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What is the Problem of Gender Inequality Represented to be in Inter-National Development Policy in Burkina Faso?

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Abstract This article contributes to critical policy analysis scholarship from a post-structuralism perspective. Employing the ‘What’s the problem represented to be’ (WPR) framework, a Foucault-influenced post-structural approach, we investigate what is the problem of Gender Inequality (GI) represented to be in development in Burkina Faso. Based on systematic analysis of selected (inter)-national development policy documents and in-depth stakeholder interviews, our results show two main categories of problem representations: a) local culture/informal structures that strengthen and are strengthened by patriarchy, and b) women’s weak agency that undermine their effective participation. These problem representations are framed from two different but overlapping standpoints: rights and development. Furthermore, the informal structures are presented as the source of the problem of GI while formal structures are portrayed as the solution. The underlying assumptions ignore the gendered impacts of history, colonial legacies, the interconnectedness and often-conflicting state policies and globalisation. Consequently, the problem of GI is depoliticised, rendered local, technical, and static. This deflects responsibility in solving the problem, limits local agency and the exploration of effective cultural and bottom-up policy responses. Alternatively, GI could be represented as a problem of structural unequal power relations – rather than a simplistic blame of local culture.

Keywords: WPR approach; gender inequality; feminist foreign policy; critical policy analysis; development; decolonisation

Introduction

Gender inequality (GI) remains a major challenge for global societal wellbeing and numerous policies aim to respond to what is considered a ‘wicked problem’. GI pertains to the unequal social constructs defining roles, values, norms, power relations and expectations of males and females, within a specific context and time. These constructs have repercussions on unequal access to – and control of – resources, decision making and opportunities for men and women (GESI, 2016). Scholars and development practitioners

have explored the nature of the problem of GI (Basse and Bubu, 2019; Bouchama et al., 2018; Calvo, 2013; Kobiané et al., 2020; Payne, 2014; Poulsen, 2006), the approaches to comprehend it (Bacchi and Eveline, 2010; Bertolt, 2018; Kabeer, 1999), the policy solutions to address it, and the socioeconomic costs of GI (Anunobi, 2002; OCDE, 2018) among others. In Burkina Faso, various political responses have been implemented to respond to GI, notably in development policy. Since the country's independence in 1960 the approaches to gender have varied, from the Integration of Women in Development approach (WID, in 1975), and the Women and Development approach (WAD, in 1985), to Gender and Development (GAD, from 1990). This translated into the creation of the Ministry of Women in 1997 (Ouoba et al., 2003).

Nonetheless, GI persists in Burkina Faso, ranking 147/162 with a gender inequality index of 0.594 according to the 2019 UNDP report. GI remains a significant barrier to the country's development, prompting questions about how policymakers and development agencies and practitioners perceive the nature of the problem of GI in Burkina Faso. We here ask what is represented to be the problem of GI in development policy documents, what assumptions underlie the policies' problem representations, and how do these reflect who shapes policy making?

Gender itself is a contested concept: its conceptualisation is political and may address or reinforce social inequalities (Eveline and Bacchi, 2005). Introduced in Burkina Faso by international development institutions, through development aid and funding requirements (Ilboudo, 2007), the GAD approach originated from critical feminist discussions mostly from the global south. GAD questions western development model and aspires not only to include women in wealth production, but also to understand how the underlying power relationships have kept them from doing so (Addis et al., 2011; Sen and Grown, 1987). However, although the GAD approach is often presented as Burkina Faso's guiding gender equality policy principle (MEF, 2011); WID seems to be mostly applied (Ouoba et al., 2003). WID takes its roots in Esther Boserup's theory of rural development, which claims the inclusion of women into the development effort within the logic of market liberalisation, without rethinking social or economic structures (Beneria and Sen, 1981; Bisilliat, 2000), thus relegating gender inequality as a technical problem. While this approach has been extensively criticised for targeting symptoms and not causes of gender inequality, it lingers in many of Burkina Faso's programmes (Ouoba et al., 2003, p. 26).

The discordance of ideas and approaches illustrates how policy frames its problem representations around dominant narratives, power relations and interests. Problem representations have historical and contextual underpinnings and bear implications for different social groups both in the present and the future. By focusing on a specific understanding of a problem, policy may ignore alternative views, potentially creating new problems or undesired outcomes (Bacchi, 2012). To unearth what is represented to be the problem of GI in development in Burkina Faso, we use Bacchi's (2009) WPR framework to analyse policy documents from the state, international development cooperation agencies and development practitioners/brokers. The WPR approach consists of methods to address

six interrelated questions that probe what policy problematises; the conceptual underpinnings, origins, history, and mechanisms of reproduction; the silences, the effects of a particular problem representation; and finally, how it could be disrupted.

We hypothesise that current representations of the problem of GI in development policy documents in Burkina Faso render the problem of GI as local, static, and apolitical, thus shifting responsibility for the problem and the lived effects thereof to the local level and the local people. In doing so, these representations deflect from alternative political-structural responses.

The next sections of the article introduce the study's methodology and conceptual framework, followed by the results outlined according to the WPR key questions, and the discussion and conclusions.

Methodology

Conceptual framework

Traditional policy analysis is often dominated by a positivist perspective that views policies as objective entities crafted by rational authorities/experts to address known issues and achieve desired outcomes. For instance, the policy cycle framework assesses policy as a sequential process including key steps (problem identification, policy formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation), while the rational model includes cost-benefit analysis. These models remain descriptive, normative with limited analytical avenue (Jann and Wegrich, 2007). These portray policy formulation and outcome as a deliberate and predictable operation, downplaying the multidimensional, interconnected, and unpredictable nature of policy processes and change (Karambiri et al., 2020). Critical policy analysis from a post-structural perspective addresses these gaps by problematising policy solutions, challenging the taken for granted knowledges/ framings underpinning policy formulation, while bringing forth the complexity of policy contexts and unpredictability of policy responses (Diem et al., 2014). The 'What's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) approach developed by Bacchi (2009) proves effective in critical policy analysis, for instance of gender mainstreaming into labour policy (Poulsen, 2006), health (Payne, 2014), development cooperation, migration, and sexuality (Calvo, 2013; Chandrasena, 2022; McGarry and FitzGerald, 2019). The WPR approach has also contributed to conceptual and theoretical advancements in critical feminism scholarship (Bacchi and Eveline, 2010; Eveline and Bacchi, 2005).

The WPR approach posits that policy solutions, gender policy in our case, in seeking to fix what they perceive as the problem, may inadvertently induce new issues affecting various social groups. Policy is constructed within specific contexts, power relations, and interests. It carries a particular understanding of the problem and its resolution. Consequently, policy may silence alternative understandings and experiences. For instance, if promoting women as workers is deemed the solution to achieve gender equality, the problem might be represented as the underrepresentation of women in the workforce (Poulsen, 2006).

The WPR approach to policy analysis includes six interrelated questions and directives that can be applied to one's own problem representations (Table 1). We investigate the first three questions based on analyses of gender policy documents and the second three based on interviews and literature reviews. These questions are not meant to be a one-size-fits all approach to policy analysis but are rather guiding inquiries that enable the researcher's self-reflexivity, awareness of own biases, policy complexity and context (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016).

Data collection and analysis

We draw from two data sets: policy documents and in-depth interviews. First, we selected and analysed a total of 23 gender and development policy/strategy/action plan documents, including 7 national and 16 from development cooperation agencies (Table 2). Selection of these agencies' policy documents was based on their membership to the gender donors' platform (*la table ronde des bailleurs de fond pour le financement des activités genre au Burkina Faso*), which includes contributors to the common gender fund (*le fond commun genre des PTF*), such as Sweden, Denmark, UNFPA, UNICEF and Switzerland. Further, we obtained one gender strategy document from an international NGO operating in Burkina Faso. Other NGOs consulted were either operating with internal gender guidelines (that are not publicly available) or did not have a gender strategy document.

Second, we complemented the policy and strategy document analysis with 22 in-depth interviews with 7 national and international NGOs leaders, 4 research and development actors, 2 government officials, 7 international development cooperation representatives, and 2 resource persons (i.e. a local leader and a gender consultant who also serves as secretary of the gender donors round table). We conducted the interviews both in person and remotely because of the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic. Three interviews included more than one participant as those organisations appointed their experts to engage in the discussion with us. We voice recorded all the interviews, except for one based on the interviewee's preference. Discussions during the interviews, encompassed organisational and personal conceptions of the GI problem, the policy development, and practices in the field, as well as the underlying assumptions and silences in current policy responses and interventions.

We transcribed the recorded interviews and coded the text corpus inductively using open-coding technique in Atlas.ti 9, a qualitative data analysis software. Codes are theoretical constructs attached to every quotation, i.e. relevant text segments that are highlighted for their importance in the elucidation of the research inquiry at hand (Walker and Myrick, 2006). Under the guidance of the WPR questions, we used content analysis to help unpack systematically the data meanings, and critical discourse analysis for their interpretation. We chose both methods for their pertinence for our topic, and coherence with a post-structural research perspective. We used the same coding process for the policy documents, where the problems were stated either

WPR Questions	Aim of question	Questions applied to gender inequality (GI) in Burkina Faso
1) <i>What is the problem of gender inequality represented to be in development policy in Burkina Faso?</i>	Uncover how gender inequality is framed and problematised in national development policy and international development cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do policy documents (national & international development cooperation) portray as being the core problem of GI? - What strategies, measures and activities are suggested as solutions?
2) <i>What presuppositions underlie this representation of the problem? What is assumed? What is taken-for-granted? What is not questioned?</i>	A complex problem may be, distorted, misrepresented or narrowly problematised into binary or dichotomous relationships of male/female, national/international, nature/culture. This question aims to identify and analyse the discursive and non-discursive practices, the conceptual logics that underpin specific problem representations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What knowledge systems (ontology), science (epistemology), and deeply rooted premises and values (conceptual logics) enable certain problem representations to exist and prosper?^a
3) <i>How has this representation of the problem come about?</i>	Explore the origins, history, mechanisms and the conditions that enable a particular problem representation to take shape and assume dominance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are specific points (in time and space) where new developments and ideas about gender equality emerged and induced different policy pathways?^b
4) <i>What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?</i>	Identify the silences that are obscured by particular problem representations. Critically analyze the problem representations and competing understandings identified earlier in questions 2 and 3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are silences (what is left unproblematic) created due to political, social, and/or cultural sensitivities? - Are current discourses too prevalent and dominant, and drown out more critical/alternative viewpoints?
5) <i>What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?</i>	Dominant discourses and problem representations lead to specific solution pathways with polarising, constructive effects or not for different social groups. Here the goal is to identify how policy interventions affect social change, which aspects of mainstream problem representations present constructive effects or not for which social groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the effects of dominant problem representations on the formation of social subjects, identities, and the lives of those concerned with the problem representations?^c - What will likely change or stay the same with current representation of the problem? - Who will likely benefit or be harmed from this representation of the 'problem'? - How does the problem representations affect those that are identified as responsible for the problem?^d

(Continued)

Table 1: (Continued).

WPR Questions	Aim of question	Questions applied to gender inequality (GI) in Burkina Faso
6) <i>How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?</i>	Identify how the means of communication and advocacy used in the dissemination processes enable specific problem representations to dominate.	- What are potential conflicting/resistance discourses that could be resources for dissemination but also materials for re-problematisation of the problem? ^d

Table 1: WPR questions, aims and application to the case of GI in Burkina Faso

^aBacchi explains, through this example 'If you introduce training programs for women, you must assume women lack training' Bacchi (2009, p. 3).

^bAcknowledge that competing problem representations exist, and that decisions over the ideas or assumptions that are translated into policy and practice reflects and is guided by power relations embedded in gender-related issues. For example, an opinion that is supported by funding agencies would likely be popular and adopted as opposed to opinions that are not backed by them.

^cFor example, if women are said to be a vulnerable group in policy, they may tend to view themselves as such, and this will tailor their agency accordingly.

^dBacchi, 2009, pp. 18–19

directly or framed through planned actions and solutions to be implemented. We obtained over 156 codes that we further clustered by meaning into nine sub-categories and two broader categories of problem representations.

The interview data enriched and complemented our WPR approach to policy analysis. This allowed us to further the critical analysis suggested by the WPR approach, including capturing the silences and in-depth representations of institutional actors, such as NGOs brokers, who may not have a publicly available gender strategy document.

Results

The results are outlined following the six interrelated questions of the WPR approach. Where relevant, we present a brief overview of the policy document reviewed.

What is the problem of gender inequality represented to be in development policy in BF? (incl. national, international cooperation and development aid)

In the policy document analysis, the problem of GI is represented to be the local culture/ informal structures and the weak agency of women.

Local culture and informal structures are the problem!

Customary practices, traditions and socially embedded norms, values and expectations are represented as the fundamental problem contributing to GI in Burkina Faso. Local culture seen as endorsing patriarchy and portraying the masculine as superior to the

Document	Role
<i>National development & gender policy documents</i>	
Nationale gender strategy 2020–2024: <i>Stratégie Nationale Genre (SNG) 2020–2024 du Burkina Faso</i>	Overarching national gender strategy, and action plan, Promotion of women entrepreneurship strategy – latest report
National Gender strategy action plan: <i>Plan d'actions opérationnel 2020–2022 de la Stratégie Nationale Genre du Burkina Faso</i>	Latest gender quota law for women's political participation
Promotion of women entrepreneurship strategy: <i>Stratégie Nationale de Promotion de l'Entrepreneuriat Féminin (SNPEF) 2016–2025</i>	Latest overarching national development strategy Sectoral gender implementation guide
Gender quota law: <i>loi n°003-2020/AN du 22 janvier 2020 portant fixation de quota et modalités de positionnement des candidates et des candidats aux élections législatives et municipales au Burkina Faso</i>	Framework for climate change mitigation and adaptation
National Plan for Economic and Social Development (PNDES) 2016–2020	
Guide for gender mainstreaming into sectoral development policy: <i>Guide d'intégration du genre dans les politiques sectorielles</i>	
REDD + Readiness Plan (RPP) Burkina	
<i>International development cooperation gender strategy</i>	
Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA): Strategy for development cooperation with Burkina Faso 2018–2022	Gender equality strategies, frameworks, principles, and areas of development cooperation with Burkina Faso
Germany: GIZ stratégie genre avec le Burkina Faso	
Switzerland: Suisse stratégie de Coopération avec le Burkina 2017–2020	
Denmark: Denmark cooperation in Burkina Faso, country programme 2016–2020	
Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA): Strategy for Sweden's Development cooperation for global gender equality and women's and girls' rights 2018–2022	Gender policies, strategies, and guidance for practice in international/foreign development cooperation
UNFPA: Gender equality Strategy 2018–2021	
World Bank Group (WBG): Gender-Strategy 2016–2023	
Belgium: Le genre dans la Coopération Belge au développement	
Canada: Aide international au développement féministe	
UNICEF, Gender Action Plan 2018–2021	
Denmark DANIDA strategic gender equality in development cooperation 2014	
Luxemburg: Stratégie genre Lux-Dev au Burkina Faso	
Agence Française de Développement (AFD): stratégie internationale égalité femmes hommes 2022	
UNDP gender strategy 2018–2021	
UN-Women gender equality strategy 2018–2021	

(Continued)

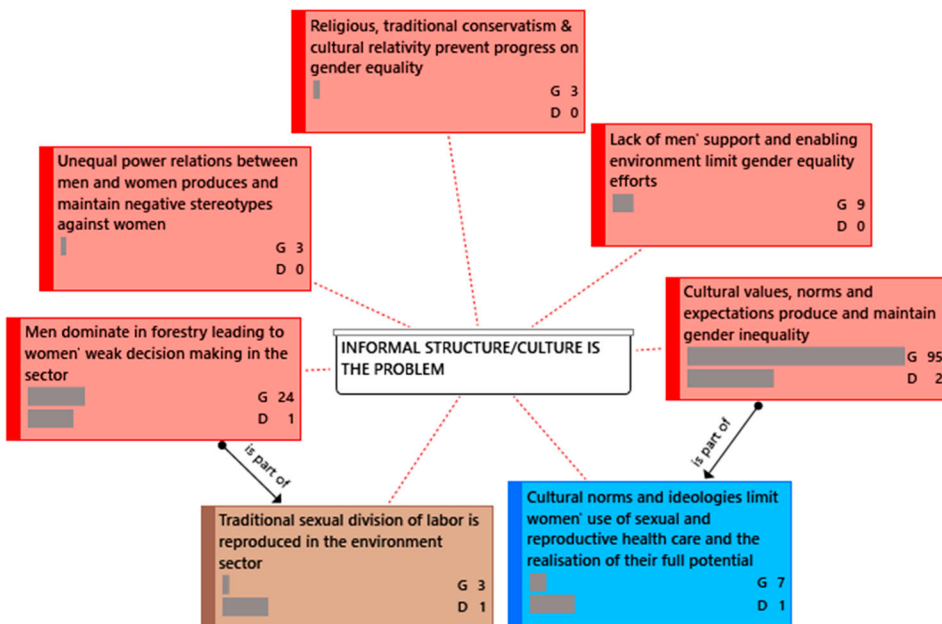
Table 2: (Continued).

Document	Role
<i>NGOs/ Brokers of development</i>	
Gender Strategy, international NGO	Gender strategy in development project

Table 2: Overview of policy documents reviewed.

feminine, is argued to produce, reproduce, and maintain GI at the expense of women and girls (Figure 1). For instance, the national gender strategy (PD1, p. 11) reports that GI is a problem of cultural and religious diversity that induce diverse gender norms, reinforce patriarchy, and creates various discriminations and harmful cultural practices against women and girls, hence hijacking the exercise of their basic human rights. The NGO gender strategy (PD23, p. 14) also mentions that in Burkina Faso ‘social and [local] cultural constructions of the relations between men and women is what produces inequality and inequity’. Likewise, PD10, PD11, PD20 report a rise of ‘conservatism and cultural relativity’ that emanate from ‘religious, cultural, and traditional beliefs and practices’ and undermine progress on gender equality and the realisation of women’s rights. These cultural practices and procedures are said to limit women’s agency over their sexual and reproductive health and rights, thus limiting their life choices, their empowerment, and the realisation of their full potential

Figure 1: Network of codes portraying culture as the problem of GI. D = density, shows number of linkages the researcher has between codes; G = grounded, shows number of times a code has been applied from data corpus



(PD13, PD10, PD16, PD20). Another implication of culture is the lack of men’s support and absence of an enabling social environment for gender equality. This aspect is portrayed as a problem of a certain ‘mentality’, rooted in patriarchy and men’s fear of losing power and authority to women. In addition, the traditional sexual division of work is reproduced in natural resource management, thus creating more resistance to change. For instance, PD19, p. 2 argues that legal frameworks for gender equality exist in Burkina Faso, but the people prefer to use customs and traditions which present inequalities between men and women. Three policy documents explicitly describe traditions as fostering unequal power relations and negative stereotypes against women, hence producing, and maintaining GI (PD10, PD11, PD23).

Women and girls themselves are the problem!

The problem of GI is also represented to be a problem of women’s weak agency, that prevents them from benefiting from the formal structures, portrayed as just and a solution to informal and cultural structures presented as an incubator of GI (more on this dichotomy informal versus formal structure in the next section).

Women’s weak agency (Figure 2) transpires in the policy and strategy documents in terms of lack of women’s capacity, empowerment, and influence in their polity. In these documents (e.g. PD13, p. 31), it is argued that because of individual and structural impediments such as formal education, women lack capacity to exercise and claim their rights, including sexual and reproductive rights. Moreover, women also lack empowerment to seize life opportunities, invent their future, and influence the public and private decision-making spheres. It is also argued that women do not have enough access to education, while it is through formal instruction that capacity is built, and public decisions rely (PD1, PD8, PD14). It is suggested that when

Figure 2: Network of codes illustrating women agency as the problem of GI. D = density, shows number of linkages the researcher has between codes; G = grounded, shows number of times a code has been applied from data corpus

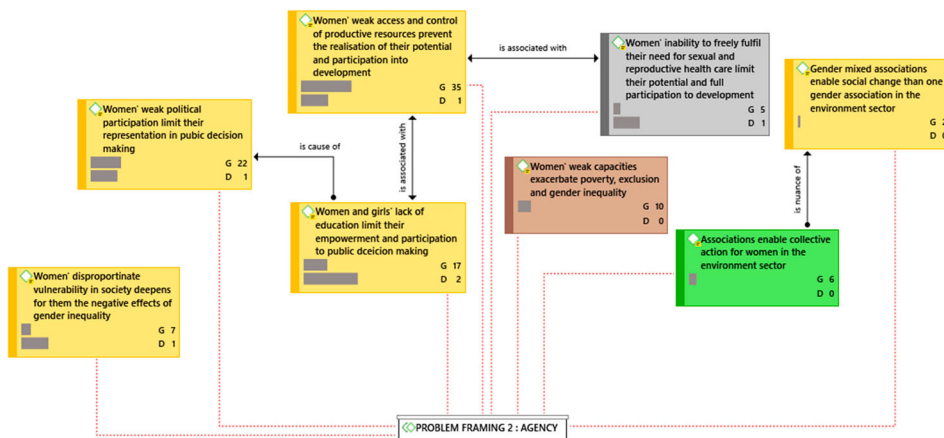
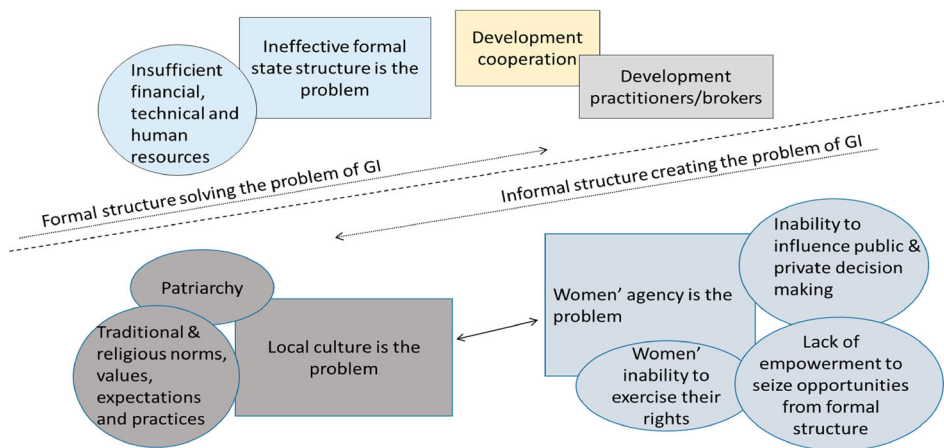


Figure 3: Problematisations of and solutions to gender inequality as identified in the selected policy documents



women are educated, they will have agency over personal life choices e.g. use of sexual & reproductive health (PD18). As a result, they will access and influence public decision making through their political participation. Moreover, they will access markets, qualified jobs, productive resources, and economic opportunities, enabling them to contribute to the country's development (PD16).

Overlaps of problem representation

Local culture and women's weak agency are distinct but interconnected problem representations in policy documents. As shown in Figure 3, local culture is portrayed as nurturing a disabling environment for the exercise of women's agency, and limiting their access to opportunities offered by the formal structure such as the state laws and regulations. For instance, the PD1 explains that rights exist but are not systematically enacted by legislators, as women themselves are hesitant to use legal procedures because of sociocultural pressures, norms, and values.

Approaches, policy measures to solving gender inequality

Surprisingly, the problem representations presented in previous sections were similar across policy solutions that had critically different perspectives: human rights-based (HRBA), gender-mainstreaming, and feminist approach. The first portrays GI from an individual right and identity perspective, and the latter two from a collective angle. All three approaches are simultaneously used by development cooperation agencies, while the national gender strategies focus only gender mainstreaming (Table 3).

Policy documents focusing on a rights-based approach present equal rights as a central objective to be pursued, resulting in an individualist and liberal perspective. This is particularly evident in Nordic development cooperation, where 'the right of

	From national gender & development policy documents	From international development cooperation policy documents and gender strategies
Contrasted norms & perceptions of the problem of GI	<p>Sociocultural structures are central</p> <p>Gender is embedded in collective identity</p> <p>Gender restricts to men-women relations</p> <p>Sexual orientation is not a gender identifier</p> <p>GE is an instrument for development</p> <p>GE is an instrument for achieving right</p>	<p>Unequal right is central</p> <p>Gender is an individual identity</p> <p>Gender extends beyond men and women's relations</p> <p>Sexual orientation is a gender identifier</p> <p>GE is an objective in itself, an inalienable right to self-determination</p> <p>Right is an instrument for achieving GE</p>
Approaches to the problem of GI	<p>Communal/societal perspective</p> <p>Social /cultural norms-oriented policy</p> <p>Development oriented</p>	<p>Liberal & individualist perspective</p> <p>Right focused policy</p> <p>Feminism (focusing on women and girls e.g. PD16)</p> <p>Development leaning, using at time culturally sensitive approach (e.g. PD13)</p>
Overlapping measures to guide practices	<p>Gender sensitive budgeting and planning</p> <p>Gender mainstreaming</p> <p>Sex-desegregated data</p> <p>Women empowerment through access and control over education, sexual and reproductive health, financial, economic assets</p>	<p>In-house gender equality strategy within own organisation (e.g. PD20, PD9)</p> <p>Matching cooperation aid to national development priorities</p>

Table 3: Perceptions, norms, and policy measures for solving GI from policy documents.

women to decide freely over her own body' is central to the argument for gender equality (PD11, p. 5 & PD12 for example). On the other hand, policy documents centred on gender-mainstreaming as a tool to advance gender equality and those claiming to use a feminist foreign development approach frame the problem as communal, emphasising context and cultural sensibilities and being more development focused. While the former advocates for integrating both men and women gendered issues into the existing structures, the latter specifically focuses on the agency and empowerment of women and girls as a 'disadvantaged' social group. There, gender equality is instrumental for development and a tool for the fulfilment of women's human rights. Both framings feature rights, but they take different narrative stances: human rights as the start of the problem framing and human rights as the product of gender equality interventions. NGOs brokers navigate between these two framings in claiming a human rights-based approach in theory and using a social norm and development-oriented approach in practice. In this sense, they adhere to the laws and policy of their country of affiliation while aligning their tools and techniques to the local

context to achieve practical results. A female research and development worker explains:

in an African context, to succeed, gender equality should be framed in relation with development priorities, and not activism or feminism. There is good ethical justification for these, but feminism discourse won't be accepted in Africa like in other parts of the West, and development is the most important thing here. Code 3:27

What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem? What is assumed? What is taken-for-granted? What is not questioned?

The prevailing underlying assumption of the problem of GI is the portrayal of an ideal, flawless, and innocent image of women and girls as capable of delivering the solutions to the world's current problems. All policy documents assume that women want to and will perform better governance of private and public affairs. If women are 'liberated' and 'empowered' through the improvement of their legal status, they will be able to induce societal change for more gender equality. In this sense, women are both the problem and the solution as PD19, p. 5 argues: 'women in control over their body leads to fewer children, less population growth, and a stronger economy'. What is not questioned is the idealised image of women as 'saviours' of the world, where expectations are set by men.

Several dichotomies or binaries exist within the ontological framework of problem representations: the local versus national and international dichotomy presents local culture and traditions as the root of the problem while the latter embodying modernity is seen as the source of solutions. In the informal versus formal structure dichotomy, the informal structure associated once again with cultural norms, are portrayed as producing and maintaining the problem of GI, whereas formal structure (state laws and international conventions) is predicted to solve those problems. The female versus male dichotomy depicts females as vulnerable, subjugated victims lacking agency, while males are represented as all-powerful and perpetrators of inequalities. Although women are recognised to be a heterogeneous group, they are often portrayed as unified in one struggle – the struggle for gender equality. A common assumption is that women want to engage in politics, acquire an education, pursue a career, but that structural barriers impede them. Policy documents also contrast women's aspirations with the standards of their polity, which is argued to be trying to suppress those desires. This simplistic narrative effectively silences alternative gender equality ideals held by women themselves, such as those that oppose gender quotas for instance. Likewise, women portrayed as victims and having weak or no agency is consistently proclaimed with no question, hence, disempowering women who do have agency. For example, in D8, P9., it is said that 'there is a particular need to focus on strengthening women's and girls' empowerment and participation in society, education and the economy, given their vulnerable position'.

Research and economic analyses are used to further support the assumption that women are the key to society's welfare. All policy documents cite numbers to illustrate the financial and economic gains ('smart economy' according to PD16) of having women equally involved in the formal production structure. For example, PD16 cites among many others McKinsey Global Institute 2015 report, which states that the world gross domestic product would gain 28 billion US Dollar if women were equally involved in formal economic structures. Other assumptions are justified on normative grounds with development cooperation agencies justifying their stance by their own long-standing traditions and values of equality and freedom as aligned with international conventions, hence deserving promotion where needed.

Local culture being the problem is taken for granted and not questioned at all, as well as the image of males being all-powerful and free from gender stereotypes. Only a few policy documents (PD9, PD17, PD20) acknowledge that men can also face gender stereotypes since these are socially constructed. Customary leaders, local culture' gate keepers who are often blamed for the problem of GI, are explicitly included in the solution space in 3 policy documents: PD2 invites traditional leaders for advocacy and communities' sensitisation. PD21, p. 8 states that

'UNDP will work with partners, including faith-based and traditional leaders, to address the root causes of gender inequalities and change the discriminatory social norms, attitudes and practices that deny women and girls rights and opportunities.' Likewise, PD22 announces that 'UN-Women will enhance its work with faith-based organizations to leverage their capacity to transform discriminatory social norms and advocate for their support programmes to be gender-responsive.'

Furthermore, several policy documents (PD10, PD19, PD20, PD18, PD21, PD22, PD16, p) put special emphasis on men as crucial allies, whose involvement will enable gender equality.

How has this representation of the problem come about?

Origins, history, mechanisms, and enabling conditions of current problem representations: The representation of GI as a problem of local culture and women's weak agency is reflected in the underlying assumptions of the concept of gender and development (GAD), which itself is embedded in the history of international development practices, aid-dependency structures, feminism, and feminist struggles.

In the 1970s the concept of *Women in Development* (WID) and underlying approach of *Integrating Women in Development* (IWD) emerged on the global political and development scene to emphasise the importance of involving women in economic development, aid policies, programmes, and practices, due to increased awareness of women's marginalisation and aid inefficacy in developing countries. Thus, the development agencies initiated and funded political reforms and projects for women's promotion and economic empowerment, viewed as a solution to aid inefficacy and development failure. Females' rights became a conditionality to

development aid (Ilboudo, 2007; Ouoba et al., 2003), and a problem of and for development to solve. Key UN frameworks were instrumental to this shift: the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) created in 1947 to raise global awareness of women's issues, set standards and formulate international conventions to change discriminatory legislations against women. The Convention on women's political rights in 1953, a set of conventions in 1957 and 1962 to protect women's civil and social rights in marriage as well as the legally binding Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. These culminated in the first World Conference on Women in 1975 and the decades of women in 1975–1985, and 1980–1990. In Burkina Faso, this international momentum translated into various political, legal, and institutional reforms. In 1958, and 1976 the first and second woman was nominated minister in the government (Rouamba and Descarries, 2010). In the mid-80s, the Popular and Democratic Revolution (RDP) undertook groundbreaking political and legal reforms to change 'degrading mentalities', restore the dignity and status of women in society, promote their political participation and economic empowerment (*l'émancipation de la femme*) in French. Thus, in 1985 women's organisations (*groupements féminines*) and enterprises emerged across the country, more women are nominated in the government, mass education programmes for girls and women were initiated as well as their enrolment into traditionally 'men's jobs' such as construction work, mechanic engineering, police, military. Following the ratification of the CEDAW in 1984 in Burkina Faso, women's organisations suggested the elaboration in 1989 of the first ever family code to protect women's rights in marriage. Furthermore, a national strategy and action plan for women's integration in development (*intégration de la femme au développement*) was adopted in 1990.

According to Roberts (1979), three faulty assumptions limited the effectiveness of the IWD approach: first, the IWD approach focused on integrating women into independent activities while ignoring the integrated socioeconomic structures centred on household and collective farming systems in which women and youth are the main labour force. The premise that women were not integrated into development processes led to technical and bureaucratic solutions to development planning which targeted women as a problem to treat, and further alienated them from their polity. Second, the 'naïve' assumption that what is good for women is good for men and acceptable to the whole society, ignores gender roles, sexual division of work, patriarchy, and related power relations, often at the expense of women. Third, the approach does not challenge the unjust economic structures, but rather condones the market as an instrument of redistribution of wealth in which women should be integrated.

The *Gender And Development* (GAD) approach emerged following the 4th world conference on women in Beijing in 1995 to recognise and question the socially constructed nature of inequalities between men and women, the mechanisms of (re)production and solution pathways. In this novel approach, women are situated in their

contexts where structures and relations become the focus. To reflect this change of paradigm, in Burkina Faso, the label ‘gender’ was used in policy discourses, and practices in replacement of women’s integration: to implement the Beijing recommendations, in 1997, the government created the ministry of women’s affairs *Ministère de la Promotion de Femme*, which became in 2013 the ministry of women and gender. The new gender strategy is elaborated in 2009, reviewed in 2020. The GAD approach remains the foundation for international gender equality frameworks in Burkina Faso, except for two development cooperation agencies (PD12 & PD16) which apply a ‘feminist foreign policy’ exclusively focused on women and girls.

To make connections, feminism and feminist struggles in Europe and the USA have paved the way to these global reforms since the first wave of feminism in the nineteenth century, focusing on women’s legal rights, the right to vote, the second wave in the 1960s extending to every aspects of women’s experience such as family, work, politics, sexuality and the third wave in the 1990s that question the essence of fundamental concepts like gender identity, femininity, masculinity and sexuality (Burkett and Brunell, 2021). Novel concepts such as ‘gender continuum’, ‘sexual liberation’, intersectionality, ecofeminism, transfeminism, emerge to claim women’s and girls’ assertive power and heteronormality. Likewise, an allegedly fourth wave feminism is ongoing since the US with the #MeToo movement in 2006 which mirrors the #memepaspeur movement in Burkina Faso in 2019, and the new movement Feminists of Burkina Faso in 2022. It is worth mentioning that these waves of feminism include various branches, debates, and theories that are important, but beyond the scope of this study.

Various divides subsist between the concerns of women from the North–South, developed-developing, middle versus literate working class, white and non-white women. For example, while white women were fighting for the right to vote, non-white women were facing colonisation, apartheid, sexism, and other subsistence challenges. Likewise, during the Beijing 4th conference on women in 1995, Westerner women were criticised for putting forward once again what they deemed to be important, issues of reproductive rights and discrimination based on sexual orientation, while neglecting the Beijing platform calling for international debt restructuring among others, the core concern of the third world women. A year earlier in Cairo 1994 during the International Conference on Population and Development, Third World women protested outside as they believed the agenda of the conference was unilaterally set by Europeans and American women on the right to contraception and abortion while the core concern of the third world women was underdevelopment. Likewise, the topics of the veil and female genital cutting were chosen for the UN women’s decade conference in 1980 in Copenhagen without prior consultation of third world women, about whom the topic was concerned. These examples lead to the questions of whose agenda and priorities matter? Is the male domination, denounced by feminism, translated into developed, white women’s domination over developing, non-white women? Are there hidden forces that push and maintain such a divide between the concerns of women from the west and the North? Or is it a

conscious determination of western women to advance their world views and their countries' geopolitical interest entrenched in current systems of exploitation?

These tensions, central to the conceptual and normative evolution of gender, can help better understand and explain certain grassroots resistance to gender equality interventions in Burkina, perceived as a Western worldview imposed by development agencies. For example, the liberal economic model promoted to bolster women's empowerment conflict with the sociocultural representations of women and their roles, thus creating tensions between what is seen as culture and modernity.

What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?

In this section, we explore three intertwined questions that lead to various dimensions of the problem that are left unproblematic, and thus kept silent: Where is history? Where does the formal structure stand versus the informal structures? Where is globalisation?

Where is history? Good culture, bad culture!

History of female leadership in pre-colonial sub-Saharan African culture, and the impact of colonial legacies on disenfranchising women, are notable gaps in current gender policy and politics. Feminists and social movements' activists such as Sarr (2009), highlight the historical prominence of women army commanders and Kingdom leaders before colonisation, emphasising their role in resisting colonial invasion. In Burkina Faso the impressive leadership and diplomacy of Princesses *Yennega*, *Guimbi Ouattara* (Guissou, 2002) is proudly told to youngsters and kept dearly in the collective imaginary, indicating a historically more gender-sensitive culture than today. Indeed, 'the concept of gender is foreign. But content wise, we see that our grandparents were more gender-sensitive than we are today' (D9, female government official). However, why does 'this culture' not translate into enhancing and legitimising women's presence in public decision making today? Moreover, why is the contemporary history of the revolution and the pro-gender policy reforms in the country also left unproblematic?

Colonisation and underlying post-colonial legacies are argued to have played a prominent role in eroding women's status and authority pre-colonisation by introducing patriarchy where matriarchy was mostly practiced (Oyěwùmí, 1997) and empowering the existing patriarchy (Anunobi, 2002). By undermining the pre-existing traditional structures that enabled women to exercise high level political, socio-economic, and spiritual power in public affairs, the French colonisers superimposed their own metropolitan patriarchal societal and religious model and culture, considered modern and superior (Sarr, 2009, p. 86; Mikell, 1995, p. 407). The structuring of the economy and trade around cash crops have further empowered men while clustering

women in subsistence, low economic value farming (Goerg, 1997). Consequently, women lost access and control of major political and economic decision-making spheres and lagged in the new ‘modern’ system fostered by the colonisers, the foundations of current African states.

One may then ask which ancestral traditions and culture are we talking about today? The one that gave birth to countless African civilisations where women were influential in public decision-making pre-colonisation? Or the post-colonial African traditions that resulted in new forms of culture (that belittle women’s leadership) rooted in both colonial legacies and remnants of what preceded it? There seems to be rather a bricolage of selective narratives, embedded in power relations of what gets recognised and taught through generations as ‘our culture’. Who decides which culture is good, in which setting, for what purpose? Finally, is the concept of culture just a mere cover, a refuge used to disguise, legitimise, and help reproduce unbalanced gender relations? (Ilboudo, 2007). Who, then, benefits from GI being currently represented as a problem of local culture? Could GI continue to be represented as a problem of local culture? or could it alternatively be represented as a problem of structural power relations that disfavors women, while promoting their privileged male counterparts?

Where does the formal structure stand in relation to the informal structures?

Another area left unproblematised pertains to the portrayal of the role of formal structures as problem solvers in opposition to informal structures (local culture) represented to be problem generators, as if the formal structure bearers including of the state, development cooperation and NGOs workers are not embedded somehow in the common culture that is being blamed. There is little questioning of if and how formal structures could also be part of the (re)production of the problem of GI. Instead, the state and its political regime are argued to not be responsible for (re)producing gender inequality but trying to solve it. For instance, Burkina’s ground-breaking women’s promotion policy (PNPF) argued that women face gender inequalities because of sociocultural hindrances that the formal/modern state laws seek to solve (BF, 2004, p. 4), as if the state’s bureaucracies are made of people that are independent entities from the culture that is being incriminated. Yet, as also shown by Dean and Maignashca (2018), the state itself is a gendered institution, entrenched in, and contributing to the (re)formation of gender inequalities, identities, and relations. Policy suggests training civil servants on how to integrate gender in their work to solve GI attributed to local culture (MEF, 2011). However, there is no mention of revising the gender biases that are found in schoolbooks, from primary to higher education. D27, a female development practitioner illustrates:

I was telling my 5 years old boy, a primary school pupil to not to play football all the time. He stared at me, smiled, and said, Fatou [female] pounds the millet, Fatou washes the dishes, that’s it, it’s in my schoolbooks, I learn that at school!.

A shift in the state's role is critical as the revolution and the ensued pro-equality reforms have demonstrated. For example, Thomas Sankara the leader of the revolution recognised that as a head of state, he himself is embedded in the same culture that is being questioned and that he must constantly challenge his own cultural beliefs to match his actions and policy reforms with the ideals of women's liberation from patriarchy (Thomas Sankara video on women's rights).

Moreover, the problem of GI is framed in its own vacuum without references to the state's own neo-liberal and capitalist policies and their negative effects on women. This may result in symbolic gender politics that would not disrupt the mechanisms of reproduction of the problem. For example, policy documents portray cultural norms as the major barriers to women's access-control of land. Meanwhile, the state's own policy of agricultural modernisation along neo-liberalist lines has induced perverse land privatisation and agribusiness practices, hence deteriorating women, and other socially disadvantaged groups (migrants) livelihoods. As D1, a male, researcher and development practitioner put it:

the state's own land reforms, supported by the World Bank's logic of land privatisation to increase private investments, have led to uncontrolled land grabbing devoid of any concern for equity nor social justice: A purely capitalistic model! Women and the poor are the losers as they do not have money to buy land.

Likewise, the Structural Adjustment Program in 1991 and the Franc CFA currency devaluation in 1994, thought to promote economic growth, are argued to have had negative effects on the livelihoods of those already in vulnerable situations, including women (Adjamagbo and Calvès, 2012; INSD, 2019); but these are kept silent.

Development cooperation agencies are often portrayed as purveyors of technical, financial, and political resources to solve the problem with NGOs acting as facilitators. However, their potential role in (re)producing the problem is not questioned. Altan-Olcay (2020) showed the influence of gender development experts on framing, problematising, and solving gender issues. Our interviews, suggest that development agencies' own cultural biases and overall perspectives on gender including liberal feminism and the inclusion of sexual orientation in their development cooperation, may contribute to create misinformation, mistrust and eventually grassroots resistance to the concept of gender itself (More in the next section). There is also silence on whether and how development cooperation agencies implement gender equality principles domestically which they promote abroad through foreign policy. Likewise, the multitude and changing approaches, techniques and tools used by the NGOs in the field are said to send inaccurate information on the issues of gender inequality and often-contradictory messages from one broker to another. While many individual claim expertise in gender issues, some may inadvertently contribute to perpetuate gender stereotypes and biases, as expressed by a female NGO worker (D17) who refers to them as '*les féticheurs du genre*'.

Where is globalisation?

Presenting the problem of GI as local induces a loud silence on the role of globalisation in producing GI. Only few policy documents referred to globalisation, but as a threat to the defence of women's rights because of *the rise of conservatism and cultural relativism*. (PD10, 11 & 21). In the former women's promotion policy document (BF, 2004, p. 4) a swift reference was made to the persistence of gender inequalities due to national and international constraints, but no explanation was given on how, and what this meant. Policy documents do refer to international, regional, and national levels but in relation to policy frameworks and instruments to guide their gender policy and practices. Even the current surge of feminist development cooperation policies in Burkina do not touch on global geopolitics that influence the conditions of the partnering countries and especially socially disadvantaged certain groups, including women.

What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

Depoliticising the problem of gender inequality and deflecting responsibilities: On one hand, representing women's weak agency as the problem of GI places blame on women, making them both problem and solution. On the other hand, narrowing the problem of GI to local culture while ignoring wider political economic dynamics, depoliticises the problem and renders it a problem of development, for development cooperation to solve. Moreover, presenting the formal structures as problem solvers deflects the state and other private organisations' responsibility in both problem creation and solving. Consequently, the government may adopt more symbolic gender policy and practices that burden women without effectively enhancing their condition in society. The focus on gender may also be used to attract more development funds: 'I personally have a feeling that the government's commits to gender issues to please us the donors' (D12, a female development cooperation agent). These are not surprising considering the roots of current gender equality discourses in the history of development practices and aid structures.

Limiting the agency of local people and the potential of culture as agents of change for gender equality: Posing the problem of GI as a problem of local culture implies that local people and their culture are the problem, therefore they are not part of the solution, in which case the solution needs to come from outside the culture being blamed. Local culture (i.e. traditional, rural) appears to be static, inherently unjust while 'modern' culture embodied by the state laws and development agencies emerge as progressive and transformative. This way of thinking may limit the agency of the local people and the exploration of historical and positive cultural provisions that could have helped promote bottom-up dynamics for gender equality. Instead, mostly top-down, siloed, and technical solutions are provided to address GI, a societal, multidimensional, and intersectional problem. Terms like awareness are commonly used for local people, whereas training is

associated with brokers and other higher-level officials. Moreover, local people are seen as those in need of development. Therefore, they are overwhelmed with diversified slogans of sensitisation that do not value their potential as active agents of change, but in need of sensitisation. This is argued to have weakened the entrepreneurship of women, induced a development fatigue where women observe their daily silent politics, but are waiting for development projects and aid to promote their rights and opportunities. (PD23).

Gender as another form of cultural domination?

The current problem representations could open the door for perceiving local culture as inferior and other ‘foreign’ culture outlined in gender policy documents as superior. This could reinforce the sentiment of imposition of certain cultural standards through top-down and somehow patronising gender interventions which can disserve the ultimate gender equality goal. For D5, a gender expert, female NGO worker, because ‘the concept of gender is imported to our context, it is difficult to translate it in our languages, teach it and be understood accurately’. She reports women’s experience in dealing with conflicts, divorce because of trainings they have received from international expatriate gender experts who failed to adapt the message on gender equality to the women’s context and situation. In addition, the social tensions, and unsuccessful experiences from the WID movements cause backlash from certain populations against what is perceived as ‘imported western’ culture and gender norms.

Likewise, the shift of mainstream gender and feminist struggles toward gender heteronormality condoning homosexuality has triggered in Burkina Faso the question of what ought to be included in the concept of gender or not, and the resulting policy measures. The national gender policy restricts GI to the inequalities between men and women in development as opposed to development cooperation agencies that more broadly include different gender expressions, and identities (e.g. the LGBTQ2S + issues).¹ Furthermore, voices raised among civil society activists in the media and on social media to claim the right to cultural freedom and denounce what is seeing as attempts by certain development cooperation to legally impose homosexuality. For instance, a former Minister of women’s affairs slammed such practices and promised to sue a German institute based in Burkina for ‘illegal promotion of homosexuality’ in the country.² Consequently, people are reluctant to hear anything about gender because they think that we NGO gender workers ‘are helping our affiliated development cooperation agencies to promote homosexuality. University students made this remark as well’ (D30, a female NGO worker).

1 LGBTQ2S+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Two-Spirit.

2 See <https://aconews.net/nestorine-sangare-crache-ses-verites-sur-lhomosexualite/>

How/where has this representation of the problem been produced? Disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?

Global regulatory frameworks, such as the UN conventions and related laws and regulations served as spaces of production and reproduction of current problem representations. Feminism, and feminist struggles taking roots in western culture as well as colonisation and colonial legacies upon which current post-colonial states are built contributed to the problem representation. Development practices, funding systems and gender scholarship acted as a dissemination machine. Against certain ideas of universalisation of gender precepts and norms that are mostly based on western scholarship, epistemologies, and white women's experience, there are African feminism thoughts, post-colonial and decolonisation scholarship that call for a better inclusion and recognition of third worlds' intellectual production, cultural diversity, and women's world views. For instance, for African feminisms to thrive and enable transformational changes to women's conditions, Pambè and Sawadogo (2017) suggest considering the inner characteristics of African societies and break-away from certain universalised, narrowed, and polarising conceptualisation of patriarchy as the de facto problem for women.

Could GI continue to be represented as a problem of local culture when we know that culture is not a clearly conceptualised or an unanimously perceived entity? Or could GI be called a problem of structural power relations that disfavour women while promoting men? The latter could present more effective effects for gender equality. Culture as a practice is difficult to change as it involves emotions, norms, values, and mentalities upon which people have built their identity. In focusing on the power relations that guide the selection and translation of what is considered culture, norms and values, the current problem representation can be disrupted, freed from normative considerations. Consequently, culture can be used as a foundation for developing bottom-up solutions where people would not see gender equality interventions as alien, or a work of and for development, instead as a certain utilisation of positive cultural legacies to construct a more just gender relations. As D13, p48 promotes, 'a culturally sensitive approach and programming that utilizes positive cultural values, assets and structures to reduce resistance to gender interventions, ensure change from within and creates conditions for ownership and sustainability of development programs'. In the same vein, one could send the message that enabling gender equality would be a sort of revival of 'our true culture' before colonisation that had certain checks and balances for both genders. This is not an idealisation or romanticisation of the past but an argument against certain mentalities that are quick to affirm 'our culture' does not allow women to do this or that. This calls for a more deconstructed bottom-up approach to solving the problem of GI. Thus, enabling the agency of all genders and putting at the centre the issue of power relations.

Furthermore, changing the top-down approaches that infantilise local people would enable a greater recognition of their agency. This would necessitate

democratising gender by extending the gender equality conversation beyond development circles and technical perspective to the larger societal level. Which societal vision do we have and aspire to, for men and women? How can discriminatory aspects of culture be addressed without disempowering and taking away the agency and transformational potential of culture bearers? Such conversation will not be transformative if they remain limited to intellectual and elites circles as it is right now.

Discussion

As opposed to traditional policy analysis tagging itself to be a neutral scientific approach, led by rational experts who use theory-supported models that mediate responsive and effective change (Diem et al., 2014), critical policy analysis from a post-structural perspective offers better avenue to challenge the making and working of policy. Policy formulation is highly political (Zittoun and Fischer, 2021), and their suggested solutions produce lived effects (Bacchi, 2009). In this perspective, conceptualisation of policy issues such as gender inequality in our case matters politically, is influenced by contexts, and has socio-political implications as argued by Eveline and Bacchi (2005). As a cultural phenomenon, policy promotes a specific conceptualisation and symbolic of social relations (Shore, 2012). Discourses as substantive ideas and interactive processes are machines for policy change (Schmidt, 2011) and feed off a sense of constant crisis to maintain their status and legitimacy (Skilling, 2014). In this sense, a specific policy on gender equality carries specific cultural views while silencing others. This transpired in our case with the example of the national gender policy narrowing the definition of gender, and avoiding concepts like feminism for political appropriateness, thus silencing the issue of sexual orientation as a gender category.

Those policy documents Swedish and Canadian that do claim to be feminist are considered groundbreaking in development, have given birth to a new research field (feminist foreign policy), but they are ‘less than a revolution’ (Towns et al., 2023). Scholars highlight several limitations. Morton et al. (2020) noticed that the Canadian feminist policy is restricted to gender foreign development aid, fail to integrate intersectionality, and adopts a mainstream liberal feminism that may be exclusive of certain peoples and groups. From a feminist postcolonial perspective, the Swedish feminist foreign policy is argued to be yet another instrument that could help reproduce the unequal power relations, further gendered development coloniality through development cooperation, Western feminism, and neoliberal discourses (Fagerström, 2022; Nylund et al., 2023). It is worth mentioning that Swedish foreign feminist policy could be reversed as their new prime Minister is quoted to have told the news *Aftonbladet* in October 2022 that gender equality is a fundamental value in Sweden, but his government will abandon ‘a feminist foreign policy because the label obscures the fact that the Swedish foreign policy must be based on Swedish values and Swedish interests.’

Nonetheless, in our case, blaming the problem of GI on local culture while suggesting Western inspired ‘modernity’ as the solution could reinforce perceived hierarchy between that which is perceived as ‘good culture’ needed to address GI against ‘bad culture’ that re-produce GI. This reinforces the sentiment of gender being just another tool for domination as Oyěwùmí (1997) argues. For her, the construction, meaning making and theorising of gender which over considers ‘women’ as a universal category, emphasise sex and opposes men and women is a ‘western imposition’ as it takes root in western colonial epistemologies and ontologies. She suggests a decolonisation of research, development discourses and funding systems through critical deconstructionist approaches, theories, and knowledge production which will build on African specificities and lived experiences.

In the same logic, post-colonial thinking highlights the embeddedness of gender in capitalist globalisation, and unequal North–South relations while challenging Eurocentrism and narrow Northern knowledge production (Chakrabarty, 2000). Apusigah (2008) advises relativist approaches that consider cultural differences in the framing and understandings of women’s concerns while not undermining current gender equality endeavours.

Such divides – north–south, developed-underdeveloped – are also consistent in the scholarship on decolonisation where western white feminists are represented and self-represent as ‘secular liberated and having control of their own lives’, thus saviours of the third-world women portrayed monolithically as ‘subjugated’ and in need of liberation (Mohanty, 2003, p. 42). For example, in the politics of gender, development and environmental governance Arora-Jonsson (2018) found that gender equality precepts were central to Swedish development aid and projects abroad while being marginal in domestic environmental policy and practices.

In terms of norms, certain western world views can conflate with a universal human rights discourse to promote or sanction practices in the developing world. For example, resistance to feminism precepts in Burkina Faso is framed as resistance to homosexuality, both viewed as an imposition of western cultural values in Burkina Faso yet considered as fundamental human rights in western norms (Rouamba, 2011, p. 162).

The depoliticisation of gender like in our case is prevalent globally. For example, gendered relations in climate change debates and interventions in Nicaragua are left unproblematised (Gonda, 2019). Likewise, GI is seen merely as a problem of numbers in the Swedish forest industry (Ville et al., 2023). In addition, the narrowing of the problem of gender inequality to local culture while ignoring the global political economic dynamics deflect responsibilities from the state and private companies in environmental degradation (Vercillo et al., 2021).

The call for decolonisation of mindsets and a political approach to gender inequality that focuses on intersectional rather than a binary gendered approach is a start to subverting the problematisation of gender inequality in Burkina Faso. It could be

more effective to frame the problem of GI as a problem of power relations, because its problematisation as culture can hamper transformative and institutional change. A critical examination of history, colonial and globalisation path dependences will help to contextualise current interventions for gender equality and challenge the resistances to change. Further, we argue that bottom-up and consensual processes that embrace a more nuanced and dynamic view of local culture will need to emerge for more effective and durable change for gender equality.

Finally, self-reflection is key, including in the WPR approach (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016) which informed our work. As researchers, we are in a position of scientific authority. Despite our intention for objectivity in scientific inquiry of the 'other', we must also be aware and critically challenge our own world views and cultural baggage as a diverse group from both the Global North and South in how we design, analyse, and present our research.

Conclusions

From a post-structural perspective, this study has used the WPR approach to critically analyse the representations of the problem of gender inequality in development in Burkina Faso. Two broad problem representations emerged: the problem of local culture and informal structures and the problem of women's weak agency framed from two distinct but overlapping perspectives: the rights-based, and the development and entrepreneurship-oriented perspective. Moreover, dichotomies or binaries appear to present among others, local culture as the root cause of GI and the formal structures as the solution, hence leaving critical issues unproblematic such as colonial legacies, globalisation and dependency structures, policy interconnectedness and their gendered implications. Subsequently, the issue of GI is depoliticised, rendered local, static, and technical, thus undermining local agency, and deflecting responsibility in solving the problem. Thereby, an important alternative is marginalised, namely one that would frame gender inequality as a problem of unequal power relations between genders, a problem representation that would acknowledge and help address negative effects of GI for women in Burkina Faso.

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