THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE IKHOWE CRAFT GROUP

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ABSTRACT

There has been considerable debate in the gender and development literature on income-earning opportunities and their empowerment potential for women, particularly rural women, in developing countries. In this, a critical question for the empowerment of women is, does access to resources, for example, enterprise income, translate into power and its various manifestations for women within their households? This study argues that access to resources alone is not a sufficient prerequisite for empowerment. Improved access to resources will only transform into empowerment outcomes if women are able to exercise their agency to achieve desired outcomes. The study, therefore, highlights the centrality of agency in the empowerment process. Agency acts as a link between resources on the one hand and empowerment outcomes on the other. Furthermore, the relationship between agency and empowerment is dialectical as the two concepts under investigation are constitutive of each other. Put differently, enhanced agency results in empowerment, which in turn feeds back to increased agency, leading to further empowerment. Hence, empowerment is presented as both an outcome of the exercise of agency and a driver of agency.

The study frames the question of agency and empowerment within feminist theory of agency - Western, African and South African. Using a case study of the Ikhowe Craft Group in rural Eshowe, the study examines the role of agency in the empowerment process for rural women crafters in two ways. Firstly, through the feminist political ecology approach, it evaluates their ability to access the natural resource, *Cyperus spp.* for use in craft making. Secondly, it examines their individual agency within their households and their collective agency in the Craft Group. Within the overarching feminist research paradigm, a mixed methods research methodology was used, which entailed embedding quantitative data collection and presentation within qualitative research techniques.

The empirical evidence suggests that the women crafters' agency was enacted and empowerment achieved within a context of enablement and constraints, with gender,

culture and traditional leadership emerging as significant variables that mediate the rural women's agency within their households and in accessing the raw material for their craft. Gender and culture intersect to influence how the women construct their identities, roles and responsibilities within their households. Despite the constraints of social structure, the women emerge as important agents of social change in their households. In addition, the study has revealed the private sphere to be a significant site of both the women crafters' agency and subordination. Hence, any conceptualization of women's agency and empowerment, particularly that of rural women, needs to be context-specific to be able to adequately capture the realities of the women that impinge on their ability to act.

PREFACE

This thesis is the original work of the author and has not been submitted in any other form to any other University. Where use has been made of others' work, it is duly acknowledged in the text.

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ACRONYMS

ACTAG   : Arts and Culture Task Group

AIDS   : Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

ANC   : African National Congress

ANCWL   : African National Congress Women's League

AsgiSA   : Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa

CBNRM   : Community-Based Natural Resource Management

CCDI   : Cape Craft and Design Institute

CCSA   : Craft Council of South Africa

CEAD   : Centre for Environment, Agriculture and Development

CGE   : Commission on Gender Equality

CIGS   : Cultural Industries Growth Strategy

CLRA   : Communal Land Rights Act

CMIP   : Consolidated Municipal Infrastructure Programme

COSATU   : Congress of South African Trade Unions

CPAs   : Communal Property Associations

C. spp.   : Cyperus.spp.

CWM   : Community Wildlife Management

DAC   : Department of Arts and Culture

DACST   : Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology

DLA   : Department of Land Affairs

DTI   : Department of Trade and Industry

ECLAC   : Economic Commission for Latin American Countries

GEAR   : Growth, Employment and Redistribution

HIV   : Human Immuno-deficiency Virus

IDP   : Integrated Development Plan

FIFA   : Federation of International Football Associations

IFRC   : International Federation of Red Crescent Societies

IMF   : International Monetary Fund

IRDP   : Integrated Rural Development Programme

ISRDP   : Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme

LED   : Local Economic Development

LRAD   : Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development

MEC   : Minister of the Executive Council

NEMA   : National Environmental Management Act

NMW   : National Machinery for Women

NRM   : Natural Resource Management

RCT   : Rational Choice Theory

RDP   : Reconstruction and Development Programme

RSDI   : Regional Spatial Development Initiative

SAP   : Structural Adjustment Programme

SDI   : Spatial Development Initiative

SEDA   : Small Enterprise Development Agency

SMMEs   : Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises

SRL   : Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

UKZN   : University of KwaZulu-Natal

UN   : United Nations

WEAU   : Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union

WED   : Women, Environment and Development

WID   : Women in Development

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH ISSUES

This study explores the role of agency in the empowerment process of a group of rural women crafters organized in the Ikhowe Craft Group in Eshowe, KwaZulu-Natal. As such, the research engages with intersecting literatures, concepts and theoretical debates. There has been much debate in gender and development literature centering on income-earning opportunities and their empowerment potential for women (Katz, 1997; Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 1999, 2000; Iversen, 2003; Kantor, 2003). This raises a critical question for the empowerment of women: does access to resources, for example, enterprise income, translate into power and its various manifestations for women within the household? There is a growing realization on the part of analysts that access to resource alone is not a sufficient prerequisite for empowerment. Improved access to resources will only transform into empowerment outcomes if women are able to act or exercise their agency to achieve desired outcomes (Kabeer, 1999, 2000). In Kabeer's (2000) model of empowerment, for example, agency is situated as the defining criterion of the empowerment process. With resources at one end and outcomes on the other, agency functions as a link between the two. A growing body of research recognizes the centrality of agency in the empowerment process (Kabeer, 1999, 2000; McNay, 2000; Malhotra *et al*., 2002). While critical in the attainment of empowerment outcomes, resources are not sufficient on their own.

Furthermore, agency/empowerment theorists posit a dialectical relationship between the two concepts (Kabeer, 2000; Malhotra, 2002; Narayan, 2002, 2005; Alkire, 2007). Not only are they constitutive of each other, they are also interactive. In other words, there are feedback loops between the two. Enhanced agency leads to empowerment, which in turn feeds back into increased agency, resulting in further empowerment. Within such a framework of an iterative relationship between agency and empowerment, both are viewed as drivers and outcomes of each other.

Although economic empowerment can be regarded as a significant element around which women negotiate their space in families, households and communities, a broader perspective that includes social and political empowerment, is required. Put differently, there is a need to go beyond the economic benefits of income generation to an exploration and analysis of the extent to which the income earned from craft-making gives the women power to renegotiate and challenge gender power relations in the household. Little work has been done in South Africa to document the ability of women to convert their enterprise income into power within their households. While in western contexts the relationship between resource access and intra-household power relations may follow certain patterns, theorists in developing countries, such as Agarwal (1997), Kabeer (1999), Sen (1990; 1999), take into account contextual variables (social norms, values and culture) that influence the ability to translate resources into household power, particularly for women, in ways quite different from western contexts. Indeed, there are many examples in development literature on women's empowerment in developing countries of cases where women's access to increased resources does not necessarily result in greater control and decision-making over the utilization of those resources (Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 1998, 1999, 2000; Kantor, 2003). The relationship between resources and power raises the issue of the central role of agency in the empowerment process and questions whether resources alone are sufficient to challenge intra-household power inequalities.

Research in the 1970s and 1980s focused on rural women's subordinate status (Berg, 2004; Gorman, 2006). However, more recently, choice, agency, resistance and the challenging of gender identities have become more prominent in research agendas, which have portrayed women not as accepting victims of patriarchal relations, but as active agents in constructing and shaping their spaces within rural households (Kabeer, 2000; Bank, 2002; Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002; Berg, 2004; Oyewumi, 2005; Gorman, 2006). The concept of agency has received much attention, by both social scientists (Parsons, 1937; Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1979,1984; Joas, 1996) and feminists alike, both Western and African (Johnson-Odim, 1991; Mohanty, 1991; McNay, 1992, 2000; Mann, 1994; Mikell, 1997; Nnaemeka, 1998; Okeke, 2000; Steady, 2004). Feminist theorists, in

particular, interrogate women's agency against the backdrop of gender/power relations, celebrating and embracing the efforts of women in exercising their agency to change their conditions in the face of constraints they face in their daily lives (Folbre, 1994; Mann, 1994; McNay, 1992, 2000; Gardiner, 1995; Kabeer, 1998; Nnaemeka, 1998; Gorman, 2006). While it is acknowledged that gender (understood here as the social construction of maleness and femaleness) intersects with other social constructs to produce relations of power, it nonetheless takes central place in any discussion of women's agency and empowerment, and conversely, their subordination and oppression. Theorists such as Giddens (1979, 1984) and Bourdieu (1977) introduce the concept of structures that shape human behaviour. Giddens, in particular, puts forward his theory of structuration to explain that people's agency shape and is shaped by structures, which can enable or constrain action.

Recognizing the variations in women's agency across localities and socio-cultural contexts, feminists warn against essentializing and homogenizing women and their experiences (Mohanty, 1991, 1997; Stamp, 1995; Mikell, 1997; Nnaemeka, 1998). Instead, they stress the contextualization of any analysis of women's agency. In African contexts, as in other societies, the conceptualization and analysis of women's agency need to take cognizance of cultural imperatives in explaining women's positions, roles and responsibilities within gender relations. In other words, the interplay of culture and gender in shaping women's identities and roles is an important factor to consider. Researchers and donors have recognized the limitations of development frameworks, such as Women in Development and Gender and Development, which serve as tools for empowering women without taking cultural factors into account (Kolawole, 2004; Steady, 2004).

The concept of agency, and by extension, empowerment in this study extends to the examination of women crafters and their ability to access, use and control the natural resource of their enterprise, in order to understand the larger framework of gender and resource use in the lives of the women crafters. Feminist thinkers have positioned gender as an important, though not the only factor in shaping natural resource use and control

(Shiva, 1989; Leach, 1992; Agarwal, 1992; Rocheleau *et al*, 1996; Leach and Green, 1997; Goebel, 2003). They advocate a gender analysis in the women/environment discourse, rather than women as a category, as it takes cognizance of the role of men in the investigation and at the same time addresses the diversity and dynamism of women's agency with regard to the environment. Thinking about gender in relation to natural resource access, use and control, raises issues of resource tenure and other social tenure arrangements. The examination of these factors enhances our understanding of women's role as users of natural resources in productive activities to sustain their livelihoods, hence underlining their economic agency. A gender-based approach to investigating and analysing access to and use of natural resources, illustrates "how the processes governing the use of natural resources can be seen as sets of interests and opportunities differentiated by gender" (Leach, 1992:17).

South African research on the empowerment of women, however, presents another set of considerations. There is minimal work that documents the ability of women to convert their enterprise money into power within the household. The concepts of women's agency and empowerment in South Africa have been linked to the liberation, housing and land movements, highlighting women's collective agency in engaging with the public sphere to bring about change in their lives (Walker, 1995; Kaplan, 1997; Wells, 1998; Gouws, 2005; Hassim, 2006). However, there is little literature providing a robust and rigorous framework for analysing and operationalizing women's agency within the private domain. While it is important to understand what constitutes women's agency and empowerment in the public sphere, particularly in the South African context and as a result of the new government's commitment to gender equality, it is also crucial to develop a context-specific framework within which women's agency at the household level can be examined. Hence, there is a need to conceptualize and operationalize female agency in the private realm where gender relations and culture interact, particularly in rural areas where patriarchy is firmly entrenched and institutionalised (Walker, 1994; Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002; Ntsebeza, 2005).

By placing the variables of gender and culture at the centre of the conceptualization of agency in African women's empowerment, the study seeks to problematize the assumed fixed nature of agency, drawing attention to the different meanings and interpretations given to the concept. Furthermore, within the South African context, the agency of rural women, as the subject of the thesis, needs to be investigated against rural development and the political, economic and social processes that are shaping the trajectory of rural development in the post-apartheid period. Such a perspective sheds light on the issues that mediate the rural women crafters' agency. These issues include the nature of rural poverty in South Africa, how the rural poor construct and diversify their livelihoods, the relationship between rural development and the environment that forms a critical resource base for rural communities in South Africa, the gender dimension of rural development and the regulatory framework of rural development. These issues provide a backdrop against which rural women's agency can be interrogated.

1.2 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to examine the role of agency in the empowerment process of the women crafters of rural Eshowe both at the household level and within the craft group. The research aim is achieved through the objectives, which are to:

1. Identify and evaluate the manifestations of the women's agency and empowerment in their households;

2. Assess the role of social structures in the crafters' agency and empowerment:
   - In their households
   - In accessing the raw material; and
   - In the craft group

3. Identify and evaluate the women crafters' empowerment outcomes as:
   - Individuals within their households; and
   - A collective, in the craft group.

4. Identify the implications of the study for the women themselves and for policy interventions.

5. Offer recommendations for policy and further research.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Many studies have been conducted in South Africa on the contribution of craft making to the livelihoods of rural people, particularly rural women (Rogerson, 2000; Rogerson and Sithole, 2001; Kepe, 2003; Shackleton, 2005, 2006). These studies have emphasized crafting as a poverty alleviation strategy. This is an important contribution. However, the empowerment potential of the enterprise income has been undertheorised, as has the centrality of agency in women's efforts to improve their own lives and the lives of their household members. This study, therefore, explores an important issue, namely, the ability of rural women to be agents of change; and whether their enterprise income translates into power for the women crafters. Hassim (2005) and Gouws (2005) have argued that analysing women's political agency is not sufficient to capture women's empowerment in South Africa. Rather, a model is required that situates women's agency within a set of relationships in the domestic realm, as the private sphere is still an important site of both women's agency and their subordination. This is particularly significant for rural women as their positions and roles within the household are strongly embedded in patriarchal structures.

This study, therefore, fills this gap by examining and analysing women's agency within a rural South African setting. By so doing, it sheds light on the interplay of agency, gender and culture in the empowerment of rural women, underscoring the context-specific nature of agency and empowerment. In addition, craft making in particular and rural development in general provide a setting for the examination of the concept of agency, and for this reason, the study considers the implications for women crafters of empowerment strategies by policy-makers. Knowing and understanding the complexities of rural women's agency and empowerment at the micro-level, provides policy-makers with an opportunity to design appropriate intervention strategies. The study is significant to the women themselves, for it is hoped that their consciousness about gender and power relations will be raised and, through time, will translate into a society in which their status is enhanced.

1.4 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This chapter has introduced the study, outlining the research aim, objectives and the significance of the study. It concludes by setting out the structure of the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework by reviewing the literature on the key concepts of the study: agency, empowerment, gender, culture, household headship, vulnerability, social capital and political ecology.

Chapter 3 describes the broader context of rural development in South Africa, particularly in the post-apartheid era.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology employed in the study, namely, mixed methods and case study.

Chapter 5 presents and discusses the research findings of the Ikhowe Craft Group.

Chapter 6 analyses the research findings.

Chapter 7 concludes the study, pointing to the implications of the findings for rural women and policy intervention in South Africa, and offers recommendations for the Ikhowe Craft Group, policy and further research.

CHAPTER TWO: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Chapter 2 introduces and develops a theoretical framework for the study by reviewing the literature on the key concepts of the study. These include the concepts of agency and empowerment, which are the subject of the study, gender; culture; household headship; vulnerability; social capital and political ecology.

2.1 AGENCY

Over the past few decades, the concept of agency has received much attention in anthropological and sociological theoretical debates (Giddens, 1976; Bourdieu, 1977; Harcourt, 1994; Archer, 1988; Dietz and Burns, 1992; Cligget, 2005). Whether agency is defined as the ability to define one's goals and act upon them (Kabeer, 2000) or as individual action within social structure, with agency and social structures interacting in a feedback system, changing and maintaining each other (Giddens, 1974; Bourdieu, 1977; Harcourt, 1994), the common idea about agency is the ability to act.

Discourses around the concept of agency draw a dichotomy between the pre-scientific view and the scientific view. According to the pre-scientific perspective, ascribed to by the early Greeks, particularly Plato and Aristotle, a person has control over his behaviour. Because an individual is "free to deliberate, decide and act, possibly in original ways, he is to be given credit for his successes and blamed for his failures" (Flew and Versey, 1987:3). On the other hand, the scientific paradigm of human nature and action postulates that an individual is a product of his genetic endowment and environment. Behaviourist psychologists, rejects the notion of agency, viewing it as a fatal flaw in our thinking. According to the subscribers of the scientific view, we have less reason to attribute any part of human behaviour to an autonomous agent.

The above opposing discourses resonate with what McNay (2000) describes as determinist and generative paradigms of action and specifically of the subject. The determinist or negative formulation of subject formation does not adequately account for the actions of human beings as they negotiate complex social conditions. In other words, the determinist view proposes that human action is determined by the environment. The

generative framework gives a creative dimension to agency, since the subject is endowed with the capacity for innovative and productive responses to challenges. The two binaries of the theory of action are located within the wider social theory of action, the most influential and fundamental thinking about action and agency. Hence, the concept of agency can be best understood if the various strands of the theory of action are traced and examined. To this end, an account of those theories within the broader social theory of agency that informs and advances the conception of agency is provided, namely, rational choice theory, normative theories, pragmatism and theory of practice.

Rational Choice Theory

The distinction between two predominant models of action, namely, rational choice theory (RCT) and the normative theories of human action provide the starting point. Rational choice theorists ground action theory in the purposive, calculating and rational nature of human beings (Emirbayer and Micshe, 1998; Archer *et al*., 2000). Located within the conceptual framework of economic theory, RCT takes the individual *Homo economicus* as the unit of analysis, contending that "human beings are eternal bargain-hunters, forever seeking to maximize their goals, what is termed instrumental rationality" (Archer *et al*., 2000). The rational choice model for explaining human behaviour and action, however, raises a number of questions. Firstly, while RCT gives primacy to the role of individual social actors in decision-making, it discounts the collective setting of that decision and the structural influences that mediate the decision-making process and thus decontextualizes the individual (Joas, 1996). Secondly, it does not address the affective aspect of a person's agency, what Archer *et al*. call the 'shoving power', which motivates the maximizer, and what Barbalet (2000) regards as central to everyday operations of social interaction. Thirdly, in presupposing that an individual's preferences are stable (they have neither history nor trajectory); RCT denies the individual the ability to reflect on his past preferences as he responds to change in his circumstances (Archer *et al.,* 2000).

Normative Theories

Talcott Parsons (1937), in attempting to counteract the limitation of utilitarian tradition of rational action, namely, its inability to explain the origin of action goals, devised the

normative framework. He maintains that the model of rational action can be overcome by considering those normative orientations, which are involved in the constitution of goals and the choice of means. Hence, he introduces the notions of 'values' and 'norms' as guiding principles that limit individualistic self-interested actions. In other words, the autonomy of human beings to choose and create goals and values is primary in Parsons' voluntaristic theory of action. According to Munch (1987), Parsons not only introduces his normative framework to explain action, but also attempts to bridge the gap between rational-utilitarian and normative models through his voluntaristic theory of action. Munch (1987:160) defines voluntarism as "see(ing) action as resulting from the nature of the relationship (interpenetration) between conditional factors (situation) and normative factors (norms) in an actor's goal orientation…it occurs in a situation consisting of conditions and means, and also within a normative frame of reference that serves to limit the choice of ends, means and combinations of the two". Jeffrey Alexander (1988), (himself a neo-Parsonsian and Kantian), advances beyond both Kant and Parsons in his analytical exploration of agency. He disaggregates the concept of agency, examines its inner structure and delineating categories of agentic processes. Furthermore, Alexander's multidimensional theory provides insight into the "contextually embedded actors", something overlooked by the rational action theorists. However, his theory suffers from two limitations as far as the concept of agency is concerned, namely, a lack of temporal framework for action and a lack of the inventive aspects of agency.

Pragmatism

The American pragmatists, notably John Dewey (1922) and George Herbert Mead (1938), challenge the dualism between instrumental and normative action. They situate agency within a temporal and contextual framework. The essence of the pragmatist theory is, as Joas (1996:128) asserts, "the anchoring of cognition/perception in real-life problems….theirs is a plea in defense of real doubt anchored in action". The pragmatist model of action postulates that real doubt arises "as our perceptions of the world and action in the world, anchored in an unreflected belief in successful routines of action are shattered… and our actions meet with resistance from the world and rebound back on us" (ibid.). It is at this phase of "interrupted context" that our perceptions must come to terms

with new possibilities of interacting with the world and find new ways of engaging with the changed reality. This is the philosophy of adaptation that under girds the pragmatist theory of action. Dewey's psychology of thinking and logic adds another dimension to pragmatism, namely, that of problem definition (Joas, 1996). He maintains that action is defined in terms of first recognizing the problem situation before specific problematic qualities can be attributed to it. It is how an actor himself, confronted with the problem situation, defines the problem that will determine in which direction the actor will look for to find the solution. In this manner the gap between objectivist conceptions of a situation and the subjective view is bridged as the actors, facing problematic situations are compelled (by the objective reality) to perform definitional work on the situation.

It is the work of George Herbert Mead (1932, 1938), however, which offers the conceptualization of agency and action "the most compelling tools for overcoming the inadequate conceptions of agency in both rational choice and norm-oriented approaches" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:968). His major contributions lie primarily in the temporality and sociality of experience, which are crucial for the understanding of the intersubjective development of agency. In Mead's view, the concept of temporality is constituted through emergent events that require continual refocusing of past and future; and the notion of sociality is constituted through the "embeddedness of actors in multiple temporally evolving relational contexts" (ibid.). As human beings respond to changing contexts, they constantly reconstruct their perception of the past in order to make sense of the emergent present, while using this new understanding to shape their responses to the future, what Mead calls 'the deliberative attitude' (Mead, 1932:76).

Creativity Theory
Joas (1996), in his theory of creativity, "wrests the theory of action from both its rationalist and norm-oriented presuppositions" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:970). Joas argues that there is a creative dimension to all human action; a dimension which is not adequately addressed in the models of rational choice and normative action. He emphasizes the interpenetration of human action and the situation in which the action takes place. For Joas, "it is not sufficient to consider human action as being contingent on

the situation, but that it should also be recognized that the situation is constitutive of action" (Joas, 1998:160). The situation of action, according to Emirbayer and Mische (1998:970), "provides not merely 'means' and 'conditions' for pre-established ends, but also the structured habitual patterns of response that become the basis for the reflective and creative engagement of actors with their changing environments". While Joas (1996:197) acknowledges the variation that exists in actors' capacities for creative interaction with their diverse contexts, he fails to elaborate on this issue of variability.

Theory of Practice
The discussion on theory of practice encompasses Anthony Giddens' (1984, 1979) structuration theory and Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus and how these contribute to a conceptualization of agency.

Agency and Structure
The debate over the primacy of agency or structure is at the heart of both classical (Marx, 1970; Weber, 1949; Durkheim, 1895) and contemporary (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Giddens, 1979, 1984, 1991; Bourdieu, 1977 and 1990) sociological theory. On the one hand, there are theories (action theorists) that argue that individual or human action defines and constitutes social reality (Garfinkel, 1967; Weber, 1949). Within such a framework of social life, human action is given centrality in shaping society. In other words, individual agents have the capacity to construct and reconstruct their social world without any constraint. On the other hand, some theorists (functionalists and structuralists) posit that our social world and what we know as our social existence is largely determined by the overall structure of society (Durkheim, 1895 Merton, 1968; Parsons, 1966). This means that society consists of structures that constrain actors. Such a deterministic view of social life overemphasizes the structure of society and overlooks the role of human action in the constitution of society. This conflict between the individual and society in shaping social existence raises fundamental questions in social theory. As Kaspersen (2000:3-4) puts it, "to what degree is it possible for indivduals to create their own lives and the frameworks for these; to what extent are we already constrained by the fact of being born into an already existing society?" Modern theorists, prominent amongst whom are Giddens (1979, 1984) and Bourdieu (1977, 1990), attempt

to find middle ground between these two extreme positions. They view agency and structure as interdependent forces in the constitution of the society, i.e., structure shapes human behaviour, and people are capable of changing the social structures in their lives. Giddens, in particular, is critical of sociological analyses that stress either the agency of social actors or social structures-what is sociologically termed the 'dualism' of agency and structure- in explaining social reality.

Giddens' Structuration Theory

In his structuration theory, Giddens' (1979, 1984, 1991) transcends the agency-structure dualism. His seminal work, *The Constitution of Society* (1984), outlines his structuration theory. Its central premise is the 'duality of structure'. It sees objectivism (represented by structures) and subjectivism (agency) as constitutive of each other. In other words, there is no dichotomy or dualism between structure and agency. Rather, they interpenetrate each other. By acting, we produce the structure that in turn, influences our action. Put differently, structures are created, maintained and changed through actions, while actions are given meaningful form through the setting of structure. Hence, the line of causality runs in both directions. Such a conceptual framework of the dialectical or recursive nature of agency and structure allows one to understand how actors simultaneously create structure and are created by them (Giddens, 1991).

According to Giddens, there are three criteria that must be met in order to attribute agency to a social actor. Firstly, Giddens' formulation of agency and action is tied to power. "To act is to be able to act otherwise; being able to intervene in the world… with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events" (Giddens, 1984:14). An agent "ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to 'make a difference', i.e., to exercise some sort of power" (Outhwaite, 1990:65). Secondly, there must be intention on the part of the social actor for agency to operate. However, Giddens' (1984) notion of unintended consequences alerts us to the fact that we should not conflate the intention with what actually happens. Such unintentional acts cannot be considered agency. Thirdly, agency requires that the actor be

reflexive, which involves observing and evaluating consequences of actions. Because social actors are reflexive (we give account of our actions) and monitor the ongoing flow of our actions and structural conditions, they can adapt their actions to their evolving understandings. In this way, actors can change their social practices and thereby the structures in which and through which these practices take place (Giddens, 1984). To illustrate the reflexivity of actors and hence the recursive relationship between agency and structure, Giddens uses the sociological concept of double hermeneutic, which explains how social scientific knowledge filters back into everyday social life and changes the way people think about their social world and act. These feedback loops play an important role in the reconstruction of our social reality (Bryant and Jary, 1991).

Giddens further explains that structures consist of rules and resources, which he terms structural properties. Giddens (1984:21) claims one of the tenets of his theory is that "social practices are accomplished by knowledgeable human agents who use and manipulate structure in the form of resources and rules to intervene in the social order." For Giddens rules refer to procedures of action (principles governing social action), which are applied in the performances and reproduction of social practices. Rules comprise constitutive rules (rules that constitute meaning in social practices), and regulative rules (that sanction the agent's conduct). He distinguishes between allocative resources (deployment of material facilities) and authoritative resources (domination over other people). Hence, actors can mobilize either allocative resources or authoritative resources to influence the course and outcome of an interaction. Within structuration theory, power can either be transformational capacity or domination, depending on the utilization of resources. Structures, therefore, must not be conceived as only imposing constraints on human agency, but as also enabling action.

Giddens (1979) identifies three factors in structures-which he calls modalities of structuration- that bind actors to social systems. These binding elements of structure incorporate signification (structures of meaning and communication); domination (structures of power and control, encompassing authoritative and allocative resources); and legitimization (structures of normative regulation). According to Giddens (1979),

these elements of structure mediate how actors' interactions and practices are structured. Hence, an analysis of social change will involve a close examination of how these binding elements are reproduced and transformed. Elaborating on the concept of structure, Lopez and Scott (2000) distinguish between institutional structure and relational structure. Lopez *et al.* (2000:3) define institutional structure as "those cultural and normative patterns that define the expectations of agents hold about each other's behaviour and that organize their enduring relations with each other." Relational structures "comprise relationships that entail interconnections and interdependence among agents and their actions, as well as the positions they occupy" (Lopez *et al.*, 2000:3).

While Giddens makes a general claim that structures always constrain and enable actors, Mouzelis (1995) introduces the idea of degrees of constraint. He argues that the power that actors have is defined in terms of hierarchical position. Some actors have more power than others do, depending on the hierarchical position the actor occupies. For example, macro-actors have the power to reorganize rules and deploy resources, which micro-actors do not have. According to Healy (1998:515), classifying power relations within a given social hierarchy is important, as it gives empirical advantage on a problem.

Like Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu overcomes the dualism of objectivism and subjectivism through his conceptual framework of practice (action) anchored in the notions of habitus, capital and field. "Being practical requires actors to relate to the particularity of situations, size them up, evaluate them from some point of view and know what to do" (Parker, 2000: 44). Habitus refers to the concrete, embodied, interest-laden dispositions of individuals. Central to the notion of habitus is that individuals are socially situated within groups or collectivities which "compete for positions in various fields in which kinds of capital (power) are at stake" (ibid.) Just as habitus informs practice from within, a field shapes action from without (Wacquant, 1998), but neither has the capacity to determine social action on its own. It is the meeting of disposition (habitus) and position (field) that generates action.

Archer (1995), through her morphogenetic theory, provides a methodological analytical tool to examine the relation between structure and agency. While she accepts the ontological nature of structure and agency (their inseparable co-existence), she argues for a methodological analytical framework within which the relation between the two is interrogated. In other words, she advocates for an analytical duality and temporal principles of interplay and emergence (Williams, 2000: 69). This concern expressed by Archer is echoed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998:962), who assert that "in the struggle to demonstrate the interpenetration of agency and structure, many theorists have failed to distinguish agency as an analytical category in its own right". They (theorists) see structure so intertwined with every aspect of practice that the constituent components of structure and agency cannot be examined separately…In the absence of any degree of autonomy it becomes impossible to examine their interplay" (Archer, 1998: 77).

Drawing largely upon Giddens' structuration theory, this study proposes that agency does not operate in a vacuum, but occurs in the context of structures - in the form of resources, rules, norms, gender, culture and religion - that can either enable or constrain agency. It is, therefore, crucial to examine the role of structural factors in any conceptualization of agency.

Conceptualizing Agency

While the concept of agency tends to be used freely in feminist and social theories, its meaning still remains elusive (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) and the definitions themselves are still contested (Gardiner, 1995:10). Agency may have different meanings or take different forms in different contexts or among different groups of people (Nelson-Kuna and Riger, 1995; Kabeer, 1999, 2001; Malhotra *et al*. 2002; Alsop *et al*., 2006; Alkire, 2007; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). "Variants of action theory, normative theory and political-institutional analysis have defended, attacked, buried and resuscitated the concept in often contradictory and overlapping ways" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:962). Yet, the concept has maintained its vagueness.

Sen (1985:203) defines agency as "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important". In his account, freedom is an integral part of agency. In other words, freedom to act and choose constitutes a person's well-being. He distinguishes between two types of freedom encompassed in the concept of agency, i.e., those freedoms that make the exercise of agency possible, namely, process freedom and opportunity freedom. The former refers to the processes that allow freedom of actions and decisions, while the latter is the actual opportunities that people have, given their personal and social conditions.

In their conceptual framework of empowerment, Narayan (2002, 2005), Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) and Alsop *et al.* (2006) define agency as the individual's or group's ability to make purposeful choices. This ability is determined by a person's individual assets (such as land, housing, savings, livestock), capabilities (human, social and psychological) and by people's collective assets and capabilities.

Mann (1994:14), speaking from a gender perspective, defines agency as "those individual or group activities deemed significant in a particular social or institutional setting". She adds that just as much as agency is normally associated with economic, ethical and sexual forms, three distinct dimensions can be distinguished, namely, motivation, responsibility and expectations of recognition or reward (ibid.). These dimensions can operate either together or separately within the context of individual actions. Mann (1994) situates agency within historical and cultural settings on the one hand, and social/ power relationships on the other.

For feminists, such as Ellen Messer-Davidow (1995), agency is linked to change that comes about as people exercise their agency. In her view, the conventional definition of agency is "the capacity to determine and act" (Messer-Davidow, 1995:25). Because agency, as Messer-Davidow conceives it, is attached to an entity, be it an individual, a group or a social structure, the particular qualities of the entity and elements determine how agency is conceptualized. According to this formulation, she proposes three models for conceptualizing agency, namely:

- individualist : when agency is attached to the self and conceived as an element of psychological well-being, it is the individual's capacity for self-determination realized through decision-making and action;

- collectivist: when attached to society, agency is conceived as culturally-determined and variable;

- social-structural: when attached to persons and conceived as an element of social being, it is said to be their capacity for social influence and intervention (Messer-Davidow, 1995: 26).

Within the agency and culture discourses, agency is defined as "the intentional causal intervention in the world, subject to the possibility of a reflexive monitoring of that intervention" (Bhaskar, 1989:81 in Ratner, 2000:413). According to this definition, "people are not passive recipients of a reified entity called culture. Rather, they play an active role in making and remaking culture" (Ratner, 2000:413). Naila Kabeer (2001) situates agency within the empowerment framework. She proposes a pluralistic and multi-dimensional interpretation of agency, defining agency as "…. the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency is more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose individuals bring to their activity, 'the power within' " (Kabeer, 2001:16). She adds that agency can take many forms, other than decision-making that has dominated social science literature. "Agency can take the form of bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance, as well as more tangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis" (ibid.). It can be exercised by both individuals and groups.

Temporality of Agency
Emirbayer and Mische (1998) contend that in order to understand agency and the historical processes that impinge on it, we need to situate agency in the past, present and future. Three elements constitute this temporal dimension of action (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998):

1. *The iterative element:* This means that actors are able to selectively react to past patterns of thought and action to give meaning to present emerging situations

thereby giving stability and order to social order and helping to sustain identities and interactions. We, therefore, are connected to our past and our past shapes our responses to the present. The centrality of the past in influencing present interactions is echoed by Bourdieu and Giddens in their theory of practice (already discussed above).

2. ***The projective element***: This element corresponds to the future orientation of action; the forward-looking aspect of action. Notions of the imaginative, inventive, innovative and creative aspects of agency emerge from this element (Mead, 1932; Joas, 1993; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998).

3. ***The practical-evaluative element:*** It entails the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments in response to emerging and evolving demands, dilemmas and challenges of the present. Practical-evaluative capabilities include practical wisdom, discretion, prudence, tact improvisation and intelligence, which all strengthen actors' capacity for judgment and choice-making in in situations that demand these.

Contextualizing Agency

Speaking from a psychological perspective, Nelson-Kuna and Riger (1995) argue that much theory on agency ignores the importance of context in shaping human action. In his study of context or of the contextualities of interaction, Giddens (1984:282) contends that context involves: (a) the time-space boundaries (usually having symbolical or physical markers); (b) the co-presence of actors, making possible the visibility of a diversity of facial expressions, bodily gestures, linguistic and other media of communication; and (c) awareness and use of these phenomena reflexively to influence or control the flow of interaction. The discourses on the interpenetration of structure and agency provide useful starting point for contextualizing agency. For the purposes of my study, Giddens' theory of structuration (already discussed above) is perhaps the most compelling for the role that context plays in enabling and constraining action. According to Giddens (1984), structures (social structures-families, religion, society, cultural conditions rules and norms) though exerting power over human beings, are also the products of human beings (Parker, 2000). Although agency is a given (Sewell, 1992;

Ratner, 2000) the capacity for specific forms of agency is culturally and historically determined (Sewell, 1992:20) and will vary enormously, depending on the range of cultural schemas and resources available in a person's particular social environment.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998:969), disaggregate context into the following types:

- The cultural context, which encompasses those symbolic patterns, structures and formations (for example cultural discourses, narrative and idioms) that constrain and enable s' world and their possibilities within it;
- The social-structural context, which entails those network patterns of social ties that comprise interpersonal, inter-organizational or transnational settings; and
- The social-psychological context includes those psychical structures that constrain or enable action by channeling actors' flows and investments of emotional energy, including long-lasting durable structures of attachment and emotional solidarity.

The above analysis of structure as context for agency illuminates the intertwinement of structure and agency and the situational embeddedness of agency. This is echoed by Mead's notion of sociality, which refers to the temporal-relational context. For Mead (1932), the intersubjectivity of individuals entails the construction of temporal perspectives, enabling one to simultaneously hold one's and another's viewpoints.

In arguing for the centrality of culture in the conceptualization of agency, Ratner (2000) contrasts the individualistic view of agency on one hand, and the cultural psychology approach. The individualistic perspective holds that "individuals negotiate their lifestyles in interpersonal dialogues, or they construct their psychological life spaces individually, independent of even interpersonal and linguistic interactions" (Ratner, 2000:413). Bruner (1982) and Valsiner (1998), both prominent proponents of the individualistic approach to agency, construe agency as interpersonal negotiation of meanings and as personal construction of a world of meanings respectively. For Bruner (1982), agency operates outside society as individuals negotiate and renegotiate cultural meanings through face-to-face communication. "It does not occur in organized groups nor in administered institutions, nor in practical activities such as work, education, politics, law, religion,

medicine, book and magazine publishing, entertainment and news industries which are organized in definite roles that carry differential power, opportunity and rewards" (Ratner, 2000:414). Valsiner (1998), through his theory of co-constructionism, gives primacy to individual actions to the exclusion of cultural influences. By psychologically distancing himself / herself from society, the individual is able to create his/her own meanings about the world. This new paradigm proposes, "most of human development takes place through active ignoring and neutralization of most of the social suggestions to which the person is subjected in everyday life" (Valsiner, 1998:393). For both Bruner (1982) and Valsiner (1998), culture serves as a forum through which individuals constantly negotiate and renegotiate meanings about the world, either individually or in interpersonal interactions. A limitation of this approach to agency, according to Bourdieu (2000:12), is that "it ignores the demands of the situation, the constraints of economic and social necessity, and the urgencies it imposes or the ends it proposes". Ratner (2000), in highlighting the fundamental attribution error that is characteristic of western society, contrasts it with the Asian countries where people's behaviour is determined by the demands of the situation, rather than individual disposition. Individualistic accounts of agency propagate the notion that agency is a personal capacity, and rejects the social formation of agency. This is the view held by the University of Chicago tradition of economics, which sees culture as an obstacle to people's ability to make rational decisions (Wolfe, 1989).

A truly cultural psychological approach to agency, on the other hand, stresses the social basis of agency. It acknowledges that agency acts on cultural phenomena and at the same time is influenced by them. As people engage their agency with social systems, they learn to understand them critically and their constraints on their behaviour. This is what Paulo Freire (1973) terms "*conscientizacion*"; a form of consciousness-raising, which is a precondition for personal and social change. This new understanding or awareness of one's social world "opens up the horizon to new possibilities for social action and new forms of identity and other psychological processes" (Ratner, 2000:427). In Ratner's (2000:422) view, the social character of agency has the following implications:

1. Agency depends on social relations to be realized. It is thus sensitive to and integrates itself in social relations; the social intentionality of agency.

 2. The quality or character of agency is a function of the quality and character of social relations in which it occurs.

3. Each pattern of social relations fosters different characteristics in agency.

The above imply that by focusing on agency alone and neglecting social relations, agency will not be changed, as its constituent social relations remain intact. While Ratner (2000) conceptualizes agency in the context of social relationships, Bruner (1990, 1996) situates agency within interpersonal relationships. He "places agency at the site of the instantiation and re-negotiation of cultural meanings in our interaction with others, always aware that the individual is constrained by their place in a culture" (Sullivan and McCarthy, 2004:295). Sullivan and McCarthy (2004), however, credit the individual with more agency, since the form that those cultural meanings take is the responsibility of the particular actor (ibid.).

 This view of an individual able to act at will regardless of cultural constraints is problematic, since it does not "address issues such as structural inequalities in resources and access to resources (and power differentials) with every individual viewed as equally agentic regardless whether they are a milkman or the president" (Sullivan and McCarthy, 2006:423). Does this mean Ratner's individual is a cultural dope? His actions and behavior are determined by his cultural experiences and he does not have his own agency. Bakhtin's (1986, 1990, 1993) dialogical approach, which gives primacy to lived experience, attempts to bridge the gap between the personal and social; the individual and the cultural. He draws our attention to the centrality of emotions, values and feelings that particular actors bring to the encounter with others, and therefore, the sense of responsibility for our actions. One major contribution of Bakhtin's dialogical perspective of agency is that it introduces values and ethics as central to our understanding of agency. For Bakhtin, it is crucial to explore people's lived experience of agency as they relate to others in and through cultural systems. The dialogical view postulates "there is no individual without cultural, personal without social, self without the other" (Sullivan and

McCarthy, 2004:292). Emirbayer (1997) terms it the "situational and relational" aspect of agency; "agency toward something, by means of which actors enter into a relationship with surrounding persons, places, meaning and events" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:973). Bakhtin's discussion of the truth is useful in illustrating the significance of lived experience in our conceptualization of agency. He distinguishes between truth as *istina* or universal and general on the one hand, truth as *pravda* or unique and embodied on the other (Sullivan, McCarthy and Wright, 2006). It is the *pravda* aspect of truth as lived experience that is articulated in Bakhtin's dialogical model of agency. He stresses, however that these two aspects o the truth are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.

Variability of Agency

Sewell (1992:20) asserts that a capacity for agency is inherent to human nature and argues that all human beings are "born with only a highly generalized capacity (so that) all members of society exercise some measure of agency in the conduct their daily lives"; just they have a capacity for respiration and to use language. Like Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Sewell does not universalize and decontextualize agency, assuming that people are at all times and places equally agentic. Rather, they acknowledge historical, cultural and personal variations of agency. According to Gardiner (1995:13) feminists regard agency as a given but that such capacities are shaped in personal and discursive fields of power that may inhibit or enable them. Variation depends on a number of factors, namely,:

- The nature of structures (schemas, resources and rules) that inform the social world (Sewell, 1992);
- How people understand their own relationships to the past, present and future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998); and
- Power/social relations (gender, class, race, religion and ethnicity) embedded in the structures that exist in that particular social milieu (Sewell, 1992; Ratner, 2000; Bourdieu, 2000).

All of the above give people different possibilities and capacities to exercise their agency. Ratner (2000:426) postulates, "Agency is merely a potential which must be developed through social intercourse into a specific form". He, therefore, regards agency as a historical project that must be developed and realized. How it is realized and perfected, will be determined by historical and cultural processes unfolding at that particular moment.

Creativity

The concept of agency is inseparable from the notion of creativity (Hekman, 1995; Joas, 1996; van Dijk, de Bruijn and Gewald, 2007). Exponents of the creativity dimension of agency emphasize the possibilities and opportunities that people perceive when faced with challenges and how they use the former to negotiate the constraints they encounter in their lives. Joas' (1996) formulation of the creative dimension of agency is perhaps the most compelling. He characterizes creativity as innovation, which manifests itself in three forms, namely, expression, production and revolution. "The idea of expression circumscribes creativity primarily in relation to the subjective world of the actor. The idea of production relates creativity to the objective world, the world of material objects that are the conditions and means of action. And finally, the idea of revolution assumes that there is a potential of human activity relative to the social world, namely that we can fundamentally re-organize the social institutions that govern human co-existence" (Joas, 1996:71). Joas warns, however, against generalizing these three forms to all human action.

Of the three forms of creativity, expression and production are pertinent and relevant to the conceptualization of agency within the context of my study. Drawing on Herder's (1955) conception of the expressive dimension of creativity, Joas states that "Herder assigns predicates to creativity which even go beyond artistic and scientific innovation" (Joas, 1996:84), insisting that creativity inheres in all human action. For Herder, creativity does not lie in the newness of the action and its outcome, but in "holistic character of the action, the way it is imbued with meaning" (ibid.). The production notion of creativity constitutes a significant part of Marx's (1977) action theory. What is striking

about Marx's production model of action, is his attempts to bring together the concept of labour and the idea of the productive power of imagination (Classical German Philosophy). In Marx's view, production is not only for individual fulfillment and gratification, but also for the enjoyment by the community in which the individual is situated. Using case studies from Africa, van Dijk *et al.* (2007) in their work, *Strength beyond Structure*, show how agency and its dimensions of creativity, inventiveness and reflexivity have helped African individuals and societies negotiate their social realities.

Self-efficacy

The self-efficacy concept is useful in distinguishing gender-related beliefs in defining agency. The theory makes a distinction between possessing abilities to act and being able to enact them. Self-efficacy, according to Nelson-Kuna and Riger, is "people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives" (1995:174). If people, for example, believe tasks to be difficult or impossible to accomplish, they will make decisions not to undertake those tasks. The result is the choices they make in life are restricted, thus lowering their sense of agency. Compared with males, they suggest, females tend to have lower estimates of their abilities and performance…even when they actually perform as well as, if not better than males (ibid.). Nelson-Kuna and Riger are quick to add, "Gender differences, like other gender-related behaviours, are context-dependent, highly flexible and multiply determined" (1995:174). Although Nelson-Kuna and Riger's (1995) work (by their admission) overlooks cultural and power dynamics, they acknowledge that how a society views women affects their self-efficacy perceptions. However, individuals have the capacity and can use their agency to change the way they evaluate their abilities. Bandura (2000), in his social cognitive theory of agency, asserts that perceived efficacy motivates and influences the direction people's actions will take. Efficacy plays an important role in human functioning by not only influencing behavior directly, but also its determinants such as goals and aspirations, outcome expectations, emotions, and perceptions of constraints and opportunities in the social environment (ibid.).

Personal and Collective Agency

Conceptions of human agency have been essentially confined to personal agency as exercised by individuals (Bandura, 2000). However, there is growing consensus that agency is both individual and collective (Messer-Davidow, 1995; Sewell, 1992; Joas, 1996; Kabeer, 1999; Bandura, 1999, 2000). Social cognitive theory distinguishes three different forms of agency, namely, personal (individual) agency, proxy agency and collective agency. In certain circumstances, people do not have direct control over the social conditions that affect their lives. They, therefore, "seek their well-being and security through the exercise of proxy agency" (Bandura, 2000:75). This is a socially mediated mode of agency, where people get the help of more powerful and influential people to act on their behalf to get the desired outcomes. As Bandura (1999:34) states, "individuals do not live their lives as isolates; rather, they work together to produce the outcomes they desire, but cannot accomplish on their own". According to Bandura (1999, 2000), people's shared beliefs in their power to produce desired outcomes, what he terms "perceived efficacy", is a critical element of collective agency. Perceived collective efficacy is an emergent group property, not the sum total of the efficacy beliefs of individual members. Individual members may perform well on their own, but poorly as a group. It is their shared beliefs in their collective power to achieve their desired results that will enable the group to perform well. It further strengthens the group's commitment to its goals, influences the type of futures they seek to achieve through collective action, how much effort they put in the group endeavor, their resilience or staying powering the face of adversity and their vulnerability to discouragement that can beset those confronting challenging situation (Bandura, 2000).

From a feminist perspective, collective agency has a galvanizing and mobilizing effect on women; particularly women who feel oppressed and marginalized (Messer- Davidow, 1995). Particularly in consciousness-raising groups that Messer-Davidow (1995) is talking about, collectivities produce the kind of agency to become aware of their oppression and take action to change their conditions. Paolo Freire (1973) terms it *conscientizacion,* which he regards as a pre-condition for change. Put in another way, you cannot change what you are not aware of. Consciousness-raising motivates people to

"actively reconsider their identity, and to redefine their interests in ways that feel truer to themselves" (Folbre, 1994:251). Freire's concept of *conscientizacion*, although lacking in gender awareness, helps the poor to develop a critical awareness of their condition in order to take more control of their lives (Townsend, Zapata, Rowlands, Alberti and Mercado, 1999). The practice of consciousness-raising, the foundation of feminist epistemology, creates safe spaces for women, where they begin to 'see the light' about their oppression, and form new relationships amongst themselves (McNeil, 1993). In fact, the feminist assertion that "the personal is political' was part of the consiousness-raising process, whereby women's private domain (their day to day struggles against male power) was recognized and challenged.

Groups also provide space for women to come together and share their feelings and experiences, which can lead to action. The role and significance of affectivity (Sarachild, 1970 in Messer-Davidow, 1995) in mobilizing women to act cannot be overemphasized. The women in the consciousness-raising group Messer-Davidow was studying, learnt intimacy and trust; in other words, they learnt to bond. In her own words, "the women's interpersonal practices of sharing and supporting, without personal criticisms that would disconfirm their feelings and experience, created the ambiance of psychic intimacy where women could perform such intersubjective practices as affect-attunement that fostered their reconstitution of their subjectivities" (Messer-Davidow, 1995:39). A critical question that Messer-Davidow raises with regard to women's collective agency is how well it functions in social-structural change. Kabeer (1999) articulates the same concerns when she argues that individual agency is not sufficient to challenge structural inequalities. In her view, "individual women can and do act against cultural values and norms, but their impact on the situation of women in general is likely to remain limited and they may have to pay a high price for their autonomy" (Kabeer, 1999:457). Women's empowerment requires collective action in the public arena as well as individual agency in the private domain.

Agency and Power

Agency and power are inextricably linked, therefore discourses about and conceptualization s of agency invariably incorporate notions of power. It is power that gives people the ability to do something; the ability to act. Townsend *et al.* (1999) describe empowerment as the power poor people find to help themselves. Empowered people can exercise their agency to achieve the desired outcomes, and conversely, disempowered people lack power to act. Foucault's (1988) conceptualization of power (discussed further below) is useful in understanding the different forms power can take. He claims, "No positive form of life can subsist without power…power-free cultures, social practices, and knowledge are in principle impossible" (Fraser, 1989:31). For Foucault, power is everywhere, permeating all social practices. Hence, social practices, governed by norms are simultaneously constraining and enabling (ibid.).

Drawing upon Rowland's (1995) formulation of the different forms of power, Townsend *et al*. (1999) distinguish the following dimensions of power:

Power over: This power dominates, oppresses, subjugates. It can be exercised by institutions over individuals; by individuals over others (over women); can be found inside a person, when an individual internalizes norms and rules that determine what he should be and how he should act (Alberti, 1999). Hence, where women are concerned, we need to look at the inner processes that condition women's sense of freedom and choice (internal impediments to choice). Giddens (1979) views this kind of power as exclusion of certain issues from the decision-making agenda and confining their decisions to safe issues, thereby excluding certain individuals and groups from benefiting from the process.

Power from within: Its basis is self-confidence, self-esteem and sense of agency (Rowlands, 1997). It arises from a recognition that one is not a helpless victim, but has the capacity to increase one's self-reliance and internal strength to work against structures outside oneself (Townsend *et al*., 1999). Kabeer (1994) maintains that such power cannot be given, but has to be self-generated. Hence, empowerment strategies for women should build on this 'power within' by improving their sense of worth and self-confidence in controlling their own lives.

Power to: Lukes (1974:15) defines this type of power as "the capacity of an actor to affect the pattern of outcomes against the wishes of other actors" and stresses the notion of power as decision-making capacity. This type of power encompasses capacities, skills and creativity. From women's perspective, it is manifest in the ability to organize themselves into self-help groups; to design and engage in livelihoods projects; and to increase their knowledge through training and education (Mercado, 1999).

Power with: This is collective power; the capacity to achieve with others what one could not achieve alone. For Zapata (1999:94) 'power with' is "a search for a shared identity, the chance to negotiate as a group, to share power, to seek the support of other organizations, to look for outside backing- all building up power in a creative and positive way". It is power that enables women to construct their social identities as individuals as well as a collective. Collective strength is a crucial resource at women's disposal to bring about transformation (Kabeer, 1994).

Relating the above forms of power to agency and its manifestations, women's agency, therefore, needs to be examined in the following areas as suggested by Zapata (1999: 152):

- Personal power, as women develop a sense of confidence and ability to overcome internalized oppression;

- Relational power, or power in relationships, as women improve their abilities to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship;

- Group power, where women work together for goals they could not achieve alone

Measuring Agency

The measurement of agency has received considerable attention in recent literature (Kabeer, 1999, 2001; Oakley, 2001; Narayan, 2002; Malhotra and Schuler 2005; Alkire, 2007; Samman and Santos, 2009). There is, however, consensus among the researchers on the difficulty and complexity of measuring the concept. Firstly, due to the multidimensional nature of the concept of agency (discussed below), more than one variable needs to be measured, and attention should be given to spheres, domains and

levels of agency (Kishor, 2000; Jejeebhoy, 2000; Malhotra *et al*., 2002; Alkire, 2007; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007).

Agency has been mostly measured by using proxies or observed behaviour (Alkire, 2007; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Samman and Santos, 2009). In other words, the presence of agency is deduced from its action or outcomes (Narayan, 2005). Most frequently, proxy measures of agency include land ownership, literacy, employment status, food expenditure and health status. By measuring the presence or absence of these proxy indicators, one can identify the agency-poor or agency-rich individuals (Alkire, 2007, Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). A growing body of research, however, criticizes this approach and argues for a direct measurement of agency to avoid conflating indicators that reflect preconditions for the exercise of agency with agency itself (Malhotra and Mather, 1997; Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra *et al.*, 2002; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). Kabeer (1999), for example, points out that there are a number of problems with using assets as proxy measures of agency. Firstly, assets may not translate into agency in the same way for different people. Secondly, the pathways by which assets translate into agency need to be thoroughly interrogated. By way of illustration, two people own the same amount of land. One is committed to using the land productively, and the other desires to pursue other interests, but out of loyalty and respect for his father who has allocated the land to him, he stays on the land. Their levels and outcomes of the exercise of agency will be different. Thirdly, many proxy measures are identical to those used in poverty analysis. This precludes a meaningful exploration of the interconnection between agency and poverty.

According to Alkire (2008:11), the most important critique of proxy measures, and one that emerges regularly in literature on women's agency, is that the same person may achieve quite different levels of agency in different spheres of life. A woman may be fully empowered in terms of employment, but marginalized within her household. Hence, Kabeer and the other researchers call for a thorough examination of the presumed link between proxy measures of agency and agency itself. As difficult as it is, some studies attempt to measure agency directly (Jejeebhoy, 2000; Kishor, 2000; Gupta and

Yesudian, 2006; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). Jejeebhoy (2000), for example, identifies the following common direct measures of agency: economic decision-making; child-related decision-making; marriage-related decision-making; freedom of movement; power relations with husband; access to resources and control over resources.

When selecting indicators of agency, methodological problems arise. These involve the question of the comparability of the indicators and to what extent they should be universal or context-specific (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Alkire, 2008; Samman and Santos, 2009). The question is whether agency can be absolutely context-specific and therefore can be measured on a case-by-case basis, or whether internationally comparable indicators are sufficient as assessment of agency. A body of literature is emerging that favours the use of internationally comparable indicators complemented by context-specific indicators (Schuler *et al.*, 1995; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Alkire, 2008; Samman and Santos, 2009).

Furthermore, Alkire (2008) stresses the importance of distinguishing between indicators when measuring agency. She identifies two sets of indicators to which particular attention should be paid, namely effective power versus control; and autonomy versus ability. These are not oppositional dimensions of agency, but they easily be conflated when agency is measured. According to Alkire (2008), most measurements of agency focus on control and ignore the role of effective power or freedom in the realization of a person's agency. For example, a woman respondent may answer in the negative when asked who makes decisions in her household. Such a measure of direct control does not take into account issues such as division of labour within the household or imposition of a partner's views on the woman. On the other hand, a measure of effective power would ask her if she wished to make decisions, could she. Alkire (2008) stresses the importance of measuring both aspects of agency. Autonomy and ability measures, according to Alkire (2008) are also easily confused. Based on Sen's definition of agency, autonomy refers to people's ability to act on behalf of things they themselves value; and ability is people's ability to act on behalf of things they are assumed to have reason to value.

Hence, while autonomy probes a person's own self-understanding and perception, own values and preferences, ability vests no interest in the person's own values (Alkire, 2008).

Female Agency

Feminism has always implicitly addressed issues of agency (Mann, 1994). Society has not recognized the autonomy of women, hence feminism's preoccupation with discourses that encourage the visibility of women as social actors (Mann, 1994). Foucault's (1980) method of 'genealogy' (his method of studying history through analysis of discourses and the role of power in the production of knowledge) provides a useful tool for feminists for creating a genealogy of female subjectivity. In other words, feminists gain an understanding of how women are constructed as subjects in discourses that are themselves pervaded by power. His theory also provides feminists with an angle from which to interrogate and offer a critique of how female subjectivity is discursively constructed. Foucault's notion of extra-discursive relations expounded in his work "*The Archeology of Knowledge*" (Foucault, 1972), finds resonance with feminist thinking on 'subjugated knowledge'. For feminist thinkers, Foucault's extra-discursive relations (this knowledge that has been disqualified as inadequate and not deserving scientific recognition) are important to recognize, as it is these unformulated experiences of vulnerable and subjugated people, such as women, that must be given a voice (Grimshaw, 1993).

Although there are some aspects of Foucault's theory that can be usefully appropriated by feminist writers, there are some tensions between Foucauldian and feminist conceptions of power. Foucault views power as being everywhere and not concentrated in a single source. As he argues, "Power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogeneous domination over others or of one group or class over others. Rather, power must be analysed as something which circulates; is never localized here or there…Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization" (Foucault, 1980:98). His view of power as neutral does not hold true for women who are victims of power in the form of violence and obscures the true nature of violence (MacCannell and MacCannell, 1993). On the other hand, Foucault's (1980) analysis of

power as operating in a more complex and interrelated way, helps to explain that power as freedom and capacity always operate within the context of other forms of constraining power. Nonetheless, the absence of the centrality of gender in the formation of agency in his theory of subject formation is problematic for feminist thinkers, who assert that it would be impossible to argue that women constitute an oppressed group under patriarchy (Mann, 1994; McNay, 2000). In their articulation of female agency, Nelson-Kuna and Riger (1995), on the other hand, stress a reciprocal relationship between women and their particular situational and structural context. Therefore, examination of women's agency must take into account the multiplicity of context and ways in which women experience and exercise their agency.

According to Mann (1994:14), "it is a foundational principle of feminism that women deserve to be recognized as significant social agents". In other words, recognition and reward of women's work play a significant role in enhancing their agency. While women remain fundamentally unrecognized within the patriarchal structures of our society, men are regarded as privileged social agents and rewarded for the actions they perform in both public and private domains (Mann, 1994). Mann (1994) proposes that domestic and maternal activities primarily identified with women deserve to be recognized as sites of social agency alongside the public activities of men. Sen (1999) takes Mann's perspective further and argues for a focus on women's agency as a catalyst to transform their own lives and to create social change. Investing in women's agency has payoffs, not only for the women, but also for the entire community. It affects children's health and survival, food intake, literary rates and improves girls' status in the family. For women themselves, the exercise of their agency may strengthen women's own relative position in the family, increase women's voice in matters of family decision-making, raise women's confidence and ease oppressive gender relations (Sen, 1999).

For feminists in particular, the conceptualization of female agency cannot be achieved outside the framework of gender/power relations, as it contains within it notions of inequality between men and women (McNay, 1992, 2000). As a socially constructed variable, gender is highly contested as it means different things to different people and

groupings and carries the ideologies of the socio-cultural context in which it is constructed. Hence, our conception and understanding of the roles and identities of men and women are based on the gender ideology embedded in that society. McNay further asserts, "an individual's life is determined by multiple factors which conflict and interlink with each other, producing differential effects" (1992:65). It thus becomes difficult to speak of gender as a bonding experience among women, as gender intersects with race, class, religion and ethnicity to characterize women's different positions and subjectivities (Code, 1991; Harding, 1996; Oyewumi, 2005; Steady, 2005). Hence, variations in female agency should be taken into account to avoid essentializing and universalizing women' agency. This is why a more complex analysis of the relationship between gender and power is required, in order to account for the potential of women's creativity and agency within social constraints. McNay (1992) insists that by not taking into account the different cultural and historical contexts of women, women's experience and agency are either not understood in their full complexity, or they are devalued and made invisible. In other words, only those theories that consider the specificity and multiplicity of women's coping with their contexts will most accurately portray women's experience of agency.

As Harding contends, "any kind of social change can be, and usually is, a site of struggle over gender relations" (1996:437). This means that strategies for improving women's conditions, both in communities and within households must of necessity address issues of power asymmetries. Most importantly, gender relations, with the power relations implicit in them, are not static, but are constantly negotiated, particularly within the household (Jarviluoma *et al*., 2003; Goebel, 2005; Oyewumi, 2005).

Third World Feminist Theory of Agency
A new paradigm shift is crucial in studying women's agency in African societies. Mohanty (1991) admonishes Western feminists for viewing the "Third World woman as a singular monolithic subject, oppressed by a singular, universal patriarchy" (Stamp, 1995:69). This reductionist formulation of women in the Third World (developing) countries leads to the labeling of women as 'powerless', 'exploited' and 'sexually harassed' (Mohanty, 1997:81). Furthermore, empirical evidence from studies about

African societies and women's lives affirm that we cannot generalize these from western experiences of gender relations, female subjectivity (agency) and social order, since the two are different. Even within African societies themselves, there are regional and ethnic variations. Again, we cannot essentialize and treat women in Third World countries as a homogenous group in relation to their experiences of power relations, self and agency.

The view that portrays African women as passive recipients of developmental aid is flawed as it pays little attention to the complexities of African women's lives, and obscures the diverse and sophisticated ways in which women cope with problem situations in their daily lives (Stamp, 1995). Despite women's contributions to household food security - they do two-thirds of the world's work, and grow half of the world's food (Gardiner, 1995) - they tend to be invisible actors in development and their work remains undervalued, unpaid and undocumented. In addition, the gender division of labour places much burden for caring for the family on the women.

African Feminism
Feminist discourse in Africa can be described as complex and controversy-ridden (Arndt, 2002). This controversy arises from the nature and the naming of the diverse positions that gender debates take in Africa. For African women, therefore, the fundamental issue concerns the definition and agenda of feminism (Johnson-Odim, 1991). While African feminists acknowledge that both western and African American feminisms were influential contributors to African feminism, other feminist scholars such as Mohanty (1991), Mikell (1997) and Obioma Nnaemeka (1998) emphasize the resistance of African feminism to western models of feminism. This resistance, according to Nnaemeka (1998), is due to different paradigms, cultural imperatives and priorities between Africa and the West. In many respects, African women's issues and worldview are different from those of western feminists.

Different paradigms:
Across classes and cultures, women are constituted on "the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals" (Mohanty, 1997:81), without taking into

account the specificities of the Third women realities. While Western feminism, particularly in the U.S.A., emphasizes gender inequalities as a source of women's oppression, African feminism insists that gender discrimination is neither the sole nor the primary locus of the oppression of Third World women. Rather, African feminists argue, gender inequalities must be viewed in the context of "other political, economic, cultural and social forms and mechanisms of oppression such as racism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, religious fundamentalism as well as dictatorial and corrupt systems of governance" (Arndt, 2002:34). African feminist scholars are vocal in their criticism of a 'universal subordination model' that ignores the differences in cultures in locations around the world (Nnamaeka, 1998; Arndt, 2002; Oyewumi, 2003; Steady, 2004; Mama, 2005; Day, 2007, 2008). Thus, a narrowly defined feminism that aims at ending women's oppression by eradicating gender discrimination is neither appropriate nor sufficient to redress the oppression of Third World women (Johnson-Odim, 1991).

Cultural imperatives:

While Western feminism embraces individualism and its attendant variable of zero-sum power (Nnamaeka, 1998; Ndlovu, 2008), African feminism operates within a framework that locates culture at the centre that is characterized by communal life, power sharing and gender co-operation, as opposed to gender contestation (Nnaemeka, 1998; Amadiume, 2000; Steady, 2004, 2005; Ndlovu 2008). African feminism defines power as something that is negotiated. Furthermore, the language of engagement of African feminism, which emphasizes compromise and negotiation, differs from the Western feminism language of challenge, deconstruct and blow apart (ibid.). According to some feminist scholars, the centrality of culture in African feminist discourses precludes a critical examination of how gender discrimination maintains unequal power relations in African societies (Aina, 1998; Okeke, 2000; Steady, 2004). They warn against accepting traditional subordination and exploitation of women in the name of tradition, what Arndt (2002) terms "traditionally grown forms of discrimination" against girls and women, such as circumcision of girls and early and forced marriages (Arndt, 2002). However, this is not to say that African societies do not acknowledge the value and agency of their womenfolk. On the contrary, as Steady affirms, "women's power bases are partly derived

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from cultural values that stress the potency of a female principle governing life and reproduction through motherhood and the centrality of children" (Steady, 2004:55). She goes on to point out that, culture has the potential the transformation of society and the empowerment of women. The challenge, therefore, for feminism in Africa is to raise the consciousness of women to oppressive traditional practices and continue the interrogation of the role gender in the socio-cultural construction of hierarchies (Steady, 2004).

Priorities:

Johnson-Odim (1991) and Nnaemeka (1998) assert that one of the causes of the tension that exists between Western feminism and African feminism concerns the issue of priorities or the agenda-setting process. For African women problems of nutrition, poverty, illiteracy, health-care delivery, what Mikell (1997:4) terms "bread, butter, culture and power issues," are of central importance in their lives. They feel their self-defined needs are not prioritized. Instead, they are relegated to a subculture of feminism (Johnson-Odim, 1991:324). Nnaemeka (1998) confirms this as she points out that talking to a group of village women in Africa with no clean water to drink, no food to eat and have never seen a different race, about feminism and the intersection of race, class and gender is a futile undertaking. African women see and address these issues as they relate to their experiences and conditions.

Nonetheless, some African feminists argue that analyses on African feminist discourse, such as discussed above, are not objectively true. The alternative view, from an African feminist, such as Bakare-Yusuf (2003), emphasizes the need to be accommodative of theoretical models explaining social systems in general, and gender and culture, in particular. According to Bakare-Yusuf (2003), western feminist theories have contributed to African feminist knowledge just as much as African intellectual history has influenced Western models of theorizing about society and gender. It is this inter-cultural exchange that needs to be pursued in order to avoid thinking about difference in exclusionary and oppositional terms. Furthermore, a critical approach to other theories is required if we are to remain true to local cultural experiences.

Defining African Feminism

Talking about African women and African feminism, Nnaemeka (1998) argues that, because of the different and complex engagement with feminism by African women captured by the fluidity and dynamism of their conditions, it is more accurate to talk about African feminism in the plural (African feminisms), rather than in a context of a monolith. This pluralistic nature of African feminism derives from the African women scholars' diverse positions on feminism as they identify and define an African-centred feminist paradigm. Through this self-naming and self-defining exercise, various forms of African feminisms have emerged and are gaining currency among African feminist theorists and writers. These Afro-centric alternatives to feminism include:

- African womanism
- Motherism

African womanism:

Coined by Alice Walker, an African American writer, this concept was taken up by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyeni in Africa to encapsulate the realities and locations of African women. She calls for African women to organize separately from white as well as African American women, as their experiences are different in the sense that African women and men have been united in their struggle against colonialism. Lewis (2004) describes Ogunyeni's position as a "a crucial milestone in radical African women's efforts to independently name themselves while contesting the appropriating ways in which many western feminists have spoken for them" (Lewis, 2004:31).

Motherism:

In her work "Motherism: the Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism", Catherine Acholonu defines as "the essence of African womanhood" (Acholonu, 1995:100). Her concept centres on three elements, namely, motherhood, nature and nurture, which denote a healing, protecting and cohesive essence of the family, the child and the society and the environment (Arndt, 2002). Arguing that women in traditional African societies were not disadvantaged relative to men, she does not challenge gender inequalities. In her view, it was colonialism and the impact of Islam and Christianity that brought about the

marginalization of African women. Women, according to Acholonu, should strive for complementarity and co-operation between men and women. Within such a framework, patriarchy in its various forms is not questioned. Amadiume (1997) expands the concept of motherhood as she asserts that African women's construct of motherhood was a means of institutional and ideological empowerment.

African scholarship attests to the agency of African women during the pre-colonial era and in contemporary African societies (Amadiume, 1987, 2000, 2005; Nnaemeka, 2005; Steady, 2006). African women's power bases were derived from various sources. The Igbo women's participation in a Women's War (1929-1930) against the oppressive colonial government, which was undermining the Igbo society's indigenous matriarchal political system, testified to their militancy and power (Amadiume, 1987). Through the flexible gender system of the Igbo and Yoruba communities of Nigeria, certain categories of women could assume male roles through practices such as 'male daughters' and 'female husbands'. These institutions gave women access to economic resources and positions of power and authority. Another indigenous institution of the woman-woman marriage among the Gikuyu of Kenya, gave the women who participated in such marriages the space and independence they would not have had in a conventional woman-man marriage. Writing of pre-colonial southeast Africa, what is now called KwaZulu-Natal, Ndlovu (2008) examines the formative roles of women in the Zulu Kingdom in the early and mid-ninteenth century. Ndlovu (2008:111-112) describes them as "workers, decision-makers exercising agency in the agricultural economy (which included their involvement in crop cultivation and cattle husbandry); they were also leaders in their family homesteads and key institutions that oversaw the expansionist phases of the Zulu state, such as the most masculine of male domains-warfare". Contrary to the gender oppression school that portrays the subjugation of girls and women in the Zulu nation, Ndlovu's (2008:111) work reveals, "how traditional gender relationships offered both males and females similar channels to customary influence and power."

In contemporary African societies, women exercise their agency both in the private and public spheres (Steady, 2006). In the public domain, women's power is manifest not only

in participating in their society's political systems of governance, but also in controlling agricultural work, the market spaces and the prices of certain commodities in their towns Steady, 2006; Day, 2007, 2008). Most African regions have women's associations, which are formal or informal socio-cultural organizations, for example, the Lunda and Ekoi groups of southern Nigeria, the Bini and Wobe of Ivory coast and the Mande (Amadiume, 1987) and the Bundu (Day, 2008) of Sierra Leone. Steady (2006) demonstrates how the women's associations of Sierra Leone use their collective agency to solve development-oriented challenges, even within their society's patriarchal structures. According to Steady (2006:9), women's activism in Sierra Leone has not been a "reaction to gender-based discrimination, but is a result of women uniting to promote shared humanistic goals". However, in the 1990's, there was a shift from development issues to political concerns, including advocacy of women's rights and female leadership and representation (Tripp, 2003).

As a collective principle, the ideology of motherhood or motherism is regarded by African women as crucial for the advancement of their society and its women (Amadiume, 1987; Acholonu, 1995; Steady, 2006). Defined by Acholonu as "the essence of womanhood" (1995:100), motherhood embodies the cohesive essence of family, the child, the society and the environment (Arndt, 2002). This concept of motherhood, as Steady (2006) contends, can be used by African women as a political tool in their struggles for their rights, as illustrated by the women's wings of a political party in Sierra Leone. Amadiume (1997) expands the concept of motherhood as she asserts that African women's construct of motherhood is a means of institutional and ideological empowerment. Gouws echoes Amadiume when she states "that from an African perspective, motherhood has formed a basis of political power for African women" (2005:5). This can be extended to the South African context as discussed below.

Feminism in South Africa
Feminism in South Africa has been articulated in the form of activism and motherhood. Many South African feminist writers see motherism as a crucial political organizing principle during the twentieth century (Walker, 1995) and particularly during the struggle

for liberation (Fester, 2005, Gouws, 2005 and Hassim, 2006). Gouws defines motherism in the South African context as "a phenomenon that is associated with women's political movements inspired and spurred on by the women in their roles as mothers, their care and defense of their children" (2005:200). In her conceptualization of motherhood in South Africa, Walker historicises the concept of motherhood and she suggests that "the historical construction of women and of motherhood in South Africa in the twentieth century has cut across rigidly racialised cultural boundaries" (1995:418). She illustrates this with two diverse organizations, namely, the Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union (WEAU) and the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL). Despite their different constituencies, political agendas and historical contexts, Walker argues, for both organizations motherhood has been central in shaping their identities as women and their political agency. Walker's view of the congruence in women's social and political identities as mothers between black and white South African women in the twentieth century, contrasts sharply with Lewis's (1996) delineation of 'western' and 'black' formulations of the concept of motherhood. According to Lewis, although black women's identities were shaped by a patriarchal ideology (as mothers, wives and sisters), they often developed new roles of authority and strength within those patriarchal constructs. While the concept of motherhood or motherism was central to South African women's struggles, its implication for women's lives and their agency is contested. Some view motherhood as a vehicle for political engagement with the government of the day (Hassim, 2006) or a platform from which to challenge their oppression (Hendricks and Lewis, 1994). Women, therefore, derive their agency, strength and authority from their roles as mothers (Lewis, 1996). Hassim (2006) has a different view of the role of motherhood in South African women's activism. She asserts that their engagement in political movements has enabled women to move from the private sphere to the public realm, thereby overcoming the private/public divide imposed upon them by a patriarchal system (ibid.).

Kaplan (1992) introduces another concept in the motherhood/activism debate, namely that of 'female consciousness' and 'feminist consciousness'. These two sides of a coin, which she calls maternal thinking (a term coined by Ruddick, 1983; 1989), are critical in

galvanizing women into collective action. According to Kaplan, female consciousness can and does evolve into feminist consciousness. Through female consciousness, women are motivated by their maternal roles as producers and nurturers of life to fight any threat to their children or communities. However, during these activities of preserving the life of their children, women may "undergo a radical change in consciousness through which they become politicized… and challenge the status quo" (Fester, 2005:200). In such conditions, female consciousness is transformed into feminist consciousness. Kaplan's (1997) study of a women's committee in Crossroads, Cape Town, illustrates how a group of women's female consciousness of a better quality of life for themselves and their families evolved into a feminist consciousness as they mobilized to legalize their informal settlement. The South African Black women's resistance to and protest against pass laws in 1913 and the 1950s (Wells, 1998) are indicative of how women's activities, initially inspired by their maternal thinking can evolve into feminist consciousness. While Kaplan insists that a female consciousness is not inherent in all women all the time, Wells, however, is skeptical of the "political maturity and feminist nature of the motherist ideology" (1998:253). She contends that motherism or 'maternal politics' as she terms it, must not be confused with feminism. In her own words, "Women swept up in mother-centred movements are not fighting for their own personal rights as women, but for their custodial rights as mothers" (Wells, 1998:253). Walker (1995), on the other hand, sees this as an overlap of women's identities.

The above formulations of motherhood speak to the conceptualization of motherhood as a practice (mothering work) and as a discourse (the norms, values and ideas of being a good mother). Walker's (1995) third dimension of motherhood as a social identity is helpful in viewing the concept of motherhood as multi-dimensional and multilayered. These three dimensions of motherhood are "embedded in a particular system of gender relations, in which women as mothers but also as workers, citizens and political activists are devalued and subordinated in relation to men" (Walker, 1995:424). Social identity as an aspect of motherhood allows women to construct their own identity as mothers - how they personally perceive and feel about their roles as mothers. This subjective element of motherhood foregrounds the agency of women and the interplay between individual and

collective processes in the identity formation. This means that women's self-image is personal and individual as well as grounded in a social context, i.e., they are also members of a distinct social group, which helps the women construct and define their identities. Central to the notion of a group membership is the existence of multiple social identities. Besides being mothers, women are also wives, workers, and employees. These other social identities interact with the social identity of mother, shaping women's choices and behaviour in complex ways. "While these other identities co-exist with the identity of mother, and may be restricted or refashioned by that, they have their own discourses and practices, which are different from those of motherhood, and may, in turn restrict or refashion the expectations, attitudes and behaviour associated with being a mother" (Walker, 1995:426).

Feminism in South Africa, particularly for black women, should be understood in the context of the struggle for national liberation (Hassim, 2006). In her work on women's organizations and democracy in South Africa, Hassim (2006) foregrounds the role played by nationalist movements in Third World societies, particularly in South Africa, in facilitating the agency of women. National liberation has created the space in which a new South African feminism is emerging (Kemp *et al*., 1995). This new South African feminism is based on South African black women's experience of multiple oppression - gender, race and class oppression or oppression as blacks, workers and women - and includes issues such as clean water and housing that have not been traditionally defined as feminist (Kemp *et al.,* 1995). Like Grewal and Kaplan (1994), Hassim (2006) questions the benefits for women, of the association of women's politics with nationalistic goals, as women's struggles are subsumed under, and defined by the larger national liberation struggle. For these writers, feminism and nationalism are fundamentally irreconcilable. Nevertheless, Hassim (2006) is quick to point out that in the South African context, making a sharp distinction between nationalism and feminism is not helpful in understanding the political gains made by South African women within the nationalist framework in the post-apartheid era. As Gouws argues, the attainment of democracy in South Africa has enabled women to "move their interests onto the political agenda where previously it was subordinated to the national liberation struggle"

(2005:71). One of these gains was the institutionalization of gender through national machineries for women, such as the National Machinery for Women (NMW) and the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) to promote women's interests (Hassim, 2003; Gouws, 2005).

The question that needs to be asked at this point, as aptly articulated by Hassim (2005), is: To what extent can women's political engagement provide a framework within which to address gender inequalities within the private domain? Engaging the public realm alone is not sufficient for the full empowerment of South African women. Rather, a model is required that situates women's struggles within a set of relationships in the private sphere, in which women create a space and meaning in negotiating their daily lives. As Gouws asserts, "the domain of the private sphere is still an important site of women's agency as well as their oppression" (2005:5). Echoing Gouws' argument, numerous studies have focused on South African women's lack of agency within intimate relationship, resulting in their vulnerability to gender-based violence, sexual abuse and increased risk of Human Immuno-deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) infection (Thorpe, 2002; Leclerc-Madlala, 2003; Dunkie *et al*., 2006, 2007; Thege, 2009).

The above discussion has sought to locate the concept of agency within feminist theories of agency. The various theoretical formulations of agency have highlighted the different meanings and constituents of agency within each theory. Hence, it is crucial to view agency as multifaceted and multi-dimensional. In line with the nature of this study as outlined in Chapter one, the following section interrogates women's agency in relation to their environment. The discussion is framed within the feminist approach to agency, highlighting the role of gender in mediating women's relation with their environment and the natural resources they use for their livelihoods.

2.2 EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a highly contested concept (Kabeer, 2002), as "it takes on a different form in different people and contexts" (Rappaport, 1984:2). Rappaport (1984) goes on to

say that we do not know what empowerment is (and how to define it), but we know it when we see it. However, for many feminists, the value of the concept lies precisely in its vagueness. On the other hand, a lack of definition can be problematic. Without some level of agreement on the meaning of empowerment, it becomes difficult to evaluate and measure progress in the empowerment process.

Empowerment, as a concept and practice has gained popularity in mainstream development institutions such as the World Bank, Oxfam and other non-governmental organizations. While these same development institutions adopted the same language of participation, consultation in working with grassroots communities, the interpretation and practice of empowerment still differed. As Parpart (2002:338) puts it, "Mainstream institutions ….envision empowerment as a means for enhancing efficiency and productivity within the status quo rather than as a mechanism for social transformation." Although a concern for women and gender began to emerge in the late 1980s in development debates (Moser, 1993; Parpart *et al.*, 2000), some feminist activists and theorists argued that women would not be empowered unless patriarchy and the attendant unequal power relations were challenged. They called for collective action as a vehicle for women's empowerment (Sen and Grown, 1987; Kabeer, 1999). Feminists, particularly from the South, began to interrogate the notion of power in empowerment. Two such feminist scholars are Batliwala (1994) and Kabeer (1994, 1999). For Batliwala (1994) empowerment entails political and collective action to challenge political, cultural and community structures that subjugate women as well as men. Kabeer (1994,1999) emphasizes the transformational potential of women's *power within* (in line with Lukes' (1974) analysis of power. This power is "rooted in self-understanding that can inspire women to recognize and challenge gender inequality in the home and the community" (Kabeer, 1994:224). Rowlands (1995:14) sees empowerment as both a gender and development issue, arguing that "empowerment is more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions". In addition, empowerment is personal, relational and collective; a process rather than an end product (Rowlands, 1997).

Kabeer (2000), in her empowerment framework, suggests three dimensions, namely, *resources* (material, social or human), which entail the conditions that serve to enhance the ability to make choices; *agency* which refers to the ability to define one's goals and act upon these; and *achievements* which are the outcomes of the empowerment process. Furthermore, Kabeer (2000) introduces three levels of empowerment: the immediate (individual or group) level, the intermediate (institutional rules) and the deeper (structural) level. She stresses, however, that for any change to translate into meaningful and sustainable processes of empowerment, it must ultimately encompass both individual and structural levels (ibid. p.27). In addition, changes in the resources accessible to an individual, without challenging or dismantling the structures of inequality, may improve her economic well-being, but does not necessarily empower her. She, therefore, highlights a distinction between women as agents within prescribed gender roles and women as agents of transformation, for in the latter power relations are being challenged (Kabeer, 2000). Both Kabeer (2000) and Rowlands (1995) view empowerment as particularly complex, because it is multi-dimensional and takes place in multiple domains: home, community, organization and political realms. It is locally defined and embedded in social, cultural and political contexts. It has personal, group and political components (ibid.). Empowerment can be subjective (involving personal experiences and definitions of empowerment) and objective (outsiders' conceptions of empowerment and its outcomes).

One definition of empowerment as formulated by Kabeer (2001) stresses people's ability to make choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. This definition highlights the ability of poor people to make purposeful choices and transform those choices into actions (in the exercise of their agency). Another definition views empowerment as all those processes where women take control and ownership of their lives (Strandberg, 2001:4). According to Strandberg, empowerment is a transformative process of changing the underlying power relations that render women disempowered (ibid.) Implicit in these two definitions is that empowerment is a process of change; a change from a state of powerlessness (disempowerment) to empowerment. The state of

being empowered is brought about by challenging the power relations that obtain in that particular context.

Narayan's (2002, 2005) definition of empowerment converges with that of Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) and Alsop *et al.* (2006). Narayan (2005:4) defines empowerment as "increasing poor people's freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives". According to Alsop *et al.* (2006:10), empowerment is "the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make effective choices, i.e., to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes". Within this framework of empowerment, increasing people's power entails two elements: agency and opportunity structure. The opportunity structure refers to the institutional climate and the socio-political structures that may enable or constrain actors to pursue their goals. These authors view the interaction of these two elements as important for empowerment to take place. Specifically, for Alsop *et al.* (2006) the opportunity structure can be considered as preconditions for the exercise of agency. Generally, they emphasize the efficacy of agency as mediated by choice-making. When measuring empowerment, they argue, the following questions should be asked: (a) whether an opportunity to make a choice exists; (b) whether a person or group uses the opportunity to make a choice; and (c) whether the choice [made] brings about the desired result (Alsop *et al*., 2006:17).

Other frameworks of understanding empowerment define empowerment as the expansion or increase in agency (Sen 1985, 1999; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). These authors argue that increasing peoples' capabilities and opportunities is central to empowering them. Indeed, Sen (1999) contends that disempowerment, which he terms 'unfreedom' occurs through inadequate processes and opportunities. Yet, for some feminist scholars, the key element of empowerment is an awareness and understanding of oppressive gender relations (Batliwala, 1994; Hayward, 1998; Oakley, 2001). Batliwala (1994:130) defines empowerment as "the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the resources of power". Batliwala points out that empowerment do not necessarily result from economic strength. The litmus test for empowerment, Batliwala argues, is women's recognition of the ideology that legitimizes male

domination and female subjugation and taking action to change the existing oppressive structures. Batliwala's (1994) empowerment framework resonates with Molyneux's (1985) formulation of practical and strategic gender needs. Practical gender needs are those needs that arise from an immediate perceived necessity as identified by women in their reproductive roles within a specific context and they do not challenge existing forms of subordination (Molyneux, 1985). Examples of practical gender needs include shelter, clean and safe water and sanitation, day care facilities. Strategic gender needs, on the other hand, emanate from women's experience of oppression in terms of the structure and nature of relationships between men and women, for example, the elimination of discrimination and inequality, rights to own property and access to credit. The distinction is important because meeting women' strategic gender needs, therefore, constitutes empowerment for the women (Molyneux, 1985).

Chambers (1993) and Friedmann (1992) view empowerment as a bottom-up process. Chambers emphasizes people's control over their lives and productive assets to secure better livelihoods, while Friedmann's definition focuses on people's participation in social and political formations and actions to effect change.

Measuring Women's Empowerment
Strandberg (2001) suggests two approaches in measuring whether empowerment has taken place in a particular context. One may approach empowerment as a holistic approach and, therefore, look at women's control or influence over different aspects of their lives. When approaching empowerment as a set of elements, such elements need to be translated into indicators to be measured (ibid. p.7). As indicators are highly context-specific, Stein (1997) calls for the 'indigenization' of the research approach and empowerment elements. Indicators, therefore, need to be developed within the context of the research and with the co-operation of the women themselves.

What is more problematic in measuring empowerment in the multi-level and multi-dimensional nature of empowerment, since as Rappaport (1987) notes, all levels of interact, and the impact of one level of analysis on the others is assumed to be important

(Stein, 1997:69). For example, change in one dimension or level is presumed to lead to, or be symptomatic of changes in others (Kabeer, 2000:27). Another way of measuring and explaining the achievement of empowerment would be look for a linear cause-and-effect relationship between changes in different dimensions or levels of empowerment, for example between changes in women's access to income-generating opportunities and their decision-making and bargaining powers within the household. Yet, according to Kabeer, 2000:28) another way of understanding social change is the processual model of social change subscribed to by many feminists. This model treats social change "as open-ended, because of the unpredictability of human agency and the diversity of circumstances under which such agency is exercised and therefore change within this framework cannot be captured quantitatively" (ibid.). Ultimately all types of approaches and models of measuring empowerment as already described, are needed to get an accurate picture of the empowerment process and outcomes.

Since empowerment is multi-dimensional, care must be taken in constructing variables relating to empowerment. Malhotra *et al.* (2002) have suggested that women's empowerment occurs along very broad dimensions, encompassing economic, socio-cultural, interpersonal political and psychological aspects. Within each dimension there is a range of sub-domains within which women may be empowered. For example, the economic dimension covers sub-domains ranging from women's control over income; women's access to employment opportunities; and access to markets to involvement by women in local trade associations. In addition, when operationalizing these dimensions, one should consider indicators at various levels, namely, individual, household and community.

Operationalizing Women's Empowerment
There is consensus among empowerment writers that the empowerment process is difficult to measure. While separating the process of empowerment into components provides a useful framework for conceptualizing empowerment, developing empowerment indicators is not as simple, given the dynamic nature of empowerment. Maholtra *et al.* (2002) assert that one variable may function as an enabling factor in one

context and an outcome in another context. For example, women's economic contribution in the household could function as an enabling factor predicting and promoting control over important decisions (agency), and it could also be an indicator that empowerment has been achieved. It is critical, therefore, that indicators are not treated in isolation, but they are contextualized. What is empowering for women in one context is not necessarily empowering in another.

Various authors have developed frameworks for measuring women's empowerment. Chen (1992), (cited in Malhotra *et al.* (2002), describes resources, perceptions, relationships and power as the key components of empowerment. Longwe's (1994) Women Empowerment Framework, constructed for UNICEF (1994), encompasses welfare, access to resources, awareness-raising, participation and control. Table 2.1 presents a synopsis of three authors' frameworks of empowerment indicators

Table 2.1: A synopsis of frameworks of women's empowerment of Chen (1992), Mayoux in Mayoux (undated) and UNICEF (1994, constructed by Sara Longwe)

Chen's Framework	Mayoux's Framework Adapted from Rowlands	Longwe's Framework
Material change: • Increased income and income security • Increased access to, control over assets and resources • Improved health and nutrition status of family • Increased ability to take advantage of employment opportunity **Perceptual change** • Self-esteem-enhanced perception of own individuality, interest and value. • Self-confidence-enhanced perception of ability and capacities. • Vision of future-increased ability to think ahead and	**Power within:** • Increased awareness and desire for change for individual woman • Women's positive evaluation of economic contribution to household • Women's confidence and happiness • Assertiveness and sense of autonomy **Power to:** • Access to income • Reduction in burden of unpaid domestic work including childcare • Skills, including literacy • Health and nutritional status of family • Mobility and access to the	**Welfare:** the level of material welfare of woman, relative to men in such matters as food supply, income and **Access:** women's access to the factors of production- land, labour credit and training **Conscientisation:** the understanding of the difference between sex roles and gender roles, and that the latter are cultural and can be changed **Participation:** women's equal participation in the decision-making, policy making and planning **Equality of control**: over the factors of production and the distribution of benefits so that neither men nor women are in a position of dominance

plan for the future • Visibility and respect- increased recognition for individual's value and contribution **Relational change** • Increased role in decision- making within the household and community • Increased bargaining power • Reduced dependence on intermediation by others for access to resources, markets and increased ability to act independently	world outside the home **Power over:** • Changes in underlying resource an power constraints at household and community levels • Control over savings and income thereof • Control over productive and household property • Control over parameters of household consumption and other valued areas of household decision-making **Power with:** • Increased solidarity with other women to challenge underlying resource and power constraints at household and community levels • Increased expenditure on girl children and other female family members • Increase in support networks in times of crisis • Joint action to defend other women against abuse in the household and community.	

Agency and Empowerment

Kabeer's (2001), Narayan's (2002, 2005) and Alsop *et al*.'s (2006) frameworks of empowerment provide an entry point for viewing agency and empowerment as constitutive of each other. In other words, in all empowerment frameworks, agency is a critical element of the empowerment process. In Kabeer's model of empowerment is presented as the outcome of the exercise of agency. The other side of the coin is also true, i.e., agency is the defining criterion or requirement for the attainment of empowerment. Sen (1985) and Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) view empowerment as an expansion of agency- empowerment is shown as a driver of agency, which means empowerment increases a person's capacity to act. Put together, these frameworks of empowerment demonstrate that the relationship between agency and empowerment is not linear, but

interactive and iterative. As Kabeer (2001) and Malhotra *et al*. (2002) argue, empowerment is a process that occurs in a non-linear and dialectical way. The outcomes or achievements of empowerment feed back -either positively or negatively- into the original situation and further enhances agency, leading to further empowerment. Put differently, within Kabeer's model agency and empowerment are interdependent; neither can occur without the other.

Distinctive Features of Agency and Empowerment

Samman and Santos (2009:6) argue, "Despite differences in the empowerment frameworks, experts have reached a certain consensus on some 'distinctive features' of agency and empowerment, and how it ought to be measured". These are: (a) the multi-dimensionality; (b) the relational nature; (c); and the cultural foundations (d) the intrinsic and instrumental value of agency and empowerment.

Multi-Dimensionality

Agency can be exercised and empowerment achieved in different spheres, domains and levels. Alsop *et al*. (2006:19) describe spheres as "societal structures in which people are embedded, which can give rise to, shape and or constrain the exercise of agency". These are normally the state, the market and society, and within these broad spheres are sub-spheres, for example the sub-spheres of society are the household and the community. Domains refer the areas of life in which a person can exercise agency and be empowered, such as religion, education, health, employment and politics. The empowerment literature stresses the importance of taking into account the different domains of life in which agency and empowerment can take place (Kishor, 1995, 2000; Jejeebhoy, 2000; Malholtra *et al*., 2002; Alkire, 2008; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2009). As Malhotra *et al*. (2002:13) note, "women's empowerment needs to occur along the following dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familia/interpersonal, legal, political and psychological". These domains are very broad in scope and within each domain, like in the spheres, there is a range of sub-domains within which women can achieve empowerment. Hence, any analysis and measurement of empowerment should specify the domain in which empowerment is taking place, as empowerment in one domain does not necessarily

transfer into another domain (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002; Mason, 2005; Alkire, 2008). Furthermore, levels comprise the micro-level (household), the meso-level (community) and the macro-level (state or country). People, therefore, can be agentic as individuals or as part of a collective at any of these levels. Sammon and Santos (2009) assert that the set of skills required for the exercise of agency at each level is different, though some skills may be transferable. Table 2.2 presents commonly used dimensions of empowerment, indicating also the various sub-domains within each domain at the household (micro) and community (meso) levels (taken from Malhotra *et al.* (2002):

Table 2.2: Commonly used dimensions of empowerment with sub-domains at the household and community levels (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002)

Dimension	Household level	Community level
Economic	Women's control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources	Women's access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/ or participation in local trade associations; access to markets
Socio-cultural	Women's freedom of movement; lack of discrimination against daughters; commitment bto educating daughters	Women's visibility in and access to social spaces; access to modern transportation; participation in extra-familial groups and social networks; shift in patriarchal norms (such as son preference); symbolic representation of the female in myth and ritual
Familial/Interpersonal	Participation in domestic decision-making; control over sexual relations; ability to make childbearing decisions; use of contraception; access abortion; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; freedom from domestic violence	Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (for example later marriage, self selection of spouses, reduction in the practice of dowry; acceptability of divorce); participation in local campaigns against domestic violence

Legal	Knowledge of legal rights; domestic support for exercising rights	Community mobilization for rights; campaigns for rights awareness; effective local enforcement of legal rights
Political	Knowledge of political system and means of access to it; domestic support for political engagement; exercising the right to vote	Women's involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns; support for specific candidates or legislation; representation in local bodies of government
Psychological	Self-esteem; self-efficacy; psychological well-being	Collective awareness of injustice; potential of mobilization

Relational nature

Agency and empowerment do not occur in a vacuum; it is in relation to others with whom individuals and groups interact (Narayan, 2005; Mason, 2005). In his empowerment account, Oakley (2001) expands on the notion of the relational nature of agency and empowerment. He explains that power can either be 'variable-sum' or 'zero-sum'. The former refers to a process whereby the attainment of power by the powerless does not subtract from the nature and level of power already held by the existing powerful group, while latter type, means that any gain in power by one group or individual inevitably results in the reduction of power exercised by others.

Cultural Foundations

Agency and empowerment are highly cultural concepts and, as such, they occur within the context of societal norms, values and beliefs (Mason, 2005; Narayan, 2005; Samman and Santos, 2009). This cultural perspective on agency and empowerment is critical in understanding that context determines the extent to which agency can be exercised and empowerment outcomes attained. Studies carried out by Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001); and Mason and Smith (2003) in Pakistan and five Asian countries respectively affirm the

influence of context on agency and empowerment. Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001:707-708) state, "No matter which indicator of autonomy is considered, women residing in the southern part of the subcontinent consistently display significantly higher levels of autonomy than do women residing in the north". Malhotra *et al*. (2002) agree the consideration of context is crucial to determine the extent of empowerment both at the household and individual levels. Hence, the complex question whether to use internationally comparable or context-dependent indicators pervades measurement literature (already discussed above).

Intrinsic or Instrumental Value
Based on Sen's (1985) definition of agency, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and Samman and Santos (2009) argue that agency and empowerment have intrinsic and instrumental value. Sen (1985:206) defines agency as "the freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent decides he or she should achieve." In this definition, agency is an important end in itself, pointing to what the agent values. Instrumentally, agency matters because it can serve as a means to attaining other development outcomes (Sen, 1999). For example, the agency of women has been shown to be beneficial to those around them (ibid.). Molyneux (1985) echoes this instrumentalist view of agency and empowerment in her typology of gender needs and interests (discussed further below)

 While recognizing that empowerment is difficult to measure, Strandberg (2001) suggests two approaches in measuring whether empowerment has taken place in a particular context-the empowerment outcomes. One may approach empowerment in a holistic manner and, therefore, look at women's control or influence over different aspects of their lives. When approaching empowerment as a set of elements, such elements need to be translated into indicators to be measured (ibid. p.7). As indicators are highly context-specific, they, therefore, need to be developed within the context of the research and with the co-operation of the women themselves.

What is more problematic in measuring empowerment is its multi-level and multi-dimensional nature, since as Rappaport (1986) notes, all levels interact, and the impact of

one level of analysis on the others is assumed to be important. For example, change in one dimension or level is presumed to lead to, or be symptomatic of changes in others (Kabeer, 2000:27). Another way of measuring and explaining the achievement of empowerment would be to look for a linear cause-and-effect relationship between changes in different dimensions or levels of empowerment, for example between changes in women's access to income-generating opportunities and their decision-making and bargaining powers within the household. Yet, according to Kabeer (2000:28), "another way of understanding social change is the processual model of social change subscribed to by many feminists". This model treats social change "as open-ended, because of the unpredictability of human agency and the diversity of circumstances under which such agency is exercised and therefore change within this framework cannot be captured quantitatively" (ibid.).

Parpart (2002) views empowerment as both a process and an outcome, and at times the distinguishing line between the two is blurred, making measuring empowerment tricky. Nonetheless, both process and outcome are important elements of empowerment. Ultimately all types of approaches and models of measuring empowerment as already described, are needed to get an accurate picture of the empowerment process and outcomes.

Female Agency and Empowerment Within the Household
The impact of gender/power relations on women's agency can best be illustrated within the context of the household. The economic household model provides a useful starting point for "a more complex understanding of how family decision-making occurs, variously allowing for individual differences in preferences, in budget constraints and in control over and allocation of resources" (Agarwal, 1997:2). It is important to note at this point that intra-household dynamics do not exist in isolation, but are embedded in macro and meso socio-economic and political institutions. However, my study focuses on the micro level, i.e., the household to investigate women's agency and its manifestations.

The unitary model of the economic household assumes homogeneity of interests and preferences and an altruistic household head that represents the household's interests and tastes and seeks to maximize utility. However, there is growing criticism of this model among economists and other social scientists (Folbre, 1988; Guyer, 1988; Agarwal, 1997; Katz, 1997; Iversen, 2003). Its failure is attributable to its inability to take cognizance of the fact that "households are constituted of multiple actors, with varying (often conflicting) preferences and interests, and differential abilities to pursue and realize those interests" (Agarwal, 1997:3). In developing countries, in particular, there is evidence of household disparities in resource allocation and distribution (Folbre, 1988; Guyer, 1988; Agarwal, 1997). Goebel (2005) points out that rural households in Southern Africa are often characterized by gendered control of economic assets, including income. For example, decision-making with regard to income rests with the men in the households, whether it is their own or money earned by their wives. However, as Goebel argues, these gender dynamics within the household are not static, but are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated under conditions of change. The Gambian experience is illustrative of the foregoing, where the Mandinka women used their newly found favourable economic status to renegotiate and "buy" power from their husbands (Schroeder, 2003). An analysis of the relationship between gender and agency is, therefore important and useful for an understanding of how women's agency is facilitated or curtailed within the household.

Sen's (1985) capability approach, Agarwal's (1997) bargaining model and Kabeer's (2000) formulation of choice making within the household will be employed to illustrate the dynamics of gender in the women's exercise of agency. I do not intend to give a comprehensive account of these approaches, but will focus on those features that shed light on the interplay of gender asymmetries in resource distribution and women's agency within the household.

Sen's Capability Approach
Sen's (1985) capability framework is particularly useful in its multidimensionality as it facilitates interpersonal comparisons of opportunities for achieving well-being. In Sen's view, "well-being is something within an individual that he/she achieves; the kind of life

she is leading and how she succeeds in doing and being" (1985:195). Central to his approach are the concepts of functionings and capabilities. Functionings refer to all the possible ways of 'being and doing', which people value in a given context (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993). According to Nussbaum and Sen (1993), functionings, which are a primary feature of well-being, can range from basic, for example, being adequately nourished, having decent shelter, being able to read and write, to complex functionings such as achieving self-respect. Sen defines a person's capabilities as "the set of functionings within his or her reach… incorporating real freedoms to do this and to be that" (1985:201). Sen's capability model therefore sees well-being in terms of functionings and the capability to achieve them.

Sen's capability framework acknowledges that a person's well-being or freedom (the ability to convert resources or commodities into valuable functionings) depends on individual characteristics and social arrangements. Hence, the possession of resources is not a sufficient indicator of well-being. It is what you do with those resources to achieve valued functionings, that matters, and this is where the notion of agency (capability) comes into play. As Robeyns notes, "the movement from capability to achieved functionings requires an act of choice" (2001:94), which, according to Kabeer (1999), is an important aspect of agency. In addition, fundamental inequalities in people's opportunities to achieve well-being may exist among persons who possess equal amounts of resources. In a household context, for example, power imbalances or gender inequalities in resource allocation and distribution take central stage in "mediating opportunities to achieve well-being among household members" (Iversen, 2003:94).

Sen's capability approach incorporates what he terms, "the perceived interest response", i.e., how a person might perceive his/her own self-interest relative to the other members in the household is critical in determining his/her response to and outcome of that inequality. This is more pronounced in traditional societies, where social norms restrict women's abilities to take action to further their interests within the household. Sen (1990) argues that if a person's perception of self-interest attaches less value to her well-being, the result would be less favourable to that person in terms of well-being. This overlap

between personal and household interests preserves intra-household inequality (Sen, 1990; Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 1999). As Sen himself asserts, "our actual agency role is often overshadowed by social rules and by conventional perceptions of legitimacy. In the case of gender divisions, these convictions often act as barriers to seeking a more equitable deal, and sometimes militate even against recognizing the spectacular lack of equity in the existing social arrangements" (1990:148-149). The question to ask then, when evaluating women's agency within the household, is, to what extent is the woman's perception of her identity and self-interests instrumental in achieving or not achieving her well-being? This point is taken further by Kabeer (1999) and other feminists who articulate the multi-facets of female agency. It is, therefore, critical to delve into the pluralistic nature of women's agency that enable or curtail women to mediate intra-household power relations to improve their opportunities for achieving well-being.

Agarwal's Bargaining Model
Whereas the capability approach places a great premium on the material foundations of power, the bargaining theory focuses on alternative types of power determinants of intra-household inequality, such as gender differentials. Agarwal's (1997) formulation of a bargaining model is more useful as it incorporates a complex range of factors that influence the bargaining process, which other models miss out or do not address adequately. For example, social norms and perceptions, and gender differentials in the pursuit of self-interest, play a significant role in the bargaining process and outcomes. Models that overemphasize material foundation of power ignore social constraints that limit women's agency in their ability to mediate intra-household power and thereby improve their outcomes (Kantor, 2003; Iversen, 2003).

The bargaining model incorporates both co-operative and non-cooperative approaches. In other words, within the bargaining framework, intra-household interaction contains elements of both co-operation and conflict. Of the two approaches, the co-operative approach has been dominating household literature. In a co-operative model, household members co-operate and the outcomes of this co-operation are beneficial to the negotiating parties compared to non-cooperation. However, conflict inheres in such

arrangements, as some outcomes are more favourable to one party than another, depending on the bargaining power of the members. An individual's bargaining power, as defined by Agarwal, "is an array of factors, particularly, the strength of the person's fall-back position also termed the threat point" (1997:4). A fall-back position is a person's outside options which determine how well-off she/he is in the event co-operation fails, and this would include assets and income earned outside the household. The better a person's fallback position is, the better bargaining deal a person gets within the household. In such a situation, "intra-household resource distribution will be determined by the non-cooperative fallback positions of the parties, and their individual abilities to influence the intra-household bargaining process" (Iversen, 2003:107). Hence, an attempt to capture accurately those aspects of a woman's agency within the household, termed bargaining skills, will have to incorporate interpersonal comparisons of opportunities for achieving well-being in the household; and her partner's individual characteristics, bargaining skills and fallback positions.

Social norms and social perceptions about economic contributions, needs and abilities (and therefore about who deserves what) require closer examination as they affect bargaining power independently of the fallback position. Social norms play an important role in determining bargaining power and in setting the limits to what is bargained for (Agarwal, 1997). In conceptualizing social norms as determining the level of a person's bargaining power and limiting what is bargained about, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'doxa' is helpful in understanding the role of social norms in influencing bargaining power and outcomes. Doxa refers to "that which is accepted as a natural and self-evident part of the social order, which goes without saying and is not open to questioning and contestation - the undiscussed, unnamed, admitted without argument or scrutiny" (Bourdieu, 1977:167-70). Tradition and culture (Kabeer, 2000), and widely accepted norms and practices (Agarwal, 1997) would fall into this category; for example, gender division of labour within and outside the household, female seclusion among Hindu and Muslim communities, intra-household decision-making, society's resource distribution and gendered occupational segregation in rural and urban employment. These aspects of the social order are taken for granted; they are accepted as natural and are not contestable.

Kabeer argues that the passage from doxa to discourse, signals the "emergence of a critical consciousness, the process by which people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical perspective on it" (2000:25). The inclusion of social norms within the bargaining model helps us understand the social constraints on women's bargaining power. "By ignoring the effect of doxa on women's willingness and ability to bargain, one misses the exercise of power that takes place without explicit conflict or decision-making" (Kantor, 2003: 428). In other words, by not taking into account the influence of social norms on women's ability and willingness to bargain to further her individual interests, we assume their complicity in their own subordination.

According to Agarwal, "there can be…a divergence between what a person actually contributes, needs, or is able to do, and perceptions about her/his contributions, needs or abilities" (1997:10). These perceptions may be caused by gender or visibility factors. A woman's contributions to her household may be undervalued because she is a woman, or her home-based work is considered less valuable and hence invisible. Women's needs and self-interests within the household are assumed to be synonymous with those of her family. She, herself, perceives her identity to be tied to her husband and children. This means that a woman's failure to perceive her true self-interests, and how the other members perceive her contributions, needs and abilities, affect both the process and outcomes of bargaining, negotiation and contestation. Kabeer adds that "altruism (investing effort and resources in the collective welfare of the family) may often be a manifestation of their disempowerment, a response to their restricted options rather than a natural female attribute" (1999:50). However women's altruism is seen, it reproduces gender inequalities in intra-household resource allocation. Agarwal (1997), however, cautions against the view (advanced by Sen (1990)) that the women in South Asian countries are complicit in their own subordination and argues that we need to look at the covert acts of resistance to male domination in resource distribution and control. She gives an account of numerous cases of South Asian rural women, who secretly engage in income-generating activities, or hide their earnings in the roof or under piles of clothes. It is, therefore, crucial that any evaluation of women's agency should take into account

both overt and covert strategies that women engage in to correct their relative disadvantage within their households. Hence, emphasis should also be on external constraints on their ability to act overtly in their self-interest.

Kabeer's Choice Making Framework

Women's agency within the household is closely linked to their ability to make choices and decisions within the family (Kabeer, 2000). Kabeer (1999, 2000) accords choice a central place in her definition of agency and empowerment. In her qualification of choice within the empowerment paradigm, she states, "the equation between power and choice (can only be plausible) as long as what is chosen appears to contribute to the welfare of those making the choice" (Kabeer, 2000: 23). She, therefore goes beyond the ability to make choices, but stresses the kinds of choices people make. For example, a woman in her household may have the space to make choices, yet the choices she makes, may not further her own interests and well-being, but serve to perpetuate her subordinate status in the family. As Kabeer asserts, "power operates not only through the exercise of agency, but also through the choices women make" (2000:25). While conceptualization of agency in terms of choice is important, it must incorporate the context in which the choices are made; i.e., the values embedded in agency and choice reflect the values of the wider context. Choices that a woman may make within her household are shaped by both her individual characteristics, and the social context. This social context, according to Lukes (1974), finds expression in socially and cultured practices of groups and institutions, and these help to "shape not only whose interests will prevail, but also how different actors perceive their interests" (Kabeer, 1994:227). The influence of social constraint, 'the structures of constraint', on individual capacity for choice should not be overlooked (Kabeer, 1999).

Iversen (2003) provides another perspective on choice making as manifestation of agency. Drawing upon Sen's capability model to explain agency, he draws our attention to the relationship between freedom and choice. In making choices, according to Iversen, a person can exercise either direct freedom (choice-mediated control), or indirect freedom (effective power) (Iversen, 2003). The latter type is exercised if someone is not actively

involved in choosing or if someone chooses on behalf of another. While Sen (1985) considers effective power adequate for his capability approach, Petit (2001) argues that effective power is vulnerable, since it is "contingent on the favours or goodwill of those around you" (Iversen, 2003:100). In his defense of the notion of effective power in relation to choice, Sen explains that it is often not possible that people can exercise direct control on all the important aspects of their lives and thus have to rely on others to make choices for them. Therefore, complete independence from others is unrealistic and not always important (Iversen, 2003). In contrast, Petit (2001) contends that an acceptable notion of real freedom cannot be favour-dependent, since favour-dependent effective power is synonymous with total subjugation to another. Furthermore, effective power (indirect freedom in choice making), according to Iversen (2003), is problematic in developing countries characterized by hierarchical domestic structures. For example, in such societies, a husband would make choices on behalf of his wife in important aspects of their lives. Such a scenario curtails the development of a woman's agency associated with responsibility for making active choices within the household.

The three frameworks of female agency discussed above have brought together different manifestations of women's agency within the household. They have brought to the fore factors that facilitate and impede women's exercise of their agency within the domestic sphere. Structural factors such as gender, cultural norms and values have an impact on how a woman understands and perceives her role and actions within her household, and subsequently her ability to act in ways that confirm her own agency as an individual.

2.3 GENDER

There are various definitions and interpretations of the concept of gender (Acker, 1992; Wharton, 2005). However, as Wharton (2005:2) points out, it is precisely "its conceptual and theoretical diversity that can provide points of overlap, convergence and opposition". The multiplicity of views on gender centres on the distinction (or lack thereof) between sex and gender. There is one view that emphasizes the fact that sex is an objective and identifiable variable, rooted in human physiology, anatomy and genetics (Udry, 2000; Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005; Wharton, 2005), and as such, sex sets limits to the construction of gender. On the other side of the spectrum are those that subscribe to the view that gender

is socially constructed and therefore social processes and meanings shape our understanding of gender (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005; Oyewumi, 2005; Sready, 2005). In the middle is the view that biology and society interact to give meaning to gender. As Hoyenga and Hoyenga (1993:6) argue, "We are the products of both our biology and our past and present environments, simultaneously and inseparably".

What then is gender? Kessler and McKenna (1978:7) define gender as the "psychological, social and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness". According to Nfah-Abbenyi (2005), most feminists distinguish between sex and gender. Nfah-Abbenyi (2005:259) views sex as "a person's biological maleness or femaleness, while gender refers to the non-physiological aspects of sex, a group of attributes and/or behaviour, shaped by society and culture that are defined as appropriate for the male sex and female sex". In other words, gender is not given at birth, but is a social construction. It is, therefore, critical that in our efforts at understanding of gender we treat it as something that requires analysis and interrogation (Harding, 1996; Jarviluoma, Moisala and Vilkko, 2003; Oyewumi, 2005; Steady, 2005; Wharton, 2005).

In her theorization of the concept of gender, Harding (1996:434-437) identifies five shifts made in the analysis of gender, namely:

- Gender is a relationship between men and women, not an attribute that men and women possess apart from the other gender;
- Gender is produced by social and cultural structures; hence, gender relations are fundamentally structural relations;
- Gender intersects with other social axes of difference such as class, race, age, ethnicity, religion to shape behaviour and action;
- Gender is dynamic and historically changing; never static or transcultural; and
- Gender is always attached to power; therefore, gender relations are power relations.

Given these shifts in our understanding of gender, feminist writers argue for a context-specific investigation of gender (Code, 1991; Mama, 1996, 1997; Oyewumi, 2005; Nnaemeka, 2005). For African feminists, in particular, gender is a highly contested concept. They are vocal in their criticism of the Western conceptualization of gender in Africa (Ekejiuba, 2005; Nnaemeka, 1998, 2005; Oyewumi, 2005; Steady, 2005). Contending that Western feminists have misunderstood the nature of gender and gender relations in Africa, they point to missing dimensions in much analysis of gender and power relations in Africa. These include woman-woman relationships (Amadiume, 1987), and conjugality as well as consanguinity in African gender systems (Sudarkasa, 1986). In this study, gender is used to indicate a social construction of maleness and femaleness with power relations attached to it and intersecting with other social axes of difference to shape behaviour and action. This study recognizes the fluid and dynamic nature of gender, and, therefore the significance of taking into account the contextual factors in the analysis of gender.

2.4 CULTURE

Theories of culture define culture as norms, values, beliefs and traditions that are passed from generation to generation. While there is consensus on this definition of culture, namely, that the social and cultural norms and beliefs that people observe, influence their behaviour, attitudes and choices, there seems to be little knowledge of what culture really entails and how it matters in development analysis and discourse (Harrison and Huntington, 2000; Moncrieffe, 2004). Anthropological studies have for a while shelved or more accurately abandoned the concept of culture, arguing that culture masked history and power relations, produced unsatisfactory definitions and inaccurate generalizations, and created assumptions about race and gender (Gershon and Taylor, 2008; Warrier, 2008).

The above-mentioned problematic about the inadequate interrogation of the concept of culture, according to Moncrieffe (2004) and Warrier (2008), arises out of the multiple views about culture. Two dominant and opposing approaches to the conceptualization of culture encompass the essentialist (static) view and the fluid view. The static view depicts culture as a fixed pattern of characteristics of groups that give rise to notions of

'whatever we are, they are not' (Warrier, 2008). Such a conception of culture obscures the changing dimensions of time and space within a group of people. Put differently, some aspects of a particular culture may be true to a group within that culture within a particular space and time period, but may not be true to the whole group at all times and in all locations. In addition, as Warrier (2008:539) contends, "Assigning traditions, values, beliefs and practices to any culture as a stable element obscures the ways in which the historical and political processes shape how a particular tradition or practice comes to occupy a central position within a culture". This is particularly true with marginalized groups in a culture, such as women and children, whose issues, while important to them, may be dismissed by the powerful in that culture. Hence, critical thinking about culture is called for to avoid generalizations and essentialism based on racial and ethnic categorization.

In contrast, the fluid view sees culture as dynamic and changing as social and political landscapes of people change (Douglas, 2004; Steady, 2005; Gershon and Taylor, 2008). Such an approach to culture acknowledges that culture intersects with other variables in shaping and influencing identities. It also negates the position that ignores the important ways in which culture influences the trajectory of change and development. However, Moncrieffe (2004:3) cautions against an "overenthusiastic interpretation of the dynamism of culture as it can easily underestimate the role of power in shaping identities and culture and in restricting or facilitating the space and capacity to contest". This is partly, as Bourdieu (1990) explains in his concepts of *habitus and doxa,* some cultural norms and practices are so internalized that they remain unquestioned and unchallenged, and in this way perpetuate their own disadvantage and subjugation.

The continual debate around structure and agency permeate discourses about culture. One position views culture as structure as it influences the behaviour, actions and choices that people within a particular culture make (Eyben, 2004). Within this structural framework, culture, like other social structures, has the potential to enable or constrain people's actions. On the other hand, proponents of the agency-in-culture paradigm emphasize the primacy of agency in the construction of social reality. Bruner (1982) and Ratner (2000),

for example, see culture as being constantly negotiated and renegotiated. What this means is that people are not passive recipients of a reified entity called culture. Rather, we can change social reality by simply negotiating about it meaning(s). As Bruner (1982:839) argues, "It is the forum aspect of a culture [in which meanings are negotiated and renegotiated] that gives its participants a role in constantly making and remaking the culture". Between these two extreme positions, is a moderate one that seeks to find a balance in the structure-agency components of culture. This middle-ground view recognizes the need to understand the social and cultural context within which people live and the ways in which these contexts can influence and shape change on the one hand, and identifying ways of encouraging the type of cultural change that will promote people's agency in bringing about change (Moncrieffe, 2004). This study views culture as a both a social construct and a social structure. As a social structure, it shapes human behaviour. However, as a social construct, it is fluid and dynamic.

2.5 HOUSEHOLD HEADSHIP

The question of headship is central in household discourse (Posel, 2001; Dungumaro, Mturi, Nzimande and Sekokotla, 2006), with the result that debates about household types and household access to resources invariably involve analysis of household heads. Hence, Posel's (2001) pertinent questions of "Who are the heads of households, what do they do and is the concept of headship useful?" in her analysis of household headship in South Africa (ibid.). Similar lines of enquiry have been put forward by feminist writers in other parts of the world about the normative notion of headship prevalent in development discourses (Varley, 1996; Chant, 1997, 2003, 2007).

Household

The interrogation of the notion of headship necessitates an examination of the definition of a household and who constitute a household's members. The concept of household is defined and used inconsistently across diverse cultures (Dungumaro *et al.*, 2006; Chant, 1997; Ruwanpura and Humphries, 2004). However, as Chant (1997:27) puts it, "While there are several debates in the gender and development literature on the desirability (or otherwise) of generating definitions which might be universally applicable, the most common definition of 'household' for developing societies (and that favoured by

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international organizations such as the United Nations) is one that emphasizes co-residence". Accordingly, Chant (1997:27) defines a household as "comprising individuals who live in the same dwelling and who have common arrangements for basic domestic and /or reproductive activities such as cooking and eating". Zulu and Sibanda (2004:218) define a household as "the residential and livelihoods arrangement in which family and non-family members co-exist". Indeed, a household is conventionally conceived as the social group, which resides in the same place, shares the same meals and makes decisions over resource distribution (Ellis, 2000). Chant (2003), however, articulates the conceptual problems presented by such definitions (also reiterated by Ruwanpura *et al.*, 2004). One such problem is that household often overlaps with family in many conceptualizations and definitions.

Family is distinguishable from a household. Family refers to near and extended kinship relations that may be found in different locations and do not necessarily co-exist. Ruwanpura *et al.* (2004) refer to family as those people who are linked to one another by ties of blood and marriage and therefore support each other, but do not necessarily co-reside". This study adopts the concept of household as defined by Chant (1997) and Ellis (2000).

Headship

Who is the head of a household? The meaning and understanding of headship varies across different cultures and contexts (Budlender, 1997; Posel, 2001; Varley 1996; Dungumaro, *et al.*, 2006). Historically, the head of household has been conceptualized as the person in the household responsible for its other members, who is usually the husband or father or other senior male as the natural source of authority. This normative view has been taken further and normalized in the Beckerian or the unitary model of the household in economics (Becker, 1965, 1974). According to this representation, the household head is the single decision-maker who acts in the interests of the other household members- a benevolent dictator. Critics of this conception of household head reject it as being hierarchical, thus masking the complex household realities and dynamics of unequal power relations among household members, for example, overlooking women's

characteristics and contributions. The bargaining power model (already discussed in detail) also critiques the unitary household model, seeking instead to accentuate the household dynamics where decisions are contested and some household members use their bargaining power to impose their interests and preferences over others (Agarwal, 1997; Katz, 1997; Kantor, 2003).

On the other hand, definitions of headship constructed by respondents-as proposed and practiced by the United Nations (UN) also present their own set of problems, particularly when respondents are not provided with a set of criteria for identifying head of household (Dungumaro *et al.*, 2006). Where such objective criteria are not given, the operational meaning of headship is resultantly unclear and confusing (ibid.). Posel (2001) in her study of household headship in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, found that although the head is usually identified as the oldest person in the household, heads are also the highest income-earners. In addition, her study revealed that decision-making responsibility is a better indicator of headship than income-earning status.

Gender and Headship

Female headship compounds the problematic of household headship, as reasons for their existence and types of female-headed households need to be probed in order to avoid universalizing and essentializing them (Chant, 2003, 2007). While some prominent feminist writers question the assumed link between female headship and the feminization of poverty (Posel, 2001; Chant, 2003, 2007), the consensus is that households headed by women are increasing and are frequently numbered among the poor. Providing a rationale for this assumed link, Chant (2007:36) contends, "This link so frequently drawn between the feminization of poverty and household headship derive from the idea that women-headed households constitute a disproportionate number of the poor, and that they experience greater extremes of poverty than male-headed households".

The most pertinent question to ask then is what are the women's routes into headship? There are many reasons why women become heads of their households. Posel (2001) and Chant (2007) cite choice and involuntariness. Some women choose not to form permanent relationships with men as a way of securing independence and control over

their lives, while others will volitionally forfeit the benefits of a relationship with a male partner because the costs outweigh the benefits. Some women assume headship involuntarily, through divorce, separation from their partners, widowhood or abandonment by their male partners. Some simply become heads of their households in the absence of their husbands who have either joined the army (in Western societies) or are on migrant labour (as in the case of South Africa and Asian societies) (Dungumaro, *et al.*, 2006; Posel, 2001).

The reasons for the construction of female-headed households give rise to the distinctions in female headship. From their study of female headship in Sri Lanka, Ruwanpura *et al.* (2004) draw three types of female-headed households:

- De jure female-headed households, which are recognized by law because the women are divorced, widowed or deserted by their male partners;
- De facto female heads who assume headship temporarily because their partners have migrated in search of work or are serving in the army; and
- Quasi female heads, who are responsible for the maintenance of their households even when an adult male is present. Varley (1996) terms this category 'female-maintained households' as opposed to female-headed households, which encompass the first two in Ruwanpura *et al.*'s (2004) typology of female headship.

The overemphasis on the link between the feminization of poverty and female household headship poses a problem, particularly for policy-makers and the women themselves. As Chant (1997) points out, gender justice is often conflated with poverty and this obscures the unequal gender relations that result in women's disadvantage within their households. In addition, the focus on women-headed households tends to either over- or underplay women's agency and renders women in male-headed households invisible.

2.5 VULNERABILITY

Although employed widely to describe the physical environment (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987), the concept of vulnerability has acquired a prominent place in 'risk and hazards'

discourses, incorporating the social dimension, particularly in the conceptualization of poverty. For Hogan and Marandola (2005), the concept of vulnerability is all-encompassing as it touches every aspect our lives. "…markets are vulnerable institutions, cities, populations, specific demographic groups, genders, ethnic groups, places, regions and nations are all vulnerable" (Hogan and Marandola, 2005:455).

In the context of my study, the concept of vulnerability will be examined from the perspective of people's vulnerability to poverty. There are different ways of defining and interpreting the notion of vulnerability. On the one hand, there are those vulnerability analysts that focus on the internal capacity or characteristics of individuals or populations to cope with risk, shocks and stress. There are also those who seek to explain vulnerability in terms of external factors or causes that reduce individuals' capacity to maintain or increase well-being (Blaikie *et al*., 1994). According to Cutter (1996), the inconsistency of the use of the concept of vulnerability arises from the conflation of cause and effect or outcome, whereby the focus is on outcome rather than the causes that lead to the outcomes.

Chambers' (1989) definition of vulnerability seems to present an integrated approach to conceptualizing vulnerability. He brings the two views together, emphasizing both the endogenous characteristics and exogenous contingencies of vulnerability. Chambers (1989:1) argues: "Vulnerability has thus two sides: an external side of risks, shocks and stress to which an individual or household is subject; and an internal side which is defencelessness, meaning a lack of means to cope without damaging loss". He goes on to clarify that vulnerability is not the same as poverty, the latter meaning lack or want, but insecurity and exposure to stress and shocks. The questions that these forgoing definitions of vulnerability encapsulate, therefore, are, what causes vulnerability or what is the vulnerability to and what are the outcomes of vulnerability? (Blaikie *et al*. ,1994; IFRC, 1999).

Looking at vulnerability from the social inequality perspective, researchers of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) (2002) distinguish between

socioeconomic vulnerability and demographic vulnerability. The former refers to the capacity of people, communities and places to manage resources and opportunities to engage in a process of accumulation; while the latter is based on the idea that certain groups possess distinct demographic characteristics that render them incapable to manage assets and opportunities for development. This conception of vulnerability is in line with Rodriguez's (2000) notion of social disadvantage to explain vulnerability of certain groups of people. According to Rodriguez (2000), certain population groups are located in the upper levels of the socio-economic hierarchy-they have assets and therefore social advantage, while others are in the lower levels of this hierarchy and therefore face social disadvantage. This framework posits a direct link between social structure and where people are situated in that structure on the one hand; and vulnerability on the other.

Sen's (1985) ideas of capabilities and functionings provide valuable insights into understanding the concept of vulnerability. In Sen's (1985) capability approach, functionings, which are possible ways of 'being and doing', are a primary feature of well-being. This state of well-being can be achieved through a set of capabilities, incorporating real freedoms to be and to do. Vulnerability then sets in when these capabilities are reduced. As Yaro (2004:32) puts it, "Of central importance is the availability of the right capital in the right quantities at the right time to provide and enhance the capacity of households to stand up to contingencies". In their theorization of hunger, Watts and Bohle (1993) seek to identify 'spaces of vulnerability' and the structure that shape these spaces of vulnerability. They contend that vulnerability is caused by a lack of entitlements, powerlessness and exploitative practices. Hence, Watts *et al.* (1993) view vulnerability as constituted by three forces, namely, entitlements, empowerment and political economy. Within the Watts *et al.* (1993) framework, entitlements refer to command over food or the economic ability to access sufficient food; empowerment to both freedom to make choices and the human right to food; and political economy refers to the class relations and power dynamics inherent in human relations. The intersection, therefore, of these three processes mediate people's experience of vulnerability. Related to the Watts *et al.* (1994) theorization of vulnerability is Liverman's (1994) focus on 'geographical space of vulnerability' (where

are the vulnerable) superimposed on 'social space of vulnerability' (who are the vulnerable people). In addition, the frameworks of vulnerability (as discussed above) highlight the environmental, social, political and economic dimensions of vulnerability. Hence, its multi-dimensional and multi-layered nature makes the analysis not only complex but also robust.

2.6 SOCIAL CAPITAL

The concept of social capital has gained currency in sociological, anthropological and political studies in general, and development studies in particular in recent years (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putman, 1993). Despite its appeal to both development agencies and scholars, social capital remains a contested concept (Molyneux, 2002). Although social capital has a long scholarly history in the social sciences, dating from the 1960s (work done by Jane Jacobs) through the 1970s and 1980s (Coleman), it was Robert Putman's work that gave social capital scholarly impetus in the 1990s. Social capital emerged in earnest as a useful policy tool within the World Bank, which highlighted the important implications of social capital for development theory, policy and practice. While there are several definitions of social capital, they are all underpinned by the common idea that "social capital is a multidimensional concept comprising norms, relationships and networks that facilitate co-operation and collective action" (Zissi *et al*., 2010:126). Coleman (1988) views social capital as the structure of relations between actors and among actors that encourage productive activities and these act as resources for individuals to use to realize their personal interests. Putman's (1993) definition, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of civic participation, voluntary organizations, norms of trust and reciprocity. He sees social capital as the property of communities and nations as opposed to Bourdieu and Coleman's individualist approach. The World Bank (1997:114) defines social capital as "the informal rules, norms and long-term relationships that facilitate co-ordinated action and enable people to undertake co-operative ventures for mutual advantage". In whatever way social capital is defined, the relational aspect of society and community life seems to be the central element. Alluding to her work on social capital in the context of Latin America, Molyneux (2002:168) asserts "social capital approaches have brought to the attention of development agencies

the quality of the local social fabric and the importance of forms of solidarity and co-operation".

Putman (2000) distinguishes between bridging and bonding social capital. According to Putman (2000), bonding social capital (intra-group ties) refers to reciprocity, support networks and solidarity that bind members of a community together through social support. Bridging social capital (extra-group networks) links people in a group or community to external networks thus, facilitating new experiences and innovative ideas that filter back into the community. Szreter and Woolcock (2004) add a third type, namely, linking social capital that cuts across groups and communities with differential power. According to McAslan (2002), it is important to distinguish between the two types of social capital and be able to identify which type a group or community possess. A community may have a wealth of in-group (bonding social capital) and lack the necessary bridging and linking social capital to access valuable resources.

In their study of social capital and gender in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Maluccio *et al.* (2003) identify ways in which men and women can accumulate social capital. These encompass two types of social networks, namely, bound networks, in which relatives are connected by strong obligations of kinship, and achieved networks, which are made up of an individual's contacts gained through experience, and not kinship. According to Maluccio *et al*. (2003:147), "the two types of networks seem to fulfill different functions: bound networks help to limit downward mobility in the face of shocks, while achieved networks help with upward mobility". Furthermore, networks, particularly bound networks, are important for women in times of crisis. Women's social capital networks are wider than those of men are, yet they mobilize fewer economic resources.

The Gendered Nature of Social Capital
Molyneux (2002) analyzes the presence and absence of gender in the social capital discourses and policy. For example, its absence is noticeable in the World Bank's literature on social capital, which largely focuses on men's networks. Where it is acknowledged, women's lived realities are assumed and consequently misrepresented,

leading to policies that disadvantage women. For example, the perceptions of women as promoters of social capital in their communities create expectations about their role in development projects. This is problematic since this assumption does not challenge the asymmetrical power relations in which women are situated in their communities. While there is strong evidence that women, particularly in the developing countries, are involved in local income-generating activities, engage in supportive relations and have the strongest community and kin ties, there is the danger of overburdening women with responsibility of community projects, in addition to their household responsibilities.

The other side of the coin is the evidence that poverty generates social capital as support networks are created to assist and support during hard times. The positive effects of social capital are particularly evident in rural development. Not only do networks in rural areas allow internal and external flows of information and resources, but also people become linked in complex ways to different scales of the economy. Furthermore, social capital plays crucial role in informal entrepreneurship. Molyneux (2002) cites her studies carried out in Latin America, which illustrate how women mobilized and organized in community associations around basic survival strategies. In her study of gender and ethnicity in Trinidad, Lloyd (1997:3) argues, "as parts of the informal sector are built on local salient networks, supported by community loyalty, trust and patronage, it provides a salient starting point from which to study how social capital underpins the living standards of the poor". These scenarios underscore the importance of social resources such as community co-operation in alleviating poverty.

However, many proponents of social capital caution against idealizing and treating it as a panacea for poverty (Fukuyama, 1999; Molyneux, 2002; Zissi *et al*., 2010). Indeed, social capital has adverse consequences. Portes (1998) identifies four negative effects of social capital, namely, it can exclude outsiders; it can limit personal freedom; it imposes obligations of loyalty to the group; and it may create conflict between the members of the group and those individuals who have ambitions of advancement. Nonetheless, social capital has grown in popularity as an analytical tool for the development community, despite its conceptual fuzziness. Although the concept of social capital is not as central to

the framework around which this study is developed, its salience is significant in highlighting the role of support networks for the rural poor.

2.7 POLITICAL ECOLOGY

In the last one and half decades political ecology has become a very important analytical tool for studying human-environment relations (Nygren and Rikoon, 2008, Mung'ong'o, 2009; Neumann, 2009). Political ecology is a theoretical approach that combines ecological and political processes that shape environmental change (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987). In their seminal work on 'Land Degradation and Society', Blaikie and Brookfield (1987) emphasize the dialectical nature of the people-nature interaction; the interdependence between society and nature.

As Mung'ong'o (2009:192) explains, "Political ecology developed as a radical critique against a-political and depoliticizing effects of mainstream environmental research and practice". Mainstream research focuses on the ecological dimensions of environmental change, and overlooks the interlocking social, cultural and political forces at play. To counteract this one-sided view of the human-environment debate, Bryant and Bailey (1997) highlight the notion of a 'politicized environment' in their conceptualization of political ecology, drawing an important distinction between the latter and environmental politics. While environmental politics treats environmental management like any other political issue, "political ecology recognizes that the natural environment is a dynamic and active participant in its own politicization" (Mung'ong'o, 2009:193). At the other extreme is the approach that downplays the role of physical processes in environmental problems. As Grossmann (1999:153) argues, "social constructivist analyses of nature tend to portray the environment as a passive entity, moulded by political-economic forces". Both positions do not offer adequate and insightful explanations of environmental change. Given these flaws in the theoretical frameworks of political ecology, several political ecologists have been advocating for an integration of these two approaches in order to understand the complex dialectics between nature and society (Nightingale, 2003; Walker, 2005).

Within such a framework of the dialectic relation between nature and society, political ecology invariably raises critical issues that highlight the intersection of ecological, socio-political and cultural dynamics in environmental policy and practice. Questions of power relations of the various actors-how control of and access to natural resources are defined, negotiated and contested; how cultural meanings around natural resources are constructed and how social and political institutions mediate resource use and access-all come into play in the political project. These multifaceted forces and processes interact in ways that make the conceptualization of the core subject of political ecology complex and dynamic.

The salience of conflict permeating natural resource use has been highlighted in natural resource management literature (Le Billion, 2001; Neumann, 2004; Nygren, 2005; Fabricius and Collins, 2007). Referring to resource-linked conflict, Le Billion (2001:195) contends, "Resources are socially constructed-they are not, they become". Conflict over resources, therefore, is inextricably linked to patterns of social relations; the quality and legitimacy of social and political institutions; power relations within communities, between communities and governments and markets at various scales of society. Hence, governance (including formal, informal, state and community institutions) of natural resources has become a critical element both in political ecology and natural resource management (Ellis, 2000; Rogers, 2002).

Several feminist writers have critiqued the gender gap in the political ecology theoretical approach, particularly in First World environmental analyses (Rocheleau *et al.*, 1996), themselves inspired by feminist writers on the environment of the Third World, for example, Agarwal (1992) and Leach (1992, 1994). Feminist perspectives on political ecology have positioned gender as an important factor, though not the only one, in mediating environmental use (Sen and Grown, 1987; Shiva, 1989; Agarwal, 1992, 2003; Rocheleau *et al.*, 1996; Francis, 2000; Goebel 2003, 2005; Schroeder, 2003). They argue that feminist political ecology is the most valuable framework for analysing and illuminating the ways in which gender situates both men and women in relation to social, cultural, political, and economic forces that shape their access and use of the environment

in their struggle to construct sustainable livelihoods. This is the perspective that the study adopts.

The Feminist Political Ecology Perspective

The feminist political ecology approach emphasizes the importance of social institutions, gender relations, cultural and ideological meanings, as well as the macro-micro linkages in understanding the relationship between women and the environment (Rocheleau *et al.,* 1996; Goebel, 2005). Rocheleau *et al.* (1996) add an ecological dimension. They define feminist political ecology as an approach that "treats gender as a critical variable in shaping resource access and control, interacting with class, caste, culture and ethnicity to shape processes of ecological change, the struggle of men and women to sustain ecologically viable livelihoods, and the prospects of any community for sustainable development" (Rocheleau *et al*., 1996:4). As such, the feminist political ecology approach to women/environment relations goes beyond the social and economic considerations of women's relationship to their environment to include cultural, ideological and institutional aspects of this relationship (Goebel, 2005). Furthermore, a gender analysis in the women/environment discourse, rather than using women as a category, takes cognizance of the role of men in the investigation (Leach and Green, 1997; Goebel, 2003).

Gender and Environment

Various strands within the feminist movement have advanced and explained the relationship between women and environment, such as ecofeminism, feminist environmentalism and feminist political ecology, amongst others. Within developmental circles, the Women, Environment and Development (WED) paradigm focuses on women's relationship with the environment as users, managers and primary victims of environmental degradation (Goebel, 2003). Ecofeminism propagated by Shiva (1989) brings together feminist and ecological concerns, positing a special relationship between the subjugation of nature and women by patriarchy. Feminist environmentalism, on the other hand, proposes that feminists should move beyond ideological and spiritual conceptions of this relationship and instead start to deconstruct the patriarchal ideology

that keeps women and environment in constant subjugation (Agarwal, 1992). Because of the sexual division of labour, women's work has always involved a close relationship with the environment as fuel-wood and fruit gatherers, water collectors and agriculturists. Braidotti *et al.* describe this relationship between women and the environment as characterized by "reciprocity, symbiosis, harmony, mutuality and interrelatedness" (1994:93). For this reason, women are considered holders of privileged knowledge about the environment, possessing specific skills in environmental management (Braidotti *et al.*, 1994; Leach *et al.*, 1995). Feminist scholars, such as Agarwal (1992), Jackson (1993), Leach (1994), and Goebel (2003), however, have critiqued the assumption of the inherent connection between women and the environment as essentialist, which thus ignores the diverse contextual realities of women across the globe. Rather, the link between women and the environment should be investigated and the specificity of women's experiences with their environments examined. Furthermore, problematizing this relationship is crucial (Agarwal, 1992; Jackson, 1993; Leach, 1994; Goebel, 2003), because it compels us to interrogate those structural conditions that mediate women's interaction with their environments. Moreover, as Schroeder argues, "it is women's regular contact with the resource base, born of specific work responsibilities, …rather than some sort of natural symbiotic relationship, that has given particular groups of women privileged knowledge of resources their communities depend upon" (2003:13).

There are examples in the African gender-environment literature that highlight the gender dynamics in the use of the environment. Goebel's study (1998) in a Zimbabwean Resettlement Area sheds light on the gender-differentiated perceptions about natural resources, their uses and resource areas. For example, some products are predominantly used and collected by one gender: poles are largely the domain of men, while herbs are known, gathered and sold by women. Men and women "live in different 'resource worlds'…reflecting gendered mobility patterns" (Goebel, 1998:7). While women's productive and reproductive tasks, such as cooking, childcare, weaving, weeding and harvesting limit them to their homesteads, men and boys' involvement with cattle, for example, takes them farther into bushes (ibid.).

Leach's study of rice farming among the Mende communities in Sierra Leone, captures the dynamic approach of using the environment as a "locus for the instantiation of relationships, creating and recreating differences between men and women" (1992:77). She shows how the various types of space in the farming process provide a general map of social relationships. Among the Mende communities, division of labour in rice farming is linked to the use of space. Men, for example, "clear the bush spaces within which women subsequently work, planting rice and vegetable intercrops" (Leach, 1992:77). Schroeder (2003), in his study of the Mandinka communities in The Gambia, describes how agricultural space is used along gender lines. While upland areas are cultivated by men (growing rice, groundnuts and coarse grains), the arable swamplands are controlled by women rice growers. However, these social relationships realized in the geographical spaces are not static, but are negotiated. Talking of "gendered spaces", Rocheleau and Edmunds (1997) advocate a focus on the separation of women's and men's activity and authority in space in order to uncover and recognize those spaces in the rural landscape in which women exert relatively more control over resource management decisions, and from which they are more likely to derive personal benefit.

Within traditional societies, gender systems regulate how marriage and traditional practices mediate women's interaction with the environment, namely, their access, control and use of natural resources. Drawing on feminist political ecology thinking regarding entitlements, Goebel (1998) highlights the centrality of marriage in shaping women's rights to natural resources. Women's relationship to natural resources, particularly in patrilineal contexts, is marked by "asymmetrical entitlements, where women's rights and access to natural resources are contingent upon their relationships with men" (Rocheleau *et al*., 1996:291): in patrilineal communities through a husband and in matrilineal communities through a father or husband (Meinzin-Dick *et al*., 1997). A woman's marital status determines her experiences socially, culturally and economically, making her vulnerable to losing access to land and other natural resources through widowhood and divorce. In most African societies, whether patrilineal or matrilineal, inheritance of land is through the male lineage (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1997). There are, however, exceptions to these norms. For example, women in Ghana can

acquire land and pass it to on to their mothers and sisters (ibid.). Kepe's study (2003) on the use, control and value of craft material in Pondoland in South Africa, highlights the position of women with regard to a craft material, *Cyprus textilis*. As a woman's crop, *Cyprus textilis* is passed on from woman to woman. In addition, decision-making about when and how much to plant, and when to harvest, is exclusively in the hands of the women. Kepe's research underscores the importance of interrogating the diversity and specificity of gender relations in resource access, control and use, and points out that the gendered complexities of resource tenure need to be understood. A discussion of resource tenure issues as they affect women's access, use and control of natural resources follows.

The historical emergence of feminism and concerns over gender inequality in international development have served as doorways into interrogating social relations of power that both shape and are conditioned by the definition, distribution and control of property, whether private, public or common (Rocheleau *et al.*, 1997). In other words, the intersection of gender and resource tenure is a crucial determinant of resource access, use and control. According to Rocheleau *et al.*, "the combination of gender and resource tenure concerns has stretched the tenure question… to address multidimensional realities, characterized by social and ecological diversity and complex webs of connection between various groups of people and the resources that sustain them" (1997:1351). Women, in particular, have been marginalized in the move from communal tenure systems to individualization of tenure. Whereas communal tenure tended to grant different rights to different people for a single plot of land, more privatized and individualized systems of tenure award exclusive and absolute rights to an individual (Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 1997). The privatized system disadvantages women whose access to land is through their relationship with a male. However, not all natural resources are managed and controlled in the same way (Lipton *et al.*, 1996). An examination of how gender mediates women's interaction with the environment in terms of accessing and using it is, therefore, crucial in this study, as it looks at women's ability to access the raw material they use in their craft enterprise.

Describing the South African context, Lipton *et al*. (1996) suggest that indigenous tenure as opposed to private tenure is more favourable to women as all community members are entitled in principle to access resources in their local neighbourhoods. It is, therefore, crucial that women have access to natural resources, since as Cousins (2000) and Shackleton (2005) argue, great numbers of rural women are converting the traditional use of resources into income-generating micro-enterprises to secure their livelihoods. However, since their value is not accounted for in national statistics, the contribution of common pool resources to the rural economy has remained invisible and consequently led to their neglect in Southern Africa as well as in other countries of the world (Cousins, 2000).

2.8 SUMMARY

The chapter has presented a theoretical discussion of the key concepts around which the study is built. These include the concepts of agency, empowerment, gender, culture, household headship, vulnerability, social capital and political ecology. The relationship between agency and empowerment is highlighted. Drawing largely from Kabeer's model of empowerment, agency constitutes a critical element, together with resources (enabling conditions) and achievements (outcomes of empowerment), of the empowerment process. Both agency and empowerment are intertwined and constitutive of each other in a dialectical relationship. The one cannot exist without the other. Just as much as agency is a critical requirement for empowerment to take place, the achievement of empowerment (outcomes), serves to enhance the ability to act, thus leading to further empowerment. Given that agency and empowerment are two sides of the same coin, they share distinctive features: their multidimensional nature; relational nature; cultural foundation; and their intrinsic and instrumental value.

Various theories have advanced the centrality of agency in defining and explaining human action. They may differ in their paradigmatic orientations to agency, emphasizing some aspects of agency over others. They are, however, aspects of a greater whole. The above discussion has highlighted the need to disaggregate agency from the elements of human action, and distinguish it as an analytical tool in its own right, with distinctive theoretical dimensions and variable social manifestations. The above discussion has

highlighted the following dimensions and features of agency: temporality, contextuality, variability; creativity; self-efficacy; personal and collective agency: public versus private agency; and environmental issues of agency.

Drawing on Giddens' structuration theory, my conceptualization of agency has highlighted the notion of the interdependence of agency and structure. Put differently, agency does not float. Rather, it is rooted in the relational; temporal; cultural and institutional contexts in which the action occurs. In other words, as it has been shown in the discussion on Giddens' structuration theory, agency interpenetrates with and impacts upon its structure. Structure (in the form of resources, rules, norms, practices and culture), in turn, shapes human action, both enabling and constraining agency. Such a perspective lays the foundation for a richer and more dynamic understanding of the capacity that actors have to mediate the structural context of their actions. Any analysis and conceptualization of agency, therefore, need to incorporate the notion of the structural context that may facilitate or inhibit the exercise of agency.

Various feminist formulations of female agency have advanced the analysis of female subjectivity and how women, in the many locations they find themselves, have deployed their agency to bring about change in the various aspects of their lives. What emerges from the discussion of Western and African feminisms is that agency cannot be universally applied because of the diverse experiences of women across the world. This again emphasizes the contextual-dependent nature of agency. Furthermore, the concept of agency, as it pertains to this study, is investigated in the context of the women crafters' ability to access, use and control the natural resource for craft. The feminist political ecology approach that the study employs highlights the gendered nature of resource use and control, and the implications of these for women. Female agency is further examined in the context of a household. Since the household is the site for women's struggle against male domination, women's agency needs to be investigated and understood within the dynamics of gender and power relations. Different models have provided useful frameworks for analysing and shedding some light on the interplay of women's agency and gender and power asymmetries in the distribution and allocation of resources,

bargaining and negotiating, and choice making. Aspects of women's agency, such as capabilities, well-being, freedom, choice and decision-making skills, control over household resources and bargaining skills have been set against gender and power inequalities within the household to examine the outcomes for women themselves. Gender and culture emerge as critical variables in the conceptualization of women's agency within the household. Starting from the premise that agency is contextually specific, the discussion has pointed out the importance of interrogating and understanding the central place of culture in an analysis of agency, particularly in African societies.

Agency is about gaining power to do something. Invariably, discourses on agency are bound up in the concept of power (individual and collective power), and how the different forms of power (power to; power within and power with) are manifest in agency. This is particularly significant for women in their efforts to empower themselves. The concept of power, therefore, is tied to the notions of both agency and empowerment. Agency and empowerment as a process, and not a state, are difficult to measure given their multidimensional nature and the question of using internationally comparable or context-dependent indicators. However, some empowerment writers have attempted to come up with commonly used empowerment indicators that have provided a reference point for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In chapter 3, I provide the context for the study. I situate the study within rural development in South Africa, particularly in the post-apartheid era. I focus on issues pertinent to the study, namely, the nature of rural poverty in South Africa, how the rural poor construct their livelihoods, the land question in post-apartheid South Africa, with particular reference to land tenure; the gender dimension of rural development, the relationship between rural development and the environment, rural entrepreneurship and the regulatory framework for rural development.

3.1 RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Rural development in South Africa needs to be understood against the backdrop of the country's historical and political development. Such a perspective problematizes rural development in South Africa. It throws into sharp relief questions of structural inequality in land possession, income and economic opportunities that have characterized South Africa since colonial and apartheid eras (Lundahl, 2001; Terreblanche, 2002; Seekings and Natrass, 2005; Bhorat and Kanbur, 2006; Andrews and Jacobs, 2009). It also interrogates how these two regimes have shaped the trajectory of rural development in South Africa in the post-apartheid period. Furthermore, rural development in South Africa needs to be situated within the context of development trends in Sub-Saharan Africa and globalization in general. The economic reform measures (market liberalization, privatization and reduced public expenditure) that constituted the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the World Bank did not have the anticipated "trickle down" effect to the poor in Africa (Belshaw, 2002; Mullen, 2002). Instead, SAP has benefited a minority in Africa, widening the gap between the rich and the poor. It has resulted in "retrenchment in public and private sectors, increased job insecurity and high levels of unemployment for many men and women" (Mbilinyi, 2002:413).

While the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)) played a decisive role in the imposition of economic reforms in the rest of Africa, its influence in post-apartheid South Africa was policy advice and moral

persuasion (Le Roux, 2001). The result was that one of the ANC (African National Congress) -led government's key macroeconomic policies, namely, Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) (to be discussed below), was modeled along the principles of the structural adjustment programme measures of the World Bank and IMF (Le Roux, 2001; Bond, 2001; Hall, 2005;Madlingozi, 2007). Although GEAR achieved modest economic growth rates, it failed to address the problems of poverty and inequality in terms of job creation and redistribution to the poor. Because of the above factors, rural development in post-apartheid South Africa has sought to redress the structural inequalities in income, property and economic opportunities (Terreblance, 2002; Madlingozi, 2007). They are structural because they are a result of the institutionalized discriminatory and segregationist laws that marginalized the majority of South Africans. As proof of this inequality, South Africa's Gini coefficient ratings (a measurement of a country's inequality) show that South Africa is one of the least equal countries in the world (Hoogeveen and Ozler, 2006; Rotberg, 2007) as illustrated in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 South Africa's Gini coefficient compared with other countries

Country	Gini coefficient rating
Botswana	60.5
Brazil	61
South Africa	57.8
Denmark	24.7

Source: UNDP Report (2004)

The establishment of homelands by the apartheid regime ensured that blacks were confined in areas with poor socio-economic conditions, with few economic opportunities. South Africa has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, with over 5 million people unemployed (Motala, 2009). As Aliber (2003) contends, unemployment and poverty in rural areas are closely linked, with unemployment being the single greatest cause of rural poverty in South Africa. For example, in their study of the rural economy in KwaZulu-Natal, Mbhele and Aliber (2005) found that unemployment in the rural areas is exacerbated by the return of retrenched men and women to their rural homes, thus increasing the number of the unemployed in the rural areas. In addition to structural

poverty and unemployment that are characteristic of rural areas in South Africa, the apartheid legacy ensured inequalities in education, health, basic infrastructure such as safe water, sanitation and housing. This inequality in service provision is not only between backs and the other racial groups, but also urban and rural areas, with the latter at the receiving end of the discriminatory laws and policies (Bhorat and Kanbur, 2006; Hoogeveen and Ozler, 2006).

3.2 RURAL POVERTY

Poverty in South Africa is characterized by spatial, racial and gender dimensions (as already alluded to) (Taylor Committee, 2008). Sixty one percent of black people and only one percent of white people in South Africa are classified as poor. The poor in South Africa, as in many countries in the world, are concentrated in rural areas (Woolard and Barberton, 1998; Carter and May, 1999; Mullen, 2002; Aliber; 2003; de Swardt, 2005), which constitutes fifty percent of South Africa's population (Taylor Committee, 2008). Seventy percent of all rural African individuals live in households with income below the poverty line (Carter and May, 1999; Shackleton, 2006), placing the poverty rate rural areas at seventy one percent (Taylor Committee, 2008). While the majority of South Africans now live in cities, the geographical dimension of poverty in the country include, as Aliber (2003) points out, the poorest provinces are those encompassing the most populated former homelands: KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo Province and Eastern Cape (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Poverty by province in South Africa

Source: Statistics S.A. (2005)

Province	% of population living in poverty
Eastern Cape	58.9
Free State	41.64
Gauteng	25.6
KwaZulu-Natal	60.14
Limpopo	64.68
Mpumalanga	54.9
North West	51.1
Northern Cape	53.3
Western Cape	28.5

Poverty, including rural poverty, is complex and multifaceted and thus defies simple definitions (Woolard and Barberton, 1998; May, 2000; May *et al*., 2000; World Bank, 2003). Poverty is more than inadequate income. It encompasses hunger, disease, unemployment, lack of access to basic services, illiteracy, vulnerability to crisis and powerlessness. As such, poverty is a relative concept and describes both a state of being and the effect of social, economic and political processes. Viewed from this broad perspective, poverty is a critical development challenge that requires the mobilisation of social, economic and political forces (Sirleaf, 1997).

Current development thinking recognizes the rural-urban linkages as an important aspect of rural development (Manona, 2001; World Bank, 2003; Aliber, 2003). In the South African context, the rural economy is dependent on rural-urban migration in the sense that rural people respond to economic opportunities available in urban areas; and the remittances the migrant workers send home constitute an important livelihood for the rural households (Aliber, 2003). This means that urban and rural areas are a continuum in terms of development. However, there is a downside to rural-urban migration relating to rural poverty. Bornstein (2000) argues that the fact that rural migrants have dual residences, what she calls 'double rootedness', contributes to rural poverty when migration leads to the neglect of wives and children in rural households.

The rural poor in South Africa are not a homogenous group. According to Aliber (2003), the rural poor comprise a number of categories including the elderly, the disabled, HIV/AIDS orphans and female-headed households. This categorization of the rural poor, according to Aliber (2003) has significant implications for anti-poverty policies and programmes. HIV/AIDS is of particular concern as the pandemic has a compounding effect on rural poverty in South Africa. It is currently estimated that 22, 5 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa are living with HIV/AIDS and Southern Africa has the highest rates (Bloom *et al*., 2002). South Africa itself has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection in the world (Rotberg, 2007). As the World Bank (2003) notes, HIV/AIDS is no longer just a health problem - it has become a development challenge threatening the progress made in the last 40 years of development and deepening poverty. The feminization of poverty and the gender-differentiated nature of HIV/AIDS results in the disproportionate vulnerability of female-headed households (Shisana *et al.,* 2010).

In its 15 year Review, the government has committed itself to intensifying its fight against poverty in order to improve the well-being of the people of South Africa, particularly in the rural areas. The government's 'War on Poverty', which commenced towards the end of 2008, focuses on assisting food insecure households, which suffer severe hunger as a result of the 2007-2008 wave of food price inflation (Ministry for Agriculture, 2008).

3.3 RURAL LIVELIHOODS

As in other rural areas of developing countries, the rural poor in South Africa are engaged in a continuous struggle to secure a livelihood in the face of adverse socio-economic and political conditions. Central to an understanding of how rural poor people construct their livelihoods are two important points, namely, social and power relations in particular historical context; and the diversity of rural livelihoods (Murray, 2002). Policy-makers and rural planners poorly understand the nature of rural livelihoods, as some writers note (Cousins, 1999; Shackleton *et al*., 2001; Manona, 2005; Kepe, 2008). This is because most poverty studies in South Africa in the past have relied on cash income (derived from production or employment) in households as measure poverty levels (Budlender, 1999). Recently, there has been a shift from a narrow analysis of poverty to a broader view that

takes account of the complexity and diversity of rural livelihoods (Francis, 2000, 2002; Ellis, 2000; Shackleton, 2005; Kepe, 2008). Put differently, rural people's livelihoods are socially embedded (Kepe, 1997; Ellis, 1999, 2000; Francis, 2000, 2002; Kepe *et al*., 2001; Kepe, 2008)). Hence, rural livelihoods must be analysed within the context of the people's histories, cultures, relationships and environments, all of which are dynamic.

 In South Africa, the rural poor put together livelihoods in diverse ways, depending on the resources they have access to, such as, land, money, livestock, skills or employment opportunity (Francis, 2000, 2002; McCusker and Oberhauser, 2006). Generally, the rural poor in South Africa rely on a mix of activities (Francis, 2000, 2002; Ellis, 2000), including harvesting and selling of a variety of natural resources, such as fuelwood, grasses, medicinal and edible plants (May, 2000; Shackleton *et al*., 2000). Carter and May (1999) provide a useful analysis of the multiple livelihood strategies of the rural poor in South Africa. These include agriculture, small and micro enterprises, wage labour, social grants, remittances from migrant workers, unpaid domestic labour (which although not paid, contributes to the household livelihood strategy). Rural-urban migration (alluded to above) remains a critical livelihood strategy for many rural households (Carter and May, 1999; Manona, 2001; World Bank, 2003; Aliber, 2003). In addition to diversification, rural people in South Africa tend to cluster themselves and their children around someone in the family with a regular income, most often a pensioner (Francis, 2002).

Drawing from research conducted on rural livelihoods in Africa, including South Africa, Kepe (2008:961) notes, that rural livelihoods display particular characteristics. These include:
 (a) the rural-urban link means that rural, peri-urban and urban household combine their incomes derived from various sources with rural-based activities to enhance rural livelihoods.
 (b) Multiple linkages to urban areas (economic and social) through which households or individual household members are linked to markets, social networks and community institutions.

(c) Social differentiation of rural people and livelihoods by age, gender education, location, political affiliation, and so on, influences livelihoods outcomes for the people.

(d) Formal and informal institutions and practices mediate livelihoods strategies.

The nature of diverse rural livelihoods in South Africa is similar to how the rural poor in the rest of Africa struggle to enhance their livelihoods. Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that rural people tend to diversify their livelihoods by engaging in a wide range of income-earning activities and that "farming often provides a surprisingly small proportion of rural households' income" (Francis, 2000:55). The diversity of rural livelihoods in South Africa means that policy-makers need to support and enhance the diverse rural livelihoods. However, it remains a challenge to understand how rural people construct their livelihoods and what factors mediate and shape the strategies they follow (Francis, 2000). Scoones' (1998) Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL) framework is useful in identifying and supporting rural livelihoods that are sustainable in the different contexts. The four basic elements of his approach are context; resources; institutions (that influence access to livelihood resources); livelihood strategy and outcomes. Similar to the framework put forward by Sen (1981), Scoones' approach helps identify the constraints that limit rural households' ability to effectively make use of their resources and assets to construct their livelihoods. Most importantly, as Chambers and Conway (1992) stress, rural livelihoods must be sustainable in terms of enhancing the assets or capabilities upon which the livelihoods depend, while not destroying the natural resource base.

Sen's (1981) work on "entitlements" helps to shed light on the construction of rural livelihoods and is useful in understanding South African rural livelihoods. In Sen's view, it is through three elements that the rural put together their livelihoods. These are (a) ownership endowments (tangible and intangible assets); (b) access to commodities (food, services and families); and (c) claiming systems (markets and state). However, the absence or lack of access to any of these components of the entitlement system may constrain the poor in making a living.

Expanding on Sen's (1981) entitlements approach to rural livelihoods, Francis (2002) speaking to the rural South African context, argues that it not appropriate to talk of strategizing of rural livelihoods. Instead, rural livelihoods must be conceptualized in terms of reaction to crisis situations, brought about by rural poverty. In addition, as Grown and Sebstad (1989) contend, differentiation of livelihood construction is important to understand people's goals in generating their livelihoods. According to Grown and Sebstad (1989), the goal of the poorest is survival; and once survival is assured, the goal may shift to security and so to accumulation.

Land and rural livelihoods are closely tied in South Africa (Shackleton *et al.,* 2001; Attfield *et al.*, 2004; McCusker and Oberhauser, 2006). Shackleton *et al.* (2001), in their study of the role of land-based strategies in rural livelihoods in South Africa, note that evidence of agricultural activity in rural villages has two foci, namely cultivation in the homestead; and on arable land. However, the productivity from both homestead and arable fields is generally low by commercial standards. Carter and May's (1999) study in KwaZulu-Natal supports Francis's finding about agriculture. They discovered that agriculture, contrary to conventional wisdom, is not the mainstay of rural households' existence. Manona (2001) attributes this to the process of de-agrarianisation that is taking place in South Africa, a shift from agriculture as a livelihood strategy to other off-farm livelihood options. This is notwithstanding the new democratic government's land reform programme, specifically land redistribution, which aimed to even out the structural inequality in land ownership between blacks and whites (discussed below). Even the newly settled people cannot invest in land productivity without government support (Francis, 2000; de Wet, 2001). Post-transfer support in the form of infrastructure, farm credit, agricultural input and access to markets for farm outputs is crucial for the overall success of land redistribution for agriculture (DLA, 2008). Yet, virtually all the key players have neglected it (Jacobs *et al*., 2003). Nonetheless, land remains a valuable resource for rural households to generate their livelihoods (May *et al.*, 2000; Aliber, 2003; Andrews and Jacobs, 2009; Jacobs, 2009) and the democratic government's recognition of this has made land a significant subject on its political and economic

agenda. The question of land in South Africa is, therefore, discussed in the following section.

The Question of Land in South Africa

As already mentioned the recognition of the centrality of land in rural development in general and in the construction of rural livelihoods in particular has led to the establishment of the land reform policy (DLA, 1997). This programme comprises three pillars, namely, land redistribution, land restitution and land tenure. Land redistribution ensures fair distribution of land through the transfer of land to historically disadvantaged black people within the willing-seller, willing-buyer framework. In land restitution, individuals or groups may claim return of land or compensation in lieu of land taken from them by the apartheid regime. Land tenure reform secures the land rights of black South Africans, particularly the land rights of farm workers, labour tenants living on privately-owned large scale commercial farms and residents in former homelands. While tenure reform has the potential to benefit many rural people than would land restitution or land redistribution, it was the slowest to emerge (Kepe, *et al*., 2001). Furthermore, land tenure is closely tied to rural people's ability to construct their livelihoods. Hence, the importance of land in contemporary South Africa's rural development should be seen against the historical setting of the land question, particularly land tenure in South Africa.

Historical Context of the Land Question in South Africa

In South Africa as elsewhere in Africa, pre-colonial and colonial rule dictated how land was held and used (Biebuyck, 1963). Governments passed laws on land, chiefs administered land, courts adjudicated land disputes and large re-settlements of people occurred. However, within this overarching state framework of land control, land relations on the ground were socially embedded (Kepe *et al*., 2001; Cousins, 2007). This meant that land was largely vested in villages; land rights were held by kinship groups and therefore inheritance rights were vested in families. Group ownership, what is commonly known today as communal or customary tenure, was the common practice.

During the colonial era in South Africa, there were attempts, however, to individualize land rights. Through the Commonage Act of 1879 and the Glen Grey Act of 1894, the Cape Colony government tried to provide individual titles in some of the native reserves.

The former law permitted the Governor of the Cape to divide the land in Ciskei into individual quitrent titles with some areas reserved for communal grazing. The latter was an attempt to modernize the conditions of African rural people, particularly migrant workers who were entitled to one plot of arable land. Both attempts at providing individual tenure to black people failed, "as land tenure was not strong and the distinction between arable and commonage land became blurred, and inherited titles were often blurred" (Cousins, 2007:297). Natal, during the colonial period, presented a different picture. The British accorded the chiefs a central role in local administration, with the result that customary law and indigenous land tenure was pursued (Delius *et al.*, 1997. In the Transvaal, the weak Boer state met with resistance from the Africans. Consequently, the establishment of native reserves was not implemented until 1881. To secure their land rights, many African purchased land through missionaries from white settlers. After 1881, they could buy land as it was registered in the name of the Superintendent of Natives. According to Small and Winkler (1992), although many Africans purchased land and would outwardly seem like individual tenure, internally land tenure continued to be communal. In general, therefore, land tenure in South Africa during the colonial era was communal, in which chiefs had control over land allocation and use (Gluckman, 1961; Sansom, 1974). However, writers such as Chanock (1991) question this blanket characterization of land tenure during the colonial period. Instead, questions of conflicts of interest (interest groups) over the land and who would benefit from which system (power relations) should be asked in order to understand continuities and changes in land tenure through the colonial transition (Beinart, 1982; Chanock, 1991; Cousins, 2007). Despite these divergent views on the character of land tenure during the colonial rule, it is an established fact that the dominant feudal model with its layered authority towards land suited the government of the day as it served as an instrument for indirect rule (Sansom, 1974; Chanock, 1991).

Decisions over land in South Africa continued into the apartheid era. Starting with its segregationist policy, the Union of South Africa passed the 1913 Land Act, which designated 7 percent of the land area of the country to blacks, known as the native reserves. Under the 1936 Land and Trust Act, African land was placed under the control

of the South African Native trust, which greatly circumscribed landholders' rights and subsequently reduced tenure security. The Native Administration Act of 1927 and the Bantu Authorities Act of 1957 strengthened the role of chiefs, who were later called tribal authorities, in land administration. Land for blacks was further regulated by two types of tenure, namely the quitrent for surveyed land; and the 'Permission to Occupy' (PTO) certificates for unsurveyed land. With the establishment of the Bantustans (homelands) in 1951, large areas of land occupied by blacks were converted into self-governing territories with state-appointed chiefs and Tribal Authorities.

In contemporary South Africa, the question of land rights, particularly for the previously disadvantaged blacks, is still as pertinent as ever before. For the 14 million people living in former Bantustans (Statistics S.A., 2000) land has both utilitarian and cultural significance (Walker, 2003). The role of land-based natural resources in rural livelihoods generation in South Africa has been documented (Cunningham, 1997; Shackleton *et al*., 1999, 2001; Shackleton and Shackleton, 2000; Hargreaves and Meer 1997; May 2000; Cousins, 2001; Francis, 2002; Kepe, 2005). A large number of rural households are dependent on a range of natural resources for home consumption or for commercial purposes. Hence, the democratic South African government committed itself to redressing the imbalances of the past through its land reform. However, as many writers note, land reform in South Africa is riddled with difficulties. These include:
 (a) the low profile accorded rural development in the ANC-led government caused by its urban bias (Walker, 2003);
(b) the constitutional contradictions between the democratic equality principles and the customary law-powers of traditional authorities in rural areas (Claassens, 2000; Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002; Walker, 2003, 2005; Ntsebeza, 2000, 2005); and
(c) the disjuncture between land policy and practice, particularly around women's land rights (Walker, 2003, 2005).
Although land reform records some gains since 1994, it continues to be marked by a curtailment of rural development in general and women's empowerment with regard to access land in particular. Land tenure within the post-apartheid government is significant for this study because of its implications for resource tenure for rural people, especially

women who rely on natural resources growing on communal land for their livelihoods. Women's rights to land in the new democratic South Africa are discussed below.

The Gendered Nature of Land Reform

Although women's land and property rights occupied a relatively important place on the democratic South African government's political and economic agendas, there was little evidence of this in practical terms on the ground (Rangan, and Gilmartin, 2002; Walker, 2003, 2005). From the outset, human rights and gender equality were enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa (Constitution, 1996). These commitments resonated with the ANC-led government's Reconstrucion and Development Programme (RDP), which identified agrarian reform as central in redressing gender equality in land rights (ANC, 1994; DLA, 1997; Meer, 1997). With the government's macro-economic shift from RDP to Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) efforts already made in land reform were undermined (Bond, 2000; Cousins, 2000; Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002; Hall, 2005). Rural women in particular bore the brunt of these policy decisions. While the RDP was socialist in its developmental approach, GEAR's market-led approach placed greater emphasis on market mechanisms in land redistribution (willing seller-willing buyer principle) and the state's hands-off approach in the market meant that land reform could not address and transform entrenched forms of exclusion and marginalization (Hall, 2005; Madlingozi, 2007). Established in late in 1996, the Gender Unit of the Department of Land Affairs produced the Land Reform Policy document, which outlined the Department of Land Affair's (DLA) gender equity regarding land rights with explicit focus on women's rights to access, own, control and use land (DLA, 1997). Subsequent policy documents, such as the white Paper on South African Land Policy of 1997 and later the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) policy of 2000 did very little to translate government's lofty principles of gender equity within the land reform programme into reality for the majority of rural women (Walker, 2003, 2005; Hall, 2005). LRAD, in particular, modeled on the principles of GEAR, further marginalized the rural poor. Through LRAD with its revised target of redistributing thirty percent of agricultural land by 2015, the government aimed at establishing and supporting a class of black commercial farmers. As Walker (2005:302) contends, "race

and historical advantage, rather than poverty or need (or gender) now became the key criteria for beneficiary selection". Some critics of LRAD point out that it ignored the priorities of rural women who access land through their relationships with men and the financial and practical obstacles to rural women accessing the programme (Claassens, 2005; Walker, 2005; Hall, 2005).

As mentioned earlier, tenure security remains the biggest challenge of the country's land reform programmes with regard to rural women (Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002; Claassens, 2005) . The battle for women's rights in the new dispensation started in the early 1990s by the Woman's National Coalition made up of women activists across party lines), in the constitution-making phase of democracy and was won when the equality clause was included in the Constitution of South Africa of 1996 (Walker, 2005). Since 1994 the relationship between the ANC and traditional leaders has been characterized as a politics of accommodation and evasion (Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002), what Walker (2003:120) describes as "a complicated political dance … about the place of culture and traditional authorities in rural local government". The enactment of the Communal Lands Rights Act (CLRA) of 2004 highlighted and heightened the tensions between the constitutional principles of gender equality on the one hand, and customary law and the role of traditional authorities in communal rural areas of South Africa on the other (Walker, 2005; Ntsebeza, 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006; Cousins, 2007). The contention is that CLRA strengthens the power of traditional leaders in the administration and allocation of land, which by customary prescriptions is gendered, which means women outside marriage relationships are denied access to land (Claasens, 2005; Walker, 2005; Cousins, 2007). As Walker (2005:298) puts it, "…the legislation would entrench the powers of undemocratic, patriarchal traditional leaders over communal land, fail to secure the tenure rights of women living on the land, and ultimately undermine the significant role that common property resources play in the livelihood strategies of the rural poor". The *Bhe* case in 2004 (Bhe v Magistrate Khayelitsha) illustrates vividly the tension between gender equality and customary law in which women's inheritance rights were pitted against customary practices and law (Constitutional Court, case CCT49/03). According to customary law of succession, the central principle is that of male

primogeniture (Grant, 2006). This means that as a rule only the first-born son qualifies to inherit the deceased's estate. This law was channelled based on its gender bias, which cause hardships for widows and their daughters in terms of land rights and access. The Constitutional Court ruled in favour of Ms Bhe and her minor daughters, underscoring the fact that "the constitutional principle of gender equality takes precedence over cultural rights and customary practices and law" (Walker, 2005:298). In passing judgement, Chief Justice Langa explained that the original social structures that could have justified the existence of male primogeniture had changed over time and therefore the current context rendered the law unconstitutional (Grant, 2006).

3.4 RESOURCE TENURE ISSUES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Given the fact that most natural resources used in the construction of the varied livelihoods in rural areas grow on communal lands, it becomes pertinent and important to explore the various tenure systems that mediate rural people's access to natural resources (Kepe *et al.*,, 2001; Kepe, 2003, 2005). According to Bruce (1993), resource tenure encompasses bundles of rights and responsibilities that govern access to and control over resources which provide benefits to the holders of those rights. Resource tenure issues give rise to questions of power dynamics; tenure institutional context (both formal and informal); and the need to locate them within the broader local rural livelihoods perspective (Kepe *et al.*, 2001; Kepe, 2008). According to Kepe (2008), these three key areas of emphasis are crucial in enhancing our understanding of tenure issues anywhere in southern Africa. With regard to South Africa, access and control of natural resources should be understood as one of the ways in which the local people derive their livelihoods and not the sole source of income for the rural people of South Africa (see rural livelihoods above). In addition, social differentiation determines who gets access to natural resources and who does not. In South Africa, class and gender are the most common aspects of social differentiation in relation to natural resource access and use (Kepe, 1997, 2005; Shackleton, 2005; Shackleton and Shackleton, 2006). Wealthier people utilize more commercialized natural resources than poorer people since they have better access to transport and other means to extract those natural resources. Moreover, wealthy people often disregard rules and regulations relating to natural resource use by

bribing relevant people, thereby excluding the poor from benefiting from the natural resources (Kepe, 2005).

Speaking from the African perspective, Berry (1989), Leach *et al*. (1999), Peters (2000) and Ribot and Peluso (2003) argue that rural people derive their livelihoods by having effective command over resources and being able to transform those rights into livelihood assets and central to these processes are institutions and practices- the former formal and the latter informal. Formal institutional arrangements governing resource tenures locally in the form of land allocation and administration via traditional leaders in South Africa and the gendered nature of such have already been discussed. Alongside the devolution of natural resource control and management from the state to local communities, has been the formation of 'community-based' systems of common property natural resource management systems (NRM) with emphasis on greater participation of local users in the management of these resources (DLA, 1998). To this end, the new democratic government has established institutional arrangements, such as the communal property associations (CPAs), trusts and community wildlife management (CWM), through which local people can benefit from the environmental resource in their locality (DLA, 1998; Ainslie, 1999; McCusker and Oberhauser, 2006). The Makuleke Communal Property Association in the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area is one example of how local people were able to derive tangible socio-economic and biodiversity benefits from their environment (Erasmus, 2005). The Community Wildlife Management project in the Mkambatini area on the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape (already alluded to) exemplifies the parks-people interaction in managing natural resources. While recognizing the importance of the South African government's decentralization of control and management of natural resources from the state to rural people through community-based systems, representations of 'community' have been questioned, as they mostly obscure social difference (Cousins, 1999, 2005; Kepe, 1999; Claassens, 2000, 2005). Hence, the rural community needs to be deconstructed in order to reveal local people's differential access and use of natural resources and therefore, the actual motivation they might have to engage in the management of common property resources (Ainslie, 1999; Kepe *et al*., 2001; Claassens 2000, 2005; Cousins, 2005). Because of customs and

traditions embedded in patriarchal systems in rural societies in South Africa, women have been marginalized in terms of land rights and subsequent access to natural resources (already discussed).

The informal institutions, which are often not visible, play a crucial role in mediating resource access and utilization for rural people (Kepe, 2008). These include legal and illegal means of access. The legal aspect of informal institutions, according to Kepe (2008), includes the *de jure* and *de facto* designations of land or property. For example, people who are not legally recognised as members of a common property may in practice gain legal access to and enjoy the benefits of the environmental resource. In South Africa, such cases include "allocated fields (*amasimu*), stock-posts (*amathanga*), and unallocated private gardens where medicinal plants and other crops are planted" (Kepe, 2008:965). HIV/AIDS in South Africa has upset land rights of infected and affected rural people and households (Drimie, 2003), with the latter renting out the land, entering into a sharecropping arrangement or selling their land (Adams *et al*., 2002; Drimie, 2003). At the same time, the intersection of HIV/AIDS, gender and age negatively impacts the ability of widows, orphans and youth to access and use land, transact or inherit. Power and social dynamics, entrenched in cultural norms ensure the exclusion of these vulnerable groups from inheriting land and deriving benefits from it (Drimie, 2003). This picture reflects what happens in much of Africa, where women are particularly at risk of land dispossession, because their rights to inheritance are compromised when their partners die (Toulmin, 2008).

There are other informal institutional practices- regarded as illegal by some, except by those who practice it- that mediate access to natural resources. Kepe *et al*.'s (2001) study of the informal institution of *ukujola* (legitimized stealing) in the Mkambati area is a case in point. In terms of the notion of *ukujola,* hunting in the Mkambati Nature Reserve by the local people is not a crime, as they believe they are laying a claim on the land and its resource that rightfully and historically belong to the community. Besides legitimized stealing, resource harvesting by village outsiders is a common occurrence in South Africa, often giving rise to open access (free-for-all) natural resource regime (Kirkland *et*

al., 2007). Through these practices, people in neighbouring rural areas treat the areas from which they illegally harvest as *de facto* common property.

Conflicts are inherent in resource tenure, because of power relations, social dynamics and the institutional matrix at national and local levels (Kepe *et al.*, 2001; Kirkland *et al.*, 2007; Kepe, 2008; Toulmin, 2008). Against the backdrop of the new government's land reform policy and its concomitant implementation instruments, a politics of land in the country emerged. The land and the natural resources growing on it have become a site of contestation between competing notions of value and interests (O'Neill, 1997; Kepe; Cousins, 1999; Kepe, 1999; Kepe *et al.*, 2001; Kirkland *et al.*, 2007; Kepe, 2008). The dimensions and emphasis of these conflicts vary across the country. These conflicts include:

- gendered dimensions of institutional access to land and natural resources (Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002; Claassens, 2005; Walker, 2005);
- uncertainty over communal boundaries, giving rise to tensions between villagers (Kepe *et al.*, 2001; Twine *et al.*, 2003; Kirkland *et al.*, 2007);
- conflict between villagers and tribal authorities over the latter's unfair and corrupt practices in land allocation and administration (Holmes-Watts and Watts, 2008; Toulmin, 2008);
- struggle over control of resources between local communities and conservation officials in community-based natural resource management systems (Kepe *et al.*, 2001; Kepe, 2008); and
- the mismatch between policy and practice in terms of community participation in resource management, resulting in conservationist paying lip service to policy directives (Holmes-Watts and Watts, 2008).

According to Kepe *et al.* (2008:966), at the heart of these conflicts "are struggles over meanings and contestations over legitimacy, authority, and obligations". Underlying these conflicts is the fact that they undermine the rural people's ability to access the natural resources and to secure their livelihoods. The resolution of the conflicts and tensions would benefit the rural communities on the one hand, by increasing the value

derived from particular natural resources, and sustainable use of same resources on the other hand.

3.5 GENDER AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Women are central to rural development in South Africa (Ndlela and Holcomb, 1998; May and Rogerson, 2000) for two reasons: (a) they do most of the work in their households; and (b) because they do most work, they are the people most affected by lack of basic services and development in the rural areas of South Africa. Speaking of the African context in general, Mbilinyi (2002) contends that it is women, particularly rural women, who mostly have to endure the Structural Adjustment Programme measures thus increasing the levels of poverty among rural African women. They have "longer work days, less access to basic resources like land and labour, reduced opportunities in formal wage employment and education, and increased financial responsibility for families and communities" (Mbilinyi, 2002:415). Female-headed households in South Africa, as elsewhere in Africa, face particularly difficult challenges with the poverty rate among them increasing (Woolard and Barberton, 1998; Aliber, 2003).

Women head over half of the rural households (Andrews and Jacobs, 2009). The phenomenon of female headship is significant in terms of rural development and rural policy interventions for the simple fact that female-headed households have a high probability of being trapped in chronic poverty (Aliber, 2003). Contending that feminization of poverty is a striking feature of rural areas in South Africa, Woolard and Barberton (1998) give four factors for the high incidence of poverty for female-headed rural households in South Africa. In their view, "female-headed households are more likely to be in rural areas where poverty is concentrated; they tend to have fewer adults of working age; and female unemployment rates are higher" (1998:28). Andrews and Jacobs (2009) highlight three aspects of the gendered nature of rural poverty in South Africa. They argue that South Africa's subsistence producers are primarily women; the feminization of casual and seasonal labour in rural areas; and the skewed gendered structure of the rural population, with more women than men in rural areas as a result of the apartheid's migrant labour system. Although speaking of women-headed households from the perspective of Latin American countries and the Philippines, Chant (1997)

warns that undue emphasis on the material basis of the poverty of female-headed households overlooks other structural factors that impinge on the formation and survival of women-headed households, such as ideological, psychological and legal-institutional factors. These factors may mean more in terms of personal perception and experience of hardship than economic factors.

Rural development and the status of rural women in post-apartheid South Africa need to be situated within the rural political dynamics. After 1996, in its attempt to extend democracy to rural areas, the ANC-led government introduced democratically elected councilors in rural areas that were already under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders. This dual political management of rural areas and the ambivalent attitude of the government about the roles, functions and powers of traditional authorities caused much confusion and chaos in rural areas. This resulted in poor and non-existent service delivery in rural areas (Marais, 2001; Ntsebeza, 2005). In addition, in spite of the democratization of rural governance after 1996, the status of women did not improve under Traditional Authority, particularly in the issue of land allocation (as already discussed). This is because the rule of local chiefs operates within the ambit of customary law, which excludes women from decision-making and property ownership (Marais, 2001). As Walker (1995) argues, the contradiction between government's commitment to gender equality and its engagement with the 'politics of traditionalism' (as embodied in rural patriarchy, Traditional Authority, African customs and culture) presents one of the greatest constraints for rural women's empowerment.

3.6 RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Amongst the multiple livelihood strategies of rural people and, particularly women, is craft production. The contribution of craft making to rural livelihoods for women and women heads of households has been documented in several studies over the last decade (Cawe and Ntloko, 1997; Rogerson, 2000; Rogerson and Sithole, 2001; Kepe, 2003; Shackleton, 2005, 2006). Much research has been done on the significance of commercialized craft production for household income generation and livelihood security, revealing that the majority of crafters are female and women heads of households (Elk, 2004; Shackleton, 2005; Pereira; 2006). Elk (2004) cites two reasons for

the predominance of women in this sector. Firstly, it has low entry levels in terms of skills-with rural women possessing a rich cultural heritage of crafting skills-and capital requirements. Secondly, as a home-based economic activity, it allows women to combine it with other productive and reproductive activities such as agricultural production, childcare, household duties respectively. In the post-apartheid period, the commercialization of rural handicraft has been reinforced by the government's interest in promoting this sector both as a poverty alleviation strategy and as part of the small, medium and micro enterprise (SMME) economy. Furthermore, rural handicrafts in South Africa are viewed as an integral part of the tourism industry and as such have been incorporated into the development and planning of the tourism industry (Mafisa, 1998; Rogerson, 2000; Rogerson and Sithole, 2001). However, critics caution against overambitious assessment of the potential of rural enterprises to promote rural development. As Aliber asserts, "…while there has been an increase in the informal sector employment, it is well known that these jobs are much less remunerative on average" (2003:3). Similar findings have been noted by studies on the informal sector and its contribution to economic growth in South Africa (Preston-Whyte and Nene, 1991; Manona, 2001; Torres *et al.*, 2000).

Historical and Institutional Context of Craft in South Africa
Rural handicraft production in South Africa has been around for centuries. Using their inherent crafting skills, rural women have been making craft from natural resources for traditional purposes, weaving sleeping mats, baskets and other commodities (ECIAfrica, 2004; Kepe, 2003). It has been part of rural community life and identity. In the 19th century, the teaching of craft making was integrated into the mission-based education system (Da Silva, 1985). However, the apartheid regime was characterized by policy neglect and support for rural handicraft, what Rogerson and Sithole (2001) describe as a 'lukewarm interest' in the rural handicraft sector. The state saw these industries as a threat to the established white-owned factory enterprises. Consequently, very little was done by the state to encourage and promote African craft in rural areas. As Rogerson and Sithole (2001:150) assert, "until the 1980s the handicraft sector in South Africa was relatively under-researched and little was known of its essential characteristics, workings

and developmental potential".

Alongside the institutional support for the promotion of craft as a livelihood strategy in rural areas in the 1980s, there was also academic interest in the South African rural handicraft economy (Rogerson, 1986). The challenge of providing an academic understanding of rural handicrafts in South Africa was taken up by Preston-Whyte (1983, 1984, 1991) and has continued since (Cunningham, 1987; McIntosh and Friedman, 1989; Shackleton, 2000, 2006; Rogerson, 1991, 2000; Rogerson and Sithole, 2001; Kepe, 2003). While research during the 1980s emphasized markets and marketing as constraints for rural craft producers (Rogerson, 2000), other critical issues around craft production and its significance emerged as the foci of research into the 21st century. For example, Cunningham (1987) and Shackleton (1990 and 1996) focus on environmental management issues around craftwork and the sustainable utilization of raw material; Kepe (2003) explores the use and value of craft material in the lives of rural people; and Marcus (2000) examines crafting as a source of livelihood in the context of HIV/AIDS.

The Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) defines crafts as "the production of a broad range of utilitarian and decorative items manufactured on a small scale with hand processes being part of the value added content. The production of goods utilizes an array of synthetic and natural materials" (ECIAfrica, 2004:1). The Cultural Industries Growth Strategy has identified five broad categories of South African craft:

- Traditional art (Specific products, which have a meaning for a specific cultural group, are produced for the local market);
- Designer goods (developed and adapted from traditional art to satisfy the tastes and needs of the high income market;
- Craft art (overlaps with traditional art as it is produced by highly skilled crafters by hand);
- Functional wares (mass-produced products made in small batches for the home-ware market); and
- Souvenirs (simplified craft and trinkets)

Crafters themselves range from the individual traditional crafters and high value craft artists on the one end of the spectrum to hand manufacturing business employing 70-400 people (Elk, 2004). Many crafters in urban and rural areas are producing craft at the survivalist level, which means they choose to make craft in the absence of other alternatives to generate a livelihood. Furthermore, recent research on crafting as a rural livelihood strategy reveals that income derived from craft is a supplement to welfare grants for many rural households (Mofokeng, 2008). The significance and value of craft for rural people is made more conspicuous by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa. In the context of HIV/AIDS, making craft provides women and grandmothers who are left to take care of their orphaned grandchildren with a source of income (Marcus, 2000; Shackleton, 2006). Against the backdrop of economic hardships, unemployment and a move from the traditional focus on agriculture to non-agricultural activities and sel-employment, craft making has become a crucial livelihood option for rural people.

Research conducted by ECIAfrica (2004) in the craft sector in KwaZulu-Natal identified four channels through which the craft products pass from production to end consumer. These channels are characterized by the relationships between the different players in the value chain. These channels are described in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3: Main channels in the value chain in craft production

Channel	Characteristics
Channel 1-Traditional crafter	This channel consists of two groups, namely, traders that operate in the open market as retailers and buy from rural and urban crafters and sell to local and international tourists; and crafters who buy their own inputs design, make and sell their products to tourists at roadsides
Channel 2-Managed commercial	This channel involves designers and buyers who subcontract crafters to produce according to prescribed designs and inputs given to fulfill given product orders
Channel 3-Managed project	Specific public funded projects fall into this channel. The channel is characterized by an interactive process between the implementing organization, designers and crafters, with an exchange of skills and learning; thus ,and a move from selling products to the tourist market towards utility items, thus removing seasonality and unpredictability in the business cycle

Channel 4- **Manufacturing business**	Craft operations in this channel operate at a production level with staff employed on a permanent basis. Products are produced in large volumes and practice is more sophisticated than the traditional crafter

Source: ECIAfrica, 2004

Before 1998, government's intervention and interest in the craft sector had been ad hoc. However, with the launch of the Cultural Industries Growth Strategy (CIGS), the craft industry has been identified by government as a priority growth sector, generating over R3, 5 billion in revenue and employing 1, 2 million people (Elk, 2004). CIGS, driven by the then Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), played a pivotal role in positioning the craft industry as a sector with potential for economic growth in South Africa. As a result of the growing significance of the craft sector, millions of poverty alleviation funds have been allocated to it. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has also come on board in strengthening the craft sector's capacity to meet the demands of expanding markets through its Craft Sector Marketing Strategy. In addition, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) has formed partnerships with other significant players to raise the profile of the craft industry. For example, *CreateSA*, a project of the Department of Labour's National Skills Fund, has focused on the promotion and development of skills in the creative industries. The establishment of institutions such as the CSIRs Product Development Unit, the Cape Craft and Design Institute (CCDI) and piloting learnerships at NQF2-6 levels across the country has seen an improvement in product quality (Elk, 2004; ECIAfrica, 2004). Nationally, the craft producers are represented by the Craft Council of South Africa (CCSA), a membership-based organisation with 2 000 members. However, due to lack of funding, among other constraints, CCSA has not been able to establish itself as the authoritative voice of the craft producers (Elk, 2004).

The CIGS reports, audits carried out in the Western and Nortern Cape in 2000 and 2001 and in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape in 2003 and 2004 respectively and the ECIAfrica (2004) research conducted in KwaZulu-Natal all point to the reality of constraints and challenges the craft industry faces. One of the major constraint of the craft sector over the years, but which is now receiving attention has been the

overemphasis of the supply side of the industry and overlooking the demand side in terms of producing the right products for the right markets in the right quantities and at the right time. In other words, the product-market match has been the greatest challenge for the craft sector. Furthermore, like other Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), craft producers experience difficulties in accessing finance despite the support of government institutions such as Khula Enterprise Finance Ltd and Ntsika Enterprise Promotion Agency . The latter provides advisory services to existing and new SMMEs through its Local Business Service Centres, of which there were over eighty throughout the country in 2000 (Taylor Committee, 2008).

Rural craft producers, in particular, face several challenges, which limit their growth and their moving from survivalist to sustainable mode. These include, amongst others, access to markets and finance; lack of business skills and technology; input supply and institutional organization (ECIAfrica, 2004). The unsustainability of the majority of government funded craft enterprises stems from the unrealistic timeframes imposed on them to succeed, coupled with inadequate provision of the necessary skills and mentoring. In KwaZulu-Natal, according to the ECIAfrica (2004) research, craft enterprises involving grass and reeds as raw materials; incorporate community based natural resource management. A case in point is the Institute of Natural Resources at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which works with groups and communities to promote the cultivation and preservation of the natural resources used by rural crafters. This approach ensures that the sustainability of both the craft enterprises and the basis of their livelihoods.

Notwithstanding the challenges mentioned above, the sector is growing. This is largely due to a change in approach from supply-driven to demand-driven (addressing the market issues) and the growing realization of the value of partnerships and the role played by different people at different points in the value chain. However, due to the limited national statistics on craft production, the economic contribution of the craft industry is underestimated (Cultural Strategy Group, 1998; ECIAfrica, 2004; Elk; 2004; Shackleton, 2006). In KwaZulu-Natal alone, the craft sector generated an estimated R994 million in a

year from local and export sales and the grass sector within the craft sector generated R9, 43 million in 2003 (ECIAfrica, 2004). Table 3.4 summarises the KwaZulu-Natal craft sector in terms of markets, sales and the number of crafters involved in the sector:

Table 3.4: Markets, sales and crafters involved in the KwaZulu-Natal craft sector

Markets	Domestic	Tourist craft	Tourist boutique	International
Sales	R72m	R680m	R168m	R74m
Percentage	7%	68%	17%	8%
Crafters	21 600	60 900	7 160	40

Source: ECIAfrica, 2004

3.7 RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Rural development and natural resources are intertwined, as many attempts to diversify and enhance livelihoods rely on natural resources (Scoones, 1998; Aliber, 2002). As Scoones' Sustainable Livelihoods model proposes, access to resources is one of the key criteria for achieving sustainable livelihoods. In other words, the sustainability of rural people's livelihoods is dependent on continued access to the environmental resources they use to make a living. To that end, the South African Constitution (1996), in its Bill of Rights, includes an environmental rights clause, which calls for equitable access to natural resources and a participatory decision-making process around environmental issues, empowering communities to manage their natural environment (ANC, 1994). This raises the significant linkage between rural governance and natural resource access and management. However, for some time, after the attainment of democracy in 1994, the ANC-led government's rural policies were not clear regarding in particular the role and functions of traditional leaders in land administration and allocation (as already discussed above), which significantly impacts on natural resource management. The power of traditional leaders was consolidated through two laws, namely, the 2003 Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Bill and the 2004 Communal Land Rights Act (Ntsebeza, 2005). In terms of the latter piece of legislation, Traditional Authority in land administration and allocation was reinforced. By extension, natural resources that grow

on communal land fell under the jurisdiction of local chiefs and their headmen and are largely characterized by open access tenure.

In addition, a very significant aspect of environmental governance in the new democratic dispensation is the promotion of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). CBNRM is an "increasingly important concept in African rural development, which ensures sustainable use and management of natural resources through involvement of local people who live in, know and depend on these natural resources" (Turner, 2001:371). As the World Bank stresses, sustainable rural development is inextricably linked with sustainable natural resource management. In southern Africa, CBNRM were launched in the 1980s, the aim of which was to conserve natural resources outside protected areas and increase resource benefits for the local people (Arntzen *et al*., 2007). Holmes-Watts and Watts (2008) contend that participation of local communities in the management of natural resources is significant from both the ethical and sustainability perspectives. The ethical viewpoint entails social justice, which means that individuals and groups share in the benefits derived from the natural resources in their environment. Social justice is distributive justice, founded on the principle of an equitable distribution of power, resources and access to resources (UN, 2006). From the sustainability perspective, the involvement of local people in managing their resources ensures that, while the local people derive benefits, there is low and controlled exploitation of natural resources (Holmes-Watts and Watts, 2008).

Historically, black people in South Africa were excluded from national parks and the benefits that accrue from them (Holmes-Watts and Watts, 2008; Arntzen *et al*., 2007). Their marginalization took two forms, namely, through expulsion from their ancestral land to make way for conservation; and by being denied rights of access into protected areas and the natural resources (Kepe *et al*., 2001; Fabricius, 2004; Watts, 2006; Holmes-Watts and Watts, 2008). In line with its democratic principles, South Africa has devised legal frameworks for defining and applying social justice in biodiversity. Put differently, CBNRM systems were established within the broader national frameworks for participatory processes for the control and management of natural resources (Holmes-

Watts and Watts, 2008). Section 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa grants everyone the right to participate in and enjoy the benefits of a healthy and well-protected environment through legislation (Government of South Africa, 1996). The legislation to enact these environmental directives and rights is the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) of 1998. This law covers many aspects of the environment and provides mechanisms for people to participate in decision-making activities that safeguard a healthy environment (Government of South Africa, 1998). With reference of CBNRM, section 2 of NEMA outlines the principles of environmental management through a legal framework for community participation in conservation and natural resource management (Holmes-Watts and Watts, 2008).

The use of the concept of CBNRM in my study refers to everyday community management of their natural resource base to enhance local people's livelihoods, as opposed to CBNRM programmes of intervention external to local communities - the same distinction that Jones (2004) makes. However, these two systems do not contradict, but complement each other.

3.8 REGULATORY RURAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Macro-Economic Policies

When the new democratic government came into power, its overriding policy framework was to redress the imbalances of the past (May 2000; Marais, 2001; Terreblanche, 2002; Venter, 2006; Andrews and Jacobs, 2009). It sought to achieve this objective first through its macro-economic policies, namely, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and later, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. While the intention here is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of these two policies, it is important to shed light on how rural development is linked to political and economic processes unfolding in South Africa after 1994. In the 1994 elections, the RDPs Policy Framework, followed immediately by the RDP White Paper (ANC, 1994), and outlined the new government's aim to address poverty and inequality, advance economic development by providing access to land, basic services, jobs (through the national public works programme), education and healthcare. The RDPs thrust was socialist (social welfare) and redistributive with the focus on tackling the country's social problems. However, the closure in 1996 of the RDP office, which was charged with the responsibility of coordinating all RDP-related activities, resulted in much controversy around RDP as an economic policy, and its concomitant slow delivery did not inspire popular confidence in it. In the same year, the government introduced GEAR. GEAR is a neo-liberal macro-economic policy for the country's economic growth. It is premised on the notion that accelerated economic growth is essential for job creation, poverty alleviation and income redistribution. To this end, it focuses on private investment and the market to stimulate economic growth and to achieve its RDP-aligned objectives.

Critics view GEAR as an inappropriate mechanism to implement the government's initial objective of solving unemployment and poverty (Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2006; Madlingozi, 2007). The most outspoken critic of GEAR, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), argue that GEAR's focus on tighter fiscal policies conflicts with the goals of RDP of meeting people's needs, job creation, poverty reduction and redistribution of wealth. Indeed, while GEAR has achieved success on the fiscal front, by reducing the country's budget deficit, it has achieved "jobless growth" (Bhorat and

Oosthuizen, 2006). Put differently, the government's policy shift from the 'people-centred' approach of the RDP to the 'market-driven' growth strategy of GEAR has not benefited the majority of the poor people of South Africa (Terreblanche, 2002; Schoeman, 2006; Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2006; Madlingozi, 2007). Instead, it has further marginalized them, particularly the poor in rural areas (Aliber, 2003) and undermined women's land rights (Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002; Walker, 2005). Notwithstanding GEAR's failure to create employment for the country's poor, some gains achieved by the government's socio-economic policies are worth noting. As Aliber attests, " there has been improved access to safe water for 4 million people, improved sanitation services for over three million people, 600 new clinics, over million houses and 1,5 million more households connected to the electrical grid" (2003:476). To counteract the failure of GEAR to address the problem of unemployment, poverty and inequalities, the government has adopted a new economic policy, namely, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA), which was formally launched in February 2006. Its commitment is to further reduce unemployment and poverty by 2014.

Micro-level Economic Framework

Within the ambit of key macro-economic policies are various policy instruments that ensure economic and social development of rural poor communities. These include the land reform programme; rural housing; the Poverty Alleviation Fund (established to balance the impact of GEAR) and the Community-Based Public Works Programme, which focuses on poverty alleviation, job creation and infrastructure provision (Aliber, 2002). As developmental local level government, municipalities are mandated with the implementation of the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP), adopted in 2000 and now changed into the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). Within the framework of IRDP, are three key components worth noting that are instruments of service delivery in rural areas, namely:

1. The Spatial Development Initiatives (SDI), which focuses on creating anchors for economic development in agriculture, tourism and industry as a way of reviving the rural economy);

2. The Local Economic Development (LED) Plans , the aim of which is to promote grassroots economic development); and

3. The Social Security Programme (SSP), which provides pensions, child support and disability grants).

In addition, the government has established the Consolidated Municipal Infrastructure Programme (CMIP), which is the largest programme for municipalities to date (Taylor Committee, 2008). Its aim is twofold, namely, to enable municipalities to provide poor communities with basic services; and to contribute to other government intervention policy objectives, such as SMME development, empowerment of affirmative business enterprises, job creation for the most vulnerable sector of society (women, youth and the disabled). The essence of CMIP, therefore, is to improve the quality of life and build sustainable communities (Taylor Committee, 2008).

The above instruments of delivery and other rural development programmes are integrated within the country's municipalities' Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). The latter also ensure their implementation in communities. The depth of policy commitment to the participation of the rural poor in these programmes is crucial in mediating their access to them and their ability to construct and enhance their livelihoods and agency within their households. As Turner points out, "…there is too much policy on paper and too little practice to achieve integration of rural development initiatives on the ground" (2001:373).

3.9 BACKGROUND TO THE IKHOWE CRAFT GROUP

A local priest in the Diocese of Eshowe in the late 1970s developed the concepts of self-help and group action that characterize the Ikhowe Craft Group and other income-generating activities in rural Eshowe (pers. com., 2007). These self-help activities, which included craft, community gardens and sewing, later developed into co-operatives, the first of which was registered in 1984. They had a strong credit and saving component, which was co-ordinated by the Zululand Central Credit Union. However, in the early 1990s, the co-operatives literally broke down as a result of people dispersing and fleeing from political violence. Although the Central Credit Union remained intact, despite

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political upheavals, it faced major challenges of corruption among members of the Board of Directors and lack of management skills. It was at this point that the Central Credit Union met Duncan Hay of the Centre of Environment, Agriculture and Development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, who revived the craft activities and established the Ikhowe Craft group in 2000. At the start of the field research, the group comprised thirty women from the surrounding villages. Towards the conclusion of the research, one group member had died.

In 2006, the Ikhowe Craft Group was registered as a co-operative and thus became a fully-fledged enterprise with its own constitution and a bank account. Group members also opened their individual savings accounts. As already mentioned, the Ikhowe Craft Group runs under the auspices of the Centre for Environment, Agriculture and Development (CEAD), at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Pietermaritzburg campus. Its project facilitator is a researcher and senior lecturer at UKZN. UKZN facilitates the marketing of the Ikhowe Craft Group's business and its craft products; the sourcing of raw material and its financial management and administration (Hay, 2006). Using two types of indigenous sedges known as *ikhwane* and *induma*, production is home-based, with the women crafters meeting at the Agricultural Credit Union Centre for the distribution of products, allocation of raw material and skills training. They produce conference bags, beach bags, file covers and other woven items suitable for the corporate and conference markets.

At the conclusion of the field research, the Ikhowe Craft Group had set up its own technology for marketing and distribution purposes, which include a telephone, a fax and a computer with internet access. Since then, the Ikhowe Craft Group merged with other four producer groups to form a consortium of craft producers, known as the Inina Craft Agency, which comprises 150 women crafters. The crafters own and manage the Agency themselves, which was registered as a co-operative in 2007. The five producer groups manufacture woven fibre products, beaded products and paper products. The National Landcare Programme, Nedbank, Carl and Emily Fuchs Foundation funded the seed money for the establishment of the Inina Craft Agency. Through the assistance of

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Tradepoint Durban (a public-private partnership agency funded by the KwaZulu-Natal government, eThekwini Municipality and Trade and Investment KwaZulu-Natal), the Inina Craft Agency has embarked on exporting their products as far afield as Canada and Germany (pers.com., 2007). Forming partnership to support rural craft producers is one of the useful ways of linking rural and informal crafters with the markets (Hay, 2006). It is for this reason that a partnership has been forged between the UKZN, EnviroDev (an environmental and developmental consultancy) and Gijima KZN, which falls within the provincial department of Economic Development to empower the producers through infrastructure establishment, leadership development, product design and packaging, sales and marketing, raw material sourcing and business administration and management. Gijima KZN, in partnership with the European Union, has funded the Inina Craft Agency to ensure the sustainability of the project. This grant was supplemented by additional funding from the Karl and Emily Fuchs Foundation and the Ford Foundation. The Ikhowe Craft Group has benefitted from all the mentioned institutions, both financially and institutionally.

The Study Area
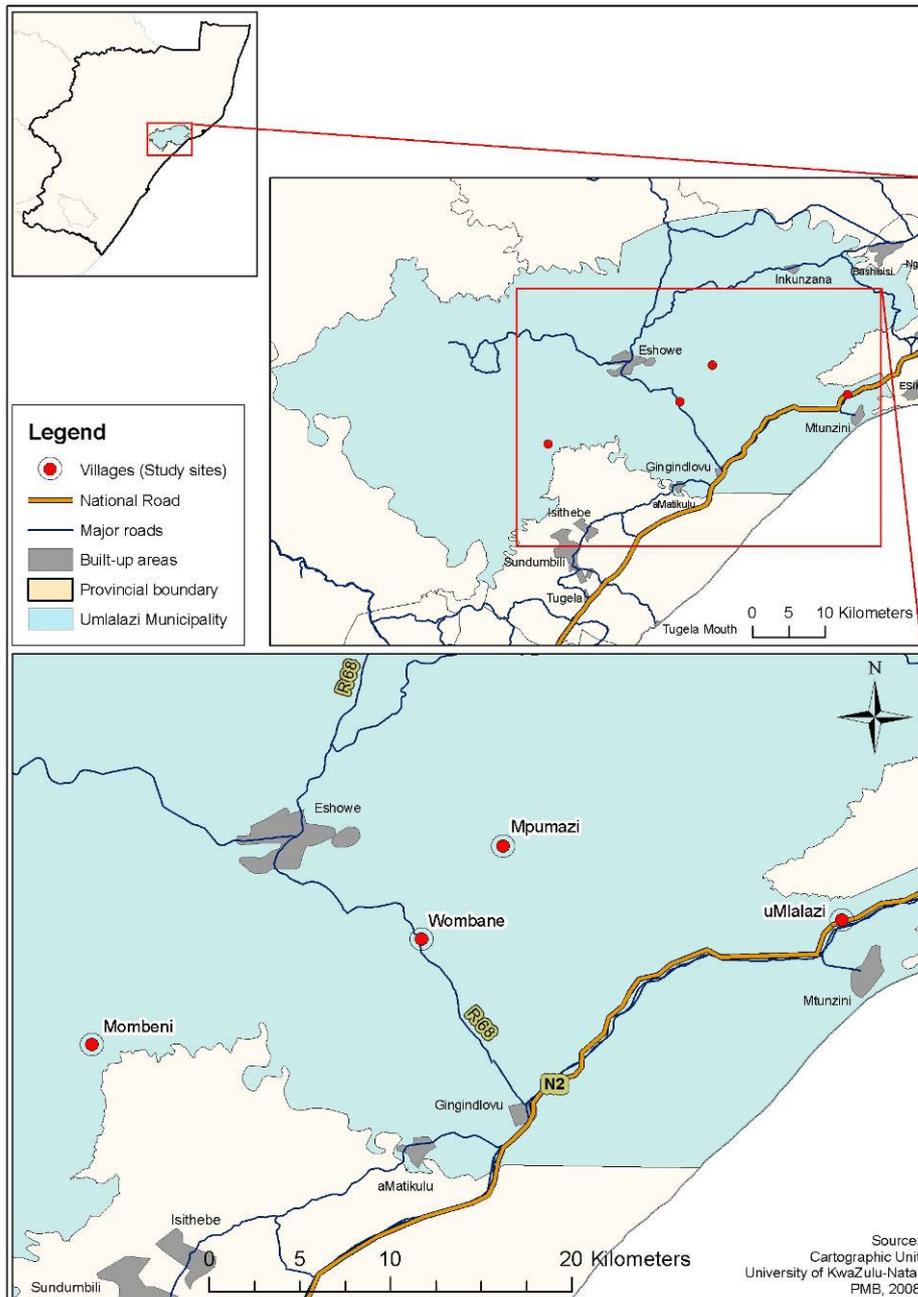
Figure 4.1: Map of the study area

Eshowe falls within the uMlalazi Local Municipality (KZ284), which is one of the six local municipalities constituting the uThungulu District (DC28) (Figure 4.1). The uMlalazi municipal area covers approximately 2 217 square km and is one of the largest municipalities geographically in the area. The municipality borders on the Indian Ocean

with a coastline of approximately 17km and a considerable rural hinterland. Eshowe itself lies to the west of the coastal belt and is characterized by hilly topography with altitudes increasing to 900 metres, which makes delivery of services difficult (Moloi, 2006). Eshowe, Mtunzini and Gingindlovu are the three main towns in the uMlalazi Municipality (Figure 4.1). Eshowe means 'the place of cool breezes'. Being the oldest town in Zululand, Eshowe is steeped in rich history in that it is the birthplace of the Zulu king Cetshwayo during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. It is situated near King Shaka's KwaBuluawayo royal kraal.

The 2001 Census records the population of uMlalazi municipality at 221179 (Statistics S.A., 2001). The gender split of the population is 45% males and 55% females. The uMlalazi Municipality, within which Eshowe lies, has the third largest number of male absentee household members in the uThungulu District Municipality, pointing to parents working elsewhere, deceased male parents and the traditional culture of extended families (Midplan and Associates, 2007). Nearly all pensioners who receive government pension grants of approximately R700.00 per month (ibid) head 43% of all households. With the average household size of 7, 4, there is an increasing burden on the household heads. High levels of poverty, which in turn are compounded by unemployment and the high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS exacerbate this situation. Thirty six percent of the population in the uMlalazi Municipality is infected with HIV/AIDS (Inhloso Planning CC, 2009). In fact, HIV/AIDS poses an enormous developmental challenge for the whole province of KwaZulu-Natal. Apart from eroding the already weak safety net of the poor people because of high expenditure on medical care and funeral costs, HIV/AIDS renders people unemployable. As a result, the potentially economically active population of the area is drastically reduced.

Rural Eshowe itself, where the case study is located, is characterized by poverty and a high unemployment rate (Colvin *et al*., 2005; Midplan and Associates, 2007; Inhloso Planning CC, 2009). While 9% of the population of uMlalazi Municipality is employed, 29% of the total is either unemployed or looking for employment and 40% of the 9% economically active is employed in Eshowe (Midplan and Associates, 2007). The

Agriculture and Forestry sectors dominate in terms of employment generation and the former alone absorbs about 53% of labour. However, both sectors are characterized by low-level skills and low income. In addition, employment opportunities are available in the Social and Personal sector, the Financial, Insurance, Business and Manufacturing sectors. The latter group is economically important in the district, incorporates high value jobs and requires skilled labour. The skills base, however, is low, given the fact that 2.59% have a tertiary education, and 56% of the household members have an education level of Grade 7 and lower (Midplan and Associates, 2007).

The population of Eshowe, and specifically in the rural villages construct their livelihoods in diverse ways (Midplan and Associates, 2007; Mofokeng, 2007; Inhloso Planning CC, 2009). Land in the rural villages of Eshowe is owned by the Ingonyama Trust (as is all tribal land) through the Ingonyama Trust Act 3 of 1994) and is administered by traditional authorities. The Ingonyama Trust Act No. 3 of 1994 protects communal tenure in the rural villages. However, poor land administration and allocation presents a challenge in terms of unlocking the agricultural potential in these areas (Moloi, 2006; Inhloso Planning CC, 2009). Most households that have access to land practise subsistence farming, primarily for home consumption and for sale to supplement their income. The introduction of community gardens in the uMlalazi Municipality has improved food security with the excess produce sold in the markets. However, the poor road conditions and high transport costs make markets inaccessible to most village residents (Inhloso planning CC, 2009). Apart from the income derived from formal employment in the agricultural and industrial sectors, as already mentioned, other sources are government grants in the form of old-age pensions, disability and child grants and remittances from migrant worker. Women, in particular, are involved in crop and craft sales. There is a steady increase in producer groups for craft made from beads, and woven fibre and vegetable produce. They are, however poorly co-ordinated in the whole of the uMlalazi Municipality (Inhloso Planning CC, 2009).

3.10 SUMMARY

The chapter has focused on the outlining the context of the study. It has situated rural women's agency and empowerment within rural development in post-apartheid South Africa. It has highlighted those aspects of rural development that are pertinent to the study. These include the nature of rural poverty; how the rural poor construct their livelihoods, with particular emphasis on the question of land; the gendered dimension of rural development; the relationship between rural development and the environment; rural entrepreneurship, with a special focus on craft production; and the regulatory framework for rural development in South Africa.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I outline the research design for the research process. I do this by dividing the chapter into two sections. In section I, I give a brief discussion of the theory of the research paradigms chosen, namely, feminist research and mixed methods research. Furthermore, the conceptual tools that inform the research process are described and the rationale for the choice and use of the feminist and the mixed methods research paradigms for this particular research are given. The empirical issues of field research are outlined in section II. These include a background to the case study; a description of the study area; an account of the various research techniques employed to collect data in the field; and the limitations of the study.

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Paradigms
The overarching research paradigm of the study is feminist. Feminist research starts from the point that 'the social and cultural contexts within which women live and make sense of their experiences differ across the world and between groupings of women' (Stanley and Wise, 1993:21). Central to feminist research, then, is that it takes cognizance of women's lived realities, noting that gender, age, class, culture, ethnicity and religion are sites of difference among women all over the world. Hence, my research contributes to feminist research. As such it advances feminist scholars' contention that contextualization of women's experiences is crucial to avoid essentializing their lives. Furthermore, gender, with the attendant power relations, should not be taken as given (Oyewumi, 2004). Rather it should be interrogated as to how it mediates women's construction of their identities, subjectives and agency.

I also situate my research more specifically within African feminist scholarship. African feminist writers advance African women scholars' realities and interests so that, as Mama (1997:5) asserts, "we develop our own applications of given theories… and take our own (African) realities as the starting point for articulating perspectives, or even entirely new theories that emanate organically from our particular conditions and concerns". Such

African perspectives can inform feminist thinking about Africa elsewhere (Arnfred, 2004). While my South-African-based research is cross-cultural as it shares some commonalities with the rest of Africa, it is at the same time context-specific due to regional variations of ethnicity, class and religion.

Within the feminist research paradigm, the study has adopted a mixed methods research paradigm. Johnson and Onweugbuzie (2004:17) define mixed methods research as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study". It, therefore, lends itself to the use of multiple approaches in answering research questions (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). According to Morgan (1998), the use of a mixed methods research paradigm should take into consideration its important dimensions. Firstly, the researcher has to think about paradigm emphasis, i.e., whether to give the quantitative and qualitative components of the mixed methods study equal status or to give one paradigm the dominant status (Johnson and Onweugbuzie, 2004; Creswell and Clark, 2007). Secondly, thought should be given to where the mixing should take place: in the objectives, data collection, data analysis or data interpretation. Concerning paradigm emphasis, the dominant status was given to the qualitative research paradigm. The research tools themselves were predominantly qualitative and supplemented with a questionnaire to collect statistical data.

In contrast to quantitative methods that "objectify" the human subjects under study, qualitative methods take into account the consciousness of the subjects as expressed in the meanings and interpretations of their experiences. This means the researcher enters the research participants' worlds (Charmaz, 2006; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, Poggenpoel and Schirink, 1998), and tries to look at the world through their eyes, what is termed intersubjectivity. By eliciting participant accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions, the qualitative research paradigm aims to empower the participant who becomes a co-researcher and speaks for himself (De Vos *et al*., 1998). The notion of intersubjectivity is critical in both feminist and qualitative research as it allows all participants to enter the research process as equally knowing subjects.

Qualitative researchers employ methods that ground analysis in real life. This allows them to examine how social experience is given meaning, often involving a search for underlying themes or patterns, which emerge during the research process. It is only through in-depth analysis that qualitative researchers are able to obtain a truthful description of how a problem or situation is experienced and given meaning by those who live it. The subjective nature of qualitative research appeals to many feminist researchers and therefore nullifies the positivist assumptions of universalistic, objective and value neutral research. The question of the researcher's subjectivity is central to feminist and qualitative research, since he/she brings his/her own thoughts, feelings, cultural assumptions, class, gender to the research. The positioning of the researcher (with the implicit power differentials) in relation to the researched is critical in qualitative research. That is why feminist methodologies challenge us to acknowledge the political and subjective nature of all research.

I have employed the feminist political ecology framework to interrogate the factors that mediate the women crafters' access and use of the raw material they use in craft making. The approach allows the investigation and, therefore, the understanding of how gender intersects with other axes of power to shape the way the women in the study interact with their resource base and specifically how these factors enable and/or constrain their agency. The framework is further discussed below.

Research Strategy- Case study

Feagin *et al*. (1991:21) define a case study as "an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative methods, of a single social phenomenon. The study is conducted in great detail and often relies on the use of several data sources." Case studies enable the researcher to ground the observations and concepts with which he or she works. A well-crafted case study will permit the investigator to observe human events and actions in their natural surroundings. Such analyses allow the observer to render social action in a manner that comes closest to the action as it is understood by the actors themselves (Feagin *et al.,* 1991). Here the observer wishes to make claims that are grounded in the claims of those who make them. As a qualitative research strategy, a case study is best

suited to address questions of meaning and interpretation. A case study gives a voice to the powerless and voiceless (ibid.). Hence, as a qualitative strategy, it is empowering to the research participants.

A case study was an appropriate research strategy for understanding both the meanings that the women crafters attach to issues of agency and empowerment; culture and gendered access to and use of natural resources in their income-generating activity and the constraints they face in the attainment of empowerment. The case study I used is an embedded study in the sense that the investigation of the women crafters agency involved more than one unit of analysis, namely, the individual women crafters in the context of their households and as a group using the human agency and feminist political ecology frameworks as discussed below.

A case study is known as a triangulated research strategy (Tellis, 1997). Triangulation can occur within data, researchers, theories and even methodologies. The need for triangulation arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the research process (Tellis, 1997) and to ensure accuracy of the findings (Stake, 1995). To achieve validity in my research data, I used multiple sources of data, namely, interviews (household, key informants and focus group discussions) and a participatory workshop. Since I was exploring both perceptions and actual behaviour, and noting that the latter might not align with the views expressed in the interviews, data from other research techniques and responses of others helped to either corroborate or disprove one set of data. One major criticism of case study methodology, however, is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing generalizable conclusions. However, Yin (1994 and 2002) argues that generalization of results, from either single or multiple designs, is made to theory and not to populations. In addition, case study research is useful as an exploratory tool and for theory development (George and Bennett, 2005). Hence, samples used are not meant to represent large populations (Reid, 1996).

4.2 RATIONALE FOR THE CHOICE AND USE OF THE FEMINIST PARADIGM AND THE MIXED METHODS RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While acknowledging that the mixed methods research methodology avoids the pitfall of representing the qualitative and quantitative approaches as mutually exclusive, the feminist research paradigm that frames the research process in this study lends itself readily to the qualitative methodology. In line with Oakley's (1981) assertion that qualitative methods, such as interviews, are the best way to find out about people's lives, the research process was, to large extent, grounded on the experiences of the rural women, letting them speak for themselves, giving them a voice. In order for the women to tell their stories, which were subjective, private and emotional; and for me to listen to them, open-ended research strategies were used. Within the feminist research paradigm and qualitative research methodology, I was able to establish a relationship with the participants, which is characterized by rapport, interaction and non –hierarchical relations. Although this was not difficult for me as I identified with the women in terms of gender, culture, ethnicity, language and age, there was need not to guard against over-identification and thus lose sight of the primary objective of the research, namely, knowledge production. The participatory model of feminist and qualitative research provided me an ideal setting to explore agency and empowerment; its dimensions and manifestations (all of which are highly specific and contextual), which the quantitative approach could not capture adequately. In other words, I was exploring the participants' attitudes, perceptions and actual behaviour in relation to agency and empowerment enhanced and achieved through craft income. In addition, variables such as gender ideology and culture, which are social constructs, and therefore are flexible in meaning and interpretation, could best be examined within the qualitative framework.

However, there were dimensions of the study that could only be addressed through a quantitative research methodology. The quantitative data collection was used in order to capture the socio-demographic characteristics (the variables of age, marital status, education level) of the women crafters and how these intersect in their impact on the women's experience of agency and empowerment. At the same time, some data collected qualitatively was analysed quantitatively, for example, income control and their sources of income.

What pertains to the mixed methods design, involves the mixing of the data collection. In other words, the quantitative data was collected at the same time as the qualitative data. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) and Creswell and Zhang (2009) identify three ways in which mixing of the quantitative and qualitative methods takes place, namely, merging, connecting and embedding. This study adopted an embedded mixed methods design. What the embedded design entailed, was nesting quantitative data collection within a qualitative method. The same instrument, the semi-structured interview, was used to capture both statistical and qualitative data. The semi-structured interview contained close-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions, which captured the age, marital status and education level of the women participants, were asked right at the beginning of the household interviews. In essence, the mixing was more on the data than the techniques used, with the statistical data used to corroborate the qualitative findings. Furthermore, the use of mixed methods presented the following benefits and advantages as noted by Green *et al* (1989) and Green (2007):

- Triangulation (corroboration of results from the quantitative and qualitative data);
- Complementarity (elaboration, enhancement and clarification of results from the qualitative with results from the quantitative data); and
- Expanding the breadth and range of research.

4.3 OPERATIONALIZATION OF KEY CONCEPTS
The following conceptual frameworks informed the research questions:

- The human agency and empowerment approach
- The feminist political ecology perspective

Human Agency and Empowerment Approach
Over the past four decades anthropological and sociological discourses have highlighted the importance of individual action within social structures (Cligget, 2005). Both Giddens (1976) and Bourdieu (1977) (already discussed in chapter 2) give individuals an active role in the formation of society, suggesting that individuals and social structures participate in a feedback system, changing and maintaining each other simultaneously (ibid.). Harcourt (1994:68) defines human agency as "the ability to act autonomously in and through history…agency leads the way out of the shadows of invisibility and 'culture

of silence' which prohibits people from creatively taking part in the transformation of their society and therefore prohibits them from being." Kabeer (2000) points out that agency is more than observable action as it encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to the activity.

The notion of human agency enabled me to look at how individuals and social systems interact in the sphere of making a living; how individuals act and influence the fundamental process of daily survival (Cligget, 2005); how they bargain, manipulate and make decisions (Kabeer, 1999). Human agency allows for conflict and negotiation within the social structure. More specifically, women are viewed as one set of players, constantly negotiating their positions in the power relations within households and community, particularly under conditions of change (Goebel, 2005; Schroeder, 2003). This framework allowed me to investigate how social structures of gender ideology and culture within the women's households and community confer differential identities, roles and responsibilities to men and women and how these shape women's conceptions and interpretations of their own agency within their households. Tying the notion of agency with the key question of my study, namely, whether the enterprise income translated into power for the women within their households, the interplay of gender, culture and agency was highlighted. In examining this question of the women's agency and empowerment (Appendix 1), I investigated to what extent the craft earnings gave the women power to make choices; to make decisions as to allocation of the income; to bargain and negotiate on matters that affect the well-being of the family; and whether their purchasing power had increased as a result of the enterprise income. In addition, the study focused on the enabling and constraining factors in the ability of the women to exercise their power within the household; and the empowerment outcomes achieved because of the power they had gained measured by changes in their material conditions; their perceptions of their self-esteem, independence and ability to plan for the future and changes in their relations with their spouses and other household members. Their collective agency within the craft group was also addressed in terms of their individual agency derived from the group, the empowerment outcomes of the group and enablement and impediments in their enterprise.

Feminist Political Ecology

The feminist political ecology perspective "provides a valuable framework for linking an ecological perspective with analysis of economic and political power and with policies and actions within a local context" (Rocheleau *et al.,* 1996:289). A feminist analysis of natural resource access, use and control illuminated the ways in which gender shapes men's and women's differential needs, interests and opportunities with regard to natural resources. Linking gender and political ecology allowed us to "focus on the uneven distribution of resource access and control by gender, as well as according to other social variables such as class and ethnicity" (Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau, 1995; Rocheleau *et al.,* 1996:300). The gender analysis highlighted the differences in access, use and control of the reed between women and men, and accentuated the interplay of gender and social arrangements of access to the natural resource. This in turn shed light on the factors that facilitate and impede women's access, use and control of the raw material. The feminist political ecology framework allowed me to explore issues related to the women crafters' access and use of *Cyperus spp.*(*C. spp.*) (Appendix 1). These included the role of gender relations, culture and other social arrangements in mediating their access to the raw material and factors that enable and constrain their access and availability of *C. spp*.

4.4 FIELD RESEARCH

Research Setting and Sampling

At the loosest interpretation, a setting is described by Holliday (2002) as a group of people with a specific interest who might be interviewed. The research was conducted in four rural villages on the outskirts of Eshowe in Northern Zululand, in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal (Figure 3.1). The research was carried out in 2006 and 2007. The group under investigation consisted of 30 women crafters engaged in craft production as an income-generating activity (Appendix 2). The women ranged from 30 to 70 years. Although a few of them were married, most of them were heads of their households, single, widowed or abandoned (Figure 5.1). These four villages were selected as all the women crafters in the Ikhowe Craft Group came from these villages. When I embarked on this research, the group had already been in existence since 2000. Hence, purposive sampling was undertaken. Defining the research setting (where, when and with whom the

research will take place), was critical in this case study, since case studies must always have boundaries (Stake, 1995). Creswell (1994) contends that the idea of qualitative research is to purposefully select informants that will best answer the research question(s). Most of the participants had been members of the craft enterprise since its inception in 2000; therefore, I felt they were well positioned to address the research question. The Ikhowe Craft Group itself exhibited evidence of a well-functioning enterprise (as discussed below) and thus provided the appropriate unit of analysis of the research problem. The Ikhowe Craft Group was the only co-ordinated craft producer group in the area. Although there were other craft groups outside rural Eshowe, such as the one at Mbongolwane, they were not accessible for investigation, whereas The Ikhowe Craft Group was, as described in the following section.

Entry and Access Issues

Gaining entry into the research setting did not present any problems. This is due to the fact that the craft group was a project run under the auspices of the Centre for Environment, Agriculture and Development (CEAD) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where I was a PhD candidate. Two staff at CEAD are closely involved with the group. Even before I started my research, a good relationship had already been established between the Ikhowe Craft Group and the CEAD. On the side of the women participants, I made contact and established a relationship with the chairperson of the group with whom I communicated with regard to my research matters. In other words, there were no gatekeepers that made entry problematic. Before the actual field research began, I met with the women in an informal meeting at which the project facilitator from CEAD introduced me to the women, and the aim and objectives of my research were outlined. My field research was undertaken in three fieldtrips in 2006 and 2007. The first trip in May 2006 was a reconnaissance trip during which I talked to a few women participants and men in the two villages of the study area and in the process familiarized myself with the area and the people. I also learnt about some of the ground issues pertaining to craft making and the natural resource (*C. spp.*) the women crafters use. Subsequent field trips for data collection took place in November 2006 and November 2007.

4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE STUDY

Permission to conduct research was obtained from the participants themselves, although not in a formal consent letter. The reason for this was that the women were already an integral part of the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (Pietermaritzburg campus) outreach and research programme through the Centre for Environment, Agriculture and Development (CEAD) (as already alluded to above). To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, their actual names were not used in the thesis. Regarding the findings of the research, dissemination will occur through publication of journal articles and the women themselves will be informed of the findings at a meeting convened specifically for this purpose. The thesis itself will be stored in digital form and submitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). These issues have been dealt with in the ethical clearance form I submitted to the Ethical Board of the University of KwaZulu-Natal during the course of my research.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION

The mixed methods research methodology (as discussed above) was used for data collection. The research techniques involved semi-structured interviews (with quantitative data nested within qualitative data) with the women in their households; key informant interviews with the management team of the Ikhowe Craft Group; a participatory workshop with a selected group of the women crafters; and a focus group interview with five men of the village.

Household Interviews

These were semi-structured interviews consisting of close-ended and open-ended questions. I made use of an interview schedule (Appendix 1) to interview the women participants in their individual households. Each interview was tape-recorded (with permission to do so before the interview) and lasted for an hour and a half at each participant's homestead. The close-ended questions aimed at capturing the statistical data that do not lend themselves easily to qualitative data collection. These included the age, marital status and education levels of the women crafters. The semi-structured questions were used to guide the discussion as it unfolded. In addition, I used probing to encourage the participants to elaborate on and clarify an issue. Hence, the questions themselves

were open-ended to facilitate the exploration of deeper meanings. There was no language barrier, as I am Zulu-speaking. However, contrary to my expectations, the women were reluctant to speak about the intimate aspects of their relationships with their spouses, despite our common gender and ethnicity, and the fact that most of the women were of my age. My reflection is that it is a cultural issue. Women in our culture are not at liberty to disclose anything about their families to outsiders. This again points to my outsider-status in their eyes.

Participatory Workshop

I held a two-day workshop with eleven of the women crafters interviewed (Appendix 2). There were no criteria for selecting the eleven women. I felt a smaller number of crafters would be easy to work with and they would engage with the issues in the various activities more adequately than if, they were in a larger group. The workshop was held at the Agricultural Credit Union Centre, which is the meeting place for the crafters. The purpose of the workshop was two-fold. Firstly, the objective was to give the participants in the research an opportunity to reflect and analyse their reality. This is one way of employing the insiders' (*emic*) perspective a better insight into people's reality (Kumar, 2002). Secondly, this exercise is important for triangulation purposes to validate or crosscheck the data from the interviews (Appendix 4). I deliberately involved women only and excluded men from the workshop for two reasons. Firstly, some of the issues that the women worked with in the workshop pertained to their agency and empowerment in the craft group and could be best addressed by the women themselves in a women's group. Secondly, concerning their agency in their households, I tried to avoid a situation where power dynamics would result in the silencing of the women's voices (Goebel, 2005), thereby defeating the goal of the workshop. Besides, the men would later get an opportunity to give their views on some aspects of the research in a focus group interview.

Key Informant Interviews

These were conducted with the management of the Ikhowe Craft Group: its chairperson, secretary and treasurer. As the people managing the group on its day-to-day business, they were well positioned to provide details of the inner workings of the Ikhowe Craft

Group and could speak with authority on such issues as the opportunities, challenges, the sustainability of the enterprise and the collective agency and empowerment of the women (Appendix 3). They were drawn from the villages as were the general members of the craft groups; hence they were also subject to enquiry on agency and empowerment. Furthermore, they elaborated and clarified issues of collective agency raised by the individual participants in the household interviews.

Focus Group Interview

The last phase of my field research entailed a focus group interview. De Vos *et al.* (1998:314) describe a focus group as "a purposive discussion of a specific topic or related topics, taking place between eight to ten individuals with a similar background and common interests". The focus group interview was conducted as an open conversation on a specific topic, with each participant making comments, asking questions of other participants and responding to comments by others (ibid.). It is different from the participatory workshop that the women crafters held. The focus group interview did not involve elaborate activities in which the participants worked in smaller groups and then came together to discuss their views. Initially, I had planned to conduct the focus group discussion with eight men from the community whom the women knew closely, but not necessarily their husbands as some of them were single women. I deemed the focus group interview crucial for a gender analysis of the study by getting the men's perspective on the power dynamics within their households and community; the role of culture in gender identities, roles and responsibilities within the households; and women's access to and control of *Cyperus spp.* (Appendix 4). In reality, only five men participated in the focus group. The focus group interview had been planned to be conducted during the weekend when the working men chosen for the interview would be available. For reasons unknown to me and for which I deemed inappropriate to delve into, I ended up with five men to carry out the focus group interview.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

In line with the mixed methods research paradigm, data analysis occurred at the quantitative and qualitative levels.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Data was presented in the form of graphs, tables and cross-tabulations (statistical analyses and graphic displays of data). No software package for analysis was used. Cross-tabulations were employed to measure the correlation between the variables of age, marital status and education levels of the women and how their intersection shaped the ways the women experienced agency and empowerment. However, the quantitative data was interpreted qualitatively, a stage Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) call, the data transformation stage.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This entailed the following steps:

- Transcribing of tape-recorded interviews

- Labelling and conceptualizing data.

  This involved the breaking down of a phrase, a sentence and a paragraph and giving each a name that represents a phenomenon related to the research problem. In other words, I identified concepts in the participants' responses.

- Discovering and developing categories

  From the concepts identified, I looked for and generated categories. This is a process whereby concepts that seem to pertain to the same idea are grouped. According to Feagin *et al*. (1991), categories have conceptual power in that they are able to pull together around them other groups of concepts or subcategories. Put differently, categories are the building blocks of theory.

- Analysis of each category of concepts

  I examined and analysed each category of concepts; identified relationships between concepts in the different categories; and sought for emerging themes and patterns to clarify and supplement the already existing concepts.

- Conclusion drawing and verification

  I interpreted and drew meaning from the conceptualized. I then compared the findings to literature to determine which findings were supported or not supported by the literature. Finally, I checked the results with the participants.

4.7 LIMITATIONS ON THE STUDY

The limitations of this study are twofold: those that are general to the case study strategy; and those specific to this study. Firstly, bias and the lack of generalizability of the findings to the larger population or to other settings are some of the critiques of the case study (Stoecker, 2006). With reference to my study, bias had to do with the subjective nature of the whole research process. The question of bias invariably raises the issue of the reliability and validity of the findings. To mitigate the impact of bias and strengthen internal validity and because the case study has no "in-built corrective against the researcher's possible bias" (Stoecker, 2006:327), I employed triangulation. I used multiple methods from both the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies for the case study, namely, household interviews with embedded quantitative data collection, key informant interviews, a participatory workshop and focus group interviews. The mixed methods research paradigm allowed for corroboration and complementarity of the research findings, thus strengthening the reliability and validity of the data (Tellis, 1997; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Creswell and Zhang, 2009). Furthermore, the criticism that a case study does not allow us to generalize to other settings is counteracted by Yin (1994) who points out that generalization of results from a case study is made to theory and not to populations, what he terms analytical generalization. I also compared my findings to other research in the region to corroborate my study.

Since the study adopted a feminist paradigm and explored the role of women's agency within the household, gender formed a critical part of the interrogation. Hence, I needed to incorporate men in the investigation. The majority of the women crafters were heads of their households and the sons of some of the women were not available for interviews, since they were working away from their homes. I could only interview the husbands of married women crafters who were present in the house at the time of the interview. I, therefore, had minimal research on male perspectives about the women's agency within their households. It was, therefore necessary for me to set up a separate focus group of men to interview on the dynamics of gender and culture and its impacts on the women' agency within the household. The criteria for the selection of these men was that they should be known or related to the women in the study, be familiar with the craft that the

women do and hold positions of authority in the villages. As already stated above, only five men participated in the focus group and as such, were not representative of all men in the area. Without undermining the credibility of the work that has been done, this was a limitation on the study, which other studies may be able to address.

4.8 SUMMARY

The chapter has outlined the research methodology used to investigate the research problem. The research design encompasses an account of the overarching feminist and within it, the mixed methods research paradigm, the case study strategy and the rationale for the use of the feminist and mixed methods research paradigms. In section II of the chapter the fieldwork part of the research is discussed, which includes an account of the the research setting and sampling procedure; entry and access issues; a background to the case study (the Ikhowe Craft Group) and the study area. Furthermore, the various research techniques for data collection are discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the research findings from the research process described and outlined in chapter three. The main focus of the research was two-fold: firstly to explore the women crafters' agency in the access use and control of the raw material they use in craft production, and secondly, to investigate the women's individual agency within their households in terms of their ability to translate their craft income into power and collective agency. In both arms of the research, a gender approach has been employed. The presentation of the research findings, therefore, includes the following issues/themes:

- The socio-demographic characteristics of the women crafters, including the economic impact of the craft income on the crafters' livelihoods;
- The women crafters' access, use and control of the raw material;
- Manifestation of the women crafters' agency within the household;
- The women's collective agency;
- The enabling and constraining factors in the exercise of their agency both individually
- and collectively; and
- Individual and collective empowerment outcomes of the women craft producers.

5.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WOMEN CRAFTERS

This section presents information gathered through observations by the researcher and the responses of the research participants and their households. It describes the socio-demographic of the crafters and how these dynamics intersect to shape the women's agency. The economic impact of the craft income on the livelihoods patterns of the crafters' households is also discussed.

The case study is a craft group, consisting of 30 women from four rural villages of Eshowe, namely: Mlalazi, Wombane, Mpumazi and Mombeni. Their ages range from 33 to 70. Figure 5.1 shows the marital status of the women crafters.
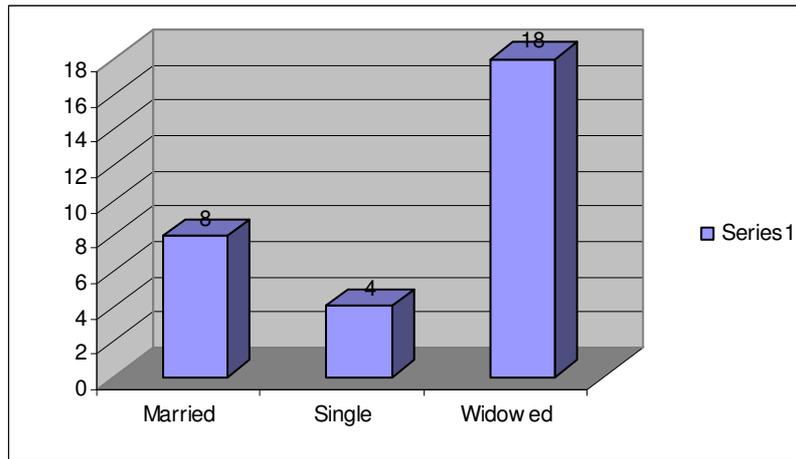
Figure 5.1: Marital status of the women participants

Of the eight married women crafters, five have absentee husbands (three of these are working away from home, two are residing with other wives and one simply abandoned his family). This means that the majority of the women crafters (twenty-seven) are not only heads of their households, but they are also primary earners and sole breadwinners in their households. They are, in fact, de facto heads of their households by virtue of their marital status or having absentee husbands. Although the sons of two widows interviewed are the de jure heads of the households, having taken over the authority of their late fathers, the running of the households and daily decisions affecting the households and their members rest with their mothers. In one household, the son is an absentee head of the household as he works away from the home; hence, his mother regards herself as the head of the household.

Table 5.1: The interaction of age and marital status of the women crafters

	Married	**Female Household Heads**	**Totals**
Age group			
31-40	3	4	7
41-50	3	4	7
51-60	2	10	12
61-70	0	4	4
Totals	8	22	30

Furthermore, findings as presented in Table 5.1 suggest that not only are there more female heads of households among the women crafters (with 22 single as opposed to 8 married), but there more female heads in the 51-60 age group, totaling 12 and four in the 61-70 age group. A relatively small group of young women, in the 31-40 age group, was involved in craft production.

The unemployment characteristic of the members of the craft group reflects the high unemployment rate of the population of the rural areas of Eshowe in general. Table 5.2 shows the interaction of the women's employment status and marital status.

Table 5.2: The interaction of the women's employment status and marital status

	Employed	Unemployed	Totals
Marital status			
Married	3	5	8
Female household heads	0	22	22
Totals	3	27	30

Of the thirty members of the Ikhowe Craft Group, twenty-seven are unemployed and only three are employed full-time. One is the chairperson and manager of the Inina Craft Agency, one is the secretary of the Inina Craft Agency and one is a helper in the household of one member of the Inina Craft Agency. Twenty-two of the twenty-seven unemployed women crafters are heads of their households, while five are married.

Figure 5.2 shows the women crafters' source of income at the time of the research. Four of the older members receive government pension grants and two receive remittances from their employed sons. Two of the group members have diversified their income generating activities: one into sugarcane cultivation and another into vegetable gardening. The rest of the group, totalling nineteen depends entirely on the income they earn from craft. The forgoing points to the fact that, although there are other sources of income for the members of the craft group, these sources do not form a substantial portion of the

total income as the majority of the group relies largely on craft production and government grants for their livelihood.
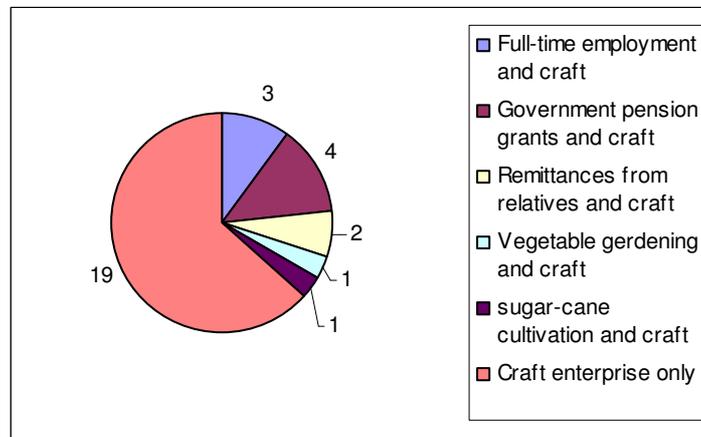
Figure 5.2: The women's sources of income

The livelihoods strategies of the members of the Ikhowe Craft Group are not that different from other women in the villages. All households in the villages have access to homestead plots where they plant crops such as maize, tomatoes, *madumbe*, beans, cabbages and others for subsistence. Selling surplus vegetables at local markets in Eshowe is a problem for rural households as they are too distant. Most women in villages organize themselves in vegetable gardening projects. Crop sales from these projects are relatively substantial and provide a reliable source of income. Livestock ownership in the households of the women crafters and the villages is no longer a viable livelihood strategy as most livestock has been lost due to extensive cattle theft. It has become a symbol of status for most households. Hence, cattle and goats are not a major source of income for the rural people. They are used for traditional rituals and customs, such as paying *ilobolo* and ceremonies for ancestors. The general trend is that most household economies have shifted agrarian to non-farm economic activities for cash.

High illiteracy rates characterized the group (Table 5.3). In the 31-40 age group, two have a secondary education, while in the 41-50 age group, one attained matric and other a secondary education. Twenty-six of the women crafters-five in the 31-40 age group; five

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in the 41-50 age group; twelve in the 51-60 age group and four in the 61-70 age group-cannot read or write. Twenty-four of the twenty-six are in the older age groups (51-60 and 61-70). Furthermore, for those crafters who have no education at all, craft provided an entry point into earning an income, since is largely dependent on the women's indigenous crafting skills.

Table 5.3: The intersection of age and education of the women

	Education	No education	Totals
Age groups			
31-40	2	5	7
41-50	2	5	7
51-60	0	12	12
61-70	0	4	4
Totals	4	26	30

5.2 ACCESS TO CYPERUS SPP.

The research questions that explored the ability of the crafters to access, use and control the natural resource they use for craft production centred on the three issues:

- Resource tenure issues;
- Value and significance of the *Cyperus spp.* for rural people, particularly the women; and
- Gender-related issues around the access, use and control of the raw material.

The last two issues, namely, the value and significance of the raw material; and the gender-linked issues on the access, use and control of the raw material, overlap. Hence, they will be discussed concurrently. The findings were derived from the semi-structured interviews, the participatory workshops and the focus group interviews.

Resource Tenure Issues

Cyperus spp. is a particular sedge (Plate 5.1) that women use to make craft either for domestic use or commercial purposes. In the context of this study, *C. spp* is investigated as a raw material for the Ikhowe Craft Enterprise the women crafters are involved in.

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Cyperus spp. largely grows on communal land under Tribal Authority in wetlands and streams (Plate 5.2). Some grow in fields of individual people that are located near streams.

Plate 5.1: Harvested *C. spp.*
Source: D. Kotze

Plate 5.2: Ecological site of *C. spp.*
Source: D. Kotze

Hence, the resource tenure of this particular raw material can be classified into: (a) open access where anyone has access to it; and (b) private ownership where the *C. spp.* grows in homestead gardens. In the latter case, the women have to seek permission from the owner of the land first before they can access it. As such, there are no formal regulations governing the access and harvesting of the resource. The unregulated nature of the resource access has both positive and negative implications for the women crafters. On the positive side, the open access ensures the accessibility of the natural resource as the women can access it without restrictions in terms of permits. At the same time, the fact that anyone can harvest it at any time limits its availability, particularly for the women who use it. The women themselves are aware of this tricky situation. One crafter told of one instance when they could not harvest sufficient fibre for their craft, because the headman had allowed women from Inkandla, another region in Zululand, to harvest in their village. They also travel to other villages to access the resource when it becomes scarce in winter in their own village. In addition, because its harvesting is unregulated, people harvest it anyhow and anytime. One of the respondents reported that some women cut the fibre when it has not reached maturity. Equally, the accessibility of the natural

resource on privately owned land is not reliable as it is dependent on the goodwill of the owner of the land.

The tenure arrangements of this raw material raise further questions about the sustainability of the women crafters' enterprise, a fact acknowledged by both male and female respondents. One male respondent articulated his concern in the following words, "I say something must be done to make sure the natural resource is available at all times. For example, if it is planted and managed in an organized way, like sugar-cane, it will not become scarce that easily". Both the men and women were in consensus about the urgent need to regulate access to the natural resource, at least at the local level. One male respondent even suggested that the whole community take the initiative to plant and nurture it in designated community gardens in the same way as vegetable gardens. The planting of the natural resource can be incorporated into the craft enterprise, so that those who plant can sell it and earn an income to augment the craft income.

Gender-Differentiated Resource Use and Value

Traditionally, *C. spp.* is regarded as a woman's plant. Both the men and women interviewed report that from time immemorial rural women have used this natural resource to make craft both for traditional and cultural ceremonies and for domestic purposes. For example, women used to weave traditional sleeping mats as parts of the gifts in the bridewealth (*lobola*) negotiations. It has always been associated with women and as such formed part of the rural women's cultural identity. *C. spp.* is part of a range of natural resources that are gender-differentiated in terms of use, value and significance attached to each, as Table 5.4 illustrates:

Table 5.4: Natural resources traditionally associated with men's and women's activities

Women-associated natural resources		Men-associated natural resources	
Natural Resource	Use and value	Natural Resource	Use and Value
Cyperus spp.(Induma)	Craft and household sleeping mats	Wood	Craft and household utensils
Cyperus latifolius (Ikhwane)	Craft	*Vetiver (umvithi)*	Binding thatching grass
Juncus kraussii (Incema)	Sleeping and sitting mats	*Hyphaene cariacea (ilala)*	Household utensils
Cyperus textilis (imizi)	Craft, sleeping and sitting mats	*Cyperus latifolius (ikhwane)*	Binding thatching grass

Table 5.4 suggests that the natural resources that the people in the study area use are gender-differentiated according to traditional women and men associated activities. This in turn reflects the gender-differentiated interests and needs of the women and men in the area and, therefore, the use and value attached to it. *C. spp.* is, amongst others, a woman-only natural resource, which they use to make craft for domestic use and commercial purposes. Other natural resources or sedges used by the women for craft making are the *Cyperus latifolius(ikhwane)*, the *Juncus kraussii (incema)* and the *Cyperus textilis (imizi).* On the other hand, men's interests lie in woodcarving, and roof thatching for which they use a variety of wood, vetiver (*umvithi)*, *Hyphaene cariacea (ilala)* and *Cyperus latifolius (ikhwane). Ikhwane* seems to be the only natural resource in this research that both men and women use.

As a woman's plant (Plates 5.3 and 5.4), *C. spp.* has enabled the women to capture it and create quasi-private tenure around it that both the men and women have accepted. In other words, the ecological sites (the wetlands and streams) are women's spaces where they have control over the harvesting and collecting of the raw material. Being a woman's plant has positive and negative implications for the women's ability to access it. On the positive side, it means the women have a monopoly over it. In other words, they do not compete with the men for its harvesting and use.

Plate 5.3: Women harvesting *C. spp*. **Plate 5.4: *C. spp*. is a woman's plant**

Source: D. Kotze Source: D. Kotze

However, because it is regarded as a woman's natural resource and its harvesting a woman's activity, the women respondents feel that its protection and conservation is being neglected by the Chief and his headmen. Despite many appeals to the Chief by the women who use the natural resource, no measures have been put in place to ensure its conservation. The threats to the raw material are fires, livestock and over-harvesting. The men in the focus group concede that little or no attention is paid to the value and significance of the natural resource for the women. Those few men who are aware of this issue, do not act upon that awareness. Contrary to the women interviewed, the men do not see this lack of support as gender-linked. However, they recognize that the Tribal Authority has a critical role to play in raising awareness of the value of the natural resources for the women crafters. They even suggested that a meeting of all community members be called to make the work of the craft producers visible by displaying what the women produce and talking about the significance of the raw material for everyone's livelihood and alerting the community to the challenges that the women face. At these meetings, the Chief would impress upon the villagers the urgency of coming up with strategies to protect and conserve the natural resource and the wetlands that are the ecological bases of the raw material.

5.3 THE WOMEN CRAFTERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR AGENCY

Questions asked about the women's recognition of their ability to change their condition aimed at unravelling the ideas women have about their own agency. This involved exploring a combination of factors within the women themselves or internal factors i.e. a conscious decision to do something about their situation; and external factors that impinged on the women's motivation to earn an income to improve the well-being of their families. The motivation for all the research participants was hunger and poverty. Even before engaging craft, the women were potential sole breadwinners, as a result of their husbands being dead, unemployed and being themselves single or abandoned. The realization, therefore, that the possibility of coming out of the poverty trap rested in them, was the primary motivation. As one of the crafters attests, "As a widow, I am the only breadwinner in my household. Life is hard, especially because I was not working before I joined the Ikhowe Craft Group". Some participants were encouraged and motivated by other participants who had already joined the group before them. They observed how well they were doing to support their families, while they were struggling to make ends meet.

The awareness of their ability to use their hands to make money and improve the status of their families was cited as an important motivating factor. Some women already possessed craft skills as they were weaving traditional sleeping mats for use within their households and thought they might as well use their indigenous knowledge to earn themselves an income. A few women were already using their hands to do vegetable gardening, hence joining the Ikhowe Craft Group afforded them the opportunity to extend their capabilities to use their hands to increase the money they made. The opportunity to earn an income, which presented itself in the form of the Ikhowe Craft Group, was another factor. All the women agreed that they grabbed the opportunity, because they knew they would be able to put bread on the table for their families. Talking on behalf of other women in the craft group, one woman crafter attributed her ability to earn an income to one particular woman crafter who facilitated the whole process of joining the Ikhowe Craft Group.

Related to unemployment and poverty as the driving forces for looking for an income-generating opportunity, was the issue of the dehumanizing and humiliating effect of having to ask for food from friends and neighbours to feed their children. For these women, the biggest push factor was their children. Their mother-instinct could not allow them to sit and do nothing to alleviate the situation in their households.

5.4 MANIFESTATION OF THE WOMEN CRAFTERS' AGENCY WITHIN THEIR HOUSEHOLDS

The manifestation of the women crafters' agency within the household was investigated in terms of the extent to which the enterprise income translated into increased power for the women. Questions were asked about power based on choice making, decision-making; control of income earned from craft; negotiating and bargaining power; and purchasing power. These issues of power as they emerged from the semi-structured interviews conducted with individual women crafters are discussed below.

Choice Making

The questions asked aimed to highlight the distinction between the choice made by the women themselves to earn an income and the choice imposed by their husbands or other members of their households; and the power to make choices in relation to matters affecting the well-being of their families. Where a distinction was made between choice made by the women themselves and choices imposed on them by other household members, all the women crafters said the choice to earn an income and improve the status of their families was theirs. The women had to make a critical choice in their lives between allowing themselves and their households to be trapped in impoverishment or make a conscious decision to lift themselves out of poverty. Of course, there were factors around them that contributed to their making the choice they did. For all the married women, the unemployment status of their husbands and therefore, the loss of a primary income, prompted them to make use of the income-earning opportunity of craft making. Being the heads of their households and the only breadwinners, the widows and the single mothers made the necessary choice to take up craft making as a way of earning an income.

In addition to the drivers of unemployment and other vulnerabilities, in the final analysis the women out of their own volition took steps to improve their living conditions. What emerges from this aspect of the women's agency (choice making), is the correlation between the women's choice to earn an income and the women's ability to initiate changes in their households. In other words, choice making came before the realization of the empowerment outcomes. The findings suggest that the women crafters' choice form an integral part of agency and empowerment.

Decision-Making

The decisions which represented women's exercise of their agency and hence their empowerment were based on two factors: firstly, which decisions were not typically women's and which decisions the women were able to make as a result of earning an income. Table 5.5 shows household decisions that are regarded as typically men and women's decisions and those taken jointly by the men and the women and their partners.

Table 5.5: Men's and women's typical and joint decisions within the household

Women's typical decisions	Men's typical decisions	Joint decisions
• Asset management • Cultivation of land • Buying and selling of food • Household tasks and obligations • Childcare • Basic needs of the family • Construction of traditional huts	• Buying, selling and distribution of assets • Resource allocation • Traditional and cultural matters • Immediate and extended family matters • Financial matters	• Children's education and general upbringing (discipline, curfew)

As shown in Table 5.5, the women were clear about which decisions were typically men's, which were women's and which they took jointly. Women were typically involved in making decisions pertaining to the management of assets (land and livestock and houses), although they were not considered owners. Seeing to the basic needs of the household, such as clothing and food (although the what and how much was decided by the man who provided the money to buy), and the general nutritional well-being of the family was the woman's domain, as well as deciding on the mundane daily matters concerning the woman's household chores and obligations. Where children were

concerned, their general welfare in terms of childcare, nutrition and clothing was the woman's responsibility, while their education is a joint responsibility of the woman and her spouse. Men's involvement in decision-making within the household was in the buying and selling of property; resource allocation; traditional and cultural matters; immediate and extended family matters (although his father and mother were also involved with variations from household to household). The women crafters' decision-making power was assessed in terms of taking on decisions that are typically men's as the following discussion will show.

Influence of Income on the Women Crafters' Decision-Making Power

The question explored here is, "Does access to income increase the women's decision-making within the household and if it does, to what extent?" In other words, were the women able to make decisions that were traditionally considered men's as a result of their earning capacity and exactly what decisions were they enabled to make? According to most participants, the money they earned from craft enabled them to decide on joining *stokvels* (a type of revolving saving scheme managed and controlled by the members themselves) to save for their children's education and burial schemes. Some of those who participated in these saving schemes did so without their husbands' knowledge. This raised the question as to what would have happened if they had consulted their husbands. Would they have been able to carry out the decision to save their income? The response to this question was that men do not attach any value and significance to saving money, particularly in saving schemes, which they consider a trivial method of saving money associated with women. With regard to buying of food, all the women reported the power they gained was deciding how much to spend on groceries and how many times to buy groceries in a month. When the married women crafters were still dependent on their partners for money, the men decided when to buy and how much the women would buy. One crafter was able to buy goats with the money she earned. For the widows, decisions were taken in consultation with their sons, but they had the authority to enact them. One woman even ventured to say that sons are symbolic heads of their households, because most responsibility lies with their mothers. Men in the focus group interviews thought that women who work for the money should decide how it is distributed and used. One

male participant added that his wife showed him the money she had earned, but left her to decide how to use it.

However, there were decisions (those regarded as typically men's) that were not impacted upon by women's economic contribution in the household. Those were decisions pertaining to traditional and cultural matters, such as cultural rituals to be performed for the household, marriage of sons and daughters and property issues. Even where the husband was unemployed and the wife brought in an income, he was still regarded as the head of the household and took such decisions. In the case of widows with sons who were working, the sons took such decisions.

Control of Income
Three dimensions of control of the income emerged from the responses of the women crafters: (a) total control i.e. keeping and deciding on its use; (b) not keeping the money but deciding on its use; and (c) showing or telling the partner or other household member about it before using it. Figure 5.3 shows the three dimensions of control of income and the number of respondents to whom each of the dimensions applies:
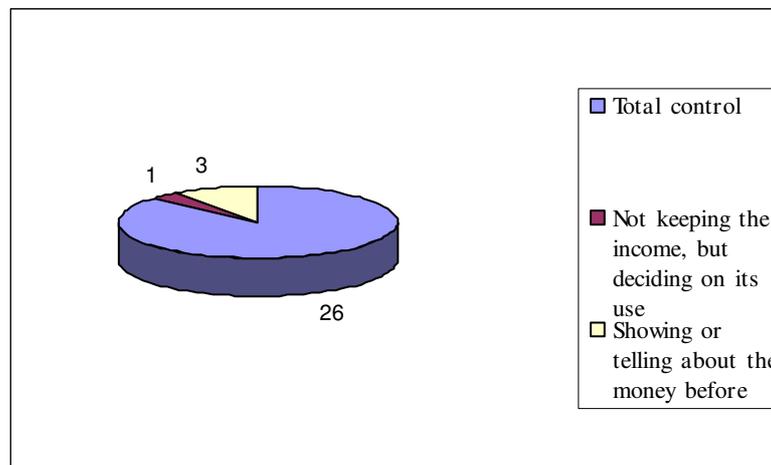
Figure 5.3: The proportional percentages of respondents in each dimension of income control

Twenty-six of the women crafters had total control of their income, where they kept it themselves and decided on its use and distribution without consulting their husbands or

other members of the household. The reasons for this varied from not trusting their husbands to demand the money from them, to the absenteeism of the partners from home. For those without husbands it was a natural outcome that they would have total control of their craft income. One participant gave her income to her mother for safekeeping, but she decided on its distribution. For this woman it was a question of trusting her mother more than her husband to keep her money safe. Three respondents with adult sons showed the money to their sons or told them about it before they used it. According to the three women, they would have done the same to their late husbands. In other words, they are continuing the gesture of respect for the authority of their sons and social norms.

The men in the focus group, however, responded differently to the question of control of the women's income. The majority of the men used tradition and cultural norms as justification for why women cannot have total control over their earnings. According to them, it is customary for the woman to give her income to her husband as the head of the household and they decide jointly how it will be used. If she does not do that, conflicts arise which invariably lead to the compromise of trust in the marriage. The men conceded, however, that despite custom and tradition, those women whose husbands are away usually have control over the use of their income. In their opinion, unemployed men co-operate with their wives on the decision to use the money. Those who give their wives problems are the employed husbands who do not support their families and make their wives use the money they have earned instead. Two of the men were of the opinion that women who earned an income had the right to decide how it is to be used and husbands should not demand it, but accept whatever they are given by their wives.

Bargaining and Negotiating Power

The majority of the women participants, particularly those with husbands, agreed bringing an income into the house increased their negotiating and bargaining power, albeit on different matters of the household. Whereas before they negotiated on financial matters, they now could negotiate on other more important matters, such as:

- Extending the house and adding an outbuilding;
- Continuing to work on craft;

- How much money to be spent on the education of the children and their school
- requirements; and
- Buying of livestock.

What was significant to the women was the fact that they were now able to overrule their partners in the above matters, because they provided the money to achieve the above-mentioned. However, negotiating with other members of the household was difficult for some women. For example, one married woman could negotiate with her husband on most important matters of the household, but could not negotiate with her mother-in-law who was the authority in both the immediate and extended families. Yet another respondent reported that she chose not to discuss her earnings with her husband, because he would demand all the money she made from craft. It would seem that negotiating and bargaining with their partners and other members of the household occurred mostly at the level where money was a prerequisite. On personal or intimate levels, the women were not as willing to discuss such matters and therefore such issues are not part of the discussion.

Purchasing Power

The women's increased purchasing power was evaluated in terms of what they were able to purchase with their earnings and whether they themselves benefited from their increased purchasing power. The latter specifically addressed the issue of perceived interest in benefiting from their increased purchasing power. All the women reported a definite increase in their purchasing power. What emerged as the most significant indicator of increased purchasing power was the quantity and quality of food bought. For example, the majority of the women could buy groceries twice a month, something they could not afford before. Also important for the woman was the quality of food and clothing they were able to buy for their children, for example groceries included nutritious food, such as eggs, meat and vegetables. One woman crafter was now able to buy brand new clothes for her children instead of the second-hand clothing she used to buy.

On the question of whether their increased purchasing power benefited them and their children (an evaluation of their perceived self-interest), the women's responses were ambivalent (not explicit). Although they agreed that buying clothes, groceries, paying for their children's education and building stronger stone huts was beneficial to all of them, it was not clear whether their personal needs had been met. Only one respondent was explicit about this issue: "I think I benefited personally, because building the house was meeting my needs as a woman and mother, i.e., of ensuring that we have a decent roof over our heads. Yes, I am satisfied that my needs were met". Another woman crafter recognized that, although she could buy more than she could before she earned an independent income, she could not meet her needs. It would seem that for the majority of the women, their children's happiness and well-being was more important than their own. Their happiness was subsumed under their children's. They were themselves not aware of this. Their perception of self-interest was low or non-existent. For the women, the concept of identity was not as an individual but only as a person in relation to others as mother, wife, grandmother.

5.5 CULTURAL NORMS AND THE WOMEN CRAFTERS' AGENCY WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLDS

Questions asked aimed at exploring the centrality of culture and tradition in women's exercise of their agency in terms of their decision to work and earn an independent income and the allocation of the women's income within the household.

Women's Decision to Earn an Independent Income

The responses of the participants to this aspect of their agency were based on three factors: their husbands' reaction to their decision to work and earn an income; the community's perceptions of working women; and what tradition and culture expect women to do with regard to work. With respect to their husbands' reaction, all the married women except one said they had their husbands' permission and blessing to work and bring in an income. In fact, most women reported that their husbands encouraged them to take up craft as an income-earning activity. The husbands' attitude towards their wives working raises a few questions around the issue of cultural norms regarding

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women working. What do cultural norms expect the women to do? Is the husbands' attitude in line with these cultural norms? If not, what is the cause for this deviation? Some of the women and men participants provided the answers to these questions. Both the women and the men were explicit about what culture and tradition expect women to do. Tradition, according to them, dictates that a woman's place is in the home where she needs to carry out her obligations to her husband and children. Hence, traditional women's tasks centre around domestic chores, reproductive activities, cultivating the land and looking after and managing the livestock. It was the men's responsibility to go out and work to fulfill his obligations towards his wife and children. However, the men in the focus group conceded that traditional norms are no longer restrictive regarding women working and earning an income. They agreed that hard times and poverty caused mainly by the high rate of unemployment of men has seen many men allowing their wives to go and work. The women participants echoed this sentiment. As one woman crafter put it, "Tradition somehow takes the backseat when there is a need to alleviate poverty." She relates that when she joined her husband's family as a new bride, she was told that the norm in the household was for the woman to stay at home and take care of her husband and children - no woman was allowed to work.

The community's attitude, personified in the neighbours', friends' and other household members' reactions, seems to exemplify and highlight cultural norms with respect to women working and earning an independent income. The women reported that the neighbours passed negative remarks about them, saying they were not really engaged in craft activities, but they were gallivanting and neglecting their duties and obligations as wives and mothers. In one of the crafter's words: "*Ngifika kulendawo ngezwa amahlebezi okuthi uma owesifazane ephuma eyosebenza usuke ejola noma efuna indlela yokujola*" *(*When I came to live here, it was rumoured that when a woman goes out to work, she is having an affair or she is looking for one). One respondent had a problem with her mother-in-law who insisted that a woman's place is at home and she did not understand why she would leave her children and husband to attend meetings and workshops for days.

Resource Allocation within the Household

In their responses, both the men and the women recognize that the father is the head of the household and as such the owner of the resources in the household who allocates them according to the needs of the household. However, it emerged that some of the men and women respondents view the income that women earn as separate from resources. When asked by the researcher why that was so, the women were quick to point out that they had worked hard for the money, while the other resources had been bought or amassed by the man. They therefore, felt that they had the right to total control of their income, as already discussed above. The men in the focus group were also divided on the issue of allocation of the women's income as part of the resources of the household. A few were of the opinion that the man as head of the household has the traditional role of allocating the household's resources, including the woman's income. Others, on the other hand hold, the view that the women have the power to decide on the distribution and use of the income they have earned.

5.6 THE EVALUATIONS OF THE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION

By the women themselves

The issue of how the women crafters themselves felt about their sense of agency, i.e., their ability to take action to improve their situation, is significant in the women's awareness of their agency. Thus, the questions asked in this part of the research process aimed at exploring the women's own evaluations of their economic contribution to their families' well-being. In other words, the questions sought to uncover the kind of feedback they got from themselves about their efforts at improving their lot. All the women, without any exception, expressed a sense of pride that they could do something with their hands to better their living conditions. They said that earning an income and contributing to the well-being of their families gave them a sense of worth, the opposite feeling of worthlessness and powerlessness they felt when they were not making any money. Some women expressed a sense of independence and self-reliance at being able to do things for families and not having to depend on other household members for support. One young woman crafter in particular, said she felt ashamed and embarrassed about being reliant on her father to support her children. The income they got changed all that. As one crafter put it, "You cannot see that I do not have a husband. My children are

at school and I am now able to do things on my own." Most importantly, according to the women, they felt they were good mothers, wives and grandmothers for being able to take care of their families. Their sense of worth and value was validated or invalidated by either their husbands' and other household members' evaluation of their efforts as the following discussion will show.

By other household members

Table 5.6 summarizes the other household members' evaluation of the women's economic contribution to the household.

Table 5.6: Other household members' evaluations of the women crafters' economic contributions

Source	Positive evaluation	Negative evaluation
Husbands	• Supported his wife by showing gratitude and • appreciation for her efforts • Expressed gratitude to neighbours • Helped wife by cutting the *Cyperus spp.* and clearing the bushes for easy access to the raw material • Stayed up in the night while his wife was doing craft • Never complained when his wife was attending meetings and workshops	• An absentee father, therefore not around to appreciate wife's efforts • Forbade his wife to join a savings scheme • Resents wife's friends and the time they spend together doing craft • Beat and chased wife out of the house for doing craft at night • Expressed concern that his wife was neglecting him and paying more attention craft
Mothers-in-law	• Encouraged her daughter-in-law to look for a job after son passed away • Helped daughter-in-law sew conference bags to meet the deadlines	• Distrusts her daughter-in-law's going out and spending nights at meetings and workshops • Suspected her daughter-in-law of having an affair
Children	• Expressed their gratitude and appreciation for their mothers' efforts • Helped their mothers with craft making to meet the deadlines for orders	
Other household members		• Complained about not doing part of work in the fields, instead they shut themselves all day in the house doing craft while they labour in the fields
Village people	• They praised the women crafters for working hard to support their families, pointing to the improvements they see in their households	• Some neighbours and friends frowned upon their efforts, saying they are destroying their marriages by gallivanting when in fact they

		were attending to meetings and workshops • They were envious of the improvements that the women crafters had accomplished in their households • They looked down on craft making as a poor woman's work
Village Headman	• He allowed access to the *C. spp.* growing in his area • He intervened when women from another village were overharvesting the raw material	

Table 5.6 shows that the women crafters received both positive and negative evaluations from husbands, mothers-in-law and village people. Their children and the village headman gave them positive feedback, while the other household members negatively evaluated them. On the positive side, the women reported that their husbands supported them in their endeavour to improve the home situation. A few husbands showed their support and appreciation by helping their wives harvest the raw material; clearing the bushes so that their wives would have easy access to it; and staying up at night with their wives while they were doing craft. This category of husbands never complained when their wives had to spend a night at the Craft Centre attending meetings and workshops. However, another category of husbands gave negative evaluations of their partners' efforts. Two of them were reported not to be around to see and appreciate the achievements of their wives. Two were aggressive towards their wives and actually beat them up. One husband chased his wife and children out of the house, accusing her of neglecting her conjugal obligations. Yet, another husband, though not aggressive, expressed his concern that his wife was spending too much on her craft at his expense.

The opinions and attitudes of mothers-in-law seemed to matter to the young married women crafters. While one respondent's mother-in-law was a source of encouragement and motivation to take up employment since her husband passed away, another crafter's mother-in-law suspected her of infidelity when she had to attend workshops. All the women's children appreciated and valued their mothers. The village people were another category of people from whom the crafters received both positive and negative feedback. Some villagers praised the women for their achievements, while others were envious of the improvements the women made in their homes. Yet others were extreme in their

criticisms, saying the women were destroying their marriages by going out and spending nights at the craft Centre. Four women of the same village reported that their headman was supportive of their craft enterprise, allowing them unlimited access to the raw material growing in his area. In fact, he intervened when some women from another village overharvested the reed so that it became scarce even for his village women.

All this begs the question of how the women reacted, particularly to negative evaluations. Were their spirits crushed and, therefore, their sense of agency eroded? To this question, some of the women interviewed answered that they never for one moment let the negative comments discourage and demotivate them. On the contrary, they continued in the face of such negative evaluation, for they saw what they were achieving with their craft earnings.

5.7 THE WOMEN CRAFTERS' COLLECTIVE AGENCY

Two aspects of the women crafters' collective agency were assessed, namely, what the women were able to do (as opposed to what they could not do on their own) as a result of their involvement in the Ikhowe Craft Group and what the women as a collective were able to achieve. Most women felt that the meetings and workshops (Plates 5.5 and 5.6) were an opportunity to share experiences and problems they encounter as women in their households, and most importantly share advice on dealing with these problems, thereby drawing strength from knowing that they are not alone in this situation. In the women crafters' words:

"*Ukuhlangana namanye amakhosikazi uzwe imibono yawo ngezinto eziphathelene nabesifazane kwayivula ingqondo yami mayelana nokubhakana nezimo ezinje*" (*Being with other women and listening to their thoughts on women's issues enlightened me as to how I should handle situations in my household*).

"*Ukuzibandakanya namanye amakhosikazi kungisizile ngoba bengithola ithuba lokuxoxa ngezinkinga engihlangabezana nazo ekhaya. Ngesikhathi lapho umyeni wami engixoshile nabantwana bami, bengiyaye ngibaxoxele omama beKhowe bangicebisi ukuthi ngenzeni.* (In the group, I was able to share my problems and challenges within my household with

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the other women in the group. For example, when my husband chased my children and me out of the house, I would talk about it with the other members and they would give me advice and support when I needed it most).

Plate 5.5: Ikhowe Craft Group workshop
Source: D. Hay

Plate 5.6: The women meet to work on their craft
Source: D. Hay

The Ikhowe Craft Group, therefore, provided space for the crafters to build relationships and friendships that extended even outside the group. In this way, they were able to expand their social networks, which for the women are critical for their individual personal and familial well-being. The issue of communication and building a trusting relationship among the women crafters, as well as between the management of the Ikhowe Craft Group and the members, emerged as one value they have all acquired. For one young married woman, just stepping out of the house to meet other crafters at the Centre gave her a sense of power. It was like crossing the divide that kept her in her own private sphere and at the same time separated her from the public realm where there were possibilities for her to improve herself. As she relates, "What I liked most with these meetings is that I would be given a leadership role that boosted my self-confidence and self-esteem". The increased self-esteem has enabled her to handle her family matters better.

On a more practical level, all the women thought the meetings and workshops they attended were invaluable as they afforded them the opportunity to learn new crafting skills. Whereas previously they only knew how to weave traditional mats with the same raw material, now they can produce sophisticated products (using various new designs) for the corporate and tourism market (Plates 5.7 and 5.8).

Plate 5.7: Some of the craft items produced by the Ikhowe Craft Group
Source: G. Thompson

Plate 5.8: Displays of the craft   produced by the Ikhowe Craft Group
Source: D. Hay

Their repertoire of skills and knowledge about using this particular reed has increased. Such skills, according to the women, will come in handy even when they leave Ikhowe. Since The Ikhowe Craft Group is now run along business lines (as an enterprise), the women have acquired basic business skills and the experience of opening a savings account. They all agree that if they had not joined the Ikhowe Craft Group, they would not know how to make a bank transaction. The management team itself reported that the acquisition of sophisticated business skills, such as the use of the internet for advertising, marketing and placing of orders has enabled them to interact with the outside world and build networks for their enterprise. The chairperson and manager of both the Ikhowe Craft Group and the Inina Craft Agency is filled with a sense of pride and self-confidence as she relates her experience of flying to Johannesburg to give a presentation to some of the key clients of the Inina Craft Agency which the Ikhowe Craft Group is part of.

5.8 EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES

The empowerment outcomes of the exercise of agency by the women crafters were evaluated in terms of the changes that have occurred in the lives of the women and their households. The question investigates how the women's earning power has affected their material conditions; their perception of themselves; and their relationships with other members of their households. The empowerment outcomes will be categorized into material, perceptual and relational outcomes. What is significant is that these outcomes in all the categories are intertwined. The realization of one outcome in one category influences the realization of an outcome in another category. Hence, they will overlap in the discussion. Table 5.7 gives a synopsis of these empowerment outcomes in their categories.

Table 5.7: Empowerment outcomes

Material outcomes	Perceptual outcomes	Relational outcomes
• Financial security- ability to save Money • Improvement in material conditions for example higher food nutritional value • Better provision for children's education • House improvement for example, extension of houses and building stronger stone huts • Ability to plan for the future – joining stokvels and burial schemes • Ability to perform cultural ceremonies thus elevating the family's status in the community.	• Realization of their inner ability to initiate change • Ability to stand tall among other women in the village • A sense of pride and worth to themselves and their families • Enhanced status of women within the household • Increased self-confidence • Realization of the importance of engaging in more than one income-generating activity • Desire and recognition of their ability to take advantage of other job opportunities.	• Ability to negotiate over division of labour • Husbands still maintained their status as heads of their households • Respect shown to the women crafters by their husbands, other household members and community members • Increased support networks • Decrease in conflicts and quarrels over money matters.

Material Outcomes

The income the women earned from craft enabled them to improve their material conditions in various ways. Most of the women felt financially secure as they were able to save some money for their children's education through stokvels. Most importantly, they could plan for the future as evidenced in their joining burial schemes. For most women their first priority was providing for their children's education in terms of paying for their school fees and providing the necessary school requirements. One woman crafter was able to put her daughter through tertiary education with the craft income. The majority of the women could improve the nutritional value of their families' food intake in terms of both the quantity and quality of food they could purchase. Home improvement was also high on the priority list; either extending the already existing house or building stronger stone huts to replace the mud huts that are vulnerable to natural forces. A few of the women were able to use the craft income to perform cultural

ceremonies, for example introducing a baby to the ancestors, thereby elevating the status of the family in the community.

Table 5.8 provides an indication of the gross annual income of the crafters as a group, which increased from 2003 to 2007.

Table 5.8: Crafters' average annual income as a group

Year	Annual Gross Income
2003	R12 771
2004	R40 820
2005	R123 225
2006	R397 147
2007	R304 189

Source: Ikhowe Craft Group Management Team

The gross income of the women crafters' group increased from R12 771 in 2003 to R304 189 in 2007. The increase in the gross income was reflected in the average annual income for the crafters. In 2003, the average earnings were between R1 100 and R3 000. With the increase in orders, the scale of earnings rose to between R5 100 and R7 000. In 2005 one crafter alone managed to make earnings of R10 000. The crafters' income levels continue to rise with the growth in sales, since the establishment of the Inina Craft Agency and its registration as a co-operative in 2007.

Despite the increases in the women's earnings and the significant contribution of the income to the women crafters' households, individual earnings varied and as a result, the economic impact of the craft income on the women's livelihoods was not the same for all of them. Those who had other regular sources of income, such the older pensioners; those with working husbands; and those who received remittances from their migrant sons reported a significant improvement in their livelihood as evident in increased ability to save their money in stokvels and, most importantly for them, to put in more money in stokvels than they usually did. Thus, the craft income enabled most crafters to diversify their livelihood strategies and supplement other incomes. The younger crafters, for whom

the craft production was the only source of income, remained in the survivalist level of their livelihoods. Nonetheless, the income did contribute substantially to their families' well-being.

Perceptual Outcomes

Perceptual outcomes are those changes that occurred in how the women crafters perceive themselves as a result of earning an income, and being able to contribute economically to the well-being of their families. The realization by the women of their inner ability to initiate change in their living conditions not only gave them a sense of pride and worth, but it also boosted their self-confidence and self-esteem so that they, as one of the women crafters put it, could stand tall among the other village women because of what they had achieved. Their status as mothers, wives and grandmothers was enhanced within their households as the other household members appreciated and valued their achievements. Their perception of their ability to work at something other than craft also changed. They all expressed their desire to engage in more than one income generating activity to increase their earnings, as well as the recognition of their ability to take advantage of other job opportunities.

Relational Outcomes

As far as relational outcomes are concerned, not all the women reported positive changes in their relationships with other members of their households. Only the positive relational outcomes are discussed here as the negative relational outcomes are discussed as constraints to the women's agency. A few women said that because the other members of their households, particularly their husbands, children and their grandchildren recognized the value of craft in improving their condition, they were willing and committed to taking on their mothers', wives' and grandmothers' household tasks and roles in their absence. That meant that the women could negotiate with them over the household division of labour. There is a relational aspect in this ability to negotiate, because it highlights the fact that the relationship between the women crafters and the other members of their households was a positive one, otherwise they would not have agreed to assume their responsibilities. What emerged as significant to the women was the fact that their earning capacity did not diminish the status of their husbands within the household. In spite of the

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traditional roles of breadwinner being reversed (the women bringing an income because their husbands were unemployed), the men maintained the authority of being the head of the household. Furthermore, their earning capacity enabled them to help their neighbours and friends who are in the same situation they were in. In this way, their potential support networks expanded. The married women crafters, in particular, reported a decline in conflicts and quarrels over money matters, especially because most of them controlled their income and knew exactly how it was spent.

5.9 ENABLEMENT OF THE WOMEN CRAFTERS' AGENCY

This section aims at exploring the factors that created conditions in which the women crafters were enabled to exercise their agency in order to realize empowerment outcomes (discussed above). The findings are derived from the participatory workshops, individual semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews with the management of the Ikhowe Craft Group. Table 5.9 provides a summary of the enabling factors and conditions of the women crafters' agency. These will be discussed under the following headings as they emerged from the research:

- Opportunities and resources
- Internal enabling factors (within the women's households and within the Craft Group)
- External enablers and enabling factors.

Table 5.9: Enabling factors and conditions

Opportunities and Resources	Internal enabling factors	External enabling factors and enablers
- Availability and accessibility of raw Material - Already existing crafting skills of the women - Availability and accessibility of the Credit Union Centre - The existence of Ikhowe Craft Group	- The Ikhowe Craft Group - Support and help from partners and other household members - Social capital within the group - Commitment of the women to changing their situation	- Funding (government and UKZN) - Capacity building (UKZN) - Research (UKZN) - Mentorship (UKZN) - Marketing (Inina Craft Agency) - Networking (with outside supporting groups and organizations)

Opportunities and Resources

The availability and accessibility of the raw material was cited as an opportunity that the women saw and utilized, making use of their crafting skills to generate an income. Although there are some challenges in accessing the reed (still to be discussed), the women agree that the fact that the raw material is a natural resource that grows in nearby wetlands and streams and it is an open access resource, is an enabling factor. However, the availability of the natural resource is restricted by its seasonality and other threats to be discussed under constraints. In addition, the existence of the Credit Union Centre as a central meeting place for the women, where they hold workshops and meetings for capacity building, has enhanced the women's productivity and contributed to their empowerment.

Internal Enabling Factors and Conditions

The internal factors that mediated the women's ability to act to bring about social change in their lives can be classified into the following:

- Those that derive from the women themselves;
- Those that emanate from the household dynamics; and
- Those that arise from the Ikhowe Craft Group as part of the women's collective agency.

According to the women, their commitment to changing their situation enabled them to persevere and push on in the face of challenges. For example, they did not quit even when the orders for their products dwindled. In the words of one crafter, "I am grateful even when I get R200.00 from craft. I say to myself I would not get anything if I were not involved in the craft business." Another woman crafter had this to say, "The fact that craft is a big source of livelihood for me and my family kept me going. I realized that the challenges we faced were minor compared to being without an income. We worked at some of the challenges and we succeeded in overcoming them." These factors point to the women's spirit of resilience and resourcefulness.

Some enabling factors or conditions emanated from within the household dynamics. They include the help and support that the married women received from other household members, whether it was in the form of gratitude and appreciation or staying up all night and helping them with craft to meet the deadlines or clearing the bushes for easy access to the raw material. Their positive evaluations of their contribution to the family's well-being (as already discussed) encouraged and motivated them to continue with craft, enabling them to increase their earning capacity. The Ikhowe Craft Group created enabling conditions for the women crafters. It was in the Group that they were enabled to achieve things they would not have accomplished on their own (these have already been discussed). The establishment of the Ikhowe Craft Group into a business enterprise further increased their ability to produce craft. In addition, the craft group created space for the women to expand their support networks on which they may depend in times of crises.

External Enablement
Funding for the Ikhowe Craft Enterprise comes from two sources, namely, the Provincial Government through its Local Development Programme, Gijima KZN (discussed in chapter four); and sponsorship from the Carl and Emily Fuchs Foundation; and the Ford Foundation, both under the auspices of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus). UKZN also provides mentorship to the Inina Craft Agency and by extension, the Ikhowe Craft Group through the Centre for Environment and Development under the leadership of Duncan Hay. UKZN focuses on building the

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management team and members' capacity in basic business skills and general entrepreneurial skills in terms of advertising and selling their products. The marketing aspect, which is critical for the viability of the enterprise, is handled by the Inina Craft Agency, established to coordinate the production and selling activities of the four craft groups under it, of which Ikhowe is one (chapter four). Exposure to the outside world by establishing contacts (networking) with other groups or organizations either involved in the craft or providing support in one way or another has enabled their empowerment in the sense that those contacts have promoted the group through sharing of ideas, marketing and selling of their craft. Figure 5.4 depicts the various contacts that the Ikhowe Craft Group has with other craft group or support organizations and the kind of support each provides.
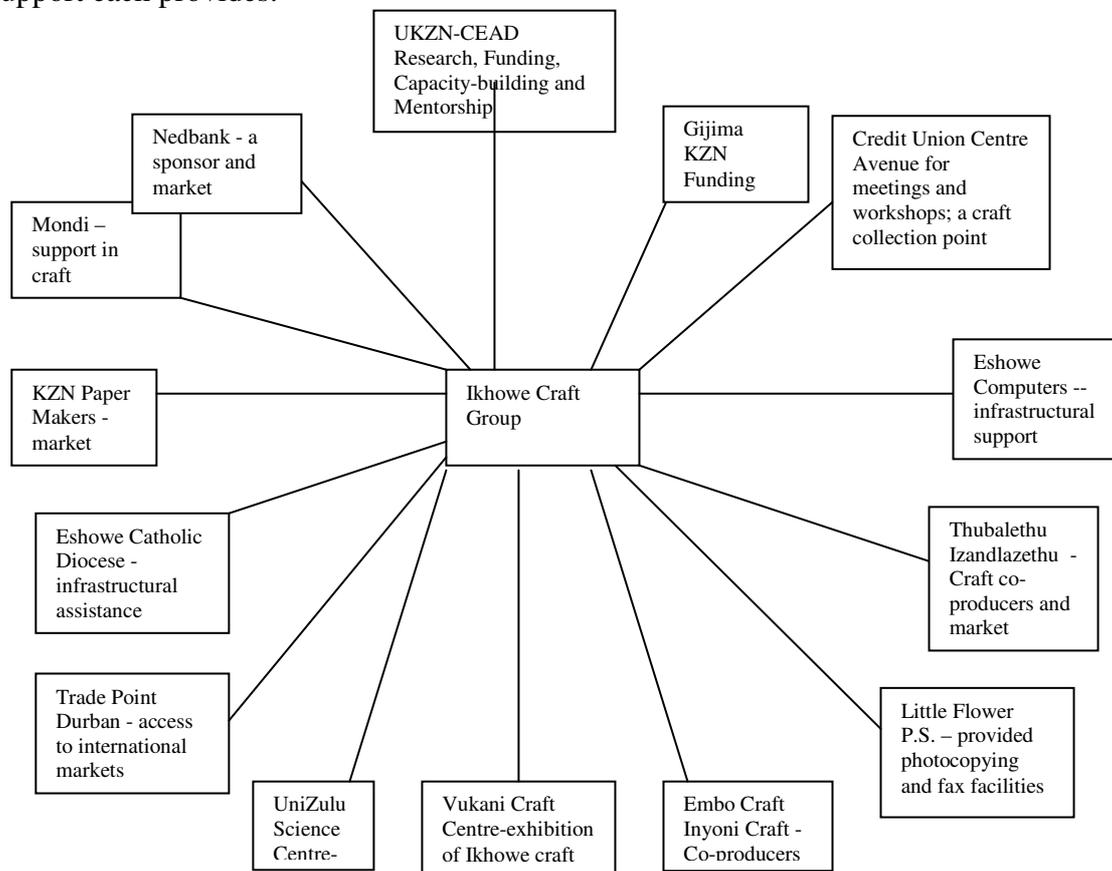
Figure 5.4: Network Diagram showing the outside contacts of the Ikhowe Craft Group

Networking or establishing outside contacts, according to the management team, has been critical in strengthening the viability of the enterprise. In addition to the funding, sponsorship and mentorship (as already discussed above), the Ikhowe Craft Group has

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established relationships with other craft groups and support organizations as depicted in the diagram. The support and assistance obtained through these relationships involve provision of both domestic and international markets for their products, infrastructural assistance in the form of photocopying, fax facilities (before the Inina Craft Agency secured its own), and provision of electricity, water and maintenance of the Credit Union Centre, which provides a venue for the women crafters' meetings and workshops.

5.10 CONSTRAINTS

The constraints that the women articulated point to those factors that impede their ability to exercise their agency in order to achieve empowerment. These factors relate to (a) accessing the raw material, (b) production and (c) household dynamics in terms of gender relations of power and cultural norms. As depicted in Table 5.10, they are grouped into:

- Raw material-related;
- Production-related;
- Gender issues; and
- Cultural issues.

Table 5.10: Constraints faced by the women crafters

Raw material-related	Production-related	Gender issues	Cultural issues
• Seasonal variation limits access to the raw material	• Rejection of products	• Domination and control by some husbands	• Cultural perceptions about working women in the community and within individual households
• They have to travel long distances to' access it in other villages in times of Scarcity	• Too many people controlling quality	• Manipulation of wives by husbands	
• Open access does not offer protection and conservation measures	• Conflict between management and members of Ikhowe	• Aggression and violence against wives	• Cultural norms and rules regarding working wives
• Its availability is threatened by fires and livestock	• Illiteracy among the majority of the women rafters	• Feelings of insecurity, inferiority and jealousy expressed by some husbands. towards their wives	• Authority and influence of mothers-in-law within households
• Scarcity of raw material in winter leads to cash	• Sustainability of the income-generating	• Lack of explicit appreciation from spouses	

flow constraints • Fear of snakes and warthogs during harvesting	activity	• Absentee fathers and husbands due to abandonment	

Raw Material-related

The fibre that the women use in craft production is a scarce natural resource that grows along streams and wetlands. The fact that it is a seasonal plant presents the women with challenges that constrain their ability to produce craft. This means that in winter when it becomes scarce, the women either have to travel long distances to harvest it in other villages (which have their own access arrangements), or they buy it from other women. In two villages, the indumo does not grow at all, therefore, the women buy from sellers at pension points or they travel to Empangeni (a town further north of Eshowe) to harvest it. Transport and purchase costs ultimately reduce the amount they actually get for their craft. The seasonal variation of the reed has serious implications for those who have not diversified their livelihood strategies (Figure 5.2) and rely solely on craft production for their income. Another factor, cited by the women, which limits the amount of raw material they can access, is their fear of snakes and warthogs they sometimes encounter in the bushes. A few women crafters harvest the reed on a white farmer's land under the pretext of harvesting firewood. To access the firewood, they have to have permits from the farmer. According to the women, their access to the raw material depends on the goodwill of the farmer and as such, it is not guaranteed. Furthermore, they faced threats from fires, and livestock who feed on the reed. Although the women have constantly appealed to the headman of the area and owners of the livestock, nothing has come of it.

Production-related

According to the members and management team of the Ikhowe Craft Group, most of the constraints discussed below were experienced at the early stages in the establishment of the enterprise. While they have dealt with some, others have been persistent, as it will become clear in the discussion.

One major challenge for the group members was the issue of quality control. When some of their products did not go through because they were rejected, they felt frustrated and despondent. As one member puts it, "It has taken us some time to understand why our product is rejected, but as Duncan (the facilitator of the craft group) and the management constantly explain to us the importance of quality control we are now trying to produce bags of good quality." From another producer, "Having my bags rejected was a big challenge to me at first. I have since learnt to do the bags properly. Duncan always tells us it is important to produce bags that will sell, otherwise what is the use of producing at all, if we'll not get an income from them." The women reported that they relied on one another for help, guidance and encouragement with regard to improving the quality of their product. Related to the issue of quality control, the women felt there are too many people in the management controlling quality. As the women explained, all the quality controllers were paid from the production income, each getting R4.00 per bag. At the end of the day, therefore, there was less income coming to each producer. They would prefer an independent quality controller to counteract favouritism. This in itself raises concerns of costs.

Conflicts that arose from lack of understanding and communication between management and the group members characterized the early stages of enterprise. All the members of the management team reported that the women did not have an understanding or the ability to reconcile the number of bags made and the money made from those bags, taking into account the rejected bags. Recording of the women's products gave rise to tensions between management and the women, as there was no communication between the secretary, who recorded the products and the chairperson, who actually collected the products from the members. The perceived discrepancies often led to confrontations on the issue of the amount earned versus the amount expected. When asked how they had dealt with this particular challenge, the secretary responded that she called the concerned member and explained how she ended up with the amount she got. According to the management team, part of the solution was to get the members themselves to do their own recording and the record keeper then verified these. With patience and constant explanations on the part of the management, the women ultimately understood the

accounting process involved. However, the problem of illiteracy among the women crafters persisted. Two-thirds of the women producers, particularly the older women, could not read or write and therefore, the information was given verbally to them. Furthermore, the dry spells caused by dwindling orders and the deaths and illness among the crafters militated against the women's maximum potential in productivity. The women, however, acknowledged the importance of diversifying their income-generating activities to mitigate the dry spells.

However, almost all the crafters were concerned about the sustainability of the enterprise. This anxiety stemmed from the difficulty in accessing the *C. spp.* in winter and obtaining markets for their products. They were afraid that the withdrawal of the UKZN facilitator would mark the end of the Ikhowe Craft Group. According to the management of the craft group, the establishment of the Inina Craft Agency would solve the issue of the sustainability of the enterprise. The Inina Craft Agency, which at the time of my research was completing its registration as a co-operative, comprised four producer groups, which would market and distribute their products. In addition, as a co-operative, the Inina Craft Agency would be able to procure government funds, a crucial element to sustain an enterprise. As far as the availability of *C. spp.* goes to maintain the viability of craft production, the women, including the management, highlighted the importance of protecting and conserving the wetland as a resource base. To raise awareness of the latter, the management team, in conjunction with the facilitator, organized workshops for the women. Most importantly, the management team was trained in skills development, such as business and administration skills; and computer and internet literacy. The general members also learnt new designs, product quality control and how to hold and interact in meetings. All these skills combined, according to the management, would ensure that they are able to run their business on their own with minimal external intervention.

Culture-Related
The cultural constraints faced by the women producers stemmed largely from cultural norms and rules embedded in the traditional rural society the women live in. They reflected people's perceptions and expectations of cultural imperatives versus what actually happened. With regard to women working outside the home to earn an income,

both men and women were fully aware of the cultural norms that governed women's work. For example, they knew that the woman's place is traditionally in the home and that the money is in the control of the man whose responsibility it is to allocate the household's resources. They acknowledged, however, that cultural issues took the back seat to survival and livelihood means. Hence, they saw no contradiction between what culture dictated and what they were doing. In fact, they attributed their having to work to the need to alleviate poverty. Cultural norms may not be explicit in households, but husbands may use them to put working women in their place. As one producer said, "My husband does not forget to remind me that, although I am the breadwinner in the household, he is still traditionally the head of the family". In addition, cultural correctness dictated that neither may a woman earning an independent income boast and brag about her achievements, (otherwise the husband will be offended and his dignity hurt), nor did the man praise his wife directly. Such was the case of the husband of one woman crafter, who talked proudly of his wife's accomplishments in the home to her neighbour and headman but never directly to her. These may appear minor challenges to outsiders, but the women regard them as significant in the sense that where they needed to be validated by their husbands they were not.

Attitudes towards the women crafters, which had cultural overtones, came from the women's neighbours and some of the married women's mothers-in-law. As already alluded to, the comments from friends and neighbours pointed to the unseemly behaviour, in a cultural sense, of the women crafters who, in their perceptions, were neglecting their children and husbands in search of an income. What they were really insinuating, was that it is against their culture for women to go out and work. Such women, culturally speaking, are 'loose' women who were out to disgrace their men. The women confronted these challenges by choosing to ignore the comments. The mothers-in-law emerged as an interesting category of people who uphold cultural and traditional norms within their own and sons' households. They in turn could be classified as enablers and inhibitors of the women crafters' agency. Of the eight married women interviewed, four experienced problems with their mothers-in-law with regard to attending meetings and workshops. According to the women, their mothers-in-law admonished them, telling them their place

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was in the home with their husbands and children. As one woman crafter put it, "When I first came as a new bride, my mother-in-law told me in no uncertain terms that no woman works in this household. That all changed when my husband lost his job". It would seem that the mothers-in-law in the scenario just described take on the role of upholding culture in their sons' households when their sons have been made incapable of doing so by their unemployment status. We thus see here the tension between culture and survival played out. The responses from the men in the focus groups suggested that although men these days are not against women working per se, they are concerned about the changes in women's attitudes towards culture. For example, some women who are allowed by their husbands to work outside the home lose respect for cultural norms. They start wearing trousers and discard the practice of wearing headscarves when they go out.

Gender-Related

Although the women interviewed were not gender conscious in the feminist way of being oppressed and subjugated, they knew and articulated it when their partners unjustly treated them because they brought in an income. The responses of the married women are of relevance here. Those women who received negative evaluations from their husbands on their economic contributions to the household (as discussed above) reported instances of domestic violence and abuse. One woman crafter related an instance when her husband chased her and her children out of the house, because, according to her husband, she was neglecting her conjugal obligations as her time was taken up by craft making. Yet another woman told of her friend's husband who stalked her to the stream where she and her friends were harvesting the raw material. Her friend subsequently got a beating from her husband, who thought he saw them flirting with the workers who had pitched their tents near the stream. When asked to define these negative reactions from their partners, the women concerned labeled them as feelings of insecurity, inferiority and jealousy. They were all of the view that their husbands felt threatened by their sudden independence and the power they acquired from their craft income. In such circumstances, the women have a difficult time negotiating with their husbands on decisions relating to the use and distribution of their income.

Although the women were not able to define these reactions in feminist terms, they were clearly aware of the subtle domination and manipulation inherent in them. Resentment of their wives' economic independence took the form of threats, physical force or subtle manipulation or abuse. A few women felt their husbands abused them through their lack of explicit appreciation and value for what they have achieved for their families. Although they understood their husbands' feelings of insecurity and the cultural aspect of overtly praising the women, they felt cheated of the affirmation from their husbands of their sense of value and worth. To highlight some of the agency and empowerment issues discussed above, profiles of a few selected respondents are presented below. Pseudonyms are used to hide the identities of the respondents.

5.11 PROFILES OF SELECTED RESPONDENTS

Profile 1: Hlengiwe

Hlengiwe is 33 years old, married and lives with her husband and their two young sons on the same homestead with her in-laws. She has a standard eight education and has never worked in her single and married life until she joined the Ikhowe Craft Group. Before that, they were poor and could not afford to send their children to school or buy school requirements. Consequently, they missed a great part of schooling. They depended largely on her mother-in-law, because her husband was unemployed. Contrary to what other respondents said about the role of culture in a woman's choice to earn an independent income, she stated that in her household a woman was allowed to work outside the home. There were no constraints in her decision to earn an income. In fact, both her husband and her mother-in-law encouraged her to look for work that she could do at home. Her husband was reluctant to let her look for work outside the home, where she would mingle with men in the workplace.

However, the problem arose when she came back with her craft earnings. He dictated to her how it should be used, which was to complete her *lobola* ritual. For her, her priority was to meet her children's school necessities, buy food and clothes for her family. Her husband encouraged her to make decisions about the allocation and distribution of the money she earned. There were, however, decisions she could not make even with her

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new status as a primary earner in the household. These decisions related to traditional and customary matters and their extended family and they her mother-in-law's prerogative. She feels empowered in the sense that she realizes that she has the ability to work and contribute economically to her family's well-being, to plan and save for the purchases in the house. Unlike other respondents' husbands who felt threatened by her new earning capacity, her husband supported and respected her. She says the money she earns from craft has given her power to negotiate to continue with craft making. Even her mother-in-law respects her now as she witnesses how her family's well-being has improved.

Profile 2: Thembisile

Thembisile is a 70-year-old widow. She lost her husband, son and daughter-in-law and is now living with her grandchildren. She is a pensioner and makes craft in the Ikhowe Craft Group to augment her government grant. With the money, she was able to put bread on the table for her family, educate her grandchildren, which are a priority for her, and build a stone hut for them. These achievements gave her a sense of worth and pride.

According to Thembisile, the major enabling factor for the craft making is the availability of the induma and the fact that they could sell their products. The group had a good leadership in the management team. This means that when the University of KwaZulu-Natal facilitator withdraws from the project, they will be able to sustain it. Most importantly, the women crafters are committed to the success of their craft production. Even when things do not go well in terms of getting substantial orders, they encourage one another to persevere and remember what their status was before they joined the Ikhowe Craft Group.

Collectively, the women have learnt skills from one another to make different designs with the *induma*, for example, blinds, placemats, conference bags, and file covers. The also helped one another with sewing to make sure they made the bags in the right way and control for quality. The meetings and workshops that the facilitator organized for the women were valuable, as they taught them how to run meetings on their own and basic business skills. Unfortunately, some of the knowledge and skills were lost to Thembisile

as she is illiterate. What she gained was from listening and she passed it on to her grandchildren in the hope they would use it in their lives.

One major challenge in accessing the fibre was the long distances they had to travel to get it, particularly in winter when fires and cattle threatened it. They then had to buy it from other women, which meant less money for them. When they put it out to dry, they had to watch it constantly, because the slightest dampness spoilt it and they could not use it any longer.

Profile 3: Busisiwe

Busisiwe, 50 years old, lives with her husband who works away from home. Unemployed at that time, she and her husband did vegetable gardening. At the invitation of one of her friends, she joined the Ikhowe Craft Group. The craft income, she says, enhanced her ability to make decisions within the household. Before she started doing craft and earned an income from it, she took decisions pertaining to the cultivation of the land and their children's education. Her craft earnings enabled her to have a say in the allocation of money; something she could not negotiate about before.

However, because she knew her husband's habit of spending all his pay on liquor, she never told him when she got paid and how she would use the money. He only saw evidence of the income spent in the form of groceries, furniture, and clothes for the family. When Busisiwe asked him if they could join a stokvel to save some of the money earned from craft, he refused, saying that doing things with people was a recipe for disaster, but she went behind his back and joined all the same. The stokvel was a good opportunity to meet other women of the community and share problems and challenges they face in their roles as mothers, grandmothers, and wives. She also took out a funeral policy and her purchasing power definitely increased.

Busisiwe faced challenges and constraints in her household from her husband. He was very difficult and resented her taking time to do craft, saying she neglected him and her conjugal obligations. He would get up, switch the light off, and threaten to throw her out

if she continued with craft making. He even complained to the *induna* of the village, his relative, that he was losing his dignity with her buying everything in the house to which the *induna* replied that he should be happy and grateful that she was stepping up to alleviate the shame of poverty. What made Busisiwe angry with her husband was the fact that he did not thank her directly for her contributions, but instead told their neighbour how much he appreciated her efforts.

Profile 4: Thandi

Thandi, aged 38, is the secretary of the Ikhowe Craft Group and part of its management team. She is married and lives with her husband, her mother, and their four children. Her education level is higher than that of the other members of the group as she completed her secondary education. Before joining the Ikhowe Craft Group, she worked as a volunteer in a community development project. Although she did not earn any income, she acquired quite a few skills, which she transferred to the Ikhowe Craft Group. The inspiration to join craft production came from seeing other women producing craft, selling these, and making a living. Besides her love for craft, she always believed that one should develop oneself or change for the better and this was what she was striving for-to improve the well-being of her family.

Her economic contribution not only improved her household's well-being, it gave her a sense of worth and accomplishment, which in turn enhanced her self-efficacy. In her own words, *"Ukwenza i-craft kungibonisile ukuthi nginawo amandla okufeza okungaphezu kwalokhu engikwenzile."* (Making craft has shown her that she has the ability to accomplish more.) Being able to achieve what she was able to do for her family and seeing her children happy and well provided, gave her new strength and self-confidence to confront life's challenges. Most importantly, her craft income has enabled her to make decisions she was not part of before, for example, how much to spend on groceries and savings and extending the house for an outbuilding for the boys. These were his responsibilities and he was not comfortable with her new role of primary earner in the home alongside him, but he did not resort to aggressive behaviour.

Thandi noted that one of the major challenges is the sustainability of the craft production. It hinges on two important factors, namely, the marketing of their products and the availability of *C. spp*. The establishment of the Inina Craft Agency, a co-operative whose task was to strengthen the marketing and skills development of the affiliated producer groups, addressed the former. The latter was tackled in workshops to raise awareness of the importance of conserving the wetlands. In the group she acquired new skills such as bookkeeping, computer literacy.

5.12 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the findings of the research based on the research questions outlined in chapter one. All the findings were derived from semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews, a participatory workshop and focus group interviews. The questions sought to explore the women crafters' agency in terms of accessing the raw material and their individual and collective agency. The women's agency was investigated within their households to evaluate to what extent their craft income translated into power for the women, looking at the women's own interpretation of their agency; the manifestation of their agency within their households (in terms of choice making, decision-making, negotiating and bargaining power, control of income and purchasing power.) The findings revealed increased power in the aforementioned aspects of agency, which enabled the women to realize some empowerment outcomes. In the findings culture and gender emerged as critical variables that challenged the women's exercise of their agency and hence their empowerment. The latter centred on material, perceptual and relational changes that occurred because of their earning an income. Furthermore, the findings revealed the enabling and constraining factors and conditions both within the individual women's households and within the craft group, the former promoting and enhancing the women's exercise of their agency; and the latter limiting their agency and empowerment. In short, the findings point to the question of the relationship between the craft income and the empowerment outcomes and most importantly the role of agency in linking the two. The following chapter analyses this relationship further.

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, the research findings are analysed, following the two-pronged nature of the study. Firstly, the analysis focuses on the women crafters' agency in the access, use and control of *C. spp.*. Secondly, the women crafters' exercise and experience of agency and empowerment outcomes relating to their socio-demographic characteristics and the concomitant vulnerability within their households and in the Ikhowe Craft Group are analysed. The structures of enablement and constraints that shape the women's enactment and experience of agency and empowerment are delineated, highlighting the social structures of gender, culture and social institutions of traditional leadership as the most powerful and pervasive in mediating their agency. Some aspects of the women's agency, such as identity formation; the ideology of motherhood; consciousness-raising; the private-public spheres; and practical versus strategic gender needs and empowerment outcomes are analysed and located within the broader feminist discourse, foregrounding the specificity and contextuality of the study.

6.1 WOMEN'S ACCESS AND USE OF CYPERUS SPP.

C. spp. has emerged as the most critical natural resource for the rural women crafters' livelihood. The women's access to those natural resources that form an important base for their livelihoods is central to any discourse of their economic agency and empowerment. Using the feminist political ecology framework, the following analysis seeks to unravel those factors that mediate the women's access to and control and use of *Cyperus spp*. It examines the relationship between the women and their resource base and the resource tenure around *Cyperus spp*.

In considering different feminist approaches to women and the environment, as introduced in chapter 2, both the Women, Environment and Development (WED) paradigm and ecofeminist approaches offer useful starting points in analysing the context under study. WED and other feminist scholars (Braidotti *et al*., 1994; Goebel, 2003) have focused on women's relationship with their environment as users, managers and primary

victims of environmental degradation. The women crafters are dependent on the environment for their income-generating activity, as it forms the critical base for *Cyperus spp* which they use for craft making. Put differently, the women's livelihoods are closely tied to the environment. As users of the environment for both daily subsistence and market exchange, the women possessed knowledge about the resource base from which they extract the raw material, *Cyperus spp*. As Schroeder contends, "…it is women's regular contact with the resource base, born of specific responsibilities…rather than some sort of natural symbiotic relationship that has given particular groups of women privileged knowledge of resources their communities depend on" (2003:17). Specifically and of relevance to this study, the women collect and use *Cyperus spp*. for market-based craft making, making it the key natural resource for their livelihood strategy to reduce poverty.

The study has revealed that the women, as primary users of the environment, are the victims of environmental degradation or neglect. Overharvesting of *Cyperus spp*, fires and livestock threaten the continued existence of *Cyperus spp*. Despite the women's appeal to the Traditional Authority for some kind of intervention to address these problems, nothing was done. In this context, there is no empirical evidence that they could be rightly characterized as managers of their environment (Braidotti *et al*., 1994; Leach *et al*., 1995). One could argue that the women themselves could have done something to ensure the protection and conservation of *Cyperus spp*. The interviews conducted with the women suggest that apart from calling on the tribal authorities to intervene, they did nothing on their part to ensure the sustainability of *Cyperus spp*. For example, the women crafters did not address the seasonal variation of *Cyperus spp*. by planting more to augment that which grows in streams and wetlands. This would be in their best interest as the sole users of *Cyperus spp*. This situation highlights their lack of management activity in relation to the raw material. The women could use their knowledge of the resource's ecological dynamics for better environmental management to secure a more sustainable harvest of *Cyperus spp*. This finding supports other feminist scholars on gender and environment (Agarwal (1992), Jackson (1993), Leach (1994) and Goebel (2003)) who argue that the relationship between women and their environment

cannot be assumed. Rather, it should be interrogated for a better insight into the realities the women face.

Ecofeminism, with its ideological notion of the women/nature relationship as opposed to WEDs material conception, introduces a significant factor in the posited relationship namely, that of activism or fighting against the destructive patriarchal developmental model on both women and nature. The Chipko movement of the Himalayan region of India is an example of such activism (Shiva, 1989). The Indian women fought to preserve the forests that provided their livelihood (ibid.). Taking contextual realities of women into consideration, this study argues that the women crafters could mobilize and actively engage with the local government structures on matters regarding the conservation of *Cyperus spp.'s* ecological base. However, this requires consciousness-raising about environmental issues, which could begin at the community level.

The feminist political ecology framework (as developed in chapter 2) is the most useful approach in analysing the women crafters' ability to access, control and use *C. spp.* as it probes into the role of gender and institutions in shaping environmental control and use and the ways in which site-specific ecological systems and livelihood strategies are linked. Feminist political ecologists (Goebel, 2003, 2005; Rocheleau *et al.*, 1996) have positioned gender as an important, though not the only factor in mediating human/environmental relationships. They acknowledge that gender relations have a powerful influence on how people use and manage their environments (Goebel, 1998, 2003, 2005; Agarwal, 1994; Leach *et al.*, 1995). Drawing on the feminist political ecology paradigm of natural resource use, this study has highlighted the institutional dynamics of access to, use and control of *C. spp.*, and how gender emerges as a significant social variable that affects the use and value of *Cyperus spp.*

The Institutional Dynamics of Cyperus spp.
The local institutional context within which the women crafters gained access and control of *C. spp* is constructed and shaped by:
- The Tribal Authority which administers the land on which *Cyperus spp.* grows;

- The gender division of labour embedded in and played out in the women's households and the society of which they are members, in ways that shape their identities and roles; and

- Natural resource tenure.

The Tribal Authority

Historically, the apartheid regime had marginalized both black men and women in land ownership and access to natural resources. The post-apartheid government, however, has initiated and implemented constitutional reforms that ensure women's access to land and natural resources in ways that enhance their livelihoods (McCusker and Oberhauser, 2006). In addition, the 2004 Communal Land Rights Act authorized traditional leaders to administer land and its environmental resources in rural areas. The land in the study area of rural Eshowe and everything that grows on it naturally, including *C. spp.*, is regarded as communal property and as such, the Local Tribal Authority administers it. This forms the foundational institutional context for the women crafters' access to *C. spp.* and other natural resources.

The research findings suggest that the local structure, instead of enabling the women's access to *C. spp.*, was a constraining factor. The Tribal Authority represented to the women a gender bias based on their experiences with the village headmen who did not heed their calls to intervene in terms of ensuring the sustainable availability of *C. spp.* (as discussed in chapter five). Hence, the Chief and his village headmen embodied patriarchal notions of regarding women's issues as trivial and not worthy of their attention. Kepe (2003) found similar attitudes among the men in his study of resource value and social dynamics around *Cyperus Textilis* in Pondoland, South Africa. Men did not get involved in decision-making over the raw material, as they regarded this as women's stuff. Because *C. spp.* is regarded as a woman's plant and its harvesting a woman's activity, it was devalued and its protection and conservation neglected. This neglect not only marginalized the women crafters in terms of environmental benefits to enhance their agency and empowerment, but it also had serious implications for the sustainability of the women's Craft Enterprise. South African research documenting the intersection of gender relations, livelihoods and environment has shown how gender

relations continue to exclude women from enhancing their livelihoods (Meer, 1997; Rangan and Gilmartin, 2002; Walker, 2003; Razavi, 2003). This situation echoes the tensions that exist between gender equality as enshrined in the constitution and customary law (traditional leadership) in rural areas as argued by Walker (2005); Ntsebeza (2005); Claassens (2005) and Cousins (2007) in chapter 3. Empowerment strategies that use a natural resource base, such as craft making, need to address issues of resource tenure and gender issues entrenched in them, for the women to emerge as true beneficiaries of those empowerment initiatives.

The gender division of labour in the women crafters' households underlie the gender-differentiated use and value of natural resources between the men and women in the study. Leach (1992) confirms that women's work and responsibilities arise through the organization of gender relations within households. As this study suggests, men's and women's activities within their households reflected the gender-differentiated interests and needs, and, therefore, the use and value attached to those natural resources they used to carry out those tasks and responsibilities. For example, *Cyperus spp.* is among those sedges that only women use to make craft for both domestic and commercial purposes. Even before the commercialization of craft (Shackleton, 2005, 2006), women used *C. spp.* for cultural ceremonies and as such, the resource has been associated with women, forming part of their cultural identity. *C. spp.* is traditionally linked to women and craft making as opposed to other natural resources that men use for household tasks, such as *Cyperus latifolius* and vetiver for binding thatching grass for roofs. In other words, because of this gender division of labour, men never use *C. spp.* nor do they derive any value and need for it. This supports Leach's (1992) contention that men and women interact with the environment within gender relations and processes concerning the use of natural resources. In her study of the Mende-speaking people of the Gola forest area of eastern Sierra Leone, she found that gender relations are central to the use of forest resources. Goebel's (1998) study in Sengezi, a Zimbabwean Resettlement Area, also sheds light on the gender-differentiated perceptions about natural resources, resources areas and their uses. She demonstrated, for example, how herbs were predominantly known, collected and used by women while poles were used by men.

Examining how the uses of natural resources are differentiated by gender, therefore, provides a useful basis for identifying people's (men and women's) different interests, needs and opportunities. This study has highlighted the fact that rural communities do not have a single shared set of interests and priorities with regard to natural resources, but a range of gender-differentiated ones. This has significant implications for environmental use and management initiatives for local level empowerment. Differentiation according to perceived needs and priorities for men and women in resource use needs to form the basis for policy and environmental interventions. Not only is resource use differentiated along gender lines, craft making using sedges or reeds is also gendered. Hence, rural women's central role in transforming craft making - traditionally done for domestic use - into an income-generating activity cannot be overemphasized (Marcus, 2000; Shackleton *et al*., 2000; Kepe, 2003; Shackleton, 2005). It is important, therefore, that rural women have access to natural resources and that resource tenure does not marginalize them.

The gendered nature of tenure around *C. spp*. reinforces the claim that gender is a variable that permeates the women crafters' lives from the household to their interaction with the natural resource, *C. spp*. Although the ecological sites of *C. spp*. are streams and wetlands, which are part of the village commons, it is an acceptable fact that only women collect and use *C. spp*. and that men are not involved in it. In other words, *C. spp*. is an exclusively women's plant. This implies that access to *C. spp*., although not regulated in terms of formal tenure arrangements, is determined largely by the gender-differentiated resource use within the women's households. As a women's plant, it has enabled the women not only to create quasi-private tenure and resource value around it, but also their own spaces in these ecological sites. This finding supports other scholars' notion of 'gendered spaces' with regard to natural resources, where men and women have differential and exclusive use and control of them (Rocheleau and Edmunds, 1997; Kepe, 2003) or what Goebel (1998) refers to as different 'resource worlds' for men and women. The women in the case study may not have decision-making power about when and how much to plant as the women in Kepe's study do, but the exclusive access they have to *C. spp*. provides them with some measure of control over it. Furthermore, *C. spp*. has a bonding effect on the women who meet at these sites and build social relationships.

As Rocheleau *et al*. point out, " a focus on the separation of women's and men's activity and control in space is crucial in unraveling and recognizing those spaces in the rural landscape in which women exert relatively more control over resource use and from which they derive personal benefit" (1997:1351). In addition, the gendered complexities of resource tenure need to be understood, and this can only be achieved by interrogating the diversity and specificity of gender dynamics in resource access, use and control.

6.2 THE VULNERABILITY OF THE WOMEN CRAFTERS

Vulnerability has recently gained currency as a concept to explain poverty and social disadvantage (Watts and Bohle, 1993; Hogan and Marandola, 2005; Cligget, 2005). The women crafters, through their sociodemographic characteristics could be described as a vulnerable group. They were generally an impoverished group and their vulnerability was caused by age, marital status and illiteracy. Whether they were de jure heads through widowhood, or de facto heads of their households by virtue of being single, having absentee husbands or by being abandoned by their husbands, female headship constituted social disadvantage for the women crafters; which was both a product and a reflection of their poverty (Hogan and Marandola, 2005). Varley (1996) distinguishes between the 'woman-headed household' (where the head is defined as the person who controls and exercises authority) and the 'woman-maintained household' (where the woman is the main supporter or primary earner). Female headship in this study showed the characteristics of the woman-maintained household in that the women crafters (whether married, single or widowed) were either the sole breadwinners or primary earners in their households in which their husbands or sons retained the status of head of the household and exercised authority. Even the married women were vulnerable in the sense that their husbands were unemployed, and engaging in craft to earn an income enabled them to take over the role of their husbands as breadwinners.

There is a strong correlation between the age and marital status of the women crafters, with most of the female household heads in the older age groups (51-60 and 61-70), thus increasing their vulnerability. Old age renders the women crafters in these two age-categories unemployable, yet they had the responsibility to take care of their children and grandchildren. The upside was that they were eligible for government pensions, which

put them in a better position than those who were not recipients of such grants. On the other hand, age also conferred on the older women the authority that would otherwise be vested in their husbands. This authority increased their ability to exercise their agency in making decisions for their households. The correlation between age and marital status for the young unmarried (age group 31-40) is not so clear-cut and straightforward. For those women who were unmarried and living with their parents, their agency was curtailed in the sense that, although the income derived from craft empowered them in some ways, they could not make decisions concerning household matters, such as ownership of property and resource allocation. Furthermore, unemployment impacts significantly on both the women household heads and the married women whose husbands were unemployed by trapping the women crafters and their households in a vicious cycle of poverty. Being unemployed with no income, compounded their poor conditions, which acted as motivation to choose to engage in an income-generating activity of craft production. Although illiteracy cut across all age groups, the intersection of age and illiteracy became a constraint for the women to learn new skills such as bookkeeping and basic numeracy as in recording their products.

Although Sen's (1993, 1999) theory on entitlements, functionings and capabilities does not incorporate the notion of vulnerability, it is useful in that it highlights the opposite of vulnerability, i.e., capacities or the power to act. In other words, in order for poor people to transcend or overcome their vulnerability, their capabilities (agency) and functionings need to be enhanced. Sen's capability model, therefore, sees well-being in terms of functionings and the capability of achieving them. The concepts of vulnerability, functionings and capabilities can be used to analyse the role of agency in the empowerment of the women crafters. The movement from a state of vulnerability to achieved functionings, which according to Kabeer (2000) is a primary feature of well-being, required that the women possess certain capabilities. For example, within their households, the women's increased power they derived from their craft income, enabled them to improve the well-being of their households and reduce their vulnerability. Their ability to control their earnings, to bargain and make decisions, which are capabilities,

allowed them to allocate and use their earnings to promote the well-being of their families.

6.3 THE WOMEN CRAFTERS' AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT WITHIN THEIR HOUSEHOLDS

The overarching research question as to what extent the women crafters are able to translate their enterprise income into power evokes the pivotal role of agency in the empowerment process. Like Kabeer (2000), this study contends that access to resources is not a sufficient condition or measure of women's empowerment. Agency emerges as the most critical link between resources and opportunities on the one hand, and empowerment on the other. However, agency does not occur in a vacuum, but within a context, which this study refers to as structure (after Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration), which may enable or constrain it. The following discussion analyses the manifestation of the women crafters' increased power derived from craft earnings in terms of choice making, decision-making, bargaining and negotiating, control of income and household resources and the perceived contribution to household well-being and the women's definition of their own agency. The analysis also incorporates a discussion of those structural factors and conditions that either promoted or inhibited the women's experience of agency and empowerment outcomes.

There is strong empirical evidence that for the women crafters living with their partners, the exercise of their agency and the realization of empowerment outcomes take place within households that are characterized by asymmetrical gender relations. In these households, more power and authority are vested in the hands of men, and women occupy subordinate positions within the household. Consequently, unequal resource allocation and distribution, control of resources and more decision-making power in the hands of men are a hallmark of the households in the case study. Feminist scholars on household economics (Guyer, 1988; Folbre, 1988) have also shown how gender dynamics result in unequal resource allocation and decision-making power, refuting the assumption of a unitary model of the economic household (Agarwal, 1997; Katz, 1997; Iversen, 2003; Goebel, 2003). Within this model, an altruistic household head is assumed to represent the household's preferences, needs and interests. My study supports

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Agarwal's (1997:3) contention that "households, including rural households in developing countries, are constituted of multiple actors with varying preferences and interests and differential capacities to realize those interests". The power hierarchy operating within rural households, and within which the actors realize their interests, is entrenched and perpetuated by the strong gender ideology and cultural imperatives obtaining in rural households. The ideology is that the man is the breadwinner and primary income earner, making all the decisions about the allocation, distribution and use of resources in the household and the woman with the children are dependants. However, as Goebel (2005) and Schroeder (2003) attest, the gender/power relations are not static, but are subject to change and negotiation under conditions of change. This is exactly what the study sought to uncover, namely, whether the women's income did indeed upset the power balance as the following analysis of the women crafters' agency within their households will show. It is important, however, to note that the different categories of the women in the research experienced agency and empowerment in both similar and different ways.

Choice Making Power

The research evidence suggests that for all the women crafters, making the choice to engage in craft making as a poverty alleviation strategy was in itself an exercise of their agency, and in fact, the first step to empowerment. They could have chosen otherwise, i.e. to remain trapped in poverty. Making a choice to act, as the women in the case study chose to do, by finding a way to earn an independent income, was not only an integral part of exercising agency in the empowerment process, but it was also the first crucial step without which there is no empowerment. Furthermore, as Kabeer (2000) in her theory of choice making suggests, making a choice to act or do something as a critical dimension of agency, entails more than the ability to make that choice. The kind of choices a woman makes within her household will either facilitate or inhibit her experience of agency and empowerment. The choices the women in the study made, namely, that of doing something to improve their living conditions, were empowering and were indeed an exercise of their agency- to choose to act. Choosing to act, to go out and earn an income afforded the women space and opportunity to emerge as significant

social actors or agents of change within their households. As Kabeer stresses, "we can equate power with choice as long as what is chosen, appears to contribute to the welfare of those making the choice" (2000:23).

This study extends Kabeer's (2000) theory by saying that the context within which women made choices is crucial in evaluating their agency and empowerment. Although driving forces played a major role in their choice to earn an independent income, their agency was further enhanced by the fact that this particular choice did not reflect the traditional and cultural values with regard to women working outside the home. Instead, their choice went against cultural imperatives and expectations, falling outside the cultural parameters. In other words, the women crafters were able to transcend cultural barriers to do whatever they could to bring about change in their families' lives. This applied to all the women crafters, since culture permeated all aspects of their lives. Even those women crafters without husbands had cultural factors to consider when they made the choice to go out and earn an independent income. Hence, the incorporation of the context of choice making will foreground 'structures of constraints' and their influence on individual capacity to make that choice. This makes the analysis of women's agency complex and multilayered. Many factors, therefore, need to be taken into consideration to account for the choice women in their households make to earn an independent income. The empirical evidence supports the claim of the centrality of choice making within the agency and empowerment paradigm (Sen, 1985; Kabeer, 2000).

Decision-Making Power

Decision-making in the women crafters' households is traditionally gendered in a way that gives men power and advantage over women and keeps the latter in a subordinate position. This supports the theory of feminist writers on household economics and decision-making, which depicts the household, including rural households, as characterized by asymmetrical resource allocation and decision-making regarding those resources (Guyer, 1988; Folbre, 1988; Agarwal, 1997; Katz, 1997; Iversen, 2003; Goebel 2005). Goebel (2005) further argues that the ideology surrounding gendered economic responsibility in the household roughly matches the unequal control of income. However,

this study shows that, as economic circumstances changed and men lost their status of breadwinner, women became the primary and sole income earners as they took over the economic responsibilities of household maintenance. Their increased earning capacity enabled them to make not just any decisions, but those decisions that were largely the men's domain, such as saving, buying of livestock, and spending money on traditional and cultural ceremonies. Herein lay the power of their agency. Put differently, if the income the women earn did not enable them to make decisions they were not making before earning an income, no experience of agency and empowerment occurred. Even in those decisions traditionally described as women's, such as buying of food, the crucial point was to determine what aspect of that decision the income and the control thereof enhanced. For example, deciding on the quantity and quality of food and how often to purchase food were aspects of decision-making that were greatly enhanced by the income they earned and controlled. This study has found that control of income significantly increases decision-making power as the following discussion on income control and resource allocation will show.

There are, however, those decisions that remained in the hands of men as heads of households, despite women's increased power within the households. For example, the study has revealed that those decisions relating to matters falling outside the domain of the household, such as relations with extended family and initiation of traditional rituals and ceremonies, such as introducing a new baby to the ancestors remained the responsibility of the man, although the woman provided the money for them.

Income Control and Resource Allocation
Empirical evidence points to the fact that resource allocation and distribution within groups, for example, the household, are closely linked to power and gender relations, which invariably favour men and marginalize women and children (Cornia *et al*., 1988; Folbre; 1988; Roldan; 1988; Papanek, 1990; Iversen, 2003). The findings of this study suggest that this power imbalance in terms of resource allocation is not static, but can alter, albeit temporarily. A change in the economic structure of the household where women earn and have control of their income may create spaces within the household for

more say in how the income and other household resources are to be allocated and distributed. Where women earn an income and control it, they have the power and the ability to change and negotiate the terms of power in resource allocation. This study reveals a strong link between women's income control and their increased power to decide on how the income is used. Kantor (2003) in her study of women's empowerment through home-based garment production in Ahmedabad, India, also found that only those women who were able to control their income were involved in important household decisions, including deciding on how the income they earned would be distributed, which was traditionally a man's domain as the wage earner.

However, this correlation is not as simple and straightforward. In this study, cultural norms and pre-existing gender inequalities mediated the women's access to and control of income and its allocation. A trace of cultural domination over women was evident in the study among those husbands who constantly reminded their wives that their place was in the home and that tradition dictated and expected that the head of the household control the money. The women responded to their husbands' subtle domination over control of their income by either not telling their husbands about their earnings or giving their income to their mothers for safekeeping. The women's response to their husbands' domination with regard to controlling the wives' income, points to the power of resistance on the part of the women. Agarwal (1997) found a similar situation in her study of South Asian rural women who engaged in covert acts of resistance to male domination in resource distribution and control by secretly engaging in income-generating activities or hiding their earnings in the roof or under piles of clothes. The single, widowed and divorced women crafters did not experience any constraints relating to income control. The women, whose sons were symbolic heads of their households, used and allocated their earnings as they saw fit. This is contrary to what one would expect culturally where a son assumes his late father's total authority.

For all the women in the study (whether married, widowed or single), the control of income in their hands not only enhanced their decision-making power in resource allocation, but it also had positive and beneficial outcomes for the children in particular

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(Safilios-Rothschild, 1988; Bruce and Lloyd, 1997; Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999; Frankenberg and Thomas, 2003). This is evidenced by the overall pattern of household consumption, the types of food purchased and higher children's school enrolment (irrespective of gender). The research findings support this hypothesis. The women in the case study placed their children's welfare and education high on their priority lists. Thomas (1997), cited in Frankenberg and Thomas (2003), in his study of household budgets in Brazil, found the same relationship, i.e., income in the hands of women within the households was used efficiently to improve the well-being of the children and the entire household. What is interesting with regard to children's education is that both girls and boys benefited from their mothers' control of income, a finding that contradicts empirical evidence that African societies do not tend to invest in the education of girls (Kevane, 2004). Increased access to and control of income in rural households by women suggest that family dynamics relating to household financial management are changing with women taking active roles in the economic maintenance of households. Hence, it becomes imperative to recognize the possibilities of craft making and other income-earning activities to increase women's ability to enhance their economic independence.

Bargaining and Negotiating Power

Increased bargaining power is closely linked to control of income and other household resources. The relationship is dialectic. The more bargaining power a member has relative to other household members, the more resources she or he can control. Equally, the more control a woman has over household resources, including an independent income, the more bargaining power she has over decisions of resource allocation within the household (Quisumbing, 2003; Frankenberg and Thomas, 2003). The latter was particularly evident in the women crafters living with their partners. They used the bargaining power they derived from controlling the income they generated from craft to overrule their partners in matters that (a) were traditionally men's responsibilities and (b) which required money to achieve, for example, buying of livestock, extending their houses and continuing to do craft.

Without an income, the women could not have bargained and negotiated for those important matters in the households. The collective bargaining models, which Agarwal (1997) and Sen (1985) advocate and support, predict that in patriarchal households women with more assets, such as an independent income or education have greater bargaining power. They have more options or what Agarwal (1997) refers to as 'fall-back position' in the event that conflicts and non-cooperation threaten both the wife's and husband's position in the marriage relationship. The most pertinent question to ask with regard to the women crafters' income is whether it was substantial enough to serve as fallback position for them. The finding suggests that it was not substantial enough to be regarded as an asset to constitute a fallback position. It merely strengthened their ability to influence the intra-household bargaining process in their favour, but not sufficient to allow the women to pull out of the relationship.

The concept of lack of perception of self-interest, advanced by Sen (1985) to explain rural women's ability to bargain for those things that promote their well-being, is useful to analyze the women crafters' bargaining power and process. The women did not bargain or negotiate for their own well-being and happiness. Instead, they used their enhanced power to promote the well-being and happiness of their children first and then the general household. In other words, the women's needs and interests within the household were synonymous with those of their families and this in turn affected the bargaining and negotiating outcomes which had very little to do with their own happiness. The women crafters' own needs and interests were not on their priority lists. What might have appeared to promote their own interest was, on closer examination, the needs of the whole household. For example, extending a house or building a stone hut (stronger and more durable) did not fulfill the woman's need for shelter, but the whole family benefited from it. This overlap between rural women's personal interests and needs and those of the household has been found to be a persistent feature in rural households. Such a situation not only preserves the intrahousehold inequality, but also curtails women's agency and empowerment within their households and challenges notions of individual interests (Sen, 1990; Kabeer, 1994, 1999; Agarwal 1997; Iversen, 2003).

Socialization emerged as the overriding factor for the women's altruism in all categories (Folbre, 1988; Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 1994, 1999; Kantor, 2003). Women within patriarchal societies such as that of the case study are brought up to fulfill the role of nurturers and caregivers, looking after the welfare of their husbands and children, often with no regard for their own needs and interests. What is most revealing is that the women do not see anything wrong or out of place with the situation. In their view, what they are doing is part of the natural order, not to be questioned. This in itself is disempowering the women, as it means that the women have so internalized their subordinate position that they are unable to see the underlying factors in their relative disadvantage within their households. This finding is congruent with Kabeer's (1994:227) assertion that "the social context helps shape not only whose interests will prevail, but also how different actors perceive their interests." In addition to the pre-existing gender ideology embedded in patriarchal households, tradition and culture play an important role in determining bargaining power and in setting the limits to what is bargained for. Any conceptualization of agency that overlooks the mediation of cultural norms on the part of women, misses the exercise of power that takes place without explicit conflict (Kantor, 2003). As much as Sen (1990) emphasizes women's lack of perception of their own interests as affecting the bargaining process, emphasis should also be on external constraints of the social context on the women's ability to influence the bargaining and negotiating outcomes. Without this consideration, both men and women will be viewed as possessing equal agency (Sullivan and McCarthy, 2004).

Perceived Contribution to Household Well-Being
How a woman evaluates her own contribution to household well-being; and how the other household members evaluate her efforts either enhances or inhibits her sense of agency or self-efficacy (which is crucial in her definition of her own agency). Self-efficacy theorists (Nelson-Kuna and Riger, 1995; Bandura, 2000) attest to the crucial role of people's beliefs about their capabilities, to act in actually enacting them. The theory is extended to add that the feedback people get from themselves and those around them affects their sense of agency. A positive evaluation heightens one's sense of being able to act, and conversely, a negative evaluation curtails self-efficacy. In the context of this

study, the positive feedback the women got from themselves and those around them (husbands, mothers-in-law, neighbours, friends and village headmen) gave them a sense of worth and value and made them aware of the inner strength they possess to act and bring about change in their households. It also validated their social identity as good mothers, wives, grandmothers and members of their village communities. In the process, their self-esteem and self-confidence increased. Equally important in the analysis of the women's agency within their households was the negative feedback they received about their efforts. The women crafters' response to the negative evaluation of their economic contribution by those around them, illustrates the point that it can either break or make them. They were not daunted by the negative comments from others. On the contrary, their criticisms served as a spur for them to continue with craft making.

Underlying the external evaluations of the women crafters' economic contributions to their households' well-being is what Agarwal (1997) terms a divergence between what the women actually contribute or are able to do and perceptions about their contributions. In the study, these perceptions of the women's contributions, particularly their husbands', emanate from the gender ideology and cultural norms of the women's society. The women's husbands did not acknowledge fully or directly their contributions by holding back due praise and appreciation or getting embarrassed by their wives' achievements. The effect this had on the women was that they felt undervalued and their worth invalidated. It also rendered their efforts and contributions invisible (Agarwal, 1997). The cumulative effect was to perpetuate the gender asymmetries within the household. In other words, men used this subtle strategy to maintain the status quo, i.e., their superior status and the women's subordinate position. Both internal and external evaluations of women's efforts as social agents - what I would call intangible resources - are crucial to how women perceive their capability for action. Without generalizing about all the women in the study, 'recognition' emerges as an important aspect of the women crafters' agency, particularly in the context of their patriarchal households. As Mann argues, "social recognition and reward are a fundamental and relatively autonomous dimension of individual agency, which is typically denied to less powerful members of society" (1994:11).

6.4 STRUCTURES OF ENABLEMENT AND CONSTRAINT

Giddens' (1979; 1984) structuration theory is useful in analysing the women crafters' agency within the context of those factors and conditions that enable and constrain their agency. According to Giddens, structure and agency are intertwined; they are constitutive of each other, as one cannot exist without the other. In other words, agency does not occur in a vacuum; it takes place within a context that either enables or impedes it. The following discussion will analyse the context of enablement and constraint that bears on the woman's ability to be social agents.

Enabling Factors
With reference to my study, enabling factors included resources and opportunities. Resources incorporated the following:

- the raw material (*C. spp*.) they used to make craft;

- the income they derived from craft;

- power within the women to choose to change their situation;

- resources provided by external enablers as in the institutional and financial support provided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN); Provincial and Local Government through Gijima KZN, donors; and

- other support groups that formed a network of support and assistance for the Ikhowe Craft Enterprise in which the women are involved.

Opportunities, on the other hand, entailed the availability and accessibility of *C. spp*. and the opportunity to engage in craft making, and the existence of the Credit Union Centre, a community facility that served as a meeting place for the women crafters. In this study, resources and opportunities sometimes overlapped. For example, a structural opportunity (a structure that offers an enabling opportunity), such as the Credit Union Centre, could simultaneously serve as a resource to facilitate the exercise of agency and the realization of empowerment outcomes. The fact that the Centre existed (long before the Ikhowe Craft Group was established) as a place where the women of rural Eshowe met and engaged in income-generating activities, gave the Ikhowe Craft Group the opportunity to revive it after it had ceased to operate. It is also a resource in the sense that it facilitated

the production and marketing of the women's product and capacity-building as it was used for workshops and meetings. The study also makes a distinction between (a) structural resources; and (b) resources outside structures. The former include those resources that arose from structures that enabled the women crafters; resources provided by the institutional contexts of the craft group. These included UKZN, Gijima KZN, Inna Craft Agency and the support and assistance by the various organizations and other producer groups in their network. The latter group consist of those resources are those existing structures, which are nonetheless resources, such as the raw material, the women's crafting skills and their strong sense of self-efficacy.

Constraints

Of the constraints that the study found to impede the women's experience of agency (raw material-related; production-related, gender-linked and cultural-based) gender and culture (to be discussed in detail below) emerged as important structural factors that mediate the women crafters' agency and empowerment. Hence, the analysis of structures as constraints will focus on the two. In the study, both the gender ideology and cultural norms within the women's households and their community can be characterized as pre-existing in the sense that they were both operating in their households, determining the actions of the various actors within the households and the women took them as given and part of the social order. This is in contradiction to what Kevane (2004) says about structures as emerging from and created by the choices of individuals. However, once they were in the game, so to speak, they had the choice to challenge the gender ideology and cultural rules. They chose not to. Whilst access to and control of their income increased their agency, the gender and cultural structures remained intact. The following discussion will show how each of these two structures influenced the women's experience of their agency.

Culture and Gender

As social structures, gender and culture, provided the structure (context) within which the women's enact their agency (Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Ratner, 2000; Rubenstein, 2001; Sullivan and McCarthy, 2004; McCarthy *et al*., 2006); and their centrality in rural women's experience of agency can never be overestimated.

They do not act separately in shaping the women's experience of agency and empowerment. Rather, they interlock in ways that restrict their achievement of empowerment outcomes. Some scholars regard culture as the linchpin of African women's subordinate status (Geisler, 2000). As a barrier, culture confines women in the private sphere, by prescribing the roles men and women should play in their households – men have the authority as heads and breadwinners; and women are the dependent, subservient and nurturing wives and mothers. Culture and socialization have entrenched these identities in households and society. However, the study has demonstrated that in times of economic crisis, for example, with the unemployment status of the heads of households, cultural parameters shift. This shifting of traditional roles of men as providers and women as dependents echoes Hunters' study (2006, 2008) in Sundumbili, a township in Mandeni near Eshowe. He found that economic trends of unemployment profoundly altered gender household relations in ways that undermined the men's masculunities, including losing their power to construct and support their families. It is important to emphasize the notion of shifting, because this indicates that the state of allowing women to work and earn an independent income may only be transient. It is likely that once the men start working again, there will be no need for women to go out and work or the women might be pressured to give up work, and the cultural parameters will return to their old position. On the other hand, it is hard to predict as the women might refuse to give up the opportunity to earn an independent income.

Furthermore, the arbitrary evocation of culture by men (in the study) to put their womenfolk in place, shows that culture is ever present in rural households. They would remind the women that, although the women bring in money, they (the men) are still traditionally the heads of the households. Again, the women's husbands used the issue of lobola payments to keep their partners in a subordinate position. The traditional conception of lobola (bridewealth) is that once a husband has paid lobola for a woman, he virtually owns her and the resources she might accrue in the relationship. Furthermore, if the woman does not do the man's bidding, she can be sent back to her maternal home, something that can be a source of embarrassment for the woman herself and her family.

This means that, although culturally it is an accepted and welcomed practice, it places women in a precarious and unfavourable position.

African women have sometimes appeared as custodians of 'tradition and culture' (Aina, 1998; Geisler, 2000) and thus the agents of their own marginalization and subordination (Geisler, 2000). Mothers-in-law (though not all) emerged from my study as an important category of women who upheld cultural and traditional norms within their own and sons' households. For example, they would point out to their daughters-in-law (some of the young married crafters) clearly and explicitly that their place was in the home taking care of their husbands and children. They were thus limiting their daughters-in-law's entry into income-generating activities. Here, 'gender' is being mediated by age and position in the household, with these women having an interest in keeping their sons' wives within the patriarchal family. Whilst they themselves were exercising agency, they were at the same time inhibiting their daughters-in law's realization of their agency. Even the community's perceptions about and attitudes towards working women, as exemplified by the comments from the crafters' friends and neighbours, underscore cultural expectations and prescriptions for all the women's behaviour in their households and communities.

The interrogation of culture as a structure that constrains women's agency within rural households can facilitate the portrayal of the women crafters as significant actors, who finding themselves in an ambivalent position with respect to their traditions and cultural imperatives, transcended those very same cultural structures (if only temporarily) to improve their situation within their households. The interaction of culture with the rural women's agency is not as simple and straightforward. Based on the findings, this study advocates an analysis of rural women's agency that understands adequately the mix of domination by men and the nurturing disposition of women towards their men; the conflict and supportiveness that exist side by side within rural households. As some feminist scholars (Nelson-Kuna and Riger, 1995; Mann, 1994) contend, only by taking into cognizance the specificity and diversity of women's cultural and historical contexts, will women's experience of agency be accurately captured in all its complexity.

Like culture, the gender ideology is a structure that is firmly embedded in rural households in my study and it pervades all aspects of rural women's lives and like culture, it is accepted as a given and part of the social order, Bourdieu's doxa (1977). Hence, the women crafters' agency and empowerment should be evaluated against the backdrop of unequal power relations. Roles, responsibilities and tasks are gender-differentiated; and men and women's identities are constructed and shaped around the gender ideology. As Dwyer and Bruce (1988) confirm, the gendered roles are explicit in African societies, yielding more authority and power to men relative to women, who occupy a subordinate position. Healy's (1998) definition of power (and the attendant unequal power relations) in terms of hierarchical positions of actors sheds light on why some actors in the social hierarchy have more power than others, depending on the resources they have and the rules they can reorganize. In other words, the more resources an actor has access to and can deploy; and more rules he can structure and impose, the more power he/she can wield. This explains why men in households have the power to make rules and allocate resources, which women do not. In short, gender has emerged not only as a significant social organizing principle within the women's households, but also as a critical power structure that limits the women's ability to exercise their agency in terms of economic participation; intrahousehold resource control and allocation and decision making. As the findings of this study suggest, power is constantly contested and the outcome of the contestation is influenced by the resources and rules used. The income that the women generated from craft gave them increased power within their households.

The literature on gender relations has demonstrated that, as a social construct, they are not static, but dynamic and flexible, as they can be negotiated under conditions of change (Harding, 1996; Jarviluoma *et al*., 2003; Goebel, 2005; Steady, 2005). The women crafters' increased economic agency in terms of earning capacity challenged the gender division of labour within their households. By taking up an income-generating activity, the women crafters became the primary breadwinners of the household, a role traditionally associated with men in rural households. With the income they generated from craft, they were able to fulfill those obligations that were their husbands' domain. Whilst this picture of reversed gender roles and responsibilities provided by the empirical

evidence is by no means typical or universal in all rural households, it does make clear the point that in times of economic crisis rural households face, gender roles can alter. As members of a society steeped in traditional gender relations, the shift of power the women experienced could be described as subtle since the men retained their traditional role of head of the household. The women themselves showed ambivalence towards their newly found power or agency and the authority of their husbands in the household. Despite this, the study has shown that, even in the patriarchal structures of gender and culture, the women developed new roles and strength.

The study has shown how gender and culture, as the most pervasive and powerful social structures, interacted to shape the women's behaviour and actions in their households. Contrary to some feminist theorists (Aina, 1998; Okeke, 2000; Steady, 2004), who argue that the centrality of culture in African women's agency precludes a critical examination of how gender discrimination maintains unequal relations, this study has foregrounded culture to emphasize its intersection with the gender ideology in affecting women's exercise of their agency within their households. Notwithstanding their gains in the control of their income, making important decisions relating to the allocation of the income, bargaining and negotiating, purchasing power and other empowerment outcomes, culture and gender have a limiting effect on the women's full realization of their agency. For married women, the men (though not all) still wield power over their wives as shown in the men's lack of recognition of their contributions and domestic violence, either chasing the woman out of the house, beating her or forbidding her to work with her friends on craft. This evidence of men's attempt to maintain their superior position in the face of their wives' increased power supports Safilios- Rothschild's (1988) finding in her study of the impact of agrarian reform on men's and women's income in Honduras. She found that, within the cultural context of rural Honduras, husbands who felt threatened by their wives' higher incomes resorted to mechanisms that minimized their wives' contributions in order to preserve the status quo within their households.

6.5 FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE WOMEN CRAFTERS' AGENCY

The study uses a feminist framework to interpret the women crafters' agency and locates some of the aspects of the women's agency and empowerment within the broader feminist discourse. This attempt rests on the premise that women's experience of agency can neither be universalized nor essentialized (Stamp, 1995; Mohanty; 1997; Nnaemeka, 1998). Furthermore, the empirical evidence from this study cannot be generalized to other African societies, as within the African societies themselves, there are regional and ethnic variations. The analysis will incorporate the following aspects of the women's agency:

- The women's identity formation
- Motherhood
- The private-public spheres
- Consciousness-raising
- Practical versus Strategic gender needs

Identity Formation

The identity of the women crafters can be characterized as two-fold and it is closely tied to how they define and construct their identities as mothers, wives and grandmothers in their households (individual or subjective identity) and as women crafters in the Ikhowe Craft Group and as members of their communities (collective identity). Both individual and collective identities of these women were grounded in the social context, a finding that supports Walker (1995) when she argues that a woman's identity is both personal and collective as she is also a member of a social group, which helps construct and define her identity. The women crafters' personal identities were shaped within their households by both their own perceptions of their role as mothers and wives on the one hand, and on the other hand, the perceptions of their social world (their husbands, relatives and members of the wider community) of which they were members. Both these sets of perceptions were in turn shaped by the social context made up by the gender ideology and cultural imperatives. Here, we see the interplay of the two identity formation processes. As mothers, wives, sisters and grandmothers, the women's actions were mediated by the rules, expectations and norms of their households and their village communities, which were often congruent with each other.

The study reveals that the social identities of the women crafters (as mothers and wives and income-earning members of their households and communities) often clashed and overlapped at the same time. For example, while the women's decision to earn an independent income promoted the welfare of their children, husband and the general household, they went against cultural expectations and prescriptions of a dependent woman. Yet again, the women's identities overlapped or complemented each other as crafters who, at the same time, fulfilled the roles of providers and nurturers. I agree with Walker (1995) that the other social identities of women interact with that of a mother in complex ways to shape women's choices and actions. Hence, a woman's identity formation must be viewed as multiple and multi-layered.

Another dimension of the multi-layered nature of the rural women crafters' identity formation process concerns the notion of altruism or lack of perception of self-interest (already discussed in detail above). In promoting the welfare of their families, the women crafters' identities were subsumed under that of the whole household. Their needs and interests became synonymous with those of their households. This finding supports the contention of notable scholars (Sen, 1990; Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 1999; Iversen, 2003) that in traditional (as in patriarchal) societies, women's abilities to take action to further their own interests within their households are restricted, since their interests overlap with those of the household. This is because the concept of identity is not as an individual, but as a person in relation to others. These findings point to a need for a context-specific conceptualization of women's agency that probes into how and to what extent women's perception of their identity is instrumental in achieving or not achieving their well-being (Sen, 1990; Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 1999).

Motherhood
Feminist writers have employed the concept of motherhood to explain African and South African women's political agency as a means of ideological and institutional empowerment (Kaplan 1992, 1997; Hendricks and Lewis, 1994; Acholonu, 1995; Walker, 1995; Amadiume, 1997; Gouws, 2005; Steady, 2006; Hassim; 2006). Within such a model, women are motivated by their maternal roles of nurturers to mobilize for social change. I extend this concept of motherhood to the rural households of the women

crafters. I argue that the notion of motherhood and their identity as mother played a pivotal role in motivating the women to engage in an income-generating activity to improve the well-being of their families. Whilst the principle of motherhood created space for black South African women's political agency in the public sphere (Hendricks and Lewis, 1994; Walker, 1995; Lewis, 1996; Gouws, 2005; Hassim; 2006), I use the concept to foreground the women crafters' social agency within the private sphere of their households.

In the context of this study, two factors helped shape the women's notion of motherhood, namely, (a) the women's own perceptions of their roles as good mothers, what Walker (1995) calls the subjective element of motherhood; and (b) societal norms and expectations of what good mothers should be and do. The interplay of these two factors is significant in explaining the women crafters' choice and action to earn an independent income. Granted, external drivers prompted them to make the choice they did. Beyond that, their maternal thinking (Ruddick, 1983, 1989) inspired the women to promote the welfare of their children. Their maternal thinking was evident in their income expenditure - their children's needs in terms of nutrition, clothing, education and school requirements were highest on their priority lists. Society also expects the women to fulfill their motherly obligations towards their children and families. However, the coming together of the subjective element and societal norms in shaping the notion of motherhood was not without conflict for the women crafters. While they saw their role of nurturing and taking care of their children extending beyond the household to include earning an independent income outside the home, society frowned upon this initiative and confined their role within the household. The latter has implications for the women's social agency. Although the women crafters realized economic gains, their friends and neighbours questioned their status as mothers and wives. Some were labelled as 'loose'- a label that denied their validity as mothers and women, since being loose is the antithesis of the cultural ideal of mother and wife. As already stated, the women managed to transcend these constraints and continued to work and do craft.

Kaplan (1992, 1997) refers to two sides of the concept of motherhood in mobilizing women into action, namely, 'female consciousness' and 'feminist consciousness'. According to her, female consciousness can and does evolve into feminist consciousness when women's actions become politicized and challenge the status quo. The women in her study of a women's committee in Crossroads, Cape Town were initially motivated by their maternal thinking to fight for better and secure housing for their families, which later evolved into a feminist consciousness as they mobilized to legalize their informal settlement (Kaplan, 1997). There is no evidence of such a transformation among the women in the case study. Their efforts to bring about social change within their households can be characterized as female consciousness. In other words, the women crafters did not possess a feminist consciousness that would prompt them to challenge patriarchy within their households. In this regard, they reflected the essence of African womanhood that centres on the cohesiveness of the family, with the woman and the man striving for complementarity and co-operation (Acholonu, 1995). This is indeed a tricky situation, for which there are no simple and straightforward answers, because of cultural nuances involved. It also serves to highlight the significance of accounting for women's settings in the conceptualization of their agency and empowerment. However, the question of challenging gender inequalities in rural households is an area for further research, and does not fall within the scope of this study. It is, however, important for this research to point out the critical need for communities and those forming part of rural women's social world (husbands, relatives, mothers-in-law) to change their attitudes towards women earning an independent income for them to fully experience their agency and empowerment.

The Private-Public Spheres

Feminist theorists have shown that drawing a sharp distinction between the public and the private spheres has served to legitimize women's oppression and exploitation in the private realm (Benhabib, 1998; Landes, 1998). The private-public dichotomy in the context of this study is not as clear-cut. For the women crafters it was the private sphere that was both a site for women's agency on the one hand, and of their subordination on the other. As a site of their agency and empowerment, the private domain portrayed and highlighted the women as significant agents of social change. Empirical evidence

suggests that within their households women were able to realize their agency and power derived from their craft income. Their social identities as mothers, wives and grandmothers were constructed and acted upon in the private sphere, taking on the role of primary earner and provider, and making substantial contributions to the sustenance and survival of their families.

At the same time, the private sphere constituted a location of subordination for the rural women in the study. Similar evidence from studies in other Third World societies serve to emphasize this finding (Folbre, 1988; Dwyer and Bruce, 1988; Kabeer, 1999, 2000; Iversen, 2003). The study has demonstrated that the gender-related response of husbands to their wives' newly found favourable economic status (with the concomitant violence and abuse), and the altruism that the women show, according to some scholars, perpetuates their marginalization (Folbre, 1988; Sen, 1990; Kabeer, 1999; Iversen; 2003). With regard to the abuse that women suffered because of their husbands' insecurities, the study has highlighted the fact that the private sphere can be a site for women's maltreatment and violence, particularly when their power increases and threatens that of their partners.

The involvement of the women crafters in the Ikhowe Craft Enterprise highlighted their engagement with the market - the public realm. They were producers for their markets and clients; and the exchange gave them the income that facilitated their empowerment. Chapter 5 has shown how the women's agency and empowerment were enhanced by the skills and knowledge they acquired at the workshops and meetings they attended. By their own admission, the meetings afforded them an opportunity to step out of their private lives, mingle with other women with the same interest, and build friendships and relationships (social capital). The Ikhowe Craft Group is part of the Inina Craft Agency that coordinates the production, marketing and distribution of their craft. Through the Inina Craft Agency, the women were exposed to the outside world. They interacted with other co-producers and support groups in the network that the Inina Craft Agency has established, such as UKZN, Nedbank and other corporate organizations that provided enabling conditions for the Ikhowe Craft Group to function.

The above suggests that the private and public spheres are sites of the women crafters' experience of agency and empowerment. This finding supports Steady's (2006) argument that rigid categorizations of the valued public associated with men and the devalued private arena associated with women do not hold true for all societies. Neither do they apply to the women in the study. The private sphere, as already discussed above, should be recognized not only as problematic with regard to women's exercise of their agency, but also as an important site where women can act upon their agency and where women construct and define their multiple social identities. The women crafters' engagement with the public arena - in an economic sense - should lay the foundation for their political and social engagement as well.

Consciousness-Raising

Throughout the discussion, the point has been raised that the power the women crafters derived from their income increased their choice making, decision-making, bargaining and negotiating abilities; and enhanced their control and allocation of resources within their household. However, their newly found power did not raise their consciousness to their subordinate conditions within the patriarchal structure of their households. Sen (1985) offers an explanation that may be applied to this lack of a feminist consciousness in his account of why women in many cases cannot derive complete empowerment out of the bargaining and negotiating processes. According to Sen (1985), women in poor economies are not concerned with bargaining for gender equality within their households and communities. They are more concerned with matters of fundamental survival. The latter often overshadow all else. This does not mean the women in the study were blind to the domination and manipulation (often subtle) of their husbands. On the contrary, they were aware of and articulated these injustices and ill-treatment suffered at the hands of their partners, although not with a feminist consciousness. They justified and explained their partners' attitude and behaviour as feelings of jealousy and insecurity.

Women's individual agency within their households must be linked to collective agency, such as consciousness-raising groups, so that women's consciousness about their marginalization and subordinate status is raised. In this way, they will be able to

challenge patriarchal structures that limit their exercise of agency in their households. From a feminist perspective, collective agency has a galvanizing effect on women, particularly women who feel oppressed (Messer-Davidow, 1995:39). The consciousness-raising groups that Messer-Davidow (1995) studied produced the kind of agency to become aware of their oppression and take action to change the situation. Paolo Freire (1973) terms this consciousness about one's marginalization '*conscientizacion*' (conscientization), which he regards as a pre-condition for change. Although Freire was not speaking in the context of gender inequality, his idea still applies to people who are agents of social change. The Ikhowe Craft Group provided space, where the women crafters shared their problems and supported each other. Although the Ikhowe Craft group it did not serve to galvanize the women to openly challenge the subordination in their households, the Ikhowe Craft Group is a potential tool for the women to use as a forum for consciousness-raising about gender and cultural issues. For the women to speak openly about their subordinate status, men's attitudes and perspectives on gender and cultural issues need to change. Without this change, consciousness-raising would be a futile exercise.

Practical Gender Versus Strategic Gender Needs
The women crafters' economic contribution to their households' well-being can be analysed within a feminist framework that distinguishes between women's practical and strategic needs, first formulated by Molyneux (1985) and taken up by Moser (1987, 1989). The question that this framework seeks to ask is, what is the implication of the women crafters' productive role for the women themselves in meeting their practical and strategic gender needs? First, however, it is important to unpack the distinction between these two types of gender needs; and why 'gender' and not 'women' as a category is used in the distinction. Firstly, the use of 'gender' in the categorization of needs point to the fact that women's (or men's for that matter) experience "develop from their social positioning through gender attributes" (Molyneux, 1985:232). Secondly, the use of the category 'women' has an essentializing effect, which assumes homogeneity of women's needs across the world, without accounting for diversity and contextuality of these needs. Drawing the distinction between practical and strategic needs, practical gender needs

arise out of an immediate perceived necessity as identified by women within a specific context, and they do not challenge the existing forms of subordination (Molyneux, 1985). Examples of practical gender needs include shelter, day care facilities, clean and safe water and sanitation. Strategic gender needs, on the other hand, emanate from women's experience of subordination in terms of both the structure and nature of relationships between men and women (Moser, 1989), for example, the elimination of forms of discrimination and inequality, abolition of the gendered division of labour, rights to own property and access to credit, to mention a few.

With reference to the study, the women crafters' gender needs that were met are in line with Molyneux's (1985) and Moser's (1987) typology. They are classified as follows:

Practical gender needs:

- Nutrition (better quantity and quality of food purchased)
- Home improvement
- Better provision for their children's education
- Financial security
- Ability to help others in need
- Carrying out prescribed ceremonial rituals, thus elevating the status of the family within the community

Strategic gender needs

- Shifting the parameters of the gender division of labour, but not eliminating them

6.6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT

The study has revealed the intertwinement of agency and empowerment. They are two sides of one coin, i.e., the ability to do something (as manifested in increased choice making; decision-making; bargaining power; control of household resources and purchasing power) gave the women the power to achieve desired outcomes (empowerment). The relationship between agency and empowerment within the context of this study can be described as dialectical. Thus perceived, agency and empowerment are constitutive of each other, the one feeding into the other. In other words, the

enactment of agency by the women crafters resulted in empowerment outcomes, which in turn led to further increase in agency. This further means that agency is not only a necessary condition for empowerment to occur, it is a defining criterion for the empowerment process. The essence of agency is encapsulated in the notion that access to income by the women crafters was not a sufficient prerequisite for the women to be empowered, but the income needed to be translated into power first for empowerment to occur. The money earned from craft increased their agency in terms of the different forms of power already discussed. What the study highlights is that the empowerment they achieved further enhanced their agency, thus highlighting the iterative nature of the relationship between agency and empowerment. The empowerment outcome of autonomy illustrates vividly the interdependence of agency and empowerment. Although their enhanced agency did not upset the gender relations in their households, they nonetheless acquired a sense of independence, self-reliance, inner strength, self-worth and self-esteem (all constituting autonomy) that enabled them to realize further agency and empowerment.

Autonomy is an important empowerment outcome as it serves to foreground the fact that enhanced agency and self-empowerment occurred within restrictive patriarchal structures. The women might have realized autonomy for themselves, but they did not use it to wrestle power from their partners. In other words, it was not a zero sum game. However, the women in the study can use the increased agency and empowerment gains as advantage against oppressive patriarchal practices. As Moser (1989:1816) suggests, practical gender needs can be used as a basis on which to build a secure support base and as a means through which more strategic gender needs may be reached. Gomez (1986) illustrates this point in his study of women's organizations in the Philippines. He demonstrates how GABRIELA, an alliance of local and national women's organizations, used the women's income-generating activity of sewing tapestry as a forum to raise awareness of women's legal rights and the country's constitution. Likewise, the women crafters' autonomy was an outcome of a project that attended to women's practical gender needs, but at the same time empowered them in a way that may advance their strategic gender interests.

Empowerment Outcomes

Agency is about gaining power to do something; and in the empowerment process itself, agency is the forerunner of empowerment. The concept of power (both individual and collective power), therefore, is central to any conceptualization of the empowerment process. To analyze the women crafters' empowerment outcomes of their exercise of agency, I use Lukes' (1974) and Rowlands' (1995) framework of power and empowerment (discussed in chapter two). To this end, the following discussion entails the different forms of power, namely:

- Power over;
- Power to;
- Power within ; and
- Power with.

The first three forms are individual power and the fourth is collective power.

Power Over

It is significant to point out from the outset that this form of power does not constitute agency and empowerment for the women crafters. On the contrary, it is a negative account of power that constrains other people's exercise of agency. People who have this power dominate and oppress others. The women in this study experienced 'power over' from their partners in the form of subtle domination, abuse, violence and not recognizing their economic contributions to their household well-being.

Power From Within

The only source for this form of power is within a person herself - her inner strength. It finds expression in self-confidence, self-esteem, self-reliance and a strong sense of worth, and is reinforced by a sense of self-efficacy. It was the power from within or their inner strength that gave all the women crafters the realization that they were not helpless victims of their impoverished condition, but, instead, they could do something to turn their situation around, and they made choices accordingly. They recognized their capacity to use their inner strength to work against structures of poverty outside them (Townsend *et al*., 1999). What is significant about this power is that it cannot be given, as Kabeer (1994) asserts, but has to be self-generated. Importantly, this power formed the basis for

the women to exercise their agency in terms of choosing to engage in craft making to generate their own income. The study has demonstrated how the craft income gave the women power within their households to make important decisions, bargain and negotiate with their partners and control their household budgets even within the patriarchal structures in their households. This newly found power in turn increased their sense of worth, their self-confidence and self-image. These empowerment outcomes further strengthened their self-efficacy, thus forming a self-reinforcing loop. Consequently, the women realized their capacity to initiate change and recognized their abilities to take advantage of other income-earning opportunities. It is worth noting, therefore, that empowerment strategies for women should build on this 'power within' to improve their self-efficacy in improving their own lives.

Power To

Lukes (1974) emphasizes this form of power as decision making capacity; the capacity of an actor to affect the pattern of outcomes against the wishes of other actors. This study suggests that the women crafters acquired more capacities than decision-making. For the women crafters, this type of power encompassed capacities; skills; creativity and innovation as elucidated below:

Capacities

- Power to make choices; to make decisions; to bargain; to control the allocation of their income
- Ability to improve their houses; to provide better for their children's education; ability to save for the future by opening bank accounts; joining stokvels and local burial schemes.

Skills

- Ability to conduct meetings and workshops
- Basic business skills, such as making bank transactions, budgeting their income, bookkeeping (the management team of the Ikhowe Craft Group)
- Ability to network with outside support groups and organizations
- Communication skills

- Entrepreneurial skills, including internet advertising and marketing of their craft (through the Inina Craft Agency).

Creativity and Innovation
- Learning new designs to improve their product, thus ensuring the viability and sustainability of their enterprise

Power With (Collective Agency)
Zapata (1999) describes this form of power as the capacity to achieve with others what one cannot achieve alone. Notable scholars have pointed out that agency and power are both individual and collective (Sewell, 1992; Messer-Davidow, 1995; Joas, 1996; Kabeer, 1999; Zapata, 1999; Bandura, 1999, 2000). Evidence from this study supports their finding. The women crafters acquired and exercised their agency as individuals within their households and as a collective as members of the Ikhowe Craft Group. The latter provided the women with the space to learn skills and capacities they would not have acquired as individuals.

The power that the women crafters derived from the Ikhowe Craft Group is not the kind of power that mobilizes women into action, as Messer-Davidow (1995) suggests; it is not activistic in nature. As the women met in the craft group for meetings and workshops, they shared the problems they experienced as women within their households. Although the support and advice they received from the other women in the group did not galvanize them to challenge the gender and cultural structures of constraints within their households and village communities, it gave them confidence and the realization that they were not alone in this situation and further strengthened their self-esteem and sense of worth. They derived power from one another; power that validated their social identities as mothers, wives, mothers-in-law and grandmothers. As Zapata notes, "'power with' is a search for a shared identity" (1999:94).

The 'power with' that the women experienced laid the foundation for building social capital for the women themselves. Social capital, in the context of this study, refers to the

friendship and relationships of trust that the women built, resulting in support networks that facilitate co-operation for mutual benefit. These support networks that the women established in the Ikhowe Craft Group provided some measure of social security. This means that as individuals, the women knew whom to turn to in times of crisis and hardship, and as such, the group became an invaluable resource to the women. For the women crafters in particular, the group savings (stokvels) and burial schemes they joined provided space where women came together and built social capital. Income-generating activities can be important avenues for rural women to build support networks that can mitigate their suffering and pain. Indeed, Maluleke (1996) stresses the importance of social capital for income-generation in the post-apartheid South Africa. He explains it as follows: "The notion of social capital has some resonance with the traditional institution of 'UBUNTU', which means, 'I am because you exist' and is seen as an expression of community life and collective responsibility" (1996:146). The crucial role played by social capital in the women's lives cannot be overemphasized.

In short, power is essential and critical for the women crafters, both for their exercise of agency and their empowerment. However, it is not in its traditional patriarchal definition as domination over others or taking power from their partners. It is a sense of internal strength to determine one's choices in life and the ability to influence the direction of change, particularly within their private spheres, and this power is derived from both the individual women and as members of the Ikhowe Craft Group.

6.7 SUMMARY

Based on empirical evidence as presented in Chapter 5, this chapter has sought to provide a context-specific analysis of the rural women crafters agency as a crucial and defining criterion of their empowerment. The analysis has focused on the two-pronged components of the study, namely, the women's ability to access, control and use the raw material, *C. spp.* and their agency in their households and within the Ikhowe Craft Group. Employing the feminist political ecology framework, the analysis has identified gender as the most important social variable that mediates the women crafters' access, control and use of *C. spp.* Feminist political ecology also emphasizes the role of macro-structures in producing opportunities and constraints at the micro-level. In this regard, the chapter has

shown how state structures such as the Constitution, Traditional Authorities and Provincial Funding mediate the women crafters agency. Giddens' (1979, 1984) theory of structuration has foregrounded the structures of enablement (resources and opportunities) and constraints (gender, culture production and raw material-related) as factors and conditions that enable and impede the women's agency. The analysis has highlighted the pivotal role that the gender ideology and cultural imperatives play, and how these intersect to constitute the context in which the women crafters exercise and experience their agency and empowerment, and how as structures of constraints, they limit their agency. Notwithstanding these and other constraints including production and raw material-related constraints, the chapter has shown how the women have been able to translate their income into power for themselves. In addition, the analysis has located some aspects of the women crafters' agency, namely, the women's identity formation; the ideology of motherhood; the private and public spheres; consciousness-raising; and practical versus strategic gender needs, within the broader feminist discourse.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I present the main findings and implications of the study and offer recommendations for the Ikhowe Craft Group and its members, for policy and further research.

7.1 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics
High levels of unemployment and the concomitant poverty characterize the study area. Moreover, a significant proportion of the women crafters constituting the Ikhowe Craft Group head their households because of various reasons, including widowhood, single marital status and abandonment by their spouses. Hence, they have similar and different experiences in relation to agency and empowerment. This also means that due to the absence (in the case of widows and single mothers) and unemployment status (in the case of the married women crafters) of the traditional male breadwinner, it was incumbent upon the women to take the role and responsibility of primary and sole earner in their households. The households are thus 'women-maintained' households as opposed to 'women-headed' households. The distinction that the study makes is significant for policy interventions. The term 'women-headed' in the context of the study would be misleading to anti-poverty policies and programmes. Those women in households where the head is traditionally the husband or son, but the women are providers, would be excluded from programmes targeting 'women-headed' households. It is, therefore, critical that, before such programmes are rolled out, adequate information is obtained about household headship to avoid marginalization of rightful beneficiaries of government programmes. In addition, unless the meaning of headship in households under investigation is thoroughly interrogated, the assumption will be made that female heads are a homogenous group. This is flawed developmental thinking, as it underplays the diversity of women household heads. As evident in the study, female household heads comprise never-married women, widows, abandoned women and elderly women living alone or with adult sons or daughters. Thus, to categorise female heads and breadwinners

in a single group renders some women, particularly older women and those women in households with male heads, 'invisible'.

Agency, Gender and Resource Access, Use and Control

The study has foregrounded the ways in which gender and agency are intertwined in resource access and use. In the examination of the women crafters' ability to access, use and control *C. spp.,* gender has emerged as an important variable that shaped the opportunities and constraints that they face in securing a viable livelihood through craft making. As an opportunity, the gender-differentiated use of *C. spp.* ensured that the women did not compete with men in its use and control. The downside, however, is the marginalization of the women's problems regarding the management and conservation of this particular reed by the traditional authorities and the men of the villages. This in turn has serious implications for policy on natural resource management and empowerment strategies for communities. If sustainable access to and use of natural resources for rural livelihoods are to be fostered and achieved, particular attention should be paid to the ways in which both men and women in communities relate to the resource base as it is precisely this relationship that determines their interest in protecting and conserving the resource base.

Sustainable Access to Cyperus spp.

Sustainable availability of and accessibility to the raw material, *C. spp*., is vital for the viability and sustainability of the women's craft enterprise. The seasonal variation of *C. spp*. resulted in dwindling production in winter. This in turn led to the women experiencing cash flow constraints during this season. Based on this finding, the study concludes that environmental interventions by both the local government structures and the village communities are crucial for ensuring ecological recovery and management of the resource base.

Agency and Empowerment of the Women Crafters

Agency, or more importantly, the exercise of agency played a central role in the empowerment of the rural women. Agency functioned as a critical link between the resources and opportunities available to the women and the realization of empowerment

outcomes. The study has highlighted the fact that without the enactment of agency by the women crafters, the income would not have translated into power. The fact that the income enabled the women to make choices, to make important decisions relating to the welfare of their families, to control their income and decide on its allocation and use, to bargain and negotiate with other household members and to have increased buying power, is testimony to their increased capacity to act. Because of this enhanced capacity to act, the women were able to achieve tangible and intangible empowerment outcomes. However, agency does not occur in a vacuum. The study has pointed to the significance of context in the exercise of agency. With reference to this study, the context comprised internal factors (within the women themselves) that facilitated and inhibited their agency; and external factors or conditions of enablement and constraint. Resources and opportunities as outlined in the thesis acted as enabling factors. The gender ideology in rural households, and cultural norms and values embedded in the society within which the women crafters lived, emerged as the most powerful and pervasive forces that shaped how the women understood and perceived their roles and actions within their households and the village communities even for the women without partners. Furthermore, the relationship between agency has been shown to be dialectical, with increased agency leading to empowerment and empowerment leading to further enhanced agency.

The Intersection of Gender and Culture in the Women Crafters' Agency
Gender intersects with culture in a significant way to shape the women's agency within their households. The social and economic agency of the women crafters signified their ability to take advantage of new economic opportunities to increase their power within their households by constructing new spaces for themselves to give expression to their new identities as providers for their families. The study has demonstrated that the traditional gender dynamics that portray men as providers and women as dependents is thrown slightly out of balance. Specifically, the gender division of labour and responsibilities has been shown to alter in times of economic crisis and challenges. However, because of firmly entrenched cultural norms that put women in a subordinate position, some aspects of the gender ideology remain intact. For example, the women could not decide on traditional and cultural ceremonies and rituals even when they

provided the money to perform them. This points to the finding that cultural norms mediate women's ability to exercise authority within their households. It is important to note that the study has drawn a distinction between authority vested in the men by tradition and culture, and autonomy acquired by the women through craft making. The study concludes, therefore, that in a context where cultural norms are firmly embedded, women's increased economic power did not equal less power for men in the traditional sense of the word.

What is interesting was the ability of the women crafters to transcend the cultural structures, while at the same time working around the notions of tradition and culture to create new forms of power for themselves. Hence, power for these women can be seen as essential for social change, but not in its patriarchal definition as domination over others, specifically their partners or sons in the case of widows with sons as heads of the households. Rather, for all the women crafters, it should be seen as a sense of internal strength, the right and ability to make choices in life that will determine the content and direction of social change. Put differently, their acquisition of power was not a zero-sum type of empowerment where empowerment is seen in terms of the marginalized group (in this case the women crafters) wrestling total power and authority from the powerful group (their partners and sons). While the single and abandoned women did not have to contend with the domination of husbands, they still had to act within cultural parameters, which expect women not work outside the home. Yet, they were also able to rise above the cultural restrictions and empower themselves through craft.

The above issues raise the question of balancing empowerment with the feminist vision and consciousness. The study has demonstrated that in certain contexts empowerment of women within their households can occur within patriarchal structures. The women's inability to challenge the gender ideology and cultural imperatives within their households and community cannot be construed to mean that they were oblivious of their disadvantageous social position. Although they might have lacked a feminist consciousness in their efforts to enhance their agency, they nonetheless acquired the status of "independent actors who shoulder responsibilities and take risks, make

contingency plans and strive to maximize their livelihood options and the positive impacts on their dependents" (Ekejiuba, 1995:60). The women attained all the critical elements of autonomy, namely, self-reliance, economic independence and greater control of household resources, without taking authority from the male heads of their households. Rural women's agency and empowerment, therefore, should be conceptualized within a framework that takes cognizance of the central role of the community's gender ideology and cultural norms in mediating their empowerment within their households.

Perceptions and Agency

Perceptions are crucial in shaping the experience of agency and empowerment. Just as the women crafters' agency is influenced by the gender ideology and culture of their community, so are perceptions about their economic contributions. For all the women, their economic participation per se did not lead to enhanced agency and empowerment. What appeared to be crucial was the perceived value of their economic contributions by their immediate social group. Cultural discounting of the women crafters' efforts, as manifested in lack of recognition and acknowledgement of their value and worth, hampered the women's self-efficacy. As a result, their sense of worth and self-esteem were eroded. The implication for empowerment strategies targeting women in a rural setting is that these should go hand in hand with strategies aimed at changing the attitudes and perceptions of those in the women's social world.

The Visibility of the Women Crafters as Significant Agents of Change in Their Households

Contrary to conventional wisdom that portrays the African woman as a powerless and passive recipient of development, the women crafters emerged as significant actors in their own right within their households. They exhibited inner strength and resourcefulness in making the choice to change their situation and break out of the vicious cycle of poverty. This image of the women crafters as autonomous, self-reliant and active participants of social and economic processes within their households needs to be celebrated and elevated to become visible. This is not to glorify the women's agency and minimize or overlook the barriers the women face in their efforts to empower themselves. Evidence from the study suggests otherwise. Empowerment strategies for

rural women should, as their starting point, tap into the women's inner strength to build external capacities for empowerment.

The Private Sphere as an Important Site for the Women Crafters' Agency and Empowerment

Recognizing the women crafters as visible and significant agents of change implies making visible and recognizing the women's private sphere as an important arena for both their agency and subjugation (Gouws, 2005). This fact is important in the light of the long-held view of the private domain as being invisible and devalued as opposed to the valued public sphere associated with male agency. In addition, the women's market-based craft enterprise opened doors for the women to venture into the public domain. The study, therefore, concludes that rigid dichotomies of the public and private spheres can no longer hold true for all contexts.

The Women Crafters Collective Agency

Both individual and collective agency is crucial for the women crafters' empowerment. The Ikhowe Craft Group, as a basis for the women's collective agency, enabled the women to achieve what they could not on their own. The craft group not only gave the women the identity of an income earner in addition to those of mother, wife and grandmother, but also provided a context in which the women had new opportunities to enhance their agency.

The Importance of Understanding Local Culture on its Own Terms

Hassim (2005) calls for a framework within which to address gender inequalities within the private domain. This study responds to that call partly by seeking to advance a framework of agency that attends to the local context a specific group of rural women. The study acknowledges the contribution of western models of agency as evidenced in theories of agency that have informed this study. However, a paradigm shift is crucial in studying rural women's agency in African societies; a paradigm shift that locates culture and gender at the centre of the interrogation. However, such an interrogation should guard against accepting the subordination and exploitation of women in the name of tradition. In short, an African-centred paradigm of agency and empowerment, while

acknowledging the centrality of culture in women's construction of their subjectivities and identities, will also challenge those aspects of culture that are oppressive to women.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Ikhowe Craft Group and its Members

Recommendation 1: Mobilize for environmental protection and management.
Community mobilization for environmental protection and management of the resource base of *C. spp*. is crucial for the sustainability of the Ikhowe Craft Enterprise. While the study recommends community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) where both men and women participate in the protection and conservation of *Cyperus spp.*, the high visibility of women is critical since their participation furthers and protects their interest in the use of *C. spp.* The involvement of local government structures, such as ward councillors is of immense importance to get the Traditional Authority (the Chief and his village headmen) to drive the initiative. To augment *C. spp.* growing in wetlands and along streams, the women crafters can get together and start a planting project either in their homestead gardens or in a plot of land allocated to them by the headmen for the specific purpose of planting *C. spp.* They could even sell some of the natural resource to other crafters and generate income for their craft enterprise.

Recommendation 2: Diversify income-earning activities of crafters.
The majority of the women crafters are sole breadwinners in their households, and during dry spells, they experience cash flow problems. Moreover, their earnings are not likely to yield big investments or create long-term income accumulation. To secure a more secure income generation, they may consider diversifying their income-earning activities. The concept of co-operatives is a viable mechanism to access government funds for this purpose. At the time of research, the Inina Craft Agency, to which the Ikhowe Craft Group is affiliated, was in the process of registering as a co-operative. This is a move in the right direction. Government funds could help the members of the Ikhowe Craft Group to invest in other small enterprises and possibly build longer-term income accumulation strategies. In this way, there will be a secure income and their autonomy will not only be

enhanced, but it will be sustained. As Grown and Sebstad (1989) assert, the shift from survival to security is marked by a diversification of livelihood activities. In addition, the formalization of saving initiatives, such as the stokvels, by the government, would ensure a sustainable and reliable investment strategy for rural people.

Recommendation 3: Conscious-raising becomes a critical component of empowerment programmes targeting rural women.

All the women in the Ikhowe Craft Group acquired autonomy and self-reliance. However, the new status of those women living with their partners met with subtle manipulation and physical abuse. They did not know how best to deal with their husbands' attitude and responses to their economic independence. It is, therefore, imperative that consciousness-raising becomes a critical component of empowerment programmes targeting rural women. To be specific to the Ikhowe Craft Group, the study recommends that the women crafters use the group as a forum where they are taught methods and skills to counter oppressive aspects of gender and cultural dynamics within their households, such as assertiveness, confidence building and critical thinking. This recommendation is in line with other empowerment strategies for rural women, which integrate gender education and sensitization into the programmes. Examples of such programmes are the KwaZulu-Natal Zibambele training programme (Department of Transport, 2003), which empowers women through saving clubs, and the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) programme that focuses on rural people and their land rights. Although these programmes are not feminist in nature, they do serve to raise the awareness of rural women about gender issues. The uMlalazi municipality would take the responsibility to integrate and implement gender equality education in its LED plans, making use of the existing women's income-generating groups. Most importantly, the attributes that the women learn can come in handy when they participate in the village leadership structures and engage with the state.

Recommendation 4: Expand the principle of motherhood for political empowerment.

The principle and practice of motherhood was central to economic and social change within the women's households. The same principle can be used as a vehicle to expand

women's social agency beyond their households to the broader village communities to mobilize for better service delivery. As Kaplan (1992) cited in this study, argues, female consciousness can evolve into feminist consciousness. In other words, through their maternal roles and thinking they may be inspired to challenge the status quo. In the rural context, for example, they can mobilize for women representation on local government structures, thus broadening the parameters of their empowerment to include political empowerment. However, the potential costs of this approach need to be taken into accounts, in terms of reinforcing gendered roles and excluding women who are not mothers. Nonetheless, the value of such an identity outweighs these concerns.

For Policy

Recommendation 1: Increase support service centres in rural areas.
The government's emphasis on small business development as part of the then Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy and now the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) policy create an enabling environment for small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in terms of providing financial support and capacity-building. The establishment of the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) under the auspices of the Department of Trade and Industry strengthens support for the craft industry in accessing finance and expanding market opportunities and making available education and training for SMMEs. To this end, SEDA is opening one-stop business centres so that small entrepreneurs can access these services. For example, one such local service centre has recently been opened by the Minister of the Executive Council (MEC) for Finance and Economic Development, Dr Zweli MKhize, in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal (Langa, 2008). What is crucial is that these centres reach rural areas so that rural entrepreneurs can also benefit from them. Opening these centres in rural areas will ensure easy access to these services for rural women. For this to happen, it is critical that SEDA functions and services are decentralized to local governments as part of their local economic development (LED) strategies and are incorporated into municipalities' Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) to be able to reach grassroots communities. This will in turn create a government regulatory environment at a local level. In short, the promotion of craft making as part of rural development requires

a more complex approach-a combination of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches that complement each other. It requires both the development of rural crafters' indigenous crafting capacities and knowledge, and a coherent local development strategy by government.

Recommendation 2: Incorporate producer groups into the region's Spatial Development Initiatives.

The co-ordination of rural craft by local government's local development strategy will also facilitate the linking up of producer groups in rural areas with the region's Spatial Development Initiative (SDI). Regional Spatial Development Initiatives have the potential of opening up new economic opportunities for the craft industry. For example, the Inina Craft Agency/Richards Bay Spatial Development Initiative link would have great pay-offs for the craft producer groups in terms of accessing markets for their products to expand both their domestic and international markets.

Recommendation 3: Raise rural men's awareness of gender equality.

The role of black South African men, particularly rural men, is critical in the national struggle for gender equality. The study has revealed that the gender relations and cultural norms within their households limit the rural women crafters' agency and empowerment. Through a National Men's Imbizo initiated in 2002, National Government has seen the need to sensitize men to issues around HIV/AIDS and gender equality (Gobind, 2005). Such forums or Izimbizo could extend to rural areas where men are educated and sensitized to gender relations and cultural issues that oppress and keep women in subordinate positions.

For Further Research

Recommendation 1: Investigate the extent of constitutional reforms regarding gender equality within households and communities.

One finding of the study is that the women crafters' households are characterized by firmly entrenched gender ideology and cultural norms and values. This situation extends to the village communities. The married women's response is marked by ambivalence, which stems from two contradictory processes taking place simultaneously in their

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households. This is happening within a context of a transformational state with gender equality entrenched in the Constitution. Hence, the more diffused significance of the Constitution and the extent to which its values may or may not be filtering into rural people's consciousness in terms of women's status is an area for further research. Furthermore, the study acknowledges that households are difficult arenas for programme interventions that aim to correct power imbalances, because it means tackling sensitive issues of culture and gender relations. Nonetheless, the study recommends that gender relations and culture are areas that require further interrogation, in order to identify those aspects of culture and gender dynamics that are oppressive to women, such as gender-based violence and the lobola practice and those that can be used to enhance the women's agency and empowerment.

Recommendation 2: Investigate to what extent traditional leadership institutions in rural areas protect and advance women's rights.

At a policy level, one area that touches on the empowerment of women, particularly rural women, is the question of how far constitutional reforms have gone in advancing and protecting women's rights. In spite of constitutional evidence that gender equality takes precedence over customary laws and practices, the reality is that on the ground, customary practices still marginalize and exclude women. Claassens' (2005) and Cousins' (2005, 2007) research have interrogated the tensions between traditional leadership and the Communal Land Rights Act. Further research is needed, particularly on men's attitudes and gendered identities that perpetuate subjugation of rural women.

7.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Agency functions as a link between resources and empowerment. Within this framework, access to resources is not a sufficient condition for empowerment to take place. Resources need to be translated into power, and for that to happen agency comes into play. Furthermore, the recognition of the intertwinement of agency and structure in shaping individual's lives is vital in understanding social change. Structures give context to agency, either as enabling or constraining factors. In the framework used in this study, structures are both resources and rules that govern and regulate people's behaviour. The women crafters' agency was shaped by both enabling conditions and constraints.

Emerging as significant social structures in this study are gender, culture, Traditional Authority and markets. Markets present an interesting scenario in that they influence the women's lives both positively and negatively. Gender, culture and the traditional institution intersect in ways that limit the women's experience of agency and empowerment. On a personal level, variables of age, education and marital status also interact to subvert women's empowerment.

Gender and culture, as social constructs, have been shown to be dynamic and fluctuating. A change in the economic circumstances of the women's households has shifted the boundaries of these variables. Being concepts imbued with power relations, gender and culture interlock in putting women in a subordinate position. However, the study has highlighted their fluidity and dynamism. The women's increased agency (both individual and collective) derived from the craft income has created a reversal of the role of breadwinner and primary earner in their households. This however is a subtle role reversal, because the patriarchal structure is not destabilized. The man in the household remains the archetypical authority who somehow is not comfortable with his wife's newfound power with the result that some men react aggressively and violently towards their partners. While not negating the women crafters' empowerment in the different areas of their lives (material, social, perceptual and relational) -because their craft income definitely translated into power for the women- theirs was not the zero-sum power of women wrestling power from their men.

These subtleties and nuances in the women's experience of agency and empowerment as a result of the interplay of culture and the gender ideology within their society, serve to foreground the importance of taking into account of the context-specificity of these two variables in their conceptualization. The study, therefore, presents a model of empowerment, which says that in certain contexts increased agency and empowerment can occur within a patriarchal structure where gender roles may shift at a material level with men losing the power to maintain their households, but remain unchanged ideologically. In response to Hassim's (2005) assertion that women's political engagement in South Africa is not a sufficient marker of their full empowerment, the

study has provided a model that situates women's struggles within a set of relationship in which they constantly negotiate their spaces in the private sphere. In addition, the Ikhowe Craft Group has provided a context for the women crafters to experience collective agency and empowerment in a public domain.

The feminist political ecology perspective employed in the study has revealed that access to and use of the natural resources is gendered and socially embedded. Hence, strengthening rural women's access to natural resources that are crucial for the construction of their livelihoods is an important project for both government and communities. Government's role, therefore, is to make sure the formal institutions governing and regulating access and use of natural resources, such as traditional authorities comply with the country's constitutional principle of gender equality. Communities, in their informal or social arrangements of natural resource access should rally behind women in their efforts to deal with the threats of fire and animal grazing on their natural resources. To this end, community-based natural resource management in which the women play an active role is the most appropriate vehicle for protecting and conserving the natural resource base in their villages.

African feminism, like its Western counterpart, is founded on those feminist constructs that give expression to women's agency in political, economic and social engagement with patriarchal domination. However, different paradigms of this engagement, cultural imperatives and different priorities emphasize the importance of context-specific analysis of women's agency and empowerment. African feminism, as some feminist scholars argue, situates culture at the centre of women's agency (Naemeka, 1998, 2005; Steady, 2006). For this reason, they see women's agency and empowerment operating within their cultural imperatives without pushing the boundaries of patriarchal and masculine hierarchies. This study suggests a paradigm shift in understanding rural women's agency in the South African context. While the new paradigm entails viewing rural women's increased agency and empowerment as variable power (empowerment that does not take away power from their husbands), it does challenge those aspects of culture that discriminate against women.

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HOUSEHOLD INTREVIEW SCHEDULE

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

IMIBUZO NGESIZULU

A.Amakhosikazi ngamunye

- **Imininingwane yakhe:**
  Igama nesibongo
- Iminyaka
- Ushadile noma awushadile
- Uhlala nobai ekhaya

1. Bawabuka kanjani amandla okwenza abanawo

1.1 Yini ngaphakathi kuwena ekwenze waqala ukwenza icraft?

1.2 Yiziphi izinto ngaphandle ezikugqugquzelile ukuba usebenza wenze icraft uhole imali?

2. Amandla amakhosikazi abonakala kanjani/ athatha siphi isimo akhaya

2.1 **Amandla okuthatha izinqumo**

2.1.1 Iyiphi indima obuyidlala ekuthathweni kwezinqumo ngaphambi kokuba ungenise imali ekhaya?

2.1.2 Yiziphi izinqumo obuzithatha mayelana nomndeni wakho ekhaya?

2.1.3 Njengoba sewungenisa imali ekhaya, yiziphi izinqumo osukwazi ukuzithatha?

2.1.4 Yiziphi izinqumo okungesizo zabesifazane osukwazi ukuzithatha?

2.2 Amandla okunqoba nokuzuza

2.2.1 Ngokujwayalekile uyakwazi ukuxoxisana nibonisane nomyeni wakho ngalokho okuphathelene nempilo yomndeni wakho?

2.2.2 Yiziphi izinto enibonisana ngazo?

2.2.3 Njengoba usungenisa imali ekhaya, zikhona yini izinto ezibalulekile osukwazi ukuxoxisana ubonisane ngazo nomyeni wakho?

2.2.4 Yiziphi lezo?

2.3 Amandla okukhetha

2.3.1 Wazikhethela ukuba usebenze uhole imali, noma kukhona owakuthathela lesisinqumo?

2.3.2 Ngokujwayelekile uyakwazi ukuzikhethela ezindabeni eziphathelene nomndeni wakho, noma umyeni wakho noma elinye ilunga lomndeni elikwenzayo lokhu?

2.3.3 Njengoba nawe sewuphonsa esivivaneni, usuyakwazi yini ukuzikhethela ezintweni obungakwazi ngaphambili?

2.3.4 Yiziphi lezozinto?

2.3.5 Lokhu okusho ku 2.3.4 kuphathelene nempilo yakho noma kumayelana nomndeni wakho?

2.4 Ezokuphathwa kwemali

2.4.1 Ubani ophatha imali oyingenisay ekhaya noshoyo ukuthi izosetshenziswa kanjani?

2.4.2 Wena nezingane zakho niyazuza ekusetshenzisweni kwemali oyingenisayo ekhaya?

2.5 Amandla okuthenga

2.5.1   Amandla okuthenga asenyukile ngenxa yemali oyithola emsebenzini wecraft?

2.5.2   Uyazuza wena nabantwana bakho kulo okuthengwayo?

2.5.3   Uma ningazuzi, yini oyenzayo ukuguqula isimo?

3.Izisekela

3.1 Amandla angaphakathi kumuntu (power within)

3.1.1 Ungakuchaza kanjani ukulangazelela uguquko empilweni yakho nomndeni wakho

3.1.2 Uwubona unjani umzamo wakho wokusiza umndeni wakho uthuthuke?

3.1.3 Yini ekugqugquzelayo ukuba uqhubeke, ubekezele noma utholana nobunzima
kulomsebenzi wecraft?

3.2 Amandla okwenza

3.2.1 Ngaphandle kokuhola imali, yini enye osukwazi ukuyenza ngokuzibandakanya
nomsebenzi wecraft?

3.2.2 Usuyakwazi ukuzimela noma uzicabangele kungekho okuvimbayo noma
ngandlelani? Uma ungakwazi, yini ekuvimbayo?

3.3 Amathuba akhona emsebenzini wecraft

3.1 Mathuba maphi akhona akwenza ukwazi ukwenza lomsebenzi wecraft?

3.2 Uwasebenzisa kanjani lawomathuba?

3.4 Ukutholaka kwezinsizasebenza

3.4.1 Ukubakhona nokutholokala kotshani bokuluka kukusiza kanjani emsebenzini
wecraft?

3.4.2 Yiziphi ezinye izinto nezimo ezikusekelayo kulomsebenzi wakho?

4. Izingqinamba ohlangabezana nazo

4.1 Umyeni wakho noma amaqnye amalunga omndeni wakho uyashaya/bayashaya
imithetho nemali oyiholayo ezintweni ezingadingi yena/bona?

4.2 Ukwenza/bakwenza kanjani loku?

4.3 Ngabe lokukwenza kwakhe/kwabo kuyakuvimbela ukuthi izidingo zakho
nezabantwana bakho zifezeke na? Kanjani?

4.4 Ngabe imithetho nenqubo yosiko lwethu bantu abampisholo ludlala indima
engakanani ekubeni:

- Abantu besifazane bakhethe ukusebenza bangenise imali ekhaya?
- Nokuthi leyomali engeniswa owesifazane icazwa kanjani?

4.5 Uma impendulo ingu-yebo, chaza ukuthi kwenzeka kanjani?

5. Inzuzo/ imiphumela yamandla (empowerment achievements)

5.1 Ngokwemali

5.1.1 Ukuhola kwakho imali kukwenza uzizwe unjani ngokomnotho?

5.1.2 Kukhona ushintsho olube khona kuloku okulandelayo ngenxa yokuthi usungenisa imali ekhaya:

- Ukutholokala nokuphathwa kwempahla ehkaya (for example umhlaba, imfuyo)
- Isimo smpilo nokudla, ikakhulukazi kumalunga abesifazane

5.1.3 Asithi kukhona amathuba emisebenzi avelayo, ungawathatha na? Ngobani?

5.1.4 Yimiphi eminye imiphumela yamandla emali eyenzekayo noma oyibonayo empilweni yakho ngokuba uhola imali yakho nangokuzibandakanya nomsebenzi wecraft?

5.2 Ushintsho endleleni yokucabanga

5.2.1 Ukuhola kwakho imali kushintshe kanjani ndlela ocabanga ngayo ngaloku okulandelayo:

- Ngokubaluleka kwakho (self-esteem)
- Ngamandla okuzenzela izinto
- Ngokucabanga nokuhlela ngekusasa

5.2.2 Amanye amalunga omndeni wakho awubuka kanjani umzamo wakho wokunyusa izinga lokuphila lomndeni wakho?

5.3 Ushintsho kubudlelwane nomyeni namanye amalunga omndeni

5.3.1 Usuyakwazi manje ukuxoxisana ubonisane nomyeni wakho namalunga omndeni wakho noma ngani ephathelene nobudlelwane noma ubuhlobo onabo nabo?

5.3.2 Uma impendulo ingu-yebo, yiziphi ngokuthi zibalulelke kangakanani kuwena?

B. Amandla enhlangano

1. Yini osukwazi ukuyenza enhlanganweni, obungakwazi ukukwenza uwedwa?

2. Yini inhlangano yecraft esikusize ukuba ukwazi ukukwenza ngaphandle kwenhlangano:

   - Empilweni yakho

   - Emndenini wakho

3. Yizimo zini ezisize inhlangano isimame ikwazi ukwenza konke loku ekwenzayo?

4. Yiziphi izinkinga (nezinselelo) nezingqinamba enihlangabezana nazo enhlanganweni yecraft?

5. Niye nenzani ukuzama ukuzixazulula izinkinga ?

6. Yini eniqguqguzelayo isimamise nemizamo yenu ezimweni zezinkinga?

7. Chaza ngokugcwele ngemiphumela yamandla enhlanganano ngalomsebenzi wecraft.

HOUSEHOLD INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Background Information

- Name and surname

- Age

- Marital status

- Education level

- Other household members

A.Individual Agency within the households

1.Women's own interpretation of the concept of agency

1.1 What is in you that has enabled to engage in an income-earning activity such as craft?

1.2 What external factors motivated you to earn an independent income?

2. Manifestations of the women's agency within their households

2.1 Decision-making power

2.1.1 What was your role in decision-making before you contributed economically?

2.1.2 What aspects of the household did you make decisions on?

2.1.3 What is your role now as an income-earner?

2.1.4 What other areas (not typically women's areas) are now able to make decisions about?

2.2 Bargaining power

2.2.1 Are you generally able to negotiate with your husband/ partner on issues affecting the well-being of your family?

2.2.2 What issues are generally able to negotiate about?

2.2.3 Do you feel you can negotiate on matters that are more important now that you contribute to the household?

2.2.4 If yes, which aspects are you able to negotiate with your husband/ partner and other members of the household?

2.3 Choice making

2.3.1 Did you choose to earn an independent income or was the choice made for you?

2.3.2 Do you normally make your own choices in matters pertaining to your family or does your husband or someone else in your family make the choices for you?

2.3.2 Do you feel you are now able to make choices you could not make before you contributed economically to your family's wellbeing

2.3.4 If yes, what are those choices?

2.3.5 Do the choices you have mentioned relate to your personal or to the general welfare of the family?

2.4 Control, use and distribution of income earned by the women

2.4.1 Who controls the income you bring home and decides how it will be allocated?

2.4.2 Do you feel the allocation of the your income serves your and children's needs and interests?

2.5 Purchasing power

2.5.1 Has your purchasing power increased as a result of the income you are earning from craft?

2.5.2 If yes, does that benefit you and your children?

2.5.3 If not, what are you doing about it?

3. Enabling factors

3.1 Power within

3.1.1 How would you describe your awareness and desire for change for yourself and your family?

3.1.2 How do you evaluate your economic contribution to your family's well-being?

3.1.3 What motivates you to continue and persevere in the face of challenges?

3.2 Power to

3.2.1 Apart from earning an income, what has your involvement in craft enabled you to do

3.2.2 Do you feel the economic power has enabled you to challenge or resist domination from your husband and other household members?

3.3 Opportunity structure

3.3.1 What opportunities are there in your environment that have enabled you to engage in craft production?

3.3.2 How do you take advantage of these opportunities?

3.4 Access to resources

3.4.1 Would you regard access to the raw material as an enabling condition for the craft Enterprise? How?

3.4.2 What other factors of production have enabled or supported in your endeavour?

4. Constraints

4.1 Do you feel dominated by your husband in matters /partner/son in matters that do not require his authority?

4.2 If yes, how does he express his domination?

4.3 Does his domination constrain you in furthering your interests and needs and those of your children? How?

4.4 Do the norms and values of your culture play a role in:

- Women's decision to earn an independent income?
- The control, allocation and use of the women's income?

4.5 If yes, could you explain how?

5. Empowerment outcomes

5.1 Material change

5.1.1 How has earning an income made you financially secure?

5.1.2 Have the following areas improved as a result of your economic contribution:

- Access to and control over assets and resources?
- The health and nutrition status of your family, especially the female members of the
- household?

5.1.3 If there were other employment opportunities available, would you take advantage of them? Why?

5.1.4 What other material outcomes have you achieved through:

- your income?
- your involvement in the craft enterprise?

5.2 Perceptual change

5.2.1 In what way has your earning capacity improved your perception of the following:

- your self-esteem (your individuality, interest and value) ?
- your capacity to do things on your own?
- your ability to think ahead and plan for the future?

5.2.2 How do you perceive other household members' recognition of your contribution and value?

5.3 Relational change

5.3.1 Do you feel you are now able to negotiate some aspects of your relationship with your husband/partner/other household members?

5.3.2 If yes, which are those areas and how important are they to you?

B. Collective Agency

1. What have you as an individual been able to achieve within the group, which you could not achieve on your own?

2. What has the group enabled you to do outside the group:
   - in your personal life?
   - within the household?

3. What factors have enabled the craft group to achieve what it has achieved so far?

4. What constraints and challenges does the group experience?

5. How has the group dealt with them?

6. What motivates and sustains the group's efforts in the face of the challenges you have mentioned?

7. Describe the empowerment outcomes of the craft group.

APPENDIX 2

PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

The Network Diagram

The eleven selected participants and the management of Ikhowe Craft Group participated in this exercise, although at different times. The aim was to uncover and understand the linkages and contacts that the craft group has with the outside world, and to get an insight into the kind of external support that the group receives. This is critical for the examination of collective agency in terms of opportunities and enabling factors. Furthermore, the network diagram focused on the depiction and analysis of the nature, quality, reasons for and frequency of contact between the group and the outside world. Instead of using cards, the participants discussed these issues and at the end of the activity the group drew and presented a diagram that depicts the various contacts of the Ikhowe group (see chapter 5).

The Snake and Ladder Exercise

This exercise analysed the women's dreams/visions, securities, vulnerabilities and opportunities within the context of their ability to translate their enterprise income into power within the household. They first depicted talked about their present state of well-being and then their desired state of well-being, the catalyst being the income they earn from craft. They identified and discussed the following:

- The ladders- the forces that would help them to get to their dream state. They put these into two categories, namely, forces within them (inner strength) and forces in their environment (opportunities). These are the enabling factors.

- The snakes- the forces that obstruct their progress. These again were categorised into forces within them (vulnerabilities) and external forces (risks or threats). These represent the constraints in the exercise of agency.

They then gave a score of one to ten to each of the categories and a reason for that score. They shared these as group, stating possible ways of overcoming the challenges and constraints.

Trend Analysis (the 'then and now' analysis)

This method studied the changes that occurred in the women's lives and their households before and after their involvement in craft making to see if there are any improvements or changes their conditions as a result of the income they bring home. The women themselves identified the criteria or areas on which to assess the change. In essence, this activity evaluated the empowerment outcomes resulting from the exercise of their power.

Iworkshop engiyenze namakhosikazi

22 November 2006

Snake and Ladder Exercise

Yenziwa kanjani:

1. Ngawachazela amakhosikazi injongo ye-exercise ngokuthi izokwenziwa kanjani.
2. Izinto ababezozicubungula bakhulume ngazo kwakuyilezi:
    - Izimo nezinto ezisizayo nezisekela ukuba omama baqhubekele phambili nomsebenzi wecraft bazuze kuwo- loku kungaba izinto ezingaphakathi kumuntu nezingaphandle kwakhe
    - Izimo nezinto ezibadonsela emuva, kungaba izinkinga abahlangabezana nazo,
    inselelelo nezingqinamba- kungaba okusuka ngaphakathi kumunto nezingaphandle kwakhe
3. Omama ngaba faka emanqenjini amabili anabantu abawu-5 iqembu ngalinye
4. Bakhetha owayezobahola nonobhala
5. Baxoxa-ke emaqenjini abo
6. Ekuqcineni bahlangana bonke sebe zosho kwi-group enkulu ukuthi batholeni ngesikhathi bexoxa emaqenjini abo.

Network Diagram

Yenziwa kanjani:

1. Injongo yale-exercise ukuthola ukuthi Ikhowe lixhumana, libambisana linobudlelwane nobani ngaphandle. Nokuthola ukuthi

2. Chazela omame ukuthi inhloso yale-exercise yini nokuthi yenziwa kanjani.

3. Omama bangena emaqenjini ukuxoxa ngalokhu okulandelayo:

   - Obani ikhowe elinobudlelwane, ubuhlobo nokuxhumana nabo?
   - Yini efezwa yilobuhlobo nokuxhumana?
   - Ungabuchaza kanjani ubuhlobo nokuxhumana?
   - Yikuphi okunye okubalulekile eningaxoxa ngakho okuphatheleni nodaba?

4. Ngesikhathi omama bephendula bexoxoxa ngayo imibuzo bayabhala phansi konke

   Abakutholayo emaqenjini abo.

5. Bayabuya naloko abakuxoxile emaqenjini abo, sekuxoxa yiwonke umuntu eqenjini

   elikhulu.

23 November 2006

"Then" and "Now" activity

1. Le-activity icubungula iqhathanise isimo omama ababephila ngaphansi kwaso ngaphambi koku sebesenza bahole imali yecraft, nangalesikhathi sebengenisa imali emakhaya.

2. Izihloko abazoxoxa ngazo loludaba zizokhethwa yibo omama (for example inhlobo yokudla okudliwa ekhaya, ubuhlobo nabayeni babo namanye amalunga omndeni, ubudlelwana

   nomakhelwane namanye amalunga omphakathi).

3. Le-activity izokwenziwa yibobonke omama kanyekanye. Ngesikhathi kuxoxwa, kuyabhalwa konke okushiwoyo

Key Informant Interviews

A. Collective Agency

1. What factors enable the operation of the group enterprise?

2. What constraints does the Ikhowe Craft Group face?

3. How has the group enabled the individual women crafters to achieve what they could not on their own?

4. How do the members deal with these challenges?

5. How do you, as the management team, deal with them?

B. Sustainability issues

1. In your opinion, what factors contribute to the staying power of the Ikhowe Craft Enterprise?

2. What role does access to the raw material play in sustaining the enterprise? Explain.

3. What other factors are crucial for the sustainability of the group?

4. How are you addressing them?

C. Empowerment outcomes

1. How did the women crafters' involvement in the craft enterprise empower them:

   - Within the group
   - Within their households

2. What are the empowerment outcomes for the group itself?

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A. Within the Household:

1. How do you view the economic contribution made by the women crafters to the well-being of their households?

2. How did you get to know about the women's craft enterprise?

3. What do you know about the craft enterprise in which the women are involved?

4. What are the cultural norms and rules regarding:

   ❖ Resource allocation within the household?

   ❖ Women working outside the home?

   ❖ Control and distribution within the household of income earned by the women?

5. What is men's general perception in your area about women's involvement in work outside the home?

6. Do you think women should have more decision-making in matters relating to How and how much should be spent within the household? What is the situation in your home?

7. Describe the changes you have seen in the women's lives as a result of earning an income from craft?

8. When women in your lives bring in an income, what do they spend the money on?

B. Access to the natural resource-based raw material:

1. Do men use *induma* in the home?

2. In your opinion, what is the value and significance of *induma* for rural people?

3. What natural resource do men use within the home for traditional and/or commercial purposes?

4. What is the social arrangement regarding the harvesting of induma?

5. Do men play a role in the harvesting and protection of induma? If not, why?

6. Do you not think it would help the women if the men in their lives helped with the harvesting and preserving it?

7. What role does the induna of the village play in the accessibility of the induma by the women crafters?

8. In your experience, what are the greatest challenge that women face in accessing induma? What could be done to overcome these challenges?