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## **‘What’s in a Name’: Implications of Women’s Cattle Ownership for Transformative Gender Mainstreaming in Botswana**

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### **Abstract**

This paper uses a case study exploring women's access to and associations with cattle in Botswana to understand how gendered affiliations with cattle affects women's opportunities, both materially and ideologically. It explores female cattle owners' lived experiences and naming practices to illuminate the role cattle play in addressing women's individual gendered needs. It also considers the ways cattle access policies connect to these lived experiences. Findings highlight that women are gaining confidence in pursuing this traditionally male undertaking, but are also using it as a means to fulfill normative domestic roles. This implies that cattle could be a way to achieve transformative change regarding gender equality in Botswana through addressing practical and strategic gender needs simultaneously. An exploration of this nature is particularly salient given the Government of Botswana's renewed commitment to gender mainstreaming and their relative lack of baseline knowledge of women's involvement in cattle farming.

**Key Words:** Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Needs, Critical Feminism, Botswana, Cattle

### **Introduction**

Current development discourse promotes livestock as a means to reduce poverty for vulnerable populations in the developing world (see, *inter alia*, Kristjanson, 2010; Miller, 2011; Njuki and Sanginga, 2013). Men and women typically have different roles in livestock management as a result of gender-based access to, control over, associations and interactions with certain animals that are rooted in normative ideas of masculinity and femininity (Gawaya, 2008; Hovorka, 2015). Depending on context-specific ideologies of masculinity and femininity, structural gender inequality tends to hinder women's participation with livestock through constraints in access to capital, land, natural resources, extension services, marketing, and labor, among other things (Distefano et al., 2013; Hovorka, 2015; Kabeer, 2003; Njuki and Miller, 2013; Njuki and Sanginga, 2013). Gender relations of power are then reproduced through differential association with different animals (Hovorka, 2012, 2015). Although other factors such as ethnicity, class, and physical location might also constrain access to certain animal resources, gender amplifies these constraints (Hovorka, 2015; Kabeer, 2003; Njuki and Miller, 2013).

There is an abundance of scholarship indicating the need to better understand the nature of

women's livestock access and ownership in the global south. Despite this, there is little actual evidence as to the extent of women's ownership and access, including how they acquire livestock, which species are most important, and the significance of livestock in relation to other types of assets (Njuki and Mburu, 2013: 21). This knowledge gap has led to the argument that women neither own nor benefit from larger livestock like cattle, as they are the domain of men (Sanginga, Njuki and Waithanji, 2013; FAO, 2011; Kristjanson *et al.*, 2010; Mupawaenda *et al.*, 2009). But emergent evidence indicates it is more nuanced than that (Njuki and Mburu, 2013), and that gendered patterns of livestock access and ownership are changing. Many existing studies of women and livestock focus on domestic small stock and small-scale agricultural production systems (Hovorka, 2015; Kristjanson *et al.*, 2010) rather than larger, and arguably more prestigious animals. A major gap in scholarship thus lies in those larger animals, such as cattle, with which women do not have a traditional or normative affiliation. Studies have been undertaken on gender-disaggregated cattle statistics in southern Africa (see Chawatama *et al.*, 2005; Njuki and Mburu, 2013; Oladele and Monkhei, 2008), however structural and ideological factors influencing these ownership statistics have largely been overlooked.

In the developing world, women's asset ownership has been demonstrated to increase their role in household decision-making, bargaining power, and allocation of spending on children's health and education (Njuki and Mburu 2013: 23), and this is seen in rural Botswana. Here, cattle ownership in particular can address practical needs such as spending on food, clothing, and children's education, and can address strategic concerns through the association of cows with (typically male) power and status. In Botswana, cattle's importance is expressed through interpersonal relations and family ties on a small scale, and economic units of production linked to money and power on a larger scale (Gulbrandsen, 2012). Women's agricultural activities have historically been focused on 'domestic' poultry and other small stock, while men traditionally keep cattle (Alexander *et al.*, 2005; Hovorka, 2006, 2012). The preponderance of cattle ownership among men relative to women here reflects broader gendered power dynamics, rooted in traditional patriarchal kinship systems and in religion (Alexander 2005; Oladele & Monkhei 2008). Patriarchal ideologies such as those in Botswana play out at the individual level, through everyday experience, and also in the structural composition of societies governing normative behavior (Harding, 1986; Hovorka, 2006, 2012; Probyn, 2003) — in this case limiting women's cattle activity. This is changing, however, particularly with legal reform. Emerging statistical and anecdotal evidence reveals that women are increasingly owning cattle in Botswana, though there is little research on this topic. This changing affiliation represents unique opportunities for women to gain power, financial security, and confidence, while at the same time undermining or overcoming normative gendered divisions of labor in the livestock sector. In other words, ownership of cattle has the potential to address immediate survival concerns while simultaneously altering ideas about women's roles and limitations.

The Government of Botswana recently renewed its commitment to mainstreaming gender through all policies and programs, instituting gender analysis prior to policy formation and program development/implementation (GoB, 2015). This supplements its National Policy on Gender and Development (NPGAD), intended to align Botswana with international and regional gender and development protocols. NPGAD provides a framework to "include the gender perspective" (GoB, 2015: 1) and promote equal participation by men and women in the development process. In light of this, and given the crucial role cattle and other livestock play in

the country's rural economy, evaluations of livestock-focused mainstreaming efforts are timely. The Government of Botswana has typically supported grants and funding schemes for women to access small stock or to increase harvest potential in their domestic agricultural plots, but has not specifically assisted women in accessing cattle. This aligns with and reinforces discourse surrounding gendered patterns of livestock ownership, maintaining traditional gendered structures. In order to see how a focus on cattle could generate transformative policy, it is important to first understand the lived experiences of women with cattle — how women are positioning themselves in relation to cattle, and the value they see in them.

This paper aims to explore female cattle owners' lived experiences and naming practices in Botswana to better understand the role cattle play in addressing women's individual gendered needs. It also considers the ways government agricultural policies connect to these lived experiences. It engages with gender mainstreaming literature, and links emancipatory mainstreaming strategies to conceptualizations of practical and strategic needs (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993). While there is rarely explicit reference to practical and strategic needs vocabulary in current development literature per se, these concepts are nonetheless reflected in 'dual track' or integrative approaches to gender mainstreaming (Moser, 2005; Sweetman, 2015; Van Eerdewijk and Dubel, 2012; Zachariassen, 2012, among others). The next section introduces the background of gender/cattle relations in Botswana. The following sections present a conceptual framework surrounding the use and current applicability of gender mainstreaming and gender needs vocabulary, and outline research methods. Following this, findings are presented using four examples of unique naming practices of women's favourite cows as an entry point into understanding how women articulate their own experiences with cattle ownership. Naming reflects a personal, intimate connection women have with cattle and understanding this helps to illuminate everyday experience. Through exploring these names, it becomes evident that cattle assist women in both undermining and reinforcing normative gender roles, as they are doing a 'man's job', but are doing so to fulfill 'women's domestic responsibilities'. In this sense, cattle represent an opportunity to address both strategic and practical needs simultaneously. The Botswana case illustrates the opportunity for gender mainstreaming strategies to go beyond assisting women with their everyday lives, toward an integrated, transformative approach that could alter women's subordinate positioning in society.

## **Background on Gender and Cattle in Botswana**

### ***Role and Importance of Cattle***

Cattle are materially and symbolically important in Botswana, as they remain critical to rural economies and relations of power, as well as food, cultural identities, and feelings of long-term security (GoB 2006; Oladele & Monkhei 2008). Their importance and normative affiliation with men in the country have been upheld and reproduced through kinship patterns, religion, customary law, and even colonization. Pre-colonization, cattle were essential to local tribal economies and as political power in the traditional courts. Their ownership reflected men's power and status, and they were used as currency for marriage and other transactions. Their importance was reinforced in the late 19th century by British colonial powers, who funneled money and development support into the cattle industry, foregrounding this aspect of the agricultural sector and inadvertently maintaining the legacy of symbolic significance (Peters,

1984). The support of the colonial administration strengthened patriarchy and other tribal ideologies, which ultimately re-emphasized both the importance of cattle and the connection between men and cows (Hovorka 2012; Peters 1984). Over a century later, cattle still dominate the culture and landscape of Botswana, and they remain the most financially significant segment of the agricultural sector in the country, heavily subsidized through the government-controlled Botswana Meat Commission (BMC). The cattle population is almost equal to the human population, with approximately 2.1 million cattle to 2.26 million people (Statistics Botswana, 2013; World Bank, 2016). Notwithstanding a recent downturn in commercial and subsistence farming due largely to drought and endemic disease (Statistics Botswana, 2013), cattle rearing remains deeply ingrained in Botswana national identity.

### *Gendered Access to Cattle*

Patriarchal roles and expectations for women have created structures of constraint surrounding their access to cattle in the country. Though women are well represented within the agricultural system in Botswana (female participation constitutes 46 percent of the traditional farming sector<sup>1</sup>), only 26 percent of Botswana's cattle are owned by women (Statistics Botswana, 2013, 2015). Traditionally, their activities are concentrated on poultry and other small stock, while men keep cattle (Alexander et al 2005; Hovorka 2006a, 2012). Domestic activities are linked to women's normative roles as caregivers, providing meals and childcare for the homestead. Small stock are easily cared for near the home, and thus have traditionally been seen as part of a 'woman's job'. Men's ownership rights in Botswana are rooted in its traditional patriarchal kinship system and religion (Alexander, 2005; Gulbrandsen, 2012; Hovorka, 2012; Malope and Batisani, 2008; Oladele and Monkhei, 2008; Peters, 1984). The culture, laws, and norms surrounding cattle ownership increase men's predominant affiliation with cattle, their likelihood to receive cattle grants, and subsequently their relative power in relation to women. This has reinforced the normative idea that 'women don't own cattle' in Botswana, and served to underscore men's affiliation, power, and status. Indeed, despite evidence of increasing female ownership (CSO, 2008, 2011; Statistics Botswana, 2013, 2014, 2015), dominant discourse indicates cattle are a 'man's job'.

Botswana women have faced institutional barriers to cattle access that include legal and inheritance rights, the legacy of a dual legal system, and unfocused gender mainstreaming policies. The patriarchal system in Botswana has prolonged women's subordination through such institutional means. For instance, until 2004, women were unable to own or inherit property without a male co-signatory. A general weakening of traditional patriarchal attitudes and structures has been recognized in southern African countries, including recent reforms allowing women to own land (Kalabamu, 2006). However, while official discourse has changed, women still experience administrative discrimination with regard to land and other claims in Botswana (Hovorka, 2012). Women remain vastly under-represented in government and policy areas, so despite wide-ranging agreements for action, commitments to gender equality may exist more on paper than in reality.

Further complicating matters, Botswana operates under a dual legal system recognizing both modern (formal) and customary law, which enables discrimination to persist in practice despite women sharing the same civil rights as men. This is especially true in rural areas and with regards to economic opportunities and property rights (OECD, 2010: 198). Overcoming

customary or traditional tenure systems in southern Africa has been difficult, despite laws that attempt to counteract them (Nadasen, 2012). These largely unwritten customary laws and practices reflect values that keep women subordinate to men (Alexander *et al.* 2012: 12). The lack of a female voice through the legacy of patriarchal ideologies reinforces women's identity and their reduced decision-making roles. Botswana's population distribution of approximately 3.5 people per square kilometer (CSO 2011; World Bank, 2016) and the relative isolation of rural areas make changing structural aspects of these ideologies particularly difficult. In areas far from the legislative capital, customary law can trump national policies. In addition, sparse rural population distribution impacts the visibility of livestock livelihoods to the government, and the knowledge and uptake of government initiatives. This means that the status and experiences of female cattle owners is particularly unknown to those policy-makers for whom this information is pertinent, and conversely that gender mainstreaming strategies are relatively invisible to those people they purport to help. This magnifies difficulties for policymakers in drafting policies that promote equality in agriculture.

### ***Gender Mainstreaming and Cattle Access***

The picture of gender-cattle relations remains unclear from a policy standpoint in Botswana, as opportunities through gender mainstreaming exist but are as yet ineffective in changing the gendered status quo. The Government of Botswana (GoB) recently reconfirmed its intentions to mainstream gender through all policies and programs in order to promote equality between men and women (GoB, 2015). Their National Policy on Gender and Development (NPGAD), including 'Vision 2036' goals, replaces the 20 year old Women in Development Policy, and follows on the heels of the country's 'Vision 2016' goals, one of which was gender mainstreaming.<sup>2</sup> Despite this general commitment to gender mainstreaming in Botswana, however, there is a lack of evidence for its efficacy. Setbacks include lack of understanding by the general population, conflict with tribal ideologies, and unfocused policies (ICRE, 2013: 78).

The creation of a Gender Affairs Department (GAD, formerly known as Women's Affairs) has contributed to some successes in mainstreaming efforts, particularly in the form of government representation (ICRE, 2013) and women's economic empowerment. For the economic empowerment stream, 'Women's Grants' are allocated to approved women's groups of five to ten members in order to fund small income-generating projects. The GoB recently took steps to make these grants more accessible<sup>3</sup> (GoB, 2016). In addition, the GAD created a 'Gender Mainstreaming Training Curriculum' to standardize gender training throughout the country (UNDP, 2016). Unfortunately, despite these successes, the majority of funding tends to help women with what they are already doing, reinforcing normative roles rather than helping to subvert them. This is exemplified by a lack of targeted cattle funding that is apparent in government documents and reviews.

Data suggest that women are not a central priority in cattle ownership initiatives in the country, but rather have typically been the focus of small-stock lending and other grants associated with their normative roles (plowing/field grants, chickens, goats). Notably, the Arable Lands Development Project (ALDEP) provided funding to expand plowing fields, explicitly indicating the benefit of this to women (ADB/GoB 1994), while the Livestock Management and Infrastructure Development Programme (LIMID) funneled the bulk of small stock grants to women, keeping the larger, cattle-related grants for men (Moreki *et al.*, 2010). Internal reviews

of agricultural funding schemes in the country intimate that livestock programs help to address gender imbalances, but these conclusions are misleading as they are based on total number of female beneficiaries rather than total funds allocated or type of animal acquired. For example, the stated aims of the 2007 LIMID Programme were to provide financial assistance to promote food security for resource-poor households, improve livestock management, and further develop livestock infrastructure in the country (MoA, 2006; Moreki et al., 2010). A 2009 internal review reveals that while the majority of assistance recipients were women (7,575 women and 2,101 men from 2007-09), their applications were predominantly for small stock such as chickens, sheep, and goats. Cattle-specific assistance, including animal husbandry or technologies such as drilling and borehole purchase, was accessed predominantly by men (*ibid*). Small stock grants are of lower monetary value than cattle grants (MoA, 2010), meaning while women do access agricultural funding, men are acquiring the bulk of available funds. This ensures that those with power and capital, historically men, possess the equity to reinvest in more cattle, further perpetuating the idea that cattle are 'for men', which leads to spaces of exclusion and makes cattle access even more difficult for women (Gulbrandsen, 2012).

A 2013 internal gender baseline report within the GoB found that gender equitable attitudes occurred alongside entrenched stereotypes and gender norms, for example that women should be free to access jobs outside the home yet should continue to function as domestic caretakers (ICRE, 2013). This report recognized that institutional opportunities for equality (i.e. gender mainstreaming) are important, but that gender and development policy should also work toward changing structural elements of women's marginalization such as gender norms and community attitudes and beliefs. Indeed, development approaches that focus entirely on women's material realities and neglect the ideological contributors to women's marginalization will fail to address the nuanced interplay between ideological and material aspects of lived experience (Sohal 2005: 674). In other words, a gender analysis of women and livestock in Botswana would be incomplete without full consideration of the ideological factors that structure gender norms keeping women subordinate to men or making it more difficult for women to change their associations with powerful assets such as cattle. This requires a gender mainstreaming approach that considers ideologies alongside material realities. In Botswana, livestock (particularly cattle) planning can address longstanding gender issues by helping women both handle their immediate circumstances and achieve true equality through meaningful structural change. Given Botswana's renewed commitment to gender mainstreaming as a transformative development process, an investigation into the current status of gender mainstreaming initiatives in development scholarship is important.

### ***Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Needs***

Gender mainstreaming is a development strategy that aims to ensure gender equality through all levels of planned action and processes (Moser, 2005; Van Eerdewijk and Davids, 2014). It is based on the assumption that unequal gender structures can be changed through focused interventions at all levels of planning (Parpart, 2014). Since its emergence as a way to operationalize the growing development agenda of gender equality and empowerment (*ibid.*), gender mainstreaming has become a pillar of development strategy. However, critiques emphasize its singular focus on economic outcomes that fail to address and understand the complexities of structural gender inequality. This section outlines some critiques and suggestions

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regarding gender mainstreaming, and then identifies how practical and strategic needs vocabulary can be utilized to promote a more transformative approach to mainstreaming policies, beyond simply adding women to the development agenda.

Gender mainstreaming began in the 1990s as a hopeful tool for development actors to operationalize the increased global interest in gender empowerment and equality. Over the past twenty years, however, it has failed to live up to expectations in practice (Parpart, 2014; Sweetman, 2015; Van Eerdewijk and Davids, 2014; Van Eerdewijk and Dubel, 2012; Zachariassen, 2012). Many attribute this to a singular focus on economic contributions and outcomes by mainstream development agencies (Chant, 2012; Parpart, 2014; Sweetman, 2015), such as increasing women's presence in the formal economy, or providing training for specific employment. Critical theorists recognize the need to move beyond top-down economy-centric approaches toward understanding women's realities and challenging structural oppression and power relations (Sweetman, 2015). Jane Parpart (2014: 386) argues that gender mainstreaming policy evaluations repeatedly try to find solutions in the same places, i.e. within already established institutional practices and structures such as skills training and women's groups. Doing so can serve to further emphasize (admittedly more visible and accessible) neoliberal economic solutions that uphold the status quo of gendered divisions of labor rather than alternative approaches that aim to alter gendered structures of power and their influence on access and privileges. An example of this is women being given further training in a sector that relates directly to their normative roles in the domestic sphere.

Other critical development scholars agree that it is crucial to develop a more nuanced understanding of gendered practices and the ways that social forces impact the acceptance or rejection of efforts to alter gendered positioning (Cornwall, 2007; Sweetman, 2015; Van Eerdewijk and Davids, 2014). This is because mainstreaming laws and policies are embedded in social structures and ideologies (Van Eerdewijk and Davids, 2014). In order to deal with built in resistance to change, societal/ideological factors must change as well as institutional ones. These scholars suggest a more transformative approach that involves integrating both structural and institutional change, as well as lived realities (Van Eerdewijk and Davids, 2014). The transformative potential of this policy approach has not been realized in the twenty years since governments and development agencies adopted gender mainstreaming as a pillar of development discourse.

Integrated gender mainstreaming approaches go by different names. Moser (2005) and Van Eerdewijk and Dubel (2012: 494) refer to the 'twin track approach', whereby a 'mainstream' track integrates gender-specific needs, interests, and objectives, while a 'stand-alone' track focuses specifically on the promotion of gender equality and women's rights. Similarly, Zachariassen (2012: 484) discusses 'integrationist' and 'agenda-setting' approaches, wherein the former works women and gender into existing areas and programs while the latter includes women in setting or determining program priorities and agendas. Integrated approaches such as these combine addressing immediate survival concerns and changing gender ideologies from the ground up. These approaches bear similarity with the gender needs approach (without necessarily explicitly using this vocabulary), so in order to define the purpose and significance of different mainstreaming efforts the inclusion of gender needs terminology is beneficial.

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Gender needs language provides a useful tool for differentiating between single track and integrated gender mainstreaming approaches. Practical and strategic gender needs/interests debates emerged in development scholarship in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1989, 1993). For development planning purposes, gender interests are defined as the particular concerns men and women develop by way of unique social positioning through gender attributes (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993), while needs are ways to satisfy those concerns. This paper focuses on the latter. Practical gender needs respond to immediate practical concerns, while strategic gender needs address women's subordinate position in society, meaning they are emancipatory in nature. In other words, practical gender needs respond to concrete conditions of life resulting from the unequal gender division of labor and access. This response to perceived necessity does not challenge entrenched gendered roles or divisions of labor. As such, practical gender needs can be said to comprise help in the domestic arena and help with immediate survival such as food, shelter, and income (Hovorka, 2006; Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993).

Meeting practical needs exclusively, for example through a single track mainstreaming approach described above, can serve to reinforce women's subordination to men as they can support gendered divisions of labor or other deeply held gender norms. In contrast, meeting strategic needs helps work toward gender equality and to change roles or disrupt women's subordinate position. These types of needs include changing of legal rights, control over bodies, access to property, gendered division of labor, and the removal of institutional barriers such as patrilineal inheritance (Moser, 1993), and can be addressed through a more integrated mainstreaming approach that understands women's lived realities and the particular structural constraints that uphold ideologies keeping women subordinate to men at different scales.

Critics of the needs/interests frameworks have argued that dividing these two creates a false dichotomy, since both types of gender needs originate from women's subordinate positioning (Rowlands, 1998; Wieringa, 1998). Some see this as empirically untenable as it is the context and motivations, rather than the nature of particular activities themselves, which determine their influence on women's oppression. However, it is useful and necessary to identify policies that solve immediate survival issues but fail to challenge the normative status quo. Additionally, the division between practical and strategic needs makes it easier to see whether a policy will be transformative in a certain context. Both practical and strategic needs must be met for institutional and ideological change, in order to address gender differences and/or inequalities within gender mainstreaming efforts. The gender needs framework is thus a useful tool to break down and articulate different aspects of integrated gender mainstreaming schemes, and provide a vocabulary to better differentiate between those initiatives that are transformative in nature and those that serve to reinforce the status quo.

The language of gender needs becomes useful in the Botswana case to articulate plans to address gender differences and inequities within the livestock sector. We have seen above that Botswana's gender mainstreaming strategies have tended to focus on assisting women with economic participation and survival; however, program and funding streams have concentrated on those areas in which women are already operating due to deeply entrenched gendered divisions of labor. While useful in terms of immediate survival, solely addressing these practical needs serves to reinforce the notion that women do not or cannot perform activities that men can do, such as cattle ownership. Cattle access has the potential not only to address practical issues

like poverty and security, but also to assist in significant ideological change regarding women's status and abilities. This follows Nadine Nadasen's (2012: 41) similar conclusions that access and rights (in her case to land) are critical to addressing practical and strategic gender needs in southern Africa in general. Using the gender needs framework, the case study in this paper explores the lived experiences of women's cattle ownership in rural Botswana and the impacts of this information for equitable development strategies that encompass both practical and strategic gender needs.

## Methods

Data collection took place between 2014 and 2015 in the Ngamiland area of North-western Botswana. Small villages peripheral to the government outpost of Maun were chosen as a steady increase in female cattle ownership in the Maun area was reflected in national livestock statistics, yet there was no literature regarding women's cattle ownership in the area. In addition, the Ngamiland area is unique in its 'red zone' status, restricting the export of beef to all but local markets. This economic limitation potentially places a different emphasis on cattle ownership, whereby symbolic association and visibility could play a larger role relative to market participation. Female cattle owners were interviewed through a snowball sample directed at eight villages located off of the main roads in three directions from Maun. Following this, participants were invited to take part in one of 7 focus groups and a workshop. Statistical analysis is based on a total of 39 semi-structured interview participants, however more than 50 women<sup>4</sup> participated in both formal and informal research activities at different stages. Both original interviewees and other interested female cattle owners from each village participated in the focus groups. Discussion surrounded cattle acquisition and ownership, the nature of their care, and how gender roles tie in to animal ownership. Qualitative data from interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed thematically for empowerment indicators, with particular attention to the level of involvement in cattle-related activities. Once a degree of empowerment was identified in the majority of participants, data were re-examined for women's valuation of cattle, with an emphasis on separating practical and symbolic elements. Subsequently, content analysis was undertaken to examine the mention of particular practical and strategic needs indicators. Results were then divided into four thematic vignettes.

## Results

### *Cattle Names and Women's Lived Experience*

Women's unique naming practices in Botswana offer an intimate and useful entry point to exploring their relationships with and valuations of cattle. Interviews revealed women's initial tendencies to highlight practical gains from access to or ownership of cattle, such as selling, milking, weddings and funerals, or to help with school fees, food, and problems in the future. This correlates with much development scholarship on the economic or livelihood potential of helping rural women access livestock (see Kristjanson et al., 2010; Miller, 2011; Scoones, 2009; Gaway, 2008). Yet, upon deeper discussion, more nuanced connections to cattle emerged, often revealing their symbolic and cultural importance or suggesting direct connections to and knowledge of cattle as valuable lifelines and societal connections. These ideological connections included dignity, pride, physical presence, or simply that "cows are my life". One woman felt

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protected by her cattle, noting they represented the way she could stand on her own two feet following the death of her husband.

When asked about the names and attributes of their favourite cattle, many women described names that reflected the above valuation of practical utility as well as symbolic or ideological motivators for cattle ownership<sup>5</sup>. In Botswana it is not unusual to name children after the circumstances of their birth, and as such, proverbs or symbolic phrases are common. Findings revealed many of women's favourite cows were also named after such proverbs. Further to the ways women valued their cattle, four particular proverb names poetically but effectively encapsulate the manner in which cattle satisfy immediate practical concerns and also more symbolic or ideological motivators. These names, representing prized values, can tell us more about economic stability and the fulfillment of domestic responsibilities. Further, they can tell us about the ways that cattle directly and indirectly help women to challenge deeply held ideologies that have kept them subordinate to men in Botswana society, and about particular challenges women face. The four vignettes below illustrate these central findings.

*Diakopa (the little that you have will give you more)*

Barulaganye<sup>6</sup> is a 46-year-old widow with the equivalent of a junior high school certificate and no employment. She named her favourite cow *Diakopa*, meaning 'the little that you have will give you more'. Barulaganye relies on seven cattle as her sole source of income, similar to half of all 39 participants. Of the remainder, 16 women (41 percent) supplement with government-subsidized funding such as *ipelegeng* (a rural rotating work project) or the Old Age Pension Programme, and 4 women supplement occasionally with the harvest from their vegetable crops or other jobs. As none of these options is necessarily secure or full-time, cattle are the only consistent livelihood strategy for Barulaganye and the vast majority of participants, which is reflected in their rationale for owning cattle. They unanimously use the 'little' money earned from cattle or milk sales to fulfill immediate practical needs, particularly necessary items at home such as food, school fees, and clothing. The sentiment is that just a few cows can be enough for a whole family to thrive. As Barulaganye puts it: "*I don't have any money in my bank accounts, but I have these cows. They will stay here in case there's anything that's needed, especially when it comes to looking after children, school fees, and stuff like that*". Of the 20 participants who recently sold cattle, 80 percent put the money toward household items or their children (with the remainder reinvesting or repaying government loans). These examples reflect the practical value participants see in cattle.

Barulaganye and several other participants also claim there is a symbolic benefit to cattle ownership. Barulaganye explains: "*When I look at my cattle I can say that when the years go by, I will be someone because of them*". This implies that her cattle provide her with a certain status in the community, one that until very recently was reserved for men only. When asked about what it means to be a woman in Botswana, she firmly states, "*people see a woman as a weak person, but women have a strength like a man... When you go to rear cattle people will say 'no, a woman cannot rear cattle', but you have to stand up as a woman and show the world that a woman is active like a man*". The authors have written elsewhere (Must and Hovorka, in review) that being able to perform activities related to cattle care contributes to women's pride and dignity, and hence to empowerment. For Barulaganye, pride is found in the way she is now

rearing cattle 'like a man', rather than (as many participants put it) waiting for a man to take care of her. *"I am always saying... 'Those cows are the ones that are taking care of me. I will never give up.'"* She has developed confidence from the certainty that she can fulfill her duties as a mother, and that she can rely on her few cattle to continue to help her do this.

*Sediwanepile ( trust where you are going...where you are going there will be a river to drink from)*

Bontle is a 61-year-old married woman with a sixth grade education and no employment. Her husband gifted her first cow, and the two of them share the duties of cattle rearing, though she has eight cattle belonging solely to her. She named her favourite cow *Sediwanepile*, meaning 'trust where you are going...where you are going there will be a river to drink from'. Bontle is fortunate because her husband operates a borehole from which her cattle can drink. This is the case with only 3 study participants. The remaining 36 women use a river as the water source for their cattle. Water is a crucial resource in Botswana, an arid country with cyclical drought patterns where boreholes are difficult and expensive to obtain and operate. The reference to a water source in the name *Sediwanepile* can thus symbolize cattle's significance as a stable survival strategy, or the trust people place in cattle to provide for them over the long term. Bontle, like 72 percent of participants, notes increased confidence in the future via cattle access and ownership. The presence of cattle for Bontle means that no cultural or domestic duty will go unfulfilled: *"they help in things like when there's a funeral we can take a cow and kill it, instead of having to go to the butcher and buy meat. Or even if a child is getting married I can take the cows and use them in the marriage proposal."*

The certainty of water alluded to here also symbolizes assurance in the direction that life is taking. That Bontle named her cow 'trust where you are going' indicates a self-confidence or assurance that she is headed in the right direction and her future will be secure. Additionally, she places her confidence in this particular cow, as it will lead her herd, and subsequently herself, to a better place: *"I am here because of the cows. I have them compared to where I would be in the other towns, suffering, looking for jobs. But I can eat because of the cows. I can drink milk because of the cows. They have brought a lot of difference there."*

*Motshelo (group)*

Motlalepula is a 44-year-old married woman with a primary school education and a full-time job in Maun. Motlalepula's favourite of her 13 cattle is called *Motshelo*, which refers to 'a type of women's fundraising group whereby resources are pooled and earnings are divided into shares at the end of the year'. *Motshelo* was purchased not with money from her job, but with the money earned by the group arrangement from which it takes its name. To her, naming this cow *Motshelo* signifies women coming together to achieve something, which includes the beginning of her cattle herd. Another participant, Lorato, similarly acquired her first cow through a group structure wherein women collectively purchased a cow to take to market for slaughter, splitting subsequent profits. After a few months of this arrangement, she did not feel comfortable purchasing a cow strictly for slaughter, and bought out her group members in order to start her own herd. Lorato used group membership to gain confidence in owning cattle, and was inspired

by this to strike out on her own. She also took advantage of resource-pooling in order to facilitate the purchase of her cow. Though she maintains a firm belief in some traditional gender roles, Lorato says about her ten cattle, "*they have taken me where I was not expecting. Way back there, I didn't even have one cow. Now I can tell people I have some cows that are mine...I can sell them or do whatever I want to do.*" They give her a particular independence and status that she was not expecting to have as a woman in a traditional Batswana household. As above, access to cattle through this type of group affiliation addresses immediate concerns related to economic stability and providing for the family, while simultaneously reinforcing the notion that household care is a woman's responsibility: "*A woman shouldn't just wait on her husband to make things happen. She must be powerful so that her children do not starve...The cattle help out with every problem, and with family matters*"

*Khumoithata (wealth is difficult to find)*

Sylvanella is a 52-year-old widow with no education or employment. She inherited her cattle from her late husband and cares for them on her own. She named her favourite *Khumoithata*, which means 'wealth is difficult to find'. Since her husband's death, her 30 cattle are her sole income. Like most others, she values them particularly for their potential to solve problems in the household. When she describes her life with cattle she says, "*Life is more difficult than when my husband was here. But I am happy because he left something to look after me — the cows.*" For rural Batswana women in particular, income and security are precarious. 44 percent of participants, Sylvanella included, look after their cattle with no external help whatsoever: "*the reason to be with the cows is that I'm taking care of the whole household.*" The name *Khumoithata* reflects both difficulties in accumulating wealth and difficulties some women have in accessing cattle and the means to properly care for them.

Difficulties expressed by participants overwhelmingly focus on lack of access to information, markets, and transportation, practical issues with roots in subordinate positioning and gender ideologies. This rings true for Sylvanella, who learned how to care for her cattle from her husband, and has not heard of any training or extension services one can receive from the government aside from mandatory vaccination and small stock loans. In terms of market access and transportation, Sylvanella is amongst the 20 participants who managed to sell cows the previous year. Similar to approximately half of those who sold cattle (45 percent), she sold to the Botswana Meat Commission. Despite this, several participants have negative feelings toward their market options, many of which stem from the inability to physically get themselves or their cattle to the market. Subordinate roles and gendered divisions of labor have left many rural women without the skills or confidence to ride a horse or donkey or to drive a vehicle. Sylvanella, for example, cannot ride a horse, but notes that men can do so (to their benefit).

The four vignettes above illustrate three central findings. First, women see cattle as assisting them with their everyday lives, particularly in the domestic sphere. Cattle allow them to fulfill certain responsibilities in the home, and ensure a degree of survival that is important when livelihoods are precarious. Second, women value their cattle for providing them with confidence that they did not possess before, indicating particular ideological benefits of cattle ownership. *Sediwanepile* affirms a future stability indicating both the satisfaction of immediate survival concerns and a confidence that can develop through disruption of women's subordinate position

through a change in gendered division of labor. Two types of this confidence are reflected in relational forms of power: 'power within', and 'power with' (see Kabeer, 1999; Mosedale, 2005; Parpart et al., 2002; Rowlands, 1998). These manifestations of power or confidence involve the more symbolic or ideological roles cattle play in women's lives. Through a name such as *Diakopa*, the cow is seen as providing not only milk or money, but also potential aspirational value through confidence and self-esteem — the 'power within', which has implications for structural barriers to action. Examples of group membership represented by the name *Motshelo* constitute 'power with', or the way that women have more options as a group than they do as individuals. Women's group participation can also be framed in terms of social capital, facilitating their access to otherwise unobtainable assets (Njuki and Mburu, 2013; Njuki and Miller, 2013). Third, *Khumoithata* reflects the structural and institutional hurdles women must overcome in order to be men's economic equals, such as lack of access to information, transportation, and markets, as well as the legacy of men's sole association with cattle. These particular hurdles can explicitly inform the direction of livestock-oriented mainstreaming efforts by suggesting where assistance is most needed.

## Discussion

### *Addressing Practical Gender Needs through Cattle*

Practical gender needs arise through concrete conditions of life that develop from unequal social positioning. They are not aimed at changing the status quo, but rather at survival. Participants recognize that these needs, related to economic stability, fulfillment of duties, and day-to-day survival, can be addressed through cattle access in Botswana. This is evidenced by the emphasis women place on cattle helping with food, shelter, and children's education — all of which fall under women's domain in the domestic sphere. 95 percent of individual respondents and all focus group participants overwhelmingly see cows as the key to future security, looking after the home, and educating their children.

A name such as *Diakopa* reveals that a great many benefits are gained through owning even a few cows, and large numbers of cattle are not important. Women's understanding of the practicality of cattle ownership demonstrates that this is a reliable strategy for fulfilling normative domestic roles independent of outside employment or connection to a more precarious livelihood strategy. The name *Sediwanepile* particularly encapsulates the perceived stability of cattle as a strategy. Echoing this sense of stability, some participants distinguish between money from cows and money from a job: "*The cow is always there. When I sell a cow, it will make a difference in my household. Because maybe I can buy a school uniform for my kids, or do something big on the compound. It's more helpful than a job*".

Women's choices surrounding cattle use indicate the internalization of their roles as caregivers in the domestic sphere, and the power they believe cattle give them to fulfill their perceived duties as women. There is a danger of strictly prioritizing practical needs, however. A focus on women's utilization of cattle in fulfilling normative gendered tasks, particularly in the domestic sphere, runs the risk of reinforcing gendered divisions of labor. It is important to recognize that the act of cattle rearing also instills confidence in participants while disrupting the idea of who can be affiliated with cattle. The transformative power of this disruption relates to strategic needs.

### ***Addressing Strategic Gender Needs through Cattle***

Strategic gender needs refer to those related to changing roles and disrupting women's subordinate positioning and are evident in the case of women's cattle ownership in Botswana. Not only does this livelihood strategy contest dominant discourse surrounding what type of people own cattle (and how they acquire them), but it also promotes both collective power and individual confidence that has wide-reaching implications for gender ideologies and divisions of labor.

The primary finding to highlight with this case study is that women in Botswana do in fact own cattle. This is indicative of a major disruption of traditionally held roles and norms in the country. There is an additional aspect of intentionality, whereby more participants actively acquired their cattle than received them through inheritance or as a gift. Discourse surrounding marital status, i.e. that only widows own cows, is contested through these different ownership and acquisition strategies. While many widows do inherit from their husbands, this was not the case for 72 percent of study participants. Women's intentional ownership has the potential to affect normative values placed on cattle and gender affiliation, creating even more opportunities for female cattle ownership. Changing ideologies surrounding conceptions of who 'should' be affiliated with cattle then serves to change both individual experiences and, more broadly, the structures organizing Botswana society. In the naming examples, one aspect of this intentionality of acquisition is reflected by group membership.

We see through a name such as *Motshelo* the way that confidence can be gained through either group membership or the visibility of other women (indicating that this activity is possible). This links to relational elements of power, such as 'power with', which describes collective action and the ways that a group can achieve more than an individual by combining strengths such as knowledge, expertise, and resources (Mosedale, 2005; Parpart et al., 2002; Rowlands, 1998). The act of women coming together in cattle ownership has transformative potential as they become known in the community for this venture. This can lead to ideological change as women transgress gender norms of appropriate behavior and move in spaces such as cattle posts and grazing areas that recently belonged only to men. Repetition of cattle rearing activities leads to confidence, which can encourage further participation. Cattle rearing for women becomes more acceptable as others witness it: "*I saw other ladies doing it so I thought I will buy one, I will try my best to look after it, even if it can be hard, I will just try*". The transformative element here relates to the visibility of collective power and independence, as well as the manifestation of individual confidence.

Confidence, pride, and dignity that develop through cattle access are significant themes in this research. These can be described as 'power within', or women's sense of self-worth and confidence (Kabeer, 1999; Mosedale, 2005; Parpart et al., 2002; Rowlands, 1998). Cattle represent these women achieving something whose esteemed value had once been for men only. This power within has implications for women's willingness to try something new ("*...even if it can be hard, I will just try*"), and also the ways others perceive them. Heidi Zachariassen (2012) notes the implications of power within for strategic gender positioning in her assessment of the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Programme<sup>7</sup> in Bolivia. Zachariassen found that women choosing and undertaking their own livelihood projects were able to address practical needs of income generation while also improving gender relations. Women developed increased

self-esteem through this Programme, which led to a change in men's understanding of women's abilities, resulting in greater respect. This started to affect systemic change as newly confident women who had earned men's respect were able to enter the political arena (2012: 489-90). While this is not yet the case in Botswana, developing confidence is an important first step, which has implications for broader structural change in the form of newfound respect and a disruption of their subordinate positioning. This again relates back to the name *Diakopa*, as access to a few cattle ('the little that you have') has a much larger impact on confidence ('will give you more'). As one woman put it: "*The cows give you strength to do everything you want to do*".

This research demonstrates that cattle access and ownership provides women the confidence to operate in spaces that were previously for men. Repetition of cattle rearing activities increases competence and confidence, leading to visibility and role-modeling. It is also evident that women are strategically utilizing certain institutional changes such as ownership laws in order to facilitate this livelihood strategy. The significance of this for a transformative mainstreaming strategy will be explored below.

### ***Mainstreaming Challenges and Opportunities***

Understanding women's circumstances is imperative for targeted policy formation. The naming examples given here highlight experiences of female cattle owners themselves, and the ways cattle affiliation in particular can both address immediate survival needs (while reinforcing gender roles) and contribute to the disruption of gendered power imbalance rooted in/reflected by connection to certain animals. Difficulties expressed by participants are tied to lack of access to information, markets, and transportation, all of which have roots in women's subordinate positioning. In other words, the above provides both incentive and concrete suggestions for mainstreaming to be used more effectively to impact structural change and equality in Botswana, including focused grants, information access, and training opportunities.

A better understanding of the ways cattle are accumulated can inform design and implementation of certain development interventions and help women access, grow, and safeguard their livestock (Kristjanson *et al.*, 2010; Njuki and Mburu, 2013). The Government of Botswana should therefore benefit from understanding the material and symbolic benefits of cattle ownership by women, different avenues for cattle access, and the need to expand programs to facilitate this access. Active cattle acquisition reflects strategic utilization of changes in ownership laws in the country. Since legal barriers have largely been removed, women have begun to intentionally own cattle, however some structural hurdles impacting access and targeted services remain. These stem from the institutional legacy noted above, whereby laws and policies are largely changed, but the structural oppression limiting women's action through entrenched ideas of masculinity and femininity persists. In fact, the belief remains that among women, 'only widows own cows', which is inaccurate. *Khumoithata's* owner Sylvanella is amongst a group of only 28 percent of widowed participants. The majority are either married or unmarried (46 and 26 percent, respectively). Most discourse surrounding female owned cattle in Botswana focuses on the widowed, perpetuating the idea of inheritance as sole pathway to cattle ownership. Unfortunately, this is also the opinion of many within the Government of Botswana, who do not fully understand the diversity of gendered ownership and access strategies. Discourse focused

solely on widows overlooks the circumstances of the majority of female cattle owners. Given the relative security cattle provide (both practically and symbolically), facilitating access strategies for all women at an institutional level should influence their perception and experience of their relative economic precarity.

The Gender Affairs Department has had some success with their Women's Group grants, which are explicitly designed to fulfill the practical goal of economic empowerment. Specific assistance and support for cattle within this granting structure would ensure mainstreaming was more transformative. Along these lines, initiatives such as the LIMID Programme could be altered in a strategic way to assist women with confidence in cattle rearing and reinforce the notion that women can (and do) rear these animals successfully. Noted above, the singular focus on adding women to economic initiatives without integrating a transformative element led to a reinforcing of gendered livestock associations and differential monetary compensation within LIMID. If cattle acquisition grants were instead made more accessible to women, not only would they be able to fulfill their (gendered) immediate survival needs, but they would also increase their competence and confidence, which could lead to changing broader ideologies that impact structures of constraint.

Access to both information and markets were among the greatest challenges faced by participants in this study. Lack of access to information reflects the trend of "information poverty" (Mburu *et al.*, 2013: 79) often accompanying the most marginalized members of a society. Indeed, the United Nations recognizes that a lack of access to information is a major challenge facing women in developing nations (Mburu *et al.*, 2013; Primo, 2003). Exemplified by *Khumoithata*, this lack of information plays out for female cattle owners in Botswana in both inadequate knowledge translation and lack of transportation, both of which impact market access. Information regarding rotating market quotas and subsidized vaccination schedules was difficult for women to find, as this information is typically posted at the *Kgotla* (customary court), another space traditionally overseen by men. Key informants in government and commercial arenas claim the expectation that "men would tell their wives" of any important information. This indicates a lack of targeted information for women cattle owners, and assumptions regarding knowledge translation, presenting an opportunity for institutional intervention. Content of information, including extension services and government-run training and lending projects, does not seem to be targeted to the needs of rural women. Essentially, though there are services in place, knowledge and uptake could be vastly improved by understanding the specific needs and concerns of women in rural villages.

Additionally, transportation skill building can address both practical and strategic needs for women. Physical barriers to market access are prohibitive to cattle sales, leading to the notion that 'wealth is difficult to find'. Transportation, including ability to drive or to ride a horse or donkey, is also typically the domain of men. Lack of transportation forces many women to hire someone (typically male) to transport their cattle to the market. With a portion of cattle income spent on transport, the net value of their cattle decreases. Assisting women with transportation and transportation-related training has implications for both practical and strategic needs. Practical needs can be addressed in the sense of market access, leading to income-generation and poverty-reduction, and strategic needs can be addressed in helping women to master a new skill that has gendered meanings attached, related to a resource that has traditionally also been highly

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gendered (cattle). *"[N]owadays women can own cattle, live at the cattle post, do everything that men can do. Way back women didn't own their own cattle. Now they are into them, rearing them, looking after them. But the problem is that there is no market. If there was a market where we could sell our cows, the cows could definitely change the lives of women around Botswana. The women will be empowered by those cattle"*

## **Conclusion**

The policies for women's advancement in Botswana typically address practical gender needs through funding or extension services for economic activities in the domestic sphere, and thus uphold traditional norms and gendered roles. Opportunities with regards to cattle access and affiliation in Botswana have traditionally been given to men only. The culture, laws, and norms surrounding cattle ownership affect men's likelihood to receive cattle grants, men's predominant affiliation with cattle, and in turn of course men's relative power in relation to women. However, through changes in traditional laws and attitudes, and through the Government of Botswana's renewed commitment to gender equality, women are gaining more opportunities for cattle holdings. This in turn affects normative values placed on cattle and gender affiliation, which creates even more opportunities for female cattle ownership.

The names of women's favourite cows reflect opportunities that cattle access and affiliation give to women in Botswana, and also what they value as important. The common thread emphasized through these names is their fulfillment of both practical and strategic gender needs, and the inherent difficulties in separating the two. Women in this study value their cattle for utilitarian purposes and symbolic ones. Cattle ownership helps participants address immediate practical needs through providing for domestic subsistence and general household operations. In acknowledging the use of cattle strictly for this purpose, however, there is a danger of reinforcing women's normative roles as caregivers in the domestic sphere. Importantly, cattle also provide the opportunity for transformative ideological change to participants. Changing associations with prestigious livestock and the confidence to manage them has the potential to influence gender ideologies, leading to changes in gendered divisions of labor and also to acceptance (by both men and women) that cattle aren't necessarily strictly a 'man's job'. This highlights the reality that lived experience is more complex than a policy approach on paper, indicating the need for mainstreaming strategies to be integrated in order to meet success.

An integrated approach to gender mainstreaming helps to address the grey areas between subverting and upholding the gender norms that lead to women's subordinate positioning. It is with this in mind that we see how understanding women's lived experiences and nuanced relationships with cattle in Botswana can lead to transformative change. Given the strong connections between gender and cattle in Botswana, provision for their ownership could be a way of ensuring that gender mainstreaming in the country is truly transformative. Policies and programs surrounding cattle access, extension services, transportation, and technology provide an opportunity for the Government of Botswana to undertake an integrated gender mainstreaming approach by addressing both strategic and practical needs simultaneously.

## **Acknowledgements**

This study was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (the

Lives of Animals Project and Vanier CGS) and International Development Research Centre's Doctoral Research Award. Thank you to the Government of Botswana, especially the Department of Gender Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture and to colleagues at Department of Environmental Science, University of Botswana for in-kind support and encouragement. Thank you especially to the cattle owners who generously gave their time and energy to participate in this study. Finally, we are appreciative of the comments from reviewers and editors of this Special Issue that helped us strengthen the paper.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The traditional sector refers to subsistence farming. Botswana's commercial agricultural sector was not included in this case study

<sup>2</sup> Prior to their updated gender policies, the Government of Botswana relied on gender neutral or gender-blind policies that served to overlook women's marginalization and even conceal systemic issues such as unequal land or resource access (Kalabamu 2006). In 1998, the GoB sought to rectify this by undertaking a review of laws affecting the status of women, in order to particularly identify laws that discriminated on the basis of gender (ICRE, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> In 2016, the GoB released a statement noting they had increased the minimum allotment for individual beneficiaries within these grants, and also translated all application forms into Setswana in order to facilitate an easier application process for all citizens (GoB, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> Only women were interviewed, as their unique experiences are not clearly understood by government. Men's attitudes and opinions were noted through informal conversation and participant observation.

<sup>5</sup> 62 percent of participants noted practical utility, while 25 percent saw symbolic value in cattle ownership (the remainder did not comment)

<sup>6</sup> Names have been changed to protect identities. Parentheses after quotations contain Setswana pseudonyms followed by the name of the participant's village

<sup>7</sup> Under the Norwegian organization Digni (<https://digni.no/en/>)

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