Title

Exploring Gendered Change: Concepts and trends in gender equality assessments

Authors

Jess MacArthur (jessica.macarthur@uts.edu.au) – Corresponding Author
Naomi Carrard
Juliet Willetts

Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney
Building 10, 235 Jones St, Ultimo NSW 2007

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Abstract

More than a quarter century, after the Beijing Platform for Action solidified the importance of gender equality in international development, it is timely to review the conceptual approaches used to assess the gendered impacts of interventions. This paper presents a systematic review of recent investigations of gender equality from development-related academic literature (2009-2019) using two analytical approaches. First, we visualize trends based on bibliographic, methodological, contextual, and conceptual aspects (n=150). Second, we explore the theoretical approaches used to conceptualize gendered change through co-citation analysis (n=61).

Our trend analysis shows a breadth of relevant disciplinary perspectives but limited geographic and content foci. Additionally, very few studies explore gender equality dynamics that involve men and boys. Our exploration of theoretical foundations identifies four theoretical conceptualizations of gendered change, each reflecting the divergent disciplines, actors and interests which operate in the gender and development space. These conceptualizations each rely on and expand the concept of empowerment. By critically reflecting on feminist principles, future studies can transcend narrower empowerment framings and contribute more meaningfully to the aim of gender transformative development.

Introduction

In 1995, during the Fourth World Conference on Women, academics, practitioners, donors, and policymakers from around the world gathered to establish a common objective to 'advance the goals of equality, development, and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity' (United Nations, 1995; para. 3). The conference highlighted a shift in development discourse about the engagement of women – from women as a tool for development to a focus on strategic change addressing perceptions of gender through social relations (Kabeer, 1994) and gender roles (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993). This objective has been further articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals as Goal 5, seeing to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (UN General Assembly, 2015).

Tasked with pursuing these goals in the developing world, relevant government bodies, donors, and civil society organizations intensified their focus on designing interventions to address gender inequalities through policies, programs, and projects. Alongside these new initiatives, it became critical to demonstrate and evaluate change against global and programmatic goals. This focus prompted the development of a wide range of approaches for investigating gendered change (Bowman and Sweetman, 2018; Malhotra et al., 2002). These approaches reflect the methodological principles of different research communities and different conceptualizations of gender equality (Kabeer, 2018; Malhotra et al., 2002; White, 2015; Worthen, 2012).

Within this context, there has been increasing academic interest in examining outcomes associated with gender equality and women's empowerment in international development. Such interest has led to a series of existing literature reviews on the topic. Many of these reviews take a sectoral focus (Laszlo et al., 2020; Pereznieto and Taylor, 2014; Taukobong et al., 2016; Winther et al., 2017). Other reviews explore quantitative measures of agency or empowerment (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Pratley and Sandberg, 2018; Richardson, 2018). Further reviews examine best practices for such evaluations (Espinosa, 2013; Gram et al., 2018a; Lam et al., 2018). Each of these reviews discuss gendered outcomes by distilling theoretical concepts into practical frameworks.

This paper contributes to and extends existing academic literature by exploring the conceptual breadth of gender equality and related themes with a focus on interventions in international development. We study this conceptual breadth by investigating how gendered outcomes associated with interventions are assessed within academic literature. We take assessments to be any program-based study which explores changes associated with program interventions. This can include but is not limited to the design or application of evaluations, impact assessments, audits, formative research and summative research. Assessments offer a unique perspective into the practical application of theory, as they require the distillation of

theoretical underpinnings into practical relevance. This article does not review the impacts of policy interventions and also does not report aggregated gendered impacts of interventions through a meta-analysis, both of which are areas for future research.

As a starting point, we describe the foundations of gender equality and women's empowerment within international development and introduce our systematic review methodology. We identify English language academic literature focused on assessing gendered changes in international development interventions (2009-2019). We then present findings on the trends and themes within this literature over the last decade (n=150). We also present findings regarding the four theoretical conceptualizations of gendered change (n=61), critically exploring how theoretical ideas significantly shape what is investigated in program-based assessments. Lastly, we address key implications of the study.

Gender equality in international development

The monitoring and evaluation of gendered aspects of development programs is rooted in the theoretical foundations of gender and development. Led by feminist practitioners challenging dominant views of the development sector, the 1995 Beijing Declaration ushered in a new sectoral discourse, from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD). The WID approach centered on the perspective that "women are an untapped resource who can provide an economic contribution to development" (Moser, 1993, pg. 2). The GAD approach expanded the dialogue around gender equality from welfare, equity, anti-poverty, and efficiency to include *empowerment* ultimately calling for societal transformation (Bamberger and Podems, 2002; Moser, 1993). Aspects such as critical consciousness, collective action, social structures and gender norms were considered foundational to gender transformations (Rowlands 1997). GAD was championed by Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN), a network of feminist development practitioners, primarily based in the South and founded in 1984 (Sen and Grown, 1987). DAWN aimed to strengthen political and collective underpinnings of the empowerment agenda within the GAD paradigm, for and by women in the South.

The inclusion of the concept of empowerment opened up the gender and development dialogue to the fields of psychology, management, human development, and education – as summarized in Table 1 – all of which were already exploring aspects of empowerment in parallel to feminist development studies. These disciplinary-specific conceptualizations of empowerment, built on philosophers and sociologists who explored aspects of power such as Weber, Dahl, Lukes, Rappaport, Freire, and Foucault (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall, 2016; Rowlands, 1997). These unique perspectives expanded the ways in which gender equality and women's empowerment can be understood and explored in international development research and interventions.

[Insert Table 1] *Table 1. Foundational definitions of empowerment utilized in development*

This focus on empowerment was a powerful addition to the GAD mandate; however, many authors began to use the concepts of gender equality and empowerment interchangeably. Still today, they are often grouped together, as is the case with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (UN General Assembly, 2015). While empowerment, equity, and equality are the three interrelated goals of GAD (Moser, 1993), many authors conceptualize equity and empowerment as leading to gender equality (Kabeer, 2005; Nussbaum, 2000). Women's empowerment focuses on the changes in power within and around women as individuals or in groups (Rowlands, 1995). Gender equality is more broadly concerned with gender dynamics, relations, and structures. It aims to transform inequalities between men and women through equal rights, responsibilities, and access to resources (United Nations, 1995). For the purposes of this paper, we use the term 'gendered changes' to represent changes that encompass both empowerment and gender equality.

Since the Beijing Platform for Action, policies, intervention designs and academic debates have aimed to extend the focus on empowerment to include wider gender equality changes, such as those articulated in gender transformative language (Batliwala, 2007; Cleaver, 1999, Cornwall and Brock, 2005). As the policy, practice and academic discourses have evolved, with this paper we take the opportunity to explore the evolution of program-based gendered change assessments.

Study approach – systematic literature review

This systematic review explored empirical studies of gender equality and related themes with a focus on international development interventions. Three databases were used for the search: Scopus, ProQuest, and Web of Science. We explored articles in academic journals published between 2009 and 2019 in the English language. Our search string included: (gender OR women OR girls OR men OR boys) AND (empower* OR equality OR equit* OR agency, etc.) AND (impact* OR research OR eval* OR assess etc.) AND (development phrasing and a set of 164 low- and middle-income country names or name derivations). From these selected terms, 1704 articles were identified. We removed irrelevant articles, duplicates, and blanks (697 remaining). Next, we screened abstracts for relevance and connection to a development intervention using DistillerSR (Evidence Partners, Ottawa, Canada), identifying 150 articles for a trend analysis. This ensures a focus on program, project or intervention-based studies with the systematic review. Further refinement by study quality identified 61 articles for more thorough conceptual analysis. Details on search terms, screening criteria, a visual schematic of the approach, and the selected articles can be found in supplementary materials.

Our analysis utilized two distinct lenses, drawing on methods from the digital humanities which rely on processes of distant and close readings to better understand a corpus of literature (Burdick, 2012). Our first lens engaged with a distant reading analysis (Moretti, 2013) of 150 articles to identify patterns and trends by coding and visualizing the literature based on titles and abstracts[1]. These codes included bibliographic, methodological, contextual, and conceptual aspects. Our second lens used a process of inductive content analysis focusing on the unique conceptualizations of gendered change within 61 articles. In parallel, we conducted a co-citation analysis (using VOSViewer) to triangulate and situate these emerging insights concerning the foundational theories and theorists. We then engaged with these foundational texts to enrich our understanding of how the conceptualizations had been applied to relevant studies and implications of these applications.

This study should be interpreted within the context of its operational boundaries and limitations. These limitations reflect the complexity of the topic and the iterative challenge in drawing practical boundaries around a systematic review. The study was focused on assessments alongside interventions, and therefore covered a breadth of sectors and methodologies. The practical focuses on the English language and academically published literature over grey literature are also limitations. These linguistic and academic-focused limitations preclude a full picture of the sector, and this study would be complemented by future analyses of more diverse material. Formal evaluations of interventions that are required by donor organizations were also excluded, as they are much less accessible and comparable. Finally, in order to identify a practical number of studies, the search terms were narrowed early in the review, excluding possibly relevant terms including female, male, children, confidence, esteem, and participation. We recommend that future studies explore research in different languages, grey literature, evaluations, assessments, or conference proceedings to enrich our findings.

Trends in assessing gendered change

By conducting a distant reading analysis of 150 articles, we explored the current trends and themes within a broader corpus of gender and development literature. Our analysis generated an alluvial chart, as seen in Figure 1, which shows the relative proportions of pertinent themes within the articles. The analysis fields are grouped into four broad sets of study characteristics, as identified at the top of the figure (and reading from left to right): bibliographic, methodological, contextual, and conceptual aspects. An almost seven-fold increase in the annual number of publications over the decade of analysis highlights the growing interest in gendered change in international development interventions. Articles were published in a wide range of journals, with a breadth of disciplinary backgrounds and intervention sectors indicating the diversity of researchers focusing on the topic of gender equality, but also signifying the potential risk for disparate and disconnected conceptualizations. The studies were from 108 unique journals, 86 of which only contain one relevant

article. Journals were most commonly within the disciplines of development (12 unique journals), public health (16), gender studies (9), and geography (10).

[Insert Figure 1] *Figure 1 Alluvial visualization of gendered change landscape (n=150)*

Although previous literature reviews have indicated a stronger prevalence of quantitative literature (Bamberger and Podems, 2002; Malhotra et al., 2002; Pereznieto and Taylor, 2014), our analysis indicates that qualitative approaches are gaining popularity for program-based studies. Of the sample, 40% were qualitative, 40% quantitative, and 20% used mixed data collection. The number of qualitative and mixed-methods studies could be a response to the "frequently criticized […] more quantitative, economic analysis-focused research methods used by bilateral and multilateral development" (Bamberger and Podems, 2002, p 84).

Reviewed studies engaged a diversity of intervention sectors, however a relatively narrow geographic scope. Interventions were widely spread, with the largest groupings in agriculture and nutrition (17%), public health (11%), women's-groups (9%), violence prevention (8%), and employment (7%). Other sectors such as water and sanitation, energy, information, and communication technologies, microfinance, entrepreneurship, and climate resilience also featured. As the number of studies increased over time, so did the breath of interventions from three types in 2009 to 12 in 2019. Geographically the studies were spread over 46 countries and clustered in South Asia (43%) and sub-Saharan Africa (31%). Of the papers focused in South Asia, 22% of the sample (n=150) were from India, 6% from Bangladesh, and 6% from Nepal. The papers from sub-Saharan Africa were more dispersed across Kenya (5% of total 150), Tanzania (4%), Uganda (4%), South Africa (3%), Ethiopia (3%) and Nigeria (3%). This geographic clustering broadly aligns with donor spending over the decade (OEDC 2019). Areas such as North Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America, and South America are less common within wider development literature (Malhotra et al., 2002). It also aligns with academic publication trends in which India represents 3.5% of global scientific publishing and is the only developing country to feature on the top 20 publishing countries list (OEDC, 2015). With gender equality requiring constructed and contextual definitions (Richardson, 2018), this underrepresentation could have significant impacts on interventions and investigations.

Lastly, the majority of investigations were focused on women and empowerment. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the articles focused solely on women, and 58% of studies utilized empowerment as the key gender inquiry (as articulated in the title or abstract). Other important inquiries of gendered change were much less visible in the sample. For instance, 'gender equality' (7%) more broadly, transformation (5%), gender norms (4%), well-being (4%), and gender equity (4%) together only made up

a quarter of the sample. Very few articles addressed girls or men, while not a single article focused on boys. Articles that did focus on men tended to explore themes of hegemonic masculinity and violence but did not review changes in men's perspective on gender equality more broadly. This narrow framing of gender equality as women's empowerment does not engage holistically with gendered change, excludes men and boys, and avoids the complexity of gender relations.

Conceptualizations of gendered change

Our second analytical lens revealed four main conceptualizations of gendered change, drawing on inductive content analysis and co-citation analysis. These conceptualizations highlight the expansions and extensions of empowerment thinking within academic research focused on programs. Figure 2 displays these theoretical clusters through the co-citation of referenced authors using VOSviewer (van Eck and Waltman, 2014). The clusters and their relevant conceptual foci are: 1) human development (individual capability); 2) economic development (household resources); 3) psychology and development (individual mindsets); and 4) feminist development (societal transformations). We mapped the network of citations (n=61 articles) identifying 97 authors and theorists who influence gender equality inquiries in development[2].

Enriching the four identified clusters from network analysis, Table 2 reviews key foundational theorists (in the far-left column), definitions of change, and key literature for further reading. Following the visual and table, we introduce each cluster with consideration to its conceptual foundations, provide a description of the cluster's salience within the 2009-2019 literature, and reflect critically on the strengths and limitations of each cluster. While the four clusters are interconnected and not mutually exclusive, each draws from a unique body of literature and has a distinct approach to the conceptualization of gendered change.

The assessed interventions and the identified theoretical foundations occur in different temporal stages, with interventions taking place between 2009-2019 and the theoretical foundations primary occurring before 2009. Additionally, the bulk of foundational theories arise shortly before and after the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, reinforcing the importance of the event for the sector. In light of this, several foundational authors, such as Kabeer, Sen, and Malhotra, were cited in multiple clusters and therefore had grey nodes in the analysis (Figure 2). Uniquely, Kabeer has foundational texts in Feminist Development (Kabeer, 1994), Economic Development (Kabeer, 2001), and Human Development (Kabeer, 1999); illustrating Kabeer's influence in the gender and development space.

[Insert Figure 2] *Figure 2 Co-citation network map of sampled studies (n=61)*

[Insert Table 2] *Table 2 Dominant conceptualizations of gendered change in sample studies (n=61)*

Human Development – Individual capability

The first conceptualization cluster, human development, was strongly associated with the Capability Approach as articulated by Sen (1992) and Nussbaum (2000). Drawing from the Aristotelian concept of the flourishing life, the Capability Approach identifies gender inequalities as philosophically counter to holistic human flourishing (Nussbaum, 2000). The approach, described by Robeyns (2005), is not to be a theory per se but is a framework to help conceptualize and evaluate the phenomena of poverty, inequality, and well-being. In the framework, well-being, justice, and development are understood through people's capability to function as enabled by freedom of choice. As such, the capability approach focuses on individuals. The approach has a long history of engagement with gender inequality and entered the discourse of empowerment through Kabeer's foundational work defining women's empowerment in 1999.

Within the selected articles (n=61), 18 studies were most closely aligned with the human development approach. Kabeer's framing of empowerment as three interrelated dimensions of resources, agency, and achievements remained the most cited theoretical framework within our sample, with 12 studies utilizing the framework to conceptualize gendered change and 26 studies citing the work. Kabeer's resources and agency explicitly draw from Sen's conceptualization of capabilities (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). Although aspects of agency and critical consciousness have been included in several studies (Burney et al., 2017; Gram et al., 2018b; O'Hara and Clement, 2018); the articles more often focus on resources or outcomes, as these are more straightforward to measure, missing critical process and agency dynamics (as articulated by Garikipati, 2013; Kabeer, 2018).

Turning now to critical reflection, the Capability Approach can be challenging to understand, and many concepts have layered meanings as expressed through processes, outcomes, capabilities, and functionings. This leads some authors to engage lightly with the concepts and often utilize more easily identifiable aspects of the approach, such as the three pillars of Kabeer's empowerment. While useful to capture the essence of empowerment, much of the depth and nuance remains lost in the analyses, often with only a statement of the three pillars or a brief definition, a challenge also identified by Batliwala (2007). The approach's focus on the individual can also exclude relevant and important aspects of collective agency and action, which are highlighted by academics seeking to expand empowerment (Batliwala 2007). Researchers who draw on the Capability Approach could benefit from greater consideration of collective forms of change and reflection on possible reductionism due to complex philosophical underpinnings.

Economic Development - household resources

The second cluster focused on the economic aspects of gender equality, a contrast to the objective of human flourishing found in the human development approach. The cluster is built on Boserup's (1970) foundational text on the economic interaction of women in development. Her efforts ultimately identified that economic burdens fall disproportionately on women. Boserup's work was foundational to the field of women in development (WID), which employed welfare, equity, anti-poverty, and efficiency principles to connect economic and women's development (Moser, 1993). Early connections between economics and gender in development come from studies connecting microfinance with women's empowerment (Mayoux 1995; Hashemi, Schuler & Riley 1996) and intrahousehold allocation and control of assets (Quisumbing and Maluccio, 1999).

Represented in 11 studies within our sample, the economic development approach is most closely linked with microfinance, cash transfer programs, and intra-household decision-making. Today the conceptualization often focuses on empowerment through 'smart economics' and has left its roots of welfare, equity, and efficiency. As Duflo argues, "[t]here is a bidirectional relationship between economic development and women's empowerment defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development – in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights and political development…empowerment can accelerate development" (Duflo, 2012, p. 1053).

Reflecting critically, the economic development approach is often critiqued by the feminist development approach for being instrumentalist – utilizing women as instruments into a broader development agenda and focusing on individual and household level indicators (Chant and Sweetman, 2012). Within our sample, economic development studies concentrated on outcomes for individuals and households through indicators of control or decision-making as measured through large surveys (see Bonilla et al., 2017; De Brauw et al., 2014; Huis et al., 2019). Such studies use standardized indicators and prioritize comparability across geographies. They also exclude structural, cognitive, and collective aspects associated with feminist forms of empowerment and equality.

Psychology and Development - individual mindsets

The third cluster of conceptualizations was associated with constructs of empowerment from psychology and more recently public health. The cluster was less connected; both externally from the core literature on gender equality and internally within the cluster. Early work by Rappaport (1987) and Zimmerman (1990) drew from Friere's (1970) concept of conscientization or critical understanding of one's environment. Concurrently, Bandura's (1989) concept of self-efficacy explored self-belief in one's own capability to complete actions; while Diener (1984) codified aspects of subjective well-being. Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) connected these

concepts in a process model of empowerment, which explored aspects of "personally meaningful and power-oriented goals, self-efficacy, knowledge, competence, action, and impact" (p. 646). While none of these concepts were explicitly designed for women, they have recently been applied to explore aspects of women's empowerment in the development context as seen within our sample (see de Hoop et al., 2014; Eger et al., 2018; Grabe, 2012).

Complementary to but disconnected from psychological approaches in the mid-1990s, researchers including Schuler and Hashemi (Hashemi et al., 1996; Schuler et al., 1996; Schuler and Hashemi, 1994) published a series of articles connecting micro-credit, contraceptive use, and violence against women. These articles launched a sub-cluster of literature reviewing gendered power and violence with a specific focus on South Asia and South Africa. The literature often considered aspects of reproductive health and behavior (Jejeebhoy, 1995). Recent research has continued to expand this into conceptualizations of masculinity and sexism (Glick et al., 2000; Jewkes et al., 2017; Shefer, 2014) and measures of gender-equitable attitudes (Pulerwitz and Barker, 2008).

The psychology and development cluster contained 12 articles within our sample over three sub-clusters: gender-equitable attitudes (Glass et al., 2019; Newmann et al., 2016), power and violence (Schuler et al., 2018), and psychological empowerment (Bragin et al., 2015; de Hoop et al., 2014; Eger et al., 2018; Grabe, 2012). The studies focused on women or male-female intimate partnerships and was only subset of literature that framed aspects of gendered change unfavourably; for example, hegemonic masculinity, insecurity, distress, and violence.

The psychological approach is broadly separate from the ongoing dialogue of gender and development and the depth and nuance given to empowerment related themes within psychology show a significant expansion of gender equality ideas. Concepts such self-efficacy, autonomy and behaviour open a wealth of knowledge to the GAD space. However, the focus on changing individual beliefs, attitudes and mindsets as in Cattaneo & Chapman (2010) may overlook the communal and collective forms of change inherent in the GAD formulation. The studies also, by focusing on the individual mind, separate gendered outcomes from social structures.

Feminist Development - societal transformations
The fourth cluster represents a wave of feminist philosophers and practitioners ushered into the international development space by Molyneux (1985) and the work of DAWN (Sen and Grown, 1987). These early writings focused on women's mobilization and emancipation as a pathway to overcome 'sexual inequalities' in the developing world, often for and by women in the South. Moser (1993) built on Molyneux's delineation between practical and strategic gender interests and helped to solidify the sectoral shift to a GAD approach. In parallel, influential feminists

Kabeer (1994) and Batliwala (1993) drew on their personal perspectives to shape conceptualizations of empowerment centered around the value of women in society. These conceptualizations recognized the value of "informed choice within an expanding framework of information, knowledge and analysis" (Batliwala, 1993, p. 7). Rowland's (1997) work in Honduras helped to establish personal, relational, and collective aspects of this perspective, which broadened traditional definitions. The feminist concepts in Rowland's work were politically motivated towards justice and rights. It leveraged concepts of collective empowerment towards radical societal transformations.

Similarly inspired by feminist philosophy, researchers from geography, political economy, and natural resource management established parallel approaches, adopting feminist principles towards equality in gender roles and equity of participation. Agarwal (1997) and Cleaver (1998) explored the equitable participation of women with regards to land rights, forestry, and water governance utilizing conceptualizations of collective action for governing common-pool resources. These studies investigated the inclusion and representation of women for better governance outcomes that move beyond nominal and passive participation to interactive and empowering participation (Agarwal, 2001) with voice and influence over group decisions. In a similar manner, geographers such as McDowell (1999) expanded feminist theory to explore how gender norms are negotiated in dynamic physical spaces – gendered space.

Although less represented within the network map, feminist development theory has shaped 17 articles within our sample of literature over aspects of governance, geography, and gender roles. While the articles pull from a variety of conceptual frameworks and illustrative cases, they all draw from common formative texts (such as Kabeer, 1994; Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993; Rowlands, 1997, 1995) and express an objective to challenge gender inequalities through the emancipation of women.

Reflecting critically, feminist approaches are inherently laden with political nuance and values about the role of women within society, which brings strengths and challenges to their application in the evaluation of development interventions. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) reflect that terms such as empowerment and equality "have been eviscerated of conceptual and political bite" (p.396) in their reflection of how non-feminist related development work has treated these concepts first introduced by feminists. There is also ongoing debate about the universality of western conceptualizations of women's rights and gender equality, especially in traditionally communal cultures. Western feminists have been critiqued for introducing Western feminist ideologies that can be insensitive to family structures and the roles of women. Additionally, even the concept of 'feminism' can be difficult for mainstream programming to adopt, with several feminist practitioners identifying

resistance to the use of the word 'feminist' for political reasons (Bamberger and Podems, 2002). Longwe (1997) describes this as the "evaporation of gender policies in a patriarchal cooking pot" (p.148). While feminist approaches can utilize simple techniques to identify gendered roles, responsibilities, and relations, true transformative change is harder to implement and evaluate due to the complexity of non-linear processes and extended time frames beyond projects (Moser, 1993).

Implications for strengthening the assessment of gendered change

Insights from the analysis presented in this literature review on program-based assessments for gendered change reveal opportunities for future studies to take a more reflexive approach, such that they can be explicitly informed by - rather than implicitly shaped by - their underlying conceptualizations. We explore three such opportunities.

Clarifying theoretical conceptualizations

Expanding the notion of reflexive practice to conceptualizations of gendered change, our review identified that the majority of studies have not overtly reflected on how theoretical foundations shape their investigations. Of particular significance is the dilution of the concept of 'empowerment' when viewed from a feminist perspective. Introduced by feminists into the development practice, development practitioners such as Batliwala, Cornwall, and Cleaver have all expressed concern that the concept of empowerment has been 'diffused and diluted' (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall and Brock, 2005). As far back as 1999, Cleaver warned that "as 'empowerment' has become a buzzword in development, an essential objective of participation, its radical, challenging and transformatory edge has been lost." (Cleaver, 1999, p. 599). Empowerment remains the most common gender equality concept across all studies and all four conceptualizations of gendered change. The majority of empowerment definitions found within our study are more aligned with an individual and depoliticalized idea of empowerment. Several articles from the first analysis utilized empowerment only in the title or abstract as a signifier, without ever defining or clarifying what is meant by the term.

There are several dynamics which elucidate this conceptual dilution and an exploration of these themes through structural and feminist lenses can support researchers to distill instead of dilute. First, knowledge production is inherently political and there is tendency towards incentive structures that privilege particular theoretical approaches, which may be more easily adopted by civil society and donors (Bedford, 2009; Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall and Brock, 2005). For example, the World Bank's use of economic forms of empowerment has continued to dominate certain circles (Prugl, 2017; Bedford, 2009), while individual focused human development measures dominate others (Hancock, 2010). The influence of donor or institutional politics can lead to the inclusion or even exclusion of particular

bodies of knowledge (Bedford, 2009). However, Prugl (2015) argues that although some aspects are lost in this marriage of feminist thinking and sectoral knowledge, there can also be emergent conceptualizations, such as the extrapolation of an empowered women as "responsible selves" and "internally driven" (p. 626). Second, there has been multiplication in the breadth of disciplines now exploring these feminist themes. Each discipline comes with differing epistemological and ontological perspectives and arenas of interests. Lastly, and perhaps most pragmatically, measuring change is inherently complex and requires some form of conceptual simplification. Each of these dynamics comes with innate risks and must be grounded in the research question driving the studies. Nonetheless, looking back to the initial intent of the GAD paradigm, stronger researcher engagement with underlying feminist concepts could temper the tendency to dilute the transformational nature of empowerment and wider gender equality agendas.

Moving to gender transformations
As the sector continues to evolve, many feminist practitioners have articulated a shift in focus from individual empowerment to structural transformations in society (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015) and within the process of research itself (Mertens, 2010). This shift is more closely aligned to the original framing in the Beijing Platform for Action and supported by organizations like DAWN. This transformational perspective requires an evolution of the methods, theories and themes used to measure gendered change. However, the focus of gender equality inquiries within the studies remained narrow from 2009-2019. For example, the strong reliance on decision-making within the surveyed studies reflects an individual empowerment perspective – placing the burden of change on women. While decision-making remains important within conceptualizations of empowerment, there is a need for further 'sophistication' in decision-making indicators as reflected within structural dynamics (White 2015).

Several studies leveraged transformational themes through 1) a revival of more radical concepts first connected to the gender and development sector and now situated as part of the gender transformations discourse, and 2) the emergence of newly identified domains of inquiry. Three aspects historically associated with gendered change that have been more recently overlooked could usefully be reintroduced, such as 1) critical consciousness, 2) collective action; and 3) structural gender norms. On the first of these, Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization – also known as power-within or critical consciousness (Rowlands, 1997) was found in several recent studies within the sample (Kantor et al., 2015; O'Hara and Clement, 2018). Secondly, collective action or power-with engages with the connected and collaborative nature of working together for gendered change and critiques the individualistic nature of many common indicators (Gram et al., 2018a; Kantor et al., 2015; Rowlands, 1997). Lastly, reengaging with the social relations and structural norms of gendered change could support a more critical and systematic perspective through activities such as a historical timeline of gender trends and 'body maps' of

gendered norms (Hillenbrand et al., 2014; Kabeer, 1994). Additionally, the introduction of new dimensions of gender equality, which challenge power dynamics related to physical space (Van Houweling, 2015) and subjective definitions of well-being and empowerment (Bragin et al., 2015; de Hoop et al., 2014; Price et al., 2018), offer novel conceptions that broaden typical themes.

Lastly, in academic practice researchers are becoming more attuned to the transformative potential of the process of research (Mertens 2010). Within the reviewed studies, approaches to community engagement in policy, practice and academic research were not always aligned. For example some highly participatory programs within wider organisational and government strategies towards girl's empowement were researched in a quantiative survey-based manner. A dialogue about alignment between policy, program and assessment modalities based on transformative research could inspire creativity and lead to further social change through research and assessments.

Including men and boys and embracing diversity
In order to holistically address the underlying perceptions and power structures that shape gender equality, studies must address the experiences and perspectives of men and boys, and ideally expand to a more nuanced understanding of gender. Very few articles engaged with gender dynamics more broadly, or men and boys more directly. The majority of studies focused on women and girls but did not take the conceptual leap to include a discussion of strategic gender challenges and the relationships between different types of men and women (age, social-economic class, caste, race, etc.). Inclusion of men was either 1) with regards to intra-household dynamics around resources and decision-making, or 2) focused on gender-based violence and hegemonic masculinity. Gender relations were almost exclusively focused on intimate heterosexual partnerships and excluded any relations such as mother and son, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law or employee-employer relationships. Similarly, the articles maintain a gender binary and do not reflect a more nuanced approach to gender relations, unlike emerging development literature (see for example Boyce et al., 2018). These trends were identified twenty years ago, in a dialogue of the missing men and myopic approach to gender in the GAD discourse (Cornwall, 2000). While the focus on men was limited, boys were entirely absent from mention in the sampled articles. Considering these gaps, expanding the focus of studies to include different interpersonal relationships, men and boys, and thinking beyond a gender binary would prompt a more rounded perspective on gendered change and enable deeper engagement with the structural power dynamics that drive gender (in)equality.

Conclusion

This systematic review of academic literature explored the last decade (2009-2019) of gender equality investigations concerning development interventions, with a focus on sectoral trends and conceptual frameworks. We identified an increase of interest around the topic within literature, a diversity of disciplinary perspectives, a balance between quantitative and qualitative approaches, a strong focus on South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and a narrow focus on women's empowerment. The study also identified four theoretical conceptualizations of gendered change in this body of literature: human development; economic development; feminist development; and psychology and development.

We assert the importance of researcher familiarity with theoretical foundations and argue for conceptual integrity. We recognize the challenge of selecting domains of inquiry for a given study, but suggest that stronger conceptual foundations can aid in this process. Lastly, we recommend that researchers review the types of people who are engaged within the studies, given that gender equality cannot be fully investigated through a sole focus on women. Researchers assessing gendered change have an embedded responsibility to reflect upon the implications of their conceptualizations of change. We advocate for thoughtful and reflexive studies that respond to the complexity of dynamic, subjective, intersectional, and contextual gendered change.

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[1] For more complex studies, the full article was analyzed to ensure clarity of coding.

[2] Authors who had at least five citations were included in network diagram. For papers with multiple authors, each author was counted fractionally. Larger nodes indicator more citations and thicker lines indicate closer connections.

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Figure 1 Alluvial visualization of gendered change landscape (n=150)

Figure 2 Co-citation network map of sampled studies (n=61)

Table 3. Foundational definitions of empowerment utilized in development

Field	Definition of empowerment
Psychology	Empowerment is a contextual psychological construct shaped by individual knowledge, decision-making processes and the interactions between individuals and their environment; as measured through individual skill development, collective action, cultural awareness and internal psychological aspects such as motivation to control, locus of control, and self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 1990, pp. 174–5).
Economics	The empowerment of women accelerates economic development by improving women's access to the fundamental elements of development such as health, education and earning opportunities (Boserup, 1970; Duflo, 2012).
Management	Empowerment is "a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and committees gain mastery over their affairs" (Rappaport, 1987, pg. 122)
Education	Empowerment requires conscientization – the process of becoming aware of social, economic and political inconsistencies and then acting against such oppression through participation and engagement (Freire, 1970).
Human Development	Empowerment is an "expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437).
Gender and Development	Empowerment is a personal, relational and collective process in which oppressive power structures are challenged. It begins with the process that "leads people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions" (Rowlands, 1997, p. 14) It often relies on organisations who "must crystallize visions and perspectives that will move them beyond their present situation" (Sen and Gowan 1987, p. 89)

Table 4 Dominant conceptualizations of gendered change in sample studies (n=61)

Theoretical Cluster	Focus	Definition of Gendered Change	Key Literature
Human Development (Nussbaum, 2000; Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1992)	Individual capability	Changes in "empowerment focus not only upon the person's freedom to act, but upon the concrete material, social and institutional preconditions required to exert agency" (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007, p. 385) leading to flourishing lives (Nussbaum, 2000)	(Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007)
		"[E]mpowerment is about change, it refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437)	(Kabeer, 1999)
Economic Development (Boserup, 1970; Duflo, 2012; Quisumbing and Maluccio, 1999)	Household resources	Changes in "production and consumption decisions in household allocation…inform the determinants of household decision-making processes" (Bonilla et al., 2017, p. 56; Doss, 2013)	(Duflo, 2012; Kabeer, 2001)
		Changes "aim not only to increase the incomes, but also the bargaining power, of poor producers through group activities" leading to empowerment (Mayoux, 1995, p. 4)	(Hashemi et al., 1996; Mayoux, 1995)
Psychology and Development (Bandura, 1989; Freire, 1970; Zimmerman, 1990)	Individual mindsets	"Changes in attitudes toward gender norms…those related to intimate relationships, sexual and reproductive health, and disease and violence prevention" (Pulerwitz and Barker, 2008, p. 324)	(Pulerwitz and Barker, 2008)
		Both changes in gender power relations and "changes in the norms of masculinity with which IPV [intimate partner violence] is typically associated" (Schuler et al., 2018, p. 670)	(Glick et al., 2000; Jejeebhoy, 1995)
		"[P]sychological processes of empowerment such as self-capacity, agency, control and competence accompany the opening up of mental spaces" (Eger et al., 2018, p. 209)	(Cattaneo and Chapman, 2010)
Feminist Development (Kabeer, 1994; Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993)	Societal transformations	Changes that engage with both practical gender needs and strategic gender interests that challenge oppressive gender structures (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993)	(Batliwala, 1993; Rowlands, 1997)
		Changes in the performance and negotiations of gender roles and gender relationships as expressed through changing space and resources (Van Houweling, 2015)	(McDowell, 1999)
		Changes in local power dynamics "rules, norms, perceptions and endowments in a gender-progressive direction" (Agarwal, 2001, p. 1641) primarily through equitable participation in governance	(Agarwal, 2001, 1997; Cleaver, 1998)

Biographical note

Jess MacArthur https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6645-5767

Jessica.MacArthur@uts.edu.au

Jess MacArthur is a doctoral student at the Institute for Sustainable Futures, focused on innovating ways to measure how women are impacted by water and sanitation programming in South and Southeast Asia. Jess specializes in the use of design thinking to impact program strategy and market systems. Prior to this role, Jess was a Director of Programs at iDE in Bangladesh where she focused on water, sanitation and hygiene; women's empowerment; and nutrition. Jess trained as a Chemical Engineer and holds an MSc in Water Science, Policy and Development from the University of Oxford. She also holds nine years of experience in WASH and education projects in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

Naomi Carrard https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3371-9113

Naomi.Carrard@uts.edu.au

Naomi Carrard is a Research Director at the Institute for Sustainable Futures, specialising in applied research to inform policy and practice in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), with a primary focus on the Asia and Pacific regions. Naomi has qualifications in Environmental Law and Geography, and 15 years' experience working in WASH, water resource management and development effectiveness. Since joining ISF in 2006, Naomi has led and contributed to research in areas of WASH policy and programming, gender equality, civil society role in development, urban infrastructure and climate change adaptation. She has a focus on work that integrates technical, environmental, economic and social aspects of development and resource management.

Juliet Willetts https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3975-9642

Juliet.Willetts@uts.edu.au

Professor Juliet Willetts leads applied research to improve development policy and practice and to address social justice and sustainable development, including the achievement of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She is a recognised expert in the field of water and sanitation in developing country contexts, and also works on issues related to gender equality, civil society role in development, governance and accountability, climate change, urban development, monitoring, evaluation and development effectiveness more broadly. In 2018 Juliet was recognized as the Australian Financial Review's 100 Women of Influence.