

**THE ROLE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ON WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT IN ESWATINI.**

**A CASE STUDY OF THE LOWER USUTHU DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (LUSIP)
PHASE 1**

by

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DECLARATION

The role of rural development projects on women empowerment in Eswatini. A case study of the Lower Usuthu Development Project (LUSIP) phase 1

I, **Kunene Nomcebo A.**, student number 2017295235 declare that the dissertation I herewith submit for the master's degree in Development Studies at the Centre of Development Support, University of the Free State, South Africa, is my own work. I also confirm that this work has never been submitted in another institution for any qualification.

I am aware that plagiarism, which is using someone's' work and presenting it as my own, without permission and acknowledging the source, is an academic offense and punishable. I declare that the work presented here has made references to ideas from other authors, but such has been credited to the sources accordingly.



Kunene Nomcebo A.

29 November 2020

DEDICATION

To my late mother, Sithobile A. Mtshali-Kunene, who always believed I could achieve that which I dreamt of. I will be forever grateful for the sacrifices you made.

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ABSTRACT

In developing countries, three quarters of poor people live in rural areas. Their livelihoods are fully dependent on agriculture (Ganiee, 2012; Moyo & Francis, 2010). In a bid to develop rural areas, International non-governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and governments have implemented rural development projects. This has been done to conclusively improve opportunities, empower rural communities, especially women (as they constitute a majority of the rural population), and wellbeing of rural people (Sadeghi, Arezoumandan, & Nejati, 2015). In Africa, women are not only an important resource, providing labour force for agriculture, but also play a key role in household nutrition and food security, which aids household income and wellbeing (Lahmadi, Bengougua, Maaoui, Zeguerrou, Belhamra, & Halis, 2016). Although women are the backbone of rural development, they are hardly positioned at the centre of policy and programme development agendas, and they do not have access to power, credit, assets, facilities, and other services; thus, there is a need to empower them (Lahmadi *et al.*, 2016; Sadeghi *et al.*, 2015). Women in Eswatini still face barriers and challenges that hinder their complete involvement in all aspects of developmental progression. This scenario is aggravated by certain Swazi customs and laws, which refuse women the right both to having access to finances and to owning land (United Nations, 2017). Empowering women is a fundamental development objective (O'Hara & Clement, 2018), and is currently one of the many concepts adopted globally to eradicate inequities and ensure gender equality (Guagliariello, Hamdy, Trisorio Liuzzi, & Ciannamea, 2015). There is growing consensus that development projects empower women; however, there is limited research on the role of the empowerment of women and rural development initiatives, specifically in Eswatini.

The aim of the study was to explore the role of rural development projects on women empowerment with a focus on the Lower Usuthu Development Project (LUSIP), Phase 1. Guiding the study are the following the following objectives:

- a) To establish women's perceptions on their empowerment in Eswatini;
- b) To identify factors that affect participation of women in the LUSIP Phase 1 project;

- c) To explore the improvements realised by women as a result of the LUSIP project;
- d) To determine the resources that enable women empowerment in the LUSIP project; and
- e) To ascertain the aspirations of women participants of the LUSIP project.

A qualitative approach was employed for the study, and empirical data were obtained through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews with 35 woman shareholders (17 board members and 18 ordinary shareholders), five key informants, and two Nominal Group Technique (NGT) exercises, which were conducted with the same in-depth interview participants. Purposive sampling was used due to the interest in respondents who had in-depth knowledge of the subject under study. The interview schedules were pre-tested for rigor and to increase validity.

For the conceptual framework, the study employed elements of the Capability Approach, Kabeer's resource-agency-achievement framework, and Longwe's Women Empowerment framework.

Analysis of data was done through thematic analysis and coding. The main findings of the study show that women's perception of their empowerment leans toward the economic dimension. The study's results indicate that women participate in meetings through attendance and speaking up during meetings. This can be largely attributed to the fact that they are always at home and, where participation is affected, it normally relates to reproductive duties.

Even though the LUSIP project did not specifically target women, and did not have an objective specifically focused on women empowerment, results of this exploratory study showed that the project has furthered women empowerment in the study area. Women's narratives show that the LUSIP project has improved the wellbeing of women and their families through contributions towards food security, improved shelter, and education for children. The LUSIP project also contributed to financial inclusion of the respondents, as 77% (27 out of 35) of the respondents had bank accounts as a result of the project. In terms of household decision-making, mixed results were observed for the married respondents. Some respondents saw a growth in their involvement in decision-making, especially regarding the welfare of their children and their economic contribution. Some form of consultation, which was

regarded as joint decision-making by the respondents, was observed. Some respondents (n = 3), however, claimed that their husbands were the sole decision-makers, except with small purchases such as food, clothing, and other minor household items. Results showed respondents who were single (who were never married, widowed, or separated) appeared more empowered in decision-making (n = 16) than those in a union. This may be ascribed to these women being household heads and hence making the household decisions on their own. Moreover, the results of the study revealed that respondents had complete control over income they generated on their own as well as sitting allowance in board meetings.

The LUSIP Project has also provided women with opportunities such as employment, starting income-generating projects, networking, and exposure to other farmer companies (FCs), which resulted in cross pollination of best practices (n = 11). Networking and exposure to other FCs was more common with respondents who were board members. Results also suggested that good behaviour, good interpersonal skills, education, and wisdom are some of the personal endowments that enable women to be elected into the FC board. Funds, level of education, agency, as well as spousal and familial support determine whether women will convert the opportunities provided by the LUSIP project to their valued beings and doings.

On the political front, however, the results of the study were muted. Even though respondents were able to attend meetings, speak, and / or vote, and thought seventeen of them were board members of a decision-making body, there was no spill over into political participation, even for respondents who have served on the board for more than two terms (n = 10). This is in contrast with the World Bank's (2017) and Nwagboso and Duke's (2012) assertion that meaningful participation of women in rural development projects results in increased participation of women in formal politics.

The study further showed that the project may also lead to disempowerment, in that these women's spouses shift the burden of household care to the women once they become shareholders (n = 5). Moreover, most women obtained jobs such as weeding, which was an extension of women's traditional roles, and which deprived them of acquiring new skills

Based on the findings of the study, rural development projects using the LUSIP model should consider incorporating non-farm business enterprises, since women still do not

own land. Where there is land redistribution before inception of the project, government should consider giving the land title to the women to safeguard against the proceeds being taken by relatives (husbands), mainly because women do not own land, especially under Swazi Nation Land (SNL). Land is an economic resource and having access to it would enhance women's participation in the economy.

The study contributes to the evolving body of knowledge aimed at understanding the role of rural development projects on women empowerment.

Keywords: *rural development projects, women empowerment, capability approach*

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ACRONYMS

AU	African Union
BNA	Basic Needs Approach
CA	Capability Approach
CDD	Community-driven development
CANGO	Coordinating Assembly of Non-governmental Organisations
ESRA	Economic and Social Reform Agenda
ESWADE	Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise
GAD	Gender and Development
HDI	Human Development Index
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institution
KDDP	Komati Downstream Development Project
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NGT	Nominal group techniques
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDA	Project Development Area
PRSAP	Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Programme
RBA	Rights Based Approach
SLF	Sustainable Livelihood Approach
SNL	Swazi Nation Land
SWADE	Swaziland Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise
SWEET	Swaziland Women's Economic Empowerment Trust

UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WAD	Women and Development
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index
WEF	Women Empowerment Framework
WFP	World Food Programme
WID	Women in Development

1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Development co-operation has been in existence for the past five decades; however, in developing countries, much of the population still live in abject poverty, especially in rural areas. As a result, some scholars have been of the view that development is an absolute phenomenon (Frediani, 2010).

In developing countries, rural areas are known to house three quarters of poor people, whose livelihoods are fully reliant on agriculture. Rural areas in the developing world are characterised by low income levels, poverty, illiteracy, as well as poor nutrition and health status (Ganiee, 2012; Moyo & Francis, 2010).

In a bid to develop rural areas, developing countries have undertaken rural development projects to significantly improve opportunities for and wellbeing of rural people. Rural development is viewed as the most powerful tool for the mitigation of poverty, and results in broad-based economic and social development (IFAD, 2016a; Ganiee, 2012). Not only are agriculture and economic development aspects employed in this transformation, but environmental, social, and human development objectives are as well (IFAD, 2016a). Ezeibe, Diogu, Eze, Chiaha, and Nwokenna (2013) postulate that a link exists between agricultural and rural development. Agricultural development is viewed as a strategy which accelerates the processes of rural development; productivity and agriculture development dominate most rural development projects or programmes (Akpan, 2015).

International non-governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and governments have undertaken to develop rural areas. This has been done through establishing rural development projects in a bid to empower rural communities, especially rural women, as they constitute a majority of the third world countries (Sadeghi, Arezoumandan, & Nejati, 2015). Supporting this view are Makufa, Kisyombe, Miller, and Barkey (2017) as well as Singh, Masuku, and Thwala (2015), who posit that rural women not only form a larger part of the rural population, but also participate in larger numbers in broader community development initiatives. This makes the role of women in development a crucial factor and, thus, projects cannot achieve their targets without the participation and involvement of women.

The international development community expresses increasing consensus that gender equality and the empowerment of women are important, not only as a basic human right, but also because of their perceived contribution to a range of socioeconomic development goals and improved child wellbeing outcomes (Johnson, Balagamwala, Pinkstaff, Theis, Meizen-Dick, & Quisumbing, 2018; Johnson, Balagamwala, Pinkstaff, Theis, Meizen-Dick, & Quisumbing, 2017; Malapit & Quisumbing, 2015; Sraboni, Malapit, Quisumbing, & Ahmed, 2014).

In Africa, women are an important resource, as they provide labour force for agriculture production (Lahmadi, Bengougua, Maaoui, Zeguerrou, Belhamra, & Halis, 2016). They mostly dominate informal economic activities (Singh *et al.*, 2015). Rural women are integral to ensuring nutrition and household food, as well as improving household wellbeing and income. Although women are the backbone of rural development, women are hardly positioned at the centre of policy and programme development agenda. Lahmadi *et al.* (2016) and Sadeghi *et al.* (2015) argue that, though rural women contribute significantly to rural development, they are not afforded access to power, credit, facilities, and other services, and consequently need to be empowered.

Empowerment is viewed as the enlargement of people's capabilities to make strategic life choices, particularly in a context in which this ability had been previously denied to them (Kabeer, 1999). Women are disempowered in most aspects of their lives; hence, there has been a global move to empower them. If development entails empowerment and expanding people's choices (UNDP, 2016; Alkire, 2002; 2010) the question becomes whether rural development projects implemented in Eswatini do empower rural people, especially women. The study focused on women empowerment and experiences from the Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project (LUSIP) Phase 1 Project in Siphofaneni, Eswatini, a project implemented by Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (ESWADE). The study focuses on women only, because women's rights and opportunities in all facets of life have been long obscured and has resulted to low women empowerment outcomes in Eswatini.

ESWADE is a government parastatal that was established in 1999 to empower rural communities so as to improve their quality of life through development projects and other enterprises. The parastatal has been able to implement two multimillion projects, namely the Komati Downstream Development Project (KDDP) and the Lower Usuthu

Smallholder Irrigation Project (LUSIP). These projects target both men and women. The study will focus on LUSIP, a project which started in 2001. It was only in 2011 that the gender policy was adopted by ESWADE; therefore, some gender-related activities were mainstreamed into the project.

1.2 Background of Eswatini

Formerly known as the kingdom of Swaziland, the kingdom of Eswatini is a landlocked country found in the sub-Saharan region of Africa. The country shares boundaries with South Africa and Mozambique, and is the only remaining absolute monarchy in Africa. Eswatini has a total land area of 17 364 km², and comprises four directorial regions, namely Hhohho, Manzini, Lubombo, and Shiselweni. The country is divided into 59 constituencies and has a population of 1 093 028 people; roughly 77% of these people live in rural areas (WHO, 2014). Inequality is high in the country, as 40% of wealth in the country is held by the richest 10%, while the poorest 40% of the population hold only about 11,5% of the wealth (UNDP, 2019). In 2016, the Gross National Income per capita was \$ 10,020 and \$ 5,078 for males and females respectively (UNDP, 2016) while in 2018, it was at \$ 11,798 and \$ 7,030 for males and females respectively (UNDP, 2019). Women in Eswatini are treated as minors and are under male guardianship – before marriage, a father, and, after marriage, a husband. Women in Eswatini still face barriers and challenges that hinder their full participation in all aspects of the development process (Mabundza, Dlamini, & Nkambule, 2014). This scenario is aggravated by certain Swazi customs and laws, which refuse women the right both to having access to finances and to owning land (Mabundza *et al.*, 2014 Fiona, 2015; United Nations, 2017).

Sugarcane production has remained the predominant economic activity in Eswatini, and the crop is known as “Swazi gold”. Smallholder farmers have been incorporated into the industry. Farmers in the project development areas consolidated their individual land and formed commercial irrigated sugarcane business enterprises or farmers’ cooperatives (Terry & Ogg, 2017). These are also known as farmer companies (FCs). The consolidation of the individual land by all the farmers ensured that people in the project area benefited equally, regardless of whether they previously did not own any piece of land.

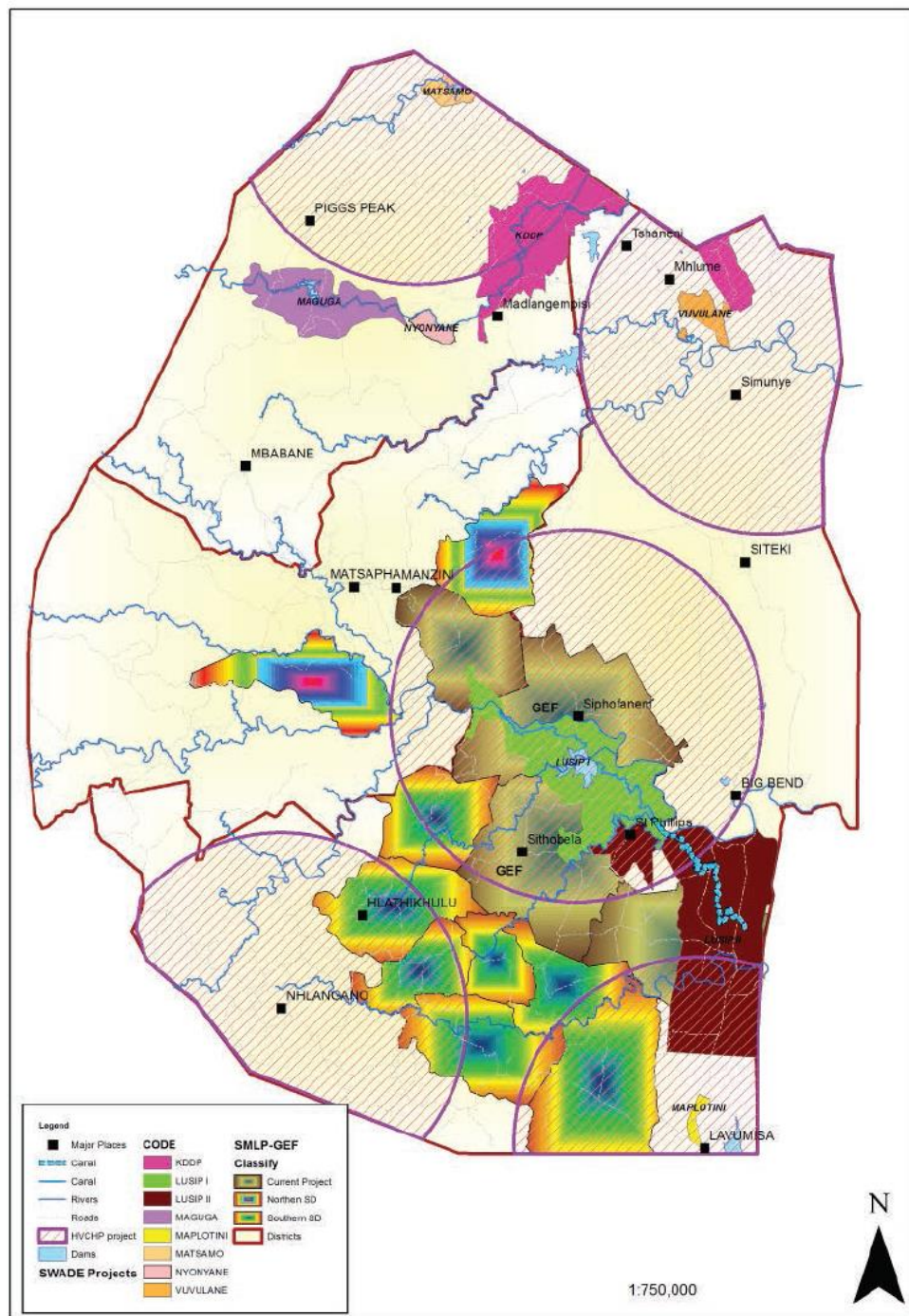
1.3 Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (ESWADE)

ESWADE was established to “provide social and technical elements to smallholder sugarcane farmers in SNL” (Terry *et al.*, 2017). Development of the community through empowerment and information sharing, as well as financial and technical advice to help farmers grow from subsistence to commercial farming, underpinned the establishment of the organisation (Terry *et al.*, 2017). ESWADE was further tasked with the creation of autonomous business units that would aid in assuaging poverty in the Lubombo region, as most of the farmers lived below the poverty line before the LUSIP project (Maziya, 2019).

1.3.1 Background of Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project (LUSIP)

As a development project, the Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project (LUSIP) was introduced by the Government of Eswatini along with bilateral and multi-lateral patron agencies, such as IFAD (SWADE, 2010). Though an agricultural project, the LUSIP project is classified by IFAD (2016b) as a rural development project. As shown in Figure 1.1 below, the project is located along the west bank of the lower Usuthu River, between Siphofaneni and Big Bend, in the Lowveld of Eswatini.

Figure 1.1: Map of Eswatini Showing the Study Area (LUSIP 1 in Green)



Source: SWADE, 2017

IFAD (2016a) is of the view that LUSIP was designed to support the government of Eswatini's National Development Strategy. It is also aligned to the IFAD development strategy and Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Programme (PRSAP). Its main objectives are:

- a) The advancement of a more equitable growth pattern, where the poor are encouraged to participate through opportunity expansion;
- b) An improvement in the quality of life of those most at risk, affording social protection for the most vulnerable and poor; and
- c) An improvement in government institutions' strategy to enhance the effect of policies for poverty alleviation and reduction.

Community participation is a fundamental aspect of the community-driven development (CDD) project approach, which underpins the implementation of LUSIP project. This is because the project uses the Community Development Appraisal and Action (CDAA) framework (Dlamini, Rowshon, Makhanya, & Sithole, 2014). This enables bottom-up planning and decision-making, and raises local consciousness and confidence. The attributes of this approach pertain to the transformation of community attitudes and building of community members' skills (technical and leadership). This is because the community is seen as the main actor and driver of the entire development processes.

LUSIP's primary objective is to enhance the standard of living of project participants through poverty alleviation. Other objectives include transforming the local rural economy from that of subsistence farming to that of equitable involvement in sustainable commercial farming driven by rigorous irrigated production, as well as expanding the availability of portable water and sanitation for scheme members. The project was also executed in order for farmers to ensure environmental protection, to address and improve standards of health in the project area, and to ensure the production of high value crops. Another result of the project was an envisaged indirect benefit of employment creation and the establishment of enterprises (IFAD, 2016a).

Each smallholder family is allocated an irrigated land holding of 2,5 hectares. These farmers are organised into farmer companies (FCs) and become shareholders through donating their land for commercial production of sugar cane and other crops. FCs are legally registered and are governed by the Board of Directors, which consists of seven democratically elected members. Landless, widowed, and child-headed households participate in the LUSIP project at initiation. In 2011, ESWADE adopted the gender policy to guide gender mainstreaming in all sectors of the project to improve gender issues within the project area. Gender mainstreaming is done to ensure deliberate,

meaningful inclusion of women in the development processes. Gender mainstreaming in the LUSIP project was done in sectors such as chieftdom development planning, financial empowerment, life sustenance, and engineering and water management (IFAD, 2016b). The strategy also focused on promotion of gender equity, equality, and mobilising for social transformation on gender issues (IFAD, 2016b). Furthermore, monitoring equal participation and access by both women and men to development is another objective of the ESWADE gender policy. Community dialogues on gender, as well as training on socio-economic rights for transformation have been conducted to assist the community in identifying gender gaps, so as to enhance meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes.

According to the LUSIP census report, the project was initiated in 2002 and comprises a population of 17 611 people. This includes seven chiefdoms and is should benefit as many as 2 600 farmers (SWADE, [s.a.]). Of all households in the area, as much as 26% are headed by women (SWADE, [s.a.]). Women constitute 70% of the Project Development Area's (PDA) population, and carry out most of the agricultural production. However, they continue to be disadvantaged by having no or limited access to the means of production (IFAD, 2016b). Women can only access land by proxy through males, such as sons, fathers, husbands, and other male relatives (IFAD, 2016b). This is despite the fact that the Constitution now includes a provision stating that women can own land through the *khonta* system in the SNL (Stewart & Dlamini, 2019).

Siphofaneni is a rural area and the land is largely Swazi Nation Land (SNL). The SNL is land that is held in 'trust for the Swazi nation, and is controlled by the king through the chiefs. Terry *et al.* (2017) posits that SNL is accessed through inheritance or through the *kukhonta* system (which is through paying allegiance to the chief). The authors further state that land under SNL cannot be sold, bought, leased, or mortgaged. Women in Eswatini cannot access SNL due to the patrilineal inheritance of land which denies women primary land rights (Vilane & Madonsela, 1996; Ndzimandze & Mhlongo, 2019). In most parts of the country, rural women can only obtain land through a male relative or a son, despite the fact that the constitution of the country allows women to access land through the *kukhonta* system (Tabibian, 1985; Daly, 2001 Mabundza *et.al.*, 2014; Fiona, 2015; Ndzimandze & Mhlongo, 2019). This has an impact on women empowerment as it affects their access to

productive assets. LUSIP was chosen for the study as it is considered one of the most successful rural development projects in the Siphofaneni (Maziya, 2019); further, the project does not only focus on wealth generation, but also addressing deep seated issues of poverty (Terry *et al.*, 2017).

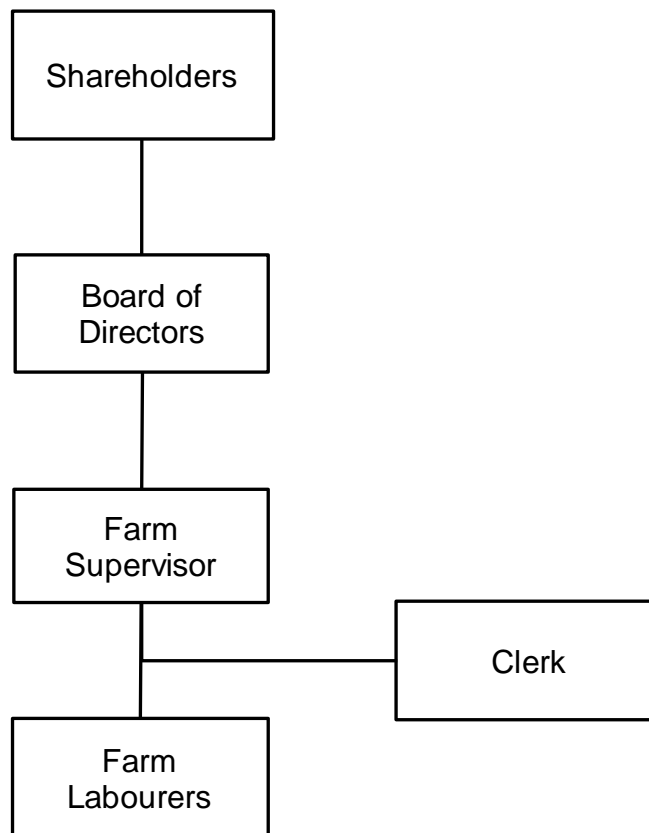
1.3.2 Operation of the Farmer Companies (FCs) under the LUSIP Project

The LUSIP project is based on the principle of community participation. Each household in the LUSIP Project Development Area (PDA) has an equal opportunity under the LUSIP model to be represented as shareholders. Operations of the FC are practically run by the shareholders. The roles the shareholders include the following:

- a) Budget approval;
- b) Approval of business plan;
- c) Attending of general meetings;
- d) Electing the Board of Directors;
- e) Standing for election into the Board of Directors;
- f) Attending business management training; and
- g) Obtaining dividends.

The Board of Directors is strictly elected from the shareholders and priority is given to farm labourers, shareholders or the members of the households that they represent, or community members. The farm supervisor and clerk can be sourced outside the FC if the skill is not available in the FC or the households they represent. Figure 1.2 shows the organisational structure of FCs.

Figure 1.2: Organisational Structure of FC



Source: Field work, 2020

1.4 Problem Statement

Eswatini is patriarchal society; the male-controlled functioning of the country as a whole, places women in a subordinate position that can lead to disempowerment. Women are treated as dependants of their fathers or husbands (Mthembu & Lunga, 2020). Pervasive structural disparities have led to gender inequalities that disadvantage women. Eswatini's constitutional legal framework and the traditional and customary laws provide women with limited protection, evident in the limited access to economic opportunities, productive assets and education (World Food Programme [WFP], 2019). WFP (2019) further states that 50% women between the ages 15 to 24 years are unemployed and women headed households are moreover, disproportionately affected by poverty and food insecurity.

Mthembu and Lunga (2020) claim that, due to the patriarchal nature of Eswatini, women most often do not hold political office, despite the fact that they outnumber men in the country.

The Human Rights Watch (2020) also espouses this view of female under-representation in decision-making and leadership positions, both in the private and public sectors. For example, during the 2013 parliamentary elections, only one out of 55 democratically elected parliamentarians was a woman; in the 2018 national elections, two out of 59 candidates elected were women. This is despite a campaign that ran just before the national elections, known as “*votela make*”, translated as “vote for a woman”, as well as the existence of the Election of Women Act of 2018 (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The pattern is mirrored in other employment sectors, for example judiciary services. This clearly indicates minimal women participation at decision-making levels in the country.

In his study of the participation of women in the *Sibaya*, a public sphere in Eswatini which was formerly reserved for men and has since been opened for women, Mthembu (2018), found that women faced challenges in participating, as a multitude of rules prohibit the free participation of women. Moreover, interviews with some women revealed that this public sphere was restrictive and intimidating. This public sphere provides a platform for the whole nation to discuss development issues pertaining to the country. Most women could not participate; hence, women’s voices were not well represented, even though they were raising pertinent issues regarding welfare, education, gender-based violence, land access, and water and electricity provision (Mthembu, 2018). It could be argued, therefore, that the marginalisation of women in mainstream politics may be a pattern replicated in other sectors, including rural development projects.

1.5 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study sought to explore the role of rural development projects on women empowerment. The study investigated whether the interventions implemented the by LUSIP Phase 1 project, whose principle rest on community empowerment, does, in fact, empower women.

The objectives of the study were to:

- a) Establish women's perceptions on their empowerment in Eswatini;
- b) Identify factors that affect participation of women in the LUSIP Phase 1 project;
- c) Explore the improvements realised by women as a result of the LUSIP project;
- d) Determine the resources that enable women empowerment in the LUSIP project; and
- e) Ascertain the aspirations of women participants of the LUSIP project.

1.6 Research Questions

The key question in this research is whether or not rural development projects empower women. Guiding the study are the following questions:

- a) What are the women's perceptions on women empowerment?
- b) What are the factors that affect participation of women in the LUSIP Phase 1 project?
- c) What are the improvements that have been realised by women as a result of the LUSIP project?
- d) What are the existing pre-conditions (resources) for women empowerment under the LUSIP project?
- e) What are the aspirations of women participants of the LUSIP project?

1.7 Justification of the Study

A number of studies on LUSIP Phase 1 have been conducted; however, none of the studies investigated women empowerment. Moreover, there has been little systemic work on the mechanism by which intercessions can enhance the empowerment of women, let alone on measuring the impact of various interventions on women empowerment in this country. Globally, women empowerment is currently a key concern in the development discourse and development interventions are increasingly required to ensure the empowerment of women (Johnson *et al.*, 2017). Drawing from this assertion, it is imperative for the country to ensure that, as the government of Eswatini in partnership with ESWADE continue to implement new multimillion poverty alleviation projects in the rural communities, the projects contribute to women empowerment. Findings of this study will thus serve as valuable input for development practitioners, policy makers in government, ESWADE, and other NGOs working in the

rural development space to, consider women empowerment as part of the objectives for any development initiative.

The findings of the study will also provide insight into whether rural development projects in the country can provide a platform that can be used to empower women, as well as the strategies that can be put in place to ensure that women are empowered as they participate in the different projects. This would ensure that rural development initiatives are gender-sensitive and work towards addressing not only practical gender needs, but also strategic gender needs. The study will also contribute to the limited literature on women empowerment in Eswatini.

1.8 Conceptual Framework for the Study

This study applied a combination of Amartya Sen's capability approach (CA), Kabeer's resource-agency-achievement framework, and Longwe's Women's Empowerment framework as the conceptual foundation of women empowerment. The researcher employed the human development approach informed by CA for the study. The basis for this selection is that the CA is people-centred, as it puts human agency rather than the organisation at the centre stage; agency is key to the actualisation of capabilities (Gébert, Bajmocy, & Malovics, 2017). Moreover, the CA considers human diversity; that is to say, the CA is cognisant of the fact that people are different, and many convert available opportunities differently, many have different aspirations and goals, and people are further seen as agents of their own development. Having high aspirations have been observed by scholars to contribute to the empowerment of women (Kosec, Akramov, Mirkasimov, & Song, 2018). Moreover, the CA's openness, which enables its application in various field or development issues, has also informed its selection. Kabeer's' framework for empowerment was selected as it considers empowerment as both the means and the end through agency. Participation is another key concept that contributes to women empowerment; therefore, it was included in the conceptualisation of the study.

1.9 Scope of the Study

Due to practical constraints, this study did not focus on all the communities covered by LUSIP 1 project. The study only focused on rural women from Siphofaneni under

the Ngcamphalala, Gamedze, and Mamba chiefdoms, particularly members of farmer companies (FC) under the Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project (LUSIP) Phase 1 project. This is despite the fact that the project development area (PDA) covered seven chiefdoms. The three chiefdoms were selected because their FCs started earlier than the other FCs in the other chiefdoms. The assumption is that this is an adequate sample to represent all women participating in the project.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

Limitations of a study can be viewed as the weaknesses that cannot be avoided (Simon, 2011). The current study was prudently arranged; however, there were still limitations that could not be avoided. Discussed below are the limitations faced and how they were mitigated.

Loss of meaning: In order for the participants to clearly comprehend the questions, the research questions were translated to SiSwati, a local language. A negligible loss of meaning of some of the study's terms was anticipated. To mitigate this limitation, the terms were thoroughly explained to each of the participants.

Time constraint: Participants studied were farmers, specifically women. As a result of the occupation, respondents could be busy throughout the year, increasing the likelihood that access to participants could be problematic. To mitigate this limitation, interviews were conducted on Saturdays or after lunch, as not many farm activities take place during these times.

Coverage of the study: ESWADE has implemented rural development projects in a number of communities in the country. The study focused only on three communities under the LUSIP Phase 1 project at Siphofaneni in the Lubombo region. Due to the context-specific nature of empowerment, the study's outcomes cannot be generalised to similar interventions elsewhere. Furthermore, due to the small sample size ($n = 35$), the findings of the study can be generalised to the population. Despite the limitations of the study, the narratives provided by the respondents represent a critical first step towards the understanding of the role of rural development projects on the empowerment of women in Eswatini.

1.11 Structure of the Research Study

Chapter one outlines the purpose of the dissertation by providing the overall background, problem statement, and the aims and objectives of the study. Chapter two will outline the literature review regarding the concepts of empowerment, women empowerment, and the theoretical framework of women empowerment. Empirical literature on women empowerment and rural development projects will also be discussed in this chapter. Chapter three of the study outlines the methodology that was employed. This chapter further spells out the sampling, data collection strategies, and how the data were analysed. Findings that answer the research questions are presented in chapter four. Lastly, chapter five outlines the conclusions and recommendations for policy and future studies.

2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the study. The chapter presents a description of the literature on the general overview of rural development projects and women's empowerment. This review of literature contextualises the study, and indicates that empowerment is closely related to participation. However, according to Agarwal (2001), participation in development projects alone cannot lead to empowerment. This chapter comprises sections on conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical literature.

2.2 Conceptual Literature review

2.2.1 Rural Development Projects and Participation

A proliferation of development projects, whose essence was to promote participation and empowerment, has been observed over the last two decades. According to Usadolo and Caldwell (2016), Rantso (2015), as well as Yabi and Afari-Sefa (2009), developed countries, international institutions such as the World Bank, FAO, UNDP, and NGOs have for decades embarked on the implementation of rural development projects in a drive to develop rural areas. In developing countries, most of these projects were agriculture development projects (OECD, 2017). For Sastre-Meriono, Negrillo, and Hernandez-Castellano (2013), the focus of development projects has evolved over time as, in the 1950s and 1960s, the projects used top-down approaches. Progressive change has been witnessed in the 1980s and beyond, as bottom-up approaches are now used. The bottom-up approach, which embodies participation and is embedded in the CDD approach, has been promoted on the grounds that it enables communities to participate fully in the projects and provides an opportunity to empower communities including women likely to be disempowered (World Bank, 2017). Sastre-Meriono *et al.* (2013) are of the view that participatory approaches empower people, as such approaches focus on the engagement of disadvantaged groups in decision-making in the development initiatives. Similarly, Sen (2002) asserts that participation can be viewed as an empowering process, as it creates and improves people's proficiencies in being dynamically engaged in the development initiative. Unlike Yabi and Afri-Sefa (2009) and Sen (2002), Matous (2013) argues that the challenge with the participation approach is that, when it focuses on headcount, sex

disaggregation which can lead to failure to address critical issues such as gender subordination. According to Agarwal, (2010; 2001) participation is an important measure of empowerment and voice. This view is supported by Babajanian (2015), who claims that participation in development projects results in individual empowerment, as it strengthens the capacity of individuals to express voice and influence choice and outcomes. Effective participation in development projects calls for a shift from lower and nominal levels of participation to interactive participation, which is empowering (Agarwal, 2010). Agarwal (2010) is of the view that effective participation of women in development projects covers meeting attendance, speaking up in meetings, and holding official positions in committees, while speaking up and voting for the World Bank (2011) is a measure of participation. Agarwal (2001), however, draws our attention to the fact that participation alone does not lead to empowerment. Table 2.1 shows the typology of participation.

Table 2.1: Typology of Participation

Form or level of participation	Characteristic features
Nominal participation	Membership in groups
Passive participation	Being informed of decision <i>ex post facto</i> ; attending meetings and listening in decision-making without speaking
Consultative participation	Being asked for an opinion on specific matters without guarantee of influencing the decisions
Activity-specific participation	Being asked to (volunteering to) undertake specific tasks
Active participation	Expressing opinions, whether or not solicited or taking initiatives of other sorts
Interactive (empowering) participation	Having a voice and influence in the group's decisions; holding positions as office bearers

Source: Agarwal (2010)

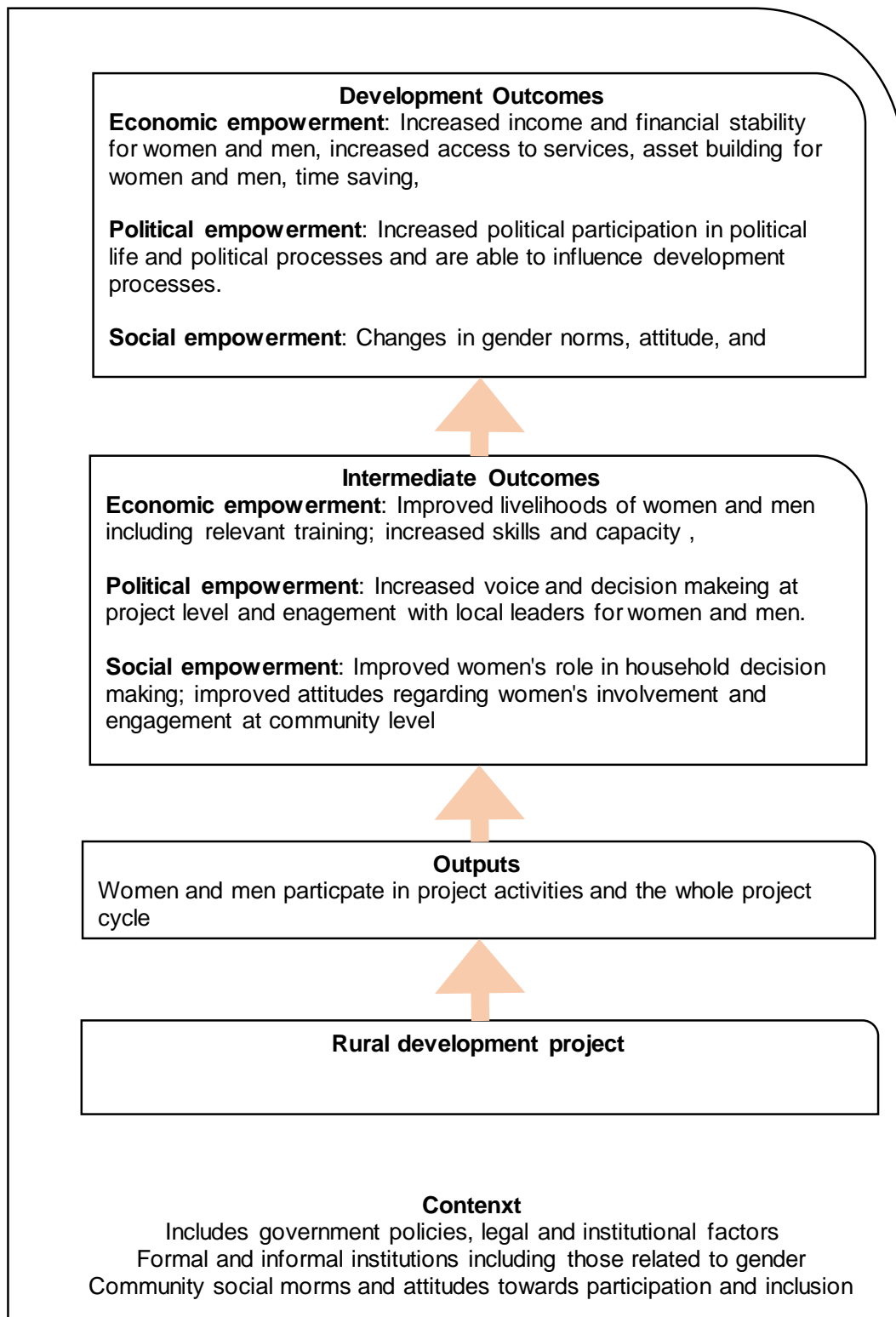
For Brown (2014), development projects that employ the CDD approach have the potential to produce excellent empowerment results for women; however, integrated projects seem to bypass women. As women, their voices in these projects are less

likely to be heard, and they have less access to decision-making power. In some projects, empowerment is included as a project objective, most often as 'empowering the community' and not necessarily empowering women (World Bank, 2017).

Gender-blindness has characterised many development projects, especially agricultural development projects. Even though a gradual change has been observed, many projects still continue to be gender blind (Johnson *et al.*, 2017). Theis, Bekele, Lefore, Meinzen-Dick, and Ringler (2018) are of the view that gender-blind projects run the risk of unintentionally worsening gender inequality. For example, irrigation projects can increase men's control over income, assets, and production, while increasing the workloads for women. Some agriculture development projects strive to address gender, while some include women empowerment as a direct or indirect objective. Johnson *et al.* (2018) posit that some projects only aim at reaching women and draws our attention to the fact that reaching women does not ensure that they will benefit from the project; even if they do benefit, their empowerment cannot be assured.

Women's empowerment through rural development projects is possible, opines Johnson *et al.* (2017) and the World Bank (2017). Rural development projects drive change in rural areas where women tend to be at a greater disadvantage (World Bank, 2017). It can be argued that women, by virtue of being in the majority in rural areas, and through their greater participation in rural development, should be empowered through rural development projects to ensure that they live a life they have a reason to value. This view is supported by Duflo (2012), who claims that development should bring about women's empowerment. Johnson *et al.* (2017), however, draws our attention to the fact that women empowerment does not occur automatically, even in cases where the project target women. Furthermore, the World Bank (2017) is of the view that, even though development projects provide a forum for women empowerment, other projects may reinforce gender roles by implementing small scale and low return projects for women, e.g. sewing selling of snacks (World Bank, 2017). Figure 2.1 shows the result chain of development projects in relation to empowerment.

Figure 2.1: Development Project Outcome Chain with Reference to Empowerment Dimensions



Adapted from Wong (2012) (cited in World Bank, 2017)

2.2.2 Empowerment

Empowerment is a broad concept that has a central role in development today; however, despite this fundamental role, the concept has a variety of definitions depending on the field of study as well as the context (Alkire, Meinzen-Dick, Peterman, Quisumbing, Seymour, & Vaz., 2013). A widely accepted definition of empowerment is “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 1999: 437). Goldman and Little (2014) claim that empowerment is a multidimensional process; it has manifold pathways at the level of the household, the community, and the individual. For Khanday and Mir (2015), empowerment is a process of moving from a position of incapability to one of complete power, while Pavanello *et al.* (2015) define empowerment as a process of improving peoples’ capacity for transforming choices into preferred actions and results, which leads to improvement of their wellbeing. Mosedale (2005: 244) contends that empowerment has four aspects that are generally accepted. Firstly, in order to be empowered, one should be disempowered in some way. Secondly, empowerment cannot be bestowed by an external actor. Thirdly, empowerment is an ongoing process and, finally, it entails the capacity to make choices that one values and acting on them.

The World Bank (2017) is of the view that empowerment occurs in economic, social, and political dimensions, hence there is a need to empower women holistically. Microcredit is one of the most programmatic interventions studied in literature (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002), and is an intervention most rural development and / or women’s empowerment projects employ in an endeavour to empower communities, and especially women, economically. It is based on the notion that empowerment in the economic dimension will lead to empowerment in the other dimensions. However, literature on empowerment suggests that empowerment in one domain may not lead to empowerment in the other domains (Johnson *et al.*, 2018; Sraboni, Quisumbi, & Ahmed, 2013). Drawing from this assertion, the study will focus on more than one domain of empowerment to ensure that women empowerment is measured comprehensively.

2.2.3 Women Empowerment

Empowering women is a fundamental development objective (O’Hara, 2018) and is currently one of the many concepts adopted globally to eradicate imbalances and

achieve gender equality (Guagliariello *et al.*, 2015). As a result, many countries have adopted the Sustainable Development Goal's (SDG) goal number five, which is to attain gender equality and to empower all girls and women as part of their development plan to eliminate aspects of inequality (Sundaram, Sekar, & Subburaj, 2015). In a wide range of sections, development investments are progressively expected to contribute to the empowerment of women (Johnson *et al.*, 2017). Women empowerment is multidimensional in nature and is usually context specific. Given its multidimensional nature, women empowerment has contested definitions. In conceptualising women's empowerment, words such as options, choice, autonomy, participation, self-confidence, control, and power appear frequently in literature (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010). Also appearing in the definitions is the concept of agency. Malhotra *et al.*'s (2002) and Kabeer's (1999, 2005) definition of women empowerment captures the commonalities in the existing definitions; this definition of women's empowerment can be applied in all contexts. Given the nature of women empowerment, a review of literature is pertinently indicated in order to elucidate how it is conceptualised and gauged in this study.

Grown, Gupta, and Kes (2008: 95) defines women's empowerment as "the ability of women to control their own destiny, that is, to make decisions, and affect outcomes of importance to themselves, for themselves and their families". The United Nations, like Grown, define women empowerment as the process by "which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices" (United Nations, 2001: 6). Rahman (2013: 11) sees women empowerment as a process of

positive change that improves women's fall-back position and bargaining power within a patriarchal structure and identify different casual pathways of change. Empowerment has to do with creation of awareness and capacity building resulting to greater participation, greater decision-making power and control and to transformative action.

Mayoux (1998) defines women empowerment as capacitating women to express their ambition, enabling them to have skills to create or access resources to achieve their aspiration. The author further claims that women empowerment should include the ability to alter the primary inequalities in power and resources, which are considered a limitation to women's empowerment. Kabeer (1999) and Malhotra and Schuler (2005) are of a similar view that household and interfamilial relation are paramount aspects of women's empowerment. The empowerment of women is essential in

minimising extant gender disparities, realising gender equality, and thus moderating rural women's vulnerabilities (Kabeer, 2005; United Nations, 2017: 6).

According to Kabeer (1999), the dimensions of women empowerment are achievements, agency, and resources. Agency refers to the capability to articulate deliberate decisions and to control resources and choices that affect significant life outcomes. This is a central tenet of empowerment. Malhotra *et al.* (2002) also support this view and assert that agency should be viewed as the crucial dimension of empowerment. They view achievements and resources as empowering circumstances and results of women empowerment respectively. Kabeer's (1999) definition of women's empowerment is attractive in that it looks at empowerment as a process, which is the change from disempowerment as well as human agency and choice.

Tangible and intangible achievement have accrued for women as a result of development initiatives (Johnson *et al.*, 2017). Women have been empowered economically by increasing their access to resources, employment, and by increasing income. Infrastructure projects such as water projects have generated substantial time savings for women and time spent to fetch water has been used for other productive activities (World Bank, 2017). Moreover, women have also been empowered politically at different levels through rural development projects. Women's involvement in decision-making in project activities provide a forum to exercise their voice. This translates into increased ability to engage with local and government leaders, and in formal politics. In a study soliciting lessons from women participating in development projects, Doneys, Doane, and Norm (2020) observed that women who participate in development projects are empowered in different dimensions. Through income-generating and security-oriented projects, women gained access to new knowledge, skills and information. Increased voice in decision-making was also observed with the increase in income generated from the income-generating projects; this achievement also resulted in improved gender relations at household level, coupled with reduction of conflicts between partners, as there were fewer financial challenges compared to the period before participating in projects.

Conclusions drawn from the literature indicate that the most important element to women empowerment is, undoubtably, resources. However, it is crucial to consider

that resources alone are not sufficient for allowing individuals to attain the anticipated outcomes. A sense of agency is also required in order for women to autonomously employ resources and realise their desired life as a result of their capabilities (resources and combined agency). These are viewed as the most suitable indicators of empowerment (Oladele and Mudhara, 2016).

Some studies suggest that aspirations, which are an individual's goals for the future, have an effect on women empowerment (Kosec *et al.*, 2018; Fox and Romero, 2017). Low aspiration results in low agency, which may, in turn, result in low empowerment outcomes for women. This is because people with low aspirations may fail to optimise the resources and opportunities provided by development projects (Kosec *et al.*, 2018). High aspirations can contribute to greater involvement of women in household decision-making and can result in women's empowerment. Kosec *et al.* (2018) claim that aspiration failures can contribute to failure to empower women.

To emancipate women's empowerment globally, international and regional declaration and protocols have been put in place. These will be discussed in the following section.

2.2.3.1 International and Regional Protocols on Women's Empowerment

The world continues to witness parity between men and women, and structural interventions in different areas, such as access to public service, production assets, increase in political voice, and participation, have formed a foundation for elimination of gender discrimination. Moreover, these structural interventions have, according to Van den Bold, Quisumbing, and Gillespie (2013), served as a basis for development programmes. Declarations and protocols aimed at the emancipation of women have also been made at international, regional, and national level. Affirming the importance of women empowerment is the 1945 Preamble to the UN Charter, which states that its aim is "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small" (UNICEF, 2015: para 4).

Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General, observed that study after study have been conducted, and that the results showed that "there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women" (UNDP, 2005: 72).

This laid the foundation for the groundwork for the direct relationship between gender and human development, and emphasised the importance of women empowerment in development initiatives. Muberekwa and Nkomo (2016) are of the view that, although men and women have dissimilar priorities and needs, they require equivalent opportunities to achieve their human rights. Moreover, women should have a chance to contribute to and benefit from all spheres of life. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have also made issues of gender and women empowerment a key priority. According to UN Women, even though tools, frameworks, and policies have been developed to ensure the emancipation of women empowerment, gaps in implementation have been observed (UN Women, 2015).

Moser and Moser (2005) opine that most interventions are characterised by only a few activities instead of a logical and incorporated process. Furthermore, national and organisational gender policies are developed and endorsed; however, these authors, like UN Women (2015), observe that a significant gap in the level of implementation still exists.

Other protocols put in place include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW was adopted in 1981 by the General Assembly of the United Nations and is a global bill regarding women's empowerment. The bill creates a framework for achieving gender equality objectives globally, and sets out national action agendas for ending all forms of discrimination against women (United Nations, 1979). Countries that have ratified CEDAW are obliged to implement the CEDAW provisions.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 is one of the key global documents adopted by different countries in the world to ensure women empowerment at a global scale. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action covers 12 identified as critical for action to advance women and gender equality. These include violence, health, poverty, and access to power and decision-making. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reaffirms and upholds commitment to CEDAW and also emphasises gender mainstreaming.

The Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) on the Rights of Women in Africa and the African Charter on Human Rights are other policy framework put in place to guide African countries. This protocol was adopted in 1981

in Nairobi and entered into force on the 21st of October 1986. Promotion and protecting of human rights and basic freedoms in Africa was the main objective of the ACHPR, which is also known as the Banjul Charter. To interpret the charter, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights was established. Moreover, in 2003 the African Union adopted the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. The protocol acts as a 'watch dog' in the role played by countries in the African continent in eliminating gender discrimination in Africa (African Union, 2003).

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development is another protocol that has been established to look at women's' issues in the SADC region. Established in 1997, the SADC Protocol's main objective was to assist nations to harmonise their laws, policies, programmes, and strategies with international, continental, and regional instruments for women empowerment and gender equality (SADC, 2008). The protocol further implores nations to increase the target for women representation in decision-making positions in public and private sectors to 50%. However, countries have failed to meet this target by the end of 2015. Principles in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action agreement are also addressed by the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

2.2.4 Rural Development Project Discourse in Eswatini

Attempts in developing rural areas in Eswatini started just after the end of World War II through the initiation of several schemes. One of these schemes was the Native Land Settlement Scheme which was implemented between 1944 and 1954. According to Low (1983), the main aim of this scheme was to settle people living on European owned farms into newly available empty lands. The author further states that a rural development scheme was also initiated between 1948 and 1956. The scheme focused on improving agriculture productivity and introducing cash crops to improve the standard of living for rural dwellers (Low, 1983). The Master Farmer Scheme, which was the direct purview of the Department of Agriculture, was another rural development initiative implemented between 1963 to and 1968. Its aims were similar to the Rural Development Scheme. Pre-independence rural development initiatives had limited success, which led to the development of the 1978-1983 National Development Plan (Low, 1983; Vilane & Madonsela, 1996).

The Rural Development Area Programme (RDAP) was another strategy implemented in the 1970s. In this strategy, the country was divided into Rural Development Areas (RDAs). RDAs were seen as a primary tool for agriculture and rural development in the country (Low, 1983; Vilane *et al.*, 1996). The objective of these RDAs was to provide technical knowledge on agriculture production, construction of water systems, and protection of the land resources (Tabibian, 1985; Vilane *et al.*, 1996; Sithole, Lagat, & Masuku, 2014).

The RDA programme, however, did not contribute much in the emancipation of rural women, as the land ownership system was ignored. This limited women's efforts at agriculture production (Vilane *et al.*, 1996). To mitigate this challenge, and integrate women in the economy, income-generating projects for women were initiated through the Home Economics wing of the RDA programme (Tabibian, 1985; Vilane *et al.*, 1996). This section trained women in home industry activities, such as sewing and food preparation and preservation, and reinforced the notion that the woman's place was at the kitchen.

Eswatini continues to make rural development a priority, and intensive engagement exists with local and international partners or donors. Moreover, government units or parastatals, such as micro-projects and ESWADE, amongst others, have been established in an endeavour to develop the country, especially the rural areas.

Diverse interventions have been implemented by the government of Eswatini and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the rural areas in a bid to develop and improve the livelihoods of the rural population, especially women. NGOs such as World Vision, the Africa Cooperation Trust (ACAT), the Inhlanyelo Fund, and Lutheran Development Services work in conjunction with the government of Eswatini to advance the rural areas in the country. The major development projects undertaken by these NGOs and parastatals relate mostly to structural improvements in the rural areas, such as the construction of schools, clinics, health centres, dip tanks, and rural electrification. In line with the objectives espoused under Vision 2020, economic development such as sewing, piggery, community gardens, weaving, handcrafts, food security, nutrition education, as well as water, hygiene and sanitation, and rural electrification have been implemented. The target population for most of these projects is the rural population with a major focus on women (Swaziland Government, 2015; Bimha, 2019). Dlamini,

Dlamini and Dlamini (2012) argue that economic development projects are the most implemented rural development projects in the country.

Projects that target women only have also been implemented. These included the Women in Development project, established in 1975, which was the first women-focused programme in the country. The project was initiated to improve the women's socio-economic status in the country (IDM, 1996). Swaziland Women's Economic Empowerment Trust (SWEET) is another development project whose main objective was to provide financial services to women in order to change the face of poverty, particularly among women. Women on this project buy shares at a rate of US\$ 5 per share. Establishment of a women's bank is the ultimate aim of the establishment of SWEET (Swaziland Government, 2015).

According to Nkambule (2018), Eswatini still implements the welfare and anti-poverty approach, as most of the rural development projects implemented strive to meet the practical gender needs and to reduce poverty. The challenge with the welfare approach is that it overlooks the strategic gender needs which enable women to challenge and overcome their subordinate position and gender inequality (Nkambule, 2018).

Expansion of sugar cane production to the SNL was seen as a new form of rural development (UNCTAD, 2000; Terry *et al.*, 2017). The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (2000) notes that expansion of sugarcane to SNL will not only change the traditional rural way of life (being dependant on subsistence farming and remittances), but will also increase rural employment opportunities on farm and off farm. Moreover, expansion of entrepreneurship was anticipated as there will be a need for support services for the sugarcane, as well as business ventures such as cane haulage, cane cutting, tractor services, and weeding (IFAD, 2016).

Informal economic activities continue to be dominated by women (Singh *et al.*, 2015). Although they are a backbone of rural development, women are hardly positioned at the centre of policy and programme development agenda. In Eswatini, this is reflected in the NDS; although gender is mentioned, there is no clear strategy on how issues around gender will be implemented. Policies such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan Comprehensive Agriculture Sector Policy were initiated to direct execution of development projects. There is a need for improvement in terms of

policies and alignment between existing policies in the country. For example, rural development is contained in the National Development Strategy, Section 4.4.3. The strategy clearly indicates that rural development will be improved through amplified budget allocation. It will also guarantee that all agriculture and rural development programmes executed will provide just access to the regulation of benefits and resources. On the other hand, the comprehensive Agricultural Sector Policy makes no mention of rural development; it also does not focus on women. Moreover, the Rural Planning, Development and Resettlement Act, an act that was to provide for women to be allocated land, with rights to hold, use, undertake transaction in, and provide for succession on the same basis as men, is still in draft form (IFAD, 2001; Nkambule, 2018). The lack of policies addressing community development and issues pertaining to rural women continue to hamper women empowerment in Eswatini. Gender and women empowerment issues were overlooked in the ESWADE project concept note, the project document merely stated that women and youth will be part of the project, without clearly spelling out how the involvement of women will be executed to ensure equitable benefit from the project (IFAD, 2001).

2.2.4.1 Women Empowerment Protocols in Eswatini

Section 28 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Eswatini guarantees freedom from discrimination and equality before the law to all people of the Kingdom of Eswatini. For women, this freedom from discrimination and equality before the law encompasses the provision of opportunities to enable women to realise their full potential,

subject to availability of resources, the Government shall provide facilities and opportunities necessary to enhance the welfare of women to enable them to realise their full potential and advancement (Swaziland Government, 2005).

To emancipate gender equality and women empowerment in the country, the government of Eswatini included gender issues in the National Development Strategy (NDS) (Swaziland Government, 2005). Institutional strengthening, implementation, and review of appropriate legislation to remove all forms of discrimination and increasing gender awareness in the country is the main focus of the gender aspect of the NDS (Swaziland Government, 2005).

The continued gender disparity in the country compelled the government to develop a National Gender Policy in 2010. The purpose of the policy was to provide indicators,

guidelines, as well as a framework to aid stakeholders or partners in achieving gender equity as per the constitution of Swaziland. A gender unit in the Deputy Prime Minister's office was also established to coordinate women's issues in the country. These interventions have yielded limited results, as gender inequality is still high. Fiona (2015) supports this view and elucidates that, even though Eswatini has adopted and ratified regional and international laws on gender equality, which include the CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995, and SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the incorporation of these laws in the national judicial system, policy documents, and development programmes is incomplete. The Election Act of 2018 has also been enacted. It allows for appointment of women from the four regions in the country if the women's quota has not been achieved (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Despite these initiatives, the number of women in leadership positions at all levels is still low; women still form a greater proportion of the unemployed and still experience gender-based violence. These factors compromise the ability of girls and women to make autonomous decisions in issues that affect their lives as well as those of the families. For Fiona (2015) and the United Nations (2017), gender inequality in Eswatini is aggravated not only by prevalent patriarchal traditions, norms, and values, but also by insufficient legislation, as well as limited access to means of production, health, and education.

Having women in the decision-making positions in all levels can address these issues, as women allocate resources differently and issues affecting women would be given greater attention (Kabeer, 2005). IFAD (2015) further argues that the promotion of women's needs in rural development is hampered as the number of women in decision-making positions is low.

2.3 Women and Development Approaches

Ideologies regarding gender and development have evolved throughout history. Women in Development, Women and Development, and Gender and Development theories examine aspects of women / gender and development. Below is a brief discussion of the theories that relate to women and development.

2.3.1 *Women in Development (WID)*

WID started in the 1970s and has its roots in modernisation theory and feminism (Yavaş, 2010). Development thinkers realised that women did not necessarily profit from modernisation (Razavi & Miller, 1995; Muyoyeta, 2004); exclusion of women was held forth as an explanation for this occurrence. It was believed that including women in development schemes, especially with regard to economic systems, was the solution to ensuring women's benefitting from modernisation (Razavi & Miller, 1995; Hegarty, 2010). This same vein is supported by Nikkah, Redzuan, and Abu-Samah (2012), who hold the view that WID emphasised the inclusion of women in development. WID focused on launching projects focused on generating income as well as welfare projects like family planning or nutrition education, in order to integrate women in development (Muyoyeta, 2004; Hegarty, 2010). The main criticism of this approach is that it was only able to meet the practical gender needs of women, and that strategic needs, which would enable women to challenge and overcome their subordinate position and gender inequality, was overlooked in the WID approach. This assertion is also supported by the FAO (2011), which indicates that this approach focused on women only and failed to address the subordinate role of women with the assumption that it will change automatically. For Yavaş (2010), the approach also increased women's workload. The WID Approach also includes the equity, anti-poverty, and efficiency approach.

2.3.2 *Women in Development (WID) Approach*

As criticism of WID grew, the WAD started making headway. WAD espoused Marxist feminist and dependency theories (Nikkah *et al.*, 2012; Hegarty, 2010; Yavaş, 2010). WAD adopted the view that women had always been crucial to development and were essential economic actors. The integration of women in development was posited to maintain extant gender inequalities (Muyoyeta, 2004; Hegarty, 2010). Compared to WID, WAD centred on the interaction between women and development. Moreover, WAD proposed that distribution of wealth, as well as class, was a significant obstacle for both genders in benefitting from the global economy (Muyoyeta, 2004). In contrast to Muyoyeta, Nikkah *et al.* (2012) perceived 'power over' as an integral impetus behind women's disempowerment. However, this approach was criticised for not considering how the patriarchy undermined women's development. Moreover, the approach did

not adequately address social interactions between genders or the impact thereof on women's development (Yavaş, 2010).

2.3.3 Gender and Development (GAD) Approach

Criticism of WID and WAD gave birth to the gender and development (GAD) approach, which became the dominant approach to address gender inequalities (Hegarty, 2010). Similarly, Yavaş (2010) claims that GAD aims at empowering women to challenge gender inequalities. Hegarty (2010) and Yavaş (2010) are of the view that GAD was influenced by socialist feminist thinking and argues that women's insubordination is a result of material conditions and patriarchal ideology. Moyo and Francis (2010) posit that the GAD approach considers women empowerment as a crucial component of social change. The approach departs from the premise that participation of both females and males is crucial for improving the gender relations; hence, participation is considered as an essential tool for enhancing the women empowerment process (Moyo & Francis, 2010). GAD offers holistic thinking regarding dealing with all aspects of women's lives. The approach does not only focus on women, but also looks at the impact of development on both men and women (Razavi & Miller, 1995; Muyoyeta, 2004). GAD further seeks to ensure equality of benefit and control of development processes (Muyoyeta, 2004). Women's reproductive and productive roles are recognised under this approach, and women are seen as agents of change rather than passive recipients of development aid (Hegarty, 2010). Collective action by women is another aspect that underpins the GAD approach, as it gives women a more effective political voice, according to Muyoyeta (2004) and Hegarty (2010). Yavaş (2010) postulates that development projects do not have the same effect on men and women; therefore, women should be seen as active agents of development in order to challenge gender inequalities. In essence, the GAD approach seeks to achieve both practical and strategic gender needs (Yavaş, 2010).

2.3.4 Empowerment Approach

Muyoyeta (2004) posits that the empowerment approach is mostly used by third world feminist and grassroots organisations. The approach arose from gender and development debates and has become a central element of development programs. The objective of this approach is to increase women's self-reliance and capacity to influence change at all levels - be it at policy, societal, economic level - to their advantage (Jacka, 2006; Muyoyeta, 2004). Gender mainstreaming, which emerged

from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995, was a result of the growing commitment to women empowerment and the realisation that women empowerment is central to human development. Moreover, gender mainstreaming emphasises the fact that, in order to improve the situation of women, gender relations must be included in the agenda of all development projects (Jacka, 2006). Engendering development was seen as very critical for holistic development (Parpart, 2014).

2.4 Methodological Literature Review

There is a growing body of literature regarding how to measure women's empowerment. However, there is limited evidence on how and how much development projects contribute to women empowerment (Johnson *et al.*, 2018). Women empowerment is a multifaceted concept and is sometimes viewed comprehensively or piecemeal (Aziz, Shams, & Khan, 2011). Institutions use different measures to assess women's empowerment; for example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) uses the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) to compare three indicators globally. A number of seats are held by women in parliament, such as managerial titles in administrative and professional divisions, as well as income. The challenge with this measure is that it uses secondary data, which poses a challenge in reliability and validity of the indicators (Leder, 2016). The Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index, which capture economic participation of women, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health, are also used to measure women empowerment (Leder, 2016; Aziz *et al.*, 2011). Aziz *et al.* (2011) is of the view that measurement of empowerment should go beyond indicators such as schooling, as they are not adequate in determining issues such as decision-making at household level.

Realising the lack of measurement and quantification of women's empowerment in the sphere of agriculture, the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) was developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute, the Oxfam Poverty and Human Development Initiative, and USAID to measure progress towards women's empowerment (Johnson *et al.*, 2018). Most scholars use this quantitative method to measure women's empowerment (Oladele and Mudhara, 2016; Johnson, Njuki,

Waithanji, Nhambeto, Roger and Kruger, 2014). According to Sraboni *et al.* (2013), the WEAI measures five domains of empowerment in agriculture and also has a component that measures gender parity within households. This results in an aggregate index reported at either regional or national level, and which is premised on individual level data regarding males and females in the same household.

The WEAI is a compound tool used to measure women's management of critical parts of their lives at both community and household level compared to males in the same household (Oladele and Mudhara, 2016). The WEAI measures engagement of women in:

- a) Making decisions about agricultural production;
- b) Having access to and management of resources;
- c) Use and control of income;
- d) Community leadership; and
- e) Time expenditure, which includes the apportionment of time to productive and reproductive responsibilities, as well as satisfaction with time available for leisure.

In this measurement, an empowered woman is considered one with adequate achievements in at least four of the five indicators, or who is empowered regarding an amalgamation of weighted indicators. Proponents of the WEAI are of the view that identification of domains wherein women are empowered helps policy makers focus on the domains where women are disempowered (Oladele and Mudhara, 2016). Moreover, women's level of empowerment relative to that of their male counterparts in the same household, is critical for understanding the gender empowerment gap; this can be identified through the use of WEAI, as it compares women's empowerment relative to that of men in the same household.

Pro-WEAI is another tool used to measure women's empowerment. According to Johnson *et al.* (2018), the pro-WEAI expounds the five domains of the WEAI, namely individual empowerment, intrahousehold relationships, physical mobility, nutrition, and gender-based violence. Although Markel (2014) claims that the WEAI, which employs quantitative measures, is helpful for certain aspects of women's empowerment, the scholar draws our attention to the fact that household indicators are best measured using qualitative methods to unpack complex issues such as decision-making

capabilities. This view is supported by Leder (2016), who posits that quantification of empowerment overshadows the complex power relations within a particular context. Table 2.2 shows the five domains of empowerment in the WEAI and corresponding indicators.

Table 2.2: Five domains of Empowerment in the WEAI

Domains	Indicators
Production	Input in productive decision
	Autonomy in production
Resources	Ownership of assets
	Access to decision on credit
Income	Control over use of income
Leadership	Group member
	Speaking in public
Time	Workload
	Leisure

Source: Adapted from Johnson *et al.*, 2018

For Leder (2016), the drawback for the WEAI is the agency which, according to Kabeer (1999), should be analysed as a process in its relationship with achievements and resources, as achievements are not taken to consideration by the WEAI. For example, not financially contributing to a household does not necessarily imply disempowerment, but may be a conscious choice. Moreover, women who are household heads may have scores that indicate that they were empowered, yet they may have no choice and may be overburdened in their role as a sole decision maker.

Malhotra *et al.* (2002) argue that women empowerment is qualitative and subjective in nature; indicators such as participation in the political domain are still inadequate in indicating if empowerment occurred without a qualitative inquiry of what representation is like or what it means. The authors further state that the process of empowerment should be measured in terms of women's interpretations thereof, and should be considered having taken place if it is validated and self-assessed by the women themselves.

2.5 Empirical Literature Review

In a wide range of sectors, development investments are progressively expected to contribute to the empowering of women, especially since such empowerment is a crucial development objective. Empirical evidence on the impact of rural development projects, according to Saguin (2018), has shown mixed results, with successes in some communities and poor performance in others. Elite capture has been one of the reasons that the author advance as a causal factor to poor execution of the rural development projects.

The section below will outline results from studies conducted to assess women empowerment. A considerable amount of literature regarding women empowerment has looked at economic projects and women empowerment with a focus on self-help groups and microfinance (Leder, 2016). These studies, however, were on projects that were clearly targeting women only, for example self-help groups or microfinance. In other projects, women empowerment was directly implied, while in some it was indirectly implied.

IFAD (2016a) attests to the fact that rural development projects have been found to have a positive effect on women empowerment, especially with regards to economic empowerment. Devi (2017) also supports women empowerment for its ripple effect, as it positively impacts the family, society, and future generations. This is because rural development projects generate new on-farm and non-farm opportunities.

There is, however, limited literature on projects that target both males and females. Browne (2014) draws our attention to the fact that community-driven rural development projects are frequently efficacious in involving women in projects, but often struggle to alter outlooks and norms regarding women's social position. The author further states that programmes that allow for women only appear to be more successful in meeting women's needs and enabling women's voices to be heard. Browne further posits that, where projects target both men and women, men outnumber women in executive positions, and women are found to participate in project execution rather than in planning, which means that their views are underrepresented (Browne, 2014).

According to Leder (2016), limited research considers women's awareness and comprehension of empowerment. Guerin, Kumar, and Agier (2013) assert that women

look for respect within their community, rather than freedom and autonomy from men. During their analysis on microfinance in Tamil Nadu, empirical results showed that the term 'empowerment' was not initially comprehended by women, and that it was only after the concept was explained that they related it to the ability to solve problems or to cope during suffering. Some respondents related it to freedom of mobility, while others defined it as being respected by their family members (Guerin *et al.*, 2013). This study indicates that women do not recognise their empowerment as liberation from male domination, but as relating to other women, their spouses, families, and communities.

Blattman, Green, Annan, and Jamison (2013), in their assessment of the Women's Income-generating Support Program in Uganda, found that there was an increase in income and wealth; however, there was no effect on household decision-making, status in the community, or freedom from domestic violence, which are some of the indicators for women empowerment. The authors further state that participation of women in the project increased; however, there was no improvement in participation outside the project for the women beneficiaries. Similarly, the World Bank (2017) notes that, although participation of women increased in self-help groups, including savings, there was no significant impact on their empowerment. Kabeer's (2001) study on women empowerment found that major economic decisions in households were reserved for men, and that only minor economic decisions were reserved for women. In some decisions, such as schooling of children, women were found to participate but did not play a major role. Similarly, Quisumbing, Roy, Njuki, Tanvin, and Waithanji (2013) found that women had little control over the income gained, and that, only in a few cases, women had an increase in income spending decisions.

Under the leadership domain, Jeckoniah, Nombo, and Mdoe (2012) found that women involved in an onion value chain project in Northern Tanzania were empowered as they gained confidence in speaking in public.

In Mozambique's Olakes programme, women reported that they were consulted more on decision-making by their husbands due to the technical knowledge and their participation in the dairy cow husbandry (Johnson *et al.*, 2014). This implies that training provided by many projects allow women to build up their skills, not only for their intrinsic value, but also because it increases their self-esteem. Moreover, the

women gain respect at family and community level. This is related to the capabilities and functioning aspect of the women.

In their study on the impact of German Bank and two other micro credit programmes in Bangladesh, as well as on the supply of labour, household expenditure and assets, and schooling, Sahu, Jha, and Gajpal found that the programme had a greater positive effect on conduct of the poor where those who borrowed money were women rather than men (Sahu *et al.*, 2015: 67). This shows the importance of focusing on women as development projects are implemented. Aladuwaka and Momsen (2010) found that a water project implemented in the community did not only improve water needs, but also helped women to engage in other income-generation projects, such as brick making and vegetable production. Women have also been observed to use their earnings for the development of the household and the community, a view that is also supported by Sahu *et al.* (2015). This may relate to their agency and aspirations.

Rural development projects also help in improving intrahousehold relationships. Aladuwaka and Momsen (2010) posit that women's status in the family and community improved as a result of increased income due to the Wanarayina Water Project in Sri Lanka. This project was implemented by women only and, as a result, a strong sense of community leadership was also created. Similarly, Beck (2012) claims that, in the study on the impact of Accumulating Savings and Credit Associations (ASCA) on child wellbeing outcomes in Mozambique, qualitative interviews showed that women grew into the role of equal partners due to their ability to contribute financially to the family. Furthermore, women's involvement in decision-making at household level was realised as a result of the ASCA project. In the same vein, Goldman and Little (2014) postulate that economic empowerment of women in the Maasai Women's Development Organisation resulted in improved relations with husbands, as they were able to contribute towards the household budget. The women were also involved in decision-making. Personal agency at household level was also increased as a result of being involved in the project. Jeckoniah *et al.* (2012) found that women involved in an onion value chain project in Northern Tanzania were empowered, as they were appreciated by their husbands and community on decision and ideas they suggested.

Increase in control and ownership was another domain impacted by rural development projects. Das, Yasmin, Ara, Kamruzzaman, Davis, Behrman, Roy, and Quisumbing

(2013) and Johnson *et al.* (2014) found that increasing women's control and ownership of assets has been found to improve women's participation in decision-making about household livelihood strategies

Participation is seen as one of the tools that have an empowering effect. However, there are mixed results in terms of whether or not participation does lead to women's empowerment. Beck's (2012) study on the impact of Accumulating Savings and Credit Associations (ASCA) on child wellbeing in Mozambique found that the ASCA project empowered women by enabling them to gain financial freedom, and also enabled them to have a voice at household and community level.

The World Bank (2011) asserts that women who participate in public decision-making in community driven development projects also show increased participation in other forums. These are spill over effects associated with community driven development projects (World Bank, 2011). This view is supported by the World Bank's (2017) report, which revealed that participation in rural development projects have seen women grow in their confidence to participate even in formal politics. Tanzania's Social Action Fund resulted in an increase in the number of women who participated in local and even national political life as an effect of participation in the project. Likewise, in Afghanistan, an increase in women participating in the 2010 parliamentary election was observed as a result of the National Solidarity Project (World Bank, 2017).

The Tejaswini Rural Women's Empowerment programme in India, which empowered women through skills development, resulted in more women participating in local elections and community decision-making institutions (IFAD, 2016a). Nwagboso *et al.* (2012) postulate that effective participation of women in rural development in China resulted in growth in leadership skills which, in turn, increased participation of women in politics. This assertion by Nwagboso *et al.* (2012) show that meaningful participation of women in rural development projects capacitate or empower women for greater leadership positions. Involvement of women at project initiation stage is key, as it ensures that women come up with strategies that empower them (Nwagboso *et al.*, 2012).

In contrast, Olubukola's (2013) study on women's participation in the CDDP Water Project found that there were few women in the committees. Where women were present, their attendance in meetings pertaining to planning and decision-making,

monitoring, evaluating, and implementation of projects was irregular. This was largely due to the fact that they were often not invited to such meetings, or that their contribution was restricted to attendance only, and not participation. The author argues that cultural norms impede equivalent involvement of men and women in community meetings. Low economic status of women was also found to affect women's confidence to challenge their low representation in the project.

Sraboni *et al.* (2013) conclude that a high proportion of disempowered women report an absence in income control, disquiet regarding speaking in public, and lack of partaking in group discussions.

2.5.1 Rural Development Projects and Women Empowerment in Eswatini

In Eswatini, the major projects undertaken by NGOs and parastatals are mostly related to economic development, food security, nutrition education, as well as water, hygiene, and sanitation. Infrastructural development and rural electrification are also undertaken. Globally, there is a growing body of literature of empirical work regarding women's empowerment and rural development projects; however, in Eswatini, there is no evidence on how and how much rural development projects contribute to women's empowerment in the country. The Swaziland Government's (2015) weak monitoring and evaluation system has been viewed as a major reason for this shortcoming; according to the Swaziland Government (2015), it can be only inferred that rural development projects in Eswatini contributed to women empowerment.

Matsenjwa and Musiiwa (2016) conducted a study on a rural development group weaving project established in the 1980s. Results from this study revealed that the project brought a positive change in women. Women who participated in group weaving project felt that their involvement in the project made them better people than before participating in the project. Participants attested to the fact that their involvement in the project changed community perception about them, as they were viewed as better persons. Moreover, participants gained community recognition and were regarded as people who were capable of bringing development to the community. Some of them were even selected to serve on school committees due to their economic achievement (Matsenjwa & Musiiwa, 2016). Proceeds from the weaving project were used to buy basic resources such as food, clothing, and farm inputs, as the husbands were working in South African mines. School fees and home

improvement was also done by the women participants in this project. These women craft producers also transverse the traditional male cattle ownership, as they bought cattle using the proceeds from handcraft sales (Matsenjwa *et al.*, 2016). Thoko Tsabedze, one of the participants of the weaving project, was quoted as saying: “had it not been for the craft production, no one could have recognized the potential in a humble person like me” (Matsenjwa *et.al*, 2016).

In her study on women in group-based water development projects in Swaziland, Keregero (2012) postulates that women’s participation in the project improved their economic independence. Moreover, participants in this project also gained recognition in the community as a result of participating in the project.

The Swaziland Government (2015) and Dlamini *et al.* (2012) were of the view that most rural development project in the country, focus on empowering women economically. This will continue to pose a challenge for the country, as the projects implemented help women achieve practical gender needs to the detriment of strategic gender needs that would help women to challenge the existing patriarchal gender norms. Supporting this view is Bayissa, Smits, and Ruben (2017), who are of the view that women empowerment in the economic dimension only is not sufficient to improve the social, cultural, and political dimensions of women empowerment. Holistic empowerment in all the dimensions is encouraged (Bayissa *et al.*, 2017).

2.6 Conceptual Frameworks for Women Empowerment

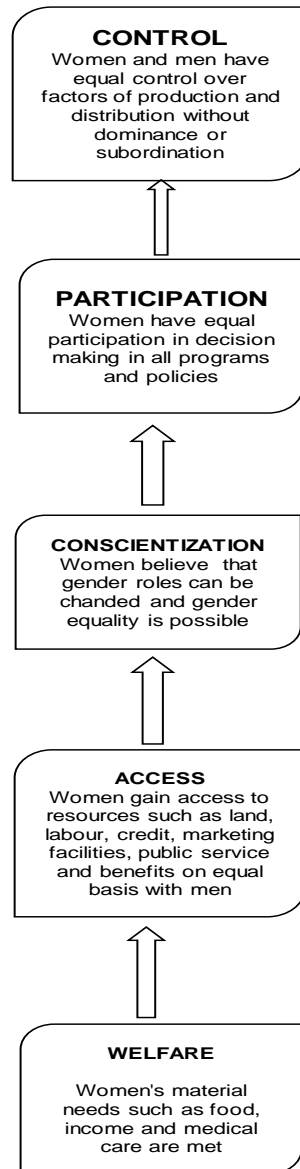
Different frameworks for conceptualising empowerment for development projects exist. This section outlines the Women Empowerment Framework, Sen’s Capability Approach, as well as Kabeer’s framework. The framework that will be used for this study will then be discussed.

2.6.1 The Women’ Empowerment Framework (WEF)

The Women’s Empowerment Framework (WEF) was developed by Longwe (1991), and focuses on the individual processes of empowerment. The framework highlights that women empowerment is achieved when they have control over the factors of production and can participate equally in the development process (Williams, 2006).

According to Okali (2012), the framework is based on five different levels of equality, depicted in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2: Women's Empowerment Framework



Adapted from Longwe (cited in Leder, 2016).

Okali (2012) posits that, although this framework was never popular, its indicators continue to appear in gender documentations, and might be used independently to measure positive social change or steps along the pathways to achieving equality and empowerment.

2.6.1.1 Strengths of the Women's Empowerment Framework

The framework is very useful in assessing women's access to income and the level of decision-making in their households. The WEF does not only provide an atmosphere for dialogue, but also provides women activists an opportunity to highlight the political dimensions of gender inequality (Endeley, 2010).

Similarly, Mohanty and Sahu (2020) assert that gendered assumptions are also made explicit in this framework and is essential in assisting organisations in developing clear strategies for implementing their programmes. This enables organisations to fend off welfare approaches, which position women as victims, and helps in ensuring that resources are seen as means for the empowerment of women, and not the ultimate goal of empowerment (Mohanty and Narak, 2013).

2.6.1.2 Weaknesses of the Women's Empowerment Framework

Failure to explain the casual factors that led to the progression from one level to the next has been one of the major weakness of this framework (March, Smyth, & Mukhopadhyay, 1999). For instance, one may assume that, to achieve the highest level, an intervention should address the four other levels, which may not be the case in practice. For Leder (2016), as well as March *et al.* (1999), the empowerment process is not linear and may not follow the stages postulated by Longwe. The framework also fails to recognise the fact that the process of empowerment begins with the individual women being open to possibilities of change at a personal or individual level (Sahay, 1998). Failure to recognise that women are not a homogenous group and that they live in different context, which may have an impact on their empowerment, an aspect that is well covered in the Capability Approach, is another weakness of WEF (Lader, 2016). The author further notes that institutions and men are not considered in this framework, yet these have a bearing on women empowerment.

2.6.2 The Capability Approach (CA)

Pioneered by Amartya Sen, an economist, and further developed by Martha Nussbaum, the CA is a normative approach that can be used as an approach to deal with political philosophy, development thinking, and welfare economics (Robeyns, 2003). Its origins can be traced back to Aristotle, classic political economy, and Karl Marx (Clark, 2006; Daojiu, 2014). According to Fukuda-Parr (2003), the CA was initiated to approach development from a human development perspective, and the

focus on money and markets as means rather than an end. Understanding development calls for the understanding of what people are capable of or able to become and to do in their lives, i.e. their wellbeing. In the same vein, Daojiu (2014) and Deneulin and McGregor (2010) argue that development should be conceptualised in terms of capabilities and attainment of what people want to be and have reason to value, which is espoused in the CA. The authors further posit that some capabilities will require financial resources as a major input, while, for others, it could be political practices, social norms, traditions, and habits. This means that the CA pays attention to the connection between financial, social, and mental wellbeing, or to the political, social, and economic cultural dimensions of life.

The difference between the CA by Amartya Sen and the one by Martha Nussbaum is that Nussbaum developed a list of capabilities to ensure that the approach is not abused (Nussbaum, 2000). Sen was not against the listing of capabilities, but was of the opinion that this undermines democracy and public participation, as the list was best developed through public participation (Sen, 2004).

2.6.2.1 *The Key Constructs of Tenets of the Capability Approach*

The section below will briefly discuss the tenets of the CA.

- a) Capability or capability set are the abilities, opportunities, or available options one can freely choose from to achieve the goals or functionings they value. This means that capabilities indicate one's ability to achieve valuable outcomes in view of opportunities that are availed to them. This is regardless of whether or not one acts on them (Walker, Berekashvili, & Lomidze, 2014; Clark, 2005);
- b) Functionings is the collection of 'beings' and 'doings' a person actually achieves and constitutes a person's wellbeing, such as being well nourished and well educated. It is the use a person makes of the resources at his or her disposal (Clark, 2005: 1345). For Walker *et al.* (2014), functionings are the actual achievements. In the context of the study, doings is being able to participate in the project, in workshops or skills development trainings, and being able to participate in decision-making at household and community level. In other words, it is to be and being empowered;
- c) Agency is the most emphasised component of empowerment and is considered as central to development. Agency is viewed as the process of removing "unfreedoms" that constrain individual choices. It refers to the processes

involved in the bringing about change, through the actions of a given individual, to achieve the functions valued by the individual (Sen, 1985). Similarly, other scholars broadly define it as ability and autonomy of one to exercise choice and pursue goals that echo their priorities or values, and to carry out the activities required to convert those valued objectives into authentic 'beings' and 'doings' (Frediani, 2010; Conradie, 2013; Walker *et al.*, 2014; Deneulin & Zampini, 2016; Gébert *et al.*, 2017);

- d) Conversion factors are viewed as the factors that influence how means or resources are converted to capabilities (Oosterlaken, 2009). Similarly, Gébert *et al.* (2017) describe conversion factors as barriers that hinder people from using their means to pursue their own ends. Scholars posit that conversion factors can either be personal, social, or environmental (Gébert *et al.*, 2017; Frediani *et al.*, 2014; Oosterlaken, 2009). This component of the CA is important, as it pays attention to diversity of persons and, according to Frediani *et al.* (2014), is important when assessing inequality; and
- e) Adaptive preferences are tendencies of people, especially deprived people, to adjust to adverse circumstances so that they can survive. Expectations and desires are lowered, and demand for any radical change is non-existent (Frediani *et al.*, 2014; Oosterlaken, 2009; Robeyns, 2003). For Frediani *et al.* (2014), adaptive preferences are important and have crucial implications for projects that aimed at social change. The study will also analyse the adaptive preferences for women under the LUSIP project.

2.6.2.2 *Capability Approach and Empowerment*

Conradie (2013) claims that the CA can be used as a theoretical and conceptual framework for a more comprehensive human development approach. The approach has been used to evaluate human development in developing countries, to assess poverty, analyse impact of technological change, and to consider gender inequality and social norms (Alkire, 2007; Anushruthi, 2017). The CA can also be used to evaluate small development projects in low income countries (Anushruthi, 2017; Alkire, 2007). Development projects may provide material goods and capacitate people with new skills; however, for Knecht (2012), such interventions are not regarded as development, unless participants' choices and abilities show expansion.

This indicates a need to explore whether the LUSIP project does empower women to live the life they value and have a reason to value.

Sen (1993) points out to the fact that the essence of development is to advance human lives by intensifying a variety of things that a person can do or be. The author further asserts that the crucial element of the CA with regards to women empowerment and development of women, is its focus on how women use their capabilities for survival. In the same vein, Robeyns (2015) notes that the interaction between CA and empowerment is their similarities in the collective, individual capabilities, freedoms, functionings, opportunities, and agency, which are key drivers for quality wellbeing and development.

Studies assessing the inequality in capabilities have been conducted using gender-sensitive multidimensional inequality or wellbeing indices similar to the CA across countries (UNDP, 1995; Robeyns, 2005). Therefore, there is a need to compare individuals within countries instead of average levels between countries.

2.6.2.3 Strengths of the Capability Approach

The CA creates a platform to appreciate the value of each individual, and not just the group, which is very important in relation to this study as it will be exploring the lived experiences of individual women participating in the LUSIP project.

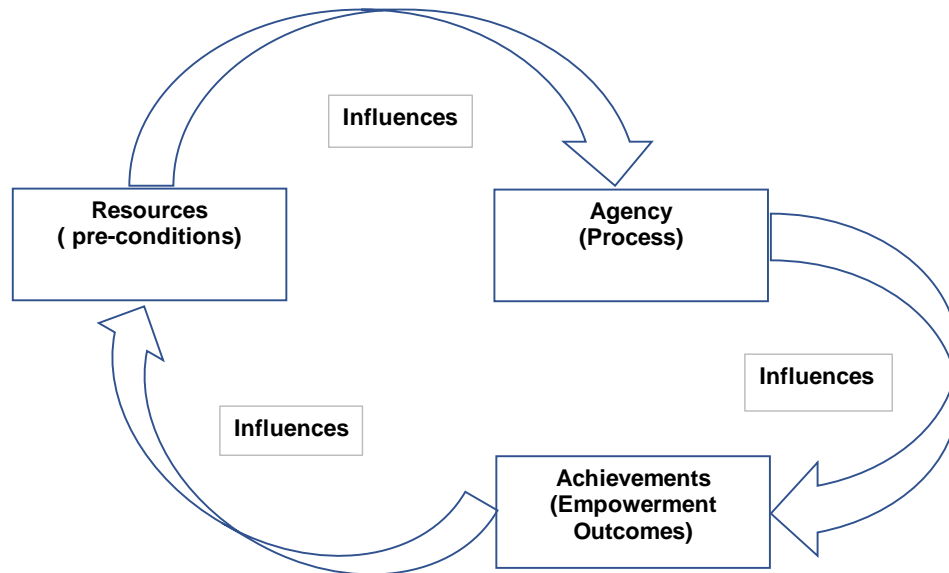
The approach has been chosen because it does not only focus on the capabilities, but also considers human diversity, as people cannot convert commodities or resources into valuable functioning the same way. The CA also captures matters of individual liberty and the occasion to live a life one has reason to value. Moreover, the CA emphasises agency, which is of fundamental importance in the actualisation of capabilities. Its openness, which enables its application in various fields or development issues, has also informed its selection.

2.6.3 Kabeer's Framework of Women's Empowerment

The mentioned framework identifies three interrelated factors that can influence women's empowerment and the importance of women's participation in development project implementation. These interrelated factors in Kabeer's framework of women empowerment are achievements, agency, and resources (Kabeer, 2001). Resources include assets as well as social and human resources. Agency includes a process of

decision-making and negotiation, while achievements are wellbeing outcomes. Figure 2.3 depicts Kabeer's empowerment framework.

Figure 2.3: Kabeer's Conceptual Framework



Source: Adapted from Kabeer (1999)

The section below will discuss the components of Kabeer's empowerment.

2.6.3.1 Resources

This aspect of empowerment involves the extension of resources required to attain women empowerment. Beyond availability of resources, women need to have access and control in order to be empowered. Resources are a medium through which agency can be exercised. In the context of empowerment, resources include not only economic resources, but also social and human resources that augment the capacity to exercise choice (Kabeer, 2005; 1999). Skills, as well as supportive measures to act upon their choices, are considered as resources in this study.

2.6.3.2 Agency

According to Kabeer (2001), women should be able to express their interest and choice. The author further states that women should not only be able to exercise the choice, but should consider themselves as entitled to exercise their choice.

Drawing from Rowland's (1997) definition of empowerment as power, agency in this study is conceptualised as 'power to' and 'power within'. According to Luttrell, Quiroz, Scrutton, and Bird (2009), 'power to' is generative power which produces new opportunities and actions sans domination, and relates to having decision-making power and power to resolve difficulties. Kabeer (2001) defines 'power to' as a person's ability to define their own life choices and goals, and to pursue them.

'Power to' covers indicators such as increased skills and access, as well as control over income and resources (Luttrell *et al.*, 2009). 'Power within' refers to the imperceptible assets such as self-confidence, assertiveness, and self-esteem. Indicators of 'power within' include increased confidence, widened aspirations, and the ability to transform aspirations into actions (Luttrell *et al.*, 2009). Conversion factors and adaptive preferences components under the CA will be measured under this domain for this study.

2.6.3.3 Achievements or Outcomes

Resources and agency constitute capabilities, according to Sen (1993), which are the potential for living the life one values. Achievements indicate the extent to which potential is or is not fulfilled. It is a culmination of people's efforts. In relation to

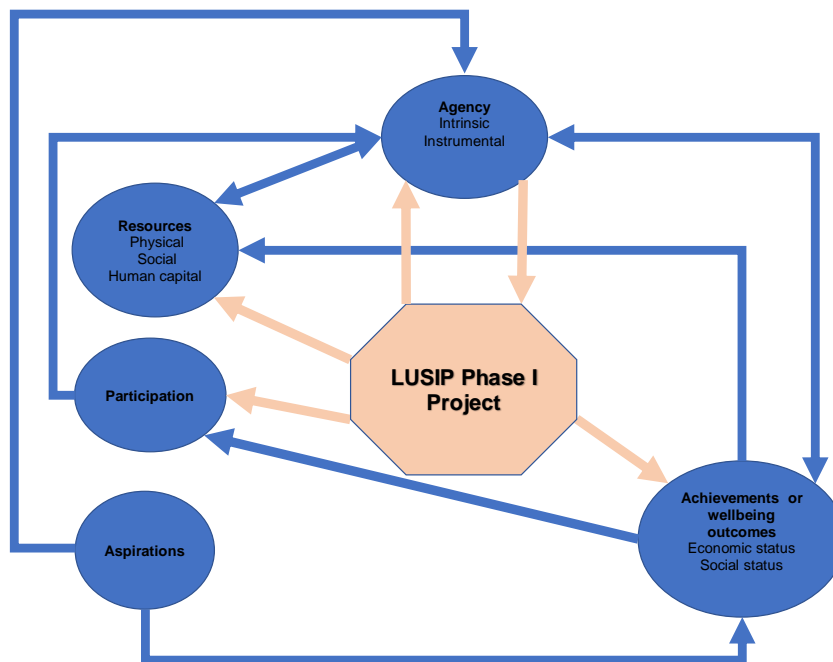
empowerment, achievements have been contemplated both in terms agency employed and the consequences thereof (Kabeer, 2005).

Malhotra *et al.* (2002) draws our attention to that fact that it is conceptually easy to distinguish between resources, agency, and achievement, but that it is difficult to separate them in the development of empowerment indicators. This is because what is deemed as a resource in one context can be viewed as women's agency or achievement in another context. For example, access to microcredit or employment opportunity maybe viewed as a resource in one context, while, in another context, access to microcredit or getting a job can constitute women's agency, and the benefits she accrues as a result, for example income and healthcare, can be viewed as achievement. Similarly, assets owned can constitute a source of empowerment and, in another context, can be evidence of empowerment. This shows that when measuring women empowerment, the context should be considered.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The study used a combination of Kabeer's empowerment framework (Kabeer, 2001), the Capability Approach, and Longwe's Women Empowerment framework to investigate the concept of women empowerment (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Conceptual Framework



Source: Adapted from Bryan *et al.* (2020), Longwe (cited in Leder, 2016), and Kabeer, 2001.

The components of the conceptual framework for the study and their relationship thereto will be discussed in the section below.

2.7.1 Resources

Resources expand the range of opportunities for women to make strategic life choices (Bryan & Garner, 2020). Beyond availability of resources, women need to have access to and control over such resources in order to be empowered. Resources are a medium through which agency can be exercised. In the context of empowerment, resources include not only economic resources, but also social, human, and physical resources (Kabeer, 1999). Similarly, women need agency to be able to access and control resources (shown by the two-way arrow between resources and agency). The project can also provide resources such as skills that can add to women's empowerment. Skills, education, as well as supportive measures that help women to act upon their choices, were considered as resources in this study.

2.7.2 Agency

Agency relates to the exercise of choice by women. Women should not only be able to exercise the choice, but should consider themselves as entitled to exercise their choice (Kabeer, 2001). This concept has to do with decision-making power.

Drawing from Rowland's (1997) definition of empowerment as power, agency in this study is conceptualised as 'power to' and 'power within'. According to Fox *et al.* (2017) and Luttrell *et al.* (2009), 'power to' is generative power which generates new opportunities and actions without domination, and relates to having power over decision-making and solving problems. Kabeer (2001) defines 'power to' as a person's capacity to pursue his or her strategic life choices and goals.

'Power to' covers indicators such as increased skills and access and control over income and resources study (Fox *et al.*, 2017; Luttrell *et al.*, 2009). 'Power within' refers to the impalpable properties such as self-confidence, self-esteem, and assertiveness. Indicators of power within includes increased confidence, widened aspirations and ability to transform aspirations into actions study (Fox *et al.*, 2017; Luttrell *et al.*, 2009). Conversion factors and adaptive preferences will also be measured under this domain for this study.

2.7.3 Aspirations

Closely related to the concept of agency are aspirations, which is one of the components of the Capability Approach. Some studies suggest that aspiration, which are an individual's goals for the future, have an effect on women empowerment (Kosec *et al.*, 2018; Fox & Romero, 2017). Low aspiration results in low agency, which may results in low empowerment outcomes for women in turn. The study explored the aspirations of women under the LUSIP project.

2.7.4 Achievements or Outcomes

Resources and agency constitute capabilities, according to Sen (1993), which are the potential for living the life one values. Interaction between agency and resources produces achievement or lack of achievements, using Kabeer's words, or functionings in the CA. This includes changes in wellbeing outcomes or the lack thereof. This process is also interactive, as wellbeing outcomes or achievements can influence women access and control of resources and also agency, as shown in Figure 5 (earlier

in this chapter). Examples of achievements could be financial wellbeing, being able to send children to school, and improved status in the community, amongst others.

In addition to Kabeer's empowerment framework and the CA, the researcher also used the participation domain from Longwe's WEF for this study. Participation in the development process has been shown as one of the tools that can help achieve empowerment. Research shows that benefits can accrue from active participation of women. Women who participate in community driven development projects are more likely to contribute to public decision-making. This is to say that experience gained in the project enhances participatory skills in other forums (World Bank, 2011). Agarwal (2010) is of the view that women's effective participation in development projects covers meeting attendance, speaking up in meetings, and holding an authorised position in the committee. Active participation will be measured by ascertaining whether the respondent spoke in front of other participants in most recent meeting and whether they voted on proposed agenda. If one of the two participation indicators have been achieved, the respondent will be considered empowered.

According to IFAD (2017), participation of women from household to the highest political level must encompass meaningful participation of rural women for women empowerment to be realised.

2.8 CONCLUSION

Chapter two introduced the concepts of rural development projects and women empowerment. Rural development projects differ both in approach in implementation. Most development project are means-based, as they focus on the provision of resources (means) instead of how people utilise them (Frediani, Boni, & Gasper, 2014). A shift in the approach employed resulted to the implementation of bottom-up approaches. Participation, which is closely related to empowerment, underpins the use of bottom- up approaches to development.

Literature shows that rural development projects have the potential to empower women. This is because they provide a platform for participation in decision-making; however, this participation should go beyond nominal participation where women are just members of associations or groups, and should reach iterative participation, which is considered the highest level of participation as it is empowering (Agarwal, 2010).

Rural development projects can empower women in the social, political, and economic domain (Doneys *et al.*, 2020; World Bank 2017, Johnson *et al.*, 2017). For Kabeer (2005; 1999), women empowerment is as a result of the interaction between resources, agency, and achievements, which are viewed as functionings in the CA.

The conceptual framework underpinning the study was drawn from a combination of the components of the CA, Kabeer's framework, and Longwe's Women Empowerment Framework. These components interact with the LUSIP project to result in either women empowerment, or the lack thereof.

Chapter four will discuss the methodology, sampling, and data collection that would be used for the study.

3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter two provided an exposition of rural development, rural development projects, empowerment, and women empowerment. The WEF and CA frameworks were also discussed, including the justification of using the CA for this study.

The CA's flexibility, its focus on individual freedom and prospects, and its vision to evaluate social arrangements, are driving factors behind its significance in this research. Methodologically, the research questions were shaped by the CA, as the interest was the capabilities and liberties available for, and valued by, women in the LUSIP Phase 1 project. The qualitative design allowed for the operationalisation of the CA in exploring the role of rural development projects on women empowerment through the lens of human development and capabilities.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methods and approaches used in the study. The first section defines the study area, while the second presents and justifies the use of qualitative approach and design employed for this study. Data collection methods and sampling design were also discussed in this chapter. These were followed by the ethical consideration for the study and data analysis processes. The data collections tools and design were selected in order to address the aim of the study, which seeks to explore the role of rural development projects on women empowerment in Eswatini by answering the research questions.

In formulating the research questions, the following considerations, as suggested by Agee (2009), were made:

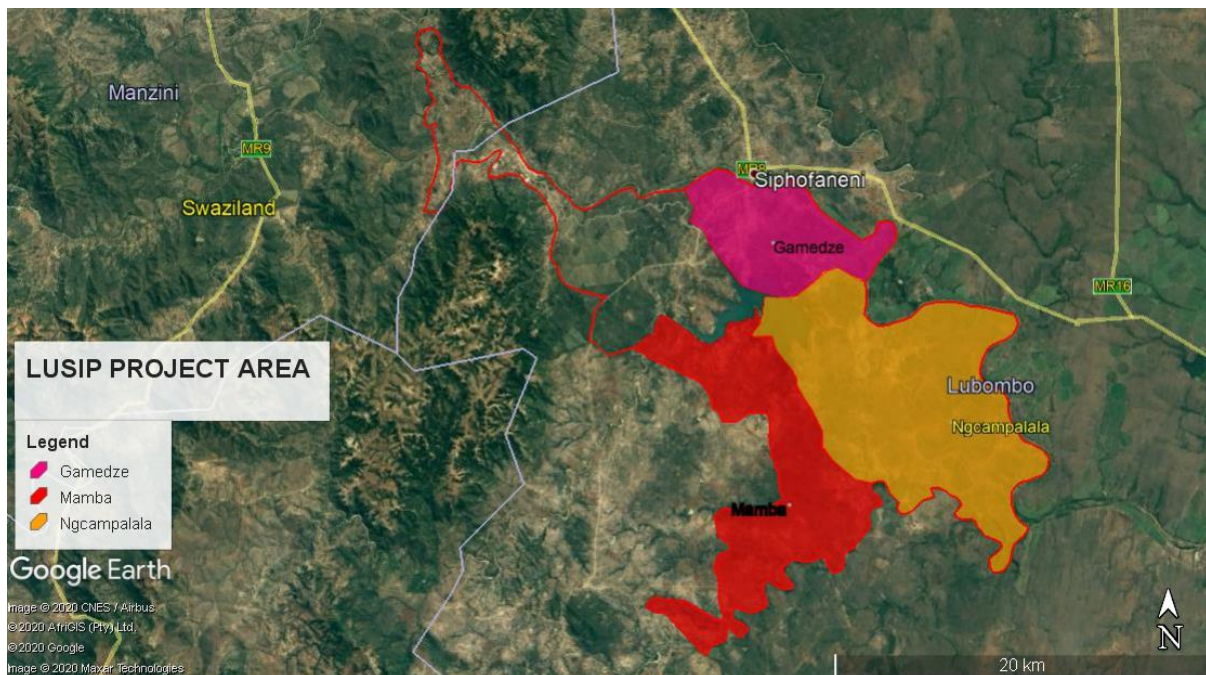
- a) Fitness of the questions in the research field;
- b) Is researching the questions worthwhile?
- c) Contribution of the question to progress within the research field; and
- d) Do the questions concern real problems?

3.2 Description of the Study Area

The study area is located at Siphofaneni on the west bank of the Lower Usuthu River in the Lowveld of Eswatini. The project area falls under seven chiefdoms, chief

Magwagwa Gamedze, Mshikashika, Ngcamphalala, Maphilingo Shongwe, Mdlaka Gamedze, Indvuna Mathambo Dlamini, King Maja Mamba II, and Prince Logcogco Dlamini. This area was chosen for its accessibility, and ESWADE’s interest in the study’s capacity to raise awareness of the role that could be played by rural development projects on women empowerment. Another rationale for choosing the LUSIP project is that the project is regarded as one of the most successful rural development projects in the area (Maziya, 2016). The study covered only three of the seven chiefdoms under the project area. The reason for selecting these chiefdoms was that FCs in these chiefdoms were developed earlier than in the other four chiefdoms (Ndlovu, Dlamini, & Nkambule, 2014). A face to face meeting was held with ESWADE management to provide information about the research and to seek permission to conduct the study, and was granted. Figure 3.1 below shows the study area.

Figure 3.1: A Map Showing the Study Area



Source: Google Maps, 2020

3.3 Research Approach and Design

3.3.1 Research Approach

In order to explore the role of rural development projects on women empowerment from a human development and capabilities perspective, the study employed a qualitative research design. Although there is no explicit definition of qualitative research (Mason, 2002), the consensus is that qualitative research embodies a range of methodologies such as ethnography, phenomenology, etc. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) used to examine human behaviour and meaning that individuals or groups give to their experiences. For Rahman (2016), qualitative research is an approach that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures, which incorporates multiple realities. Conception of women's empowerment is subjective and diverse. Such complexities can be understood by using a qualitative research approach. Drawing on Alghamdi's (2015) assertion that social realities are best accessed using qualitative methods, as they are value laden and subjective, the qualitative research approach was suitable for the current study. This is because the study sought depth of the phenomenon under study rather than statistics. Agee (2009) postulates that such realities are better researched through a qualitative approach, a view that is also supported by Alkire *et al.* (2013).

Flick (2015) asserts that another strength of qualitative research is that experiences of study participants are shared from their perspective. Moreover, production of a dense, detailed description of the participants' feelings, opinions, and meaning ascribed to the phenomenon under study is another strength of qualitative research. Qualitative research also sits well with feminist researchers, as it gives women a voice to be heard (Bryman, 2012). The limitation of this approach is that it is subjective and that researchers question its trustworthiness (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). Non-generalisation of research findings to general population is another weakness of qualitative research (Stark & Torrance, 2005; Yilmaz, 2013). Notwithstanding the weaknesses of qualitative research, the approach was favoured because the interest of the study was to explore women's experiences and to account for women empowerment in the rural development projects they participate in. Selection of qualitative study design was informed by the fundamentally restricted potential for

structured surveys to aid in the understanding of women empowerment, as is extensively recognised in the literature.

3.3.1.1 Research Design

The study will employ the case study design. Bryman (2012: 55) defines a case study as a research design that “entails detailed and intensive analysis of a single case”. Case study was selected as little was known about the subject under study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This view is reiterated by Bless, Smith, and Sithole (2013), who claim that the use of a case study allowed for a comprehensive understanding and in-depth knowledge about an unknown or poorly understood phenomena. Selection of the case study design and qualitative research approach renders this study a qualitative case study. The research took an exploratory and explanatory angle, as it sought to explore the role of rural development projects on women empowerment. It enabled the researcher to incorporate impressions and perceptions of the phenomenon under study.

Neuman (2014) is of the view that a case study design has many strengths. Flexibility and in-depth explanation of proposed relationships or alternative views and development of richer explanation of complex social issues is one of the strengths of case study (Neuman, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Similarly, Stark and Torrance (2005:33) also argued that a case study provides in-depth enquiry in understanding the case rather than generalising to a population at large. According to Stark and Torrance (2005) and Flyvbjerg (2006), one of the shortcomings of a case study is that it is highly specific, which implies that findings are related to the particular case and cannot be statistically generalised to a larger population. Flyvbjerg (2006) also claims that researchers question the rigor of the approach and further states that case studies also contain a bias towards verification. Since there is little information that pertains the phenomenon under study in Eswatini, the research used the case study despite the limitations associated with its use. Moreover, the case study was used since it was suitable in explaining the how and why questions (Yin, 2013; 2009; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

3.4 Sampling Methods

Sampling is the selection of participants for a particular study in order to respond to a research question. Sampling can be differentiated in terms of probability or non-

probability sampling (Bryman, 2012). Kalu and Bwalya (2017) posit that sampling plays a key role in qualitative research, as the research is conducted in its natural setting. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was implemented in this study, as it emphasises predetermined features of participants in the research. Purposive sampling can be defined as the deliberate selection of participants due to the characteristics participants have (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Maree, 2016). Members of the sample are chosen to *represent* a phenomenon, groups, or incidents in relation to a key criterion (Maree, 2016) and should have in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Paudel, 2014). Views of the participants in this type of sampling technique are viewed as more credible than when the sample consists of both knowledgeable participants and participants that do not have the knowledge or expertise on the subject under study. Scholars are of the view that the strength of purposive sampling lies in the selection of information rich cases which provide great insight to the issues central to the research study (Maree, 2016; Paudel, 2014; Masuku & Kristen, 2003). Sharma (2017) contends that, even though purposive sampling provided for selection of information rich cases, its weakness lies on the fact that it is prone to researcher bias. Moreover, representativeness of the sample in purposive sampling may be difficult to prove due to subjectivity and non-probability nature of the unit selection. Bhattacharjee (2012) opines that another weakness of purposive sampling is that findings cannot be generalised to a larger population.

While there is no clear guideline for the sample size in qualitative research, Maree (2016) asserts that there are a few studies that offer guidelines on data saturation and sample size. The author is of the view that a sample as small as six and as large as 60 interviews can be a good sample for qualitative research (Maree, 2016). Following the guidance by Maree (2016), 36 women from 17 FCs under the Mamba, Gamedze, and Ngcamphalala chiefdoms under LUSIP Phase 1 were selected as units of analysis for this study. Despite the weaknesses of purposive sampling, it was favoured for the study because it allowed for an opportunity to interview participants with in-depth knowledge of and experience of the phenomenon under study. ESWADE staff members helped the researcher to reach the selected participants who have an in-depth experience on the project (Battacherjee, 2012).

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

This section discusses the data collection strategies that were employed in this study. The strategies used for data collection were informed by the research design and research questions. Semi-structured interviews with women who are members of the farmer companies were used as the main data source for the study. However, as the research evolved, there was an interest to find a consensus on the responses that were given by the interview participants. This pertained to how women perceive empowerment, factors that impede or enhance their participation, and strategies that can be employed to empower women in the country; thus, the nominal group discussion was adopted. Yin (1994) asserts that researchers need to be adaptive, flexible, and willing to change procedure and strategies if there is a change in circumstances. Key informant interviews were also held with people who were working in the rural development and women empowerment field. These included staff members from the Ministry of Tinkhundla and Development, ESWADE, World Vision, and two community leaders who work closely with the project from the study area. Alghamdi (2015) is of the view that in-depth interviews are better suited for when little is known about the subject under study.

To assess the rigor and increase the validity of the data collected, pretesting of the tools was done (Hurst, Arulogun, Owolabi, Akinyeni, Uvere, Warth, & Ovbiagele, 2015) on four in-depth participants, one key informant, and one Nominal Group Technique (NGT). The selected individuals had similar characteristics to the target study subjects, and this was used to assess rigor and increase validity of the data collected. This was then followed by the revision of the data collection tools.

To ensure minimize exposure to COVID-19, all interviews were held in open and well-ventilated areas. Participants were also requested to wear a mask throughout the interview.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The study employed semi-structured interviews, which were considered as the main source of data collection for the study. Curtis and Curtis (2011) define in-depth interviews as a case focus approach whose framing allows for addition of themes or questions and this allows for generation of rich and detailed data. This view is also

supported by Flick (2015), who further states that the sequence of the questions can be changed or slightly reformulated. Questions in the semi-structured interview guides were prepared in relation to identified themes (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The strength of the semi-structured in-depth interviews lie in the fact that they allow for studying the researched from their perspective (Bless *et al.*, 2013; Bryman, 2012; Curtis and Curtis, 2011) and allowed for people's voice and feelings to be heard. At the same time, it afforded the researcher control in directing the conversation within the pre-determined themes. This is done with minimum interference and influence from others. For Boyatzis (1998), the strength of semi-structured interviews is that they give the study depth and breadth, as they are intensive. Greef (2005) sees its strength in its flexibility in scope and depth, a view also supported by Qu and Dumay (2011) who postulate that semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow for probing to get elaborate responses. The limitation of semi-structured interviews is that they are time consuming and that the researcher may have a lot of data to analyse. Despite the limitations associated with in-depth interviews, the dialogic approach embedded in in-depth interviews was favoured, as it helped in the understanding of subject under study.

Although the initial sampling plan was to include 30 women, the change in sampling preference led to a total of 35 women being interviewed. The sampled comprised 18 ordinary shareholders and 17 board members of the FCs under the LUSIP Phase 1 project. Exploring whether there are differences in the degree of empowerment from the two cadres motivated this selection criteria. Research participants were selected from FCs that have been in operation for at least nine years in three chiefdoms under the LUSIP Phase 1 project. Comprehensive data of all the FCs under the three chiefdoms was sourced from ESWADE. A total of 41 FCs were found to have been in operation from 2008 to 2011 in the three chiefdoms. Four of these were eliminated, as they did not have the comprehensive data (i.e. number of males and females). FCs with a 40% female membership were selected for the study. This was based on the average percentage of female membership from the all the 37 FCs. Permission to interview the respondents was sought from the board chairperson of the selected FCs. Table 3.1 shows the number of FCs, number of women, and their positions.

Table 3.1: In-Depth Interview Participants

Chiefdom	Farmers Organisation	# of Females	# of Males	Total members	% Females	Sample per FC		
						Board Member	Non-Board Member	Total
Gamedze	Setamiphilo eNgonini	15	11	26	58%	1	1	2
	Sibhotela Investments Pty Ltd	23	15	38	61%	1	1	2
	Sukumani Ngonini	16	8	24	67%	1	1	2
Gamedze Total		54	34	88	61%	3	3	6
Mamba	Asibebahle Mbabala	16	9	25	64%	-	1	2
	Kwenta Akufani	43	25	68	63%	1	2	3
	Mbabala Mngongomaneni	23	8	31	74%	1	1	2
	Vuka Sive	21	15	36	58%	1	1	2
Mamba Total		103	57	160	64%	3	4	8
Ngcamphalala	Chubekani	14	18	32	44%	1	1	2
	Embusweni Matjentima	24	34	58	41%	1	1	2
	Gcekeni	14	14	28	50%	1	1	2
	Ingungwane	32	31	63	51%	1	1	2
	M&S	26	26	52	50%	1	1	2
	Matimavu	41	45	86	48%	2	1	3
	Mtfweni	23	34	57	40%	1	1	2
	Mthomanzi	21	27	48	44%	1	1	2
	Phendukani Investments	21	27	48	44%	1	1	2
	Sesibonile	17	0	17	100%	1	1	2
Ngcamphalala Total		233	256	489	48%	11	10	21
Grand Total		390	347	737	53%	17	18	35

The selected women study participants must have been rated as poor or of middle income at registration in the FCs, and a list of farmer companies with their women members and contact numbers was obtained from ESWADE. Limited time and funding

have informed the selection of the three chiefdoms, viz. Ngcamphalala, Mamba, and Gamedze.

Key informants were people considered in the study as people who had more detailed knowledge on the subject matter. Five key informants were purposively selected on the basis of their roles or experience in the local area and in their level of participation in rural development landscape. Interviews were conducted with staff members from the Ministry of Tinkhundla and Development, one ESWADE staff member, one World Vision staff member, and two community leaders who work closely with the project from the study area.

Permission to interview key informants was first sought from the leadership of the organisation(s) in which the officers are attached to or work for. Letters detailing the aim of the study and requesting their participation in the study was sent. The letter also covered ethical issues such as assurance of confidentiality, and voluntary participation in the study. Participants were also assured in the letter that they can decide to withdraw at any time during the study.

The traditional leaders from the community under study were informed verbally of the study during their routine meetings. Informed consent was also sought from all the research participants before commencement of the study. Permission and consent to record and take notes during the interview were sought from the participants. This was done to ensure that impressions during the interviews are not lost. Face to face interviews were used. The interviews were done at the women and key informants' places of comfort. Moreover, the interviews were done separately to avoid group responses, which could have compromised the validity of the responses. Field notes and audio recordings will be used to identify themes and subthemes that are emerging interviews.

3.5.2 Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

The research employed the Nominal Group Technique (NGT). The NGT is a structured variation of the focus group discussion (Dang, 2015), and is used to promote meaningful, interpersonal disclosures among the group participants by gathering equally weighted responses. The technique includes the focus group discussion and the voting stage (Dang, 2015; Harvey & Holmes, 2012). Harvey and Holmes (2012) claim that NGT is close to exploratory research.

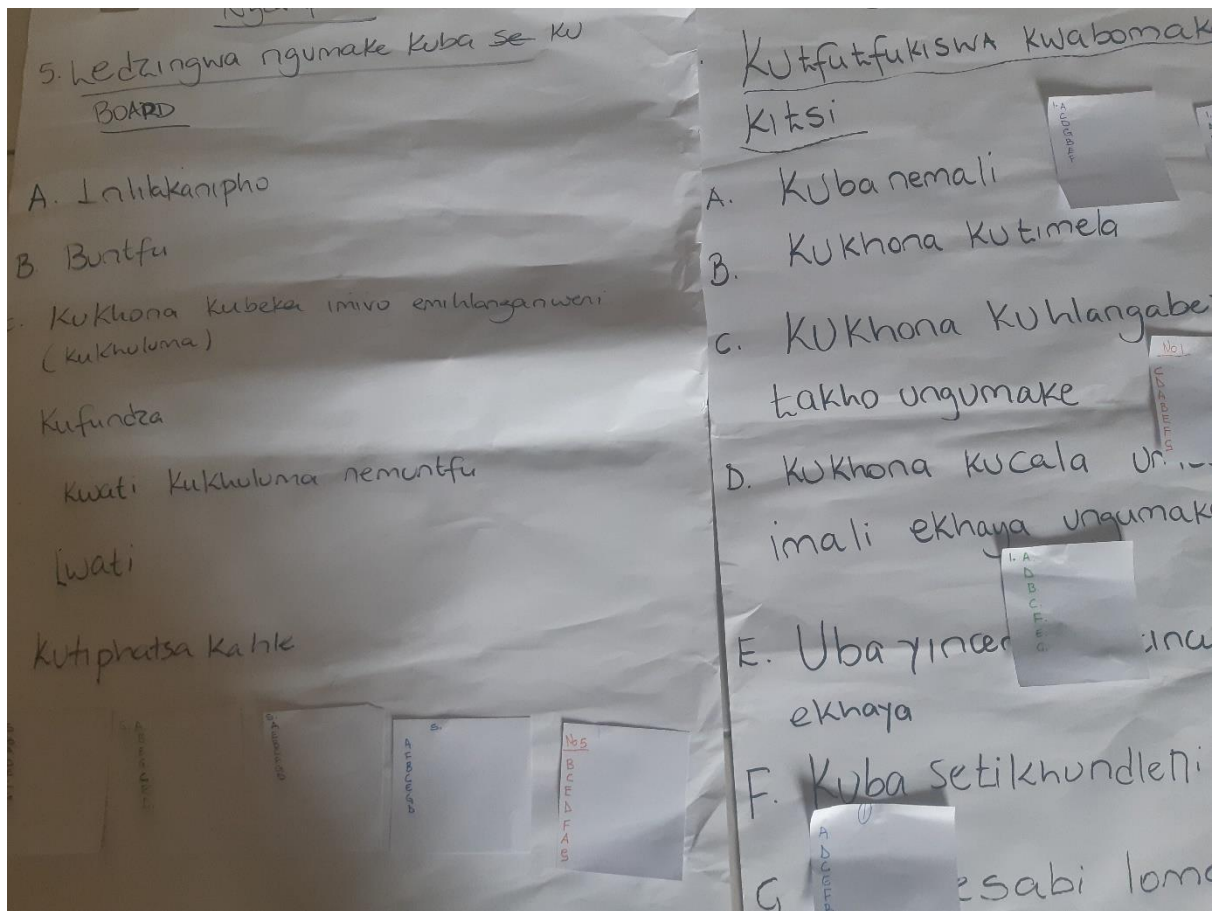
The strength of this data collection method is that it allows for equal voice for all participants in the group discussion and minimises domination of the process by more confident or outspoken group participants (Dang, 2015; Harvey & Holmes, 2012). Another strength of this approach is that it is easy to analyse the results, as the ideas generated are voted on and ranked during the session.

Dang (2015) and Harvey and Holmes (2012) are of the view that the major weakness for the nominal group technique is that the method requires that all participants should have reading and writing skills and should also be comfortable to share their ideas verbally. Moreover, the data sourced from the NGT cannot be generalised to a wider population due to the specific characteristics of who is nominated to attend (Dang, 2015).

Two nominal group discussions were held for this study, with each group consisting of five to six participants aged between 31 to 45 years old. The NGT exercise was conducted to solicit consensus on the themes that were identified after the in-depth interviews, such as perceptions of women empowerment, factors that affect participation of women in rural development projects, resources that women need to be part of the FC, and the changes (achievements) that have been realised by the women as a result of participating in the LUSIP project. The NGT was adapted, since the same in-depth interview research participants were used for the study were used.

In a flip chart, the key research questions and responses from the in-depth interviews were compiled. These were presented to the NGT participants, and all participants discussed and clarified the issues raised. Points that the group felt were similar were then grouped together. Letters A, B, C, and so on were written on the list under each theme on the flip chart. After this stage, the participants, without discussing, on a piece of paper ranked the issues according the most important to the least important per question. The pieces of papers were then collected for data analysis. The scale of analysis ranged between one and five, as the top five points were selected for analysis per question. Items ranked first were given the highest point (five) on the scale, and the points decreased as one went down the priority list. The adapted NGT process that was conducted is shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: The NGT Exercise Conducted in One of the Communities Under Study



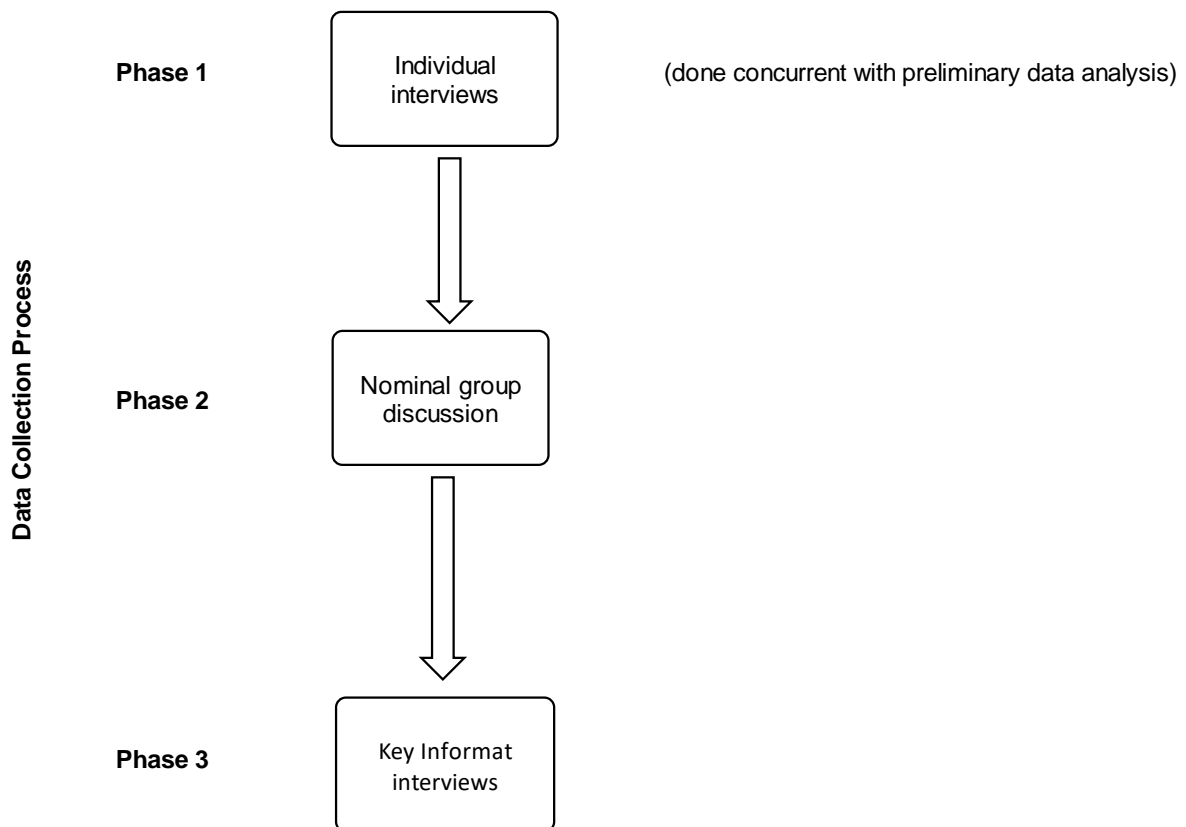
Items ranked on top were given five points, number two was given four points, and so on. Combined scores of the participants were then calculated for each item on the list per question. Table 4 shows the summary of the data collection methodology that was followed for the study.

Table 3.2: Summary of Data Collection Methodology

Target group	Data collection method	Number of participants
Document review	Review of literature, policy, website, newspapers and journal	
Women in FCs	Face to face semi- structured interviews	35
Key informants	Face to Face semi- structured	5
Women in FCs	Nominal Group Technique	12 participants 2 groups

Figure 3.3 shows the data collection procedure that was followed for this study.

Figure 3.3: Data Collection Process



3.6 Data Analysis

This section of the study outlines how data were managed, processed, and analysed. Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process meant to understand how participants make sense of the phenomenon under study. Research participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Thematic analysis was employed for this study, and questions in the interview schedule were thematically structured for ease of managing and analysing the data.

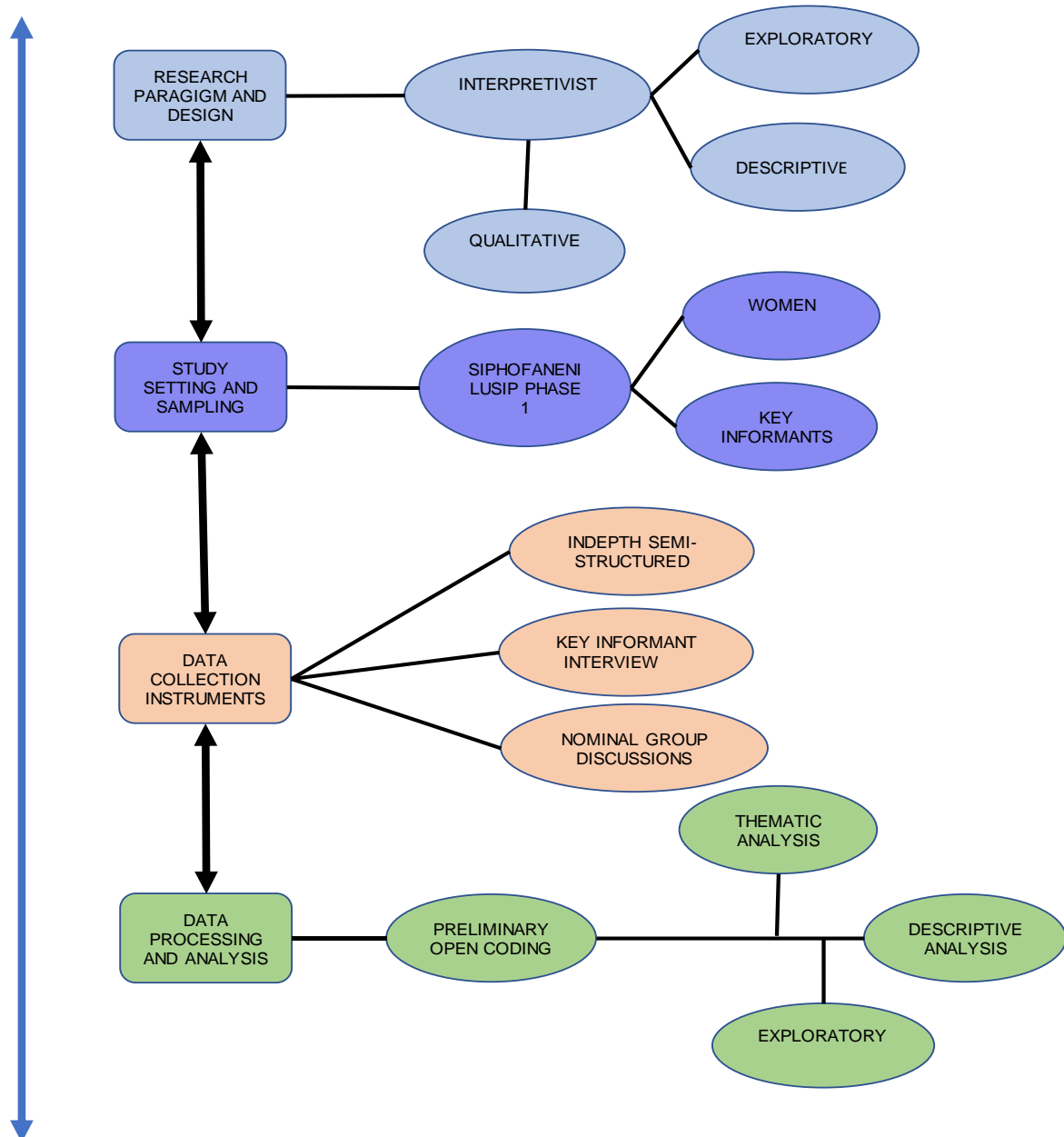
Interviews were audio recorded and supplemented with taking of notes. The interviews were conducted in Siswati, a native language for the interviewees and the researcher. The audio recorded interviews were translated and transcribed verbatim from the voice recorder. These were then typed in Microsoft Word format. This was done not later than two days after collecting the data. This was helpful in ensuring that discussions were not misinterpreted. The data was then cleaned, which entailed editing the transcripts to remove grammatical errors. The notes taken during the interviews were compared with the audio recording to fill any gaps. Open coding of data from hard copy transcripts was also done. Strauss and Corbin (1990) are of the view that the researcher's role is to make sure that the participants voices are interpreted verbatim with little or no interpretation. In contrast to Strauss and Corbin (1990), Creswell (2013) as well as Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) argue that interpretation is embodied in qualitative research and hence not avoidable. Strauss and Corbin's position help to guard against distorting the interviewees' voices. Care was therefore taken to ensure that the meaning of the responses given by interviewees was not altered in this study.

Thematic coding, which is regarded as the core of qualitative data analysis, was then performed (Creswell, 2013). Coding was done manually, even though the questions in the interview schedule were grouped into themes. This was done to identify emerging themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Coding for in depth interviews was then transferred into Excel for analysis. Data from nominal group discussions and key informant interviews were analysed manually as it was manageable. Interpretation of data grouped according to themes was done to give a presentation of the role of rural development projects on women empowerment.

An interactive feedback session with the research participants was conducted during the NGT exercise to validate or verify the findings to ensure that it was a true reflection

of the discussions with the research participants. Discussions on recommendations which could ensure women empowerment through rural development projects were discussed during the nominal group technique exercise. To summarise the research methodology, a schematic diagram was developed. The summary of the research process methodology is shown in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4: Research methodology process summary



Source: Adapted from Mackenzie and Knipe (2006)

3.7 Research Ethics

Creswell (2013) points out that ethical issues in qualitative research must be considered throughout the research process. According to Agee (2009), researching people's lives is an exercise of ethics. It was for this reason that ethical issues were considered throughout the research process. The short- and long-term impact of the study was considered when formulating the study questions, especially since women empowerment issues are a sensitive issue in the Kingdom of Eswatini (Agee, 2009). While ethical issues will underpin the research process, data collection, analysis, and presentation of the role of rural development projects on women empowerment, the whole research process will be approached with consideration of moral values. Commencement of empirical data collection for the study was done after a formal ethical approval by the University of the Free State. This was done to ensure that the study was feasible and that the subjects of this inquiry were protected.

To avoid any unforeseen risk, the researcher was transparent and honest with the participants regarding the study's purpose from the onset. Participants were informed of the nature of the research and its implication and procedures. It was also clarified that there are no benefits that would accrue to them directly resulting from participating in the study; however, their participation would help as the study sought to contribute to policy and programming that ensured the advancement of women in Eswatini. Written informed consent was obtained from all the research participants. These were prepared in both Siswati and English, which are the official languages in the country. For community entry, verbal informed consent was sought from the three chiefdoms with the help of ESWADE. The informed consent comprised the details of the study and emphasised the fact that respondents' involvement was voluntary and that they were free at any point of the research to withdraw without fear. Research participants were also encouraged to ask for clarity on the research purpose, and the researcher continued to provide information on the research so that participants were cognisant of the purpose of the study.

The study generated qualitative data at individual level; therefore, the identity of the participants cannot be linked to their responses as they were assigned pseudonyms. Assigning of pseudonyms to conceal participants' identity is a view that is also supported by Maree (2016). In a bid to maintain dignity of the human person and to

apply the no harm principle, questions were asked in a way that do not bring any harm or shame to the participants.

Participants were also assured of privacy and were informed that the audio recordings and transcripts will be kept in a safe lockable place. Moreover, respondents were assured that the audio recordings and transcripts will only be accessible to the researcher and the supervisor or the University of the Free State on request. Participants were further assured that the information generated during the inquiry will be used only for academic purposes and that their names will not be revealed in the final research report.

3.8 Conclusion

Chapter three described the research methodology that was employed for the study. A qualitative research approach was deemed the most appropriate, because the purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of the women participants of the LUSIP phase 1 project. The research methodology was depicted and related to the design, data collection tools, sampling, data management, and analysis. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were favoured for this study. Nominal group discussions were conducted to find consensus on perception of women empowerment, factors that affect participation of women in rural development projects, and the changes (achievements) that have been realised by the women as a result of participating in the LUSIP project. The themes in the interview agenda and the interview questions were informed by the constituents of the CA, Kabeer's empowerment model, and Longwe's Women Empowerment frameworks. Data from interviews with the research participants enabled triangulation, as it was collected from a variety of sources (key informants and in-depth interviews with women and nominal group discussion). Lastly, ethical protocols that were followed during the current study were also outlined. Therefore, chapter four presents a description of the research findings.

4. CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the methodological considerations of the study. The study sought to explore the role of rural development projects on women empowerment. An exploratory angle was employed, as limited knowledge on the rural development projects on women's empowerment in Eswatini exists. To explore this phenomenon, data were obtained in the field using in-depth semi-structured interviews with women who participate in the LUSIP Phase 1 project and with five key informant interviews. The NGT approach was used to find consensus on issues raised by the women during the semi-structured interviews.

This chapter, therefore, is a presentation and discussion of the empirical findings of the study. The findings will be presented in themes in line with the research objectives and key research questions of the study. In this regard, biographic data of the respondents and how they became shareholders were first presented. This was then followed by the presentation of the findings in line with the research objectives and questions. Participants were allocated pseudonyms to protect their identity. These pseudonyms will be used throughout the study.

4.2 Response Rate

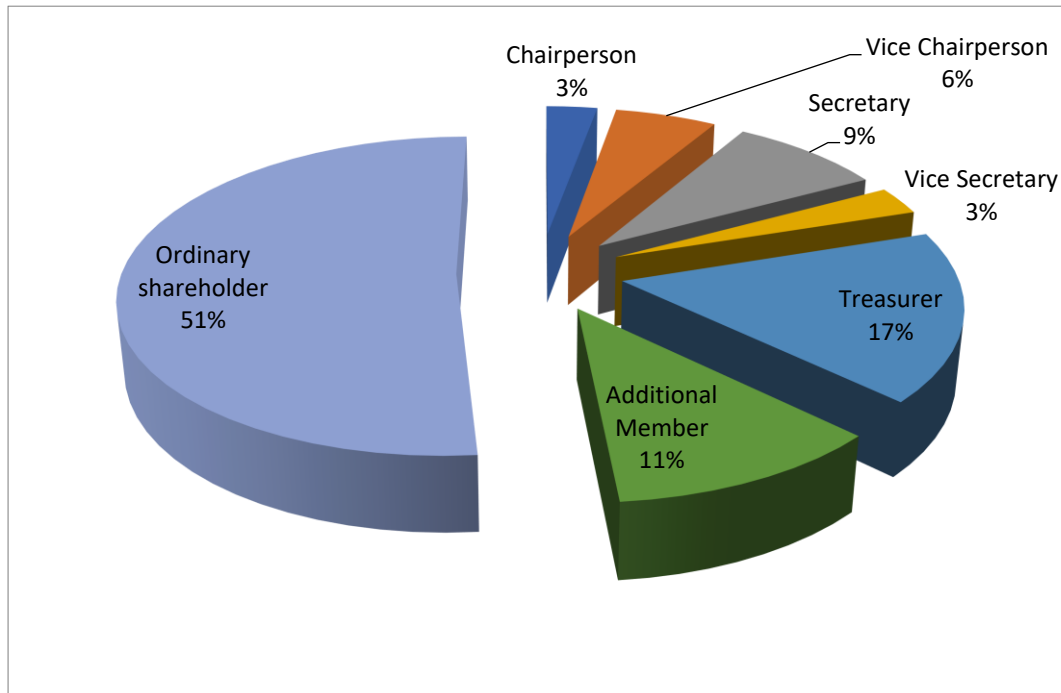
Seventeen FCs were selected for the study, and 16 of these FCs had both male and female shareholders, with only one FC comprising only female shareholders. All the selected FCs were represented in the study. Thirty-five out of the 36 respondents identified through purposive sampling were interviewed, translating to 97% response rate. Seventeen (49%) of these were FC board members, while 18 (51%) were ordinary shareholders. All five key informant interviews were held, and two out of three nominal group discussions were conducted.

4.3 FC Membership Status of Respondents

The membership status of the in-depth interview respondents in the FCs is presented in Figure 4.1. Ordinary shareholders constituted 51% of the respondents, while most

respondents who were board members were treasurers (17%), followed by additional members (11%). A few chairpersons also participated in the study (3%). The study's results indicate that the education level obtained has an effect on the positions that women can occupy in the FCs. This conclusion can be deduced from the large quantity of respondents occupying the additional member position, which does not require attainment of any education.

Figure 4.1: Membership Status of the Sampled Respondents



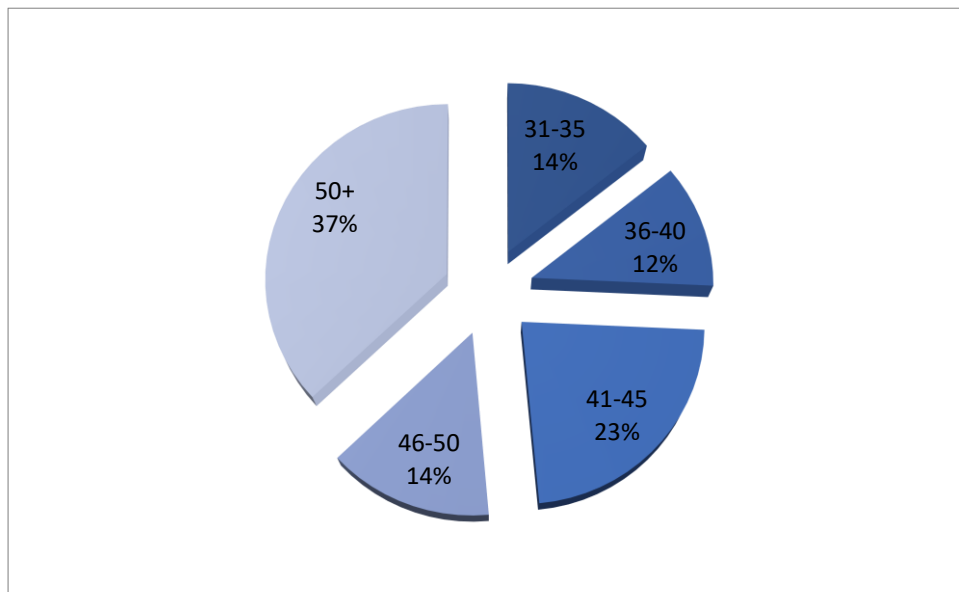
4.4 Biographic Profiles of Study Participants

Demographic data of LUSIP Phase 1 women are discussed under this section and gives a contextual background against which the findings can be interpreted. The profile includes age, marital status, number of dependants, and educational background. Respondents had an average of six dependants, and 18 of these dependants had two or more dependants older than 18 years old who they also had to take care of financially; for this, they mostly relied on the dividends from the FC. Not only are the women taking care of older dependants, but the burden of caring for grandchildren also fall to them. With so many dependants to look after and the limited resources available, women are unable to make meaningful changes in their lives.

4.4.1 Age of Study Participants

The age of the study participants is visually captured in Figure 4.2. Out of the 35 women interviewed, 13 (37%) were above the age of 50 years and only four (14%) were between ages of 31 and 35. There were no respondents below the 31 to 35-year age range. This demonstrates the fact that membership in the FC was only for those who were married or had a household at the time of LUSIP project inception.

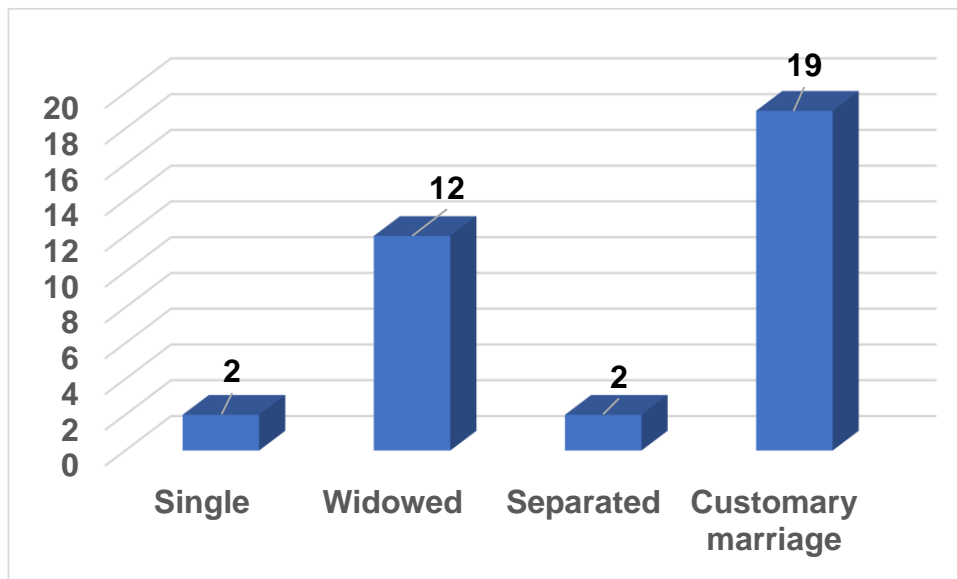
Figure 4.2: Age Range of Study Participants



4.4.2 Marital Status of Study Participants

Of the 35 women interviewed, two (6%) were single and two (6%) were separated, twelve (12%) were widowed, and 19 (54%) were in a customary form of marriage. This shows that the majority of women shareholders in the different FCs were those who were married; an assertion made by the respondents during the interviews is that to be a shareholder one had to be married. Single women who were considered still eligible to get married were not permitted to join the FC, as it was believed that they will marry, and that their matrimonial homes would not benefit from the proceeds of FCs in their parental area. It was only in special instances where parents of the single girls requested from the areas' chief to include their girl child in the FCs, which was only observed in two of the 17 FCs selected for the study. Figure 4.3 shows the marital status of the study participants.

Figure 4.3: Marital Status of Study Participants

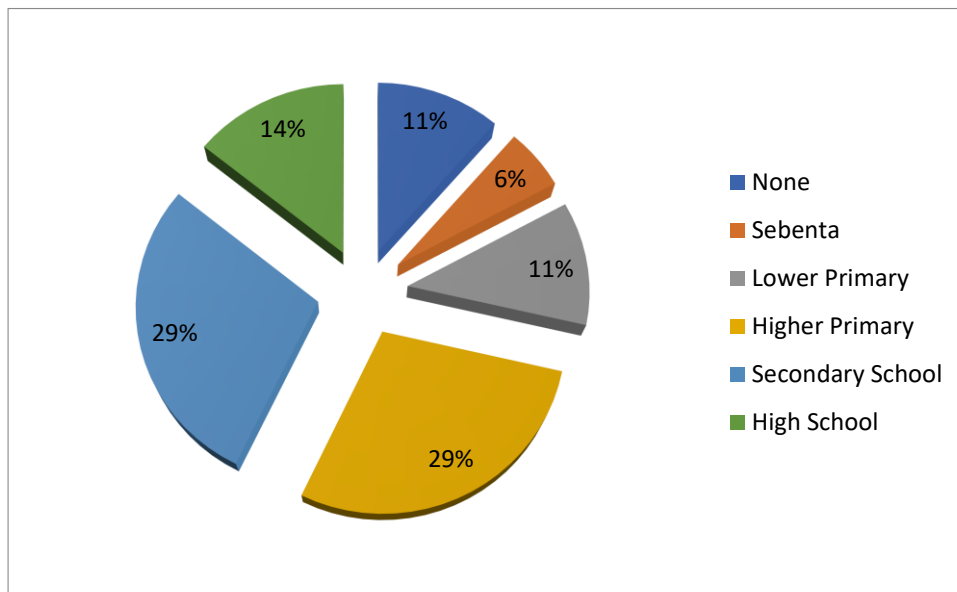


Eighteen (51%) of the respondents were dependents, while 17 (49%) of them were households heads, as they were either single, separated, or widowed.

4.4.3 Educational Background

Findings of the study indicate that four (11%) women did not receive any form of education, while two (6%) attended Sebenta classes, and four (11%) only reached the lower primary school level, Grade 1 up to Grade 4. The level of education with the highest number of respondents was the higher primary level (Grades 5 to 7) and secondary school, which had ten (29%) respondents each. Only five (14%) reached high school level. Respondents who had a higher level of education also had a likelihood of being a board member, occupying positions such as vice chairperson, treasurer, and secretary for the board. This is in line with the assertion made by the respondents that, for executive board positions, the level of education attained is considered during elections. Only one FC had a chairperson who had a higher primary education level. None of the respondents had a tertiary education. Figure 4.4 shows the educational background of the respondents. Lack of education continues to hamper empowerment of women.

Figure 4.4: Educational Background of Study Participants



4.5 Becoming a Shareholder in the FCs

In discussing how women became shareholders in the FC, events surrounding the initiation of the LUSIP in relation to land should first be iterated. Before the inception of the LUSIP project, there were two categories of people - those with land and those who were landless. There was also a disparity in the land holdings in the communities, as some household has big land holdings, while others had little land. To ensure equitable benefit from the development in the community, the community members had to renounce their land right and return the land to the *umphakatsi* for reallocation. FCs were then established, and membership to the FC was determined by the vicinity of the homesteads relative to the land allocated to the FCs. The household criterion was then coined. However, it is worth noting that, even though the land renunciation was done, respondents still mentioned the donation of land as one criterion for becoming a shareholder, which had a bearing on whether women in some households could become shareholders.

Women were asked how they became shareholders in the FCs. A myriad of reasons were given, which, for the purposes of this research, were grouped into four categories, namely:

- a) Large land holdings;
- b) Lack of interest by husband in the development initiative;

- c) Women were household heads; and
- d) Absent husbands.

4.5.1 Large Land Holdings

Women who were in households or homesteads with large land holdings benefitted from the use of land to join the FC. According to the respondents, households that had land holdings of more than five hectares were allowed to be represented by two or more representatives, depending on the size of the land holding previously owned. This gave women an opportunity to be shareholders, whereas households that were landless or had small land holdings were represented by one person as a shareholder. During the data collection, respondents also alluded to the fact that a person was only allowed to be a shareholder in one FC; if the husband was already in another FC, this again opened an opportunity for a woman (n = 4) to be a shareholder. As one interviewee puts it: "If my husband's siblings were old, my husband could have been the one who is the shareholder" (Funiwe, an in-depth interview participant whose husband is a proxy for his siblings in another FC, August 2020).

Women who were married in the same chiefdom or who thought that they will never marry (n = 4) were given land by their relatives so that they could be shareholders. Single women who were thought to be married in future were never given land, as it was felt that benefits from the development cannot be used in other chiefdoms that is in the lady's marital home. This view was articulated by one of the respondents as follows:

My father had land where he was growing cotton and he went to the chief to ask that all her children otherwise girls were not allowed to be shareholders as it was believed that they were still going to get married. Due to these eleven girls were given the opportunity to be shareholders and later other FCs ended up copying this. My father paid a cow to the umphakatsi to facilitate her inclusion in the FC (Nomsa, a 34-year-old in-depth interview respondent, August 2020).

4.5.2 Lack of Spousal Interest in the Development Initiative

Respondents were also of the view that they were shareholders because their husbands were initially not interested in the development initiative. Four of the 19 respondents in customary marriages claimed that their husbands were not interested in or never thought something would come of the development initiation, and allowed them to be part of the FC. If this was not the case, they could not have been

shareholders. The extract below shows that the women received the opportunity to be a shareholder due to lack of interest in the project by her husband:

My husband did not pay attention to the development initiative and when it started to pay off, he wanted to be a member, however, that window was closed. He has tried to request that he takes over and be a shareholder, but he has failed (Thembekile, an in-depth interview respondent, August 2020).

4.5.3 Women were Household Heads

Findings of the study also showed that women became shareholders because they were household heads. Household headship came in different forms. Widowhood was one of the factors that allowed women to be shareholders (n = 6), while others became household heads because they were separated with their husbands (n = 2). For the purpose of this research, women who were in polygamous unions were also considered as household heads. For women in polygamous unions (n = 3), preference was given to women to be shareholders. The reason that was put forth was that the husband may not be able to take care of the households in this union equally. For example, one respondent said:

Batsi baka SWADE ngeke angene babe ngobe ngeke asinike imali ngalokufanako. Tsine sibese siyamupha kuloko lesikutfolile nasisheza. Ngiyo lentfo langayifuni uhlala atsi utasikhokha. Wasisita ESWADE sihlala simbonga.

ESWADE advised us during the meetings that it is better to have women as shareholders because a man in a union with more than one wife may not be able to take care of the households equally. When we get the dividends, we share with him. He hates this and usually says he will ask that we be removed as shareholders in the FC (Sibonisile, an in-depth interview participant who is in a polygamous relationship, August 2020).

The respondent appreciates the advice that was given by ESWADE; it has helped women since it is known that when women obtain money, it is used for the welfare of the family, whereas when men have money, they use the money for their own benefits or with other women (girlfriends). This is an assertion that was confirmed by one of the key informants who said: "Once men have money, they just buy one bag of maize and the remaining money will be spent on other women" (Key informant interview participant, August 2020).

The in-depth interview respondent continued to state that her husband received money for relocation during the inception of the LUSIP project, but, as his wives, they

never received a share and do not know how it was used. Asked what would happen if she could give the dividends to her husband, she said without hesitation that “*ngebe ngiyilahlele*”, meaning that she would have wasted the money. Consistent with this assertion is Banu, Farashuddin, Hossain and Akter’s (2001) claim that households benefit more if money is brought in by the women than when it does so through a man. To emphasise this benefit, Sibonsile said that “SWADE really helped us, we will forever be grateful” (Sibonisile, an in-depth interview participant who is in a polygamous relationship, August 2020).

4.5.4 *Absent Household Heads*

Of the 35 respondents, nine became shareholders due to the fact that their husbands, who are the household heads, work far away and could not attend the FC meetings as per the expectation from shareholders. Most of the women in the study area do not work; it was thus a better option for the household if they became shareholders, as they would be able to attend all FC meetings. However, it was noted that, in some cases, women in households where the man was working away from home would stand as a proxy for the men instead of being a shareholder. Being a shareholder, even when the husband is present can be attributed to two factors, namely:

- a) The development wanted people that were always present in the community; and
- b) During the project initiation meeting, ESWADE advised that it is better when women are shareholders, as women will use the dividends for the benefit of the whole household rather than men.

Some households took heed of this advice. In one respondent’s account of events surrounding membership of women in the FC, it was said that

SWADE advised that anyone could be a shareholder, but said that be to the advantage of the household when the woman becomes a shareholder because the husband will use the money with other women and women normally know the household needs well whereas the husband will meet a few needs and would lead to quarrel in the family. As a board member we have seen this and some men due to the quarrels would come and make a change to solve the quarrels (Zanele, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Fifteen of the 19 respondents who are in customary marriage claimed that they would not have been shareholders had it not been for the various reasons that affected their husband’s participation in the FC. This is articulated by one respondent as follows:

He would not have allowed me to be a shareholder if it was not for the fact that he thought that the shareholder position was a minor position at the time. At first the shareholder position was dubbed the child you will send around as the head, but this changed after some time and the shareholder was considered the important person in the FC. If this was said at initiation my husband would have been the one who is a shareholder (Nomvula, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

While other respondents in customary marriages attested to the fact that their husbands do not bother them when the dividends are received, some respondents are reminded that they did not come to the marital home with land. Some of their husbands threaten to remove them from the FC, while others have unsuccessfully attempted to remove them in the FCs due to the benefits of being an FC shareholder they now see. Respondents attested to the fact that some women, who are the shareholders, are faced with their husbands taking the dividends and using them without much contribution to the family's welfare.

The results reveal that land access continues to be a challenge woman, especially in the SNL in Eswatini, whereas land ownership is viewed as an imperative device for increasing women's empowerment and their economic wellbeing, especially in developing countries (Khushbu & Abdoul, 2016). Land ownership has been seen to increase women autonomy and empowerment, as it increases women's bargaining power. Khumshbu and Abdoul (2016) are of the view that, when women have access to land, resources are redirected towards women's predilections, including increased investment in human capital in the household, such as nutrition, health, and education, which was also observed in this study. For Khumshbu and Abdoul (2016), legislative reforms are insufficient to produce significant increases in women's empowerment unless cultural norms and attitudes that disfavour women are also changed. Table 4.1 provides a summary of how women became shareholders in the FCs.

Table 4.1: Reasons Enabling Women in Customary Union to be Shareholders in FCs

How women became shareholders in the FCs	Frequency	Percentage
Large land holding	12	34%
Husband not interested in the development initiative	4	11%
Women were household heads	10	29%
Absent household heads	9	26%

4.6 Theme 1: Women’s Perceptions of Women Empowerment

Only a few studies have considered women’s perception of women empowerment. This study explored the local definition of empowerment as defined by the respondents. This was done by asking the respondents to describe women empowerment and the characteristics empowered women have. The respondents did not understand the term at first, but with explanation they were able to define and give characteristics of empowered women and were allowed to give as many responses as they could. For all the respondents (n = 35), women empowerment was perceived as economic advancement. Responses suggested that women empowerment is an initiative to encourage women to have a source of income through starting income-generating projects or businesses so that they could be self-reliant and reduce dependency of other people (husbands or neighbours). Self-help and savings groups, where women can save money and access loans (n = 2), as well as employment opportunities (n = 1) were also viewed as a way of empowering women in this study. Only one respondent was of the view that other than economic empowerment, women empowerment also entails having a voice at both household and community level, while another respondent (n = 2) also viewed women empowerment as the position a woman is in. NGT group rankings also confirmed this thinking, as decision-making, being able to speak up, and being in positions of influence were ranked last, while having money, being self-reliant, and having one’s own business were ranked as top definitions of women empowerment in the study. Economic empowerment to help women to be self-reliant was also a recurrent theme among the key informants. Creating the “I can” attitude among women, especially in terms of taking up positions of power, was also seen as the essence of women empowerment among some of the key informants (n = 3). This view was also held by the development practitioners. For

the community leaders, women empowerment only defined through the economic dimension only.

The characteristics of empowered women as elicited by the respondents have been grouped into broad categories below.

4.6.1 Individual empowerment

Empowered women under this category were seen as those who were able to meet their household's basic needs, such as food and payment of school fees for her children.

4.6.2 Resources

Respondents viewed empowered women as women who have assets, such as their own house or business.

4.6.3 Input in decision-making

Women who were in positions of power and were able to speak up during meetings were considered empowered by the respondents.

4.6.4 Behaviour

Self-reliance, self-respect, humility, hard work, being able to mentor or help other women, and respecting other people as well as their husbands were the most common characteristics of empowered women that were elicited by the respondents.

Women empowerment was defined based on the ideals that render someone proficient, acceptable, and reputable as a woman (Mulema, 2018). None of the respondents perceived women empowerment as independence or autonomy from men (Guerin *et al.*, 2013), nor did it indicate their stance on abuse or handling intimate partner violence. It was mainly related to power within a view also shared by one respondent:

It is our upbringing, our roots, our socialisation. Our Swazi culture dictate that a woman is under the control of her husband, she does not have a voice even at home, the husband is in control (Promise, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Surprisingly, no significant differences were found in the perception of women empowerment by ordinary shareholders and board members. A possible explanation for these results may be attributed to the context that the respondents are exposed to, a patriarchal society, and the socialisation that has been entrenched in women minds.

4.7 Theme 2: Participation of Women in the LUSIP Project

The section below will discuss the participation of women in the LUSIP project. The section will start with the presentation of the number of women in the FC boards and will also investigate the factors that affect their participation in FC activities, including meetings.

4.7.1 Position of Women in the FC Board

Women's participation in development projects should go beyond attending meetings, but should also be part of the governing bodies so that their voices can be heard. Agarwal (2010) posits that having women as office bearers is one dimension of effective participation. Participation in leadership positions empowers women, as it builds their skills and trains them to exercise their voice in public, as well as nurturing them for higher roles. All respondents and key informants were of the view that the election of women into governing bodies in rural development projects in the country, including the study area, have improved. This has been attributed to the capacity building in communities provided by ESWADE coupled with other initiatives that promote election of women into local governing bodies.

The appointment of women to the FC boards under the LUSIP Project is not mandatory in all the sampled FCs. Gender equality was only said to be discussed just before the election of board members to encourage shareholders to elect even women. This may imply that women elected as board members have endowments that enable them to be elected, as such findings suggest that it is unlikely that women elected as board of directors in the FCs are figureheads, though some may be. Findings of the study showed that, although some women are elected to FC boards, a greater percentage of them hold auxiliary or supportive positions such as secretary, vice secretary, treasurer, chairperson, and additional members. These positions are viewed as an extension of women's reproductive roles. This is in line with the findings of Mandara, Niehof, and Van der Horst (2017) and Agarwal (2001). Lack of education and self-confidence are some of the reasons contributing to women being awarded these auxiliary positions. Corroborating these findings are Mandara *et al.* (2017) and the World Bank (2017). All respondents (n = 35) attested to the fact that level of education is considered when selecting shareholders into the executive positions; the elected people should be able to read and write. Most of the women that were elected as

treasurers (n = 6) had either attained secondary or high school education. For the additional member positions, the level of education was not considered; hence, more women were represented (n = 17) in this position. This shows that the level of education of women in the study area was low and was one of the contributing factors that affected their membership to the board. From the sixteen FCs who had female and male shareholders, there were only three chairpersons, six vice chairpersons, ten vice secretaries, and 17 additional members, as presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Frequency of Women in the Different FC Boards with Both Male and Female Shareholders

Position in selected FC Board	Number of Women in the position	Percentage
Chairperson	3	5%
Vice chairperson	6	11%
Secretary	7	13%
Vice secretary	10	18%
Treasurer	12	22%
Additional members	17	31%
Total	55	

Of the three FCs that had both female and male shareholders, and a female chairperson, two of the chairpersons are from privileged backgrounds. The other is very old, which might have contributed to their election to the chairperson position (World Bank, 2017). A possible explanation for this might be that women are not a homogenous group. Some are elected into positions due to their age or economic status, a phenomenon known as “elite capture” (World Bank, 2017; Browne, 2014). For example, one of the respondents noted:

Our chairperson is from an affluent household; they have income-generating projects and she even does not want to be included in the list of community members who receives food rations. She even says how you can include me a white person (‘umlungu’) in the food ration list (Marcia, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020)

Our Chairperson is very old (sowungugogo) (Khabo, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

She was referring to the fact that, when they entered the board of directors, she advised the chairperson, who is an older woman, that they should change the financial reporting strategy to shareholders so that it is transparent.

The findings also reveal that the greater the number of women shareholders, the greater the likelihood of women being elected into the FC board. FCs (n = 6) that have 58% or more female shareholders had five female board members, while those that had less than 58% female shareholders had one to four females on the board. This is in line with Agarwal's (2010) findings in her study on women's comparative strength and their contribution to governing local forests in South Asia. Ngcamphalala FCs appeared not to be more open to female leadership, as there were a few board female members (one to four), even though the female shareholders were between 44% and 51%.

Speaking up during and attending meetings have also been viewed by Agarwal (2010) as other dimensions of effective participation. Mixed results were obtained in this study. All 35 participants said that they are able to attend meetings as long as they are notified early, and also because they are normally at home. Attending meetings can be seen as a form of passive participation; however, Agarwal (2010) suggests that this form of participation can pave the way for active participation in the FC's decision-making. Women who attend FC meetings are exposed to the setup of these meeting; this may help them speak up or devise strategies that help them get their views across to decision-making body (Mandara *et al.*, 2017). One respondent said that younger women's ideas were not taken into consideration during the FC meetings, and that sharing their ideas with older women they are sitting next to during meetings or on their way to the FC shareholders' meeting help in getting their ideas across. The growth from being a passive participant to active participant as a result of attending meeting can be drawn from Sibonsile's response:

Being a board member really helped me because I was a shy person but now I am able to voice my ideas and I am happy that they are taken into considered, as I would hear some of my suggestions being presented to the shareholders (Sibonsile, an in-depth interview participant who is in her first term as a board member, August 2020).

Respondents were asked whether they were able to speak up and vote in the most recent board or shareholder meeting. A majority of the board members (n = 15) claimed that they were able to speak up in meetings, which was attributed to the fact

that chairpersons ensured that everyone speaks. Those in executive positions, such as chairperson, secretary, and treasurer, were expected to speak by virtue of the positions they hold. This seems to create confidence in the female board members and prepares them for the shareholder meeting. Only two board members said that they did not speak, and the reason was that the chairperson (male) does everything, including her duties as a treasurer. For other board member, the reason was that she was still new in the board and still trying to learn the ropes. More shareholders (n = 10) than board members were unable to speak up during meetings; the reasons advanced ranged from being afraid to speak in front of other people, being afraid of being hated, their ideas not being considered due to age (either young or old), and men's and older women's ideas that are more often taken into consideration. One respondent felt strongly that women did not have a voice on decisions made, and wished that the FC comprised women only, although she is cognisant of the fact that they would also need men at times. Both board members and shareholders were able to vote during meetings where required.

4.7.2 Factors that Affect Women's Effective Participation in Projects

4.7.2.1 Attendance

Generally, the findings of the study suggest that respondents (both ordinary shareholders and board of directors) are able to attend scheduled meetings. Where they were unable to attend, it was mainly due to ill health or reproductive and community duties (for example, rural health motivators normally submit reports at the health facility). These findings were also attested to by the key informants and were also in line with Agarwal's (2010) assertion that reproductive duties affect women's attendance in meetings. Another factor that affects attendance in FC meetings by women shareholders, as elicited by the respondents, and that ranked among the top five factors identified by the NGT participants, is not receiving dividends or getting less than expected. Respondents felt discouraged when no benefits accrued as a result of being a shareholder. To ensure attendance in board meetings, non-attendance without reporting attracts a fine, which is deducted from the monthly sitting allowance for board members. This ensures that all board members attend meetings. Attendance in shareholders' meetings is encouraged by holding meetings during weekends, on holidays, or on days that suit the members, especially board members.

4.7.2.2 *Lack of confidence*

Synthesis of the interviews with the respondents reveal that lack of confidence does affect women's probability of taking up leadership positions. Women still refuse to take up leadership positions.

Leadership positions are scary and the the reason is that one is a woman [...] it's our socialisation. Tradition dictates that men are leaders, decision-makers. Even if you take the leadership position, men will make use of these powers to suppress you just because you are a woman (Promise, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Women are still afraid of taking up leadership positions due to lack of self-confidence (Key informant interviewee, August 2020).

4.8 Theme 3 : Changes Attained by Women as a Result of Participating in the LUSIP Project

The purpose of this section was to ascertain the achievements or functionings obtained through the LUSIP project. To determine the achievements or functionings attained by women as a result of participating in the LUSIP project as a shareholder in the FC, changes in areas, such as improved wellbeing, new skills, participation in other forums outside the FC, engagement in income-generating, and control of income, amongst others, were investigated. Moreover, opportunities available for women as a result of the LUSIP project were also determined.

The pattern of responses on the use of dividends suggest that respondents pay school fees, meet household food requirements, use the money to construct houses, and to buy assets. Though some respondents are still vulnerable, their narratives indicate improved beings and doings. As articulated by one respondent:

I have seen a lot of changes in my life due to the project. Before the project inception, when I wanted to go to Siphofaneni, I had to borrow people's clothes. My house was in a very poor state. When I got my first dividends, I resolved that I will construct a brick house and install electricity. Before I had refused to join an electricity scheme, because I never thought I will be able to have a house that could have electricity due to lack of funds. With God through SWADE, I was able to construct and install electricity, a dream that was far-fetched before the project. As a family we no longer borrow people's clothes to go to town and the relationship between the children is good as everyone has his or her own clothes (Thabi, an in-depth interview respondent, August 2020).

4.8.1 Improved Wellbeing

Through participating in the project as shareholders, respondents have been able to meet basic household needs, such as purchasing food. The study area is one of Eswatini's drought-stricken zones; hence, the dividends from the FC are used to meet the household food requirements. All the respondents (n = 35) reportedly use the dividends and / or the allowance, in the case of board members, to purchase food. One respondent claimed that, before the inception of the LUSIP project, she would depend on neighbours or else go to her parental home to request for food assistance. Now her dignity has been restored, as she is able to meet her family's food requirements. Respondents have also claimed that, before the LUSIP project, their houses were made of stick and mud, while others were in a deplorable state. Dividends received have helped them in constructing modern houses, as shown in the extracts below:

I used to have a stick and mud house. The roofing was covered with plastic sheeting and a tyre to keep it in place as during rainy days the roof would leak (Thuli, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Households have been able to construct decent houses. Before the LUSIP project in some households you will even see a bed inside the house. The poverty rates were high (Key informant interview, August 2020).

Although respondents in this study had not attained any tertiary education, while (n = 31) had not reached Form 5, findings of the study suggest that schooling of their children is prioritised by the study participants, as they desire a better life for their children. Before the inception of the LUSIP project, respondents claimed that there were unable to pay fees for their children, so much so that they had to negotiate for payment terms with the schools or their children had to drop out of school. Some respondents said:

Seven of my children did not finish school due to shortage of funds - i.e. before the LUSIP project. I am now able to pay school fees for children, although it is still a struggle, because I have a lot of children and my husband does not help with school fees payment. But it is better now because other than the dividends, I have an income-generation project in which I sell food items to the cane cutters (An in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Two of my children dropped out of school due to lack of funds to cater for school fees. Paying school fees at that time was a struggle. How I wish I could make these kids young again so that they could go back to school. The ones who are currently schooling are not going to drop out

of school due to lack of funds, but it will be of their own volition, thanks to the LUSIP project. I see the ones who are currently schooling getting good jobs or being self-employed and having homes that have remote controlled gates. My wish is that they have a better life than me (Thabi, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

The ability to pay school fees as a result of the LUSIP project was summarised by one key informant, who is also a member of an FC:

Being a shareholder is good. You get dividends which is used to pay schools fees. In my case two of my children dropped out of school, their father said he no longer had money to cater for school fees for all my children. They had to drop out so that the younger ones can also get basic education. Ngaze ngatsi ngabe bekakuphi nangu SWADE (I always asked myself why SWADE delayed coming to my community). Stress levels now are reduced, as in January shareholders are given money for school fees in most FCs (A key informant interview participant, August 2020).

Some respondents (n = 6) are now able to send their children to better-performing schools with the sole purpose of ensuring a brighter future for their children. Purchasing of assets and household furniture, which include sofas, fridges, and goats is another achievement attained by the respondents. Some of these assets, for example the fridges, are also used to support income-generating projects. The pictures below show some of the achievements that have been attained by the women as a result of the LUSIP project.

Figure 4.5: Respondents' Achievements as a Result of the LUSIP Project



4.8.2 Alternative Source of Income

Alternative sources of income have come about as a result of the new opportunities availed in the community as a result of the LUSIP project. Some respondents were

able to tap into these opportunities to improve their wellbeing and that of their families, especially children.

4.8.2.1 Wage Employment

Growing of sugarcane in the study area has enabled women under the LUSIP area to get job opportunities. They were previously unemployed due to lack of employment opportunities, or because their husbands refused to allow them to work far from home (n = 7). Women under the LUSIP project Phase 1 are employed in the FCs to do jobs such as weeding, smut management, gleaning, applying fertilisers, and irrigation. Respondents (ordinary shareholders) who were employed as irrigators, a job mostly done by men in the sugarcane fields (n = 2), showed more achievement or functionings than those who were doing short-term jobs such as weeding and smut management. Improving access to paid work has been viewed as a fundamental driver of women's empowerment, especially if it offers regular and dependable income, such as those employed to irrigate the sugarcane fields (Cornwall, 2016). Wage earnings and allowances for board members were used to meet basic needs, such as paying school fees, and buying clothes and food for the family. Their wellbeing was improved, they were self-reliant and able to meet household needs, such as purchasing food, and paying for schooling and other needs of their children. Achievements such as this, in turn, led to improved self-esteem for the women. According to one respondent:

The greatest achievement for me to getting employed into sugarcane fields to irrigate the sugarcane, as the dividends are taken by my husband and I am only given a little if more has been received. Getting employment has changed my life for the better. It has enabled me to pay school fees for my children. Never in my life have I ever thought that my children will reach high school level and, as I speak, I have two of my children who are at high school and I am the one paying school fees for them through the salary from the sugarcane (Gugu, an in-depth interview participant who is a shareholder, August 2020).

4.8.3 Engagement in other income-generating projects

Some respondents (n = 21) have used the available opportunities brought about by the influx of people in the community and the dividends received from sugarcane sales to start income-generating activities, such as house rentals, driving schools, vegetable, crop, and livestock farming, as well as retail and entertainment (game rooms). Women between the ages of 36 and 50 (n = 12) were found to engage in some form of economic activity, which sustains them until the next dividends. The

results also suggest that women who have five or more dependants had other income-generating projects to ensure that household requirements are met throughout the year. Respondents who did not have income-generating projects indicated competing household needs which are prioritised, such as paying of school fees and purchasing food. According to Kosec *et al.* (2018), literature suggests that women who are economically active are able to increase their asset wealth and improve health, nutrition, and education outcomes for their children. Talking about the changes that have been attained as a result of the LUSIP project, one key interviewee said:

Women have started income-generating projects such as piggery and broilers, have bought assets such as goats as a result of the LUSIP project (Key informant interview participant, August 2020).

Figure 4.6 shows businesses women are involved in to supplement the dividends received on yearly basis.

Figure 4.6: Businesses Initiated as a Result of the LUSIP Project



4.8.4 Involvement in Other Forums Outside the Project

Participation in public decision-making in community driven development projects have been shown to increase women's participation in other forums. According to the World Bank (2011), these are spill over effects associated with community driven development projects. Respondents in this study were found to participate in other forums where they even hold certain positions in the committees. These forums were mainly in savings groups (n = 27) followed by community committees (n = 10) such as

water committees, electricity scheme committees, and Lihlombe lekukhalela, a group of community members fighting against abuse, amongst others. Respondents were also part of church committees where they also hold key positions. Findings of the study show that more board members (n = 14) than shareholders (n = 13) are engaged in other committees outside the FC where they are in key positions. Exposure to high level meetings and their roles in the board may have contributed to their confidence and exposure; hence their election into other committees in the community. As stated by one key informant:

Women's involvement in project committee make them visible such that they are elected into other committees such as school committee (Key informant interviewee, August 2020).

For Doneys *et al.* (2020), participation of women in other groups, organisations, and networks is seen as empowerment at community level. Other than participating in savings, church, and community groups, board members (n = 6) were also part of committees for farmers' groups, such as cane haulage groups, and Tjala, the newly established fish production board. The findings of the study are in line with Doneys *et al.*'s (2020) who found that women mainly participate in savings group and church committees outside of the project.

Contrary to the assertion by the World Bank (2017) and Nwagboso *et al.* (2012) that participation in development projects can result in increased participation, even in formal politics, respondents in the study area have not attained this level of political empowerment. Surprisingly, this was the case even for respondents (n = 11) who have been in the FC boards for more than one term of office. This finding may help trigger an inquiry into why and what could be done to ensure that women are empowered politically.

4.8.5 Knowledge and New Skills

Involvement in the FC has enabled respondents, especially board members, to learn new skills, such as leadership skills, financial management, interpersonal skills, business management skills, engaging financiers, and making a loan application. Of the 17 board members, only two said there has been no new skill learnt as a result of being part of the project. The number of years in office, education level, and the positions they occupy (additional member and vice secretary position) may have contributed to the respondents not gaining any new skill. For the shareholders,

farming and sugarcane husbandry were newly acquired skills, while some shareholders (n = 9) had not acquired any skill due to their participation in the project. Minimal involvement in high level activities of the FC may have resulted in minimal skills development. New skills acquired as a result of the project are being used or are anticipated to be used by respondents outside the FC for their own benefit, as noted by one respondent:

The financial management skills that I have learnt is now used in my business. Previously, I used to keep business money in the house, and I would find myself using this money for household needs, e.g. emergency medical requirements, but now I keep the money at the bank. I now know that I should not use the whole profit but should save some (Nomsa, in-depth interview, August 2020).

The benefit of sharing the new knowledge was clear in the interviews, both as a source of pride and also in creating networks with other farmers:

With the skills I have learnt, such as loan application, I can confidently use it to apply for a loan for my own business. With the knowledge learnt I have been able to have the opportunity to train other sugarcane farmers which has increased my confidence. I was also able to build networks and copy some best practices from other FCs that were shared with the FC I am a shareholder in (Noncedo, a 35-year-old in-depth participant, September 2020).

4.8.6 Improved Social Status

The research indicates mixed results with regard to social status of women involved in the project. Some respondents (n = 24) claimed that there has been an improvement in their social status at household level and / or community level as a result of their involvement in the project. Respondents who had a positive response attributed the improved social status to their economic advancement from dividends, board allowances, or salaries as a result of being employed in the FCs in the study area. The income received has been used to construct houses, a task normally performed by men, especially in female headed households (Doneys *et al.*, 2020). Improved wellbeing was realised, respect by the community was gained, and women's self-esteem increased, as noted in the extracts below:

Before the project inception, I was poor. No-one respected us as a family. In Siswati when you go past people's homes, you greet them using their surname; however, in my instance this was not done. Be poor in the community, you will see... But after I had constructed my houses using my dividends, my home became dignified and when people in the community go past my home, they now greet us using our surname. Community members even go to the extent of saying if

only my husband would rise up from the death and see what I have achieved and this makes me proud of what I have achieved (Thuli, in an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

I was a very quiet person; before the project I had a very low self-esteem (*bekungatsi ngiyagcumukela*) because I was poor, and it was difficult to make relationships or friendships. But now am very confident and it is now it's easy to make new relations or friends and I am now well-known in the community. Moreover, as a secretary of the board I get to be exposed to other places and people like financiers which also improves my confidence and self-esteem (Sibo, a board member, in an in-depth interview, August 2020).

Due to the businesses I have established, a contribution from the dividends, I am now respected by even men who wish their wives could do what I have done since the passing away of my husband. Some members of the community couples use me as peace broker now which was not the case. I have a voice and I am not left out in extended family members' decision-making meetings and I am happy with the recognition, as it helps boost her confidence and makes her brave and work hard to achieve more. Hardworking now have a voice in the extended family - I see the difference now (Nomsa, in an in-depth interview, August 2020)

More board members ($n = 13$) than ordinary shareholders ($n = 11$) claimed to see an improvement in their social status. The exposure to the community members and other sugarcane stakeholders by board members may have contributed to their attainment of more positive results than the ordinary shareholders.

4.8.7 Household Decision-Making and Intra-household Relations

Results of the study suggest that respondents ($n = 16$) who were single (i.e. never married, separated, or widowed) were sole decision-makers because they are household heads. This may suggest that female household heads are empowered; however, Leder (2016) postulates that women household heads may not be as empowered as the results suggest because they may feel overburdened and have limited choices in terms of decision-making.

Mixed results for respondents who were in a union were observed. Some respondents saw a growth in involvement in decision-making, especially with their economic provision and the welfare and their children. Some form of consultation, which was regarded as joint decision-making by the respondents ($n = 12$), was observed. In this situation, either of them exerts more control and decision-making power due to the value of the assets to increase harmony between spouses. Some respondents ($n = 3$), however, claimed that their husbands were sole decision-makers, except with small purchases such as food, clothing, and other minor household items.

Results also suggest that, for most respondents, revenue is engendered from their income-generating projects or businesses, and from their salary or allowance. Some with dividends are sole decision-makers with regards to their use. These findings are in line with Mulema's (2018) assertion that women tend to have more control and decision-making over income they have earned. However, it seems that respondents have to report how much they have received and how it has been used in the spirit of creating harmony at household level. Two respondents claimed that their husbands take the dividends and use them for household or personal needs and only share with them when there is a surplus.

Respondents feel empowered as a result of the project, as they are now involved in decision-making and are able to make strategic choices. The study's findings propose that the respondents do not want autonomy from their husbands, but that they appreciate being respected as per the excerpts below:

Nami sengiyatsatseka njengemuntfu lophilako nakulobabe (I no longer feel like my husband sees me as less of a human being) (Sibongile, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Before I was involved in the LUSIP project I was not involved in the decision-making, relationship was tense. Sometimes I would just see the facial appearance of my husband and just know that I cannot ask for anything (bewubona buso nje kutsi angeke ngicele), but now it has improved because I am also able to bring food at the table and contribute to other household needs (Ntombi, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

The study's findings also indicate that, while some respondents have not seen any significant improvement in intrahousehold relations, other respondents have had their relationship negatively impacted. For others, the relationship has been positively affected by the women's involvement in the FC:

There is now peace in the family (sekunekuthula lakhaya). My husband even asks money from me now e.g. money for fuelling is car (Fakazile, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Two important issues that emerge from these findings is that, as a result of women's economic contribution to household expenditure, their status rises to that of an equal partner (Beck, 2012). Secondly, increased finances lead to a reduction of poverty-related stress, which leads to healthier relationships in turn (Krenz *et al.*, 2014). In their accounts of the events surrounding intrahousehold relations, respondents whose relationship was negatively impacted cited non-agreement on the right custodian and / or the use of the dividends as reasons.

4.8.8 Access to Bank Account and Exposure to Technology

Most of the respondents (n = 27) have bank accounts as a result of the LUSIP project, as shareholders are encouraged to open bank accounts. NGT discussion in Gamedze confirmed that most of the shareholders have accounts as a result of the LUSIP project. Some respondents (n = 2) have been able to save money, which they previously did not do. A sense of pride was observed from the respondents as they attested to the fact that they are now able to operate Automated Teller Machines (ATM), as seen in the comments below:

I now have an account number due to the LUSIP project and I have learnt to use the ATM (Bonsile, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

I now have an account due to sugarcane. I previously kept my money with me (bengiyibophela elucontfweni). With the account I now have a bit of savings kept at the bank (Judidah, a 50+ year old in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

I have two bank accounts now, one for the dividends and the other for my savings. I went to the bank and inquired what I could do in order to save some of my money and I was advised to open a savings account at Eswatini bank (Phetsile, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Low literacy, limited numerical skills, and a lack of familiarity with technology have been found to constrain women's capacity to efficiently use digital financial products (Hendriks, 2019). Low levels of education affected women's ability to operate the ATM, as articulated by two respondent who have no education at all:

I have a bank account as a result of the LUSIP project; however, due to the fact that I did not get any education, I am always assisted by the security stationed at the ATM to operate it (Ntombie, a 50+ year old in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

I am unable to read and write, hence I cannot use an ATM. I always need to ask assistance from security (Thuli, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

4.9 Theme 4: Resources

Taking positions in the executive board is considered as one of the central empowerment indicators in this study. Respondents were asked the resources were – resources are, according to Malhotra *et al.* (2002), the enabling conditions for women's empowerment that allow women to be shareholders and to be elected into the FC boards. Findings suggest that, in order to be a shareholder, women needed to

be a household head or be in a family that had large land holdings. To be a board member, respondents provided a range of characteristics required for women to be elected to the board. Behavioural and personal attributes are some of the leading pre-existing conditions (resources) that determine whether a woman will be elected in the board enable women. Good behaviour, being humane, trustworthiness, and good interpersonal skills are some of these characteristics. Wisdom and being knowledgeable were other common trends. Respondents who were board members were also of the view that support at family level was critical to being elected, and for continued membership during one's term of office, because board members attended a great deal of meetings even outside the community. The response below shows the importance of family support:

I had a three-day old baby when the FC elections were conducted for the second term and I could not attend. My husband phoned me to say I should come and attend the election meeting because the shareholders want to elect me again. I rushed to the meeting just before the elections started and I was elected again as a treasurer. I used to travel with my little baby to different meetings on behalf of the FC and one of the extension officers jokingly said that if I was your husband, I would fine the FC, travelling around with such a young baby (Khanyisile, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Education is another important criterion considered to be important for women in order to be elected as board members, especially into executive positions. In some FCs, to be elected to an executive position, one needs to have reached Grade 7, while, for others, the requirement is Form 3 and upward. The level of education in the study area is very low, and this criterion limits opportunities for women to be in the executive positions. Hence, those who are elected to the board are mostly additional members, a position that does not require any education. Lack of education does not only affect women's election to executive positions, but for one respondent it also affected their participation in the formulation of the FC's constitution.

In our FC, people who have not attained Form 3 were not part of those who formulated the constitution, kushoni loko, kushoni? Does it mean if you have not reached Form 3 you cannot be anything on earth? The board that has been selected this week is a male only board and this was due to the constitution which stated that only those who have Form 3 can be elected into the board. You can only be an additional member if one has not attained Form 3. Most of the people who were left out of the formulation of the constitution using this criterion is us women (Thembeke, an in-depth interview participant, September 2020).

Psychological characteristics, such as confidence and self-esteem, were common characteristics of women selected to the FC. Confidence and self-esteem enabled women to speak up during meetings.

NGT results for both groups showed that the leading trait that a woman should have to be elected as a board member is being humane and having good interpersonal skills. Education was not considered as important, and was not included in the top five pre-existing conditions that enable women to be elected into the FC board.

According to Bryan *et al.* (2020), resources are essential for empowerment, as they are used for exercising agency, leading to achievements. The achievements can, in turn, lead to an increase in resources, which can also lead to more empowerment as the empowerment process continues.

The resources discussed above have enabled women to be part of the FCs' board of directors, which has, in turn, enabled them to obtain a monthly sitting allowance. Due to the monthly sitting allowance, the board of directors has a constant monthly income for three years. This enables them to achieve better functionings than ordinary shareholders, who receive dividends once a year, or backpays, which also occur only once or twice a year. The allowance is used by board members to buy food and pay for school needs, such as transport fees for their children.

Conclusions gleaned from literature indicate that the most crucial factor in women empowerment is, undoubtedly, resources; however, it is noted that resources alone are inadequate for allowing individuals to attain the anticipated outcomes. Women also need a sense of agency (Oladele and Mudhara, 2016), power within to utilise the opportunities available that can lead to their empowerment and achieve their desired life.

4.10 Theme 5: Aspirations and Conversion Factors

4.10.1 Aspirations

According to Conradie (2015), aspirations are the multifarious hopes a person has within his or her social context. Aspirations are more of a life dream, a central motivator for the person in question, and define how he or she views a good life. Aspirations are literally hopes and ambitions to achieve something. Some studies suggest that

aspiration, which are an individual's goals for the future, have an effect on women empowerment (Kosec *et al.*, 2018; Fox & Romero, 2017).

Respondents were asked what their new aspirations were since being part of the project. Respondents had a myriad of aspirations that they would like to achieve. Most respondents (n = 18) aspired to start new businesses, or to diversify or expand already existing businesses, while others wanted to construct new or expand already existing houses. Purchasing of cars, mainly to support businesses, was another constantly occurring response from the respondents. For respondents who had no form of education, attaining some form of education (sSbenta – informal education which teaches adults to read and write) was their new aspiration after seeing the need therefore and the loss they incur as a result of illiteracy after being involved in the project:

My wish is to be able to read and write [...] My biggest challenge is that I cannot even monitor educational performance of children or even assist them with homework. I am also not able to read financial statements which are handed out during the FC annual general meeting (Thuli, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

I would like to pursue my education (Sebenta) so that I will be able to read and write. At first, I did not see the need to read and write, but now that I am in the board, being able to read and write has become a need. It's painful to have to ask people to read your personal stuff, being unable to read the financial statements and other FC documents (Sibonisile, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Aspirations are normally derived from the lives and achievements of “similar people” within the aspiration window (Conradie, 2015). Results of the study are consistent with this line of thinking, as most of the respondents wanted to start poultry farms, piggeries, and / or groceries businesses, while others wanted to buy cars, which is associated with successful people in the community who are involved in sugarcane farming. This was the common characteristic of businesses that empowered women were said to have in the community.

Some of the respondents (n = 5) did not have new aspirations, while one respondent just aspired to build her kraal using fence. Results of the study revealed that respondents who were above the age of 50 years were likely to have low aspirations (n = 5), as five respondents who had no income-generating project or businesses were above the age of 50 years and widowed. Low aspiration have been shown to result in

low agency, which may, in turn, cause low empowerment outcomes for women. This is because people with low aspirations may fail to optimally use resources and opportunities provided by development projects (Kosec *et al.*, 2018). The authors further claim that aspiration failures can contribute to failure in women empowerment.

This is in stark contrast with respondents who had big aspirations, such as starting a car rental or property business, or one who wants to buy a grab loader because she has seen the gap in services required in the sugarcane industry. The poor are said to lack the capacity to aspire due to limited access to opportunities that facilitate the process of aspiring. Moreover, practice, repetition, and exploration ensure that the capacity to aspire thrives. Results showed that respondents who had practiced some form of business had their capacity to aspire developed:

I want to have a big business - car rental business - and I want to learn more about the business because I think I do not have the knowledge I would like to have. If I can be able to attend the business management classes (Nomsa, in-depth interview, August 2020).

4.10.2 Conversion Factors

4.10.2.1 Education

Human capital, especially level of education and knowledge as a resource for women empowerment, emerged during the interviews regarding resources needed to be elected as a board member. When the respondents were asked their level of education, many of the respondents were ashamed of the fact that they had little or no education. This is similar to findings by Bryan *et al.* (2020), where education was viewed as an important resource for exercising intrinsic factors - one's sense of power within, such as confidence and instrumental agency, which is an individual's freedom to achieve their goals through their own action and choice (Bryan *et al.*, 2020). Findings of the study suggest that illiteracy affected effective participation of women in the project, especially as office bearers.

4.10.2.2 Support at household level and community

Lack of support from other women

Respondents were asked why there were few women in the board, even though most of the shareholders were women. Respondents were of the view that women do not

support each other and do not want to see another woman succeed. This may be one of the contributing factors to the minimal number of women in the board.

Lack of spousal support

Bad family relations and lack of support affect women's empowerment and participation in rural development projects. For two respondents in the study, the lack of family and spousal support has led to their income-generating project being a non-starter or to poor performance thereof. Respondents stated during the interview:

My business is not doing well, and I have been asking my husband to support me to start a piggery or poultry business. He does not support my dream. The dividends I get from the FC are used to meet household needs with no contribution from his dividends. This lack of support worries me, and it has affected our relationship (Vuyo, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

With my first share I bought cement bags to start a poultry business. The money was not enough. I was of the hope that my husband would support me; however, he did not and after ten years the incomplete structure was destroyed by rains and since I have many dependents I am unable to continue with my dream, more so because I am now heading the household since my husband is deceased (Duduzile, an in-depth participant, September 2020).

Bad family relationships have been shown to be a factor in women's withdrawal from the committees and politics. Family support, especially the role of a supportive husband, is very important for women's success in the in local management. Women in leadership may be faced with stereotypical assumptions and unfair criticism, which frustrate their participation in decision-making forums, as noted by one respondent:

Our chairperson had to resign. Her husband and in-laws wrote to the FC requesting that she be released from her duties as a chairperson due to certain allegations. Our chairperson was very good and was able to handle the operations of the FC, however, she had to resign because her family and in-laws said so (Sibo, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Saving her marriage and family may have forced the woman to withdraw from the chairperson position and the board due to her husband and her in-laws' disapproval. Use of the leadership opportunities available to women depends not only on their personal agency, but also on the social costs involved (Mandara *et al.*, 2017).

4.10.2.3 *Funds/ Income*

Availability of funds and lack thereof was raised as a one of the conversion factors in the study that has affected respondents' ability to achieve their valued functionings. Dividends are only received yearly, and some respondents have not received any dividends for two to three years due to poor performance of the FC. Money or income continue to affect women's ability to convert available opportunities to being and doings they value. Respondents aspire to develop their homes and establish businesses to attain financial dependence; however, due to shortage of funds and competing household requirements, they have not been able to achieve their aspirations. This is despite others who have achieved theirs due to the availability of adequate income.

I have not been able to start my business because I am still building my house since dividends are small while the needs are high (Mandy, in-depth participant, August 2020).

I have achieved all the aspirations I had before joining the project; my children are schooling in good schools. I have a car and a decent home, and this was possible because I know have the money coupled with determination and hard work (Nomsa, an in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

4.10.2.4 *Agency*

Agency has been defined as the ability to make strategic life choices and to act on them. The study's results suggest that, for women to attain the achievements they have realised as a result of the LUSIP project, there was a need for power within, which propelled them to achieve their aspiration. Women who lacked this power within seemed to be disempowered and unable to achieve their valued beings and doings:

I would like to go back to school, but my husband does not want me. We are struggling financially as a family. Very soon one of our children will be in high school and we will struggle with school fees payment. I have seen two young married women of my age in the community who have gone back to school and they are now doing well, but I cannot go because my husband does not approve of this (Vuyo, in-depth interview participant, August 2020)

This is in stark contrast with another respondents, as shown in the comments below:

My husband does not support my business ventures; he always discourages me. Recently I shared with him that I want to start a broiler project. He was against it and was of the view that who I am, people will not buy, there is no market [...] I have decided that I will go ahead with

my business idea and I am currently constructing the poultry house because I know it will succeed (Fakazile, in-depth interview participant August 2020).

During the cane cutting season I do registering of trucks which is also done at night.

When asked how she did this, as some respondents indicated monitoring of harvesting at night was done by men as it was improper for women to be found with men at night, she said:

I want the money and I requested permission from my husband to do this job and he allowed me (Praise, in-depth interview participant, September 2020).

4.10.2.5 Household level factors

Results obtained suggest that respondents who had a high number of dependants attained few or no achievements, because the income is mainly used to purchase food and paying school fees for their children, as noted in the extract below:

I have a lot of dependants - 16 in total, including grandchildren. Have not been able to achieve my aspirations which were to start an income-generating project and also develop my home. Dividends are used to meet food requirements and the cost of buying food is high. I have not been able to make any savings from the dividends I get since they are received once a year (Dudzile, an in-depth participant, September 2020).

Household size (from six and greater than 10 members) was found to have a negative effect on the empowerment of rural women (Obayelu & Chime, 2020).

4.11 Areas of Women Disempowerment in the LUSIP Project

4.11.1 Jobs Women Do are an Extension of Their Traditional Roles

Although there have been creation of job opportunities for women, the jobs that they do are an extension of their reproductive duties, which affect their opportunity to get new skills. Women are mostly hired to do weeding, apply fertiliser, gleaning, and smut management.

There are employment opportunities, people no longer go to bed hungry. Most of the time women are employed to apply fertiliser and for weeding (Key informant interview participant, August 2020).

Only two of the respondents who were shareholders said that they were employed as irrigators. Pump attendants were mostly men; when asked why, one respondent said:

It is thought that women may not be able to irrigate the sugarcane as sprinklers are used and the pipes are long [referring to the dragline sprinkler irrigation system] (Phindile, an in-depth interview participant, September 2020).

Social norms also affect the FC activities women are involved in. Women board members only monitor harvesting during the day because, as one respondent puts it, it was not socially acceptable for women to be found with other men at night, even when it relates to work. Continued adherence to cultural norms will continue to hinder women's empowerment, an assertion also supported by Stein (2017).

4.11.2 Burden of Taking Care of Household Now Fall on Women

Results of the study suggest that for some respondents (n = 5), the burden of meeting household requirements have shifted to the women as a result of being a shareholder, and as men withdraw their contributions to household expenditure. One reason advanced by the respondents is that they are seen to have money as women, and are "able" to care of the household. Some of the respondents said:

Burden of paying school fees now is on me - my husband has relaxed and if I can also relax my children would not go to school (Ntombie, in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

The husband no longer supports the family because he says I have money since I also receive sitting allowance because I am a board member (Sibonisile, in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

My husband is no longer responsible for the family needs; he even brings his children born out of wedlock to be taken care me without any contribution. The reason is that he thinks I am able (Nomvula, in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

Similar trends have been reported by Jeckoniah *et al.* (2012) and Malhotra *et al.* (2002); when women's contribution to household expenditure increase, men tend to divert their attention from household expenditure, thereby increasing the expenditure burden on women.

4.11.3 Husband Takes All Shares: Resource Control

Discussions with some of the in-depth interview participants revealed that, for some women, although they are shareholders, a major share of the dividends received are

taken by men, so much so that the women are unable to meet household needs and do necessary home improvements. For this study, these women were seen as glorified proxies. This phenomenon was well articulated by one respondent who said:

Some husbands take all the dividends and go and use it as they wish lomake uba sitfombe nje sekulandza nje imali lenhlanganweni ngobe babe ngeke abe namabili emagama. (The woman is just a shareholder to enable the man to get more dividends because he can never register twice as a shareholder). In such households, there is no tangible development (Thabi, in-depth interview participant, August 2020).

According to one key informant interview and in-depth interview participant, such women do not report these cases to the FC board or to the chieftdom in fear of losing their marriage and the notion that they do not own the land, and are hence not eligible for the dividends. For Choo and Williams (2014), many women have acceded to their inferior position or have perceived it as normative.

4.12 Conclusion

Chapter four presented the analysis and discussion of the empirical findings of the study. This information was useful in understanding how the changes related to empowerment at individual, household, and community level occurred, and how these changes were perceived and valued by the respondents.

Context has been shown to be very important in the understanding of empowerment. Most of the respondents in the study perceived women empowerment as economic empowerment, with a few of the respondents defining it beyond economic empowerment to include having a voice, being in leadership positions, and being employed. Respondents' perception of women empowerment covered a wide range of issues, such as an increase in income, being able to meet household needs, having a voice, and being included in decision-making. These findings were in line with Jeckoniah *et al.*'s (2012) study on women empowerment.

Personal endowments and attributes, such as educational skills, being knowledgeable, having good interpersonal skills, and wisdom have been identified as some pre-existing conditions (resources) that enable women to be elected to the FC boards.

Even though the LUSIP project did not specifically target women and was not a women empowerment project, results of this exploratory study show that the project has contributed to the empowerment of women in the study area. This links to Sen's (1999) postulation that capabilities refer to having freedom to access opportunities to achieve certain functionings. The LUSIP project has enabled respondents to achieve functionings they never had before. Women have been empowered psychologically, economically, and socially. The women's narratives propose a measured process of empowerment characterised by material, relational, and psychosocial changes at community and individual level. Moreover, vulnerability of households has been reduced and wellbeing of women and their households were improved as a result of the project. The project has also contributed to financial inclusion of women, and 77% of them had bank accounts due to the project.

Although women have been able to achieve varied functioning, such as paying school fees for their children, meeting food requirements, and home improvement, disempowerment is one theme that was identified during the analysis of the results. This included lack of control of the income, jobs offered to women being an extension of their traditional roles, which impedes their acquisition of new skills, and social or cultural norms which prevent them from doing some of the FC activities. Reproduction of traditional roles in development initiatives continue to hinder empowerment of women. On the political front however, the results were muted; even though respondents were able to attend meetings, speak, and / or vote, and though some were board members of a decision-making body, there were no spill over into political participation, even for women who have been in the board for more than two terms.

Chapter five will present the summary conclusion, recommendations of the study, and areas for future study.

5. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four presented the empirical results of the study coupled with the analysis and discussion. This chapter will provide conclusions regarding the main findings of the study. In doing so, the chapter will first present a summary of the concepts covered in the study with the intention of connecting the narrative and argument presented by the study. Relevant conclusions are deduced, and recommendations based on the findings will also be presented. The chapter also provides suggestions for further research.

5.2 Summary of the Study

5.2.1 Background

International non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governments have implemented rural development projects in a bid to develop the rural areas. This has been done to permanently improve opportunities and empower rural communities, especially women, as they constitute a majority of the rural population. In Africa, women are not only an important resource as they serve as the labour force for agriculture, but also because they play a key role in household food and nutrition security, improving household income, and ensuring household wellbeing. Even though women are the backbone of rural development, women are hardly positioned at the centre of policy and programme development agendas, and do not have access to facilities, credit, assets, power, and other services; there is thus a need to empower them. Women in Eswatini still face barriers and challenges that hinder their full participation in all aspects of the development process. Exacerbating this is Swazi law and customs, which deprive women of the right to own land and access finances. Empowering women is a fundamental development objective and is currently one of the many concepts adopted globally to eradicate imbalances and achieve gender equality.

There is growing consensus that development projects empower women; however, in Eswatini, there is limited research on the role of rural development projects on women empowerment.

In light of the assertion by Johnson *et al.* (2018), women's empowerment has been under-researched in Eswatini, particularly regarding the role of rural development on women's empowerment.

5.2.2 Purpose of the Study

Exploring the role of rural development projects on women empowerment underpinned the aim of the study, and the objectives of the study were:

- a) To establish women's perceptions on their empowerment in Eswatini;
- b) To identify factors that affect participation of women in the LUSIP Phase 1 project;
- c) To explore the improvements realised by women as a result of the LUSIP project;
- d) To determine the resources that enable women empowerment in the LUSIP project; and
- e) To ascertain the aspirations of women participants of the LUSIP project.

5.3 Summary of Key Findings of the Study

5.3.1 Perception of Women on Women's Empowerment

In-depth interview participants in the study perceived women empowerment mainly as economic empowerment, with a few of the respondents defining it beyond economic empowerment to include having a voice, being in leadership positions, and being employed. This view was also largely held by the key informants who were traditional leaders (n = 2). It was only after probing that women leadership was considered also to be empowerment. Women who had income-generating projects or businesses were seen to be empowered by the respondents. The findings of the study further suggest that self-reliance, confidence, ability to meet household needs, paying of school fees for children, owning own house, and assisting others who are in need were the leading characteristics of empowered women. There was no significant difference in the

perception of women empowerment between respondents who were board members and those who were ordinary shareholders.

5.3.2 *Participation and Factors that Affect Participation of Women in the LUSIP Phase 1 Project*

Contrary to Agarwal's (2001) assertion that the number of women in executive committees affect their attendance and active participation in meetings, this study indicates that women in the study area who were board members attended and spoke up during board meetings, even in cases where only one female served on the board. Respondents who were ordinary shareholders claimed that they always attend meetings, especially because they are always at home. It was only on rare occasions where they would miss meetings, largely due to reproductive duties, especially if it was not a scheduled meeting. The impact of reproductive duties on women's participation in development projects was also corroborated by the key informant respondents who asserted that women's participation was affected by reproductive duties, especially women of childbearing age, as the care of their children rests with them. Having scheduled meeting was found to help the women plan for these meetings in advance; this is in line with Krenz *et al.*'s (2014) findings. Not receiving dividends as expected was another factor that affected attendance of women in the shareholders' meeting. Results of the study further revealed that board members' attendance in board meetings was almost mandatory, as non-attendance attracts a fine deducted from the sitting allowance for every meeting missed. Therefore, board members do not miss meetings, especially without a valid reason and reporting absence. Due to this regulation, it is unclear whether participation or attendance in FC board meetings can be considered as anything other than compliance to the set rules (World Bank, 2017).

Results of the study also suggest that the communities under the LUSIP project are still not very open to women leaders. Out of the seventeen FCs sampled for the study, only three had women as chairpersons. One of the three FCs was an all-female FC. Discussion with the respondents showed that the other two female chairpersons were old or from an affluent background, which may have contributed to their election into the chairperson position. Most respondents who were board members were additional members in the executive board, which can be attributed to women's low education

attainment, since education was one of the key requirements for election into executive positions in the FCs.

5.3.3 Achievements Realised by Women as a Result of the LUSIP Project

The study's results suggest that, through the LUSIP project, respondents have been presented with new opportunities or capabilities, such as farm employment, starting new businesses or income-generating projects, and also acquiring new skills such as leadership skills, financial management skills, and engaging financiers and other sugarcane stakeholders. Attending shareholders' meeting have helped them to acclimate to meeting processes and built their confidence to speak up during the meetings. Their responses further reflected self-confidence, self-efficacy, and improved social status. Results of the study suggest that the women's newfound confidence and improved status resulted from their increased income from wage employment, dividends, and allowances, which has been used to improve their wellbeing. After years of living in abject poverty and unemployment, being able to improve their family's wellbeing, improve their homes, and provide for their families reinforces a sense of power within.

The findings of the study further suggest that there has been a gradual process of empowerment characterised by material, psychosocial, and relational changes at individual and community level. The study revealed that women achieved their valued beings and doings through the project. Respondents were able to meet food requirements for their households. Women's use of dividends and income from income-generating projects and allowances from board sittings may lead to enhanced educational achievement among respondents' children, more so because about half of the respondents went as far as looking for better performing schools outside their communities to ensure their children receive better education. Home improvement and purchasing of household assets were also enabled by the income from the FCs. Income-generating projects were also started to meet the market requirements that resulted from the LUSIP Project.

Respondents' narratives suggest that the LUSIP project has contributed to the financial inclusion of women. Results revealed that most of the respondents have bank accounts as a result of being shareholders in the different FCs. Hendriks (2019) postulates that opening a bank account has been shown not only to have an increase

in expenditure on female-related consumer assets, but also women's bargaining power in the household. Ripple effects of the LUSIP project were also observed; respondents were able to participate in savings groups as a result of the income gained, and the income was reinvested to achieve more functionings. Having bank accounts exposed the respondents to technology as they are now able to operate the ATM, which was a farfetched dream before the inception of the project.

In terms of household decision-making, mixed results were observed for married respondents. Some respondents saw a growth in involvement in decision-making especially with their economic contribution and their children's improved welfare. Some form of consultation, which was regarded as joint decision-making by the respondents, was observed. Some respondents, however, claimed that their husbands were sole decision-makers except with small purchases such as food, clothing and other minor household items.

Results of the study further showed that respondents who were single (i.e. never married, separated, or widowed) were sole decision-makers because they are household heads. No control from other household members or relatives on household decisions was observed from this cohort. This may suggest that single women are empowered; however, like Leder (2016), the study concluded that these women may not be empowered, as the results suggest but may seem so because they are household heads and have limited choice in terms of decision-making. Results also suggest that most respondents are sole decision-makers with regards to the use of the income they have generated from income-generation projects, including their salary, and for some even the dividends. These findings are in line with Mulema's (2018) assertion that women tend to have increased management of and decision-making over income they have earned.

Further, the study's findings indicate that, while some respondents have not seen any significant improvement in intrahousehold relations, other respondents have had their relationship negatively impacted. For other still, others the relationship has been positively affected by the women's involvement in the FC; due to their financial contributions they are seen as equal partners by their husbands.

5.3.4 Pre-Existing Conditions (Resources) that Enable Women Empowerment Through the LUSIP Project

Personal endowments and attributes, such as educational skills, being knowledgeable, having good interpersonal skills, having agency, being a hard worker, wisdom, and support from family have been shown to be some of the pre-existing conditions (resources) that enable women to be elected into leadership positions in the FC boards in the LUSIP Phase 1 project. Large land holdings and being a household head, and being available in the community to participate in the project has enabled women to be shareholders.

5.3.5 Conversion Factors

Gébert *et al.* (2017) postulate that conversion factors are barriers that hinder people from using their means to pursue their own ends. They influence how means or resources are converted to capabilities (Oosterlaken, 2009). Although education was listed among the least important resources for women to be elected as a board member during the NGT exercise, education was one of the recurring factors mentioned by in-depth interview participants as a resource that enables women to be elected as a board member. From the results of the study it can be concluded that education is key in ensuring that women are elected into leadership positions, as the ability to read and write is considered as a key election criterion. The results also show that women board members were mostly additional members, a position that does not require any education.

Limited funds is another factor that was shown by the study to affect the conversion of opportunities to women's valued beings and doings. Respondents with six or more dependants showed slightly muted empowerment outcomes, as the dividends were used to meet household needs and pay for school fees. These respondents were unable to start income-generating projects to support their families, as dividends are received once a month.

Spousal and familial support was another conversion factor that affected women's ability to convert capabilities as presented by the respondents. Where support was given, the respondents flourished in their valued functionings; where support was lacking, and where the women lacked agency, there was failure to achieve valued beings and doings.

5.3.6 Aspirations of Women Participants in the LUSIP Project

Results revealed that most of the respondents wanted to start poultry and piggery businesses. This was the common characteristic of businesses that empowered women in the community. This is confirmed by Conradie (2015), who asserts that aspirations are normally derived from the lives and achievements of “similar people” within the aspiration window.

The results of the study also revealed that low aspiration resulted in low agency, which may, in turn, culminate in low empowerment outcomes for women. The results also showed that older and or poorer respondents had low aspirations, which affected their empowerment outcomes.

5.3.7 Disempowerment

Although the respondents have been able to achieve varied functioning, such as paying school fees for their children, meeting food requirements, and home improvement, disempowerment is one theme that was identified during the analysis of the results. The results of the study suggest that women were employed to do activities such as fertiliser application, weeding of the sugarcane fields, as well as trash and smut management, which is an extension of their traditional roles. This impedes acquisition of new skills by women, which affects their empowerment. Only two respondents interviewed were employed as irrigators. Social or cultural norms were also found to affect the FC activities that women are involved in; for example, women board members do not monitor the trucks during harvesting at night, as it was viewed as improper for married women to be found with men at night, even though this is a work setting.

It can also be inferred that the burden of household care for some respondents has increased, as their husbands no longer provide money for household upkeep, purporting that they receive dividends and or allowance from the FC. Lastly, due to lack of land ownership, results of the study suggest that some women, although shareholders, have no control over or are not involved in decisions regarding how dividends are used. This has resulted in women accepting their lot and not taking any action against perpetrators. Fear of being expelled from the marital home and sour relationship with in-laws were elucidated as another reason why women do not report the financial abuse cases to the FC board or chieftdom. Lack of control and / or non-

involvement in the use of the dividends restrain women's capabilities and their freedom to choose and act on their valued beings and doings.

5.4 Recommendations to ESWADE, Development Partners, and Government

The following are recommendations that ESWADE, other development partners, and the Eswatini government can consider for advancing women empowerment through rural development projects:

- a) Promotion of off-farm business that could be part of agro-based projects, since women do not own land;
- b) Where land is available, women-only FCs should be formed and allocated land to avoid cases where their partners take all the dividends saying that the women did not come with land to their matrimonial home;
- c) Rural development projects should have a women empowerment objective so that there could be intentionality as they empower communities. Gender mainstreaming projects should be cognisant that the needs of men and women are different and that, in a development initiative, they do not start off at the same level;
- d) Project impact analysis should consider intended and unintended outcomes and put in place mitigation strategies at project conceptualisation;
- e) When selecting a board of directors, FCs should strive for a balance between male and female members, but not as head counts (quotas), to ensure that they participate in the decision-making body; and
- f) LUSIP-style projects should consider training or partnering with other development partners to train women in other income-generating projects to reduce dependence on the dividends received only once a year.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for future research emerged as a result of the study:

- a) Due to limited time, the sample size was small; a similar study could be done with a bigger sample in order to have a broader understanding of the research topic;
- b) The same topic can be studied using a quantitative research design whose results could be generalised to the general population;
- c) A study which would involve varied perspectives, from women shareholders, those who are glorified proxies for their husbands, and non-project participants. This research would help broaden the understanding of women's experiences of the LUSIP project, and also women empowerment through rural development projects;
- d) A study which would ascertain men's perception of women empowerment through rural development projects.

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7. ANNEXES

7.1 Annex 1: Approval Letter from ESWADE



Sincephetelo MVA Building |
3rd Floor, Mbhilibhi Street | Mbabane, Swaziland | P.O. Box 5836
Mbabane | Tel: (+268) 2404 7950/1 | Fax: (+268) 2404 7954
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Eswatini Water & Agricultural Development Enterprise

Our Ref: SWADE/GEN

12th March 2019

Attention: Ms Nomcebo Kunene - Dladla

RE: Request to Conduct an Academic Research Study on LUSIP 1

We acknowledge receipt of your letter requesting permission to do a research on LUSIP 1 on Exploring the Role of Rural Development Projects on Women Empowerment in Eswatini.

We consent to your study utilizing SWADE information for academic Research work.

Wishing you the best in your studies

Yours Faithfully


Samson Sithole
Chief Executive Officer

Innovation, Integrity, Responsibility, Professionalism, Empowerment

7.2 Annex :2 Consent Form

In- depth Interview schedule – Women Participants

Pseudonym for participant: _____

Study: The role of rural development projects on women empowerment in Eswatini. A case study of the Lower Usuthu Development Project (LUSIP) Phase 1:							
Aim: Exploring the role of rural development projects on women empowerment.							
Research information							
Name of researcher:			Interview date:			Venue:	
Demographic Data							
Age (years)	21- 25	26- 30	31-35	36- 40	41-45	46-50	50+
Marital status	Single	Civil rights Marriage	Customary marriage	Widowed	Separated	Live in partner	Divorced
Education level reached	None	Sebenta (adult education)	Primary school	Secondary school	High school	Tertiary	
Number of Dependants:							
Age of dependants (in years)	0-3	4-6	7-11	12- 18	18+		
Household head				Level of education for household head:			
Family type (extended or nuclear)							

Selection shareholder/ board member (possible reasons):			
Committee membership	Role/ Position:	Constitution for the FC Available or not Are gender issues considered in terms of membership in the board?	How long have you been a board member/shareholder:
Interview questions			
Research Objective	Research question	Probe questions	Responses
Theme 1	Women empowerment		
Objective 1	What are the women's perceptions on women empowerment?	In your own view, what is meant by women empowerment	
		Do women like you regard themselves as empowered since being part of the project (as a board member or shareholder)? Please explain.	
		What do empowered women like you have in common? i.e. characteristics of women considered to be empowered.	
Theme 2	Participation		
Objective 2	What are the factors that affect participation of women in the LUSIP phase 1 project?	What was your participation like in the most recent board or stakeholder meeting? <i>Probe in areas of:</i>	

		<p>Do women like you speak in Board/stakeholder meeting? Are they listened to, are their opinions taken into consideration? Explain Voting on proposed discussion in the meeting. Influence on decision-making</p> <p>Other FC activities that board / shareholders are involved in (check in activity and align with project cycle)</p> <p>Factors that affect attendance in meetings.</p> <p>What could be done to ensure active participation of women like you in board or shareholder meetings?</p>	
		<p>Tell me of a time in the past 12 months when you were not able to attend a critical meeting convened by the board or FC? What were the reasons for your non-attendance?</p>	
Theme: 3	Agency, Achievements or Functionings		
Objective 3	<p>What are the improvements that have been realised by women as a result of the LUSIP project?</p>	<p>What were your expectation when you joined the FC?</p> <p>How has participation in the project changed/ influence/ benefitted the life of women like you?</p> <p><i>Probe in the following areas:</i></p>	

		<p>Engagement in other income generation activities that can be traced to the participation in the LUSIP project</p> <p>Household decisions Household Income/ finance- do women like you have a say on the dividends received from the company? Please explain Intra household relations</p> <p>Social status/ confidence</p> <p>New skills attained</p> <p>Increased participation in other forums e.g. local, regional etc. Involvement in other social groups, membership and position</p> <p>How was the situation before your involvement in the project?</p> <p>Have you had new opportunities since your involvement in the project?</p> <p>What aspect of the project has had the greatest impact?</p>	
Theme 4	Resources		

Objective 4	What are the existing pre-conditions (resources) for women empowerment under the LUSIP project?	<p>In your opinion what are the resources that women like you have that enable them to participate and be empower by the LUSIP project?</p> <p><i>Probe in the following areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resource Physical Social Material Psychological Other 	
Theme 5 Aspirations, Conversion factors and adaptive preferences			
Objective 5	What are the aspirations of women participants of the LUSIP project?	<p>Tell me of one aspect of your life you wanted to change before participating in the project?</p> <p>Have you been able to achieve the desired change after participating in the project? What in your opinion has resulted to this change?</p> <p>If not what as the challenges faced?</p> <p>Would you like to change anything in your life at this point in time?</p>	
		Do you feel that women like you can generally change things in their lives or community if they want to? Explain	

		<p>Imagine a staircase of three steps, where at the bottom of the first step are women who cannot make and act on decisions that pertain their lives and the third step on top are women who have complete freedom to make and act on decisions regarding their live.</p> <p>On what step do you consider women participating in the LUSIP project were at before the project and on what step are, they on now? Explain</p>	
<p>Any other comment or issues</p>			

THANK YOU

7.3 Annex 3: Introduction and Informed Consent Form

INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT – INDEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant

I am a master's student at the Centre of Development studies (CDS) at the University of the Free State. I would like to invite you to take part in my research project entitled: *The role of rural development projects on women empowerment in Eswatini: A case study of Lower Usuthu Small-holder Irrigation Project (LUSIP) Phase 1*. Exploring the role of rural development projects on women empowerment is the overarching and underlying aim of the study.

Study procedures: In depth interviews will be conducted with 30 women who are members for the farmer companies under the LUSIP Project. Moreover, 5 key informant interviews will be conducted with staff from Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (ESWADE), Ministry of Tinkhundla Administration and Development (MTAD), World Vision Eswatini and 2 community leaders.

Notes will be taken during the discussion. Moreover, the conversation will be recorded so as to capture your view accurately. The discussion will take 30 – 90 minutes.

Benefits of partaking in the study: There will be no benefits for participating in the study, however the information that you are going to provide will contribute towards an understanding of the role played by rural development projects on women empowerment and may help in the designing of policies, programmes or projects that will advance women empowerment in the country.

Confidentiality: The study does not require you to disclose or name any individual (s). To protect your identity pseudonyms will be used and your name will not be recorded anywhere. The study does not force you to discuss any personal information that you do not feel comfortable sharing.

The information that will be shared by you will be stored safely and will be shared with my supervisor who is also part of this research. Furthermore, excerpts from the interview may be included in the final dissertation.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks that will be as a result of your participation in this study

Participation: Participating in the study is purely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. If you are unhappy with the way the research is being conducted, you may consult my supervisor, Professor Micah B. Masuku at +26876026557 or his email at mbmasuku@uniswa.sz or mbmasuku@gmail.com.

Please feel free to ask any questions on any aspect of this research that is unclear to you.

Yours sincerely,

Nomcebo Kunene

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____