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Inclusive business models

Empowering women in urban agriculture in Burkina Faso

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Chapter 10

Conclusion

10.1 Answering the main research question

This work shows the magnitude of gender inequality worldwide and particularly in low-income countries, which results in women's economic exclusion from formal economic value chains where they could generate more income and possibilities of decent jobs (FAO, 2015). The way to invert this problem may reside in building suitable business models which are gender-aware and inclusive of vulnerable people, notably women at the BoP. Thus, this research has addressed the following main question: "How can gender-aware inclusive businesses contribute to the economic empowerment of WSEs/WFEs in the urban food value chains in low-income countries, and what do gender-aware inclusive businesses imply in practice?" The answers are organised around women's functioning and capabilities/agency.

The research findings show that a gender-aware inclusive business model is a generator of social, economic and environmental multiplier effects on the functioning of the poor (women) in urban (local) food value chains in low-income countries. First, it contributes to their social empowerment as their activities are appreciated by society. This increases their self-esteem; they feel more useful than before and as they can contribute to their household spending. These women also benefit from increased autonomy vis-à-vis their husbands. Thus, a gender-aware inclusive business model can show another image of women in both their household and society, as not just human beings who provide domestic work, reproductive services and child care in their household, but who can contribute to food security in their homes and in society. This finding shows that a gender-aware business model can help overcome the dominant power relationship between men and women at the household level (BSR, 2017; IDRC, 2016).

Second, economically, poor women run the business themselves by supplying quality food to the urban (local) population. The market they supply the vegetables to is still largely untapped and has a very promising growth potential for products related to health in food consumption patterns. This type of business is more viable through a direct linkage between producers and consumers (or at least the demand for this brand of product across the urban areas). These women producers also get income and/or profit that contributes to supporting their family consumption as well as material equipment: housing, means of transportation, clothing, schooling of children. Such findings shed light on the potential of women, when engaged in paid work, to durably generate income which is used in their household care. Because of this income, women become less dependent on their husbands, and therefore a balance in the gender power relationship occurs. Therefore, a gender-

aware inclusive business, which allows BoP women access to paid jobs and the utilisation of the generated income, may serve as a solid argument for gender equity awareness raising to achieve women's empowerment (FAO, 2011).

Third, the GAIB models are partly environmentally friendly as they are founded on the sustainability of the activities. The finding shows that these models coincide with organic food production, which is aware of environmental and health issues (Kini et al., 2020). Indeed, as an integral part of the gender-aware inclusive value chain, such business models are suitable for long-term perspectives. One condition underlying these long-term perspectives is that there is no competition between and among the actors in the value chain (or people doing such businesses together). As shown in a case studied, the competitive behaviour among actors (e.g., at horizontal level, producers versus producers or intermediaries versus intermediaries) leads to the adoption of non-sustainable production practices (e.g., water pollution, early water shortages) (see 8.2.2; 6.4.11 & 6.3.5).

Hence, GAIB models enable poor women to express themselves in their society. The transition from unpaid household work to paid work is perceived as a huge opportunity, because it changes their life to a certain extent. They feel empowered in the sense that they are less dependent on their husbands. For female widows, such businesses are opportunities to earn stable money and find new connections (relations) with others. All of this contributes to feeding their children and ensuring a good future for them. Therefore, these research findings provide arguments to overcome gender disparities in gender-blind countries, which consequently solves the concern raised in this research problem statement (see 1.2.1).

A GAIB model has contributed to significant changes in women's capabilities, particularly in their time dedicated to domestic work, production or business activities as well as their social relations and human capital. First, the business has considerably alleviated a gender barrier that is related to the lack of control over time by women. Women did not have full control over their time resources in the past, because of their husbands and household work, but most of them fully control their time now after being included in the groups. For some women, the time dedicated to cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, water collection and so on, has significantly decreased in favour of the time spent on their business activities as well as the time to socialise with their neighbourhood and group members outside the business sphere (some can hire domestic servants, others are helped by their household members). However, for other women, their participation in such businesses did

not change the time dedicated to domestic, because there is no redistribution of the labour among their household's members. On the contrary, this increases their time burden so that they are obliged to shorten their sleep or rest time.

Second, women have also reinforced their social relations through their business activities, both within and outside their group. Indeed, as group members, they have external partners that are interested in and support their activities. For example, the Ministry of Environment, which provides them with trainings on climate variability awareness and adaption strategies; the Ministry of Agriculture provides them with trainings on agricultural production techniques (organic manure, fertilisers and pesticides use); local and international organisations (e.g., UNDP, FAO) support women's groups with funding of water irrigation systems, infrastructure) [see 6.3.6 & 6.4.11]. In addition, the regular and non-regular buyers who interact with these women all are part of the social relations built up through the business by women as a group, but also as individuals. This has proven to be a very important contribution to women's individual wellbeing as they acquired a certain credibility as well as a reputation among the population of the city. This also contributes to increasing their self-esteem. Furthermore, the business has contributed to improving the relations in the household as women who were beaten and/or neglected by their husband (particularly in polygamy) before, are now respected by him, and even by their co-spouses. This enhances their psychological and cognitive wellbeing (see Altaf, 2019; Pouw & Kini, 2016).

Third, with this business, all women included have benefitted from one key asset with multiplier effects on their business activities, which is human capital (recording a positive change). Indeed, with this set of knowledge (both local knowledge and knowledge improved by science), the women are technically empowered to engage in more productive activities. For example, their knowledge on environmental and health issues may justify their choice for organic food production, a branch of production that has not spread throughout Ouagadougou yet.

Consequently, in practice, doing gender-aware inclusive business implies self-organising (or by the funders of the business activities) of women and men into separate groups (in regard to the gender issues highlighted by women themselves, see 6.4.3) at the horizontal nodes of the value chain in the short and mean term, while working on increasing the awareness of men about the benefits of breaking down gender barriers due to the social and cultural norms. Indeed, in regard to the current gender-reality (social and cultural norms against women are still predominant) learnt from the case study, mixing men and women in the same group may be counterproductive in alleviating gender disparities. In so doing,

that may contribute to solving the problem earlier highlighted by FAO (2011) that in the agricultural value chain, women's position is largely influenced by gender inequality that hinders their empowerment. On the one hand, this requires that men's mentalities and mindsets on their perceived superiority to women has to change. A powerful way to achieve that is to improve these informal social, cultural and religious institutions by raising awareness and training people on the benefits from gender equity in villages. These institutions are so powerful that the formal institutions (laws) seem limited to account for this in the short term. It is a process that takes time, and one that requires the involvement of both female and male stakeholders. To this end, short term actions (with long term effects) include promoting (for example) the "school of husbands" under the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project (SWEDD) (World Bank, 2019, para.4). This new approach creates an environment where men and women are confident to share their experience and learn from each other. In so doing, it contributes to significantly changing men's mentality so that they get more involved in household/domestic works (World Bank, 2019, para.6). Afterwards, both women and men can equally work together at the horizontal level in the urban value chains; but this requires a full participation of national and local authorities as well as CSO and NGOs. On the other hand, education at early schooling (boys and girls) that integrates gender equity is the better path for next generations to account for this.

Hence, in regard to the contribution of GAIB to women's economic empowerment and the fact that majority of these women are still survival entrepreneurs (see 8.5.3), a main conclusion of this research is that women survival entrepreneurs (WSEs) need to be supported in self-organisation and enabling their transition to women food entrepreneurs (WFEs) with a growth-oriented objective within a competitive environment. Such a support to WSEs is similar to the infant industry argument by Alexander Hamilton and Friedrich List in the 19th century, who advocate for a protection from the State of nascent industries under certain conditions (Melitz, 2004). This argument considers that nascent industries oftentimes lack the economies of scale compared to their older competitors, and thus need to be protected until they can attain similar economies of scale as of their competitors.

Even though infant industry pertains to the international trade relationship between firms, it fits in the current research simply because it calls for the State's intervention in the economic sphere. In particular, this is more relevant in the framework of gender-aware inclusive value chain (GAIVC), which is analogous to a human being (human body) that lives, speaks and produces (Foucault, 1972). Such a value chain is a system akin to a human body in which the components (senses, organs) are physically identifiable, with flows of products and information within

this framework as human blood flows inside the organs and between the organs and with no competition between the different parts. So, just as the human body does not differentiate between its organs, the components of the value chain (key actors) are also not meant to be treated differently or discriminated against; instead, they are complementary, otherwise the system collapses.

In this vein, I propose to use the concept of income or salary instead of profit in the case of WSEs as the latter is not relevant in this context. My argument is that WSEs undertake such business activities primarily to seek an income necessary to face their key urgent spending (on basic needs). Indeed, the profit estimated in this research did not include the salary that each WSE could pay to herself. If we acknowledge that WSEs should pay to themselves a salary to remunerate their labour, there would probably not be positive profit as estimated for this category of women entrepreneurs. Thus, the cut-off point, which is 1.7 time higher than the minimum salary guaranteed, can be considered as the salary that each WSE could pay to herself as argued in 8.5.3. Once this minimum salary is guaranteed for WSEs, they can now make profit. This coincides with the growth-oriented objective of their business, meaning that WFEs can pay themselves a minimum salary while making a profit on their business activity. Of course, this cut-off point is contextual as it may vary depending on the space (country level) and time, particularly when considering the increasing life cost and household's needs over time.

10.2 Theoretical reflection

10.2.1 Gender-aware inclusive value chains

The literature treats the concept of “value chain” as a static analytical and operational model or a framework (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2000) and as a dynamic process involving the flow of food commodities or services from the raw material production to end-products (Bamber & Staritz, 2016).

The current research has contributed to the debate by bringing the Foucauldian perspective on humans to the conceptualisation of a value chain. Thus, the research has proposed that value chains claiming for gender awareness and inclusiveness, particularly for WSEs, should be analogous to the human body (see 2.3.4 & 10.1). This is the best way to address the issue of gender inequalities and inclusion of the BoP populations in the food system, particularly poor women in cities. Hence, value chain development (mainly in the agriculture sector) which aims to truly include the poor and address gender issues may adopt this perspective.

From the conceptualisation of the gender-aware inclusive value chain, this research has identified the existing (actors, structures, environment and institutions), communicative (knowledge and information flow) and productive (production outputs) components of the three women's groups studied (see 7.1.1, 7.1.2, and 7.1.3). It clearly shows the interactions existing between elements of each component and how they contribute to the overall performance of the value chain. For example, the existence of infrastructure such as roads, water equipment and buildings at the production sites has multiplier effects on the value creation and business opportunities (see 5.3.4). In addition, the roles of institutions such as gender and political institutions are identified as significant factors influencing the performance and durability of the businesses, particularly in the group of Tanghin. This is not the case of the women's groups in Tampouy and Kossodo where gender barriers do not exist, rather they experience non-gender related leadership issues. Women in both groups are also from households with commonalities and differences that completely shape their business arena. Indeed, most of them have experienced very difficult living conditions (extreme poverty, loss of their husband and so on). Thus, their business activities are seen as the only way to improve their living conditions, and then they are seriously engaged in a sustainable way. However, this research has not been able to clearly identify the economic institutions, meaning the market rules that affect their activities. This is due to the scale of the analysis (local level).

Hence, this research has shown that a value chain in which men and women play the same role (same position) or carry out the same activities (horizontal integration-actors creating the value) is less likely to be gender-aware and inclusive (e.g., value chain of women's group in Tanghin, see 8.2 & 6.2.4). This is the case in both short and long value chains. The reason pertains to the power imbalance between men and women, as recognised by the women themselves. These power relations are sustained by the social norms, which means that men will always play a dominant role (or take over) in the chains' activities and then capture the largest share of the benefits to the detriment of women. In contrast, a value chain totally controlled by women (i.e., they are the main decision makers of producing, processing or vending) both horizontally and vertically (vertical and horizontal integration), is more likely to be gender-aware and inclusive for poor women, as there is almost no gender barrier in the chain. Even if there is a power imbalance between actors in such value chains, it is still not on the basis of their gender, but as actors who fully recognise themselves as equal to each other. Thus, a gender-aware inclusive value chain for survival farmers also means the exclusion of men from these value chains (of course, male consumers/buyers cannot be excluded as they are good partners for women, see 6.4.2). As such, this supports the practices of gender-aware value chains tending to regroup women-only at horizontal nodes independently of their

poverty conditions (Riisgaard et al., 2010; USAID, 2009), but it is also different as it clearly regroups women who experienced (shared) poverty conditions and other social illness, such as discrimination, violence and sexual harassment.

These research findings on value chain concept can be compared to the recent work by Ros-Tonen et al (2019). These authors provided a sound analytical framework for the value chain integration (inclusive value chain collaboration), and two main commonalities can be found between my findings and theirs: we both address gender issues and BoP populations' (smallholders notably) in an integrated manner in value chain conceptualisation. In doing so, we consider human right and dignity (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2012) in the analysis and collaboration in a value chain. Second, we both consider inclusive value chains as a framework where inclusive business models are conducted (see 3; 8; & Ros-Tonen et al., 2019, p.13). This confirms my view that a gender-aware inclusive value chain is a necessary condition for a business to be gender-aware and inclusive (see 8.2).

However, my findings contrast with Ros-Tonen et al. (2019) on the following points. First, the authors' work is still theoretical as their conceptualised framework of inclusive value chain collaboration has not been empirically tested (Ros-Tonen et al., 2019, p.13), while mine has been tested (see gender-aware inclusive value chain as necessary conditions of gender-aware inclusive business in 8.2). Second, their model merely pertains to existing global value chains (and how to integrate the BoP population as well as address gender barriers in such value chains); whereas, mine is more directed towards new value chains (although it is built on lessons from the existing value chains in order to propose a scaling up perspective). Third, they focus on long value chains (international or cross-country); whereas mine focuses on short value chains. While relevant, the authors position of value chain is the one which has been criticised by Likoko and Kini (2017). The latter assume that this way of integrating the BoP populations in business is merely the position defended by SNV and WBCSD (2011) or multinationals, which integrated these populations as consumers, suppliers/distributors or producers of certain raw materials (Likoko & Kini, 2017). In such a way, the BoP population cannot be drivers of the business, meaning that they have little power or influence on the value chain dynamics. This is recognised by Ros-Tonen et al (2019, p.14) themselves when they state that in such value chains, there is a great potential of adverse incorporation and exclusion, thus they are not inclusive of all the farmers. Fourth, their model cannot fully address the problem of power relations as BoP populations are powerless in such business value chains and are forced to adopt decisions made by the drivers of the business (mostly the multinationals). In contrast, my approach to value chain is meant to address

the unequal power relations. Indeed, if each stakeholder sees herself or himself as complementary instead of a competitor, the power relationship (gender-based or poverty-based) has a great chance to be balanced among and between themselves.

10.2.2 Gender-aware inclusive business

By emphasising human dignity in doing business with the Bottom of Pyramid-populations, this research defines an inclusive business following Sopov et al. (2014) and Likoko & Kini (2017). A business model is inclusive if it is innovative, credible, affordable (equitable), adaptable and viable (efficient). However, an operational conceptualisation which focuses on business with poor people in an inequitable gender context was missing.

This research contributes to filling this gap in knowledge by integrating gender issues in the conceptualisation of the inclusive business in its first four components, whereas the viability (fifth component) is seen as the outcome of overcoming gender barriers. Thus, the research identifies the indicators and sub-indicators of each of the five relevant components (see 8.5.1) and formalised them into a mathematical equation to allow numerical computation in a gender-aware inclusive business index (see 8.5.2). From testing this index with field data, three main types of business models were identified: the gender-blind and exclusionary business models focused on profit maximisation (with high power imbalance), the transitory business models, and the gender-aware inclusive businesses (with power balance, gender awareness and inclusion of the poor). The transitory business models can be targeted for increasing gender-aware inclusive businesses. The third category of business can be targeted by interventions (from the State, NGOs) that aim at sustaining and promoting businesses carried out by this category of the population, because of its significant impact on their daily life.

Gender-aware inclusive business models comprise businesses driven (i.e., controlled) by poor people themselves (not market-driven, but producer-driven) (FAO, 2015). However, gender-aware inclusive business is still survival entrepreneurship (see 8.5.3), yet with a great potential for growth. The business is survival, because women in this business have limited capacities or resources (both collectively and individually) to support more intensive solutions (their capacities are so limited that they are not able to create or generate more intensive solutions) for growth-oriented business. While these women have a strong will to do business that generates more income (growth-oriented), their limited access to land resources (because of the lack of space in Ouagadougou) and to substantial funding, and their high propensity to spend the earned profit on their children's food, education and health care needs (preventing them from saving money) are the key barriers.

This research's findings on gender-aware inclusive business can be compared to those of by Sopov et al. (2014) and Pouw et al. (2020). First, two points (pros and cons) can be highlighted when comparing my findings with Sopov et al. (2014). In terms of cons, these authors used the link methodology with six criteria developed by Lundy et al. (2014) to assess the inclusiveness of more than ten business models including big corporates and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Although Sopov et al. (2014) have defined a business model as durable, equitable, efficient, effective, adaptable and credible, the authors used six relatively different criteria to assess the inclusiveness of these business models. These criteria include a) the chain wide collaboration; b) effective market linkages; c) fair and transparent governance; d) equitable access to services; e) inclusive innovation; and f) measurements of outcomes (Lundy et al., 2014, p.127). Therefore, in regard to these criteria, my findings are different from Sopov et al.'s findings because their tool aims to evaluate inclusiveness in trade relationships between smallholders and formal buyers (Lundy et al., 2014, p.125). Also, no mathematical causal relationship was designed to rigorously assess the inclusiveness of the business. Furthermore, gender issues are implicitly considered in the work by Sopov et al. (2014), but not explicitly as I did. In contrast, my research has failed to explicitly show the scalability conditions of the gender-aware inclusive business, something the authors have done.

In terms of pros, a common point of my research with Sopov et al. (2014) is that they have considered a value chain collaboration as a criterion to the inclusiveness of the business/value chain. Indeed, by developing the value chain as a condition for a business model to be gender-aware and inclusive, my research and theirs acknowledge that a value chain is primarily the framework in which a business occurs. This supports my understanding of the value chain concept.

Second, the recent work by Pouw et al. (2020) has analysed the inclusion of poor and marginalised people in business by focusing on innovation. Innovation is seen as the key driver capable of bringing about true inclusive business models with visible impacts of the food and nutrition security of these marginalised people. The authors argue that such innovations should be applicable to a specific problem and context, affordable at low costs, and accessible to all if they expect to be effective in ensuring this food and nutrition security for the marginalised people (Pouw et al., 2020). These authors used four (out of the five) dimensions of the gender-aware inclusive business developed in my research. However, the story underlying their analysis is different from mine. Indeed, to them, innovation is considered as the driver of the applicability, affordability and accessibility of inclusive business aiming at empowering the BoP people (Pouw et al., 2020). This assumes that innovation, applicability, affordability and accessibility are sufficient to conclude

that a business model is inclusive, a view that I reject. This also assumes that the authors refer only to existing value chains as one innovates on what already exists, otherwise one creates another value chain.

I find that this is not sufficient as condition in regard to the systemic approach used in this research. Indeed, a gender-aware inclusive business model, in its current form, considers all these dimensions (innovation, applicability, affordability, accessibility including the viability) as playing the same role and interdependent. This is in line with the dynamics of human body organs which are all important to keep the body system alive and growing over time. This perspective is necessary to truly consider the BoP in doing business on a win-win basis, with balanced power relationships and gender-equity.

10.2.3 WSEs as societal and economic agents

The debate on women in entrepreneurship records an extensive contribution to understanding the constraining factors. The key lessons learnt from such a debate is that women entrepreneurship, particularly in low-income countries, should be placed into their socio-cultural contexts (Likoko et al., 2019; Pouw, 2017; Marlow & Dy, 2017; Vossenbergh, 2016). Indeed, when considering gender issues in understanding women's entrepreneurial activities, their performance is influenced by many factors (domestic work, child care) making them, sometimes, less performing than men. Therefore, it is suggested considering woman entrepreneurs primarily as a socially embedded person to better understand her entrepreneurial performance.

While the current research acknowledges that women in entrepreneurship should be looked at differently than men entrepreneurs, because of gender barriers they face, it goes beyond the usual analysis by integrating three theoretical perspectives (capability approach, firm-level economic wellbeing and theory of organisations) into a holistic-specific approach (see 2.5.2).

Based on this holistic-specific approach, gender-aware inclusive business models carried out by WSEs stand to be opportunities for them to increase their capabilities (resources), agency and functioning. To make this happen, such business models first affect women's individual agency (socio-demographic and economic characteristics), which stand to be key drivers towards their capabilities or resources increase, and then achieving their functioning. Several (examples of) findings of this research are supportive of this view (see 9.3.1). First, old women tend to earn less money (financial resources) than young ones from their business activity (food production). This finding raises the problem of physically active people in poverty

conditions when there is a development (e.g., business) intervention. Indeed, to Altaf (2019) development interventions tend to often target active people in the BoP, thus excluding the non-active people. In the case studied, this finding raises the issue of the inclusion or not of old women if a private investor were interested to build a long-term partnership with the women's groups, as in short future, these old women would become inactive.

Second, WSEs with higher human capital (capacity building) tend to earn more profit or financial resources than women with low human capital. This shows that the business is adaptable to the majority of poor people who do not have the opportunity to access a higher school degree, but who have significant know-how. It is particularly adaptable for most of the informal settlement people in general, and women in particular, as they are the poorest group in the cities (UN-Habitat, 2007). This finding confirms the results by Akouwerabou (2014) who recommended to limit the education of people involved in agriculture-based activities to literacy and capacity building trainings if one expects to increase their productivity. This finding also confirms the importance of the tertiary business process (e.g., capability building, knowledge sharing) as key element leading to applicable, affordable and accessible innovations (Pouw et al., 2020).

Third, food intake (number of meals per day) appears to be constraining for WSEs' profit or financial resources making. Indeed, food intake is constraining for women's profit making as to meet the food and nutrition security for their children, women may spend an important part of their income (earned from the business) and time on food purchases, reducing their financial and time capacity to reinvestment. In addition, as women also self-consume a part of their lettuce, this can be seen as a non-marketed part of the production, reducing then the net benefit that could be drawn from the plots of land. Consequently, this partly explains why the majority of women in this business are still in survival entrepreneurship, even though they are motivated to grow their business. This finding confirms the recent work by authors for whom it is better considering "survival entrepreneurship and growth-oriented entrepreneurship as entrepreneurial spectrum rather a clear-cut distinction" (Pouw et al., 2020, p.5).

10.2.4 Structures, actors, environment and institutions

Structures

Structures include the physical and non-physical elements in a value chain. I conclude that infrastructure and equipment/material play significant roles in WSEs' capabilities and agency building. Indeed, these women have a high potential

of innovating and diversifying their activities, including vertical integration of the value chain nodes (production and processing), if they have the required infrastructure and equipment. Such infrastructure, equipment and material (both collective and individual) also generate more business opportunities such as developing a new brand. This finding shares the position of Pouw et al. (2020) for whom secondary business processes (including handling, packaging, transport, and so on) constitute key elements towards applicable, affordable and accessible innovations capable of being impactful on food and nutrition security. Indeed, this view assumes that a certain level of infrastructure, equipment or material exists as these structures influence the business processes (e.g., existing structures in Tampouy contribute to increasing their processing capacities, thus creating new opportunities for women).

The non-physical elements of the value chain also influence WSEs individual and collective capabilities and agency. For example, women's collective business strategies include: production planning to avoid group members producing the same crop at the same time; production of the most demanded crops during annual festivities; growing adapted crops to the hot/water stress period; and joint selling system. These directly increase their collective capabilities (opportunities generated by their business activities, common resources or capacities), functioning (social relations, profit) and agency (group governance and conflict management as drivers of women's behaviour). These findings show that well organised actors (women particularly) in the value chain at the horizontal level (coordination) tend to guarantee equity to their members as the competitive behaviour, power imbalances and gender-disparities in their relationships can be alleviated. Therefore, the finding confirms the Foucauldian view that in a value chain operating like a human being's body (Foucault, 1972), actors (human beings) are not competitors, but complementary so that each earns what he/she is capable of. This research also shares the findings by Sopov et al. (2014) on the importance of well organised groups (e.g., good transparency in the groups) in a value chain.

Hence, these findings validate the hypothesis (*H3*) that "constructions, level of vertical integration and level of horizontal coordination in a value chain shape the capabilities, agency and strategies of WSEs/WFEs."

Actors

'Actors' are the other people intervening in value chains and how they communicate together with WSEs. Three types of actors are identified: development partners, business partners and consumers. First, development partners comprise the set of NGOs (national and international) and public services providers that support WSEs' activities in terms of capacity building (training-human capital), infrastructure (housing, irrigation water supply system) and so on. These partners have contributed to improving WSEs' capabilities and agency. Second, business partners include the seeds/inputs providers, private services providers (microfinance services for savings) and food wholesalers and retailers. The finding shows that these actors, notably food vendors are very influential on women's financial resource earning, particularly in long value chains where WSEs cannot gain the premium price as in short value chain. Also, because of the competitive behaviour between traders themselves and between them and producers, less powerful actors in the chain earn low rewards. Both findings confirm the view of Van Tulder (2018) that the State, civil society and businesses have to complement each other for coming across to effectively implement inclusive business.

Third, consumers are key actors who determine the earning of the upstream value chain actors (producers, wholesalers, processors). This research shows that consumers in long value chains are less influential on WSEs' activities than short value chains. Because of their close interaction with food producers, consumers can share their knowledge and feedback on the quality of food and production techniques with these food producers. This close business/social relationship between the consumers and producers does not exist in long chains where intermediaries directly interact with the producers. Consequently, this relational resource is part of WSEs' capability, which translates to some extent to their social esteem. As such, this research finding supports the view by Marsden et al. (2000), that in short value chains, interactions between consumers and producers go beyond only market considerations, they are also socially embedded. This still confirms the Foucauldian perspective of the human being as a framework of value chain analysis, which sees all stakeholders as part of the same body, and any competition between them are potential threats for the system to collapse (Foucault, 1972). This also confirms the research assumption that the other actors in value chains play significant roles in shaping WSEs' business models as well as their capabilities, agency and business strategies.

Environment

This research has also occasionally referred to the environment. It has identified two main climate stresses, flooding in the rainy season and water shortages over the dry season. The climate stresses exacerbate current pressures on water, land and ecosystems resources (UN Environment, 2019). This reality is experienced by all women's group studied so that they have developed and shaped their business strategies to adapt to these environmental issues (see 6.4.11). For example, this research has shown that women are capable of adapting to climate variability's impacts by developing and adopting business strategies such as off-ground or hydroponic cultural techniques (on-table production), which use less water than soil-based techniques. Also, women adapt the crops they grow in accordance with the time period. In this regard, the crops they grow when water is abundant are different from those when there is water scarcity or in hot periods. These findings are similar to those of Pouw and Humblot (2020) as they show the capability of poor women to cope with the challenging environmental stresses.

This research finds little competitive behaviour between the three studied value chains. No competition exists between the short value chains which involve women-only groups, probably because they are geographically distant. Also, no competition exists between the long value chain of the mixed group (men and women) and short value chains probably because of the geographic distance, and merely because the latter focuses on organic vegetables whereas the former on conventional vegetable production. This finding may pertain to the theory of monopolistic competition in industrial economics (Robinson, 1933). Indeed, this theory informs that in the case of market imperfection, that is, all the market products are not identical (homogenous), producers or processors tend to differentiate their products with those of their potential competitors creating then a different value chain in order obtain the monopoly in the market. However, there is a competition between conventional vegetables in the studied long value chains with other conventional vegetables produced both inside and outside the city. Indeed, as wholesalers are very active in these value chains, they tend to collect vegetables from various production sites both in the city or surrounding villages to bring to the marketplaces.

Hence, the natural and competitive value chains influence WSEs' capabilities and shapes their business model.

Institutions

I looked at formal and informal institutions and their influence on WSEs. On the one hand, formal political institutions comprise the formal governing system organised within the executive, legislature, and judiciary. In theory, these institutions are assumed to be independent of each other, as argued by Court and Cotterrell (2006). However, this seems not to be the case as many corruption cases are pointed out yearly by the civil society organisations, but no sanction from the judiciary power (and to some extent the parliament) were implemented (REN-LAC, 2017).

The government has prepared two key policies and programmes to increase women's capabilities, agency and functioning, particularly in the business sphere. First, education policies have increased girls' (formal) education rate compared to the past. This is expected to increase their agency as education significantly contributes to their capabilities and agency and leads to increasing their functioning (see 5.3.1). However, this contrasts with my research findings on education level in relation to WSEs' profit, as the causal relation between formal education of women and their profit making is not statistically significant. Consequently, these policies appear to not be adapted to self-employment (particularly agricultural entrepreneurship) as argued by Savadogo (2013), thus justifying the call for reforming the education system (Kyelem, 2009). This is also advocated by Akouwerabou (2014) who asserts that there should be a focus on capacity building and literacy (i.e., know-how).

In this vein, alternatives to formal education include social and financial education (Kini & Rouamba, 2020; Aflatoun International, 2017) or the 21st century skills for lifelong learning (Olaf, 2021). Both approaches provide adolescents with life and financial skills so that they can prepare for their future career as social or entrepreneurial workers for example. Particularly, in lifelong learning, the learning outcome 'to be' develop a student's character, personality, awareness of their cultural and social values and resource optimisation (Olaf, 2021). In addition, the learning outcome 'live together' implies that students have good understanding of their communities. This means that they learn to share episodes of their life, acceptance differences and work together for a common purpose (Olaf, 2021). Hence, these alternatives to formal education appear to be context-specific and adapted to the real needs of society.

Second, agricultural policies and programmes and national funds are key drivers of WSEs' capabilities, agency and functioning enhancement. In agriculture-based countries, where most of the active populations earn their living from this sector,

policies improving women's access to land, fertilisers and agricultural materials (equipment) impact their capabilities and thus their functioning. This is in line with Souratie et al. (2019).

On the other hand, informal institutions such as gendered relations and corruption constrain women's capability building. Even though I did not empirically test it, corruption creates non-efficiency in the implementation of policies and programmes in regard to its high level (REN-LAC, 2014). Furthermore, corruption is also part of the customary system which appears to be one of the informal institutions that affects the design and implementation of the formal policies, mostly via corruption. In terms of the consequences of corruption, this finding may be linked to the view of Jain (2011). Jain argues that countries with bureaucratic corruption (as the case studied in this research in regard to the data in 5.3.5) cannot grow as long as the resource allocation process is influenced by what motivates political corruption, that is, the vested interests of policy-makers or decision-makers⁶⁰. Therefore, effective policies need to be corruption-free, and this is a great challenge for countries like Burkina Faso.

Overall, the assumptions of the interactions between the 'other components' of gender-aware inclusive value chains and WSEs' capabilities, agency and business strategies as well as their business models are not rejected even if they have been qualitatively tested. However, it is worth noting that these assumptions should to be investigated more with deep quantitative testing methods.

10.2.5 Economic empowerment

By adopting empowerment as a process in which outcomes are measurable in terms of material and non-material wellbeing of the empowered people (Pouw, 2017; Narayan, 2005), this research focuses on women's economic empowerment (Riisgaard et al. (2011). Yet, this process is a product of complex forces, thus it examines the causal forces on empowerment in terms of interactions between the agency of people to empower and the opportunity structure in their society (Narayan, 2005).

I show that gender-aware inclusive business models effectively contribute to WSEs' economic empowerment by improving their material and financial gains and their non-material gains. This was feasible through the changes it brought to their various resources or capabilities such as time, space, material, human capital, natural resources and social/professional relations. In particular, human capital and time

⁶⁰ Policymakers comprise the army, the traditional chiefs, religious organisations, trade unions and members of the political party in power (Alenda & Robert, 2018)

resources have proven to be the key channels through which this type of business can lead to women's economic empowerment. The time resource is important, because women can shift from domestic work (unpaid work) to paid work, which allows them to gain control over their time. In addition, human capital, meaning the sets of acquired business training based on local and hybrid knowledge, highly contributes to increasing women's material gains, which are also part of their economic empowerment. Indeed, for most women who have not been to school, this kind of business is worthy as it heavily contributes to increasing their income earning.

Gender-aware inclusive business models are socially beneficial because the business contributes to increasing their agency and freedom both at the household and community levels. At the household level their position has changed since they are able to contribute to household spending (for non-widows), making them respected by their husbands. At the community level, women in these businesses participate in social life through financial or in-kind contributions to the social events, such as marriages, baptisms, funerals.

My findings fit into the controversial debate around the concept of empowerment as they include elements of both agency empowerment and economic empowerment (Bandiera et al., 2015; Shankar et al., 2015a, 2015b; Samman & Santos, 2009; Laven et al., 2009; Kabeer, 1999). Three of the five levels of women's empowerment (welfare, access and control) are achieved due to gender-aware inclusive business models (Behal, 2011). First, WSEs' improved socio-economic status (i.e., improved nutritional status or revenue) compared to their situation before engaging in the business means that their welfare has increased, even though this is qualified as the "zero level of empowerment" (Behal, 2011, p.39). Second, WSEs now have more access to resources such as paid work time resources, space resources (e.g., land), human capital, relational resources, financial resources (except credit). Therefore, they have reached the first level of empowerment according to Behal (2011). Third, most of WSEs have got more control on their times resources, but not the land resources. This means that some of WSEs have reached the last and most important level of empowerment (Behal, 2011, p.40). However, a contrast for this last level of empowerment needs to be made. Indeed, according to Behal (2011), the control on resources supposes that women have taken actions resulting in gender equality in decision making over their access to resources. In a sense, this is true because women engaged in the studied gender-aware inclusive business models are only female groups, where there is no man. As such, their business decision-making is primarily determined by their collective decision. But, once at home, their decision-

making may be contested by their husband. Therefore, while there is gender equity in women's business area, the social and cultural norms in their household are still weighing on their control of resources, notably their time and land.

Many institutional and political actions have been conducted to achieve women's full control of resources via gender equity (Savadogo, 2013; Souratie, 2019; INSD, 2020). Indeed, many authors argue that education appears to be a key factor towards achieving this goal (Bandiera et al., 2015; Shankar et al., 2015; Behal, 2011). To my view, this is about agency empowerment, as it involves women's conscientisation and mobilisation (Behal, 2011; Shettar 2015). For example, because of gender and education policies, the primary education of girls is balanced with boys to date in the case study country. However, such education needs to be complemented by capacity building, vocational and life skills training (Bandiera et al., 2015) to increase women's welfare and access to resources.

Hence, this research has contributed to the debate on women's empowerment by bridging, to some extent, the resource-based and agency-based empowerment. Therefore, the hypotheses (*H4*) and (*H5*) founding this empowerment analysis are confirmed (see 3.2). Indeed, the changes in time resources (from more unpaid time resources to more paid time resources), human capital, and relational resources stand to be the most significantly (statistically) determining factors affecting WSEs' functioning (material and non-material wellbeing). Also, WSEs' socio-demographic and economic characteristics such as their age, education, human capital acquired, experience, household size and food intake are the significantly determining factors of their material gains (income/profit).

10.3 Methodological reflection

This section reflects on the strengths and challenges of the research methodology and the different methods that were used to carry out this research.

10.3.1 Critical Intersubjectivity

By adopting the post-positivism epistemology with a critical intersubjectivity approach to study the economic empowerment of WSEs in urban food value chains, this research intended to deeply go through the complexity of the system analysis to draw insightful conclusions. To this end, the research has adopted the mixed methods approach, meaning a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (both data collection and analysis). The strength of critical intersubjectivity pertains to the fact that it places at the heart the interaction between the researcher and researched as a 'best way to get to know others' (Galbusera & Fellin, 2014; Fay, 1999), that is WSEs individually and collectively as social and business agents.

However, this strength is also the weaknesses of critical intersubjectivity. Indeed, critical intersubjectivity can be slightly nuanced by critical realism (both pertain to the post-positivist epistemology), which differentiates between reality and observability (Warwick University, 2020, para.1; Wight, 2012). The 'real' world cannot be observed and exists independent from human perceptions, theories, and constructions (Warwick University, 2020, para.1). Thus, critical realism appears to be directed towards understanding the social realities linking observable phenomenon. In addition, "unobservable structures cause observable events and the social world can be understood only if people understand the structures that generate events" (Warwick University, 2020, para.1).

Hence, systemic research, such as the current which involves both human beings and physical or observable things (such as physical food production or vending, infrastructures), should go beyond the simple perception/view of only the people studied in the value chains by further investigating how the social construct links the observable and unobservable worlds. Therefore, a combination of the critical reality and critical intersubjectivity approaches might fit better with a systemic analysis. This implies change in the research methods to use for such a study (see 10.3.3).

10.3.2 Comparative study

The comparative case study (multiple case study) has been used as the main methodological approach. It was very useful for understanding the dynamics of the value chains and gender in the cases studied as well as the business activities implemented. However, despite the significant benefits of the case studies, it also has certain concerns (Alnaim, 2015). First, the case studies are not generalisable, thus questioning their external validity. Second, the researchers' subjectivity when conducting the case studies is likely to affect the results and then reliability. However, the use of statistics drawn from the survey on these case studies, reinforce the reliability of the findings as argued Demetrious (2009). I believe that the GAIB index is generalisable for any farmer's group.

10.3.3 Research methods

Mixed methods have been useful in this research as they ensure more validity of the findings. For example, the evolution of women's individual and collective resources was investigated through focus group discussions and individual life story interviews, which were tested using quantitative methods. However, the limitation of these methods is the reliance on only the subjective opinions of the interviewees (Demetriou, 2009), as well as the participant and distant observation ethnographic methods used to collect the data (see 4.7). An alternative could be the

use of experimental or quasi-experimental methods to complement the qualitative methods. Experimental (or randomised) methods consist of manipulating at least one explanatory variable(s) and applying them to at least one explained variable(s) with a result of measuring the former's effect on the latter (Khandker, Koolwal & Samad, 2010). This effect is generally observed and recorded during certain period, and this helps investigators to draw an acceptable conclusion pertaining to the linkage between these two variable categories. A particular example is the randomised control trial (RCT), which could be used in the WSE Project framework. Using this approach means assigning to control and treatment groups women/men producing vegetables. As such, this research could be designed using three levels (or arms) of randomisation: (a) a set of women-only groups (with control and treatment groups); (b) a set of mix (women and men) groups divided into control and treatment groups; (c) a set men-only groups (with control and treatment groups). In so doing, this could yield more insightful results on gender analysis.

10.4 Policy implications and recommendations

This section draws on the policy implications of the research. It first recalls the cross-cutting policy issues at the international, national and local (urban) level, particularly the SDGs. Second, the subsection formulates some recommendations at the national, meso and local level.

10.4.1 Cross-cutting policy challenges

SDG5 aims to “*achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*”. This is an impossible goal to achieve if the current political discourses are not followed up by substantive, honest and concrete acts and policies—such as offering business opportunities to women living in poverty conditions both in the urban and rural areas. Possible concrete policy solutions at this level are twofold. First, a better categorisation of women/girls in regard to the specific problem they face and design of suitable policy responses. For example, the current research finding on the two categories of women entrepreneurs such as WSEs and WFEs with growth-oriented objective is indicative. While WSEs' priority or most valued achievement is to satisfy the needs of their children in terms of food, education and health care; WFEs with growth-oriented objective have already crossed such social pressures to combine maternal responsibilities with the desire to build a business. Thus, it is evident that the policy responses to the needs of each category of women entrepreneurs will be different. Therefore, to achieve SDG5, policy responses should first identify WSEs and design adapted tools or initiatives that help these women ensure their transition to WFEs with growth orientation. In other words, this category of women entrepreneurs needs more support from policies. For example, governments may help women in survival entrepreneurship by easing their access

to institutional markets such as schools' provision with women group's vegetable (e.g., university restaurants, primary schools and secondary schools feeding). This may guarantee WSEs to earn an income until they reach the growth-oriented level. The suggested governmental actions can be considered as a part of the intervention to protect WSEs as infant industry to ensure their transition to growth-oriented entrepreneurs. For WFEs with growth-oriented objectives, adapted policy responses are required notably their access to funding and other technical support.

Second, policies need suitable tools or indicators capable of making this categorisation of women/girls. This is the case of the gender-aware inclusive business index developed in this research. This index may serve as a tool to truly assess and monitor business models 'so called' inclusive of the poorest.

10.4.2 Tripartite partnerships to create business opportunities for the poorest (active) in urban areas

A need for tripartite partnerships can be a better solution for the inclusion of the poorest in businesses. Such partnerships can be made in the following way. The design and implementation of a tripartite business model (as recommended by Van Tulder, 2018) include women self-organised groups, the State and the private sector (investors particularly such as financial services providers, food industries). All these actors create this business together as shareholders, acting as a steering committee with representatives of each part. First, the State should guarantee the access to land resources and infrastructures for women (land, space, roads) for 100 years as is the case in Tampouy. This will give women in the business and their household members enough time to build up a sustainable income for 100 years at least. For this purpose, in each urban planning policy document, the required agricultural land should be made accessible to the poor (women and young particularly) without gender discrimination. The State will also need to provide the other necessary technical and administrative services and law enforcement to protect women and their rights. Furthermore, as education and capacity building are key factors increasing women's capabilities, agency, strategies and then their functioning, the State should design adapted policies on education and capacity building to women's groups involved in gender-aware inclusive business models as a sure pathway towards their empowerment and gender inequality alleviation in the long term.

Second, the private sector (national or international) can invest in constructing the necessary infrastructures (building for processing activities or storage) to allow both vertical and horizontal integrations in the value chains (production, processing, and marketing) depending on the real capacities of the women groups. The private

sector can also support women groups with necessary knowledge (management, hybrid processing technologies) to foster and increase their performance. Third, women groups will be running the business by implementing the business activities on the ground. Thus, they will produce, process and market the food in order to make profit.

To scale-up this business model and the value chain from a small scale (within urban areas) to the national scale, the process should target the urban areas to replicate the business model. At a small scale, and in each city of a country, this model can produce very interesting outcomes in terms of income, food supply (diversity), food quality, relationships to the benefit of the whole urban communities. In other words, at a small scale, such a business model could cope with the competition of the other value chains. Thus, this small-scale business model might be gradually extended to cover much more of a country.

10.5 Research related recommendations

For future research, the main challenges will be significant when scaling-up this model to a larger dimension, exposing it to rural-urban interactions at local, meso and national levels. The current research did not investigate this, and future research should fill this gap in knowledge. Indeed, political and economic institutions will be at the heart of such upscaling, and a deep understanding of these political and economic institutions will help to assess the accuracy of the business models proposed as a result of the current research. As the dominant business model supports vertical and horizontal integration in the value chains in the food sector, the most powerful actors in the sector could become real threats for the actors participating in the gender-aware inclusive businesses and value chains, as they might see their market shares reduced. Therefore, improving the understanding of the power of economic and political institutions to support the implementation of poor-driven business models will be insightful for further decision making. A practical example could be the implementation of the gender-aware inclusive value chain and business model in the Sourou Valley to feed both the local region and other urban areas in Burkina Faso. This will be an opportunity to conduct an experimental analysis based on the “with and without” business intervention, which is lacking in the current research (see 10.3.4).

Hence, new research questions may include: What are the scalability conditions of the gender-aware inclusive business model at national level (rural-urban)? What institutions (economic and political) prevail and how do they shape gender-aware inclusive business? What is the cut-off point from which these business models (national level) cannot be considered as such anymore? What type of value chain could prevail in such a scalability process?