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### Policy Brief No. 6-2017:

*Empowering women in the agricultural sector of Uganda*

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# Empowering women in the agricultural sector of Uganda

## Executive Summary

This report was motivated by attempting to provide practical insights in how to empower women in the agricultural sector in Uganda. Therefore, the concepts of doing gender and women's empowerment are reviewed, and applied to four real-life case studies that are conducted in the agricultural sector in Uganda in April 2017. Based on these case studies, this report argues that women's empowerment in the agricultural sector in Uganda could be achieved by the use of a four-steps plan that is constituted out of theoretical and practical insights enabled by the case studies. In the context of the agricultural sector in Uganda, this report contends that the four-steps plan requires support from governmental entities and NGOs. That is, these external parties need to facilitate the process of women's empowerment by creating awareness among the value chain players of the unequal power relations in the agricultural sector, and by supporting female value chain players to be able to claim their empowered position without being hindered by the male value chain players.

## Introduction

The agricultural sector in Uganda contributes substantially to the economic welfare of the country. In fact, the sector contributes to 40% of the country's GDP and provides 80% of the total employment. An interesting fact is that the sector is largely employed by women. Women's

contribution to the agricultural sector is actually substantially more than men's contribution. For example, in the district Buguri, men solely spend 54% of their time in production, whereas women spend approximately 75% of their time (AgriQuest, 2017; Amanda, 2006).

The fact that women are the biggest contributors to the agricultural sector is partially due to culturally developed social arrangements. These social arrangements are a result of what is described as doing gender. Doing gender is a construct that refers to the act of 'creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not naturel, essential, or biological' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137).

Doing gender, however, results into gender differences that constitute unequal power relations within the agricultural sector in Uganda. For this reason, women are the biggest contributors to the sector. Unfortunately, however, these power relations cause that women are demotivated to produce commercially, thereby hinder economic growth. Women are also often forced to perform domestic and agricultural activities instead of being able to make decisions freely.

In this report, therefore, these power relations are analyzed to see how women's empowerment could be achieved. The report is thus guided by the research question '*how to empower women in the agricultural sector in Uganda?*' The knowledge gained by answering the research question could be used to enable women's empowerment, and thereby increase economic growth in Uganda.

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In this report, the research question is answered through applying theoretical and practical knowledge to case studies conducted in the agricultural sector in Uganda. The present theoretical knowledge provides a three-steps process in which women could be empowered. Practical insights, on the other hand, enhanced this knowledge by providing additional step into how to facilitate the three-steps process provided by academics.

In order to achieve women's empowerment, however, not only the participation of female actors in the agricultural sector is needed, but also the participation of influential actors such as the government and NGOs.

In the following sections the issue of the unequal power relations in Uganda are discussed to ultimately answer the research question. Firstly, the theoretical background of the constructs doing gender and women's empowerment are reviewed. Secondly, the methodology used to gather and analyze data is presented. Thirdly, the case studies that resulted from the data gathering are presented followed by an interpretation of these case studies. Fourthly, the recommendation to empower women is discussed. Finally, the conclusion of the report is provided.

## Conceptual Background

By answering the research question, the aim of this report is to provide a recommendation to empower women in the agricultural sector in Uganda. In this section, therefore, the theoretical background of the concepts Doing Gender and Women's Empowerment are reviewed.

## Doing Gender

The concept of gender has been widely discussed within the existing academic literature (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Martin, 2003; Martin, 2006; van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). In this academic debate, it is generally accepted that gender needs to be distinguished from the concept sex. That is, sex refers to the biological categorization of men and women, and gender refers to a distinction between men and women that is build from a social or cultural perspective.

Gender differences are thus seen as differences between men and women that are socially or culturally constructed. In the literature, this process is referred to as doing gender. Doing gender entails the act of making differences between men and women, boys and girls, that are not biological, but build from socially or culturally perspectives (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137). For example, women often are expected to fulfill economic positions such as being a nurse or teacher, whereas men are expected to become a police officer or soldier. This sharp distinction between expected social roles is not decided upon by nature, but a result of doing gender, and often has resulted into differences that position women in an inferior position to men.

## Women's Empowerment

Women's inferior position to men's economic position constitutes unequal power relations between men and women. Power relations in this sense refer to the ability to make decisions based on free choice. Therefore, an agent's ability to make decisions in the absent of any enforcement made by third parties is defined as power. Consequently, power relations refer to the various relations that exist among agents in which each agent

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has a different level of power compared to one another (Kabeer, 2005)

Power relations in relation to doing gender largely refer to men having more economic power than women. In the discussion how to reduce unequal power relations, therefore, women's empowerment has received a great deal of attention. Women's empowerment is generally described in the literature as a process that entails a change in a woman's ability to make decisions based on free choice. In this accepted theory, it is assumed that women did not have the power to make decisions by their own choice before. That is, to be empowered, one must have been disempowered to begin with (Mosedale, 2005; Kabeer, 2005).

Furthermore, empowerment requires an active form of agency. Empowerment cannot be granted by any third party, but needs to be claimed by the one who becomes empowered. Moreover, the sensemaking process of the agent who becomes empowered is another aspect that is required. Reflection, analysis and action are the three elements of sensemaking considered to be essential in order for someone to become empowered. The final aspect that entails empowerment refers to the indefinite progress of the process of becoming empowered – i.e. empowerment is an ongoing process (Mosedale, 2005).

## **Doing Gender & Women's Empowerment**

Doing gender is an act that is not always done consciously by the agent performing gender – i.e. non-reflexivity (Martin, 2003; Martin, 2006). In addition, gender differences are often highly interwoven into the social or cultural arrangements of

a society, and as a result are perceived as natural or biological. It is therefore assumed in this report that for an agent to become aware of these differences it requires a great deal of internal competency that enables someone to set oneself apart from one's current worldview. Hence, the relatedness between the concepts and the aim of this report I aim to address here. For women to become empowered, it is essential to become aware of established differences between men and women that are not naturally based.

## **Research Methods**

In this chapter, the research context, design, the data collection and analysis are discussed.

### *Research Context*

The research started in April 2017 in collaboration with AgriQuest Uganda. AgriQuest is an applied research project that aims to strengthen the agricultural sector in Uganda. Apart from the applied research project performed by AgriQuest, an additional research was conducted to gain theoretical insights into how gender affects inter-firm relationship development in the agricultural sector. In addition to this theoretical part, additional data was conducted to write this practical report that would concern the subject gender. The research context in which the data was gathered was thus the agricultural sector in Uganda.

### *Research Design*

Data was gathered through the use of qualitative research methods that entailed several face-to-face interviews, focus groups, group conversations, a factory visit and observations.

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### *Data Collection*

The data was gathered in three districts in Uganda, Bugiri, Oyam and Kampala. The respondents were farmers, governmental entities, input dealers, farmer groups and a researcher of the AgriQuest team.

### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis was performed iteratively and inductively, and encompassed several stages: transcribing of the interviews, coding of the interviews and observational notes, writing up of supporting case studies and analyzing the developed case studies.

In the subsequent section, the case study examples are provided in which it becomes evident that women's inferior position inhibits economic growth. In addition, a case study example is provided in which women are empowered. Subsequently, these case studies are analyzed to elucidate the power relations and the economic consequences of these power relations. Finally, the analytical lens of women's empowerment as described above is applied to the case studies to provide a recommendation for women in the agricultural sector in Uganda to become empowered.

## **Case Studies**

In this chapter, four case studies are presented to illustrate the unequal power relations in the agricultural sector of Uganda. The first three case studies illustrate an important issue that arises from the unequal power relations – i.e. lack of economic growth. The fourth, final case study illustrates a situation in which the unequal power relations are reduced to become aware of the benefits that more equal power relations could generate.

## **CASE STUDY 1 - Female Farmers Oyam District**

The Northern located district Oyam is one of the many districts in Uganda. The district is known for its cassava production.

During data gathering, we spoke with the district chairman and the Chief Administration Officer (CAO). The interviewees provided information about the agricultural sector within Oyam. The interviewees explained that Oyam is a district that mostly produces cassava. Cassava is a crop that can be used for many different purposes, such as for food consumption or as for the production of alcohol beverages.

Although cassava has several purposes, up to now most farmers have produced cassava for domestic consumption. According to the interviewees, however, the government has attempted to create awareness among farmers to shift from subsistence farming to commercial farming. The government desires the farmers to become aware that farming does not necessarily have solely the purpose of food security, but can also provide for an economic purpose. The district chairman claimed that this particular shift from subsistence to commercial farming is currently taken place. Table 1 (see appendix) summarizes key barriers from a shift from subsistence to commercial farming experienced by women based on case study 1.

### **Barriers that hinder shift from subsistence to commercial farming**

The district chairman explained as well that there are some barriers to this development, and those barriers are explained below.

### **1. Unequal division of revenues**

The chairman explained that the majority of the farming activities is carried out by women. In fact, he claimed that women contribute to at least 60% of the work, whereas men only take on approximately 40% of the work. Despite the major contribution of the women, the men end up having the largest share of the benefits of the production. The profits are shared in favor of the men, and not in favor of the women. He explained that this is due to farmers' ignorance regarding the economic purposes of farming. That is, the men do not realize it is not in favor of their economic success to spend their earnings on personal benefits rather than on commercial purposes.

### **2. Men's alcohol abuse**

The CAO provided an additional barrier to the shift from subsistence farming to commercial farming apart from farmers' ignorance. He claimed that in the district many people are still suffering from the war resulting into alcohol abuse of men. Men drink recklessly, force women to perform all necessary agricultural activities and force women to tolerate everything. As a result, women are not likely to produce anything more than forced up upon by their husbands.

### **3. Lack of women's decision-making power**

Another closely related explanation that the CAO provided is that the men often merely want to produce crops that provide immediate money instead of serving for food production or steal any other produced crop to support their abusive alcohol behavior. Either way, women become demotivated to produce for commercial purposes, because if women produce more than necessary for domestic

consumption they are at risk losing the produce to their men that use it to support their alcohol consumption.

### Consequences of women's lack of power

Case study 1 demonstrates in three manners how women's lack of power affects their lives.

#### **1. Women have to perform majority of work**

Firstly, women are supposed to do the majority of the work, but cannot make decisions about how the money earned from it is going to be spent. The women's husbands benefit from the production, because the husbands have the power to decide how the money is going to be spent. Many women therefore become demotivated to produce for commercial purposes, because this would imply more work for them without benefitting from it.

#### **2. Women cannot disagree with men**

Secondly, the men have the power to force the women to do all of the work. The men themselves do not contribute to the agricultural activities, because the men in general have an alcohol problem. This alcohol problem makes them lazy and violent to women. The women, unfortunately, do not have the power to change this situation leaving them demotivated to do anything more than necessary for food security.

#### **3. Women need to comply with bad behavior of men**

Thirdly, the men can decide, thus have the power, to produce crops that provide for quick money to support their abusive alcohol behavior. In addition, in the cases that the household is producing other crops, it occurs that the men steal those crops, go to the market to sell it and use

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the money for buying alcohol. The women become demotivated to produce for commercial purposes, because it supports their husband's bad behavior. This example illustrates that the women do not have the power to change their husbands' behavior.

## **CASE STUDY 2 – Female Entrepreneur in the Kampala District**

An interview was conducted with a successful female researcher and entrepreneur (hereafter FRE) based in Kampala to obtain her opinion about the agricultural sector in Uganda. FRE's organization is mainly concerned with the production of herbs for tea and natural ingredients for the production of soap bars. The organization attempts to reduce gender differences by empowering women in order for economic growth. The organization attempts this by educating people, and bringing women together in groups to enable them to understand their situation. Moreover, women have to comply with certain standards imposed by the organization, such as having proper accommodation, before receiving any support for empowerment. By doing so, the organization attempts to facilitate the empowerment process. Table 2 (see appendix) summarizes key barriers from a shift from subsistence to commercial farming experienced by women based on case study 2.

### **Barriers that hinder shift from subsistence to commercial farming**

During the interview with FRE, however, two barriers to the commercialization of the agricultural sector related to gender were described.

#### **1. Unequal division of revenues & Alcohol abuse**

Firstly, FRE explained as well that the agricultural sector in Uganda is dominated by women, but owned by the men. She stated that men abusive alcohol, force women to perform all of the work and use the income for their own personal benefits.

#### **2. Lack of education**

Secondly, she claimed that the women are the actual backbones of the agricultural sector. According to FRE, women take care of the children and take care of the economy. However, she explained that the major cause for women not to get involved in commercial agriculture is a lack of education. Taken that the women barely perceive any education, it is difficult for women to fully understand the purpose of commercial farming, since this is not something that is traditionally done.

#### *Consequences of women's lack of power*

Case study 2 is an adequate example of how doing gender has developed culturally accepted arrangements that divide men and women in such that men are more likely to receive education than women. Women's lack of education, in turn, negatively affects their economic prosperity, because the women are not knowledgeable enough to understand the purpose of commercial farming. Women lack the power to obtain equal opportunities as men concerning education.



*Unequal Power Relations*

### **CASE STUDY 3 – Catherine Tindiwensi**

Catherine Tindiwensi is a successful female researcher at AgriQuest Uganda. Catherine is divorced, has several children and owns her own farm. In Uganda, as Catherine explained, the women often get the blame for a divorce. It is difficult for women to become accepted by society again after a divorce. Catherine has experienced this particular issue herself, and has worked hard to become as successful as she is right now. Catherine stated that the major mechanism for women to increase bargaining power is through collective action. In addition, she claims that Western practices to empower women need to be adjusted to the local context in order for the practices to be constructive rather than destructive. Table 3 (see appendix) summarizes key barriers from a shift from subsistence to commercial farming experienced by women based on case study 3.

#### **Barriers that hinder shift from subsistence to commercial farming**

Catherine provided an additional constraint for women to get involved in commercial agricultural. At first, Catherine provided a similar picture of the agricultural sector as the other interviewees, however, she brought to light

the issue of land ownership and the heavy workload of women.

#### **1. Land ownership**

In Uganda, the decision-making power is allocated to the one who owns land. The majority of the women, however, do not own land. Solely men inherit land, and in the case women can buy their own land the men often do not allow it, because the men feel economically threatened. Women are therefore constrained to make long-term strategic decisions, because the men have the final say about the use of the land. The men, for example, can decide to use the land for entirely different purposes as was intended by the women. As a result, women tend to solely take care of food security instead of any commercial purposes.

#### **2. Heavy workload for women**

The final constraint, the heavy workload of women, is a result of the societal/cultural expectation of women's economic roles. Women are not only supposed to perform the majority of the agricultural activities, but are also supposed to take care of the children, the household and other domestic activities. This results into such a substantial amount of work that women are forced to make tradeoffs between domestic and agricultural activities hindering economic growth.

#### *Consequences of women's lack of power*

Case study 3 provides two other examples of the unequal power relations within the agricultural sector of Uganda.

#### **1. Women do not own land**

Firstly, women generally do not own land, because it is culturally decided upon that only men inherit land. Moreover, men often feel economically threatened when



their wives own land, therefore prevent them from owning land. As a result, women do not have any decision-making power about the land use, and are not motivated to make any long-term strategic decisions, because it is likely that the women are not able to perform these decisions.

## 2. Women are forced to make tradeoffs

Secondly, women have such a heavy workload that makes it impossible for them to fully engage in commercial farming. That is, women need to make tradeoffs between agricultural and domestic activities. As a result, women are more likely to produce solely for food security in order to be able to fulfill the domestic activities.

### CASE STUDY 4 - Empowered women's group

The female dominated farmer's cooperation, Loro Note En Teko Co-operative, entails 6 different farmer's group. The cooperation operates in the Northern part of Uganda, in the district Oyam, and is mainly concerned with the production of cassava.

We, the research team, arrived at the interview location at the end of the day. We felt pretty exhausted after an entire day of traveling and conducting interviews, but from the moment we left the bus to meet the interviewees a group of women came to us singing, dancing and laughing. You could tell the dynamics in our group immediately changed, and energy was running through our veins again.



*Loro Note En Teko Co-operative – Women sitting on Chairs*

We started the interview by a brief introduction from both sides. During the interview, the cooperation described similar problems as other farmer's groups had done before them, but despite of this, the group appeared stronger and more vividly. After carefully analyzing and considering different alternatives as to why the group appeared so powerful, I realized that all women were sitting on chairs, and not on the ground, as was usually the case. Shortly afterwards I realized that the majority of the people present were women, and that a female member of the group was interpreting the interview from the locale language to English. She spoke both languages fluently, and looked very confident. The women appeared more independent and less submissive to the men in comparison to the other interviews we had so far.

We took the opportunity to ask them about them being women and whether this affects their work. Everyone in the group, including the men, started clapping their hands and the women made loud, cheerful noises. One female interviewee answered that being a women's group, they have savings that support them to run their businesses and improves their lives. Being in a women's group, supported them with

other obligations in life as well such as taking care of the household easily.

### Consequences of women's empowerment

Case study 4 is an example of an empowered group of female farmers. This report assumes that the female members of the cooperation were empowered, because the women were allowed to sit on chairs, a woman interpreted the entire interview indicating that she was educated and the women appeared more independent and less submissive to men due to their behavior during the interview. Moreover, it is assumed that the women were aware of their exceptional position because of their reaction after asking about them being women. The interviewees explained that due to their collective power, their lives were improved, and the women were able to run their businesses themselves and to fulfill other obligations in life.

## Policy Recommendations

It becomes clear from the case studies that women's empowerment in the agricultural sector in Uganda not only benefits women's economic prosperity, but also benefits the entire economy. To clarify, women's contribution to the agriculture is substantial, however, their lack of power causes that women hinder the shift from subsistence farming to commercial farming, which would enable economic growth.

Taking the analytical lens described previously in the theoretical section of this report, the process of women's empowerment requires certain steps to be taken. In this section, I elaborate briefly on the steps that need to be taken. It is

important to bear in mind, however, that it is a process that requires support from not only the actors to whom it concerns – i.e. the female value chain players – but also support from governmental entities and NGOs. Women's empowerment is a daunting task that requires much effort, time and dedication.

### **STEP 1 – Create Awareness**

The case studies illustrate clearly that the agricultural sector in Uganda meets the assumption of empowerment that states that someone needs to be disempowered in order to become empowered. However, in order for women to become empowered, it is essential for them to become aware of their inferior position. As previously described, doing gender often is done unconsciously, and the social arrangements that result from it are perceived as natural. Therefore, it is likely that many farmers do not realize that unequal power relations exist. The first step should be to create awareness among the farmers that these power relations exist.

### **Responsible Actors**

This report contends that this task should be dedicated to governmental entities and NGOs, because it is complicated to dedicate this task solely to the value chain players for at least two reasons. First, it is assumed that the majority of the value chain players are not aware of the unequal power relations, making it impossible for them to preach a message that these players are not aware of its existence. Second, the male value chain players are assumed to be unwilling to change the current power relations, since it would imply that their relative power would be reduced. Consequently, this task should be executed by more objective entities, thus entities that are not involved in the

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value chain as the value chain players themselves.

### **Potential actions to be taken**

The governmental entities and NGOs should create awareness by dispersing the message of the unequal power relations accompanied by the negative aspects of the existence of these power relations. This could be done in several ways, however, it is recommended to start this process by simply referring to the issue at every current project that concerns enabling improvements to the agricultural sector in Uganda. In addition, both the governmental entities and NGOs could initiate new projects to create awareness of the unequal power relations either individually or in collaboration.

### **STEP 2 – Enable Active Agency**

Although external parties such as the government are assumed to be the rightful candidates to create awareness, these parties cannot grant empowerment to the ones who it concerns. That is, empowerment requires an active form of agency, which entails that the female value chain players must claim their empowerment. For female value chain players to claim their new position in such, it requires a great deal of internal courage and power.

### **Responsible Actors**

As described above, the female value chain players need to claim their empowerment themselves. Thus, the first responsible actors for step 2 are the female value chain players themselves. However, governmental entities and NGOs should facilitate this process, because the current power relations impede this particular behavior of women. That is, the current power relations force women to retain in their inferior position,

therefore the women are not likely to claim their own empowerment. For women to claim their empowerment, it would imply that the women go against the current power relations, which is assumed to cause dissatisfaction amongst the male value chain players. As a result, it is assumed that women are not likely to pursue this behavior. Therefore, external parties, such as governmental entities and NGOs, should create an environment in which female value chain players are willing to claim their own empowerment, and an environment in which the male value chain players do not attempt to hinder this behavior.

### **Potential actions to be taken**

The governmental entities and NGOs should initiate projects that create an environment as described above. It is recommended that the government attempts to create awareness among the value chain players of the benefits of more equal power relations, such as economic growth. By making the value chain players aware of the benefits, it is assumed that both the female and male value chain players are more likely to facilitate the process of empowerment.

### **STEP 3 – Sensemaking**

The final step entails the process of sensemaking. Female value chain players need to be reflective, analytical and take action. The value chain players need to be aware of the power relations, analyze how to change these relations and take proper actions to achieve the change, and afterwards reflect about it enabling adjustments if required.

### **STEP 4 – Facilitate Realization**

Based on case study 4, it is assumed that the above-described steps are more likely to be realized by forming groups. Thus, for

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women to become empowered, it is necessary to work together in groups. By being in a group, women have collective power and are more likely to be able to claim their empowerment.

## Conclusion

The constructs doing gender and women's empowerment are highly related. In fact, consequences of doing gender have resulted into the urge for women's empowerment in the agricultural sector of Uganda. By empowering women, it is assumed that not only their economic position will be enhanced, but it is also assumed that the entire Ugandan economy will benefit from it.

This report has combined theoretical and practical insights to provide a grounded recommendation to empower women in Uganda. The theoretical groundwork provided by many scholars enabled the development of the three-step plan for female farmers to become empowered. In addition, practical experience supplemented this recommendation by providing the fourth step, the recommendation to perform the first three steps while being in a group.

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## Appendix

KEY BARRIERS	EXPLANATION	CONSEQUENCE
<b>Unequal division of revenues</b>	The women perform most of the agricultural activities, but the men perceive the revenues from the activities	Women become demotivated to produce more than necessary for survival
<b>Men's alcohol abuse</b>	Men drink too much, and as a result the men do not work and force women to perform the agricultural activities	Women become demotivated to work more than what they are forced to do by the men, which is often solely subsistence farming
<b>Lack of decision-making power regarding to what crops are produced or the sales of the produce</b>	Men often steal produce of women to obtain quick money to buy alcohol or produce crops that offer short-term benefits to buy alcohol as well ignoring the long-term consequences of this behavior	Women prevent the men from this behavior by producing only enough to survive; as a consequence the men are less likely to steal the produce. That is, if there is more produce than necessary for survival, the men are more willing to steal the produce for quick money. If there is only produce to survive, the men are more likely to find other ways to get alcohol.

**Table 1 – Barriers to shift from subsistence to commercial farming case study 1**

KEY BARRIERS	EXPLANATION	CONSEQUENCE
<b>Unequal division of revenues &amp; alcohol abuse</b>	Women perform the work, but the men benefit from it and the men have an alcohol problem forcing women to perform agricultural activities	Women become demotivated to produce more than necessary to comply with the amount what is imposed by men
<b>Lack of education</b>	Women are generally not educated, therefore are not aware of the benefits that commercial farming could provide	Women do not realize that commercial farming could be beneficial for them and their families, therefore the women do not see the need to change their current production

**Table 2 – Barriers to shift from subsistence to commercial farming case study 2**

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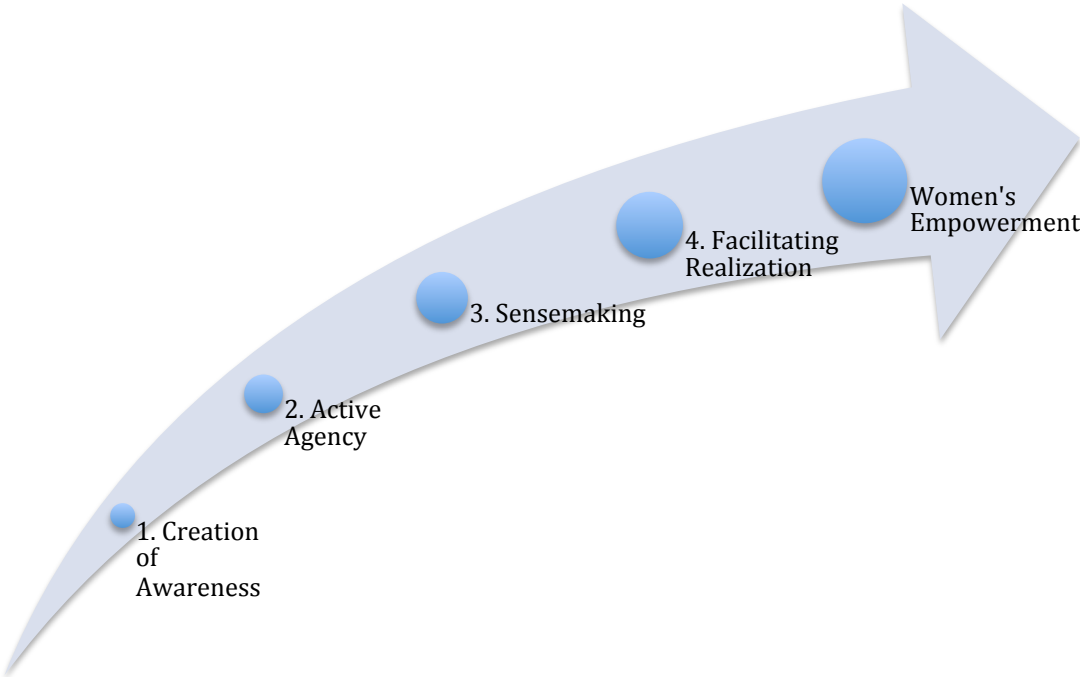


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KEY BARRIERS	EXPLANATION	CONSEQUENCE
<b>Land ownership</b>	Women cannot inherit land, and barely buy own land	Women cannot make decision about the land use, and are therefore demotivated to make long-term investments on the land
<b>Heavy workload for women</b>	Women have a substantial amount of agricultural and domestic work to perform	Women are not able to perform all required activities to maintain their households and to perform commercial farming, therefore tradeoffs need to be made. These tradeoffs often are not in favor of commercial farming

**Table 3 – Barriers to shift from subsistence to commercial farming case study 3**



**Figure 1 – Women’s Empowerment 4-Steps Plan**