

# Policy and lived realities: Women's cattle ownership in Botswana

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## Abstract

*This article aims to facilitate a dialogue on effective and targeted gender mainstreaming policy in Botswana that can simultaneously fulfill other national development goals. An examination of the circumstances and lived experiences of women cattle owners in Ngamiland demonstrates the importance of cattle to women's lives as both a subsistence strategy and a means of personal and collective empowerment. This indicates cattle can further gender equality measures while simultaneously supporting rural livelihoods. Policies and programmes seeking to assist women with livestock acquisition are timely in terms of the Government of Botswana's concurrent gender mainstreaming mandate and their development focus on both agriculture and sustainable livelihoods. Importantly, findings indicate an emphasis on improving communication and service delivery would help to achieve policy uptake by women in all other areas.*

**Keywords:** gender mainstreaming policy, women cattle owners, empowerment, sustainable livelihoods

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## Introduction

In 2014, the Government of Botswana adopted the National Policy on Gender and Development, the aim of which is to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment at all levels through gender mainstreaming. In 2016, the government released the National Development Plan 11 (NDP 11) for 2017-2023, referencing these gender parity aims (GoB, 2016). However important these goals are, they have yet to be supplemented with specific, targeted planning in certain areas. The government has taken an integrationist rather than a transformative approach to mainstreaming: women are included in policies and programmes without a strategic aim to push boundaries of assets/activities and thereby change gender relations. Since cattle remain integral for rural power, security, and livelihoods in the country, gender planning should include an acquisition of this resource. Women's contributions to and engagement with cattle rearing have significant implications for strengthening rural livelihoods and changing systemic inequalities. Cattle activities thus provide an opportunity for Botswana to advance its gender mainstreaming agenda and improve the status of women in the country.

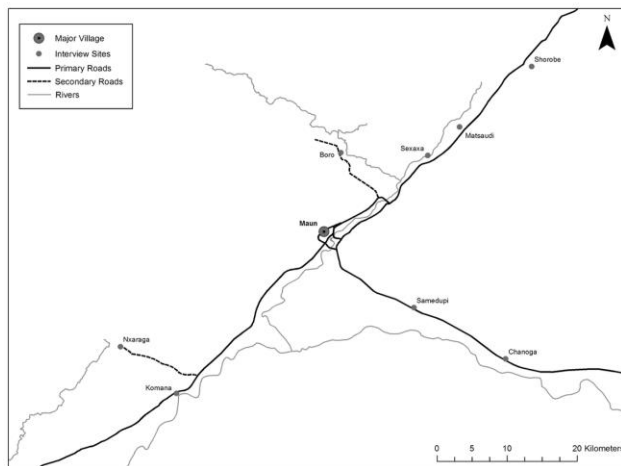
The Botswana cattle sector, while a declining contributor to the country's GDP, remains crucial for precarious rural livelihoods and food security. Small-scale traditional farming is Botswana's dominant agricultural livelihood strategy in terms of both percentage of population and geographical coverage (UNDP/GoB, 2012). Cattle have historically been synonymous with power in the country (Gulbrandsen, 2012; Hovorka, 2006, 2012; Must & Hovorka, 2017; Oladele & Monkhei, 2008; Pettit, 2016). Today, they remain both practically and symbolically valued as they represent both economic and social status (GoB, 2006). Cattle ownership has traditionally been a male domain based in patriarchal social structures and reinforced through colonial economic structures (Alexander, 2005; Gulbrandsen, 2013; Hovorka, 2006, 2012; Must & Hovorka, 2017; Oladele & Monkhei, 2008; Pettit, 2016). However, women are increasingly utilizing cattle as a livelihood strategy. As acquisition laws have changed, women have found different means of cattle access. This is reflected in official statistics indicating approximately 26 percent of the national herd is owned by women (GoB, 2015).

This paper is concerned with the intersection between government provisions for gender equality and agriculture/livestock. These include the Government of Botswana's commitment to gender mainstreaming, favourable changes in ownership and inheritance laws, and select funding schemes. It has been shown that women's empowerment programs and initiatives must take lived realities into account (Mookodi, 2005; Njuki & Miller, 2013; UN, 2012: 10). To that end, this study examines the circumstances and lived experiences of women who rear and sell cattle as they relate to Botswana's mainstreaming mandate and current development strategies.

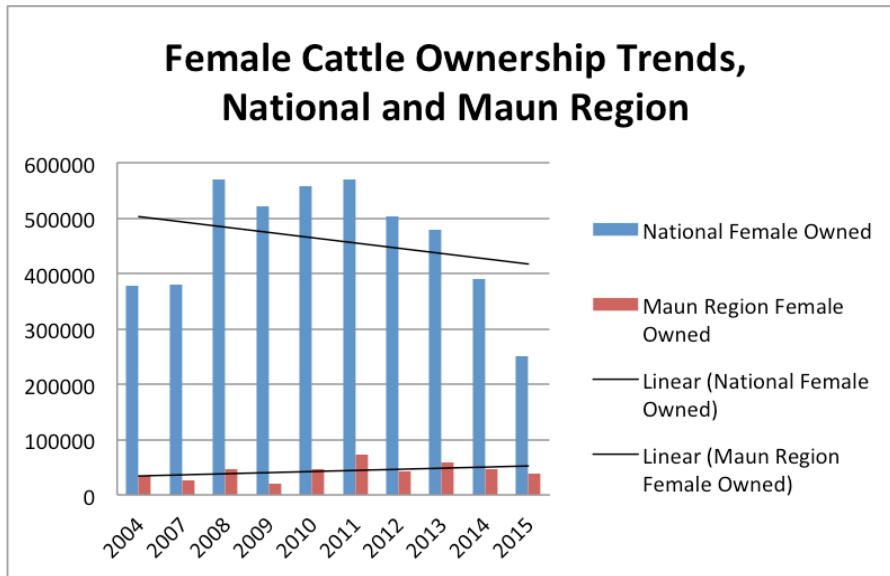
Following a review of methods and study site, the second section of this paper provides a brief history of gendered development in the country and a snapshot of current government support for women in agriculture. The third section presents an empirical investigation of women cattle owners in Ngamiland. The fourth section identifies challenges for both women and policymakers regarding gender mainstreaming initiatives and access to resources. The fifth section highlights opportunities to overcome identified challenges, linking them with the country's National Development Plan and National Policy on Gender and Development. Ultimately, the most impactful areas of focus are improvements in government initiatives/service delivery and effective communication. Changing the approach to livestock provisions (i.e., focusing on women and cattle) creates more space for women to undertake activities to empower themselves, which is the ideal outcome of transformative gender equality measures.

## Methods

This paper presents data collected between 2014 and 2015 aiming to better understand whether and how cattle access contributes to women's empowerment in Botswana. Data collection took place in eight villages surrounding Maun, in the Northwest/Ngamiland district of Botswana (Figure 1). Sites were chosen based on an upward trend in female ownership around Maun seen in national livestock statistics but neither reflected in literature nor expressly understood by local government (Figure 2)<sup>i</sup>. Villages were chosen based on proximity to Maun along major roads. Thirty-nine semi-structured interviews were undertaken through an opportunistic snowball sample. Participants were then invited to take part in one of seven focus groups. A follow-up knowledge translation workshop in 2015 connected participants to local government representatives. Key informant interviews and secondary sources including government reports and evaluations complemented interview and focus group activities



**Figure 1:** Study site map (created by Author using GPS data)



**Figure 2:** Female cattle ownership trends, national and Maun region (2004-2015)

Statistical analysis is derived from interview responses, however, the total number of participants in all research activities including participant observation, focus groups, and the workshop was over 50. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically using a grounded theory approach that initially screened for empowerment indicators and then focused on cattle-related activities and spaces. Government policies, grants, and evaluations were taken into consideration when examining women's access to cattle. This paper is a follow-up to individualized reports created for the Department of Veterinary Services, Gender Affairs, Wildlife and National Parks, Rural Training, and targeted areas within the Ministry of Agriculture in Maun.

### **Government support for gendered development and livestock**

The trajectory of gender provisioning in Botswana closely mirrors that of the wider development community. The Women's Affairs Unit (WAU) was established in 1981 as a direct response to international discourse on Women in Development and focused on integrating women into pre-existing policies. In 1996/97, concurrent with the approval of Botswana's Policy on Women in Development, the WAU was upgraded to a full government department but remained focused on adding women to existing policies. The shift to the concept of 'gender', including Gender and Development (GAD) and gender mainstreaming came in 1998 with the National Gender Programme Framework – a Botswana Government and UNDP/UNFPA collaboration (GoB/UNDP, 1998). Godisang Mookodi (2005), gender expert, Senior Lecturer at the University of Botswana, and former Assistant Coordinator for the WAU, asserts the most transformative approaches to development have been civil society driven. In response to civil action, over the past fifteen years the Botswana Government has amended ownership and inheritance laws such that a single woman does not have to relinquish power to a male relative. In particular, the government abolished the Marital Power Act and amended other legislation to align Botswana with the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (UN, 2010). Despite certain exemptions (UN, 2010: 3), women are in a more favourable position than the past with regards to rights and economic participation. Botswana has also acceded to several global gender equality agreements (see FAO 2018 for full list).

The Government of Botswana recently recommitted to gender mainstreaming through all policies and programmes (GoB, 2015, 2017). The National Policy on Gender and Development (NGPAD) is included in Pillar 2 of Botswana's 'Vision 2036' goals: Human Social Development. NGPAD continues to draw on gender analysis and gender mainstreaming to address systemic gender inequalities (ICRE, 2013; UN, 2012). The National Gender Commission was established in 2016 to monitor its implementation (UNWomen, 2016). Specific policy related to these goals is unclear, however. Though women and gender are more prominent in government mandates, the same critiques continue to arise, such as these lack of targeted planning and of communication (Koloka et al., 2011).

The development community and the Government of Botswana have particularly highlighted women's economic empowerment as a target outcome. As part of the Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs<sup>ii</sup> developed a Women's Grant<sup>iii</sup> described as an initiative "to help women groups with seed money to start their own income generation projects." (GoB MLHA, ND). The Government states that it has "prioritised Women's Economic Empowerment which forms the basis of their liberation" (GoB, 2016). The programme remains ongoing despite funding-related suspensions (Baitlotli, 2017; Kgamanyane, 2018; Rantsimako, 2017). Government representatives report mixed reviews of these grants as men can also access funds and extension support and follow-up are lacking.

Botswana's NDP 11 aims to promote sustainable rural livelihoods (GoB, 2016). As an integral aspect of rural livelihoods, cattle have unique potential to assist rural women both practically and strategically. Better support for cattle provides practical/economic benefits, while challenging traditional norms keeping cattle (and thus power) in the realm of men has strategic implications. The presence of livestock development and redistributive programs in Botswana offers women the opportunity to access cattle through grants, which is less common in other areas of Eastern and Southern Africa (Njuki & Mburu, 2013: 32). Government provisions do not discriminate by gender although a gender neutral (i.e., blind) approach may be detrimental to achieving gender parity.

The GoB has several ongoing initiatives related to both agriculture and gender equality that connect to strategies in NDP 11 surrounding diversified economy and sustainable employment creation. The Agricultural Support Services Project (ASSP) is a joint Government of Botswana and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) project designed to help with food insecurity and poverty reduction in rural areas, with aims to improve livelihoods. It is a refocusing of the Integrated Support Programme for Arable Agriculture Development (ISPAAD). Essentially, its mandate is to help ensure the sustainability of small-scale agriculture in rural Botswana (UN, 2012: 15). Female smallholder farmers are one of four principally targeted groups of this project (GoB, ND). The Sustainable Energy for All Initiative is "working towards increased equitable access and control of resources for youth and women" (UN, 2012: 27). Privately, Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA) supports entrepreneurship and citizen owned businesses. CEDA<sup>iv</sup> was built upon the GoB's Financial Assistance Policy (FAP) of the 1980s, which provided financial assistance to small-scale manufacturers (World Bank 2011). Available grants utilized by or familiar to study participants include Livestock Management and Infrastructure Development (LIMID), the ISPAAD provisions for ploughing, ALDEP, FAP, and the Women's Grant for group-based economic enterprises.

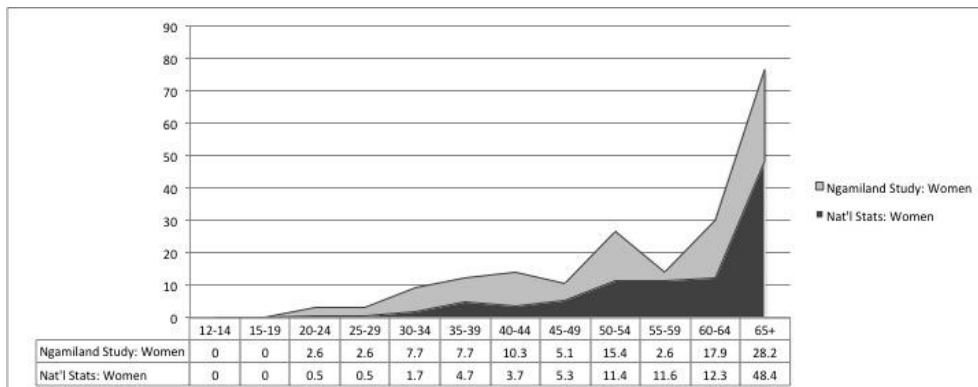
**Women and cattle: Findings**

Findings from this study differ from the dominant narrative surrounding women cattle owners. While it is clear on paper, they are a populous and diverse group, popular assumption points to older widows as the only women who possess cattle. This presupposition about the nature of women’s cattle ownership leads to a disconnect between lived reality and the basis for policy formation. Below is a more holistic picture of women cattle owners in Ngamiland. Select demographic information is included to demonstrate the variability of cattle owners’ circumstances. This research illuminates some qualitative details behind national statistics, and as such national data are included in the demographic categories below in order to add context to this study’s regional findings.

**Age**

As per Table 1, the age distribution in this study resembles national data for female cattle owners in the most recent Annual Agricultural Survey (MoA, 2015). This sample had more representation from age 40-44 and less from 55-59; however, as sampling was not explicitly focused on age but rather a range of demographic details. Both national and study data indicate age 50 and upwards are most active in cattle rearing, corresponding with the notion that this activity is more common for older generations with more traditional family values. The converse is also true in that cattle rearing is less common among younger women (see Table 1). This also reflects the general trend toward youth rural-urban migration and favouring the consumer economy over cattle rearing (Pheko et al., 2014). Unsurprisingly, many of the oldest women in the study were widows. Ultimately, while the dominant narrative suggests older widows are the only female cattle owners, this study found younger women do own cattle, and older women with cattle are not necessarily widows. Both findings reveal important alternative narratives on cattle ownership that are currently overshadowed by the dominant narrative. Table 1 visually displays this finding both nationally and locally: while more women over 65 own cattle, ownership is not solely confined to women in this age bracket.

**Table 1:** Age Breakdown of Female Cattle Owners: Ngamiland Study vs National (GoB, 2015)



**Economic status**

Cattle are integral to the survival of many rural women without sufficient education for formal, paid employment. Most participants either have no formal income or precarious/seasonal employment, underscoring the importance of cattle as a reliable subsistence option. This mirrors previous research on rural livelihoods (Hovorka, 2015; Njuki & Sanginga, 2013). Forty-nine percent of participants rely on cattle as their sole income source. Of the remaining 51%, almost half rely on government subsidies such

as the Old Age Pension Programme or the rotating *ipelegeng* work project, and a few supplement their income with odd jobs or vegetable sales.

### ***Education level***

The most recent national literacy survey states the two main detractors from school attendance are looking after cattle or parents' unwillingness to send children to school (GoB, 2014: 9). Many men who did not complete Standard 5 cited looking after cattle as a reason, while women cited looking after sick family members. Inhabitants of rural areas and urban villages were more likely to have never attended school (2014: 32). Botswana youth of both genders have more opportunities to attend school while older women with less education have limited skills and knowledge to apply to livelihood strategies. In this study sample, the majority (74%) of participants have a Primary Certificate (Standard 7) or below. Nearly half of that number never attended school. Eight percent of participants have their Junior Certificate, and 5% have completed high school.

### ***Marital status***

The 2011 Population/Housing Census puts 'never married' women at 53.4% nationally (GoB, 2016b). Similarly, almost half of study participants are unmarried, and many are sole providers for their dependents.<sup>v</sup> This provides an impetus to perform both male and female roles, and in some cases to demonstrate they do not 'need a man' to succeed. Single womanhood, or single motherhood, is motivation to own cattle for the multi-faceted security they provide. The remainder of study participants comprise approximately 25 percent married and slightly over 25 percent widows of different ages. Married women participate in cattle rearing despite the presence of men to fulfill traditional male duties and the continued discursive categorization of cattle as a 'man's job'. This implies progressive family values of equal marital partnership: many participants described the balance of power in the marriage as '50-'50', indicating the GoB's gender equality message is reaching some of its intended audience.

### ***Acquisition***

Anecdotal discourse still overwhelmingly asserts women don't *intentionally* own cattle, rather widows passively acquire them upon the deaths of family members<sup>vi</sup>. In fact, women's cattle acquisition is much more complicated and nuanced, and cattle are acquired at all ages and stages of life. For example, nearly two thirds of widowed study participants already owned cows prior to their husbands' deaths. Women acquire their first cows in several ways: some inherit from family, but many seek them out by saving up for purchase or taking advantage of loans and grants. This active and intentional acquisition is not well understood or reflected in discourse. In this study, over 39 percent of research participants used their own money to purchase their first cow(s) and roughly 21 percent accessed a government grant or loan. As mentioned above, these grants encompass both general agriculture and cattle, including ALDEP, FAP, and LIMID. None of these specifically target women beneficiaries, so there is an opportunity to develop support in this realm by addressing challenges facing rural women. Relatedly, 74 percent of participants were unaware of available governmental assistance, indicating an opportunity to improve upon communication. In terms of passive acquisition, 21 percent of participants received their first cow(s) as a gift, while roughly 18 percent inherited their first cow after the death of a loved one<sup>vii</sup>.

### ***Spatial context/land use***

Traditional pastoralism still accounts for over 80% of the cattle population in Botswana (Darkoh & Mbaiwa, 2002, p.155; Mmopelwa & Seleka, 2011). Smallholder cattle rearing is largely a rural subsistence activity (UNDP 2013) utilizing communal rangeland without producing beef exports. Two thirds of

livestock grazing resources in the country are communal rangelands (GoB, 2006: xv). These areas are further divided into village grazing areas (VGA) and borehole-cattle post grazing areas (CPGA) where owners have water use rights but not land rights. Ngamiland has no freehold land. As of 2005, this district had 79.3 percent tribal and 20.7 percent state land (GoB, 2006: 11). Participants indicated the use of either communal land (54%) or a singular plot of land for their cattle post (46%). Proximity to rivers means study participants do not need boreholes as a water source for their cattle. However, this strategy leaves cows vulnerable to drought and water-borne diseases. Ngamiland is also within Botswana's "red zone", whereby veterinary cordon fences limit the spread of Foot and Mouth disease. Beef raised within the red zone is not eligible for direct export to the EU or other valuable beef markets. Due to the lack of commercial market, many participants here keep their cattle for subsistence or to supplement other precarious means of income generation. Ngamiland's red zone status thus impacts the way people in this area use and value their cattle (Must & Hovorka, 2017). In addition, conservation activities and cattle rearing occur simultaneously but somewhat in opposition as land is contested<sup>viii</sup>. There are also implications for conflict between traditional pastoralism and wildlife tourism in Ngamiland (Darkoh & Mbaiwa, 2002; GoB, 2006). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the wildlife tourism sector, though lucrative, has become difficult to access for individuals with little training and no initial capital. As such, despite living in a tourism area very few interview participants directly benefit from this industry.

### ***Cattle livelihood contributions***

Participants suggest the main contributions of cattle to their lives are the ability to look after domestic matters, increased decision-making and stability, and decreased dependence on others. These benefits are both practical in terms of addressing immediate needs, and strategic in terms of changing the ways women are seen and valued, which in turn increases their own confidence and self-esteem. Addressing both practical and strategic needs is an aspect of transformative multi-scalar gender policy (Must & Hovorka, 2017).

A typical day for a female cattle owner in Ngamiland involves not only looking after cattle, but also ensuring children's needs are met, completing domestic chores, and managing the agricultural plot. Cows allow for the family to be fed, cared for in marriage and death, and act as savings in the event of unexpected circumstances. This correlates with existing development scholarship regarding the practical livelihood potential of facilitating livestock access for rural women (*inter alia*: Gawayana, 2008; Hovorka, 2015; Kristjanson et al., 2010; Miller, 2011). Women made statements such as,

*"Because I'm the one that's taking care of the family, it's really important for me to have cattle because they can help me in the future"* (Boipelo, Participant),

*"I believe that when you stay in the cattle post you have to rear a cow so that when you are facing any problems you can take from that kraal and solve that problem"* (Lesego, Participant).

*"[A] cow is something that educates the children...pays for school fees, making sure there is food in the house...clothes that I put on... Every problem that is needed whether it's funerals, weddings, the cow is there"* (Dikeledi, Participant).

The practical value of cattle ownership is tied to agency, or women's ability to act. Many participants believed they made better choices than men with regards to spending money on domestic items. Importantly, cattle give participants more power to fulfill what they see as their duties as women. Half of study participants attached an ideological or symbolic value to their cows such as dignity, pride, or simply



that “*cows are my life*”. One woman articulated feeling protected by her cattle, indicating they represent her ability to stand on her own two feet following the death of her husband. Dignity or visibility of ownership was a common theme:

*“When I look at my cattle, I can say that when the years go by, I will be somebody because of them.”* (Barulaganye, Participant).

*“People can see me as someone who has cows. It makes a difference. Other people don’t have them.”* (Keneilwe, Participant).

*“If you have the cow, you are known. You have dignity. Everybody knows that there is that person there, because of the cow. It makes you proud.”* (Focus Group Participant).

We have written elsewhere that the symbolic value of cattle ownership impacts women’s empowerment, leading to confidence operating in a space that was not historically theirs (Must & Hovorka, 2017). In this way cows contribute to strategic needs of women by increasing self-confidence and changing their (and others’) understanding of their own. This confidence fuels participants’ desire to continue cattle rearing in a sustainable manner and has broader significance in terms of changing deeply entrenched gender roles and the policing of gendered activities. Cattle rearing can thus be truly transformative for women’s lives and livelihoods.

### **Summary**

Female cattle owners in Ngamiland are not simply older widows passively acquiring cattle; rather they are women of varying demographic profiles undertaking cattle rearing for a multitude of reasons. Ultimately, cattle have the potential to contribute to women’s empowerment through increased decision-making, increased stability, and decreased dependence on others. Supporting women’s cattle access can also lead to improvements in rural livelihoods and sustainable livestock production. Shedding light on the context of women cattle owners reveals potential overlap between the GoB’s agricultural policy initiatives and gender equality measures. It is with this in mind that barriers to and challenges for women’s cattle ownership are discussed in detail below, so they may be understood and addressed in future policy and programming.

### **Challenges**

Common challenges to cattle rearing identified by study participants include limitations of government initiatives, conflict with wildlife, lack of consistent market and transportation options, and insufficient communication of available help and knowledge. These themes echo other studies on women and livestock in the Global South, listing common constraints as: limited information provided through extension services; lack of access to service delivery systems; limited decision-making power; and limited credit, land, and water access (Njuki & Sanginga, 2013). These challenges relate directly to those put forward in NDP 11 and are detailed below.

### **Limitations of government initiatives**

According to the ICRE (2013), “although Botswana has committed itself to gender equality and non-discrimination, the country does not have an explicit strategy or policy that guides stakeholders towards set goals and targets as far as gender equality is concerned” (ICRE, 2013: xxii). Similarly, the FAO states “[w]ithin the agricultural sector, implementation of gender equality programming is unsystematic pointing

to the fact that proper strategies and guidelines need to be put in place” (2018: xii). While the official stance is to help women at all levels, a specific policy-based approach is still to come. Additional ongoing barriers stem from “male-biased access to and control of productive resources due to national and macro-economic policies and programmes that do not have specific and special incentives for promoting women’s participation in the economy” (ICRE 2013, p. vii).

While Botswana has a comprehensive gender agenda, the approach to gender mainstreaming remains integrationist rather than transformative. Many grants are inadequate for women or are simply gender blind, not acknowledging that men and women might require different provisioning to achieve similar outcomes. Gender blind agricultural grants, for example LIMID, inadvertently lead to men gaining more access to prestigious resources such as cattle (ICRE, 2013; MoA, 2010; Moreki et al., 2010; Must & Hovorka, 2017). Communication of available extension services for cattle is often directed at men, as it is assumed that women do not need this type of information. Since women’s cattle involvement has been mischaracterized, the government has until now missed opportunities to incorporate women/cattle strategies into both their mainstreaming mandate and their sustainable livelihoods/agriculture mandates.

One major issue is the limited reach of gender mainstreaming goals/initiatives and lack of information regarding the women themselves (on the part of the government). Unfortunately, regional government representatives do not always have a clear picture of women’s cattle ownership and access, or how/if policies and initiatives are affecting this population. There are knowledge translation barriers on both sides, and government and extension officers have little opportunity to interact with female cattle owners to understand their unique challenges and goals. More accurate information regarding this populous group of cattle owners could lead to much more effective policy outputs.

Nationally, NDP 11 discusses cross-cutting challenges related to “data gaps, including lack of gender disaggregated data, to inform decision-making”, as well as “insufficient planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of programmes, projects, and strategies” (2016, p. 107). A 2011 report notes difficulties with service delivery and adequate staffing in the Northwest district. This affects initiatives such as LIMID through difficulty carrying out monitoring and evaluation (Koloka et al., 2011: 27). In Ngamiland, the distance from central government and perceived ‘old-fashioned’ values (and ubiquity of Kgosis/tribal rule) left participants feeling unsupported by the government. Noted above, participants reported being unaware of available grants, loans, and extension services. Importantly, their perceptions regarding available help mirror problems with service delivery.

### ***Human-wildlife conflict***

In Ngamiland, cattle farmers and wildlife tourism operators are still negotiating ways to coexist. This is a well-documented and complex issue (see for example Darkoh & Mbaiwa, 2009; Mbaiwa, 2003, 2011; Mbaiwa & Mbaiwa, 2006) that is broader than the scope of this paper; however, one applicable aspect surrounds minimizing conflict with ‘problem’ animals through proper cattle management. Many participants provided inaccurate or out of date information regarding herd management in relation to predators, indicating they were not aware of current protocols. A handful had the outdated impression that they were free to shoot animals that attacked their cows. Others were unaware of the reporting protocols, with 28 percent indicating there was nothing they could do about predators. Thirty one percent of participants suggested predators were more of an issue for women than men, connected to lack of information on prevention and reporting and inadequate transport to report stock loss. These themes tie to broader transportation and communication issues.

### ***Market/transportation***

The lack of reliable markets in Ngamiland is also well-documented (see for example: Seanama Conservation Consultancy, 2012; UNDP, 2013), and in this case is exacerbated by transportation issues. Participants feel this acutely; when the BMC slaughter quota reaches their area, they do not possess the experience or resources to get their cows to the point of sale. This necessitates paying someone (male) to herd or drive their cows, ultimately reducing net income. In contrast, men do not face this barrier as they can drive their own cattle. While lack of transport is not entirely a gendered issue and has already been reported the Northwest district (Koloka et al., 2011), men seem to have disproportionate access to transport. Despite both men and women being geographically isolated, women's inability to drive leaves them more vulnerable. Njuki and Miller (2013) point out: "generally, agricultural produce markets in Africa are gendered because of the gendered access to transport" (112). In addition to transportation barriers, many participants lacked accurate information regarding the BMC slaughter rotation schedule. This was partially due to common communication or knowledge translation issues.

### ***Communication***

The largest but potentially most straightforward hurdle for female cattle owners is communication, both in terms of available help and knowledge or experience of cattle rearing. Knowledge translation pathways still overwhelmingly favour men as heads of households and majority attendees of Kgotla meetings. There were assumptions that information would be passed on, when in fact this was not occurring. Women expressed frustration at being left out of available knowledge and decision-making opportunities. Gendered access to knowledge related to cattle access specifically and gender equality more broadly.

Government representatives acknowledged that communication outreach tends to focus on villages farther away from the greater Maun area, unintentionally overlooking villages within a thirty-minute drive. However, the majority of these proximal village inhabitants have no means of transportation to reach Maun or are too easily overwhelmed/discouraged when they arrive to enquire about assistance. At the 2015 follow-up workshop, local government representatives acknowledged they lacked current information about locals, especially women. NDP 11 cites communication barriers like insufficient public service delivery and "data gaps, including lack of gender disaggregated data" (GoB, 2016, p. 107) impacting effective decision-making. This research reveals these communication barriers and data gaps to be multidirectional and provides an opportunity to improve service delivery and gender-sensitive programming. There is a particular opportunity to reach out and fortify lines of communication in remote villages and villages thought to be close enough not to necessitate outreach.

### **Prospects**

Challenges above echo prior studies both nationally and throughout the SADC, indicating these issues are yet to be adequately addressed. Prospects for action tie in to NDP 11 goals and are immediately applicable to the Government of Botswana's gender mainstreaming mandate and National Development Plan. Participants recognize the practical and strategic value of rearing cattle and are highly motivated to learn best practices for cattle care. In addition, gendered norms surrounding appropriate action are changing, including who can own and manage prestigious livestock. Many of the above challenges can be addressed in some way. This paper particularly recommends two areas with the most potential impact: improving government initiatives, including service delivery and grants, and improving communication and knowledge translation.

### ***Improving government initiatives/service delivery***

Botswana's National Policy on Gender and Development aims to utilize gender mainstreaming to achieve gender equality. This research indicates that cattle rearing is a particular area where women can increase

participation and become empowered. The government can assist women in this part of the livestock sector. One area of focus for poverty eradication in NDP 11 is sustainable livelihoods (GoB 2016b). With regards to gender equality, NDP 11 states that gender planning and analysis will be promoted to inform gender-responsive and rights-based policies. It also states that gender mainstreaming will be intensified and utilized as a sustainable development strategy. The intention is for development resources and meaningful opportunities to be distributed fairly between women and men (ibid). An explicit effort to provide gender-aware planning in the cattle subsector can provide sustainable livelihood solutions and a boost to gender equality in the country. One notable opportunity for this lies in the newly refocused ASSP, within which women farmers are targeted for improved technologies and services (GoB, NDB). To benefit from support projects such as this, women must first be made aware of them.

### ***Communication/knowledge translation***

A 2012 UNDP/GoB report highlighted extension services should pay particular attention to providing women support and information regarding livestock and agriculture. Many of the above challenges can be addressed through more targeted information sharing by the government and including women in decision-making processes. Workshop attendees concluded women are motivated to receive assistance; many are simply unaware of how to seek help and information. Focus group attendees considered banding together to pool social and informational resources and better articulate their needs to extension officers. Noted above, some desired outcomes of NDP 11 relate directly to this research. As part of Outcome 1, “Diversified Economy”, the government aims to focus on export-led growth, including stimulating the agricultural sector. As part of Outcome 3, ‘Sustainable Employment Creation’, in reference to Output 2: ‘Development of Entrepreneurship Culture’, the government aims to stimulate economic activities, including those related to youth and women’s economic empowerment. This also includes better monitoring of women’s economic empowerment programmes to help develop capacities of women entrepreneurs. Linked with the information here, it is evident that provisions for women’s cattle ownership, with a particular focus on service delivery and knowledge translation, will contribute to Botswana’s desired development outcomes.

### **Transformative Prospects**

Addressing practical opportunities to advance Botswana’s gender mainstreaming and development goals also has strategic gender implications. Debusscher and Hulse (2014: 561) assert “[G]ender mainstreaming requires a challenge to patriarchy in an institutional context”. For this challenge to be transformative, it must aim to alter fundamental gender norms keeping women subordinate to men. The authors have written elsewhere that performing the traditionally male activity of cattle rearing in traditionally male spaces changes ideas of who can operate in those spaces (Must & Hovorka, 2017). This contributes to empowerment by increasing women’s confidence and self-esteem, encouraging them to continue challenging gender norms. Empowerment is rooted in the ways people view and value themselves and how they are seen by others (Kabeer, 1994, 2005; Parpart et al., 2002). Utilizing Botswana’s gender mainstreaming mandate to alter agricultural support structures and provide women more opportunity to access prestigious assets like cattle thus has transformative implications for gender relations in the country. Further normalizing women’s work in the cattle sector will help women empower themselves and will also provide more active contributors to the agricultural economy. Over half of study participants are unmarried, which exemplifies both legal changes in access to prestigious assets and changing ideologies surrounding female independence in Botswana. These changing ideologies can be built upon to achieve more transformative development.

## Conclusion

Botswana's current National Development Strategy encompasses boosting rural livelihoods, stimulating agricultural sector growth, generating sustainable employment, and creating an environment for women's empowerment. National gender mainstreaming efforts have not specifically focused on the cattle realm. This paper has shown the intersection between these agenda items. There is a real opportunity for the GoB to engage in agricultural policy work that will change the lives of rural women, but it must start with understanding the women themselves. This is particularly significant as the picture of women cattle owners on the ground is different and much more varied than discourse would suggest.

Livestock development projects and policies can reduce gender gaps provided they work to promote women's empowerment. This involves working to eliminate gender bias related to women's and men's associations with, control over, and access to certain animals (Hovorka, 2015; Njuki & Miller, 2013). In other words, policies seeking to change the lives of women in Botswana must consider assets that can disrupt the balance of power. Cattle are one such asset, as they are both practically and strategically important to rural women in Botswana. Their ownership and control allow women to carry on with normative domestic responsibilities while simultaneously demonstrating they are capable of undertaking traditionally male tasks. This association with a male-dominated livelihood strategy has the potential to change the balance of power between women and men. While Botswana has an extensive foundation of agricultural grants and agricultural/livestock development initiatives, many of these are gender blind and/or tend to focus on increasing what people already have. This can be problematic as those with more capital (i.e., men with cattle) have the potential to accrue more, forcing those without it to seek an alternative, and less effective strategy (Gulbrandsen, 2012).

Challenges to female cattle ownership include traditional societal norms dictating women should not participate in cattle rearing (however many participants indicated this issue is decreasing, perhaps in part due to GoB media campaigns promoting women's empowerment), limitations of government initiatives and programmes, conflict with wildlife, transportation, and lack of consistent communication surrounding extension services and available knowledge and assistance. The main challenge faced is information delivery, including the assumption that men will pass information along to their wives, which does not always occur.

Botswana's gender mainstreaming challenges are not unique in the SADC region. Other countries report similar issues, including lack of targeted/gender disaggregated data and insufficient monitoring and evaluation. In terms of rural agriculture in particular, lack of access to knowledge, resources, and opportunities are common for women (ADB, 2009; FAO, 2017). Njuki and Miller assert "(l)ivestock officials, veterinarians, economists, researchers and animal scientists must understand the social context of the value chain, and why and how to intentionally include women and other marginalized groups in training and information exchanges, market participation and policy development" (2013: 114, citing Rushton, 2009). A focus on providing livestock and agriculture support to women will not only help with gender empowerment, but it will also have a significant impact on precarious rural livelihoods in Ngamiland, fitting with both the current gender mainstreaming and National Development strategies. The most impactful areas of focus highlighted by this research are improvements to government initiatives including service delivery and effective communication of information. The women in this study are highly motivated and interested in participating in their own empowerment. Further research on productivity, economic contribution, and the role of female-owned cattle in health and food security would also be beneficial. Gaps in these areas both nationally and in the wider SADC community are noted by livestock and development scholars (see FAO, 2017; Hovorka, 2015; Kristjanson et al., 2010; Njuki & Miller, 2013; Njuki & Sanginga, 2013).

- <sup>i</sup> Other regions also saw an increase in female ownership; however, given Ngamiland's 'red zone' status restricting beef export, there was potential to understand cattle ownership beyond strictly market contributions.
- <sup>ii</sup> Previously, Gender Affairs was a little-known department within the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs. The recent change in name to the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs indicates a strong commitment to foregrounding gender equality.
- <sup>iii</sup> These grants also accommodate men provided they do not outnumber women in the group.
- <sup>iv</sup> CEDA funds operations across many sectors including agriculture; however, the percentage of female CEDA beneficiaries for agriculture in 2012 was the lowest out of all categories at 22.3% (ICRE, 2013: xi).
- <sup>v</sup> Solo parenting also reflects a general weakening of taboos surrounding having children out of wedlock (Pitso & Carmichael, 2003).
- <sup>vi</sup> Anecdotal evidence comes from participant observation and discussion with government representatives in Maun and Gaborone.
- <sup>vii</sup> Previous work by the authors notes a higher number of inherited cattle (28%), however this number related to cattle inherited at any time, while the current paper is concerned with initial cattle acquisition only.
- <sup>viii</sup> Communal cattle production is characterized by unrestricted access to rangeland, resulting in uncontrolled grazing (Mmopelwa and Seleka 2011). Land degradation and unsustainable agricultural practices have been identified as a problem in NDP 11. A key area of this plan surrounds sustainable environment, with focal points on the conservation of resources and species management. These areas are beyond the scope of this paper and can be seen in more detail by accessing Chapter 7 of the National Development Plan.

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