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# The Road to Women's Empowerment in a Man's Crop

*A field study of Ugandan women's empowerment  
process in the coffee farming industry*

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# Abstract

In recent years the concept of empowerment has flourished to a large extent, not least in development studies. Empowering marginalised communities, poor people and women has become a priority for development agencies and organisations. This thesis aims to assess how women are empowered by a top-down approach through International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA) and a bottom-up approach through the women themselves. The paper is based on a field study that took place in the coffee farms of Uganda where women face enormous challenges as they work in an exploited industry and live with husbands who often withhold the income of the work the women have done. Drawing on Naila Kabeer's definition of empowerment, this paper looks at if and how the resources, agency and achievements of the women have led to empowerment in the levels of household, workplace and community. The research strategy used for this paper is data collected from semi-structured interviews with women working in coffee farms in Uganda. The results show that women become empowered to a large extent in the workplace and community levels but struggle in the household level. There is not sufficient transformative power from IWCA and the women themselves to change the structures regarding gender-norms that are vastly embedded in the culture. There is a need to raise more awareness and knowledge, not only for women and organisations but for the men as well, in order to reach women's empowerment and gender equality.

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# 1 Introduction

Empowerment is one of the concepts that has flourished greatly in recent years in development studies and interventions. A potential reason for this is the growing body of literature and policymakers that have acknowledged firstly, the concept of empowerment and secondly, the significance of empowerment for marginalised communities, women and poor people. The focus of this paper is women's empowerment. Broadly speaking, women's empowerment is the strategy to reduce gender inequalities and expand women's freedom of choices and actions to shape their own lives (Narayan, 2005:4). There are various definitions of empowerment but what can be agreed is that empowerment is a relational concept, emerging from the interaction between women somewhere and their environment (Narayan, 2005:6). The approach to women's empowerment is less agreed upon. Between arguments of using a top-down approach and a bottom-up approach, more evidence is showing how the two approaches combined can lead to better results (Narayan, 2005:3). Governments, multilaterals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are as important key players as the women themselves for the empowerment process to operate effectively.

## 1.1 Aim, Background and Research Question

This paper aims to add to the growing literature of women's empowerment by focusing on women in the coffee industry in Uganda. Coffee is the most valuable export commodity in Uganda and one in five Ugandans derive most of their income from the coffee production (McDonnell, 2017). At the same time, women are often subject to exploitation and vulnerability and do not have the same prospects as men, both in the same industry but also elsewhere in the country. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations (UN) in which SDG 5 aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", several organisations and interventions are working to promote empowerment. Their usefulness and effectiveness are up to debate.

International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA) is an NGO which was first formed in South America in 2003 with the aim to empower women in the international coffee community to achieve meaningful and sustainable lives (IWCA, 2018). Today, the alliance is present in over 22 countries, each chapter being self-governed and self-organised (IWCA, 2018). The IWCA Uganda Chapter was formed in 2010 and through various workshops and trainings, they continuously work to empower female farmers who are members of the alliance. This paper

intends to assess how effective the empowerment process has been for the women who are members of IWCA Uganda Chapter. Considering that empowerment can be applied on several domains for an individual, this paper will investigate the process on three levels: household, workplace and community. The purpose is to increase the understanding on if and how women in the coffee industry become empowered by looking at the top-down and bottom-up approaches. The top-down refers to IWCA and the bottom-up are the women themselves who show willingness to become empowered and challenge power structures. It is significant to study empowerment in relation to both approaches to extend our understanding of what actually matters when intending to empower women. Should the women always adapt to the gender initiatives or vice versa for empowerment to take place? Or can some problems not be improved by either of these approaches? This leads to the research question for this paper:

*How are women in the coffee farming industry empowered at household, workplace and community levels?*

This question will be answered using qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with women in the coffee industry in Uganda, who are members of IWCA Uganda Chapter. A content analysis of the interviews will be applied in which the empowerment process will be measured. To measure a process is difficult considering that well-known authors in the field are still struggling to do so. Accordingly, this paper will delimit the scope of measurement by analysing the suitable answers and finding patterns that can be associated with empowerment in one, or more, of the three levels. One important remark to remember is that throughout this paper, IWCA Uganda Chapter will be referred to as only IWCA.

The thesis is structured into four chapters. What follows is an examination of the previous literature on empowerment. The paper then goes on to discuss the methodology, material and operationalisation used. Chapter three analyses the findings of the research, structuring the analysis in three sub-chapters: household, workplace and community. Finally, the summary and concluding remarks are presented.

## 2 Literature Review

In the development discourse, the concept of empowerment has been highly contested. In the 1980s, the concept flourished as a critique towards the theories of Women in Development, Women and Development, and Gender and Development, which largely viewed women apolitically and considered economic independence of women to be the solution in development interventions (Batliwala, 2007:558). In the critique, women's significant role was now to be viewed in the political, social *and* economic structures (Batliwala, 2007). The earlier terminology used, such as "women's development" and "women's welfare" were replaced with "women's empowerment". Still today, development agencies are using the concept of empowerment in a widely manner without a clear definition or analysis of the term. SDG 5 reads: "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (UN, 2018). Out of the nine targets of that goal, the word "empowerment" is only stated twice. This can be viewed from various perspectives and presumably criticisms, however, arguably this only shows that empowerment is more of a process rather than a goal. In other words, empowerment is the underlying notion which, hopefully, drives and leads to various successes.

To consider empowerment as a process has not always been the case. An often-used example is the UNDP's Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which measured gender equality only based on women's political and economic representation<sup>1</sup> (Kabeer, 2001). As Beteta (2006) also determined, GEM measured inequality among the most educated and economically advantaged women as well as excluding non-economic dimensions of decision-making power at the household level and their own bodies and sexuality. This certainly brings problems. Firstly, women at the lowest degree of employment at grassroots levels or no employment were not considered. Secondly, empowerment was viewed as an outcome rather than a process. For example, more women in national parliaments does not necessarily imply that women's decision-making power in the household is empowered. Presumably, UNDP recognised this weakness as in recent years, the GEM is no longer being measured.

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<sup>1</sup> The GEM index was measured using three components: the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, the percentage of women in economic decision-making positions and the female share of income.

## 2.1 Concept or Theory?

As discussed above, empowerment has not always been easy to define and one of the reasons is due to authors viewing the word differently. For some, empowerment is a conceptualisation, implying that it is a contested term where every definition of empowerment is different. For others, empowerment is a theory which results from certain actions. It is significant to distinguish the two views for the purpose of this study. Samman and Santos (2009) explain how empowerment has been considered to be the result from the interaction between agency and opportunity structures while others argue that empowerment is a multidimensional concept that can be used and applied differently. Moreover, empowerment has also been viewed as something that occurs on a top-down level; interventions from development agencies or such that encourages empowerment, or something that occurs on a bottom-up level; a process emerging in people's lives and homes, by themselves or collectively (Narayan, 2005). Previous literature has argued that the top-down approach is how empowerment should operate, indicating that institutions and development agencies such as the UN are *key* for empowering women (Samman and Santos, 2009). Recently, authors have determined that the bottom-up approach is more viable, implying that empowerment must come within oneself and that it cannot be forced upon people (Narayan, 2005; Klein, 2014). This paper is in line with Narayan (2005:6) and argues that empowerment, of especially women, requires both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The reason for this is because women cannot themselves become empowered if they are unaware of the fact that they indeed can become empowered. But also, the women themselves must *want* to become empowered. Usually, the top-down interventions are the providers of knowledge and information and together with the bottom-up approach, empowerment is more likely to take place. In contrast to Narayan, this paper does not view empowerment as a theory where empowerment is a product of agency and opportunity structures. Rather, this paper considers empowerment as a concept with numerous different meanings and below I will discuss various definitions that has previously been used and the one this paper will draw on. This is not to say that Narayan's argument, that empowerment results from agency and opportunity structures, is wrong, but rather to say that viewing empowerment from that angle is *one* of the ways to conceptualise the term and not the only way.

## 2.2 Conceptualising Women's Empowerment

Amartya Sen (1999:130) introduced the term "capability approach", indicating that achieving well-being should occur not only through opportunities but through people's actual capabilities.



Development, according to Sen's (1999:115) inclusive approach, should therefore be understood in terms of people's increased freedom to shape their own destinies and lives. Unlike the previous scholars and theories in the field, Sen highlighted the importance of the individual being a participant in social, political *and* economic actions (Sen, 1999:44). More importantly, he argued that there is clear evidence that women's empowerment within the family reduces child mortality significantly, and this is one of the reasons why women's agency and voice should be further empowered (Sen, 1999:379).

Naila Kabeer (2001), following the footsteps of Sen, is one of the most influential scholars within the field of empowerment. She continuously advocates for empowerment entailing a process of change rather than a state of being as well as recognising that the *ability* to exercise choice is an important element to conceptualise power (2001:19). For Kabeer, one has to be disempowered in order to be empowered, and thus she considers empowerment as the "expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (2001:19). On the other hand, Alsop et al. (2006:10) define empowerment as a "group's or individual's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes". The difference between the two definitions is that Kabeer believes that empowerment can only occur if a person has been disempowered before and distinguishes the importance of first-order choices and second-order choices.

Two points will be made regarding the two differences. Firstly, this thesis agrees with Kabeer's argument that one has to be disempowered in order to become empowered. By this I also mean that if someone has been unaware of certain choices, and suddenly acquires the existence of those choices, that implies that she used to be disempowered but now is empowered. Thus, becoming empowered means that there is an ability to have chosen *otherwise*. Secondly, Kabeer's definition is suitable when considering empowerment in very poor and exposed places because she believes that there is a need to make a distinction between first-order choices and second-order choices. The first-order choices are the so-called strategic choices, those that are critical for people to live the lives they want to, for example, choice of livelihood and whether and who to marry and so on. These choices help frame the second-order choices, which are less consequential and might be important, but they do not constitute the defining parameters of one's life (Kabeer, 1999:437). For Alsop et al. (2006:84), the effective choices they refer to are barely defined but they contend that actors themselves should be making the choice and not be

influenced by the “rules of the game” which often are in favour of the more powerful ones. On the other hand, Alsop et al. (2006) regards transforming the choices to desired actions and outcomes to be important. Kabeer (2001:24) also recognises this when arguing that some women can choose not to choose that particular *strategic* choice. In other words, the choice is there but it is not exercised. The question is then what constitutes becoming empowered? Is it to make the choice and transform the choice into desired outcomes or to only have the expansion of ability to make the choice and not necessarily choosing. Ideally, Alsop et al.’s definition would be preferred because it signifies that the individuals acquire the ability to make a choice, then make the actual choice and finally transform the choice into their desired outcome. However, for the purpose of this paper, that definition is arguably more difficult to apply into poor and exploited environments because not everyone has the option to transform their choices into desired outcomes due to various hinders along the way, such as informal cultural norms. Kabeer provides a broader and more accessible definition of empowerment which this paper will therefore apply throughout the analysis.

### **2.3 The Empowerment Process**

Unlike Sen (1999) who argued that agency should be the core component in development processes, Kabeer (2001) lists three components that affect the ability to exercise choice: resources, agency and achievements. Access to *resources* in terms of economic, human and social resources, enhances the ability to exercise choice (Kabeer, 2001). It is significant to note that if a woman’s primary form of access to resources is dependent on the breadwinner of the family, her capacity to make strategic choices is limited. Therefore, the way a woman acquires resources is highly relevant for this component to be measureable. Conversely, Malhotra (2003:3) appears to disregard resources by arguing that it should not be treated as empowerment per se, but as a factor that can foster the process. This may be true to some extent but without access to social, economic and human resources in the first place, empowerment cannot be a process. Arguably, resources are more than just a factor, they are significant indicators to the process of empowerment. Women cannot gain more control over their farms if there was no farm to begin with.

*Agency*, or decision-making agency, is the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them (Kabeer, 2001). Agency can have positive and negative meanings in power-terms. “Power to”, the positive sense, refers to people’s capacity to define their life-choices and pursue their own

goals, regardless of opposition from others (Kabeer, 2001:21). “Power over”, which can be regarded in a somewhat negative sense, is the capability of an actor or actors to overrule the agency of others by the use of violence, threat or coercion (Kabeer, 2001:21). There is also a third dimension of agency, “power within”, which encompasses an individual’s *sense* of agency. This dimension resembles Elise Klein’s (2014) definition of psychological agency. In her analysis of the effects of purposeful agency, Klein (2014), identified the major role the psychological dimension of agency had on the process of empowerment. In short words, Klein found that people in Bamako, Mali regarded the agency that came from *within* to be a significant, legitimate catalyst for action (2014:646). She noted that having the psychological dimension is not sufficient for empowerment because of external barriers such as gender relations and poverty (Klein, 2014). Still, this dimension indicates what was discussed above, that empowerment must to some extent also come within oneself in order to succeed in the process. This is also what Sen (1999) argues when noting that the agency role of the individual is his or her capacity to make change through individual or collective activity. Malhotra et al. (2002:9) discuss another important insight; can agency amount to empowerment if no meaningful result can be found in a woman’s position? As previously mentioned, Kabeer’s definition also recognises this issue to some extent when arguing that women might receive the expansion of ability to make choices but do not necessarily exercise them. Arguably, awareness of the ability to make choices suggests strengthening in the agency aspect. This will be examined further in the operationalisation and analysis of this paper.

For Kabeer (2001), exercising choice should challenge power relations, and the freedom in decision making is central to empowerment. Resources and agency combined can be referred to Sen’s capability approach signifying that one’s potential can allow people to live the life they want and achieve what they desire. This leads to Kabeer’s third component of power, *achievements*, referring to the extent to which people are able to realise their choices and goals, and willingness to improve their lives. Resources are a pre-condition, agency is the process and achievements are regarded as the outcome of this power procedure (Kabeer, 2001). This does not entail that when reaching the stage of achievements, empowerment is fulfilled. It is an ongoing process rather than a quantifiable outcome and should be understood accordingly. Empowerment is relational, meaning that people are empowered or disempowered relative to others, or to themselves. Most importantly, as Kabeer illustrates, all three dimensions of resources, agency and achievements are interdependent on each other and equally significant in order to understand the process of empowerment.

Other authors question the equal importance of all indicators. Malhotra et al. (2002:9) suggest that *agency* should be the defining criterion because without “women’s individual or collective ability to recognize and utilize resources in their own interests, resources cannot bring about empowerment”. For example, gaining more access to resources does not lead to more control over the resources (Malhotra et al., 2002). Malhotra et al. (2002:9) differ from Kabeer’s definition of agency as they regard agency as the ability to formulate strategic choices and control resources and decisions that affect important life outcomes. The difference is that Kabeer regards agency as the *ability* to define goals and act upon them and Malhotra et al. believe that agency should provide the *ability* to formulate strategic choices and control resources. One can criticise both definitions; Kabeer’s definition for being irrational due to the difficulties of acting upon one’s goals. Malhotra et al.’s definition can in turn be criticised for the difficulty of being able to control resources for women in developing countries. On the other hand, it should be emphasised that encompassing agency and becoming empowered is not supposed to be an easy task. Both of the definitions are suitable for the purposes of this paper and for explaining agency. It is important to be able to define and act upon goals, but it is equally significant, if not more, to be able to formulate choices and control resources.

Alsop et al. (2006) take on another perspective which has been highly used, particularly by the World Bank. They argue that empowerment is defined by two interrelated factors: agency and opportunity structure (Alsop et al., 2006). They, unlike Malhotra et al., believe that agency itself cannot be treated as synonymous with empowerment as they regard that even in the capacity to choose options, agency might not be used effectively due to the opportunity structure. The opportunity structure is defined as institutions that govern people’s behaviour which in turn can influence the success or failure of the choices made by individuals (Alsop et al., 2006). Their idea of institutions derives from Douglass North’s (1991) article which discusses the notion of *institutions*. North (1991) implies that institutions are humanly devised constructs that structure political, economic and social interaction and consist of informal and formal rules which can constrain individual choices. Samman and Santos (2009:4) argue how their framework suggests that institutions and its operations can operate in a certain way which hinders the individuals’ transformation of their choices into desired outcomes. This framework brings forward, unlike the previous ones, the acknowledgement of norms and cultures that govern and constrain behaviour. However, an argument against this is the evidence that scholars (see Kabeer, 1999:457) have put forward of when individuals act against the norm even though they may

have had to pay a high price for autonomy. Debatably, it can be questioned whether acting against the norm will always make a difference. In other words, one can act against the norm but that does not necessarily imply that power structures will change which goes back to Alsop et al.'s argument that one can indeed then "blame" the institutions and their operations through the aspect of opportunity structure.

Dietz et al. (2018) argue for the economic aspect of empowerment, an aspect that various other researchers have also stressed (see Duflo, 2012). In their study, Dietz et al. (2018:34) focused on women's empowerment in the agricultural sector, arguing that the economic empowerment of women leads to a "spill-over effect" in other development outcomes such as health, child nutrition and education. Arguably, their framework is somewhat simplistic when contending that economic empowerment will strengthen women's situations. For example, what they neglect is that other factors, such as norms, can prevent women from acquiring money.

This paper will use Kabeer's three components of empowerment; resources, agency and achievements to examine how strengthening of these components will enhance the empowerment process. Kabeer (2001:457) argues that the "project of women's empowerment is dependent on collective solidarity", implying that women's organisations have the opportunity to create conditions for change by helping individuals act against the norm. Thus, this paper will also take Alsop et al.'s component of opportunity structures into consideration when determining if institutions, formal or informal, do at times restrain individuals from exercising choice, even in the presence of women's organisations. It will be examined whether Kabeer's argument that women's organisations can outweigh the opportunity structures and challenge structural change is accurate, using IWCA as an example, or if the so-called institutions cannot at times be challenged.

## **2.4 Measuring Empowerment**

If the conceptualisation of empowerment is blurry and contested, then one can argue that the measurement of empowerment is even blurrier. There are certain aspects to consider before attempting to measure empowerment. Firstly, it is useful to consider and differentiate various realms and dimensions in which women can be empowered. This will be discussed more in detail in section 2.5. However, it is worth mentioning that becoming empowered in for example the familial sphere does not imply that one will become empowered in the political sphere

(Narayan, 2005:74). If the purpose is to examine the empowerment process of women, it should be in the interest of the researcher to consider the different domains. On the other hand, as Narayan (2005:74) indicates, empowerment in the economic or social aspect can in many times overlap with empowerment in the familial aspect. Kabeer (1997:298) found in her study on women in the garment industry in Bangladesh that access to wages and employment made an unequivocal difference to the lives of most women in the household. Secondly, context is essential when measuring empowerment. Malhotra et al. (2002:17) indicate that certain behaviours that signify empowerment in one context can have a different meaning in another one. For example, a shift in women's ability to visit a doctor without permission of the husband can indicate empowerment in Ghana but it is a norm in Sweden. Even if the different domains and contexts are taken into consideration, Malhotra et al. (2002:19) stress the challenge of measuring a "moving target", that is, the process of empowerment. How this will be done will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

What is important to take into consideration for this paper is the so-called *triangulation* when measuring empowerment using resources, agency and achievements (Kabeer, 1999:452). Kabeer (1999) discusses how it is not sufficient to see whether someone has access to resources. What matters for measuring empowerment is to examine if that access to resources has an impact on the aspect of agency, for example through acquiring awareness of having certain choices concerning the resource. One way of operationalising that is for instance to see if control, and not only access, of the resource has been gained. As Narayan (2005:73) contends, "without women's individual or collective ability to recognise and utilise resources in their own interests, resources cannot bring about empowerment". Achievements is what the individual is able to do to transform her life as desired with the accessed resource and effective agency. This is the most challenging aspect to measure because one must take into consideration that achievements is valid when we can tell whose agency was involved and to the extent the achievements have challenged the inequalities in resources and agency (Kabeer, 1999:452). Empowerment should thus be measured in three dimensions; resources, agency and achievements, and it should be measured through the three domains; household, workplace and community, illustrated in Figure 2 in section 3.2.2.

## 2.5 Domains of Empowerment

This paper recognises the significance of observing the empowerment process from different domains. Carr (2016:12), together with Commonwealth of Learning, establishes a three-dimensional empowerment framework in order to measure empowerment not only by considering achievements but the whole process of choice. The three realms are household, livelihood and community as they regard that those three realms are helpful to see the differentiated levels of empowerment in multiple contexts (Carr, 2016). This paper will use these realms but with a slight change in terminology using “workplace” instead of “livelihood”, because although the work the women are doing is accurately their livelihood, this paper will focus mainly on their workplace as coffee farmers and no other livelihood activities.

IWCA (2018) aims to empower women by “enabling women to gain control over the sources of power /.../ leading to greater participation in the decision-making process, control and transformative action”. Their goal therefore seems compatible to examine through this paper’s framework of empowerment and the three domains. IWCA has other goals such as to change the inequitable access to resources and to prevent violence against women. These aspects cannot be tackled by only empowering women in the household domain. Thus, the empowerment process in this paper will be examined at the household, workplace and community levels. Additionally, this will also allow to consider if IWCA can make structural change by collective solidarity.

## 3 Methodology and Material

### 3.1 Methods

This paper is based on a field study which was carried out between September to November 2018 in two different districts in Uganda. The methods used in the field are semi-structured interviews based on both closed-ended and open-ended questions (see appendix A). The method used for analysis of the interview responses is qualitative content analysis. As the aim of the paper is to try to capture the *process* of empowerment, the most effective way to measure this for me is through direct measuring of decision making, choice, control etc. by asking those type of questions straight to the respondents (Malhotra et al., 2002:19). Naturally, to capture a process, especially with the implementation of IWCA workshops, would be to follow the process across at least two periods in time – ideally before the workshops began and after the

workshops (Malhotra et al., 2002:19). This was evidently one of the limitations of this study. On the other hand, Kabeer (1997:292) proposes that, since measuring through interviews will be subjective, the women's voices that are often missing from policy and academic discussions can offer a valuable tool for understanding how the women actually feel and what can be done for them. Moreover, Carr (2016:7) explains how one of the key considerations for measuring empowerment is to capture a form of change, which she defines as "movement from a marginalised position to one of relatively greater agency and freedom". Through the 40 qualitative semi-structured interviews, I managed to capture the subjectivity of these women and the change, if any, they went through due to the IWCA workshops.

### 3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted, individually, with 39 female coffee farmers and one informative interview with an officer from IWCA. The closed-ended questions were necessary for gathering specific information and to understand the extent of certain problems. The open-ended questions, which provided the actual qualitative and subjective part of this study, had the opportunity to elicit meaningful answers and experiences from the respondents. Berry (2002) explains it well when suggesting that semi-structured open-ended questions allow the subjects to tell what is relevant and important in their lives, rather than the interviewer's preconceived notions of what is important. Considering that the concept of empowerment is highly abstract and contested, this kind of interview allowed me to get a glimpse of the lives, including problems, thoughts and dreams of 39 different women. This is of course advantageous in a way, but it also makes it more difficult to compile the main findings from these interviews. What helped in this situation was that the interview guide was based on three chosen domains, making the questions more concentrated upon the domains.

Half of the interviews were conducted in English with only myself and the respondent in the room and the other half of the interviews were conducted with an interpreter due to lack of English language skills. The interpreter is a coffee farmer herself and in addition she is a chairperson of IWCA in one of the districts where the interviews were conducted. This can have both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, all the women in the district know this woman since firstly, they voted for her, and secondly, most meetings and workshops are often held and organised by her which makes her a trustworthy person when the respondents disclose



private information. On the other hand, considering she is a representative of IWCA, the respondents might have had difficulties in discussing possible criticisms of the workshops.

Finally, the interviews took place in different locations. Some were conducted in the house of the respondent and some were conducted in the house of the interpreter of one of the districts. There is of course a possibility that being in the home of the IWCA chairperson in one of the districts could have implications for the respondents' willingness to share their honest opinions. However, being in the house of the respondents does also entail difficulties, especially when the husband is nearby during the interview. Ideally, the interviews should have taken place in a completely neutral environment, but this was not possible.

## **3.2 Material**

### **3.2.1 Case selection**

Uganda ranks 8<sup>th</sup> among the top coffee producing countries in the world, and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Africa after Ethiopia (McDonnell, 2017). Coffee is the most valuable export commodity in Uganda, after gold, and one in five Ugandans derive most of their income from the coffee production (McDonnell, 2017). 90 % of the coffee is produced by smallholder farmers and 70 % of all agriculture labour, including coffee, is made by women (McDonnell, 2017; Magombe, 2018). At the same time, Uganda is ranked at 162 out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index<sup>2</sup>, categorising the country as “low human development” and it is ranked at 126 out of 160 countries in the Gender Inequality Index<sup>3</sup> (UNDP, 2018). Women in the coffee farming industry in Uganda are a prime example of where gender inequality exists and where empowerment is necessary. As will be discussed more in the findings below, the economic chain in the coffee industry in Uganda appears to be exploited by middle-men driving into villages buying coffee for a very low price from the farmers to then go on and sell it to a much higher price to large enterprises. Getting insights from actual experiences from women's IWCA workshops can yield valuable information of how gender initiatives affect women's empowerment, especially in a vulnerable and highly exploited environment, such as the environment of smallholder female coffee farmers.

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<sup>2</sup> The Human Development Index assesses three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living. These dimensions are in turn measured by life expectancy, mean years of education etc. (UNDP, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> The Gender Inequality Index is measured through three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity (UNDP, 2018).

### 3.2.2 District selection

The two districts chosen, Sironko and Mityana district, are about 300 kilometres from one another, roughly shown in Figure 1 below. The districts differ in what sort of coffee beans they can grow. In Sironko, they grow the renowned Arabica beans. Arabica coffee makes up for about 60–70 % of the world’s coffee production and in Uganda, out of 112 districts that produce coffee, 15 of them produce Arabica only, 88 districts produce Robusta only, and the remaining nine districts produce both Arabica and Robusta (UCDA, 2017). Magombe (2018) notified me that Arabica cannot be found in many districts because it is more difficult to cultivate and grow due to its sensitivity to the environment. It must be grown in humid climate and at higher altitudes, which is why it is mostly found on hillsides. This makes the Arabica more expensive than Robusta. In contrast to Arabica, Robusta is easier to grow because it is not as demanding when it comes to the climate nor when it comes to taking care of the crop. Therefore, Robusta could be grown in the central region of Uganda, where Mityana is placed. Considering that Uganda is a top coffee producing country and a country where the two most used coffee beans exist, it was relevant for me to meet women from each of the producing districts in order to note the differences, if there were any. However, this does not make this paper a comparative study that is based on comparing how IWCA empower the women in the two districts. Rather, the two districts allow for relevant insights on the diverse standard of livings, with Mityana being a city near the capital, and Sironko being surrounded by an environment that mainly allows for agriculture as a way of making a living, seven hours away from the capital. Findings in the comparisons between the districts are primarily discussed in section 4.2.2.



**Figure 1:** Map of Uganda. (FreeVectorMaps, 2018. Own adjustments made).

### 3.2.3 Respondent selection

The respondents from Sironko were identified by representatives from IWCA, Jane Magombe and Rose-Mary Gizamba. The respondents from Mityana were identified by the current board member of IWCA, Rose Kato. The criteria for selection were twofold: 1) to be a coffee farmer, 2) to be a member of IWCA. All participants were contacted prior to the interviews by their respective representatives.

Considering that IWCA chose the respondents, there is a potential bias that can emerge: the women that were chosen could have been women who are somewhat more empowered. Although it is difficult to know this, it can be suggested that women who are members of IWCA are in general perhaps more empowered just by being exposed to and part of such a group.

### 3.3 Ethical Aspects

When conducting semi-structured interviews there are some ethical aspects that must be addressed. To ensure that this study is in line with ethical guidelines, the key principles of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were followed (Wiles, 2013). Before conducting the interview, the respondent was informed about the study and what their role would entail. Consent of recording the interviews was also important to gain. Wiles (2013:37) also acknowledges the issue of ‘capacity to consent’, implying that certain groups such as children often do not have the capacity to consent. For my interviews, all women were above the age of 18 and accordingly had the capacity to consent. Confidentiality refers to the need to keep identifiable information about the respondents private and anonymity is one of the ways to achieve this (Wiles, 2013). Thus, the names of the respondents have all been altered and pseudonyms were chosen randomly by myself. It should be noted that four key people from IWCA have given consent to be named in this paper and thus, their names have not been altered. Jane Magombe, the former president of IWCA, is one of these key people. An in-depth interview was conducted with her that provided important insights and facts about the coffee industry, characteristics of different coffee beans and the IWCA. Due to this, when she is cited, it will be referred to as “(Magombe, 2018)” in order to distinguish the fact-based emphasis of that interview, from the other interviews where the emphasis leans more toward subjective experiences. Those respondents are instead cited with referral to their fictional or real first names and their respective districts.

### 3.4 Reflexivity

It is significant to examine the reflexivity, that is, the process of assessing how oneself as a researcher and the research relationship can be affected by social power such as gender and class (Ortbals and Rincker, 2009). My own socioeconomic, geographical and ethnical positioning inevitably affects this kind of study because these systems of social power are something we cannot free ourselves from (Ortbals and Rincker, 2009). The selection and wording of my interview questions are therefore a representation of my own assumptions and preconceptions. For example, it was important for me to conduct the interview one-by-one if possible in order for the respondents to be able to speak freely to me about problems in the household or with the IWCA, something that I assumed beforehand was going to exist and hence asked them about. Further, my relation to IWCA could have made respondents alter their answers supposing that the workshops might end if they criticised them. These considerations are important to have in mind as they could have shaped this research, even though I attempted to limit the effects by thoroughly explaining my role and their role in the study.

### 3.5 Categorising Data

This paper used a qualitative content analysis in which the transcripts of the interviews were categorised and analysed. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software used for analysing and categorising large amounts of data and texts. Due to the large amount of text derived from the interviews, NVivo was highly useful in this study. All the transcriptions were imported into NVivo and coding of the text occurred in the software. The interview questions were organised to fit the purpose of this study, to look at empowerment in the household, workplace and community (see appendix A for interview guide). The relevant answers were coded to fit into one or more of these requirements: to fit into one of the three levels; to entail a process of empowerment; to entail no process of empowerment or change. Table 1, below, illustrates how the coding agenda could be framed:

Quote	Level	Meaning	Code
“Because now I can grow good coffee and I have managed to know how to harvest coffee seeds and how to dry them. I have become more strong in growing coffee.”	Workplace level	The IWCA workshops have helped her become more confident in growing coffee.	Perceived empowerment in workplace level due to IWCA

**Table 1:** Example of the coding schedule.

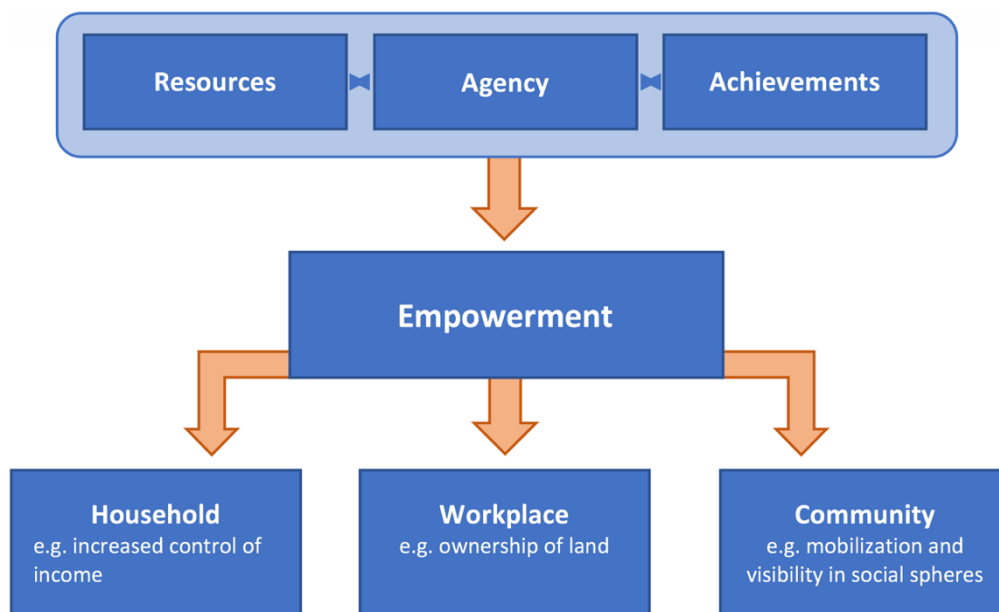
Moreover, the same quote could fit into two levels. For example, the IWCA workshops could have empowered someone both at the workplace level and at the household level. Thereafter, the more quotes and women fitted into a code, the more the code could be analysed and examined. As Drisko and Maschi (2015) argue, description of the patterns and regularities found in the data is the aim of qualitative content analysis. While this should not be confused with statistics, the frequency of a certain pattern can, however, help us understand the latent content of the data.

Finally, one important note to make before moving to the operationalisation is that this paper has decided not to consider the aspects of validity and reliability, due to the multiple definitions and viewpoints by various scholars who argue that those two concepts do not belong to qualitative research versus those who argue that they do. I stand with Golafshani (2003), who argues that these concepts should be redefined in order for qualitative researchers to adopt the concepts. This is because I believe that especially reliability, that is the consistency of the findings with the chosen measuring instrument, is difficult to measure in a qualitative research. Achieving validity and reliability will be affected by my perspective and preconceptions (Golafshani, 2003), which was discussed in the section of reflexivity. Therefore, this study aims to increase its truthfulness using various scholars who have studied empowerment or similar concepts in qualitative settings instead.

### **3.6 Operationalisation**

The process of empowerment in the Ugandan coffee farming industry for women is defined as the expansion in a woman's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied or unknown to them. The process is operationalised as the *strengthening* and/or *awareness* of resources, agency and achievements. The awareness does in some sense imply strengthening because a woman might be aware that she should have equal control over the resources, however, she might not be able to do something about this due to for example existing norms. But what is different now is that she has the expansion of abilities to make the strategic choice whereas before she was not even aware that the choice existed. This obviously challenges the 'achievements' part of the empowerment process, but in a similar manner like Olausson (2017) explains in her study, by including the aspect of achievements, one is hoping to discover subjective accounts of the respondents transforming their resources and agency to desired outcomes in spite of the *awareness*-aspect.

The triangulation of those three components constitute empowerment and it will be examined whether that empowerment can be found at the household, workplace and/or community levels of women in the coffee industry. An illustration of what the operationalisation looks like is found in Figure 2, below. Although measuring empowerment is challenging, as discussed in section 2.4, this paper will look at how the top-down and bottom-up approaches have worked to empower women in coffee farming. The operationalisation of becoming empowered looks different in the three levels and can also overlap. For example, gaining more control over *resources* at the workplace can lead to strengthening of *agency* at the household. When viewing these two separately, they are only components that may affect the ability to exercise choice, but viewed combined, they are indicators of empowerment. This thesis will then examine whether the indicators have led to empowerment in the household, workplace and community through a top-down and bottom-up approach. The top-down approach being IWCA and the bottom-up approach being the women themselves showing willingness to challenge power structures and believing in the empowerment of themselves.



**Figure 2:** Illustration of the empowerment operationalisation.

## 4 Analysis

This chapter will analyse the 40 interviews that took place in the Sironko and Mityana districts and the interview with the IWCA officer in Kampala. The analysis aims to show the main challenges these women face in their household, workplace and community in their process of empowerment. A content analysis of the interviews will be applied by analysing quotes from interviews with the purpose of finding common patterns and trends among the women in order to examine if and how the women have been empowered through top-down and bottom-up approaches. The operationalisation of the study will be applied in this chapter.

The outline of this chapter is as follows. Firstly, the findings on the household level will be analysed. Secondly, the workplace level will be examined, followed by the community level.

### 4.1 Household Level

#### 4.1.1 Money and coffee – a man's commodity?

From the majority of the interviews, it was detected that the husband played a dominant role in the women's lives and it was not necessarily always in a positive manner. One of the primary reasons for this can be clearly summarised by the quote below:

“It is of course the man who takes the money /.../ because according to our tradition, women don't own land. A woman is working on the man's land. You find few homes where the woman owns the land.” (Nabude, Sironko).

This made me realise how much of the problems they are facing are structural, making it more difficult for organisations to change such an issue and in turn, making the empowerment process more challenging. One of the women questioned me when I told her that I want to find out how IWCA is empowering women:

“Because many women, now you live in Kampala, but if you came to our rural areas like this one, many women have coffee but they stop after picking [the] coffee. When it is picked, dried and ready to sell, it becomes a commodity for husbands. Now in that case, how do you empower women?” (Hilda, Mityana).

This woman considered it to be a difficult task to change this culture and particularly to empower women, because that is not something the husband would favour considering that coffee, alongside other cash crops should be in the hands of the husband. She continued:

“There is fear that when women are empowered, they are going to look down upon men. If a woman has money, if you marry a woman who has been to school and she can talk for herself, then a man’s place is lost. It is that fear.” (Hilda, Mityana).

This type of reasoning is also found in Kabeer’s (1999) study on women in the garment industry in Bangladesh. Her data revealed that most of the husbands did not want their wives to work because the women’s wages were seen as disruptive since the woman will be free and “have no reason to obey my wishes” if she has her own income (Kabeer, 1999:270). Kabeer’s interviews with the husbands illustrate that most of them would not want to marry someone who is in a higher position than themselves, especially economically. Why then should they be supportive tools in the process of their wives’ empowerment? It seems that the husbands viewed the empowerment of their wives to be a zero-sum game. Narayan (2005:366) puts it firmly by stating that “if women’s decision-making power within households increases, men’s decreases”. This thought appeared to be present in the Ugandan coffee farming industry as well.

Besides Hilda, there were several other women, including the previous president, the board member and the officer from IWCA, who also pointed out how often men take over when it comes to marketing and selling the coffee. Again, Kabeer’s study can be applied here as she suggested that the male as the breadwinner concept was adopted through the Bangladeshi women handing over their wages to their husbands in respect to the cultural norm that the husband is the head of household (1999:277). The same cultural norm exists in Uganda as most women let their husbands take care of the business aspects of the coffee, in other words, selling the coffee and keeping the earnings. This norm is presumably also interconnected to another norm, namely that men are the ones who should concentrate on the production of cash crops and that women should concentrate on food crops for family consumption (Ellis et al., 2006:29). As Ellis et al. (2006) contend, this has been the case in Uganda. Estimates show that women represent the majority of the labour force in agriculture in Uganda, but as the men are more involved and therefore perhaps, experienced, in cash crops and the business aspects, the women obey and hand over their earnings to the husband (Ellis et al., 2006).



The majority of the women I interviewed did agree, especially after the IWCA workshops, that this type of reasoning is wrong and that they should own those earnings. Arguably, the *awareness* of a problem like this, calls for a strengthened agency in the empowerment process. Malhotra et al. (2002:9) acknowledge the issue of whether agency can amount to empowerment even when no meaningful result can be found in a woman's status, welfare or strategic position. Theoretically, this might be an issue as the authors contest. On the other hand, empirically, this awareness might in the long run lead to positive outcomes that can be linked to the empowerment process. An example might be that these women raise their daughters differently with the knowledge of this issue. Batliwala (cited in Mosedale, 2005:248) recognises that what women need more than anything regarding this problem is information and knowledge that will change their consciousness as well as their self-image. In a context like this, women can only receive information from external agencies, such as IWCA. Women have been led to participate in their own oppression for a long time and Batliwala also admits that this information they gain should encourage action (cited in Mosedale, 2005:248). However, that is easier said than done and what these women can do now is to encourage their own daughters to not participate in the same kind of oppression, underlining the importance of the bottom-up approach in empowerment. To better understand why some women can only be aware and not act, one can relate back to Alsop et al. (2006:13), who argue that the opportunity structures affect the success or failure of the choices women make. In this setting, it is the informal institutions, that is cultural norms, that lead to the failure of these women not making the choice they have gained awareness of.

Although many of the women could not transform their awareness into action, there nevertheless were several women who did perceive a change in the decision-making power at home after the workshops. When asking how her life would look like if she would not have been part of the trainings, one woman from the Sironko district said:

“Before that, husbands were taking our coffee. But now when we got the trainings, we go and talk to them, like my husband, I went to talk to him and he appreciated and accepted. He gave me land to own and that is why my life is good.” (Kakayi, Sironko).

In a like manner, another woman from Mityana told me how happy her husband became when she joined the workshops:

“My husband wants someone who can help him because he is also old like me. So, when I bring this money, and we use it together, he becomes happy. He wants you to contribute while he is also contributing. Our family is more stable now.” (Bridget, Mityana).

In hindsight, after completing all interviews it was noted from both districts that for some women, the decision-making power improved after the trainings. For others, there was never a problem to begin with since they decided everything together anyway. Then there were those who admitted that it is always the husband deciding. It is evidently difficult to draw conclusions from these various answers, however, what could be observed was that the women who mentioned their husbands’ satisfaction with IWCA, almost always mentioned that their husbands could see the earning potential the workshops could bring to the family:

“As I went back to tell my husband [about the trainings] he allowed me to go to the trainings. I told him that we should try to make the coffee very clean, premium coffee, and the chance will come and we will sell it to a higher price. Before, I was not allowed to go.” (Gina, Sironko).

“He felt good because he knew that I was going to be empowered [in the trainings]. He said ‘go to those ladies and see what they are talking, maybe we can sell our coffee at a better price if you joined them.’” (Betty, Mityana).

The above-mentioned quotes are two examples of when the husbands allowed their wife to go to the trainings in order to learn more about coffee and in effect, earn more money to the family. Yet these two women also admitted that their husbands take the earnings made from the coffee. As Gina puts it, she does not own the land as it belongs to her husband, but “there are some pieces of land [they] bought together but he still says it is his land and he decides over the money”. Even if the women perceived that they felt somewhat empowered by the trainings and the higher earnings they could make, in the end, at the household level, the husband had the primary control over the income. In other words, the decision-making power between the husband and wife did not shift. This analysis is also supported by Ellis et al. (2006:35) who have found that women knowing that they will not benefit from the income earned from cash crop productions often withhold their labour. Notably, this would have enormous implications on the family, the economy and most importantly for the purpose of this study, the women’s empowerment. On the bright side, the fact that the women I interviewed are still into the coffee

farming discredits Ellis et al.'s worry that women will continue to withhold their labour. Perhaps this is due to the IWCA workshops and the exposure they receive from them, which will be discussed in the sections on workplace and community below.

To summarise, the former president of IWCA, Jane Magombe (2018), demonstrated it well: “Men generally are not interested in empowering women, but they are decision-makers and they will be the ones to make it happen to allow you to be what you want to be”. This cannot be generalised for all the women I interviewed, but a fair amount. Uncovering the empowerment process at the household level was challenging. Below I will discuss the few cases where the husband acted in a considerably different manner.

#### 4.1.2 The “lucky” and “blessed” ones

There were few women who perceived themselves as “lucky” or “blessed” because their situations with their husbands were different among the majority. Important to note is that their situations were not affected or strengthened by the IWCA workshops, their indications of being empowered in the household took place prior to the workshops.

“I am very glad to mention this because amongst all women, maybe I am very lucky, I am very lucky because we [me and my husband] will sit at the table like you and I are doing right now, and we make some revolutions, we make decisions together.” (Holly, Mityana).

When asked why she thinks her husband listens to her, she replied that “maybe it’s a favour from God”. After she provided some other explanations, she concluded that “he is good to me because I paid my role of being good to him”. This raises questions of whether she actually is lucky, or if it is her role of being good to him that has made him respect her more. Another woman in Mityana who also perceives herself as lucky explained that Christianity and her husband’s upbringing helped him become a good and fair husband. She later on explained that women who have found husbands that do not perceive themselves as superior as most men do, should consider themselves as lucky. According to these women, Christianity and being good are two reasons of why they are in this position compared to the others. It may, however, be problematic to refer to Christianity as the explanation of why these women were the “blessed ones” considering the fact that almost all of the women interviewed in Mityana as well as in

Sironko also mentioned indicators of Christianity being their religion. Similarly, it is difficult to argue that these women have “been good” or better to their husbands compared to the other women as a reason for why they are more empowered.

With caution, it can be summarised that these women who are the lucky ones for finding husbands that have let them become more empowered, compared to many of the others, have become so presumably due to the different norms their families, or more accurately, their husbands, have adopted. Samman and Santos (2009) suggest that intergenerational transmission may play an important role for determinants of agency and empowerment but could not find any real evidence of this in their study. Still, they do contend that women are more likely to affect outcome of their children’s norms (Samman and Santos, 2009:10). Given this information, it can be argued that if a husband, or a wife, has a strong mother with values of gender equality, it might have been transmitted to her children. This can help explain why some husbands have different behaviours and values than others. Above all, this type of behaviour from the husband is crucial for the empowerment process of these women, allowing them more control and decision-making ability, in other words, more agency, in the household.

#### *4.1.2.1 The case of Rose Kato*

The board member of IWCA and chairperson of its Mityana district, Rose Kato, can also be categorised as a “lucky one”. She explains her situation as “I was just lucky, that was God’s blessing. I call it God’s blessing because my friends, they are really suffering with their husbands”. However, Rose Kato is indeed a special case. She grew up with a father who was the first African to own a shop on Kampala road in Kampala, one of the busiest roads in the country, and her grandfather was a prominent coffee farmer. Her parents managed to send her to school and university where she studied corporate marketing. After her studies, she was working for the Cooperative Bank in which after a few years, she was asked to move to Mityana to open up a branch there. She met her husband in Mityana as he was working for the Cooperative Union and together they founded Zigoti Coffee Works Limited in 1992 when Uganda had just liberalised the economy and the monopoly of coffee export was abolished. As Rose explains it herself, they started “from the other end of the coffee chain industry”, implying that without having a coffee farm they opened up a primary processor plant for coffee where they bought coffee from farmers and processed it. Zigoti Coffee Works Limited became the first company to get an export licence for coffee after the liberalisation. The company is today

working with farmers from the eastern, western and central Uganda to process and export coffee to Europe, Asia and America.

At the same time of getting into the coffee industry, Rose Kato's husband opened up a budget hotel in Mityana and the couple also had a company where they distributed sodas. Rose Kato explains that she became empowered from the moment she began working for the bank. However, as her husband died in 2016, she explains that she has now become even more empowered as she is the one dealing with all these enterprises by herself. For her, empowerment is not only about economic resources, but also having the ability to believe in oneself, helping others and achieving one's dreams. Her children have also been exposed to opportunities that many of the other women's children have not. Some of Rose Kato's children are today engineers, businessmen and two received their university degrees in China, speaking fluent Chinese today.

It is easy to assume that Rose Kato is an exception from all these women, however, when listening to her upbringing, it is not exceptionally different from some of the other women. There were women who also completed university but still had not reached the level Rose Kato had. There were also many women who practiced Christianity as a religion and "involved God on my shoulder" as Rose Kato describes. When I asked why she was so different and empowered she explained that she worked harder and that she and her husband started from nothing. Perhaps, her case can thus be explained as a result of hard work. Today, she is responsible for numerous IWCA workshops in Mityana and she has decided to assist these women further by buying their coffee for her exporting company to a higher price. When interviewing the women from Mityana, they all expressed an enormous gratitude towards Rose for helping them in all possible ways and a lot of them explained how they want to be like her one day.

"I always see Rose Kato as my role model. She is now a very famous lady, she is earning her money and all her children are well-off. She is hard-working. With time, I know things will be good for me too." (Holly, Mityana).

One can clearly apply the dimension of power relating to *agency* here, both for Rose Kato but also for the women looking up to Rose. Malhotra et al. (2002:9) explain how agency is the ability to formulate strategic choices, control resources and decisions that affect life outcomes.

Kabeer (2001:21) suggests how it also refers to the capacity to pursue one's goals. For Rose, the dimension of agency is fully encompassed. Since one of her goals is to "become the number one coffee exporter here in Uganda", and seeing how she works and her capability, it can be established that she will probably work very hard to reach that goal. Additionally, Rose has the ability to formulate strategic choices that affect important life choices. In fact, her situation makes it difficult to measure the empowerment process in comparison to the other women. As mentioned previously, measuring empowerment should be context-specific. This implies that behaviours that attribute empowerment in one context can signify norms in another. In the case of Rose, her attributes and behaviours are far different than the other coffee farmers. Being able to go outside the home to join women's groups does not signify empowerment for her while it does for many of the other women. Regardless, one can clearly assert that Rose Kato is empowered, in resources, agency and achievements.

For the women in Mityana, the dimension of agency is somewhat acknowledged thanks to Rose and the IWCA workshops. All women considered Rose to be very hard-working and they are now aiming to work as hard, especially in their coffee farms, in order to be as successful as her. They have the ability to define their goals and act upon them. The main difference between them and Rose in Kabeer's dimensions of power is that Rose appears to have a stronger dimension of *resources* which together with her *agency* help her with her *achievements*, the outcome of choices. In other words, although Rose and IWCA support these women with their agency, their process of empowerment is hindered by their slow change in the dimension of resources and their ability to *control* them. Kabeer (2001:20) mentions how the various human, social or material resources should serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice. For many of these women, their ability to exercise choice is stalled by their husbands as the access to these resources are always conditional on exploitative relationships.

Hanmer and Klugman (2016:240) draw attention to an important distinction; increased access to resources and assets does not necessarily imply strengthened agency for individuals, especially considering different structures of constraints and norms that exist in various families and villages. Hanmer and Klugman's analysis can offer a possible explanation for why even though several women had a similar upbringing as Rose Kato, they did not reach the same outcomes. Hanmer and Klugman's explanation would imply that it is due to the different structures of constraints. In simpler terms, different backgrounds are what can determine if someone will receive enhanced opportunities or not, even if the resources are available and

similar. On a macro-perspective, this is also supported by Jejeebhoy and Sathar's (2001:707-708) study that highlight "the centrality of social institutions of gender within each community /.../ rather than primacy of religion or nationality – in shaping women's autonomy". This can also help explain why the women in Mityana showed more of an autonomy than in Sironko – thanks to the social institution that is Rose Kato and her business. What all of this provides for the study is that increased access to resources has to lead to increased control of the resources for the empowerment process to occur. This control can be hindered or facilitated by family structures and social institutions.

#### 4.1.3 The fate of the children

One common theme among all the women, which made the empowerment process at the household level more challenging, was the children and their needs. Almost all of the women from both districts had more than five children, although in Sironko, the village area, the number of children more often exceeded ten. What the women mainly struggled with was paying for their children's school fees. There was no observed difference between the two districts regarding this, however, more children in Mityana managed to finish university but when it comes to paying the fees for school, both districts struggled. Jane Magombe explained this common trend of not finishing school:

“When we think of the communities where we live, so many people stop in primary level for so many reasons, either not understanding the value of education or poverty. For me, having been educated by my parents I think it is just like a duty to educate my own children and expose them to better opportunities.” (Magombe, 2018).

The first factor Magombe brought up, the value of education, was of great interest. What could be noticed was that those women who had completed university themselves more likely *succeeded* to send their own kids to school and university, even though almost all women, whether they had completed school or not, still *wanted* their kids to finish university. The other factor Magombe pointed out, poverty, was the main indicator as to why these women had struggles of sending their children to school. Not everybody had the capability to send *all* their children to school and consequently, some of the children were awaiting to start school whereas others had to drop out and find other jobs, alternatively to marry off.

The IWCA workshops could not make a significant change regarding the children's issue. Nonetheless, a few of the women could in fact send their children to better schools and some even had the opportunity to send more of their children to schools after the income changed as a result of the IWCA trainings or more importantly in Mityana, thanks to Rose Kato buying their coffee at a higher price. Those who benefited from the IWCA workshops were lucky, however, since some of the advice that IWCA gave the women seemed to be unattainable for many who needed to pay fees instead. For example, in the workshops, one of the suggestions is for the women to not sell the coffee right away but to save it until the season is over because in that case they will be able to sell it to a higher price to the middle-men. Although some families had that possibility, some of the women informed me that in many of the cases, they are desperate to earn money as soon as possible in order to pay for the fees so the children can go to school.

“The local middle-men buy it to a very low price. When you are desperate and in need to pay school fees, you just sell it to them even though it is very little.” (Holly, Mityana).

This illustrates how one aspect of the empowerment process, more specifically the economic one, becomes jeopardised due to the women's role to pay school fees for their children. This example shows how an NGO, such as IWCA, can empower the women who have the option to store the coffee, but it can also be of no help at all to those who cannot afford to save the coffee until the end of the season. Since the children's fees appeared to be what most families and in particular, women, spent their earnings on, this seems to be a crucial theme that NGOs should aim to empower the women in. This is not to argue that empowerment implies higher income. Rather, helping the women to pay for their children's fees could contribute to a long-term empowerment for the children. Samman and Santos (2009:24) offer a large body of evidence which suggests that more women than men demonstrate a higher marginal of tendency to invest in their children. As the two authors also contest, this is not considered to be evidence of empowerment for women, rather for their children.

Nevertheless, my interviews showed how the education of the children is a priority for most of these women and they wanted to “let our children first have their education” (Holly, Mityana) before they could purchase things for themselves or their homes. This shows how important these women perceive their children's education to be, and perhaps, empowering their children will in effect, empower them. As most scholars in the field argue, empowerment should enable



people to live the lives they desire, and the children's education is what most mothers desired in their lives. Alsop et al. (2006:84,86) contend that agency is built by strengthening the individual's endowment of human, social, informational and/or psychological assets and endowment over one asset can affect endowment of another asset. Presumably for these women, endowment of human capital, such as the money to send the kids to school, can affect the endowment of psychological assets, the capacity to aspire and envision alternative options. To explain this in more practical terms, the enhancement of the psychological asset can help the women to think about themselves and not only their family, which definitely serves to enhance agency and thus, the empowerment process at the household level.

#### 4.1.4 Single mothers and widows

What has been discussed so far are struggles women face regarding their husband, their children's future or a combination of both. The kind of person who has managed to avoid both these struggles to a large extent are single mothers. There were of course difficulties to send their kids to school, however, since the single mothers had the possibility to decide where the money should go, the priority were always on their kids' education. The significance of single mothers was one interesting and unexpected finding that I was first afraid to draw conclusions from. However, after discussing this with the single mothers themselves as well as the key people from IWCA, it is possible to suggest that single mothers have the opportunities and as Kabeer mentions, *choices*, to further their empowerment process. Caution must be applied considering that with a relatively small sample size, the findings might not be the same for single mothers with not as much exposure and opportunities as with those I met. Olausson (2017) finds similar findings in her study, that becoming more independent and empowered is more common for widows and single mothers among those who are part of an anti-poverty programme in India.

There was one woman in particular, Mire, who distinguished herself from the other empowered women who I met. Mire divorced her husband and opened up her own agriculture shop with the help of her brother and mother. Yet today, she owns the shop and is selling vegetables, fertilisers, seed-openers and so on. In addition to the shop, she is a nursery operator<sup>4</sup> and she also has some coffee trees and banana plantations. She has been a member of IWCA for only 6

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<sup>4</sup> A nursery operator is a registered farmer who grows coffee seedlings that are provided to them by the government. When these seedlings have grown, the operator sells them back to the government, which in turn, provides the seedlings to coffee farmers who want to grow coffee (Magombe, 2018).

months, however, she is also involved in other community groups such as the church, agriculture groups and women's groups. The reason Mire was different was because she had managed to construct her own house, send her kids to school and have been and is still travelling abroad with some of the associations she is part of. She told me about how in the upcoming months she would be going to Dubai with some of her friends from a women's association for leisure. Upon asking her of why and how she has become so empowered compared to most of the others that I have interviewed, our dialogue proceeded as follows:

Mire: "I have worked harder. I grew up in a family where my mother was a very hard-working woman. We were about 11 children and my father was a primary teacher so the earning was not enough for us, so my mother worked very hard so that we can go to school. She was digging and growing local brew. My background... very humble but hard-working. And I think that also made me hard-working. I went to school, studied law, I got married when I was 23 years to a veterinary doctor, I had three children, but I was not satisfied with my married life. I found it boring. I couldn't exercise my... my potential, what I could do."

Hale: "Do you think that if you were together with your husband today, that you would become this successful?"

Mire: "No, no, no, NO! Because as I am talking now, he is not even successful, how would I have become successful? I have really exceled, alone! When I think of something, I put it into action." (Mire, Mityana).

This answer illustrates the positive change this woman went through after separating her husband. It also supports the intergenerational transmission argument drawn from Samman and Santos since this woman was raised with values that made her realise her self-worth and her potential in life. Moreover, she wanted to become more empowered and wanted to change the power structures. In effect, this might have made it easier for her to divorce her husband. It is evidently difficult to draw a general conclusion from Mire's story that women are more empowered without their husbands because not everybody has her will-power and help that she received from her family. Not everybody has the same experiences with their husbands either. What can be established, though, is that Mire provides an example of how empowerment must come from within oneself as well, which indicates the importance of the bottom-up approach for empowerment. Moreover, another example that contributes to the conclusion that mothers perceive that they feel better without their husbands is exemplified in the following quote:

Agatha: "I am the decision-maker because my husband has many wives, so I take care of my own children."

Hale: "So whenever you earn money, is it your money? He is not taking it?"

Agatha: "He is not, I earn my own money."

Hale: "Do you want him to be more involved in your life and family?"

Agatha: "He never cared for myself or our kids. I feel that I am better off without him."

(Agatha, Mityana).

It can thus be concluded that some of the women feel that they can accomplish more of their full potential without their husband. Not only in their workplace, which will be discussed in the section below, but also in themselves, their children and their household. A study from Grasmuck and Espinal (2000:236-237) discovered when looking at entrepreneurship and gender relations in the Dominican Republic that more male-owned firms rely on the labour of a partner than the female-owned firms. They found that women are more likely to rely on no one in their businesses or workplaces while men see family members as essential for the success of their businesses (Grasmuck and Espinal, 2000:237). This example illustrates that husbands are inclined to use their wives for the success of their businesses whereas women are less inclined to do so. Therefore, it is likely easier for single Ugandan women to succeed in the workplace because there is no husband there to exploit them.

The two above-mentioned single mothers, Mire and Agatha, recognised their own potential for success prior to the IWCA workshops, implying that this was not initiated from the workshops. Nevertheless, the IWCA workshops have only confirmed and supported that women can work on their own and talk for themselves:

Madina: "I took some ideas from the trainings, now I am able to have a voice and say that some things are good and some bad."

Hale: "You didn't have a voice before?"

Madina: "No, I didn't. I got it from the IWCA trainings. I didn't know that a woman can say and talk. Before, we just listened to the man. We couldn't tell them off when they came home drunk with the money from the coffee. But this time, we can."

Hale: "If you had a husband today, do you think he would take your money from the coffee?"

Madina: "No, he can't! Not this time. I have power today and I know what to do."

Hale: "But if you had a husband five years ago, would he take your money then?"

Madina: “Yes! Because by that time, we didn’t know that the woman can talk. Although you are working together, he is your husband, and he was the only head of the family. But this time, I can say ‘no, we have worked together, where is the money? Put the money on the table and we decide together what to do with the money’.” (Madina, Mityana).

Applying the dimensions of power to these findings, resources are accessible because the husband is not there to limit the women through conditional relationships. Presumably, the strong existence of agency, the ability to formulate strategic choices, is what made them divorce their husbands in order to control their resources more fully and hence, affect important life outcomes and achieve what they want to. Since their resources and agency co-exist, it is easier to reach a more desired outcome, underlining their highly developed empowerment process.

In some societies, becoming a widow can make a woman lose all her status. In Uganda, this was not something I noticed. The single mothers discussed above, such as Mire and Agatha, had separated from their husbands and worked hard to achieve what they wanted to on their own. However, there were also several widows who *had* to work hard after their husband’s deaths and who also became somewhat more empowered than those who were still married:

Victoria: “The reason is, I am a single mother, I started with so many children. I wanted to see my children go to school, so I had nobody to help me. So, I had to struggle so much that I achieved what I wanted.”

Hale: “Your struggles helped you become strong?”

Victoria: “Yes, because you go time by time. Each year, you add on [with coffee trees]. You become strong and you have a confidence and as I am a single mother, I have nobody to tell me ‘don’t do this, do this’, it is what I decide and what I think.” (Victoria, Mityana).

The chairperson Rose-Mary of IWCA in the Sironko district had a similar point:

“I have seven children, my husband died. My children are primary teachers, lab technicians, one is in the army, and so on. I educated them! He died before the kids grew up. I had to do it myself. I left everything and focused only on my kids. So, the little I had, I had to give to my kids. /.../ I know that if I go and cry every day, no one is to solve my problems. That is why I was able to do all that I did. I know that there is no one I can wait for that will come and bring me sugar or food or take my children to school. I know

that everything is on me and they are my own children, no one else can support them. But some of these women are waiting for a miracle to happen.” (Rose-Mary, Sironko)

These two quotes illustrate how the widows’ struggles and the realisation that they are on their own, made them work hard to achieve what they wanted for their children and themselves. Again, it is difficult to draw conclusions and argue that without their husbands, they were able to accomplish their achievements. Yet, as Victoria described, it was her struggles being a single mother that made her more empowered. Although Rose-Mary pointed out that some women are just waiting for miracles to happen without doing anything themselves, it is difficult to know if she would have been able to achieve what she has done if her husband was still by her side. Theoretically, it is challenging to understand the link between widows and empowerment considering that it has not, as far as I am aware, been written about in previous research. Even the discussion of single mothers and empowerment has rarely been examined. This is unexpected considering that the husbands were the primary obstacle for women’s empowerment among the women interviewed in this study.

Above all, what is necessary at the household level for the women to become empowered is education and knowledge, not only for the women but for the husbands too. The IWCA officer, Phyllis, highlighted this by arguing that if you do not educate the *whole* family, the husband will not let the wife go to the trainings and the husband will still believe in “the norm that coffee is a man’s crop”.

## **4.2 Workplace Level**

### **4.2.1 The silent producers**

On a workplace level, empowerment processes were clearly visible. Ultimately, IWCA’s main focus is to teach women working in the coffee industry of how to better themselves by selling enhanced and more coffee to a better price.

Magombe (2018) discussed the notion of “silent producers” during our first meeting. The silent producers are women who work in the gardens on a daily basis without an actual purpose or real commitment. In other words, they do not care about how they can improve their coffee production or how they can remove diseases that grow on their trees because they are only there to perform their daily duty. The reason they are called *silent* is because they do not know that

they can do better and be “real coffee farmers”, as Magombe contends. After all, 70 % of all the agriculture labour in Uganda is carried out by women and IWCA is there to empower these women and “push them from being silent producers to become producers with a vision” (Magombe, 2018).

“Why are they working in this garden? Is it just a routine? Or is this a specific dream to achieve something? Empowering means that you open their minds and their understandings, you help them to change their attitudes, their negative attitudes, maybe there are certain actions which they do that are not worth for the coffee.” (Magombe, 2018).

Women are working without knowing their capabilities or choices. To get women out of this unawareness, Alsop et al. (2006:233) indicate how grassroots organisations focus on people’s “power from within” so they can recognise their “power to”. This is what IWCA aims to do. By helping them to build their agency through psychological assets, these women can gain the expansion of ability to make strategic life choices and thus, imagine alternative choices in life (Alsop et al., 2006). It could be argued then that these women have been disempowered as they have been living as silent producers with no aspiration of growing until IWCA stepped in and helped them to enjoy working and growing coffee. What follows is a discussion on the notable differences between the districts in the domain of workplace.

## 4.2.2 Before and after IWCA

### 4.2.2.1 *Sironko*

In Sironko, the factor of poverty had a hampering impact on the progress of IWCA’s empowerment workshops. However, IWCA could at least provide valuable knowledge and foster enthusiasm for the work so the women could step out of their role as silent producers. When asking the women if they felt that their lives have changed in any way since joining the trainings, some of the answers were:

“My life has not improved that much. But what is different now is that there is something I know about coffee that I did not before. Now it gives me some confidence.” (Milly).

“I have come to love coffee now. After the trainings I have even added on more coffee because I love working with it. I feel empowered, because of the trainings I can manage two acres of coffee now.” (Macy).

“I now know more about coffee and I take care of my coffee more. I don’t want anyone to touch my coffee now.” (Juliet).

These women have come to enjoy working with coffee as they have learned how to watch the farm. In other words, it can be suggested that these women no longer are the so-called silent producers, rather, they have developed a newly-found purpose and passion for their work. It is somewhat misleading to call it “newly” considering that one of the differences between the districts Sironko and Mityana is the backgrounds of these women. When asking the women in Sironko how long they have worked with coffee, the reply I received were often laughter because “whether you like it or not in every home we have coffee. Either married or not, you are in coffee” (Rose-Mary). It appeared to be common to get married to a man who had a farm that the wife would take over. Prior to the marriage, it was equally common that the woman would have been involved in the coffee business when working at her parents’ farm. What is different when getting married is that the woman becomes a worker at her husband’s farm. As workers, they rarely own a share of that farm but merely work there, more often than not without the husband’s help – except for when it comes to selling the coffee.

It became clear that in many instances, IWCA did make a change for these women at the workplace. As discussed in the previous section, Kakayi was given a piece of land from her husband after the IWCA workshops that encouraged women to have a discussion with their husbands regarding ownership of land. There are two concerns arising from this. Firstly, it can be questioned whether Kakayi already had a degree of agency and empowerment considering the fact that she had the courage to propose to her husband that she should have her own piece of land. Arguably, proposing such a thing is a big step in the empowerment process. In a like manner, this is an example of an individual acting against the norm as Kabeer suggested. The norm in this case would be that women do not own or co-own land in Uganda (IWCA, 2018). Kakayi would presumably not have asked for land if IWCA did not encourage this, confirming both Kabeer’s argument that with an organisation’s support, acting against the norm is easier and also the significance of combining bottom-up and top-down approaches. Secondly, one can question the actual aspect of ownership. I met several women who lost the land when the

husband died to relatives of the husband, even if the land was the woman's. One example is Rose-Mary, the chairperson of IWCA in the Sironko district. She explained that today she only has a small garden that she bought herself following her husband's death because the garden they owned together was taken by his relatives. At the same time, I was told by several women that if a woman buys her own land, everything about the farm is hers, including the earnings:

Margaret: "What I need mostly is to get my own money. Given the chance and opportunity I would plant my own coffee in my own garden. When you plant coffee in someone else's garden and you nurture it and so on, when it has grown, the husband comes and tell us to quit. They start picking the coffee and yet you are the one who planted the seedlings. Those are the challenges we are facing."

Hale: "So right now because you own the coffee together, he takes the money?"

Margaret: "Yes, he takes the money and you don't have a say over that coffee."

Hale: "If you owned the land, then he wouldn't take the money?"

Margaret: "Exactly, if I buy my own land, that is my personal land and he would respect it and wouldn't have any right over it." (Margaret).

What is evidently necessary for these women to fully advance in the empowerment process is to be able to buy their own land. If that occurs, the women are no longer workers at their husband's farm with no access or control of the income. Instead, buying own land will give them an expansion of ability in making strategic life choices, which hopefully can make these women become independent workers, wives and most importantly, women.

#### *4.2.2.2 Mityana*

The circumstances in Mityana differed to those in Sironko. In Mityana, it was not self-evident that every household owned coffee. Most women who lived in the villages presumably owned coffee, however, I met many women who lived in the city centre who had decided to get into the coffee industry and bought land in the villages. Those women were indeed empowered prior to IWCA as they had the choice to even buy land several kilometres away from their home. One of the women who started working with coffee did so because "my neighbour did it" (Sarah). With that said, in Mityana, there appears to be a choice and mainly, the choice derives from the knowledge that one can make business out of it. Jane Magombe (2018) notified me after being in Sironko that the women in Mityana are more well-off than in Sironko. Although



I found no specific reason of why this might be, I could not help but notice that IWCA had made significant change in Mityana for all the women regarding their workplace:

Holly: “Rose Kato is doing some tremendous work for us. /.../ The trainings teach us how we should look after our coffee and what we should do in case of any pests. In fact, we are very proud of her, she has really changed the community, we are now very okay. We are far different than how we used to be.”

Hale: “What is it that you have learned that has made the most impact in your life?”

Holly: “After learning that coffee is good to our families, after growing enough coffee you can really earn enough for the family. We have been trained to grow more coffee, we have been trained to look after our coffee very well you know. We have been told how to lobby and then to advocate for what we are doing.” (Holly).

Hale: “How would your life look like today if you did not join IWCA?”

Betty: “The education and the knowledge I am getting about coffee, because they are now telling us that instead of selling it, there is another level I need to get to after removing the peel and you start to roast the coffee beans. And I want to reach that level. And I think that by joining IWCA, I am empowered by knowing that I can reach that level.” (Betty).

Arguably, what makes it easier for IWCA to succeed better in Mityana is the fact that most of these women were already passionate about coffee prior to joining IWCA. What has changed following the IWCA workshops is more knowledge and opportunities. Hence, this leads to more empowerment as it opens up prospects of how to improve the farm which, in turn, leads to more opportunities.

Presumably, that is the main reason for why at a workplace level the two districts differ: *opportunities*. Only in the past few months, several of the women received the opportunity to sell their coffee to Rose Kato. This has facilitated the empowerment process for these women because now, they have one less burden to worry about. The reason I call it a burden is due to the problems arising by selling the coffee for these women. Whenever a middle-man would come by, most of the farmers felt an urge to sell it immediately in order to earn a little money fast. This, indeed, stalled the process of these women to improve in their workplace. Being able to go to Rose and sell their coffee there, to a higher price, is a relief for the women. Altogether, being members of IWCA and to have been exposed to someone like Rose Kato have definitely

improved the situation for the women in Mityana. This leads to a second opportunity the women have received from IWCA and Rose: the opportunity to dream more. This is not to say that the women in Sironko did not dream. However, their dreams seemed more aimed at short-term goals in order to survive the year, while on the other hand, the dreams from the women in Mityana, more often than not, involved dreams of achieving long-term goals.

“I wish if I get money, I would like to buy a very big garden and increase my coffee garden. And teach other people so we can share being rich. Together we can move out of poverty.” (Farida).

“To buy more land, so I plant coffee. Two weeks ago, I was thinking of our retirement with my husband. Then we talked about buying a piece of land, maybe bigger than what we have and putting all the coffee so that when we retire we have an income. So, the goal is to buy another piece of land and plant more coffee and so when we reach an old age, we are able to help ourselves not to depend on our children.” (Betty).

“Here in Uganda, there are the men who build the houses. My dream is, I have a plot in town, I want to build a storage home for me. Not for the family, but for me. For myself. That is my dream.” (Victoria).

Hilda: “Dreams? At this age? I want to live happily.”

Hale: “No dreams you wish to achieve?”

Hilda: “Maybe... I don’t know. As I told you, my dream was to come out with a centre where I train young people. Cause I am interested in especially girls. I love working with girls. But I feel I have not been able to help them much. Maybe if I can achieve something in my upcoming years where I can help them, I would be very happy.” (Hilda).

As the quotes illustrate, the dreams vary, however, the common denominator is that the dreams involve some sort of agency. These women seem to be working towards pursuing their dreams and every small step along the way involves, what Kabeer uses as indicators of agency; meaning, motivation and purpose. Whether all women will achieve those dreams or not is according to me irrelevant. However, as discussed previously regarding that *awareness* builds on the aspect of agency, I would argue that so do *dreams*. The ability to set goals for one’s own life affirms Sen’s (1999) argument that agency builds on the capacity to be able to bring about change, individually or collectively. In other words, one shows willingness to change one’s life

situation by setting dreams and aiming towards them. In addition to ability to set goals, dreams also build on the agency through the dimension of well-being. If a woman has a dream she wants to reach, she suddenly has a *purpose* of her work. Accordingly, she is put in a new situation where there is a dream to aim for. This situation of having a purpose and aim will likely increase her well-being. In line with Sen's (1999:375) argument that there is an interlinkage between well-being and agency, one can argue that having dreams also contributes to the building of agency through the dimension of well-being.

Klein (2014) found similar results in Bamako, Mali when discovering that the people's sense of agency, the power within, was a legitimate catalyst for action. By believing in the two words *Dusu*, internal motivation, and *Ka da I yèrè la*, self-efficiency, the people could act against socioeconomic status and informal institutions in order to reach change (Klein, 2014:646). By highlighting the importance of self-belief, Klein's argument contributes to this study when considering the women in Mityana. Most of them have gained this self-belief and psychological dimensions of agency that help them work harder. Klein (2014:650) contends that the psychological dimension of agency provides individuals with a sense of hope and belief, especially by watching others succeed and seeing themselves make small progress. Consequently, it can be argued that without IWCA and Rose Kato, the women in Mityana would not have succeeded as much as they did at the workplace level and by witnessing the success of Rose, they can believe more in themselves. All in all, the women have become more hopeful today knowing they have an organisation backing them.

#### 4.2.3 Money and middle-men

Besides gender norms, improved workshops and more hope, there were factors that contributed negatively to the empowerment process of these women – by delaying the process further at the workplace level. The middle-men, mentioned with discontent by almost all women in their interviews, were the primary obstacle when it comes to selling the coffee. The discontent derived from the fact that the middle-men bought the coffee to a low price. It also appeared to be difficult to bargain and negotiate the price since the middle-men could easily turn to other houses that were desperate to sell. In other words, trying to negotiate with the middle-men was a challenge. Predominantly in the villages, the situation is rough. The price of the coffee depends vastly on how far the farmers have processed their coffee. The cheapest and easiest way is to sell the coffee beans in cups as soon as they are ripe and picked from the trees. This

is the method most women used, particularly in the villages prior to the IWCA workshops. This method was chosen because there was barely any knowledge among the farmers of the other methods. For example, if the farmers processed the coffee cherries before selling, the price would go up (Magombe, 2018). The IWCA workshops taught these kinds of methods to the women which helped them a lot, but only to an extent. One of the things the farmers ought to do when processing the cherries is to place them under the sun to let the cherries dry for at least two weeks (Magombe, 2018). In other words, the *process* of growing coffee is more than just picking cherries from the trees, it takes time and time is not something the women have when money, school fees and children's needs must be addressed urgently. The chairperson of IWCA in Sironko, Rose-Mary, describes this dilemma quite well:

“Do you know that these people sell these cherries in cups, 300 shillings<sup>5</sup>. When you do that, there is nothing that feels good. But it is hard for these women to be patient, especially because of the demands and because they don't have any other enterprises. They just have this coffee so that's why they sell the cherries instead of pulping, drying and maybe be patient and sell it to cooperatives. But because they need money they have to sell to the middle-men. That is the main problem we have. And the middle-men are never patient.” (Rose-Mary, Sironko).

Although the workshops are teaching the women valuable information regarding the industry, it is still difficult for some of the farmers to adopt the new information into action:

Hale: “Since you joined IWCA, can you sell your coffee to a higher price?”

Farida: “These days the price is very low. And what they told us yesterday is that we have to wait and not sell our coffee, we should wait until the price rises. But we cannot do that because we don't have anything else to sell. We have to sell this one to a poor price because it is the only thing we have that can help you raise money for your family. I cannot stay without eating and say ‘let me wait for a better price. I shall eat tomorrow’ when the stomach is telling you ‘please, I want some food’. So you sell and you lose some money because of that.” (Farida, Mityana).

Rose-Mary and Farida explain how waiting is not an option when you are desperate of earning money as soon as possible. This dilemma poses considerable limitations for the empowerment

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<sup>5</sup> 300 Ugandan Shillings correspond to approximately 0,7 Swedish Kronor (XE, 2018).

process at the workplace level. The farmers cannot adopt to the information they have been taught and as a consequence, they cannot sell their coffee to a higher price and accordingly, their empowerment process cannot be fully attained. This is not to argue that economic attainment is the sole and most important contributor to empowerment, but it is crucial to still consider that aspect because it is the aspect most of the women are desperately aiming to achieve. In addition, several authors have concluded in their studies (see Pankaj and Tankha, 2010 and Duflo, 2010) that women as income earners can have positive empowerment effects such as greater decision-making roles in the family and more confidence in their workplace. IWCA aimed to increase the income for the women and their intentions are clearly positive. The negative part is that the intention is not always leading to positive results. This is the case for women who completely depend on their coffee and are in need of money whenever it becomes available. For others, however, the situation did improve. A majority of the women were able to sell their coffee to a higher price after joining IWCA, through in-depth learning of how one should take care of their coffee and the process of selling it to a higher price. This is an achievement and the women did feel empowered in the workplace because of this, as shown in the interviews with Betty and Holly:

Betty: “When I dry the cherries in my courtyard, people used to come to me and say ‘can we get that coffee?’ and I would reply ‘no, I am waiting for it to dry’. If it is not dry, they buy it at a very low price. When it is dry, it is of high price.”

Hale: “Today, you can sell it more expensively, compared to before IWCA?”

Betty: “Yes!” (Betty, Mityana).

“Yes, we could sell. But we would sell to people who were just going around asking if there is coffee they could buy. But we couldn’t find the best people. After joining this group [IWCA], Rose Kato told us that ‘I can come and buy it from you at a very good price’. Then we said okay and realised that the others have been cheating us. So now we just sell it to her.” (Holly, Mityana).

Betty and Holly are two examples of how, thanks to IWCA, their situation at the workplace level could improve. Betty has learned the vital techniques in order to sell it to a higher price whereas Holly has been lucky to have been exposed to Rose Kato and to sell the coffee to her. Apart from working with coffee, Holly is a teacher and thus have other sources of income and Betty is a housewife who only works with coffee but has a husband who also provides for the family. Farida, on the other hand, who did not find the trainings particularly helpful, is the only

income provider as her husband has retired. With this in mind, it can be concluded that the workshops' functionality for women's empowerment at the workplace level seems to be conditional on a precondition: not being completely dependent on the own coffee enterprise, but also having additional sources of income.

### **4.3 Community Level**

#### **4.3.1 Exposure**

The effects of the IWCA trainings at community level seem limited, due to IWCA's aim being primarily elsewhere. Surprisingly, in this domain, several women still showed signs of empowerment. The primary effect the IWCA trainings had on the women in this domain was the *exposure*. Several women pointed this out and explained how the exposure to other women as well as places makes them feel more privileged and empowered:

“When you get exposed to new places, you know by the time I joined we had a conference in Hotel Africana in Kampala and that was the first time I went to Hotel Africana. I had always heard of it but I never had the chance to go there until now, so it was very fun. /.../ I saw various strong characters there, very strong women because of coffee. I also felt empowered by being there. I became stronger, I said, let me move along with my fellows as far as coffee is concerned.” (Holly, Mityana).

“Before IWCA, I was not exposed so much to other women and now when I interact with my friends, even if I have domestic problems, I can share them and they can give me advice.” (Gina, Sironko).

“I would be lagging behind [if I were not part of the trainings] because I would not see certain things. For example, they took us to very good places where I would have never gone. Like who would have taken me there? So that is a chance and a privilege.” (Margaret, Sironko).

The exposure can be linked to empowerment because women can now add onto their human and social resources. Kabeer (2001:20) clarifies that human resources are an individual's knowledge, skills, imagination etc. and social resources derive from claims, obligations and expectations that exist in relationships, networks and connections. In effect, by using these resources individuals are able to improve their situation and life chances in ways that would not

be possible by individual efforts alone. These human and social resources that the women gain from this exposure enable them to think and act larger. In other words, women are now meeting women that are doing the same work, women that have climbed the industry of the same work and women that have just joined the same work. From this networking they can grow to be better farmers and learn about more opportunities or prospects of the industry. This is evidently a great step in the empowerment process at the community level but above all, this empowerment in the community empowers the women in the workplace and household levels to a wide extent as well. Women can get advice on how to solve their domestic problems, as Gina mentioned, which helps them at the household level. In addition, women can get advice on how to improve their farms, or more importantly, they meet someone like Rose Kato who buys their coffee at a higher price. According to Sen (1999:376), outside exposure has educational effects, indicating that being exposed to the world outside the household makes the women's agency as well as voices more effective. Hence, the exposure is vital for the women to grow and also for the women to *feel* good. As far as I noticed, whenever the women told me how they got to visit places they have never been to before, their faces lit up and they felt appreciated and happy. Presumably then, these women have been working so hard for someone or something else, such as their children's education, and for once they themselves are the ones who get to experience the "reward" of their hard work.

#### 4.3.2 The empowered empowering others

Another interesting discovery in the community domain, which relates back to the exposure aspect, is the already empowered women who were in IWCA. With this I do not imply Rose Kato or board members of IWCA who evidently are empowered but some of the female farmers discussed in previous chapters that I presented as somewhat empowered by their fine accomplishments. Victoria and Mire are two of them. Although they also grow coffee trees, they are mainly nursery operators growing coffee seedlings in their farms which they then sell to the government. They have also gained such advanced coffee farming skills that they do not need actual knowledge from IWCA, especially considering that their main work, being a nursery operator, is far different from being an ordinary coffee farmer. The IWCA workshops mainly concentrate on the coffee farming. Yet, they are still active members who enjoy helping out the other members:

Hale: “Do the IWCA teachings about coffee help you in any way even though you are a nursery operator?”

Victoria: “It helps because as a nursery operator I know the problems which the coffee farmers face and as I told you, I have a drug shop for coffee items. But for those people, they don’t really know what to use when they get such a problem and with me, I know what they can use. And when we meet up, I give them a lesson on how to go about the problems.” (Victoria, Mityana).

“I am amongst those ones who are empowered, so you see that our fellow women have got problems and I want to help them become empowered. /.../ and I am helping others also to come on board and be empowered.” (Mire, Mityana).

This can be related back to the point made in section 4.3.1, explaining how the women learn and grow with the help of the stronger and more experienced women. Victoria and Mire are two amongst those more empowered women who are more than willing to help their fellow “colleagues”. Looking from that angle, this really is a community among women in the coffee industry. They acknowledge that empowerment is not a zero-sum game. The empowered women help empowering other women. These empowered women, arguably, become even more empowered at community level; they become mobilised, visible and known as the helpful and informed ones. For them, they have gone through a change of role in their community, which is an indicator of empowerment at the community level.

Moreover, those who were already exposed to the community prior to IWCA also became more confident and empowered following the trainings in the workplace. As Madina (Mityana) told me: “Some people who are growing coffee in our village come to my garden and ask me how I manage to grow this coffee that is looking very good”. A virtuous circle is developed where those who became empowered in their workplace also became empowered in the community and aimed to spread their knowledge further. Their social resources improve, leading to an even more effective agency and hopefully this enhances their achievements further.



## 5 Summary and Concluding Remarks

To summarise the analysis is challenging considering how varied the findings were. There are, however, certain conclusions that can be drawn. There was clear evidence that the empowerment had been enhanced in all three domains, not for all women but for the majority. The domain that was most difficult to discover any changes in was the household level, both from the top-down and bottom-up approaches. This is why that section became the most examined one in order to understand the specific obstacles. The reason why IWCA did not have enormous transformational power at the household level was mainly because that particular level occurs behind closed doors, involving husbands who may not want to make changes in the household. Meanwhile, some of the women did not or could not challenge the power structures for several reasons and hence, empowerment was limited at the household level. The difficulties of becoming empowered in the household had an effect on becoming empowered in the workplace. In some instances, the husband did not allow the women to own land or control the income, making it harder to become empowered in the workplace. Nevertheless, the workplace domain showed visible signs of empowerment among almost all women because of the new knowledge they gained from the workshops. This knowledge, combined with their own willingness and approach towards growing stronger, helped them become empowered at the workplace. There were constraints in the workplace too as a consequence of poverty. If there were no other income-providing members or enterprises within the family, becoming empowered to a large extent in the workplace proved to be difficult. Turning now to the community level, empowerment was unexpectedly discovered thanks to the massive exposure the women received from being members of IWCA. IWCA exposes the women to new people, opportunities and knowledge, but the women themselves also need the “power within” to seize these opportunities to the fullest extent. Women who already were empowered became even more so as they spread their knowledge further and mobilised themselves in the community, indicating that empowerment does not stop when one becomes empowered, but it continues when you aim to empower others as well. This highlights how the top-down and bottom-up approaches should be combined for the empowerment to increase.

What conclusions can then be drawn from this? This thesis aimed to increase the understanding of how women in the coffee farming industry become empowered at household, workplace, and community levels. Drawing mostly on Kabeer’s definition of empowerment, it has been

shown that resources, agency and achievements should all interrelate for empowerment to occur in the three domains although admittedly the achievements-aspect is difficult to reach for many of the women. One cannot undermine the inevitably difficult process of empowerment and while IWCA could in some areas greatly enhance the situation for women, it was nevertheless difficult to make structural change that concerns poverty and in particular, making change on the household level. Since the informal cultural norms are so embedded in the structures of society, it seems far-fetched for organisations to reach significant structural change. This discredits Kabeer's argument that women's organisations can outweigh opportunity structures that hinder women's empowerment. Fortunately, IWCA has still come a long way. As shown, the women have become more aware of the fact that they are subject to gender inequality and that this should change. It has been argued throughout the paper that this awareness strengthens the aspect of agency in the empowerment process. In the short-term, no substantial results can be achieved from only awareness, but one can hope that the awareness leads to change in self-images and choices, so that the achievement-aspect of the empowerment can be attained. Single mothers and widows seemed to reach empowerment more easily because the cultural norms did no longer limit them, though generalising these findings must be done with caution. The link between single mothers, widows and empowerment needs to be examined more closely as this has previously been missing in the literature.

All in all, to answer the research question, women are empowered to a great extent in the domains of workplace and community and a small amount are empowered also in the household. For development agencies such as the UN to reach goals that aim to empower all women and girls, more changes are necessary, especially structural changes. A top-down approach alone is not sufficient to improve the situation for women working in agriculture and coffee farming. The women must themselves also be aware of the inequality and show willingness to challenge the power structures whenever possible, especially considering that top-down approaches cannot impose change in private homes without the consent of the household. Spreading knowledge is thus vital, not only to the women, but also their husbands who are the underlying hinders for the empowerment process of the women. Further research should focus on how to incorporate the husbands in order to make the empowerment strategies as effective as possible.

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## Interviews

The interviews in Sironko took place between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2018 and the interviews in Mityana took place between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2018. The interview with the officer in Kampala took place the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 2018.

Name	Age	Marital status	District	Interpreter
Rose-Mary Gizamba	-	Widowed	Sironko	No
Jane Magombe	-	Widowed	Sironko	No
Rose Kato	62	Widowed	Mityana	No
Phyllis Chesimol	-	-	Kampala	No

Fictional name	Age	Marital status	District	Interpreter
Neumbe	48	Married	Sironko	Yes
Nabude	43	Married	Sironko	Yes
Ester	55	Married	Sironko	Yes
Beatrice	52	Married	Sironko	Yes

Namisi	-	Married	Sironko	No
Hadijja	47	Married	Sironko	Yes
Juliet	51	Married	Sironko	No
Macy	-	Married	Sironko	No
Katie	42	Married	Sironko	Yes
Milly	48	Married	Sironko	Yes
Kakayi	49	Married	Sironko	Yes
Nurwenga	65	Divorced	Sironko	No
Grace	58	Divorced	Sironko	Yes
Faith	49	Married	Sironko	No
Margaret	46	Married	Sironko	Yes
Gina	40	Married	Sironko	Yes
Leah	-	Widowed	Sironko	No
Holly	41	Married	Mityana	No
Betty	33	Married	Mityana	No
Farida	64	Married	Mityana	Yes
Florence	57	Widowed	Mityana	No
Victoria	53	Widowed	Mityana	No
Mire	56	Divorced	Mityana	No
Hilda	74	Married	Mityana	No
Lilly	-	Married	Mityana	Yes
Madina	56	Divorced	Mityana	No
Sarah	50	Widowed	Mityana	No
Agatha	42	Married	Mityana	Yes
Alice	60	Widowed	Mityana	Yes
Bridget	63	Married	Mityana	Yes
Cynthia	-	Married	Mityana	Yes
Nakato	68	Widowed	Mityana	Yes
Sheila	64	Widowed	Mityana	Yes
Susan	37	Married	Mityana	No
Zamira	-	Married	Mityana	Yes
Anitha	-	Married	Mityana	No

## Appendix

### A – Interview guide

Introductory questions
1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?

Household level questions	Prepared follow-up questions
3. Who is in your family?	a. Husband, children?
4. Do your children attend school?	a. Do you want your children to attend school? b. Do you have the option to send all your children to school?
5. What does your husband do for a living?	
6. How is the decision-making power in your household?	a. Grocery shopping, buying clothes, selling coffee etc. b. Do you want the decision-making power to change? c. Are you able to change it? d. Do you wish to have more control over the household income? If so, what would you prioritise more than your husband does not?
7. Are you financially able to go and see a doctor if needed?	

Workplace level questions	Prepared follow-up questions
8. For how long have you worked with coffee?	
9. Was it by your own choice? And why do you work here?	a. Do you have any other workplaces?
10. Do <i>you</i> own this farm?	
11. Do you like working with coffee?	a. Why/why not?
12. Do you have a good knowledge of how to take care of your farm?	
13. Do you have all the tools necessary for farming?	
14. When did you start with the IWCA trainings?	
15. Who do you sell your coffee to?	a. Do you want this to change?
16. How much coffee are you able to sell?	a. Are you satisfied with this amount? Do you reckon you get the money you deserve for this coffee?
17. Has this amount and cost changed after you joined the IWCA trainings?	

18. What have you learned in the trainings that has made the most impact in your life?	
19. Do you want your kids to ever inherit the farm and work with coffee farming in the future or do you want them to work with other jobs?	a. Why/why not?
20. What do you wish to achieve by working with coffee?	

Community level questions	Prepared follow-up questions
21. How is your social life outside your home?	a. Are you able to and do you see any friends when you want to?
22. Do you regularly vote in elections?	
23. Do you have a say in who governs your community?	a. Do you vote in local elections?
24. Are you able to go somewhere/to someone if you need any economic or social help/support?	a. Where? b. Do you want to be able to go somewhere for help?
25. Is there anything you wish this community had which could make your life easier?	a. Any support groups? Churches? Banks?
26. If you had the opportunity to choose to either live in the city, have a job there and leave the village or to stay here in the village, what would you choose?	

Questions on 'achievements'	Prepared follow-up questions
27. Do you feel more <i>empowered</i> since you joined the trainings?	a. Can you send more children to school? b. Can you go to the doctors more often? c. Can you buy the necessary items you need for your household? Such as food, clothes? d. Can you sell your coffee to a higher price? e. Can you decide more in the household regarding how to spend the income? f. Do you have more of a voice/influence in political matters than before?
28. Do you get any recognition and praise for what you do in the household, workwise and community-wise? By either husband, friends, family?	
29. How would your life look like if you were not part of the trainings? Do you have any concrete examples?	a. Is there anything you miss from the workshops? More trainings on farming, family etc.?
30. Do you ever create goals for yourself to reach and accomplish in your life, and if so, do you have the possibility and confidence to reach the goals?	a. What goals/dreams do you have?