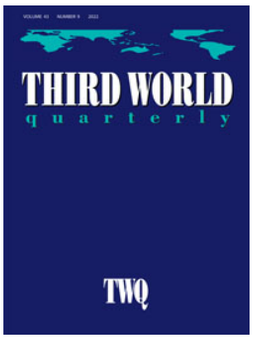

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How internationally funded NGOs promote gender equality in horticulture value chains in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the literature on global value chains by examining how non-governmental organisations (NGOs) promote gender equality. NGOs have been instrumental in setting social standards that seek to institutionalise gender-sensitive governance structures. However, relatively little is known about their roles in doing so. Using in-depth empirical research on the Women@Work Campaign in the cut-flower sector in Kenya, the article examines how a coalition of Kenyan NGOs and an international NGO push for gender equality in global value chains. While the Kenyan NGOs do most of the actual work on the ground, the international NGO uses its position to facilitate and empower the local NGOs to do their work. Yet, we see that funding conditions hamper the local NGOs' efforts to promote gender equality. Overall, our analysis highlights that NGOs fulfil important roles in promoting gender equality in horticulture value chains but the requirements of the international aid system act as a constraint.

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Introduction

In recent years, promoting gender equality has emerged as an important agenda for donor agencies, businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engaged in the development of global value chains (GVCs). Donor-driven support for gender equality has led to increased discussions of inclusive value chains that seek to benefit large numbers of poor people. Gender equality has also become an important policy priority for national governments due to its perceived ability to promote growth and development through job creation and women's economic empowerment (Harper, Belt, and Roy 2015; Rubin and Manfre 2014).

This article recognises the different conceptualisations and contestations of gender equality in GVCs (see eg Tallontire et al. 2005; Stoian et al. 2018). However, we follow Verloo and Lombardo (2008, 23) in conceptualising gender equality as 'a problem of achieving equality as sameness (ie the strategy of equal opportunities), or of affirming difference from the male norm, or of transforming all established norms and standards of what is/should be female and male'. Thus, our understanding of gender equality in GVCs refers to the process of

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ensuring fairness and equal opportunities for men and women in terms of (for example) decision-making and participation. Gender equality is therefore about promoting 'equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men […], in all spheres of life' (Barreiro-Gen et al. 2021, 3). This understanding of gender equality stresses the need for fairness and social justice in GVCs.

In promoting gender equality in GVCs, several social upgrading initiatives such as gender-sensitive policies and private regulatory systems have been proposed for businesses. In addition, several guidelines and tools have been developed by NGOs, donor agencies and international organisations (Rubin and Manfre 2014; Stoian et al. 2018). For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 2016) produced the guideline *Developing Gender-Sensitive Value Chains: A Guiding Framework*. Similarly, Senders et al. (2013) developed *Gender in Value Chains: A Practical Toolkit to Integrate a Gender Perspective in Agricultural Value Chain Development*. Also, *Gender Mainstreaming in Value Chain Development: Practical Guidelines and Tools* was developed by the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) (Terrillon 2010).

Furthermore, NGOs have also become instrumental in advocating for workers' rights by targeting international agencies, national governments and businesses (Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire 2003; Barrientos and Smith 2007). Although local and international NGOs are key stakeholders in setting social standards and advocating for workers' rights (KHRC 2012; Williams, Abbott, and Heery 2017), the existing literature has mainly discussed NGOs in passing (see Riisgaard 2009; Barrientos 2019). In particular, despite their relative importance in promoting workers' rights, the roles of local and international NGOs in GVCs remain poorly understood, with few or no empirical studies existing on the topic. Thus, our understanding of how NGOs promote gender equality in GVCs and the effects of donor conditionality on their work remains limited.

This article addresses this gap and seeks to clarify the roles that NGOs play in promoting gender equality. In doing so, we examine the role of the aid system in understanding how NGOs promote gender equality in GVCs. While donors provide resources enabling NGOs to undertake advocacy work, existing studies have shown that donor funding generally comes with 'strings attached' or conditionality (see Barman 2008; Baur and Schmitz 2012). Therefore, understanding how NGOs promote gender equality in GVCs requires considering donor conditionality.

This research focuses on the case of the Women@Work Campaign (hereafter, the Campaign) by the Netherlands-based NGO Hivos and its local NGO partners in Kenya. This Campaign seeks to promote gender equality and decent working conditions within the cut-flower sector in Kenya. This is on the basis that although the sector has flourished in recent years (Horticultural Crops Directorate 2017), it faces several challenges such as sexual harassment, gender discrimination, casualisation and job insecurity, poor health and safety standards and low wages (see KHRC 2012; Riisgaard and Gibbon 2014; Jacobs, Brahic, and Olaiya 2015; Mitullah, Kamau, and Kivuva 2017).

This article asks the following questions: What roles do local and international NGOs undertake in the Women@Work Campaign to promote gender equality in the Kenyan cut-flower sector? How does donor conditionality affect the NGOs' ability to promote gender equality? By drawing on evidence from the cut-flower sector in Kenya, this article positions itself in the literature on social upgrading and gender equality in GVCs and makes two important contributions. First, by presenting rich empirical evidence from Kenya, this article

provides a micro-level analysis of the various roles of NGOs in social upgrading programmes in the cut-flower sector. Second, this article demonstrates how donor conditionality profoundly affects NGOs' roles in social upgrading programmes. In doing so, our analysis places donor funding at the heart of the discussion of gender equality in GVCs.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the literature on GVCs with a specific focus on gender equality. In subsequent sections, we present our research methodology, offer a brief overview of the Kenyan cut-flower sector and introduce the Campaign as our case study. We then discuss the research findings, which show how the various NGOs in the Campaign promote gender equality and how donor conditionality acts as a constraint to NGOs' work. The last section presents some concluding remarks.

Gender equality in GVCs

There is a growing interest in the developmental effects of GVCs and identifying pathways towards more inclusive arrangements. One ongoing debate focuses on the position of smallholders in GVCs, particularly their bargaining position in relation to other value chain actors (eg Kilelu, Klerkx, and Leeuwis 2017) and initiatives to improve market access, farming practices, innovation and learning (Pietrobelli and Staritz 2018).

This article is concerned with the gender dimension of GVCs. GVCs are embedded in socio-cultural contexts characterised by gendered norms, values and power relations that influence women's participation (Bamber and Staritz 2016). In particular, gendered patterns of behaviour shape the roles, responsibilities, distribution of resources and benefits that accrue to men and women (Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire 2003). Women's work in GVCs mostly involves the least valued aspects or non-remunerated activities. For this reason, women workers are often at the base of GVCs (Stoian et al. 2018; Barrientos, Bianchi, and Berman 2019). Gender inequality therefore influences women's control over productive assets and affects their decision-making power and well-being at the household level.

Against this backdrop, gender inequality is pervasive within GVCs, which has led to efforts aimed at addressing such inequalities (Tallontire et al. 2005). For example, recent years have seen the introduction of social upgrading programmes including social standards and codes of practice that seek to improve the working conditions of women (Barrientos 2014; Barrientos 2019). A typical case of a recent social upgrading programme is the Trade and Global Value Chains Initiative, which seeks to examine how investments such as better working conditions and access to better work can lead to business and development gains (Nelson et al. 2016). Another social upgrading programme is the Health Enables Return Project, which aims to create sustainable health programmes for women in the workplace. The project focuses on women's health education and awareness-raising by linking multinational companies and local NGOs in delivering critical health services, which leads to business returns (Yeager and Goldenberg 2012).

Social standards in social upgrading programmes also seek to institutionalise gender-sensitive governance structures. However, they have been criticised for their top-down implementation and perceived inability to produce meaningful results (Tallontire et al. 2005; Kuiper and Gemählich 2017). For instance, Riisgaard (2009) argues that despite the proliferation of social standards within the Kenyan flower sector, gender sensitivity remains very limited. Similarly, in their analysis of the horticulture sector in Kenya, South Africa and Zambia, Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire (2003) argue that codes of conduct have failed to address

the gender needs of workers. These authors maintain that for codes to provide meaningful benefits to workers, their gender sensitivity has to be enhanced to take into consideration the employment concerns of women workers.

A prominent argument is that promoting a gender-equitable value chain can provide enormous benefits to the economy in terms of job creation and women's empowerment (Harper, Belt, and Roy 2015; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015). Gender equity in value chains and economic growth are therefore considered mutually supportive goals (Rubin and Manfre 2014). Engendering value chains is also considered a win–win approach for both businesses and workers. In the Kenyan cut-flower sector, Barrientos et al. (2017) found that promoting the human rights of women workers led to increased productivity, market expansion and lower staff turnover. Moreover, empowering women is critical for building resilient and healthy businesses, improving product quality and raising productivity (Rubin and Manfre 2014).

The importance of NGOs in advocating for workers' rights and promoting gender equality, in particular, is routinely mentioned in the literature (KHRC 2012; Williams, Abbott, and Heery 2017). Yet, to our understanding, how exactly NGOs go about promoting gender equality in GVCs, and how their performance is affected by donor funding, has not been the subject of in-depth empirical research. Besides addressing an important 'black box' in the literature, we believe illuminating this issue is crucial for identifying pathways towards more inclusive GVCs.

Research methodology

The Women@Work Campaign was selected for two reasons. First, the Campaign explicitly claims to address gender dimension equality in horticulture value chains. Second, the Campaign involves a partnership between an international NGO and local NGOs, and as such sheds light on the dynamics and interplay between the two.

This research used qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and participant observation in the Netherlands and Kenya between May and December 2018. In total, 65 semi-structured interviews with 42 participants were conducted, covering all major stakeholders of the Campaign. It is important to clarify that many of the 42 participants were interviewed more than once as part of the data collection exercise, which resulted in a total of 65 semi-structured interviews. The interview participants included members of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in The Hague (one staff), the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) – Kenya (two staff), Hivos – The Hague and Hivos – Nairobi (11 staff), seven local NGOs in Kenya (20 staff), six key informants in the flower sector (eg certification and auditing experts and academics) and two government officials from the Horticultural Crops Directorate in Kenya. Purposive sampling was used in selecting participants because of their unique positions in the Campaign and the flower sector.

Aside from semi-structured interviews, five FGDs were conducted with 65 flower workers (20 men and 45 women) in three different counties (Nyandarua, Kiambu and Naivasha). The FGDs aimed to understand the opinions and experiences of workers in their interactions with NGOs. The flower workers were purposively selected from 15 farms because they were direct beneficiaries of NGOs' interventions on farms. To provide a representative sample, a stratified sampling based on job category (eg pickers, graders and sprayers) was used in selecting participants who were gender and welfare committee members, shop stewards,

supervisors and managers. All FGDs were conducted outside the farms to allow workers to freely open up without being coerced by their management. FGDs were open-ended but guided by a set of questions, and lasted for about two hours.

Participant observation played an important role in the data collection. One researcher was stationed at the office of Hivos – Nairobi and was involved in field visits and workshops by local NGOs between May and November 2018. This provided first-hand knowledge of 'being there' and experiencing the everyday operations of NGOs, the farms and their workers. Among the data collection methods, document analysis was also employed. Specifically, contractual agreements and project reports were reviewed. Document analysis helped in triangulating findings from the interviews which improved the validity of the research findings.

The data gathered from interviews and FGDs were recorded with the informed consent of the participants and were later transcribed and coded using NVivo 11. The analysis was inductive and iterative. Thematic analysis was used in the identification of emergent themes from the data. To validate the research findings, a workshop was organised in Nairobi with participants including flower workers, staff of the RNE–Kenya, NGOs (Hivos and its partners), government officials and experts in the flower sector. It is important to mention that the NGO representatives who participated in this study consented to using the names of their organisations, hence anonymisation was not required.

Kenyan cut-flower sector and women in value chains

The cut-flower sector in Kenya plays an important role in the socio-economic development of the country through the provision of employment (Horticultural Crops Directorate 2017). Although the exact number of people employed in the sector is unknown, the Kenyan Flower Council (2020) reports that the flower sector employs over 200,000 workers directly on the farms while over one million Kenyans benefit indirectly from the sector. In terms of employees, the sector is dominated by women, who account for about 80% of the total labour force (Mwangi 2019). This is largely due to the gendered nature of the sector characterised by a clear division of labour between men and women. Women are often confined to labour-intensive aspects such as picking, sorting and packing that require maximum concentration and long periods of standing (Dolan, Opondo, and Sally Smith 2012; Mitullah, Kamau, and Kivuva 2017). In addition, many of the women are unskilled or semi-skilled labourers employed on a casual and seasonal basis (KHRC 2012; Kuiper 2019).

The gendered nature of roles and responsibilities on farms creates an unequal playing field and power dynamics between male and female workers which perpetuates gender discrimination (Mitullah, Kamau, and Kivuva 2017; Kuiper 2019). The sector faces challenges such as sexual harassment and poor health and safety standards (KHRC 2012; Riisgaard and Gibbon 2014; Jacobs, Brahic, and Olaiya 2015). It is worth mentioning that while average wages and benefits in the flower sector are higher than government average minimum wages, the issue of a living wage for workers has not been adequately addressed by the flower sector (Mitullah, Kamau, and Kivuva 2017). Mitullah, Kamau, and Kivuva (2017), for instance, found that the average monthly salary of flower workers was about KSh 14,500 (US$140) with the majority not having an alternative source of income. This was relatively higher than the basic minimum monthly salary (ie KSh 12,926 = US$125) for general labourers in Kenya (Kandie 2017). Similarly, in their analysis of Kenyan flower workers, Anker and Anker

(2017) estimated that in 2015, the living wage among workers in the Mount Kenya and Lake Naivasha areas was KSh 11,937 (US$124) and KSh 19,305 (US$191) per month, respectively. Aside from this, although the sector is dominated by a female labour force, women remain under-represented in leadership positions at the farm and union levels (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015). These challenges affect the growth and sustainability of the sector given that many women workers find themselves experiencing difficult working conditions.

The social upgrading programmes that have been set up in Kenya in (partial) response to these issues have been met with considerable criticism (Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire 2003; Kuiper and Gemählich 2017). For example, several studies found that the introduction of social certification schemes like Global Gap, Fairtrade Standards and Flower Label Programme within the flower sector in Kenya has brought few improvements in the lives of workers (Riisgaard 2009; Kuiper and Gemählich 2017). According to Kuiper and Gemählich (2017), certification schemes do not adequately improve the working conditions and well-being of workers. Within the flower sector, social upgrading programmes have paid little explicit attention to workers' rights and gender equality (Riisgaard and Gibbon 2014; Barrientos 2014). The Women@Work Campaign of Hivos, an international NGO originating from the Netherlands, aims to address this gap.

The Women@Work Campaign

The Campaign is implemented in eight countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe) by Hivos and its local NGO partners. However, for the purpose of demarcation, we focus specifically on Kenya. The choice of Kenya is based on the following. First, the Hivos office in Kenya plays a proactive role by serving as the regional hub overseeing the implementation of the Campaign, which is Hivos's most mature advocacy programme on gender and labour issues in East Africa. Second, there is a strong Dutch interest in the Kenyan flower sector because the Netherlands auction is the biggest market for Kenyan flowers and accounts for over 65% of exported flowers (Mitullah, Kamau, and Kivuva 2017; Dolan, Opondo, and Sally Smith 2012). Breeding and propagation activities in the Kenyan flower sector are also dominated by Dutch companies (Kazimierczuk et al. 2018). The Campaign therefore targets Dutch companies, in line with the aid and trade agenda of the MFA which is the funder of the Campaign.

The Campaign seeks, among other things, to (1) improve working conditions for women and gender equality in horticultural value chains; (2) increase awareness of and publicity on the promotion of living wage for workers; (3) strengthen the lobby and advocacy capacity of local NGOs to work on gender equality; and (4) strengthen the capacity of workers and their representatives to influence workplace policies and practices. Overall, the Campaign aims to achieve better working conditions for women by making the horticulture value chain more inclusive of women and by securing the implementation of decent working policies (Hivos 2016).

The target group of the Campaign includes management and workers of flower farms, government agencies in Kenya (eg State Law Office and Department of Justice, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection), labour and trade unions in Kenya, NGOs and media houses, certification bodies, retail shops and consumers in the Netherlands, and the general public

in Kenya (Hivos 2017). The Campaign also involves stakeholders including the RNE – Kenya, the Kenyan Flower Council and Fairtrade Africa (see Figure 1).

In Kenya, the Campaign started in 2012. At the time of this research, the Campaign was in its second phase, based on a grant from the MFA for the period 2016–2020. The funds are transferred from MFA to Hivos – The Hague (in the Netherlands) which then transfers them to Hivos – Nairobi (in Kenya) and subsequently to seven Kenyan NGOs. These are the Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC), Federation for Women Lawyers (FIDA), Workers' Rights Watch (WRW), Haki Mashinani (HM), Ufadhili Trust (UT), African Woman and Child Feature Service (AWCFS) and African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) (Figure 1).

Hivos – Kenya has the overall day-to-day management responsibility for the Campaign while Hivos – Netherlands manages engagements and reporting requirements with the MFA. The transfer of funds is accompanied by donor conditionality such as funding and accountability requirements, which flow down from the MFA to Hivos and then the local NGOs. It is important to mention that within the Campaign, resource flows are not limited to funding but also include information, relationships and expertise. Although the Campaign has a nationwide focus, it is being implemented across eight counties in Kenya. These are Nairobi, Kiambu, Laikipia, Nyandarua, Isiolo, Kericho, Kajiado and Nakuru. The choice of the eight counties is informed by the fact that the majority of flower farms in Kenya are located in these areas (Mitullah, Kamau, and Kivuva 2017).

Findings and discussion

In this section, we present and discuss our findings on the roles of NGOs in promoting gender equality in the Campaign. In our analysis, we distinguish between the roles of local NGOs and the roles played by Hivos. First, we begin with the roles of local NGOs in promoting

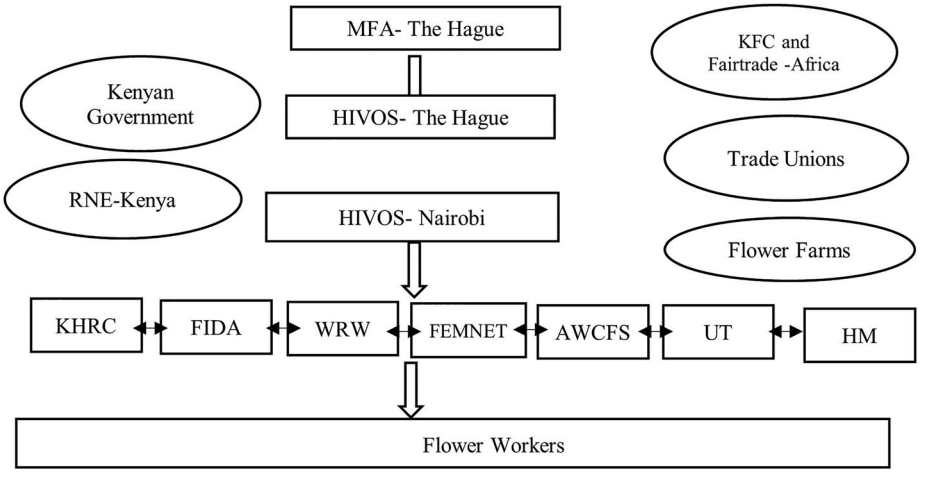

Figure 1. A simplified flow of funding and stakeholders in the Women@Work Campaign.
Source: Authors' construct. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE), Kenyan Flower Council (KFC), Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC), Federation for Women Lawyers (FIDA), Workers' Rights Watch (WRW), Haki Mashinani (HM), Ufadhili Trust (UT), African Woman and Child Feature Service (AWCFS) and African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET).

gender equality. Here, we identify two key roles: (1) co-creation and monitoring of gender equality and sexual harassment policies; and (2) capacity strengthening of farm management, workers and duty bearers.

Co-creation and monitoring of gender equality and sexual harassment policies

We found that local NGOs played a significant role in co-creating model gender equality and sexual harassment policies for flower farms. By working together with the Kenyan Flower Council and Fairtrade Africa to develop model policies, the NGOs enabled the farms to reform their human resource practices. The co-creation of model gender equality and sexual harassment policies became necessary because although many flower farms had developed such policies, their implementation remained a challenge. In ensuring that farm management effectively implemented these policies, the local NGOs supported farm management to institute gender committees, workers' committees and complaint mechanisms for sexual harassment at the workplace:

> In many flower farms, with the assistance of the NGOs, gender and workers' committees have been established. So, if a worker feels that someone is harassing him/her sexually or they are being bullied for sexual reasons, they have the right to report it to the gender committee to investigate. (NGO Staff, 18 July 2018)

The campaign therefore contributed to flower farms' adoption of gender equality and anti-sexual harassment policies, which reportedly has helped many flower farms to undertake gender audits (ie of the proportion of males and females) in their recruitment, promotion and staff appraisal.

Aside from co-creating gender and sexual harassment policies, local NGOs also gather data on incidences of sexual harassment. Cases of sexual harassment are gathered through the use of a checklist developed by local NGOs for collecting evidence of sexual harassment on flower farms. These data provided grounds for NGOs to engage with farm management on ways of helping them address sexual harassment issues. More importantly, as part of their monitoring role, local NGOs have held farms accountable for the implementation of sexual harassment policies by ensuring that they instituted measures for handling complaints and providing sanctions for violations of sexual harassment policies at the farm level. In addition, the local NGOs have ensured that many flower farms adopt policy statements that demonstrate their commitments to addressing sexual harassment, undertake training of workers and management on sexual harassment and ensure the confidentiality and protection of victims of sexual harassment on the farms. A flower worker explained: 'We now have a sexual harassment policy [due to the local NGOs] and there are now confidential ways you could report if such thing happens on the farms' (FGD, 21 July 2018).

Although this research does not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the local NGOs' efforts, the impression from NGO staff, flower workers and farm management is that there has been a degree of success. For instance, it was reported that the work of the local NGOs on sexual harassment has led some farms to dismiss workers found liable for engaging in sexual harassment, and farm management has supported and facilitated the effective operation of the gender committees which hitherto were absent. Overall, our findings illustrate that local NGOs, by co-creating and monitoring gender equality and sexual harassment policies, contribute towards holding the management of flower farms accountable

concerning issues of sexual harassment in the Kenyan cut-flower sector (Barrientos 2019; Jacobs, Brahic, and Olaiya 2015). Furthermore, our findings indicate that local NGOs were instrumental in the design and adoption of a model sexual harassment policy within the Kenyan flower sector. As Kuira (2022) demonstrates, the adoption of the model sexual harassment policy has led to a significant reduction of sexual harassment cases on flower farms because there was a better understanding of sexual harassment among employees. Our findings are therefore consistent with the observation by Kuira (2022) and Jacobs, Brahic, and Olaiya (2015) that local NGOs are significant actors in the fight against sexual harassment in the Kenyan flower sector.

Capacity strengthening of farm management, workers and duty bearers

In the literature, it has been argued that flower farms institute gender committees in response to pressure from standards (Kuiper 2019; Kuira 2022). Our empirical evidence highlights the key role of local NGOs in making sure the standards are implemented in practice. Recognising that a lack of knowledge and awareness underpins the perpetuation of gender inequality in GVCs, local NGOs invest heavily in strengthening the capacity of key target groups.

A major group includes farm workers and managers in the flower sector. Over the past years, the local NGOs in the Campaign have organised countless training and capacity building workshops to raise awareness on sexual harassment, targeting gender committees, workers' committee representatives and management. Amongst other things, the training and workshops touch upon issues such as sexual jokes, invited touching, sexualised behaviours, verbal abuse and insults. Capacity-strengthening activities also targeted farm management staff and focused on undertaking gender audits as part of their human resource policies and practices.

As gender inequality is about power relations, the local NGOs also organise specific training for women that is designed to strengthen their participation in decision-making and their ability to assume leadership positions on flower farms. According to the interviewees, the aim is to empower women workers to challenge existing power and socio-cultural structures that deprive them of their potential. In speaking about the significance of the leadership development training, one woman explained that the training has positively affected her position at the household level: 'I have been taken through leadership skills. It does not remain at the farm; I even take it home. I am empowered because I know my rights and I will stand for my rights' (FGD, 21 July 2018).

As part of their empowerment efforts, local NGOs work in collaboration with gender committees, farm management, the Kenyan Flower Council and Fairtrade Africa. Our findings therefore suggest that local NGOs have been instrumental in providing capacity-strengthening training on gender and women's leadership that has led to the adoption of action plans for the implementation of gender-sensitive practices. Our empirical evidence therefore highlights the role of local NGOs in making sure that standards such as the gender-sensitive practices in flower farms are implemented in practice. Similar findings have been reported in the literature (Kuira 2022; Kuiper 2019).

The local NGOs in the study also worked to strengthen the capacity of duty bearers and rights holders (eg judges, magistrates and labour officers) concerned with labour laws in Kenya. Here, the emphasis is on awareness and sharing information on labour rights violations. According to interviewees, the implementation of existing labour laws such as the

Employment Act, 2007 and Employment (Amendment) Act, 2019 is weak because labour officers are unable to regularly visit farms to ensure compliance. In addition, some certification auditors are not aware of labour and gender indicators within their certification (FGD, 21 July 2018). Another issue is that many court cases on labour and gender rights violations are Kenya are dismissed by judges. This, according to an interviewee, is because most of the women are not able to properly articulate themselves in court.

Roles of Hivos in promoting gender equality

Hivos, as an international NGO, played two key roles in the Campaign: (1) brokering relationships and enhancing the credibility of local NGOs to undertake advocacy, and (2) linking local-level advocacy to international-level advocacy.

Brokering relationships and enhancing the credibility of local NGOs

The existing literature on International Non-Governmental Organisations' (INGOs') involvement in GVCs only focuses on their role in international campaigns and social governance (Barrientos et al. 2016; Williams, Abbott, and Heery 2017). Our research adds to the literature by demonstrating that INGOs also facilitate advocacy interventions at the local level.

To promote gender equality, Hivos plays an active brokering role among stakeholders in the cut-flower sector. In particular, local NGO staff emphasised that Hivos added value to their advocacy work by creating opportunities for dialogue with the Kenyan Flower Council, Fairtrade Africa and flower farms. This involves organising round table discussions to deliberate on issues that affect the well-being of workers. During the annual International Flower Trade Expo (IFTEX), for example, Hivos creates opportunities for local NGOs to interact with and influence managers of flower farms. Importantly, local NGO staff explained that without the involvement of Hivos, it would have been very difficult for them to build up relationships with flower farms due in part to suspicion associated with their work. For instance, one farm manager said: 'When local NGOs come to the flower farms, they are coming to spoil our workers by inciting them' (Farm Manager, 21 June 2018).

In Kenya, local NGOs are often viewed by farms as 'troublemakers' and associated with negative publicity on labour and human rights issues on farms. This is mainly on the basis that many local NGOs have been accused of giving the flower sector negative publicity, which in turn has created some perceived animosity between flower farms and local NGOs (KHRC 2012; Jacobs, Brahic, and Olaiya 2015; Kuiper 2019). During interviews, many farm managers referenced the naming and shaming practices towards flower farms that made them mistrustful of local NGOs. As a consequence, local NGOs typically have a tough time accessing flower farms in Kenya, making it very challenging for them to address gender equality issues on these farms. In the Campaign, Hivos uses its international reputation and its networks with, especially, Dutch-based flower farms and key stakeholders like the Kenyan Flower Council to enable local NGOs to gain access to the farms. Hivos staff explains:

> During IFTEX in Kenya, we [Hivos] pitch the Campaign with the flower farms. We try to always have on-site meetings between local NGOs and the flower farms and other stakeholders […] So, we [Hivos] connect the local NGOs and the farms by organising some round table discussions on gender and labour issues. (Hivos Staff, 29 May 2018)

A local NGO staff explains that Hivos plays a key role in overcoming distrust: 'There is always suspicion when you convene a meeting with flower farms. So, Hivos being the one leading [the Campaign] played a more neutral role in bringing all of us together' (Local NGO staff, 9 July 2018). Local NGO staff also explained that working with Hivos, an INGO with widely recognised expertise and credibility on gender and labour issues, had enhanced their credibility and visibility with flower farms and key actors in the flower sector. This, they argued, had greatly enhanced their own ability to promote gender equality: 'Hivos has come with a unique programme and it has added value to our visibility, because now when people hear that we are an implementing partner of Hivos, it gives us a higher profile' (Local NGO staff, 7 August 2018).

Besides making their claims more legitimate in the eyes of stakeholders, the increased visibility of local NGOs helped them in attracting the funding needed to sustain their advocacy activities and undertake similar gender equality projects in the flower sector beyond the Campaign. For example, a staff stated: 'Now the Campaign has gotten our name out there. We always say that when INGOs like Hivos come to you, they often draw other donors' (NGO staff, 9 July 2018).

Linking local-level advocacy to international-level advocacy

Another role played by Hivos in promoting gender equality is that it uses its position as an INGO to link the advocacy work on gender equality in Kenya to the international level. In the Campaign, they did this in two ways. First, Hivos enabled local NGOs to attend international conferences and technical meetings. These include the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conferences and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) sessions to promote labour rights and gender equality issues. In December 2018, KHRC and Hivos were invited by the UN Working Group to participate in a technical meeting regarding developing a guideline on applying a gender lens to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. KHRC and Hivos also led the convening of the Gender Roundtable organised at the UN Forum in November 2018. Overall, these international exposures strengthened the local NGOs' understanding of international accountability mechanisms while creating opportunities for them to network with other NGOs and global audiences working on social upgrading programmes.

Second, Hivos has directly lobbied a range of key stakeholders at the international level, based on the experiences and evidence gathered in Kenya. For example, Hivos has been lobbying the Dutch government and international organisations like the United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights to consider gender equality policies in the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. In November 2018, Hivos co-organised a session on living wage at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights. Hivos also lobbies the Dutch government through the WO = MEN platform, where Dutch NGOs join their efforts to lobby the government on gender equality policies and gender-inclusive trade-investment agreements.

Furthermore, Hivos has also formed collaborations with Dutch supermarkets such as Albert Heijn and Jumbo to create a socially and environmentally sustainable flower sector. As part of efforts by Hivos to increase the demand for fair flowers, Albert Heijn and Jumbo place a 'sustainable flower' sticker on roses from Kenya and other African countries. More importantly, Hivos provides support to Dutch retailers in developing improvement plans

towards a living wage. Here, we see a clear parallel with the strategy used by local NGOs in Kenya to help farms with better policies.

As part of their advocacy role, it was explained that Hivos also targets consumers by convincing them to purchase traceable flowers from Kenya. Since supermarkets often source their flowers directly from growers in Kenya, targeting consumers was considered an important strategy for improving the working conditions of workers and promoting gender equality. In doing so, Hivos engages in an annual public campaign (the 'Small Change, Big Deal' campaign), especially around Mothers' Day or Valentine's Day, targeted at bigger retailers in the Netherlands to engage in dialogue on ways of promoting gender equality in the flower sector. This led to the participation of the seven largest Dutch retailers, including Albert Heijn, in the Living Wage Lab, a platform where stakeholders in the agri-food sector work towards establishing a living wage for workers in their supply chains.

Donor conditionality and NGOs' ability to promote gender equality

Besides teasing out the extensive range of roles performed by NGOs in the Campaign, the research also found that the NGOs' ability to promote gender equality is affected considerably by donor conditionality. This section shows how – through what mechanisms – donor conditionality affects NGOs' roles in promoting gender equality in GVCs.

Funding arrangements

The conditions under which funding is provided to local NGOs appeared to have a major impact on the work undertaken. Three elements stand out: short-term contracts, lack of core support and the disbursement of funds in tranches.

Regarding the first, the local NGOs in the Campaign have two-year contracts that are subject to annual renewal by Hivos. Local NGO representatives pointed out that this funding arrangement is at odds with the nature of advocacy work, in which a longer period is typically required before results become visible. One local NGO staff explained:

> Project-based funding is a tricky area because, for good advocacy work, you start seeing returns after three to four years. So, when you are funded for only two years, Hivos might leave you when you're at the tipping point of seeing major results […] The period that has been allocated on this work is not sufficient. (Local NGO staff, 31 October 2018)

Another funding constraint is that local NGOs do not receive core funding, which would enable them to cover administrative costs. Most local NGOs argued that the absence of core funding resulted in a constant turnover of staff, especially when project funding ends. Given the importance of building relations with the farms and the complexity of gender equality issues, this undermines the long-term impact of the work undertaken. For instance, an NGO whose contract ended in July 2018 was unable to keep two principal project staff who had developed extensive experience and relationships with flower management and workers. To this end, the departure of the 'quality staff' – as described by one NGO staff member – meant that they had to sever their relationship with farm management, which in turn affected their performance on the project:

> Our contract with Hivos is project-based without core funding. So, when our project ended in July, we were not able to retain the staff implementing the Campaign, and that affects our

> performance in undertaking advocacy work on the farms and our sustainability as an organisation. (Local NGO staff, 26 November 2018)

The disbursement of funds in tranches to local NGOs also appeared to have a constraining effect on local NGOs. All local NGOs received their funds in tranches upon meeting Hivos's funding conditions. The release of funds was tied to compliance with quarterly reporting requirements. For Hivos, the release of funds in tranches is a risk-mitigating mechanism, as explained by a staff:

> The only reason why Hivos gives funding in tranches is from a risk mitigation perspective. We disburse funding in tranches as part of the milestones we have set for them [local NGOs] to achieve before we can reclassify them in terms of our risk. (Hivos staff, 31 July 2018)

However, according to local NGO staff, the release of funds in tranches has delayed the implementation of the Campaign on numerous occasions and negatively affected their established relationships with stakeholders in the flower sector, as explained below:

> Delays in project implementation affect the success of the Campaign. When there is a big gap due to delays in funding, businesses lose interest in working with you. They drop off in the partnership and say 'You people [local NGOs] are not serious, we want to deal with serious organisations'. (Local NGO staff, 22 June 2018)

Several local NGO staff explained that they had to suspend their training on farms because of delays in funding disbursement, which meant that the time they had scheduled with farms to undertake training did not materialise. Because of the seasonal nature of activities on farms, delays meant that by the time they had their funding, 'the women workers were not available to engage with us, which affects the work in terms of delivering on the activities and the goals of the Campaign' (Local NGO staff, 8 June 2018).

Accountability requirements

In the Campaign, local NGOs have to submit quarterly financial and narrative reports to Hivos. Local NGO representatives claimed that the high reporting frequency shifted their focus from actual project implementation to meeting the reporting requirements:

> You have to do four quarterly reports, and then you have a final report. Those are five reports in a year. So, you now find that you have more reporting and it consumes much of your time for implementation. So, you're always spending more time reporting than you are implementing. (local NGO staff, 20 August 2018)

Local NGO representatives explained that high-frequency reporting requirements negatively affected the amount of time they could spend with flower workers. The underlying issue here is that of financial dependence, as explained by an NGO staff: 'Hivos is our donor, so we are accountable to them first and foremost. And then we are accountable to our stakeholders and beneficiaries' (NGO staff, 31 October 2018).

While NGO representatives were very critical of the accountability requirements, they appeared reluctant to share these sentiments with Hivos. One local NGO staff explained that: 'Criticising them [Hivos] is something I don't encourage. For a partner, you just have to let things run because that is your donor' (NGO Staff, 14 July 2018). The reluctance of some NGOs to critique Hivos was attributed to power differentials that are inherent to relationships based on resource dependency. Some NGO staff claimed that providing feedback to Hivos

could run the risk of being misinterpreted as 'complaining too much' and subsequently undermine prospects for future collaborations. The resulting inability of some local NGOs to engage in honest and open communication limited the potential for feedback and organisational learning in the Campaign.

Advocacy strategy restrictions

Both Hivos and local NGO representatives emphasised that their dependence on official Dutch funding limited their autonomy. More concretely, they were pressured by the Dutch Embassy in Kenya to refrain from using confrontational strategies, such as making critical press releases, that would create negative publicity for (especially the Dutch) flower farms. They maintained that due to Dutch business interests in the flower sector, they felt pressed to use dialogue rather than dissent when engaging with farms. An embassy staff concurred, stating: 'The Campaign involves Dutch businesses and it is part of our strategy of enabling Dutch businesses to operate in Kenya. So, when there an issue with Dutch businesses, the preferred strategy is dialogue' (Embassy staff, 1 November 2018).

Local NGO representatives pointed out that this limitation undermined the effectiveness of their advocacy work because 'always our hands are sort of tied'. For example, an NGO staff explained the rationale for using the dissent approach to advocacy by stating that: 'At times you have to dissent, do a public protest, publish a report, let it flare up and then they [farms] will come down to the table and have a discussion with you' (NGO staff, 31 October 2018).

The 'silencing' of local NGOs by limiting their strategy to dialogue demonstrates how donor funding can lead to an 'advocacy chill' where NGOs to a certain extent have to dance to the tune of donors because of their resource dependence.

Conclusion

This article sheds light on the various roles that local and international NGOs play in promoting gender equality in GVCs – a topic of inquiry which thus far has received little sustained attention in the literature. Our empirical evidence from the Kenyan cut-flower sector shows that local NGOs play active roles in co-creating and monitoring sexual harassment policies on flower farms. By holding flower farms accountable for their policies and practices, the local NGOs contribute towards making sure that standards are implemented in practice. Additionally, local NGOs offer capacity strengthening training on women's leadership and sexual harassment for management, workers and representatives of gender and welfare committees. Overall, our findings illustrate that local NGOs are crucial actors in the pursuit of gender equality in GVCs.

While the existing literature has only touched upon INGOs' involvement in international campaigns in promoting gender equality in GVCs, our findings show their involvement is much broader. Flower farms in Kenya typically see local NGOs as adversaries who bring bad press to the sector. Our findings demonstrate that INGOs like Hivos can facilitate the work of local NGOs in promoting gender equality by using their neutral positions, reputation and credibility in bringing together and facilitating dialogue among stakeholders. Additionally, Hivos went to great lengths to enable local NGOs to participate in international fora, underscoring the notion that INGOs can be 'South–North connectors' that link local level advocacy to international audiences.

Notwithstanding these positive roles, we found that donor conditionality affects the ability of especially local NGOs to promote gender equality in GVCs. In particular, we highlight how funding arrangements, accountability requirements and advocacy restrictions have numerous constraining and undermining effects. Our findings also suggest a trade-off between promoting gender equality and efforts to promote private-sector interests which have become a key policy agenda of donor agencies in recent years. This raises new critical questions about the feasibility of merging aid and trade policies by donor agencies such as the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and about the role of donors in promoting gender-equitable GVCs in general.

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