

Challenging traditional gender roles in Cuba

*Analysis of an empowerment project from Oxfam
aiming at gender equality on the Caribbean island*



Photo by: Marta Rodrigues / OXFAM

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at answering the question “Why are the empowerment strategies used in the project ‘Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening’ from Oxfam and the EU insufficient towards the realization of gender equality in rural Cuba?”. The purpose hereby is to evaluate the above mentioned project according to their empowerment strategies used in order to reach gender equality. With traditional gender roles persisting in Cuba, we thought it to be essential to write about the NGO OXFAM whose goal it is to empower people through a bottom-up approach. Our work will be an addition to the limited research that has been done in Cuba about gender equality and empowerment on the local scale.

Throughout our paper we have used a qualitative research design with a constructivist and all-inclusive approach. Our qualitative research is based on a combination of primary and secondary sources, such as narratives and empirical research. Our main source is the final report written by OXFAM, where the main activities and results of the project are explained. We will be using women testimonies, one interview conducted with the manager of the project, and the communicative materials produced by the project as additional sources.

Our paper is based on the assumption that the empowerment strategies aimed at reaching gender equality employed in this project were not sufficient. In fact, we argue that this is due to our different perception and understanding of the keyterms ‘gender equality’ and ‘empowerment’. For this reason, we explained our own definitions of the terms and, based on this, we analyzed how these concepts were understood by OXFAM. In order to find out how the project impacted men and women who participated in the project, we have analyzed the women testimonies and the project manager’s interview to fully understand the effect that this project has had. A measurement and evaluation framework for qualitative indicators of empowerment is used as an evaluation tool for the applied strategies.

The main result of our research is that the goal of reaching gender equality was not fully achieved by OXFAM. We argue that this project has confined the meaning of gender equality to being an issue of women alone. Contrasting this stance, we state that it is a concern of the whole community, which has to actively participate regardless of one’s advantaged or disadvantaged position within the society.

Also, by only taking women into consideration, we argue that in this project the line between biological sex and gender was blurred. According to our definition, gender is a social construct that varies according to specific context and culture, and that biological sex itself does not define gender. However, in this project gender was mainly associated with biological sex, therefore excluding other interpretations of the term.

We also conclude that the empowerment principle of ‘participation’ was not employed efficiently: in fact, women were included in only a part of the decision-making process, therefore the project is not complying to the notion of participation, according to which the women’s inclusion into the previous organizational steps of the process is needed.

We suggest other NGOs, practitioners, and policy-makers to make use of alternative empowerment strategies and to adopt an evaluation tool which incorporates all facets of empowerment and gender equality. We also recommend to take local context and culture into consideration when starting a programme aiming at gender equality, as values and norms are deeply rooted in one’s culture causing traditional gender roles to persist.

Keywords: Gender equality, empowerment, evaluation, Cuba, women

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of our research is to answer the question **“Why are the empowerment strategies used in the project ‘Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening’ from Oxfam and the EU insufficient towards the realization of gender equality in rural Cuba?”**. We suspect that the empowerment strategies used are not sufficient to achieve gender equality, mainly because women were the only target group taken into consideration. Therefore, we assume the strategies to be insufficient and want to evaluate them in order to find out whether or not our assumption is correct. If so, we want to find out why those strategies are insufficient and what is lacking in order to achieve gender equality. To do so, we will analyze the empowering methods used by the different cooperatives in Cuba within this project and we will find out how these worked towards gender equality, by challenging the conception of traditional gender roles as well as the subordination of women in rural areas.

The inspiration of our thesis came from the experience that one of us had during an internship at OXFAM in Cuba, where she was able to experience how patriarchy and gender discrimination are actually intrinsic factors of the Cuban society.

The non-governmental organization (NGO) OXFAM has been working in Cuba since the 90's. In 2011, it introduced a project aiming at improving the food security situation in the country through sustainability and gender equality. In this paper, we will focus on the efforts that this project has made in regards to gender equality through its women empowerment methods.

This project took place in 89 cooperatives spread over 10 municipalities in three Cuban eastern provinces. A specific part of this project places a special focus on empowerment and gender equality: this is the section of the project we will be focusing our paper on. This section consisted of 16 different economic initiatives held in 10 of these 89 cooperatives that aimed at empowering women by giving them the chance to create and manage businesses such as laundrettes, handcraft, cheese production and so on. While all these 16 initiatives completed by the cooperatives have been successful in empowering women to some degree, we assume that some empowerment strategies were not enough to achieve gender equality. Moreover, we will

offer suggestions in regards to the empowerment strategies that we find are missing and that should be employed in order to reach gender equality. This will not only be beneficial for policy makers but, in particular, for NGOs and cooperatives focusing on strategies to reach gender equality and empowerment, in their decision-making, project formulation and policies.

Our four research questions are as follows:

1. How do we define empowerment and gender equality?
2. How has the project ‘Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening’ impacted women and men in terms of empowerment and gender equality?
3. What is the project lacking to reach gender equality and empowerment according to our definitions of these concepts?
4. How does OXFAM understand empowerment and gender equality based on the project?

With our first research question we will offer the reader our own description of gender equality and empowerment based on the theories that we have explored in the prior chapter. We will also state our position on the existing academic debate regarding the theoretical approaches of those subjects. We will use these definitions as a basis for our analysis in chapter five.

With our second research question we want to understand how the project that OXFAM has carried out from 2011 to 2015 has impacted women’s and men’s lives. In order to do so, we will use personal testimonies of several women who have been a part of the initiatives and some of their husbands, as well as an interview conducted with the manager of the project, Marta Rodrigues.

In order to answer our third research question we will explore what the project is lacking in terms of empowerment strategies to achieve gender equality based on our definitions of those concepts. In particular, we will take the results gained from the previous chapters and apply them to Malhotra, Schuler and Boender’s measurement framework of empowerment. This will help us in finding out what these strategies are missing and how the project can be improved. Finally, we will explore the attempts of the project in achieving gender equality and show why we think they were not sufficient. To do this, we will recall our definitions of the terms ‘gender’ and ‘gender equality’ and see how the project worked towards their fulfillment.

In our fourth research question we aim at exploring how OXFAM understands and applies these two concepts in this specific project, recalling their definitions of ‘empowerment’ and ‘gender equality’.

In terms of data research, we will focus on a wide range of sources such as books, journals, interviews, reports, evaluations and documentaries. We will employ an inductive approach in order to answer our problem formulation. The analysis will be based on the document ‘Suburban agriculture and cooperative strengthening in ten municipalities of Camagüey, Las Tunas and Holguín’ as well as on empirical research and testimonies. We will base our analysis on empowerment and gender theories as these appear to be the most suitable to explain which empowerment methods are successful in eliminating women’s subordination and why. In particular, Malhotra et al.’s measurement framework of empowerment is used to analyze the used empowerment strategies as it is the most flexible measurement framework found which takes cultural contexts into account. The aim hereby is not a quantification of empowerment, but rather a qualitative measurement of the strategies used and an evaluation of the results and failures of the project.

Our first chapter will give some background information on the political, and social situation in Cuba as well as on women inequality in Cuban rural areas, in order to give the reader an overview of the overall situation.

In our second chapter we will present the project ‘Suburban agriculture and cooperative strengthening in 10 municipalities of Camagüey, Las Tunas and Holguín’, describing the goals, strategies, and the activities that were unfolded.

In the third chapter, our methodology, we will explain: why we have chosen the specific theories; why we chose this particular project by OXFAM; and how we will apply our gained knowledge from empowerment and gender equality theories in our analysis. We will also define the ontological and epistemological position that we will use throughout the paper, which is built on a constructivist approach.

Following, in our fourth chapter, an overview of the theoretical approaches on gender and gender equality will be given, showing the meaning and the evolution of those concepts.

Literature on the two main theoretical approaches concerning gender equality, namely Women In Development (WID) and Gender And Development (GAD), will be explored and analyzed. Afterwards, we will present Carr's theory on empowerment being a process together with his cycle of empowerment. We will further explore Malhotra et al's measurement framework in which indicators of empowerment are demonstrated. These will be of use for the evaluation of the project in chapter five.

In chapter five, our analysis, we will firstly state our definition of empowerment and gender equality which will serve as basis for our analysis. We will next analyze personal testimonies and one interview conducted with the manager of the project in order to fully understand how the project has impacted women and men. Furthermore, we will evaluate the project's empowerment methods based on the adapted measurement framework of Malhotra, Schuler and Boender in which the results of the project are used to find out what strategies the project is missing and what could be improved. We will also explore how the project worked towards the achievement of gender equality and the reasons why we claim that this goal was only partially fulfilled. To conclude our analysis, we will provide the reader with how OXFAM defines empowerment and gender equality based on this project.

Finally, in chapter six we will draw our conclusions, offer recommendations to NGO policy- and decision-makers in the area of women empowerment, and outline the limitations that we met while writing our project.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

In this chapter we will provide the reader with some background information about Cuba, in particular, its economic, social and political situation. This will help the reader in getting a general overview of the situation that Cuba is in and of the context that the project of OXFAM took place in. Following this background information, we will present the situation of women in Cuba by demonstrating data on gender inequality and by describing their current gender roles.

1.1. Political, Economic and Social situation of Cuba

In this subchapter, we will give an overview of the political, economic and social situation of Cuba, with the final purpose of offering a general background of the country to the reader. The context and the political situation in Cuba is important in order to explain the specific social position that women are in today, and to better understand the concept of traditional gender roles in the Cuban society.

Cuba obtained independence in 1902, under the protection and the faculty of intervention of the US. In 1925 the Socialist Party was founded and in 1952 Sergeant Fulgencio Batista, backed by the US, took power. However, Batista initiated an oppressive and corrupt regime (BBC, 2015), that was overthrown by Fidel Castro and Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara in the revolution of 1959. Fidel Castro created a one-party republic led by the Communist Party of Cuba, whose revolutionary values were: education for all, political participation, patriotism, social responsibility, and solidarity (Hansing, 2011).

Following the nationalization of all businesses in Cuba in 1960, including the US-owned industries, the US cut diplomatic relations with Cuba and declared a trade embargo on the country (BBC, 2015). The Bay of Pigs invasion -when the US intelligence attempted to invade Cuba in 1961- and a Cuban alliance with the Soviet Union aggravated the tension between Cuba and the US. This led to a big confrontation between the US and the URSS concerning the deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba, the so-called missile crisis, in 1962 (BBC, 2015).

In the period after the triumph of the revolution up until the 1990s, Cuba experimented a shift towards socialism by implementing the values of the revolution. Following the principle of education for all, the government started the so-called Cuban Literacy Campaign in 1961, a year-long effort to abolish illiteracy in Cuba due to the lack of access to education in rural areas (Independent, 2010). In order to decrease it, the government sent ‘literacy brigades’ from the main cities to the most remote areas of the country (Kellner, 1989, p. 61). It became one of the most ambitious and organized literacy campaigns worldwide, and it succeeded in increasing the literacy rate from 60% to 96% (Independent, 2010). Other achievements of the revolution were the introduction of the national health care system that to this day guarantees Cubans free medical care; and a new education plan which offers students free education up to the university degree (Phillips, 2012).

In 1993, the American government tightened the restrictions of the embargo on Cuba, in order to deteriorate its economy, and made the embargo permanent in 1996 (BBC, 2015). In 2008, Fidel Castro’s brother, Raúl, took over as president and Prime Minister of the one-party Republic, which is still led by the Communist Party of Cuba today, the only legally accepted party (BBC, 2015).

After the shift of power between the siblings, the ties with Russia were revitalized and the US-Cuban relations were eased (BBC, 2015). With the agreement signed on the 17th of December 2014 by the Obama administration, a policy shift towards Cuba was announced (Oppmann, 2016). The new approach consists of normalizing diplomatic ties. This shift of policies has been hailed by the Cuban President, Raúl Castro, and was highly supported by Canada and the Pope, who in the course of 2015 had personally contacted the American and Cuban president, encouraging their compromise. A recent milestone in the US-Cuban relations was Obama’s visit to Cuba on the 21st March 2016, where both parties agreed on the importance of reviving ties in a collaborative manner, and the US recognized the necessity of lifting the embargo (The Boston Globe, 2016; Jaffe & Labott, 2014; Dlamond, 2015). This was the first American presidential visit to Cuba after Calvin Coolidge’s in 1928 (Saul, 2016).

Up until now, the embargo still remains in place: in fact, only the American Congress is allowed to end it officially, by law (Oppmann, 2016). Despite the difficult revocability of the embargo, several restrictions have been eased over the years: in the course of 2015, some of the

trade and travel limitations were eased; embassies were re-opened; diplomatic agents were exchanged and banking relations with the US have been established; scheduled commercial flights were resumed (Marsh & LoBlanco, 2015); and Cuba was lifted from the US' list of states that sponsor terrorism (BBC, 2015). Furthermore, since March 2016 US citizens are allowed to travel to Cuba for individual educational tours, contrarily to the previous constraint of joining group tours on planned itineraries. Finally, Cuban nationals are now allowed to receive salaries in the US, and postal service to Cuba has been resumed after a fifty year long interruption of direct mail service - imposed on by the US as an isolation strategy towards the government of Fidel Castro (Oppmann, 2016).

Speaking of economic depression, Cuba has been facing a large economic crisis since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, called 'special period' (Hansing, 2011). As a report published by OXFAM America states, "Cuba lost 80% of its export market and its imports fell by 80%—from \$8 billion to \$1.7 billion - practically overnight" (OXFAM America, 2001, para. 4). Employment, production, and standards of living collapsed. "In the cities, buses stopped running, generators stopped producing electricity, factories became as silent as grave yards. Obtaining enough food for the day became the primary activity for many, if not most, Cubans" (OXFAM America, 2001, para. 5).

Today, tourism is increasingly becoming the driver of change and of income in Cuba (Ahmed & Burnett, 2015, para. 3). The amount of spending in building hotels, restaurants and commercial activities suggests a more entrepreneurial approach of the country (Ahmed & Burnett, 2015, para. 4). Experts in the field speculate that the future of Cuba's economy will be in the hands of the private sector. In fact, despite being still limited and monitored by the state, the private sector counted nearly half a million of local workers last year alone, reaching one million when also considering illegal workers (Ahmed & Burnett, 2015).

The particular historical, political and economic situation in Cuba obviously shaped the Cuban society deeply. The continuous state of economic crisis that traces back to the fall of the Soviet Union deeply affected the life of Cubans. In fact, their lifestyle has changed, together with their attitudes and behavior towards the state (Hansing, 2011). The faith in the system that existed before the crises started fading: the presence of corruption, repression policies, crime, the lacking quality of education and health services led people to find alternative ways to survive and to live

their lives (Hansing, 2011). Generally speaking, salaries are too low for families to live a decent life and it is not uncommon to have more than one job at a time; moreover, there is a sense of frustration and a wish to migrate especially in the younger generations, born during the economic crisis (Hansing, 2011). “Unlike their parents and grandparents (...), their main point of reference is the economic crisis and its many social contradictions” (Hansing, 2011, p. 17). Because of the censorship existing in the country and the crave for openness on behalf of the society, Cuban of all ages are keen to search for knowledge and news besides what is already provided by the state (Hansing, 2011). To be in touch with the outside world, Cubans engage with family members residing abroad and with tourists. Also, they use internet connections, video rentals and cable TV antennas although these are very expensive (Hansing, 2011).

The human rights situation in Cuba is problematic. Short-term arbitrary detentions of human rights activists and independent journalists has recently increased noticeably, and the government continues to repress dissent and public criticism (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Preventive detention is a common means to avoid peaceful marches or certain politically-oriented meetings. As suggested earlier, freedom of expression is limited also through the control of mass media. Freedom of movement is also not completely guaranteed due to the government having broad power in restricting the right to travel, basing their restrictions on defense and national security issues or reasons of public interest (Human Rights Watch, 2015, para. 17).

Despite its poor human rights standards, Cuba obtained a regional position in the UN Human Rights Council in 2013. According to Human Rights Watch, Cuba has “regularly voted to prevent scrutiny of serious human rights abuses around the world” as a member of the Council (Human Rights Watch, 2015, para. 26). However, in 2014 it supported a resolution against violence and discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

For now, lots of speculation exists in regards to the economic and social future of Cuba and, in particular, in regards to its political transition. The announcement that Raúl Castro made in 2013 in regards to his five-year term of presidency being his last, raised many questions on a possible democratic future of the country and on the nature of the new elections. The collaborative and supportive spirit between Obama and Castro brings about a possible scenario

where the embargo will be completely lifted and where the two countries will work towards restoring their ties.

Furthermore, on April 2016, the seventh congress of the Cuban Communist Country was held in La Habana with the aim to discuss the continuity of the economic reform and to plan the political future of the country (Escambray, 2016). The congress recognized the inefficiency of the state-controlled economy for which 79% of the legal and economic reforms established at the 6th Congress failed. Moreover, it recognized the potential of investing in the private sector (The Guardian, 2016; Cuba Debate, 2016).

They also announced that Raúl Castro, 84 years old, would remain as the party's first secretary for at least part of the next five years to come, together with José Ramón Machado holding the post of second secretary (Carroll, 2016).

1.2. Women inequality in Cuba

Although the Cuban Constitution guarantees gender equality for all men and women (Chapter VI article 44), and Cuba being the first country to sign the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (UN, 2004), traditional gender roles in Cuba persist and women still have the main responsibility of childbearing and household maintenance, as laws regarding the household, for instance sharing the workload at home, are not enforced (AAUW, 2011).

Furthermore, when looking at statistics it can be said that less than 40% of working-age women are employed in Cuba, which is a lower percentage than in most countries of Latin America (Torregrosa, 2013). Additionally, the salary of Cuban women is about half of their male counterparts, as men are represented in higher-paying professions while women tend to have the main responsibility of caring for their children and the elderly (Torregrosa, 2013).

According to the Human Development Index (HDI), which measures the quality of life via three different indicators -life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling and economic income, Cuba managed to position itself on a high level of development in 2014 by ranking 67th place out of 188 countries with a value of 0.769 (UNDP, 2015).

The Gender-related Development Index (GDI) which measures gender gaps in human development also places Cuba on place 67 with a value of 0.954 (UNDP, 2015). The highest discrepancies are seen in the economic sphere with male economic incomes being 1,96 times higher than females (UNDP, 2015). The same differences were confirmed by the Global Gender Report 2015 where Cuba is placed on rank 29, out of which its index on economic participation and opportunities places Cuba on rank 119 out of 145 countries involved (WEF, 2015).

A positive development in Cuba, however, is seen with the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which measures female representation in economic and political power, such as their representation in management and professional positions (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003; Klasen & Schüler, 2011). It places Cuba on rank 51 out of 182 countries, classifying it as a high development index with the value of 0,68 (UNDP, 2009). This is also apparent from Cuba being ranked third on the global level for having 48.9% of women holding seats in the parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016), and from Cuba's high percentage of women in ministerial positions which has risen to 50% from 21.4% in 2009 (Fox News Latino, 2012).

Contrasting this, however, social researchers in the field of local development found that rural women in Cuba make up only 142,300 of the 1.838 million people who work in livestock, forestry and agriculture etc. (ONEI Statistics as cited in Grogg, 2014). Most work carried out by women in rural areas such as raising livestock and caring for the home and children is neither remunerated nor recognized, which according to social researchers is “one of the worst forms of inequality in rural areas in Cuba” (Grogg, 2014, para. 15).

According to the economist Dayma Echevarría, stereotypes is what keeps women in their role as care-takers, including the lack of support services for mothers, which makes rural women even more vulnerable in regards to their employment (Grogg, 2014). This way, women remain in these traditional gender roles and do not become a part or a voice in their community, while men stay the dominant force and heads of the family who are responsible for earning a salary (Grogg, 2014).

Full development, though, cannot be achieved “unless women and the resources they represent are integrated into the development process [because] women's empowerment is vital

for improving economic, social and political conditions in developing countries” (OECD, 1999, p. 7).

Another aspect that has been criticized in Cuba is the high occurrence of domestic violence, which Cuba does not have a separate law for (Grogg, 2015). Domestic violence also does not get reported to the police very often, nor does the police respond, and the government does not provide report statistics or research on this subject (AAUW, 2011). A study on rural women conducted by the World Bank has found that gender-neutral learning opportunities and laws help in reducing domestic violence and in increasing empowerment for women (The World Bank, 2013). However, these laws should be well enforced and publicized as the study also revealed that in particular men and women in rural communities are not well-informed of their rights and of the existing laws intended to promote gender equality (The World Bank, 2013).

Since the creation of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) in 1960 some progress in gender equality has been made. The FMC helped in shaping the National Action Plan which entered into effect in 1997 and comprises 90 measures that remove obstacles and create conditions that favor the development and improvement of the situation of women in Cuba (UN, 2004). Additionally, several laws were introduced such as the Labor, Civil and Family Code in 1975 which give women equal status in the family, at work and in the society (AAUW, 2011). Moreover, the maternity law which came into effect in 2003, has made it possible for both fathers and mothers, to take maternity leave (Rose, 2015).

The Labor Code, for instance, guarantees equal access to employment and resources and facilitates women the access to education. It has helped in shrinking the women unemployment rate by 4% and has shown positive effects in the education sector as women show a higher enrollment rate than men with a percentage of 65.7% of all students enrolled (UN, 2004). Also, statistics of illiteracy in Cuba show that 99.8% of women in 2015 were literate compared to 60-70% back in 1959 (Douglas, 1989; CIA, 2015). Moreover, healthcare was made free and universal in 1976 which helped in decreasing the rate of infant and maternal mortality (UN, 2004), and has put the conditions of women and children in Cuba onto the same level as of industrialized countries (AAUW, 2011).

All of these developments have helped in improving the situation of women in Cuba, however, despite the creation of new laws and the constitution guaranteeing equality, Cuba has not achieved full gender equality yet, because of the traditional gender roles that persist in the society, and because these laws concerning gender equality at home are often not enforced (AAUW, 2011). Furthermore, while women have the same educational opportunities, for example, these do not translate into professional opportunities or leadership positions yet (Rose, 2015).

Another aspect preventing economic development in Cuba is the Helms Burton Act and the economic, trade and financial embargo imposed on the country by the United States in 1962 and 1996, respectively. Economic consequences arose especially for women and families in rural areas because of shortages of transport, food, sanitary and cleaning products, machinery and agricultural equipment etc. (UN, 2004). Moreover, as most Cuban homes do not possess dryers, washing machines or other modern technology, for instance, it is more difficult for women to maintain the home alone which is why many women with children decline to have a career (AAUW, 2011).

In 2008, President Raúl Castro undertook further economic reforms by distributing land in order to revive the economy and boost food production. However, this undertaking failed in boosting gender equality because it were mostly men who gained the land and benefited from this opportunity (Grogg, 2014). Men remained in decision-making roles in rural areas while women fell back into their traditional roles of being care-takers (Grogg, 2014).

With the relaxation of economic sanctions by President Obama in December 2014 and renewed diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba, the island's economy is expected to become more liberal in future (Sagasti, 2015; Sweig et al., 2013). According to Rose (2015) a rise in the economy could further contribute in strengthening the economic power of women as well.

CHAPTER 2: PROJECT ‘SUBURBAN AGRICULTURE AND COOPERATIVE STRENGTHENING IN TEN MUNICIPALITIES OF CAMAGÜEY, LAS TUNAS AND HOLGUÍN’ BY OXFAM

In this chapter we will introduce the project created by OXFAM and funded by the EU that we will base our analysis on. We will firstly describe all the achievements of the project followed by the strategy that was used. Secondly, we will present the 16 business ventures created within the project which have provided women with more job opportunities as well as strengthened their decision-making power, confidence, awareness on gender-related topics, and entrepreneurial skills.

The history of non-governmental organizations in Cuba is not very long. It started in 1993, within the Special Period, when the government allowed international NGOs to work in the country (OXFAM, n.d.a). OXFAM started its cooperation in Cuba in 1993, on request of the Cuban government. Since then, approximately 20 million dollars have been invested into several projects ran in cooperation with other Cuban institutions, especially in the rural territories in the eastern regions, which are often affected by climate change (OXFAM, n.d.a).

For the analysis of our thesis, we are taking one project OXFAM has carried out in Cuba, within different regions, into consideration. This project was funded by Intermón-Oxfam and the European Union (OXFAM, 2016a, pp. 2-4). It had two national associates: ANAP (National Association of Small Producers) and INIFAT (Institute of Fundamental Research on Tropical Agriculture). It started on the 1st February 2011 and ended on the 31st December 2015. It was completed in Cuba, in concrete in 89 cooperatives of 10 municipalities in the provinces of Camagüey, Las Tunas and Holguín, in the eastern part of the country (OXFAM, 2016a, pp. 2-4).

According to the International Co-operative Alliance, a cooperative (also known as coop or co-op) is an autonomous association of people who, voluntarily, unite themselves to form their own economic, social and cultural alliance. It is done through a jointly owned and democratically controlled business (Yousuf & Lal 2013, p. 33). An agricultural cooperative, known also as farmers’ coop, is a cooperative where farmers invest their resources into a certain area of activity (Yousuf & Lal, 2013, p. 33).

ANAP is the main partner of this project. It is the Cuban National Association of Small Producers, and it has 4,331 cooperatives that include 331,874 members/associates, 35,971 of which (the 11%) are women (EcuRed, n.d).

The direct final beneficiaries of the project were approximately 1,268,399 inhabitants of 10 municipalities that represent 54% of the population of the three provinces and 11% of the country (OXFAM, 2016a, pp. 2-4). The target groups were: the associates of 89 cooperatives that belong to ANAP -approximately 10,565 people: 8,968 men and 1,597 women- and their families; ANAP's executives positions -emphasizing gender commissions; and provincial and municipal groups of urban and suburban agriculture (OXFAM, 2016a, pp. 2-4).

The main aim of this project was to contribute to the food sovereignty of 10 municipalities of three eastern provinces in Cuba, based on the principles of sustainability and gender equality. Its purpose was to strengthen the cooperatives by producing, commercializing and processing healthier and better food for the local consumption; to improve the capacity of cooperatives in labor; and to strengthen the presence and representation of women in the manufacturing sector (OXFAM, 2016a, p. 2).

The project was introduced into a changing national context and it represented an experiment to promote and strengthen the modernization of the economic model in the country. To do so, the project promoted the changes from the productive perspective of the agricultural and the livestock sector, through the implementation of local experiences of micro-businesses, as well as through the stimulation of other ways of commercialization, and the creation of opportunities of jobs for women (OXFAM, 2016a, p. 2).

This project consisted of four steps, set out for four different goals, which the project was planning to achieve. Those goals, called results, were described in the OXFAM report (2016a, p. 2) as follows:

- R1) To increase the production of food, decreasing the dependence on external resources;
- R2) To increase the distribution of the cooperatives' production locally;
- R3) To strengthen the human, technological, organizational and infrastructural area of the cooperative sector;

R4) To reach gender equality by incorporating women into the cooperative sector - through the offer of membership, jobs and directive positions within the structures of ANAP.

In this paper, we are focusing on all the activities and results that arise from goal number four (R4), which is the only goal that is directly focused on reaching gender equality by challenging traditional gender roles in the country.

The result number four (R4), as the last phase of the whole project, took place in the last two years from 2013-2015. This is when an idea crossed Marta Rodrigues' mind, the manager of the project: she thought that OXFAM could encourage women in opening their own businesses (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 92, l. 3-10). Therefore, OXFAM decided to directly ask the women of the cooperatives what kind of jobs they would like to do and which economic activities they thought would be useful for them; based on their answers, the project would help them in realizing their dreams (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 92, l. 5-10). The full participation of ANAP into the creation of those initiatives was essential, since ANAP is the main Cuban organization of Small Farmers, which all cooperatives are a part of, and with which many of the farmers are affiliated (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 92, l. 5-10).

Consequently, the main result is that by now there are 16 business ventures which are led by women and which were established during the last phase (R4) of the implementation of the project. According to Rodrigues, these initiatives do not have any official data yet since they are very new. However, through a documentary and several testimonies of women we will be able to explain how the project was achieved in more detail.

2.1. Achievements of the R4

The goal R4 was to strengthen the process of the establishment of gender equality inside the cooperative-farming sector. Through activities which supported and strengthened the implementation of ANAP's gender strategy, this project developed different actions focused on increasing the number of female members of ANAP; strengthening the knowledge of women and men related to gender equality and to their working roles without any discrimination; promoting the leadership of women inside the economic sector with their participation in the implementation

of economic initiatives; and promoting women's rights and gender equality (OXFAM, 2016a, pp. 60-75).

The goal R4 has helped in achieving the following results as part of the overall project: achievement of a better incorporation of women within the cooperative sector -through membership, offer of jobs, including management positions within ANAP (OXFAM, 2016a, pp. 60-75).

2.1.1. Strategies used to achieve these results

The main strategy to achieve these results, as mentioned above, was via the creation of 16 business ventures which were created, established and maintained by women; ANAP and OXFAM supported these initiatives financially and via trainings. For the women leading these economic ventures, this opportunity represented a way to challenge and assure their autonomy; as well as a way to transform their lives and those of the people surrounding them. Today, beyond working as remunerated employers, the protagonists of these economic initiatives promoted new leaderships of women within their communities (Machin et. al. 2015, p. 5).

The pre-context of the project showed that prior to the initiatives, the women were always situated in the less remunerated positions with lesser presence in the managing and decision-making positions (Machin et. al. 2015, p. 10). These were also often subjected to strong stereotypes regarding gender roles not only in the labor sector, but also on the domestic level. Even though the reduction of the gender gaps was one of the more modest aims of the project, it became one of the bigger achievements of the overall project as well as a guide for further efforts (Machin et. al. 2015, p. 10).

At the beginning, the creation of these initiatives was seen favorable because there was a lack of trainings and workshops aiming to promote gender equality. The gender school of ANAP had disappeared some time before, and that resulted in less opportunities for women to get empowered (Machin et. al. 2015, pp. 10-15). However, ANAP was, and still is, one of the most important organizations to promote the development of Cuban rural communities. Through this project, the alliance between ANAP and OXFAM became more relevant and also helped in strengthening the mutual trust (Machin et. al. 2015, pp. 10-15).

Thanks to OXFAM, ANAP understood that sexism -machismo- limited the personal and professional growth of women within their organization and recognized the need to enhance its gender strategy (Machin et. al., 2015, p. 11). This strategy led to the creation of jobs and to the increase in the number of women within the cooperatives (see achievements R4) (Machin et. al., 2015, p. 11).

2.2. The 16 current initiatives

From a long process of personal growth and innovation, 16 economic initiatives were created by 10 different cooperatives. Also, more than 50 female producers are now directly involved in the cooperatives associated to ANAP. A list of all these 16 initiatives, divided into the 10 cooperatives, will follow below (Machin et. al., 2015, pp. 32-35).

1. CPA ‘Ramón López Peña’; Puerto Padre, Las Tunas:
 - Cultivation and marketing of flowers and floral ornaments.
2. CPA ‘Juanito Garcell’; Camalote, Nuevitas, Camagüey:
 - Goat cheese production;
 - Beauty salon for men and women;
 - Laundry and tailor shop.
3. CCS ‘Calixto garcía’; Holguín:
 - Cultivation and marketing of flowers.
4. CCS ‘Conrado Benítez’; Redención, Minas, Camagüey:
 - Laundry and tailor shop.
5. CCS ‘Regino Guerrero’; Banes, Holguín:
 - Production and marketing of organic fertilizers.
6. CCS ‘Sabino Pupo’; Camalote, Nuevitas, Camagüey:
 - Flower shop;
 - Beauty salon;
 - Communal laundry shop.
7. CPA ‘17 de mayo’; Gibara, Holguín:
 - Handcraft and production of furniture.
8. CCS ‘Josué País’; Barranca, Las Tunas:

- Handcraft made of “malangueta”, a local indigenous plant.
9. CCS ‘Camilo Cienfuegos’; Banes, Holguín:
 - Cultivation and marketing of flowers and floral ornaments.
 10. CPA ‘Ignacio Agramonte’; Minas, Camagüey:
 - Beauty salon;
 - Laundry and tailor shop;
 - Tire reparation.

2.2.1. Obstacles faced by the initiatives during the process

The obstacles that the women were facing began even before the start of the project. Many questions regarding the initiatives and their protagonists arose from different spaces – administrations, families, cooperatives, etc., as a consequence of the sexist context they were trying to fight (Machin et. al. 2015, pp. 31-32).

The most common existing barriers were experienced in the family sphere and in the space of the cooperatives, as follows:

- a. family sphere:
 - skepticism about women being a part of the economical remunerated labor sector;
 - denial of the participation of women in workshops outside the community;
 - verbal and psychological violence against women;
- b. within cooperatives:
 - undervaluation of women by the board of directors;
 - no support from some of their presidents;
 - delay in the decision-making process;
 - stagnation/ ultraconservatism;
 - appropriation of a part of the resources destined to the initiatives on behalf of some men.

These initiatives pointed out that women were in need of strengthened abilities in different places e.g. at home, in the cooperatives and in the community. It was not enough to integrate women's rights into the rules or policies of the institutions or organizations. The

reduction of gender gaps has to happen alongside the compromise of many people who accept the equality of women (Machin et. al. 2015, pp. 22-25).

The most common questions men asked during the process, regardless whether they were part of the initiatives or not, were: ‘Why are these initiatives only for women?’, ‘Why are trainings only for them?’, ‘Why are that many resources and opportunities directed to a group of women only?’ (Machin et. al. 2015, pp. 22-25). These questions showed:

- A lack of awareness with gender justice/equality;
- The belief that everything has been achieved because of the legal guarantees that exist for women in Cuba;
- A lack of information about the reasons and methods of the project;
- The feeling of risk -or uncertainty- to lose power, to lose the decision-making ability, and to lose resources allocated to the initiatives;
- The need to be at the center of the decision-making process within the cooperatives.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, we will explain the methods that we used to conduct our research and why we have chosen the particular theories for our paper. We will also describe the type of material we used and the limitations that we encountered in finding available sources.

3.1. Motivation

The reasons that inspired us to study the situation of women in Cuba were several, however, we encountered many limitations along the way. In fact, it was hard to find thorough information regarding social topics such as gender equality and empowerment. Nevertheless, we decided to continue writing about this topic as it picked our interest, and because we would like to contribute to an issue that is still under-researched. By this we mean that gender equality in Cuba is often researched in projects that encompass a wide range of developing countries, but that is not often researched on its own (Acosta-Belen & Bose, 1990; Bjerre-Poulsen et al., 2012). In addition, while much research has been done on the quantification of empowerment, for example, via the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and the Gender Development Index (GDI) measures, not much has been done for the development community and practitioners, who need an operational measure to analyze and track empowerment (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003; Beteta, 2006; Schüler, 2006; Klasen & Schüler, 2011). Therefore, this paper tries to build on the attempt of a measurement framework created by Malhotra, Schuler and Boender and to adapt it to the Cuban culture on the basis of OXFAM's project.

We have specifically chosen the project 'Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening in ten municipalities of Camagüey, Las Tunas and Holguín' funded by Oxfam and the EU because it was the only completed project available to us, which also focused on gender and was fully accessible. Furthermore, the project incorporates many initiatives spread out in different municipalities in Cuba and was done over a five-year long period from 2011 to 2015. The first point was particularly important to our goal because it gave us the chance to evaluate the empowering methods used in different economic initiatives. The second point, regarding the time span of five years, and the fact that the project finished in 2015, helped us in getting a full insight

into the empowerment process of this project and a clear overview of the current situation of how women can be empowered in Cuba.

3.2. Research design

In our project we are using a qualitative research design with a constructivist and all-inclusive approach. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) this position is described as believing in “multiple constructed realities that generate different meanings for different individuals, and whose interpretations depend on the researcher’s lens” (p. 270). In other words, our epistemological assumption is that every person has a different view of the world which is difficult to capture via quantitative research.

Based on our problem formulation and research questions, we have chosen an inductive research approach for this paper starting from a specific observation of gender inequality in rural Cuban areas, moving to broader generalizations and theories (Creswell, 1998). Since the inductive approach aims at analyzing a phenomenon based on individuals’ experiences and perceptions of this phenomena (Trochim, 2006), we find this approach to be the most suitable for this paper. In particular, because we will be using testimonies of women who have been part of the project as well as an interview conducted with Marta Rodrigues, the manager of the project, as part of the analysis.

Therefore, we are not aiming at a quantification of data, which is very often used in combination with a deductive approach, rather we try to “describe” and “decode” a meaning of a phenomena (Van Maanen, 1983, p. 9). Instead of the measurement, we focus on the meaning of data (Collis & Hussey, 2009) and on the description of a subject’s experience and perspective of the world (Bryman & Bell, 2007). With the qualitative research interview being a “unique potential for obtaining access to and describing the lived everyday world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 54), we have chosen to conduct a semi-structured interview with Marta Rodrigues, using open-ended interview questions in order to leave space for spontaneous questions and thoughts that might arise during an interview (Saunders et al., 2009). An outline of the interview questions together with the interview itself and the women’s testimonies can be found in the appendices (appendices A-C).

As this paper concentrates on three major concepts, namely ‘gender’, ‘gender equality’ and ‘empowerment’, which are very much discussed within the academic literature, we want to highlight that our work follows the argument of Judith Butler (1990) and Alice Dreger (1998) according to whom gender is a mere social construct not directly derivable from biological features, but that it is culture and context-specific. We assume that through projects focusing on empowerment and gender equality, such as the one that we are analyzing, the current perception of gender roles in Cuba can be challenged in the long-run.

The range of sources we are using include both narratives, and empirical research such as academic journals. We consider a combination of primary and secondary sources, from online Cuban, English and American newspapers, to academic literature such as journals, research papers and books. We also took all the communicative materials that were produced by the 16 economic initiatives of this project: a video-documentary with personal testimonies of the people involved in this project; a booklet of the business ventures; and a photo exhibition. Additionally, we use the final report written by the project manager as our main source. The project report is a document written by Marta Rodrigues, the manager of the project of OXFAM. It was written at the end of the implementation of the project and is an unpublished, internal document of the NGO. It is a 121-page document where the results of the whole project are summarized in terms of how food sovereignty has been achieved together with gender equality. We have used this document as our main source, but we also wanted a more personal content. This is the reason why we looked for empirical data and why we used the documentary, the booklet and the photo gallery as additional sources. Through these communicative products we were able to better understand the people involved by, for instance, analyzing their personal testimonies. We also interviewed Marta Rodrigues to get more information about the project.

3.3. Research questions and theories

As mentioned in chapter one, our problem formulation is: **“Why are the empowerment strategies used in the project ‘Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening’ from Oxfam and the EU insufficient towards the realization of gender equality in rural Cuba?”**.

In order to solve this problem we have come up with four research questions to help us break down the problem into several parts.

Our four research questions are as follows:

1. How do we define empowerment and gender equality?
2. How has the project ‘Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening’ impacted women and men in terms of empowerment and gender equality?
3. What is the project lacking to reach gender equality and empowerment according to our definitions of these concepts?
4. How does OXFAM understand empowerment and gender equality based on the project?

We have chosen the questions mentioned above because we suspect that what OXFAM perceives as gender equality and empowerment in this specific project does not fully match our definitions of the same terms. For this reason, we discuss our own definitions of gender equality and empowerment as well as OXFAM’s.

Because of our assumption, according to which the empowerment strategies of the project are not enough to fight gender inequality in rural Cuba, we thought it would be essential to explain the existing debate behind the key terms ‘gender’ and ‘gender equality’. We will offer an overview on the main literature concerning this debate, for then being able to take a stance on the ongoing discussion and to create our own definitions of gender and gender equality, which will be the basis of our analysis. Therefore, we will explore the theoretical positions of scholars such as Alice Dreger, Judith Butler, Mitchell and Moser, but also explore the definitions offered by organizations such as OXFAM and the UN. We will offer an overview on literature regarding strategies to reach gender equality, including the gender equality model based on the elements of ‘sameness’, ‘difference’, and ‘transformation’; we will also introduce the two main approaches used in gender planning: Women In Development (WID) and Gender And Development (GAD).

When introducing empowerment theory in chapter four, several theories are discussed. Firstly, feminist and social theories are used to introduce the concept of power and to lay a basis for the empowerment theories to come. In particular, Hannah Arendt’s, Iris Young’s and Michel Foucault’s perceptions of power are used to demonstrate its relational and transformative characteristics that power and empowerment entail. The first empowerment theory used is of E. Summerson Carr and his concept of empowerment being a process, while the second one used is Anju Malhotra, Sidney Ruth Schuler and Carol Boender’s measurement framework of

empowerment. Those two theories were deliberately chosen for this paper as they help in analyzing and in finding an answer to the problem formulation. To find out what exactly the project is lacking, and what else could be done in terms of empowerment, a combination of both theories is presented.

Through Carr's empowerment cycle the process of empowerment can be analyzed step by step, giving the reader a full overview of what experiences the women participating in an empowerment project are going through. Furthermore, with this characteristic being a major part of why measuring empowerment is difficult to achieve, it was essential to include his concept as it is connected to the evaluation of empowerment.

The other major theory that we rely on is Malhotra et al.'s measurement framework. Their study about empowering women, which was published as a *Background Paper Prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender* in 2002, is taking various factors and indicators for measuring empowerment into account. Their research is based on theoretical, methodological and empirical literature with the aim of finding an operational measurement of women empowerment for practitioners of the international development community. The measurement framework is applicable internationally to various projects but also allows room for flexibility and for the incorporation of one's own local project indicators. This adaptability was one reason why this measurement framework was chosen. The other reason was because it has different layers to it, from six dimensions to three different levels of social aggregation. One key element that is presented in the framework and highlighted in their theory is the importance of the cultural context within the measuring indicators, which is what many frameworks are lacking (Malhotra et al., 2002). Many measurement frameworks are either oriented towards just universal projects or just very specific cultural contexts, whereby this framework takes both sides into account.

CHAPTER 4: THEORIES

We will now introduce the concepts and theories we found to be the most appropriate ones to explain how gender equality can be achieved in rural Cuba. Empowerment and gender equality are highly connected and interrelated concepts. In fact, empowerment theory focuses on empowerment strategies, the power relation between men and women, and how gender equality is achieved through empowerment. On the other hand, the theoretical approaches towards gender equality focus on the strategies and variables that help in eradicating gender subordination. Therefore, in this chapter, we will explore the main literature and theoretical positions in regards to the concepts of ‘gender’, ‘gender equality’ and then of ‘empowerment’.

4.1. Defining gender, gender equality and the theoretical approaches WID and GAD

In this sub-chapter we will offer an overview of the main literature in regards to gender and gender equality. We will explore the notion of gender developed throughout the 70’s, meant as a social construct that goes beyond the traditional male and female dichotomy. We will then explore the existing discussions and definitions of gender equality, and see how the theoretical approaches of Women In Development (WID) and Gender And Development (GAD) claim to support it.

4.1.1. Gender

It is out of doubt that belonging to a particular sex or gender group influences the life of individuals worldwide to some degree in regards to access to basic spheres of their everyday lives such as safety, politics, freedom of expression, education, work, health and many other factors. These social practices of gender are intrinsic of the specific social contexts, appearing often as natural and unproblematic (Waylen et al., 2013, p.1).

The term **gender** emerged for the first time in 1969 within the works of the psychologist Robert Stoller and in reference to intersexed individuals; this concept was then recalled by

theorists such as Gayle Rubin in 1975 (Jackson, 1998, p. 133). The term suggested a substantial shift of focus from ‘women’ to the concept of ‘gender’, replacing the attention from the biological difference between sexes, to the social aspects of gender (Colclough, 2008, p. 58).

In *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*, we find the authors agreeing with the notion that “gender is never just about sex but varies by race, ethnicity, nation, class, and a variety of other dimensions of social life” (Waylen et al., 2013, p. 2), including “sexuality, family, work, institutionalized relations of power and violence” (Waylen et al., 2013, p. 19).

Alice Dreger (1998) defines the term ‘sex’ as merely related to anatomical features, whereas “‘gender’ is used as a category of self-and/or social identification” (p. 10).

Judith Butler (1990) and, later, Alice Dreger (1998), claim that the categorization of individuals into the dichotomy of being female/male fails to exist when intersex individuals are taken into account. In their research, the two authors highlight the pressure that intersex individuals experience by complying with one of the two sexes, due to social and cultural conventions that find intersex status to be a ‘doubtful sex’ (Dreger, 1998; Butler, 1990). By this, they aim to show how sex, by itself, has no agency in defining gender, and how gender is a mere social construct traditionally linked to ‘what is feminine’ and ‘what is masculine’ on the basis of culture. In fact, Butler describes gender as a performative act:

“that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way. That expectation, in turn, is based upon the perception of sex (...).” (Butler, 1988, pp. 527-528).

By this, she asserts that the idea of gender is a pure social construct created by a series of acts, which are consolidated throughout time (Butler, 1988, p. 523).

4.1.2. Gender Equality

Gender equality has been the focus of governmental policies and aims of international organizations worldwide. However, the very meaning of gender equality has been a subject of numerous debates. At the center of this debate was the broadening of the understanding of equality itself. This implied enlarging the focus from the redistribution of resources to the

recognition and representation of cultural identities (Waylen et al., 2013, p. 731). With this being the main legacy of the debate, it has become a common understanding that gender equality relates not only to a misdistribution of goods, but also to a cultural oppression (Waylen et al., 2013).

Gender equality is defined by the UN as the pursue of:

“equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development” (UN Women, n.d.a, para. 2).

OXFAM’s definition of gender equality is as follows:

“(…) the situation in which women and men enjoy equal status, conditions and responsibilities, and have equal opportunities for realizing their full human rights and potential and can benefit equally from the results – regardless of being born male or female. Gender equality encompasses equality in social relations and equal access to, and control over, resources by women and men” (OXFAM, 2013, para. 4).

The organization also states that:

“it is women and girls who face the most discrimination as a result of gender inequality. (...) They have fewer resources, less power and less influence in decision making when compared to men. They are exposed to various forms of violence and exploitation and experience further inequality because of their ethnicity, age, race, class, marital status, sexual orientation and (dis)ability. We believe that transforming gender and power relations, and the structures, norms and values that underpin them, is critical to ending poverty and challenging inequality. We believe that women taking control and taking collective action are the most important driver of sustained improvements in women's rights, and are a powerful force to end poverty not only for women and girls, but for others too” (OXFAM, n.d.b, para. 1).

Ronald Inglehart (2008) states that gender equality is central to human development, because it is an essential aspect of human equality, meant as civil and political freedom and human rights (pp. 142-143). Therefore, gender equality is directly linked to the rise of self-expression values in the post industrial society, which brought an increasing tolerance of human diversity and a variety of anti-discrimination movements (Inglehart, 2008, pp. 142-143).

As Judith Squires highlights in *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*:

“gender equality can be understood in a range of ways, variously focusing attention on life expectancy and income distribution (Sen 1992), welfare regimes and employment rates (Sainsbury 1996), or

political participation (Kenworthy and Malami 1999). Nonetheless, its role (...) generally rested on a presumption that the equality in question was formal equality of opportunity between women and men” (Waylen et al., 2013, p. 742).

Gender equality is pursued by the effort in changing policies, the introduction of gender quotas to ensure women’s participation in political decision-making and their inclusion in political debates (Waylen et al., 2013).

The development of feminist approaches of gender and gender equality in the 70’s and 80’s led to a discussion in regards to the multiple strands of equality: in fact, other identity groups, in particular ethnic minority ones, started coming forward and claiming equality following the same feminist principle of cultural recognition and representation (Waylen et al., 2013). A new challenging perspective of multiculturalism made its way into the study of gender equality, and the concept of intersectionality emerged, indicating the cross-cutting nature of forms of oppression within race, gender and class (Waylen et al., 2013, p. 732).

As described by Sylvia Walby, a popular model of gender equality consists of three interconnected elements. **Sameness** places the focus on equal opportunities and equal treatment. According to this model, equality is sought through the inclusion of women in the spheres where they were typically excluded. Critiques of this approach claim that through it, women enter the set of standards that is a domain of men and, as a consequence, the previous male norms remain the standard norm (Walby, 2003, pp. 6-7). The second element is **difference**, that is, the awareness of the existing gender segregation in the society that is due to biological difference. Because of this situation of segregation, there is the need to create new spaces that accommodate the different gender identities (Verloo, 2005). This can be done by creating tailored programs for the disadvantaged group in question in order to overcome differences and to reach gender equality (Walby, 2003, pp. 6-7). The critiques towards the difference approach claim that “it is difficult to recognize differences, while avoiding the trap of essentialism and relying on essentialist notions of femininity and masculinity. It can reinforce existing stereotypes and the current organization of labor and care” (Fraser as cited in European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013, p. 8). Finally, **transformation** focuses on the change of gender relations: it highlights the process of the creation of new standards that replace the previous ones, based on gender segregation (Walby, 2003, pp. 6-7). This can be done by gender mainstreaming, through the redesign of systems and structures (Fraser as cited in European Institute for Gender Equality,

2013, p. 8). In particular, gender mainstreaming “involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/ dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects” (UN Women, n.d.b, para. 1).

4.1.3. Women In Development & Gender And Development

In the 1970s, the dominant strand of thinking in regards to the fulfillment of gender equality demanded more equity and social justice towards women. This approach, called Women In Development (WID) was aimed at modifying the development policy, by showing that women could have positive productive contributions and, consequently, at economic growth. In doing so, development planners and policy makers would be influenced to invest economic resources into women, reaching a higher equity with men (Razavi & Miller, 1995, p. 1).

The gender development expert Caroline Moser (1993) outlined the dominant approaches of WID:

- 1) a focus on welfare, which aims at meeting the practical needs of women within their reproductive role, for example through food provision;
- 2) a focus on equity, which promotes equality by using an economic stance;
- 3) the use of an anti-poverty approach, which focuses on women’s productivity through the eradication of poverty;
- 4) the focus on efficiency, by aiming at a more efficient development where women are active participants of economic contribution, while carrying out their ‘triple role’: reproductive -childcare and household maintenance; productive -remunerated work; and community role -maintenance of community and social networks (Venter et al., 2006, pp. 137-138).

However, the problematic implication of this strategy was that reaching gender equality became secondary and conditional upon showing economic profit (Razavi & Miller, 1995, pp. I-1). For example, attention was mainly drawn to women’s productive labor rather than social welfare and maternity issues. As a result, it turned out that policy makers prioritized what development needed from women rather than the other way around (Razavi & Miller, 1995, p. 1).

The approach of WID focuses on **practical needs** of women. This is done by helping them to improve their perceived immediate needs by providing basic services such as access to health care, nutrition, water supplies, income earning for household provisioning, housing and basic services, family food provision (Moser, 1993; Mitchell, 1996; Williams et al., 1994).

However, these needs “(...) arise from women’s roles within the sexual division of labor” (Wallace & March as cited in Mitchell 1996, p. 140); for this reason, they arise from the subordinate position of women and aim at reinforcing their reproductive and productive role (Williams et al., 1994). Since these immediate needs arise mainly from the requirements requested by the society, intervening merely on practical needs could actually reinforce traditional gender roles (Mitchell, 1996). For example, relief projects focused merely on the practical need of generating income that do not invest in training within the fields of accounting, management, and control over primary resources, may eventually reinforce the existing gender inequalities (Williams et al., 1994, p. 10). Therefore, intervening on practical needs alone does not challenge women’s subordination in the society and does not question the prevailing division of labor (Mitchell, 1996; Moser, 1993; Williams et al., 1994).

For these reasons, a strong criticism has spread towards the efficacy of the WID approach since the late 1970s. In fact, the focus that WID had placed on women’s lack of resources left the problem of women’s subordination unaltered. A new perspective started to develop from the critiques that feminists raised in the 80’s: a new approach called Gender And Development (GAD) emerged, placing a main focus on gender roles and on the relational nature of women’s subordination (Venter et al., 2006). Instead of fighting merely to obtain more economic resources, the restriction to the access of those resources was being questioned; moreover, the social construction of gender identity and gender roles was emphasized (Razavi & Miller, 1995). In fact, “the value of a symbolic analysis of gender [...] lies in understanding how men and women are socially constructed, and how those constructions are powerfully reinforced by the social activities that both define and are defined by them” (Moore as cited in Razavi & Miller, 1995, p. 12).

With a GAD approach, the final goal of gender equality is reached by placing a focus on **strategic gender interests**. These aim at transforming women’s subordinate position in the society by challenging the gendered division of labor and power and by reshaping the nature of

the relationship between men and women (Williams et al., 1994). These strategic interests aim at changing or strengthening women's position in the society and can be understood as a process towards their full social, economic, and political autonomy (Mitchell, 1996; Barrig & Wehkamp as cited in Mitchell, 1996). However, addressing this type of interests requires long-term planning.

As Maxine Molyneux (1985) explains, strategic objectives could be the

“abolition of the sexual division of labour, the alleviation of the burden of domestic labor and childcare, the removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination, the attainment of political equality, the establishment of freedom of choice over childbearing, and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women” (p. 233).

As Williams et al. (1994) point out in *Oxfam Gender Training Manual*, clear examples of institutionalized forms of discrimination are the right to own land and property, as well as the access to education and credit. Moreover, it is highlighted that, to fight gender inequality, it is extremely important to involve men in the process. OXFAM states that “contributions of both men and women are needed for positive and lasting change” (OXFAM Australia, n.d., para. 6);

In fact,

“it is a basic principle of community development that people themselves should participate in making the decisions which affect their lives. This means that women as well as men must be consulted, and that men as well as women must tackle gender inequality” (Williams et al., 1994, p. 100).

Ann Whitehead emphasizes that “any study of women and development...cannot start from the viewpoint that the problem is women, but rather men and women, and more specifically the socially constituted relations between them” (Whitehead as cited in Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 402).

Baden and Reeves (2000) highlight that although WID and GAD approaches are indeed theoretically different, in practice the division line is less clear. According to the authors, while committing to a gender approach typical of GAD, development agencies' programs might involve elements of both approaches. In fact, they argue that the primary institutional perspective of development agencies are WID-oriented, fighting mostly for anti-poverty and efficiency policies (Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 33). As Suzette Mitchell (1996) points out, providing literacy courses to women who do not have enough food to feed their families would not be effective;

therefore it is necessary to address both practical and strategic needs at the same time (p. 140). In fact, development interventions aiming at improving women's social condition -as in material condition- must, at the same time address women's social position -as in the social, political, economic and cultural position of women in relation to men of the same group (Williams et al., 1994, p. 100).

As Williams (1994) points out in *The Oxfam Gender Training Manual*, the key to support women's development is through empowerment, which means "enabling women to take an equal place with men, and to participate equally in the development process in order to achieve control over factors of production on an equal basis with men" (Williams et al., 1994, p. 292). Participation is directly linked to the concept of empowerment and aims at involving the community in the development decisions (Williams et al., 1994, p. 214). To do this, it is critical that "women themselves identify what the strategic issues and paths of actions are for them" (Williams et al., 1994, p. 10).

According to the *Women's Development Criteria* described by Suzanne Williams (1994), the level women's social development can be demonstrated via five hierarchical levels. These levels are: 1) equality of material welfare, such as food supply, health care, income etc.; 2) equality of access to factors of production; 3) conscientization, as in understanding of that gender roles are cultural and can be changed; 4) equality of participation in needs assessment, project formulation, implementation and evaluation; and 5) equality of control over factors of production and over the distribution of benefits (Williams et al., 1994, p. 293). These levels are hierarchical, so the last point 'equality of control' indicates a higher empowerment and equality than the ones that are listed first.

4.2. Defining Empowerment Theory

As the goal of this project is to analyze empowerment methods used by different cooperatives and to evaluate them, this part will focus on empowerment theory. Firstly, the concept of power will be discussed, empowerment will then be defined and the empowerment process will be explained. Secondly, a measurement framework will be presented which will be used as an evaluation tool for the implemented empowerment methods.

4.2.1. Definition of power

Before we can start defining empowerment, it is essential to discuss the concept of **power** in order to understand how the power relation between men and women is connected to gender discrimination and inequality and to understand how empowerment can help alter the situation.

The concept of power has been a highly debated topic in feminist theory. It started in 1980's and 1990's as the notion of transforming power relations aiming at social justice and the transformation of economic, social and political structures in favour of women's rights (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Power, in liberal feminist theory, was understood to be a resource which was unequally distributed in society between men and women, meaning that it is a social good that "can be possessed by individuals in greater or lesser amounts" (Young, 1990, p. 31), something that men have but women do not (Otkin as cited in Waylen et al., 2013).

As this concept lacked in demonstrating the relationship between women and men, other feminists have suggested a different meaning of power and understood it to be relational, in particular, a relation of domination (Young, 1990). This can also be termed as 'power over' somebody, with men dominating over women by placing them in a subordinate position (Young; 1990). This power is perceived as negative and coercive stemming from the notion of patriarchal power (Waylen et al., 2013).

However, also this concept was contested as some feminists perceived this concept of domination to be a masculinist perception of power and therefore suggested a reconceptualization of power to a more female theory (Haslanger et al., 2012). In this other, re-formulated approach, feminists have moved away from the coercive 'power over' concept towards a 'power to' notion which entails the capacity to empower and transform oneself and others (Waylen et al., 2013; Wartenberg, 1990). Mary Parker Follett, for example, describes this power as coactive in terms of a community based model of empowerment (as cited in Waylen et al., 2013), similar to Hannah Arendt's definition of power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" (1970, p.44), which requires dialogue with others as well as people working collectively to bring about social change (Young, 1994). This strand of thinking is linked to the concept of 'power with'

which is based on collaboration and mutual support as individuals have to find common ground to change matters (Young as cited in Waylen et al., 2013).

Iris Young and Jean Baker Miller offer another, transformed understanding of power, one of ‘power within’ which is about the development of one’s autonomy, confidence and self-control, a power that comes from within to empower oneself and enhance one’s self-development (Miller as cited in Waylen et al., 2013). It also sees power as institutionalized relations such as social, political institutions as well as norms and traditions in which people exist. Michel Foucault describes this power as a product of dynamic relationships which “circulates” and “functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands” (1977, p. 98).

As empowerment is about changing power relations and structures (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015) these different versions of power are needed to better understand what empowerment is about and why it is needed to change gender inequality. It also helps the reader to understand empowerment in the context of a relationship between men and women, on which this paper is built. Keeping this in mind, the following section will introduce the reader to the theory of empowerment and its characteristics.

4.2.2. Definition of empowerment

The word **empowerment** came first onto the scene in 1975 when it was used with regards to civil rights, in particular in combination with the empowerment of the black community. Grassroots and health organizations continued using the word empowerment and it became a popular term in academic literature and in the field of development. From 1980s onwards the term empowerment was also used in combination with marginalized people such as the poor or women (Lausch, 2011).

In 1995 empowerment was recognized as a major objective in development goals: firstly, in the Copenhagen Declaration of the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) (Husain & Dutta, 2014) and secondly, in the Report of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women which captured their agenda for women empowerment in the following terms: “the principle of shared

power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities” (UN, 1995, no. 1). At the same time, OXFAM presented its first definition of empowerment defining it as “challenging the forms of oppression which compel millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights” (Oxfam as cited in Oxaal & Baden, 1997).

Empowerment as such, has been and still is associated with various terms like ‘agency’, ‘autonomy’, ‘power’, ‘gender equality’, ‘discrimination’ etc.. Because of this wide variation and usage of the term empowerment, the definition and interpretation of the word varies (Malhotra et al., 2002).

Social and gender theorists such as Naila Kabeer (1999) as well as Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinsohn (2005) offer a broad definition of the term empowerment, facilitating the usage and the application of the term across different areas of the development sector. Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) define empowerment as “a person’s capacity to make effective choices and to transform choices into desired actions outcomes” (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005, p. 4), while Kabeer explains it as “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. 6).

In the context of women empowerment Gita Sen defines empowerment as “altering relations of power [...] which constrain women’s options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being” (as cited in Malhotra et al., 2002, p. 5). In her work about empowerment Sen not only focuses on the power relation between men and women but also highlights the importance of human diversity and the context of empowerment, which goes beyond the economic level (Sen as cited in Robeyns, 2003).

Bonnie Keller and Dorcas Chilila Mbwewe describe women empowerment more detailed as “a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination” (as cited in Malhotra et al. 2002, p. 6).

Georgina Ashworth, furthermore, adds the importance of agency when describing empowerment as “the recognition from within oneself of capabilities and capacities to exercise influence, power and leadership in some or all social relations; and then going out and acting on that recognition” (as cited in Mitchell, 1996, p. 142).

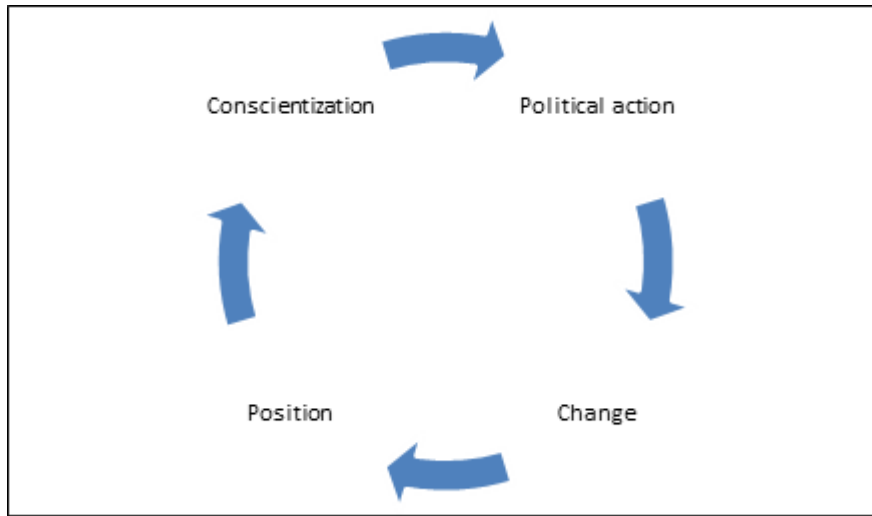
All of these definitions present key elements which are commonly used when defining empowerment which include ‘options’, ‘choice’, ‘control’ and ‘power’ (Malhotra et al., 2002).

Furthermore, Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) stress two other important factors which are that of ‘human agency’ and the idea of empowerment being a ‘process’. Human agency/ personal agency can be understood as the capacity to make meaningful choices or to express preferences in order to live a good life. Together with options or opportunity structures, which are the existence of formal, informal institutions, laws, frameworks, norms etc., human agency influences the degree to which a person is empowered. According to Alsop and Heinsohn the degree of empowerment can be measured by the existence of choice, the use of choice, and the achievement of choice (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005). Regarding empowerment being a process, more will be discussed in the next section.

4.2.3. The process of empowerment

There has been a debate in the academic literature about whether or not empowerment can be seen as a process or as a result. Some authors also imply that empowerment is both a process and an outcome (Rappaport, 1984). However, the majority of authors conclude that empowerment is a process (Carr, 2003). This is because it is not a “commodity to be acquired, but a transforming process constructed through action” (Kieffer as cited in Rappaport, 1984, p. 27), an ongoing process of acquiring skills which is developmental (Zimmermann, 1995). This is an important factor and characteristic of empowerment to point out as this is the reason why empowerment is difficult to measure which will be discussed at a later point in this paper. Because of the cyclical nature of empowerment, Carr (2003) introduced the following figure to demonstrate that characteristic:

Figure 1: The process of empowerment



(Carr, 2003, p. 14)

As every process has a starting point, Carr has named the point of departure in his cycle of empowerment **position**. By terming the first step position Carr hints at it being changeable in nature, meaning people who experience empowerment move from one position to the next as indicated in the figure.

According to him the starting point is a state of powerlessness or oppression, a position that is meant to be overcome. Many theorists have furthermore agreed that powerlessness is not only composed of socioeconomic factors, such as the lack of external support or political power, but also of psychological factors including the lack of self-esteem and one's attitude as a result from past experiences and continued patterns of thinking (Rappaport as cited in Carr, 2003). The empowerment process is often sparked through stressful life events, new experiences or special challenges (Gutierrez, 1994; Hart, 1996).

Conscientization is the second step in the empowerment process and is described as a level of consciousness-raising (CR), a process of discovery whereby women get together and uncover their roots of powerlessness. This step in itself can be divided into three parts. The first part (a) group identification, is about people selecting or becoming part of one group with a similar culture and shared norms and values. The second part (b) is about the development of group consciousness, meaning the group understands the roots of their powerlessness and is

looking for solutions together as a group. The third step (c) is the solution to their problem the development of group efficacy; in form of mobilization toward social action. Basically, individuals move from interpreting the world, to discovering their identity, to becoming active via group mobilization (Carr, 2003).

Through finding oneself and choosing one's identity one also chooses a political standpoint which at the same time creates a demand for a "socio-political restructuring" (Alcoff, 1994, p. 34). This is also illustrated as a **political action** level in the next step of Figure 1.

Through conscientization people get mobilized for action. They collectively formulate strategies in their groups and decide on action plans. Once an initiative has failed they reflect upon it, interpret their position and analyze the situation which often leads to a better understanding of the structures and systems that are being targeted. The result of this group action is a societal and personal **change** in terms of one's self-conception. This is demonstrated as the last step of the empowerment process as can be seen in Figure 1 (Carr, 2003).

4.2.4. Measuring Empowerment

Although empowerment has been widely discussed in the academic literature, the development of indicators in order to measure, evaluate and monitor empowerment is still in the early stages (Malhotra et al., 2002). However, some authors have attempted to create frameworks and indicators for practitioners which are engaged in empowerment projects so as to facilitate the analysis of their strategies (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005). As mentioned earlier, the difficulty to measure empowerment stems from its characteristic of being a process, a moving target so to speak, which cannot be measured directly except through proxies such as education level, health, life expectancy, literacy rate or employment etc. (Moghadam & Senftova, 2005). In order to get more adequate results of the process, Malhotra, Schuler and Boender suggest to make several measurements across at least two points in time (2002).

The other factor that challenges the measurement of empowerment is that empowerment is context specific (Malhotra et al., 2002). One context in one country can have a different meaning somewhere else. This has an affect on the comparability and consistency of the used

indicators. A study conducted by Kritz et al. show for example that “contextual factors are often more important in determining women’s empowerment and outcomes than individual level factors” (as cited in Malhotra 2002, p. 18). In order to allow for flexibility in specific indicators Malhotra et al. created their own framework which incorporates all necessary dimensions such as economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political and psychological dimension. Moreover, it is based on levels of social aggregation which are the household level, the community as well as broader arenas which incorporates regional, national and global levels.

Table 1. Measurement framework:

| DIMENSION | HOUSEHOLD | COMMUNITY | BROADER ARENAS |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| ECONOMIC | Women’s control over income, relative contribution to family support, access to and control of family resources | Women’s access to employment, ownership of assets and land, access to credit, involvement and/or representation in local trade associations, access to markets | Women’s representation in high paying jobs, women CEO’s, representation of women’s economic interests in macro-economic policies, state and federal budgets |
| SOCIO-CULTURAL | Women’s freedom of movement, lack of discrimination against daughters, commitment to educating daughters | Women’s visibility in and access to social spaces, access to modern transportation, participation in | Women’s literacy and access to a broad range of educational options, positive media images of women, |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | | extra-familial groups and social networks, shift in patriarchal norms (such as son preference), symbolic representation of the female in myth and ritual | their roles and contributions |
| FAMILIAL/ INTERPERSONAL | Participation in domestic decision-making, control over sexual relations, ability to make childbearing decisions, use of contraception, access to abortion, control over spouse selection and marriage timing, freedom from domestic violence | Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (e.g. later marriages, self-reflection of spouses, reduction in the practice of dowry, acceptability of divorce), local campaigns against domestic violence | Regional/national trends in timing of marriage, options for divorce, political, legal, religious support for (or lack of active opposition to) such shifts, systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion, reproductive health services |
| LEGAL | Knowledge of legal rights, domestic support for exercising rights | Community mobilization for rights awareness, effective local enforcement of legal | Laws supporting women's rights, access to resources and options, advocacy for rights |

| | | | |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| | | rights | and legislation, use of judicial system to redress rights violations |
| POLITICAL | Knowledge of political system and means of access to it, domestic support for political engagement, exercising the right to vote | Women's involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns, support for specific candidates or legislation, representation in local bodies of government | Women's representation in regional and national bodies of government, strength as a voting bloc, representation of women's interests in effective lobbies and interest groups |
| PSYCHOLOGICAL | Self-esteem, self-efficacy, psychological well-being | Collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilization | Women's sense of inclusion and entitlement, systematic acceptance of women's entitlement and inclusion |

(Malhotra et al., 2002).

The indicators are a collection and combination of various case studies and research papers analyzed by Malhotra et al.. While all dimensions are equally important, they are not sufficient by themselves (Parpart et al., 2002), therefore academics highlight the importance to adapt an integrated approach and to combine all these dimensions in order to get better results (Wesley & Dublon, 2015).

In order to reach these indicators, non-governmental organizations use different methods. The most common practices consist of education/workshops, micro credit/finances, job creation, health and network building (Parpart et al., 2002). While all of these practices are useful approaches, some have been pointed out by authors as being especially helpful.

According to Jane Parpart, Shirin Rai and Kathleen Staudt, for instance, education is one approach which has the potential to cover all the dimensions mentioned above as each educational program can be designed to teach specific skills for each particular dimension (2002). Nelly Stromquist states that non-formal education programs such as workshops have shown the highest success in empowerment so far (as cited in Parpart et al., 2002). The reason being, that platforms provided by NGOs for women help them in exchanging their experience, in boosting their confidence and in networking (Parpart et al., 2002).

When designing policies and programs aiming at women empowerment, however, it is necessary to do so with care as according to Carol Bacchi governments and institutions very often “react to pre-existing problems” and “are active in creating or producing” problems in the first place (as cited in Partridge, 2010, p. 12).

Two things that academics point out that are often not considered in empowerment practices are firstly that empowerment methods often do not change familial structures which means that other family members need to be involved in the empowerment process as well (Deshmukh-Ranadive, 2003), and secondly that the development and planning process of these practices should not be done in exclusion of women but rather that women should be included in every step of the process in the sense of gender mainstreaming (Oxaal & Baden, 1997; Sen & Grown, 1985).

According to Wierenga, for instance,

“the assumption that planners can identify women’s needs runs against empowerment objectives which imply that women themselves formulate and decide what these interests are. Planning suggests a top-down approach, and yet women may define their interests differently from planners” (as cited in Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 6).

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

In this chapter we will answer our four research questions based on the project data and theories provided above. As we came to realize, OXFAM has a different perception of the concepts of ‘gender equality’ and ‘empowerment’ within this project. Therefore our aim is to firstly provide the reader with our definitions of these terms as these definitions will serve as basis for the following analysis.

Having provided the reader with our understanding of ‘gender equality’ and ‘empowerment’, we will then analyze how the project has impacted women and men in terms of gender equality by citing and analyzing testimonies of women involved in the project, as well as by analyzing one interview conducted with the manager of the project, Marta Rodrigues.

In order to find out what the project is lacking to achieve gender equality and empowerment, we will apply our theories of empowerment and gender equality to the project. In addition, we will contrast the achievements and failures of the project to our definitions of those terms to fully understand the missteps of the project.

Lastly, we will provide the reader with what we think OXFAM’s position on ‘gender equality’ and ‘empowerment’ is, based on this project alone. This will help us in clarifying the question of why we think OXFAM’s empowerment strategies are insufficient.

5.1. How do we define empowerment and gender equality?

As we suspect OXFAM to have a different understanding of gender equality and empowerment in this project, than we do, our aim to answer this first research question is about defining our own standpoint in regards to the terms ‘empowerment’, ‘gender’ and ‘gender equality’. These definitions will be helpful in answering the following research questions regarding the impact that this project had on women and men as well as what the project is lacking in order to reach gender equality and empowerment.

5.1.1. Empowerment

Empowerment as a means to diminish gender inequality is most often, just as gender inequality itself, associated with measures and terms of the market economy, especially with indicators such as income or earnings and job-holdings (Sen as cited in Robeyns, 2003).

The Human Development Index (HDI), for example, together with the Gender Development Index (GDI), that adds a gender component to the prior index, were developed by the United Nations to look past the simple achievement aspect of a country in terms of its GDP. Another index, the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), was added to fully contain the gap of gender inequality by looking at the representation of men and women in the social, economic and political sphere (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003; Klasen & Schüler, 2011).

However, both indexes the GDI and GEM do not look past the economic dimension at other dimensions such as the household, and women's decision-making power, their household work or even their freedom from domestic violence (Beteta, 2006). The same goes for the community level and the availability of supportive social networks (Sen as cited in Robeyns, 2003).

We agree with the limitedness of how empowerment has been portrayed and have therefore included Malhotra, Schuler and Boender's multi-dimensional empowerment measurement framework which takes three different dimensions -household, community and broader arenas- and six various levels -economic, socio-cultural, familial, legal, political and psychological- into account.

Empowerment is not and should not be restricted to only some of these dimensions, but has to be understood in its context, since its meaning lies in the context and culture of a community (Malhotra et al., 2002). This is also the reason why so many definitions of empowerment exist, because there is not one right meaning or definition of empowerment. Thus, in order to reach full gender equality, it is necessary to empower women in all of the above mentioned dimensions and levels.

However, while all these indicators support the process of empowerment, true empowerment can only come from within. While programs directed at empowering women facilitate the path to empowerment by eliminating obstacles on the way such as by providing women with jobs and necessary skills for instance, empowerment can only come from the women themselves and from within. In this sense, we support the notion that agency and conscientization

-interpreted by Carr and Ashworth as the need to realize and internalize one's position before taking action- play an important role in the process of empowerment. This is similar to Arendt's and Young's concepts of 'power with' and 'power within' in which power is acquired by an individual himself/ herself or within a group of individuals who share the common goal of empowerment.

As mentioned earlier, gender equality is not only about women but more about the relationship between men and women, meaning that both genders are part of the empowerment process.

Rather than power being a 'resource' or 'commodity' that is possessed by somebody, we support Foucault's idea of power having institutionalized structures. In this sense, empowering methods leading to more knowledge and skills are not enough if they lead people to act within the same power structures and traditions of the mainstream culture.

In the Report of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, for instance, the same thought has been captured as women empowerment is defined as "the principle of shared power and responsibility [which] should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities" (UN, 1995, no. 1).

This is what our definition of empowerment is about, namely, a shared responsibility between men and women, which shall be reflected within all dimensions and levels of one's community, just as the empowerment framework that we have presented earlier entails.

Taking all of this into consideration, we choose a combination of empowerment definitions as basis for this paper:

Empowerment is a process between two or more individuals which is multi-dimensional and context-specific. It entails an individual to recognize his/her own capabilities and capacities in order for him/her to challenge the current constraints of power relations he/she is experiencing at home, in the community or at work. Through his/her own agency this individual manages to become more self-reliant, confident and independent; as well as achieves to increase his/her access to resources and opportunities.

Based on this definition we will analyze the empowerment strategies used by OXFAM to achieve gender equality as well as the impact this project had on women and men in chapter 5.2 and 5.3.

5.1.2. Gender Equality

As discussed in the theory section, in the 70's the term 'gender' started acquiring a new meaning, connected to the social aspects of one's identity. This shift of focus from one's biological sex to one's social constructed identity led to an extremely important change in the approach to gender equality. In fact, the fight for women's equality started placing a focus on the social, cultural and political position of women, instead of trying to improve their immediate economic conditions.

First of all, we want to clarify how we define gender. We agree with the notion of gender indicating an abstract category of self- and social identification as provided by Alice Dreger. We claim that biological sex per se does not define gender. Instead, we support the idea for which gender is also influenced by other dimensions such as race, ethnicity, nation, class, sexuality, family, work, institutionalized relations of power and violence. We also agree with the theory of gender performativity of Judith Butler, according to whom gender "is a pure social construct created by a set of acts (...) consolidated through time" (Butler, 1988, p. 523).

We claim that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are dynamic concepts that vary from time and society. For this reason, gender is merely a social construct; an abstract category that defines context-specific behaviors.

Therefore, our definition of gender is the following:

Gender is a social and cultural construct which is context-specific and which consists in a series of acts, consolidated through time, that individuals learn throughout their lives, conforming to what is traditionally known to that specific society as masculine and feminine.

We will now present our position on the debate regarding gender equality.

We agree that in order to reach gender equality and to fight gender subordination, there must be a shift of focus from economic equity to gender relations. This means that equality is not

merely a question of redistribution of resources between men and women, but the representation and recognition of cultural identities (Waylen et al., 2013, p. 731).

Because gender is a social construct that varies by the specific social and cultural context, we claim that gender equality involves not only women, but all individuals within a society who do not benefit of equality with others because of being categorized as a specific gender group. These could be women but also men, transgendered, non-gendered people etc., depending on the specific cultural and social context.

We agree with the UN's definition of human rights stating that gender equality is not only a concern of women, but also of men. In particular, we share the belief of Suzanne Williams and Ann Whitehead who claim that women as well as men must tackle gender inequality (Williams et al., 1994, p. 100). In fact, "any study of women and development...cannot start from the viewpoint that the problem is women, but rather men and women, and more specifically the socially constituted relations between them" (Ann Whitehead as cited in Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 402).

We support the gender equality model according to which the three elements sameness, difference, and transformation -under the shape of gender mainstreaming- must be present in order for gender equality to be achieved.

We agree with the model of Gender And Development (GAD), developed in the 80's by feminist theorists, stating that development plans aiming at gender equality cannot merely focus on welfare, equity, anti-poverty and efficiency strategies. Instead, they need to place their focus on strategic gender interests, aiming at transforming women's subordinate position in the society by challenging the gendered division of labor and power relations, and by reshaping the nature of the relationship between men and women (Williams et al., 1994). We also share the vision of GAD theorists and practitioners such as Suzette Mitchell (1996) and Suzanne Williams (1994) who claim that if primary needs are not satisfied, there is a natural lack of interest in the target group to fight for their long-term strategic interests. We claim that, instead of focusing merely on practical or strategic interests alone, a combination of both approaches should be incorporated.

Below follows our own definition of gender equality:

Gender equality is the pursue of equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities of all individuals in the society regardless of their gender. Gender equality aims

at empowering the disadvantaged group in that society. It is realized through the full inclusion of members pertaining to both the advantaged and disadvantaged groups as well as through the satisfaction of a combination of factors, namely immediate practical interests and gender strategic interests. These are reflected in equality by the following spheres: material welfare, access to factors of production, conscientization, participation, control over factors of production and the distribution of resources.

5.2. Impact of project on the life of women

Our second research question is: “how has the project ‘Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening’ impacted women and men in terms of empowerment and gender equality?”. In this chapter we will analyze personal testimonies of women and men who have been a part of the project as well as an interview conducted with Marta Rodrigues in order to answer this research question.

The process of creating the 16 economic initiatives led by women, as mentioned before, started when OXFAM, with the support of ANAP, approached the members of the cooperatives, asking them about their ideas in regards to the type of business ventures they would like to be a part of (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 92, l. 3-11). OXFAM also encouraged other women connected to the cooperatives, but who were not directly associated with the cooperatives; i.e. the wives of associates to participate. The main idea behind the project was to make women aware of the needs they had, and to enable them to create their own job positions (Machin et. al., 2015, p. 15-16). When they had several proposals, OXFAM chose the initiatives according to the following main elements: economic sustainability; social impact; innovation; viability in terms of funding, legal advisory, technology, environmental protection, and logistics; contribution to the implementation of the gender strategy of ANAP; strengthening of abilities of the people involved and of the cooperatives themselves (Machin et. al., 2015, pp. 19-21).

After choosing the most suitable initiatives, OXFAM encouraged other women, who have not been a part of the proposals before, to join the initiatives (Machin et. al., 2015, p. 13). Many of these women were dissatisfied with their confinement at home (Appendix C, p. 100, l. 15-19): most of them, were responsible for household chores and food provision, depending on their

husbands financially. Others, were also raising animals in their backyards or helping their husbands in agricultural labor without receiving any salary in exchange. (Machin et. al., 2015, pp. 19-21; Appendix C, p. 99)

In order to change the existing perception of traditional gender roles, and to provide women with tools to make those initiatives possible, OXFAM created different workshops. Below is a list of all the workshops that took place in the framework of these initiatives from 2012-2015:

- Workshop on increasing awareness on gender equality for women: ‘The gender activist’;
- Workshop: ‘Gender from a women’s rights perception’;
- Workshop on self-esteem and personal growth: ‘Looking at ourselves through the lens of gender equality’;
- Workshop: ‘Learning from the leadership of rural women in the farming and agricultural sector’;
- Workshop: ‘Dialoguing with experiences on promoting women’s leadership and economic empowerment’;
- Technical training on professions related to the initiatives;
- Exchange of experiences with women on a national level;
- Exchange of experiences with women on an international level;
- Workshop: ‘Initiatives of women: What has been achieved and what still needs to be done’;
- Workshop: ‘Reflecting on our leadership experiences during the implementation of the economic initiatives’;
- Workshop: ‘Launch of the economic initiatives of women in cooperatives of ANAP’;
- Workshop: ‘Women initiatives change our lives’;
- Workshop: ‘Economic initiatives for women: routes for their sustainability’.

All those workshops were created for women, to give them the tools to get empowered on different dimensions. There were no workshops created for men. According to the project manager, Marta Rodrigues, the possibility of including men was not taken into consideration at the beginning of the project but it became a ‘pending task’ for the future. (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 96, l. 12-25)

In an interview conducted with Marta Rodrigues, which we did to go more in-depth with the results and motivations of the project (see Appendix B), Rodrigues expresses self-criticism when being asked about the motivations that led them not to include men:

“There was no specific reason; it was just that we did not see it as important. Honestly, we didn’t see it at the beginning; it arose as a demand during the process. The fact to work only in groups of women was also a new thing. From that first step, to work only with women, arose the demand to work with men as well, but it was not obvious at first” (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 96, l. 12-15).

To better understand how this project has influenced the Cuban rural community, we have taken some women’s personal testimonies together with some of their husbands’ into consideration. These testimonies were collected for a documentary called ‘Luces para el cambio’ (Lights for Change). The documentary was produced by a Cuban producer hired by OXFAM during the last term of the implementation of the project, in 2015. Appendix C shows all the citations of these testimonies that we have used for our own analysis, split between cooperatives and economic activities. Below, in Table 2, we will list the keywords we used to define the main ideas behind all the testimonies analyzed in Appendix C, with the amount of times the keywords were mentioned in the testimonies.

Table 2: Total of keywords used in the quotes

| Final results | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Keywords used | Times expressed in the quotes |
| Traditional gender roles (machismo) | 8 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Independence | 5 |
| Equality | 3 |
| Confidence | 11 |
| Power | 1 |
| Community empowerment / Social networking | 2 |
| Legislation | 3 |
| Women rights | 3 |
| Knowledge | 2 |

Looking at Table 2, it is possible to state that the words which were used the most are ‘confidence’, followed by ‘traditional gender roles’ and ‘independence’. Therefore, it is apparent that there was a big effort to empower the women psychologically, who were a part of the project, by providing them with workshops aimed at increasing their self-esteem.

Extracts of some of the testimonies from Appendix C are listed down below in Table 3 together with the keywords that we have chosen and classified to represent the result of the impact of the project. Furthermore, we have added a row called ‘Dimension’ in order to link our results to the dimensions of Malhotra, Schuler and Boender’s measurement framework. Those dimensions will be further explored in chapter 5.3. Also, we have listed the amount of times that the keywords were used as demonstrated above. We are aware that the resulting picture does not represent all women, as the documentary has chosen only a handful of women for interviews. Our aim was simply to provide the reader with a sample of some of the opinions of the women involved in the initiatives.

Table 3: Final results

| Final results of the personal testimonies of the documentary ‘Luces para el Cambio’ | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| Example of quotations | Result (keywords) | Dimension | Times expressed in the quotes |
| <p>“Well, my motivation was... I wanted to be independent. I wanted to earn my own salary” (Appendix C, p. 98, l. 10-11).</p> <p>“My family is making its ends meet much better, I am not the sole provider for the family anymore as she is providing for it also” (Appendix C, p. 99, l. 16-18).</p> | <p>Independence</p> <p>Independence</p> | <p>Economic</p> | <p>4</p> |
| <p>“And it's not the same now. Before, she was rather submissive. Not anymore. Today she’s just like me, on an equal standing” (Appendix C, p. 98, l. 15-16).</p> <p>“I don’t know whether it is because they feel stronger and more self-confident, but there have even been divorces because women used to depend on men, and now men don’t</p> | <p>Equality</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Independence</p> | <p>Familial /</p> <p>Interpersonal</p> | <p>4</p> |

| | | | |
|---|--|----------------|----|
| <p>like women having their own money. But it is their money, they have earned it!” (Appendix C, p. 100, l. 30-32).</p> | | | |
| <p>“And during our training we thought it would be good to propose to ANAP headquarter to include our cooperative rules to pass, as part of the agreements by member assemblies and so on, a document defining the way in which each initiative is to be carried out” (Appendix C, p. 102, l. 28-30).</p> | Legislation | Legal | 6 |
| <p>“We all have created a network. And, through it, we got to know each other and got informed about the problems different women were facing” (Appendix C, p. 101, l. 16-17).</p> | Community empowerment / Social network | Socio-Cultural | 3 |
| <p>“And after nearly twenty years, it was not easy for him to accept that I worked.” (Appendix C, p. 98, l. 18-19).</p> <p>“People said many things, like ‘his wife is out there working, learning new things, he is going to lose</p> | Traditional Gender roles Traditional Gender roles | Psychological | 17 |

| | | | |
|--|--|------------------|----------|
| <p>her...” (Appendix C, p. 99, l. 10-11).</p> <p>“... and then it started, he had the typical macho reaction, but, I gradually calmed him down and I explained and told him to have confidence in me. And he did” (Appendix C, p. 99, l. 13-14).</p> <p>“Today I feel empowered, today I feel like a changed woman; a woman who can deal with any situation and who will never say no because I know I can deal with it.” (Appendix C, p. 99, l. 24-25).</p> <p>“I was a very shy person and then, after having all that training, I learned about gender, women’s rights and the existing forms of violence...” (Appendix C, p. 101, l. 10-11).</p> | <p>Confidence</p> <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Women rights</p> | | |
| <p>“There were also obstacles like, for instance, when I wanted to sell flowers in Holguín, and the government said “no, you can’t take them out because that income is for the area and for local development” (Appendix C, p. 100, l. 30-33).</p> | <p>Legislation</p> | <p>Political</p> | <p>1</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|

As we can see with their personal testimonies, according to some of the women protagonist of these initiatives, the relationship between women and men are ruled by the perception that men are afraid of women who are willing to take a man's place (Appendix C, p. 99, l. 1-14). This reflection reveals the need to work with men from the perspective of masculinities. This was also a concern of the manager of the project, who at the beginning did not see the need of involving men in achieving gender equality. As Rodrigues explained in the interview, by the end of the implementation of the project OXFAM started talking with the Iberoamerican Network of Masculinities (Red Iberoamericana de Masculinidades), to see if they could help them in creating workshops for men (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 96, l. 23).

From some testimonies, we learn that for some women it took longer to accept empowerment, and to understand the problem behind the existence of traditional gender roles, than for others. The personal testimonies reveal big conflicts with sons, daughters and husbands, after making the decision of being a part of the initiatives (Appendix C, p. 98, l. 5-20). However, the testimonies also reveal that these misunderstandings decrease with time. Some families have changed their relationships. For instance, nowadays some families share household work more equally, there is more respect for the needs of women and more support in activities related to the initiatives (Appendix C, p. 98, l. 15-16).

From some testimonies it became apparent that for women who do not feel confident enough to stand up for themselves, more workshops about personal development and empowerment within the household are needed (Appendix C, p. 99, l. 20-25).

A big change for the protagonists of the initiatives are the gained communication skills: in some cases women have transformed from being silent to not being afraid of sharing their thoughts anymore, as we can see in the following example: "Today I can speak up to the management and in a general assembly or at neighbor, municipal or provincial government

meetings and I can say what I want, the way I want to, no matter who is listening” (Appendix C, p. 102, l. 9-11).

On the other hand, there was a significant progress in the development of group conscience through friendship bonds, comradeship, solidarity and respect with the aim of reaching common objectives (Appendix C, p. 101, l. 16-27). However, because of transportation difficulties, it was not easy to gather all women (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 95, l. 7-19).

It is interesting to notice how some women in management positions were described by other women as women ‘with moustaches’, referring to their management style as being similar to the traditional one that is associated with men: imposing, showing no empathy and no interest in dialog with the group (Appendix C, p. 102, l. 4-5).

Nevertheless, in the majority of cases, the aims of the initiatives were achieved through positive relationships with other existing leaders, especially when women were the ones in those decision-making positions. The female directors of the cooperatives were more supportive, for instance, with investments and in general with their enthusiasm in supporting initiatives (Machin et. al., 2015, p. 28).

Nowadays, the women of the initiatives are recognized as leaders in their agricultural entities and municipalities, and this has helped in creating a certain degree of awareness of gender equality, despite the still predominant ‘machismo’ notion (Appendix C; Machin et. al., 2015, pp. 37-38). Nevertheless, in the end the manager of the project admits that the goal of gender equality has not been achieved.

“Honestly, I could not say that this project has reached empowerment and gender equality in the region. I think that the project contributed with a small grain of sand to the awareness and to the personal empowerment of some women in a very specific context. I would say that this project was a very small sample in such a large universe as is the Cuban countryside” (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 93, l. 15-20).

The cooperatives have also experienced a strengthening in their capacities, which led to a better working order of ANAP. On a personal and organizational level, the initiatives are recognized as a new and as a more participatory way to work (Machin et. al., 2015, p. 27). These women have also achieved creating unprecedented businesses within ANAP, and for the

cooperatives this has led to a better and more efficient way to connect with the rural communities (Machin et. al., 2015, p. 27).

Moreover, even though it did not happen in all the regions in the same way, there have been proposals to institutionalize rules and policies to protect those initiatives in the future and to assure their sustainability (Machin et. al., 2015, p. 28). For instance, in Las Tunas (Jesús Menéndez), they have opted for this course of action (Machin et. al., 2015, p. 28).

5.3. What is the project lacking to reach gender equality and empowerment according to our definitions of these concepts?

5.3.1. Empowerment

In order to understand what the project is lacking in terms of empowerment based on our definition of empowerment, it is necessary to recall what we define as empowerment. According to us empowerment is a process and a power relation between two or more individuals. This power relation is embedded into the local context of the individual's environment and encompasses many dimensions. In order to challenge the existing power structure, which is only/more beneficial to just one of these individuals, one has to firstly recognize one's own capacities and capabilities. Through agency, as in active participation, one can change this power relation within the many dimensions it exists in, be it at home, at work or in the community. Through this active change the individual achieves to increase his/her access to resources and opportunities as well as manages to gain more independence, confidence and self-reliance.

We first describe empowerment as multi-dimensional and context-specific. We do so because we think that empowerment consists of various factors and levels. In particular, we take Malhotra, Schuler and Boender's measurement framework as basis to find out on what dimensions and levels the project is lacking.

While the previous table in chapter 5.2. connects the activities of the 16 initiatives to the results achieved as well as the dimensions of Malhotra's measurement framework, it is still unclear which levels and what indicators have and have not been achieved by the project. Therefore, an adapted framework is presented in Table 4 below which gives an overview of the

indicators that were realized by the project alongside existing indicators about women in Cuba which have been mentioned in our background chapter.

In order to get a general overview of the context, for instance, data from the national level, including laws created for women prior the start of the project, are presented as well since empowerment can not be seen in separation of the laws that have improved the situation of women in Cuba. The framework, divided into six dimensions and three levels, manages to incorporate all facets of the project as well as data presented in prior chapters about the general condition of women in Cuba. The different colors used, as explained in the legend below, indicate where the indicators originate from.

Table 4. Adapted measurement framework:

Legend of colors used:

Black: original indicators from Malhotra et al.’s table which were achieved by the project

Green: new indicators added from the project

Blue: general country facts added as mentioned in chapter one.

| Dimension | Household | Community | Broader Arenas/ National |
|------------------|---|---|---|
| ECONOMIC | Women’s control over income, contribution to family support | Women’s access to employment, representation in local trade associations, access to markets, 16 business ventures where 100% of the jobs were filled by women; more management positions of the | Cuba’s Constitution and Labor Code give women more equal access to employment |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| | | cooperatives were occupied by women; more director positions of the municipal and provincial committees of ANAP were filled by women | |
| SOCIO-CULTURAL | Women's freedom of movement | Women's visibility in and access to social spaces, participation in extra-familial groups and social networks | Women's literacy and access to a broad range of educational options: Labor Code has helped providing better access to education |
| FAMILIAL/ INTERPERSONAL | Participation in domestic decision-making, change in marital status | Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (e.g. acceptability of divorce), local campaigns against domestic violence | options for divorce, systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion, reproductive health services: universal and free healthcare, Civil and Family Code provide women with a more equal status in |

| | | | |
|----------------------|---|--|--|
| | | | marriage, the family and parental rights |
| LEGAL | Knowledge of legal rights, women rights and domestic violence | | Laws supporting women's rights: maternity law for fathers and mothers since 2003, Cuban Constitution together with Labor, Civil and Family Codes guarantee gender equality for all men and women |
| POLITICAL | | | Women's representation in regional and national bodies of government: 48.9 % of seats in parliament being held by women, 50% of women in ministerial positions |
| PSYCHOLOGICAL | Self-esteem, self-efficacy, power, community | Collective awareness of injustice, potential | |

| | | | |
|--|---|-----------------|--|
| | empowerment, knowledge, confidence, independence, power, autonomy, acceptance of wife/women being equal, personal development | of mobilization | |
|--|---|-----------------|--|

Note: Table adapted from (Malhotra et al., 2002).

In the **economic sphere** the project helped women to become more independent and to contribute to the family's financial situation as several jobs were created which are presented in the green color. The creation of 16 business ventures further helped the women to be represented on the community level as their businesses were made accessible to the population. Through the businesses the women also had more access to markets and to other communities around them. On the national level the government has improved economic conditions for women since the revolution in 1959, with the help of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). The Labor Code together with the Constitution ensure equal rights for women and equal access to employment.

In the **social-cultural dimension** the project helped to foster women's participation in local groups, their networking and also freedom of movement as there weren't bound to their home anymore but had other spaces and places to go to as OXFAM provided a platform for workshops and training sessions for their businesses and personal development. On the national level, the government has managed to make school more accessible to women and has promoted gender equality at schools. As a result, the number of female university graduates was higher than the number of male graduates in 2015 and the illiteracy rate has decreased after the revolution (CIA, 2015).

In the **familial/interpersonal dimension** women have achieved more decision-making power and husbands have accepted their wives as equal partners (Appendix C, p. 98, l. 16).

Furthermore, we can conclude that some values and norms have shifted not just on the individual level but also on the community level as with more independence and autonomy of the women, the numbers of divorces have increased (Appendix C, p. 100, l. 30), showing that more couples are willing of getting a divorce. The society is in the process of accepting these changes so to speak. On the national level, the government has made sure that with the adaptation of the Family Code in 1975, equal rights apply to the areas of marriage, divorce, abortion and responsibility for the children. Furthermore, since the availability of free healthcare, the conditions of infants and mothers have improved that much that the achievements can be compared to industrialized economies (Cuba Solidarity Campaign, n.d.).

In the **legal dimension** women have learned more about their rights through workshops provided by OXFAM which have taught women about domestic violence and about gender equality. On the community level, the women have mobilized as far as networking and the identification of their needs goes (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 95, l. 7-19), however a mobilization for rights awareness has not happened yet and no effective enforcement of rights especially regarding violence at home has been introduced. On the national level the Cuban Constitution guarantees women equal rights in the political, social, economic and cultural sphere. Furthermore, the Labor, Civil and Family Codes give women equal status in the family, at work and in the society. They ensure equal social security benefits and legal entitlements such as maternity leave, health, holiday etc.

In the **political dimension** the project was not as active as in the other areas. As presented in the framework, possible indicators on the household level could be: knowledge transfer of political systems, domestic support for political engagement, or exercising the right to vote. Also, the project has not facilitated empowerment via the creation of local political campaigns or via the representation of women in local bodies of the government. According to Marta Rodrigues, this is because cooperating with a government under communist rule makes it difficult for an international organization or NGO to engage people in political debates as this would have been perceived as taking a stance on politics which could have led to the end of the project (Rodrigues, Appendix B, pp. 93-94). Rather, the goal was to improve the women's self-esteem and confidence as well as to get them together to network so that they could get politically active on their own (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 94, l. 8-15). On the national dimension Cuba is ranked

third on the global level for having a percentage of 48.9% of women parliamentarians (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016) and 50% of female ministers (Fox News Latino, 2012).

As the women testimonies have shown, the **psychological dimension** has turned out to be the most impactful dimension. The results of the women testimonies are demonstrated in Table 2, where it shows that women have gained more independence, confidence, knowledge and autonomy which has helped them in their personal development. On the community level the project has helped in creating awareness of their rights and injustice which provides the women with the potential of mobilization. It is difficult to say that a sense of inclusion and entitlement of women has been created on the national level. Marta Rodrigues herself admits that the project was only helpful for a small amount of people by saying that “the project contributed with a small grain of sand to the awareness and to the personal empowerment of some women in a very specific context” (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 93, l. 16-17). The government has provided and implemented laws and regulations in favor of gender equality; however, laws are not enough to transform gender roles as they need to be enforced as well, which is difficult to achieve. Rather stereotypes and traditional gender roles need to be changed at home first before norms and values in a community can change (Deshmukh-Ranadive, 2003). It is necessary to include all family members in workshops and to educate kids from an early age about gender equality.

Looking at all of these six dimensions it is evident that empowerment is a process which incorporates different areas and needs to be achieved by a combination of strategies. It cannot only be solved through the creation of jobs. Development agencies focusing on empowerment should, therefore, take these different dimensions into account before starting and implementing a project which is meant to empower women or other disadvantaged groups.

OXFAM has managed to empower women on five of these six dimensions, all except the political dimension where it fell short in providing women with knowledge of political systems or with helping women in getting jobs in local government bodies, which would enable these women in having a say in their communities, and on subjects that are important to them such as their businesses. As this is difficult to achieve, without being politically active, not much could have been done by OXFAM that would not have put the project in jeopardy (Rodrigues, Appendix B, pp. 93-94).

Also Carr highlighted the importance of political action within his cycle of empowerment. Based on his theory, political mobilization was the only position that has not been achieved. For

him, political action would follow automatically after the conscientization step in which women collectively have realized their 'powerlessness' and have taken a stance on politics in order to change the current socio-economic order. This would then lead to their transformation and personal change. While mobilization in terms of networking may have happened or a potential for mobilization may have been created, no actual political action has taken place. Therefore, we conclude that more work should be done concerning the political dimension, in order to fully empower women.

Looking at the other steps of Carr's cycle, it can be said that the women have started from a point of powerlessness at home, a lack of external support or resources as well as a lack of confidence. Through the conscientization step, the women have identified their powerlessness, have interpreted it within a group setting and have worked on overcoming it via their business ventures and the workshops which have given them more access to knowledge and power. The key elements of empowerment 'options', 'choice', 'control' and 'power' have been met by this project, which has provided women with more options and with the opportunity to have a say in their own business ventures, which at the same time created more choices for them. They were able to control their own resources as well as their income as a result from the businesses which gave them more decision-making power in the job as well as at home.

Coming back to our definition of empowerment, we can say that the project indeed helped in making the women more self-reliant, confident and independent. The women recognized their own capabilities and capacities through what Carr calls the 'conscientization' step. A personal and societal transformation is the result of this action which can be observed in shifting gender roles at home between husband and wife, in a new perception of marriage, given the higher divorce rate in the community, or in a new appreciation of working women and of them being the employers and bosses for a change.

This affects another aspect of our definition namely the one of the women changing their power structures at home, at work and in the community which has helped them in increasing their access to resources and opportunities.

The last aspect in our definition which has not been affected by the project is the important concept of power relations meaning the involvement in empowerment of women as well as of men. While the women were able to change themselves and their perception of power just as the concept of 'power within' proclaims, no change can occur if other individuals of the

same power relation do not participate in the change. Meaning that the ‘power within’ concept can only be successful in combination with the ‘power to’ and ‘power with’ concept which includes the surrounding community and individuals. In order to effectively change power relations on the household level, for instance, the participation of all family members should be given.

Therefore, what the project is lacking in terms of empowerment is alternative strategies that do not only focus on women, but instead also provide workshops for men or educational sessions about gender equality for children.

5.3.2. Gender equality

Now, we will explain what the project is lacking to achieve gender equality according to our definitions of ‘gender’ and ‘gender equality’.

As we learnt in chapter two, one of the aims of the project conducted by OXFAM is the establishment of gender equality, by challenging the existing perception of gender roles in the country. In fact, rural Cuban women belong to a social environment where gender roles are highly stereotyped. Gender equality is guaranteed by the constitution, and some progress was achieved through the establishment and the work of the Federation of Cuban Women since 1960. However, the social and cultural perception of the women’s role still remains unchanged. As we discussed in our background chapter 1.2., most work carried out by women in rural areas such as raising livestock and childbearing is not remunerated nor recognized, with men being the ones in charge of earning a salary. There is still a clear gender disparity when it comes to the distribution of resources and professional opportunities, with women being assigned to their traditional reproductive role, and men having most of the decision-making power in the family and, more generally, in the society.

In the theory section we presented the debate existing between the strategy that Women In Development (WID) and Gender And Development (GAD) use to tackle gender inequality. A WID approach focuses on the intervention on the practical needs/interests of women. This means providing what is perceived as immediate need, as in housing and basic services such as food and water supply, and access to health care. It also focuses on economic equity with men and poverty eradication by offering income earning for food provisioning. Lastly, it employs an efficiency

approach through which women are active participants of economic contribution, while carrying out their 'triple role': reproductive -childcare and household maintenance; productive -paid work; and community role -maintenance of community and social networks (Venter et al., 2006). A GAD approach, on the other hand, criticizes WID-oriented plans for taking a mere economic stance towards gender equality, leaving gender roles and the social position of women in the society unchanged. Instead, GAD aims at achieving gender equality by focusing on strategic gender interests (Reeves & Baden, 2000; Venter et al., 2006).

Theorists and practitioners such as, for example, Suzette Mitchell (1996) and Suzanne Williams (1994) realized how the two approaches are actually interconnected and interdependent to reach gender equality.

We claim that the project analyzed has used a combination of the two approaches. The WID approach is visible in the provision of paid jobs to women through the 16 business ventures. Women were given jobs with the purpose of challenging the cultural gender tradition according to which men are the ones in charge of earning a salary. Therefore, part of this project worked towards the redistribution of resources and economic equity. Other practical needs as in basic services such as housing, provision of supplies and access to health care were not a concern of the project. After all, they were not a major issue in the specific local context.

However, the project is not only addressing the social condition of women through the offer of income earning. In fact, the project is said to have a focus on strategic interests. In particular, the project aimed at challenging the traditional gender roles of rural Cuban women, whose main responsibilities are household work, food provision and family care; typically they are economically dependent on the husband. Some women may raise livestock or help their husbands in unpaid agricultural labor.

What the project did to challenge the sexual labor division was to increase the participation and involvement of women in the cooperatives of ANAP and in 16 economic activities that were created.

Following our definition of gender equality, equality must be presented within the following spheres: (a) material welfare, (b) access to factors of production, (c) conscientization, (d) participation, (e) control over factors of production and (f) distribution of resources (Williams et al., 1994).

The project intervened in the sphere of equality of material welfare (a) by ensuring a source of income to those women, therefore aiming at reaching economic equity with men. To grant access to factors of production (b), OXFAM organized technical training on the professions related to the initiatives, in order to provide them with necessary knowledge to enable them to work safely and efficiently. Furthermore, these women were given the access to resources in order to run their economic venture.

An emphasis on conscientization (c) was placed: in fact, many workshops were organized with the aim of making women aware of their rights and opportunities, building self-esteem, and spreading the awareness that gender roles are a cultural construct which is not static and which can be changed. National and international exchanges were also organized in order to create a community of women who can share experiences of self-growth with each other.

Only participation was not employed successfully (d): women were indeed incorporated in the cooperatives as they were given the opportunity to carry out jobs and to be involved in the decision-making concerning the economic activity. In fact, local women were asked by the cooperatives themselves which kind of economic activity they thought would be more useful to create. By doing this, they were incorporated within the decision-making process to a certain level. However, from the project report written by OXFAM, we learn that involving women in making decisions about the activities was not the plan all along (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 92, l. 2-10). Instead, it was a spontaneous idea of the project manager during the course of the project (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 92, l. 2-10). Moreover, we support the idea that participation is a process that involves inclusion in every step of the planning process. We claim that, in this specific project, OXFAM did not invest enough on the principle of participation. While local rural women were asked which activities and business ventures should be established, the project did not involve them in the previous planning steps. OXFAM did not already incorporate them on the organizational level where it is decided that business ventures are a part of the strategy to empower women or whether or not workshops should be created. The same goes for the creative outlet of the project such as the photo gallery and the documentary which represent all the women and their business ventures. Still, these were designed and planned by OXFAM (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 92, l. 1-10). A full incorporation and empowerment of women can only be reached if the whole community is included within programs about gender empowerment

during every stage of the decision-making process. Therefore, we claim that OXFAM failed in this particular objective.

Moreover, only women were the ones being included in the empowerment process of the project, leaving men out of the picture. Instead, we think that a percentage of all gender groups should have worked with the planners in order to reach a higher degree of participation and in order for OXFAM to work more efficiently towards gender equality. Finally, we argue that the last point, (f) ensuring equality of control over resources and over factors of production, was successfully fulfilled, to the extent that women gained control over their businesses. Moreover, throughout this project some management positions within the cooperatives were filled by women, therefore promoting leadership in the economic rural sector. This, together with the workshops, helped in creating a feeling of worthiness and self-esteem that we believe is highly important in the process of overcoming stereotyped gender roles and to reach gender equality in the long-term.

During our research process, we came across the debate behind the notion of gender and gender equality. In the end, we agreed on our own definition of gender being a social and cultural construct which is context-specific and consists in a series of acts consolidated through time, that individuals learn throughout their lives; conforming to what is traditionally known to that specific society as masculine and feminine. We also agreed that sex per se does not define gender. Besides biological differences, we argue that the existing perception of men and women is a social construct that is deeply shaped by the culture and by the specific context one's referring to. We also describe gender equality as the pursue of equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities of all individuals in the society regardless of their gender.

In relation to what we stated above, we want to highlight three main discordances between our definitions and the project in question.

First of all, we claim that a very common mistake was made in this project: the line between gender and biological sex was blurred. In fact, the term gender is only addressed to women, as in female individuals, whose gender roles are confined to the traditional context-specific view of what is feminine. Through this, a direct link between gender and sex was created by OXFAM, contradicting the notion of gender as we perceive it. By taking only women into consideration, men and intersexed people were immediately excluded from the focus of the project, involuntarily stating that women, as in female individuals, are the ones afflicted by

gender inequality. In other words, with gender being a mere social construct, not accountable to just biological sex, we find the target group of this project not to be fully representative of our notion of gender.

Secondly, we claim that the project only takes the stereotypes of gender that ‘matches’ the biological sex into consideration, neither questioning nor including transgendered or non-gendered identities, for example. By linking gender identities as in what is traditionally known to be feminine and masculine, the project confined the concept of gender, and consequently, gender roles, into a dichotomy. Therefore, gender roles are not challenged effectively.

Thirdly, we argue that the arbitrary selection of target groups goes against the definition of gender equality according to which all members of the society, pertaining to both the advantaged and disadvantaged group, must be included in the process.

According to our definitions of the key terms gender and gender equality, the project fails to address the concept of ‘sameness’, ‘difference’ and ‘transformation’ correctly. We claim that it is because it considers these dimensions under a different definition of gender. In fact, ‘sameness’ is perceived as equality between male and female sex, and reached by incorporating women into the spheres where they were typically excluded from; the approach ‘difference’ uses an essentialist interpretation of gender, creating tailored programs for the disadvantaged group which is meant as women exclusively; and ‘transformation’ through the process of gender mainstreaming is pursued merely in regards to women’s situation, instead of using a gender perspective.

Taken from the testimonies of the women involved in the project, for some women, the role in the household has changed. For most of them, a feeling of self-esteem grew from within, making them feel empowered. The husbands of these women were interviewed and stated to be aware of the changes: some, despite some reluctance, asserted to accept the new circumstances; others were more hostile to change (Appendix C, p. 98, l. 6-22). In this respect, we believe that this project brought some good improvements to the self-perception of women. We think that the project helped in making the women aware of their potential and value by giving them the technical knowledge to run an economic activity, therefore challenging the traditional gender roles in rural Cuba to some extent. However, we want to highlight how the reluctance of some men in accepting these changes is just a natural consequence of the lacking strategy employed by the planners. In fact, all of the sudden men found themselves in a situation where women

changed their habits visibly: they started working and earning a salary, spending less time at home; demanding more recognition in the household and in the society. This is no easy and natural transition in a society like the Cuban one, where gender roles are highly traditional. For this reason, we claim that such a transition requires full participation of the whole community especially in the process of conscientization, where the community as a whole can acquire awareness on themes such as gender roles and gender equality.

5.4. How does OXFAM define empowerment and gender equality?

Having defined our standpoint regarding empowerment and gender equality with the first research question, we aim to interpret OXFAM's definition of the same terms with this concluding research question. By doing so, we will limit ourselves to what this project alone is stating about OXFAM and its perception of these terms. The above analyzed sections will serve as basis for our remarks about how OXFAM is defining empowerment and gender equality.

5.4.1. Empowerment

In general terms, OXFAM defines empowerment as “challenging the forms of oppression which compel millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights” (Oxfam as cited in Oxaal & Baden, 1997), basing their definition on the freedom from oppression and inequality. However, we will only take this project into consideration and analyze OXFAM's definition based on what the project has aimed at and managed to achieve, therefore not taking this general statement as basis.

As we conclude from our previous sections, OXFAM has used various empowerment strategies to reach gender equality. Given the multi-dimensional characteristic of empowerment, empowerment can be achieved via different strategies of which the most common ones are focused on finance, education or health (Parpart et al., 2002).

OXFAM itself, in this project, has focused on education via workshops about gender inequality, gender violence and personal growth as well as via finance by providing women with jobs and the financial means to open their own businesses. These strategies have led these women

to be more independent, confident and self-sufficient not only at work but also at home and in the community. The held workshops appealed to the women's agency which led them to change their own power relations, with the aim of transforming societal relations in one's community together with the norms and values.

However, as we define empowerment as a multi-dimensional process that sets out to achieve gender equality, we focus on the relationship between two parties, e.g. a man and a woman. Meaning that if one of the parties is actively trying to change the current power structure he/she is in, but the other party is preventing it, that no sustainable empowerment can occur. While agency and change via 'power within' is an essential step in empowerment, it is not successful without the 'power to' or 'power with' component which includes the environment to change with oneself.

For instance, OXFAM has achieved to empower women from 'within' by increasing their self-esteem, raising the gender awareness and consciousness as well as by building their confidence. The workshops have also helped in empowering the women to some degree in the concept of 'power with' which focuses on building networks. However, it has not led to any social mobilization yet, although provided the potential for one. The 'power to' component is what is missing as the women should not only be able change themselves but to transform others such as their husbands with them.

This last aspect is where we disagree with OXFAM. While we agree that women should help in transforming their community and others once they have changed their own power relations, it should not be the women's main burden. This is where we come back to empowerment and power being based on relations and not on one sole party. Men should be as involved and active in the empowerment process as women.

Therefore, we do not share the notion that because the problem in Cuba is gender inequality, in particular the subordination of rural women, policies and programs should focus on just women as this is where the problem is. According to Carol Bacchi, for instance, who believes problems to be social constructions, governments and institutions "react to pre-existing problems and [...] are active in creating or producing" them (as cited in Partridge, 2010, p. 12). Meaning that just because a problem with women was observed does not mean that this is where the problem lies.

This supports our idea in that there are other alternatives to empowering women than to just focus on women. In order for gender equality to be sustainable, all members of a community, including men, have to be incorporated into the empowerment process. The same goes for other family members such as children and the elderly in order for empowerment to influence the household dimension which is where the main problem is.

5.4.2. Gender Equality

OXFAM defines gender equality as follows:

“Gender equality refers to the situation in which women and men enjoy equal status, conditions and responsibilities, and have equal opportunities for realizing their full human rights and potential and can benefit equally from the results – regardless of being born male or female. Gender equality encompasses equality in social relations and equal access to, and control over, resources by women and men” (OXFAM, 2013, para. 4).

Moreover, OXFAM states that

“it is women and girls who face the most discrimination as a result of gender inequality. (...) They have fewer resources, less power and less influence in decision making when compared to men. They are exposed to various forms of violence and exploitation and experience further inequality because of their ethnicity, age, race, class, marital status, sexual orientation and (dis)ability. We believe that transforming gender and power relations, and the structures, norms and values that underpin them, is critical to ending poverty and challenging inequality. We believe that women taking control and taking collective action are the most important driver of sustained improvements in women's rights, and are a powerful force to end poverty not only for women and girls, but for others too” (OXFAM, n.d.b, para. 1).

From these definitions it is apparent that OXFAM understands the concept of gender equality to include men and women, and that the majority that suffers more of inequality of those both sexes are females. Therefore, in these particular definitions, emphasis is placed merely on the empowerment of women. Additionally, we conclude that OXFAM does not take intersexed individuals as a disadvantaged category into consideration, excluding it from the debate on gender equality. Another observation we make is that the organization places a direct link between the notion of gender and biological sex, by assuming that gender inequality concerns merely men and women. For this reason, we can say that, in this specific project, OXFAM perceives gender in a different way than we do.

According to the interview with Marta Rodrigues, it is clear that while OXFAM does consider gender relations and gender equality to include men as well as other disadvantaged

groups, such as gays and lesbians, no thought has been spent on including these groups into their empowerment strategies of this project (Appendix B, p. 92). The reason behind it is that the demand for workshops designed for men was not present at the time, and that the demand arose at a later point in time (Rodrigues, Appendix B, p. 96).

From this project and from the definitions provided by OXFAM, we conclude that the organization does place a focus on the concept of: sameness -equality between sexes being reached by incorporating women into the spheres where they were typically excluded; difference -using the awareness of gender segregation to create tailored programs for the disadvantaged group; and transformation -through gender mainstreaming. However, all these three points are based on the assumption that gender equality merely concerns women groups, so the focus of programs and gender mainstreaming efforts are exclusively directed to them.

The position of OXFAM is that “contributions of both men and women are needed for positive and lasting change” (OXFAM Australia, n.d., para. 6); meaning that, in order to achieve sustainable empowerment and equality, both parties have to be involved. However, from the project we understand that, in this particular project, OXFAM does not consider the engagement of the whole community as being an essential element of gender equality.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this chapter we will present the outcome of the analysis carried out in chapter five, together with our reflections on the results achieved. We will then discuss the limitations encountered while writing this paper and conclude with suggestions and recommendations regarding gender equality and empowerment programs in Cuba for future practitioners, researchers and policy decision-makers.

6.1. Results

As explained in the introduction, our aim was to understand **why the empowerment strategies used in the project ‘Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening’ from Oxfam and the EU are insufficient towards the realization of gender equality in rural Cuba.** Moreover, we wanted to understand what the project is lacking in terms of empowerment methods in order to make them more efficient and to reach gender equality. In fact, we suspected that the empowerment strategies were not enough to achieve gender equality because of the selective focus that the project placed on women. To find out if this assumption was correct, we broke the problem formulation down into the following research questions and answered them in the analysis.

1. How do we define empowerment and gender equality?
2. How has the project ‘Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening’ impacted women and men in terms of empowerment and gender equality?
3. What is the project lacking to reach gender equality and empowerment according to our definitions of these concepts?
4. How does OXFAM understand empowerment and gender equality based on the project?

In order to answer the first research question we defined our own understanding of the terms ‘empowerment’ and ‘gender equality’. We have chosen a combination of various definitions in order to create our own definition of these terms.

Under the term ‘empowerment’ we understand a process in which a disadvantaged individual changes his/ her disadvantaged position by actively altering the power structures and relations that the individual is in. This so-called agency occurs once this individual has realized his/ her own capabilities and capacities and is using these in order to increase his/ her access to resources and opportunities so that these match the rest of the society’s. As empowerment is multi-dimensional these changes could occur at home, at work and within one’s community and should, overall, lead to the individual’s personal growth in regards to his/ her confidence, independence and self-reliance. Empowerment is also a means to reach gender equality.

We defined ‘gender equality’ as the pursue of equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities of all individuals in the society regardless of gender, where gender is understood as a social and cultural construct which is context-specific and varies from cultures and societies. We claim that gender equality is reachable through the full inclusion of all members of the society, and the satisfaction of a combination of immediate practical interests and gender strategic interests in the spheres of: material welfare, access to factors of production, conscientization, participation, and control over factors of production and the distribution of resources.

The second research question was answered with the help of the women’s testimonies and the interview conducted with the project manager, Marta Rodrigues. These demonstrated how much women were affected by the project. Most of all, however, their personal development was affected as the workshops, the technical training, exchanges and business ventures have given them more confidence, professional knowledge and awareness of gender relations. It further helped them economically in the sense that the initiatives strengthened the women’s independence and autonomy. Women were given the chance to be equal providers for their families and have received more decision-making power at home.

On the other hand, the analysis of the testimonies also showed that there were some lacking strategies that could have been used, but were not. For instance, we saw that men were not considered in the gender strategy of the project, so there were no workshops directed at them.

We conclude that including men's empowerment strategies is a main issue to be considered in further project proposals.

Moreover, the project recognized some female leaders in their cooperatives and municipalities, despite the still predominant 'machismo' notion. This has helped in creating a certain degree of awareness of gender equality, even though we argue that gender equality has not been achieved. These leadership positions came along with some women carrying out management roles with styles similar to the traditional ones that are associated with men: imposing, showing no empathy and no interest in dialog with the group. Ironically, these women were called 'women with moustaches'. This led us to conclude that it is important to empower women so that they are able to get management positions, but it is also important to teach them about management styles within the context of gender equality.

In order to answer the third research question with which we want to find out what was missing in OXFAM's empowerment strategies, we applied gender and empowerment theories to the project.

We started out with applying the empowerment measurement framework of Malhotra, Schuler and Boender in order to evaluate how the project has empowered women. Through this measurement framework we were able to see how broad the concept of empowerment is and how all fields are interconnected to each other; be it the socio-cultural, economic, political, psychological, legal or familial dimension. Therefore, we suggest all practitioners aiming at empowering a group of people to take this holistic approach into account when evaluating one's project.

The main result stemming from the framework was that all dimensions were realized to different degrees with the exception of one dimension, the political dimension, which was not achieved. Due to the communist rule in Cuba, projects dealing with politics, are not well received, according to the project manager Marta Rodrigues, which was the biggest reason why the project did not contribute to empower women politically.

Another aspect was that although women have gained more power at home, it was still difficult to convince their husbands of this change as norms and values are deeply rooted in the culture. A strategy to solve this would be to teach kids about gender roles from a young age and to engage husbands and children in the workshops offered, because stereotypes and traditional

gender roles need to be changed at home first before norms and values in a community can change.

The other empowerment theory, introduced by Carr, was used to demonstrate the positions that the women were facing throughout the empowerment process. This helped in illustrating the struggles that women were facing but also the phases and the time that was needed in order to change one's view and to actively participate in the change. Through this theory it became more evident how the change has been internalized by the women before it could affect one's family and community.

Carr's theory is also connected to the theories presented on power by Arendt, Foucault and Young, which highlight the institutional characteristic of power and power relations. These demonstrate that power is not a commodity anyone possesses, rather it is a dimensional relationship between individuals which can be changed once both individuals affected by it have actively participated in the transformation. Agency is therefore essential in order for empowerment to be achieved.

We also aim at showing what the project lacked in terms of reaching gender equality according to our understanding of this term. The project complied with the objectives of the approach of Gender And Development (GAD) by aiming at challenging subordination of women through empowerment. It also helped women in obtaining economic equity with men by providing them with remunerated jobs, an approach typical of the Women In Development (WID) principle of equal distribution of resources.

However, following our analysis we claim that the project failed in reaching gender equality because of the following reasons:

First, we claim that in this project the line between gender and biological sex was blurred. It is clear, in fact, that the term gender is directly derived from pertaining to a specific sex, in this case, women. This clashes with our perception of gender as being a social construct that varies depending on culture, society and context.

Secondly, we observed that even though the project officially aims at fighting the existing perception of traditional gender roles, by linking gender to biological sex, the project confines gender identity again to what is traditionally conceived as feminine and masculine. Therefore, gender roles are not challenged effectively.

Thirdly, we argue that the project in question did not achieve gender equality because it did not fully incorporate the whole community into the process -selecting only one of the disadvantaged groups instead- that is, women. Based on our definition, the whole society must be involved in order to reach gender equality; however, the project only focused on providing self-confidence and gender awareness workshops for women, excluding men from the process. With gender roles in Cuba being highly connected to a 'macho culture', we claim that also men should have been offered the same opportunities.

Lastly, the principle of participation, according to which individuals must be included in every step of the planning process, was not fully respected. In fact, we have realized that although OXFAM has done a good job at incorporating women on the organizational level within the cooperatives, more could have been done. The women in question were indeed asked about which activities and business ventures should be established; however, OXFAM did not already incorporate them on the organizational level where it was decided, for example, whether or not business ventures should be created in the first place; or whether or not workshops should be organized. Additionally, many outputs such as the documentary, the photo exhibition etc. were all led by OXFAM representing the women, when instead it could have been the women coming up with their own ideas of how they want to present themselves.

In order to answer our fourth research question, which explores the definition of 'empowerment' and 'gender equality' by OXFAM based on this project, we conclude that we employ different definitions of the key terms, and this is why we argue that gender equality was not achieved.

In terms of empowerment, we agree with OXFAM that agency plays a major part in the process of empowerment and the empowerment from within, which was done by increasing the women's self-esteem, raising gender awareness and consciousness as well as by building the women's confidence. However, we disagree in the thought that gender inequality is the main burden of women alone and argue for alternative empowerment strategies which also include men. In order for power relations to be changed in the long run and to achieve gender equality at the end, a transformation of the power structure is needed which can only be done if all members of that power relation are actively participating or else one is merely put into the same existing power structures and traditions of one's culture.

In OXFAM's understanding of gender equality, women are the most disadvantaged group suffering from inequality. Intersexed individuals, as a discriminated sex, are not mentioned in their definitions, and are therefore excluded from the debate on gender equality. The same concept was applied throughout the project, that was exclusively concerning women. Therefore, OXFAM understands gender equality as the subordinate relation between men and women which can be reached through women's empowerment. Although OXFAM recognizes that a lasting change can only be achieved through the contributions of men and women, this principle was not applied in the project: in fact, the main focus was placed on women and no resources were directed at men.

Nevertheless it can be said that a change in traditional gender roles is already in process and that the situation of rural women will continue to be improved by NGOs or programs directed at women empowerment. Those targeted women will then be able to take their knowledge gained from those programs, internalize it and change through it. Through that change, norms can be bent and the traditional gender roles within a community can be transformed.

However, it is important to highlight that gender equality is a complex process that derives from long-term trends, and that cannot be achieved only with one project but through broader strategies such as a combination of programs and public policies of the government.

6.2. Limitations

The main purpose of our project was to study and to understand the empowerment methods used by OXFAM in order to empower rural women in Cuba. In order to do so, we felt it to be important to include personal testimonies of the women who participated in OXFAM's project.

One of the limitations we encountered is that we had to make use of already existing personal narratives of these women instead of carrying them out ourselves. The current political situation of Cuba, did not allow us to visit the economic business ventures led by women. Even though one of the authors of this paper lived in Cuba for six months, she did not get the special visa permit to leave the capital to go and visit these women. Hence, we had to rely on all the communication products that were published by OXFAM during the project itself.

As explained in our methodology, we specifically chose this project because it was the only completed project available. At the beginning, we wanted to consider two or more projects focused on gender in Cuba and to compare the way they contributed to the achievement of gender equality. After analyzing all the data available we decided to switch our focus on only one project, since a comparison between projects was not possible due to the lack of information.

In regards to the theories we used, we understand that by using an empowerment measurement framework which is not focused on the quantification of the achieved results, we are limiting our conclusions regarding its generalizability, meaning that due to the context-specific character of the measurement framework, the used indicators can not be used on a national or even global scale such as the GEM, which is used across countries and different settings. Furthermore, since empowerment is a process that incorporates various factors such as education, health, employment etc., capturing empowerment is very difficult and can only be measured partly and depending on one's own definition of the term, which in turn influences the validity of the measurement. Knowing that, we felt that a qualitative approach was necessary in order to capture the women's experiences and to find out how they have been empowered, looking beyond quantifiable indicators.

Finally, we are aware that our subjective judgment is asserted into our qualitative analysis of OXFAM's project. Like we stated in our methodology chapter, we used a constructivist approach according to which we understand reality to be socially constructed and, thus, subjective; for this reason, we are bringing our personal bias into what we are observing.

6.3. Recommendations

In order to make our findings more generalizable, further research could focus on the quantification of empowerment. This would make it easier to compare findings across different countries and to measure the results on a repetitive basis which would, in turn, increase the reliability of the measures as well. For instance, with gender equality being a process, which requires time to realize, it would be interesting to monitor the influence of this project in the years to come. For this reason, we recommend future researchers to carry out an evaluation of the results of this project regarding the gender equality situation in the future.

Moreover, in-depth interviews could be done with men or the husbands of the already interviewed women, in order to obtain more data of the actual changes within the families and the power relations on the household level.

Other theoretical approaches could be used in order to study the situation of gender equality in Cuba. In addition, future researchers could analyze government public policies instead of NGO projects; or a combination of both.

For future programs, directed at empowering women or gender equality, we suggest NGOs to include the targeted parties into the program planning procedures in every step of the process, as well as to take alternative empowerment methods into account by focusing on a broader definition of gender. Furthermore, we suggest potential NGOs and policy makers to strengthen the awareness of main actors such as municipal and provincial governments, suppliers, boards of directors; and to count on the support of other local organizations to continue with the ventures.

Our last recommendation is to promote communication and visibility of gender equality programs through divulging these experiences at a local, national and international level.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

The Project, its outputs and its aim

1. How did the idea of the economic initiatives begin?
2. Which communicative products were produced by the initiatives?
3. How were the communicative products used to spread the word?
4. Do you think empowerment and gender equality were reached through this project?

Political Engagement

5. What political dimension did the economic initiatives, led by women, have?
6. Did the project have any proposal of change in the legislative regional or national sphere?
7. Did the women and/or OXFAM do any political campaigns within the framework of the business ventures?
8. Was there any collective mobilization to unify all the women who were part of the economic initiatives?
9. Did the idea of mobilization come from OXFAM or from the women themselves?

Practical vs. Strategic Needs

10. In the project, which immediate needs of the women were satisfied? For example: we know they were given the chance to earn a salary through the offer of jobs. But were women helped with other practical things: access to health care, nutrition, water supplies, housing and basic services, family food provision?

The involvement of men & gender relations

11. How and to what extent were men included in the project?
12. Why did the empowerment strategy not include men?
13. How did you find out about the demand for men?
14. Speaking of gender as a social construct that is not connected to biological sex. Besides women, was the project open to also intersex individuals, transgender, non-gendered people and so on?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW

Interviewer: Mar Sabé Dausà (MSD)

Interviewee: Marta Rodrigues (MR)

Interview -June 15th, 2016.

Interview with **Marta Rodrigues**, the project manager for OXFAM in Cuba. Rodrigues lived in Cuba from 2011 until April 2016, and she was the main coordinator of the project ‘Suburban ‘Suburban agriculture and cooperative strengthening in ten municipalities of Camagüey, Las Tunas and Holguín’. It was her idea to introduce economic initiatives for women with the aim of putting more emphasis on the gender strategy of the whole project. She was the writer of the project report that we are using as our main source. We used the conversation below to clarify some aspects that were not clear enough for us after reading the project.

MSD: How did the idea of the economic initiatives begin?

MR: During the implementation of the project, which main aims are about providing food security and gender equality, the gender officers of OXFAM in Cuba and I saw an opportunity to
5 improve gender equality, by giving women, who where somehow involved in ANAP’s cooperatives, the economic resources and also the knowledge for them to realize their own ideas. It was not easy, because the agricultural and livestock environment in Cuba has still many gender gaps, where men are usually the only ones able to take decisions and able to work in this field. This is why the workshops and lessons about gaining confidence and personal empowerment
10 were very important during the whole process, especially in the beginning.

MSD: Which communicative products were produced by the initiatives?

MR: The communicative products that arose out of the economic initiatives led by women were:
15 (1) A documentary called ‘Luces para el cambio’ (Lights for change), in Spanish but with English and Portuguese subtitles, together with a brochure; (2) a photo gallery exhibition with pictures of them shot by me and printed in 2 meters-long canvases together with a brochure; and (3) a booklet of information of those initiatives, how they are made and with some personal

testimonies of the women involved. It was presented in a photo exhibition in February in La Habana, in a Congress of ANAP, and the exhibition toured to all of the cooperatives involved. Each cooperative has one canvas with pictures of the initiatives. After La Habana, the whole gallery started travelling to each of these cooperatives and, by the end of summer 2016, each cooperative will have its own canvas. We thought that these materials were the most visual and the easiest ones to carry and to spread the word.

When taking the whole project into consideration we also produced other communicative products, more related to giving tools in agro-ecology.

MSD: How were the communicative products used to spread the word?

10 **MR:** We easily saw that the best way to spread the word was by giving women the confidence to raise their voices through workshops about self-confidence. Today these women are leaders of their communities, which means that other people, mostly other women, can reach out to them asking for advice or help.

MSD: Do you think empowerment and gender equality were reached through this project?

15 **MR:** Honestly, I could not say that this project has reached empowerment and gender equality in the region. I think that the project contributed with a small grain of sand to the awareness and to the personal empowerment of some women in a very specific context. I would say that this project was a very small sample in such a large universe as is the Cuban countryside. I would not dare to say that the project has changed the gender relations neither in those municipalities nor in those cooperatives. For a group of women, the project, of course, had an important impact: on their families, communities... but I cannot say that the project has achieved gender equality. In my opinion, there have been some personal and collective achievements, but it has not revolutionized the gender relations in Cuba yet.

MSD: What political dimension did the economic initiatives, led by women, have?

25 **MR:** In Cuba, there is only one party that controls the government, and this government rules everything within subdivisions and local assemblies. We know, as an international organization, that we could not try to engage people in political empowerment directly, while writing the project proposal, because the government would not allow us to do it and it would stop the

project and its implementation. Knowing that, we realized that we needed a strong partner and this is why we worked together with ANAP. ANAP belongs directly to the Communist Cuban Party, which means that it is the people of the party who choose the board of directors of ANAP. It is an organization that sometimes did not help in empowering women, since that would lead to changes in the whole society, especially a change of the concept of gender roles. Sometimes it was tough to make people of ANAP realize that challenging traditional gender roles was a good thing for everyone.

However, in giving women the possibility to empower themselves through gaining knowledge, confidence and self-esteem, what we did was to allow them to raise their voice in any situation, also politically. For instance, now, whenever there is an assembly from ANAP or from the party, some of the women go; when beforehand they would have always thought that politics had nothing to do with them. The reason why this would happen, is that probably the women did not understand what was being discussed prior to the implementation of this project. Now, they are generally confident enough to go tell the audience their point of view in any important decision that has to be made.

MSD: Did the project have any proposal of change in the legislative regional or national sphere?

MR: There have been changes in the structures of the cooperatives and within ANAP. After the project, 25% more women were associated with ANAP in each municipality. Also, at least 30% of the management positions of the cooperatives were occupied by women and at least 35% of directive positions of the municipal and provincial committees of ANAP were women. Having in mind that ANAP belongs to the party and, by so, is extremely directed to the government, these can also be considered a political achievement that arose out of the project.

All in all, the main objective of the initiatives was not to strengthen women's political empowerment, although, it did nevertheless.

MSD: Did the women and/or OXFAM do any political campaigns within the framework of the business ventures?

MR: No. As I explained before, we have to understand that in Cuba it is not actually easy to go into politics for anyone, but it is even worse if you represent an international non-governmental

organization. We tried to help these women in being able to speak up for themselves, and of course, spreading the word is important and needed, but step by step. Maybe if there was a continuation of this project we would have that in mind and try to do some campaigns, but so far, we did not.

5 **MSD: Was there any collective mobilization to unify all the women who were part of the economic initiatives?**

MR: Yes, there was collective mobilization. From the beginning we had the idea that it would be interesting for women to be together and to share their ideas, challenges, problems, fears etc. Since we started the creation of the business ventures during the last two years of the
10 implementation of the whole project, we had at least 10 meetings, but it was not easy at all. Usually, we would organize the meetings in the capital, La Habana, but that meant that we had to give them the tools to be able to come. Don't forget that the initiatives are all settled in different provinces of the country, some far away from the capital. In Cuba, infrastructures are not really
15 advanced, so it takes a long time to go from one side of the island to the other, and also there are not many transportation opportunities. In addition, we realized that especially at the beginning, the majority of women were afraid to participate, since they had never left their hometowns before. Also their families, especially their husbands, did not help their wives in joining, or didn't allow them to go. This was one of the big reasons of the many divorces that happened during the project. So it was a big struggle from the beginning.

20 **MSD: Did the idea of mobilization come from OXFAM or from the women themselves?**

MR: The idea to get together was OXFAM's and in the beginning the women were a bit skeptical of the reason why we were doing that, but everyone loved it in the end, and even became close friends with women from other regions.

**MSD: In the project, which immediate needs of the women were satisfied? For example: we
25 know they were given the chance to earn a salary through the offer of jobs. But were women helped with other practical things: access to health care, nutrition, water supplies, housing and basic services, family food provision?**

MR: No, they weren't. The main aim of the project was to give these women the tools to be able to think by themselves and to speak up, so there were no practical things directly given to them.

MSD: How and to what extent were men included in the project?

MR: No, men were not included in the project, and that was something that came up as a learned lesson at the end of the project. After a long process of resistance, where men did not understand why there were only spaces for women, they saw that women were successful and got empowered. At that point, they started asking for the same spaces. When we saw that, we realized that, in further projects, also men's needs should be taken into consideration, and we understood that we could do that by creating workshops on 'masculinities', a way to work on gender equality only within groups of men.

10

MSD: Why did the empowerment strategy not include men?

MR: There was no a specific reason; it was just that we did not see it as important. Honestly, we didn't see it at the beginning; it arose as a demand during the process. The fact to work only in groups of women was also a new thing. From that first step, to work only with women, arose the demand to work with men as well, but it was not obvious at first.

15

MSD: How did you find out about the demand for men?

MR: I think that initially it was maybe a matter of jealousy of the men, who wondered why there were spaces just for women. Afterwards, they saw the logic in the spaces created for women, where they shared their opinions which they did not do in an environment that included men. Following this same logic, men started asking for spaces just for them, with male facilitators, as well. That was almost at the end of the project and at that point we even started talking with the Iberoamerican Network of Masculinities (Red Iberoamericana de Masculinidades), to see if they could help us in solving this need. Since I left, I don't know if the agreements have proceeded or not, but it was definitely a pending task.

25

MSD: Speaking of gender as a social construct that is not connected to biological sex. Besides women, was the project open to also intersex individuals, transgender, non-gendered people and so on?

MR: No; for the the nature of the project, it was just directed to rural women inserted in cooperatives. I am not saying that this is a good way to do it, but from the beginning that has been our aim. However, once, a woman from the cooperative Sabino Pupo, in Nuevitas, who became the president of it, came to tell me: “I have this situation, there is a member of the cooperative who is gay. He is super accepted in the community but within the cooperative evolved a topic that sometimes creates disagreements within the ideas of other members, and I don’t know how to deal with it. This is also a matter of gender, isn’t it?”. I had to tell her that of course that was also a matter of gender relations, but in the end, the project stopped there as it did not deal with these issues. It was just like, suddenly, we realized that there were other fields in gender that we should have taken into consideration, even though it was not the main aim of this project. This fact opened a window to see other realities, but at the beginning, the project did not take that into consideration.

15

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX C: PERSONAL TESTIMONIES FROM THE DOCUMENTARY 'LIGHTS FOR CHANGE'

'Luces para el Cambio' (Lights for Change) is a documentary produced by OXFAM with the support of the European Union, the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation and the Japanese Embassy in Cuba under the project 'Suburban Agriculture and Cooperative Strengthening in 10 Municipalities in the Provinces of Camagüey, Las Tunas and Holguin', completed in 2011-2015.

Cooperatives – Activities:

Citations

CPA 'Ramón López Peña' - Cultivation and marketing of flowers and floral ornaments:

5

Aldo Acosta: "Yes, I have friends who would not allow the women in their families to work".

"They say no, that women don't need to work because men work and provide for the families".

10 **Elyzabeth Rojas:** "Well, my motivation was... I wanted to be independent. I wanted to earn my own salary."

Aldo Acosta: "Actually, she just did house chores and it was me who worked.

15 "And it's not the same now. Before, she was rather submissive. Not anymore. Today she's just like me, on an equal standing"

Elyzabeth Rojas: "And after nearly twenty years, it was not easy for him to accept that I worked"

20

"But I insisted. I told him I wanted to work and to be independent and I also wanted to help him. And he let me work."

“But, as he was no driver, he could not accept having a wife who was this way, a woman driver going around on the streets”

5 **Aldo Acosta:** “And now she is one of the managers here”. “Before, I gave her orders and now it is her giving me orders, sometimes, when I have to work with her, you get it?” “And it's both a little imposing and annoying. I sometimes get annoyed with her for that. But I have to accept it. What can I do?”

10 **Elyzabeth Rojas:** “People said many things, like ‘his wife is out there working, learning new things, he’s going to lose her...’”

“... and then it started, he had the typical macho reaction, but, I gradually calmed him down and I explained and told him to have confidence in me. And he did.”

15 **Aldo Acosta:** “My family is making its ends meet much better, I am not the sole provider for the family anymore as she is providing for it also”.

“I mean, it's balanced, you see?”

20 “This is a new initiative in this municipality and as I told you a while ago, people thought it would not work, but it has been working, it is working”.

“I have made many men understand that there is nothing wrong with their wives working”.

25 **Yamaris Ávila:** “Today I feel empowered, today I feel like a changed woman; a woman who can deal with any situation and who will never say no because I know I can deal with it”.

“Today I spare time for myself; I didn’t spare it before”.

30 **CPA ‘Juanito Garcell’ - Goat cheese production; beauty salon for men and women; laundry and tailor shop:**

Mailén León: “To me, the most important thing has been self-esteem, leadership, and today I feel I thoroughly understand it.”

5 “I have a star. I have a tattooed star. And I had it done after an exchange with women in Colombia. There I read that the stars represent the universe and that the light from them will be there forever”.

10 “When I came back from that exchange I decided to change my life so that it would become a shining light in the universe”.

CCS ‘Calixto García’ - Cultivation and marketing of flowers:

15 **Woman1:** “In the community I would be asked: How come you are going to work, under the sun? A young housewife like you doesn’t need to do that. Your husband should provide for you.”

“Why not? I like it. I feel I’ve grown up. When I stayed at home I felt limited, like somebody unable to explain and express herself fully. ”

20 “And now I feel I’ve developed personally and mentally at my workplace.”

Yamaris Ávila: “This Yamaris that you see today is not the one who was just a housewife before.”

25 **Woman1:** “There were also obstacles like, for instance, when I wanted to sell flowers in Holguín, and the government said "no, you can’t take them out because that income is for the area and for local development.”

CCS ‘Conrado Benítez’ - Laundry and tailor shop:

30 **Woman1:** “I don’t know whether it is because they feel stronger and more self-confident, but there have even been divorces because women used to depend on men, and now men don’t like women having their own money. But it is their money, they have earned it!”

CCS ‘Regino Guerrero’ - Production and marketing of organic fertilizer:

Yanelis Amat: “It was like an awakening to life. Like I realizing that yes, I can; yes, I can do it.”

5 “It [the workshops] helped me a lot. A lot, because I got so much knowledge.”

“I have made many friends. I have learnt about woman rights, which I didn’t know about before.”

CCS ‘Camilo Cienfuegos’ - Cultivation and marketing of flowers and floral ornaments:

10 **Adelmis Quintana:** “I was a very shy person and then, after having all that training, I came to know about gender, women’s rights and the existing forms of violence...”

“All this process which was also part of our training for initiatives that included economic issues, the law, the environment... Yes, I've grown, I feel I’m a totally changed person.”

15

“We all have created a network. And, through it, we got to know each other and got informed about the problems different women were facing.”

20 “Then we realized it: We have to create a network among ourselves. And see how we can support one another”.

“But maybe in two years there will be another management or president and someone else will be in charge.”

25 “And that person may not have been participating in this process. He may not have been in this process since the beginning and shall not understand that initiative and he might say: "As to this resource, well, I am the president, I am in charge...”

30 “This is why we want everything to be part of the rules. It is a law and what is a written law in the cooperative must be followed.”

“Sometimes, the one leading a group of people or women with difficult situations at home and with children and a family should know how to take such things into consideration.”

5 “Yes, there are women who know a lot and are sensitive to all these issues, but that is not the case with others. Those are leaders, women leaders, with moustaches.”

“Sometimes you even wonder, but is this leader a woman or a man?”

10 “Today I can speak up to the management and in a general assembly or at neighbours and municipal and provincial government meetings and I can say what I want in the way I want to, no matter who is listening.”

“And if it is to support women like me, the more so”

15 **PROVINCIAL COORDINATOR**

Milagros Serrano Mosquera - Holguín, provincial coordinator of the project: “But, really, you can’t say they were fully ready for the initiative when it started; but thanks to the training each of those women learned to stand up for themselves.”

20 “The chief obstacle of these initiatives, not to all but to some of them, has not been little support from the management, but the imposition of certain criteria on some of them which have prevented women from doing everything they can do.”

25 “A national document was sent to all cooperatives in each municipality and provinces about the use of resources under the project, especially the Piaggio motorbikes that had been distributed.”

30 “And during our training we thought it would be good to propose to the ANAP headquarter to include our cooperative rules in a document, as part of the agreements by member assemblies and so on, defining the way in which each initiative has to be carried out.”

“The women who have stepped forward and who are now participating in the initiatives are community women.”

5 “Those are women who have never worked before, women who needed a salary and could not earn it. But they are earning it now.”

“And we have never had such a thing before.”

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END OF TESTIMONIES

