Article

The Genesis and Performance of Gender Focal Person Structures in Rwanda and Uganda National Agricultural Organisations: A Critique

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Abstract: Gender Focal Persons (GFPs) are commonly recruited by organisations as part of institutional efforts to mainstream gender. Despite their wide usage, these structures often struggle to achieve the intended goals. The underlying factors that explain their limited success are not well understood; yet, this would inform strategies for institutionalising gender in research institutions. This paper traces the genesis and operationalisation of the gender focal person structures in Rwanda and Uganda national agricultural research organisations, to unearth factors influencing their performance. Results presented are based on document reviews and qualitative interviews with scientists, managers, and GFPs in the two organisations. We found that the GFPs hinged on individuals and donors, and operated in an ad hoc manner without streamlined procedures. The structures were not embedded in institutional frameworks, hence their low visibility within the organisations. They were characterized by informality, voluntarism, unclear terms of reference, and accountability frameworks. We conclude that the ineffective performance of the GFPs in both organisations is explained by the informal approach used to establish, operationalise, and nurture them. Institutionalising the structure would require that the pioneering champions and donors successfully negotiate the embedding of GFPs into the mainstream; eventually, guaranteeing allocation of adequate human and financial resources from national budgets, as well as the establishment of accountability systems.

Keywords: gender mainstreaming; gender units; institutionalisation of gender; agricultural research

1. Introduction

The need for gender-responsive agricultural development is widely recognized, and expressed for decades in global, regional, and national development strategies and programmes. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 as a framework to guide global development, and their precursor, the Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015) [1], all recognize gender equality as a development target. Within Africa, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) policy framework advocates for agricultural transformation, wealth creation, food security and nutrition, economic growth, and prosperity for all [2]. Globally, the Gender Focal Person (GFP) strategy has been commonly adopted by agricultural organisations as part of an institutional effort to mainstream gender in their programmes. The GFPs are expected to spearhead gender integration in policy making, legislations and regulations, and planning and implementation of programmes in their respective organisations [3,4]. However, the GFP structure has not yielded the anticipated results of institutionalising gender within organisations. Agricultural research projects and programmes have largely

remained "gender-blind" in design and implementation [5], which limits gender equitable outcomes. This points to some unanswered questions regarding what is necessary to achieve gender responsive agricultural research targets. In reference to African agricultural research organisations, some scholars have described the institutionalisation of gender as 'cosmetic' and 'business as usual' rather than transformative [4,6,7].

The underlying factors explaining underperformance of the GFP structures are not well documented; yet this would inform refinement of the strategy for enhanced effectiveness. This paper contributes to filling this gap by interrogating the operationalisation of the GFP structures in two sub-Saharan Africa agricultural research organisations–Uganda's National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) and the Rwanda Agricultural Board (RAB). Specifically, we trace the story of GFP structures in these organisations, illuminating how shortcomings in formal institutions explained its performance.

Institutions have been defined as the 'rules of the game' of society [8,9] which constitute a framework of norms, rules, and enforcement mechanisms. We conceptualise formal institutions as the written rules, guidelines, and policies that structure an organisation's interactions and activities, distinguishing them from informal institutions that encompass "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" [10,11].

2. Conceptual Framing: Situating the GFPs in the Global Historical Context

Unraveling the GFP structure requires a careful understanding of the historical and contemporary context within which they were implemented. The need to target women in agricultural development began to take centre stage around the 1970s when Ester Boserup's (1970) book "Woman's Role in Economic Development" not only proclaimed the need to conceptualize and analyze the role of women in agricultural systems but also raised consciousness about the need to include them in all development interventions. Around the same time, the UN supported Conferences on Women began to raise the profile of development issues specific to women. The 1975 UN Mexico City Conference on Women, coinciding with the first International Women's Year, highlighted the need for women-specific development approaches, which culminated into the adoption of the women-in-development (WID) approach. The WID approach, which focused on women's individual legal rights to social, economic, and political advancements, ignored issues of gender equality and structural economic inequalities [12]. This raised anxiety that the approach tended to marginalize women's concerns by confining them to a specifically "women's" office or programme. It became clear that transforming gender relations required the integration of men's concerns and perspectives with those of women. Consequently, the gender and development (GAD) approach was adopted by development practitioners which encouraged gender mainstreaming [12]—the attempted integration of gender concerns into all development programmes.

Gender mainstreaming, historically adopted as a global strategy for promoting gender equality through the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in 1995, was premised on the belief that equality would be achieved if men and women equally benefit from all planned actions, programmes, and policies, in all areas of the development process [13]. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) [14] calls for all State Parties to the Convention to agree to pursue, by all appropriate means, a policy of eliminating discrimination against women (Art. 2). Countries like Uganda and Rwanda, which have ratified the CEDAW (1979), agree to ensure that women have the right to participate in development planning and implementation at all levels, including access to agricultural research and innovations. It indicates, among others, that resources need to be specially allocated to ensure growth and broaden opportunities for income generation for women involved in subsistence agriculture, and that special efforts should be made to provide women cultivators with equal access to credit, inputs, technology, and extension services, and to ensure equal pay for women agricultural wage workers.

One of the most widely used structures to achieve gender equality is use of standalone units within organisations dedicated to gender and women's empowerment. As a result of these global efforts, most African countries established ministries of gender and women in the 1990s. Uganda established its Ministry of Gender in 1997 [15], while Rwanda's Ministry in charge of Family and Women Promotion (MIFAPROFE) was established in 1994 [16]. Subsequently, Uganda developed a National Gender policy in 1997 that was revised in 2007, and, in Rwanda, the policy was developed in 2004. In the early 2000s, the African Union established gender structures and a gender policy aimed at supporting member countries to integrate gender into their development processes [17]. Given that the GFP was one of the interventions proposed by the Platform of Action in the Beijing Declaration 1995, many countries appointed GFPs in every government organisation to promote gender integration. Agricultural research organisations, for example, the Forum for Agricultural Research (FARA), ASARECA, and the Ethiopian Agricultural Research system, introduced GFPs [6,7]. However, these positions were phased out in the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and ASARECA [5,18].

This study aims to examine the GFP strategy commonly used as part of institutional efforts to mainstream gender. This study traces the genesis and operationalisation of the gender focal person structures in Rwanda's and Uganda's national agricultural research organisations, to unearth factors influencing their performance, and draw implications for strategies to institutionalise gender in research organisations. We situate our analysis within feminist critiques of gender mainstreaming in international development, where the intent of transforming oppressive systems has been replaced by integration of gender into an institutional context [19–21]. Integrating gender into existing systems has shaped how it has been co-opted to become a "governable field" that can be understood, simplified, and accepted by the development mainstream [22]. This uncoupling of gender from its feminist activist transformative roots, making it a safe and unchallenging topic of discussion, is mediated through narratives of "helping" poor and marginalized women [23]; managing, educating, and training them through development processes [22].

3. A Profile of the Case Study Organisations: National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) and Rwanda Agricultural Board (RAB)

Uganda's National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) is a Public Institution established by an act of Parliament, the NARs Act (2005), mandated to coordinate, oversee, and guide agricultural research in Uganda, while ensuring dissemination and application of research results. There are no explicit gender provisions in the Act [24].

In terms of structure, NARO has sixteen semi-autonomous Public Agricultural Research Institutes (PARIs). Out of these, seven are National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs) with a mandate to conduct research of a national strategic importance, while nine are Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institutes (ZARDIs), responsible for conducting adaptive research in the nine agro-ecological zones of Uganda [24].

The Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) is governed by Article 10 of Organic Law No 38/2010 of 25 November 2010 [25]. The Board is responsible for overseeing and managing agricultural research in the country. Although the core functions of RAB, together with the mission, vision, and core values, do not reflect gender specific considerations, most of the RAB Strategic Plan (2013-2018) objectives are gender responsive. One of the objectives is:

> "empowering and promoting proactive participation of all gender categories in agricultural development".

In terms of structure, RAB has four agricultural zones and fourteen centres where agricultural research activities are managed [25].

Both Uganda and Rwanda have National Gender Policies (NGPs) that guide the integration of gender in the various sectors [15,16]. Rwanda's NGP requires all sectors to integrate gender in the planning and implementation of development programmes in order to promote gender equality. The agricultural sector where RAB falls is expected to com-

ply with the country's NGP. Consequently, Rwanda has the Agriculture Gender Strategy (2010) aimed at guiding the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), its agencies and development partners with respect to gender responsiveness of their programming and interventions [25]. The document provides a lens for guiding the transformation of the agriculture sector by promoting equal opportunities for men, women, boys, and girls in the sector. The Strategy also informs agricultural development interventions in Rwanda in line with the Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation in Rwanda-Phase II (PSTA II). The PSTA aims at increasing the incomes of the rural population through improved agricultural productivity and facilitating transformation from a subsistence economy to production for both domestic and export markets [25,26].

4. Methodology

A comparative qualitative case study research approach was employed to enable an in-depth understanding of the GFP story in RAB and NARO. In both organisations, the GFP structure consisted of existing staff at national, regional (for RAB), and Institute (for NARO) levels, who were identified and assigned additional gender integration roles on top of their existing job descriptions. Case studies typically focus on small groups or individuals within a group and document that group's or individual's experience in a specific setting. They also allow gathering information through multiple sources and perspectives [27]; hence, this was deemed suitable for studying questions such the one handled in this study. In general, the qualitative research approach is best suited to understand complex processes of this nature involving multiple triggers, events, processes, and participants [28,29] at various levels of the organisation. Open-ended qualitative methods enable in-depth analysis of the diverse experiences and perspectives of participants, and for drawing interpretations against the institutional and wider environmental context [29]. Consideration of different perspectives helps identify conflicting perspectives and biases, yielding a more holistic picture.

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines of social science research. Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology as well as the RAB and NARO leadership. Upon being granted permission to proceed, participants were taken through the consent form detailing that their participation was voluntary, and they were at liberty to leave at any point of their choosing should they decide not to continue. The anonymity and confidentiality clauses were well laid out and explained to the respondents. Utmost integrity was maintained in the field to ensure that no harm was experienced by participants. Data was collected over a period of three months (June–August 2016). While the study was conducted five years back, findings remain relevant in drawing lessons from an understanding of context-specific experiences around institutionalising gender in research organisations. We are not aware of any study of this kind that has been conducted in RAB and NARO specifically focusing on that time period.

Initial entry into the organisations was through the national level GFPs who were championing gender in their organisations, identified through the authors' professional networks. The national GFPs facilitated the securing of formal letters of approval to conduct the study signed by the Director Generals of the two research organisations.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure data collection included all categories of people with relevant experiences and perspectives about the genesis, functioning, and performance of the GFP structures. In this regard, we sampled national Secretariat management, directors of institutes, national level GFPs, institute level GFPs, and principal investigators. In categories where there were few members, namely, national level top management (Director General and deputies) and national GFP, we targeted to interview all. In Uganda, we were able to interview 2 of the 3 top managers, and the 2 national GFPs. In Rwanda, we interviewed 1 out of 3 top managers, and the national GFP. At the research institute level, we sampled 4 out of 7 national research institutes for Uganda. For Rwanda, only one of the four zones was sampled because it was the only one perceived to have a

reasonably functional GFP. At each of the sampled institutes, we interviewed the director, institute GFP, and 2 researchers. At the national level, 1 researcher at NARO and 2 for RAB were interviewed. Overall, we conducted a total of 29 interviews (21 in NARO and 8 in RAB). We were able to obtain perspectives from all relevant categories of informants in RAB despite the lower number of interviews, making the results credible.

Interviews were conducted in the respondents' offices by the authors using a semi-structured interview guide, with the help of a team of research assistants. An iterative and reflexive process was employed throughout the data collection and analysis process [30]. The interviews were audio recorded after obtaining participants' consent.

Field teams held daily debriefing sessions to review and guide the next step in data collection. Preliminary data analysis was conducted in the field for identification of preliminary themes that informed subsequent interviews, acting as a useful point of comparison of perceptions across informants. Once fieldwork was completed, the data were analysed using a dual analytical combination of interpretive content [30] and thematic analyses [31]. The interpretive content analysis approach integrates content and discourse analysis, by looking beyond the text/content categorization, to pay attention to its relationship to the context where meanings are produced. Six major steps were employed in data analysis: (1) transcription, (2) cleaning, (3) reviewing, (4) data organisation, (5) coding, and categorizing into theme, finding patterns of relationship, and (6) interpreting. The whole analytical process entailed comparing responses within each category of participants for each organisation and across both organisations, as well as analytical team agreements on the emerging key findings.

Reliability and validity were enhanced through triangulation of different methods and data sources, and verification of themes by checking the different perspectives of the research team [32]. Throughout the findings, direct quotations have been selected for representativeness and clarity of issues that participants themselves prioritized [32]. In addition, findings are supported with evidence from other studies in the discussion section for a robust interpretation.

5. The Origin and Status of Gender Focal Person Structures in NARO and RAB Case Studies

5.1. Origin Traced to Individual Champions and Development Partners

Triangulated evidence from the GFPs revealed that in both organisations, the genesis of the GFP structures is traced to strategically positioned champions and development partners' influence. In NARO, the process started in 1996 when a female Director General attended a meeting outside her organisation, where she appreciated the importance of incorporating gender in agricultural research. On return, she constituted a task force charging it with the responsibility to consult other staff members about the value of gender mainstreaming and spearhead the process within the organisation. This internal championing was fueled by donor funded partner organisations such as ASARECA which supported staff gender training, for example, under the Participatory Research and Gender Analysis (PRGA) project (2004–2006). In the same vein, the World Bank put a requirement for research proposals to be gender responsive, as a key criterion for funding. In 2006, NARO established a gender and diversity programme funded by the government and coordinated at the national Secretariat. The programme efforts culminated in appointment of GFPs at every research centre in the country. The Rwanda experience differed from Uganda in that it was externally initiated. The GFP structure was established in 2013, spearheaded by ASARECA, which requested RAB to appoint a national GFP to oversee the integration of gender in its funded projects.

5.2. GFP Appointments Aligned with the Existing Structure

The structure of GFPs in both NARO and RAB was aligned with the overall organisational structure, which consisted of the national and regional units. At the time of the study, both organisations had appointed national level focal persons, although some regional

gender focal positions had not been filled. In RAB, while each of the four regions was supposed to have a GFP, only 2 regions had filled the positions.

Top management and the national GFPs in NARO articulated the expected roles of the GFPs as: Provision of technical support to the various research projects in their respective institutes on how to integrate gender in the entire research cycle, from proposal development to implementation, including support in developing the relevant tools. In addition, they were expected to support development of the organisation's gender strategy and implementation of gender responsive guidelines and work plans. The technical support was expected to ignite positive practices and outcomes at both the organisation and community levels. The role of the National GFP in Rwanda was the identification and selection of regional GFPs, and coordination of gender activities at RAB, as well as guiding other regional GFPs in ensuring that researchers are gender responsive. The National GFP was required to closely collaborate with the Gender unit at ASARECA to ensure effective mainstreaming of gender in research programmes.

5.3. Variations and Misconceptions around GFP Roles

There was varied understanding, and in some cases, outright misunderstanding of the mandate and role of the GFPs among the sub-national GFPs, research managers, and other researchers in both organisations. In NARO, some institute directors perceived the GFP position and gender committee as a "women's job", with expectations of counseling fellow women employees on personal matters as illustrated in the quotes below.

> 'We have a gender committee at the institute to handle gender issues. The committee is composed of women to counsel the staff especially on personal issues. For example, we were faced by a situation where one of our staff was interested in furthering her studies but was scared to lose her boyfriend. Our gender committee intervened and handled the issue. The committee also handles issues to do with the elderly'. (Male Director, in one of the Zonal Institutes, NARO)

In both RAB and NARO, the sub-national GFPs themselves had not internalised and embraced their roles to a point where some could not define themselves by that title.

> 'We don't have a real unit at the Institute level that we can say is a gender unit or a team. And sometimes I may have to be reminded that I am a gender focal person because I have many other assignments which are not gender related'. (GFP, NARO Institute)

> In response to questions on:

> "What are your roles and responsibilities as a gender focal person/champion? Who do you report to?"

findings portrayed a disconnect between expectations by national level GFPs and the sub-national GFPs. While the former expected the sub-national GFPs to implement and report to them on technical research related matters, the sub-national GFPs instead mentioned involvement in ad hoc activities of a personal or social nature, for example, helping staff who had failed to pay school fees for their children (Institute level GFP, NARO), encouraging fellow staff to get treatment for HIV/AIDS (Institute level GFP, NARO), providing induction of new female staff on social perceptions about women and expected dress code (Institute level GFP, NARO), and "conducting small activities that do not require a lot of funding" (Institute level GFP, RAB).

5.4. GFPs Had Low Visibility and Were Nonfunctional

The GFPs had low visibility in both organisations and were largely non-functional. Despite having been in existence for several years, most researchers and managers in both organisations were not aware of any existing support by the GFPS at their workplace. A research coordinator in the Southern region expressed that:

"I don't think there is someone who is in charge of gender in RAB", while another one mentioned that: "I have known today that we have a GFP at the zone".

Similarly, key informant interviews with researchers and GFPs revealed that while the GFPs were expected to support gender integration in the research process, they were rarely pro-actively consulted by researchers. GFPs' support was only sought under crisis to meet donor requirements during proposal development or reporting.

6. Why the GFPs' Structure Is Not Working

6.1. Institutionalisation Journey Incomplete

In both Uganda (NARO) and Rwanda (RAB), efforts by the champions and development partners to introduce the GFP structure were ad hoc and informal, neither owned by management and the entire organisation nor anchored in formal institutional processes. Formal institutions in agricultural research organisations include policies and operational guidelines for key organisational tasks such as priority setting and planning, staff recruitment, reporting and accountability systems, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation, as well as research project design and implementation. Complete institutionalisation would require that the GFP structure is embedded in all these mainstream institutions. In the following sections, we present findings under the key institutional processes.

6.2. Priority Setting: Contradicting Perceptions

Both NARO and RAB had stakeholder processes that guided research agenda priority setting. The GFPs in both countries were not assigned any specific roles in these processes, meaning that gender aspects were missed out at this critical foundation stage that informs planning and resource allocation. We use the NARO case to illustrate the priority setting process in detail.

Within NARO, stakeholder consultations were conducted to set research priorities and solicit feedback on programme performance and technologies, developed every 5 years at the national level, and on an annual basis in all its institutes. The stakeholders consulted included farmers, donors, government departments, researchers, and civil society organisations, among others. An exploration of the gender responsiveness of the process revealed conflicting results. While top management described the process as gender responsive, institute directors reported the process to be gender blind. This could point to a disconnect between what is verbalized by top management and actual practice. In relation to this, below is a narrative from top management.

> 'In order to set research priorities, we use a bottom-up strategy; as a routine, every year the ZARDIs hold annual meetings where all stakeholders are invited. In such meetings, needs of different categories of beneficiaries, including women, are identified so that they inform the research agenda. At times, different institutes conduct baseline surveys on farming systems. The information from these baselines is disaggregated by gender. Therefore, information about men and women comes out clearly from gender disaggregated data reports. Sometimes, when new projects are starting, they require baselines against which to assess impact. Men and women are interviewed separately to get their unique needs. Research priorities are identified after reviewing project reports, baseline and impact studies, and annual reviews. In our understanding of gender responsiveness, we go beyond consideration of the numbers of men and women participating in activities but also whether the needs of these different gender categories have been addressed'. (top manager, NARO)

Contradicting the above narrative, several institute directors reported gender blind stakeholder consultation processes during the priority setting phase. Several voices pointed to the absence of deliberate efforts to address gender and the dominance of men during consultative meetings. An institute director commented that:

'It (priority setting) is like a bottom-up approach from farmers. We prioritize, for example, like in this meeting and collect points of interest from the farmers. When we call for meetings, we call both men and women though it is men who are always the majority and, in many instances, we don't target women specifically. . . . there is no special encouragement for women to attend'. (Institute Director NARO)

Document review further confirmed gender blind practices in NARO. The gender compliance assessment of Uganda's national budget revealed that NARO's budget allocation to gender interventions remained negligible. Despite gender being emphasized for a long time, NARO still lacked the sex disaggregated data needed to inform the analysis of gender issues [33].

6.3. Policies, Operational Guidelines, and Management Not Supportive

We found that gender responsive policies and guidelines were non-existent in NARO and RAB. For the case of NARO, the two key policy documents, notably, the strategic plan (2008/2009) and the Human Resource Manual, lacked any gender related objectives, strategies, and operational procedures. The position of GFPs was not established in the human resource structure. Top management, some institute directors, GFPs, and scientists indicated that the lack of gender responsive policies and operational guidelines remains a large challenge to gender integration in agricultural research. The gender initiatives in both organisations operated as project efforts. Thus, while the projects that required gender integration established a gender footprint among the participating scientists, there was no evidence of impacts at the wider institutional level; especially, in terms of influencing the setting up of formal guidelines for gender responsive research. Neither of the two organisations had a gender policy at the time of the study. In Rwanda, staff were aware of the government initiatives that promote women, such as the gender policy in the Ministry of Agriculture and the overall national gender policy. However, these policies had not been internalised and contextualised within agricultural research. The quote below illustrates this finding.

'I know that we have a gender policy at the Ministry of Agriculture, but I do not know much about it, although I think I have it on my desktop computer. I haven't read it. I can't remember how I got it. The policy is there but we have not implemented it'. (Female, Coordinator Research, RAB)

GFPs expressed dissatisfaction with the support from the top management. Their perception was that support from top management stopped at them talking about gender occasionally. Beyond this there was no effort to hold staff accountable for gender targets and outcomes.

'If the Director General had written an order saying every project must have gender, it would have added something onto what ASARECA said. But he is only supporting informally through talking about it'. (Female Gender Focal Person, RAB)

6.4. Recruitment, Reporting and Accountability Systems Not Formalised

The recruitment of GFPs in NARO and RAB didn't follow formal procedures as per the organisation human resource policies. The GFP position was not in the structure of both organisations. Existing staff were re-designated to take on the GFP roles as an add-on to their main appointment as researchers. A few had formal appointments while others did not. However, even in cases where there were appointment letters, the roles were neither clear nor detailed.

In RAB, the recruitment involved identifying staff with interest in gender and/or being from the already existing Social Economics Unit. The national gender focal person received a formal appointment from the Director General to undertake the gender responsibilities on top of his other responsibilities as a socio-economist and head of Innovations Platforms.

The national GFP subsequently appointed the regional level focal persons that were assigned duties with no formal appointment letters. In selecting the regional GFPs they considered interested open minded people that would most likely steer gender transformation in the organisation. Another consideration was inclusion of the various disciplines within the organisation. The selection process, described in the quote below, depicts the informality of the recruitment process.

> 'I had a selection criteria. First, they had to be gender sensitive. When I was appointed, I conducted a big 2-day meeting where I introduced the gender issues. During the meeting, I saw the people with sensitivity and non-sensitivity. For gender sensitivity, there were some questions which I asked people in the gender workshop such as: 'can you do this work if you were a man or woman'? For men, the question was about cooking. Men in Rwanda don't cook. I asked if they could help their wives to cook. 90% said no. They were not gender sensitive because they subscribed to the rigid traditional gender roles. Second, I considered inclusiveness—I wanted a crop scientist, livestock scientist, social scientist, agribusiness scientist. I wanted a balance'. (National GFP, RAB)

In contrast to RAB, where recruitment of sub-national GFPs was a responsibility of the National GFP, in NARO, institute leaders took a central role. Designation of staff to serve in this capacity was led by Directors at the various levels, guided by a range of subjective reasons, namely, interest and the willingness of staff members to take on the positions, being social, and the perceived ability to communicate well to staff, being a woman, or having attended some gender short courses. When four of the research institute GFPs (NARO) were asked this question: "*How did you become a gender focal person/champion?*", they responded as follows:

> 'I was chosen by the director to be the focal person because he noticed that I would interact with almost every category one including fishermen despite my profession as a technician'.

> 'The former executive director was my mentor. She would send me to attend gender workshops so I can be a TOTs so l can teach others. Through these trainings I was able to get more interest in gender. Therefore, with time the Former executive director understood my interest in gender and pushed me to take on the responsibility'.

> 'I was appointed by the Director who felt that with my position as communications officer I was best suited to infuse and influence the implementation of a gender sensitive kind of research'.

> 'I was selected by a NARO team by a gender training expert because I showed deep desire/interest in wanting to conceptualize gender and did a lot of personal reading/research on it'.

In both NARO and RAB, GFPs, especially at the sub-national level, were not required to report on gender in their annual reports. In addition, there were no reward and incentive systems for GFPs.

6.5. Inadequate Capacity of GFPs to Support Gender Integration in Research

Capacity was defined in terms of adequacy of number of GFPs, technical expertise, and funding.

The number of GFPs per research station (one per institute), technical gender expertise, and financial resources were perceived to be inadequate by the different informant categories (GFPs, researchers, and managers) in both organisations. The professional backgrounds of GFPs in NARO included laboratory technology (employed as Laboratory technician), plant breeding, development communication and agronomy/weed science. For RAB, GFPs had qualifications in social sciences, agricultural extension, and agricultural economics. Only one GFP in NARO had professional qualifications in gender, with a PhD

in Agricultural Policy, Gender, and Rural Development. Consequently, all GFPs were not suitably qualified to perform the assigned tasks. In terms of trainings, a majority had attended short gender courses lasting between 1 day and 2 weeks. Even the few who had received more training felt ill-equipped for their role. For instance, a male GFP who had attended up to 10 gender trainings felt his skills had not had a substantial impact on his performance.

Over two thirds of the GFPs indicated that they had technical capacity deficiencies, as preparation for this role had been inadequate. Access to gender training was found to be low and most of the training efforts were planned and facilitated by other organisations, which may indicate a lack of prioritization of gender training by NARO and RAB. Most of the researchers interviewed had never received gender training.

6.6. Very Low or Non-Existent Gender Budgets

Regarding financing, both NARO and RAB did not have dedicated budgets for GFP activities. In instances where projects included a gender component, GFPs reported that the gender budgets were low, not in sync with the requirements. When projects experienced financial constraints during the course of implementation, the gender budget was often the first to be cut. A GFP from NARO narrated that "... even those who win grants which are supposed to be gender responsive end up not implementing the gender ideas and activities". Consequently, GFPs were found to operate with limited or no budget at all, implying that gender work was often secondary. The lack of specific gender budgets was mentioned as a key barrier by respondents in all categories for both organisations. Selected quotes below illustrate the views in RAB.

'To incorporate gender requires a lot of funding but the gender budget is always meager. Usually when there is a shortage, gender tends to be ignored'. (M and E, RAB)

'We itemize activities and allocate funds accordingly. There was no specific budget for gender activities'. (Male, PI, Eastern Agriculture Zone/RAB)

'I have no specific budget as a gender focal person'. (Male, GFP, RAB)

'The problem is that the gender focal person at Headquarter has no funding to move to those people (i.e., the regional gender focal persons)'. (Male, GFP, RAB)

'For this type of work, I use funds of other projects ... Social economic research including baselines for all projects in the south'. (Male, GFP, RAB, national level)

In NARO, the situation was not any different. The consensus across informants from the various categories (national and institute level management, human resource managers, and GFPs) was that while the national Secretariat had a small budget for gender activities, no research institute reported a gender budget. The limited budget shows that gender is not considered a priority. However, there was some mention in one institute that individual scientists are encouraged to budget for gender in research proposals. We found isolated cases of donor funded projects where GFPs undertook relatively more in-depth gender integration. As a case in point, between 2012–2014, the Association for Strengthening Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) financed a number of projects in its member countries, in which integration of gender was emphasized. Other research projects that had a strong emphasis on gender integration included the East African Productivity Enhancement Programme Cassava Centre of Excellence (2009–2014) in Uganda, and the Pre-Cooked Bean, for improving food, nutrition, and income Project, financed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Uganda (2014–2017). Established guidelines and systematic implementation plans to foster and sustain gender actions were reported not to be in place.

6.7. Misconceptions about What Gender Integration Entails

Misunderstanding what gender integration in the research process entails was widely prevalent amongst the various key informant categories in NARO. These misunderstand-

ings were perceived to create a barrier to action. A cross section of the respondents reported a widely held perception amongst management and staff that gender is a woman's issue, and a threat to men. The perceived threat to men is illustrated in the following quote:

'Staff here think that gender is for women. The men scientists are scared that if gender is incorporated, they would lose their jobs to their women counterparts'. (Male GFP, NARO)

Gender equality processes were seen to be mainly spearheaded by women, and largely focusing on women's issues, creating the impression that men should not play an active role. Gender was perceived to be a confusing concept and this lack of conceptual clarity was thought to explain failure of scientists to integrate gender in practice. A director in one of the NARO regional institutes had this to say on why gender integration is difficult:

'People have never understood gender, which they are required to integrate. It does not make sense, most especially for scientists whose background is pure science, to be asked to integrate gender in a manner that is not clear'.

Agricultural scientists struggle with understanding the connection between their work and gender issues or gender research. In fact, gender research is not perceived to be a "serious science", and it is trivialised. GFPs reported instances where some scientists laugh at the mention of gender in a manner that belittles not only the concept but also the entire GFP structure.

Another perceptual barrier was gender fatigue arising from talking about it too much to a point where some switch off while others begin to get the impression that enough is being done. A researcher at RAB aptly phrased it as follows:

'A lot of people are talking about gender so much so that many people have heard about it without necessarily appreciating or understanding it. There is gender fatigue but not much understanding—people are tired of hearing about gender before they understand it'.

However, gender has been much about talk rather than a practice.

A common perception especially among the directors and some GFPs at the sub-national level was that gender integration meant balanced representation of women and men in the different work positions, committees, and having work facilities that support both women and men. A male director for instance mentioned that:

'Gender is important, and we look at gender issues in our work at the planning level and during implementation of our activities. We consider the percentage of men against women, we have toilets well marked for men and women, we consider the needs of people with disabilities but mostly women'.

For others, gender consideration meant catering for women's welfare issues, for instance providing physical structures for breastfeeding mothers. A few top management and the national level GFPs in both organisations understood gender integration to entail paying attention to gender in the entire research cycle, from the proposal stage through strategy formulation and implementation, but noted that this is yet to be realized in practice due to the limited capacity and absence of operation guidelines.

'Most researchers who claim to integrate gender do not know how to do it because there is no guideline as what should be done'. (Director, NARO)

Gender was also perceived as a "misfit" within the existing structures. With research structured around commodities, it wasn't clear where to fit gender. In RAB they tried to assign it to the existing socio-economic unit, without revising its mandate and budgets. The structural confusion is well illustrated in the quote below:

'Research in NARO is structured on commodities and there is no commodity called gender. Therefore, gender has no home, and you keep pleading for it. Even pleading for it is not easy because scientists say that science is science, we are recruited to do science, and including gender, which was not our original

calling, seems to be taking us to a different direction'. (Male, Gender Focal Person, NARO)

7. Discussion

7.1. Effect of Informality on GFP Structure Operationalisation

The informality of the GFP appointment process, and the absence of formalised accountability and rewards, negatively influenced compliance by the researchers and GFPs as well as the motivation of the latter. In practice, the involvement of the GFPs in research activities was not streamlined. It was ad hoc and depended on the initiative of the individual researchers based on their personal interest and willingness. For instance, in RAB, the national GFP would request the regional focal persons to prepare reports on an informal basis, albeit with limited compliance. There were no institutionalised mechanisms to compel researchers to work with the GFPs, which was cited as a demotivator by most GFPs. The extract below from an interview with a GFP in NARO aptly captures the views of GFPs in both organisations on this matter.

'Involving the GFP in a research process is often done on a crisis basis. Scientists only invite me to give advice after their workplans have been queried by donors and have been told 'you must incorporate gender'. With this they call me to integrate gender in their already formulated activities. The World Bank funds NARO activities, and in the Aide Memoire there is perennial comment that gender hasn't been addressed. Currently I have lost interest in supporting them because I am not formally appointed to serve as a GFP'. (Female Gender Focal Person, NARO)

The informally appointed GFPs were expected to add these new responsibilities on top of their substantive job descriptions without additional pay. This practice was found to be ineffective in two public organisations in Malaysia [34].

Given that the GFP position neither attracted remuneration nor an evaluation for promotion, gender work was considered secondary. Both the GFPs and researchers integrated gender voluntarily out of interest. As noted by a Programme Leader, NARO:

" . . . so, if they fail to do any gender responsive work/integration, they cannot be held accountable".

A member of NARO top management quoted below further emphasizes this drawback.

'The people currently performing the gender related roles are doing it as an add-on because it is not their core responsibility. They are not assessed and promoted on the basis of this additional role of gender, but on the core mandate; therefore, they accord gender less priority'.

GFPs found it challenging to combine their substantive job descriptions with the gender work as 'an add on'. The heavy workload meant that some of the roles were not effectively executed.

Because of the informality surrounding the structure, research operations continued to be 'business as usual' despite the introduction of gender structures. This is consistent with other scholars' assessment of the gender responsiveness of agricultural research organisations in Africa [6].

Clearly the informal and ad hoc structures perpetuated misconception and marginalization of gender in these institutions, reducing it to "add women and stir" occasional interventions when under duress. The informality of the structures undermined their performance, level of influence, and appreciation by peers, eventually leading to GFP burn out.

7.2. Incomplete Institutionalisation of GFPs

Effective institutionalisation of gender structures within organisations is complex, calling for a systematic approach if national policy statements are to be contextualized in organisa-

tions. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) [35,36] give instances where there was more comprehensive institutionalisation of gender within organisations.

Cases are described [35] where the government of India and NGOs institutionalised gender into policy and programmes by setting up quotas for women on boards and in leadership positions, following affirmative recruitment and promotion strategies, integrating gender into job descriptions and performance evaluation. A few NGOs went ahead to emphasise changing the 'masculine' decision making and organisation culture through making the organisation more democratic, promoting flexible working time and space which accommodates women staffs' reproductive roles, increasing the voice of women staff in decision making, increasing accountability to women clients, and building alliances with leaders of the women's movement to create demand for organisational change from outside [36].

In contrast, for the case of NARO and RAB, despite the existence of national gender policies in both countries, coupled with supportive public pronouncements by the respective heads of state, gender policies and strategies in the two institutions were found to be lacking. RAB had an edge over Uganda because it had a documented gender policy. Uganda's NARO was in the process of developing a gender and diversity strategy at the time of the study. A systemic approach would ensure that policy provisions at national level are traced to lower organisational levels. Corresponding changes in organisation policies, structures, mandates, and guidelines should be embraced by organisations with accompanying national budgets [4,7,37].

The gender mainstreaming efforts in the two organisations were fragmented, leaving the GFP structures hanging without adequate support. A study by Farnworth [4] posits that a weak national gender machinery characterised by understaffing and weak linkages to gender focal points, in line ministries, and civil society organisations focusing on gender, cripples the GFPs assistance to the line ministries' development of gender strategies.

Researchers in the Caribbean noted three common challenges in implementation of their gender agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework include: (1) the persistent and limited number of technical staff trained in gender mainstreaming within the national machinery and across the Government, (2) the absence of gender responsive budgeting, programming, and monitoring, and (3) a misconception or unclear perception of the mandate and role of the national machineries [37].

Finally, national machineries have not been included or involved in the process of developing their long or medium-term national development plans. With the exception of the Bahamas, Dominica, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, there is no formal mechanism that involves national machinery in the committee in charge of developing and monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda [37].

They recommend that, to advance gender equality through effective mainstreaming of gender in national development planning and as part of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SDGs would require fostering of coordination and coherence among government institutions and other stakeholders, like the civil society, women's groups, private sector, faith-based organisations, and youth networks, implementing gender responsive budgeting, building capacity, in particular on gender data, supporting citizen-lend initiative to monitor progress, and holding governments accountable for gender equality commitments [37].

On the contrary, the GFPs in NARO and RAB were not adequately anchored and linked with the national gender mainstreaming efforts in line ministries, or Ministries of Gender and Civil Society. Instead, they were traced to efforts of a few passionate individual champions and donors as opposed to the existing national policies. While these leaders played a critical role in initiating the gender focal person structures in NARO and RAB, it is evident that a few champions and one person per institute are not enough to drive gender responsive institutional transformation. A critical mass is needed, coupled with requisite capacity and a conducive institutional environment characterised by supportive gender responsive policies, operational guidelines for key organisation

functions, accountability, and reward systems [34]. Mainstreaming gender in development planning can only be accomplished with the requisite political will and commitment to transforming administrative structures and modes of decision-making [37]. Promoting gender equality and equity, especially in the science disciplines, requires heavy investments of both technical and financial resources [3].

Various authors [4,7,35,37] have suggested that mainstreaming gender requires careful thought, effort, commitment, budget, policies, and guidelines. Similarly, others have argued that for agricultural organisations to be gender responsive; changes must occur at different institutional levels, in agenda setting, policymaking, planning, implementation, and evaluation [38]. The transformation is facilitated by new staffing and budgeting practices, training programmes, policy procedures, and guidelines [38]. Human resource management performance appraisal, rewards, and promotions [39], as well as the corresponding changes in organisation mandates and structures, are important [4,37] for promoting gender responsiveness. Notably, the advent of gender mainstreaming as opposed to Women in Development (WID) approaches meant that dedicated budgets were removed since gender was ostensibly mainstreamed in all activities [4]. The argument that gender is incorporated but with no special budget therefore defeats the purpose of gender mainstreaming.

The NARO and RAB structure, established to guide the integration of gender into agricultural research activities, was coordinated nationally, with focal points present in most regional institutes. Since Institute Operations were structured around commodities, the absence of institutionalised mechanisms to guide researchers on how to fit gender into the commodity-oriented mandates posed a challenge. In a nutshell, the institutionalization of the GFPs in both organisations was incomplete, stopping at informal appointments not backed up by mainstream official procedures.

7.3. Misconceptions around Capacity Needs of Gender Focal Persons

Serving as a GFP confers a whole new and important set of responsibilities and duties that are not part of regular research work. This makes the assignment even more challenging and the learning curve steep [40]. In addition, where the GFPs have neither formal gender qualifications nor prior experience in the area, it becomes important to make ample provisions for them to develop adequate capacity through in-depth formal training as opposed to short term gender courses. Expecting GFPs who have limited gender technical capacity themselves to drive the gender agenda, especially in an unsupportive institutional environment, would be an uphill task.

In this case, perceptions around the concept of gender and gender integration reflected misconceptions found to be prevalent in other African agricultural research organisations, that gender means equal numbers of women and men, having a gender expert on the research team and a few statements on gender in the organisation's documentation, even if they are not followed up for implementation [6].The commonly voiced narrative by political leaders that interpreted gender to mean encouraging women's representation in governance and development processes seems to, in part, have informed the widely verbalised misconception that gender integration means women's representation. This is problematic in that it shifts emphasis to meeting women representation targets rather than addressing deep seated gender issues and women's needs. Researcher misunderstanding of gender is likely to affect the way they appreciate and apply the concept in research. Conceptual clarity is critical for practical application.

7.4. Donor Strategy Weak

The findings point to donors as one of the key triggers of GFP structures, with demand for GFP input in research processes only sought to fulfil donor requirements. However, donors' efforts seemed to fall short in terms of strategic follow up to ensure systematic gender integration during implementation. While donors catalysed integration of gender in agricultural research, especially at the proposal stage and establishment of the GFP struc-

tures, they did not support essential subsequent steps, notably in depth skills development and institutional reforms such as policy reviews, formulation of operational guidelines, and requiring organisations to establish positions of gender experts in mainstream human resource structures. In the absence of counterpart government funding, GFPs were unable to deliver on expectations. Gender equality policies and programmes must be supported by capacity-building of all staff so that they have the necessary skills and information to engage in gender analysis of public sector policies and programmes [37].

8. Conclusions

The GFP structure in both NARO and RAB was ineffective in institutionalising gender within the organisations. It had low visibility within the organisation and was largely informal, driven by voluntarism with no clear terms of reference, no resources, and no accountability framework. Gender work was an add-on responsibility executed on a voluntary basis by GFPs who had no formal training in gender, and they were not required to plan for and report on their GFP roles. Biophysical scientists themselves were not obliged to report on gender despite requirements in funding proposals. The explanation for the status quo lies in the way GFP structures were established, operationalised, and nurtured within both organisations. While donor funding was critical in catalysing their establishment, NARO and RAB did not embed them into existing organisation structures, policies, strategies, and operational guidelines. Both organisations lacked relevant institutional incentives for gender responsiveness. There was no evidence of accountability systems to commit staff to be gender responsive. The limited gender capacity among GFPs and other staff further explains the poor performance, as both organisations did not prioritise gender capacity development. Strengthening the gender structures requires a deliberate effort to put in place policies that support gender responsiveness. The necessary resources, institutional environment, and well-trained personnel should be in place to support these efforts.

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