



Report

Women's voice and leadership in decision-making

Assessing the evidence

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Nicola Jones, Kate Bird, Anna Larson,
Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and Craig Valters

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Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil society organisation
ESID	Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre (UK)
GBV	Gender-based violence
GSDRC	Governance and Social Development Research Centre (UK)
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (Sweden)
IDS	Institute of Development Studies (UK)
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems (US)
ILO	International Labour Organization (Switzerland)
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union (Switzerland)
IRI	International Republican Institute (US)
KKPKP	Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (India)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (India)
MP	Member of Parliament
MSAM	Mahila Swasthya Adhikar Manch (Women's Health Rights Forum, India)
NDI	National Democratic Institute (US)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIMD	Netherlands Institute for Multi-party Democracy
PPD	Private-public dialogue
PR	Proportional representation
RCT	Randomised control trial
RPF	Rwanda Patriotic Front
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association (India)
SHG	Self-help group
TNA	Transitional National Assembly (Somalia)
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising (US)

Executive summary

This report reviews the global evidence on the processes of change that enable women to have substantive voice and leadership in decision-making. It answers two core research questions:

- What are the enabling factors for women and girls' voice, leadership and access to decision-making?
- What do we know about whether and how women and girls' voice, leadership and/or presence in decision-making roles result in greater gender equality?

Voice, decision-making and leadership are understood as elements of women's empowerment. They encapsulate women having the power to express their preferences, demands, views and interests, to gain access to positions of decision-making that affect public or private power and resource allocation, and to exercise influence in leadership positions. Women's voice, leadership and decision-making power may be present at the household, community and national level, and be individual or collective.

The report is guided by a conceptual and analytical framework that draws together long-standing theories of both women's empowerment and the political economy of institutional change in developing countries. We test two common assumptions about women's voice. First, that women's voice, access to, or participation in decision-making will lead to them to have actual influence over decisions and outcomes. Second, that women with influence will champion issues of concern to women, including gender equality. To do this, we look at the processes and activities through which women exercise voice, leadership and decision-making in the political, social and economic spheres. We also look at the broader contextual conditions that inform women's political participation, social activism and economic empowerment. These include social structures and norms, political regime type, characteristics of the state, civil society, and market, and international relations.

Key findings: What does the evidence tell us?

Does women's participation in political, social or economic activities strengthen women's voice, leadership, and access to decision-making processes and roles?

Women's individual and collective action, whether in formal politics, civic society or the economy, provide opportunities for women to *voice* their needs and demands. Women often organise around their practical interests, particularly in the case of social and economic mobilisation. But women, usually from the elite, also come together to lobby for gender equality and to advance their strategic interests.

'Women's voice' as an abstraction risks masking the socio-political and economic cleavages that separate women and underplaying their diverse interests, identities, and ideological or normative preferences. These cleavages include class, religion, ethnicity, caste, age and sexuality. Women's choices and preferences are bounded by concrete individual and collective experiences and consciousness about gender roles and injustice. Women's voice is itself a site of contestation shaped by the dynamics of power, and some groups of women – as individuals or collectively – are better equipped to wield influence than others. At the same time, women (and also men) from different walks of life have formed alliances around shared interests, and these broader coalitions have been critical to substantive processes of political change, such as challenging autocratic regimes or gender inequality.

Women overwhelmingly still have limited access to positions of leadership. While there has been progress in many countries in increasing the numbers of women in elected posts, both at local and national level, women are less likely to occupy executive branch posts or key cabinet positions. Similarly, while women occupy leadership roles in social movements they mostly remain under-represented in organisations that do not focus on women and gender issues. And, in the private sector, women across the world remain woefully under-represented in business management, corporate decision-making and business associations.

Women's leadership is mostly seen in terms of access to formal leadership positions, but too little is known about how women become leaders. Effective voice and leadership is associated with an ability to navigate the web of formal and informal institutions and networks that constitute the world of political decision-making or in the market. Civic action, paid or voluntary work and/or participation in formal political life can create opportunities for political apprenticeship, through which women develop political and leadership skills at the individual and collective level. However, trajectories of women's political or economic influence and leadership are mostly still poorly documented or explained.

Promising new research looks at the processes through which women leaders come to exercise influence or occupy decision-making roles. In relation to political life, this explores how women and gender advocates navigate the gendered features of formal and informal political institutions and social structures to acquire influence and decision-making roles. Key factors include how formal political or regime features interact, including how different electoral systems intersect with internal dynamics of political parties, and how informal rules, such as personalism and clientelism, and access to informal decision-making forums affect women's political careers.

Does women's voice, leadership and presence in decision-making roles result in greater gender equality?

The variation in modes and levels of voice and influence means that it is not possible to track clear trajectories of change between women's voice and leadership and wider gender equality gains. In any case, the research on this relationship is limited across all three thematic areas. Nevertheless, some findings did emerge on whether women's voice and leadership has led to more gender-responsive law and policy, more gender-responsive provision of public goods and services, more inclusive political settlements, more equitable social norms and better socio-economic outcomes for women and girls.

Women's collective voice, when strategically oriented and perceived to be broad-based, is instrumental to their ability to negotiate transformative change. There is no automatic link between women's presence and voice in public life and transformative change. Women may not be heard when they voice their demands and articulate feminist interests. The viability and sustainability of collective feminist voice depends on women's mobilisational capabilities and resources for strategic action and coalition building. It also depends on there being institutional structures and political opportunities, including the political space for associational life, to enable voice to become influence.

There is substantial evidence of how women's political voice has resulted in gender-responsive legal and policy reform. These gains include, but go beyond, women's presence in formal political positions and are often connected to women's social mobilisation and their collective organisation around gender justice. But the presence of gender advocates and sectoral experts that are well placed in, and able to strategically navigate, political and institutional opportunity structures is often also critical to women's influence. Prominent formal legal gains through women's political actions include the recognition of gender equality in new constitutions, provisions for temporary measures (e.g. quotas) to redress historical discrimination, legal recognition of women's inheritance and property rights, and their right to be free from sexual and gender-based violence. Through collective bargaining women's unions have also secured improvements in women's labour rights (e.g. wages, work environment, access to social security).

Women's social and economic activism can improve their access to public goods and services. The social mobilisation literature provides substantial evidence on women successfully advocating for improved local environments, e.g. sanitation, social housing, transportation, anti-pollution. Under enabling conditions, women's participation in social accountability processes has also led to increased transparency in government decision-making, increased budget allocations for services that benefit women, more accessible or responsive services for women, particularly local health services but also personal safety and social protection, and, in some instances, to legal or administrative redress for women, including for gender-based violations. There are some documented instances of women worker's organisations successfully lobbying for new rights and services, such as increased minimum wage, access to credit and savings, subsidised food, healthcare and childcare. Whether and how women holding formal political power improve access to services for women more broadly is an under-developed area of research.

The links between women's participation and voice and more inclusive political settlements are under-researched. Post-conflict and political transition processes can provide opportunities for women to renegotiate political settlements, but retrenchment on gender equality commitments and gains during peace is common. Latin America, for instance, saw an effective 'beheading' of women's movements following the democratic transitions as women sought to take advantage of supposedly inclusive political settlements. Overall, there has been widespread disappointment in the *de facto* reshaping political settlements from a gender equality perspective, as well as more widely. At the same time, there is emerging evidence on the symbolic and socialisation effect of increased levels of women's presence in public life and in leadership roles, in terms of changing social norms and attitudes on gender roles.

Under enabling conditions, women's political participation, social activism and/or economic empowerment can progressively shift social norms. The economic literature signals how economic empowerment can result in changes in decision-making power dynamics around household decisions, including *in some cases* in ways that lower the risk of domestic violence and increase the acceptance of women controlling assets. Some studies also show that women's participation in local politics or associational life can improve their status within communities, particularly when they are seen to deliver concrete group benefits, and that women's access to employment outside the home can shift social norms that restrict women's mobility and participation in public life. Research on women's voice and leadership rarely presents data on changes in socio-economic outcomes for women and girls, or attempts to attribute these to women having more influence over decision-making. Overall, and whether in politics, business or associational life, the symbolic and substantive effects of women holding power, and causal pathways for these, is an under-explored area.

What are the factors that enable or constrain women's voice, leadership and influence?

There are recurrent themes about the factors that enable women and gender advocates to develop voice, influence and leadership capacities across the political, economic and social spheres – and in the factors that signal active modes of resistance.

Context matters. There are multiple pathways to women's activism. Women's experience of changes in gender relations and empowerment, at the individual/household level and collectively, are also diverse. What works in one context to support women's substantive voice and leadership may be irrelevant in others. This means that common enabling and constraining factors can guide policy and programming but do not provide a blueprint.

Women's capabilities and resources, at both an individual and collective level, are important. There are five key findings on capabilities and resources.

- Women's capabilities and interests are shaped by their life experiences – and these must be understood as embedded in wider socio-political, economic and cultural histories.
- The combination of economic capital (e.g. women's ownership of productive assets and control over income) with other types of resources associated with social and cultural capital (e.g. education, skills training, awareness raising with men, and logistical support to engage in collective action) increases the likelihood of women gaining more power at the household level, and the potential for change at the community and national level.
- Formal sector principles in the labour market, such as minimum wages or social security benefits, can enhance the transformative potential of employment for women's agency.
- Legal and technical knowledge, and education more generally, can enhance women's voice and credibility and, therefore, capacity for influence. Political skills, networks and experience are also key to women's leadership and influence – and women often develop these through informal activities and welfare-oriented work, rather than more conventional formal party politics or political training programmes.
- Women organising with other women around shared interests builds their capabilities for voice and influence. The experience of group cohesion and solidarity can contribute to self-affirmation at the individual and collective level, give support and legitimacy to gender equality agendas and enable women to exert the collective power needed to shift gender norms.

Political processes and institutions are key to women's access to decision-making.

There are four key findings on political institutions.

- Both formal and informal institutions matter. Formal institutions matter in how they shape incentives and opportunities for different actors in trajectories of voice and influence (such as the particularities of different electoral or party systems). Informal institutions co-exist alongside and, in many cases, trump formal institutions; so women must also navigate and engage with informal institutions to have influence and access to decision-making.
- Advancing gender equality agendas involves contesting and redefining the political settlement. Here, the features of regime type are important. This includes whether there is sufficient openness in the political system for political participation: for example whether citizens are able to associate and influence political decisions through elections, the media and accountability processes. The receptiveness of key veto players to women's demands is also important.
- Large-scale institutional change – such as revolutions, conflict or democratic transitions – can be a catalyst for progressive change in gender equality (but can also result in regression in gender norms).
- Coalition-building, networking and lobbying strategies developed at different levels (local, national and transnational) and with different categories of actors (supporters and potential resisters, within and outside the state) are vital to women's ability to capitalise on the opportunities that critical junctures present. This is doubly so for women to turn legal gains won during political transitions into actual policy and *de facto* changes in the allocation of power and resources in ways that benefit women.

Discriminatory social structures and norms are a primary barrier to women's voice, influence and access to decision-making roles. There are two main findings on social norms.

- Social norms are another dimension of the world of informal institutions that either enable or constrain political voice and influence. Patriarchy and gender hierarchies (manifest in public attitudes, biases and behaviour) are a primary constraint on women's voice, leadership and influence in private and public life, and across the social, political and economic spheres.
- Women's diversity is a reflection of wider social, political and economic cleavages. Women's groups can be incentivised to overcome these differences in the pursuit of a common agenda. However, the normalisation of politics often results in the exclusion of women, and particularly poor women, from platforms for voice and influence, such as political office, professional organisations and associations, and the formal labour market.

Policy implications and the role of international actors

The findings from across the report point to key areas where international actors may best be able to support and strengthen women's voice and leadership in decision-making.

Ensuring that the design of interventions and external support is context-specific is a priority. While there are similarities within and across countries, the political and institutional foundations of both gender relations and the broader political settlement vary across time and place. Technical approaches that are not grounded in an understanding of how these play out in particularly localities *and* for particular groups of women (and men) will be ineffective. Investing in international actors' understanding of the context must be an integral and sustained feature of engagement across the political, social and economic spheres.

Achieving change requires activists and donors to 'think and work politically'. Increasing women's voice and leadership involves redistribution of power and resources, and thus is often met with resistance. Advances in gender equality are therefore mostly the outcome of political work, and donor approaches need to help and not hinder this. This includes facilitating strategic dialogue, trust and alliance building, including among unlikely partners, alongside support for women's collective action and oppositional (social and political) mobilisation. The challenge lies in achieving a balance between taking the strategic and pragmatic decisions likely to advance women's political interests, while maintaining the transformative goal in sight and not accepting trade-offs that unwittingly jeopardise or delay progress towards gender justice. For donors, working politically means investing in

locally driven change processes and using international resources to leverage change and facilitate strategic coalitions in-country. Research indicates, for instance, that successful women's coalitions are those that employ 'soft advocacy' by harnessing existing networks, both informal relationships with male power-holders and established ties between elite women, and who strategically frame issues so as to circumvent conservative opposition (Tadros, 2011; Hodes et al., 2011).

Supporting women's collective action is strategic. Women's socio-political and economic mobilisation have been consistently found to be important to change the formal and informal rules important for their voice, access to decision-making and influence. Assisting collective action means recognising women's diversity and supporting them to define and organise around their priorities and interests. Women often focus on practical concerns initially, but their attention can shift over time to more strategic objectives that seek to change the underlying causes of women's marginalisation. External funders and implementers may also need to alter their own thinking and allow for multiple women's movements rather than just 'a' women's movement. Funders should also adopt a twin-track approach of supporting women's autonomous organisations, known to be important for more transformative agenda setting, while also helping women to exert greater influence in mainstream (i.e. male-dominated) organisations and policy forums where key decisions are made.

Work with multiple stakeholders and invest in long-term relationships with partners. Doing so will help donors to select credible intermediaries, support substantive change processes, and build on organic rather than induced participation. Fostering both professional and grassroots women's organisations, and long-term relationships between them, is needed to ensure poor women's everyday needs and concerns inform national advocacy by elite women and to connect community action to broader socio-political movements. Women (and their funders) need also to build coalitions and networks with decision-makers and other stakeholders in a strong position to advance women's empowerment, such as core government ministries, universities, and the private sector.

Women need to work both within and from outside the state to achieve change. Overall, the evidence suggests that engaging with state actors (and working within the state) is nearly universally required in order to protect and promote women's well-being, but that more transformational agenda-setting is often best accomplished in more independent arenas. On the basis of the particular country and issue, activists and donors will need to assess whether women's goals are best supported by working with public officials and building coalitions that encourage reforms from within and/or from autonomous women's movements exerting influence from the outside. It has been strategic, for example, for international agencies to support early efforts at women's social mobilisation in conflict-affected setting. Logistical and networking support has helped to get women to the negotiating table or in a strong position to influence peace processes through oppositional voice, and this has put them in a better position to influence subsequent constitutional reform processes and to have an ongoing political presence.

Better understand and support women's political apprenticeships. Women need leadership and negotiation skills to navigate the particular formal and informal modes and forums of political engagement and decision-making in political and social space. Women can develop political capabilities and networks through a range of experiences, including civic associations and oppositional voice, having family members who are politicians or activists, student politics, and voluntary and professional work, as well as formal political careers in party or legislative politics, and through increased presence in cabinet and executive posts. Donors must recognise the different ways that women may enter politics, and that what women need to be better political leaders will also vary as a result. There is a need to invest in a better understanding and learning about what it takes to support women's political and leadership roles more effectively, given context-specific political economy conditions.

Develop and support multidimensional approaches that address both the practical and structural constraints to women's voice, decision-making and leadership. Siloed and overly technical approaches, such as to microfinance, social accountability or women's leadership development, can achieve short-term, localised and more instrumental gains (e.g. increase women's access to assets, services, formal political positions). However, supporting women's empowerment and sustained change requires joined-up programming and complementary activities that explicitly seek to raise women's (and men's) consciousness, develop social capital and capabilities and change de facto norms. For example, access to assets, such as microfinance, is more likely to empower women when provision encourages group interaction between women and is combined with technical, vocational and/or legal training. Similarly, social accountability processes or political engagement by women can only be vehicles to advance

women's interests if they are designed to address barriers to their meaningful participation, and will only lead to sustained change if processes are either linked to broader social movements or become institutionalised.

1 Introduction

1.1 Objective of the report

This report is part of the Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making learning and evidence project, which aims to provide lessons to strengthen development policy and operations in related areas through an assessment of the knowledge base. Specifically, the report reviews the global evidence on the processes that enable women to have substantive voice and leadership in decision-making.¹ The report aims to answer two core research questions:

- What are the enabling factors for women and girls' voice, leadership and access to decision-making in developing country contexts?
- What do we know about whether and how women and girls' voice, leadership and presence in decision-making roles results in greater gender equality – including more inclusive political settlements, more gender-responsive laws and policies, better provision of public goods and services to women and girls and more equitable social norms and outcomes.

To answer these two questions, the review assesses the evidence on three thematic areas – women's *political participation*, *social mobilisation* and *economic participation* – and on how activities in these spheres affect women's voice, leadership and influence over decision-making. The report also assesses the interconnections between the three thematic areas, and examines whether and how international development interventions support women's voice and leadership, including in different political systems and governance contexts.

1.2 Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the working definitions and analytical framework that guides the assessment of the evidence.

The following three sections review the evidence on the linkages between women's voice, decision-making and leadership through our three thematic areas. These sections are divided into further sub-themes.

- Section 3 is on political participation, covering post-conflict governance, political parties and electoral reform.
- Section 4 is on social activism, covering social mobilisation and social accountability activities.
- Section 5 is on economic empowerment, covering women's access to assets and participation in the labour market.

For each we provide an overview of the evidence base and identify gaps in the literature relating to the research questions guiding this report. We then discuss the findings on the effect of women's activity in that sphere on their voice and leadership and, through this, their influence over public decision-making, including more gender equitable outcomes. Finally, for each we examine the factors that explain these changes, and consider the role of international actors and policy implications.

Section 6 of the report concludes by analysing the findings across the three thematic areas and discussing policy implications on pathways to strengthen women's voice, leadership and influence in public life.

¹ See Appendix for a description of research methodology. The main report is complemented by rapid evidence reviews in two areas: interventions to support women and girls' use of ICTs (Cummings and O'Neil, 2015) and support to women and girls' leadership (O'Neil and Plank, 2015).

2 Concepts and analytical framework and approach

2.1 Conceptual and analytical framework

The review is guided by a conceptual and analytical framework that draws together long-standing theories of women's empowerment and the political economy of institutional change. The framework was used to identify lines of inquiry about the factors likely to contribute to women's voice and leadership, and also to interrogate assumptions about relationships between voice, influence and improved gender equality outcomes.

2.1.1 Definitions of key concepts

This report examines, through an assessment of the evidence base, what factors enable women's voice, decision-making and leadership, and whether increases in these in turn enable women to influence the distribution and use of public or private resources or to change attitudes and behaviours in ways that increase gender equality.² The report therefore explores what it takes to enable women's substantive voice and leadership *looking beyond women's presence and the number of women participating to address the politics of influence*.

As a starting point, we establish working definitions of the concepts of empowerment, voice, decision-making and leadership that were used to guide the analysis.

Empowerment is understood as the process by which women (or men), individually or collectively, gain the ability to make and enact strategic life choices (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment can take place in different dimensions of life, including psychological (the belief that one can effect change in the external world), political (the ability to influence rules about who gets what, when and how), social (the ability to control one's own social interactions within the household and community, reproduction, health and education) and economic (the ability to make and act on decisions about participation in labour markets, the sharing of unpaid work, and the use or allocation of assets). Empowerment is therefore a multidimensional concept and empowerment in one area of a women's life does not necessarily mean that she will be empowered in others (Eyben, 2011; Luttrell et al., 2009; O'Neil et al., 2014). According to Kabeer (1999), a woman's ability to make strategic choices has three inter-related elements: access to resources, the ability to use these to define and act on goals or choices (i.e. agency), and the achievements or 'realised capabilities' that result from these actions.

Voice refers both to the act of making known one's preferences, demands, views and interests and to the capabilities this requires (O'Neil et al., 2007). These capabilities include confidence and belief in the worth of one's opinions and the legitimacy of expressing them. They also include the ability to make informed choices based on critical awareness, education and information. Voice can be exercised at the household, community and national levels, and through individual or collective action. Voice is therefore closely linked to processes of empowerment and change in what Jo Rowlands (1997) calls 'the power within'. In many societies, women are (or have been) expected to remain silent in debate, denied the right of consent (to marital sex, to vote, over property) and seen as irrational or trivial. This diminishes the perceived validity and reliability of women's voice, even when these discriminatory norms and assumptions are historical (Goetz and Nyamu Musembi, 2008).

Access to decision-making refers to women's prospects and actualities of gaining access to decision-making positions that affect public power and resource allocation, whether at the national, sub-national or household levels. This access can be direct, as when women hold positions of power as ministers, parliamentarians, local councillors, senior or street-level bureaucrats, judges, frontline providers, or directors of private companies; or it

² Note that this review also sought to include literature on adolescent girls' voice, decision-making and leadership. However, little evidence was found directly related to the research questions. As such, we refer to the evidence on girls where available, but predominantly refer to women's voice and leadership throughout the report.

can be indirect, as when women interact with appointed and public officials in order to lobby them and influence their decisions and behaviour. Indirect access to decision-making takes various forms, including individual or collective endeavours, ad hoc or institutionalised mechanisms, formal or informal channels and relationships, and government- or citizen-initiated activities.

Leadership is an especially contested and, in many respects, underdeveloped concept in the social sciences. It has tended to either focus on individual traits, qualities and capabilities, such as vision, charisma and ability to bring along a constituency or to be seen as a set of behaviours or processes on the part of a wider group that seeks the achievement of concrete goals, such as a ruling elite or the executive (Batliwala, 2010; Lynne de Ver, 2008). In both respects, leadership is defined by the exercise of influence: a form of persuasion in the pursuit of individual or group goals. Leadership thus involves the capabilities for, and process of, mobilising people and resources. This includes the political aspect of mobilising people – that is the ability to navigate power relations, and secure desired outcomes through contestation or negotiation, by building strategic coalitions in formal political space and through informal networks and institutions, and by co-opting or blocking opponents (ibid.).

Leadership types can be further divided into ‘transactional leadership’ capacities, including the capacity for achievement of goals in more stable normative settings, and ‘transformative leadership’, which seeks to challenge the prevailing political or normative order (Leftwich and Hogg, 2007). An example of transformational leadership is ‘feminist leadership’ – or leadership that is motivated by equity and which advocates for social justice and an end to all forms of oppression, including gender-based (Antrobus, 2002; Barton, 2006; Batliwala, 2010).

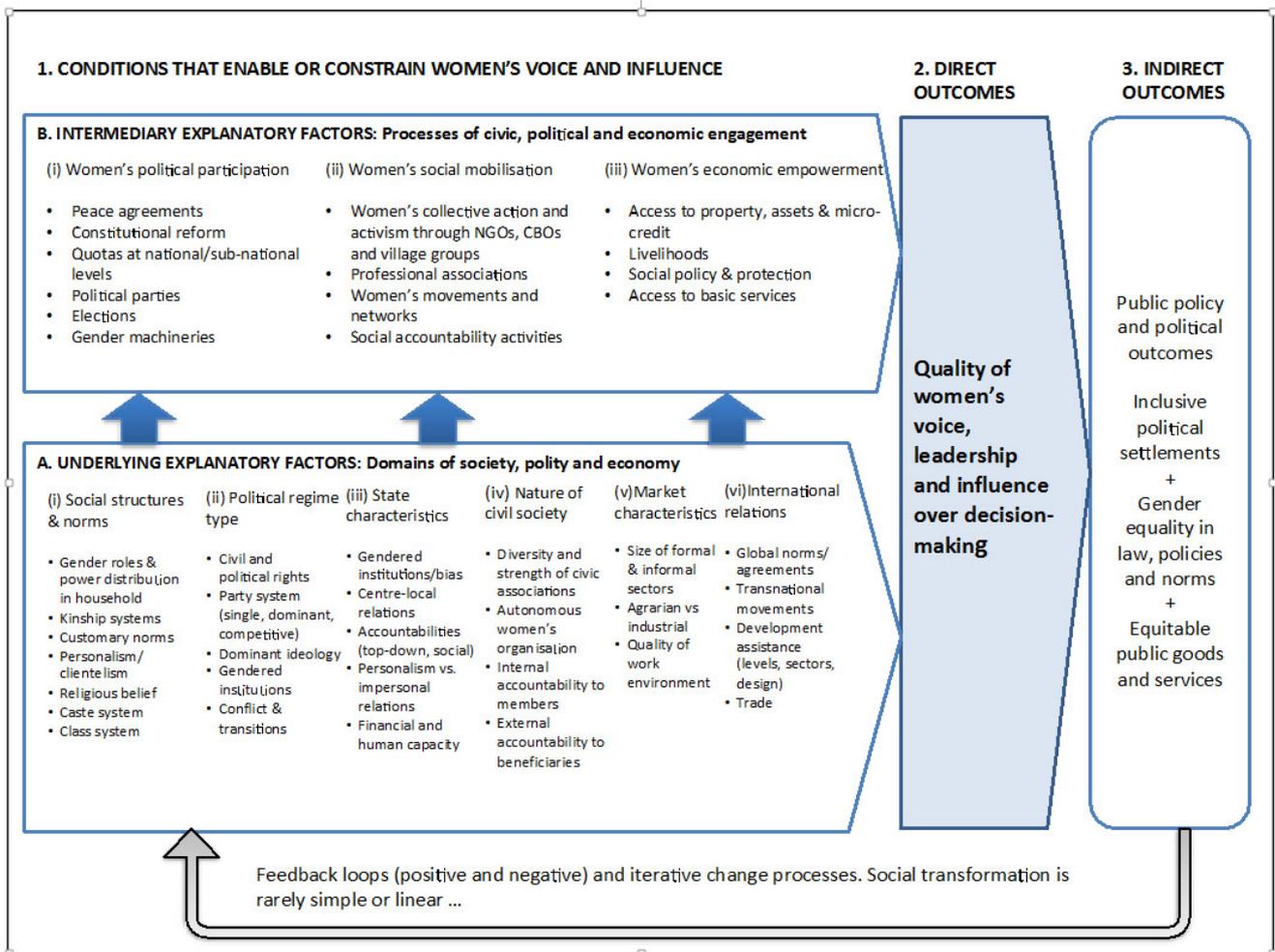
Leadership is thus effective when it translates into outcomes, whatever the precise content of those might be. It is this capacity for *influence* that is important in connecting voice to the effectuation of change. Leadership, therefore, whether collectively or individually represented, enables the ‘power over’ others to achieve change or drive certain outcomes (Rowlands, 1997; Higgitt, 2011).

2.2 Analytical framework

Drawing on these definitions, this review maps and synthesises the evidence from the global literature on the enabling pathways to women’s voice and leadership and access to decision-making. It looks at changes in women’s presence and influence in decision-making forums, the factors that explain them, and, to the degree possible, their effect in terms of outcomes for women, including gender-responsive policies, the provision of public goods, more inclusive political settlements and more equitable social relations.

What are our assumptions about the relationship between women’s increased voice and their influence over public decisions? Informed by the established conceptual and theoretical literature on women’s empowerment, the review looks at the processes and organisations through which women engage in public life in the political, social and economic spheres to explore changes in the quality of women’s voice and influence in and through these activities. The review tests assumptions about the factors that are likely to shape the quality of women’s voice in these spheres, the interactions between them, and their actual influence on improved and more equitable outcomes for women. Figure 1 sets out the analytical framework for the review, including the direct and indirect outcomes of interest, and guiding assumptions about underlying and intermediary explanatory factors.

Figure 2: Analytical framework: what factors are important for women’s voice, leadership and influence over public life



2.2.1 Direct and indirect outcomes

Goetz and Nyamu Musembi (2008) note that there are two common assumptions in the literature about women’s voice. The first is that women’s access and presence will allow them to have actual influence over public decisions. The second is that women with influence will champion issues of concern to women, including gender equality. This review looks at both of these assumptions. It examines the evidence on the extent and quality of women’s voice, leadership, and access to decision-making processes and roles. It also considers the direction and extent of any changes and the level of society at which they take place, from household and community to national institutions and processes. This is our *direct outcome* of interest.

The quality of women’s voice and participation in decision-making processes is informed by factors such as whether women represent the constituency they claim to speak on behalf of (which might be themselves but, in the case of civic and political leaders, is usually a group), whether they have the capabilities, information and choices to formulate informed views and to express them freely, and whether they are able to influence public decisions-makers effectively. As such, indicators like the number of women parliamentarians, women’s organisations or women in paid employment provide insights into the presence of women in public life. But they are only a starting point for assessing the quality of women’s participation and the extent to which they have actual influence (ibid.).

Women’s voice and participation should therefore not be viewed in absolute terms but as a matter of degree; women rarely have complete voice or none at all, but instead have more or less voice in different areas of their lives. In turn, their individual and collective capabilities, as well as their socio-political environment, shape the extent and quality of their voice and public engagement.

The review also considers the second assumption posed by Goetz and Nyamu Musembi (2008): whether engagement in civic and political life enables women to shape public decisions about the use and allocation of power and resources in ways that favour women and gender equality more broadly. This is the *indirect outcome* of interest. Following those such as Waylen (2007) and Goetz and Nyamu Musembi (2008), gender equality is assessed in the following ways.

- **More inclusive political settlements**, which refers to changing the ‘rules of the game’ regarding political social and economic engagement that result from the balance of power between competing interest and social groups (Di John and Putzel, 2009). Political settlements are the outcome of elite bargaining, and contestation between and within elite and non-elite groups. A more inclusive political outcome is one that includes a wider spectrum of stakeholders that have a say in negotiating the terms and content of the bargain. Importantly, the political settlement refers to the *real* rules of the game that shape conduct and over which there is a shared (if not always consensual) understanding. In that sense it is not limited to the *de jure* description of political agreements or constitutional texts, but to the *de facto* rules of how power and resources are allocated.
- **More gender-responsive law and policy**. International commitments, such as ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), signal aspirations to inclusivity. Gender equality principles being given legal force in constitutions and law indicates some progress towards women’s inclusion in political and civic life. Implementation is a measure of the actual nature of the political settlement, and closing the gap with *de facto* practice requires concrete policy action and gendered accountability mechanisms.
- **More gender-responsive public goods and services**. These may be specifically about advancing gender equality but might also reflect women’s preferences in relation to how services are provided and what gets prioritised. This includes policies and measures relevant to, for instance, reproductive and sexual health or assets and livelihoods.
- **Improved gender equality**, both in terms of relations between women and men and of outcomes for women. These may include, for example: improved attitudes, behaviours and social norms, including in terms of women’s mobility; a more equal division of labour between men and women, improved physical security for women; and improvements in indicators of maternal health or girls’ education.

Assumptions about the relationships between women’s voice and leadership (the direct outcomes) and their actual influence and gender equality (indirect outcomes) do not necessarily hold, however. The factors that influence this relationship in practice depend on the environment in which women’s voice takes place, as we explain in more detail in the next sub-section.

2.2.2 Explanatory factors

Under what conditions are women not only present and vocal in civic and political life but also able to influence decisions about how public and private power and resources are managed and allocated? For the purposes of the review, the enabling and constraining factors are divided into two types – intermediary explanatory factors, and underlying explanatory factors.

Intermediary explanatory factors

The intermediary factors are the actual processes and activities through which women are able to gain access to decision-making. Women participate in public life in many different ways, and these can be grouped into three main spheres.

Political: women engage with formal political institutions as voters, within women’s movements, and as members of political parties and holders of public office.

Participation in formal political institutions and processes is the most direct way that women influence government decision-making. These are the forums in which power-holders negotiate, establish and enact the formal *and* informal rules of the game about who gets what rights and resources, as well as when they get them and how (Laswell, 1936). Formal political institutions include central and local government, the legislature (including political parties and women’s caucuses), oversight bodies (e.g. the judiciary), the civil service

(including street-level bureaucrats and service providers as well as central ministries), and arms-length state bodies (e.g. ombudsmen and other regulators). Formal political processes include elections, constitutional reform and peace processes. Women's political engagement therefore regularly takes place at sub-national and national levels.³ Much decision-making in political space is mediated through informal institutions and informal networks and relationships. This includes those informal spaces and networks where political decision-making takes place, and to which women have typically limited access, but also includes women's collective action outside formal political institutions. Women typically have limited access to *informal* political space even when their formal participation is secured – and this has implications for their capacity for influence and leadership.

Social: women engage in civil society by forming or participating in civic associations and social movements and by acting collectively to lobby government and others on the basis of shared interests.

Women therefore also shape the decisions and behaviour of power holders through their activism outside of government and state. In fact, women are more likely to organise and mobilise through civic associations and social movements and indirectly influence government decisions than to hold public office. Civic associations include grassroots groups and movements, more formalised community-based organisations, professionalised non-government organisations, trade unions, and professional associations. The channels through which women in civil society express voice and interact with the state can be formal or informal, institutionalised or ad hoc, and at community, sub-national and national levels.

Economic: women engage in economic society through domestic activities (paid and unpaid), public activities, (including participating in the formal labour market and in unpaid activities outside the home), and through ownership and control of assets.

Economic activities can support women's organisations and civic engagement, as when women form micro-savings, microcredit or business networks or join unions or professional associations. Paid employment and access to assets (land, property, finance), as well as social assets such as health and education, also have the potential to alter women's status and influence over decisions within the household, and possibly their civic and political activities outside the home. While women's economic participation in developing countries can provide a platform for decision-making at national level, as with individual business leaders or through unions or professional associations – they are more likely to affect women's decision-making power within the household and community. Women engage with economic activities through earning, benefits, skills development, and through control and ownership of finances and assets. The question is whether this can increase women's agency by expanding their life choices, increasing their status and bargaining power, and more actively participating in communities and societies. But assumptions that women's economic participation automatically leads to increases in women's empowerment and capacity for voice and leadership need to be moderated – especially in relation to public life. Linkages with political empowerment, for instance, are complex and non-linear, and mediated by multiple constraints (and opportunities) across formal and informal institutions, markets and households. Constraints are most severe among women who face other disadvantages, such as being poor or being a member of minority group.

The three thematic areas of the review have been chosen because they map on to these intermediate explanatory factors and also because the interconnections between them are essential for women's empowerment in practice.

Underlying explanatory factors

The underlying factors are the broader contextual conditions that inform how the processes of women's engagement in the political, social or economic sphere translate into strengthening women's voice, decision-making, leadership and influence. For the purposes of the review, these underlying factors, both enabling and constraining, are grouped into six domains. These reflect the theoretical literature on the types of factors important to women's voice, leadership and decision-making power.⁴ In particular, the way that women's and men's power and interests are institutionalised in each of these domains informs the power and capabilities of

³ While women's political and civic engagement in the international arena have been critical to advancing gender equality, the report focuses on women's voice and influence within the domestic arena and so does not systematically include evidence on women's international activities.

⁴ The theoretical framework draws in particular on Gaventa and McGee (2010), Goetz (2003), Goetz and Nyamu Musembi (2008), Tadros (2014) and Waylen (2007).

women and girls and their ability to form relationships and organisations with others. Across the six domains, historical processes and institutional change, such as democratisation and the maturing of civil society, as well as more bounded and/or contingent events, such as conflict, elections or external support, shape the opportunities that women have for voice and influence (Gaventa and McGee, 2010).

The six domains we consider are:

Social structures and norms are factors in shaping women's agency, including their worldview, their capabilities, their choices and preferences, as well as in shaping resistance through prevailing belief structures associated with patriarchy. Gender hierarchies that subordinate women and norms that limit their private and public roles, choices and actions are a principal concern, but so too are other types of power asymmetries based on, *inter alia*, class, religion, ethnicity and caste (Goetz, 2003).

Political regime types have implications for the opportunities that citizens have to influence public decision-making at different levels (Gaventa and McGee, 2010). Even in countries with multi-party competition, women may have fewer civil and political rights than men. Other political factors that can limit women's influence include the institutional legacy of previous regimes, the timing and nature of transitions, and the openness of power-holders to gender concerns (Waylen, 2007).

State characteristics are important for gender equality outcomes because policy emerges from battles within the state, which includes bureaucrats wielding significant influence during implementation. Goetz (2003) highlights how gendered accountability failings arise not only from the individual biases of officials but also from their institutionalisation. For example, accountability institutions often do not have a remit to punish officials whose actions produce patterns of bias. However, the state is not homogenous and the relationship between feminist civic activists and feminist bureaucrats ('femocrats') is an important determinant of women's influence and gender equality (Eyben, 2014; Waylen, 2007).

The nature of civil society matters because civic associations are the main vehicles for engaging with and trying to influence and sanction public decisions and performance (Goetz, 2003). Civil society organisations are not automatically representative of, or accountable to, the women they claim to speak for. Nevertheless, the presence and strength of civil society is important for women's voice and influence, including elite/professional associations, women's grassroots organisations and the community-based organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that often support them and are a channel for external funding (ibid).

Market characteristics play a role in determining how women's economic participation translates into women's voice or agency. The structures and institutions of the private and public sector (e.g. formal and informal rules, regulations, hierarchies and work environment) determine the extent, location and quality of women's participation (Kabeer, 2008). They also shape – in combination with social norms – patterns of control and ownership of assets, and the specific implications for women's autonomous engagement in economic life and linkages with other empowerment capabilities.

International relations influence women's capability for voice and influence in several ways. These relations include transnational women's movements that link feminists and gender activists, providing exchange of ideas and peer support. The international gender norms and political commitments that have resulted from transnational activism, civic and political, have in turn shaped domestic discourse on gender and women's rights in developing countries. Bilateral and multilateral and government and non-government agencies have funded both women's organisations and government institutions in support of women's voice and leadership (Domingo et al., 2013).

3 Women's voice, leadership and influence through political participation

This section looks at the evidence on the features and pathways of women's voice, access to decision-making and leadership in formal political spaces and in contesting and redefining the terms of the political settlement. We separate these issues into three sub-themes: (1) women's role in negotiating peace processes and constitutional reform in post-conflict and transition settings; (2) the trajectories of women's voice and leadership in political parties; and (3) the impact of electoral systems and quotas on women's presence and influence in political life. It is important to stress that the three sub-themes are closely interconnected and interact in complex ways, including in how they shape opportunities for women activists and gender advocates to challenge and redefine the terms of the political settlement.

For each sub-theme we reflect on the evidence base in terms of the nature and quality of the evidence, areas of convergence or contestation, and gaps in the literature. We then discuss what women's presence and influence looks like and the factors that enable the development of voice and leadership (direct outcomes); and in turn how this shapes wider outcomes regarding the quality of the political settlement and the prospects for more gender equitable policy outcomes and legal gains (indirect outcomes). We also examine the factors that affect these changes. First, however, we provide an overview of the main findings and recommendations on women's political participation overall.

3.1 Summary findings and recommendations on women's political participation

3.1.1 The evidence

The literature on women and politics considers how participation is achieved in the political space; it also increasingly reflects on the impact this has for gender equality. However, the observation of how women and gender activists navigate the political economy of change processes to contest the political settlement is less developed. We know more about how women engage in peace agreements (and, to a lesser extent, constitutional reform), for instance, than about the *political processes* by which they influence peace agreements and constitutional reform – and the degree to which this results in transformative processes that advance gender equality. On the politics of quotas, much of the literature agrees that quotas do not guarantee influence of women's voice in shaping political outcomes, or that women politicians will prioritise gender equality agendas. There is also insufficient research on how women navigate the internal politics of political parties. Overall, then, we have a limited understanding of how women navigate what happens at the intersection of formal institutions (quota systems, political party systems, regime types) and the informal rules and networks of political decision-making – and the impact this has for gender equality agendas.

3.1.2 Key findings

- Women's access to key decision-making roles or bargaining spaces in political life remains limited, but there has been progress in women's access to formal political roles. This is associated with the highly gendered bias in formal and informal political space and the often invisible pathways of political negotiations, to which women continue to have limited access.
- Peace processes and constitutional reform exercises are a window of opportunity for gender activists to take part in shaping renegotiated political settlements but women's formal participation remains limited. Where they have influence, this is often associated with political skills in strategic networking and leadership capabilities in oppositional collective action rather than formal access to decision-making roles. Gains for women remain fragile and uncertain.

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- Collective action and social mobilisation has been consistently important in changing rules of access to decision-making and altering formal and informal institutions to advance gender equality. This is also true in post-conflict and transition settings where the political settlement is the object of heightened negotiation.
 - Timing seems to matter in post-conflict or transition settings when the rules of the game are in flux and in dispute. Early engagement in peacebuilding processes increases the chances of women's demands being visible. But women's interests are not homogenous: social, political, cultural, ethnic and ideological cleavages can remain divisive.
 - Skills in strategic action in informal political space to achieve influence are important. Women's voice and influence has often been informal and indirect, including to target informal decision-making forums and networks. Building strategic alliances not only among women's groups but also with key decision-making actors in political negotiations is important in shaping outcomes.
 - The presence of gender experts can make a difference to the quality of voice articulating a gender equality agenda. Legal expertise is also important.
 - A political environment at least minimally receptive to change, or in which the politics of inclusion features in the political settlement, makes a difference to the prospects for women's access to decision-making roles. The political environment includes features of formal institutions (such as quotas, to make up for entrenched gender bias, or a party leadership committed to gender equality) and features in informal institutions and social norms.
 - Material resources are not unimportant in enabling women's political voice. Informal political institutions, such as patrimonialism, for instance, require control or ownership of resources. In peace agreements and constitutional reform processes, basic logistical requirements (travel, subsistence expenses) shape women's access to sites of political negotiation.

3.1.3 Recommendations

- Thinking and working politically. International support for women's voice and leadership is most effective when underpinned by politically attuned modes of engagement grounded in a deep understanding of the political economy of context. This includes engaging with formal political space as well as informal institutions, networks and forums of decision-making and negotiation around the rules of the game. This is important also to identify relevant and strategic entry points for support to gender equality advocates.
- Supporting locally driven change processes is essential. Technical support – including in the form of gender or legal expertise – is unlikely to be useful or relevant if it is not aligned with and supportive of locally driven and locally owned change processes
- Support to women's access to post-conflict or transition processes of political negotiation (such as peace agreements or constitutional reform) is important. This includes supporting the strategic engagement of gender advocates through civil society or through formal access to the negotiating table. Material support to cover logistical needs relating to travel and subsistence and supporting safe conduct for women's political participation should not be underestimated.
- There is a need for more research on the political economy of change processes. This means opening the 'black box' of the intersection between the formal and informal political space. There is a gap in our knowledge on how women navigate formal and the more invisible (but often more influential) informal political institutions, decision-making forums and strategic networks. This includes building the evidence base on the development of political apprenticeship, leadership skills, capabilities and access to resources in contexts of entrenched gender-based discrimination.
- There is a need for more evidence on the politics of constitutional reform and gender equality agendas. We know more about women's roles in peace processes, but the evidence on the politics of constitutional reform remains underdeveloped.
- There is a need for more research on how electoral quotas intersect with other political norms, such as regime type (for instance, parliamentary versus presidential), party systems (formal and informal), party regulation, or electoral systems (first-past-the-post or proportional representation) and the consequences for women's political careers.

3.2 Peace agreements and constitutional reform: contesting the political settlement in post-conflict and transition settings

Peace negotiations and constitutional reform processes are critical junctures characterised by intense political bargaining among contending actors and highly variable levels of openness, participation and consultation. At stake is the (re)negotiation of the terms of the political settlement. In post-conflict settings, this includes often a sequence of processes, including a peace process and peace agreement, and often (where an older constitution is not invoked) the negotiation of a new constitutional text.

Constitutional reform may take place in transition settings, although there is nothing pre-determined about this (Domingo, 1994). Sometimes older constitutions are invoked, as in Argentina in 1983 or Bolivia in 1979. Constitutional reform may occur as part of the evolution of stable political development, when a *magna carta* is perceived as outdated, or has ceased to reflect the values and interests of key political elites. In any event, both peace agreements and constitutional reform processes are windows of opportunity to contest and redefine the terms of the political settlement. This report considers the evidence base on how women's groups and gender advocates are able to influence the process and outcomes of both.

Depending on the particular features of the post-conflict or transition setting, peace agreements and constitutional reform processes give *de jure* content to what emerge as *formal* political agreements. As outcomes of a bargaining process, they reflect the balance of power between contending and participating actors. They can also involve a complex political game in which actors may appear to engage in public consensus-building for the sake of legitimation even while elite commitment to future implementation is less than fully sincere. The gap, therefore, between *de jure* agreements and the realisation of the intent of peace agreements and constitutional texts depends on the nature of the underlying political settlement that is forged in the bargaining process. The fragility or robustness of these commitments reflects the shifting balance of power between contending elites and interest structures, the resilience of emerging regime institutions and state capacity, and the degree of societal acceptance and legitimacy of the bargain.

The degree to which women and gender advocates are able to drive gender-responsive content in these processes is a key question in this section. What does the evidence say about what constitutes and enables meaningful women's voice and leadership in peace negotiations and constitutional reform processes, and with what impact in terms of advancing gender equality goals?

In relation to the gendered features of constitutional reform and wider regime transition dynamics, Waylen (2014, 2006) underlines the need to unpack the complex processes of political negotiation, including the formal and informal networks and sites of negotiation that they involve. What is at stake are the rules of political, social and economic engagement. Taking account of the political economy of these process dynamics allows us to identify the scope of opportunities for advancing gender equality goals and feminist action, as well as the capabilities and resources that are relevant in the different modes of strategic engagement by gender advocates in pursuit of a gender equality agenda. Research which addresses both formal processes and outcomes as well as the informal rules, coalitions and networks through which the political settlements are 'resettled' is an emerging field (see also Nazneen and Mahmud, 2012; Goetz and Nyambu-Musembi, 2008; Waylen, 2007; Anderson and Swiss, 2014; Tadros, 2014; Goetz, 2003a, Hassim, 2003 and other essays in Goetz and Hassim, 2003). The premise is that this approach can contribute to identifying the enabling factors and constraints that explain advances in women's political voice and in substantive gender equality gains. These analytical approaches fit well with recent scholarship on political settlements that has informed analysis of post-conflict governance processes (Di John and Putzel, 2009). As regards post-conflict and regime transition settings, this is still a relatively young field, but echoes lines of enquiry already underway in some of the gender literature.

Concretely, feminist institutionalism has generated important new thinking, mostly from the 2000s which addresses the complex interaction between formal and informal institutions and decision-making processes, and the gendered consequences of this for women's access to decision-making processes and leadership prospects.⁵ The increased focus on the *process* dynamics of institutional and socio-political change (what enables it, and

⁵ Research led by Georgina Waylen (funded by the European Research Council) focuses on "Understanding Institutional Change: A Gender Perspective" (2012-17). Initial outputs feature in a special issue of *Politics and Gender* 10(4) 2014, which presents new thinking on gender gains and institutional change. reflecting.

how change is achieved) provides analytical insights that are relevant for transition settings (including in post-conflict or regime change processes). Aspects of this analysis have been embedded in older literature on gender and democratization⁶. More recent findings delve further into the stickiness of gender bias in political space, not least through the resilience of informal institutions, and what Mackay (2014) calls the ‘nested newness’ of institutional change –when it is achieved - that is absorbed and made ineffectual by the ‘old’ ways of doing things.⁷

3.2.1 Description and assessment of the evidence base

Nature and quality of the evidence

Knowledge on the role of women in both peace agreements and constitutional reform processes is a relatively nascent field. The work on women in conflict and peace has an older trajectory and focuses on women’s experiences in conflict and increasingly in peacebuilding (such as Anderlini, 2007; Conciliation Resources, 2013; essays in Pankhurst, 2007; Tripp et al., 2009, Connell, 2011; El-Bushra, 2012; Meintjes et al., 2001; Macleod, 2014). There is also growing interest in assessing the impact of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and international support for enhancing women’s voice and participation in peacebuilding processes and their outcomes (see Olonisakin et al., 2011; Barnes, 2011; Pankhurst, 2002; Tripp et al., 2009 among others; and Domingo et al., 2013 on gender-responsive statebuilding).

The academic literature that analyses the *political processes* by which women exercise voice and influence peace agreements and constitutional reform is narrower. There are some significant examples of robust qualitative and quantitative analysis on the presence of women in these processes and on the legal gains flowing from it (for instance, Bell and O’Rourke, 2010; UN Women, 2012; Haynes et al., 2011; Ni Aolain et al., 2011; essays in Williams, 2009). But there is less on implementation and long-term transformative impacts. Quantitative analysis is mostly descriptive, counting presence, or achievement of the policy and legal gains, but some studies seek to develop causal connections between process and outcome (for instance Anderson and Swiss, 2014). Qualitative analysis begins to delve into the process aspects – focusing on enabling conditions and on challenges and constraints regarding women’s access and the factors that explain gains (Ni Aolain et al., 2011, Haynes et al., 2011; Mcleod, 2014; Anderson and Swiss, 2014; Waylen, 2014, 2006). The grey literature, though prescriptive and normative in orientation and sometimes anecdotal in nature, documents change processes and experiences of women’s participation and their influence on peace processes and peace agreements (Strickland and Duvvry, 2003; Conciliation Resources, 2013; International IDEA, 2013). Mcleod (2014) presents a comprehensive review of the evidence base on women and peace agreements.

There is an emerging research agenda that focuses on the intricacies of *process*, including the nature of informal dynamics that underlie political negotiations surrounding, for instance, constitutional reform (Waylen, 2014b; chapters in Nazneen and Sultan, 2014). Recent scholarship is beginning to grapple with a more deliberately gendered analysis of how political settlements are negotiated (Waylen, 2014a; Waylen 2014b; Nazneen and Mahmud, 2012).

There is also in the academic literature an emerging body of single or small number case studies that examine change processes. While the analytical focus and principal research questions vary, they provide insights into the factors that enable women’s access to or influence on peace agreements, and/or to constitutional reform processes. Mostly, however, they do not constitute an established or cohesive body of literature.

Weighting of evidence

Overall the emerging literature on these issues finds that while women participants and gender issues are increasingly present in peace processes and constitutional reform processes, they continue to be marginal to both. The literature on peacebuilding and gender mostly concurs that women’s participation in these processes adds value in terms of inclusivity and *de jure* outcomes on paper. The mobilisation of women’s movements aimed at influencing these processes is also a recurring presence and enabling factor in maximising the prospects of gender-responsive agendas.

⁶ Not least through such work as that of Alvarez (1990), Goetz and Hassim (2003 among others, as noted).

⁷ See also Waylen (2014a and b), Lowndes (2014), Chappell (2014) as well as many of the other pieces in the special issue of *Politics and Gender* 10(4) 2014; see also Krook and MacKay (2011).

Contested areas and key gaps

Women's voice, access to decision-making roles and leadership in post-conflict settings is a nascent field of enquiry. The participation of women and gender advocates in advancing gender agendas is widely seen as important, but there is less consensus on the view that women make more committed peacebuilders or are more inclined to pursue inclusive policies or peace agreements. Critics note the risk of essentialist views of women as victims or peacebuilders (see Otto, 2009; Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2013).

Important gaps in the evidence base

There are also some important gaps in the literature:

- We lack a systematic assessment of the factors that enable or constrain women's access to processes of negotiating peace agreements and with what impact. This is even truer for women's access to and influence on constitutional reform processes.
- There is insufficient political analysis of *process* in relation how women's influence is deployed (whether through civil society lobbying or through formal access to peace talks or constitutional deals), and how gender advocates and women politicians navigate institutional and structural conditions to achieve meaningful gains.⁸
- There is limited analysis from a gender perspective of the development of the political settlement, including how and under what conditions women and gender advocates are able to contest the political settlement to advance women's empowerment.⁹
- There is a limited knowledge base on how women's formal political voice and influence in peacebuilding and constitutional reform is interconnected with processes of economic empowerment and social change.

3.2.2 Findings from the literature

Peace agreements and constitutional reforms reflect different stages in wider processes of heightened political negotiation about the rules of the game. Both can be assessed in terms of concrete legal advances for women's voice and access to decision-making roles, as well as gender equality more widely.

Direct outcomes

There has been some progress in women's participation in peacebuilding and constitutional reform processes. First, given women are rarely key players in these processes, when women and gender advocates take part – formally or informally – in peace processes and constitutional reform processes this is an indicator of progress. The key questions here include how participation (whether formal or through social mobilisation) translates into substantive influence and what accounts for women's capacity to influence processes and outcomes in the course of political negotiation. Second, the nature of women's voice and influence is itself relevant. What does meaningful participation involve, how is influence achieved, and how do women exercise leadership roles? Third, do the resulting agreements themselves establish rules that secure women's representation and access to decision-making roles in the formal political space? Do they advance a gender equality agenda?

Participation, access and a seat at the table

Peace processes often involve a number of stages that present different opportunity structures for gender advocates. These include: deals that focus on ceasefire and pre-negotiation agreements; framework agreements setting out terms aimed at settling the conflict; and agreements that focus on how implementation of such terms will take place (Bell and O'Rourke, 2010). Increasingly, peace agreements have become roadmaps which include forward-looking substantive provisions intended to feature in later constitutional reform process. Including reference to gender in these roadmaps is likely to advance the prospects for future legal gains. In

⁸ As regards developing countries, studies that highlight the importance of process include Waylen (2014a and b; Nazneen and Mahmud (2012); essays in Nazneen and Sultan (2014); Hassim and Goetz (2003). Hassim, (2003), Rai (2004).

⁹ Recent research agendas are addressing this gap – see Nazneen and Mahmud (2012) and Waylen (2014). The literature on political settlements is young, but draws on more established strands of new institutionalism and historical institutionalism as well as political economy analysis. The earlier work on democratic transitions captured some of this, in terms of how dilemmas unfolded among women's groups and feminist literature on how to engage with the state and democratic politics, such as Alvarez (1990). And more recent developments on feminist institutionalism are hugely relevant to informing work on political settlements – see footnote 4 above.

practice, the pathways of peace processes are highly varied, reflecting the fluid and uncertain nature of these processes (Bell and O'Rourke, 2010; Haynes et al., 2011; UN Women, 2012).

The literature finds that women have been mostly absent as formal participants in peace processes (Bell and O'Rourke, 2010; Ni Aolain et al., 2011; Haynes, 2011; UN Women, 2012) and are marginalised from the often-invisible key decision-making spaces. A study by UN Women (2012) found that of 61 peace agreements between 2008 and 2012, women were among the signatories in only two. This absence is especially marked in contrast to women's access to other public decision-making roles. In part this reflects the highly militarised context of such processes (Haynes et al., 2011). Further, the priority is often negotiating an end to conflict, so that political agendas concerned with inclusiveness – including gender issues – are susceptible to being set to one side.

But while women have been excluded from these processes, they have participated and exercised influence in a number of ways. UN Women (2012) summarises the modes of engagement for women in peace agreements:

- Taking part as mediators: women participated in 12 of 14 UN mediation teams in 2011, but a woman has never been appointed to lead one.
- Taking part in peace processes as delegates of the negotiating parties.
- Forming an all-female negotiating party: this occurred in Northern Ireland, where women formed a cross-community coalition.
- Acting as 'witnesses'.
- Acting as observers.
- Holding parallel forums has been a recurrent recourse, again, as a result of exclusion rather than preferred choice.
- Engaging as gender advisers, providing technical support to delegates.
- Participating as members of technical committees or special sub-committees.
- Being signatories to the peace agreement: In this role it is important to distinguish between women who are involved primarily as gender activists and those who are principally representatives of other political agendas for whom gender issues may not be a priority (UN Women, 2012).

There is convergence in the literature that constitutional reform processes in post-conflict and transition settings are unique opportunities to influence the renegotiation of the political settlement and embed normative principles of gender inclusion into the formal rules of political, social and economic engagement (Ni Aolain et al., 2011; Haynes et al., 2011). They are foundational processes that crystallise an agreement about the rules of the game regarding how power and resources should be allocated and the key features of the relationships between state and society and among citizens.

Comparative research on women and constitutional reform in transition and post-conflict settings remains especially underdeveloped (with some exceptions – Waylen, 2006; Wayen, 2015; Ni Aolain et al., 2011; Haynes et al; Anderson, 2014; essays in Dobrowolsky and Hart, 2003; essays in Williams, 2009). Single case study analyses are an important source, but they constitute a still nascent body of knowledge. On the one hand there is a widely shared assessment that constitutional reform processes mostly remain gender-blind, echoing the experience of peace agreements, although there has recently been a shift towards greater inclusion. In post-conflict settings Haynes et al (2011) note the logic of short-term expediency, which results in the principles of gender equality and inclusion being marginalised. Women activists featuring more heavily in the dynamics of post-conflict peace agreements or transition processes correlates with higher prospects for the inclusion of gender equality clauses and quotas (Anderson and Swiss, 2014). In some cases, as in Nepal, the post-conflict settlement can include a commitment to ensure women's presence in constitutional reform processes (International IDEA, 2013). Tripp (2009) notes that constitutional reform in Africa since the 1990s has included a growing expression of demands to incorporate women's rights and gender equality principles.

There is, however, no major review of the gender content and process of constitutional reform experiences (for instance equivalent to that of Bell and O'Rourke, 2010 or the UN Women, 2012 study on peace agreements).

The knowledge base remains patchy on the process and the substance of participation and influence by women and gender advocates. Case study analyses give insights, however, into how constitutional reform efforts in transition settings can be effective sites of contestation where gender advocates can advance gender equality and women's political participation (Waylen, 2006; 2014b; Burnet, 2008; Tripp et al., 2009; Haynes et al., 2011). South Africa, Brazil, Nepal, Kenya Burundi and Rwanda and more recently Tunisia are interesting cases where gender issues featured significantly in constitutional reform outcomes. These case studies are important examples from which to draw lessons on what works to embed gender equality.

Political process and influence

There is no obvious pathway to effective engagement of women and gender advocates in peace processes or constitutional reform. It is evident that the political economy of the post-conflict or transitions context sets the wider boundaries within which strategic engagement by gender advocates can take place – whether within political parties, peace delegations, women's movements or international teams. Added to this is the fact that peace processes and constitutional reform are highly uncertain and interactive processes (Waylen, 2007; Ni Aolain et al., 2011). Taking account of the political conditions and institutional opportunity structures as well as the particular sets of capabilities, resources and features of individual and collective engagement that characterise women's voice is important in order to identify the prospects for women to lead change in peace and constitutional reform processes.

In some cases this includes the fact of *changed gender roles resulting from the experience of conflict* (where women have become heads of households, or where they have actively participated in armed conflict or oppositional movements such as in South Africa, El Salvador or Nepal) has contributed to enhancing capabilities for collective action and leadership (International IDEA, 2013; Wood, 2008; Banderage). Wood (2008) for instance highlights in the cases of El Salvador, Peru, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka how not all women return to their pre-war roles at the end of a conflict; and some women continue in newly found leadership roles, for instance in new civil society organisations (CSOs). Such experiences have sometimes served to galvanise processes of collective self-assertion that have translated into social mobilisation by women driving a gender agenda in the peace process and/or constitutional reform processes (see Moser, 2007).

Ni Aolain et al (2011) note the importance of *anticipating* peace agreements and constitutional reform processes through peace processes. Thus while gender advocates are likely to remain excluded from key decision-making roles in formal processes, they can prepare in advance to draft a gender agenda through a wide range of lobbying, convening and meeting processes. Early women's activism may combine a mixture of activities that give public visibility to gender issues in different spaces. This includes activities that support the articulation of debate and discussion *within* women's movements to give body to gender issues and demands, as well as activities that involve lobbying and political mobilisation informally with other key actors who may have veto power on outcomes. Strategic networking and alliances both nationally and internationally can make a difference.

It matters also how differences between women's groups and diverse identities and interests are addressed and overcome to find common ground for gender demands to be agreed. This featured significantly in South Africa, Burundi and Northern Ireland. In Nepal the women's caucus in the constituent assembly was unable to bridge divisions based on caste, class and culture (International IDEA, 2013).

Waylen (2009) notes the importance of *strategic alliances between women as outsiders and insiders*: that is, between women in political parties and women in women's movements, drawing on the examples of Brazil, Argentina and South Africa. These alliances were effective in defending ambitious gender goals in the new constitutional texts. For instance, in South Africa it led to strong constitutional commitments to equality generally, and gender equality specifically, including a commitment to trumping customary norms (Albertyn, 2003; Hassim, 2003). In Argentina, the forceful mobilisation of women inside and outside the constituent assembly, crossing party lines, secured the gender demands, the most challenging of which was to prevent an anti-abortion clause in the final text (Waylen, 2009). In Brazil, 80% of women's groups' demands were included in the constitution of 1988 thanks to the combined strength of cross-party alliances among women members of the constituent assembly, supported by exchanges with the civil society women's umbrella organisation (Sardenberg and Alcantara Acosta, 2014). Informal lobbying and strategic alliances are important to secure buy-in from different actors, but there are also potential trade-offs (Alvarez 1990; Jacquette and Wolchik 1998).

The institutional and political setting is also important in shaping the opportunities for women's voice. This includes the degree to which there is *receptiveness to inclusionary agendas* among potential veto players (Waylen, 2014a). Elite actors' willingness to buy into a gender equality agenda may owe more to the political capital and legitimacy to be gained than to a sincere commitment to the spirit of the *de jure* commitments to gender equality gains. But the absence of buy-in from veto players in redefining the political settlement can render collective action by gender advocates ineffective. It is also the case that the particular features of *formal institutions* contribute to shaping the incentives of different actors, and types of voice and women's representation. In the case of Nepal, the different elected pathways to women's presence in the Constituent Assembly made a difference to their public image and the likelihood of their role in advancing a gender agenda. A study by International IDEA (2013) suggests that a mixed electoral system to elect women led to some women members (selected through the PR system) being perceived as 'token women', in contrast to women elected through the single member constituency who were seen as political leaders in their own right, but not necessarily gender advocates.

The literature consistently underlines the critical importance of women's activism in CSOs and social movements in achieving gains in peace agreements and constitutional reform (Campbell et al. 2006; UN Women, 2012; Waylen, 2006 and 2014b). The evidence base consistently demonstrates the strong correlation between the organised collective action by women's groups early on in post-conflict and transition settings, and the gender-sensitivity of peace agreements and constitutional agreements (UN Women, 2012). Importantly the *process* of participation and strategic networking helps to nurture political capabilities among women activists – a political apprenticeship of sorts – that can translate into a normalisation of political engagement and the development of political skills.

Overall there is a strong convergence in the literature that the prospects for advancing women's voice and leadership in political processes are improved by a combination of *early* mobilisation by women's movements and inclusive political environments that shape gender advocates' formal and informal access to peace negotiations and constitutional reform processes (Waylen, 2014). They make the point that women's political activism around peace agreements contributes to the political energy necessary for a sustained effort in the subsequent process or for ensuring the adoption of electoral quotas. The evidence also strongly points to the importance of locally driven processes in shaping positive outcomes (UN Women, 2012; Bell and O'Rourke, 2010; Kandiyoti, 2004), as opposed to agendas that are seen as international imports. Tripp et al (2009) also note the importance of changes in global norms (such as UNSCR 1325), international action and transnational feminist mobilisation as well as the resources necessary for women's mobilisation and capacity for influence.

Content and gains regarding women's voice and leadership in peace agreements and constitutional reform

Bell and O'Rourke (2010), UN Women (2012) and Anderson and Swiss (2014) undertake both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the gender component of peace agreements. Bell and O'Rourke's study of 585 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2010 finds that only 92 (16%) made specific reference to women. UN Women finds that out of 61 peace agreements signed between 2008 and 2012 only 17 (28%) included gender-related wording, and that such references are often vague and are stuck in preambles or annexes rather than the main text of the agreements (UN Women, 2012). UNSCR 1325 does, however, appear to have made a difference in terms of increasing the number of references to gender issues in peace agreements (Bell and O'Rourke, 2010; UN Women, 2012).

Analysis of peace agreements suggests that their gender content is insubstantial. There are two questions here. Do peace agreements (through women and gender activists' action) secure women's voice in the constitutional process, and in which ways? And do peace agreements begin to frame the gender equality content of constitutional reform processes? The experiences in practice are very varied.

Bell and O'Rourke (2010) show that the most frequently mentioned issue is in the form of general reference to political and legal equality on the basis of gender and non-discrimination. This is followed by references to social equality or workers' rights with mention of gender or women and explicit reference to sexual violence. Next is reference to women's political participation. And there is some reference to women's inclusion in the implementation of peace agreements. Concrete analysis of how women have sought to ensure formally agreed levels of voice in constitutional reform features mostly in case study analyses. Here there are diverse pathways associated with issues related, as signalled, to capabilities for collective action, incentives for unity among

women's groups, international funding, the institutional and political context, the fragility of the transition period, and receptiveness to inclusionary agendas among contending actors.

Indirect outcomes

There does appear to have been progress in the integration of references to gender equality and women's rights in new constitutional texts – with varying levels of connectedness to peace agreements. Whether *de jure* commitments translate into substantive gains is a matter of implementation and political commitment to the realisation of constitutional principles. Indeed, ensuring gender-sensitive content in peace processes and peace agreements remains a challenge. The more tangible gains appear to be in securing women's access to representation in subsequent political processes. The evidence on more substantial changes resulting from peace processes in which women were involved or from agreements addressing gender is still underdeveloped.

A key area of progress is in the integration of political representation rights. Tripp et al (2009) shows how since 2000 there have been important advances in constitutional commitments to different gender equality agendas. Half of African countries have adopted quotas. Anderson and Swiss (2014) note the strong correlation between the activism of women and gender activists and the achievement of electoral quotas in constitutional texts.

Despite insufficient gains regarding women's voice and leadership in constitutional reform processes emerging through political or post-conflict transition processes, there is an increasing number of 'magna cartas' that pave the way for legal gains in embedding quotas in the political and public office. In Burundi, women's activism contributed to ensuring 30% representation in the executive, legislative and judicial branches and in all public bodies (Falch, 2010). The Rwandan constitution enshrines the 30% quota in all government and public office. In the DRC the 30% quota has been institutionalised. In Anderson and Swiss's sample of 115 countries, 45 adopted some form of quota between 1990 and 2006 (Anderson and Swiss, 2014). South Africa secured access to the constituent process for women; in turn, the constitution makes provisions for women to comprise 30% of all new civil servants. The concern here is the degree to which the absence of a race-gender perspective will not resolve other horizontal inequalities and will privilege white women (Budlender, 1997; Waylen 2006). Quotas were also secured in Kenya, Nepal and Brazil among others (Cottrell and Ghai, 2007; International IDEA, 2013).

Resistance to securing women's representation has not been entirely eroded. For instance in Somalia: 'We lobbied for a quota for women in the future legislature, the Transitional National Assembly (TNA). But we faced opposition from the male delegates. "No man," they told us, "would agree to be represented by women".' But the women did not give up and ultimately helped create a National Charter that guaranteed women 25 seats in the 245-member TNA, and protected the human rights of women, children and minorities as well (Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002). In Uganda, Goetz (2003) underlines the importance of women with legal knowledge in drafting constitutional text with the effect of embedding gender friendly content, notwithstanding the subsequent political instrumentalisation of women's participation by Museveni

Violence against women has begun to feature in new constitutions in more explicit terms (Tripp, 2009b). Measures include addressing impunity related to sexual violence experienced during conflict, and there is a growing number of references to redress for widows or displaced households affected by violence.

Social and positive rights, such as access to health, education and protection from domestic violence have become more present in constitutional texts. For instance in East Timor, the Gender and Constitution Working Group secured nine articles in the constitution guaranteeing social, health and educational rights, equal access to traditional law and protection from domestic violence. The constitution also provides citizenship protection for children born of rape (Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002). Reproductive health rights are especially controversial, but in Argentina gender activists were able to prevent an anti-abortion clause (Waylen, 2014). Likewise in Colombia, legal mobilisation before an activist Constitutional Court with considerable review powers has resulted in the removal of the ban on abortion (Reuterswald et al., 2006; Undurraga and Cook, 2009).

Gender equality has taken the form of references to non-discrimination with varying levels of specificity. But this led to clashes with defenders of the customary norms that are used to justify gender-based inequality and discrimination, for instance in regard to access to property rights and inheritance and to the continuation of practices such as female genital mutilation (Tripp 2009b). The South African process resulted in the principle of equality trumping customary norms, as women lobbyists in the constitutional reform process fought hard to secure gender equality (Waylen, 2014b and 2006; Alibertyn, 1994). However, as Bell and O'Rourke (2010) note,

there are real challenges in attempting to reconcile quotas for women with ethnic or clan quotas. Byrne and McCulloch (2012) find that in power-sharing the rights and role of minority groups can get emphasised in ways that tend to sideline gender and divide women along the lines of geography, ethnicity and social class.

There are also difficulties associated with balancing the international community's advocacy of provisions on women's rights and equality (which may be perceived as a Western imposition), and advocacy by local constituencies to protect customary and religious laws that embed inequality for women (Haynes et al., 2011; Kandiyoti, 2004). The Constitution of Afghanistan is an example of such tensions. It endorses various international conventions whilst also granting equal citizenship rights to men and women while proclaiming that no law can contradict Shari'a (Kandiyoti, 2004). In practice, the complexity of contexts of institutional hybridity means that it is difficult to reconcile international norms that endorse gender equality with customary and traditional norms in constitutional negotiation processes (Haynes et al., 2011). It is not uncommon in the Middle East to find that family law is exempted from being bound by constitutional law or international norms, even in progressive states, as exemplified in Yemen (Molyneux, 1995).

Overall, the process through which constitutional reform is negotiated and contested from a gender perspective, and what constitutes important gains in terms of advancing gender equality, remain under-researched with some important exceptions. Moreover, there is a need for more research on how *de jure* gains can translate into substantive transformation or can underpin the evolution of the political settlement in practice.

3.2.3 How does change happen?

Peace agreements and constitutional reforms represent concrete outcomes, and the *de jure* achievements from a gender perspective can be identified and counted and constitute important gains and building blocks in advancing gender outcomes. It is also evident that what counts is the political process preceding peace agreements and constitutional reform. Waylen (2015) describes this as unpacking the 'black box' of formal and informal institutional mechanisms, political strategies and capabilities that interact with the political denouement of peace and constitutional reform processes. In delving into the complexities of this process, this analysis enables us to identify the kind of factors that contribute to enabling presence, voice and influence and to more substantive or transformative gains and the sustained presence of gender advocates in the political sphere.

Enabling factors

There are a number of recurring factors that appear to make a difference:

- *The nature of conflict dynamics and the transition process* itself shapes the enabling – or constraining – political economy that women's groups and gender activists have to navigate. Periods of political change and the experience of conflict can alter the role of women and gender relations, as they become the main breadwinners, participants in opposition or combatants. The literature suggests that in some contexts such experiences have enhanced women's critical consciousness and ability to influence political processes, including peace processes (Harris, 2010).
- *Women's mobilisation in transition and post-conflict processes is key.* Women typically remain marginalised from formal participation in peace negotiations leading up to the signing of peace agreements. Where gender-responsive outcomes feature in peace agreements or constitutional reform outcomes, a recurrent element is the role of women's civil society organisations in mobilising to lobby peace negotiations.
- *Timing* seems to matter. Early engagement in peacebuilding processes increases the chances of women's demands being visible. But women's interests are not homogenous. How women's interests coalesce around a common agenda to advance gender goals varies; social, political, cultural, ethnic and ideological cleavages can remain divisive during and after these change processes.
- *The presence of gender experts* can make a difference to the quality of voice articulating a gender equality agenda. Legal expertise is also important, as evidenced in South Africa and Brazil (Waylen, 2006, 2014b).
- *International support for women participants* either through civil society or through formal access to the negotiating table can be crucial for women activists. Mobilisation and collective action is expensive for women, especially poorer women, and the value of funding to support the logistics of travel and subsistence cannot be underestimated.

- *Skills in strategic action* to achieve influence are important. Purely demand-side mobilisation reduces the effectiveness of collective action. Building strategic alliances not only among women's groups but also with key actors with decision-making power in the negotiations is important. Influence requires certain minimum levels of receptiveness to inclusionary agendas among key stakeholders involved in peace or constitutional reform processes.
- *The nature of the political process itself matters*, in terms of the concrete institutional context (formal and informal rules), and engaging strategically with windows of opportunity as these arise through shifts in the balance of power between contending actors in what are often fluid and uncertain contexts (Waylen, 2006, 2014a).

Constraints and disabling factors

- *Peace processes are often militarised processes*, and women are in the main excluded from key decision-making roles. Women's voice and gender issues are typically not perceived as make-or-break issues in brokering an end to conflict, a ceasefire or framework agreement (Haynes et al., 2011; Ni Aolain et al., 2011).
- *The subordination of gender agendas to other oppositional or transformative agendas* is a recurrent theme in the analysis on the prospects of advancing gender equality in transition settings (Molyneux, 1985; Campbell, 2006; Waylen, 2007).
- *Social norms* represent a formidable barrier to change. While there is evidence, as noted, of conflict leading to a change in gender relations, the literature also shows that such changes in gender roles often do not survive into the post-conflict period: patriarchal structures and gender inequalities remain or are reverted back to (Sørensen, 1998). Moreover, transition processes are rarely linear (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006), and can coexist with a continuation of discrimination and inequalities normalised by war (Carey et al., 2010; Ismael, 2004). The pervasiveness of social norms that are inimical to gender equality gains is part of the socio-political landscape that undermines formal legal gains for women's rights.
- *Commitments on paper vs. commitment in practice* thus often reflects the mismatch between constitutional principles and social norms, as well as the insincerity of political deals. The literature underlines the gap between the ideals expressed in peace agreements and constitutions and their actual implementation. Some observers have noted the need for a strong focus on gendered forms of enforcement, including on which parts of a peace treaty translate into binding domestic legal norms and which do not (Haynes et al., 2011; Ni Aolain et al., 2011).

Implementation is challenging in post-conflict contexts because the processes of empowering women and recognising and tackling gender-based inequalities are deeply political phenomena that entail altering fundamental power structures and gender relations. Not surprisingly, implementation is likely to become an ongoing, contested and highly variable arena that has to engage multiple actors – not only those whose views framed the peace negotiations or the new constitution (Haynes et al., 2011).

The role of international actors

International actors have mixed effects. UNSCR 1325 has strengthened the international discourse in support of women's participation in post-conflict processes of peace. But in practice the evidence is mixed on the practical impact on improved levels of women's participation since UNSCR 1325 (Haynes et al., 2011).

International support has been especially effective in facilitating dialogue, including difficult conversations between women's movements and governments. In Colombia, international actor's role of accompanying women to talks with local government officials has had the effect of providing safe spaces and opportunities to voice their demands (Domingo et al., 2013b). Donors have also been important in providing material and logistical support to getting women to the negotiating tables or constitutional reform sites.

At the same time the transnational activism of women's movements has resulted in effective modes of support and visibility to women's demands. In East Timor, the engagement of organisations like Oxfam and the Asia Foundation made a difference to women's groups influence in the constituent assembly (Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002). International actors are at their best when they support locally driven processes of political mobilisation by women and gender activists – in formal political spaces or through social movements. They

should therefore focus on where they can best support this – and at a minimum ensure they do not undermine local capacities and processes.

Concluding reflections

Overall, there is little evidence on the degree to which peace agreements result in transformative processes that can meaningfully advance gender equality, and this continues to be an important knowledge gap. As Bell and O’Rourke (2010) note, ‘the relationship between peace agreement text, implementation of its provision and durable peace remains largely unknown’ even when gender provisions are conceded. The same is true for constitutional reform processes.

At the same time the literature mainly appears to signal that peace processes and constitutional reform exercises are a window of opportunity for gender activists to mobilise in order to influence the wider processes of negotiation around the political settlement. To the extent that gender gains are achieved, the *process* of engagement may contribute to, and also reflect, the development of women’s political capabilities, manifested in how voice is expressed, what it represents (as strategic and practical interests) and the degree to which it influences outcomes.

Formal participation in peace agreements for women or gender advocates is typically limited. Influence is deployed through political skills and leadership capabilities in oppositional collective action rather than through access to decision-making roles. In some cases this influence is carried over into effective voice and influence in constitutional reform processes, but this cannot be assumed: the weight of political economy conditions and the resilience of discriminatory social norms dictate the admissibility of inclusive agendas. Gains for women remain equally fragile and uncertain in reality.

While there is a problematisation of women’s voice, its diversity and potential tensions in relation to what and whom women activists represent in peace agreements and constitutional reform, the literature gives little consideration to what women’s leadership looks like or what it means to support women’s leadership development. However, the knowledge base does provide insights into how women negotiate the terms of the political settlement – with varying levels of commitment to gender equality agendas – and what influence looks like.

3.3 Women’s voice, leadership and influence through political participation: Political parties

3.3.1 Description and assessment of the evidence base

Nature and quality of the evidence base

Most academic literature on women’s political participation in the developing world,¹⁰ rather than providing a specific analysis of parties, tends to take a more general approach, emphasising women’s roles in national legislatures or institutions of local governance, or their participation as ‘quota women’. As Amrita Basu (2005: 1) notes, ‘Scholarship on women’s political engagement has devoted a great deal of attention to the state, but much less – and less nuanced – attention to political parties’. She attributes this to authors wanting to write about the successes of state-level women legislators or social movements, rather than the comparative lack of progress in women’s participation in parties.

Feminist and party literature on women and the role they play in parties as institutions is largely limited to the study of advanced industrial nations (Brooks et al., 1990; Caul, 1999; Campbell et al., 2006; Childs and Cowley, 2011; Childs and Krook, 2012; Murray, 2012; Dahlerup and Leyenaar, 2013). While we draw on this, this is not extensively reviewed in this paper. More studies are available in the grey literature, with reports produced for International IDEA (Ballington and Karam, 2005; Htun, 2002; Llanos and Sample, 2008), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) (Ballington, 2012) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 1999), for example. Even here, however, these reports are the exception, with the same organisations placing much greater emphasis on women in parliaments or political participation more generally, with only limited inclusion of party detail. This is in spite of the way in which IPU in 1999, assessing progress four years after Beijing, highlighted parties

¹⁰ Women’s political participation now constitutes a very large body of literature and for the purposes of this study, the literature review has been limited to case studies in the developing world.

as a critical area for change: ‘It is parties that hold the key to change, in the drafting of programmes, in taking account of women’s needs and of the impact of all kinds of action on their situation, in nominating candidates, in providing logistic support for election campaigns and in many other areas’ (IPU, 1999: 32). The few studies of women’s roles and participation within parties that have been produced by IDEA are of high analytic quality but are limited in their coverage of country contexts (focused mainly on Latin American cases – Htun, 2002; Llanos and Sample, 2008).

On the other hand, the literature on gender quotas is expanding rapidly and is increasingly focusing on ‘critical actors’ (Childs and Krook, 2009), including parties and party leaders. In the past it focused primarily on the question of whether women’s greater presence in elected office led to their greater influence and propensity to promote women’s interests – more recently expanding to look at the conditions for substantive representation (Francheschet, Piscopo and Krook, 2012; Childs and Krook 2009; Celis et al., 2008).

Weighting of the evidence

There is general agreement that parties are critical gatekeepers of women’s access to political participation in the majority of contexts and that they are under-studied as vehicles for women’s social and political advancement. There is also consensus over the way in which women have traditionally played support roles in parties and have only recently begun to assume political roles (Ballington, 2012). This being the case, it is surprising that more studies have not emerged detailing the institutional characteristics of parties either as case or comparative studies, within or across country contexts.

Contested areas / key gaps

Among the existing studies, there is some divergence over whether parties tend to be willing to advance women’s political careers and interests, but lack the capacity to do so (IPU, 1999), or whether they usually have the mechanisms in place, but lack the will to commit to substantive change (Waylen, 2000; Htun, 2002; Araujo, 2010; Walsh, 2012; Francheschet and Piscopo, 2012). Most of the more recent literature suggests the latter is true. Some authors argue that, within parties,¹¹ mechanisms such as quotas for candidate lists have a net positive effect in providing incentives for parties to support strong women candidates (Miguel, 2008). Others suggest that parties are likely to find any way possible to avoid allocating power to women, in spite of their compliance with quotas (Walsh, 2012). As discussed in more detail below, context matters a great deal, with parties’ propensity to promote women influenced by the levels of party institutionalisation, party ideology, the party system more generally, and prevailing gender norms.

Latin America and India are predominant as case studies in the literature on women’s role in parties in the developing world, primarily because of the way in which their established, bureaucratic states and multi-party political systems render parties critical actors to any efforts to promote women’s voice and leadership. Their histories of nationalist and socialist struggles, in which women’s movements have played significant roles, may also partly explain the way in which evidence is weighted toward these geographical areas. Basu (2005) extends case studies to South Asia more broadly, including to Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, in an excellent examination of parties’ relationships to both women and social movements that promote women’s interests. But this, along with Liyanage’s 1999 study of women in Sri Lankan parties, is an exception to the dominant focus on India and Latin America. Basu (2005) concludes that, within these countries, the stronger the democratic institutions, the more opportunities there are for women to gain representation through parties, and thus in Pakistan women tend not to engage with parties as much as in India. This suggests that it is variation in the political system that makes a difference, possibly explaining why, in other countries without strong democratic institutions, parties have not been identified as subjects of interest to scholars looking at women’s representation. Nevertheless, parties function as key gatekeepers to political participation even in these other countries, albeit in less formal, or institutionalised ways, and so it is surprising that more has not been written specifically on women in parties in other contexts. More often than not they are simply considered a side issue in the more general consideration of women’s political participation, if they are mentioned at all. This makes comparison over time and between parties difficult.

¹¹ This is an important distinction – legislative quotas can be a different story.

How influential the evidence is on policy and practice

The influence of the evidence on policy in this field has been minimal, firstly because – with the exception of international IDEA’s 2008 ‘best practices’ report which directs itself specifically to Latin American parties – political parties have not been targeted as specific actors to whom recommendations have been addressed. Second, international donor interest in supporting parties and party institutionalisation has been minimal because of the political, interventionist stance that this kind of assistance might represent. US organisations such as the NDI, International Republican Institute (IRI) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) have provided this assistance but have largely defined it in technical terms in order that it might be seen as non-partisan. Organisations that do align themselves politically, such as the German political foundations affiliated with parties (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Heinrich Boll Stiftung, for example) and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) have greater propensity to work with parties in developing country contexts to encourage uptake of research findings; but again, due to the lack of comparative studies producing concrete, applicable findings for implementation, this has been limited to date.

Multilateral organisations such as UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme have considerable experience working in the fields of democratisation and building peace and security, and in some cases do form strategic alliances with political parties in order to promote women’s roles within them (Domingo et al., 2013). This depends very much on the country in question, however, and is not an organisation-wide strategy.

Crucially in recent years there is an increased focus in the literature on women’s access to executive branch and party leadership positions. This is still a very recent and nascent body of research focusing on women occupying executive positions, which analyses women’s access to and performance in cabinet and in head of government roles, and the impact of their achieving these positions (see for instance Jalalzai, 2013; Krook and O’Brien 2012). The body of work, summarised by Waylen (2015), signals that as power and decision-making mostly resides in the executive branch it is not enough to get women into the legislative branch; and second that there has in fact been a considerable increase in women accessing executive branch positions in recent years – although this varies considerably. For instance, in Latin America there have been a number of female presidents – increasingly less from political families, or elite groups, such as Dilma Rousseff in Brazil. Waylen (2015, citing Mueller et al., 2014) notes that pathways to executive office for women are not necessarily that different to men’s experience, in terms of political capital or effectiveness. Recent research finds that the symbolic value of women’s presence in leadership positions in the executive branch is important in shifting attitudes towards women’s leadership (Alexander and Jalalzai, 2014). Despite women also increasingly being appointed to the ‘hard’ ministries, such as defence or finance, there continues to be more recurrent appointments to the ‘soft’ cabinet posts.¹²

3.3.2 Findings from the literature

Direct outcomes

The evidence suggests that women’s presence in political parties as candidates or party members (and in political rather than administrative or supportive roles) has increased over the last 20 years. This is particularly the case in Latin America, where in this period 11 countries have introduced party quotas (as distinct from quotas for appointments to parliamentary mechanisms, or reserve seats which may exist in the absence of party quotas) requiring that parties put forward candidate lists for election that comprise 20-50% women (Llanos and Sample, 2008: 12). This is likely linked in many countries to a greater awareness of women’s (potential) contribution to party politics since Beijing (IPU, 1999). Specific contextual factors have also brought about greater presence of women in parties – in Rwanda, for example, the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) party has increased its share of elected seats to 50% women in a post-genocide recognition of the need to avoid discrimination of all kinds (Powley, 2005).

By contrast, other examples, such as the Zambian case (Longwe, 2010), point to little or no change in parties’ efforts to increase women’s participation. Yet others demonstrate that in spite of measures such as party list quotas, parties have found means to avoid compliance – especially when, as in Brazil, quotas are combined with

¹² O’Neil and Plank (2015) provide a summary review of the knowledge base on women and leadership.

other electoral stipulations that limit their impact and/or a lack of sanctions against non-compliant parties (Htun, 2003; Llanos and Sample, 2008: 16).

Further, it is also clear that mechanisms for women's participation in parties do not guarantee voice, leadership or access to decision-making (Walsh, 2012; Francheschet and Piscopo; 2012, Waylen, 2000; Araujo, 2010; Baldez, 2007; Beck, 2003). Much depends on the way in which mechanisms to promote women's participation in parties – such as candidate quotas – affect political incentive structures. Araujo (2010) for example describes how the vagueness of quota law in Brazil and a lack of sanctions on parties that do not comply, hinders the quota's effectiveness. Even where mandatory party quotas exist (e.g. Argentina since 1991), parties have been accused of filling these with inexperienced, elite or party-line women (Piscopo and Francheschet, 2012; Waylen, 2000; Walsh, 2012). Walsh (2012) outlines a case in South Africa where the ANC adopted a voluntary gender quota which allowed the party to handpick women who would toe the party line. As a result the party centralised power further, and denied women the opportunity to advance women's rights while giving the impression that they were more committed to women by adopting a quota. The number of parties seems also be relevant in shaping prospects for political advancement of women – for instance more parties in the system can diminish the number of women reaching higher positions (Dahlerup and Leyenaar, 2013).

Evidence clearly points to the way in which formal rules and processes for the inclusion of women as party candidates can only go so far in altering established institutional norms, practices and values within parties. While it is important to understand women's involvement in formal political processes (Goetz, 2003; Goetz and Hassim, 2003), research suggests that informal processes are just as critical. Waylen (2014a), along with the Pathways research at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) (Cornwall, 2007; Tadros, 2014), points to the way in which informal institutions are critical in shaping women's prospects for political involvement. Thus, the 'old boys' network' approach to party politics can hinder women's access to voice and leadership just as much if not more than the lack of a quota for women candidates (Ballington and Karam, 2005; Longwe, 2010; Bjarnegard, 2013).

On the one hand, as Basu (2005) asserts in relation to South Asian parties, it is generally the political systems with the strongest democratic institutions that offer greater opportunities for women's representation. On the other hand, Htun (2002) notes that the most institutionalised of party systems may not be the ones that best facilitate women's access to voice and leadership: indeed, informal spaces, (for example in competitive clientelist systems) can offer opportunities to women where formal rules of the game are too restrictive and established beyond hope of alteration, or indeed where formal systems are less determinant of the *de facto* rules of the game than are informal norms and practices. This can be seen in the Afghan example, where parties play no formal role in the political or electoral system and yet where women are still able to take advantage of party resources, for example in terms of campaign financing. Reserved seats for women provide an incentive for parties to support female candidates as women can win seats with many fewer votes than their male counterparts. As such, putting a woman forward as an informal party candidate – officially campaigning under an 'independent' label – can at once free women of the potentially negative association that parties hold in the public eye but also essentially fund their entire campaign, with no formal means of parties being able to hold them accountable to the party line once they are elected (Larson, 2015, forthcoming).

This strategic navigation of the informal nature of party politics in Afghanistan then brings into question issues of *women's agency* and the nature of the relationship between women candidates for office, women party members, women party leaders, and the party leadership more generally. The Afghan example serves to highlight how women with all apparent odds stacked against them can in fact play the system to their advantage, with some limitations (ibid.). This is not the case only for individual women, but of women's movements as a whole. Some women's movements have been able to navigate the political advantages and disadvantages of association with parties in a way that best benefits them and the message they want to promote, as has been the case in India with women's movements and their connections to the right-wing BJP (Basu, 2005). In general, however, there is a distinct lack of literature on women's strategic agency vis-à-vis parties, either as individuals or as collective organisations.

Parties that have actively promoted women's voice and leadership have done so for a variety of reasons. Rwanda boasts the highest number of women legislators in the world (64% of parliamentary seats, and 38% of senate seats, are held by women), largely as a result of the ruling RPF party's stated commitment to ensuring equality

for all (the party had almost 50% women appointed to the seats it controlled in parliament before quotas were introduced) (Powley, 2005). As Rai (1995) documents, Indian parties have for many years been incentivised to ensure the representation of different social groups and have pursued strong female candidates toward this end.

Often critical is the extent to which parties are linked to social, political or women's movements or civil society organisations more generally, although the differences between these are important and have produced different kinds of alliances, not all beneficial to promoting women's interests (Basu, 2005). Women's organisations within parties have also often been critical vehicles for women's voice and leadership inside the party and beyond. This was the case in the 1970s in Iraq, for example, within both the Ba'athist and Communist parties, whose women's organisations helped bring about change in the Personal Status Law (Efrati, 2005). More recently, however, studies have attributed greater numbers of women in legislatures in established democracies to women's organisations: 'One of the critical reasons for this rise is the impact of women's organizations both inside and outside political parties. Women's organizations were well aware of the effect of single-member electoral districts on women's candidacies. They worked with political and government institutions to secure electoral changes to facilitate women's nomination and election' (Shvedova, 2005: 38). This was particularly the case in Morocco, where, recognising the importance of parties as gatekeepers in a strong party system, women's organisations lobbied parties resulting in a number of them adopting voluntary quotas for women in 1999 and 2001 (Sater, 2007, 2012; Darhour, 2012; Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013).

Linked to the issue of parties' connection to political movements is the question of ideology. Caul (1999) suggests that parties with leftist ideologies have been more likely to promote women and their interests as a result of their commitment to emancipation struggles of marginalised groups more generally. Communist parties in particular have left legacies of strong women's movements, even though the party itself has long since disappeared from mainstream politics in many countries such as Bangladesh (Nazneen et al., 2010), Iraq (Efrati, 2005) and Palestine (Jad, 2010). As Htun (2002) points out, however, in reference to Latin American parties, even right-leaning parties have not performed badly in terms of numbers of women elected, and so ideology alone cannot explain why some parties are better than others at promoting women's voice and leadership.

Whether parties promote women's leadership in developing countries is another question about which relatively little has been written. Again, in regard to legislative environments more generally, very few women hold leadership positions as the heads of important committees or within the secretariat (Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson, 2005; Childs and Krook, 2009). The likelihood of women acquiring positions of leadership could also be linked to political and social attitudes in the country in question (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). As Htun and Piscopo (2010) note, across the Caribbean and Latin America public opinion generally holds that women make good political leaders – something that appears to be connected to the high rates of women legislators that some countries in the region enjoy. But this region may be an exceptional case in this regard, as in developing countries more generally the phenomenon of women's leadership does not appear to be strongly linked to social perceptions of their abilities as political leaders (Matland, 1998; Yoon, 2004).

The question of women's leadership in parties extends beyond the acquisition of seats on committees – although this in itself is often no mean feat. The key is that women acquire leadership of *important* committees, attesting to the way in which they have had to mobilise people and resources in order to do so. Navigating the often male-biased political environment in both formal and informal spaces and essentially bargaining for positions of power are prerequisite to attaining key leadership roles with parties and parliaments more generally, and yet little is known about how women acquire these skills. Tadros (2014) goes some way towards exploring this through the concept of political apprenticeship, and Rai's (1995, 2011) study of Indian parliamentarians' stories also touches on different routes to power through negotiation with different critical actors, parties included.

The way in which national-level party politics is linked to local or subnational political party activity and representation varies greatly from one context to the next, with the details of the system very much determining women's positions in real terms. In Morocco, a strong party system combined with closed lists for national and district seats, and 30 reserved seats for women at the national level, means that national women's seats are considered representative of the nation as a whole and are accountable primarily to parties, whereas district seats are beholden to voters and need to consider the demands of a particular geographical constituency (Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013). Nevertheless, as both national and local elections involve closed lists where voters choose only the party and not the individual, parties play critical gatekeeper roles at both levels. In Palestine, by contrast,

voters vote for individual candidates, meaning that name and reputation carry significance. Jad (2010) documents how a 20% quota in local councils has greatly increased the number of women winning seats, but that party support for their candidacy varies in importance between urban and rural areas: critical to women candidates in cities, it is less important in villages, where reputations and social contributions matter more..

Indirect outcomes

Very little evidence exists that explicitly links women's political participation in parties to improved gender equality or future voice and leadership. As Childs and Krook (2009) point out, the evidence on women's willingness and ability to represent women's interests remains inconclusive. Also, this body of literature, particularly when focused on developing country cases, lacks analysis of the impact of women's party affiliation.

Party women's willingness and ability to promote gender-sensitive legislation in parliament is linked to the broader issue of how legislative and executive powers are divided in a given system, the role that parties play in parliament (if any), and the extent of parliamentarians' own influence over the executive branch. In strong presidential systems, legislators can be easily overruled by presidential decree and thus even the most concerted efforts among parliamentarians to bring about gender-responsive change can be silenced from the top. In other cases, as in Afghanistan, party politics is not institutionalised to the degree that parties play any formal role in parliament (Coburn and Larson, 2014).

Alongside the political system, other aspects of the contextual environment matter greatly. As Wang (2013) points out in reference to the Ugandan case, while a move to multiparty politics in 2006 was clearly important for women's mobilisation as legislators, it was their connection to civil society, the strength of the women's caucus and the support of male legislators that facilitated the advance of pro-women policy outcomes. Regime type can determine the way in which parties discipline and develop themselves as institutions and, in turn, the ways in which policy outcomes can be achieved.

Clearly, women party members are politically ambitious but few are involved in politics solely for the purpose of promoting gender equality. Shirin Rai's (1995) study of Indian women MPs documents this well: women describe themselves as 'partywomen first' (p.116) and, in spite of meeting together across parties to discuss some gender-related issues, they are restricted in the action they can take on these issues by party requirements. Rather, as party women with political ambitions, women MPs in India react to the institutional incentives that are put to them. This means that in political systems where parties form the central organising component of mainstream politics (all established democracies) it is not possible to separate women's efficacy as agents of pro-equality change from their party affiliations.

The indirect impact of women's voice and leadership in party politics in terms of improved equality for women-in-general seems to be connected less to the actual numbers of women elected to office and more to the nature of the party's connection to women's movements, whether these be internal or external to the party (Rai, 1995; Llanos and Sample, 2008; Efrati, 2005; Basu, 2005; Rai, 2011, Wang, 2013). This remains underdeveloped in donor engagement. Some women's movements have attempted to avoid connections with parties for fear of being co-opted, or where the general public view parties with suspicion (Basu, 2005). Again, party ideology can be important here, but the likelihood of parties promoting pro-women agendas is also very much linked to broader political trends at the local, regional and global levels (Thomas, 1994; Childs and Crook, 2009).

3.3.3 What factors explain change

Enabling factors

Where parties have promoted women's voice and leadership, and where indirect outcomes have ensued, these can be attributed to:

- Commitment from the party leadership to ascribing equality into the core principles of the party and putting these into practice – for example, in the RPF in Rwanda or Argentina's Socialist Party.
- Solid connections with women's groups and social movements, both within and outside the party (Rai, 1995, 2012; Efrati, 2005; Basu, 2005).

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- Socialist or left-leaning political ideologies that have traditionally supported emancipated groups – and which, as in a number of cases in Latin America, have been connected to unions facilitating horizontal linkages and ideological platforms across what have previously been separate social groups.
 - Features of formal institutions make a difference to shaping incentives for women, as do internal party mechanisms that facilitate women’s movement up the ranks (e.g. quotas).
 - Informal institutional cultures that facilitate women’s movement up the ranks, such as the acceptance of women’s presence as political actors and leaders.
 - Informal institutions, such as patrimonialism, where leadership figures within parties are open to women’s participation – although the policy outcomes of this participation can be limited in cases such as South Africa where toeing the party line is a condition of being nominated as a party candidate.
 - Where parties’ presence and influence at the subnational level is strong, combined with quotas for women in local elections. This is particularly beneficial in PR systems where open lists are used, enabling women to make the most of their local reputation as social figures (teachers, philanthropists, or familial connections to influential male leaders).
 - Women activists and/or men promoting women’s participation in positions of authority within the party.
 - A wider context and/or political settlement in which inclusion has been a defining principle (for example the Rwandan case), giving women ground to contest space for their own political involvement.

Disabling factors / constraints

Where parties have not promoted women’s voice and leadership or gender quality outcomes, this can be attributed to:

- Lack of will among party leaders as a result of patriarchal social norms or an unwillingness to share political influence (e.g. Zambia, Brazil, South Africa).
- Lack of sanctions for parties refusing to comply with quota laws, and/or the existence of other electoral stipulations that render quota laws essentially ineffective (e.g. Brazil).
- Weak connections to women’s movements.
- Informal institutional cultures that prevent women’s access to positions of influence (‘old boys’ network’ mentalities).
- Other informal institutional realities such as patrimonial structures that exclude women or create zero-sum competition between women and men candidates.

Role of international actors and their support

International actors have played little role in supporting political parties directly, primarily due to the need to remain non-partisan and a reluctance to get involved in internal political affairs. As such, agencies that have provided support to parties, such as NDI, IRI, and IFES have done so on a purely technical basis, with ‘cookie-cutter’ training programmes that have been rolled out in many different country locations (NIMD and the German political foundations are something of an exception to this, working with parties that hold similar ideological values to their own). This approach treats women as beneficiaries of technical assistance rather than as political actors in their own right. It cannot address the political incentives and disincentives that determine whether or not women who do have access to voice and influence use this to promote an equality agenda.

The purely technical approach to assistance is beginning to change, however, with a commitment to assessing political context and designing programmes accordingly (NDI, 2014). Ballington (2012) describes how NDI is changing its approach to working with parties to facilitate greater empowerment of women within them – by encouraging institutional reform while simultaneously targeting specific women activists within and outside the party (2012: 2). NIMD has focused on running lengthy training courses for politically active individuals, with some success in Indonesia (NIMD, 2009). As these are recent changes, however, it is yet to be seen whether they will have an impact on parties in the longer term.

3.3.4 What are the policy and programming lessons?

- Engage with parties, recognising the way in which they are the gatekeepers of women's political participation in most contexts.
- Understand the limits of technical support to parties, and ensure that support given engages with the specific political context (and the incentives and disincentives that it determines) in question.
- Understand that quotas alone do not equate to greater women's voice and leadership or substantive representation, even when parties do comply with them.
- Pay more attention to the detail: the ways in which regime type, political systems, electoral systems, party politics and quotas intersect in a given context, both formally (i.e. according to constitutional and legal conditions) and informally (i.e. according to the relationships that are most influential). The detail is often what determines not only who gets elected but what they are able to do once in a position of authority.

3.4 Women's voice, leadership and influence through political participation: Electoral reform

3.4.1 Description and assessment of the evidence base

Nature and quality of the evidence base

Over the last decade a considerable amount of research has been conducted into the introduction of electoral quotas for women candidates, both within parties and for legislative seats, and has developed into an academic field in its own right (Ballington 2004; Frankl, 2004; Ballington and Karam, 2005; Dahlerup 2006; Jayal, 2006; Norris, 2006; Randall, 2006; Wordsworth, 2007; Tripp and Kang, 2008; Childs and Krook, 2009; Costa 2010; Tadros and Costa, 2010; Tadros, 2010; Ballington, 2012; Francheschet et al., 2012). This builds on earlier work by Dahlerup (1988) and Phillips (1995) on women's political presence more generally, and stems from work looking into the reforms that followed the UN's Beijing conference on women in 1995. Partly as a result of the proliferation of studies, there is now a body of quality analysis across academic and grey literature on the subject of quotas. Francheschet et al. (2012) put forward an influential framework through which to assess quotas and the representation they facilitate – dividing this into descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation – which has been taken up in other studies since (Tadros, 2014).

Latin American case studies are most prevalent in the literature, partly because 11 countries in Latin America adopted quotas in the 1990s following the example set by Argentina in 1991 (Htun, 2002; Peschard, 2002; Llanos and Sample, 2008; Miguel, 2008; Araujo, 2010; Costa, 2010; Sacchet, 2008, Francheschet and Piscopo, 2012). Following this, a number of studies have been conducted on the local quotas in South Asia (Reyes, 2002; Jayal, 2006; Ciotti, 2009; Devika and Thampi, 2011; Agarwal, 2014), and studies on reforms in African and Arab countries have also become more common (De Diop, 2002; Sabbagh, 2005; Al-Sharmani 2010; Tadros, 2010; Sater, 2007, 2012).

Weighting of the evidence

Much if not all of the literature on quotas – and particularly more recently work – agrees that quotas in themselves do not equate either to increased women's voice and leadership or to the indirect outcomes that it might engender. As Htun (2001: 1) finds, 'quotas, when they succeed in bringing women into power, do not always grant women the resources they need to use that power effectively'. Quotas have intrinsic value, nonetheless. A general consensus exists that for quotas to bring about substantive change, other conditions need to be in place, including an electoral system conducive to women's candidacy, incentives for parties to include women (including sanctions for non-compliance), women's movements within and outside parties lobbying for change, and the political will among influential politicians for reducing inequality.

Contested areas and key gaps

The literature on quotas appears to be split into three camps. While research generally agrees that quotas are flawed and, in and of themselves, inadequate to ensure women's voice and leadership, some authors suggest that they are a necessary first step and have broader, positive effects (Miguel, 2008; Sacchet, 2008; Bari, 2010; Agarwal, 2014); others contend that they are constrained by patriarchal norms and informal politics (Htun, 2002;

Beck, 2003; Wordsworth, 2007; Llanos and Sample, 2008 on Brazil; Araujo, 2010; Larson, 2012); and others argue that they can in fact derail attempts to empower women (Walsh, 2012).

As compared to the work on quotas, comparatively little research has been conducted on other electoral reforms – for example, the change from single to multi-member constituencies, or vice versa, or a change in electoral system – and how they may or may not benefit women candidates; or indeed how they may affect the effectiveness of quotas. The Brazilian case in particular demonstrates the importance of analysing the electoral system as a whole rather than quotas in isolation (Htun, 2003; Llanos and Sample, 2008), including in terms of the opportunities for building gender policy coalitions and political alliances.

How influential is the evidence (e.g. on policy and practice)

Generally speaking the academic literature has had a limited impact on policy, but the increased academic focus on quotas has been paralleled by a significant expansion in the grey literature on the subject, particularly coming from International IDEA (for example Dahlerup, 2002; Ballington and Karam, 2005; Larsrud and Taphorn, 2007; Llanos and Sample, 2008) and IPU (1999, 2006, 2012). These include guidelines for parties and action plans for gender sensitive parliaments that are designed for policy uptake, although the extent to which this has had an impact on practice is difficult to ascertain.

3.4.2 Findings and analysis of the literature

Direct outcomes

In most countries, electoral reform that includes quotas of some kind has led to more women getting elected to national legislatures or locally elected bodies. Brazil provides an example of very little change in this regard, as patriarchal norms are so entrenched that the weak incentive structures that the quota has brought in are not strong enough to enforce change in party behaviour. In addition to this, there are some cases where quotas have led to greater numbers of women elected, but where women's voice and leadership has been stifled nonetheless, for example in Costa Rica (Sagot, 2010) and South Africa (Walsh, 2012). On the opposite end of the spectrum, Powley (2005) documents the Rwandan case in which 51% of elected parliamentarians are women, but notes that almost half of the ruling RPF party's seats were filled by women before the quota was enforced (p. 159). The consensus in the literature is that quotas can only bring about limited change in women's voice and leadership in spite of their contribution to women's political participation. This speaks to the disjuncture between women's presence in elected institutions and the access to decision-making and interaction with formal and informal power structures that this study's definition of women's voice and leadership encompasses.

There is a significant gap in the literature on the intersection of quotas and the electoral system more broadly – for example on how quotas work differently in multiparty or majoritarian systems, or in open or closed list systems, or in single or multi-member constituencies. This is important because this intersection shapes opportunities for pro-women coalitions and allegiances to party leaders on gender agendas, for example. It is possible, of course, that cross-cultural and comparative conclusions about the propensity of different types of electoral system to promote women's voice and leadership through quotas are difficult to make as a result of the specific contextual norms that shape the informal politics of a given case. This in itself would be a key finding, but as yet no evidence exists to back it up.

On a related issue, however, an IDEA study of parties in nine Latin American studies found that there was no significant difference between the number of women elected as a result of parties with formal stipulations regarding female candidate selection, and the number of women elected from parties without these formal rules (International IDEA, 2011, cited in Hedstrom, 2013). As Hedstrom suggests, this implies that informal norms and contextual factors are critical in determining the effects of electoral reform on women's voice and leadership. These informal norms may also be critical in determining the way in which electoral systems are established, for example in peace settlements in the aftermath of conflict. Little has been written on the way in which political settlements made according to patrimonial norms limit the opportunities for women's voice and leadership through the choice of electoral system, and whether women's involvement in high-level peace settlements can in fact influence the choice of electoral system or the inclusion of electoral reforms that encourage women's participation.

At the community level, evidence on the benefits of quotas is mixed. Much of the literature on quotas focuses on national-level (legislative or party list) quotas. Some studies suggest that local quotas can have a significant impact, both symbolically in terms of encouraging young women and girls to follow political careers (for instance in India's local councils, as documented by Beaman et al., 2012), and practically in opening doors for those who would otherwise never have the opportunity to get involved in politics (Reyes, 2002, on Pakistan; Chhoeun et al., 2008, on Cambodia). Other case studies, for example on the Indian Panchayati Raj, indicate that local level quotas in village councils have not empowered women or anyone else at this level to exercise voice in the national development process (Gala, 1997). Women heads of councils' knowledge of and connections to higher level governmental bodies or officials can rarely come anywhere close to matching that of their male counterparts (Gajwani and Zhang, 2014). This results in a disjuncture between women performing as well as men as heads of village councils in terms of procuring local services, but being perceived by villagers as under-performing due to the types of services they are able to provide (and more critically, the types of services they are not able to provide) (Duflo and Topalova, 2004; Gajwani and Zhang, 2014). This may be a case of women being able to access some but not all forms of decision-making, and remaining limited by the informal norms that privilege male advantage. As Beall (2005) summarises, '[w]hen local government is impervious to progressive social change it may be an unreliable site for the pursuit of gender equity, particularly in contexts where women are making gains within the formal institutions of the state' (p.3).

Indirect outcomes

The indirect outcomes of electoral reform essentially comprise what Krook terms 'substantive representation', where elected representatives push for policy change that reflects the interests of their constituents (Francheschet et al., 2012; Tadros, 2014). After an initial interest in the promotion of women's presence that quotas helped facilitate, much of the literature turned to the issue of impact and whether women were actually pursuing goals that prioritised the needs of women-in-general (as demonstrated in Francheschet et al., 2012). This revisited questions of essentialism that Phillips (1995) had brought to prominence, problematising the issue of whether women simply by virtue of being women would prioritise 'women's interests'. Jayal (2006) looks at the developmental impact of quota women in the Indian Panchayati Raj, concluding that, while the quota appears to be addressing women's practical gender needs through development projects, it is taking more time to have an impact on their strategic gender interests, in terms of women's contribution to the planning and design of these projects.

Sacchet's (2008) argument that quotas have altered the political culture in Latin America requires consideration too. In this case, 11 countries across the continent adopted a quota within a relatively short timeframe in an example of snowballing international policy transfer – although the way in which the quota was implemented and merged with existing electoral law differed in each country. Nevertheless, the overall indirect impact of electoral reform in this case has been a continent-wide politicisation of gender issues, placing gender firmly within mainstream political discourse and as such forcing male-dominated political institutions to contend with it. While in some cases, such as in Brazil, this appears to have caused a backlash in terms of provoking parties and other institutions to find increasingly sophisticated ways of avoiding compliance, this in turn has provoked women's movements to lobby for changes in the law. As Hedstrom (2013) notes, it is interesting that a number of countries that adopted quotas in the 1990s and early 2000s are now revising their quota laws towards enhancement and greater efficacy (Hedstrom, 2013). While the impact of this has yet to be seen, it could be that, in the long term, quotas even in their imperfect manifestations actually do bring about, what Tilly and Tarrow (2007) call, a 'politics of contention' able to facilitate compromise and, eventually, equality.

Finally, in some cases, electoral reform can ensure a place for women in the political sphere in the future, after the expiration of what are ideally short-term affirmative action measures such as quotas. Darhour and Dahlerup (2013) talk about the concept of 'sustainable representation', which they define as 'a durable, substantive representation of women' (p.132) and call for further research into the way in which quotas could promote this as yet under-studied area.

3.4.3 What factors explain these changes?

Enabling factors

There are a number of factors that contribute to, first, advancing the prospects for quotas to be adopted, and second, quotas having impact. Enabling factors that actually bring about the implementation of electoral reforms such as quotas include:

- Critical **historical junctures** (for example post-conflict political processes, constitutional reform and electoral reform processes in which the political settlement is under review – ESID, 2014), as in the cases of Rwanda (Powley, 2005) and Afghanistan (Wordsworth, 2007; Larson, 2012).
- **International policy discourse**, potentially facilitating a contagion effect or policy transfer, as in the Latin American case where several countries in close proximity to one another adopt similar reform measures in a short timeframe. Quotas being part of international policy discourse also may facilitate some level of donor presence or advocacy in terms of promoting electoral reform.
- **Women’s mobilisation**, which could include civil society advocating quotas, women politicians in legislatures or parties (or both) pushing for electoral reform, or – most effectively – a combination of both.

Enabling factors that have led to direct changes in women’s voice and leadership as a result of the introduction of quotas, however, are quite different and include:

- a visible, existing commitment to women within parties (Rwanda);
- effective sanctions for non-compliant parties (Argentina);
- electoral rules and an electoral system as a whole that complements and strengthens the quota rather than undermining it. Where the electoral system and quota are designed to co-exist productively, quotas have changed the incentive structures of politics to create opportunities for strategic coalitions that have the potential to promote women’s gendered interests. (This is linked to the activities of political parties in promoting women’s voice and leadership, as discussed in earlier in this chapter).

Enabling factors that have led to indirect outcomes of women’s voice and leadership, for example in the Latin American case of politicising gender issues, are different again and in general require space for political and social movements to mobilise and put pressure on government bodies and parties. In some cases, this requires an established bureaucratic state, with a government and functioning opposition; yet in other cases, for example in competitive clientelist systems, individual champions can achieve more through personalised, informal networks which facilitate greater opportunities than the formal governmental machinery can provide.

Disabling factors/constraints

Structural constraints on women’s participation are manifested through patrimonial politics (Beck, 2003), which hinder the extent to which electoral reforms impact women’s voice and leadership. These are linked to informal political norms that can determine the terms on which formal reforms are implemented or can undermine them (as in Brazil). In addition to this, the lack of sanctions for parties that do not comply with quota regulations, and the presence of contradictory electoral laws with which reforms must co-exist, can also derail the prospects for change in women’s voice and leadership.

A number of factors inhibit women representatives from being effective proponents of gender concerns, even when they are keen to promote them. These include:

- Reconciling agendas among women politicians with other policy priorities: for example, party women whose first allegiance is to the party rather than to constituents directly, or women politicians divided both in terms of who they are – in terms of ethnicity, class, region, language, or religion, for example – and the issues they stand for.
- Structural constraints, including informal political norms and wider social in patriarchal systems. In addition to this, the particularities of the political system and broader political settlement may also have inhibiting features.

3.4.4 Role of international actors and their support

In cases of post-conflict settlements, international actors can have a role in influencing the nature of peace settlements and constitution building, and in this case can lobby for electoral reform that facilitates women's representation. This runs the risk, however, of associating quotas with imposed international agendas rather than women's movements, even though in many cases the two groups of actors work in coordination during constitution-building processes (as in the Afghan case, for example – Larson, 2012). Indeed, international involvement in electoral reform more generally risks the perception of meddling in internal affairs, and for this reason bilateral international actors are often reluctant to get involved.

The Beijing conference, however, while its impact was incremental at first (IPU, 1999), seems to have facilitated the gradual spread of awareness of quotas globally, to the point where now the definition of electoral reform often includes quotas or at least some provisions for increasing women's role in politics. This suggests that multilateral actors such as the UN might be better placed to promote reform that aims to increase women's voice and leadership, but that its impact might not necessarily be visible in the short term.

Another important role that donors can play is supporting women candidates in the run-up to elections, for example by providing campaign training. The impact of this kind of assistance is difficult to measure, however, because the variables that contribute to any candidate getting elected are multiple and an election victory may in the end have much more to do with informal connections or family reputation than any technical support that is given by external actors. Further, donor-funded support for candidates in elections can often be contained within certain west-centric parameters that make assumptions about what elections are and how they are won – for example, in the promotion of 'get out the vote' methods such as door-to-door campaigning. Yet, these may have a limited effect in contexts where bloc voting by extended family networks or even by entire villages is common and considered a more strategic way of participating in elections.

3.5 Conclusions

- Effective voice in political space for women or gender advocates is typically limited, even when formal participation has been secured through quotas. Quotas do not guarantee women influence in shaping political outcomes, or that women politicians will prioritise gender equality agendas. Alliances between women in political parties and women in women's movements remain important in embedding gender equality as a political agenda in formal political space.
- The evidence on how to nurture leadership skills or give women activists and politicians a wider political apprenticeship is especially under-developed. This is challenging for international actors aspiring to improve their effectiveness in this area. The gap reflects a wider gap in the academic literature on the development of women's individual and collective political engagement.
- Influence appears to be shaped by capabilities for action which are a reflection of a number of factors. These include the development of processes of self-awareness and affirmation of critical self-consciousness among women – individually and collectively – and prompted by life experiences, but also exposure to and engagement with changes in the wider socio-political setting. Collective action and social mobilisation has been consistently important in changing rules of access to decision-making, and altering formal and informal institutions to advance gender equality.
- Material resources are important not only in enabling social mobilisation, but also advancements in political careers: this, however, has the effect of privileging the voice of elite women, which affects the quality and inclusiveness of voice as substantive representation for all women.
- Women's access to key-decision-making roles or bargaining spaces remains mostly limited, but there have been changes in recent decades. Continued exclusion is associated to the highly gendered bias in formal and informal political space and the often-invisible pathways to political negotiations to which women continue to have limited access. This underlines the merits of unpacking the 'black box' of formal and informal institutional mechanisms, political strategy and capabilities that shape how political settlements get contested and redefined overtime – and how political decision-making takes place. In delving into the complexities of this process, this analysis enables us to identify of the kind of factors that contribute to both enabling presence, voice and influence and to what accounts for more substantive of transformative gains in the form of implementation, but also sustained presence of gender advocates in the political sphere.

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- For international actors to engage effectively in supporting women’s political roles they need to get involved in what are inevitably highly political modes of engagement. Technical support – other than in the form of gender or legal expertise that is aligned with locally driven processes of political mobilisation and change – is unlikely to be effective if it is not grounded in the political economy of context and a deep understanding of the nature of the political settlement, and the opportunity structures for women and gender activists to contest and redefine the rules of the game to advance gender equality agendas.

3.6 Recommendations for international support

- Thinking and working politically. International support for women’s voice and leadership is most effective when underpinned by politically attuned modes of engagement grounded in a deep understanding of the political economy of context. This includes engaging with both the formal political space and the informal institutions, networks and forums of decision-making and negotiation around the rules of the game. This is also important for identifying relevant and strategic entry points for support to gender equality advocates.
- Supporting locally-driven change processes is essential. Technical support – including in the form of gender or legal expertise – is unlikely to be useful or relevant if it is not aligned with and supportive of locally driven and locally owned change processes
- Support to women’s access to post-conflict or transition processes of political negotiation (such as peace agreements or constitutional reform) is important. This includes support strategic engagement of gender advocates through civil society or formal access to the negotiating table. Material support to cover logistical needs relating to travel and subsistence and supporting safe conduct for women’s political participation should not be underestimated.
- There is a need for more research on the political economy of change processes. This means opening the ‘black box’ of the intersection between formal and informal political space. There is a gap in our knowledge on how women navigate formal and the more invisible (but often more influential) informal political institutions, decision-making forums and strategic networks. This includes building the evidence base on the development of political apprenticeship, leadership skills, capabilities and access to resources in contexts of entrenched gender-based discrimination.
- There is a need for more evidence on the politics of constitutional reform and gender equality agendas. We know more about women’s role in peace processes; the evidence on the politics of constitutional reform is especially underdeveloped.
- There is a need for more research on how electoral quotas intersect with other political norms, such as regime type (for instance, parliamentary versus presidentialism), party systems (formal and informal) and party regulation laws, or electoral systems (first-past the post or proportional representation) – and with what consequences for women’s political careers.
- There is a need to invest in emerging research on how women access executive branch positions.

4 Women's voice, leadership and influence through social activism

This section looks at the evidence on whether and how women's social activism increases women's voice, decision-making and leadership. We discuss these issues in relation to two sub-themes: social movements (Section 3.3) and social accountability processes (Section 3.4). For each sub-theme we:

- provide a brief overview of the issues and then reflect on the evidence base in terms of the nature and quality of the evidence, areas of convergence or contestation, and gaps in the literature;
- discuss the effect of women's social activism on their voice and leadership (direct outcomes) and their influence over public decision-making, including more gender-equitable outcomes (indirect outcomes);
- examine the factors that affect these changes; and lastly
- consider the role of international actors and policy implications.

First, however, we provide an overview of the main finding and recommendations on women's social activism overall (Section 3.1). We also summarise the issues that women mobilise around, whether through grassroots organisations, broader movements, or activities to hold power-holders to account (Section 3.2).

4.1 Summary findings and recommendations on women's social activism

4.1.1 Evidence

The evidence base on the impacts of women's social mobilisation and participation in social accountability initiatives on their voice and influence is relatively small and fragmented, especially in the case of social accountability. The majority of evidence regarding women's collective action looks not at longer-term impacts that accrue to women as the result of their participation, but at the success or failure of movements in regard to their articulated goals. Case studies and ethnographies detailing particular movements which women have spearheaded are common, as are histories of broader women's movements in a given country or region. Similarly, the social accountability literature, both academic and grey, is largely based on single case studies that do not directly consider whether and how women exercise voice and leadership. Moreover, even when women's participation is measured, the number of women involved relative to men is nearly always the main indicator.

4.1.2 Key findings regarding women's voice and influence through women's social activism

- Women are most likely to mobilise around (1) practical day-to-day concerns that arise from their roles as wives and mothers and (2) sexual and gender-based violence.
- Similarly, women most often participate in local accountability mechanisms, such as community monitoring and district-level participatory planning and budgeting.
- Women's participation in both social mobilisation and social accountability processes can increase their voice and influence over public decision-making, including by building their confidence, skills and social capital.
- Women's roles as wives and mothers, while providing a focal point for both formal and informal forms of collective action, are often the largest impediment to their participation given (1) the time poverty that the fulfilment of gendered roles entails and (2) the rigidity of social norms that confine women to those roles. Poor women are often rendered especially mute by time and resource constraints.
- Social accountability activities and social mobilisation are more likely to foster women's voice and leadership when gendered power relations are explicitly addressed.

- Women's organisations and movements, which have until recently often been the lone voice pushing for gender equality, remain underfunded and fragile.
- International support can be critical in strengthening or promoting new agendas but, unless approached sensitively, may risk homogenising local women's movement demands rather than supporting diverse voices which are critical to longer-term sustainability
- Cultural norms typically change in non-linear ways, with reversals and backlashes common. This not only makes it difficult to reach the most marginalised women and girls, but also tends to obscure current progress by making it easier to focus on remaining gaps rather than the successes already achieved.

4.1.3 Implications/recommendations

- There is a need for more systematic monitoring and evaluation of the effects of women's social activism on their voice and influence in order to strengthen the evidence base and promote more strategic investments in this area.
- Programmatically, it is important to balance top-down agendas with local needs and voices. While the international community can be critical to extending agendas, care needs to be taken to avoid a service delivery model and to facilitate a diversity of girls and women's voices.
- Social accountability exercises need to be seen less as bounded one-off exercises and more deliberately embedded in broader social movements if they are to lead to sustained growth in women's voice and leadership.
- If they are to enable women (particularly poor women) to participate in meaningful ways, gender and power analyses must inform the design, implementation and monitoring of social accountability programmes.
- Investments in initiatives to change gendered social norm change need to be undertaken with a longer-term view given the non-linear nature of change and the importance of carefully managing and addressing potential reversals and backlashes.

4.2 What issues do women mobilise around?

Women's activism reflects the diversity of women's experiences. For descriptive purposes, however, women's collective struggles and action – whether through associations, movements or social accountability mechanisms and activities – can be grouped into three types:

- **Political struggles:** women mobilising around political change or seeking to influence the quality of state institutions and governance in ways that benefit both women and men (e.g. challenging corruption or calling for greater political participation).¹³
- **Practical struggles:** women mobilising around their day-to-day needs and survival and pursuing practical outcomes for women and girls (e.g. improved shelter and nutrition, or better sexual and reproductive health services).
- **Strategic struggles:** women mobilising around feminist concerns that directly reflect the gendered nature of their disadvantage, challenge harmful social norms and power relations, and push governments to protect and provide gender equitable entitlements and services.

There has been a great deal of effort directed at distinguishing between differences in women's gender needs. Although Alvarez (1990) used the terms 'feminine' and 'feminist', Molyneux's (1995) language – which divides gender needs between the 'practical' and the strategic – has become more generally accepted. The former are the day-to-day things that women need in order to care for their families, including food, shelter, health care, and

¹³ Molyneux (2001) distinguishes between three types of women's movements: (1) autonomous women's movements; (2) those that have 'associational linkages' with other organisations (potentially with different interests); (iii) and 'directed mobilisations', where women's collective action is directed by interests outside of their group (e.g. women's wings within political parties). A similar analysis could be applied to the groups through which women participate in social accountability activities. Hallward-Driemeier (2013) highlights a similar issue in relation to women's ability to advance their interests in business, noting that 'business associations, including those focusing on women's businesses, provide an important platform for promoting women's business interests. But women are often poorly represented in mainstream business associations (p.17), and concludes that a 'dual-track approach' to women's increased economic voice is often needed that seeks to strengthen women's business associations while also increasing their influence within mainstream mechanisms (p.18).

unpolluted environments, while the latter are needs that will ultimately erode gender inequalities, such as legal rights and access to voice and decision-making at all levels. Molyneux (1998) notes that while the ‘interest paradigm’ is regularly over-simplified and misapplied, the key distinction that it draws is that it is only by addressing women’s strategic gender interests that collective action can offer transformative potential.

While the interest paradigm is useful in terms of categorising women’s social collective action at an analytical level, in the real world their motivations and outcomes often overlap and interlock, which Molyneux herself acknowledged (1985, 1998). Furthermore, the difference between women’s practical needs and their strategic needs can be very thin indeed. Movements that focus on quotidian issues often segue into deeper understandings of gender and more powerful articulations of voice over time (Haritas, 2013; Sanyal, 2009), while feminist movements often find that in order to reach a broader grassroots constituency they need to also integrate practical gender considerations into their advocacy agenda (Das and Dasgupta, 2013).

4.3 Women’s voice and influence through social mobilisation

4.3.1 Overview of the evidence base

The evidence base regarding women’s participation in social movements in the developing world is quite broad but only rarely addresses the development of women’s voice and leadership directly.¹⁴ The vast majority of evidence, rather than looking at longer-term impacts that accrue to women as the result of their participation, examines the success or failure of movements in regard to their articulated goals. Case studies and ethnographies detailing particular movements which women have spearheaded are common, as are histories of broader women’s movements in a given country or region. Cross-national or cross-regional reviews are more rare, although there are several useful exceptions that we cover in our discussion.

The global evidence base has two points of convergence: first, that women’s involvement in social movements often grows directly out of their day-to-day roles as wives and mothers; and second, that women’s movements have more space for activism and more impact during times of transition, whether that be during struggles for independence, during democratisation or as part of the peace-building process. There are, however, marked regional differences.

- In Latin America, the literature revolves around women’s involvement in ending military regimes and the subsequent ‘NGO-isation’ of women’s interests in the late 1980s and early 1990s that significantly muted local discourse. Evidence of more recent mobilisation is scant¹⁵ and evidence of longer-term impacts on women’s voice and leadership – outside of recent victories in the executive branch – nearly absent.¹⁶
- In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) the evidence base is historically divided between sources looking at the women’s movements of the 1990s, largely centred around their relationships with state feminism, and a flurry of post-Arab spring analysis centred on women’s roles in the revolutions and the regression that followed.
- The literature on African women’s social movement participation is generally more recent and primarily focused on a narrow subset of nations, including Uganda and South Africa, and the way in which women’s movements have contributed to political and legal change, including relatively high rates of women’s political participation in countries such as Rwanda.
- The evidence base from Asia is disproportionately focused on South Asia and appears to grow out of the penetration of NGOs in Bangladesh and India. While current and aimed at voice and other ‘empowerment’ outcomes, the literature from South Asia begs the question: when is a movement a movement and when is it a programme intervention or a programme outcome?

There are a variety of contested areas in the literature but possibly the largest revolves around the role of international actors. Conclusions are mixed – at times almost wildly so – regarding space for international

¹⁴ The Research Network on Gender Politics and the State has produced a large body of evidence regarding impacts in Europe and North America. See <http://libarts.wsu.edu/pppa/mgs/publications.html>.

¹⁵ There are exceptions to this—including, for example, the involvement of women in Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement (MST) (Caldeira, 2009) and Mexico’s Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Garcia et al., 2009).

¹⁶ Alvarez (2009) says that NGOs are beginning to represent smaller populations again, but Jacquette (2009) is more pessimistic and asserts that the complete lack of coordination between NGOs, parties, elected women and femocrats means that they cannot possibly be called a movement.

agendas and funding and how those play out in terms of the ‘NGO-isation’ of women’s movements. On one hand, in all regions there appears to have been a time when international support was important for women’s mobilisation. On the other hand, at some point in each of the regions there also appears to have been, at a minimum, concern that international agendas have silenced more indigenous voices and, occasionally, outrage at international interference, primarily centred around either the mismatch between ‘western’ and non-western gender norms or the way in which the international women’s movement has placed gender issues ahead of nationalist and other identity concerns.

4.3.2 What effect has women’s social mobilisation had on their voice, leadership and influence over decision-making?

Political struggles

Women played an important role in helping to bring down authoritarian regimes in a several Latin American countries, especially Argentina and Chile, and are now key players in the region’s burgeoning indigenous movements. Indeed, because Latin American regimes initially saw women as apolitical, particularly when they were engaged in ‘women’s work’, they were sometimes given more space than men to organise (Craske and Molyneux, 2002). With exceptions, however, women have reaped little benefit from their fight for political freedom (Htun and Piscopo, 2014; Blofield and Haas, 2005; Del Campro and Ricardo, 2005; Adams, 2002; Alvarez, 2000; Schild, 1998). The reasons include the culture of machismo, which acts to marginalise women, the pull of political parties and trade unions, which demand group loyalty above gender, and the disconnect between the middle-class women who run women’s organisations and the poorer women they often fail to represent (ibid.). While the continent is home to several of the women dubbed the ‘Most Powerful Women in the World’ by Forbes (2014), fewer than 10% of mayors across Latin America and the Caribbean are female (Htun and Poscopo, 2014; International IDEA, 2014).

Similarly, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), while women were important players in the deposition of dictators in a handful of countries, and the granting of political concessions in others, the subsequent rise of Islamism throughout the region has left women with less rather than more space to make themselves heard (Sinha, 2012; Sherwood, 2012; Salbi, 2013; Johansson-Nogués, 2013). Not only is violence against women on the rise throughout the region (Johansson-Nogués, 2013), but, as Salbi notes, ‘Political speeches given at the culmination of the various revolutions referred not to women’s active roles in these historical political changes, but rather, to a return to the traditions that placed women back into the confinement of the private sphere, in traditional roles as defined by men’ (2013: 235). While there have been some efforts to enhance women’s rights – with the 2014 constitutions of both Tunisia and Egypt calling for gender equality – for most women, Arab Spring activism has not translated into improvements in women’s voice and leadership.

In Africa, however, where women have been heavily involved in anti-colonial independence movements, in the expansion of democracy and in peacebuilding following tribal and sectarian strife, there is evidence that women’s engagement in broader political struggles has had more positive impact on their access to voice and leadership in some countries. In South Africa, the Women’s National Coalition organised a wide spectrum of women *as women* to protest against apartheid and then worked closely with the ANC to ensure that the new constitution included provisions for gender equity (Waylen, 2007). The Rwandan experience was similar. During the post-genocide transition, the ‘women’s movement mobilised actively around the drafting of the constitution to ensure that equality became a cornerstone of the new document’, including securing quotas for women’s political representation (Powley, 2005: 155).

Practical struggles

Most grassroots women’s movements tend to be small and localised and are thus rarely captured in the literature. However, the evidence that does exist suggests that women’s mobilisation around their day-to-day practical gender needs, despite seeming at first glance to reinforce traditional gender roles, tends to have a surprisingly large impact on voice and community leadership.

Box 1: Women's social mobilisation around 'practical needs'

- In Monterrey, Mexico, poor urban women organised around their need for access to water, pressuring local authorities through mass rallies, blocking public roads and kidnapping water service vehicles and personnel (Bennett, 1995).
- In Cuzalapa, Mexico, poor indigenous women who first mobilised around income transformed not only the way they saw themselves, but their positions in the community (Contreras-Arias et al., 2012).
- In Bangladesh, women mobilised around public services and corruption, working to 'ensure that they [benefits] went to the intended beneficiaries rather than disappearing in to the patronage networks of elected officials' (Kabeer, 2011: 517).
- In Burkina Faso, women solved an intransigent waste removal problem by forming a women's cooperative to clean neighbourhood streets, providing employment – including management opportunities – offering environment education, generating compost and improving public health all at once (Verschuur, 2009).
- In Nepal and India, women are spearheading movements to protect the forests that are necessary for their livelihoods, enacting stricter rules on forest use and better protecting canopy cover than groups without a critical mass of women (Agarwal, 2009).
- In Cape Town, South Africa, a group of women neighbours came together to build their own permanent housing and push for jobs for their families; their efforts were judged so successful that the government sought out key women to get their input while developing the National Housing Policy framework (Newton, 2012).

While recognising that women's domestic workloads drive the time poverty that often precludes more politicised involvement, mobilisations around women's social roles, including motherhood, can give women's demands an immediate legitimacy. This improves not only their odds of meeting their concrete goals, such as access to water or better schools, but also increases intra-familial and community respect for women's efforts (Haritas, 2013; Yulia, 2010; Sanyal, 2009; Mooney, 2007). While this strategy *can* result in trade-offs that jeopardise more structural, longer-term equity-related goals (Blofield and Haas, 2005), empirical evidence suggests that it does not have to. Indeed, Haritas (2013) argues that women's neighbourhood activism, which is often framed as an extension of their home roles, transforms 'not only local politics but also gendered constructs of a woman's place' (p.135) and Sanyal (2009) concludes that 'in some contexts, women's mobilization for practical interests ... may represent a more drastic break from women's traditional gender roles than would mobilizing against strategic interests' (p.531). Whether these mobilisations translate into enduring gains for women is relatively unexplored, however.

Strategic struggles

Movements that press for legal reform have more often been spearheaded by elite women, who are less likely to be constrained by time poverty. Their first achievement is often legal reforms that offer protection rather than empowerment. Over time, however, this can provide the open space for women to mobilise to push for implementation and to advance other interests (World Bank, 2014).

Across many African countries, women have come together to press for their gendered rights – with mixed success. For example, in Uganda, '(since) the National Resistance Movement's takeover of the government in 1986 the women's movement has become one of the strongest mobilised societal forces in Uganda' and has been largely successful in its advocacy of laws and policies to protect women's strategic interests (Tripp, 2012: 23). On the other hand, because the Museveni government was unwilling to unleash the social change that land reform might bring, women's efforts to achieve land reform have been unsuccessful (Tripp, 2004). This leads to questions about the limits of women's voice versus their political expediency. Kakuru (2008), who examined Uganda's ongoing efforts to achieve gender parity in primary education, which have been thwarted by strong gender norms that leave girls with the lion's share of domestic chores and care-related work, also questions the relative merits of the women's movement's continued focus on legal reforms. She concludes that – in Uganda at least – it is important to 'refocus women's activism towards more practical rather than theoretical engagement' (p.36).

In Brazil, women's organisations have played a key role in influencing health and social policy reform in some local and regional governments, as part of collective efforts to realise the constitutional promise of democratising the governance of health care services. Shankland and Cornwall (2007) note, for example, that in the case of the Cabo de Santo Agostinho Municipal Health Council, a popular front formed from widely differing groups, which was able to institutionalise participation by civil society in health decision-making such that government officials spoke positively of 'learning from the collective intelligence of the community' as a result of an institutionalised interface between service providers and civil society representatives.

Since the Arab Spring, women in some MENA countries have been very active in working to guarantee women's rights. In Tunisia, for example, they have organised against revisions to the Personal Status Code, which offers them legal protections such as access to their children after divorce and the ability to travel without permission (Sinha, 2012; Daniele, 2014). In Egypt, where sexual violence has become endemic and UN Women (2013) reports that 99.3% of Egyptians have experienced some form of harassment, women and their allies have mobilised around safety and prevention (Tadros, 2014; Marx, 2013). The movement is notable for the close partnership it has fostered between young people of both genders (Al Jazeera, 2014). This reflects the variability of contexts and the opportunities available to women in regions that are otherwise resistant to women's rights issues.

4.3.3 How does change happen? What conditions help movements nurture voice and leadership?

There is a great deal of consensus in the literature about which conditions facilitate successful women's movements – not only in terms of concrete outcomes, such as access to water or regime change, but also in terms of transforming women themselves. While not all movements meet all conditions, overall it appears that movements' impact on women's voice and leadership is strongest when:

- the timing aligns with other political processes,
- the movement brings together a broad array of women,
- individual personalities and symbolic faces provide a focal point,
- groups foster collective identity and cohesion,
- groups deliberately 'engender' their cause,
- the non-linear nature of complex culture change is recognised and taken into account, and
- women engage critically with the state.

Timing

A variety of authors have argued that timing, or 'opportunity structures' (Tarrow, 1998) – usually in relationship to a background of conflict – is important to the emergence and success of collective action in general and women's movements in particular (Ray and Kortweg, 1999; Tripp et al., 2009; Jacquette, 2003; Jones, 2006; Destrooper, 2014). Women's conflict-driven mobilisation can be seen during the democratisation of Latin America (Alvarez, 1990; Waylen, 1995), the nationalist struggles in Palestine (Kuttab, 2008) and in Bangladesh (Jahan, 1995), the socialist movement of Nicaragua (Destrooper, 2014) and in the recent spread of Islamist women's groups throughout Morocco (Bordat et al., 2011) (see also Ray and Kortweg, 1999).

Because in many contexts women's movements have been co-opted by political parties, the timing of women's mobilisation also matters in terms of party formation and realignment (Tripp, 2001: 110). In Chile, for example, Baldez (2002) argues that when parties realign and are actively seeking new constituencies, women's groups are more likely to coalesce into active movements, particularly if they are able to frame their protests in a non-partisan way.

Breadth and diversity

As Win (2004) notes, 'sharing a female identity is definitely not enough to build or sustain an effective coalition' (p.19; see also Molyneux, 1998). Indeed, women's movements appear to be far more successful when they seek and build on diversity. This not only helps them achieve their more concrete goals, but may also, if grassroots connections are strong, lend the movement staying power, which is key given that many movements fragment after their initial goals have been met (Waylen, 2007; Tripp et al., 2009; Baldez, 2003).

In South Africa, for example, the Women’s National Coalition’s wide constituency, which by 1994 included ‘13 regional coalitions and 90 individual organizations that ranged from political parties, religious groups, to the girl guides, coming together across geographical, racial and class lines’, was one of the key drivers of its success (Waylen, 2007: 531). Similarly, in Nigeria, women’s groups were able to achieve legal reform on widows’ rights in part because they partnered with grassroots religious organisations and were able to build a broad consensus regarding political legitimacy, whereas the ‘elite NGOs and professional women that dominated the CEDAW coalition were regarded with suspicion’ and were less successful (Adamu and Para-Mallam, 2012: 814). Cole and Phillips (2008) make a similar argument in regard to the networks working against gender-based violence in Ecuador and Brazil, where they find it is important to maintain ‘broad definitions of a given political project to accommodate a broad coalition of potential support’ (p.164). Blofield (2008) finds this to be true for Latin American domestic workers – virtually all of whom are women – as well. She argues that it has variously taken the support of ‘labor, feminist, and indigenous organizations’ to apply enough pressure to alter the political agenda (p.158).

Symbolic faces

Individual faces – and the stories behind them – are often critical to rallying support for causes. Indeed, in their examination of the conditions, factors and methods which empower women to mobilise around social action and health promotion, Kar et al. (1999) note, in case after case, ‘the catalytic role of individuals in initiating and sustaining social movements’ (p.1438). In some cases, these individuals are the women who launch the movements or serve as inspirational role models. For example, in the case of South Africa’s Victoria Mxenge neighbourhood, the efforts of a single woman, Patricia Matolengwe, led to the establishment of the savings club that ultimately transformed the neighbourhood (Newton, 2012). In other cases, it is victims’ faces that help mobilise women. In Latin America, Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue that the reason it has been easier to mobilise support for legislation to control gender-based violence is that victims – and perpetrators – have human faces that groups can rally around. A similar point can be made regarding Bangladeshi victims of acid attacks (Nazneen and Sultan, 2010: 72) and Malala Yousafzai, whose face and voice has galvanised the global fight for girls’ education. Faces do not even have to be real to galvanise support. For example, in Egypt, Qahera, a ‘witty hijabi superheroine who fights back against crime and prejudice on the streets’, has become the face of the anti-sexual harassment movement (Grigsby, 2014: 9) (Figure 2).

Figure 3: Qahera



Source: Mohamed, 2014

Group cohesion

While conflict, diversity and faces can be said to encourage successful movements and contribute to gender equitable outcomes, evidence suggests that shared experience and a sense of ‘groupness’, which Brubaker and Cooper (2000) define as ‘the emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members’, specifically encourages not just concrete outcomes, but genuine voice and leadership (p.19). As Evans and Nambiar (2013) note, ‘group action can be vital in supporting women’s self-esteem and self-confidence as well as providing access to spaces and networks that go beyond family and kin’ (p.4). This appears to be particularly true when groups are more democratic and emphasise active participation (Klugman et al., 2014; World Bank, 2012; Saini, 2009; Janssens, 2010; Skinner and Valodia, 2003).

In Bangladesh, for example, Kabeer (2011) emphasises that ‘it was sharing life experiences and seeking solutions to common problems’ on a face-to face basis that built women into the ‘communities of practice’ that has helped them meet their practical gender needs and facilitated ‘their struggles in the political domain’ (513-514). Similarly, the successes of many women’s trade unions – spanning the globe from Chile to South Korea –

have been in large part due to the way in which unions foster solidarity, building a ‘sense of sisterhood’ that becomes an ‘impetus for future activities and of change’ (Park, 2009). Women’s group solidarity is also a key building block in forestry initiatives in Cameroon (Veuthey and Gerber, 2010) and in Brazil (Shanley et al., 2011).

Given the critical role of NGOs and government programming in developing the ‘groupness’ that helps women mobilise, it is unclear at times when women are mobilising as part of a programme or project and when they are mobilising more organically. Sometimes more organised activity is a first step: as Kabeer (2011) notes, membership in NGO associations appears ‘to be acting as a seedbed for grassroots leadership in the countryside’ (p.518). In India, for example, while women tea growers organised organically around Fair Trade issues, they did so in the context of previous experience with micro-credit (Sen, 2014). Similarly, experience with BRAC increased women’s ‘legal and political awareness and participation in public campaigns and protests’ (Hashemi et al., 1996: 650). In other contexts, however, such as the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), it is women’s organic mobilisation that gives birth to the NGOs that shape later campaigns. This often-circular relationship points to a key opening in terms of fostering empowerment outcomes.

While the importance of face-to-face contact cannot be disputed, especially in environments where women have limited mobility and are socially isolated, social media and newer forms of communication that allow for personal interaction without the necessity of leaving home are also helping women mobilise. As one female Egyptian activist noted, ‘We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world’ (as cited in Howard, 2011). Although there has been some concern that the importance the press devoted to social media has diluted the agency attributed to the Arab women using the media and redirected it to the media itself (e.g. Newsom and Lengel, 2012), the overall consensus from women users is that digital media is not only helping build momentum by linking formerly isolated voices, but enabling safer environments for activities (Zlitni and Touati, 2012; Marx, 2013).

Engendering movements

The impact of women’s movements on voice and leadership also appears to be stronger when groups help women recognise their unique gendered interests. Htun and Weldon (2012), in their exploration of the impact of women’s movements on legal reform against gender-based violence, note that ‘women organizing as women generate social knowledge about women’s position ... they develop an oppositional consciousness’ (p.549). Kabeer (2011) notes that in Bangladesh the most successful women’s groups have deliberately grown women’s awareness through ‘on-going processes of learning, reflection, action, experience, observation and analysis, reflective forms of practice generally absent in lives that were dominated by the struggle for survival’ (p.511). Similarly, in India, Sanyal (2009) argues that membership in NGO associations has exposed women to new ways of thinking and provided them with information about their rights and the laws that protect them. This has led some to speak out against gender-based violence, standing en masse in front of victims’ homes, and others to engage with community leaders and fight to annul illegal child marriages. A government programme called Mahila Samakhya has had a similar effect. Aimed at lower-caste rural women, the programme uses mentors to bring women together and help them recognise both their shared gendered interests and their capacity for effecting change in their own lives (Janssens, 2010).

Box 2: Men, the ‘other side’ of gender

Until recently, women’s movements were often the sole voice working to increase women’s participation and leadership by interjecting notions of gender and empowerment into community and political discourse. This has started to change with the growth of NGOs allied with MenEngage, which is working with men and boys to actively promote gender equality (MenEngage, 2015). Often built around the establishment of ‘new masculinities’, men’s groups are working with women as equal partners in the fight for women’s rights. For example, men’s participation has been critical to the success of Egypt’s anti-sexual harassment movement. While women activists have been monitoring which spaces are safe and which are not, coordinating reporting and establishing safe houses, men activists – such as the Tahrir Bodyguards – have borrowed tactics from the offenders and use their own bodies to keep women’s safe (Marx, 2013; Ramanathan, 2013).

Bordat et al. (2011) highlight the impact of gender empowerment approaches on women. Working in Morocco, they examine the impacts of grassroots efforts to improve women's legal knowledge. They find significant impacts on women's 'individual and collective capacities for critical analysis, to defend their rights and to mobilize for change' (p.101). This has led to an array of improvements in women's voice. For example, some girls are refusing underage marriages, some mothers are refusing to marry their daughters without official documentation and women are more able to assert their opinions at home and 'interact effectively with local authorities and decision-makers...pressuring state institutions, from the bottom up' (p.103-104).

The non-linear nature of change

Key across all regions – and regardless of whether women are mobilising around political freedom, practical gender interests or more feminist concerns – is the reality that progress is non-linear (Evans and Nambiar, 2013; Kabeer, 2012). Institutional change often precedes norm change, but institutional progress itself is often highly circular. As Mansuri and Rao (2013: 12) claim, civic engagement is likely to proceed along a 'punctuated equilibrium', in which long periods of seeming quietude are followed by intense, and often turbulent, change. Rapid improvements may be offset by losses tomorrow, some of which may foster the development of unexpected allies.

In some contexts, this non-linearity is evident in the way in which women's public voices are stronger than their private voices. In Bangladesh, for example, even where women spearhead movements in public spaces, earning community respect for their work to obtain public goods or standing for elections, their access to any sort of voice at home often remains sharply limited by the reality that marriage continues to be the only basis of their long-term security and is therefore worthy of their support (Kabeer, 2011). As Kabeer (2011: 519) notes, this leads to a 'marked contrast between women's response to institutionalized forms of injustice in the public domain...and their dealings with inter-personal injustices where their responses were mixed and often contradictory'.

Backlashes against progress in women's rights are also fairly common. In Nicaragua, for example, an anti-feminist movement emerged as women's voice and leadership saw broader improvements. This movement, of which the Catholic Church is the primary supporter, was a reaction to the Sandinista revolution and the emergence of organised feminism, both of which encouraged women's public voice and leadership (Kampwirth, 2006: 75). Promoting complementary gender roles, the anti-feminist movement actively promotes a return to 'an imagined past in which men protected women in exchange for their loyalty and subservience' (p.78).

At times, institutional progress itself is non-linear. Across the MENA region, for example, a strong history of state feminism, which offered women protection for their rights if not democratic voice, has been eroded. Gender quotas, for example, were removed in Libya and Egypt, and in November 2014 the President of Turkey, long a regional voice of secularism, called for women to be equally respected rather than treated equally (BBC, 2014).

Given the way that women often find voice and leadership in social movements that are not broadly supportive of gender equality, attention should also be directed at how to encourage voice and leadership indirectly. For example, Hallum (2003) notes that Latin America's Pentecostal movement, which is generally associated with support for traditional gender roles, has helped women to challenge machismo in their homes by reducing alcoholism and gender-based violence, to assume new community leadership positions, and to grow stronger voices through participatory worship and by spearheading conversion efforts. Hallum finds the movement 'is serving strategic gender interests, as women address problems of inadequate health care, poverty, low self-esteem, and abusive men; and in the process of coming together, a shift may occur in which women begin to explore the deeper causes for their life situations and inequality' (p. 183; Brusco, 2010; Mariz 1994).

The role of the state

While functioning state institutions are key to women's collective action because they can provide the necessary framework in which agency thrives (Evans and Nambiar, 2013), there are mixed opinions on *how* women's movements ought to interface with the state. In some cases, women's goals are best supported by working with the state – working closely with femocrats to build the coalitions that encourage reforms from within. In other cases, however, women's movements have more power when they maintain autonomy and engage from the outside. Overall, the literature suggests that state engagement is nearly universally required in order to protect

and promote women's well-being, but that more transformational agenda setting is often best accomplished in more independent arenas.

Evidence suggests that women's autonomous organisation is required in order to push the state to expand its reach. Weldon and Htun (2013: 231), examining the trajectories of policy aimed at violence against women in 70 countries, found that the presence of feminist activism is more critical to outcomes than 'left-wing parties, numbers of women legislators, or even national wealth'. While acknowledging that gender machineries play an important role in both protecting women's rights and supporting the articulation of their voice, they argue that state supported organisations often add to – rather than replace – the work of independent movements (Htun and Weldon, 2012). This is because of the way that agendas are set in already established institutions, which can easily marginalise gender-related concerns as being applicable 'only' to women and therefore of secondary importance. Autonomous movements, on the other hand, by working from the ground up to change first public opinion and then that of policy-makers, can 'articulate the social perspectives of marginalized groups' and 'drive sweeping policy change' (ibid.: 564).

4.3.4 What is the role for international actors?

While the global women's movement that grew into and out of the UN conferences has put gender on the international agenda, in the post-Beijing world the 'appropriate role for development agencies in supporting collective action processes is not always clear', especially given that 'some evidence suggests that such processes are more effective when they develop organically rather than as the result of top-down support' (Klugman et al., 2014: 169; see also Evans and Nambiar, 2013). However, a review of women's empowerment movements from around the world identified four key roles in which external non-governmental actors may be useful: (1) lending legitimacy and recognition, perhaps especially by linking local movements with regional, national and international networks and causes; (2) providing organisational or technical support, including capacity building and leadership training; (3) funding; and (4) protecting actors who are vulnerable because of their work (Kar et al., 1999; see also Evans and Nambiar, 2013, Domingo et al., 2013).

All are well represented in the literature, which emphasises the importance of international and transnational actors in professionalising Latin American women's movements (Alvarez, 2000; Schild, 1998), funding the NGO movement in South East Asia that has helped foster a culture of women's mobilisation (Kabeer, 2011; Rahman, 1997), and supporting African women to transform national political landscapes (Tripp et al., 2009). To this list we will add a fifth area: extending agendas. For example, Weldon and Htun (2013) observe that international and transnational issue networks have helped put violence against women on agendas worldwide, and to a growing extent girls' empowerment (see Box 3).

Box 3: Girls' mobilisation: a growing trend

Girls' mobilisation appears to grow almost exclusively out of their participation in NGOs and clubs. This is not surprising given that until the advent of these more formal spaces girls not only had few 'safe spaces' in which to exercise voice and leadership, but also little exposure to the notion that they could lay claim to either.

BRAC has a network of clubs for girls that is now active in six countries: Bangladesh, Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Liberia. Called Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA), the clubs expand girls' social networks, fostering the 'groupness' needed for mobilisation, and target them with health, livelihoods and rights education. ELA had reached more than a quarter of a million girls by 2012 and has been found to foster better communication between girls and their parents, likely key to the higher rates of school enrolment seen among participants, and to improve girls' domestic positions vis-à-vis their husbands (BRAC, 2014). In Uganda, Bandiera et al. (2012), using a randomised control trial, found that ELA participation improved girls' economic self-sufficiency and their ability to refuse unsafe sex.

A key outcome for girls' clubs around throughout Africa and south Asia has been a reduction in child marriage. In Ethiopia, for example, Pathfinder (2006) concludes that '(o)ne of the most important factors for the recent decrease in the frequency of early marriage is the role played by girls themselves' (p.25). Willing to report planned marriages to their teachers, their club mentors and officers of the law, girls from Niger to Nepal are using their new-found voices to say what they want most, which is to go to school (ibid.; BRAC, 2014).

However, while it is clear that external support can be vital to help build and sustain social movements, the literature also suggests that international agendas can co-opt and depoliticise them, extinguishing the motivating outrage and passion. Examples revolve around three main themes:

- Where external support is premised on the notion of *a* women's movement, it implies a universalism based on gender that often does not exist, quashing the diversity that makes such movements strong (Klugman et al., 2014; World Bank, 2012; Kuttab, 2008; Al-Ali, 2003; Win, 2010; Muniz and Beardon, 2011; Jacquette, 2003; Ray and Kortweg, 1999).
- Competition for external funding often pits women's groups against one another (Al-Ali, 2003) or fails to recognise that 'that the vibrancy of the women's movement does not lie primarily in the activities of large national organisations' and that 'while they may not be the most visible actors, grassroots groups often provide the dynamism for social change' (Subramaniam, 2011: 86; see also Alvarez, 2000; Verschuur, 2009).
- Where international agendas are identified with western/northern cultural norms that are seen to be at odds with local customs, they can engender a backlash against women's movements and voice that has less to do with the agenda per se than with its perceived instigator (Al-Ali, 2003; Daniele, 2014; Adamu and Paramellam, 2012; Craske, 1999).

Box 4: Raising Her Voice: An example of INGO good practice

Raising Her Voice (RHV) was a five-year portfolio of projects designed to develop women's capacity for voice and leadership. Supported by DFID and led by Oxfam, it comprised 19 projects and spanned four continents. While initially only loosely related, over time RHV's portfolio developed a coherent theory of change that led to a more integrated approach. Key to that approach was the notion that the development of women's voice depends on three broad spheres: the personal, the political and the social. While acknowledging that 'political spaces need to be more open, inclusive and representative of women', the RHV theory of change highlights the critical importance of growth in personal 'capacity, self-esteem and confidence' and the way in which relationships are the 'glue' that enables change in the other two spheres.

An independent evaluation found a range of positive outcomes in all three spheres (Beardon and Otero, 2013). Women in target communities were found to have a better understanding of their rights and more confidence to engage with their communities and local governance. In Nepal, for example, 85% of participants – compared to 15% of non-participants – said they had the confidence to influence decisions. RHV projects also led to improvements in the ability of poor and marginalised women to be heard in government planning forums and to push for changes in harmful traditional practices. In some communities in Tanzania, for instance, women's involvement in management committees grew from none to nearly half, and in Gambia women activists came together around child marriage, girls' education and women's land rights.

While underscoring that improvements in women's voice are fundamentally rooted in changes in the personal sphere, the evaluation of RHV highlights 'the impact of networking and solidarity on the ability of individual women to raise their voice'. Programme efforts to reduce social isolation and nurture collective action helped grow women's confidence and improve public awareness about women's rights.

Examples of where the international community failed to consult and work with local women are plentiful. In Darjeeling, Fair Trade representatives believed they understood what local women needed, without asking them (Sen, 2014). In Costa Rica, donors and their national allies pushed for shelters for abused women despite the fact that local women's groups insisted that they were not wanted, and that a focus on counselling, community education and legislative reform was more urgent (Carcedo, 1997). In Burkina Faso, where local women organised around waste removal, they have been pushed out by a private company hired under the auspices of the World Bank's Urban Development Plan (Verschuur, 2009). In Uganda, donors pushed for a return to customary land tenure arrangements despite the fact that local women's groups were mobilising around co-ownership (Tripp, 2004).

The identification of women's movements with elites has grown, in part, out of their allegiances with international actors, who have tended to support a professional, service delivery model. In Latin America, for example, although Alvarez (2009) notes that there has been rampant concern for decades that the NGO-isation of women's movements across the continent has worked to silence the voices of ordinary women who do not

necessarily share the concerns of femocrats (Schild, 1998). Indeed, Jenkins (2011) concludes that ‘the emphasis on gender relations, feminism and empowerment’ has been lost as women’s groups have moved to a service delivery model (p.318).

Some of the most vocal opposition to external actors has come out of the Middle East. In Tunisia, for example, Daniele (2014) argues that paternalistic donors have moved to professionalise and bureaucratised civil society, compromising women’s ‘autonomy from both internal and international powers’. Kuttab (2008) makes a different but related point about women’s mobilisation in Palestine. The imposition of external agendas has created a ‘consensus platform...that sticks only to the lowest common denominator’ (p.102). For example, programmes discuss poverty alleviation without discussing the occupation’s role in creating and sustaining poverty and discuss violence against women without situating it in the broader context of political violence. Ultimately, she argues, programmes ‘have become accountable to overseas donors instead of to their own people’.

4.4 Women’s voice and influence through social accountability

Social accountability refers to citizens’ actions to influence and hold to account (elected and appointed) public officials for how they manage public resources and carry out their responsibilities, including their commitments to women’s rights. Importantly, it also refers to the actions that public officials take in response. Citizens can exercise social accountability, individually or collectively through a variety of mechanisms and processes (see Box 5). Women may use social accountability to advocate for particular issues and causes, both individually and collectively, and through women-only or mixed-sex groups. Both state- and civic-led accountability mechanisms and processes *can* provide a channel for women’s activism. For example, women’s organisations may use forums such as statutory participatory governance institutions or public hearings to lobby government and advance their causes, or participation in social accountability activities may be a catalyst for women’s politicisation and mobilisation.

4.4.1 Description and assessment of the evidence base

Nature and quality of evidence base

The body of published academic literature on social accountability and gender is small.¹⁷ Much of the material on social accountability, including sources that consider the participation of women and girls specifically, is grey literature based on single case studies.¹⁸ Among the secondary studies, qualitative methods are most common, and around a third of the studies use mixed methods. Only a handful of the studies use statistical techniques (e.g. regression analysis). No relevant studies based on experimental design (e.g. random controlled trials) were identified.

Box 5: What is social accountability?

Social accountability refers to the actions citizens take to influence and hold to account public officials. It is often differentiated from vertical and horizontal accountability but, in practice, there is some overlap between types, as when citizens exercise accountability in tandem with public bodies. As a form of accountability processes, social accountability describes not only citizen’s call for an explanation from a public official/body but also the answer/response they receive. The ability to exercise sanctions when public servants do not comply is an important part of any accountability process, but these sanctions can be informal (e.g. reputational risks or threat of ostracism) as well than formal (e.g. disciplinary or legal action).

There are different mechanisms/processes through which citizens exercise social accountability and engage with the state, individually or collectively. These include state-led participatory governance processes (planning, budgeting, monitoring) mandated by law; litigation, including public interest litigation and administrative mechanisms, such as official complaint and grievance processes; citizen audits, such as social, gender, or safety audits; civil society initiated activities, such as scorecards or public hearings; and

¹⁷ The search of the Scopus database returned only two pieces that, from a review of the abstracts, were deemed relevant to the sub-theme on women’s voice and leadership and social accountability, in comparison to over 50 pieces on women’s social movements and mobilisation more broadly.

¹⁸ 143 pieces on social accountability were reviewed, of which 78 were coded as relevant to our research questions.

even ad hoc individual pressure on public officials.

While some social audits and participatory budgeting exercises focus on national policy and processes, most studies, and particularly the academic and more analytically sophisticated literature, focus on women's actions at the community or district level. Where the exercise of social accountability is by women and women's groups specifically the focus tends to be health entitlements and services, particularly maternal, reproductive and children's health. Other common issues that women mobilise around are education, personal security and social protection.

Almost half of the 78 relevant studies were multi-country studies, but these tend to be secondary reviews of single case studies or programme reviews/evaluations, and do not involve systematic comparison. Of the single-country countries, Asia, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa are quite evenly represented. Arab countries are notable by their absence. Of the single-country studies, India is the only country where there appears to be any concentration of research (13 of the 78 reviewed). However, a handful of studies were also found on Bangladesh, Brazil, Peru, and Uganda. While several types of accountability mechanisms are the object of study in the Asian countries, discussion of participatory budgeting and social/gender audits dominates the material on sub-Saharan Africa and, in particular, Latin America.

Much of the grey literature on social accountability does not directly consider whether and how women exercise voice and leadership. Most authors do not analyse which women are able to take part in social accountability or whether they participate in meaningful ways. This makes the quality and role of women's voice and leadership in the outcomes of social accountability processes difficult to infer. For example, even when women's participation is measured, the number of women involved relative to men is nearly always the main indicator. More rarely, the inclusion of issues that affect women more than men – in community scorecard exercises, for instance – is also used as a proxy for the extent of women's participation (e.g. Mai et al., 2009). There is also little consideration in the material in terms of the differences between consultation, formal institutionalisation of social accountability processes, whether citizens have legal sanctions and whether the state is accountable to citizens in practice (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001; George, 2003).

Even when researchers engage with the question of the type and quality of women's participation in social accountability, few attempts are made to measure or assess this – and debates about how best to define and measure women's empowerment (e.g. O'Neil et al., 2014) are notably absent. Where women-only groups undertake social accountability activities and achieve their objectives, it is possible to infer that their exercise of voice contributed to this in some way, but this is not true of mixed-sex groups.

The focus on outcomes in the social accountability literature tends to be on access to, and the quality of, public goods and services and, to a lesser degree, policy or legal changes. In some cases, researchers use quantitative indicators to measure outcomes but more often they use qualitative methods to find out if activists and service users perceive there to be a change in services as a result of their actions. However, authors tend not to acknowledge that improvements to services are likely to be the result of several factors and attributing outcomes to specific social accountability activities is extremely difficult (GSDRC, 2013; Robinson, 2008). For studies that look at localised actions, it is easier to draw inferences between the intervention and the outcomes. Even in these cases, however, authors rarely disaggregate data on who benefits from service improvements. No follow-up reviews of particular interventions or longitudinal studies were identified, which also means that it is not possible to know whether positive outcomes are sustained.

In sum, with some notable exceptions discussed below, there is inadequate engagement in this literature with theories of gender, citizenship and/or accountability. These analytical shortcomings have direct implications for research design, including conceptual clarity, plausible assumptions about how social accountability processes work and might empower women and, therefore, interpretation of findings. Few pieces combine primary data

and theoretically informed analysis. Instead, the material is divided between empirical pieces that lack analytical depth and secondary reviews with more sophisticated analysis.

Convergence, contested areas and key gaps

There are seven main gaps or shortcomings in the evidence base on women's voice and leadership through their exercise of social accountability. First, as noted, the grey literature often lacks analytical sophistication.¹⁹ Second, in terms of the material reviewed, there is no substantive body of empirical data on women's participation (as distinct from men's) in social accountability activities or their influence through it. Third, consideration of the relationship between social accountability and women's leadership capabilities is rare. Fourth, there are hardly any studies of girls and social accountability. Fifth, empirical studies are often done during or shortly after the accountability activity under review, making it impossible to draw conclusions about future effects and whether any observed outcomes for women and girls are sustained. Sixth, the analytical weakness of the material is compounded by the scarcity of comparative methodologies, which means it is not possible to draw conclusions on which factors are more or less important. Seventh, while some pieces discuss the activities of implementing partners, the role of external funders and how their relationship with implementing agencies and women's groups affects their ability to support women's voice and leadership is rarely addressed.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that women's collective action through social accountability can, and has, enabled them to challenge poor governance and gender discrimination and negotiate better outcomes. Further, from the material that does engage with our research questions, some common themes emerge about the factors that influence the effectiveness of social accountability mechanisms. This includes some consensus about the factors that constrain or support women's voice and influence, which are outlined in Section 3.2. There are no explicit or notable contradictions in evidence or interpretation in the material, perhaps reflecting the relative immaturity of this area of inquiry and action.

4.4.2 Does women and girls' participation in social accountability increase their voice and influence?

In this section, we summarise the findings on whether and how women's activism through social accountability contributes to their voice and leadership and, in this way, to influence over improved outcomes for women.

What effects have social accountability activities had on women's voice and leadership?

Most women's accountability activities reviewed are at the district or community level, and involve participatory governance (e.g. budgeting) or community oversight (e.g. audits, public hearings, scorecards, citizen monitoring). However, there are some examples of women interacting with central decision-makers and using national accountability mechanisms to seek more equitable entitlements or the implementation of existing ones. These include exercises to audit and improve gender mainstreaming and equity in the policy and operation of government or other organisations (HLSP, 2012; Mwakipole, 2009; Muchabaiwa, 2010, ILO, n.d.). They also include legal accountability activities, such as strategic litigation that leads to legal changes or confirmation of entitlements (Domingo and O'Neil, 2014).

The following are the most common ways that studies find women's voice to be enhanced, individually or collectively, through social accountability processes:

- Women develop the capabilities they need to express their views and preferences – what Jo Rowlands (1997) terms the 'power within'. This can be through receiving new information about their entitlements and government responsibilities or through complementary interventions and training, or from the process of interacting with public officials (Barpanda and Das, 2013; Das and Dasgupta, 2013; Frisancho and Vasquez, 2014; George, 2003; Lambrick and Travers, 2008; Mwakipole, 2009; Roche, 2009; UN Habitat, 2008).
- Women develop new networks and build social capital. Women organising with other women in similar positions (bonding capital) is known to be important for their development of critical awareness of their social position. However, their collective action can also lead them to build relationships with women and men from other social groups, (bridging or linking capital) including professionals and government (Das and Dasgupta, 2013; Campbell et al., 2012; Lambrick and Travers, 2014).

¹⁹ Gender analysis was absent or poor in approximately three-quarters of the literature reviewed.

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- Women's collective action around one issue can catalyse further activism or broader mobilisation. In particular, the findings of social accountability processes can provide a basis for further advocacy efforts with government, or can lead communities to try to tackle the underlying causes that are unearthed (Das and Dasgupta, 2013; Mwakipole, 2009; Limbrick and Travers, 2014).

Women's influence through social accountability depends not only on their ability to have voice but, crucially, on power-holders' responsiveness to this. The following are the most common ways that studies find that social accountability processes provide the *potential* for women to have influence.

- Women have a platform to describe their experiences and express their views, needs and preferences to public officials and service providers. In doing so, women have the opportunity to influence the mind-set of public officials or the information that informs their decisions (Limbrick and Travers, 2008; Frisancho and Vasquez, 2014; Campbell et al., 2012; Jargor, 2010; Venugopal, 2009; Meyer and Jones, 2012; Clancy, n.d.).
- Women seek out services and monitor them more actively and/or are more able to negotiate their entitlements with officials and providers (Evertzen, 2006; Frisancho and Vasquez, 2014; Das and Dasgupta, 2013) (see Box 6).
- Women can also improve their credibility and standing in the community through social activism. Women appear to gain the respect of, or at least to be taken more seriously, by authorities and community leaders where they are seen to have the backing of officialdom (e.g. where they receive training or resources from government or NGOs), where their actions gain the attention of the media or where they become well-known for being advocates in a particular field. Also important is that communities see concrete benefits from women's activism in terms services (e.g. Barpanda and Das, 2013; Care, 2012; Das and Dasgupta, 2013; Mwakipole, 2009).
- The confidence and skills women gain through their participation in social accountability processes can lead to them to stand for public office or to be given positions in official bodies, such as national taskforces (Das and Dasgupta, 2013; Wright and Gueye, 2009).

Box 6: Women leaders and health activism in Uttar Pradesh, India

Mahila Swasthya Adhikar Manch (MSAM, or Women's Health Rights Forum) was formed in 2006 after an intensive grassroots campaign on women's rights to maternal health in Uttar Pradesh. As of 2013, there were 12,114 registered members of MASM in 171 active village-level groups across twelve districts in Uttar Pradesh. Each MASM group elects five women leaders for a three-year term, each responsible for a thematic area (health services, livelihood, nutrition and food security, violence against women, and social security). 686 MASM women leaders were elected in 2012; only 2% were from privileged castes. Contributions are voluntary, with women often losing a day's paid work in order to take part in MASM activities.

Training and empowerment efforts are focused on the women leaders who, over time, have developed the skills and confidence to monitor services for the rural poor and to identify and challenge poor care, both through systematic health enquiries and ad hoc interventions on behalf of the women in the village. MASM's first target was informal payments demanded by health providers for services that should be free. MASM leaders confronted health officials and made complaints to their superiors. Women in villages with MASM groups no longer need to pay for local health services, a significant gain given their poverty. MASM groups have now asked for information on their entitlements, and not only health, and they monitor whether the rural poor receive them.

The MASM women leaders have gone from rarely speaking out in front of their families or leaving their homes to having the confidence to speak to the District Chief Medical Officer, senior government officials and the media. Importantly, the women have developed collective understanding and solidarity, and MASM leaders now stand up for the rights of women in the village, even when their own interests are not at stake. A MASM facilitator noted, 'the personal victories of women were essential for larger struggle and the movement. The personal empowerment gave women the confidence to fight for their rights. The smaller struggles gave women the motivation to fight for bigger battles'. As a result, local leaders, officials and men within the community, initially sceptical, have 'more or less accepted them [MASM] as a group that is not only very organised but is also very serious about the issues they are working on'.

Source: Das and Dasgupta (2013)

In general, the studies reviewed tend not to report negative findings of social accountability interventions. Where discussed, the most common risk to women and poor people is confronting those with more power: for example, reprisals from health providers or leaders who are criticised, or violence or ridicule from husbands or community members who think that women should not speak up (Campbell et al., 2012; Evertzen, 2006; Goetz and Jenkins, 2001). The public nature of public hearings and rallies mean that they are particularly risky, although collective participation can also reduce the fear of speaking out. Campbell et al. (2012) also note the possibility that women will feel discouraged and less confident about their ability to influence their environment if their actions do not lead to improvements.

Some researchers also discuss the under-representation of women in mixed-sex social accountability activities. For example, Naz (2014) describes how women's exclusion from public life influences their opportunities to engage in citizen oversight in Pakistan. Others look at the under-representation of women and girls in particular mechanisms, such as participatory budgeting in Peru²⁰ (McNulty, 2012), public hearings in Andhra Pradesh (USAID, n.d.), and citizen scorecards and participatory budgeting in Ethiopia (Mai et al., 2009). Mai et al. (2009) found that women participated in focus group discussion as part of scorecard activities but that women facilitators and coordinators were rare.

Despite targeted searches, hardly any examples of girls' involvement in social accountability activities were found. Exceptions include children's participatory budgeting and analysis in Brazil (Guerra, 2005) and South Africa (Nomodo, 2006); children safety audits in Greater Johannesburg (Satterthwaite, n.d.) and an initiative by the Population Council to help adolescent girls to map and establish safe spaces (Baldwin, 2011).

²⁰ McNulty (2012) only a third or less of those involved in participatory budgeting in Peru at regional level since 2008 were women (from 22% to 30% participation in meetings to form the annual budget). Further, women made up only around a quarter of the technical budget formulation teams where most funding decision are made, and only 2-3% of those attending meetings represented women's organisations.

Has social accountability led to better rights and services for women and girls?

There is some evidence that women's efforts to lobby and hold government and providers to account can influence public decision-making, resource allocation and service provision. This includes women making providers more aware of and responsive to the specific needs of women and girls. The most common outcomes of women's activism through social accountability include:

- Increased government transparency, such as the publication of parallel gender budgets or discussion of allocations to women by parliamentarians in Zimbabwe (Muchabaiwa, 2010), or increased access to information, including the legal right to information in India (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001).
- The institutionalisation of a gender perspective through new resources or governance structures, such as a gender focal person in government departments in Zimbabwe (Muchabaiwa, 2010), commissions or committees to work on issues specific to women or girls in Zimbabwe and India, or specialised dispute resolution forums for women in India (Dasgupta, 2002).
- New or increased budget allocations for services that benefit women, such as earmarking of profits from mining concessions for women in Papua New Guinea (see Box 7) or increased funding for childcare, social protection, women's literacy or health, to combat gender-based violence and other women's programmes (Muchabaiwa, 2010; Mwakipole, 2009; UNFPA/UNIFEM, 2006).
- New laws or policies, such as: a domestic violence bill and decentralisation of the registration of births in Zimbabwe (Muchabaiwa, 2010); the adoption of participatory budgeting as national policy in Tanzania (Mwakipole, 2009); new legal obligations for employees to take measures to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace in India (Dasgupta, 2002), the institutionalisation of community monitoring in national policy in Peru (CARE, 2012), and the successful national campaign for right to information in India that emerged from participatory auditing of local spending by MKSS (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001).
- Changes in knowledge and/or behaviour of public officials. In various countries women's safety audits have made officials more aware about violence experienced by women in public spaces and the factors that make women feel insecure (Lambrick and Travers, 2008).
- Use of litigation to challenge discriminatory laws and practice and to seek redress for violations of entitlements. For example, public interest litigation has been used effectively to challenge discriminatory property and inheritance regimes and to establish the precedence of statutory/constitutional law over customary law in several sub-Saharan African countries (Scholtz and Gomez, 2004).
- More accessible or responsive services for women, including:
 - New water points (which could free up time for rural women), separate toilets for girls in schools, or more maternal services (Ethiopia – Mai, Mitik and Deneke, 2009).
 - Better quality of health services for women (Barpanda and Das, 2013), increased maternal health services and improved treatment of women during childbirth, including more culturally appropriate practices, prevention of bribes and/or increased antenatal visits (community health monitors, Peru – see Box 8; community health audits and community monitoring, India) (Frisancho and Vasquez, 2014; HLSP, 2012; Shahi, n.d.; Hoffman, 2014; CARE, 2012), and increased access to contraception and use of family planning (Social Development Commissions, Madagascar) (CARE, 2012).
 - Allocation of shelters and relief goods for single women in emergency refugee camps, improved access to contraceptives and to the police in cases of domestic violence (women's action groups, Sri Lanka) (Roche, 2009).
 - Challenging corruption and gender bias in the administration of social protection programmes (participatory auditing, India) (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001).
 - Changes to physical environments to improve women's security, such as new lighting, signage, convex mirrors, emergency phones, improving gender friendliness in public transport (women's safety audits, global) (Lambrick and Travers, 2008; Jargor, 2010).
 - Reimbursement of bribes, prevention of discriminatory employment practices and checks on nepotism and corruption (women's health groups, India) (Das and Dasgupta, 2013).

Box 7: Women negotiate with mining companies in Papua New Guinea

In 2006-2007, women's leaders in the Western Province, Papua New Guinea were, for the first time, included in negotiations between Ok Tedi Mining Limited (OTML) and affected communities. The women's delegation had a single seat at the negotiation table alongside male community leaders. A group of 20 women developed an effective strategy and persuasive position, and were able to secure an allocation of 10% of all compensation for a Women and Children's Fund, 50% of educational scholarships for women and girls, payments being made into family, not clan, bank accounts, and women's representation in governing bodies. In 2012, the number of women negotiators was increased to 30, and they were able to secure an increased allocation for women and children: up to 18% of compensation for some villages. Key to the women's success in both rounds was their work to frame benefits for women and girls as in the interest of the community as a whole, demonstrating the outputs of community projects to convince male leaders, and secure their support in advance for ring-fencing a Women and Children Fund. The women leaders attended all the regional meetings in the period between negotiations, becoming more familiar with the issues and building strong relations between villages and with the OTML interlocutors.

Source: Popoitai and Ofosu-Amaah (2013)

Few studies report on either negative or unintended consequences of women's exercise of social accountability on outcomes. Exceptions include Popoitai and Ofosu-Amaah (2013) who found that women village leaders did not have the knowledge and skills they needed to turn the large sums of money they had secured from mining concessions into concrete benefits for their communities. In their review of experiences of gender budgeting, Mwakipole et al. (2009) note the risk that governments can use participatory budgeting initiatives to legitimate processes over which women have little or no influence in practice.

Box 8: Health monitoring by indigenous women in Peru

In CARE's Participatory Voice project, indigenous women in the Huancavelica, Piura and Puno regions of Peru are trained to be 'social monitors' or 'vigilantes'. The women receive three months of training to enable them to observe health facilities and talk to women service users and compile reports to discuss with the ombudsman, civil society groups and health care providers and to develop action plans. Authorities present at a consultation meeting sign the minutes, and a public hearing is held to monitor progress, attended by authorities and local media, followed by period participatory assessments. Common concerns include the poor treatment of poor and indigenous women by staff and culturally inappropriate health care practices.

Qualitative evaluations show that women know more about their rights and report improved services, including staff working the hours they should and treating women with respect and not asking for informal payments. A quantitative assessment also shows a one-third increase in the number of facility births after one year (from 9,183 to 12,184) and a large upturn in more culturally appropriate vertical births (from 194 to 437 between 2008 and 2009).

Rather than taking a 'naming and shaming' approach, the programme built a strategic alliance based on trust and dialogue between the civil society network, ForoSalud, the ombudsmen and health insurers. Complementary activities were also used to inform the community of their health rights. While systemic weaknesses in the Peruvian health system limited what could be achieved through local engagement, the approach built the credibility and status of women and increased their health care choices. The success of the programme informed a new national policy for the promotion of citizen health monitoring in 2011.

Source: CARE (2012); HLSP, 2012; Hunt and Gray (2013).

4.4.3 How does change happen? What factors explain changes in women's voice, leadership and influence through social accountability?

Below the main factors found in the literature to enable or constrain women's voice and influence through social accountability are summarised.²¹

Socio-cultural norms

Gendered norms used to justify and naturalise masculine privileges and control over women are the primary constraint on women's voice and activism, and are particularly harmful in societies where patriarchal relations are embedded in custom and law. Examples of how such norms prevent women's meaningful participation in social accountability processes include:

- Restrictions on women's mobility and participation in civic and public life. Meetings may be held late at night or in places that may be unsafe for women or not socially acceptable for them to visit, or women may not be able to participate in meetings because of threats, violence, or other forms of exclusion effected by their husbands or powerful village elites (MacPherson, 2008; Naz, 2014; Shahnaz and Karim, 2008).
- Restrictions on women's ability to speak up and give their view freely and based on informed choices. For example, women may participate in meetings but remain silent or speak with 'men's voice' (Campbell, 2012; Evertzen, 2006).
- Gendered institution of marriage and division of labour in the home. Women have primary responsibility for reproduction and childcare and domestic work, often alongside paid work, leaving little time for activities outside the home or for activities in the evenings and weekends when meetings, the backbone of associational life, tend to be scheduled (Evertzen, 2006; Goetz and Jenkins, 2001; McNulty, 2012; MacPherson, 2008).
- Gender discrimination also means that women are less likely to have the skills or literacy needed to take part in social accountability processes (Evertzen, 2006).

It is not only gendered norms that undermine activism, however. Women subject to intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusionary norms based on other economic and social characteristics are the least able to participate in social accountability processes. McNulty (2012), for example, notes how women from marginalised groups are the least likely to have resources, education, leisure time and self-confidence. It also cannot be assumed that women have the same interests, regardless of class, age, education, religion, etc., or that women's organisations that participate in accountability processes will represent other women's interests. As Evertzen (2006) notes, women's organisations are not always rooted in local communities or accountable to them. Lambrick and Tavers (2006) also highlight the risk of 'professional co-optation' of women's safety audits, where professional expertise replaces everyday women's voices.

Economic and social inequalities can also mean that elites capture social accountability processes. As George (2003) points out, while participatory governance at the community level can provide opportunities for the less powerful to engage, they are not 'automatically inclusive'. If anything, it is here that exclusionary social norms and conflicts between marginalised and elite groups can be most acute (MacPherson, 2008). Even when women participate in community oversight mechanisms, the large power distance between service users and professionals and officials can prevent effective monitoring (Brucker et al., 2011; Wild and Harris, 2013; George, 2003).

Specific efforts to counter unequal power structures in the household, community and society more broadly must be taken to improve the representation and participation of women in social accountability processes (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001; Evertzen, 2006; MacPherson, 2008). This includes increasing women's access to resources that improve their decision-making power within the home, such as employment outside the home, independent income, property ownership and education (MacPherson, 2008), but also designing social accountability mechanisms to ensure that women, and different groups of women, are able to participate and do so in meaningful ways.

²¹ Given the paucity of material on girls and social accountability, this section focuses on the factors that enable or constrain women's voice and influence through social accountability processes. Explanatory factors around women's leadership also do not feature strongly because of the lack of data.

NGO support

Some studies highlight the essential role that NGOs have in laying the ground for citizen participation in social accountability processes. Where active, NGOs can inform people of their rights, make them aware of opportunities to engage with the state, mobilise the community to participate in public events, help to identify suitable individual participants and provide technical support for women who set up their own monitoring groups (e.g. WRA, n.d.; Shankar, 2010). It is notable, however, that these studies do not consider that civil society organisations may not be representative of, and accountable to, the women they claim to speak for (Goetz, 2003).

Politicising social accountability and linking forms of civic action

Analysis of the role of NGOs in women's exercise of social accountability in these studies is quite instrumental, however. The grey literature tends to focus on how NGOs support women to achieve specific, often service, outcomes within bounded accountability mechanisms – rather than how they might support women's broader mobilisation and provide a platform empowerment beyond the particular activity. Exceptions include the studies that highlight the bridging capital that civil society organisations can bring, linking rural women to urban elites, or facilitating strategic alliances between citizens and national accountability mechanisms, such as ombudsmen (Fraisancho and Vasquez, 2014; Das and Dasgupta, 2013).

In relation to the broader social accountability literature, Joshi and Houtzager (2012) also highlight the tendency to treat social accountability in isolation from wider political processes. They argue that social accountability tends to be conceptualised too narrowly, with the focus on specific mechanisms (or 'widgets'), whether organic or externally induced, rather than as an ongoing process of engagement between citizens and the state. Similarly, Gaventa and McGee (2010), argue that the literature on citizen action is split, with one strand looking at citizen voice through 'invited spaces' and the other on more adversarial approaches to advocacy, with the latter not recognised as also being 'contentious politics'. Both of these tendencies are pronounced in the literature on women and social accountability.

State capacity and behaviour

Much donor policy and programming is based on the implicit assumptions that citizen voice and demand will lead to state accountability and improved services (O'Neil, et al., 2008; Rocha Menocal and Sharma, 2008). In practice, the responsiveness of public officials to citizen activism is far from assured and depends on their capabilities, values and interests. There are few attempts in this literature to think seriously about how the political economy of local governance and service delivery affects women's accountability initiatives and the responsiveness of public officials. Some authors do, however, find downward pressure from politicians on bureaucrats, or from local government officials or frontline service providers, to be important for women's influence.

Das and Dasgupta (2013), for example, found that while local health providers were intransigent when women users confronted them about illegal payments, they were motivated to return the bribes when the women took their complaint to district officials because of fear of exposure, reputational loss and sanction by superiors. In one programme in Ceará, Brazil, the state governor bypassed the patronage systems of mayors by directly recruiting the health agents, induced competition between municipalities, built in citizen assessment of municipalities and conducted a large publicity campaign. These combined factors led to a fall in the infant mortality rate from 100 per 1,000 live births in the 1980s to 25 per 1,000 in 2001 (Evertzen, 2006).

Type and quality of social accountability activities

The evidence suggests that well designed and executed social accountability initiatives can influence policy and service for women even in the context of unfavourable social and political conditions. The reverse is also true: poorly conceived and managed accountability processes are unlikely to provide a platform for women's voice, organisation and influence even if the political and social environment is favourable. Four common themes emerge.

First, social accountability measures should be designed in ways that ensure a gender focus so that steps are taken to enable women to participate and when they do, are able to express their own views and do not simply 'speak with men's voices, reproducing the desired answers and hiding their own ideas' (Evertzen, 2006: 17). Measures include:

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- Holding meetings at appropriate times and places, and conducting them in a way that encourages women to speak up, such as women-only meetings or involving women's organisations and considers language and literacy barriers, as well as the having a skilled facilitator (Evertzen, 2006; Lambrick and Travers, 2008).
 - Complementary inputs to foster women's skills and confidence are also important, such as training on leadership, organising and lobbying, and team-building meetings and exercises (Lambrick and Travers, 2008).
 - It is not possible to draw definitive conclusions from the literature about effectiveness, but it is clear from the material reviewed that women-only groups and initiative gender equity focus, such as participatory gender budgeting and auditing, are more likely to involve women and are more likely to advocate for women's interests.

Second, if social accountability measures are to be inclusive, specific measures must be taken to target and include women from poor and marginalised groups, for example by providing childcare, advertising in places and through appropriate mediums likely to reach hard-to-reach women (e.g. radio, canvassing), or using quotas (Lambrick and Travers, 2008; Popoita and Ofosu-Amaah, 2013).

Third, while adversarial actions may sometimes be appropriate, the evidence strongly suggests that collaborative approaches are more likely to promote citizen influence and state responsiveness than purely 'demand-side' approaches. 'Naming and shaming' approaches, can lead to public officials blocking the efforts of women monitors or being unresponsive, particularly in the absence of formal sanctions (George, 2003). It is important to involve professionals and decision-makers early on in social accountability processes to secure buy-in and to extend reach, and to tailor programmes to communities and context (Campbell et al., 2012; Lambrick and Travers, 2008; Wild and Walsh, 2015).

Finally, there is also evidence that integrated strategies are important to the success of social accountability initiatives. Based on a review of 25 quantitative evaluations, mostly field experiments, Fox (2014) found that the accountability interventions that use multiple tactics ('strategic' approaches) were more effective than bounded, society-side interventions ('tactical' approaches). There is no comparable review of bounded and integrated interventions in the gender material, but the single studies seem to suggest that women's voice, leadership and influence depends on a series of linked activities to build their self-belief, collective action and effective political engagement (Muchabaiwa, 2010).

4.4.4 Role of international actors and their support

Much of the literature on social accountability, particularly outside of India and Brazil, relates to activities that are funded directly or indirectly by development agencies. But the studies pay little attention to whether funding relationships might also influence whether social accountability programmes contribute to women's voice and influence. This is perhaps not surprising given that most reports are commissioned by CSOs who will be reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them. Explicit references to international actors and funders (in 32 of the 78 relevant studies reviewed) tend to be concerned with who the funder is and what support they provided, with no analysis of the impact of different models of commissioning, funding or partnering.

Below are five key messages about the type of international support to social accountability that appear to work better or worse to support women's voice, leadership and influence over decision-making. This draws on the explicit analysis of these issues in the review of the evidence (Roche, 2009; Evertzen, 2006; Frisacho and Vasquez, 2014; CARE, 2012; Hoffman, 2014 and Wild and Walsh, 2015), but also on conclusions drawn from the evidence on enabling and constraining factors of women's voice. It applies both to funding and implementing agencies, including government, not-for-profit and private sector.

Adapt social accountability interventions to the particular society and polity

External actors can only hope to support social accountability if they and their local partners both understand and are able to adapt their programmes to local conditions. Doing so means designing programmes on the basis of theories of change that are plausible given the factors that enable and constrain women's voice in that particular context. Understanding and adapting women's social accountability programmes to context is a prerequisite for donors to be able to act on the remaining four messages.

Build and work through long-term relationships

Relationships are central to the concepts and practice of voice and, in particular, to influence and accountability – between women and women’s organisations, and between women and other parties, such as public officials and the media. One implication of this for funders and implementers is that they must build long-term relationships with national and district-level NGOs, who in turn can develop long-term partnerships with grassroots women. This makes it less likely that women’s social accountability will be seen as a technical exercise, and more likely that they will respond to the priorities of excluded women, build their capacities and embed social accountability in long-term processes of women’s mobilisation. Building substantive relationships with women’s organisations also improves the chances that funding will support voluntarism and ‘organic’ processes of civic action. Evidence suggests these are more likely to be self-sustaining and able to solve local problems than ‘induced’ forms of participation (Mansuri and Roa; 2013; Booth, 2013).

Another implication is that a key role of development and implementing agencies is to connect women’s organisations and broker their relationships with other civic and state actors – to help women to build a ‘constituency for accountability’ and to strengthen the linkages between actors in different parts of the ‘service delivery chain’ (Evertzen, 2006).

Maintain a gender focus in social accountability activities

Thorough gender and power analysis is essential to counter the specific barriers women face to voice and influence, and particularly so for programmes that involve both men and women where there is a much higher risk that women’s voice will be drowned out. Sex-disaggregated data is also needed for women to be visible in social accountability activities and public policy, and gender audits can provide an *ex ante* check on whether women are actually present and enabled by policy or programming. However, even when measures are taken to ensure women can participate and express themselves in mixed civic associations (like a village group or a political party), their interests often get side-lined by men (Goetz and Nyamu Musembi, 2008; Wild and Walsh, 2015). It is more likely that women-only organisations and activities will be enabled to articulate their interests and form associations with women with shared interests. This is an important first step for them to be able to form networks and alliances with other organisations (both women’s and mixed-sex) whose interest overlaps with theirs, even if not fully. Building such strategic alliances is important for women seeking to negotiate changes in law, policy and social norms. Supporting women’s grassroots and other sub-national organisations also seems essential to foster women’s leadership capabilities.

Use programme design to mitigate constraints and maximise the chances of women having voice and influence

Implementing agencies must ensure that they explicitly design social accountability programmes in ways that mitigate constraints on women’s voice and influence resulting from structural issues of gender bias. They also need to secure the buy-in of decision-makers or work in other ways to motivate them to act on women’s needs, preferences and interests. This means using integrated programmes that use a variety of measures and tactics to build both the capacities of women and the quality of their interaction with power-holders.

4.5 Conclusions: women’s voice and influence through social activism

To conclude, we draw out key points of convergence and divergence from the social mobilisation *and* social accountability literatures in relation to women’s voice and influence. Overall there is considerable consensus about the ways in which women’s mobilisation and their participation in social accountability activities impact on their voice and leadership. These can be clustered around five themes:

The mixed role of NGOs

There is a broad consensus in both literatures that NGOs and other women’s organisations/girls’ clubs are often crucial to expanding activism – especially when it relates to feminist concerns and the risks in challenging entrenched social norms. However, both literatures also express concern over elite-capture/NGO-isation that can silence the diversity of women’s experience. They highlight the ways in which grassroots issues can be side-lined by even well-meaning national or international players who do not understand local realities and caution that local power dynamics, if not well understood and managed, can effectively prevent the most marginalised from participating.

The importance of social capital and group cohesion

Both literatures note the key importance of social capital and ‘groupness’ or solidarity in helping women develop voice and leadership. They highlight the ways in which collective consciousness often develops out of face-to-face interactions and how shared experiences can foster the courage that helps women move into different and larger venues and tackle other needs and forms of discrimination. While the mobilisation literature highlights the need for autonomy, and the threat of co-option by elite agendas, finding allies to work with, and keeping dialogue positive, is more likely to return desired results in gender equality agendas – especially in regard to the development of women’s voice and leadership.

The importance of investing in women’s capacities to exercise voice and leadership

However, both literatures also underscore that women’s numeric participation is not equal to women’s voice and leadership – and attempts to account for this are still nascent. Reported results of mobilisation and accountability activities are largely limited to impacts *for* women, i.e. whether they get what they want in terms of political change or service delivery, not impacts *on* women’s capacities to exercise voice and leadership more broadly. We still know relatively little about whether and why there are tangible changes in women’s empowerment outcomes and the local social norms that shape them as a result of their participation in movements or social accountability mechanisms.

The critical importance of context

Both literatures highlight the importance of socio-political context in shaping the forms of women’s activism, the objectives women hold (political, practical or strategic) and the level at which women engage (community, subnational, national or international). Because analysis generally focuses on a single region or country, however, few comparative typologies have emerged to explain similarities and differences across contexts. Overall both literatures also note that women’s activism is more likely to be successful and sustained when it grows organically out of local passion, rather than being instigated by external actors, which can engender backlash.

Differences between social mobilisation and social accountability literatures

There are also, however, several critical differences between the social accountability and mobilisation literatures. The mobilisation literature highlights the importance of strong personalities and individual stories to birthing and strengthening women’s leadership. Social accountability, because it tends to be planned, often externally organised and more tightly focused on a specific programme or issue, does not appear to need this form of leadership. However, there are some indications that, where women’s village groups are formed to monitor services, strong women leaders can emerge and spur further activism.

5 Women's voice, leadership and influence through economic empowerment

This section looks at the evidence on how women's economic participation can lead to increases in women's voice, decision-making and leadership. Women's economic participation relates to their livelihoods activities. This includes their access to and ownership of financial and productive assets that enable them to engage in productive activities (for example in the form of self-employment), as well as their participation in the formal and informal labour force. Here we are particularly interested in how women's economic participation is empowering; that is, the extent to which it leads to women having more power, choice, voice and influence over decision-making. Increases in women's power and agency can be identified through: their increased participation in collective action; greater self-efficacy and ability to make decisions; bargaining power; control and ownership of resources and financial independence. Their economic advancement can be identified through their participation in business and labour market activities; their acquisition of new skills and adoption of new business practices; access to new markets; increased profits and improved livelihoods (Golla et al., 2011). We explore women's economic empowerment by examining (1) women's access to and control of financial and productive assets and (2) women's active participation in the labour market.

The structure of this section is as follows: For each sub-theme we provide a brief overview of the issues and then reflect on the evidence base in terms of the nature and quality of the evidence, areas of convergence or contestation, and gaps in the literature. We discuss the evidence on the effects of financial and productive assets or labour market participation on women's voice, decision-making and leadership (as direct outcomes); we then ask whether these changes result in gender equitable outcomes (indirect outcomes); and examine the factors which affect these changes. Finally, we summarise the key analytical points and highlight the policy implications, including for the role of international actors. First, however, we provide an overview of the main finding and recommendations on women's economic empowerment overall.

5.1 Summary findings and recommendations on women's economic empowerment

5.1.1 Strength of the evidence

The literature on economic empowerment rarely addresses our research questions directly. There is significant research on the effects of microfinance on the lives of poor people, but the literature on women's asset holding and on economic participation is less well developed. Overall, the literature is narrowly focused on direct outcomes of women's economic participation rather than their broader empowerment impact. Where empowerment is considered, various indicators are used to measure whether women have more power and choice. Studies rarely explore how women's diverse characteristics, identity and experiences account for differential empowerment outcomes. Many of the quantitative studies also do not account for differences in context when presenting their results, which may explain some of the ambiguous and inconclusive findings. Finally, we found only few studies to engage directly with gender-responsive law and policy.

5.1.2 Findings

- Economic participation stimulates only small increases in women's voice, influence and decision-making power at the individual/household level. Even so, this provides an important building block for subsequent increases in agency and voice.
- Collective action can enhance women's self-esteem and their identity as citizens, change restrictive social norms over time, address practical and strategic gender interests, and enable voice, agency and leadership (through trade unions, cooperatives, self-help groups) at both the community level and within broader political structures.

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- Enhanced voice and agency can lead to greater women's autonomy, freedom of movement and improved working environments – including by policy and legal changes in women's wages, social security benefits, and protection of their rights as workers.
 - Key determinants of the degree to which women's economic participation strengthens women's voice, bargaining power and influence are: the type and quality of women's work; the extent to which economic participation is coupled with additional opportunities to strengthen women's capabilities and shift constricting social norms; and the scale and strength of women's collective mobilisation.
 - Access to assets can empower individuals but this does not necessarily in itself translate into women's collective empowerment.
 - Microfinance can empower women and build their self-esteem and social status (enabling greater community participation), enhance women's awareness of political parties, processes and channels of influence and support political participation (particularly if they include training programmes). But it can also have no effect or a negative effect on women's voice and influence.
 - Multidimensional approaches in microfinance are more likely to deliver gains in women's agency and decision-making and offer pathways to greater social organisation and political voice at the community level; minimalist microfinance tends to focus on the individual, ignoring the need to challenge broader social structures.
 - Group lending can help build social capital for wider collective voice, which in itself can lead to broader gender equality outcomes.
 - Women's secure property rights can lead directly to their increased decision-making power in the household or indirectly through increased income or production.
 - Control of assets, more broadly, can enable women to renegotiate the conjugal contract by altering their 'fall-back position': altering their ability to engage in household decision-making, their willingness to tolerate domestic violence and their ability to engage in markets and public forums.
 - Empowerment potential is greater where women can access land directly, rather than through a male family member, but whether benefits are greater for those with individual or joint land title or access through customary rights depends on context. If empowerment outcomes are to be maximised, titling reforms need to be accompanied by interventions that make women aware of their rights.
 - Access to and control of resources can create conflicts, predominantly within the home, including increases in domestic violence.
 - Women's engagement in paid work can shift attitudes and social norms around gender inequality.
 - The transformative effect of work depends on the type and quality of work (the regularity of wages and place of work, formal employment being the most 'transformative'), social visibility, independence from the 'familial sphere of control', the extent to which women receive childcare support, the social acceptability of their work, the nature of any collective action, the importance of women's participation in public-private dialogue, and class/caste and socio-cultural differences.

5.1.3 Implications and recommendations

Recommendations on how to achieve these goals include:

- Taking a multidimensional approach and working with a range of actors both formally and informally to address women's constraints and challenge social norms.
- Interventions should combine improving access to economic assets or income with providing training or knowledge, engaging with men and reducing women's triple burden.
- Supporting collective action which focuses initially on addressing women's practical concerns and then supports them in addressing their longer-term and strategic goals.
- Better networking opportunities for businesswomen and support at the highest level of government to enable women to voice their demands.

- Replicating some of the desirable characteristics of the formal in the informal economy by creating an enabling regulatory environment, providing social protection, and supporting organisational capacity.
- Using targeted communication strategies to reduce biases and stereotypes.
- Developing policies to promote economic opportunities for women.
- Promoting legal reforms that enable women to own and inherit land and other assets along with complementary interventions to shift patriarchal norms so that women can have full control of the assets they own.

5.2 Women's access to and control of assets

This sub-section reviews the literature on the effects of women's greater access to or control of financial and productive assets on women's voice, decision-making, influence and leadership, and whether this results in gender equitable outcomes more broadly.

'Assets' can be defined broadly to include capital of various types: natural, physical, human, financial, social and political (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011). In this section of the paper we focus primarily on access to and control of *financial capital* (e.g. credit, savings, income transfers), and access to and control of *natural and physical capital* (primarily focusing on land, property, and livestock). We include assets that are individually or jointly owned, reflecting the reality across diverse contexts (Quisumbing et al., 2014: 1).

5.2.1 Reflections on the evidence base

Nature and quality of the evidence base

There is a large body of research on the effects of microfinance on the lives of poor people. This includes at least two systematic reviews of the impact evaluation evidence (Stewart et al., 2010; Duvendack et al., 2011). Historically, the positive rhetoric around the developmental benefits of microfinance has made it difficult to assess its impact (Stewart et al., 2010). This perhaps reached its peak in 2006, when the Nobel Peace Prize of 2006 was jointly awarded to Mohammed Yunus and Grameen Bank. A number of high-profile studies point to the potential damage of microfinance programmes at both the micro (individual women) and macro level (e.g. Bateman and Chang, 2012; Hulme and Arun, 2011); or they have at least shown that their effects are often far from transformative (Roodman, 2012; Banerjee et al., 2015). So the body of evidence on the effects of microfinance, although substantial, is polarised, with many researchers now looking in detail at which models of microfinance work, for whom, in which contexts and for what purpose (Amouso et al., 2011; Roodman, 2012).

There is also a smaller body of literature on the linkages between women's access to and control of property and land and their decision-making power within the household. This material has been well-summarised in a handful of literature or evidence reviews (Dekker, 2013; Domingo, 2013; Klugman et al., 2013; Henley, 2013).²² Broader reviews of the drivers of women's empowerment also proved to be useful (Evans and Namibiar, 2013; Klugman et al., 2014). Papers that took a broader social, institutional or anthropological approach or analysis were also used to help frame the broader findings of this report, as well as sources of evidence in themselves (CLEP, 2008; Domingo, 2013).

The majority of primary research papers drawn on in this review use qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews supported by some quantitative work, often derived from household survey data (for example Goetz and Gupta, 1996; Kabeer, 2001; Lakwo, 2006).²³ While there are a significant number of papers, particularly on the effects of microfinance, drawing almost entirely on household survey data, the vast majority were not directly relevant to our research questions. Some of the most useful analyses across the different assets literature

²² Our search of the academic databases returned 994 results for research on women's access to assets and their voice and leadership. These were assessed for relevance to our research questions and 39 were initially selected for inclusion in our review. In the writing process several were excluded due to their lack of depth on our research questions, which left 10 remaining from the initial 994. A further 75 pieces were sourced through specific website searches, snowballing and expert recommendations (85 publications in total).

²³ These papers were used partly because RCTs, for example, have been well covered in other systematic reviews. Furthermore, given the size of the evidence base on women's access to assets, and particularly on microfinance, existing systematic evidence reviews and other comprehensive secondary reviews were prioritised, with primary source material chosen to supplement gaps or review the author's findings. Where sourcing of the original paper was not possible due to time or access restrictions, the secondary review is cited instead.

were those that undertake cross-country or regional comparisons, although only a few papers do this in an in-depth manner (e.g. Agarwal, 1994; Kabeer, 2005; Amouso et al., 2011; Banerjee et al., 2015).

The majority of research on microfinance is concentrated in South Asia, predominantly Bangladesh and India, although single-country case studies do exist within Africa and the Americas. Regional studies (of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa) and global studies, such as systematic reviews, helped us understand what evidence was available (Stewart et al., 2010; Duvendack et al., 2011). On the issues of land, property and livestock, the geographical spread is more diverse, and included Nicaragua, Tanzania, Guatemala, Sierra Leone and India, but, in general, this material has less depth of analysis in terms of our research questions than the microfinance literature. Along with the comprehensive secondary reviews, there are a number of single and comparative case studies that are particularly pertinent to our review (Roy, 2008; Pena et al., 2008; Agarwal, 1994; Quisumbing et al., 2014; Action Aid, 2013; Amouso et al., 2011).

Despite this significant evidence base on microfinance, most papers do not address our research questions *directly*. Almost no studies look at women's voice, decision-making, influence or leadership beyond the household and in the community (exceptions to this include Action Aid, 2013; Kabeer, 2005; Mahmud, 2003), or at how women's access to assets might influence their participation in the business sector, social movement, or as political actors (exceptions to this include Kabeer 2001, 2005; Amouso et al., 2011). As a consequence, much of our analysis focused on pulling out relevant findings, rather than a detailed assessment of the scientific rigour of individual studies. Furthermore, across the literature, there are different definitions and conceptualisations of women's empowerment, and various indicators are used to measure whether women have more power and choice. We aimed to draw on those papers whose indicators are most relevant to our review: those with a focus on women's decision-making, voice and influence within the household.

Weighting of the evidence

Systematic reviews of the effects of microfinance conclude that it is generally an important mechanism for women's access to financial services (Stewart et al., 2010; Duvendack et al., 2011). The effects of microfinance on women's power are generally understood to take place within the household, and involve changes to women's decision-making ability. Several papers also highlight the broader effects that access to income through microfinance can have on women's social standing (Buijs, 1998; Reddy, 2002; Meenai, 2010; Kshetrimayum, 2013; Chan and Ghani, 2011; Oswald Spring, 2013). Based on these potential gains within and outside the household, there is a general consensus that microfinance *can* empower women, but some studies find that access to microfinance can have no or negative effects on women's voice and influence (Das et al., 2013; Haile et al., 2012; Roodman, 2012; Banerjee et al., 2015; Wrigley-Asante, 2012). There appears to be some agreement that both the design of a microfinance programme (for example, whether they take a multidimensional approach) and the way it is implemented are crucial to whether gains in women's agency and decision-making in the household are made, and whether these can cascade into wider and sustained effects within the community. There is some limited discussion of how multidimensional microfinance programmes may lead to greater political awareness (and to some extent voice), but this tends to be standalone evidence.

There is less evidence regarding productive assets in relation to our research questions. A recent review of the relationship between property rights and social, political and economic empowerment found 'ambivalent' results (Domingo, 2013: ii). It remains fairly well acknowledged that land titling and improved documentation – or even stronger communal land rights – *can* bring a range of benefits including greater autonomy in the home, mobility out of the home and decision-making power for women (Klugman et al., 2014). However it is important to note that often such linkages are assumed rather than empirically shown, in particular in relation to individual property rights (as noted in Domingo, 2013).

Contested areas and key gaps

Debates about the adequacy of various forms of evidence for different kinds of claims plays out strongly in the microfinance literature. For example, Banerjee et al. (2015: 1-2) argue that the '...empirical evidence invoked by microcredit proponents was largely based on anecdotes, descriptive statistics, and impact studies that failed to disentangle causation from correlation'.²⁴ However, such reviews themselves tend to focus predominantly on

²⁴ Also see Duvendack et al. (2011) who argue that most impact evaluations of microfinance suffer from weak methodologies and inadequate data, which can lead to misconceptions about the effects of such programmes.

randomised controlled trials (RCTs), which discounts more granular qualitative assessments of the effects of microfinance (Duvendack et al., 2011). Overall, the question of whether various forms of microfinance can lead to women's empowerment (and, for our purposes, voice and leadership) remains deeply contested, in part linked to the evidence debates outlined above.

The literature tends to be focus on specific forms of microfinance, most often microcredit programmes with some additional related training and/or programmes. Much less is known about the impact of micro-savings, for example, on women's empowerment (Stewart et al., 2010). There appears to be a gap in both research and practice in terms of programmes that target the severely and chronically poor, and whether such programmes can provide a path to voice, leadership or influence for poor women (Amouso et al., 2011).

With regard to the literature on productive assets, more research is also required to enhance understanding of how individual and joint ownership differ in their effects on women's household decision-making (Klugman et al., 2014). A review of the evidence of the relationship between individual property or land rights and improved social and political voice found inconclusive results (Domingo, 2013). However this same review argues that ambivalence in the evidence is unsurprising given the context specificity of different political settlements, property regimes and their interrelationship with gender dynamics (ibid.). Moreover this is an evidence base that, with some exceptions, tends not to focus on the question of how access to property shapes women's voice outside the household.

Overall, there is limited research that looks at how women's diverse characteristics, identity (along class, caste, ethnic, religious or other relevant lines) and experiences affects their access to, and control of assets – and particularly so in terms of their empowerment potential.²⁵ Many of the quantitative studies reviewed do not examine women's lives specific to their socio-cultural history or take account of the 'ideas and practices of gender relations' (Kabeer, 2001: 83).

The literature on both microfinance and productive assets also often (but not always) focuses narrowly on the direct outcome (for example loan access and control), rather than examining broader empowerment gains or losses associated with improved access to and control of assets. We know that women may have power and influence in some areas of their lives but lack autonomy in others. For example, a woman might be economically independent but sexually submissive to her husband and/or excluded from politics. Furthermore, the empowerment of one group of women may also be at the expense of another (O'Neil et al., 2014). The literature on assets typically fails to weigh up these potential differences within individual and group experiences.

5.2.2 How do financial and productive assets affect women's voice, decision-making and leadership?

In this section, we examine the extent to which financial and productive assets in women's hands leads to increased voice, decision-making and leadership. We look at evidence of the magnitude of such changes and what it takes to be transformative, for example challenging gender relations or leading to increased voice or influence in community or political forums.

Individual and intra-household changes

Women's empowerment is often measured in relation to *control over household resources*. Klugman and her colleagues point to a range of studies confirming the importance of control of resources for 'greater self-esteem, respect from other family members, economic opportunities, mobility outside of the home, and decision-making power' (Klugman et al., 2014: 131). Control of resources can enable women to renegotiate the conjugal contract by altering their 'fall-back position'. This can have powerful implications for their ability to engage in household decision-making, their willingness to tolerate domestic violence and their ability to engage in markets and public forums. In their seminal study of a rural microfinance scheme in Bangladesh, Goetz and Sen Gupta (1994) found that most women (and in particular married women), exercised little or no control over the loans that were acquired in their name. However, Kabeer's (2001) study of microfinance in Bangladesh finds that women's access to credit improved their overall decision-making in the household, despite male partners being more likely to control the loan itself. This highlights how control of the loan itself is only one variable among many by which to measure women's empowerment.

²⁵ This is a common problem in gender literature, as noted in ODI's assessment of the evidence of links between gender equality, peacebuilding and statebuilding (Domingo et al., 2013: vii)

Overall, there is mixed evidence on whether *control over assets means that women can exercise greater decision-making or influence* over other household-related issues. In one extensive study of a microfinance programme in Uganda, Lakwo (2006) demonstrates empowerment gains beyond decision-making ability, including the ownership of household assets commonly owned by males (such as poultry), ability to manage financial resources (through bank account ownership) and improvements in social standing and mobility outside the household. In contrast, research on a self-help group in India finds that women who receive microfinance do become more involved in household decision-making, but that this has not expanded into areas of family planning, children's marriage and the buying and selling of land (Bali Swain, 2006: 19). There may be little to no empowering effects even where household income increases on the basis of a loan. This was the case in the Women's Income Generating Support (WINGS) programme in Northern Uganda, where income gains failed to translate into improvements for women in household decision-making, or broader gender attitudes or less intimate partner violence (Evans and Namibiari, 2013: 12). In their assessment of a microcredit programme targeting the 'ultra poor' in Bangladesh, Das et al. (2013) argue that, while providing assets and training to women has ambiguous effects on decision-making, there are often other gains, such as a growth in confidence and social capital (Das et al., 2013: v).

More broadly, a number of other authors also *challenge the empowerment potential of microfinance*, arguing that participation leads to the ongoing subordination of women by reinforcing patriarchy (Mahmud, 2003; Scott, 2012). Fernando (1997) argues that the visibility of women in micro-credit programmes is not necessarily evidence that they are autonomous if these programmes prevent them from challenging broader discriminatory structures and institutions; microfinance can be a controlling industry which may reduce willingness to engage in collective action against injustice (Ahmad, 2003; Montgomery, 1996; Nazneen, 2007 cited in Kabeer, Mahmood and Castro, 2012). Whether this is the case is likely to depend on a range of factors, which we discuss further below. Overall, these findings suggest that while microfinance *can* lead to shifts in household decision-making, it may fail to make headway into traditionally gendered issues, and needs to be understood as part of a broader economic strategy.

In an extensive review of the evidence on gender equality and female empowerment, Dekker (2013: 5) finds *evidence linking women's secure property rights to land, houses and other assets to their increased decision-making power in the household*. This can occur directly, as a result of independent asset ownership, or indirectly through increased income or production (also see Doss, 2005; Smith et al., 2003 cited in Klugman et al., 2014). In rural Karnataka in India ownership of land allowed for greater decision-making in relation to work, health and household expenditure (Swaminathan, Lahoti, and Suchitra 2012 cited in Klugman et al., 2014: 126). Other research in India suggests that changes in inheritance laws, allowing unmarried daughters to inherit land, have delayed the marriage age and encouraged a focus on education for girls (Deininger, Goyal, and Nagarajan, 2010 cited in Klugman et al., 2014: 132). Yet a number of studies also point to the multitude of barriers women face in land rights and titling processes and how they can be disempowering (Agarwal, 1994 and 2002; Razavi, 2003; Pena et al., 2008). For example, Pena and her colleagues highlight that in the absence of a holistic strategy to accompany the provision of land with activities that enable women to be aware of their rights, resources may produce increased income but fail to address power relations at the household and community level (Pena et al., 2008). This suggests sustainable gains in improvements in household decision-making will be tied to broader dynamics, which demands a multi-dimensional strategy.

Across the literature surveyed, it is clear that access to and control of resources can create conflicts, predominantly within the home (Wrigley-Asante, 2012; Haile et al., 2012; Mayoux, 1997). Haile et al. (2012) argue that marital conflict can arise when men pressurise women to access microcredit loans. Wrigley-Asante (2012) also notes the potential for microfinance to drive marital conflict in Nigeria. This fits within a broader literature that acknowledges changes in household economic relations can lead to conflict, including an increase in domestic violence (Wrigley-Asante, 2012). When backlashes to women's empowerment occur, they may have a considerable influence on women's future decision-making and voice within the household. However, research in Western Uganda on 26 self-help groups in a joint microfinance and coffee co-operative found that membership of groups has allowed women to challenge the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) (Meier zu Selhaisen, 2012). As we discuss below, the ability of women to challenge social norms and GBV is often tied to the nature of group membership.

Beyond the household: changes in social, political and economic spheres

Research on the effects of empowerment changes beyond the individual or household remain limited across literature reviewed here. Microfinance programmes, for example, are often understood to improve women's 'social standing', but what this means across different contexts is often underdeveloped. However, a few key studies do exist which examine whether and how women's empowerment, in terms of their voice, decision-making or leadership opportunities at the community or political levels, have changed as a result of greater access or ownership of financial or productive resources (Lakwo, 2006; Kabeer, 2005; Amouso et al., 2011).

There is some evidence to suggest that changes through microfinance programmes in individual and intra-household levels of empowerment can provide women with an *elevated status and position in the community, allowing for increased participation in community issues*. For example, in Uganda, participation in microfinance programmes meant women were able to secure assets that upgraded their status from 'property-less to properties people' allowing them to discuss community issues with men, including marital norms around polygamy, rules around microfinance repayments, and women's participation in community-level politics (Lakwo, 2006: 172). As noted above, such debates can spark conflict. Lakwo also highlights how these discussions in Uganda met with mixed results, with '...acceptance for those changes that are considered worthwhile or overdue, and resistance for those that are seen as shaking the foundation of the social setting' (Lakwo, 2006: 165).

Involvement in community issues tends to be *closely linked to group participation*. In Kabeer's (2001) study of microcredit in Bangladesh, 'a growth of women's self-confidence, in their knowledge of their rights, their willingness to participate in public action and even the reduction of domestic violence may have occurred as a result of women's participation in the new forms of social relationships embodied in credit organizations' (Kabeer 2001: 81).²⁶ Amouso et al. (2011) provide an interesting study which focuses on microfinance and *civic activism*.²⁷ Their research on multidimensional microfinance groups across Bangladesh and Bolivia clearly revealed that members had opportunities to create new social networks which instigated improvements in confidence levels, as well as opportunities to renegotiate marital relations, develop greater relations with women's organisations and increased leadership development opportunities.

Access to or control over productive resources, such as land, may bring similar benefits even where group membership is not a key element of the process. Action Aid (2013) finds that in Guatemala, India and Sierra Leone, access to, control over or ownership of land has given women confidence and status in their community, increased awareness of their own status and greater knowledge and involvement in wider community struggles. In Guatemala, involvement in community struggles included those that are traditionally 'gender issues' (such as women's solidarity over health rights) as well as those that are not (such as challenging regulation around mining activities). In India, control over land gave Dalit women greater respect in the community leading to improved voice in community issues (Action Aid, 2013: 22).

There is also some more limited evidence that access to or ownership of productive resources and involvement in microfinance programmes can *enhance women's awareness of political parties, processes and channels of influence, or support political participation* (Cheston and Kuhn, 2002; Kabeer, 2005; Amouso et al., 2011; Pena et al., 2008). For example, research on self-help groups in India highlights how participants showed greater awareness of reservations for women in local institutions and jobs, and 'an increased level of participation in village politics' (Bali Swain, 2006: 19). This appears to be largely dependent on whether a programme explicitly aims to develop political voice and influence, the nature of group membership, as well as the social norms in the given context. Hashemi et al. (1996, cited in Cheston and Kuhn, 2002) find that more female members in BRAC's programmes engaged in political action than did those in Grameen programmes, in large part because BRAC offers training programmes aimed at creating political and social awareness. Cheston and Kuhn (2002: 25) also point to the Working Women's Forum in India, which, through a combination of advocacy and lending programmes, has managed to mobilise women around practical and strategic interests. It is possible that multidimensional microfinance programmes can help develop skills – for example through gender sensitivity training – which later can be used strategically in engagements in politics. However this raises the question of

²⁶ Although this bore little relationship to loan productivity. This highlights how the effects of microfinance may not be linked to whether the loan itself is a success

²⁷ This paper defines women voicing demands and being involved in decision-making both locally and nationally as 'civic activists', which aligns closely with our focus of voice and access to decision-making.

the importance of microfinance in itself, as opposed to other programmes which focus more explicitly on education and leadership skills, for example.

Unfortunately, very little research explicitly addresses women's leadership capabilities in relation to productive and financial resources. Amouso et al. (2011) signal a few interesting examples from the microfinance literature. They discuss how 'a social network of microfinance groups can create a climate that is conducive to increasing the number of women entrepreneurs and their businesses', particularly if these networks can be scaled up and formalised (p.20). They cite the example of Swayam Shikshan Prayog, a women's empowerment organisation that has developed a number of women-led federations, which aims to create links between various local groups, businesses and government departments. Such links have led to a number of female entrepreneurs working directly with a major energy company (Amouso et al., 2011: 20). However, most successes come from relationships between 'elite' microfinance groups and businesses. The majority of microfinance groups are in small networks and it is difficult for their members to mobilise effectively on key issues related to improving their overall wellbeing or economic productivity (Amouso et al., 2011: 20). Cheston and Kuhn (2002) highlight a number of examples where microfinance programmes have given women increased confidence and leadership opportunities, including in the Philippines, where a number of female microfinance programme participants were elected into local-level political positions. However, more generally, increased analysis is required of the individual histories of female leaders and how involvement in programmes has contributed (or not) to their political participation.

Overall, it should be noted that *individual* empowerment does not necessarily translate into women's *collective empowerment* (Kabeer et al., 2013). It is well evidenced that participation in different forms of groups can have positive effects in terms of individual economic outcomes as well as broader social benefits. However, the existence of these groups in themselves is unlikely to be enough; it is often important that such groups are explicitly formed to shift social norms for there to be broader transformational gains (Evans and Nambiar, 2013).

5.2.3 Does women's increased voice, influence and decision-making result in improved gender equality outcomes?

In this sub-section we look at the evidence on whether improvements in women's voice and decision-making, through access to or ownership of financial and productive resources, contributes to broader gains in gender equality. As outlined in the analytical framework, this could include changes in relation to gender-responsive law and policy, gender-responsive public goods and services, political settlements and broader gender equality outcomes. We found only very limited literature that directly engaged with the first three of these, but there is some important discussion of broader gender equality outcomes, such as improved attitudes and behaviours in social norms, including women's mobility, as well as some limited evidence of related improvements in indicators of health and education. The sources often analyse whether economic empowerment has led to gender equality outcomes, but do not explicitly analyse how women's voice and decision-making played a role in those outcomes. Despite this it is possible to extrapolate some findings for our research questions, however limited.

A number of studies we have discussed above either explicitly or implicitly highlight improved gender equality outcomes (Lakwo, 2006; Kabeer, 2005; Amouso et al. 2011; Cheston and Kuhn, 2002; Klugman et al., 2014; Action Aid, 2013). For example, Lakwo's study of microfinance in Uganda found an important shift in social norms around polygamy, as well as increased participation in community-level politics. Examples from Bolivia and Bangladesh suggest that group membership has allowed women to negotiate and challenge social norms in the community through involvement in local politics (Amouso et al., 2011; Kabeer, 2001). Cheston and Kuhn's (2002: 22) analysis of Working Women's Forum in India also finds that microfinance groups can be mobilised, with the necessary conditions and support, to fight for political and legal changes that support women's rights and opportunities. Research from Ghana and Bolivia suggests that where microfinance interventions also have an explicit education focus, they may lead to wider education and health outcomes through increasing women's knowledge and practices in these spheres (Dunford, 2001 cited in Amouso et al., 2011). There are rarely explicit pathways demonstrated between women's improved voice and leadership and these gains, in part because the pathways between interventions and social norm change, for example, are neither one-directional nor linear.

There are some interesting studies which analyse the links between land and property rights and gender equality outcomes. For example, survey data from Kerala and in India and in rural Nicaragua find that that women

owning property (in the form of land or housing) lowers the risk of domestic violence (Panda and Agarwal, 2005; Grabe, 2010, cited in Domingo, 2013). Research in Rwanda finds that recent legal changes have radically altered women's rights to land through inheritance, which has in turn began to radically shift social norms around these issues (Daley et al., 2010). Work in Colombia by Friedemann-Sánchez (2006) highlights that women with property have more freedom of movement and a less chance of experiencing domestic violence (cited in Domingo et al., 2013). This aligns with findings from a study of a multidimensional microfinance programme in Nepal, where female participants began to resist domestic violence and demand better working pay (Cheston and Kuhn, 2002). Drawing simple links between ownership and control of assets and declining domestic violence should be avoided, however: as highlighted above, many studies acknowledge that changes in household economic relations can lead to conflict or domestic violence (such as Mayoux, 1997; Schuler, Hashemi and Badal 1998; Silberschmidt, 1999, 2005 cited in Wrigley-Asante, 2012).

A number of studies discuss the limited ability of microfinance to create broader gender equality outcomes. A recent review of evidence from seven RCTs states that 'there is little evidence of transformative effects. The studies do not find clear evidence, or even much in the way of suggestive evidence, of reductions in poverty or substantial improvements in living standards. Nor is there robust evidence of improvements in social indicators' (Banerjee et al., 2015: 13). In their review of the impact of microfinance across sub-Saharan Africa, Stewart et al. (2010) find very limited evidence that demonstrates improvements in health, food security and nutrition, education, housing and job creation. Importantly, the study points out that many empowerment claims in relation to microfinance suffer from a significant attribution problem.

While these studies did not specifically analyse women's voice and leadership in relation to these findings, an implication is that microfinance programmes should perhaps not be expected to deliver improved gender equality. This raises the question of whether microfinance can be economically harmful in ways that would serve to curb women's empowerment potential on these fronts in both the shorter and longer term. For example, failure to increase income after obtaining a loan can lead clients into further debt, leaving them reliant on further loan cycles (Bateman, 2011). The potential for microfinance to go both well and badly aligns with what Mayoux (1999: 977) refers to as 'virtuous spirals' and 'vicious constraints'. Given the polarised nature of the literature on this issue, what remains clear is that microfinance has the potential be damaging and, as a sole intervention, may lead to only marginal gains in gender equality.

5.2.4 Which factors contribute to or prevent positive change?

There are, then, numerous factors which influence whether women's increased access to or ownership of financial and productive resources leads to improved voice or access to decision-making – what Kabeer et al. (2013) refer to as the 'gendered structures of constraint'. This section draws on what the literature identifies as these key enabling and constraining factors. Broadly speaking, these factors can be divided into three interrelated areas: those that are specific to microfinance programming; the property regime related to access and ownership of productive assets; and broader socio-economic contextual factors.

Factors specific to microfinance programming

In terms of the most direct impact of microfinance – whether women control their loans or not – a number of practical design and implementation issues are reported to influence this effect, including loan size, timing and types of product (savings, loan, etc.) (Eyben et al., 2008). However, evidence suggests that the original objective of microfinance – increasing individual access to finance – may not be as important in fostering changes in voice, influence and decision-making as the strategic design and implementation of programmes. The literature identifies four important areas: (1) the involvement of men to change gender-related attitudes, (2) the importance of the group approach, (3) the objectives of group mobilisation, and (4) the multi-dimensionality of microfinance programmes. An overlapping feature of these is that they depend largely on an organisation's approach in a given context.

First, in relation to the involvement of men, Evans and Nambiar (2013) argue that the apparent mismatch between increases in women's income or asset levels and other expressions of agency is 'the overly dominant engagement of, or in the obverse, the lack of involvement of men, which in turn limits opportunities for changes in gender attitudes and behaviours' (p.13). Comparative research in Bolivia and Bangladesh finds that involving men near the start of a microfinance programme can encourage a more progressive attitude towards the participation of women, while also pushing gender discussions into the wider community (Amouso et al., 2011).

Second, the evidence generally finds that group-based lending is preferable to individual lending (Stewart et al., 2010; Duvendack et al., 2011). Holvoet's (2005) study of the impact of microfinance on decision-making in Tamil Nadu finds that channelling loans to groups rather than individual women substantially increases the likelihood of increased female decision-making and bargaining, yet that it would be 'shortsighted to assume all forms of group intermediation will invariably achieve their empowerment potential' (p.36). The extent to which organisations promote a group approach is often embedded in the history of collective action in the country. In Bangladesh, for example, differences in levels of collective action can be traced to the historical emphasis given by NGOs to such forms of action – with 'minimalist microfinance organisations' at the weakest end of the mobilisation spectrum (Kabeer et al., 2012: 2052). Kabeer (2005) states that the approach to group formation is important for its potential to support the achievement of wider social gains, including frequency of meeting and levels of training. There are major differences, of course, between using group mobilisation to encourage loan repayment (through peer pressure) and using it to develop collective identity around women's practical or strategic interests.

This relates to the third key area: the objectives of microfinance programmes have a major effect on their impact (Ackerly, 1995; Scott, 2012). For example, Evans and Nambiar (2013) argue that the scale and duration of benefits depends crucially on how explicitly programmes seek to shift social norms. Indeed, it clearly matters who is promoting and managing microfinance and how this translates into programme objectives. Bali Swain (2006) gives an example: 'If the banks (who are concerned with their business of financial services) are put in charge of this task, they might be more interested in ensuring the safety of their loans rather than taking time-consuming interest in managing the SHGs [self-help groups]' (p.21-22). Kabeer et al. (2012) point out that if each meeting for microfinance participants revolves only around the loan, then this is unlikely to generate the necessary social capital for wider collective voice, which in itself can lead to broader gender equality outcomes.

The fourth area highlighted by the literature is that multidimensional microfinance programmes are those that appear to offer pathways to greater social organisation and political voice at the community level (Amouso et al., 2011). Bali Swain (2006) argues that if women's social and political empowerment is to be pursued as a serious objective, greater emphasis needs to be placed on training, education, awareness raising and social intermediation. Minimalist microfinance interventions, which concentrate strongly on financial intermediation to the exclusion of more multidimensional interventions, tend to focus on the empowerment of the individual. This ignores the need to challenge broader social structures of gender equality to achieve lasting gains in women's empowerment. This suggests that often a range of participation mechanisms at different levels is required to elevate women's knowledge, awareness, contacts or skills and together lead to improvements in their voice and access to decision-making at both the household and community level.

Political and policy regimes related to productive resources

The nature of property regimes (such as legal frameworks including family law, inheritance law, and land law) are identified in the literature as important factors not only determining women's access to, ownership of, and control over property, but in terms of the effect on women's potential bargaining power and influence (over assets themselves, but also more broadly).

The law can be an important factor in promoting or blocking women's rights to assets (such as land or livestock), which in turn can limit their bargaining power (Quisimbing, 2011). Major legal changes have the potential to change social norms around women's voice and leadership over the longer term. In Rwanda, the 1999 Succession Law established (for the first time in the country) women's rights to inherit land. Daley et al. (2010), based on qualitative research conducted in 2006, argue that a majority of young women in Rwanda are now receiving a parcel of land from their family at the time of succession – commonly called the distribution of *iminani* – which usually occurs on the marriage of their eldest brother. Since new laws do not apply retroactively, a large proportion of women do not benefit from them, yet younger women are inheriting land, with positive spillover effects on bargaining power in their marital and natal families. Of course, legal changes to state law alone are often insufficient in the context of legal pluralism, as well as the deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms that prevent women's access to, ownership or use of assets.

More generally, the ways in which women gain access to or ownership of productive assets has important implications for the degree of control they have over the assets and the extent to which spillover effects are generated in terms of voice, decision-making and influence. For example, research conducted by Action Aid in

Sierra Leone and Guatemala found there was greater empowerment potential where land could be accessed directly by women, rather than being mediated through a male family member (Action Aid, 2013).

The evidence around whether single or joint titling can lead to greater bargaining power and improvements in decision-making for women is ambiguous. Joint titling improved women's voice and decision-making in the household by redefining their bargaining position in urban informal settlements in India (Datta, 2006, cited in Domingo, 2013). In Heredia, Costa Rica, joint titling also increased the bargaining power of women, specifically during divorce (Klugman et al., 2014). In terms of individual property ownership, Klugman et al. (2014) point to research in Mali, Malawi and Tanzania which finds that, while ownership can increase decision-making power over issues related to land, it may have little effect on other kinds of decisions in their lives. More generally, it has been argued in relation to both property and land that formalisation may reproduce gendered patterns of exclusion, particularly when a process of land titling results in predominantly male ownership (Ali et al., 2014; Nyuma-Musembi, 2006). This highlights how customary rights to land may sometimes provide better space for women's bargaining power – it should not be assumed that implementing formal property or lands rights will be beneficial for women. Overall, there is a clear need for further research which compares how different kinds of property regimes influence the potential for women's voice and leadership through the formalisation of property rights, individually or jointly.

Broader contextual enabling and disabling factors

As is already clear, histories of gender relations and existing socio-cultural norms in a given context form the basis for what increased access to and control of finance or productive assets can or cannot achieve. Furthermore, differences between women in terms of their wealth, class, income level and education can militate against collective action (O'Neil et al., 2014). Kabeer (2005; 2001) argues that differences between individuals are an important (and often neglected) explanation for differences in outcomes linked to microfinance. Both the individual characteristics of women as well as the assets that women bring to marriage are important determinants of their control of assets during marriage and their share upon divorce. Marriage may significantly reduce women's movement and ability to participate in public life, by 'preventing them from applying for a passport, entering a contract, or appearing in court without their husbands' permission' (World Bank, 2012: 160).

Differences in formal and informal institutions and rules also shape the impact of microfinance programmes. In their study of two microfinance programmes in Ethiopia, Haile et al. (2012) argue that, where women have traditionally had an independent income, microfinance can improve their ability to address their practical as well as strategic needs. However this outcome was mediated by 'existing local economic structures and opportunities as well as social norms [that] defined how women invested their time', and which meant that women often became overloaded with work and their health suffered as a result (Haile et al., 2012: 264). In a study of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Agarwal (1994) highlights the importance of existing 'empowerment levels'. This study argues that while formal property rights may often be required for increased bargaining power, in some contexts (including parts of India and Sri Lanka) women's bargaining power over productive assets may already be high due to 'relatively matrilineal cultural norms' (as discussed in Domingo, 2013: 20).

5.3 Women's participation in the labour market

The second sub-theme of this section is women's participation in the labour market. Women's global labour force participation was estimated at 1.3 billion in 2012, or almost 40% of the total labour force²⁸ (ILO, 2012). However, there are significant regional differences in women's labour force participation: lower in the Middle East (21%) and North Africa (26%) and higher in East Asia (68%) and sub-Saharan Africa (72%) (ibid.).

Globally, fewer younger women (aged 15-24) work (41%) than adult women (54%), particularly in the Middle East (13%), North Africa (20%) and south Asia (23%) compared to sub-Saharan Africa (51%) and East Asia (61%) (ibid.). This is partly because increased education levels mean that they are in the education system for

²⁸ The labour force participation rate is a measure of the proportion of a country's working-age population that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work.

longer, but also is reflective of a growing incidence of young people who are neither in employment nor in education (ibid.).

Several factors affect women's labour force participation, at both the micro level (e.g. women's level of education, cultural norms, etc.) and the macro level (e.g. the absence of an enabling environment, sectoral trends and globalisation) (see, for example, Bhalla and Kaur, 2012; Chamlou et al., 2011; Chioda et al., 2011; Ghani and Kharas, 2010; ILO, 2012).

Women's employment has changed by sector and type within and across countries. Over the last decade, and across all regions (except North Africa) the percentage of women working in agriculture has decreased and their employment in industry and services has increased, particularly in East Asia and South East Asia and the Pacific (ILO, 2012). The number of women-owned enterprises has been growing rapidly in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and particularly in Africa, and they now make up 38% of all registered small businesses worldwide (GENDERNET, 2011, citing DFID, 2010). For example, women own nearly half of all micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in Kenya and 39% of all registered businesses with their own premises in Uganda (Narain, 2009).

Although women's participation in specific sectors is changing, in 2012 more than half of all employed women were in vulnerable employment (including family work and own-account work).²⁹ In developing countries this is particularly high: for example 84.4% in sub-Saharan Africa, 83.3% in South Asia and 65.6% in South-East Asia and the Pacific (ILO, 2012). Moreover, women also continue to receive lower wages than men, and face barriers to promotion. For example, studies in India and Ghana found women wage labourers were paid between a third and a half as much as their male counterparts (Das, 2006; Whitehead, 2009). Kabeer (2008) reflects that while there may be expanded opportunities for educated women in managerial jobs, they still face a glass ceiling in the higher echelons of management. Moreover, globally women tend to be concentrated in lower-paid sectors (ILO, 2010) and poorer women continue to be disproportionately represented in casual and poorly paid activities at the informal end of the labour market (Anker et al., 2003; Chen et al., 2005). The poorer the region, the more likely women are to be found in self-employment or contributing family labour (Kabeer, 2008: 5).

5.3.1 Reflections on the evidence on the effect of women's labour market participation on voice, decision-making and leadership

Nature and quality of evidence base

There is a substantial literature on the effects of women's labour market participation on empowerment – notably at the individual and household level.³⁰ The vast majority of papers cited in the following analysis were country case studies, often in South Asia (predominantly India and Bangladesh). The papers reviewed were fairly evenly split between qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Quantitative assessments often draw on national-level statistics or household survey data.³¹

This literature is largely drawn from empirical research on women's participation in the informal or semi-informal economy, in both rural and urban areas in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. Indeed, there is a well-established body of literature that focuses on the changes in women's *decision-making and status within the household* as a result of earning their own income through labour market activities. As we discuss in more detail below, these changes are often modest, incremental changes that result in women having increased decision-making over the use of their income, but subject to constraints. This may mean that women have discretion over small household purchases but cannot make independent decisions regarding large expenditures. Bigger shifts in women's empowerment as a result of participation in paid work are constrained by persistent discriminatory socio-cultural norms in the home, community and workplace.

²⁹ A contributing family worker is a person who holds a self-employment job in a market-oriented establishment operated by a related person living in the same household (<http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=443>). *Own-account* workers are those workers who, working on their own account or with one or more partners, hold the type of job defined as a self-employed job, and have not engaged on a continuous basis any employees to work for them during the reference period (<http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=2008>).

³⁰ Of the 63 papers cited in this section of the report, 19 came from academic search engines with 44 coming from website searching, snowballing methods or peer recommendation.

³¹ Secondary reviews of the literature were also used wherever necessary. Where sourcing of the original paper was not possible due to time or access restrictions, the secondary review is cited instead.

Overall, there is little empirical evidence available which examines the direct links between women's participation in the labour market and women's voice, decision-making and leadership *beyond the household sphere*. The main exceptions here are IFPRI's Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) and IDS's research on pathways to women's empowerment. Both these studies have moved beyond understanding women's economic empowerment solely in relation to the individual to associated changes in the community, social and political spheres of their lives. The WEAI focuses on women in the agricultural sector in 19 countries and includes indicators of 'leadership in the community', measured by membership in economic or social groups and comfort speaking in public (Alkire et al., 2013). IDS's research agenda is cross-sectoral in three countries (Bangladesh, Egypt and Ghana) and examines the relationship between women's work and women's agency as citizens: 'the capacity to act collectively to protest injustice, to claim their rights and to work on equal terms with men to shape the society in which they lived' (Kabeer, 2011: 1).

There is also a body of evidence which discusses women's voice and influence through collective action – e.g. through their participation in unions, self-help groups or cooperatives. This evidence is largely based on sector-specific and country-specific examples of women mobilising around work issues, and how women's collective bargaining power has demanded changes in women's rights as workers or, in some cases, broader gender-equitable change.

Weighting of the evidence

On the whole, the studies reviewed here are weighted towards a general consensus that women's access to labour markets are likely to have a bearing on their voice and agency at the household level, on their self-affirmation and collective action capabilities, and in changing social norms about women's role in society and the market. However, studies are ambivalent and mixed in relation to the effects on women's voice and access to decision-making roles at the community or national level – and concretely in relation to formal political space. There are also a number of studies which highlight some negative effects and costs for women in engaging in work outside the home.

Key gaps

Only a few authors explicitly note gaps in the literature. Kabeer (2008), for example, highlights the disproportionate focus on women in export-oriented sectors, particularly in manufacturing. This explains the literature's strong concentration on a few countries in Asia and Latin America. Kabeer (2008), Hossain (2011) and Dekker (2013) all identify the strong focus in the literature on women's empowerment in the domestic domain, with far less attention paid to whether and how this influences their lives as workers, citizens or political actors, or how it may have wider impacts on society in terms of renegotiating or transforming the socio-cultural constraints, structures and norms which women face.

Moreover, the literature fails to disaggregate women's participation in the labour force by other characteristics, for example age, wealth, class, caste, or ethnicity. While there is literature on younger women's roles in the labour force, it rarely analyses their economic empowerment in terms of voice, decision-making, influence or leadership.

5.3.2 How does women's participation in the labour market affect women's voice, decision-making and leadership?

In this sub-section, we first discuss changes at the individual or household level before turning to the community or political level.

Individual and intra-household changes

A number of sources report on the benefits of women engaging in paid work, including meeting their own (and their families') needs, becoming more self-assured and independent, gaining greater autonomy in the household, including making decisions over their income but also, for example, making decisions over health care and visiting relatives, and experiencing expanded choices and gains in power (e.g. Amin et al., 1995; Esplen, 2007; Forey, 2013; Holmes and Jones, 2013; Hossain, 2011; Jose, 2008; Kabeer, 2011; Kavar, 2000; Khan, 1999; Pankaj and Tankha, 2010; Sarker and Chatrabarti, 2013; Sathar and Kazi, 2001). Even when wages are low, women report their control of resources to be important. For example, Rakowski's (1995) study of workers in Venezuela reports: 'I don't have to ask him for every penny,' and 'I don't have to ask permission to buy what I want' (p.70).

Studies in Bangladesh and Jordan show how emerging urban workforces can open up new opportunities for younger women (Amin et al., 1998), expand new horizons and challenge existing relationships between men and women (Kawar, 2000). In Bangladesh, for example, women workers in the export garment industry report that they were able to use their wages to postpone marriage, challenge the practice of dowry, renegotiate their relationships within marriage, and/or leave abusive relationships (cited in Esplen, 2007: 4). However, not all studies point this way and, even where studies report gains in one dimension of empowerment, there may be stagnation, decline or even backlash in another area. A study of younger women's participation in the urban labour force in Jordan demonstrates, for example, that women were able to challenge relationships between men and women and across generations. But it also found that traditional values concerning family honour were sometimes reinforced through new forms of control over young women (Kawar, 2000). Kabeer et al., (2011) note in their study in Bangladesh that women's greater voice and agency as a result of increased economic contributions often meets with resistance from male family members.

Many studies show that the shifts in household relations relating to women's voice, decision-making or influence are often small, if they happen at all. For example, a study of women workers in non-timber forest products from Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Zambia found very limited positive benefits of women's voice and negotiating power from their work (Shackleton et al., 2011). Unsurprisingly, women workers in rural Pakistan who worked in household farms or within the household economic unit experienced no changes in their autonomy as a result of working (Sathar and Kazi, 2001) and women in Lucknow, north India, working in urban sub-contract and home-based work also did not seem to experience a significant shift in their decision-making ability in the household, although they did benefit from wider financial independence in buying small items (Kantor, 2009). In Afghanistan, women working on income-generating activities (through the National Solidarity Programme) did not gain control of their income or have greater involvement in decisions concerning the purchase of household items or regarding family matters (Beath et al., 2010). These studies argue that the extent to which women's work can break down existing gender norms are related to factors such as the type of work women are involved in (e.g. the regularity of wages and place of work), the extent to which they receive childcare support, the social acceptability of women's work, and class/caste and socio-cultural differences. We return to these factors in more detail below.

Beyond the household: changes in social, political and economic spheres

Despite the context-specificity of gains in empowerment from employment, there is evidence that promoting women's access to economic opportunities has 'transformative implications for different aspects of women's lives' and also contributes to the pace and inclusiveness of growth (Kabeer, 2013: 2). Few studies explicitly examine these links beyond the household level, especially in terms of women becoming individuals who voice opinions and influence issues at the community level, who are political actors or workers in the labour force. Among the studies that do is one by Kabeer et al., (2011), who find that women in formal employment in Bangladesh, Egypt and Ghana are more likely to participate in rural committees and are more likely to be aware of labour laws. But the study also shows that access to paid work had only very minimal impact on its own in promoting women's citizenship. Also, because women commonly work in weakly unionised occupations they have limited bargaining power to negotiate for fairer wages, better conditions or greater recognition of their rights as citizens (Kabeer, 2011: 6). Similar findings are reported in the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index study in Bangladesh (Sraboni et al., 2013a), which finds that one of the three domains which contributes most to the disempowerment of women is weak leadership in the community, defined as a lack of participation in groups, and discomfort speaking in public (as well as a lack of control over resources, and a lack of control over income). Other research on specific labour market interventions finds similar results. For example, in their study on India's public works programme, the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA), Pankaj and Tankha (2010) finds that despite the scheme's provisions on including all workers in the governance of the programme – for example, through meetings and social audits whereby participants can shape the decisions of the programme – while women's presence in the *gram sabha* (village meeting) reportedly increased, men continued to dominate the decision-making process. These findings are also echoed in Holmes et al.'s (2010) study on MGNREGA in Madhya Pradesh and a study by Jones et al. (2010) of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme, which highlighted the limitations of translating participation into voice and influence without any other supportive mechanisms for women.

There is, however, a more substantial emerging literature which looks at these links from the perspective of women's collective action and mobilisation – arguing that participation in groups can provide a mechanism for

women's participation, voice and agency, and the collective approach can create an enabling environment for women's influence at the community level and, potentially, within broader political structures too. Examples in the literature come from across regions – Africa, Asia and Latin America – and across different forms of collective action in different sectors, such as trade unions, cooperatives, self-help groups, in manufacturing, agriculture and domestic work.

A number of studies demonstrate that through *collective mobilisation around work identity*, women's collective voice and influence has resulted in positive economic benefits as well as spillover effects in other spheres, although there is little evidence that actions have substantially re-shaped state-citizen relationships. Much of the evidence on economic benefits has been as a result of group action demanding higher wages, workers' rights and access to social security (see, for example, Beerepoot and Hernández-Agramonte, 2009; Dekker, 2013; Rural Women's Research Team, 2010; Forje, 1998; Ojha and Mishra, 2013) – discussed in more detail in the next subsection below.

As illustrations, examples of these mechanisms include Carswell and De Neve's (2014) study of the MGNREGA in Tamil Nadu which found that not only had women's bargaining power for higher rural wages increased but also that their dependency on elites had reduced, and that this was especially important for low-caste workers in re-shaping the power relations between themselves and high-caste landowners. The authors state this is partly due to the availability of an employment alternative (particularly important given the socio-cultural constraints that unskilled low-caste women face in accessing employment opportunities) and the improvements in labourers' collective bargaining power vis-à-vis employers as a result of women's increased confidence to ask for higher wages. In Brazil, participation in the rural women's movement has opened up opportunities for women to engage in previously male-dominated politics and brought them into contact with government officials who design and enforce the regulation of labour markets (Kabeer, 2011).

While there is an emerging literature on women's collective action in the informal economy (see also Evans and Nambiar, 2013 and Kabeer, Sudarshan and Milward, 2013) there is comparably less attention in the literature to women's influence in the formal business sector. Exceptions to this include Hallward-Driemeier's (2013) report on 'enterprising women' in Africa, which argues that women across the world have low representation in corporate management decision-making and policy-making and in business associations³² (see also Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013). Referring to the African context, the Hallward-Driemeier makes the case that women are largely excluded from policy-making in the private sector, but that there are a number of mechanisms and instruments which have been developed to facilitate interactions between representatives of the business community and government decision-makers, and there has been some progress in terms of women's increased participation in the policy arena and in using this position of influence to set the agenda and frame the policy debate. She also argues that women's business associations have enabled women to participate directly in mechanisms influencing policy to promote gender-responsive reforms of family law and other laws that affect women (Hallward-Driemeier, 2013).

5.3.3 Does women's increased voice, influence and decision-making result in improved gender equality outcomes?

Women's increased labour force participation and collective action have driven improved gender equality outcomes. Economic outcomes have particularly improved and there have been some social and political spillover effects, with some limited structural changes or transformative shifts in social norms or in citizen-state relationships. It is difficult to attribute these changes to women's labour market participation, and much of the literature focuses simply on the fact that women are working and on its impact on gender equality outcomes. Few authors critically examine whether increases in women's voice, influence or decision-making is a mediating factor.

Despite these gaps, the literature does point to some important areas of change. Kabeer (2013: 2) argues that there is now 'persuasive evidence' that gender equality in employment (and education) contributes to economic

³² 'Even in the United States in 2009, women were 13.5 percent of Fortune 500 executive officers and 15.2 percent of board members (Catalyst 2009)...[and] in Europe in 2007, women were only 11 percent of the members of executive committees of listed companies (McKinsey and Co. 2007)' (Hallward-Driemeier, 2013: 227). A report by Bruschini (2007) cites statistics from Brazil that 24% of positions in high management (board of directors) and 31% of Chief Executive Officer positions in the formal sector in Brazil were held by women. However, on closer analysis, these positions were predominantly held in public sector education, health and social services sectors.

growth. In particular, she notes that women's agency is enhanced by education and employment, enabling them to capture new opportunities, which enhance their survival chances, well-being and rights. Indeed, there is a substantial and well-recognised body of evidence which demonstrates that women's increased control over income (e.g. through wages) and greater decision-making in the household results in improved impacts on children's health and family well-being (ibid.). Recent IFPRI research in Nepal and Bangladesh supports this, with improved outcomes in maternal BMI, women's overall empowerment, engagement in the community, and control of income in Nepal. The research also highlights the complex nature of empowerment and illustrates that different dimensions of empowerment support different outcomes. For instance, women's greater autonomy in agricultural production and control over their own workload are key determinants of their own dietary diversity and their children's nutrition (Malapit et al., 2013). Evidence from a nationally representative survey data from Bangladesh also finds that the overall women's empowerment score, the number of groups in which women actively participate, women's control of assets, and a narrowing gap in empowerment between men and women within households are positively associated with calorie availability and dietary diversity³³ (Sraboni et al., 2013b).

There is also a substantial and growing literature which looks at impacts beyond the household, including the effect of women's mobilisation to demand better working practices and workers' rights including equal wages and access to social security. For example, in India, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has organised rural women workers across multiple sectors in the informal economy, providing them with key services, such as access to credit and savings, healthcare and childcare, as well as strategically linking women with government programmes and demanding and securing working class rights (Saini, 2007). Women in the ready-made garments industry in Bangladesh have fought for higher minimum wages (resulting in a doubling of the minimum wage in 2011), gained support from the government around garment workers' rights, and have been successful in campaigning for the provision of subsidised food grains in the factories to protect workers against rising food prices (Hossain, 2011). The Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) waste pickers union in India lobbied to get the municipal government to issue them with identity cards and extend the right to basic social security (Chikarmane, 2012). The International Domestic Workers Network, supported by Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising (WIEGO), won the adoption of Convention 189 and its accompanying Recommendation on Decent Work for Domestic Workers at the International Labour Conference in 2011.³⁴

Spillover effects into other spheres are also evident. Kabeer (2012) draws on a number of examples of how collective action by and on behalf of working women have 'reformulated codes of conduct to address women's practical and strategic gender interests'. These have included 'designing affordable child care for working women from low-income households, lobbying the state to extend social protection, including the minimum wage, to women workers in the informal economy, [and] provision of training and skills development around a broad agenda of livelihoods, life skills and legal rights that help women workers overcome their lack of formal education, gain self-confidence and recognize the value of their own contributions' (Kabeer, 2012: 49). The example of SEWA's experience is important here, as it is described as combining three movements – 'the labour movement, the cooperative movement, and the women's movement' – to achieve both economic and social goals (Saini, 2007: 824; see also Chen et al., 20015; Hill, 2001; Kapoor, 2007). Wainwright (2012) also discusses the spillover effects of group action, or 'transformative resistance' whereby where public sector unions take responsibility for the larger public benefit. For example, the KKPKP waste pickers union in Pune in India (90% of waste pickers are women) countered privatisation and fought for environmentally sustainable waste management (Chikarmane, 2012). A farm workers' trade union movement, Sikhula Sonke, in the Western Cape, South Africa, negotiating equal wages and representing women's labour rights, also used farm meetings for organisers to explain the importance of treating women as valued and equal members of a family, and addressing issues such as the abuse of young girls (White, 2010).

The extent to which the literature points to transformative changes in social norms is more limited. A small section of the literature demonstrates that women's economic participation can lead to a shift in attitudes and social norms around gender inequality. Drawing on her studies from Egypt, Bangladesh and Ghana, Kabeer (2011) reports that women's participation in the formal or semi-formal labour force is linked to support for a

³³ Per adult equivalent calorie availability and household dietary diversity

³⁴ <http://wiego.org/wee/domestic-workers-leadership-empowerment>

more equitable distribution of unpaid workloads and, in cultures characterised by son preference, less discriminatory attitudes towards daughters. She also found that women in formal employment were more likely to be treated with respect within their community and consulted by others for advice and information. In Bangladesh, Hossain (2011) reports on the effects of women's work in the garments sector and the 'feminization of urban public space' whereby there has been a significant and unprecedented change in women's public mobility (Zaman, 2001: 148 cited in Hossain, 2011: 26). This normalises women's public mobility and access to public institutions, which may improve women's public safety (Hossain, 2011). There have been limited changes in men's attitudes towards women working in the garments sector, which has even resulted in harassment in workplace factories and public places (Hossain, 2011).

5.3.4 What factors explain these changes?

Across the literature, a number of factors emerge as being particularly important for translating women's engagement in the labour market into opportunities for increased voice, influence and decision-making. These include socio-cultural and institutional factors, the type and quality of work, the nature of collective action, and the importance of women's participation in public-private dialogue.

Socio-cultural and institutional factors

Socio-cultural and institutional factors, including at the household level of the household, can be as influential as the economic aspects of women's employment. The socio-cultural background of unmarried female call centre workers in Delhi, for example, has a stronger influence on their capacity to exercise their agency than their employment (Tara and Ilavarasan, 2011). In Egypt, the importance of community influence was highlighted by a study which found location to be generally more important in explaining variations in women's empowerment than individual and household characteristics (Kabeer, 2011). Kabeer argues that 'the degree of religious or cultural conservatism, the dynamism of the rural economy, socio-economic connectivity (roads, transport, communications, electricity, media, particularly TV) as well as the quality of local level governance are among the factors that are likely to differentiate women's access to paid work as well as their capacity to translate paid work into empowering outcomes' (Kabeer, 2011: 9).

This also points to the importance of understanding the process of empowerment, influence and agency and Kabeer (2011) argues that the transition from participation to empowerment is not linear. For instance, in Bangladesh specific changes in empowerment (namely control over income, being consulted by others for advice and information, attending rural committees and knowledge about labour laws) are associated with three broad sets of resources in women's lives: employment, cognitive (including education) and relational (including NGO membership and political participation) (Kabeer et al., 2011). As the authors state 'these pathways do not unfold in a uniform fashion for all women. Their significance varies considerably by such factors as age, marital status and household economic position. Nor do they operate in isolation from each other. Instead, they frequently overlap and interact, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes offsetting each other' (ibid.: 38).

Type and quality of employment

Recent studies have aimed to shed light on what type of work and what conditions of employment promote women's empowerment. Macro-level econometric studies show that women's access to economic opportunities can be transformative but they have not been able to tell us what 'kinds of employment ... are most likely to be conducive to promoting women's empowerment in different contexts. Nor do the studies describe what kinds of policy regimes and patterns of growth are most likely to generate these enabling opportunity structures' (Kabeer, 2013: 2). The IDS Pathways study from Bangladesh, Egypt and Ghana demonstrates through micro-level analysis that formal employment has the most 'transformative' impact on women's lives (with the state playing the most important role in providing this employment); but that in some cases, informal employment or self-employment outside the home has positive effects on empowerment (ibid.). This evidence appears to be consistent with context-specific studies which have largely focused on informal employment. Given that only a small proportion of the female labour market works in formal employment, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of the literature focuses on the empowerment potential of informal or self-employed work. This finds that it is social visibility, independence from the 'familial sphere of control' (ibid.: 77) and the regularity of wages which contributes most to the transformative effect (Fontana et al., 1998; Kabeer, 2005a cited in Esplen, 2007; Kabeer, 2013).

Women's collective action: groups, unions, business associations

Several studies discuss the opportunities created by mobilisation in different forms – especially the mobilisation of poor women to increase their voice and influence. Kabeer (2012) sees women's collective action through participation in formal or informal groups as perhaps the 'missing ingredient that can help to transform women's access to paid work into an economic pathway to empowerment and citizenship' (p.49). As Kabeer notes, 'while many organise around issues that are particular to their sector, it is frequently to the state that they make their demands, a strategy that enhances their identity, not only as workers but as citizens'. Evans and Nambiar (2013: 20) also note that 'the intrinsic value of association where the very act of associating becomes the resource – in the form of an increased sense of self and self-esteem. This is especially important for women living and working on the margins of the public sphere'. They also argue that this association can provide positive feedback loops between an increasing sense of self-worth and women's agency, which has the potential in time to change restrictive social norms, as demonstrated in the example of the Self-Employed Women's Association below (ibid.: 20).

Group action rooted in the economic sphere that has been successful in prompting social and political changes tend to combine formal and informal strategies (ibid.). The aims of collective action are also important, and greater empowerment can be expected where the goal is to address social norms (e.g. property rights), rather than purely economic outcomes (Oxfam, 2013, in Evans and Nambiar, 2013).

These different strategies, or combinations of strategies, can be seen across many different forms of collective action – formal unions, emerging 'new unions',³⁵ self-help groups, rural cooperatives, and business associations.³⁶ 'New unions', as discussed by Kabeer (2012), organise their activities around women's multiple roles as workers, mothers and women, addressing practical gender concerns such as safety of travel at night and support for childcare along with the more traditional trade union concerns such as wages and working conditions. In particular, these new unions working in the informal sector are organising some of the 'hardest-to-reach' of this workforce by resorting to 'soft power' strategies by 'workers who lack the collective bargaining capacity of the traditional male dominated trade unions' (Kabeer, Sudarshan and Milward, 2013). These strategies include 'the use of information to educate workers about their rights, to make the public aware of economic injustices and as a form of moral and political pressure on employers; the subversive use of cultural symbols to challenge established ways of thinking, the framing of demands in ways that will resonate with larger agendas around the environment, social justice, economic growth and ... the use of the law to negotiate demands rather than resorting to confrontational tactics' (Kabeer, 2011: 6).³⁷

The importance of legal mechanisms is highlighted by a number of organisations that specifically incorporate legal training programmes as a key aspect of their strategy. The structure of the organisation is also significant, with an empowering representational or management structure being particularly important. An example of these features can be seen in the Farm Women's Project in South Africa; the Migrant Assistance Programme which worked with Burmese migrants in Thailand; Saptagram, BRAC, Nijera Kori and Samata who work with landless men and women in Bangladesh; the KKP KP which organises waste pickers in India; and the domestic workers' rights movement in Brazil (Kabeer, 2011: 12). White's (2010) study on the farm workers' trade union in the Western Cape highlights an example. The farm workers' trade union was started by an NGO (Women on Farms) in 2002 and is led by women (although men are also members), with the aim of challenging the unfair labour practices faced by women farm workers and addressing their social and economic development needs. The core activities of the union include running collective campaigns and building good relationships with government.

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), based in Ahmedabad in India is also a particularly successful model of organising and empowering a large number of women workers in the informal sector. It combines the features of a trade union with a workers' co-operative and aims for a community support model of social protection for workers in the informal sector by linking workers with the state to secure their rights as

³⁵ Kabeer (2012) states that 'new unionism' is one recent form of organising to emerge which is more responsive to the needs and interests of working women, and which came about as a response to the growing presence of women workers in the export economy.

³⁶ Whilst there is recognition that membership in business associations can also support individual entrepreneurs that 'amplify the voices of their members in the public sphere', reliable information on women's participation in them is patchy (Hallward-Driemeier, 2013: 226).

³⁷ Not all the organisations studied were equally effective in their strategies (Kabeer, 2011). Kabeer (2012) also highlights the importance attached to legal rights in the training provided by these organisations, and that strategies through the law (rather than strike tactics), 'may provide them with a pathway towards more formal status'.

workers (Saini, 2007). Some of the other key features of success of SEWA include proactive state support for such efforts, provision of need-based services to members, leadership, democratic management structures and new legal forms of organisation for responding to the poor people's needs (Saini, 2007 see also Chen et al., 20015; Hill, 2001; Kapoor, 2007).

Private-public partnerships and dialogue

There is a limited discussion of role of the private sector in the literature. However, Evans and Nambiar (2013) discuss the importance of collaboration among public, private and non-profit sector entities that are 'shifting the pattern of collective action and shaping the way in which gender equality issues are resourced and tackled at the global level' (p. 18). They highlight the IFC-ILO Better Work Partnership as an international collaborative effort to improve working conditions for women workers, especially through the role of unions with national governments, manufacturers and international buyers. There are nevertheless limitations to women's ability to exercise agency in formal institutions and in the workplace compared to their ability to work through informal, autonomous groupings and associations (ibid.).

Another example is provided by Hallward-Driemeier (2013) who discusses the role of women and integrating gender into public-private dialogue (PPD) (e.g. applying a gender lens to legal and regulatory reforms of the business environment). She argues that there has been some progress in engaging in and monitoring gender issues and women's leadership in PPD processes through ensuring a gender-friendly PPD process, including appropriate gender representation in, and engagement with, all components of a PPD's structure as well as identifying sector-specific gender issues. However, Hallward-Driemeier also stresses the 'importance of not only getting women to the table but also focusing more strategically on the tables that matter' (p.238) when thinking about how business women can better influence policy. One debate focuses on whether it is better to support women's autonomous business organisations and/or to focus on improving their influence in mainstream business mechanisms, with Hallward-Driemeier advocated for a 'dual-track approach' (p.18). For example, the Uganda Investment Authority Women Entrepreneurs Network provides a networking forum for businesswomen, but has also 'brought women into the Presidential Investors Round Table, the apex policy dialogue body between the president and the private sector' (p.238).³⁸

Disabling factors

Women face practical and strategic constraints to exercising voice, agency and leadership through their participation in the labour market. Practical constraints include having to manage their 'triple burden' (reproductive, productive and community management roles), while strategic constraints include unequal societal structures in the form of patriarchy, gender-discriminatory attitudes, the difficulty of shifting persistent unequal norms, and the reflections of these within the workplace and the opportunities for employment open to women. Indeed, the very fact that the private sector remains 'largely inhospitable to women' and that women continue to be highly represented in the informal labour market, categorised by low and irregular wages and unskilled work, or as unpaid family labour (Kabeer, 2013), is a key reason why women's engagement in the labour market does not translate into substantial or transformative changes in their voice, agency or influence.

The lack of involvement of men in changing gender attitudes and behaviour is key to explaining why women's increased income is not matched by increased expressions of agency (Evans and Nambiar, 2013). Enhancing agency is complex and long-term, and dependent on the wider normative context, prevailing social norms and hierarchies (ibid.).

Women's collective action around work issues can enhance women's voice, influence and leadership. But important constraints to women's participation in organised groups remain and there is only so far that collective action can go in addressing deep-rooted inequalities. For example, most formal unions remain male-dominated and exclude the informal sectors where the majority of women work. Moreover, traditional union activity generally fails to address women's practical and strategic issues (e.g. such as childcare, sexual harassment, unequal wages) (Chakravarty, 2007; Gammage et al., 2002; GERA Programme, 2003; in Randriamaro, 2006 cited in Esplen, 2007; Lindberg, 2001). Although we have seen examples discussed above of the 'new unionism' and different types of collective active, restrictions on women's mobility or the burden of care work can create

³⁸ The number of women representatives in the Presidential Investors Round Table has increased from 2 members (out of 22) in 2004 to 5 in 2013, and the aim of the Uganda Investment Authority Women Entrepreneurs Network is for women and men to be equally represented (Hallward-Driemeier, 2013: 238).

barriers to women's participation in meetings and prevent women from assuming leadership roles (Chen et al., 2005 cited in Esplen, 2007). Indeed, as discussed, organisations which are based on addressing institutional inequalities within the organisation through representative management structures offer better opportunities for enhancing women's collective bargaining power to address gender inequality. Conversely, collective organisations may perpetuate patriarchal power structures, restricting women's membership and leadership opportunities. And, as Hallward-Driemeier (2013: 227) notes, women are often excluded from formal or informal networks in the private sector, with gender-based stereotypes and a lack of role models often blocking women's professional advancement and limiting their voices in business communities and policy-making.

5.4 Summary of key analytical points

A key finding from the literature is that shifts in women's voice, influence and decision-making are shaped not only by types of changes in women's economic activity (such as ownership and control of assets, or access to employment): how these interact with other gendered structural and institutional features of the context, including social norms, the nature of formal political space and other qualities of collective action among women is also important. Interventions aimed at addressing gender bias in economic life need to be tailored to context.

In addition, we find that collective action is an essential part of transformative gains. Within the household the factors supporting change include *the type of work* that women are engaged in (with formal work being the most important, but also regular waged work outside the home, even if informal) or the ways in which increased access to income or ownership of assets is *combined with support in other areas of women's lives* (e.g. education, skills training, awareness raising with men). Larger and more transformative shifts in women's voice and influence (and to some extent leadership, although this is not discussed in detail in the literature) are often noted in the literature as a result of women's participation in collective action groups. The experiences of women mobilising around economic issues has increased bargaining power and resulted in benefits to women as workers (e.g. in terms of workers' rights) as well as generating some spillover effects in other spheres. This has often been achieved through leveraging both informal and formal mechanisms (e.g. the groups may be 'informal' but using formal mechanisms such as legal avenues) to enact changes.

To date, however, the literature has taken a relatively narrow analytical focus on the potential of women's economic participation – commonly looking at empowerment within the household – which misses the potential to analyse the gains made through group activity and social mobilisation. The positive effects of group membership are regularly highlighted but rarely subjected to the same degree of scrutiny. Yet research on collective action shows how many different forms of groups 'from credit and savings associations, to community managed services, political parties and online collaborative platforms [are] all seeking to harness the power and influence of the group' (Evans and Nambiar 2013: 3). Perhaps part of the reason for this narrow focus is that in the social and economic programmes on which most development assistance is focused, empowerment has tended to be interpreted in a more individualistic and instrumental fashion. The emphasis has often been on improving access to income and assets for individual women and men to enable them to make informed choices about their own needs and interests and to improve their personal circumstances – but this falls short of recognising the collective potential of these groups (Eyben and Napier-Moore, 2009). Duvendack et al. (2011: 10) support this view, arguing that most research into the impact of credit on poverty continues to be framed by relatively simplistic causal models that link credit as an exogenous 'treatment' on individual borrowers to one, or more, indicators of well-being mediated via induced effects on household livelihoods and interpersonal relations. An alternative approach would be to explore aggregate changes in financial systems on higher units of social organisation, from villages to national states.

5.5 Policy implications and the role of international actors

Five main policy lessons emerge from the evidence reviewed here: (1) that shifting patriarchal norms requires more than changes to the law; (2) the importance of multidimensional programme approaches that address both the practical and structural constraints to enabling women's voice, decision-making and leadership; (3) the potentially transformative role of collective action; (4) supporting principles of 'formality' in the informal labour market; and (5) pro-equity leadership in the private sector.

5.5.1 Real change needs more than legal reform

Legal reforms that enable women to own and inherit land and other assets is important, but complementary interventions are necessary to shift patriarchal norms (Klugman et al., 2014: 139).³⁹ Interventions must be designed to change practices and enable women to control the assets they formally own and the income derived from them. Pena et al. (2008) suggest these include activities that enable women to be aware of their rights, or that enable women to act as independent farmers who control their land, or strengthen the functioning of women's (political) groups that can strive towards advancing women's rights, alongside advocacy strategies at the micro and macro level aimed at guaranteeing that women's tenure is secure and socially accepted.

5.5.2 Developing multidimensional approaches

To achieve transformative progress in women's voice and agency, interventions enabling women's economic participation should therefore take a multidimensional or integrated approach and work with a variety of other actors and stakeholders, formally and informally, to address women's numerous practical and structural constraints and challenge social norms.⁴⁰ Minimalist approaches will rarely lead to transformative change, particularly where an enabling environment is absent. Key mechanisms should combine improving women's access to economic assets or income with:

- *training and knowledge* to amplify women's empowerment potential, particularly technical or vocational training (e.g. market, business skills) or health and legal training (e.g. Hossain, 2011; Kabeer, 2005, 2011; Meier zu Selhausen, 2012);
- *engaging with men*, which is seen as central to effect strategies to improve decision-making, voice and influence (e.g. Amouso et al., 2011; Evans and Nambiar, 2013); and
- *reducing women's 'triple burden'* by providing services or behavioural changes towards a more equitable division of labour within the household. This may include working with women and men to change social and cultural ideas about 'masculine norms' and the division of labour, provision of targeted services and care provision (e.g. availability of quality childcare services, improved infrastructure to reduce women's time on domestic activities) (e.g. Esplen, 2007; Hossain, 2011).

Taking a multidimensional approach also requires working with multiple stakeholders, especially those that are in a strong position to advance women's economic empowerment through appropriate strategies, such as Ministries of Finance, Agriculture and Labour, and to work in partnership with the private sector and the NGO community to leverage support for initiatives that contribute to women's economic empowerment (GENDERNET, 2011).

5.5.3 Supporting collective action

The potential for collective action to increase women's voice, agency and leadership opportunities is another key area that needs active support. Evidence presented above suggests that women's participation in various forms of formal and informal associations (e.g. trade unions, 'new unions', self-help groups and cooperatives) have been successful vehicles for women to enact economic changes – such as building workers' rights, access to social security, equal wages, access to productive assets – as well as, to some extent, broader social and political changes. Successful organisations are often those that start by addressing the immediate and practical concerns of women workers and then support them in addressing longer-term goals. Kabeer (2011) notes that such organisations sought to mobilise women at 'a pace that reflected their very real constraints rather than one imposed by outside agendas and combined strategies for change which straddled productive and reproductive domains, the world of family as well as work ... In addition, these organisational efforts take on an added effectiveness where they have been able to link up with other networks and associations with shared goals' (p.12).

Within the private sector, Hallward-Driemeier (2013) also argues that better networking opportunities for women and increased participation in business associations can enable women to influence and change the

³⁹ Experience from more than 40 World Bank land reform projects in Europe and Central Asia over the past two decades has demonstrated that challenges associated with social norms and culture cannot be solved by legal reform alone (Klugman et al., 2014: 139).

⁴⁰ Eyben, Kabeer and Cornall (2008, 14), for example, emphasise that changes in one sphere of gender relations – for example in relation to financial institutions enabling women to procure loans - may not necessarily trigger changes in another sphere such as in local politics or within the household. Therefore, donors can play a useful role in designing such interventions so they may have a helpful multiplier effect in other spheres.

business environment. In particular, she argues ‘a combination of bottom-up advocacy work, better networking opportunities among businesswomen, and support at the highest level of government can bring more women to the table and ensure that issues of importance to them – with a specific gender angle or not – are discussed’ (p.238).

Here, it is important to note that while donors can play a role in supporting women’s associations and collective action, as discussed in Section 4 (on social mobilisation) this needs to be approached cautiously and carefully. A positive example of existing donor support is to WIEGO – a global research-policy network which aims to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy (GENDERNET, 2011). This movement has supported progress in legal changes in workers’ rights, as well as fighting for workers’ benefits such as social security. However, as Klugman et al. (2014) note, the ‘appropriate role for development agencies in supporting collective action processes is not always clear’, especially given that ‘some evidence suggests that such processes are more effective when they develop organically rather than as the result of top-down support’ (see also Evans and Nambiar, 2013).

5.5.4 Supporting principles of ‘formality’ in the informal labour market

A key finding on labour markets is that formal work contributes most consistently to empowering women to exercise greater voice and agency within the household and community. However, while women’s participation in the labour market is changing, women are still more likely to work in informal and vulnerable employment, which limits the transformative potential of their economic participation. In the absence of sufficient decent jobs and the continued segmentation of labour markets, Kabeer (2011) argues that one of the key policy lessons is to replicate some of the desirable characteristics of the formal in the informal economy – for example, by creating an enabling regulatory environment, the provision of social protection, and supporting organisational capacity: ‘If we ask ourselves what it is that distinguishes formal work from other forms of economic activity that is likely to lead to these positive outcomes, it is likely to include some form of contract that recognises relationship between women workers and their employers, be they private contractors or the municipality, predictability of work, regularity of income, legal rights and some degree of basic security that is not entirely dependent on one’s income earning capacity. There are also likely to be indirect benefits such as access to formal financial institutions, regulatory bodies and membership of work place organisations’ (p.10).

5.5.5 Leadership in the private sector

Targeted communication strategies can reduce biases while stereotypes and policies to promote economic opportunities for women correlate positively with women’s economic success. In addition, the social acceptance of women in the labour market and in high-level positions contributes to higher female participation in the formal labour force and in entrepreneurship. However, leadership from the top on gender issues is necessary in both private enterprises and the public sector as this helps to create opportunities for women (Barsh and Yee, 2012; Barsh, Cranston, and Craske, 2008), and so establishing positive role models for future generations of girls (Pande and Topalova, 2013). A change in the mindset of women to aspire to equal employment opportunities and career paths can result in women taking on more widespread, high-level responsibility in the public and private sectors (Barsh and Yee, 2012), particularly where this change is complemented by effective anti-discrimination interventions and supported by the assumption of joint family and household responsibilities by both men and women (Cited in Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013).

6 Conclusion: Pathways to women's voice and influence in public life⁴¹

6.1 Nature and quality of the literature

Across the thematic and sub-thematic sections there has been significant variation in terms of the scope, quality and depth of the existing knowledge base. Some knowledge areas, such as electoral quotas, engage directly and explicitly with our research questions, and draw on an established empirical, theoretical and analytical discussion about empowerment as manifested through women's voice and influence. Other areas, such as the material on microfinance, assets and labour market participation, while significant, remain mostly detached from the questions about how women's voice, access to decision-making roles and leadership is supported beyond the household level. For its part, the material on gender social accountability lacks analytical depth in its consideration of women's voice and influence. This is associated with both the youth of the field and with a tendency – given the weight of grey literature – to abstain from a sufficiently critical view of social accountability mechanisms and strategies. In presenting findings, we have considered the weighting of the evidence to identify areas of convergence, disagreement and gaps in knowledge, as well as to ensure that analytical connections are commensurate with the nature and rigour of the evidence base.

Significantly, the degree to which different sub-thematic literatures include analytical lines of enquiry that purposefully review inter-linkages with other thematic areas or disciplinary fields varies. For example, social action features strongly in the political literature and so overlaps with the social movements literature. By contrast, consideration of the connections between women's political and economic power are rare. When they do feature, they tend to be based on normatively derived assumptions about the inter-linkages between political voice, economic autonomy and decision-making capacity and leadership roles, rather than on empirical testing. For its part, the consideration of empowerment in the economic literature is disassociated from women's political action. This is in spite of the more theoretical literature that posits that the individual capabilities that arise from women's economic autonomy are relevant for their political agency. The frequent failure to make connections between women's empowerment in different spheres in the literatures reviewed is notable not only in the lack of theoretical cross-fertilisation, but also in authors making linkages between similar empirical findings. For example, there are similar findings across the social, political and economic literatures that increasing women's influence requires strengthening their participation in mainstream organisations and institutions, but that women's autonomous organisations are more likely to set and drive transformational agendas (e.g. Molyneux, 2001; Cornwall and Goetz, 2005; Hallward-Driemeier, 2013).

6.1.1 The political sphere

The literature on women's political participation most explicitly engages with questions of women's voice, leadership and influence. There is a robust and wide-ranging treatment of the merits of electoral quotas and a critical assessment of women's descriptive and substantive representation, including for advancing gender equality. This literature overlaps with, but has evolved in parallel to, the literature on political parties. Across both sub-thematic areas most of the literature focuses on developed democracies, but there is a significant and emerging body of work on Latin America and some South Asian countries. Linked to this there is a nascent body of work on women's role in decision-making roles in the executive branch. There is also a growing, if more recent, body of academic and grey literature on Africa and on post-conflict settings. The latter increasingly

⁴¹ We consciously borrow the term from the feminist activists and researchers from around the world who participate in the Pathways to Women's Empowerment research consortium, whose work we build on and who aptly describe women's empowerment as a journey, with many possible routes, and not a destination (www.pathwaysofempowerment.org).

looks at the conditions and pathways of peacebuilding and peace agreements and, more recently, on experiences of constitutional reform in post-conflict and transition settings. This is a younger body of literature.

Post-conflict and regime transition settings are recurrent themes in the literature on women's political roles in developing countries, and present particular windows of opportunity for contesting power structures and the political rules of the game (the political settlement). This is especially evident in peace agreements and constitutional reform processes. Importantly the nature of the challenges that women face vary in relation to the political economy of conflict and post-conflict, and of regime transition experiences.

More recently, analysis has turned more purposefully to the *process* aspects of women's participation in these contexts, and how this shapes their voice and influence. In this analytical shift, there is a greater emphasis on how wider political and social structures affect women's capabilities, participation and capacity for influence. Some scholars combine historical institutionalism with analysis of collective action, and consider how structures, formal and informal institutions and strategic coalition-building shape how women develop voice and deploy influence. With a few exceptions, however, there is still only limited research on how this affects the wider political settlement. Increasingly there is more attention paid to how women navigate the informal rules and networks of political decision-making processes to which women typically have limited access, including where formal law guarantees their political voice.

6.1.2 Social sphere

The literature on women's movements is especially robust, although more developed in relation to Latin America and South Asia than the rest of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Regional literatures have emerged at different stages and largely reflect women's involvement in large-scale mobilisation during political transitions. The literature engages with, but also goes beyond, theoretical frameworks and literature on women's social mobilisation in the global north. The evidence base combines analyses that draw on largely qualitative studies with some emerging cross-national quantitatively informed studies (e.g. Htun and Weldon, 2012). There is also a wealth of less analytical grey literature from multiple regions.

By contrast the literature on social accountability and gender is a younger and less developed field. There is a small academic literature on gender and social accountability, made up of mostly qualitative case studies, some rich, and a number of secondary analyses. There is a dearth of systematic comparison. At the same time, there is a large grey literature relevant to women and social accountability, but most studies are insufficiently grounded in wider social and political theory, including gender. The role and quality of women's participation and voice in social accountability processes is rarely of direct concern – and even less their leadership and influence.⁴² Any analysis of these issues tends to be weak. Few report negative or unintended consequences of social accountability activities. Only a handful of studies on girls' participation in social accountability were found. And finally, there is an uneven geographical spread, with the notable absence of the Middle East and North Africa. A small number of studies focus on activities in authoritarian regimes, but most research is centred on countries that have some degree of political pluralism/competition and protection of political and civil rights.

6.1.3 The economic sphere

There is a body of academic literature, both quantitative and qualitative, which measures women's empowerment in relation to their labour market participation and women's participation in microcredit schemes. There are fewer academic pieces on women's access to and ownership of assets. Empowerment measurements and indicators include decision-making and some proxies for voice, but not for leadership. Mostly the focus of the evidence base is on the household level. Grey literature exists across the two sub-themes, including numerous secondary literature reviews on changes in household relations between men and women as a result of increased economic participation. However, there are only a few empirical papers that measure changes in women's voice, agency or decision-making at the community or formal political institutions and fora, and there is little empirical evidence that women's economic participation has led to women's increased political participation in community or national-level politics. At the same time, there is an emerging body of literature examining the role of women's collective action around economic identities. While there are numerous studies

⁴² Also see Cummings and O'Neil's (2015) rapid evidence review on whether women's use of digital information and communication technologies increases their voice and influence, undertaken as part of this project, which comes to similar conclusions about the lack of focus on women's empowerment in the literature on gender and ICTs, particularly beyond economic participation and in terms of their influence over public decision-making.

from around the world, there is a notable concentration on women's economic participation and empowerment in South Asia.

6.2 Does women's participation in public life enhance their voice, leadership and influence?

Despite the divergent nature of the knowledge base across the different themes and sub-themes, some common findings emerge from the literature about the nature and quality of women's voice, decision-making and leadership. How these are weighted, however, varies significantly across the themes.

6.2.1 Voice and decision-making

It is clear that formal political institutions, social and political activism and organising around collective economic identity or interests all provide opportunities for women to discuss, articulate and publicly express their needs and demands. Women often organise around their practical interests, particularly in the case of social and economic mobilisation at community or district levels.

Women, usually elite, also come together to lobby for gender equality and to advance their strategic interests through national political processes, but this is not guaranteed through women's presence in formal political space. In addition, women remain under-represented in formal and informal decision-making roles.

Importantly, organising with other women can itself build the capacity for voice, such as critical consciousness and confidence. Women's participation in small community groups set up around economic programmes – such as cooperatives or self-help groups – have created new or strengthened forms of social capital resulting in increased awareness of community politics, avenues to discuss community-related issues around social norms (such as gender-based violence), and contact with local officials.

Women's access to finances (through microcredit or direct transfers, for example), productive assets (such as land, property, livestock), or participation in the labour market *can* lead to changes in women's decision-making and bargaining power within the household. However such changes are mainly related to decisions in 'women's domain', such as small household expenditure items, education and health.

There is also some evidence that social norms can change as women enter the workforce – such as increased mobility and acceptance of women in public spaces, and to some extent attitudes towards girls in the household (e.g. girls' education). However, there is limited evidence that women's economic participation on its own can lead to larger transformational shifts in women's bargaining power and decision-making (such as women's choices related to reproductive health issues) or shifts in deep-rooted social norms (such as the gender-division of labour). There is also little empirical evidence on how household-level changes in economic decision-making roles directly translate into collective voice and political action more directly.

By contrast, in the political literature, economic resources and autonomy are found to be related to the independent political voice of women candidates. This literature also confirms that voice through numbers can be an enabling factor for contestation of gender relations, either through intense collective civic action or women's presence in formal political life (including through quotas), but that it is no guarantee of effective voice.

The existing scholarship on political participation and social movements critically analyses assumptions about women's voice in its different forms (collective, individual, strategic or practical), and how it relates to gender equality agendas. Women's social activism and formal political participation can increase their voice, but the category of 'women's voice' risks masking the diversity of women's interests, identities, ideological and normative preferences, and the socio-political and economic cleavages that separate women. This means that women who have voice in, for example, political parties, trade unions, peasant associations, or rights and justice movements will not necessarily prioritise gender equality over other political and practical interests.

6.2.2 Leadership

The evidence and theory on leadership and how it relates to advancing gender equality agendas remains fundamentally under-explored.

Women still have limited access to positions of leadership. While women now occupy more elected posts in many countries, they are still under-represented in leadership roles. For example, the global average of women mayors is less than 5% (Markham, 2013). Few women head executive branches – and achievement of these posts is frequently associated with family ties or, in some cases in Latin America and South Asia, through the death of an assassinated husband or father. Women also still mostly do not occupy cabinet or ministry positions, although this is changing (Waylen, 2015). Women are more likely to occupy leadership roles in social movements – but mostly remain under-represented in organisations that do not focus on women and gender issues (Markham, 2013). And in the private sector, women across the world have little representation in business management and corporate decision-making, policy-making and in mainstream business associations (Hallward-Driemeier, 2013).⁴³

Social action and participation in formal political life creates opportunities for political apprenticeship – that is, the development of political and leadership skills at the individual and collective level. However, trajectories of women’s political influence and leadership are mostly still poorly documented. We need to know more about how women navigate the gendered features of political and social institutions and structures – as well as informal political space – to acquire influence and access to decision-making roles; we need more understanding, for example, of how electoral rules influence the internal dynamics of political parties and women’s careers within them.

There is also a tradition of capacity development for leadership that is often internationally funded but which has, until recently, mostly followed cookie-cutter approaches with little reference to the features of political engagement in the relevant country context and the political economy issues that shape leadership success for women.⁴⁴ A particular gap in the literature is the role of education in enabling leadership capabilities for women.

Political apprenticeship is also shaped through the experience of oppositional voice in social movements and civil society. Here of note has been the role played by professional women – lawyers, journalists, academics – in spearheading movements in some contexts (e.g. Latin America, Ethiopia, South Korea) – and sustaining ‘issue networks’. Individual champions or *causes célèbres* have also been identified as igniting and sustaining mobilisation. But mostly, as in the analysis of formal political space, a systematic analysis of the political economy factors that shape leadership roles is lacking.

The literature on economic empowerment, and on social accountability, has little to say about the development of leadership capabilities. Importantly, women activists and politicians frequently cite the importance of access to resources to fund political campaigns, whether these come from official or informal sources. Women-only grassroots groups appear more likely to support the development of the leadership capacities of poor women than their participation in mixed associational activities within the community.

As such, the elusive quality of leadership and how it is associated with substantive representation or voice remains underdeveloped, as does its role in driving increased gender equality. This knowledge gap is problematic for international actors seeking to support leadership development.

6.3 Does women’s voice and leadership improve gender equity?

There is no automatic link between women’s presence and voice in public life and transformative change. Instead, the unity of women’s collective voice, the degree to which the issues they raise are perceived as legitimate or representative and how women’s interests intersect with men’s, mediates this relationship. Findings across the literature emphasise that women may not be *heard* when they voice their demands and articulate feminist interests. The *viability and sustainability of collective feminist voice* depends on both mobilisational capabilities and resources for strategic action and coalition building. It also depends on there being institutional structures and political opportunities, including the political space for associational life, that enable voice to translate into influence.

⁴³ In the United States in 2009, women were 13.5% of Fortune 500 executive officers and 15.2% of board members (Catalyst 2009) [and] in Europe in 2007, women were only 11% of the members of executive committees of listed companies (McKinsey and Co. 2007, cited in Hallward-Driemeier, 2013).

⁴⁴ Also see O’Neil and Plank’s (2015) rapid evidence review on international support to women and girls leadership, undertaken as part of this project, which includes discussion of the factors that have been found to enable women’s leadership capabilities, such as family background and childhood experiences, including opportunities for ‘political apprenticeship’.

The variation in modes and levels of voice and influence across the different sub-themes means that we cannot track clear trajectories of change between women's voice and leadership and wider gender equality gains. In any case, the relationship between women's presence, voice and influence in decision-making, on the one hand, and increased gender equity, on the other, was found to be an under-explored area of research across all the themes. However, the following findings emerge across the four outcome domains:

Gender-responsive law and policy: Across all three themes – the political, social and economic literature – there is substantial evidence of how, in different contexts, women's political voice has resulted in gender-responsive legal and policy reform. These gains go beyond women's presence in formal political positions and are often connected to women's social mobilisation and their collective organisation around rights and gender justice as well as economic issues. But the presence of gender advocates and sectoral experts that are well placed in, and able to strategically navigate, political opportunity structures is often critical to women's influence. Women's mobilisation has led to the formal recognition of gender equality in post-conflict agreements and transitional constitutions, as well as to specific provisions, such as quotas, that increase women's ongoing political representation and, in some cases, presence in other public institutions.

Women's political and civic action has also secured incremental improvements in specific areas of law and policy. For example, there is a substantial evidence base on the contribution of women's mobilisation to improving women's rights to be free from sexual and gender-based violence in developing countries. Legal reform in areas that have traditionally been viewed as the 'private domain' are often more resistant to change, but even here strategic litigation and political mobilisation by women's organisations has won landmark rulings that redefine gender power relations in relation to women's status, and their inheritance and property rights (Scholz and Gomez, 2004; UN Women, 2011). Some individual studies also demonstrate that women organising around work or economic identity in larger-scale forums, such as unions or 'new unions', can provide a vehicle for women's collective bargaining power. In some cases this has enabled women to influence economic policy on women workers' rights (e.g. wages, work environment, access to social security).

Gender-responsive public goods and services: Single studies suggest that increasing women's formal political representation can lead to them having more or better access to public goods and services (e.g. Jayal's 2006 study of Panchyats (local councils) in India), but the relationship between women's access to formal positions and changes in service provision remains an under-developed area of research. There is a larger body of research on women's social activism leading to practical improvements for women. For example, the social mobilisation literature provides substantial evidence on women playing a key role in successfully advocating for improved local environments, e.g. sanitation, social housing, transportation, anti-pollution. While the literature on social accountability is more fragmented and less academic, studies show that women's participation in social accountability processes has led to increased transparency in government decision-making; increased budget allocations for services that benefit women; more accessible or responsive services for women, particularly local health services but also personal safety and social protection, and, in some instances, to legal or administrative redress for women, including for gender-based violations. However, data on which groups of women benefits from any changes to services, or whether these are sustained, is generally not available. Worker's organisations, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association in India, have also successfully lobbied for new rights and services, such as increased minimum wage, access to credit and savings, subsidised food, healthcare and childcare.

More equitable political settlements: The links between women's participation and voice and more inclusive political settlements are more tenuous. Latin America for instance saw an effective 'beheading' of women's movements following the democratic transitions as women sought to take advantage of supposedly 'inclusive' formal political settlements. At the same time, the fact of women entering government (including with leadership roles, such as Presidents Bachelet in Chile and Kirchner in Argentina) and increasing numbers of women in cabinet roles mean that women are progressively better-placed to work in the state and to work for gender equality reform. Overall, however, there has been widespread disappointment in the *de facto* reshaping of political settlements from a gender equality perspective, as for social justice more widely.

Gender equality outcomes: The literature on women's social and political activism posits potential linkages between the women's exercise of voice and wider gender equality gains. For example, studies that show women's participation in local politics or associational life to improve their status within communities,

particularly when this leads to tangible improvements in services and other group benefits. The economic literature also signals how economic empowerment can result in changes in decision-making power dynamics around household decisions, including in ways that lower the risk of domestic violence and increase the acceptance of women having control of assets. (However, drawing simple linkages should be avoided as other studies find that women's access to assets and income can increase conflict within the household; attention to context is paramount). Women's economic empowerment, and particularly their access to employment outside the home and/or in the formal labour market or in informal jobs with characteristics of formality, can also lead to transformative change in social norms (e.g. in relation to women's mobility and access to public space or acceptance of polygamy).

Tracking causal pathways between women being more visible and active in public life and changes in social norms and gender relations is also difficult – not least because these change processes are likely to emerge from multiple factors and not be linear. For example, Sacchet (2008) finds quotas and women's increased descriptive representation to have altered the political culture in Latin American and politicised gender issues. While political parties have subverted these rules in countries such as Brazil, women movements have lobbied for changes to the quota laws, and these are now being revised in many countries to increase the likelihood that parties will implement them in the spirit of the law. Overall, however, and whether in politics, business and associational life, the symbolic/socialisation and substantive effects of women holding power, and the reasons for these, is an under-explored area of research.

Research on women's voice and leadership rarely presents data on changes in women's socio-economic outcomes, or attempts to attribute these to women having more influence over decision-making. For example, there are mixed findings on whether women's access to financial and productive assets and increased labour force participation improve their health, education and other types of outcomes,⁴⁵ and those that do identify a positive relationship rarely examine the role of women's voice and decision-making.

6.4 What factors enable and constrain women's voice, leadership and access to decision-making?

The first point to note is that *context matters*. There are multiple pathways to women's activism. Moreover there are very diverse experiences in terms of how women live through changes in gender relations and empowerment – at the individual/household level and collectively. The well-known trope of 'context matters' is central to analyses that seek to identify entry points to supporting women, voice and leadership in ways that can be meaningful. What works in one context may be irrelevant in others. This is well established in the academic and grey literature across all themes, but remains a challenge for practitioners seeking to support change in women's capacity to drive a gender equality agenda.

Taking context specificity as the starting point allows for explanation of the variation in how women's strategic gender interests intersect with their practical interests, how these are in turn shaped by more complex understandings of identity and socio-political, ethno-cultural and economic cleavages and interests structures, and how voice and influence evolve. Whether this is at the household level – as in the literature oriented to women's economic engagement and capabilities – or at the community or national political level, as in the literature that looks at women's collective action and participation in formal political space, the specific features of the institutional and social context in which change processes take place condition the opportunity structures, the incentives and constraints that are available to gender activists.

In this section we outline the enabling factors and constraints that appear as recurrent features of how women's voice and influence take shape, and with what impact for gender equality agendas. While there is significant variation in the evidence base on how women develop voice and leadership capacities to effect change toward gender equality, some recurrent themes about enabling factors emerge. The literature also points to some common constraints and obstacles that either limit change or signal active modes of resistance.

⁴⁵ Although there is an established body of evidence that demonstrates that women's increased control over income and greater decision making in the household improves their own and their children's health and well-being (e.g. Kabeer, 2013).

6.4.1 Capabilities and resources

Voice relies on capabilities and resources that are developed at different levels of individual and collective life. Capabilities are also the outcome of life experiences.

Life experiences embedded in wider socio-political histories matter. Different life experiences result in uneven capabilities, unequal resources, different experiences of violence, conflict, exclusion or discrimination and varying exposure to enabling resources (such as education and health). In practice, women's (and men's) lives are shaped by a very wide range of life experiences. Accordingly, the evidence signals that there is good reason for women's mobilisation to focus in some contexts around practical gender issues, such as addressing conflict-related violence or mobilising for peace. Practical gender issues can be a springboard for engagement in more strategic gender concerns. As evidenced in a number of post-conflict settings (South Africa, Burundi or Northern Ireland), practical gender issues have also created the space for dialogue and unity among women separated by class, ethnicity, religion or ideology.

Engendering social movements. The experience of mobilising as women and around gender interests can itself facilitate voice and agency. Shared experiences, a sense of 'groupness' and the feelings of solidarity that this can inspire can contribute to supporting women's self-esteem and self-confidence, and to generating critical consciousness with positive consequences for building women's voice. The literature is unequivocal on the important role of women's movements in prompting political action for legal and policy change. This includes direct lobbying of political actors, engendering oppositional voice and consciousness among women activists and among others through alliances with other groups and social movements.

This is further reinforced when political conditions motivate different social movements to come together, embracing and building upon diverse groups of women and their interests. When countries are going through a political transition, such bridging is key to avoid movement fragmentation, to give visibility to issues about gender inequality and to focus energy on lobbying formal political processes where the rules of the game are being contested and redefined.

In economic life, women's participation in collective action groups (e.g. their mobilisation around economic issues or identity) has increased their bargaining power and resulted in benefits to women as workers (e.g. in terms of workers' rights) as well as having some spillover effects in other spheres.

Material resources matter. The material aspect of empowerment was also found to be important for women's capabilities. Women's ownership of productive assets and control over income makes a difference to the prospects for a rebalancing of the gender power relations at the household level. This is particularly the case when access to assets is combined with support in other areas of women's lives, such as education, skills training, and raising men's awareness.

The practical importance of access to resources is also critical for collective action. The sustainability of social movements as an oppositional voice requires funding and the role of international actors has been crucial in this respect. Pragmatically, the mobilisation of women's groups to lobby for gender equality agendas in peace negotiations or constitutional reform processes have required basic funding support to get women to the relevant sites. In the political literature it was also found that material resources is one of the factors that has affected the prospects for 'career development' of individual women engaging in political life and for gaining access to decision-making roles.

The problem for social movements however, lies in the perils of 'NGO-isation' of social voice, and the resulting depoliticisation of collective action. Over time, the reliance on funding pits groups against one another as they compete for the same funding sources.

Gender expertise, and legal and technical knowledge can enhance voice. Credible technical expertise and legal knowledge can increase the credibility and influence of gender advocates in political negotiations, and limit the tendency to marginalise both the gender agenda and the role of women in processes of political redefinition. Such expertise was found to be effective in giving technical robustness as well as self-confidence to social, economic or political groups espousing a gender agenda. It also ensures a degree of oversight in the context of intricate political-legal negotiations where legal precision counts in peace agreements or constitutional and legislative text. Nurturing local knowledge and expertise is most effective. Examples of constitutional reforms

where gender advocates have succeeded in embedding legal gains have often featured local technical expertise among women activists either as gender experts or as legal experts.

Political skills and apprenticeship remains an understudied field – yet is critical to processes of political empowerment. For voice to be translated into influence and concrete legal and political gains in relation to gender equality, the energy of social mobilisation must be harnessed to such political skills, as political negotiation. These processes often take place behind closed doors. The arsenal of political skills involved includes: deploying oppositional voice to give visibility to demands and gender injustices; strategic recourse to international norms and discourse and transnational social action; but also strategic engagement with individual and groups with the power to redefine the political settlement. This may involve a perilous balancing act between nurturing buy-in from potential veto players, and ensuring that the trade-offs remain palatable to the original constituency for gender justice.

6.4.2 Political process, institutional and regime context, and state capacity

Social action, and the capabilities associated with voice and mobilisation, is an important dimension of the development of voice and influence. But political process and institutions are also key. Advancing gender equality agendas involves contesting and redefining the political settlement. The political settlement is the outcome of processes by which actors navigate both formal and informal institutions to contest and redefine the prevailing rules of the game, including those that govern gender relations, in order to advance their interests. The effectiveness of gender equality agendas depend, therefore, on the ability of gender advocates to work through emerging opportunity structures. Here, peace processes and constitutional reform processes are the critical junctures where large formal gains in gender equality are possible, but incremental political and institutional reform is also possible. Whether changes to the formal political settlement are sudden or glacial, to be effective women must be able to mobilise resources and build strategic coalitions and networks across formal and informal spheres of political action. Both collective and individual action are involved.

The features of regime type are important. The degree of openness in the political system to women's voice and influence make a difference to whether and how gender activists can engage, as does the strength and position of key veto players and their willingness to accommodate (some of) their demands. The evidence in the political and social literature indicates that some receptiveness within the system is necessary, whether voice is channeled through women's movements, social accountability mechanisms or formal political institutions and roles. Understanding the opportunities for gender activists to press their interests goes beyond general categories of democracy versus authoritarianism, however. Rather there is a need to understand the variation in levels of *de facto* inclusiveness in the political settlement, whether elite groups see interest in engaging with transformative agendas (for whatever reason), and whether there are options for building alliances with potential reform champions among ruling or elite actors.

Political opportunity structures can catalyse progress in gender equality, enabled through change processes or critical junctures within the political system. Political opportunity is the point at which there is sufficient openness to allow agents of change to act, though this does not mean that they will act or be able to capitalise fully on such opportunities. Regime transitions, post-conflict peace processes or constitutional reform processes are examples of such moments where there is an opportunity to redefine the political settlement. In some of these contexts, early action by gender activists within the political system and through social action is found to increase the chances of achieving legal gains in constitutional reform, as in South Africa or Burundi for instance. This is also relevant in terms of harnessing local struggles to wider change processes, such as action by female Egyptian factory workers, which took place in the context of a broader labour struggle, or women in Bangladesh taking advantage of the political and economic importance of the garment sector to national elites to advance more equitable labour policies.

Timing is also critical in terms of calculations of the receptiveness of ruling elites to change processes. In relation to social accountability, for instance, proximity to elections can make a difference to how governments will respond to initiatives to hold them to account.

Coalition-building, networking and lobbying strategies developed at different levels (local, national and transnational) and with different categories of actors (including reformers and potential resisters) are a critical feature of how voice can be translated into influence. This has included, for instance, strategic alliances between

women's groups crossing ethnic, religious or ideological boundaries, as in the cases of South African women coming together to push for the inclusion of gender equality in the post-Apartheid constitution; and in the Northern Ireland peace process, the coalition of women across faith groups. But alliances also take shape with strategic actors who can block change, such as male community elders. The particular dynamics of how women in formal political space interact with gender activists in social movements can make an important difference to the legitimacy of women's voice in politics. At the same time, strategic action involves a range of networking and lobbying activities that take place behind the scenes and in the closed-door meetings where key players make decisions. In this regard the interplay between formal and informal institutions is critical to identifying where the opportunity structures and constraints lie for change agents.

Formal institutions matter in how they shape incentives and opportunities for different actors in trajectories of voice and influence. The particular features of quota laws combined with electoral systems and how political parties are structured reveals much more about context-specific opportunities for women candidates to prosper in their political careers – and the quality of their voice – than the fact of quotas on its own. Equally, how social accountability mechanisms are embedded in the formal mechanisms of accountability in the state system makes a difference to how societal voice can result in effective oversight of public officials' conduct. For women's economic empowerment, legal gains that eliminate gender-based discrimination regarding access to the labour market or to other assets, such as property, signify important gains in terms of economic empowerment at the household level. This is especially so when it enables women's independent engagement with economic activities and in formal economic space.

At the same time, ***informal institutions*** co-exist alongside, and in many cases trump, formal institutions. The gap between *de jure* gains for gender equality (and formal political institutions generally) and the *de facto* practice of political, social and economic engagement is closely related to the balance between formal and informal institutions. Informal institutions range from the very specific modes of political patronage and gendered bias in how political networks and alliances are forged, for instance within political parties, to wider social norms associated with patriarchy and discriminatory attitudes towards women's roles in politics. Crucially, the literature confirms the importance of understanding the intricacies of how women politicians or gender activists in social movements navigate the world of informal institutions and networks. These reflect the mostly invisible sites and spaces where political bargains take place, and the most crucial deals about the political settlement struck. Identifying the opportunities for women to exercise voice and influence within and through informal institutions remains under-studied, but is increasingly important regarding the advancement of gender equality agendas.

Formal or public recognition of economic activity enhances the transformative potential for women's agency. In the economic literature, at the household level it was found that the *type of work* that women are engaged in matters. Here, the evidence shows that formal work provides the most transformative potential for women's empowerment because it can provide access to regular wages and social security benefits. But, given that the majority of women work outside the formal sector, women's empowerment is greatest when they at least work outside the home, rather than as family wage or unpaid labourers. The evidence does not support the idea that women's work in a particular sector enhances women's voice or decision-making; rather it is the quality of the work and work environment that counts the most. But women's participation in economic life is also subject to such *practical constraints* as childcare responsibilities, domestic responsibilities and mobility.

6.4.3 Social norms/social structure

In all sub-thematic and thematic areas, the importance of social structures and social norms in shaping outcomes features as a recurrent constraint on women's voice and influence, as well as access to decision-making roles.

Social norms are a key dimension of the world of informal institutions that either enable or constrain women's voice. Patriarchy and gender hierarchies feature recurrently as a primary constraint on women's voice, leadership and influence, and civic and political engagement in general – both in terms of *de facto* community and public attitudes, as well as behaviour and gender biases in political and economic activities. They reinforce power imbalances in gender relations at the national, community and household level. The resilience of social norms is such, according to the evidence, that following critical junctures such as conflict, constitutional reform or regime change, traditional gender hierarchies and roles are often re-established. This occurs at the level of

national politics, where gender bias resurfaces in daily practice, and at the household and community level following, for instance, processes of stabilisation in post-conflict settings.

To the extent that social norm change occurs it is mostly slow and layered. There is a frequent lag effect between institutional change and social norm change: during such periods it is often difficult to sustain mobilisation. There is also often an imbalance between changes in women's public voice versus their private or intra-household voice. Moreover, there is a primary effect of household power structures on women's civil and political engagement through the reality of women's sexual subordination, men's (*de jure* or *de facto*) control of women, and women and girls' unequal access to resources.

Importantly, social norms are mutable. Social activism combined with strategic political action in the political sphere can contribute, through iterative processes of change, to shift gender norms and expectations in ways that benefit women. The achievement of legal gains is a feature of that process of social norm change, taking account of the time lag between *de jure* and *de facto* change in the mind-sets of communities and public officials and attitudes towards women's voice and influence (particularly poor women's). Moreover, the evidence also shows how concrete gains can positively impact on attitudes towards women's ability to effectuate change through collective action and their public role.

6.5 Gaps in the literature on voice and leadership

There are important gaps in the literature, which limit the capacity for more effective international action in support of women's voice and leadership, despite this being an important objective of the international community.

- There is a dearth of empirical or theoretical work on the qualities and pathways to women's leadership in the academic literature. This is also true for the grey literature. Given the enthusiasm for supporting women's leadership in social, political and economic life, there is a call for a closer examination of what these interventions involve, and what accounts for their successes or failures.
- There is a need for more empirical work on the trajectories and quality of women's participation, the capabilities women require to participate in meaningful ways, and the pathways through which presence becomes influence. Voice and leadership are essentially a 'black box', and causal pathways between participation and direct and indirect outcomes remain under-explored. This *process* aspect of change needs more empirical observation and analysis.
- There is limited research on the linkages across change processes at different levels and qualities of social, political and economic voice and access to decision-making and leadership roles. For instance, linkages between economic empowerment and political voice remain under-explored.
- Context-specific variation influences the relationship between political institutions and economic development, but there is little systematic analysis of how the features of this relationship also shapes opportunities for women's mobilisation capacity, voice and influence.
- There is a need for more evidence on how particular features of formal institutions (like quotas, electoral laws and regime type) affect pathways for women's access to leadership roles, and the consequences for gender equality agendas.
- There is also a need for more evidence on the role of social accountability in processes of empowerment, rather than seeing it primarily as a bounded activity with instrumental gains for local services. A particular gap is the link between social accountability and broader changes in cultures of oversight and impunity – which are central to the type of political settlement.
- The political economy of local governance is poorly integrated in the research in terms of how the interests and incentives of politicians and bureaucrats affect their receptiveness and responsiveness to women's voices and demands for social accountability, as well as to gender equity more broadly.
- There is little consideration of adolescent girls in the work on women's voice and access to decision-making roles. Political apprenticeship, and acquiring skills and understanding on the exercise of power and influence,

is also about learned experiences. We also do not know enough about how adolescents' or young women's access to economic resources or work relates to their voice and leadership.

- Finally, there are important gaps in how women's economic participation and ownership of assets can lead to increased voice, decision-making and leadership beyond the household level, and how women's individual agency leads to participation and influence in collective action groups.

6.6 Policy implications and the role of international actors

The policy implications presented here reflect the lessons learnt from the analysis regarding the political, social and economic spheres, and identify some of the key areas where international actors may best be able to engage to support and strengthen women's voice and leadership in decision-making.

Importantly, the report identifies that context specificity is crucial, so a good starting point for international actors is investing in contextual analyses of gender relations and the socio-political constraints and opportunities for transformative change. Moreover, international actors need to be sensitive to the fact that international support can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, external support can be critical in terms of lending legitimacy, funding, support to vulnerable activists, technical support, and extending agendas (e.g. to tackle rights-based issues or girls' empowerment); but it may also prevent local ownership, fuel competition for funding through NGO-isation of collective action, or even engender backlash. As such, often a balance needs to be struck between helping to 'engender' movements so that women can recognise their own unique interests and yet not pushing shifts in gender social norms so far so fast as to encourage backlash.

It is also important to emphasise that the design of interventions is critical to whether or not they facilitate women's voice and influence, specifically in terms of whether or not women, and particularly poor women, can participate in decision-making in meaningful ways, and whether plausible assumptions about how pathways of change (from participation, to voice, to influence) may emerge.

Specific policy implications identified across the three thematic areas of the report include:

Engaging with the politics of the intended change processes is essential in every aspect of international support that aims to enhance women's voice and leadership capabilities. The change processes involved – if effective – result in a reallocation of power and resources, and as such face often deeply entrenched resistance. To achieve change requires navigating context-specific political economies of incentive and interest structures at multiple levels – household, community and national – as well as changes in formal, informal and social norms. Technical approaches that are not fundamentally grounded in a deep understanding of the political context of both gender relations and the broader political settlement cannot be effective. This means investing in international actors' understanding of the context as an integral and sustained feature of engagement across all spheres.

Enabling activists and reformers in developing countries to 'think and work politically' across formal and informal institutions is an important aspect of international support – and the thinking and working politically modality is increasingly captured in different areas of development interventions. Advances in gender equality goals are mostly the outcome of strategic dialogue, trust and alliance building, including among unlikely partners. The challenge lies in achieving a balance between taking strategic and pragmatic decisions that make advancing women's interest more likely, while maintaining the transformative goal in sight and avoiding trade-offs that unwittingly jeopardise or delay progress towards gender justice. Working politically requires investing in locally driven change processes and using international resources to leverage change and facilitate strategic coalitions grounded in national change processes. For example, research indicates that successful women's coalitions are those that employ 'soft advocacy' by harnessing existing networks, both informal relationships with male power-holders and established relationships between elite women, and who strategically frame issues so as to circumvent conservative opposition (Tadros, 2011; Hodes et al., 2011).

Supporting women's collective action. The evidence is unequivocal that women organising with other women is instrumental to their politicisation and solidarity, as well as for their ability to exert the collective power and influence necessary to shift entrenched legal and social norms that marginalise women. Successful organisations are often those that start by addressing the immediate and practical concerns of women, which then supports

addressing longer-term strategic goals. Care needs to be taken not to essentialise women and their interests and to allow local women to drive their own causes – with space left for them to frame those causes in culturally resonant ways. This may require donors and other external agents to shift their own thinking and allow for not just ‘a’ women’s movement but for multiple women’s movements. Within the private sector, better networking opportunities for women and increased participation in business associations can also promote women’s voices in shaping and improving the business environment. Whether relating to political, economic or civic life, autonomous women’s organisations are vanguards of transformative change and must be supported, but women also need to be assisted to exert greater influence within mainstream (i.e. male-dominated) organisations and policy forums.

Working with multiple stakeholders and investing in long-term relationships with partners in order to select credible intermediaries and support substantive change processes which build on organic rather than induced participation. Intermediary women’s organisations with established relationships with grassroots women’s groups are essential to develop poorer women’s leadership and mobilisation capabilities. As importantly, strong links between professional and grassroots organisations ensures the everyday needs and concerns of poor women informs national advocacy by elite women, and connects community action to broader socio-political movements. Women (and their funders) need also to build coalitions and networks with decision-makers and other stakeholders in a strong position to advance women’s empowerment through appropriate political, economic and social strategies, including, for example, ministries of finance, the private sector, and the NGO community. There is also merit in supporting strategic alliances, including with potential ‘losers’ of such change processes, and contesting the incentive structures around which resistance to change is shaped.

Working within and from outside the state and formal political space. In some cases, women’s goals are best supported by working with the state, including working closely with both feminist bureaucrats (‘femocrats’) and male allies to build the coalitions that encourage reforms from within. It is equally important to build strategic alliances with key decision-makers and power-holders – including those who may initially resist change but can be motivated to find merit in aligning with a gender equality agenda. In other cases, however, women’s movements have more power when they maintain autonomy and engage from the outside. Overall, the evidence suggests that engaging with state actors (and working within the state) is nearly universally required in order to protect and promote women’s well-being, but that more transformational agenda-setting is often best accomplished in more independent arenas. This might involve taking risks at moments of strategic and critical junctures, such as peace negotiations: for instance supporting early efforts at social mobilisation in conflict-affected and transition settings through logistical support to get women either to the negotiating table and/or in a position where they can exercise effective oppositional voice. Fostering women’s presence, credibility and networks early in peace processes also increases the likelihood that women will be able to influence subsequent constitutional reform and have a continuing presence in post-conflict political institutions.

Supporting the political apprenticeship of gender activists to exercise influence in political and social life. This includes navigating the processes of negotiation and bargaining in both formal and informal spaces in the political sphere. Key decision-making often takes place in informal space, from which women are frequently excluded. Concrete activities need to be tailored to context. For instance, interventions to support women’s political leadership capacities must be designed in ways that take into account features of the particular national and sub-national political settlement. Women also acquire political skills and networks through a variety of experiences, including early immersion from growing up in political families, student politics, and professional and voluntary work, and not just through formal party politics or political skills/leadership training (Tadros, 2014). The different potential pathways that women take into politics, and variety of political training grounds these entail, should be recognised and supported.

Developing and supporting multidimensional approaches to women’s empowerment which address both the practical and structural constraints to enabling women’s voice, decision-making and leadership. Joined-up programming and complementary activities (for example, in consciousness raising, development of social capital and capabilities, norm change, implementation of legal gains) are essential if they are to support women’s empowerment and sustained change, rather than short-term, localised and more instrumental gains (e.g. to service provision, access to assets). For example,

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- Combining a focus on women's greater access to economic assets or income with training and knowledge to bring about 'cognitive and behavioural changes' to amplify their empowerment potential, such as technical or vocational livelihoods training (e.g. market and business skills) and legal training (for instance on access to and use of property). Access to assets such as micro-finance is also more likely to empower women when its provision encourages group interaction between women rather than a one-to-one relationship between a creditor and a recipient.
 - Designing and implementing social accountability (and any other) interventions in ways that increase both their sustainability and empowerment impact. This includes inputs to address the specific barriers women, and particularly poor and marginalised women, face to meaningful participation, such as holding meetings at appropriate times and places, providing childcare, and facilitating women-only discussions or groups. It also involves efforts to make bounded accountability interventions relevant to the, often more practical, concerns of women while embedding them in broader social movements to encourage women's ongoing conscientisation and influence.
 - In all areas, engaging with men and with key political actors with decision-making power is central to strategies to improve decision-making, voice and influence. Women's 'triple burden' of responsibility for unpaid domestic work, reproduction and childcare in addition to any paid work is a fundamental constraint on their participation in political and civic life. Changing this requires working with both women and men to change social and cultural ideas about 'masculine norms', including the division of labour, and providing targeted services, such as quality childcare services or improved infrastructure to reduce the time women must spend on domestic activities.

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SECTION 4: SOCIAL ACTIVISM

Social movements

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Appendix: Methodological approach

The report's literature identification and review strategy adheres to the principles of systematic reviews – rigour, transparency, a commitment to taking questions of evidence seriously – but also allows for a more flexible and user friendly handling of retrieval and analysis methods (DFID, 2013; Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2013; Mallett et al., 2012). The approach to reviewing the literature consisted of three separate tracks: (1) applying systematic principles to the literature search of mainly academic literature; (2) 'snowballing' through recommendations on influential papers from key experts; and (3) capturing the grey and policy literature. The methodology is detailed in a Research Protocol, which is available on request.

Track 1: Systematic literature review search

Track 1 applied systematic review principle procedures, which included developing a research protocol, setting inclusion/exclusion criteria and carefully composing and testing search strings. These strings were used in academic databases that cover relevant academic journals. Although not sufficient in itself, it remains a necessary and important part of the retrieval process.

Track 2: Snowballing

Snowballing involved actively seeking advice on relevant literature from key experts, and subsequently looking at the reference lists of those publications. This track is particularly useful for retrieving non-published studies and for getting a sense of which parts of the literature have been important and influential in the field.

Track 3: Capturing the grey literature

Finally, the last track captured relevant material that is often located outside the orthodox peer review channels (that is, academic databases, journals). This material, referred to as grey literature, includes working papers, concept notes, donor reports, policy documents, and briefings. This included searching institutional websites (NGOs, donor websites, women's organisations) and using internet search engines such as Google.

Each theme and sub-theme draws on different and, often distinct, literatures. Each theme examines the evidence relating to:

- the nature and quality of the evidence base in this area;
- the extent and nature of change in women's voice, access to decision-making and leadership, and whether these changes affect gender equality, in terms of gender-equality outcomes, gender-responsive laws and policies, public goods and the nature of political settlements;
- the factors that enable or constrain women's voice, leadership and influence over decision-making; and
- the role of international actors in supporting (or at times undermining) women's voice and leadership.

For each we therefore provide an overview of the evidence base in terms of the nature and quality of the evidence, areas of convergence or contestation, and gaps in the literature.



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