has experienced, the community is always meetings to discuss its safety.

Producer organisation leader, Ter T

Aged 49, head of polygamous household with three wives, each wife has her own yam farm and grows other crops such as soya, ground nuts and vegetables intercropped in the farms. He grows rice, soybean, cassava, maize. an active community member who attends all community meetings to discuss various issues including security. Also works in the community as electricity bill collector.

Non-Active member Producer organisation, Ter Q

Aged 55, married to one wife a, is the head of his home, lives with his wife and children and relatives. A rice farmer who also grows soybean, maize, and millet. His wife has her yam farm and farms a small plot of soy, ground nuts and vegetables. Was not very active in the producer organisation because he had other engagements at meeting times and not able to attend all meetings but applied new technologies taught by MII on his soy farm and shared learning with his wife. Also earns an income from doing odd jobs such as roofing building.

Member and significant other of producer organisation leader, Ngo RR

Aged 30, lives in a male headed monogamous household, with husband, children, mother-in-law, and husbands relatives and her relatives. Has primary school level education. Has her own yam and soybean farm, grows ground nuts and sesame as well as vegetables in her farms for household use. Farming is her main source of income and sometimes buys and stores produce such as pepper for resell when prices are high. Is a member of six women's labour groups. One of the women's groups is working with IFAD on rice production.

Member and significant other of producer organisation leader, Ngo QQ

Aged 35, eldest of three wives, lives in a male head polygamous household with husbands and his wives and all children and some in-laws. Hass five children. Farms her own yam and soybean farm as well as groundnuts and sesame. She is the only wife who sits with husband to discuss issues about what is to be done in the household. Shared MII teachings with all members of the household and any new thing she learns at any of the meetings she attends. A leader of a women's labour groups working with IFAD on growing rice. A member of three women's labour groups. grains trader, buys, stores and sells grains when she has the money to invest.

Member of mixed producer organisation, Ngo UU

Aged 55, widowed, head of her household sharing authority with her eldest son, educated to primary school level. Her household consists of her children, stepchildren, grand children, in-laws, a relative and his wife. She has her yam farms and grows, soybean, rice, maize with her adult sons. Has taught her-in-laws and members of her household MII new planting techniques. Used to be in five women's labour groups as a younger woman but now as an older woman only a member of one women's labour group as she cannot do a lot of weeding as she did at a younger age. Farming is her only source of income

Member of mixed producer organisation, Ngo PP

Aged 20 and educated to primary school level, lives in a male headed monogamous household with her husband, mother-in-law, brother-in-law and his wife and children. Farming is her only income and husband brings in additional resources from his work as a mason. She has her yam farm and the family grow, rice and soybean and vegetables for household consumption as well as cassava. A member of one women's labour group did not use to farm when she got married but was encouraged by her sister-in-law and other women when she saw all they did with money from their farms. She shared her MII soy new planting techniques with her brother-in-law and his wife and they adopted it on their own farm.

Member of mixed producer organisation, Ngo VV

Aged 31, educated to primary school level, widowed and head of her household which consists of her, her children, and stepchildren. Household used to be one of four wives but now all alone and the head of the household. Farms, yams, soybean, maize, guinea corn, cassava, and vegetables. Has no other source of income. A member of one women's labour group and her

children all work except the baby. She shared her learnings on growing soy with other adults when husband was alive and there were more people in the household.

Member of mixed producer organisation, Ter Q

Aged 32, married with one wife and head of his household, educated to secondary school level. His household consists of his five children, wife, mother, his siblings and their wives and children. In addition to farming, he makes an income from his work as a mason which is dependent on when there is work, makes his main income from farming. He farms, rice, maize, soybean, cassava, and guinea corn. His wife has her yam and soy farm and grows groundnuts and vegetables and does petty trading during the dry season as there is no farm work currently.

Significant other, non-active member, Ngo XX

Aged 27, educationally speaks Tiv only, lives in a male headed polygamous household and her husband is the mixed producer organisation's non-active member. She yams and soybean farm. Adapted the MII new soy farming techniques her husband taught her but prefers to use the old planting method as it is not time consuming and waist breaking but applies fertilizer which is the MII teaching but also broadcasts as against burying as taught by MI. Member of one women's labour groups. She also farms casava, groundnuts and vegetables. Farming is her main source of income

Significant other, active, Ngo YY

Aged 37, educated to primary school level, lives in a male headed polygamous household with her husband his wives and their children, with husbands relatives and mother. Applies new MII soybean planting techniques taught by her husband on her soy farm, has a yam farm and crows, cassava, groundnuts as well as maize and vegetables. Member of two women's labour groups and farming is her main source of income

4. Greenfield mixed producer organisation

Mixed producer organisation leader, Ter BB

Aged 55, educated in Tiv only reading and writing, head of polygamous household with two wives. Shared MII learning on soya with family. A farmer, his main source of income. Grows rice, soy, maize, sesame, maize, guinea corn and cassava. His wives have their yam farms and small plots of soybean, as well as groundnuts and vegetables. Has given the group free land before to raise money to register with the government agency for cooperatives before group was networked with MII. Community men once invited him to share new MII technology with them before people ran away from the village because of cattle herder attacks

Mixed producer organisation leader, Ter Z

Aged 37, has two wives educated at secondary school level, head of his household which consists of his wives, children, siblings, and mother. Made secretary because he could write, represent and report back to the group. Shared MII technology with family and when men in the community invited the producer organisation to share with them MII markets, he, and the chairperson were delegated to go and teach the village people. He farms rice, soybean, maize, guinea corn. His wives have their own farms and grow yams, cassava, groundnuts, and vegetables.

Member of mixed producer organisation, Ter W

Aged 45, primary school level education, married to one wife, household consists of his wife, children, mother, and his male and female siblings. Farms rice, soybean, maize, cassava, sesame, guinea corn. His other income is from his tractor hiring services. Shared MII new planting technology with his wife and household members and they still use these new

methods. Hires farmland because cannot access own lands because of insecurity from herders attacks. His wife has her yam farm and grows groundnuts and cassava and vegetables.

Member of mixed producer organisation, Ter EE

Aged 35 years and has only primary level education. Married to one woman and has two children. His household comprises, ten people including his wife children, mother and younger siblings and sister-in-law. Farming is his main source of income, and he grows maize, soybeans, sesame, guinea corn and rice on his own. The household has a joint farm where they grow food crops for family food as all the wives of the men cook together for all family members. His wife and brother's wives also have their own farms where they grow yams, cassava and groundnuts and vegetables such as okra.

Significant other and member of mixed producer organisation, Significant, Ngo BBB

Aged 34, has secondary school level education, lives in a polygamous male headed household with husband, children, mother-in-law, and other relatives. Husband shared MII teachings, and they use on their soya farm. She has her yam and her soy farm and grows groundnuts, cassava, and vegetables. Handles all sale of farm produce in the household as husband is elderly. The live in Naka town because of insecurity but go to the village to farm and are always assessing the security issue and leave for the town as soon as they are not comfortable even if it is at night. Prefer to flee village at night because darkness provides them cover. Only suckling babies go to the village with the parents, older children stay home in the town home.

Significant other of producer organisation leader, Ngo CCC

Aged 28, secondary school educated lives in a male headed household with her husband and wife and children as well as other relatives. Husband shared new MII learnings, and they applied to their soy farm which became a small plot because family had to focus on household

food at the height of the violent conflicts between cattle herders and farmers in the area and just working to increase the soy acreage. The family grows mostly rice. She has a yam farm and grows, cassava, vegetables, and maize as well as groundnuts.

5. Experts

Extension worker, female

Aged 62, married with two children, has Higher National Diploma in agriculture and extension services (a Higher National Diploma (HND, is the highest certificate awarded by polytechnics in Nigeria and is the equivalent of a bachelor's degree). Worked for 30 years to the Benue state agriculture and rural development agency (BNARDA). Worked on several agriculture projects providing extension services to farmers and being assigned to work with private agriculture projects before being assigned to the MII local service provider. In the MII project plan presented in chapter three, state ADPs were to provide the Extension assistants to the project through the local service providers. Even though engaged by the local service provider, MII supervised her work as well. She was trained alongside other extension workers by MII and attended several trainings. Was trained upon employment at a weeklong workshop before commencing work with farmers and trainings continued all through the project. Extension workers were provided training materials as well as farm calendars to use in training farmers. She was assigned to work in Gwer East local government area and was still in the service of the state ADP when assigned to work with the local provider. See training guide used for engagement with producer organisations at appendix 3.

Extension worker, male

Aged 62, has Higher National Diploma in agriculture and extension services, is married with a wife and six children. Employed by the state Ministry of Agriculture and posted to the Benue state agriculture and rural development agency (BNARDA) where he worked for 35 years and retired. Was employed by the local service provider as an extension worker to work with rural farmers on the MII project until 2016. He was trained by MII before going to the field and attended a series of trainings and workshops organised by the local service provider. Training materials for use with farmers in the field were provided by MII as well as the local service providers. He worked with farmers groups in Gwer West local government area. See training guide used for engagement with producer organisations at appendix 3.

Gender and capacity building expert, female

37-year-old female, married to one husband who is monogamous with three children, and has a master's degree in gender and development. Worked for two years with an agriculture project before joining MII local service provider first as a Capacity building expert and designation later changed to Gender and capacity building expert. Her job entailed working with MII producer organisations build strong systems and ensure that women in mixed groups were given the same opportunities as men to fully participate in all activities from trainings as well as group discussions and leadership roles. She was required to meet with each farmer group once a month working with them to strengthen their organisations but meetings with leaders took place at all MII trainings and farmers field days. Leaders of organisations also had her contact details and could call whenever they wanted to seek her advice about organisational issues. The project provided an orientation training at the start of the employment. She also received the same training on new agronomic practices from the in-house agronomist, equipping her to also provide some extension services if needed when in the field visiting farmers organisation. Other in-house trainings included basic accounting and record keeping,

basic administrative skills and report writing. As capacity building experts they were responsible for paying farms transport stipends during meetings, so they were required to have basic accounting and financial skills.

Capacity building expert, male

35-year-old male, married to one wife with three children and has a bachelor's degree in agriculture economics and extension services. Employed by the local service provider in Benue state to work as a capacity-building specialist on the MII project. His job responsibilities were to work with farmers organisations to build their organisational capacity and work with them to solve problems that would inhibit their functioning. Meetings were scheduled with producer organisations once a month and attendance as groups were required to meet once a month even though some groups met twice. As a capacity building expert, he was trained by MII and was given a manual to guide his work with the farmers producer organisations. He attended such meetings twice before the project ended as he was employed in the projects last two years as project needed young computer literate staff to support work of extension agents who were not computer literate and thus had challenges sending in reports. His employer, the MII local service provider, also provided a series of trainings and every month there was an in-house meeting to discuss project implementation and challenged and how to mitigate them.

Appendix 2: Focus group discussion and interview guides

Guide 1: Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. Contact with MARKETS II

a) What did you learn (in terms of information, networks, skills, and contact) from MII that has continued to impact your life? How, in what ways? Please explain further.

b) What has changed since you joined the PO?

- In terms of farming (inputs-)
- In terms of selling produce
- Personally - participating in group and community activities; supporting a cause in the community or in the market

2. Participation in and activities of the Producer Organisation (PO)?

a) How did you join the PO?

b) What did the PO do during MII and what is it doing after MII?

c) Does the group influence pricing of soyabean? How? How does the group ensure that members who sell at the farm gate get the agreed(good) price?

d) What is member participation like in the group? – attendance; decision making, implementation of group decisions? Are some members more active than others? Why, what do you think is responsible for this situation?

e) In what ways is the PO involved with the wider community and other groups? And what is the community's response to the PO? – for example, does community seek the POs opinion on issues?

f) Are there other POs that were established by other projects have remained active after such interventions have ended? What do you think is responsible for this situation?

g) Are there other groups through which female farmers can be reached by agricultural projects? Why do you think these can be used to reach female farmers?

3. Defining women's empowerment

a) What has changed in your lives since you became a member of this MII PO?

- in your household, has anything made it easy/difficult for you to participate in the PO?
- in your interactions in your community and in the market

b) If you were to advice an agriculture projects, what would be your suggestion on how female soyabean farmers can be empowered?

c) What can the female farmers do to improve on what they have learnt and about themselves?

Guide 2: Interview guide: PO Leader

1. Contact with MII

- a) How did you become a leader?
- b) What has changed in your life since you became a member and leader of this MII PO? – as a farmer of soybeans; in your activities in the MII PO and other groups; in your household; in your interactions in your community and in the market
- c) In what ways are you involved with the wider community and other groups as a PO leader? And what does the community think of you as the Leader of the PO?

2. Participation in and activities of the Producer Organisation (PO)?

- a) How has the PO been functioning since its establishment - before and after MII? What does the PO do?
- b) In what ways are female farmers who were/are members of MII POs different from other female farmers? Why? What has changed in the lives of members (female farmers) of the POs?
- c) How has this difference between MII female farmers and non-MII soya bean female farmers widened since MII left?
- b) In what ways does the PO provide a platform for female farmers to interact with the market and their communities?
- e) How do members participate - decision making, implementation of decisions? Are some more active than others? Why?

3. Defining women's empowerment

- a) If you were to advice agriculture projects, what would be your suggestion on how female soyabean farmers can be empowered?
- b) Are there other groups through which female farmers can be reached by agriculture projects?
- c) Are there POs that were established by other projects that have remained active after such interventions have ended? What do you think is responsible for this situation?
- d) What can the female farmers do to improve on what they have learnt?

Guide 3: Interview guide: Active and non-active PO member

1. Contact with MII and participation in the PO

- a) What did you learn/get in terms of information, networks, skills, and contacts from MII PO that has continued to impact your life? How, in what ways? Please explain further.
- b) How did membership in the PO change your live/or not? Why, please explain. In terms of farming
 - In terms of selling produce
 - In terms of your person -participating in group(s) and community activities; market
 - What made you active/not active member of the PO?
- d) What has changed in your live since you became a member of this MII PO? – as a farmer of soyabeans; in your activities in the MII PO and other groups; in your household; in your interactions in your community and in the market
- e) How did your family react to your participation in the PO? What challenges occurred and what support did you get?
- f) Are there some aspects of the POs that would have performed better if they had been organized differently? Please explain

2. Defining women's empowerment

- a) If you were to advice agriculture projects, what would be your suggestion on how female soya farmers can be empowered?
- b) Are there other groups through which female farmers can be reached by agriculture projects? Please explain
- c) Are there other POs that were established by other projects that have remained active after such interventions have ended? What do you think is responsible for this situation?
- d) What can the female farmers do to improve on what they have learnt?

Guide 4: Interview guide: Significant other (male or female)

1. Contact with MII and participation in the PO

- a) How many groups is your wife/husband a member of and in which groups are they still active? Why?
- b) Focusing on the MII soyabean PO, what did your spouse learn and how has membership of the MII PO changed her/him?
 - How has this impacted her farming, marketing, household, interaction with the community and other peoples?
 - Has she/he she continued to practise learnings from the MII PO? Please explain?
 - Has this led to her/him to join/establish other groups and taking up leadership roles or active in these other groups?
- c) In what ways has the PO leadership role of your wife/husband impacted on your family and farm business?
 - What new things is she/he doing/wants to do and what are the challenges they have faced and how has she/he handled these challenges?
 - what support has he/she received from the household?

2. Defining women's empowerment

- a) What other groups is your wife/husband a member of? How different are these groups from the MII PO? Has she/he always been a member of these groups or did it happen after her contact with MII?
- b) If you were to advise agriculture projects, what would be your suggestion on how female soyabean farmers can be empowered?
- c) Are there other groups through which female farmers can be reached by agriculture projects?
- d) Are there other POs that were established by other projects that have remained active after such interventions have ended? What do you think is responsible for this situation?
- e) What can the female farmer do to improve on what they have learnt? What can the female farmer do to improve?

Guide 5: Interview guide: Capacity building experts and Extension workers

1. Before MII

- a) How were the MII POs identified, established, and networked? How were female farmers especially women recruited for the project? How did MII ensure that poor and less privileged women were recruited?
- b) How were the farmers especially women involved in the strategy used to reach farmers? Where did the strategy come from?
- c) What were the things women could do or not do as female farmers (in the household; as regards farming; in the community and in the market)? Where/are there restrictions? Please explain?
- d) In what ways did MII enable women address these constraints?

2. Contact with MII and participation in the PO

- a) What impact did the MII POs have on female farmers? How did the POs provide a platform for female farmers to interact with the market and their communities? In what ways is this continuing?
- b) How did women and men negotiate among themselves in the PO? What has changed since contact with MII? How did this happen?
- c) What were group relations like in both mixed and all female POs? What constraints/challenges did you notice working with the women/farmers in the POs? What was responsible? Were these addressed and how?
- d) What things did the female farmers start doing that were considered men's responsibilities before MII?
- f) What differences did you notice between women in all female groups from women in mixed groups?
- g) What can the female farmers do to improve on what they have learnt?
- h) How have the POs been functioning since they were established - before, during and after MII?

3. Post MII

- a) Have you interacted with the POs since MII ended in 2017? What did you notice – changes in the groups and individual members for instance as regards relations within the group, social relations in the communities/families/farming business?
- b) What do you think is responsible for the changes that have happened during and after the end of MII?

4. Defining women's empowerment

- a) If you were to advice an agriculture projects, what would be your suggestion on how female farmers can be empowered?
- b) Are there other groups through which female farmers can be reached by agriculture projects?
- c) Are there other POs that were established by other projects that have remained active after such interventions have ended? What do you think is responsible for this situation?

Follow-up interview guides

Guide 1: Follow-up interview guide(women)

1)Name: 2) marital status 3) age; 4) number of children. 5) number of people in the Household:

6)type of household - (a. female-headed; b. male-headed (monogamous); c. male-headed polygamous [how many wives; what is your position among the wives]

Section 1: In the Household and Family

Decision-making in the household

1. Who are the people in your household?
2. How are decisions made concerning farming—on your yam farm, your soya/other farms, on husband's farms
3. How are decisions made on other issues in the house other than farming e.g., food, health, construction of buildings, education, supporting family members, attending meetings
4. Are women's voices as important as men, in decision-making in the household? In what ways? Are your concerns recognised/ to what extent, give me an example?
5. Your husband has more than wives, how are decisions made since it is not just you and him in the house as husband and wives?
6. Do wives work together and take decisions together? Give me examples? Any changes since you join MII? Give me an example
7. How has membership of MII PO affected these things? What did and have done differently since entering MII? What is the reason for this change? If, no change, why?

Control of resources

1. Control over resources within the HH, from personal and joint farms, who decides, about what? Do you have any control? Give me an example of when you were in control? How often?
2. So, everyone keeps money from their farm/trade and spends it as they want?
3. Who manages household resources, money, food, when and what produce to sell? Does everyone sell her our produce as she wants, or it is decided together? How are resources managed?
4. Do you have a job outside your home and farming — employment or trade? What type of job do you do? What do you do with the income from this job? When did you start doing this job? Was it because of MII? Please explain?
5. How do you get land, labour for your farms and other inputs—seeds, herbicides, fertilizers etc?
6. What changed in your life and how you related within the family since you joined MII?

Gender roles in the household

1. Who does what in the household – male children, female children, husbands, men in the house, wife, women in the house? Has this ever changed? If no, why? If yes, what changed and why? Did your membership of MII contribute to this change?
2. What changed in your life and the household in terms of what people do in the household since you joined MII? Give me an example
3. How about farming—who does what on the farm? Do you pay your husband when he works on your farm, and does he pay you when you work on his farm? Why, so? So, its free work for both of you?
4. Intra-HH relations between husbands, wives, co-wives, in-laws, extended family. How do you relate with these people, do you live in the same house? How does your relationship with them affect your farming?
5. What has changed in your relationships because of your membership in the MII PO?
6. When you want to do something, how do you go about it? Example. Were you doing this the same way before and after MII?

Section 2: Women's labour Groups

1. Are you a member of a women's labour group? How many groups are you in? How long have you been in this groups? Who are the members of this group – all from one extended family or different families?
2. How does it function, how do you women decided the arrangement of how to go round farms?
3. What else do women in this group do other than farming?
4. How do members of this group relate with each other and how are conflicts resolved or everyone pretends no conflicts?
5. Do you think that if a project works with these women labour groups instead of establishing producer organisations, the labour groups will be stronger and not disappear after project ends and continue to grow by applying what they were taught?

Section 3: Defining women and empowerment

1. Who are women? What can you do and cannot do? Why? Have you or any women questioned what you cannot do or do? What are women concerned about? What do they want?
2. How do you and women define progress, and empowerment?

Section 4: In the community

1. In this community, how many groups/associations do you belong to—farming, church, business, adashi, etc? What do you do in the groups/associations?
2. Since you got involved with the MII, what changed in the way and manner you participate in these other groups? What did you learn from MII that made this change?
3. In this community who are the women leaders? Are you one? How did you become one? Did engagement with MII make you a more popular women leader? How, please explain?

4. Are you invited to all women's meetings in this community? If no, why? If yes, which ones and did you started being invited? What about other women?
5. Are you or other women invited by the community (Ityo) to attend and participate in discussion? If no, why do you think women are not invited? If women went to the meetings and asked to be allowed to contribute will the men refuse? So, why have women not gone to such meetings, for example where men are meeting to discuss security issues such as the Fulani attacks?
6. In the groups were women meet, do they ever discuss their life issues and what they would want to change? Give me an example. So, what did they do?
7. How do women get the things that bother them to be solved in the community?
8. What other aspects of the community life are women involved in and how active are they?
9. What hinders women from having a voice in the community?
10. What changed in your life and how you related with the community since joining MII?

Guide 2: Follow-up interview guide (men)

1)Name: 2) marital status 3) age; 4) number of children. 5) number of people in the household: 6)type of household – (a. polygamous - number of wives and position of this wife; b. monogamous)

Section 1: In the household and family

Decision-making in the household

1. Who are the people in your household?
2. How are decisions made concerning farming — your farm, your wife(wives)
3. How are decisions made on other issues in the house other than farming e.g., food, health, construction of buildings, education, supporting family members, attending meetings
4. Are women’s voices as important as men, in decision-making in the household? In what ways? Are your concerns recognised/ to what extent, give me an example?
5. When you want to do something, how do you go about it?
6. How has your wife’s (or yours if member of) membership of MII PO affected these things? What did you do (and have done) differently since entering MII? What is the reason for this change? If, no change, why?

Control of resources

1. Control over resources within the HH, who controls
 - a) Use and sale of farm produce
 - b) Money from sale of farm produce
 - c) Money from your job other than farming – what other job do you do?
 - d) So, everyone keeps money from their farm/trade and spends it as they want?
2. Managing household resources
 - a) Who manages household resources, money, food, when and what produce to sell?
 - b) Does everyone sell her our produce as she wants, or it is decided together? How are resources managed?
 - c) How do you get land, labour for your farms and other inputs—seeds, herbicides, fertilizers etc?
3. What property does your wife have that is her own—eg. goats, chickens, her businesses like trading, jewellery, bike, car, hours etc?
 - a) Who controls these things?
 - b) Can she keep her money and use as she likes and sell her small animals and yams as she likes? Please explain answer
 - c) If …(that is maybe)you divorce her, what property will she take away as her own?
 - d) Do you buy her clothes? If yes from what money? If no, how does she get clothes

Section 2: in the community

1. Are women invited by the community (Ityo) to attend and participate in discussion?
 - a) If no, why do you think women are not invited?
 - b) If women went to the meetings and asked to be allowed to contribute will the men refuse?
 - c) So, why have women not gone to such meetings, for example where men are meeting to discuss security issues such as the Fulani attacks?
2. How do women get the things that bother them to be solved in the community?
3. What other aspects of the community life are women involved in and how active are they?
4. What hinders women from having a voice in the home and the community? Can this change? Please explain your answer.
5. This has been the situation before and after MII? MII did not change this?

Section 3: Defining women and empowerment

1. Who are women? What can you do and cannot do? Why? Have you or any women questioned what you cannot do or do? What are women concerned about? What do they want?
2. How do you and women define progress, and empowerment?

Vignettes for FGDs with rural farmers (female and male-only groups) exploring issues arising from main interviews - a community of women, a community of men and women's empowerment.

Vignette 1:

An NGO was villages sinking boreholes for communities that had no source of water within or near them. They came to the village and requested for the village to provide young men who will work free of charge with the drillers. The young men were to gather sand for the work as well as provide all the manual labour needed such as carrying sand and cement mixture for the construction of the concrete slab where the manual water pump will be installed for villagers to pump water from the well. The well was to be handed over to the community upon completion. The labour of the young men will be free of charge and not paid for. After a long silence, the young men refused to work on the drilling free of charge and insisted that they be paid for their labour even though the well will belong to the community. The young men's labour was to be the only contribution from the community. The women who daily fetch water from a long distance could not speak up even though their faces showed their eagerness to have a water source in their community.

The NGO left the community and took the borehole to another community. The women were left to keep tracking the usual long distance to look for water for all household needs as this was part of their responsibility.

1. Why did the women not speak up and insist that they borehole be sunk? The women are the ones doing all the suffering fetching water from long distances for household use.
2. Why didn't the older men and women speak up?
3. Would women in this community have spoken up at this meeting? Why?
4. Was there another way the women could have made their wishes known? Could they have volunteered to provide the labour?

Vignette 2:

Ngodoo's husband left the village and has not returned for over 20 years and no one knows his whereabouts. His wife was left with four children whom she provided for all alone from her farm work and her trading in the market. No one in the family assisted her except on the rare occasions when women in the family compounded gave her some grains. When her daughter was to marry, she insisted that all the bride price be paid in her side of the compound and that she receives all the wealth and distributes it as she deems fit because no one helped her with the upbringing of the children. All male relatives in the family ganged up against her and insisted that this could not happen because the child is their daughter. Ngodoo said bit none of you ever supported me not even to make ridges for my farm free of charge, why do you now want to collect the bride price?

1. How do you respond to this story? Why?

2. The men abandoned the children but now they want to rip where they did not sow. Is this right?
3. How should the matter be solved? Why?

Vignette 3:

Terdoo is married to Tardoo. Terdoo is a hard-working woman who has several farms in addition to her big yam farm. She also farms soya beans, maize, cassava, and groundnuts. In addition, she also sells at the market in town as a middle woman. Tardoo does not contribute anything to her farms nor to the household upkeep as he sells all his produce from his soyabean farm and spends the money on himself, buying clothes and drinking with his friends. When her friend invites her to a training on rice farming to hold in Makurdi for a week, her husband says she cannot go. Terdoo insists that she will go as it was an opportunity to learn something new and she attended the training. On return, her husband reports her to the community meeting and the men call Terdoo and warn her never to repeat such a thing and that if she does that will be the end of the marriage. The men refused to listen nor consider Terdoo's explanation saying that she is a useless woman who does not obey her husband even though they all know that Tardoo does not take care of his family.

No woman in the community could speak in defence of Terdoo not even the leader of River town women's association.

1. Why do you think the community elders blamed Terdoo?
2. How do you think Terdoo should have handled the situation? Why
3. What should Tardoo have done? Why
4. Why didn't the women speak up in support of Terdoo? Why, please explain?

Vignette 4:

Ngo attend a farmers training on new farming methods at the local government headquarters as a member of a farmers group. As she applied the new methods and taught other farmers she needed to ask further clarifications from the Extension Worker Mr Harvest. She saw him in town at the weekly market but was hesitant to walk up to him and ask her questions because she had not asked her husband permission to speak with him. She thus lost an opportunity to get further explanation that would have benefited members of her group as well as hers. The group had to wait for another 2 months when the Extension Worker came visiting to their group to ask clarifications at which point the best time for what they should have done had passed.

1. Why do you think Ngo was afraid to speak with Mr. Harvest in the market?
2. Would it be wrong for her to have approached Mr Harvest without her husband's permission? Why? Please explain?

3. Is it the custom of the people here that women cannot speak to men such as in this case to ask questions? Why? Please explain.
4. Can women in this community approach men extension workers and ask questions without